

# Metareference across Media

Theory and Case Studies



Edited by  
Werner Wolf

*Studies in Intermediality 4*

## Metareference across Media

## STUDIES IN INTERMEDIALITY (SIM)

### 4

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# Metareference across Media

## Theory and Case Studies

Dedicated to Walter Bernhart  
on the Occasion of his Retirement

Edited by  
Werner Wolf  
in collaboration with  
Katharina Bantleon and Jeff Thoss



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2009

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of "ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence".

ISBN: 978-90-420-2670-4

E-Book ISBN: 978-90-420-2671-1

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Printed in The Netherlands

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## Preface

Strange as it may seem at first sight, widely differing works such as the cover illustration of the present volume, Pere Borrell del Caso's surprising painting "Escapando de la critica" ('Escaping criticism'), Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and Mozart's sextet "Ein musikalischer Spaß" ('A Musical Joke', K 522) all share one common feature: they have a more or less conspicuous meta-dimension. The present volume, the fourth in the series *Studies in Intermediality*, is dedicated to the transmedial analysis of such 'metaization' and in this continues the transmedial approach of the series, in which framing (*Framing in Literature and Other Media*, 2006) and description (*Description in Literature and Other Media*, 2007) have so far been issues under transmedial consideration.

'Metareference' is a particularly topical theme, which will be familiar, albeit mostly under the name 'metafiction', to literary scholars and students but may be less familiar to readers coming from other disciplines. In fact, metareference has hitherto mostly been explored within literary studies, in particular within studies of contemporary, postmodernist novels while similar phenomena in other genres, arts and media have received considerably less attention. The present volume aims to remedy this lacuna in research. It is one of the few existing studies that transcend the boundaries of individual media in the analysis of metareference and offers 'transmedial', media-comparative perspectives on this phenomenon.

The title of the present volume – *Metareference across Media: Theory and Case Studies* – requires some comments. These, of course, concern first and foremost the concept of 'metareference'. However, this is a field that is in itself so vast that a preface is not the right place to explain it in depth. For the moment, metareferentiality can be said to denote all kinds of references to, or comments on, aspects of a medial artefact, a medium or the media in general that issue from a logically higher 'meta-level' within a given artefact and elicits corresponding self-referential reflections in the recipient. An extended discussion of 'metareference' can be found below, in the "Introduction" to this volume. As far as the terms 'medium' or 'media' are con-

cerned, they are meant to embrace both the ‘traditional arts’ (including verbal art) such as painting, architecture, music and literature and the more recent media such as photography, film, TV, and the digital media.

The present volume presents a selection of the papers given at a symposium held in Graz from May 22 to 24, 2008 as part of a project on metareference financed by the ‘Fonds für Wissenschaft und Forschung’ (FWF), the Austrian Science Foundation. This symposium, entitled ‘Metareference in the Arts and Media’, was organized by my colleague and friend Walter Bernhart and myself as a part of the Intermediality Programme which has been run by the Faculty of the Humanities of the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz for many years. We hereby gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the conference by the FWF and the University of Graz; both provided the financial and institutional framework which rendered the conference – as well as this volume – possible in the first place.

Metareference is such a wide field that many volumes could be filled with its discussion, especially if one approaches the subject from the broad perspective of the arts and media in general. The present volume can only focus on some of the key issues. It is in particular dedicated, firstly, to individual case studies documenting the range and relevance of metareference in and for the media; secondly, to theoretical issues, including the transmedial adaptation and reconfiguration of the conceptual toolboxes that exist for the analysis of metareference in individual media as well as discussing the capacity for metaization of individual media and genres from a media-comparative point of view. Since the first few decades of the twentieth century metareference has been of special and increasing relevance to Western culture and has reached a hitherto unparalleled climax in postmodernism and contemporary (post-postmodernist?) media. Therefore, a follow-up conference with ensuing conference proceedings as a sequel to the present volume will deal with ‘The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Arts and Media: Forms, Functions and Attempts at Explanation’. This future conference will thus be dedicated to the presentation and explanation of metareference in recent and contemporary culture and in particular to a functional analysis of metareference in our time.

The publication of an interdisciplinary volume such as this would not have been possible without the participation of scholars from both inside and outside my own field of literary studies. It is therefore my

foremost wish to thank all those who contributed to the symposium held in 2008 and to the lively discussions in the wake of the individual papers as well as to all contributors to the present volume for the often considerable efforts they made in expanding and revising their papers. I also would like to thank all who have collaborated in the material production of this volume, in particular Nicholas Philip Scott for his assistance in language matters, Ingrid Pfandl-Buchegger and Jutta Klobasek-Ladler for their help in the editing process and its context, and above all the remarkably efficient 'FWF-crew': Susanne Kartous, Peter Mittersteiner, who did most of the index, and my principal editing assistants, Katharina Bantleon, whose admirable expertise, almost inexhaustible energy and resourceful handling of all difficulties deserve a special mention, and Jeff Thoss, the expert on metalepsis.

Last but not least, I would like to express – once again – my warmest gratitude to Walter Bernhart for his support before, during and after the conference as well as during the gestation of this book. This is the first book edited by myself as a single editor after a series of no less than five volumes which Walter Bernhart and myself have jointly edited over the past ten years (two in the present series, three in the related series *Word and Music Studies*, all published by Rodopi). It is also the first volume on intermediality stemming from the intermediality-related activities in Graz and the newly founded 'Centre for Intermediality Studies in Graz' (CIMIG) after Walter Bernhart's retirement as professor of English and Director of the eminently intermedial research unit 'Literature and the Other Media' established by him in 1993. In grateful and admiring acknowledgement of his invaluable and often pioneering activities in the field, this volume is dedicated to him on the occasion of his retirement on September 30, 2008. Nevertheless, I hope and, observing Walter Bernhart's new distinguished function as Director of the CIMIG, am confident that this date will not prove to be a watershed in his academic activities, least in the fields to which he has dedicated all his energy over so many years and where he particularly excels, namely word and music studies and general intermediality studies and criticism. The 'flight from criticism' – so graphically rendered in the cover illustration of the present volume – will, I am sure, not be his for a long time to come.



## **Introduction**



# Metareference across Media

## The Concept, its Transmedial Potentials and Problems, Main Forms and Functions

*Werner Wolf*

1. Meta-phenomena across media: current research situation, research desiderata, and aims of the present volume
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6. Functions of metareference
7. Historical aspects of metareference across media



# 1. Meta-phenomena across media: current research situation, research desiderata, and aims of the present volume

In his “Introduction” to a volume entitled *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Dan Sperber attributes to humans a “metarepresentational capacity” that is “no less fundamental than the faculty for language”, and he claims that “[u]nderstanding the character and the role of this [...] capacity might change our view of what it is to be human” (2000a: 6f.). The present volume ultimately aims to contribute to this elucidation of ‘the human’ from the point of view of the humanities, to the extent to which they deal with the media, that is, the traditional arts and the more recently emerged media (both groups will henceforth be referred to indiscriminately as ‘media’).

Although the humanities, and in particular the disciplines dealing with the arts, literature and other media, would seem to be privileged to investigate the human “metarepresentational capacity”, strangely enough, they have received little attention in Sperber’s “multidisciplinary approach”. Sperber’s volume compiles essays on meta-fields as diverse as linguistics, psychology, anthropology and primate research, and emphasizes a cognitive perspective as a potential common ground, but the humanities are represented in it mostly through linguistics, while literature and other media receive only one indirect mention (“aesthetics” [6]) in an enumeration of disciplines that have contributed to discussions in the field. This neglect is arguably due to several factors. One of them may be the fact that Sperber’s volume is based on a very broad conception of ‘metarepresentation’, which includes phenomena that would in most cases not (yet) qualify as meta-phenomena in the context of the media. For instance, Sperber counts among ‘metarepresentations’ phrases that betray a ‘theory of mind’ such as the following thought by a person A: “B[...] thought that *the house was on fire*” (Sperber 2000b: 119)<sup>1</sup>. Another, and more important reason for disregarding the media may be that ‘meta-research’ in these areas – where it exists at all – has so far largely remained within

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<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the direct representation, e. g. of ‘fire’, in one’s mind or in an utterance, the representation one may mentally or verbally create of “the *content* of representations” someone *else* is thought to produce (Sperber 2000b: 117 [emphasis in the original]) is a genuine, self-reflexive meta-phenomenon. However, it is both too covert and too general or also too little media-specific to have been investigated in art and media studies.

the limits of individual disciplines and has not developed a theory that could be useful in contexts that transcend such limits. Indeed, research has failed to provide recognizably interrelated descriptions of meta-phenomena for the fields investigated by the humanities at large. However, given the multi-faceted nature of meta-phenomena, the “multidisciplinary perspective” chosen by Sperber in his overarching project should obviously also apply to the humanities, in particular when it comes to highlighting to what extent, by what means and with what functions such phenomena inform the media. Admittedly, there is as yet a long way to go before the disciplines dealing with the media will be able to enter into a large-scale dialogue with one another as well as with other sciences. Yet what we can do now is take a decisive step in this direction by intensifying interdisciplinary, transmedial research into meta-phenomena at least in the field of the media, thus trying to overcome the ‘insularity’ of the individual, monomedial discourses in view of a larger aim, namely to shed light on human meta-capacity as such.

Indeed, ‘metaization’<sup>2</sup> – the movement from a first cognitive or communicative level to a higher one on which the first-level thoughts and utterances, and above all the means and media used for such utterances, self-reflexively become objects of reflection and communication in their own right – is a common feature not only of human thought and of language as a primary medium but also of literature as a secondary medium (using language) and arguably of all other media as well. However, as stated above, research in this latter field has in most cases been focussed on individual media only. Additionally, the overwhelming bulk of research on meta-phenomena stems mainly from one discipline, namely literary studies. In fact, literary texts have hitherto been the best-researched medium in this context. The most important contribution in this respect is what has been known as ‘metafiction’ since the 1970s, when William H. Gass (1970) and Robert Scholes (1970) separately coined the term. By now, research in this area has been cultivated over decades, and the investigation of meta-phenomena in literature actually extends well back before the 1970s, yet formerly they had been addressed under other, albeit narrower rubrics: e. g. – with reference to drama – as elements of ‘metatheatre’ (see Abel 1963, one of the earliest literary studies using

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘metaization’ (“*Metaisierung*”) was to my knowledge coined by Klaus W. Hempfer (1982: 130), who, however, concentrates on metafiction.

‘meta-’ in a sense relevant to the present volume), but most frequently – with reference to fiction – as manifestations of ‘narratorial self-consciousness’ (see Booth 1952)<sup>3</sup>. The monomedial focus on literature has led to a highly differentiated, albeit neither uniform nor complete conceptual ‘toolbox’ for analysing meta-phenomena in verbal texts and has permitted fruitful discussions of possible functions of meta-phenomena in this field. Indeed, the literary field has proved to be so fertile both with reference to the construction of meta-related typologies and historical (including functional) analyses (although these have tended to concentrate on postmodernism and a few ‘precursors’ of postmodernism such as Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* or Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*) that today virtually all further research on meta-phenomena in literature but also in other media must take the results of metafiction research into account, and therefore metafiction researchers may consider themselves in a privileged position.

Curiously enough, even within literary studies, transgeneric attempts at transposing the findings of metafiction research into other fields – be they only other literary genres – are rare. Even recent research continues the strong, not to say exclusive focus on fiction which has characterized most of the literary research of the past (see, e. g., Huber/Middeke/Zapf, eds. 2005). Indeed, there is considerably less research on metadrama or metatheatre<sup>4</sup> and even less on metapoetry<sup>5</sup>, and most of it (with the exception of, e. g., Müller-Zettelmann 2000) has been carried out independently of metafiction research and without caring to build inter-generic bridges.

<sup>3</sup> The innumerable studies on metafiction cannot all be named here; it may suffice to mention the following representative studies in alphabetical order (even if they sometimes use different terms for metareference in fiction): Alter 1975, Barthes 1959, Booth 1952, Breuer 1981, Cornis-Pope 1997, Currie, ed. 1995, Dupuy 1989, Fletcher/Bradbury 1976, Greber 2006, Hempfer 1982, Huber/Middeke/Zapf, eds. 2005, Hutcherson 1980/1984, Imhof 1986, Lowenkron 1976, Nünning 1995, 2001 and 2004, Picard 1987, Reckwitz 1986, Rose 1979, Scheffel 1997, Schmeling 1978, Scholes 1979, Stoicheff 1991, Stonehill 1988, Waugh 1984, Wells 2003, Williams 1998, and Zimmermann 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Examples are Abel 1963, Bigsby 1980, Blüggel 1992, Hornby 1986, Korthals 2003, Maquerlot 1992, Schmeling 1977 and 1982, Vieweg-Marks 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Specimens of this sub-field include Ahrends 1987, Baker 1986 and ed. 1997, Finck 1995, Gohrbandt/v. Lutz, eds. 1996, Hinck 1989, Müller-Zettelmann 2000 and 2005, Weber 1971.

The reluctance of scholars to look across boundaries is even more discernible when it comes to the crossing of medial boundaries into non-literary fields. Admittedly, the notion of ‘metafilm’ or ‘self-reflexivity’ in film is by now not entirely unknown in film studies (cf. Stam 1985, 2000a and 2000b: 226f., Metz 1995, Ames 1997, Žižek 2000: 528f.)<sup>6</sup>, but when it comes to metapainting there are only Stoichita’s seminal book 1993/1998 and a few other studies on painterly self-reflexivity, sometimes without discussing it as such<sup>7</sup>. ‘Meta-architecture’, or “Architecture about Architecture”, as formulated in the title of a seminal essay by Susan Wittig (1979), is even less researched<sup>8</sup>, and the same is true for ‘metacomic’ (an area where Groensteen 1990 is a rare exception). As for music, meta-phenomena have been discussed for some time in musicology with reference to individual composers or epochs. Yet the limits and possibilities of instrumental metamusic in particular have hardly received any systematic, theoretical attention so far<sup>9</sup>, and the very term ‘metamusic’ is – with rare exceptions – as yet virtually unknown<sup>10</sup>. Generally, even where, in non-literary fields, meta-phenomena have come under scru-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also the studies on film in Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007 (in particular the essays by Withalm and Siebert) as well as in Hauthal et al., eds. 2007 (notably Gymnich and Butler/Sepp).

<sup>7</sup> See Lipman/Marshall 1978, Georgel/Lecoq 1987, Lehner 1987, Asemissen/Schweikhardt 1994, Mitchell 1995: ch. 1.2., and also Mai/Wettengl, eds. 2002 (a volume which also discusses sculpture).

<sup>8</sup> Thus even in discussions of postmodernist architecture such as Klotz 1985, Jencks 1986, and Thomsen 1987 the notion of metareference is at best touched upon, in spite of the fact that this architectural style with its self-conscious (sometimes self-protectingly) ironic recycling of historical ‘vocabulary’ (cf. Wolf 2007d: 42f.) would present an ideal topic where one would expect metareference to play a central role.

<sup>9</sup> I have tried to contribute to remedying this lack elsewhere (Wolf 2007a: 309–315; Wolf 2007b: 53–59; Wolf 2009a, forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> The first use of the term in the above-mentioned sense seems to be by Mittmann 1999; Xenakis 1967/1971 employed it, too, but only in the sense of a musicological theory of music. Terms which seem to come relatively close to the concept of metamusic are ‘musical self-reflexivity’ (Danuser 2001) and ‘music on music’, a term which (drawing on a passage in Adorno [1949/1975: 165–189]) musicologists have used more frequently (cf. Dibelius 1966/1998, Danuser 1996, Schneider 2004); ‘music on music’, however, is more diffuse than ‘metamusic’ since it also includes musical homage in a very broad sense and compositions inspired by other compositions (which need not be metamusic).

tiny there is still a tendency to devise independent terminologies and to view these phenomena exclusively from a monomedial perspective as if they were totally isolated from analogous phenomena in all other media.

As this brief survey of the current situation in research shows, surprisingly little effort has indeed been made both within literary studies and from the perspective of other media to create bridges between these areas by exploring a vast field that transcends the individual areas of metafiction, metadrama, metafilm etc. and forms what in this volume is termed the field of 'metareference'. As a consequence, the toolbox of metareferential analysis devised within metafiction studies in particular has so far been of little profit for the investigation of other media, and conversely, the scant research on meta-phenomena outside fiction has been of equally little relevance to literary studies. The splendid isolation which has hitherto characterised meta-research within the individual disciplines has had further consequences: the analytical categories devised so far are often enough inappropriate to objects and disciplines outside their field of origin, and transmedial comparisons and investigations with respect to theoretical historical and functional issues are all but non-existent. Indeed, as far as I know, within the special field of research that is explicitly dedicated to meta-phenomena, the present volume is only the second world-wide that seeks to transcend this monomedial focus towards an explicit trans-medial approach embracing several media. The pioneering study in the field is Hauthal et al., eds. 2007, but Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007 and Nöth et al. 2008 should also be mentioned, since in spite of sporting the wider notion of 'self-reference' in their titles, they also contain large sections on meta-phenomena. These studies are indeed noteworthy first explorations of the vast field under discussion (for Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007 and Nöth et al. 2008 this is true in particular due to their emphasis on the new media). In addition to highly informative introductory chapters on theoretical aspects, these volumes mainly consist of a series of interesting case studies dedicated to self- and metareference in individual media<sup>11</sup>. However, a lot remains to be done.

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<sup>11</sup> Following a conference in Edinburgh, organized in August 2007 by the International Association for Word and Music Studies, another volume is currently in preparation that will deal with self- and metareference in at least two media, namely literature and music (see Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2009, forthcoming).

‘Metareference across media’ is indeed such a large field that the present volume can only aim to fill some of the lacunae of existing research. In order to show to what extent the volume continues and expands on existing research, it is helpful to first adumbrate the wider range of desiderata and indicate where the present collection of essays purports to advance research and where it leaves room for future investigations. Lacunae in research so far require activities and related aims in at least the following four respects (A to C focussing mostly on systematic issues, while D is predominantly a cultural-historical issue):

- A. collecting relevant examples of metareference where this has not yet been done to a sufficient degree (this concerns notably Western instrumental music of the past few centuries, and moreover, for instance, sculpture and architecture);
- B. reconceptualizing the originally literary concept of ‘metafiction’ and corresponding typological sub-divisions with a view to an interdisciplinary applicability to other media; i. e. providing a common conceptual and terminological framework for interdisciplinary comparisons and descriptions;
- C. on the basis of the above reconceptualization, carrying out a comparative analysis of metareferentiality in several media in order to draw conclusions concerning both their general metareferential capacities (or limits) and their ability to realize particular forms of metareference;
- D. investigating the (cultural-)historical functions of metareference, including contemporary (post-)postmodern culture, in which metareference appears to play a particularly important role.

Ad A: The existence of films that discuss filmic matters, such as Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) and Nicoll/Weir’s *The Truman Show* (1998), of paintings that ‘self-consciously’ explore the art of painting (as collected in Stoichita 1993/1998), even of architecture that self-reflexively refers to other architecture (such as the ironic recycling of traditional forms in postmodernist architecture of the type of Charles Moore’s Piazza d’Italia in New Orleans as discussed by Henry Keazor in this vol.) – all this points to the fact that metareference is indeed a transmedial phenomenon and should not be investigated from a merely monomedial perspective. The guiding hypothesis of the present volume is therefore that there is virtually no art, no (semiotic) medium that cannot be used in a metareferential way

and for meta-purposes (notably for exploring its own medial status). If this is true, even media whose metareferential potential would, at first sight at least, appear to be remote, minimal or even non-existent, such as sculpture or instrumental music, should be susceptible to metareference. This claim, however, has as yet to be substantiated. Several contributions to the present volume do this. Among the several media investigated beyond literature<sup>12</sup>, instrumental music looms large here, as can be seen in the contributions by Tobias Janz, René Michaelsen and Jörg-Peter Mittmann. In addition, the volume deals with media as diverse as musical theatre and other forms of vocal music, including pop songs (see the essays by Martin Butler, Hermann Danuser and David Francis Urrows), film (investigated by Erika Greber, Janine Hauthal, Jean-Marc Limoges and Barbara Pfeifer), painting (discussed by Andreas Mahler), photography (dealt with by Katharina Bantleon/Jasmin Haselsteiner-Scharner), architecture (see the essay by Henry Keazor), comics (on which Karin Kukkonen's contribution is focussed), computer games (see Fotis Jannidis' essay), audioliterature (presented by Doris Mader), and even dance (see the discussion by Ingrid Pfandl-Buchegger/Gudrun Rottensteiner). However, this list of media, long as it may seem, is not complete. Further investigations in the 'meta-field' could also include media not dealt with in this volume, e. g. sculpture or landscape architecture.

Ad B: As metareference is a transmedial phenomenon, its systematic description presupposes conceptual and analytical tools that transcend an individual medium such as literary, book-transmitted fiction and should, at least to a certain extent, be 'translatable' into other media. The existing wealth of research concerning metareference in literature, in particular concerning (meta)fiction, seems to provide such a toolbox. Yet its monomedial focus has tended to produce categories such as 'story-transmitted metafiction' as opposed to 'discourse-transmitted metafiction' (cf. Wolf 1993: ch. 3.2.2.) which are useful for narrative media but would obviously be difficult to apply to (predominantly) non-narrative media, e. g. to instrumental music. This highlights the necessity of reconceptualizing 'metafiction' as well as the analytical terminology devised in its context on the basis

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<sup>12</sup> Even in the well-researched field of literature metareference can still be fruitfully discussed as is shown in the contributions by Erika Greber, Daniella Jancsó, Andreas Mahler and Hans-Ulrich Seeber in this vol.

of the expanded evidence collected through activity A, so that the resulting provisional toolbox of concepts no longer precludes any applicability beyond the confines of verbal texts. Some of these conceptual and terminological issues are addressed in the more theoretically oriented contributions by Andreas Böhn, Sonja Klimek, Winfried Nöth and Irina Rajewsky; some will also be dealt with below, in this introduction, including the question to what extent various subforms of metafiction are relevant to other media and whether ‘metareference’ is a viable reconceptualization of ‘metafiction’ in the first place so that the concept as well as the term are valid for a transgeneric and, above all, a transmedial description of meta-phenomena in literature and other media. It is at any rate clear that the transmedial aim of the project to which this volume is dedicated presupposes some provisional modifications of the results of existing metafiction research in order to facilitate the proposed exportation of the conceptual toolbox for the analysis of meta-phenomena in other media.

Ad C: For the sake of advancing a theory of metareference, a related, theoretical activity is then requisite in ‘meta-research’, namely a comparative analysis of metareferentiality in the media on the basis of the (provisionally) modified concepts of metareference (see Wolf 2007a, 2007b, 2007c: sec. 3). Such a comparison is necessary for two purposes. The first is to test whether the modified concepts which activity B has yielded actually serve their transmedial purpose. As a result, the conceptual toolbox will be validated, or else elements will have to be fine-tuned or discarded, as the case may be. The description of metareference in media outside fiction (or literature) could thus produce new tools of in-depth description, e. g. for art history or musicology, and in some cases (in particular in musicology) perhaps even open up perspectives on individual media that are entirely innovative; in a recursive loop, the findings to be expected may also have reverberations on the description of meta-phenomena in fiction (or literature) itself. Indeed, one of the benefits of a transmedial comparison could be that features of individual media – including the original source-medium of ‘meta-research’, fiction – may appear in a clearer light as well as in a broader perspective. While the present volume will hopefully yield some evidence concerning the validity of the basic concept of metareference proposed here (in addition to including perhaps some basic forms of metareference), it is only after a prolonged investigation into several fields outside fiction that a genuinely



operable transmedial typology of metareferential forms can be expected to emerge. The fine-tuning of the concepts and terminology of metareference will inevitably require a lengthy feedback process resulting from the application to other media, so it will take some time before a common and commonly accepted language for the description of a plurality of media can establish itself. Producing such a transmedial terminological and conceptual toolbox for the description of meta-phenomena in media beyond fiction is therefore an aim which the present volume strives for without, however, claiming to propose definite and universally viable conclusions. It attempts to suggest fruitful perspectives for future research and takes some first steps in this direction. The project of creating a transmedially manageable ensemble of concepts and terms may be long and complicated. Yet it is an indispensable prerequisite, for common concepts are a vital presupposition of efficient intermedial comparisons.

A second theoretical aim of the present volume, which is also destined to facilitate transmedial comparisons, is to provide the basis for assessing the general metareferential capacities and limits of individual media, including their ability to realize particular forms of metareference<sup>13</sup>. Using a perhaps as yet provisional conceptual toolbox, such an evaluation of individual media will in part emerge from the present volume (for the first steps in this direction see the terminological discussions by Andreas Böhn, Jörg-Peter Mittmann, and Winfried Nöth), yet here, too, further research will be required in order to come to more general conclusions.

Ad D: Devising a more generally applicable ensemble of concepts and terms should not only be advantageous for a theoretical and systematic description of metareference as a transmedial phenomenon and thus contribute to ‘Grundlagenforschung’ in the humanities, but also from a cultural-historical and ultimately also an anthropological perspective. The theoretical activities, as enumerated above, must therefore be complemented by a functional and historical elucidation of metareference. As repeatedly mentioned (cf., e. g., Nöth 2007: 7, and Nöth et al. 2008: 27–30, 55–56), one of the most outstanding features of contemporary, postmodernist culture in the Western world is a

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<sup>13</sup> It would, for instance, be interesting to test whether print-transmitted fiction really possesses a higher meta-potential than pictorial media, as has been claimed (cf. Bode 2005: 323f.), since it does not rely on concrete representation to the same degree and consequently tends less towards referential ‘naturalization’.

hitherto unknown increase in meta-phenomena. Originally more or less restricted to the traditional genres and arts of ‘high culture’, metareference has by now not only reached ‘net.art’ (cf. Ryan 2007) and art films (one of the most prominent recent metafilms being Marc Forster’s *Stranger than Fiction* [2006], see Pfeifer in this vol.<sup>14</sup>), but also various branches of the popular media, a development which has even led to the coinage of the term ‘metapop’ (see Dunne 1992, cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 27). Areas which might be regarded as (transmitting) ‘metapop’ are, for instance, children’s literature (with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* stories being a noteworthy early example and Michael Ende’s *Unendliche Geschichte* a particularly intriguing more recent specimen), comics (see Kukkonen in this vol.<sup>15</sup>), TV and animated films (see Butler/Sepp 2007, Siebert 2007), advertising (cf. Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007: Part II, and Nöth et al. 2008: ch. 3.), and computer games (see Jannidis in this vol.<sup>16</sup>). In this context, transcending generic as well as medial boundaries also aims to provide a means of comparative analysis of the current ‘metareferential turn’ and thus prepares the ground for cultural-historical explorations serving to elucidate the functions and origins of what may even be called an on-going ‘meta-range’ (see the conclusion to Butler’s contribution in this vol.). By including some case studies of contemporary ‘metaizations’ the present volume can only provide some perspectives on this interesting issue; the bulk of it must be reserved for a further study dedicated to a transmedial cultural-historical elucidation and possible ways of explaining the remarkable metareferential turn which we have been witnessing over the past few decades.

Ultimately, the functional and historical comparison of the media should contribute to the elucidation of the human capacity for metareference in general (an anthropological aim, which, of course, also requires trans-cultural investigations). In fact, a particularly interesting extension of the field of meta-research would be to create a bridge between the meta-research carried out in literary and other media studies within the humanities and the ongoing meta-debate in other areas as documented in the aforementioned ground-breaking volume *Meta-representations: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Sperber, ed. 2000).

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<sup>14</sup> See also Gymnich 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. moreover, Nöth et al. 2008: ch. 5.

<sup>16</sup> See also Ryan 2007, cf. Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007: part vi, and Nöth et al. 2008: ch. 4.

As has become clear, expanding the investigation of forms and functions of meta-phenomena from literary (and in particular fiction) studies to other genres and media (in the long run even to other branches of scholarship) is an innovative approach that opens up fascinating perspectives on culture and the human capacity for metaization. Within the humanities, the present volume is an answer to a genuinely interdisciplinary challenge from which innovations can be expected both concerning a transmedially useful conceptualization and description of metareferential phenomena and the elucidation, in particular, of media that have so far not been focussed on in this context. In addition, it is from this broader transmedial perspective that cultural-historical phenomena such as the remarkable increase in metaization in contemporary postmodern culture can be expected to be profitably described and assessed.

To sum up the aims of the present volume: it purports to remedy the one-sidedness and monomedial focus of most past research within the framework of a 'transmedial' approach – for theoretical and, to some extent, functional and cultural-historical purposes. More specifically, it continues the project undertaken in the aforementioned volumes by Hauthal et al., eds. 2007, Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007, and Nöth et al. 2008, that is, to document the wide systematic and historical range of meta-phenomena in the media as well as the manifold functions they can fulfil. In addition, and more importantly, it also purports to advance the theory of metareference in the media so that it can ultimately provide a toolbox of concepts for intermedial comparison and cultural analysis on a broader basis than has hitherto been the case. This theoretical approach is mainly based on semiotics and is directed at a reconceptualization of 'metafiction', 'metatextuality' etc. in order to arrive at more widely applicable concepts that avoid the ad hoc bricolage that has so far characterized large parts of literary research. The key-term proposed here is 'metareference', which is used as a heuristically motivated umbrella term for all meta-phenomena occurring in the media.

A note on terminology seems appropriate at this point: why 'metareference' rather than, e. g., 'self-reflexivity' or 'metarepresentation'? And what is the difference between 'metareference' and 'metaization'? The former question will be answered below (in sec. 3.1. and 3.2.). As for the latter question: both terms will be used in this volume in a largely synonymous way and are indeed meant to have the same denotation. If at all, a connotational difference may (but need not) be

created by tendentially employing ‘metaization’ when referring to a process (see above: 3) and ‘metareference’ whenever the result is in focus.

In the following, the ‘transmedial’ framework in which this volume is located and the concept of ‘metareference’ on which it is based shall be explained in more detail.

## 2. Interdisciplinarity and intermediality as frames of transmedial research on metareference

One of the original sources of motivation for the project underlying the present study was literary studies. However, literary studies is not an isolated discipline. Rather, it is an area that over the past few decades has been ‘fertilized’ by a number of other disciplines, ranging from art history to linguistics, psychology, sociology and, most recently, the cognitive sciences, and, in this process, has profited from many concepts which it borrowed from these disciplines (from, e. g., ‘Renaissance’ to ‘figure and ground’). This interdisciplinary cross-fertilization has also functioned the other way round. In fact, in particular in the recent past, literary scholars have not only witnessed a remarkable import of non-literary concepts into their field but there has also been an increased export from literary studies to other disciplines. Notions such as ‘narrativity’, ‘intertextuality’ or ‘mise en abyme’ that originated in literary studies can, for instance, nowadays be found as well in art history and film studies.

A fruitful theoretical frame for the promotion of such interdisciplinary cross-fertilization is the concept of intermediality (this is also the reason why the present volume features in a series entitled ‘Studies in Intermediality’). In a broad sense, ‘intermediality’ applies to any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media and thus comprises both ‘intra-’ and ‘extra-compositional’ relations between different media (cf. Wolf 2002a: 17f.). The concept of ‘medium’ which is implied here and which, as we will see, also plays a role in metareference, is a notoriously fuzzy notion. Following Marie-Laure Ryan’s lucid discussion, in which she includes technical, semiotic and cultural aspects as constitutive of the term ‘medium’ as used in intermediality studies (cf. 2005: 288–290), I conceive of a medium as follows: it is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular technical or

institutional channels (or one channel) but primarily by the use of one or more semiotic systems in the public transmission of content that includes, but is not restricted to, referential ‘messages’. Generally, media “make [...] a difference as to what kind of [...] content can be evoked [...], how these contents are presented [...], and how they are experienced [...]” (Ryan 2005: 290). As said before, medium in this sense includes the traditional arts (among which literature as verbal art) as well as more recent means of representation or communication such as photography, film and the digital media.

Among the several forms of intermediality, the category of ‘transmediality’ as developed by Irina O. Rajewsky (cf. 2002: 206 and 2003: ch. iv.3.4.) and myself (see Wolf 2002a) is of particular importance for the present volume. As opposed to intermedial relations that operate within given artefacts (in the form of plurimediality or intermedial references) and as opposed to intermedial transpositions (as exemplified, e. g., by the filmization of novels), ‘*transmediality*’ deals with general phenomena that are – or are considered to be – non-media specific and therefore appear in more than one medium. These include historical phenomena that are shared by several media in given periods, such as, e. g., the pathetic expressivity characteristic of eighteenth-century sensibility (which can be traced in drama, fiction, poetry, opera, instrumental music and in the visual arts); and they also include systematic phenomena that occur in more than one medium, such as, e. g., framing structures (which can be observed, among others, in literary genres, film, painting and even music), descriptivity (shared by all of these media) or narrativity (one of the most widely applicable transmedial concepts). Some of these systematic transmedial concepts have recently been explored, including some publications in the series *Studies in Intermediality*<sup>17</sup>. Metareference is another concept that can profitably be employed within the framework of transmediality, as the present volume hopes to show. Transmediality as well as interdisciplinarity therefore provide the major relevant frameworks of the present volume. Further frameworks, in particular the semiotic approach which is also important in our context, will be elucidated in connection with the following discussion of the key concept ‘metareference’.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for framing, Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2006, for descriptivity Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2007, and for narrativity, e. g., Mahne 2007, Meister, ed. 2005, Ryan, ed. 2004, Wolf 2002b, 2003, and 2004.

### 3. 'Metareference' in the context of related concepts<sup>18</sup> and various approaches

#### 3.1. The term 'metareference' (I): general remarks

'Metareference' is not yet a received notion in the humanities. In literary studies, one may instead encounter a plethora of partly overlapping terms which all have various degrees of affinity with 'metareference', in particular 'self-consciousness' (e. g. Alter 1975), 'self-reference' or 'self-referentiality' (e. g. Cornis-Pope 1997, Nöth/ Bishara, eds. 2007), 'autoreferentiality' (e. g. Nemec 1993), 'self-reflexivity' (e. g. Huber/Middeke/Zapf, eds. 2005), 'reflexivity' (e. g. Williams 1998), 'metanarrativity' (Nünning 2004), 'metatextuality' (e. g. Kravar 1987), 'metafiction' (e. g. Currie, ed. 1995), 'metanovel' (e. g. Lowenkron 1976), 'introverted novel' (Fletcher/Bradbury 1976) 'metadrama'/'metatheatre' (e. g. Abel 1963, Hornby 1986, Schmeling 1982), 'metapoetry' (e. g. Müller-Zetzelmann 2000). So, why add yet another term to this babel of terminology?

I would like to give the following answers. To start with, 'metareference' generally helps avoid the problem that would occur if in a transmedial approach one chose a term that implied references to individual media or macro-modes only (as, for instance, 'metafiction', 'metadescription' and so forth<sup>19</sup>).

As for the prefix 'meta-' (rather than 'self-'), it seems best to mark the logical nature of the phenomenon under discussion, which implies the difference between an object- and a metalevel. Moreover, the term has been chosen to show that the phenomena in question are special cases of, but not co-extensive with, self-reference (see below, sec. 3.2.). It thus permits us to distinguish between terms and concepts that for better or worse have traditionally been used indiscriminately, in particular, 'self-reference', 'self-reflection' and collocations beginning with 'meta-' while indicating a close relation between the various phenomena that have already been designated as 'meta-' in a plethora of disciplines.

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the position of 'metareference' in the context of related terms and self-reference in particular see Wolf 2001 and 2007b.

<sup>19</sup> For the usefulness of these terms for the purpose of mapping the metareferential field, see, however, below, sec. 4.2.

The second constituent of the term, namely ‘-reference’, serves to point to the specific semiotic nature of the phenomenon under discussion (for more details see below) while also suggesting a difference from ‘meta’-terms as used in other fields, in particular fields outside the media (for instance, from the physical term ‘metamaterial’, which has been defined as “a material which gains its properties from its structure rather than directly from its composition”<sup>20</sup>). As opposed to ‘metarepresentation’ and ‘metatextuality’, ‘*metareference*’ has the advantage that it does not create problems when applied to non-representational or non-textual (i. e., non-verbal) media. ‘Metareference’ is in particular preferable to ‘metarepresentation’ as used, e. g., in Sperber, ed. 2000, for the component of Sperber’s term ‘representation’ could, in the context of literature and other media, easily be misunderstood as denoting heteroreferential ‘mimesis’ and therefore would exclude from the ‘meta-field’, e. g., abstract, ‘non-representational’ paintings as well as music as an equally non-representational medium. At least as far as abstract painting is concerned, it should be clear that paintings in this style can certainly contain metareferences to the medium of painting as such (although they are not ‘metarepresentations’) and therefore *cannot* be excluded from the field investigated in the present volume<sup>21</sup>.

‘Metareference’ thus appears to be best suited as a term for research across media. Indeed using this umbrella term renders it possible for the first time to systematically compare analogous phenomena in individual media, including those which, like music, seem to be more or less eccentric to, or marginal in, the meta-field.

### 3.2. The term ‘metareference’ (II):

heteroreference vs. self-reference, self-reflection and  
metareference seen from a semiotic point of view

The fact that the various meta-phenomena occurring in the media require a common denomination may be clear enough by now, as are

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<sup>20</sup> *Wikipedia*, s. v. “metamaterial” [16/02/2009].

<sup>21</sup> In a potential future joint venture between meta-research in the humanities and the life sciences a notion such as ‘metaization’ could perhaps form a common denominator, for it denotes what is under discussion in both areas: the human capacity for self-reflexively making simple references to, and ‘representations’ of, the objects of higher-level observations.

some of the reasons for the choice of the term. What requires, perhaps, some further elucidation are the contexts in which the notion of 'metareference' is embedded and within which it is differentiated from several (potentially) alternative terms and neighbouring concepts, in particular from 'reference' and 'self-reference' as well as from 'self-reflection' or 'self-reflexivity' (all of which are also received notions).

*Reference*, in the strict semiotic sense used in linguistics, means the relation of verbal signs to the extralingual world (cf. Rehbock 1993: 499, Nöth et al. 2008: 20). However, for the present transmedial purpose, this term must be broadened in several respects. First, it is obviously requisite that 'reference' encompasses not only (symbolic) verbal signs but – with an eye to media such as painting or photography – signs of any kind (including iconic and indexical ones). This implies that, in the following, 'reference' will be used as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of realizations (see also Krah 2005) from a simple 'pointing to' a referent to complex cases of relations between sign and referent (or between signifier and signified). The 'pointing to' something may simply consist in a basic iconic similarity between signifier and signified/referent and may only support a formal, non-discursive meaning that elicits no more than the idea of similarity (e. g. for the sake of identifying a particular object by means of a diagram), while at the other end of the spectrum 'reference' may also encompass complex and detailed symbolic relationships that support a specific discursive meaning, in particular a higher-level meta-comment on elements situated at a lower object-level.

Secondly, 'reference' as designating the relation between sign and referent must not be restricted to the world 'outside' the sign or sign system but also apply to elements, or the entirety, of the sign (system) in question itself so that it will include self-reference. For only then can we link notions such as 'self-reference' or 'metareference' to the idea of reference in the first place. If we broaden 'reference' in this way, the term becomes a hypernym (see *Figure 1*), encompassing two basic variants: self-reference and 'heteroreference' (or, as Nöth calls it, "alloreference" [2007: 62]).



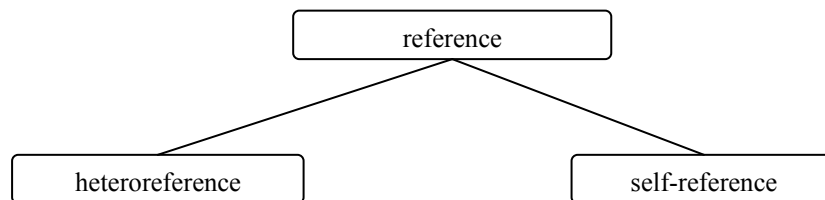


Figure 1: Basic forms of reference

‘*Heteroreference*’ denotes the narrower linguistic sense of the term as described above and means the ‘normal’ intended quality of signs, namely to point to, or designate, elements of what conventionally is (still) conceived of as ‘reality outside’ a semiotic system. In the present context, however, heteroreference means not only a semiotic referential function as described by Roman Jakobson as one of the six functions of language identified by him (see 1960) but also an expressive/emotive or an appellative/conative use of signs in a communicative act. Heteroreference in the sense of pointing to extra-semiotic reality has become problematic since the structuralist attempt to describe verbal meaning as difference *within* the system of language. In particular, the notion that there is meaning outside language may seem naive in the context of poststructuralism and radical constructivism (cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 10f.). However, as Nöth has correctly noted, we still expect signs to inform us about the world rather than about sign systems (cf. *ibid.*: 31), and this is particularly true of the (representational) media. Regardless of contemporary sceptical stances in the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language, and also in spite of the fact that, of course, the media are themselves part of our world, it is therefore justified to maintain the basic difference of self- vs. heteroreference. For this opposition yields conceptual and terminological tools that are appropriate for the description of works that are still mostly read, viewed or listened to with the commonsensical notion in mind that there is a difference between medial representation and the world ‘outside’ and hence between, in Luhmannian terms, self-reference and ‘external reference’ (cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 19).

Heteroreference is not only the commonsensical default-function of everyday language but also of the use of most signs in most media. In contradistinction to this it is heuristically useful to distinguish heteroreference from ‘*self-reference*’. For self-referentiality is a quality that is not only especially palpable in poetry, as Jakobson (1960)

tried to show, but it is an important phenomenon also in other arts and in the media in general, in particular when they are used for aesthetic purposes<sup>22</sup>. In a broad semiotic sense, self-reference can be defined as a usually non-accidental<sup>23</sup> quality of signs and sign configurations that in various ways refer or point to (aspects of) themselves or to other signs and sign configurations within one and the same semiotic system or ‘type’ of which they are a part or ‘token’ rather than to (an element of) reality outside the sign (system)<sup>24</sup>. The kind of relationship is hereby not specified. It can be symbolic (and thus may be used for the purpose of discursive meaning), iconic (and thus may consist in a mere mirroring of elements within the system), or indexical (and thus may serve as an announcement or foreshadowing of elements within the system).

Of course, the term ‘system’ also requires clarification. In the case of the media, a differentiation between a narrow and a broad definition of the system mentioned in the above definition is appropriate. In the broad sense, ‘system’ covers the entire area of the media. Self-reference which occurs within this large range but outside the immediate work or text in question is what I term ‘*extra-compositional self-reference*’. It includes, for instance, intertextual and ‘inter-musical’ relationships between different texts and compositions as well as intermedial references, for instance the relation between literary texts and music embodied in the verbal descriptions of a composition. In contradistinction to this the ‘system’ can also be the work one is confronted

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<sup>22</sup> In this context Jakobson (1960) emphasizes what he termed the ‘poetic function’ of language, though within his system of six functions of language, the metalingual and the phatic functions are also obviously self-referential (cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 16, who, owing to a very broad concept of self-referentiality which even allows for non-intentional self-reference, also attribute a salient potential for self-referentiality to the emotive, sender-centred function).

<sup>23</sup> From the point of view of a not merely semiotic but also communicative approach (see below) and also with an eye to the media, in which effects are usually created on purpose, I would like to maintain the notion of an intentional or at least a non-accidental element in the regular description of self-reference (see also below, sec. 3.3., the analogous problem with respect to metareference; in contrast to this, Nöth et al. [cf. 2008: 32f.], seem to accept also non-intentional self-referentiality when claiming that the mere fact that a speaker inevitably reveals something about him- or herself and thus something about the producer of an utterance is already self-referential).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. for a similar definition Nöth et al. 2008: 16f.

with. Self-reference operating within these narrow confines is what I call '*intra-compositional self-reference*'.

Over and above the variants just mentioned, self-reference occurs in many further forms. This does not only apply to the various fields in which it can be observed – from autopoietic phenomena in nature and the kind of self-referentiality discussed in (fractal) mathematics and system theory to self-reference in the media, which is of relevance to this volume – but also to the various types of self-reference. Some self-referential phenomena are only self-referential in a general way while others are, in addition, self-reflexive and/or metareferential. In order to explain what is hereby implied, namely that there is – or that conceptually as well as terminologically there ought to be – a difference between simple, general self-reference, self-reflection, and metareference as applicable to the media, I propose to take a look at the following three examples from the field of the verbal media<sup>25</sup>, using at first mainly a semiotic approach (for alternative approaches see below):

*Example 1:*

Tyger! Tyger! Burning *b*right  
 In the forests of the *n*ight,  
 [...] (Blake 1794/1982: 33 [my emphases])

*Example 2:*

[...] I desire you to be in perfect charity [with Mr Irwine], far as he may be from satisfying your demands on the clerical character. Perhaps you think he was not – as he ought to have been – a living demonstration of the benefits attached to a national church? But I am not sure of that; at least I know that the people in Broxton and Hayslope would have been very sorry to part with their clergyman [...]. (Eliot 1859/1985: 225)

*Example 3:*

*This sentence contains five words.*

All three examples can be subsumed under the term '*intracompositional self-reference*' in the aforementioned broad sense. Yet there are noteworthy differences between them:

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<sup>25</sup> I am here drawing on, but also modifying, Michael Scheffel's research and a typology which I have published elsewhere (see Wolf 2001). Scheffel was among the first to attempt some systematic ordering in the vast field of terms such as 'self-reference', 'auto-reflexivity', 'metafiction' etc. that up to then had mostly been used as mere synonyms (cf. Scheffel 1997: in particular 46–49).

*Example 1* contains, in the highlighted parts, specimens of *general verbal self-reference*: the alliterations and the rhymes form acoustic recurrences within one and the same system, here Blake's famous poem "The Tyger", and can be said to point to each other much in the same way in which the second occurrence of a theme in a musical composition points back to its exposition. This kind of non-semantic self-reference through *similarities* and *contrasts* or the formation of an *ordered series*<sup>26</sup> obviously corresponds to Jakobson's well-known 'poetic function' (see 1960), which is commonly conceived of as a form of self-reference<sup>27</sup>, but it is also this kind of intra-systemic reference which is meant when we speak, for instance, about the characteristic self-reference of music<sup>28</sup>.

*Example 2*, an excerpt from chapter 17 of George Eliot's realistic novel *Adam Bede* (1859), is a narratorial comment on the failure of a clerical character, Mr Irwine, to admonish the son of the local squire in a moral affair. Clearly, this comment refers to a part of the text from which it is taken, and therefore is also self-referential. However, the self-referentiality is here not an effect of similarities, contrasts or elements of an ordered series that all merely point to each other and trigger at best the correspondent ideas of formal connection without eliciting or implying a discursive meaning as a 'content' of the self-reference: self-reference here emerges owing to the triggering of a discursive 'reflection' on elements of the same system. It thus may be said to be an instance of '*self-reflection*' (or 'self-reflexivity'). This use of the term must be further differentiated from formal 'self-reflection' in the sense of 'mirroring' as in simple *mises en abyme*. Actually, simple 'mirroring' is first and foremost a case of intra-sys-

<sup>26</sup> Fricke (cf. 2000: 36) uses these three forms in order to clarify intratextual deviations from standard language. There are, of course, many possibilities of self-reference which obey the minimal condition of a link between elements of one and the same system; in the verbal media this includes not only all the variants of Jakobson's 'poetic function' (see 1960) but also, e. g., semantic recurrences ('isotopies') and grammatical *accord* as in Caesar's "Gallia omnis divisa est in partes tres [...]".

<sup>27</sup> Cf., e. g., Scheffel 1997: 17 and *passim*, Krah 2005: 4, Nöth 2007: 12, Ryan 2007: 270, who classifies Jakobson's 'poetic function' as a weak form of implicit 'self-reflexivity', Nöth et al. 2008: 16, 22, 31 and Reinfandt 2008: 650.

<sup>28</sup> It is the same kind of non-discursive self-reference which authors and aestheticians of the Romantic and post-Romantic eras had in mind when attempting to create or celebrate similarities between music and poetry or indeed all the arts.

temic similarity and therefore an instance of ‘general self-reference’ – which, however, can show a more complicated structure and be used for further purposes and thus can, in certain circumstances, be classified also as a metareferential device (see below, sec. 5.2.).

*Example 3* is clearly also self-referential and operates with self-reflexive meaning like *Example 2*. Yet the kind of meaning is different: the narrator’s statement in *Example 2* is formally self-referential because it discusses an element of the novel we are just reading, but in this statement, rector Irwine seems to be a person existing beyond the text. In fact, in the quoted passage nothing implies that he is actually a fictional figure, and nothing points to the medium of fiction. Rather, the comment combines self-referential form with a discursive heteroreferential content, and it is this content which is dominant in the passage. In contrast to this, the self-reflection in *Example 3* focuses on the signifying system as such and thus on signifiers and not only on heteroreferential signifieds. More precisely, the sentence refers to the medium or signifying macro-system ‘verbal language’ and even to the micro-system ‘sentence’ of which it is itself a part. In doing so the sentence establishes a logical difference between an object-level (in *Example 3* this is the entire sentence seen as a chain of signifiers) and a meta-level (in *Example 3* this comprises the entire sentence with the words in italics as particularly clear metareferential signifieds) and points from the meta-level to the object-level. This is self-reference or self-reflection with a metadimension, or what I call ‘*metareference*’. ‘Pointing to’ is, however, not precise enough, for metareference always is, or at least implies, a metacommunicative statement – this is why it is a special kind of self-reflection or self-reflexivity in the above sense. In our case, the metacommunicative statement is explicit and, as already mentioned, encompasses the signification of the entire sentence. In other cases only parts of a message may be explicitly or implicitly metareferential.

To recapitulate and enlarge: in contradistinction to heteroreference, which constitutes a primary reference to ‘reality’ at large or, in representations, establishes a represented (possible) world, self-reference refers to texts and media and related issues – in a broad sense as yet regardless of their also being conceived of as part of ‘reality’ or a represented world or not. Metareference goes one step further: it establishes a secondary reference to texts and media (and related issues) as such by, as it were, viewing them ‘from the outside’ of a meta-level from whose perspective they are consequently seen as different from

unmediated reality and the content of represented worlds. Metareference thus appears to be a special kind of self-reference (and also of self-reflection), which is (theoretically) opposed to heteroreference. This first distinction, self-reference vs. heteroreference, is basic for any reflection on self-reference, as it concerns this notion in contradistinction to its 'other'. It is also particularly useful in the context of discussing and interpreting the media, since all forms of self-reference, general self-reference as well as, for instance, authorial self-reflections in fiction, can be, and in fact often are, conducive to metareference<sup>29</sup>. Subsuming all forms of reference that are not (exclusively) heteroreferential under one and the same term is therefore not only a theoretical categorization of appealing simplicity but also harmonizes well with a frequent medial practice and is therefore heuristically justified<sup>30</sup>.

However, upon closer inspection, the simplicity of the theoretical categorization requires some modification. For in medial practice, individual phenomena can display both of the basic variants of reference, hetero- as well as self-reference, to a greater or lesser degree. Functionally, hetero- and self-reference including metareference are thus not so much a strict binary opposition made up of categorically opposed terms but rather poles of a scale with many gradations in between the poles. In other words: in theory one may establish a neat dividing line between metareference and heteroreference with good reason, but when it comes to analysing concrete examples, one must admit that they are usually located in areas in between these two poles and thus participate more or less in both. In fact, real signs are never entirely self- nor entirely heteroreferential<sup>31</sup>, but rather show a mixture of both aspects to varying degrees. It is thus the predominance of one or the other component that suggests to us an opposition and justifies

<sup>29</sup> "Attract[ing] attention to itself" (Ryan 2007: 270) is indeed a potential of the forms subsumed under Jakobson's 'poetic function', albeit not always and necessarily a realized one. For a more detailed discussion of the conditions under which certain forms of general self-reference can become metareferential see below, sec. 5.2.–5.4.

<sup>30</sup> The theoretical problem discussed during the conference on which the present volume is based, that self-reference in this broad sense encompasses heterogeneous phenomena, thus may be overruled by the heuristic advantages this conceptualization possesses.

<sup>31</sup> For the logical paradox of an entirely self-referential sign cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 10, 12, 15; for the mixture of self- and heteroreference and the ensuing gradability of self-reference cf. *ibid.*: 12, 15.

the binary terminological classification as an abbreviation. It would indeed be surprising if some kind of mixture could not always be observed at least on the macro-level of entire works. For where metareference can be observed, in particular in the representational media, it as a rule occurs in combination with heteroreference. Who has ever read a metafictional novel which did not also tell some sort of heteroreferential story? And who has ever gazed at a picture whose every single element was metareferential? For instance, the representation of a painter's painting process is not only metareferential but also shows a particular person and in addition perhaps a room, furniture etc. – which are all also heteroreferential objects of representation.

It thus appears that most metareferential works are *double-coded*, and the same may frequently be said about individual metareferential elements. What is more, in particular considering the problem of perceiving implicit metareference as such, which will be discussed below, one will see that there is a spectrum of *degrees of metareference* rather than a binary opposition of hetero vs. meta. This concerns, on the one hand, entire works, which may show a higher or lesser degree of metareferentiality; on the other hand, the gradability can also concern the more or less intense *effect* which individual elements – in combination with further factors – may have in the process of reception. Such further factors include: the salience and frequency of occurrence of metareference, the extension of a metareferential sign complex, its intension (whether focussing on the entirety or only parts of the sign complex referred to), the possibility of 'naturalizing' metareferentiality in a given work or performance owing to criteria of probability, and so forth<sup>32</sup>.

This gradability also has repercussions on our interpretive activities. It is obvious that isolated metareferential elements such as conventional reader-addresses in nineteenth-century novels or occasional mises en abyme of novel-reading (even if the metareferential terms 'reading' or 'novel' are used) will not yield salient interpretive material from the point of view of a meta-centred reading. In contrast to this there are works where metareference occurs systematically and

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Limoges in this vol., who discusses such factors with respect to film – moreover Nöth 2007: 13, Ryan 2007: 270, who mentions degrees of explicitness, and the intracompositional additional factors which I discussed in my theory of aesthetic illusion as relevant for the assessment of the (anti-)illusionist effects of particular devices (cf. Wolf 1993: 219, 256f.).

persistently, as e. g. in some postmodern metafilms. In these cases one will be more inclined to centre one's interpretive attention on meta-reference.

3.3. Metareference, seen from a communicative, cognitive and cultural-historical point of view, as a combined effect of work, medium, author, recipient and context

Semiotically, metareferentiality is the quality of a sign, sign configuration or sign system. Yet for interpretive practice, in particular when it comes to applying the concept to different media in the process of cultural communication, other points of view and therefore other aspects of the phenomenon also merit mentioning. From a communicative perspective, the use of metareference in a particular *work* or 'message' (which in the performative media also includes a performance) involves more factors than just a 'message' (or sign configuration), in particular: the medium as the sum of the communication-theoretical factors 'code' and 'channel' (actually aspects of the work), the author ('sender'), the recipient and the (cultural historical) context.

To begin with, the transmedial nature of metareference requires that the different *media* in which it occurs be systematically taken into account. For even if it is true, as according to my hypothesis, that metaization can in principle occur in all media, this does not mean that this occurrence shows the same quality and quantity in all cases nor that all media have the same possibilities or limitations in expressing metareference (cf. also Nöth et al. 2008: 32).

In communication, metareference is not merely a 'message' encoded in a given medium but requires a *recipient* who cognitively realizes it. More precisely, it is not restricted to simple 'givens' within a work (text, artefact or performance): these 'givens' form mere potentials that *may* have meta-effects – but metareference also requires the actualization of such potentials by recipients who are willing and able to cooperate, for it is in the recipient that the most basic function of metareference, the eliciting of a medium-awareness, takes place. In fact, the metacommunicative statement present or implied in metareference, if it functions well, always triggers an awareness of the medial status of the work or system under consideration (its quality as



artefact<sup>33</sup>) – even if only aspects of this system (e. g. its production, reception or structure) are mentioned or highlighted.

Moreover, the complexity which metareference implies with its characteristic distinction between a meta- and an object-level, renders it highly probable that actual metaization is the product of an intentional act on the part of an *author*. However, this presents two difficulties. The first is that ‘intention’ is a problematic notion, which in most cases cannot be verified but only inferred, so that it would perhaps be safer to say that metareference is non-accidental and that the author (performer) is usually thought to be responsible for the meta-referential message, including non-accidental ‘signals’ that invite a ‘meta-reading’. The second difficulty consists in the fact that there are cases where non-intentional and intentional phenomena are quite similar both in form and in (illusion-breaking) effect (e. g., in theatrical performances, wings revealed as such on purpose or by accident, or in a film, recording equipment represented on purpose or by chance<sup>34</sup>). Yet it would present a serious difficulty to account for such happenings in a theory of metareference. Moreover, as a rule, the default option for most if not all elements of a work of art or a medial performance is to perceive them not as accidental but as purposeful; it is at any rate under this condition that such elements are considered part of the meaning of the work. Therefore metareference, as discussed in this volume, will be regarded as usually non-accidental.

One final factor, namely the (cultural-historical) *context*, still needs to be taken into account (which at the same time also opens up a cultural-historical approach to metareference): the context influences all other communicative factors: the works, which are produced and received under certain conditions, the recipients, the authors, and the media existing in a given period and culture. Thus in a particular religious context, in which the picture of a deity is regarded not as a mere representation but as the ‘re-presentation’ of the deity in the sense of rendering it present, a metareferential foregrounding of the representational status would be extremely odd; conversely, there are historical contexts, such as the periods of Romanticism and postmodernism in Western culture, in which metaization was or has become a

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. below, in sec. 4.3. fictio- (vs. fictum-)metareference.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Jean-Marc Limoges’ discussion of such ‘accidents’ in film in this vol.: sec. 2.

relatively frequent and well-known phenomenon which facilitates the usage and development of metareferential devices.

All in all, from a communicative point of view, metareference – like so many other elements in the field of the media – is thus a multi-polar phenomenon, as illustrated in *Figure 2*.

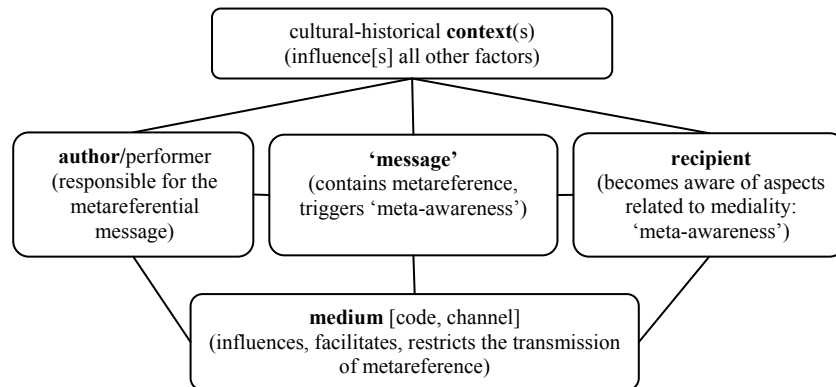


Figure 2: Factors implicated in the communication of metareference

Over and above the communicative point of view a cognitive approach to metareference is illuminating with reference to the recipient in particular. For metareference activates a certain *cognitive frame* in the recipient's mind. All media use primary sign systems in the creation of complex second-order semiotic systems (literature uses, e. g., highly organized verbal language, painting complex pictorial signs and music highly organized sound). Drawing on Goffman's frame theory (see 1974), one may say that understanding such second-order systems (which also includes play-acting and games) presupposes in the recipients a *secondary macro-frame* which they apply whenever a given phenomenon, e. g. a theatrical representation or a modern musical composition, is processed as literature (and not as reality) or as music (and not as mere accidental noise). In Dan Sperber's cognitive approach (see 2000a) this awareness corresponds to what he calls a 'metarepresentation'. In other words, 'meta-awareness', in our context, is the at least passive or latent knowledge that a given phenomenon is not 'reality' as such but something thought, felt or represented by someone else, in short that this is a phenomenon or a 'reality' processed through a medium.

However, such secondary frames which regulate this special reception – and here one needs to elaborate on cognitive approaches such as Goffman's or Sperber's – are not always foregrounded in communication. They sometimes, as it were, 'go without saying' and generally occur in different shades of awareness in the mind. Among these one can distinguish two zones: there is, on the one hand, what one may call a *pragmatic zone*. In this zone the secondary frame is merely *used* for the understanding of the text, representation, artefact etc. as such (as opposed to reality, to which a primary default frame applies), but the mediality or representationality which triggers it can cognitively remain in a state of latent awareness. This means that the medial, second-order quality of what one perceives is somehow taken into account but remains 'in the back of one's mind' (such latency, e. g., allows recipients of medial representations to 'immerse' themselves vividly in the represented worlds in a state of aesthetic illusion without taking them for reality [cf. Wolf 1993: ch. 1.2.1.]). On the other hand, there is what one may call a *metareflexive zone*: here the secondary frame is no longer latent but is activated, and its defining trigger, 'mediality' or 'representationality', *becomes an object of reflection*. In this zone the recipient's cognitive attention focus is centred on the second-order system and its conditions (including possible consequences of mediality, an extreme case being him or her becoming aware of the 'framedness' of all perception, cognition and reception). The cognitively most basic effect of *metareference* which, from a functional or reception perspective, at the same time forms the smallest common denominator of all metareferential devices is thus – as already adumbrated – to *trigger such metareflection, to render the mediality or representationality implied in the secondary frame* (and issues related to it) *an object of more or less active awareness*. As this reflection (or in abbreviated form 'medium-awareness') is per se a rational activity and foregrounds an aspect of a text or artefact rather than of 'reality outside' (namely the text's or artefact's self-reference), the activation of the secondary frame always involves a rational distance and presupposes that a recipient is aware of the nature, forms and conventions of the signifying systems and media in question. This 'backgrounds', at least preliminarily, possible emotional responses as well as the heteroreferentiality (including possible pragmatic functions) that may inform the work or text in question (and this may have further consequences, e. g., for the reception process, the cultural

functions and perhaps even for the evolutionary effect of metareference for the training and development of human cognitive faculties).

Metareference thus appears to have a basic effect or function which is triggered by or in an artefact. Two important notes must be added at this point: first, the rational distance implied in the metareferential eliciting of 'medium-awareness' (to use again this short, albeit simplifying formula) can be relatively weak and need not always disrupt aesthetic illusion (in some cases, in particular where metareference is employed to suggest the authenticity or truthfulness of a representation, it may even, as a secondary effect, strengthen aesthetic illusion); second, triggering a medium-awareness as a basic function of all metareference does generally not preclude other functions. Such other functions will be surveyed below in sec. 6; thus one further function may suffice as an example here, namely the potential of metareference to entertain the recipient through humour. Functions like these may even become dominant in individual works and thus relegate the eliciting of a medium-awareness to a more or less covert function – yet in all cases the raising of this awareness, be it only for the fraction of a second, is a presupposition. If, for example, in Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*, III/4, Béralde gives the hypochondriac Argan the advice to let go of his sombre thoughts and amuse himself at the theatre by watching a comedy by Molière – this metareferential (and indeed metaleptic) device is, of course, first and foremost a humorous, comic device, yet it will only elicit laughter in spectators who are aware of the fact that they themselves are currently watching a comedy by Molière and, perhaps in addition, of the convention that an illusionistic artefact should, as a rule, not draw the recipient's attention to its author. Children, who are not aware of these facts, may arguably not be amused by metareferential devices such as the one used by Molière<sup>35</sup>.

### 3.4. Definition of metareference

Metareference in the media, as discussed so far, can thus be located in the context of other related terms as can be seen in the classification of the aforementioned *Examples 1–3* in *Figure 3*.

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<sup>35</sup> The fact that medium-awareness is an effect of enculturation and familiarity with media may explain why both ontogenetically (and perhaps also phylogenetically) metareference occurs and/or is perceived as such at a relatively late stage.

|                                                                                                 | intra-systemic<br>reference (= self-<br>reference) | discursive (not<br>merely formal)<br>quality of the<br>intra-systemic<br>reference<br>(forms or implies a<br>statement with<br>variable contents) | reference to (aspects<br>of) the medium or<br>related issues from a<br>meta-level (thereby<br>eliciting ‘medium-<br>awareness’ in the<br>recipient) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Example 1</i><br>general self-<br>reference through<br>similarity/contrast/<br>serialization | +                                                  |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Example 2</i><br>general<br>self-reflection<br>without a meta-<br>dimension                  | +                                                  | +                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Example 3</i><br>self-reflection with a<br>metadimension:<br>‘METAREFERENCE’                 | +                                                  | +                                                                                                                                                 | +                                                                                                                                                   |

Figure 3: Metareference in the context of other forms of self-reference

More precisely, ‘metareference’ is a hypernym for all phenomena that fulfil the following three conditions:

1. the existence, in a work or artefact, of a usually non-accidental *self-reference* or ‘intra-systemic reference’, whereby the ‘system’ within which the self-reference immediately operates can extend from the work in question to the entire field of the media, yet ultimately, even this latter possibility (indirectly) refers to the work in question since it is part (a token) of the larger field;
2. the discursive (self-reflexive) quality of the self-reference: it does not interlink elements of the system only through similarity, difference or as parts of ordered series, triggering merely the correspondent formal ideas, but contains or at least implies *reflections* with variable contents in the recipient;
3. a specific logical origin and content of the self-reflection: it issues from a higher level of reflection (a ‘meta-level’) that exists or is implied in the work in question<sup>36</sup> and is *focussed on (aspects of) the medium or the system referred to and related issues* (e. g. the production, distribution or reception of a text or artefact). As a con-

<sup>36</sup> See, below (503), Karin Kukkonen’s discussion of the “secondary deictic set” as typical of metareference.

sequence, an at least minimal ‘meta-awareness’ is elicited in the recipient<sup>37</sup>.

Using these three criteria, metareference can thus be defined for the field of the media: *It is a special, transmedial form of usually non-accidental self-reference produced by signs or sign configurations which are (felt to be) located on a logically higher level, a ‘meta-level’, within an artefact or performance; this self-reference, which can extend from this artefact to the entire system of the media, forms or implies a statement about an object-level, namely on (aspects of) the medium/system referred to. Where metareference is properly understood, an at least minimal corresponding ‘meta-awareness’ is elicited in the recipient, who thus becomes conscious of both the medial (or ‘fictional’ in the sense of artificial and, sometimes in addition, ‘invented’) status of the work under discussion and the fact that media-related phenomena are at issue, rather than (hetero-)references to the world outside the media.*

It should be noted that metareference as defined above is first and foremost applicable to individual phenomena within certain works (‘meta-elements’). Yet, if meta-phenomena become salient features of a work as a whole, one may speak of a ‘metatext’, a ‘metadrama’ etc., and if several ‘metaworks’ exist within one and the same medium, they may even be said to form a metagenre. Thus, ‘metafiction’ can refer to individual passages of a novel, to a novel as a whole, or to a novelistic genre.

A final remark on the term ‘metareference’ is requisite here: sometimes short – but partially misleading – definitions of meta-phenomena explain metafiction as “fiction about fiction” (Hutcheon 1980/1984: 1), which would be analogous to metafilm as ‘film about film’ and so on<sup>38</sup>. In view of these abbreviations it should be understood that the term ‘metareference’ does, of course, not imply

<sup>37</sup> In former publications I privileged the functional criterion (‘eliciting meta-awareness’); this was criticized during the conference on which this volume is based as departing from the structural nature of the other criteria used. I therefore have entered the structural distinction between higher level (‘meta-level’) and object-level before adding the functional criterion, which nevertheless seems to me indispensable.

<sup>38</sup> Actually, these formulae designate meta-phenomena occurring in the fields of fiction, film etc. that imply ultimately (also) a metacomment on the respective medium; but on the surface a metafilm such as *Stranger than Fiction* may not immediately be regarded as a film about film but as an intermedial film about literature.

prima facie an analogy to this usage and in particular cannot be reduced to designating ‘reference about reference’ (for metareference can be about much more than only, e.g., the problems of heteroreference in fiction); rather, if one requires a short explanatory formula, metareference can be said to apply to a ‘meta-phenomenon occurring in the field of reference’ and is actually short for ‘a self-reference in the media with a metadimension’.

#### 4. Mapping the field of metareference

##### 4.1. Metareference in the media vs. other meta-subfields

Meta-phenomena do not only occur in many forms but can be observed in a plethora of areas. As already discussed, these areas all belong to the larger field of self-reference<sup>39</sup>, of which metareference constitutes a special form, and are opposed to heteroreference as the ‘other’ of self-reference in all its forms. According to Krah (cf. 2005: 3) a systematic and comprehensive mapping of the complex field of metareference is still a desideratum. The following reflections aim at meeting this desideratum to a certain extent by proposing a typological map on which the manifold metareferential areas and in particular the field in focus in the present volume can be located.

The ‘meta-field’ under discussion here, namely the area concerning the media, only constitutes a part of all the areas in which meta-phenomena can occur. Within the general meta-field the ‘*outside*’ of our particular sub-field is formed, for instance, by metaization in science (theory of science, ‘metascience’), and moreover by the aforementioned ‘theory of mind’, by which humans and higher animals develop thoughts about the thoughts of other individuals (see above: sec. 1), and last but not least, this ‘outside’ also comprises art- and media-critical discourse, as exemplified by the contributions to the present volume. The borderline between this outside and our *inside* is formed by the nature of the respective discourses and their typical functions: on the one hand there are predominantly pragmatic and argumentative discourses and uses of sign systems, and on the other hand there are the media and in particular the arts as being at

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<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the areas involved in this larger field of self-reference cf. Nöth 2007, esp.: 3–7 and Nöth et al. 2008, esp.: 21–27.

least capable of also fulfilling non-pragmatic, playful and aesthetic functions as well as in many, albeit not all cases the additional function of representation. Most importantly, where meta-phenomena occur in the media, as a rule they are not merely offered as (elements of) a theoretical metadiscourse to the recipients' reflection such as argumentative articles on literature, music or the arts but enable the recipients to *experience* metareferences, so that metaization in the media becomes 'applied metareference'. Thus, the mechanicals' unprofessional performance of the play within the play in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not only elicit abstract reflections on theatrical conventions but also makes us experience these conventions *ex negativo* in an amusing way and in addition throws light on the concrete (and hopefully better) performance of the comedy as a whole.

#### 4.2. Macro-mapping of the subfield 'metareference in the media' according to media or other criteria?

Having established the confines of the meta-subfield in which the media are located, we may now proceed to the question of how to map this particular subfield on a macro- as well as on a micro-level. As for the question of a *macro-structural mapping* of the *inside* of our subfield, basically two ways of dividing this field have been offered in research. Both make use of two different criteria: on the one hand, the field has been split into sub-areas according to various, more or less transmedial criteria. The most systematic approach in this respect is Ansgar Nünning's (see 2001 and 2004), who distinguishes 'metanarration' (as metareflection on narrativity and narrative transmission) from 'metafiction' (in the sense of metareflection on the fictionality of texts) and in addition also appears to distinguish both from 'metalinguistic comments' (cf. 2001: 132). Although Nünning, as is typical of most previous research in meta-phenomena, originally only concentrated on the occurrence of these forms in fiction (see 2001), they are basically transgeneric and transmedial if one grants that narrativity and hence the possibility of reflecting on narrativity is possible in all narrative genres and media. Nünning himself extended the scope of 'metanarration' in an essay published in 2004, where he admits that "metanarration can also be found in many non-fictional narrative genres and media" (16), while at the same time restricting his notion of 'metafiction' to the genre of fiction (cf. *ibid.*), whereas he previously –



and more logically – defined ‘metafiction’ in his sense as a comment on the fictionality of narratives (it would have been more logical still to extend the scope of ‘metafiction’ in this sense to all metacomments dealing with the fictionality or the truth-value of *representations*, narrative or otherwise). Lately, he has added ‘metadescription’ to his list of meta-subforms (cf. 2007: 98f. and 110f.), and the list of possible further subforms devised along these lines thus seems to be an open one. Be that as it may, the principle has become clear: in this line of thought terminological and conceptual sub-divisions of the ‘meta-field’ are obtained by combining the prefix ‘meta-’ with a particular *object* on which the metaization focuses (narration, fictionality, description, language etc.).

An alternative is the more traditional way of using the individual media themselves as the criteria for the formation of subfields. As a consequence, in the combination of ‘meta- + x’, x does not refer to the object of metaization but to the *medium* or *macro-genre* in which metaization takes place. This yields a notion of ‘metafiction’ that is different from Nünning’s, namely ‘metaization occurring in fiction’ in the generic sense of novels and short stories. In analogy to this use there are – or one may coin – terms such as ‘metafilm’, ‘metacomic’, ‘metamusic’ and so forth.

In the face of these different possibilities an important question to ask when considering a transmedial conceptual toolbox of metaization is which alternative to choose or on which hierarchical level to use the two sets of terms and concepts. For our purpose of a transmedial theory of metareference the modal, cross-medial conception of subforms in Nünning’s sense has some attractions (see also Rajewsky in this vol.). However, the scope of the resulting differentiation of special, content-centred meta-forms is not extensive enough to embrace a sufficiently large area of the media. This can clearly be seen with ‘metanarration’ and ‘metafiction’, concepts which originated in narratology and which would in part not be applicable, e. g., to non-narrative music (which is never fictional) or painting (which may be neither narrative nor fictional). In contrast to this conceptualization, the traditional criterion, namely simply to use the individual media as areas of metaization, permits us to encompass the entirety of the meta-field under discussion. I therefore favour this way of macro-mapping as a first option, since it is the more general one. The choice of this criterion is all the more sensible, as part of our aim is precisely to investigate the metareferential potential of individual media; as a

consequence, the particularities of each medium must be taken into account in the first place. Therefore, the different sections of the present volume sport the medial criterion as its main organizing principle.

The choice of the traditional criterion of different media and macro-genres for the macro-mapping of the meta-field in order to subdivide it in, as it were, vertical areas, does, however, not preclude the possibility of using further, quasi 'horizontal' differentiations according to Nünning's sub-divisions and terminology (of course, with the exception of his use of 'metafiction', which should be replaced by a different term<sup>40</sup>): where necessary and appropriate, one may well speak of a metanarrative, metadescriptive or metalingual/metalinguistic element *as part or a sub-category* of, e. g., metafilmic, metafictional or metapainterly devices. For some purposes this may even be quite necessary<sup>41</sup>. Under the proviso that this object-centred differentiation is hierarchically on a lower level and is limited to certain media only (metalinguistic elements to the verbal media, metanarrative elements to the narrative media etc.) one may say that a graded combination of both systems appears to be the best solution for our purpose.

#### 4.3. Micro-mapping of the subfield 'metareference in the media': general subforms of metareference

With the admission of 'metanarration', 'metadescription' etc. as sub-divisions of metafiction, metapainting etc., we have in a sense already addressed the question of how to map the metareferential area of the media on a micro-scale. The differentiations proposed by Nünning are, however, not the only possible ones. Along the line of content-centred sub-divisions one could, e. g., adopt different *functions*, as for instance Marion Gymnich has done with reference to metapoetry (see 2007). It is indeed one of the tasks of a transmedial approach to metareference to highlight the functions of the various meta-devices in the different medial, historical etc. contexts (see below, secs. 6 and 7) and to raise, moreover, the question of whether the functions diagnosed to operate in one medium or work are particular to that medium or belong to a general cross-medial spectrum of functions. There is, however, a disadvantage of adopting a functional criterion for a typology of meta-forms: like the specific object-centred sub-division under-

<sup>40</sup> See below, fictum- or truth/fiction-centred metareference.

<sup>41</sup> See, e. g., Rajewsky in this vol., who continues to use 'metanarration'.

lying Nünning's differentiations it forms an open paradigm for a plethora of possible subforms, according to the functions attributed to individual meta-phenomena, and in addition it yields categories that are not applicable to all media and in all cases.

Another option of a typological differentiation of meta-forms has been proposed by Gloria Withalm with reference to film (see 2007). According to her, all filmic meta-forms can be classified as either focussing on a) the "product", b) the "production", c) the "reception" or "consumption", and d) on the "distribution" or the "exchange" (129). This typology, which is in principle based on a communicative approach and also focuses on *content-dimensions of metaization*, has the advantage of creating a closed system. Prima facie it seems as if this system is applicable to all media. Yet again the question must be asked to what extent all of these dimensions can be transferred to other media. It is, for instance, impossible for instrumental music to metareferentially address problems of distribution.

Yet another possibility of drawing typological dividing lines within each media-specific meta-field is to employ very general and predominantly effect- and recipient-orientated criteria, as was originally done by myself mostly with reference to metafictional effects of aesthetic illusion (cf. Wolf 1993: ch. 3.2., and see 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009a, forthcoming) and in part also by Marie-Laure Ryan (2007). The advantage of such a definition of sub-categories in particular when using pairs of concepts for each category, is that, in principle, they should be applicable to all meta-phenomena in ideally all media.

Let me explain these *general subforms* in more detail (in combination with the other categories discussed so far in sec. 4, they complete the mapping of our field as illustrated in *Figure 4* below, at the end of sec. 4). For clarity's sake I will principally illustrate them with examples taken from fiction. In using these formal criteria and by illustrating them in this way, I am well aware of the problem of 'exporting' categories which were originally devised in the context of a theory of literary metafiction to other media. In order to ensure the transmedial applicability of these forms, I have adapted the original terminology so that it avoids an exclusive reference to fiction and have deleted some forms as less important or not widely applicable enough in a transmedial context<sup>42</sup>; the relevance of the subforms to media beyond

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<sup>42</sup> Thus I have deleted from the list of general metareferential subforms the following pairs of metafictional forms as too narrow in their potential transmedial applica-

fiction will briefly be pointed out in the discussions following the survey and the illustrations. The four pairs of forms under discussion, the criteria used, and relevant examples are:

- a. intracompositional or direct vs. extracompositional or indirect metareference<sup>43</sup> (criterion: scope of metareference)

*Example 4: intracompositional/direct metareference*

WITH a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799. (Eliot 1859/1985: 49)

*Example 5: extracompositional/indirect metareference*

HAVING placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind [...] I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings. (O'Brien 1939/1967: 9)

- b. explicit vs. implicit metareference (criterion: semantic discernibility of metareference)

*Example 6: explicit metareference (see Examples 4 and 5)*

*Example 7: implicit metareference*

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bility: story- vs. discourse-transmitted metafiction (cf. Wolf 1993: 234–239), since it is only applicable to literary or, at best also, filmic narratives (for a tentative trans-medial reconceptualization as 'content- vs. form-based metareference' see Rajewsky in this vol.); central vs. marginal metafiction as only relevant to temporal media (cf. *ibid.*: 239–241), and metafiction that is typographically associated to its context vs. metafiction that is dissociated from it (cf. *ibid.*: 241–242) as only applicable to print-mediated texts; moreover, the criterion of metafictional intensity: isolated vs. extensive metafiction (cf. *ibid.*: 242–244) as well as the criterion of the extension of the metafictional comment: total vs. partial metafiction (cf. *ibid.*: 250–251) as at best additional factors that can be combined with other general subforms, and finally the opposition 'overt' vs. 'covert' explicit metafiction (cf. *ibid.*: 245–247) as a mere specification of one pole of another pair of oppositions, which moreover is also covered by what has been said about meta- and heteroreferential double-coding.

<sup>43</sup> Originally (cf. Wolf 1993: 250–254), I termed these forms 'self-centred or textual' vs. 'intertextual' and 'general metafiction' ('Eigen-, vs. Fremd- und Allgemein-metafiktion').

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MY uncle Toby's Map is carried down into the kitchen.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

AND here is the Maes – and this is the Sambre; said the corporal, pointing with his right hand extended a little towards the map [...]. (Sterne 1759–1767/1967: 608)

- c. fictio vs. fictum (or generally mediality-centred vs. truth/fiction-centred) metareference (criterion: content of metareference)

*Example 8:* fictio or generally mediality-centred metareference (see *Example 5*)

*Example 9:* fictum or truth/fiction-centred metareference

This story I am telling is all imagination: These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in [...] a convention universally accepted at the time of my story [...]. (Fowles 1969/1977: 85)

- d. critical vs. non-critical metareference (criterion: frequent functions of metareference)

*Example 10:* critical metareference (see *Examples 5, 7 and 9*)

*Example 11:* non-critical metareference (see *Example 4*)

It should be noted that these pairs of sub-categories can be combined with each other and are applicable to all individual cases of metareference – as the multiple uses of one example for several forms show.

Ad a) The first of these pairs of terms is regulated by the criterion of scope, which corresponds to Ryan's categories of scope and focus (cf. 2007: 270–271). It has already in essence been introduced in the discussion of the extension of self-reference (see above: sec. 3.1.) and is analogous in the special case of metareference: *intracompositional* metareference operates within the work under discussion as the 'system' in the narrow sense within which this special form of self-reference occurs, while *extracompositional* metareference denotes all other forms of metareference that go beyond the confines of this work (without, however, leaving the media as the self-referential system in the broad sense), be it by referring to a specific other work, or group of works, be it by making a general aesthetic comment on one or more media. Since such extracompositional metareference to a field (type), of which the work in question is also a part (a token), indirectly also implies a metareference to the work in question, albeit by means of a detour, this form may equally be termed *indirect metareference*. This form is opposed to the intracompositional variant, which – since no

detour applies here – can alternatively be termed *direct metareference*. In fiction, *intracompositional* metareference can, e. g., be observed in metalinguistic comments by a narrator on his or her style or, as in *Example 4* (taken from the beginning of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*) on his or her ability to give a convincing picture of past reality, while *extracompositional* metareferences include parodies of pre-existing works, but also meta-remarks that are not – or do not seem to be – immediately applicable to the work in which they occur. An example of the latter kind can be found in *Example 5* (taken from the opening page of Flann O'Brien's experimental novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*) in the general reflections of a diegetic author-character on beginnings and endings of novels. Of course, such indirect metareference is frequently only a disguised form of the direct, intracompositional variant; in *Example 5* this is particularly obvious owing to the fact that the general reflection on beginnings occurs precisely in the opening page of the novel (and is followed by a hypo-diegetic illustration of “three openings entirely dissimilar” [9]). Yet indirection of this kind merits, nevertheless, being given a separate form, in particular because it will usually be perceived as the ‘weaker’ form of metareference (which may prove important, e. g., with respect to a possible [anti-]illusionist effect). For both direct and indirect metareference in fiction analogies may be found in other media. Thus, a painting can, for instance, portray the very artist of the picture under consideration in the act of painting (this is direct metareference); alternatively, a painting may also draw the viewer's attention to some general feature of the art in question (e. g., in the context of the ‘paragone’, its being implicated in a competition with other representational media, in particular by showing maps and mirrors as well as paintings mises en abyme in a picture – this would be an indirect form of painterly metareference)<sup>44</sup>.

Ad b) The second opposition, explicit vs. implicit metareference, which I have derived from Linda Hutcheon's theory of metafiction (see 1980/1984), refers to the semantic discernibility of the metareference in certain signs or sign configurations. This discernibility can vary (cf. also Ryan's criterion of degrees of explicitness [2007: 270]). Where a metacomment is clearly made by the conventional, denotational meaning of a sign (configuration), we may speak of *explicit*

<sup>44</sup> For an application of direct vs. indirect metareference to the opera see Ort 2005, who incidentally uses a similar terminology (“indirekte und direkte Selbstreferenz” [88]); for the relationship of mise en abyme to metareference, see below, sec. 5.3.

*metareference*. Thus the numerous discussions of storytelling in, for instance, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* are all examples of explicit metareference, and the same applies to *Examples 4* and *5*, which contain clear (and even quotable) metareferential phrases such as "reader", "pen", "beginning" or "good book". Owing to their conventional meaning and their occurrence within a work of print fiction, these expressions are obviously located on a meta-level from which medium-related issues are commented on that refer to the work one is just reading and are apt to remind the reader of the print medium as such.

In contrast to this, there are more covert devices which may also establish a meta-level and elicit reflections on the ontological status of the text as a medium or artefact without, however, using explicitly metareferential expressions or signs. Rather, they operate on the basis of a salient foregrounding of the medium as such and/or of aspects of given works as artefacts (their production, reception, function etc.). Foregrounding, as explained by Geoffrey N. Leech (see 1969) with reference to poetry, always implies salient deviations from conventions. In *Tristram Shandy* such *implicit* metareferences can, for instance, be observed in the manifold 'typographical devices' which not only foreground the usual symbolic use of novelistic language by visibly deviating from it through the employment of iconic or indexical signs but also imply a comment on, and an awareness of, the medial conventions as such. Something similar is true of *Example 7*. Here reducing a chapter to only one short sentence is a salient deviation from the convention of creating meaningful and coherent chapters as *larger* text units. This deviation is arguably meant to expose this very convention – here with a partly humorous function and partly an (on the part of the narrator) self-ironic one, since he already criticized his previous chapter, at whose end he complained that "nothing can make this chapter go off with spirit" and therefore "let it go to the devil" (Sterne 1759–1767/1967: 607).

Implicit metareference shows the necessity of a cooperation on behalf of the recipient, which (as discussed above) is indispensable in all metareference, in a particularly clear way, for it is in principle possible to overlook the meta-implication of, for instance, typographical devices or of an extremely short chapter and consider such features as mere oddities. Consequently, markers are requisite in order to ensure a metareferential reception. Such markers can vary in their obviousness and can range from devices that enhance the salience of

foregrounded medial devices to the supplementary employment of explicit metareference in framing paratexts or in the vicinity of implicit elements (the many metalinguistic and metafictional comments on the uses and abuses of language as well as the aforementioned explicit metareference to a “chapter” in *Tristram Shandy* serve as markers of the latter kind). As far as the applicability of the opposition ‘explicit vs. implicit metareference’ in media beyond fiction and literature is concerned, this is not such a simple affair and merits a more extended discussion, which we will come back to below (see sec. 5.1.)

Ad c) The third pair of opposing terms, *fictio* vs. *fictum* metareference, uses the *content* of the metareflection as its criterion of differentiation. In all cases, metareference by definition implies a statement on, and elicits the idea of, mediality and the ontological artefact status of the work in question. In accordance with the Latin *fictio* (‘shaping, formation’), I have termed this *generally mediality-centred* facet of the ‘fictionality’ which is thereby implicated “*fictio-metareference*” (1993: 247). One can thus say that metareference always goes along with an at least implicit and indirect statement concerning the (existing) *fictio* nature of the artefact or performance in which it occurs. Instances of *fictio*-reference can be found in all of the above examples: in the reference to the writing activity in *Example 4*, in the comment on the conventions of openings and of chapter structuring in *Examples 5* and *7*, and even *Example 9* (taken from John Fowles’ novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*) openly contains this general, mediality-centred form in the comment on the convention of the omniscient narrator.

However, *Example 9* illustrates yet another metareferential facet: as opposed to *fictio*-metareference, which is always implied in all forms of metareference, this facet is optional and refers in addition to the truth-value of the work under discussion or its ‘fictionality’ in the conventional sense: this is ‘*truth or fiction-centred metareference*’ or, as I also termed it, “*fictum-metareference*” (from Latin *fictum*, ‘lie’ [ibid.: 247]). In this form, the common meaning of the term ‘fictionality’ frequently comes to bear, namely a certain relation of the work to reality. It should, however, be noted that this truth/fiction-centred variant of metareflection need not always focus on the fictionality of a text in the sense of ‘mere invention’ but can also extend to suggestions of truthfulness (as implied in *Example 4*). This is why ‘*fictum*-metareference’ must be paraphrased by ‘truth or fiction-centred metareference’. Suggestions of only imaginary, ‘fictional’ reference, though,



are perhaps more frequent, in particular in recent literature as exemplified in the by now classic example of this form at the opening of the famous chapter 13 of Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

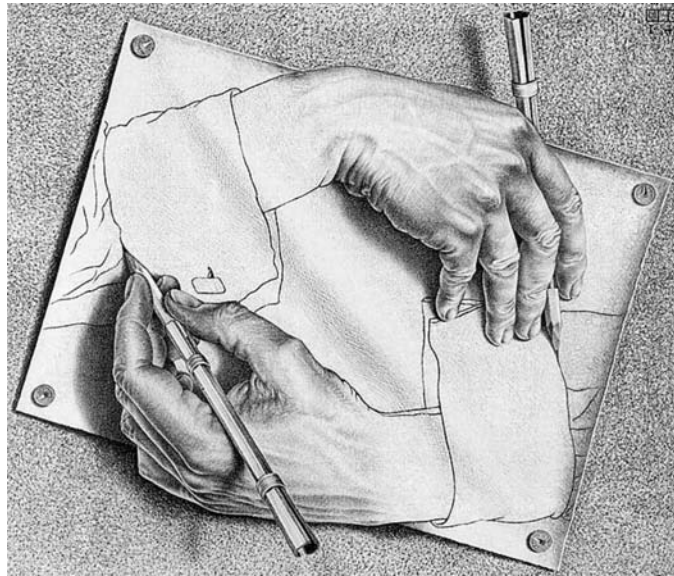


Illustration 1: M. C. Escher, "Tekenende" ('Drawing Hands', 1948).

In the visual arts, to come back to these media, a generally medially-centred (fictio) metareference could, for instance, be exemplified by Velázquez' famous "Las Meninas" (1656): here, several instances of representation are brought to the viewer's attention, including mise en abyme paintings within paintings and a mirror<sup>45</sup>. All of these forms remain within the frame of the possible and even probable, so that the medium is reflected on, but not necessarily also its truth value. This is quite different in the "strange loops" or "tangled hierarchies" (Hofstadter 1979/1980: 684) as epitomized by M. C. Escher's metaleptic lithograph "Drawing Hands" (see *Illustration 1*): as it is impossible in reality that a drawing hand is produced by another drawing hand<sup>46</sup>, such a metaleptic representation indirectly (through implicit metareference) reveals its status as 'mere' fiction.

<sup>45</sup> The picture also includes a self-portrait of the artist in the act of painting and thus combines direct with fictio-metareference.

<sup>46</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the paradox involved cf. Hofstadter 1979/1980: 689f.

Ad d) The aforementioned quotation from Fowles (*Example 9*) leads to the fourth, in part also content-related but mainly function-centred pair of terms, since it not only exemplifies fictum-metareference but also self-critical metareflection. In the face of a tendency to overstress such critical ‘laying bare of the work’s fictionality’ so often encountered in scholarly discussions (in particular of postmodernism) one should, however, emphasize that metareference can also be *non-critical*. Non-critical metareference can be used, for instance, in explaining aesthetic innovations but also in order to suggest that the story one is reading is authentic: (this would be a non-critical fictum metareference). The suggestion of the power of the narrator to evoke a past in all its detail which can be found at the beginning of George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (see *Example 5*) is also an illustration of such non-critical metareference (which was the dominant form in realist novels). In painting, an instance of non-critical metareference would be the self-celebration of a painter in a self-portrait as painter, whereas Escher’s impossible worlds, while implicitly celebrating the bravura of their author, may also be said to contain critical implications concerning, for instance, the truth value of pictorial representations.

| 1. meta-phenomena                                                              |          |              |       |                      | 2. signifying phenomena other than meta-reference |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1.1. in the media                                                              |          |              |       | 1.2. in other fields |                                                   |
| 1.1.1. macro-mapping according to media                                        |          |              |       |                      |                                                   |
| 1.1.2. micro-mapping of the medial 'meta-fields' according to general subforms |          |              |       |                      |                                                   |
| metafiction                                                                    | metafilm | metapainting | etc.  |                      |                                                   |
| intra-/extracomp.                                                              | ditto    | ditto        | ditto |                      |                                                   |
| ex-/implicit                                                                   | ditto    | ditto        | ditto |                      |                                                   |
| fictio/fictum                                                                  | ditto    | ditto        | ditto |                      |                                                   |
| critical/non-critical                                                          | ditto    | ditto        | ditto |                      |                                                   |

Figure 4: Mapping the field of metareference

## 5. Some problems of a transmedial (re-)conceptualization of metareference

### 5.1. Implicit and explicit metareference

According to the definition given above, metareference implies a certain logical structure in a compositional element or an entire work, namely the existence of a meta-level from which a statement on at least the medial nature of the work in question and/or the system to which it belongs must issue forth, and elicits a medium-awareness in

the recipient. However, the requirement that a text or work elicit something in a recipient causes theoretical problems for a conceptualization of metareference such as the one adopted here which also considers the reception-oriented facet of the phenomenon under discussion: how can one be sure that a given phenomenon triggers a meta-awareness, in other words, a particular semantic effect? There is no lexicon of metareferential devices that could be consulted for literature, let alone for all other arts and media. In addition, there may be (or have been) recipients who are (or were) not equally responsive to triggers of metareference (perhaps owing to historical or generic contexts in which metareflections are or were relatively rare and therefore seem or seemed alien), and there may even be a widespread or 'natural' tendency to disregard metareference and naturalize it wherever possible in favour of heteroreference<sup>47</sup>. Even if one can reduce the latter problem – at least for contemporary recipients – by postulating a well-informed and sensitive recipient, enough problems remain. Especially problematic among these is the possibility that a metareferential element may be 'too weak' to trigger an awareness of mediality. This difficulty occurs in particular in implicit forms of metareference but explicit metareference is not without its pitfalls either, in particular when viewed from a transmedial perspective. The problems attached to both subforms of metareferentiality shall be discussed briefly in the following.

Explicit metareference is clear enough in the verbal media: it occurs whenever there are quotable elements that are semantically metareferential in their denotations, such as the expressions 'dear reader', 'this chapter', 'this is a work of fiction' etc. But what about other media, e. g. visual media in which, as a rule, there are no quotable discourses (cf. Wolf 2007b: 51)? It has been argued that explicit reference is indeed restricted to the verbal media<sup>48</sup>. This would automatically reduce all metareference outside at least partially verbal media (such as literature, film, musical theatre etc.) to implicit reference. All of this, of course, depends on the definition of 'explicitness'.

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<sup>47</sup> This at least is what decades of teaching suggest to me, since, in particular where metareference occurs in double-coded elements, most students almost invariably will consider the heteroreferential level before – if at all – commenting on the metareferential side.

<sup>48</sup> Oral communication by Winfried Nöth in the discussions during the conference on which the present volume is based; cf. also his contribution to this vol.

If one defines it as present in the meaning of basic signs of a symbolic sign system (as in the lexicon of English, where lexemes such as ‘reader’ and ‘text’ have a clear denotation which becomes metareferential if the lexeme is used in the text of a novel), then explicit metareference must in fact be restricted to the verbal media.

However, explicitness may also be defined differently. I propose to conceive it as a high degree of discernibility or ‘obviousness’ on the ‘surface’ of signs and sign configurations that must be representational, yet need not be restricted to symbolic signs but could include iconic and indexical signs, as in painting and traditional photography. ‘Obviousness’ is in this context the quality of a clear, (quasi-)denotational representation through the activation of conventional world-knowledge. If explicitness is defined in this way, explicit metareference would then not only be restricted to verbal media but could extend also, for instance, to paintings showing a painter in the process of producing a picture (as in Velázquez’ “Las Meninas” or in Vermeer’s “The Art of Painting”, see *Illustration 2*).

Admittedly, the representation of the painter is not ‘quotable’ in the linguistic sense; rather, the picture must first be translated into verbal language, nor is the represented painter a basic sign in the ‘language of painting’, but rather a sign configuration. Yet this configuration can even be isolated within a larger canvas and still clearly denotes ‘painter’, albeit through an iconic sign system, owing to representational conventions and world-knowledge. Since, as noted in section 1, one task of the present volume is to modify the toolbox of concepts that originated from verbal media so that they can fruitfully be applied to other media as well, I would tend also to extend the notion of explicitness to such clear cases. Explicit metareference would then be the quality of representational signs or sign configurations that are clearly metareferential owing to a conventional meaning in a given context, a meaning that unmistakably refers to (aspects of) a medium.

Alternatively, and bearing in mind Ryan’s notion of degrees of explicitness (see 2007: 270), the obviousness of metareference on the surface meaning of signs or sign configurations as in the aforementioned painterly example could terminologically be accounted for by attributing it at least a ‘quasi-explicit’ status. This alternative would equally furnish a descriptive tool by means of which one could, notably, distinguish metareference in instrumental music (which, in my opinion, can only show various degrees of implicit metareference) from other arts and media.



Illustration 2: Vermeer van Delft, "De schilderconst" ('The Art of Painting', c. 1665), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. (Orig. in colour.)

Whether one opts for a wider definition of explicit metareference or for a narrow one that is exclusively modelled on verbal media, one thing seems to be uncontroversial: namely that the counterpart to explicit metafiction, implicit metareference, is certainly more problematic, since the defining quality is here precisely the absence of a clear, (quasi-)denotational metareference in the surface meaning of a sign configuration (a sign configuration that need not even be representational). In painting, such potentially implicit metareference could, for instance, be assumed where the painterly medium or what is represented is employed in a highly unusual way so that the medium and/or the conventions of painterly representation are foregrounded. This is,

for instance, the case in the aforementioned ‘impossible’ representations by M. C. Escher, in some paintings by Magritte and in the meta-*leptic*, virtually frame-breaking cover illustration of this volume reproducing Pierre Borrell del Caso’s painting “Escapando de la crítica” (1874, ‘Escaping Criticism’); originally, such implicit metareference may also have played a role in abstract painting as a salient, even revolutionary break with the age-old tradition of representation as the ‘natural’ function of painting<sup>49</sup>.

Yet are these examples really illustrations of metareference? When one takes a closer look at (alleged) implicit metareference, it becomes clear to what extent this form poses more problems than explicit metareference, because the meta-quality of the corresponding devices is notoriously questionable and disputable. Implicit metareference covers a large field of devices which do not openly declare their metareferentiality owing to their semantic content – in literature this would correspond to the mode of ‘telling’ – but by means of devices which perform or illustrate metareferentiality, a form which can be likened to the literary mode of ‘showing’. Implicit metareference consists in certain ways of employing the medium in question so that a second-order statement centred on medial or related issues can be inferred. As stated above, foregrounding through salient deviation is the procedure *par excellence* in this context. Yet, how is one to distinguish metareferentially motivated ‘salient’ deviations from ‘ordinary’ deviations that remain within the limits of what may be expected in a non-trivial work that, for instance, follows an aesthetics of *aemulatio*, originality or fantasy?

The actual problem with implicit metareference is that it hinges much more so than explicit metareference (where at least conventional or denotational meaning can be made use of) on contextual frames of reference, in particular on all the aesthetic, historical, pragmatic etc. conventions ruling the work in question, its performance, the genre to which it belongs, its reception and so forth. It is only against such conventional backgrounds that deviations can be perceived as such (whereby ‘deviation’ includes ‘over-’ as well as ‘under-fulfilment’ of the respective conventions). Thus, in certain compositional forms of instrumental music, improvisations are expected, even improvisations that display a certain virtuosity. To the extent that improvisation re-

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. also Rajewsky in this vol.: sec. 3, where she discusses form-based metareference in photorealism.

mains within the range of expectations, we are on the other side of metareference. Yet it is conceivable that an improvisation becomes so extensive, foregrounding the limits of the instrument or the exceptional musical brilliance of the performer to such an extent that one is tempted to perceive the performance as a foregrounding of music, the performer or the instrument as such – which would mean that the frontier into ‘meta-land’ has been crossed. Yet where exactly is this border?

A possible criterion for differentiation could be that implicit metareference can be assumed whenever there are deviations whose deciphering is not merely a bonus in a work’s reception or (a) performance but essential to its understanding. With reference to music this criterion provides a rule of thumb by which one can distinguish ‘ordinary’ originality (in compositions) or virtuosity (in performances) from marked ones – although it is clear that no exact border can be delineated and that this criterion may still seem unsatisfactory as lacking in precision. As for painting, the seeming fantasy ‘non-sense’ of Magritte’s “L’Inondation” (*Illustration 3*) may also help to illustrate the point: the ‘non-sense’ of a nude whose upper half dissolves in the sky becomes (more) meaningful when it is read not as a mere surrealist fantasy but as a metareferential laying bare of a pictorial representation as such (which can wilfully depart from mimetic realism). Magritte’s painting can thus be classified as containing implicit metareference to facets of the art of painting.

Still, the problem remains: can the salient deviation from conventional representation not also be read as something else? Magritte, for instance, is frequently not classified as a metapainter but as a surrealist artist, a painter who does not elicit reflections on his medium but on dreams, the unconscious etc., in short on heteroreferential issues (this is how Magritte is, for instance, classified in the Musée de l’art moderne in the Centre Pompidou in Paris). “L’Inondation” is especially problematic, as it lacks a marker which in many other cases helps to identify implicit metareference as such, namely explicitly metareferential elements in the paratext(s) and/or the context of the work in question.



*Illustration 3: René Magritte, “L’Inondation” (‘The Flood’, 1928). Dexia, Brussels. (Orig. in colour.)*

Both markers can be seen at work in Escher’s “Drawing Hands”: both the caption and the clearly metareferential drawing situation depicted render it highly probable that one will regard the ‘impossibility’ of a drawing hand being created by itself as an implicit metareferential use of a painterly metalepsis. The title “L’Inondation” does not offer such help and seems rather to refer to a heteroreferential element in the represented world, namely the lake or sea in the background. However, the obviously unsatisfactory relation of this title to what is actually in the foreground of the picture could be read as a hint to look for further, better links – which might be a covert invitation to a meta-referential reading.



## 5.2. The question of a metareferential essence of individual devices (I): metalepsis

In the media, metareference, in particular its implicit variant, can be transmitted by a variety of devices. Again and again, as the contributions to this volume show, one encounters, in this context, metalepsis (see, e. g., Klimek, Kukkonen, Limoges and Pfeifer), *mise en abyme* (see, e. g., Limoges and Urrows), intertextuality or intermediality (see, e. g., Bantleon/Haselsteiner-Scharner and Böhn). Most of these devices can easily be seen to imply relationships between elements of the works in which they occur or between different works that all belong to the larger field of the media and are thus clearly self-referential. The fact that these devices can also frequently be observed in metareferential works makes it probable that they, in addition, have at least a metareferential potential. Yet does that mean that all of them are in themselves also *automatically* metareferential?

As far as metalepsis is concerned, one would be tempted at first sight to answer in the affirmative. For the prototypical case of metalepsis can be defined as a salient phenomenon occurring exclusively in representations, namely as a usually non-accidental and paradoxical transgression of the border between levels or (sub)worlds that are ontologically (in particular concerning the opposition reality vs. fiction) or logically differentiated (logically in a wide, not only formal sense, including, e. g., temporal or spatial differences)<sup>50</sup>. The paradoxical ‘impossibility’ of metaleptic transgressions seems to lay bare the fictionality of the work in which they occur and thus implies a meta-statement on its medial nature as an artefact. I am well aware of the fact that in some respects this conception of metalepsis deviates from other notions of metalepsis, notably from Genette’s (much too restrictive) definitions as given in his book *Métalepse* (2004), where he describes it as a manipulation of the causal relationship between a representation and its producer (“une manipulation [...] de cette relation causale particulière qui unit [...] le producteur d’une représentation à cette représentation elle-même”; 14) or, alternatively, as a deliberate transgression of the threshold dividing an embedded structure from its surroundings (“[une] transgression délibérée du seuil d’enchâssement”; *ibid.*). As is also shown by the different uses of the notion in Pier/Schaeffer, eds. (2005), metalepsis does not (yet) have a

<sup>50</sup> This is a reformulation of a previously published definition (cf. Wolf 2005b: 91).

generally accepted definition. What metalepsis actually is, or, rather, how it can be meaningfully conceptualized, notably in a transmedial context, merits some comment, since the metareferential potential of this device obviously depends on what one incorporates under this term. At the same time ‘metalepsis’ can be used as a model case for the transmedial reconceptualization of a (probably) metareferential form which was originally described within the narrower confines of literary narratology (for this reconceptualization see also my more extended discussion in Wolf 2005b). The reformulation of metalepsis which I have offered above aims at encompassing a maximum number of phenomena which have been or can be regarded as metaleptic and proceeds from the following reflections:

- a) Like metareference (see above: sec. 3.3.) metalepsis, at least in prototypical cases, is (regarded as) an intentional or non-accidental device.
- b) Metalepsis can be observed not only in narrative fiction but also in drama (e. g., in out-of-character speaking), in painting, narrative and otherwise (see *Illustration 1*), in film (as in *Stranger than Fiction*, see Pfeifer in this vol.), in comics (see Kukkonen in this vol.), in computer games (see Jannidis in this vol.) and other media (e. g. illustrated children’s books, see Klimek in this vol.). In its transgeneric and transmedial nature, metalepsis is similar to self- and metareference, but, according to condition a) is more limited, since it exclusively occurs – or seems to occur – within representations and thus representational media; this, on the one hand, excludes, e. g., instrumental music as a typically non-representational medium but on the other hand also includes more representational media and works than only narrative ones (which is why one should not speak of ‘*narrative* metalepsis’ unless one wants to designate a special case).
- c) Metalepsis presupposes the existence of at least two different ‘worlds’ or (onto)logical levels, at least one of which must be inside the representation or be the representation itself. It is helpful to postulate ‘levels’ or ‘worlds’ as a minimal condition in order to be able to accommodate metaleptic phenomena that do not only involve the classical case of a transgression between the ‘vertically stacked’ levels of the representation and the represented within a representational work but also the following phenomena: a – seeming – transgression between a work and the

world of the author or recipient outside it, transgressions between parallel or ‘horizontal’ subworlds within a work (cf. Wagner 2002: 247<sup>51</sup>), and transgressions between a representation and a non-representational sub-level (e. g. a hypothetical abstract painting one of whose abstract forms ‘leaps out’ of the frame and becomes alive on the diegetic level of a film).

- d) The border-crossing implied in metalepsis is not just of any kind but of a paradoxical, ‘impossible’ nature. ‘Paradoxical’ can refer to strictly logical contradictions but can also extend to salient contradictions of ‘doxa’, i. e., what is conventionally considered possible in reality and is *not* sanctioned by generic conventions (e. g. ‘impossible’ synchronizations of worlds/levels with widely differing temporal settings *outside* fantasy literature)<sup>52</sup>. Metalepsis is therefore open to historical change and also to the evolution of, e. g., generic codes. The ‘impossible border-crossing’ is the most important condition of metalepsis, and this may justify the extension of this term to phenomena that go beyond strictly logical contaminations of a level of representation and a level of the represented, to which some researchers in the wake of Genette would like to restrict metalepsis (see, e. g., Klimek in this vol.).

Research (cf. Nelles 1992: 93–95<sup>53</sup>) has by now distinguished three basic types of metalepsis:

- a) rhetorical metalepsis: it is restricted to verbal media involving a narratorial agency and consists of a seemingly ‘impossible’, although only imaginary narratorial transgression of the border between extra- and intradiegetic levels (e. g. a lengthy narratorial explanation motivated by the fact that a pause occurs in the action taking place on the intradiegetic level) (cf. Ryan 2004: 441);
- b) epistemological metalepsis: it is limited to media that are able to represent specific thoughts and speech and consists, e. g., in an

<sup>51</sup> This is, however, a very rare case; Klimek, for whom metalepsis must always occur between hierarchically different levels, excludes it from the realm of metalepsis in her contribution to this vol.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Wagner 2002: 237: “[...] l’ensemble des procédés métaleptiques repose sur une transgression des canons mimétiques.”

<sup>53</sup> Ryan (cf. 2004: 441–442) only differentiates between rhetorical and ontological metalepsis, though.

‘impossible’ knowledge fictional characters appear to have of their being mere characters (cf. Nelles 1992: 94);

- c) ontological metalepsis: it can occur in all representational media and consists in the paradoxical, yet seemingly actual, physical transgression of a logical or ontological border between two levels/worlds by a character or object.

The metareferential potential of these forms is noticeably different: in ontological metalepsis (which is at the same time the form most easily encountered outside narrative fiction), it is highest. Since the representation of ‘impossible’ crossings of (onto)logical levels, in particular in the typical case of a transgression of the frontier between hierarchical, ‘vertical’ levels – which usually are correlatives of the opposition ‘reality vs. fiction’ – can only happen in fiction, ontological metalepsis may be conceived of as implying an ontological comment on the entirety of the representation in question, namely ‘this is fiction’. Since fictionality, which is thereby foregrounded, is always produced by means of a medium (and an author), this comment fulfils the prime condition of metareferentiality, namely to imply a statement on aspects of the medium in question or on the frame ‘work of art’, ‘text’, etc., in short, on mediality in general (cf. Krah 2005: 13)<sup>54</sup>.

As opposed to ontological metalepsis, the metareferential potential of rhetorical metalepsis is markedly less developed, since as a mere discursive effect, and one that is highly conventionalized at that, this device does not seriously impair the logic of a representation. In fact, rhetorical metalepsis only transparently hints at an ‘impossible’ contamination of distinct levels or worlds without actually representing it (and therefore, at least in principle, could also occur in non-fictional texts). This reduces the paradoxical effect and thus also the foregrounding of fictionality or other aspects of the medium in question. When a narrator’s extradiegetic comment appears, for instance, to be motivated by a pause occurring in the diegetic action owing to a character having fallen asleep, this could even have the effect of conferring the same reality status on both diegetic and extradiegetic levels.

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<sup>54</sup> Krah here takes up an argument by Hofstadter (1979/1980: 690), namely that metalepses such as Escher’s “Drawing Hands” bracket the ‘pragmatic context’ of art. In contrast to this I think that, on the contrary, they implicitly point to the frame ‘art’ and/or ‘fiction’ and thus become metareferential – by virtue of the very mental process which Krah himself mentions (cf. 2005: 14f.), namely that all paradoxes contain an appeal to the recipient to make sense of them.

As a consequence, rhetorical metalepsis would here seem to fulfil a heteroreferential function rather than a metareferential one<sup>55</sup>.

As for epistemological metalepsis, which may be regarded as a form in between ontological and rhetorical metalepsis, its metareferential potential can be qualified as correspondingly intermediate, for on the one hand the transgression remains on this side of the suggestion of an actualized impossibility, but on the other hand the transgression is more than an (in part) conventionalized rhetorical device and, particularly when it is a speech act of represented characters, borders on ontological metalepsis: characters in a novel, according to the 'doxa' of representational conventions, cannot know about their ontological status, and when they do – and say so –, this is nevertheless an 'impossibility' that can only occur in fictional texts and thus implicitly lays bare the fictionality of the possible world in which it happens.

Yet even if ontological metalepsis can arguably be accorded a high degree of metareferential potential, one has to allow for further factors that may reduce and sometimes perhaps even de-actualize this potential. Most important here are generic conventions. Thus, ontological metalepses would be less conspicuous or odd in fantasy literature than, e. g., in a representation that seems to be inscribed in the tradition of realism. Moreover, one must account for the fact that repeated metalepses within one and the same work (e. g. in children's literature or fiction such as Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* [2001], a novel which mixes fantasy, detective fiction and science fiction) need not necessarily enhance the paradoxical effect but can weaken it through habituation. This may also have reverberations on the supposedly anti-illusionist effect of metalepsis: even though the paradoxicality implied in metalepsis may be said to be generally apt to immediately distance the recipient from the representation and thus at least undermine aesthetic illusion, ambivalent, particularly double-coded cases are possible in which an ontological metalepsis is represented so convincingly that the illusion, at least for a moment, may even be intensified (see Klimek in this vol., who strongly argues in favour of an illusionist effect of some metalepses).

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<sup>55</sup> For an interpretation of (rhetorical) metalepsis as an authenticating device see Anja Cornils' (2005) interpretation of the seemingly 'impossible' change of narrative situation (from third-person to first-person) in Acts 16, 21 and 28.

Such an at least temporary pro-illusionist effect seems to occur in trompe-l'oeil art, where the reality 'contained' within a picture 'spills over' onto the frame – if the viewer accepts this transgression of levels as an intensified illusion<sup>56</sup>. The cover illustration of the present volume is a case in point. It at first suggests that a boy virtually leaves the frame of the painting of which he is a part and thus seems to be even more real than the painting and the painted frame together, before the recipient becomes aware that such metaleptic border crossing is in fact only possible in representations such as illusionist paintings – which eventually breaks the illusion and transforms it, possibly into an amused admiration for the painter's trompe-l'oeil skill.

All in all, one must note that even ontological metalepsis can only be attributed a strong metareferential *potential*, while in individual cases aspects other than those implying a statement on facets of the medium in question may be so dominant that this potential cannot be said to be actualized. As typical of implicit metareference, under which metalepsis must be subsumed, this device requires a confirmation of the implied metareferentiality, e. g., by a context underlining or explicitly actualizing this aspect, in particular in the form of explicit metareference. The cover illustration, entitled "Escapando de la crítica" may again serve as an example. Its caption is double-coded

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<sup>56</sup> One may also think of two-dimensional representations parts of which turn into three-dimensional sculptures, as in some baroque frescoes (examples of this are discussed by Klimek in this vol., albeit from a different perspective). If one regards this medial change as signifying the spilling over of a fictional representation onto reality, something resembling a metalepsis seems to occur. However, this spilling over – as long as the trompe-l'oeil effect lasts, will not be regarded as a paradoxical transgression between two levels, since the artefact is not perceived at all as such but – both in its two- and three-dimensional parts – as an extension of one and the same reality of which the viewer is also a part. Therefore no paradox and hence no metalepsis can be identified. When the trompe-l'oeil effect fades, the transgression appears merely as one taking place between two media (painting and sculpture) but not as a transgression between (onto)logical levels. Therefore again no paradox is involved, and thus the phenomenon under discussion is not actually a metalepsis (if metareference is involved here, it does not proceed from an alleged paradox but from the elicitation of admiration for the artist's skill). So what in this context remains of genuinely metareferential metalepses that can at the same time produce a pro-illusionist or at least ambivalent effect are cases such as the cover illustration of this volume in which visible frames are transgressed by convincing representations.

like the representation itself. At first sight “la crítica” can be understood to refer to the world represented inside the painting so that it may be supposed that the poor, scared boy is escaping some form of chiding issuing from the interior of the represented world. Yet, on taking a closer look and on further reflection, one may also become aware that he is actually looking with a scared expression at some object to the right in *front* of the picture. This may be the place, not where some fictional ‘criticism’ scares him, but the location of “la crítica” in the generic singular, in other words, where the real-world critics are ready to criticize him as a painterly representation and with this the painting as a work of art. This may then be regarded as the boy’s motivation for escaping the painting altogether (before being rejected as impossible since a fictional boy cannot be aware of real critics). As soon as we read the caption in this way, it becomes explicitly metareferential, and this in turn will support the perception of the painterly metalepsis as an implicitly metareferential device. It is a device that perhaps saves the painting from the critics owing to its original, metaleptic treatment of a motive of painterly realism known, e. g., from Murillo, namely a boy from the poor classes, a motive which by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century may otherwise have appeared hackneyed.

### 5.3. The question of a metareferential essence of individual devices (II): mise en abyme

As we have seen, even ontological metalepsis, in spite of its strong bias in this direction, cannot be said to be (clearly) metareferential in all cases. This relativization is even more appropriate with respect to mise en abyme. This device designates a special relationship within an embedding structure, namely – with reference to the media – the ‘mirroring’ of parts or the totality of a framing or embedding higher level of a semiotic complex (text, work, performance) in a discernible unit located on an embedded, lower level<sup>57</sup>. In contrast to what the name of this concept may imply (‘putting something into an abyss’) mise en abyme is not restricted to infinite recursion (for the various forms of mise en abyme see Dällenbach 1977/1989, 1979–1980, 1997), but can also refer to discernible relationships of similarity, including identity

<sup>57</sup> See also Wolf 2009b, forthcoming, where I discuss mise en abyme and its counterpart, ‘mise en cadre’.

(as an extreme case of similarity<sup>58</sup>) and contrast (to the extent as contrast presupposes similarity) between only two different, vertically (hierarchically) ‘stacked’ levels. Nor is it restricted to narratives, but – like metalepsis – is a transgeneric and transmedial phenomenon which can occur in all literary genres, in comics, film, painting, and other media<sup>59</sup>.

Since mise en abyme is based on a similarity within a work<sup>60</sup>, this device, when it occurs within the media, is clearly a form of (intra-compositional) self-reference. Yet it would be difficult to argue that all instances of this device are at the same time metareferential, that all reflections *of* (a part of) a work or performance are also reflections *on* its mediality, structure and so forth. In pictures such as *Illustration 2* (Vermeer’s “The Art of Painting”) this is unproblematically so – at least with respect to the painting which the represented painter is about to produce, for this representation can be said to be a mise en abyme of the actual painterly process which produced the painting we see and thus to contain a pictorial semantics that is clearly metareferential. Yet does this also apply to the representations mise en abyme in the background, the map with the miniature pictures on its margin? Or what about realist paintings of interiors in which pictures are represented as ornaments or status symbols? Do such mises en abyme suffice to render paintings metapictures? And do all novels in which a novelistic character tells another character a story automatically become metareferential owing to this doubling of the act of storytelling?

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<sup>58</sup> In the face of misleading conceptualizations (cf., e. g., Krah 2005: 6) it is also important to note that the mirroring of mise en abyme may, but need not refer to the entirety of the ‘upper’ level.

<sup>59</sup> Depending on the meaning one is prepared to attribute to ‘levels’ as part of the definition of mise en abyme, one may even argue that – unlike metalepsis – it is not even restricted to representations, nor to the media for that matter: if the difference between the part of a whole and the whole is considered as sufficient in this context, mise en abyme could be said to occur in instrumental music (e.g. where a micro-element within a composition mirrors its macro-structure) as well as in mathematics (e.g., where the elements forming the outline of a figure of fractal geometry recursively mirror the figure as a whole) or in nature (leaves mirroring the structure of a tree).

<sup>60</sup> This also includes representations of the intended response of the implied reader by fictional characters, e. g., in the horror which characters are often made to feel in Gothic possible worlds, since the implied reader can be said to be part of the work in question.



In contrast to the painterly *mise en abyme* in Vermeer's work, such cases, while also *mises en abyme*, cannot actually be said to produce or imply a meta-level in the work in question from which a comment on (aspects of) the medium or related matters is made. If *mise en abyme* can thus be metareferential in some cases and 'harmless' in others, how are we to distinguish between these cases?

The self-referential recursivity which *mise en abyme* by definition possesses is a feature that may point to the artificiality of the work in which it occurs and thus certainly has a metareferential potential. However, its actualization is not an automatism but depends on a number of contextual, extracompositional as well as intracompositional factors, including, in particular, the salience of this artificiality. Of course, salience is not an exact criterion, and consequently *mise en abyme* is a particularly good example of the fact that metareference is a gradable phenomenon which sometimes can become so covert – or, in double-coded representations, so dominated by the heteroreferential facet – that it is barely perceptible. Where the recursivity is plausible, in particular, where it can be said to be a feature of a represented world (as in the paintings adorning the walls of a realistically painted interior) the prominence of the artificial similarity thereby involved will be low. As a consequence, the *mise en abyme* in question will not be conceived of as a metareferential phenomenon but as a predominantly heteroreferential one. Dominance of heteroreferential plausibility is thus a criterion which can considerably diminish the salience of a *mise en abyme*.

As opposed to such possibilities of 'naturalizing' the artificiality of *mise en abyme*, the artificiality can also be highlighted, thus affiliating the device with metareference. This is, for instance, the case where *mises en abyme* occur with a high frequency in terms of parallel, 'horizontal' mirrorings, or else in terms of 'vertical' depth (by a multiplication of embeddings). Both forms should be mentioned in relation to Vermeer's "The Art of Painting" when it comes to discussing the metareferentiality of the map on the wall of this interior in combination with the *vedute* of Dutch towns in its margins. As far as the (high) frequency of parallel *mises en abyme* of representation is concerned, the map has its counterpart in other media represented on the same canvas: not only in the painting which is just produced but also in the sculptured bust lying on the table as well as in the fact that the painter's model (probably) impersonates Fama and thus is also a – performative – representation. As for a higher than ordinary vertical

frequency of mise en abyme in Vermeer's work, one could point out that the illustrations contained in the vedute bordering the map may be regarded as representations at a third remove: they are representations depending 'hypertextually' on a representation (the map), which is in itself part of a representation (Vermeer's painting). In spite of the possibility of regarding Vermeer's "The Art of Painting" also from a heteroreferential angle, it is thus at least arguable that the painting has a relatively distinct metareferential quality.

Another way of underlining the artificiality of mise en abyme and thus of rendering it metareferential would be its paradoxical use, which makes it coincide with metalepsis as discussed above. A painterly example of this would be *Illustration 1*, Escher's "Drawing Hands".

Yet another option for mise en abyme to actualize its metareferential potential is shared by this device with all other devices of implicit metareference: the combination with (quasi)explicit forms of metareference. Generally, the paratextual level (containing indications such as "The Art of Painting") is a privileged locus for such explicit metareferential marking. In the case of mise en abyme another privileged place for explicitness is the framing 'upper level'. In verbal texts, this embedding level can – and frequently does – contain discussions of the embedded medium (storytelling, acting, painting etc.). In painting, the (quasi)explicit metareference to the act of painting which we see in Vermeer's "The Art of Painting" provides an equally obvious metareferential context, implying for the unfinished embedded picture the ontological comment 'I am a picture' – which can then be regarded in a second step as referring to the embedding painting as well. As far as the cityscapes in this work are concerned, the same (quasi)explicit painterly metareferentiality serves as a context which helps to actualize their metareferential potential, too (in addition to the aforementioned criterion of frequency). The equally (quasi)explicitly metareferential framing context of 'gallery pictures' forms a further painterly possibility of rendering a mise en abyme metareferential: for here the embedded pictures are not merely heteroreferential commodities or status symbols in an interior but are clearly represented as works of art by the very context in which they appear. In analogy to what Lucien Dällenbach has already said about some cases of mise en abyme with respect to the 'avowal of a text's artificiality which a too rigorous symmetry makes' ("l'aveu qu'une trop rigoureuse symétrie [fait] de l'artificialité" [1977/1989: 94]), namely '*I am literary, I myself and*

*the story in which I am embedded* (“*Je suis littéraire, moi et le récit qui m’enchâsse*” [ibid: 79]), one could here say that the mise en abyme in such gallery pictures implies in each case a statement such as ‘I am a painting – like the representation in which I am embedded’.

When comparing the metareferential potential of ontological metalepsis and mise en abyme in particular, it is safe to say the following: ontological metalepsis can only be ‘naturalized’ with difficulty and with reference to some rare cases in which only a few factors, in particular generic conventions and an effect of habituation, apply. In all other cases, and this seems to be the majority, the metareferential potential of metalepsis is strong enough to be activated. As opposed to this, a plethora of criteria (only some of which could be discussed here) seem to be requisite in order to actualize the metareferential potential in mise en abyme, which thus appears to be much weaker than in metalepsis. In interpretations one should consequently be circumspect and certainly not rush to metareferential conclusions when encountering a mise en abyme.

#### 5.4. The question of a metareferential essence of individual devices (III): intertextuality and intermedial reference

The same can be said, as we will see, about another important and potentially metareferential device, namely intertextuality. Now usually considered to designate a non-accidental textual (verbal) reference or relationship to a real or fictitious pre-text (see Broich/Pfister, eds. 1985), intertextuality is also sometimes extended to analogous intra-medial relationships within non-verbal media, and sometimes even to relationships between different media. However, for this latter case, intermediality has become the received term, denoting – in the aforementioned broad sense (see above: sec. 2) – any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media<sup>61</sup>.

Like mise en abyme, both intertextual and intermedial reference (which is only one form of intermediality<sup>62</sup>) are generally self-referen-

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Wolf 2002b: 17, Rajewsky 2002: 199, and see Wolf 2005a.

<sup>62</sup> It should indeed be noted that not all forms and instances of intermediality can be classified as (medially) self-referential; while this is possible for intermedial reference (in analogy to intertextual reference) as well as for intermedial transposition (as in the filmicization of novels), other forms, i. e., plurimediality and transmediality (analogies between works created in different media) can only be considered self-

tial devices, the difference being, however, that they belong to the extracompositional variant whereas *mise en abyme* belongs to the intracompositional one. Yet again one cannot claim that at the same time all of these cases are also metareferential. As in the case of *mise en abyme*, a number of factors and criteria must be active or applicable to allow the actualization of the metareferential potential which these forms no doubt possess. These factors and criteria include the frequency of the device, its combination with forms of explicit meta-reference and its salience as a secondary reference to the world of texts and media seen as such rather than as a primary reference to reality or possible worlds. In this context the criterion of functional dominance must again also be mentioned. Intertextuality – in the form of individual or system reference – may, for instance, be predominantly used for the construction of a represented world; but it may also be employed in order to lay bare the pastiche character of a text as a ‘mere’ representation. In the first case it would not make sense to speak of metareference, in the second case it would.

Let me give an illustration: when a character quotes from the Bible as a part of the fictional world of a novel, this kind of intertextuality is verbal self-reference, but not metareference, since it is compatible with the primary references establishing the novel’s possible world and does not force the reader through a secondary reference issuing from a meta-level to take an ‘outside’ view of the text. However, intertextuality could become metareferential if a discussion of the reality or fictionality status of the recited Bible episode ensues. Intertextuality, both as a relation between verbal texts and within works of other media, becomes regularly metareferential in parodies (see Rose 1979), for parody always implies a critical comment on the pre-text as a text (or the pre-existing work as an artefact), foregrounding (usually through distorting imitation) its (alleged) deficiencies. An illustration from painting may serve as an example: René Magritte’s “Perspective II: Le Balcon de Manet” (*Illustration 5*) is not only a clear intramedial reference to Manet’s painting mentioned in its caption (*Illustration 4*) but also a humorously distorting imitation of this classic work of

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referential under certain circumstances (in plurimedial works only where a noticeable influence can be seen to operate between the medial components leading to similarities, contrast, ordered series or mutual comment). Space does not permit an extensive discussion of this classification problem here, but it would merit some attention.

Impressionism. Rendering Manet's characters in the form of coffins and presenting them in the same recognizable setting amounts to a comment which does not only imply the heteroreferential fact that Manet's models, by the time of Magritte's painting (some eighty years later) will all be dead but arguably also the metareferential suggestion that in the 1950s they are as dead as the painting style of Impressionism.

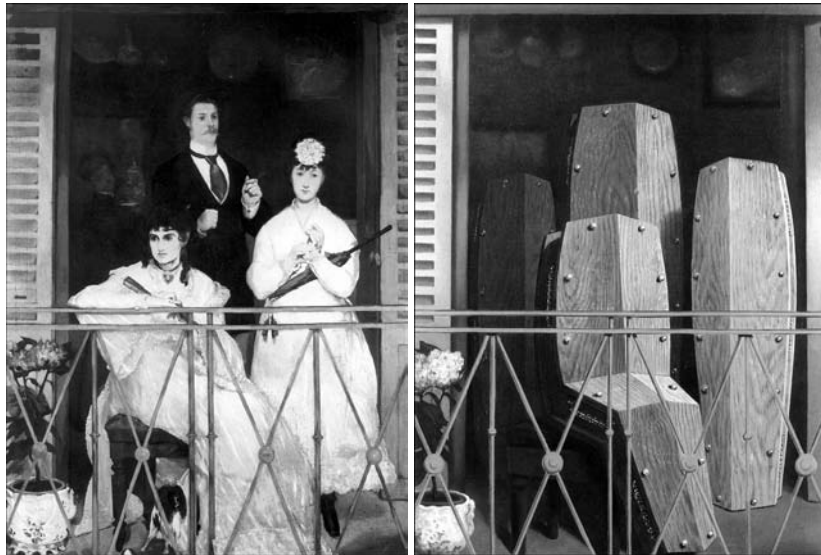


Illustration 4 (left): Edouard Manet, "Le Balcon" ('The Balcony', 1868). Musée d'Orsay, Paris. (Orig. in colour.)

Illustration 5 (right): René Magritte, "Perspective II: Le Balcon de Manet" ('Perspective II: Manet's Balcony', 1950). Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Gent. (Orig. in colour.)

As far as intermedial reference is concerned, one should be as cautious in equalling it with metareference as in the case of intertextuality. There is, however, a variant that is particularly prone to being combined with metareference, namely an experimental imitation of an 'alien' medium which goes 'against the grain' of the medium of the referring work, as for instance in the experimental imitation of musical structures in the Sirens-episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (cf. Wolf 1999: ch. 8). Here, too, the salience of the reference, in particular where it is combined with a high degree of deviation from the traditional use of the medium in question (in Joyce's case the medium of

print-transmitted verbal fiction), is an important factor for the implication of a meta-level from whose vantage point the mediality of the media involved, their potentials and limits, appear foregrounded<sup>63</sup>.

#### 5.5. Transmedially relevant vs. media-specific forms of metareference

As we have seen, metalepsis, mise en abyme, intertextuality and inter-medial reference are all self-referential devices that – like most generally self-referential forms – have a potential for metareference. However, the extent of this potential varies and depends on several further factors, so that we cannot say in any case that there is automatically a connection between the phenomena discussed and metareference. The affinity between general forms of self-reference and metareference at any rate justifies once again the fact that both are classified under one and the same umbrella term, ‘self-reference’.

It would be interesting to enquire whether the metareferential validity of specific devices such as metalepsis and mise en abyme depends not only on individual uses but also on media-specificities. While it has become clear that not all mises en abyme are metareferential, it may well be that mises en abyme in the performative media have a higher tendency to become metareferential than in other media. For a play within a play, or a film within a film will more often than not be accompanied in particular by explicit metareference in the framing (which will ‘infect’ the embedded level and thus turn the mise en abyme into an implicitly metareferential device), whereas novel reading in a novel may be part of a quite ‘harmless’ story. Likewise, as mentioned above, the epistemological variant of metalepsis has a relatively restricted range of occurrence (it is limited to media that are able to represent thought and speech), while the rhetorical variant has an even narrower range of occurrence (it is limited to narrator-transmitted texts). Both variants have been shown to also have a different (and, in comparison with ontological metalepsis, more limited) potential for metareference, which also illustrates the point made here that media-specific criteria should also play a role in the discussion of metareferential devices.

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<sup>63</sup> For another possibility of ‘metaizing’ intermedial references see Ulrich Seeber’s discussion of the use of intermedial metaphors in H. G. Wells’ *A Modern Utopia* in this vol. as well as Daniella Jancsó’s contribution to this vol.

This brings me to an important point, which can, however, only be touched upon briefly: the transmedial approach to metareference adopted in the present volume not only entails intermedial comparisons but also the question as to what extent one can differentiate between transmedially relevant forms and functions on the one hand and more media-specific forms and functions on the other. Thus the problems of metanarrativity addressed by Irina Rajewsky in this volume seem to belong to the media-specific variant, and a similar question is raised by Fotis Jannidis with respect to metareferential techniques employed in computer games. If this ‘sifting’ of existing concepts, be they of narratological origin or of a different extraction, is systematically continued, it is to be hoped that some of the typological differentiations which are variously used in the disciplines involved in meta-research will reveal their transmedial applicability while others must be fine-tuned or perhaps (as is probably the case with rhetorical *metalepsis*) discarded altogether from the chart of transmedially relevant notions and concepts.

## 6. Functions of metareference

By definition, all metareference in the media goes hand in hand with the introduction of a meta-level from which an explicit or implicit comment is issued forth on aspects or the entirety of an object-level. The content of this object-level may consist in (aspects of) the work itself which contains the metaization (in cases of direct metareference), but it may also focus on the (art or media) system as a whole or on works other than the one in which the metaization occurs (in cases of indirect metareference). Yet even when the metacomment is thus only an indirect one it ultimately always affects the work from which the metaization issues forth. It may, for instance, imply a classificatory self-referential statement of the kind ‘I am a better work than the one in focus’ or ‘I belong to the same class of artefacts as the work referred to’. Such basic ontological classification (artefact vs. natural object), which frequently extends to an aesthetic classification in the sense ‘I am an artwork’, is fundamental to all other statements and functions at issue in metareference. In any case, by separating the work in question from the realm of natural objects and also by marking its status as art, this classification – at least for a moment – directs the attention to something other than the conventional and usual con-

cern of medial artefacts (e. g. depicting reality, creating beautiful music, telling or experiencing the re-enactment of a story and so forth): it foregrounds the general medial quality of the respective work. Regardless of whether this fundamental metareferential comment is achieved in a witty, ingenious, critical or laudatory way, the classificatory gesture at its core always implies something rational, intellectual rather than experiential or emotional (see above: sec. 3.3.). This fundamental fact influences to a great extent the manifold individual functions which metareference can serve – for the work itself, its immediate medial, generic or aesthetic context, its author, recipient or the wider cultural-historical context. In the following, some of these functions will be enumerated, grouped according to these interrelated factors of, or participants in, communication (although it is clear that individual cases of metareference may be adduced under several headings since they may serve several functions at the same time)<sup>64</sup>.

As far as *work-centred functions* are concerned, metareference, by virtue of the aforementioned classificatory gesture, always foregrounds the frame ‘art’ or ‘medium’. This frame is basic for the understanding of the work in question. As long as art has existed, the marking of the secondary frame ‘artefact’ or ‘artificial activity’, as opposed to the primary frame applicable to the experience of reality (see Goffman 1974), has been a feature of artworks. Frequently, the metareferential signalling of this frame is relegated to various media-specific framings at the ‘threshold’ of the respective works, be they the pedestals of statues, the frames of paintings or photographs, the proscenium arches of theatres or (old-fashioned) cinemas, film credits or the prefaces and other paratexts of novels<sup>65</sup>. Yet, as we have seen, such framing can also occur within works – in the manifold implicitly or explicitly metareferential devices and gestures which are the subject of the present volume. In particular, the classification as art (or

<sup>64</sup> For similar catalogues of the functions of individual media see also Gymnich 2007 (for metaization in film and TV) and Gymnich/Müller-Zettelmann 2007 (for metapoetry).

<sup>65</sup> For such framings as ‘metamessages’ see Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2006, and cf. Wolf 2006: 7, 13; these framings also include contextual framings, e. g. the physical framing of exhibitions or performances, and generally the entire cultural discourse on the traditional arts and other media, which today is often felt to be (or criticized for being) constitutive of the art-quality of avant-garde artworks, performances etc. rather than the quality of the artworks, performances etc. themselves.



bad art) can generally confer value on the work in question (or disparage other works), but metareference can also serve other and more specific work-centred functions. Among these are self-praise owing to certain foregrounded qualities of the work in question (in fiction, this can take on the form of a protestation of authenticity by means of a non-critical fictum metareference, which sometimes may even deny the work's status as art) as well as rendering the work interesting in various ways: it can, for instance, make it intellectually appealing or generally amusing (all of this may also be responsible for the proliferation of metareference in contemporary 'metapop'). Metareference can also include specific points of criticism directed at other works and genres (e. g. in parodies), but also self-criticism and, over and above such overtly evaluative functions, foreground various aspects of the work's production, structure, reception etc. or insert it into a specific (aesthetic, generic) tradition.

As for possible *author-centred functions*, metareference may not only confer value on the work referred to but also on its author. The author – and this curiously even applies to postmodernist authors who produce in a context in which originality and the very concept of the author allegedly have lost value – may reveal him- or herself as a particularly self-conscious and hence intellectual person or as one capable of surprising, witty and amusing devices (such as startling metaphors<sup>66</sup>). In addition, metareference may provide the author with a means of experimenting self-consciously with the possibilities and limits of his or her medium, at the same time including the (intelligent and interested) recipient in these experimentations. Since metareference can also be used for comments on the aesthetics of one's own work, or on other works, or on aesthetics in general, authors may also employ it as a means of educating the recipients, or of providing interpretational clues and cognitive frames to their own works (this is an option often chosen in highly experimental works or otherwise unusual and innovative oeuvres, where authors may fear that they could otherwise not be properly understood). Last but not least, metaref-

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<sup>66</sup> As Hofstadter (1979/1980: 689) aptly remarked – and illustrated with Escher's lithograph "Drawing Hands" (see above, *Illustration 1*) –, even in the most paradoxical representation there always remains an "Inviolable Level": the level of the real artist who invented the paradoxical representation in the first place. Well-wrought impossibilities may thus not only implicitly draw attention to, but also celebrate, their authors as well as the potential of the media in question.

erence permits authors also to comment on the products but also the personalities of their colleagues, be it by way of homage (as in homage poems) or critically (as in parodies).

Metareference has, of course, also a number of *recipient-centred functions*. The impact of metareference on them is even so important that one metareferential function was mentioned in the context of the definition of the term, namely ‘eliciting a medium-awareness in the recipient’ (this corresponds to the aforementioned basic classification of the respective work as artefact or art implied in all metareference and is also related to the potential inherent in metareference to educate the recipients aesthetically). As far as the representational media are concerned, in particular in cultural contexts in which aesthetic illusion or ‘immersion’ can be expected to be elicited by them, one will immediately think of the capacity of metareference to undermine immersion and even destroy aesthetic illusion<sup>67</sup>. However, while this is to some extent a rather frequent consequence of the rational quality of metareference, which directs the attention to the medium rather than to a represented world, it would be rash to attribute this effect to all metareference to the same degree. As I have repeatedly noted elsewhere with reference to aesthetic illusion in fiction (cf. 1993: ch. 3.2.), and as stated above, the basic distancing effect of metareference can at least in part be overruled, in particular in non-critical forms, and sometimes leads to the stabilization of aesthetic illusion<sup>68</sup>; arguably, even metalepses may, under certain circumstances, contribute to aesthetic illusion (see Klimek in this vol.). Further possible functions of metareference that are particularly relevant to the recipients are: providing entertainment and – often funny – amusement (this is also the reason why metareference so frequently occurs in comedies) and satisfying ludic desires (especially in ‘experimental’ works). Moreover, the appeal to reason implied in metareference may also work as a gratifying intellectual stimulus for recipients who are capable of responding to it and who are thus given insights into the

<sup>67</sup> While heteroreference is apt to ‘recentre’ recipients in a represented world, metareference, by pointing to these worlds from the ‘outside’ of a meta-level, can easily distance them from it (see also Kukkonen in this vol.).

<sup>68</sup> A pro-illusionist possibility of metareference in narrator-transmitted narratives is the curious effect that a narratorial undermining of the ‘primary’ illusion that is always centred on the experience of the story level may lead to the emergence of a ‘secondary illusion’ centred on the narrator him- or herself (cf. Wolf 1993: 102f.).

structure, aesthetic, and other facets of the work under consideration and at the same time are invited to quasi cooperate in its production<sup>69</sup>. In this context, metareference, and notably the aesthetic or intellectual value potentially conferred by it, may also function as a stabilization of a more or less elitist group of connoisseurs of media ‘consumers’ who have become such experts in the respective medial or aesthetic conventions that laying them bare or experimenting with them can become the source of a particular in-group pleasure (this function may also be at the basis of much of contemporary metaization, including ‘metapop’).

As far as the *context*, aesthetic and otherwise, is concerned, meta-reference can, here too, serve several purposes. Winfried Nöth has directed our attention to an important cultural function of metareference, namely to contribute to the general tendency of all ‘semiospheres to become self-reflexive’ (see Nöth et al. 2008: 56). This does not only harmonize with the anthropological “metarepresentational capacity” of man (Sperber 2000a: 6) mentioned in the introductory section above, but is also enlightening in a cultural-historical sense. For such tendencies should be expected to become more intense as culture matures, and this is arguably what may be said about Western culture over the past few centuries, in particular concerning the proliferation of metareference since the second half of the twentieth century.

Maturing can, of course, also mean ‘ageing’, and thus the proliferation of metareference could be seen as a symptom of decadence. It may, for instance, be an indicator of a crisis of representation in the corresponding media. This appears to apply in particular to times of ‘exhaustion’ as in postmodernist ‘literature of exhaustion’ (see Barth 1967/1977). This exhaustion of traditional forms, which is not confined to literature alone, is in fact an important motivation for the metareferential turn which, to a large extent, has characterized the media in the recent past. The massive occurrence of metareference can not only critically be regarded as a symptom of cultural weakness, but

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<sup>69</sup> This is the eponymous *Metafictional Paradox* which Linda Hutcheon discusses in her study on *Narcissistic Narrative* with reference to metafiction which renders readers “the distanced, yet involved, co-producers of the novel” (1980/1984: xii); of course, the distance and the involvement mentioned by Hutcheon refer to different levels of the metafictional text, the first to its storyworld, the second to its discourse, and generally to its quality as a work of art.

also as a problematic reinforcement of this weakness. The principal function of the media, in particular the representational media, is, after all, not to mirror themselves, but to contribute to 'Culture' at large, raising questions, 'holding the mirror up to nature' and so forth. Excessively focussing one's attention on the media themselves rather than on the world and its problems can amount to a narcissistic (cf. Hutcheon 1980/1984) shunning of important issues. Indeed, this self-reflexive tendency may be likened to a man who, in the face of the oncoming winter, should build a house for shelter but instead endlessly reflects on the tools he should use for that purpose so that the winter comes and the house is not built. Metareference, in fact, appears to be implicated in a strained relationship with pragmatic activities, and this may be seen as problematic.

However, it would be one-sided to focus only on such potentially problematic effects. After all, metareference may also have positive aspects and effects and thus at least betray ambivalent functions. It is not only an indicator of a crisis of representation or a blocked situation of exhaustion but may also bespeak a high-cultural situation in which people can afford meta-reflections since they, so to speak, already live in comfortable houses. It can moreover be a contribution to, as well as a symptom of, increased media-literacy. Intensified media-literacy may in turn prepare the ground for an intensified appreciation of metareference, which can even be used as a way out of the problem: namely by making this very crisis and blocked situation the subject of new works (in fiction this has, for instance, produced the numberless postmodernist novels centred on a novelist who suffers from writer's block). In this respect metareference may even be welcomed as a field permitting an intensified and sophisticated cultural creativity (cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 55). It can moreover generally further the development of the arts and other media by means of providing aesthetic reflections on them in their past and present forms (e. g. poetological, dramatological, filmological reflections)<sup>70</sup>. Such promotion of media development can also be effected by the various experiments which illustrate, in an implicitly metareferential way, the potentials and limits of the media or genres in question. Thus, the critical reflection on the medial tools at the disposal of a culture is not merely a detraction from

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<sup>70</sup> As has been said, the capacity of metareference to comment on past aesthetic issues can also be considered a contribution to cultural memory (cf. Gymnich/Müller-Zettelman 2007: 87).

pragmatic activities and functions but can contribute to the development of culture. This can be achieved by the practical improvement of these tools so that they will be of a better use in the future and also by contributing to the theoretical discussion of fundamental cultural, and in particular epistemological issues. These issues include notably the possibilities of differentiating reality from fiction, an issue of particular topicality in our “hypermediated culture” (Dunne 1992: xi) and the current ‘precession of simulacra’ as discussed by Jean Baudrillard (1978/1981). Moreover, metareference can be employed for the critical elucidation of discursive systems, above all the (metalingual) exploration of verbal language, and generally for the discussion of the question of how to acquire and represent knowledge by means of the media at our disposal. Metareference can thus be said to further what Jürgen Peper has identified as one of the functions of literature but what is perhaps more aptly described as one of the principal contextual functions of metaization, namely to perform an ‘applied epistemological criticism’ (“angewandte Erkenntniskritik” [2002: xiii]). All in all, metareference in the media may even be regarded as realizing a higher-level mimesis of present-day culture, since the media themselves have acquired a hitherto unknown importance in it, not least as a means of constructing what we perceive as reality (cf. Nöth et al. 2008: 55). Metareferentiality in medial representations thus becomes an acknowledgement of, and a sensitization towards, the impact of the media on ourselves and culture at large.

The foregoing survey of possible functions which metareference can have, individually or jointly, on the various participants and factors of cultural communication could only adumbrate some aspects and is not meant to be exhaustive. Thus, I have occasionally been able to differentiate between functions that are merely applicable to individual media and those that have a more general applicability<sup>71</sup>. In the context of a transmedial approach such differentiation plays an important role not only with reference to the analytical tools, the concepts and typology presented with respect to metareference but also con-

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<sup>71</sup> An example of a media-specific function, one that is only applicable to narrator-transmitted media such as fiction, is mentioned by Philippe Hamon (cf. 1977: 264f.) in his comment on narratorial metareferential instructions of the readers, namely that these instructions can help to compensate for the lack of situational determinacy in literary communication. Obviously, this function could not be transferred to, e. g., painting.

cerning its overall functions. However, an in-depth discussion of the manifold possible functions of metareference and the conditions under which they are actualized would exceed the frame of the present introduction.

## 7. Historical aspects of metareference across media

In view of the manifold functions metareference can fulfil it is no surprise that it is not an exclusive feature of postmodern arts and media; as is well known by now, it is indeed anything but a recent phenomenon in the history of the media. One may even venture to say that it is as old as art itself. For as soon as a given medium no longer has a predominantly pragmatic function (e.g. within a religious cult) and obtains at least a certain degree of autonomy, thus approaching the condition of art, it at the same time acquires a potential for metaization. Whether this potential is then realized, and if so, to what extent, is another matter and depends on a plethora of factors which cannot all be mentioned here. They include, for instance, the degree to which representation as such is taken for granted or challenged, the degree to which generic conventions have become established, as well as the role played by the emotions in a given genre or cultural context. Thus it is remarkable that in the history of Western literature, metareference, for a long time, seems to be restricted to comic genres and texts. In the drama of antiquity, it emerges in the Greek new comedy (Aristophanes' *The Frogs* [*Batrachoi*, 405 B. C.] being one example), and as for narrative fiction, metareference can be traced back to parodies such as Pseudo-Homer's *Batrachomyomachia* (first century B. C.) and to Apuleius' equally comic *Asinus Aureus* (c. 170–175 A. D.). In contrast to this, serious literature, and tragedy in particular, seems to be comparatively resistant to metaization. The reason for this special affinity of metaization with the comic is arguably the parallel between the aesthetic or intellectual distance involved in metareflections and the emotional or even moral distance which, according to Henri Bergson's theory, is a presupposition of laughter. Bergson aptly speaks of an "anesthésie momentanée du cœur" (1899/1975: 49), 'a momentary anaesthesia of the heart', which is obviously opposed to *eleos* and *phobos*, pity and fear, the Aristotelian emotions elicited by tragedy.

A similar situation can be observed in the history of literature after antiquity: again metaization occurs for a long time more or less exclu-

sively in comic texts: in comedies such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595)<sup>72</sup> or Beaumont and Fletcher's metacomedy *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607/1608), and in comic novels such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–1615), Antoine Furetière's *Le Roman bourgeois* (1666), Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (written 1771–1775) and even in Romantic novels such as Clemens Brentano's *Godwi* (1801), in which a particular historical form of metaization, namely 'Romantic irony', still shows vestiges of the old relationship between metaization and the comic. It is not until the artist-novel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and beyond this genre, even until modernism and the 1940s (in particular Borges' stories) that we find non-comic metatexts on a major scale.

As far as music is concerned, in the few examples where one can speak of instrumental metamusic in the early history of post-medieval Western music, it is noteworthy that meta-elements are not restricted to the comic mode to the same extent as in fiction. A case in point is Bach's [?] "Musikalisches Labyrinth" (BWV 591), which I have read elsewhere as a serious metareferential experiment with musical modulation (cf. Wolf 2007b: 56f.). However, in instrumental music, too, there seems to be at least a tendency to combine metareference with a comic or light 'tone', as can, for instance, be heard in the ironic meta-elements in Haydn's symphonies, and also in Mozart's sextet "Ein Musikalischer Spaß" ('A Musical Joke', K 522 [see Wolf 2009a, forthcoming]), a composition which characteristically indicates its humorous character as early as in its title.

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<sup>72</sup> One should, however, also mention the fact that at least in the genre of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy with its characteristic plays within plays metaization deviates from the long prevailing tendency to occur in combination with the comic. This can, for instance, be seen in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Here metaization appears in the explicitly metadramatic discussion of the mimetic nature of literature in the context of the players' preparation of the 'Mousetrap'-scene. In this regard the tragedy *Hamlet* is similar to the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where such explicit metaization occurs with reference to the mechanicals' rehearsals and performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe"; both plays also contain implicit metareference: *Hamlet*, for instance, in implying that drama can be conducive to revealing truth, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in presenting ex negativo examples of a clumsy (and illusion-breaking) theatrical performance on a hypo-diegetic level, which may be felt to contrast strongly with the much more expert (and illusionist) performance and script of Shakespeare's own (diegetic) play and dramatic art.

Curiously, in the art of painting metareferences do not appear to be linked with the comic mode as closely as in the history of literature (or even music). Thus early metapictures in medieval illuminations representing painters at work are not humorous at all, and the same can be said of a meta-classic such as Velázquez' "Las Meninas" (1656) and many Dutch metapaintings of the seventeenth century as discussed by Stoichita (1993/1998).

The degree to which individual media show a more or less intense relationship between the comic mode and metaization is just one aspect which would merit attention not only from a systematic but also a historical point of view. However, to date there are no individual histories of metaization (nor of metareferential devices) in all the relevant media, let alone cross-medial histories, not even for individual periods and individual aspects such as the aforementioned one. All one can say at the moment is that the history of metaization has in general been poorly researched so far, with certain nuances according to individual media. Again, literature, and (meta)fiction in particular, appears to be the best researched medium (see, e. g., Alter 1975, Waugh 1984, Picard 1987, Stonehill 1988, Wolf 1993) followed by (meta)drama (see, e. g., Abel 1963, Schmeling 1982, Hornby 1986). As already remarked in section 1, there is less research with reference to poetry, film, the visual arts and other media<sup>73</sup>. Thus there is still ample room for future research, and many volumes could be dedicated to the history of metaization both within individual media and across media (be it only for certain periods).

A particularly fruitful field for crossmedial historical research is, of course, the period since modernism, notably the 'metareferential turn' which appears to have informed the media over the past few decades. However, even a restricted area such as metareference in postmodernism or in present-day Western culture would furnish so much material that an introductory essay is certainly not the proper place for such a discussion, nor is a volume as the present one, which is primarily dedicated to theoretical matters. As mentioned in the "Preface" to this volume, these issues will be analyzed more in detail at a follow-up conference and in a corresponding volume of proceedings, the

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<sup>73</sup> As for the visual arts and film, existing research, even where it goes beyond individual case studies, can at best be said to provide building blocks for a future history of metaization in these genres (see for relevant research above, sec. 1 and fns. 6 and 7).



working title of which is *The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Media: Forms, Functions and Attempts at Explanation*.

As may be expected, the discussion of the vast field of metareference must necessarily leave lacunae – in the present collection of essays as well as in this introduction –, lacunae not only with respect to the theory of metareference and its functional dimension but also to its historical dimension. However, what this volume as a whole and the foregoing mentioning of some functions of metareference as well as the brief remarks on its history (including its ‘explosion’ in the contemporary ‘metareferential turn’) have hopefully shown is the fact that metareference is more than the ephemeral product of mere artistic and medial narcissism, as adumbrated in the title of Linda Hutcheon’s study *Narcissistic Narrative* (1980/1984). Rather, metareference is a crucial aspect not only of narrative fiction but of many other media, and it is important not only in modernism or postmodernism, but across history. One can therefore say with confidence: metareference across media is an issue that matters. May the present volume contribute to the broadening of at least some of the manifold perspectives on it.

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**Theoretical Aspects of Metareference,  
Illustrated with Examples from Various  
Media**



## Metareference from a Semiotic Perspective

Winfried Nöth

The paper examines the semiotic foundations of metareference, the differences between verbal and nonverbal, explicit and implicit, symbolic, indexical, and iconic metareference, and distinguishes between metasigns, metaphors, connotative, and self-referential signs. The thesis is developed that only verbal signs can explicitly express that they are metasigns, whereas nonverbal signs can only do so implicitly. Paintings can only implicitly show that they are paintings, music can only implicitly represent that it is music. 'Performative metareference' is defined as a metasign which states, shows, or indicates that a semiotic act is being performed, that a speaker is speaking, a writer is writing, a painter is painting, a musician is performing a piece of music, etc. With reference to several of the figures of thought distinguished by ancient rhetoric, which are performatively metareferential, a semiotic framework for the study of performative metareference in verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication in the arts and the media is outlined.

The present volume on *Metareference across Media* testifies to the ubiquity of metasigns in culture. The extension of the study of metareference from language and literature to music, the visual arts, and the media brings about a considerable broadening of the scope of meta-phenomena, but at the same time, there is also a narrowing. While more meta-phenomena fall within the scope of inquiry when nonverbal, visual, or musical signs are included, the metareferential potential of the signs to be investigated decreases, for, while verbal signs can be explicitly and implicitly metareferential, nonverbal signs can only be implicitly metareferential. Only language has an explicit metareferential sign repertoire; only speakers or writers can say: "We are speaking" or write: "We are writing"; the painter, the mime, or the musician, by means of their own specific sign repertoire, can only implicitly convey the idea that they are painting, miming, or making music. Performers of nonverbal messages can only perform, but they cannot perform that they are performing, but this does not mean that implicit metareference is necessarily less strongly metareferential, i. e., that it creates less metasemiotic awareness than explicit metareference. An implicit metasign can lead to as much or even more reflection on the nature of signs as an explicit metasign can.



### 1. Metareference and the semiotic triangles of sign and metasign

The study of metareference has a long tradition in logic, linguistics, and the philosophy of language. In their philosophy of language, the medieval Scholastics addressed the topic by distinguishing between *suppositio formalis* and *suppositio materialis* (see Bos 1997). In its formal supposition, a term stands for a thing which is not a verbal sign, e. g., the word *boy* used with reference to a 'male child'. In its material supposition, by contrast, the same term refers to its phonetic form (*boy*: a consonant followed by a diphthong) or to its morphological and grammatical structure (e. g., *boy*: a noun, head of a noun phrase or prepositional phrase, etc.). In modern terminology, considering a word from the perspective of its *suppositio materialis* means creating a metasign, a sign about a sign. The use of words in their material supposition was also called the *autonymous* use of terms (cf. *ibid.*: 86). This terminology suggests that the item under consideration is a *name* (Gr. *nomos/-nym*) considered by itself (*auto-*), a name as a name. Centuries later, in the age of Rationalism, the Port Royal Grammarians redefined this dichotomy as the difference between *ideas of things* and *ideas of signs* (cf. Nöth 2000: 16, 53). The modern dichotomy of *object language* vs. *metalanguage* is the coinage of twentieth-century language philosophy.

In the framework of his logical theory of types, Bertrand Russell argues that object language and metalanguage are two radically distinct kinds of language, and he postulates the necessity of a strict separation between reference and metareference to avoid the paradoxes and aporias that may occur when language is used in both ways. Consider the following examples:

- (1) *Socrates is wise.*
- (2) *Socrates is a name.*
- (3) *A name is a name.*
- (4) *'Name' is a name.*

(1) exemplifies object language, whereas (2) exemplifies metalanguage. (3) exemplifies the dangers of confounding object and metalanguage. In spoken language and in written language without quotation marks, as in (4), the utterance is ambiguous, having a tautology as one of its possible readings. Tautologies and paradoxes are the semiotic dangers and at the same time provide the creative potential inherent in expressions that may be read as signs of object language and at

the same time as signs of metalanguage (see Nöth/Bishara/Neitzel 2008).

At the root of metareference in language is the semiotic feature of *reflexivity*, one of the so-called design features of language, by which verbal language differs from nonverbal sign systems in nature and culture<sup>1</sup>. A sign system evinces reflexivity that has elementary metasigns specialized for the purpose of referring to signs. The terminology of linguistics may illustrate the nature of verbal metasigns. Terms such as *letter*, *vowel*, *phrase*, or *sentence* are verbal metasigns.

Definitions are verbal metasigns; new technical terms introduced by new definitions testify to the potential of language to create new signs by means of metasigns (cf. Nöth 2008b)<sup>2</sup>. They exemplify how verbal signs, by means of metasigns created by the same verbal code, can create their own reflexivity. To create a new metasign, for example by introducing and defining the term *metareference* in the context of a scholarly paper, requires a metalingual elaboration of the topic, which means that the term *metareference* thus defined is created by means of metasigns. Metasigns hence do not only serve to create new signs of the object language; metasigns are themselves created by means of metasigns.

The definition of metareference presupposes a definition of reference, and to understand what reference is, we need to define what a sign is. The classical model of the sign is the semiotic triangle as shown in the upper part of *Figure 1* (cf. Nöth 2000: 140). A *sign*, which this semiotic triangle represents as its lower left corner, is related to an object or *referent* (at the top of the triangle) as well as to a *meaning*, the idea associated with this object (right corner). Consider again the example of the written word *boy*. In this case, the sign is the sequence of its letters which we can read, regardless of whether we understand its meaning or not; its referent is one of the human beings to which we may refer by means of this sign, i. e., an individual boy; and the meaning of this sign is the idea, mental image, concept, verbalization, or paraphrase associated with the sign and its object in the mind of those who use the word *boy*. A possible description of the meaning of the word *boy* is then its paraphrase 'male child'.

<sup>1</sup> The theory of design features goes back to writings by the linguist Charles Hockett; cf. Nöth 2000: 271. See also Sperber, ed. 2000 on metarepresentation as a feature of human cognition.

<sup>2</sup> Metalanguage and linguistic creativity are hence closely related; see Koch 1983.

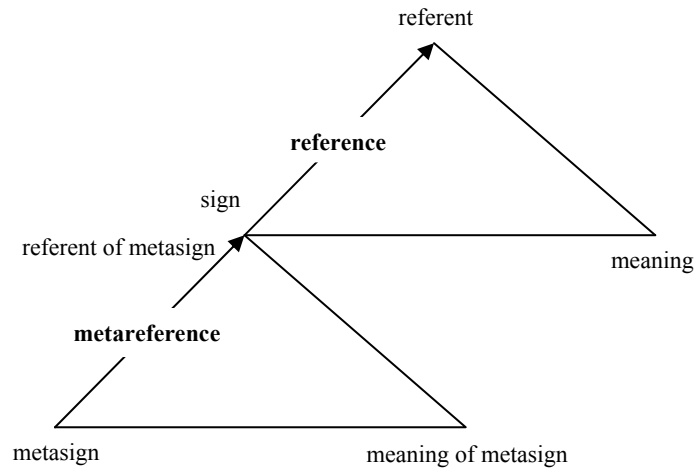


Figure 1: Reference and metareference in the semiotic triangles of object language (top) and metalanguage (bottom)

*Reference* is the property by which a sign refers to its referent. The verbal sign *boy*, the word which we read, has the property of referring, i. e., of directing our attention to, its referent, one of the children to which the word may be used to refer. The model of reference in the semiotic triangle in *Figure 1* is the arrow pointing from the *sign* to its *referent*.

*Metareference* is the property by which a metasign refers to its referent, which is itself a sign. A *metasign*<sup>3</sup> is evidently also a sign with a referent and a meaning of its own. The resulting semiotic triangle of the metasign is shown in the lower part of *Figure 1*. The connection between the two semiotic triangles of the sign and the metasign is at the point representing both the referent of the metasign and the sign of the triangle of the sign of object language. The arrow of metareference thus finds its continuation in the arrow of reference.

<sup>3</sup> For a semiotic model of the metasign (defined as a “metasemiotic”) in the framework of the dyadic model of the sign which only distinguishes between the expression plane and the content plane of a sign, cf. Hjelmslev 1943: 114–125. Hjelmslev defines the metasigns as a semiotic whose content plane is a semiotic (cf. *ibid.*: 114; see also below, section 5). The signs represented in *Figure 1* as referential signs (signs of the object language) are denotative signs. According to Hjelmslev, a denotative sign is “a semiotic none of whose planes is a semiotic” (*ibid.*).

In language, verbal signs and verbal metasigns belong to two different languages. As expounded above, ordinary verbal signs belong to *object language*, i. e., language referring to objects or referents which are not themselves verbal signs, whereas metasigns belong to *metalanguage*, i. e., language about language. To exemplify the difference between the signs in the two languages according to the model of the two connected semiotic triangles of the sign and the metasign let us consider a metalingual sentence (5) in contrast to a sentence (6), which belongs to object language<sup>4</sup>:

(5) “*The boy*” is a noun phrase.

(6) *The boy is a rogue.*

The two sentences show that there are verbal signs that are always metasigns and signs that may be used both as signs and as metasigns. *Noun phrase* is a sign specialized for the purpose of being a metasign; it has no meaning in the object language since it is always and only a metasign. Nevertheless, the model of the double semiotic triangle applies. The left corner of the lower triangle, designated as “metasign”, is the point which represents the linguistic term, the compound of the two nouns *noun* and *phrase*. The “meaning of the metasign” (right corner of the lower triangle) may be paraphrased as ‘syntactic construction whose center consists of a noun and which may serve as a subject or an object of a sentence’. Its “referent” (upper corner of the lower triangle) is the large class of all syntactic constructions to which the term applies, one of which is the noun phrase *the boy*. *Noun phrase* is thus a metasign referring to many signs of the object language. In a metasentence (5), however, the context restricts the referent of the metasign *noun phrase* to one single noun phrase (*the boy*).

In contrast to those verbal signs that specifically constitute metareference and have no meaning in the object language, the verbal signs which are meaningful in the object language can be considered both as signs and as metasigns, as the Scholastics knew when they set up their distinction between *suppositio formalis* and *suppositio materialis* introduced above as valid for all verbal signs. The resulting duplicity

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<sup>4</sup> “The language which is the object of study is called the object language. [...] The language we use in speaking about the object language is called the metalanguage” (Carnap 1958: 78). On the topic of metalanguage see especially Schlieben-Lange 1975 and the chapters “Natural Language as Metalanguage” and “Metalanguage, Pragmatics, and Performatives” in Leech 1980: 31–77.

and occasional ambiguity of verbal signs, which can be signs or metasigns at the same time, is illustrated by the different uses of the noun phrase *the boy* in (5) and (6). The quotation marks in which it is included in (5) and its context indicate that this noun phrase is used as a metasign. They indicate that the expression is meant to be read from a different perspective, not the perspective of one who wants to pass information about 'a specific male child', but from the perspective of the linguist who wants to determine the syntactic structure of a sequence of words. Let us examine, then, the difference between the two homonymous signs as which this noun phrase can function according to the model of the two semiotic triangles.

As in the previous analysis of metasigns specifically constituted in order to serve as such, we can see that the meaning and the referent of the verbal sign changes when the expression is used as a sign in contrast to being used as a metasign. As metasigns, verbal signs are considered from the special perspective of their sign characteristics, and as such the "meaning of the metasign" *the boy* is 'noun phrase' or, if we wish to avoid the circularity of what the metasentence already states, 'a syntactic structure consisting of a determiner followed by a noun, etc.'. The referent of this metasign is the expression of the object language which includes the first two words of (6), the verbal sign whose meaning may be described as 'a specific male child'; its referent is then the particular child to which this particular sentence refers.

Whereas the verbal metasigns of linguistic terminology, specifically constituted for metalingual purposes, have referents which differ from the metasign (the referent of *noun* is the class of words which includes *boy*, *apple*, *health*, etc.), metasigns not specifically constituted for this purpose (as in our example of *the boy*) are homonyms of their own referent (with the exception of the quotes in writing, which disappear in spoken language, though).

This homonymy of the verbal sign with its metalingual counterpart is a frequent source of jokes or paradoxes. The difference between the two languages is addressed in the form of a quasi-paradox in the following lines from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (II, 1: 85–86):

What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.

The same expression, the word *rose*, is first addressed as the referent of the metasign *name*. Then it is addressed as the referent of this first referent, i. e., as the referent of the verbal sign *rose*, which serves as a

sign of the object language, and this referent is not a name, but the flower called *rose*. Whereas the referent of the metasign *name* could be different in the object language to which it belongs, the referent of the sign of the object language would still be the same (*smelling* equally *sweet*) under a different name.

Metasigns which are homonyms of their own referent seem to be self-referential signs at the same time. Consider once more example (5). The metasentence seems to be partially self-referential since the noun phrase *the boy* is not only a noun phrase in all of its occurrences in the English language, but also in this particular sentence, of which it is the grammatical subject. However, to say that (5) is self-referential in this particular sentence is only superficially true. It is only true if we neglect the difference between language and metalanguage, but if we follow Russell's postulate of the necessity of a strict distinction between language and metalanguage, we must conclude that the metasentence (5) is not self-referential at all. The quotation marks in which the verbal sign "*the boy*" is included indicate precisely that (5) is *not* a statement about *this* noun phrase at the beginning of (5), but about the homonymous noun phrase which is its referent, i. e., for example, the noun phrase of (6) or of any of its other occurrence *in the object language*<sup>5</sup>.

How does a verbal sign become its own homonymous metasign? In (5), the verbal sign *the boy* turned metasign by being explicitly referred to as a *noun phrase*. By being described by means of a predicate which contains a verbal sign (*noun phrase*) specialized for the purpose of expressing the notion of a metasign, the sign of the object language is referred to as a metasign. Is this the only way of transforming a verbal sign into a metasign?

Consider the following example of a proverb, in which no special metalingual term refers to any of its constituents:

(7) Boys will be boys.

Does the circularity by which the verbal sign *boys* refers back to itself in (7) constitute a metasign, in other words, is (7) a metalingual state-

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<sup>5</sup> In a different context, Peirce discusses the difference between using a verbal sign as a sign (referring to an object) and a metasign (referring to a sign) by means of the following example: "If a person points to it [i. e., the sun] and says, See there! That is what we call the 'Sun,' the Sun is not the Object of that sign. It is the Sign of the sun, the word 'sun' that his declaration is about" (1931–1958, vol. 8: §183).

ment? There are reasons for assuming that this is so. First, the proverb has at least a metalingual connotation since it sounds like a tautology (A is A), and signs considered as tautologies are considered from a metareferential perspective. Second, since tautologies imply gross logical fallacies, whereas proverbs never do so since all proverbs express some popular “wisdom”, we have to assume that there must be a difference between the meaning of the first and the second occurrences of *boys* in this proverb after all. The conclusion at which we arrive is that there is indeed a semantic difference: the first meaning can only be ‘young male human beings’, whereas the second meaning of *boys* is something like ‘acting immaturely’. The way by which we have arrived at this conclusion has made us think *about* language. When language makes us reflect on language, our reflections, whether they are uttered or remain only private thoughts, are verbal metasigns, and the relation between these metasigns and their referents is one of metareference.

Nevertheless, there is a difference not to be ignored between the examples (5) and (7) of metalanguage. Whereas (5) is explicitly metareferential since it expresses its metareferential content by means of a sign specifically constituted for the purpose of doing so, (7) is only implicitly metareferential because the reader infers the metareferential content in the process of interpretation. “Implicit metareference” is a fuzzy and perhaps even vague concept<sup>6</sup>. If the metareferential content of (7) must be inferred by the activity of the reader, it depends on his or her metalingual awareness, and this awareness is a matter of degree. The implicit metareferential content of a verbal sign may be recognized by some, but remain undiscovered by others, and the awareness of this content is a matter of degree.

To summarize, verbal metareference involves language *about* language; it is explicit when the metareferential nature of the verbal sign is referred to by means of a metalingual term specialized for the purpose of referring to metalanguage; otherwise, it is implicit. Both explicit and implicit metareference in the verbal examples discussed create language awareness, either in a systematic and analytic way, as in the explicit metalanguage of the linguist, or in unsystematic ways, as in the implicit metalanguage of creative or merely surprising modes of language use resulting in metalinguistic insights into the way object language is structured and used in communication.

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<sup>6</sup> On the semiotics of vagueness see Nöth/Santaella 2007.

## 2. Iconic and indexical, actual and potential metareference

According to Peirce's semiotics, metasigns, like all other signs, can be symbols, indices, or icons, depending on the relationship between the sign and its object. A symbol refers to its object by a convention or habit, an index by a natural cause, immediate effect, or temporal or spatial contiguity, and an icon due to a similarity or features shared with the object. Verbal signs are essentially symbols, but in addition, they can be indexical and iconic signs, too<sup>7</sup>.

The metasigns of the vocabulary of linguistic terminology are symbols. In addition to metalingual terms, the symbols of the verbal metalanguage also comprise metasentences specifying meanings in the form of definitions or semantic paraphrases, syntactic analyses of sentence structures, or metatexts, such as treatises on language, grammars, linguistic textbooks, etc. Metasigns of verbal language can also be verbal indices and icons; this is mostly the case in combination with symbols.

An example of *indices* used as metasigns in verbal texts is the device of the footnote "reference" in a scholarly paper. The text of the footnote consists of symbols, but the mode of reference from the footnote number in the text to the corresponding footnote paragraph at the bottom of the page is an indexical metasign that directs the readers' attention not only from one point in the graphic space of the paper to another but also from one mental domain (of the author's primary arguments) to another (the one of the author's supplementary annotations).

A nonverbal example of an indexical metasign is a picture frame. A frame marks a picture as a picture. By informing us that what we see is neither a colored segment of reality nor merely a segment of a painted wall (see Nöth 2007a), its indexical message is: "This is a picture". In the performing arts, actors who give implicit or explicit signals to inform their audience that they are (only) acting convey indexical metasigns referring to the signs of their performance.

Like the frame of a picture, the performative 'frame' of a musical performance on the musicians' podium and the circumstances of the execution of the piece of music imply a performative metasign; its meta-message may be paraphrased as: 'We are performing a piece of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nöth 2000: 66. For the foundations of a semiotic linguistics on Peircean premises, see Nöth 2001 and 2002.



music'. This message seems to be trivial because of its omnipresence in all musical performances. Nevertheless, in the bruitistic or minimal music of the avant-garde, not always easily distinguishable from non-musical sounds or even noise, this performative metasign may serve to convey the nontrivial meta-message that the audience is *not* listening to noise.

*Icons* have qualities in common with their object. Peirce distinguishes three classes of icons, the *image*, which is an icon sharing simple qualities with its object, like the picture of the green apple that shares the quality of being green with its object, the *diagram*, which evinces mere structural correspondences with its object, and the *metaphor* (see below, section 5). Iconic signs can be signs of iconic, indexical, or symbolic signs. If so, are they metasigns? Is a picture of a picture a picture *about* a picture, a metapicture? A picture of a picture in a picture, represented by the so-called device of *mise en abyme*, is indeed the prototypical example of an iconic metasign representing an iconic sign (cf. Nöth 2007a). A picture in a picture is somewhat unusual since pictures are signs whose purpose it is to represent objects, people, scenes, landscapes, etc. but not signs or pictures. For this reason, such pictures of pictures in pictures can make us reflect on the nature of representation. They are then in this respect *implicit metasigns*. Even though such pictures may result in very thorough reflections on the nature of pictorial representation, they are not explicit metasigns. Only language can be explicitly metareferential, as argued in the previous section, since language has symbols specifically constituted for the purpose of representing metasemiotic concepts. Whereas a picture in a picture is (often) an implicit metasign, a story in a story is an explicit metasign when it is referred to as a story (which is a metaterm); it can function as an implicit metasign when it is part of a story without being referred to as a story in the narrative in which it is included.

Although pictures can be implicit metasigns, not all pictures which are signs of signs are implicit metasigns. After all, most pictures are signs of signs. For example, the picture of a man in the uniform of an officer includes an iconic representation of symbols insofar as the uniform contains conventional signs of the officer's rank, and the photo of a car is also a sign of a sign since it allows us to infer from the design and the model of the vehicle in which year the picture was most probably taken.

Many diagrams are metesigns. In the linguistic study of syntax, the tree diagrams representing sentence structures are explicit diagrammatic metesigns since they make syntactic structures visible and thus convey insights into of language structures that remain hidden in speech or writing. A subway map is a nonverbal example of a diagram of underground railway tracks, stations, and connections; is it an implicit metesign? To the degree that it simply represents and is a sign of these connections, it is not, although it is at least partly a complex sign of signs, since stations have names and are therefore signs. An architect's blueprint is a diagrammatic sign of signs, since the building which it represents is a cultural sign of the way in which its inhabitants use it and live in it. Each room has a meaning; the design of one room means 'kitchen', the design of the other 'bedroom', etc. Is the architect's blueprint of the house an implicit metesign since it is a signs of signs?

The analogy with language about language in metalanguage may help to answer the question whether signs of sign are metesigns. In contrast to the signs of object language, the signs of metalanguage have an essentially new meaning, which does not include the meaning of its homonymous sign in the object language. The meaning of the verbal metesign contains analytical reflections upon the sign as a sign, which create metalingual awareness. Analogously, in a nonverbal sign, we should expect that an implicit metesign also informs about the sign and thus contributes to metasemiotic awareness. However, an architect's blueprint is not designed for the purpose of creating meta-architectural awareness. Just like writing is not the metesign of speech, although it can be used for the purpose of being read aloud, and just like a musical score is not meant to convey insights into the structure of the piece of music it represents, the architect's blueprint is not meant to convey metasemiotic insights. The signs of musical scores, architectural blueprints, or written texts are signs *of* signs and not signs *about* signs since they serve to represent other sign, works of music, buildings, or spoken language as faithfully as the sign system allows if not in a one-to-one correspondence. They are parallel or perhaps secondary sign systems, but not systems of metesigns.

However, as mentioned above, implicit metareference is a fuzzy concept, and metasemiotic awareness is a matter of degree. Although a subway map is not meant to create or to enhance metasemiotic awareness, it cannot be excluded that the map can also be read as a metesign and not only as a means of orientation for its users to find

their way from station to station. A metro map read as a paradigm of diagrammatic abstraction is read as a metasign. Writing may serve to create insights into the structure of language, and if the writing of a rare word is studied from this respect, if we derive information about the morphology of a word from the way it is written, then writing serves as a metasign of speech. The same holds true for any sign which represents a sign. To improve our above conclusions that maps are not metasigns of their territory, musical scores not metasigns of works of music, and that writing is not a metasign of speech, we should specify that such signs *of* signs *can* be read as signs *about* signs, that although they are not typical metasigns, they are *potential metasigns*. More radically, we must even conclude that each sign is its own potential metasign, since each sign can be considered as a sign and as its own metasign. The Scholastics knew this very well when they postulated that each verbal sign can be considered either from the perspective of *suppositio formalis* or from the one of *suppositio materialis*.

Let us consider a few more examples of potential and actual diagrammatic metasigns in verbal and in nonverbal sign systems. In language, some metalingual terms have diagrammatic constructions as their synonyms. The verbal metasign *metanovel* is a synonym of the expression *novel about novels*, which is a diagrammatic expression created by the device of syntactic self-embedding, an icon which represents effectively the idea of reflexivity inherent in this expression. Noun phrases with self-embedded prepositional phrases, such as *a story about a story*, *a sign of a sign*, *a lecture on words* exemplify explicitly metareferential expressions. The sign type used to form these metasigns is the diagram, an abstract icon consisting of patterns of relations which represent their underlying structure by means of an abstracted similarity.

Echo words, such as *dum-dum* or *riffräff*, and echophrases, such as the US state slogans *Smiling Faces – Beautiful Places* (South Carolina) or *Great Faces – Great Places* (South Dakota) exemplify various verbal patterns of diagrammatic iconicity in object language (see Nöth 2008a). Are they only potentially or also actually implicit metasigns? The patterns of verbal repetition, parallelism, rhyme, alliteration, and other metrical forms inherent in such expressions are not created for the purpose of enhancing language awareness, but the poetic ingredients in these patterns direct their readers' attention away from their content towards their form. Giving attention to language form is a way

of creating language awareness. To the degree that they are considered in this way, such verbal signs are implicit metasigns. It is hard to determine this degree, though. The transition from actual to merely potential metareference is a fuzzy zone.

In music, variations on a theme are diagrammatic signs referring back to the theme they vary. Are they signs of signs or metasigns, signs about signs? The standard title of such variations, *Variations on a theme...*, suggests that they are musical signs *about* musical signs, but, again, it will be difficult to determine whether they create awareness of musical structures or not. If punning and other forms of playing with language are ways of creating language awareness and hence a potentially metasemiotic device, the same can be argued with respect to musical variations of a theme.

### 3. Verbal and nonverbal metareference

The potential to form metasymbols has been described as a unique design feature of language absent in all nonverbal sign systems; the matter has been much discussed in zoosemiotics and media semiotics (cf. Nöth 2000: 106, 240, 332).

From the point of view of zoosemiotics, it was Charles Hockett who dealt with this topic under the heading of *reflexivity*. His conclusion is that only human language but none of the various sign systems by which animals communicate evince the potential of signs to communicate about signs (see Hockett/Altmann 1968). The semiotic axiom of the uniqueness of the metasemiotic potential of language is only valid with respect to the sign repertoire of elementary symbols, the terminology of linguistics. Although it is true that animal ‘languages’ and nonverbal human signs have no explicit metasymbols, it is not true that metacommunication is only possible by means of symbols. It was Bateson (1972: 177–193) who has shown that also animals use metasigns in their communication with other animals. The theory that the roots of play and fantasy are the roots of metacommunication is a theoretical cornerstone of Bateson’s *Ecology of Mind*. However, the signs by which animals communicate what they communicate (for example ‘playful aggression’ and not ‘serious aggression’) are not symbols, but icons or indices.

From the point of view of comparative media semiotics, it was Benveniste (1974) who argued that only language and none of the

nonverbal media by which humans communicate has a metasemiotic potential. Benveniste's semiotic principle of the unique metasemiotic potential of language is not restricted to the insight that only language, with its metalingual vocabulary of linguistic terms, such as *word*, *noun*, *verb*, *sentence*, *paragraph*, or *text*, has elementary metasymbols referring to language. The principle also formulates the insight that language has metasymbols referring to nonverbal signs and that this sign repertoire of symbols of signs is equally unique to language. Examples of verbal metasymbols referring to nonverbal signs are terms such as *tone*, *melody*, *harmony*, *song*, *sonata* or *symphony*, which belong to the vocabulary of verbal metasigns of signs of music, terms such as *line*, *triangle*, *circle*, *blue*, *red*, *yellow*, *painting*, or *photography*, which are metasigns of visual signs, or words such as *gesture*, *nod*, or *glance*, which are verbal metasigns referring to human non-verbal communication.

However, Benveniste's axiom that only language has metasigns of nonverbal signs requires two extensions. The first is analogous to the above extension of Hockett's design feature of reflexivity: although nonverbal human sign systems, such as pictures, sculptures, or music, have no explicit metasymbols, their signs can be indexical or iconic, especially diagrammatic, implicit metasigns (metapaintings or metamusic). The second necessary extension is that 'language' must be understood in a broader sense to include logographic or ideographic symbols derived from language and writing. For example, the sign system of musical notation with its notes on the five-line staff, its bars, dots, ties, etc. are the symbols of a graphic metalanguage of music which are potential metasigns that can contribute to metamusical awareness. Such symbols can be used for the purpose of theorizing about music.

Nonverbal sign systems have no metaterminology about their signs, for, as Benveniste observes in his seminal paper on the specific difference between verbal and nonverbal sign systems,

no semiology of sound, color, or image can be formulated or expressed in sounds, colors, or images. Every semiology of a nonlinguistic system must use language as an intermediary, and thus can only exist in and through the semiology of language. [...] Language is the interpreting system of all other systems, linguistic and nonlinguistic<sup>8</sup> (1985: 239).

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<sup>8</sup> "aucune sémiologie du son, de la couleur, de l'image ne se formulera en sons, en couleurs, en images. Toute sémiologie d'un système non-linguistique doit emprunter

One of the reasons why there are no metasymbols in music is because symbols are signs which have a general reference, whereas musical sounds or rhythms cannot express general ideas concerning sounds or rhythms. No musical sign can refer to an element of music in general. The sign repertoire of a pianist consisting of the 88 notes of the standard keyboard has no note to express the idea of a musical note itself, and among musical configurations, such as rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, phrase, or movement, there is none which represents the idea of rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, etc. in general. The same holds true for the elements of visual language. No color expresses the idea of any other color nor of its own color; no line may convey the general idea of a line, and no form serves to express the idea of a form let alone its own form.

Verbal metasigns of musical performance, such as *allegro*, *andante*, or *ritardando*, are symbols, too, words of the vocabulary of music or graphic symbols of musical notation. The gestures by which a conductor gives metasigns to the orchestra are either diagrams, representing characteristics of the music being performed iconically, or indexical metasigns, which serve as instructions to individual musicians. Music can be metamusic and thus produce metasigns (see Wolf 2007), but there is no musical sign repertoire of elementary metasigns specifically constituted to refer to musical signs. The metareferential potential of music is mainly iconic. Often, works of metamusic have to use verbal symbols for the purpose of explicit metareference in music, which the work of music itself can only express implicitly and which otherwise may even escape the listeners' musical awareness.

Prokofiev, for example, created an explicitly metareferential piece of music with his Symphony no. 1 in D major, op. 25. Its epithet *Classical* is a verbal metasymbol referring to music about music<sup>9</sup>. Insofar as the metareference of a modern symphony to classical compositions is recognizable from the symphony itself, irrespective of its title, the modern musical metasign imitating or recalling the classics is a metadiagram since it consists of patterns of musical signs which evince similarities to patterns of classical music. Unlike verbal metareference which can be used to state explicitly that words are used as metasym-

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le truchement de la langue, ne peut donc exister que par et dans la sémiologie de la langue." (1974: 60)

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed treatment of titles marking metareference in music, see Danuser in this vol.

bols, diagrammatic iconic metareference remains implicit, vague, and allusive.

In sum, the so-called (nonverbal) meta-arts, meta-architecture, metafilm, metamusic, metapainting<sup>10</sup> do not convey their metames-sages by means of symbols but mainly by means of icons and indices, if we disregard that they may be works of meta-art because of verbal comments or titles, such as “Symphony in the Style of the Classics”, which make their implicit metasemiotic purpose explicit by means of verbal symbols.

#### 4. Self-reference, metareference, explicit and implicit metareference

Metareference is closely related to self-reference, but the affinity between the two concepts depends on whether we consider them in their broader or narrower sense. In the broadest sense of self-reference, a sign is self-referential if it refers to a sign. A self-referential sign in this broad sense may refer to the class of all signs and not necessarily only to itself. Alliterations and rhymes are instances of self-reference in this broad sense. Although the vowels and end consonants rhyming in the pair *bright/night* do not literally refer to themselves but to the occurrence of the same speech sounds in two different words, their reference to each other is self-referential insofar as the reference from one speech sound to the other with which it rhymes is a reference from language to language and not from a sign to a referent outside language. At the same time, there is also allreference in the rhyming pair *bright/night* since the adjective and the noun have referents of their own outside language and the language-internal reference from *bright* to *night* created by the rhyme is associated with the awareness of their difference in meaning. In this broad sense, self-reference includes metareference since a sign *about* a sign is one whose referent is a sign<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the contributions to this vol., see especially Wolf 2007 on metamusic and Stoichita 1993 as well as Caliendo 2008 on metapictures. – For the difference between the metasemiotic potential of language and pictures cf. especially Nöth 2004: 13–15.

<sup>11</sup> For self-reference in the media in a very broad sense, see Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007 and Nöth/Bishara/Neitzel 2008. Wolf 2007 and in his introduction to this vol. also adopts this very broad sense of self-reference, which includes metareference.

In a much narrower definition, which can be found in logic, self-reference is only the self-reference of a sign to itself or one that refers to a class of referents of which it is itself a member. The sentence *This sentence has five words* is self-referential in the former sense; it is a sign that refers to itself. Expressions such as *noun*, *word*, or *English* are often given as examples of self-referential words in the latter sense: among the words to which the word *noun* refers is the word *noun* itself, *word* is a word, and the word *English* is English in its spelling as well as its proper pronunciation. However, there are semiotic reasons to argue against this standard argument of logicians that words as self-referential metasigns. As a symbol, a word is general in its reference. The word *noun*, e. g., refers to all nouns in general and not to any individual noun. (Reference to an individual noun is indexical reference.) Since the referent of the word *noun* is not any individual noun, one can argue that *noun* is not a self-referential word since its referent is general and not particular. In its narrower sense, self-reference does not necessarily include metareference since not all metaterms refer to themselves (e. g., the word *verb* is not a verb).

The terms *metareference*, *metalanguage*, and *metasign*, too, have broader and narrower definitions. The broader sense of the term ‘metasign’ can be found in the tradition of literary semiotics; it is the sense in which W. A. Koch (see 1978, 1983) has defined poetic language as *concrete metalanguage*. In contrast to *abstract metalanguage*, which is the metalanguage of the linguists, philosophers of language, and of Roman Jakobson’s metalingual function, concrete metalanguage characterizes poetic language in Jakobson’s sense as a language that draws attention to the structure of language itself without aiming at any other purpose. Jakobson’s definition of the poetic function as “the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination” (1960: 358) actually describes nothing but a verbal process resulting in patterns of implicit metareference<sup>12</sup>. Alliterations such as *horrible Harry* or rhymes such as *I like Ike* are iconic because their recurrent constituents are selected from the axis of equivalence due to their mutual similarities. They are metalingual because the poetic function which they serve draws the hearers’ or readers’ attention to language as language, and they are

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<sup>12</sup> However, Jakobson distinguishes between the poetic and the metalingual function of language (cf. Nöth 2000: 105).



implicitly metalingual because they involve no metasymbols to make this function explicit.

Wolf (see 2007) favors the narrower sense of the concept of meta-sign, as defined in the introduction to the present volume. According to this definition, only those messages evince metareference that make their recipients reflect on the message as such and create meta-awareness about the medium of the message. The difference between Wolf's and Koch's interpretations of the term is more than a merely terminological one. Whereas Wolf interprets Jakobson's poetic language only as a mode of self-referential language which does not generally involve medium awareness, Koch defends the thesis that poetic language is in its essence language which enhances language awareness. The present paper favors Koch's broader theory of metasign in literature, the visual arts, and music with the specification that poetic signs are not necessarily always actual metasigns but often only potential metasigns.

The distinction between implicit and explicit metareference is a cornerstone of Werner Wolf's theory of metareference across media<sup>13</sup>. According to Wolf, whenever "a meta-comment is clearly made by the conventional, denotational meaning of a sign (configuration), we may speak of explicit metareference" (in this vol.: 39). Wolf's examples of explicit metareference in literature are passages containing verbal metasigns such as "reader", "pen", "beginning", or "book". Wolf concludes:

Owing to their conventional meaning and their occurrence within a work of print fiction, these expressions obviously are located on a meta-level from which medium-related issues are commented that refer to the work one is just reading and are apt to remind the reader of the print medium as such. (Ibid.)

If "explicit" means "distinctly expressing all that is meant leaving nothing that is merely implied" ("Explicit" 1973), all verbal metasymbols specialized for the purpose of expressing metareferential concepts are indeed explicitly metareferential signs since they are signs about signs by their very definition. One cannot use a verbal metasymbol such as *noun*, *sentence*, or *letter* without being explicit about its metalingual character. Among the verbal signs which are explicitly metareferential are also the speech act verbs (such as *say*, *tell*, *ask*, *suggest*), which are verbs that mark their syntactic complement explicitly as a speech act (see below, section 6). For example, the verb

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wolf in this vol.: sec. 5.1. and fn. 48.

*say* in the sentence *I say "Go!"* is a metareferential sign because it indexically announces that its syntactic complement, the embedded imperative sentence *"Go!"*, is a speech act.

To be explicit about the metareferential nature of a sign is to use a sign whose meaning is explicitly metareferential. 'Metareference' is an abstract and general concept, and a sign that explicitly conveys the general abstract meaning 'sign about signs' or 'sign referring to signs' must be a symbol since only symbols can have abstract meanings. Metalingual terms, such as *noun*, *verb*, or *say*, are explicitly metareferential signs for this reason.

Indices, by contrast, cannot be explicitly metareferential since they are signs that only point and draw attention to their object without giving any information about their referent. Metaindices are signs that merely draw attention to another sign, which is an indirect way of conveying the metareferential information. This is why indexical signs can only serve implicitly as metasigns.

Icons cannot convey abstract meanings either. An icon refers to its object because of qualities that are inherent in the icon itself and which it has in common with its object. A metaicon merely *has* the characteristic of the object to which it refers, but it does not state explicitly that it has them, and qualities are not general and abstract.

Not all forms of verbal metareference in language are explicit, though. A text whose style imitates the style of a pre-text in a parody is only implicitly a metatext since it does not state that its purpose is to refer to its pre-text. The device of imitating a pre-text is an iconic device since a sign that results from imitation is an iconic sign. The conclusion is hence that explicit verbal metareference requires symbols, whereas metareference by means of iconic and indexical verbal devices can only be implicitly metareferential.

Can nonverbal signs be both explicit and implicit in their metareferential meanings, too? If explicit metareference requires symbols and if indexical or iconic signs can only be implicitly metareferential, the question amounts to asking whether nonverbal metareference can be symbolic. The question whether there are explicitly metareferential nonverbal signs then amounts to the question whether nonverbal sign systems have nonverbal metasymbols.

Neither pictorial nor tonal signs are typical symbols because symbols are signs whose referent is general, whereas the signs of music and of pictures are mainly signs because of their own qualities or their similarity to their object. A picture of a picture or a picture in the style

of Picasso evinces iconic or indexical metareference, but this metareference is only implicit because there is no specific visual or tonal symbol of its metareferential character. An explicit reference to the great classic of modern art requires reference to the painter's name, which means a verbal metasign. The picture creates the metareference only implicitly since it has no signs expressing the idea of metareference.

I agree with Wolf (in this vol: sect. 5.1.) that music can only evince implicit metareference but I am not convinced that painting, in contrast to music, can be explicitly metareferential. Painters represented in a painting and pictures whose referential conventions are broken by means of metaleptic optical illusions are not explicit about their metareferential devices and the same applies to paintings representing painters at work. Since the metareferential sign repertoire of pictures is restricted to indices or icons, especially diagrammatic or metaphorical icons, metapaintings can only *show* by similarity or *indicate* by means of indices, and these sign types are indirect means of referring to the circumstance that they are metapaintings. To be called 'explicit', a metareferential sign must have an elementary metasign that expresses directly, i. e., by means of symbols, that it is a metasign. In sum, whereas verbal signs can serve the purpose of *explicit and implicit* metareference, nonverbal signs can only be used for the purpose of *implicit* metareference.

The conclusion that only metasymbols, which are verbal signs, evince explicit metareference, whereas nonverbal signs are essentially implicitly metareferential icons or indices does not mean that the metareferential effect, the effect of media awareness, is necessarily higher in the verbal than in the nonverbal arts and media. It is well-known that the great revolutions in the nonverbal arts since the beginning of the twentieth century have been revolutions in which art has become meta-art. There is no evidence that this revolution was more powerful in the verbal than in the nonverbal arts.

## 5. Metasigns, metaphors, and connotative signs

Metaphors and connotative signs are *potential implicit metasigns*. Their meanings 'go beyond' (which is the meaning of the Greek prefix *meta-*) those of other signs, as does the meaning of a metasign. The common denominator of metasigns, metaphors and connotative signs

is that they are semiotic extensions of another sign. The sign extended by a metasign is the sign of the object language (see *Figure 1*), the sign extended by a metaphor is a verbal sign in its (literal) meaning, and the one extended by a connotative sign is the denotation of the same sign. The stylistic connotations of the writings of an author that identify this author and his or her idiosyncrasies are indices of the way this particular writer writes. A speaker's dialect or foreign accent is an indexical sign of the influence of his or her mother tongue on the second language. The style of a work of music or of the visual arts is a metasign of their composers, artist, epochs, genres, traditions, etc. Metaphors may be defined as iconic metasigns since they are signs related to their object by similarity, whereas connotations are indexical metasigns since they serve to indicate a particular style, an attitude, etc.

The term 'metaphor' contains the prefix 'meta-' in its own name, which suggests that they are metasigns, signs *about* or *beyond* their literal meaning. Literal reference and metaphorical reference seem to be related in a way that is similar to a sign and its metasign. Nevertheless, metaphorical language is not metalanguage, nor is a connotation a metasign. The typical semantic effects of metaphors and connotations differ from the meanings typically associated with metasigns. Whereas metaphors and connotations have poetic and stylistic effects, metasigns have the analytic purpose of creating or enhancing language awareness. Yet, as discussed above, poetic language is potential metalanguage, it can lead to language awareness. In this sense metaphors and connotations are *potential metasigns*. Since metaphors and connotations never state explicitly that they are metaphors, they can only be considered *implicit* metasigns.

The differences between a metaphor and a typical sign of a metalanguage can be illustrated by the example of the verbal sign *fox*. In its literal sense, the referent of *fox* refers to a 'wild animal of the Canidae family, tribe Vulpini'. Considered as a metasign, *fox* is, among other metalingual things, the referent of metasigns such as *monosyllabic noun with two consonants and a vowel*. As a metaphor, the referent of *fox* is 'a person clever at deceiving people'. Whereas the metaphor *fox* is motivated by the assumption of a similarity between its two referents, the animal and the sly person, the metasign explains the structure of the sign as a sign of the object language.

While only language has metasymbols specifically constituted for the purpose of serving as metaconcepts, both verbal and pictorial signs

can be metaphors and have connotations. Pictorial metaphors are popular in advertising. An example of a pictorial metaphor – discussed by Forceville (cf. 1996: 122) – is an ad for Dunlop tyres with the photo-montage of a car with ‘real’ lifebuoys instead of its wheels. The example shows clearly the relationships of substitution (lifebuoys *instead of* wheels) and similarity (circular shape and size) as well as a tertium comparationis (safety), which are characteristic of both visual and verbal metaphors.

The additional meaning of a connotative sign extending its denotative meaning can be exemplified by the English loan word *pizza*; it denotes the well known ‘food made of bread and baked with tomato, cheese, etc. on top’, and at the same time, it connotes ‘Italian cuisine’. Connotative signs and metasigns evince a formal similarity in their semiotic structure first brought to general attention by Louis Hjelmslev<sup>14</sup>. According to the Danish semiotician, a connotative sign is a semiotic whose expression plane is a semiotic, a metasign is a semiotic whose content plane is a semiotic, whereas a denotative sign is “a semiotic none of whose planes is a semiotic” (1961: 114). In Hjelmslev’s terminology, “a semiotic” is roughly ‘a sign’; the content plane of a sign corresponds to its meaning (see *Figure 1*), whereas the expression plane is the sign itself, in its phonetic form. Both metasigns and connotative signs are hence secondary signs which include a primary or denotative sign, but whereas the connotative sign adds a new content to a denotative sign, the metasign adds a new expression, i. e., a new sign to the denotative sign which it includes (cf. Nöth 2000: 86f.).

Whether music can be metaphorical, as Spitzer (see 2004) argues, remains to be examined in more detail, but it seems that the meta-meanings associated with music are primarily connotations and not metaphors, i. e., references which the musical message evokes *in addition to* their primary message and not *instead of* this primary meaning. Consider the musical signs produced by the organ stop *vox humana*. The name of the stop, ‘human voice’, is certainly a verbal metaphor. This verbal metaphor conveys the idea that the sounds produced by this stop are *not* the sounds of a human voice, although they are similar to it, but sounds produced by an organ. The sounds of *vox humana* do not *stand for* a human voice. They only evoke the association of a human voice in addition to being organ sounds. Unlike a

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hjelmslev 1961: 114–125; see also fn. 3.

metaphor, which conveys the idea that the metaphorical meaning is *not* its literal meaning, a connotation conveys a meaning in addition to its denotation.

## 6. Performative metareference

What is performative metareference<sup>15</sup>? In linguistic pragmatics, the adjective *performative* has a narrower and a broader sense. The narrower sense is the one introduced by Austin and Searle in their definitions of performative speech acts. A performative speech act is one in which the act of speaking does not only have a referent, as all words have, but in which it has a referent which only comes to existence by the utterance of the very words to which it refers. For example, the performative verb *to resign* used by a speaker referring to him or herself is performatively self-referential, and metareferential as far as the speech act is concerned, because the chairman who says *I resign* is stepping down and ceases to be a chairman with this very utterance by which he declares his resignation.

A performative verb such as *to promise* in *I promise to pay you a drink* is a reflexive metasign since its grammatical complement, which expresses the speaker's intention to pay a drink to the hearer, is itself the content of the promise, announced by means of the verb *to promise*. For similar reasons, syntactic constructions introduced by a speech act verb such as *to say*, *to ask*, *to write*, or *to read* are reflexive performative metasigns, too. In its reference to an act of speaking, the verb itself is an elementary verbal metasign. Furthermore, in the construction of the verb with its complement, this complement is a verbal sign whose referent is the speech act indicated by the preceding speech act verb. For example, in the verb phrase *asking a question*, the verb *ask* contains a semantic index which points to the word *question* that follows, which it implies (as *asking* implies a *question*) and which we hence expect to hear before it is even uttered.

Verbal metasigns of this kind are constructed in syntactic patterns of self-embedding: by implication, the meaning of the grammatical complement of a performative and speech act verb is semantically included in the meaning of the verb. If I *promise* X, X is a promise, if

<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere also discussed as enunciative or communicative self-reference; see Nöth 2007b and Nöth/Bishara/Neitzel 2008.

I *say* X, X is a speech act, if I *narrate* X, X is a narrative. This is why certain expressions in which speech act verbs are constructed with grammatical objects sound somewhat tautological. Consider expressions such as *to ask a question* or *to tell a story*: what else if not a question can you ask, what else if not a story can you tell? Notice that in such expressions the repetition of the signifier in the verb and in the noun phrase that follows, as in *quoting a quotation*, is avoided. Only in English can you *ask a question* (because of the difference of the signifiers of the verb and the noun); in German the equivalent expression, *eine Frage fragen*, sounds tautological and unacceptable.

In a much broader sense, the concept of *performative* is used by linguists who adopt the so-called *performative hypothesis*, arguing that each and every speech act contains an implicit sign of its purpose as a speech act and thus a sign about itself (cf. Leech 1980: 60). The semiotician Luis J. Prieto has called this kind of metareferential communication the *notificative indication* of a semic act (cf. 1966: 32). This implicit metasign can be made explicit by means of a paraphrase that is its synonym. For example, the order *Come here!* can be paraphrased by the explicitly performative utterance *I order you to come here*, a question such as *Where are you?* is synonymous with *I am asking (you) where you are*, the author of a poem conveys the performative metamessage '*My text is a poem*', and novelists convey the implicit message '*What I communicate is fiction*', etc. Every speech act thus implies a performative metareferential sign of the kind *I speak, I say, I ask, I write*, etc. Implicit or explicit performative metareference is thus a matter of implicit or explicit syntactic embedding of the kind *I say X*. This broader sense of implicit or explicit performative metareference will be adopted in the following. It is the concept underlying the essay collection *Performanz: Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaft* (Wirth, ed. 2002), in whose introduction the editor claims that cultural studies are facing a *performative turn* with their current interest in performances, staged or embodied realities (cf. Wirth 2002: 10).

To illustrate why a speech act verb is a metasign and how it involves metareference, it may suffice to compare the utterance *I said 'no meat' (and not 'no need')* with the utterance *I don't eat meat*. While the verb *said* indicates that its direct object, '*no meat*', is a mere noun phrase uttered in an act of speaking, the verb *eat* refers to the consumption of edible food. Verbal metasigns can be reflexive at sev-

eral meta-levels. The speech act of quoting is an example of a meta-metesign. When we quote, we repeat what someone else has said.

The sentence *Tarzan loves Jane* in the context of Rice Burroughs' novel may serve to exemplify the nature of performative metareference. When we read the sentence in the said novel, we know that its author does not really claim that some person called Tarzan really existed and really said that he loved some other existing girl named Jane. When reading a novel, the reader knows that it is all fiction, and this knowledge is an implicit metamessage of this novel and so many other works of literature. The implicit metareferential message of Tarzan's utterance may be paraphrased as follows: *According to the fictitious scenario of this novel, Tarzan loves Jane*. Hence the reader of this novel reading Tarzan's declaration of love interprets it under the premise of an implicit performative metesign, which can be made explicit as: *The author of this novel presents me with the fictitious scenario of a certain Tarzan who declares love to a certain Jane, both inventions of his novel*.

Not only verbal but also nonverbal messages convey their implicit performative metamessages. Performing musicians convey the message that they produce music, not noise, and actors must make sure that the audience knows that they are only acting. When Ewan McGregor and Colin Farrell play the role of the assassins Ian and Terry in Woody Allen's film *Cassandra's Dream* (2007), their metamessage is: "We only act as assassins; in real life we are actors". Film directors who do not convey this message to their audience run the risk of having their actors arrested for the crimes they commit on the screen. Mural painters convey the message that they produce mural paintings unlike the artisans who merely paint the wall in this or that color.

What can happen when a painting fails to convey its metaperformative message was brought to our semiotic attention by the ancient Greeks. According to their legend, the two painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius each wanted to paint a picture of utmost illusive appeal, which should completely conceal its performative metareferential message that identifies it as a painting. Zeuxis managed to deceive the birds with the realism of the grapes depicted in his still life to the degree that the illuded birds flew near the picture in order to eat the grapes, but Parrhasius did more. He did not only deceive animals but his fellow painter Zeuxis himself by painting a curtain at the sight of which



Zeuxis exclaimed: "Pull it aside so that I may see what your painting is about!"

### 7. Performative metareference from rhetoric to the arts

Performative verbs are elementary and explicit metasigns without counterparts in pictorial or musical signs. No musical note or melody can express the self-reflexive idea of its own performance, and pictures have neither colors nor forms to represent the idea of painting. Nevertheless, reference to performance in music and pictures is possible by various iconic devices creating implicit modes of metareference. The photographer in his or her own photo is an iconic performative representation of the act of taking the photo. Unlike a performative speech act which is metareferential because it expresses explicitly what kind of act is being performed, the picture of the photographer taking his own photo only *shows* the act of taking a photo but does not state explicitly that it is showing this act.

Haydn's Symphony no. 45 in F sharp minor, *Farewell*, is only implicitly metareferential as to its own performance. The performance, in which one musician after the other leaves the podium until it is empty, is a performative icon of the idea of departure. Actually, the musical metasign involved in this metaperformative piece of music is not the musicians' potential leaving the podium but their successively becoming silent when convention would rather make one expect a tutti (and consequently, the presence of all performing musicians) at the conclusion of a classical symphony. However, there may be some vagueness as to the notion of musical performance in this case. If musical performance includes the mere bodily presence of the musicians on the podium, it may also include the coming and going of the musician, which could then also be used as an indexical mode of performative metareference.

Performative metareference is hence the reference of the act of sign production to itself. In its broadest sense, it is a synonym of meta-communication, and if it is true that we always communicate that we communicate, then performative metareference is omnipresent in each and every communicative situation.

One of the more specific modes of performative metareference can be found in certain rhetorical figures that ancient rhetoricians have classified as figures of address. The metareferential aspect of these

figures of thought consists of the circumstance that they contain comments given by the speaker on his own speech, its mode of production, or delivery. Among these features are:

- *Aporia*, the claim of the impossibility of giving some information, e. g.: “I can’t tell you how much I love you”.
- *Aposiopesis*, the claim of the impossibility to continue, e. g.: “The boat is sinking and – I cannot go on”.
- *Subjectio*, a fictional dialogue in which the answers to questions are anticipated, e. g.: “What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air.” (Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*, V, i: 133–134).
- *Correctio*, self-correction, e. g.: “Your brother, no, no, no brother, yet the son (Yet not the son, I will not call him son) [...]”. (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II, iii: 19–20)

A common characteristic of these devices of performative metareference is the fact that they present the rhetorical fiction of a divided speaker, speaking in two voices, one being in the voice of natural, spontaneous and often imperfect discourse, the other being the voice of a metadiscourse which interferes with, controls, corrects, or improves this other voice. Furthermore, since both voices originate in the same speaker, these figures result in performative paradoxes. Take the example of *aporia*: she who expresses the impossibility of expressing how much she loves paradoxically expresses precisely by means of this figure of speech how great her love is. A *subjectio* exemplifies the performative paradox of asking a question and giving the answer at the same time, for the one who asks a question should not ask it if he or she knows the answer in the first place.

The study of performative metareference and its possibility or impossibility of occurrence in the nonverbal media is a research project worthwhile pursuing in depth. The currently fashionable device of enhancing the credibility of documentary films by showing the filming of the film is certainly a performative device of metareference. The camera operator who pretends to be filming himself while filming uses the metareferential device of a performative *mise en abyme* by representing that he represents (see Andacht 2007).

Only a few suggestions can be given concerning the modern successors of ancient rhetorical devices in the contemporary arts and media. The metaperformative device of Haydn’s symphony *Farewell* discussed above is not unlike the figure of *aposiopesis*, but it also

shows the difference. By means of music, the musicians cannot express explicitly what, according to a well-known anecdote, was Haydn's intention to convey, namely that they wish to stop playing and have a holiday; they can only create an icon of *stopping* by stopping.

A Romantic castle erected in the form of a ruin to represent the ruin of a medieval castle constitutes a aposiopetic paradox in architecture, for the architects would most certainly have been able to finish the monument in their lifetime had they not been given the order to build a ruin. He who constructs a ruin finds himself in an aposiopetic dilemma, because he has to build a monument which is a ruin of a monument at the same time. In painting, Francis Bacon's deliberate device of effacing the faces in his portraits may be seen as a metaperformative device between aporia and aposiopesis. The painter, who is most certainly able to draw the faces of the portrayed persons in more detail, represents them as if he could not paint properly. Photos by artists who show their referent in a deliberately decentered way such as one of the photos of the Berlin Philharmonic Music Hall taken by the photographer Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck are metapictures which draw the viewer's attention to the art of taking a photograph by deviating from standard practice.

The ancient *correctio* is another figure for which examples can be found easily in music and in pictorial representation. In music, it can be found in metamusical operas such as Cimarosa's *Il Maestro di Cappella* (1793), with chorus rehearsal scenes representing the gradual improvement of the chorus' performance with each new try. Part of its corrections are mediated by language though.

In the movies, the best-known recent example of *correctio* is *Run Lola Run* (1998), a metafilm which consecutively develops three different storylines from the same initial constellation. In contrast to the ancient *correctio*, which suggests an improvement in the course of the substitution of the corrigendum by the corrigens, the modern device of *correctio* suggests no such improvement in the course of the narrative development but leaves it undecided whether any one of the three versions is an improvement of its precursor. The three narrative strands of *Run Lola Run* exemplify Jakobson's principle of the projection of paradigmatic equivalences into the syntagmatic axis of a film. The concrete metasemiotic effect of this poetic device calls for reflections on the principles of filmic narration in general and for re-

flections of the structures of repetition and variation in this film in particular.

## 8. Conclusion

The panorama of the semiotics of metareference unfolded in this paper has opened a wide horizon. The purpose was to examine the theoretical foundations of reference and metareference, to show in which respects metareference is an eminently semiotic topic, to examine the fundamental difference between verbal and nonverbal metareference, and to introduce the concept of performative metareference as a new research field. A thorough investigation of the semiotics of metareference requires taking into consideration all three branches of classical semiotics, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, which, in the context of the present research, can be defined as metasemantics, metasyntax, and metapragmatics.

Metasemantics, the study of the relationship between the metasign and its metareferent, is the point of departure in any attempt to determine the essence of metareference. The distinction between iconic, indexical, and symbolic metareference and the insight that explicit metareference is only possible by means of symbols were the main results of the metasemantic approach to metasigns. Metasyntax, the study of how signs are combined to metasigns in sequences and structures, revealed that the combination of signs to diagrammatic patterns is an important device of creating iconic metasigns. Metapragmatics, the study of how signs become metasigns under certain conditions of use, was the framework which revealed that verbal and nonverbal performative signs are indexical metasigns.

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## The Case is ‘*this*’ Metareference in Magritte and Ashbery

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The article explores the use and function of the deictic expression ‘this’ in meta-referentially alert visual (Magritte) and verbal art (Ashbery). Pursuing the processual character of reference rather than its mere result, it argues that, in art, acts of self-reference induced by means of ‘this’ are ‘pseudo-autophoric’ in the sense that they make artefacts refer to themselves as something that they are not (yet) and that they thus performatively generate, rather than imitate, their (aesthetic) objects of reference.

To be *and* not to be, that is the question.

The magic word is ‘this’. It does not only designate, nor does it merely refer, it can also constitute and create and, in the end, erase itself.

In the following, I will first concentrate on a textual example putting the word ‘this’ to some conspicuous use; I will then try and systematize its referential potential; in a further step, I will discuss what happens to the word ‘this’ in Magritte’s (in)famous painting “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (‘This is not a Pipe’); lastly, I will explore the function and use of ‘this’ in John Ashbery’s poem “Paradoxes and Oxymorons”.

### 1.

One of the most frequent questions asked in the face of (predominantly modern/postmodern) art is, ‘what (on earth) is this?’, immediately to be followed by ‘what does this mean?’. Almost everyone will be able to recount anecdotes such as the “story told of a celebrated Russian dancer, who was asked by someone what she meant by a certain dance” and who “answered with some exasperation, ‘If I could say it in so many words, do you think I should take the very great trouble of



dancing it?”<sup>1</sup> Now since, as one will gratefully acknowledge, I cannot (and will not) take the trouble of dancing what I mean, I will, in all due modesty, try and say it in ‘so many words’, and I will begin with some observations drawn from a Shakespearean sonnet.

The German Shakespearian Werner Habicht has highly suggestively drawn attention to the curious use of the word ‘this’ in quite a number of the bard’s sonnets (see 1993). The couplet concluding “Sonnet 18” (“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”), for example, uses the word, as is well known, even twice within its last line:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives *this*, and *this* gives life to thee.  
(Shakespeare 1986: 85, ll. 13–14; my italics)

These lines can be read, as Habicht argues, as a concise and logical summary of what the speaker has brought forth in the preceding quatrain:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,  
Nor shall Death brag thou wand’rest in his shade  
When in eternal lines to time thou growst. (Ibid., ll. 9–12)

In such a reading, the word ‘this’ refers back to the ‘eternal lines’ of ‘this’ poem, making for textual cohesion and guaranteeing a metareferential (and metapoetic) reading: ‘this poem will eternalize your beauty by communicating it to all future generations’. Considering, however, that more than half of the text indulges in arguing the evident impossibility – the Petrarchan *adynaton* – of expressing the very thing the couplet purports to have celebrated, this reading becomes more than implausible. The sonnet’s ending thus turns out to be more ambiguous than it seemed at first sight:

On the one hand it would seem to confirm retrospectively that the preceding expression “when in eternal lines...” does in fact refer primarily to “this” poem, claiming that the poem is capable of immortalizing life, beauty and love. On the other hand, the “this”-gesture, in merely purporting to sum up the poem becomes vague in that it detaches the finished text from the love-inspired poetic process by which it has been generated – that is, from what the poem has essentially been dealing with. (Habicht 1993: 117)

This brings us back to the question of ‘what all this is about’. Obviously, the word ‘this’ is here (pragmatically) designating something

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hughes in his introduction to Faulkner (1975: 7); Hughes in turn uses the anecdote to defend the allegedly bewildering aesthetic structure of Faulkner’s novel.

that it (semantically and syntactically) cannot fulfil. "Hence, the concluding 'this'-gesture, in that it refers to the poem as a whole, both asserts and undercuts the poem's claim to eternity." (Ibid.: 118)

Now, this is precisely what I am interested in. What happens in the last line of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" is an act of 'self'-reference that does not quite come out at the point it has taken into view. The reference it stages is, at best, oblique. In other words, the 'this'-gesture employed here makes something refer to itself as something that it is not. (This is what I have in mind with the motto given at the beginning.) In making something refer to itself as something else, the word 'this' serves not only to connect text and world (i. e., medium and 'reality') or text and text (as part of its cohesion and coherence) but to constitute and create realities that would not exist without it. It is in this sense that one could talk of an autopoetic or self-generating use. I would propose to call it 'performative reference'<sup>2</sup>.

Performative reference thus creates the very thing it talks about and, in doing so, draws attention to its (dubious) referential status, i. e., the act of referring itself becomes an 'object of reflection'— in other words, what we have here is an instance of metareference<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.

The word 'this' is, as everybody knows, a deictic expression<sup>4</sup>. Categorically, it can be classified as a demonstrative pronoun or a determiner; functionally, within the context of grammar, it is mainly used as sentence reference or noun-phrase reference<sup>5</sup>. Its scope of reference is either exophoric (pointing towards something outside the text: '*this* is my script') or endophoric (designating elements from within the text itself: 'the case is *this*: metareference in Magritte and Ashbery');

<sup>2</sup> For a distinction between the mimetic and the performative cf. Iser 1993: ch. 6; for performativity in poetry, with special reference to the Shakespearean sonnet, see Pfister 2005.

<sup>3</sup> For a systematic discussion of the idea of metareference, with regard to narrative genres, see Wolf 2001 as well as his introduction to this vol. (cf. esp. 2f., and the newly modified, and enlarged, attempt at systematization in sec. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the entries 'deictic expression' and 'deixis' in Bussmann 1996: 116f..

<sup>5</sup> For a syntactic analysis of 'this' cf. Quirk et al. 1972: 136–139, 700–703 and Aarts/Aarts 1988: 51, 106–108.

within endophoric reference, it is either anaphoric (referring to things that have already been introduced: ‘but I know all *this* already’) or cataphoric (referring to things to come: ‘now listen to *this*, it will surprise you ...’)<sup>6</sup>; as such, I would like to add, it is mostly allophoric (linked to other elements in the text) but it can also be autophoric (designating nothing but itself)<sup>7</sup>.

My interest lies, as one may easily guess, in the last point. In Shakespeare’s lines “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee”, the reference seems to lie exclusively in the text as a whole, i. e., it seems exophoric on the one hand but autophoric on the other or, to be more precise, its use can be described as ‘pseudo-autophoric’ (and, up to a point, pseudo-exophoric) in the sense that it refers to something that, in ‘reality’, is only just in the process of its making. This is the idea of performative reference: the deictic expressions used in the text do not find themselves anchored in a pre-established extratextual situation indicating what they mean (and thus giving ‘life’ to them) but constitute a situation of their own that is *and is not* at the same time<sup>8</sup>.

This is what Karl Bühler has called ‘phantasmatic deixis’ (“Deixis am Phantasma”; cf. 1982: 121–140); it is what we call ‘fiction’. In conditions such as these, the word ‘this’ finds itself used as part of a world-making process in which a poem such as “Sonnet 18” can be made to celebrate an act of immortalization even though it argues at the same time that such a thing is, strictly speaking, impossible.

### 3.

Pseudo-autophoric reference is a point that can also be made for Magritte’s “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (see *Illustration 1*).

<sup>6</sup> For the different types of reference in text and discourse cf. Brown/Yule 1985: ch. 6; for reference and discourse deixis cf. Levinson 1985: 85–89.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of ‘phoricity’ (“Textphorik”) cf. Kallmeyer et al. 1986: ch. 7.

<sup>8</sup> For paradoxical affirmation of the type ‘Once upon a time there was and was not’ (as at the beginning of Majorcan fairy tales, “Això era y no era”) as a signature of fiction cf. Jakobson 1960: 371; for the role of deictics or ‘shifters’ in linguistic world-making see Jakobson 1971; for the world-making aspect of deictics and speech acts cf. Iser 1987: ch. 2.

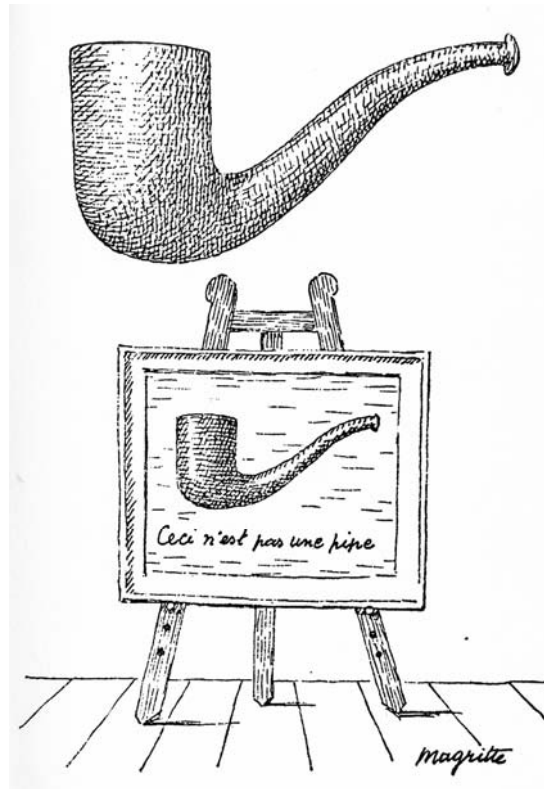


Illustration 1: René Magritte, “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (‘This is Not a Pipe’)<sup>9</sup>.

Everybody taking a first glance at Magritte’s drawing will know that what we see *is* a pipe even though the text in the drawing immediately informs us that ‘this is not a pipe’. If the drawing were to be communicated in the “game of giving information” (Wittgenstein 1967: 28e) this would be an obvious contradiction<sup>10</sup>. But, generally, we do not look at visual art in order to find out what is a pipe and what is not<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> This is one of several versions of the drawing, for the discussion of which cf. Foucault 1973: 7, 9–15.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein’s self-admonishment: “Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language game of giving information” (1967: 28e).

<sup>11</sup> This explains why Magritte wrote on the back of one of the reproductions of his drawing: “Le titre ne contredit pas le dessin; il affirme autrement” (‘The title does not

So we come back to the question of what all ‘this’ is about. What do we see?

The drawing can be said to consist of three elements: first, there is a pipe outside a frame; second, there is a pipe within the frame as part of a picture propped up on an easel; third, there is a sort of calligrammatic caption inside the frame, textually explaining, in a handwriting that strongly resembles Magritte’s signature, that ‘this is not a pipe’. (This may be likened to the structure of a baroque emblem: of an *in-scriptio* as the work of art’s title, a *pictura* as its object [of reflection], and a *subscriptio* as its explanatory comment<sup>12</sup>.)

As everyone who has read Foucault’s astute analysis of Magritte’s drawing knows, this can be interpreted in many different ways: one way is to oppose writing and image within the frame, making the sentence read ‘*This* (handwriting) is not a pipe (but the image is)’; another one is to oppose the space within the frame to the one without, saying ‘*This* (representation of a pipe in the picture on the easel) is not a pipe (but that pipe outside the frame, the ‘real’ one, is)’; yet another way of reading would be to carry the last variant one step further, affirming that there is no pipe at all on the paper<sup>13</sup>. So what does the ‘this’ refer to?

Going back to Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18” one could surmise that what Magritte undertakes here is another one of these ‘this’-gestures, referring to nothing in particular but to the work of art as a whole, autopoetically creating something that is more than just a pipe, – or the difference between an analogous (pictorial) representation of a pipe and a digital (linguistic) one, – or the difference between a representation of a thing and ‘the thing itself’.

This, again, leads us back to a kind of performative reference: ‘this’ is not a pipe because ‘this’ is a work of art<sup>14</sup>. ‘Reading’ such a work of art, then, neither means to identify it with the (imaginary) idea of a pipe on the level of its contents nor to reduce it to the mere materiality of (real) strokes and lines on the level of representational tech-

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contradict the drawing; it affirms differently’; qtd. in Foucault 1973: 91 [my translation]).

<sup>12</sup> For the basic structure of the emblem (along with a wealth of ensuing examples) cf. the introduction in Henkel/Schöne, eds. 1996: XI–XIII.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion of this cf. Foucault 1973: 23–38.

<sup>14</sup> I here resume ideas that I have discussed more systematically elsewhere (cf. Mahler 2006b: 227–229).

nique but to acknowledge the difference between what is *and what is not* on the one hand (a pipe *and no pipe*) and what is not *and what is* on the other (*no strokes and lines and strokes and lines*). It is the type of reference of the 'this'-gesture, making something refer to itself as something that it is not.

This is what we are wont to call 'aesthetics'.<sup>15</sup> Its experience follows a dynamic which can be played both ways, from syntactic impulse (strokes and lines) to semantic gratification ('Ah, a pipe') or from semantic impulse (a pipe) to syntactic gratification ('Oh, strokes and lines'), and it lasts as long as the to-and-fro movement between the *construction* of meaning at the price of the *destruction* of texture and the *construction* of texture at the price of the *destruction* of meaning is not arrested by an arbitrary decision to fix the one ('Well, after all, this is a pipe') or the other ('Now, come on, definitely, this is a drawing').

In this aesthetic approach, the decisive hinge seems to be precisely the 'this'-gesture, constantly also referring to the other dimension of the same thing. Magritte's 'trick', as it were, is thus to blend two media, i. e., to operate two material levels and their corresponding (single) level of imagination at the same time<sup>16</sup>. In 'reading' his drawing, we constantly take into account the rivalry between two differently signifying media: the 'image' (and its analogical mode of signifying) and the 'text' (and its arbitrary mode of signifying). The work thus analogically presents an object ('a pipe') whilst at the same time arbitrarily (and in a paradoxical way metareferentially) denying its representation ('no pipe', cf. Foucault 1973: 59–79)<sup>17</sup>.

Hence, again, the 'this'-gesture, in that it refers to the work of art as a whole, both asserts and undercuts the drawing's claim to (re)presentation. What is at play, then, is a kind of intermedial metareference,

<sup>15</sup> For the (characteristically but not exclusively) French tradition emerging in the second half of the nineteenth century of liberating art – the 'ais-thetic' – from 'a somatic support of the thetic' ('un soma-support du thétique'), i. e., from its mimetic gravitation, cf. Kristeva 1974: 78; see also Mahler 2006a.

<sup>16</sup> This can be likened to the idea of a sandwich, with the two outer (material) layers, one pictorial, the other verbal, simultaneously, and paradoxically, focussing the inner, semantic, one, thus always already (metareferentially) indicating an alternative way of signification that should have remained hidden.

<sup>17</sup> For the ideas of (mimetic) imitation and (performative) symbolization and their aesthetic "tilting game" cf. Iser 1993: ch. 5, quote 250.

interminably drawing attention to the other (rival) type of signification, with both types, however, turning out to be equally distant from what we would like to consider to be ‘the real thing’<sup>18</sup>.

## 4.

Such a programmatically playful foregrounding of an artefact’s mediality is also what happens in John Ashbery’s metapoem significantly entitled “Paradoxes and Oxymorons”<sup>19</sup>. The text aptly begins with one of the ‘this’-gestures under scrutiny here:

This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level.  
 Look at it talking to you. You look out a window  
 Or pretend to fidget. You have it but you don’t have it.  
 You miss it, it misses you. You miss each other.  
 The poem is sad because it wants to be yours, and cannot. 5  
 What’s a plain level? It is that and other things,  
 Bringing a system of them into play. Play?  
 Well, actually, yes, but I consider play to be  
 A deeper outside thing, a dreamed role-pattern,  
 As in the division of grace these long August days 10  
 Without proof. Open-ended. And before you know  
 It gets lost in the steam and chatter of typewriters.  
 It has been played once more. I think you exist only  
 To tease me into doing it, on your level, and then you aren’t there  
 Or have adopted a different attitude. And the poem 15  
 Has set me softly down beside you. The poem is you.

(*The Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1983: 1292)<sup>20</sup>

The very first line of the poem seems to state ‘what this is all about’: “This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level”. But if that is so, it seems, again, to refer to something that it is not. Once more, this is a kind of performative reference: the ‘this’-gesture is pseudo-autophoric in the sense that it explicitly calls the text a poem *and* refers to ordinary language as its object of reflection *at the same*

<sup>18</sup> For a thorough discussion of the concept of ‘intermediality’ see Rajewsky 2002.

<sup>19</sup> For metareference in poetry cf. Müller-Zettelmann 2000: 157–252, and see Müller-Zettelmann 2005; for similar discussions of other poems by Ashbery see McHale 1992 and 2005 and Haselstein 2003.

<sup>20</sup> For the sake of accessibility, I quote the poem, which originally appeared in Ashbery’s collection *Shadow Train* (1981), from *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*.

time. Ashbery's text seems to be a poem *and no poem*; and it seems to be *no* ordinary language *and ordinary language*. This reflects its paradoxical as well as its oxymoral quality.

So, once more, this poses the question of what 'this' is all about. Something that is merely concerned with language on a very plain level is not really what we would expect to turn out to be a poem in the end. And yet, this is precisely what happens. What emerges in the course of the text, in the process of its reading, is an artefact that surely is, for the most part, written in language 'on a very plain level' (literally, of course, on a sheet of paper), but, as the text tells us, a plain level "[...] is that *and other things*, / Bringing a system of them into play" (ll. 6–7; my italics). In reading Ashbery's text, what we do is 'bring' all sorts of things 'into play', correlating them, creating a to-and-fro movement between its two levels of material (syntactics) and content (semantics) that, at times, cannot be brought to a halt<sup>21</sup>. So, what at first sight seems to be nothing but language on a very plain level, gradually becomes a poem even though it syntactically still very much looks like what it seems.

What Ashbery does is give us a sort of lyrical Möbius strip (with the 'plain level' forming a 'strange loop') that cannot be brought to a halt, precisely, because we cannot resolve the interplay between syntactics and semantics, since in the construction of the text we are not sure which is which<sup>22</sup>. This is, again, typical of (self-reflexive, 'pseudo-autophoric') 'art'. In reading the entries 'cuckoo' or 'swan' in a dictionary, we automatically (and exclusively) convert the given syntactic material into semantic information whereas in reading poems such as Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo" (1802) or John Hollander's "Swan and Shadow" (1969) we lingeringly go back and forth between the two levels until the game is finally (and arbitrarily) brought either to some mimetic ('This is about a bird') or to some performative halt ('This is about linguistic material forming the shape of a bird').

<sup>21</sup> Again, for a more systematic discussion cf. Mahler 2006b: 229–234.

<sup>22</sup> For the idea of the Möbius strip as a technique used in postmodernist fiction to produce the effect of interminability (as can also be experienced, e. g., in the drawings of M. C. Escher) cf. McHale 1989: 119–130.



The epiphanous feeling, however, which can be seen as some ‘aesthetic’ moment<sup>23</sup>, seems most intense when the syntagmatic progression of the reading process almost comes to a standstill so as to produce a most rapid succession of paradigmatic tilts conveying, and renewing each, the illusion of some momentary liberation from the medial constraints of language (i. e., as it were, from linguistic ‘gravitation’)<sup>24</sup>. This is what seems to happen in the middle of the text where the speaker contrastively sets out to define *his* notion of play: “Play? / Well, actually, yes, but I consider play to be / A deeper outside thing, a dreamed role-pattern, / As in the division of grace these long August days / Without proof” (ll. 7–11).

In the Möbius structure of “Paradoxes and Oxymorons”, this tilting game, aesthetically exploring something ‘deeper’, ‘outside’, something that can only be ‘dreamed’ and will always remain ‘without proof’, which surreptitiously suggests a Borgesian ‘imminence of some revelation that never comes’, is made interminable in the sense that it becomes undecidable at what point the text ‘really’ is a ‘poem’ ‘talking’ about ‘language on a very plain level’ and when it is ‘language on a very plain level’ ‘talking’ about a ‘poem’. This means that the ‘play’ between the indistinguishable levels is, as the text itself indicates, at least theoretically, “[o]pen-ended” (l. 11), since it can neither be brought to an unambiguously semantic nor to a convincing syntactic halt<sup>25</sup>.

And Ashbery complicates it even further in that he makes his text not only project into one the levels of syntactics and semantics but

<sup>23</sup> For the idea of the ‘aesthetic’ as the ‘imminence of a revelation which does not come about’ (“esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético” [my translation]) cf. Borges 1980: 133.

<sup>24</sup> This is the type of “frenzied oscillation” (Dupuy 1990: 106) that arises when metalanguage and object-language become indistinguishable; for an illuminating discussion of this, with reference to Roger McGough’s “The New Poem (for 18 words)” (1985), cf. Müller-Zetzelmann 2005: 135–137.

<sup>25</sup> Ashbery’s ‘trick’, as it were, is to telescope into one ordinary and poetic language, thus providing two mutually exclusive offers of signification at the same time. In distinction to what Magritte does in “Ceci n’est pas une pipe”, this can be seen as a kind of *intramedial* (i. e., purely verbal) metareference in the sense that what looks like syntactic material on the one hand (‘poem’) and semantic content on the other (‘ordinary language’) may also be content on the one (‘poem’) and material on the other (‘ordinary language’). This may be likened to a ‘collapsed’ (metalepsed?) sandwich where it is unclear which is the bread and which the butter; cf. above fn. 16.

also those of syntactics/semantics on the one hand and pragmatics on the other, compelling the reader (“on your level”, l. 14) into finally acknowledging the text ‘concerned with language on a very plain level’ as his/her ‘poem’: “The poem is you” (l. 16). This can be read as a direct echo to Wittgenstein’s dictum that a poem may be composed in every-day language but that it is played in a different game. And this is precisely what happens before everything “gets lost” (l. 12) again. In pseudo-autophorically turning ordinary language into ‘this poem’ we, as the manipulated agents of Ashbery’s aesthetic performance, cannot but admit with the speaker: “It has been played once more” (l. 13).

5.

Both Ashbery’s poem about ‘language on a very plain level’ and Magritte’s drawing of ‘no pipe’ can be seen, as I (without making a song or dance) have tried to demonstrate, as cases of performative (meta) reference. This seems to be due to a pseudo-autophoric use of the deictic expression ‘this’, which, in both cases, refers not to some object already made (i. e., to a finished product) but rather to something that is in the process of its making (*poëin*), talking about ‘itself’ as if it existed already. In Ashbery’s “Paradoxes and Oxymorons”, the poem’s reference to itself as something that it is not is intralinguistic in the sense that the text of the poem opens up the possibility of two different types of verbal material (poem and ordinary language) paradoxically vying for the expression of their opposite metalinguistic content (‘ordinary language’ or ‘poem’), whereas in Magritte’s drawing, the same game is played intermedially, with two (medially) different types of material (pictorial and linguistic) simultaneously designating a self-contradictory semantic content (‘a pipe’ and ‘no pipe’). What both cases have in common, however, is that they foreground the (normally unseen) gap between the two levels of signification (material and ideas), cross-(meta)referentially alerting us not so much to the epistemological (or thetic) question of what something is but rather to the cognitive (or aesthetic) one of how we signify.

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## Beyond ‘Metanarration’ Form-Based Metareference as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon

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French novels of the 1980s and 1990s prominently feature a specific variant of metaization, which is bound to an unnatural, ‘perplexing’ rendering of the respective novels’ narrative situations. This as yet barely considered form of metaization brings to the fore the transgeneric and transmedial relevance of a distinguishing characteristic that aims at the specific *modi operandi* of distinct metaization particles. In terms of narrative genres, this involves the differentiation between discourse- and story-based metaization strategies. However, as this contribution will illustrate, analogous differentiations may also be of advantage in non- (or only to a very limited extent) narrative genres and media such as painting. Discourse-based forms of metaization as substantiated in the ‘perplexing narrative situations’ of selected 1980s and 1990s French novels may hence be inscribed in a more comprehensive concept, which I – for want of a better expression – will term ‘form-based’ (vs. ‘content-based’) metareference.

As mentioned in the introduction to the present volume, current research abounds in partly overlapping terms that, in one way or other, pertain to metareferential phenomena. Especially from a genre- and media-comparative point of view it is thus without a doubt advantageous and worthwhile to introduce a comprehensive term that is restricted neither to particular arts or media nor to specific meta-phenomena but that is capable of transgenerically and transmedially encompassing various realizations of metaization. The term ‘metareference’, as defined by Werner Wolf, aims at precisely that: to supply a “heuristically motivated umbrella term for all meta-phenomena occurring in the arts and media” (in this vol.: 12; cf. also 2007, esp.: 33f.).

However, introducing such an umbrella term naturally – and necessarily – also results in a *single* term subsuming numerous phenomena which may in themselves be of heterogeneous quality. In or-

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from German by Katharina Bantleon; all translations of French quotes the author’s, all translations of German quotes are the translator’s.

der to avoid a 'levelling' of differences and differentiations and to preserve the accuracy of the individual concepts, it appears sensible that on a subordinate level more specific terms and distinctions be introduced (or retained), which are apt to accommodate the qualitative diversity of various individual meta-phenomena. Accordingly, Wolf has already introduced a number of distinctions ('explicit' vs. 'implicit', 'fictio-' vs. 'fictum-metareference', etc.), which I will not discuss in detail.

In the following, I will rather concentrate on a particular, underresearched variant of metaization and its specific functional mechanisms in order to deduce possible implications and consequences for the theoretical description of metareferential phenomena in general. The starting point for my discussion will be French novels of the 1980s and 1990s which feature the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of 'omniscient first-person narrators' and hence a 'perplexing' or 'unnatural' rendering of the narrative situation. Despite having indeed attracted attention in research, this phenomenon has thus far not yet been perceived and discussed as one of metareferential quality<sup>2</sup>. In this respect, 'perplexing narrative situations' doubtlessly already deserve attention in their own right and will be elucidated by way of concrete examples in the first section of this contribution and then subsequently expounded on in terms of their specific functional mechanisms. This will, at the same time, provide a basis for the ensuing discussion, which will raise questions as to the larger framework of metareferential techniques as such. In this context it is especially noteworthy that the particular variant of metaization in focus reveals a blind spot in traditional narratology and thus virtually challenges a critical concept upon existing concepts. This becomes obvious when comparatively contextualising perplexing narrative situations with the concept of 'metanarration', which is – although commonly regarded as aiming at techniques closely akin to the perplexing narrative situation – tellingly *incapable* of grasping strategies of this kind. Before this backdrop, perplexing narrative situations will serve as an example to demonstrate that the common understanding of metanarration as "[a] narrator's commenting on the process of narration" (Nünning 2004: 12) proves to be rather limited in various respects. A key observation in this context is the fact that the specific variant of metaization under

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<sup>2</sup> The exception would be my own publication (see Rajewsky 2008a), on which the following discussion is based.

scrutiny also exists in other medial contexts, a fact which relativises the traditional practice of restricting metanarration to narrative texts proper<sup>3</sup>. This gives rise to a whole range of implications that are relevant for the transgenerically and transmedially oriented debate about different forms of metaization.

In this context, especially from a genre and media comparative perspective, the heuristic potential of a distinguishing criterion which is primarily concerned with the *level* of mediation in metareferential practices becomes clearly apparent. In the field of narrative genres and media, which this contribution will initially focus on, we may thus delineate ‘discourse’- from ‘story’-based metaization techniques. As will be shown in the third part of this contribution through the example of photorealist painting, the transmedial scope of such a distinguishing criterion, however, clearly exceeds the referential frame of narrative conceptions in general. In this context it will therefore be crucial to establish a more encompassing concept which I am terming ‘form-based’ versus ‘content-based’ metareference.

1.

In France – as in other (Western) countries – a radical shift in the literary field occurred during the 1980s, which led critics to proclaim the ‘end of avant-garde literature’ (“Ende der Avantgarde”; Gelz 1996: 1), an ‘epochal threshold in contemporary literature’ (“Epochenschwelle der Gegenwartsliteratur”; *ibid.*), a ‘profound shift in paradigms’ (“tiefgreifender Paradigmenwechsel”; Tschiltschke 2000: 14) as well as the birth of postmodern<sup>4</sup> or post-avant-garde literature. In France this development can, in part, be traced back to a number of younger authors particularly successful as of the 1980s, such as Jean Echenoz (\*1947),

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<sup>3</sup> Here as well as in the following, the term ‘narrative texts *proper*’ refers to the understanding of narrative (and related terms) in the restricted sense as usually implied by narratological approaches based on the parameters of so-called classical narratology with reference to the Platonic-Aristotelian ‘speech-criterion’. ‘Narrating/narrative *proper*’, accordingly, bears upon the long-established differentiation between the narrative and the dramatic mode of presentation, i. e., between a diegetic and a mimetic mode of communication.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘postmodern’ here refers to the continental European discourse on post-modern literature which can be paralleled with John Barth’s notion of a ‘literature of replenishment’.



Jean-Philippe Toussaint (\*1957), Patrick Deville (\*1957) or Marie Redonnet (\*1948). All of their novels were published by Éditions de Minuit, the very publishing house that, in the context of the nouveau and the nouveau nouveau roman, had won fame with authors from the preceding generation such as most notably Alain Robbe-Grillet. It is thus not surprising that the authors whom I shall focus on in the following have come to be known as the ‘jeunes auteurs de Minuit’, the ‘new Minuit generation’.

The popularity of their novels is to a considerable extent based on the fact that they are actually telling stories again. After the theory-driven literary production of the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of the nouveau and the nouveau nouveau roman as shaped by Tel Quel, the 1980s saw a remarkable revival of storytelling, i. e., the return to plot, character and ‘readability’. However, that is storytelling in a typically postmodern or post-avant-garde manner as has been well documented in research. The latter goes hand in hand with a continuous foregrounding of the artifactuality of storytelling itself and thus with a range of metareferential narrative strategies that in various ways undermine aesthetic illusion and hence accentuate the constructedness of the texts.

As initially suggested, this contribution will concentrate on one particular of these strategies, a phenomenon which in research has readily been termed ‘misapplication’ of perspective construction (see Mecke 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Brandstetter 2006), that is, narrative practices which deviate from common parameters of ‘classic’ narrative situations. As will be exemplified, the texts thus spawn a ‘meta-effect’, which brings to the fore their constructedness and even more so the artifactuality of the narrative process itself, thereby ultimately shaking narrating to its very foundation. I will illustrate such narrative practices by way of examples from Patrick Deville’s novel *Longue vue* (1988) and Jean Echenoz’ 1992 *Nous trois* in order to then expound them in terms of their specific functional mechanisms.

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The first sentence of Deville’s *Longue vue* already discloses the novel’s (alleged) narrative situation: “Voici un livre scientifique, car

Skoltz et Körberg, effectivement, je les ai connus”<sup>5</sup> (1988: 9). We appear to be faced with a first-person narrator, or more precisely, a peripheral first-person narrator, a fact which is made explicit once more a few pages later – “Alexandre Skoltz était irrité. Pourtant, la première semaine de son séjour parmi nous avait été des plus agréables. Je l’avais rencontré, une fois ou deux”<sup>6</sup> (ibid.: 13) – and of which the reader is repeatedly reminded throughout the novel (cf., e. g., ibid.: 19, 114). Yet, the same narrator also evidently conveys events that happen in the lives of, among others, the novel’s main characters Skoltz and Körberg; events which, given his status as peripheral first-person narrator, he cannot – or as per narratological conventions *should not* – know about. This corresponds to various internal focalizations within the scope of which the first-person narrator does not impart his own perception, feelings and thoughts but those of *other* characters, ‘to which’, as Jochen Mecke observes, ‘a witnessing narrator could not have had access’<sup>7</sup> (2002a: 107).

A case in point for such a situation would be the end of the second chapter (Deville 1988:36), when professor Körberg is in his room at the Hôtel Casablanca, alone and unobserved – at least by the first-person narrator:

Körberg pensait que c’était une bonne idée [he had been told that he would have to leave his accommodation], et regrettait de ne pas l’avoir conçue lui-même, mais son esprit était lent, ces jours-ci, à concevoir. A cause de la chaleur, suggérait-il en se déshabillant. Il se glissait nu dans les draps. [...] Il regardait au plafond les trois pales du ventilateur et les jeux d’ombres, réguliers, sur les murs. Une enseigne lumineuse clignotait dans la rue: vert chlorophylle, puis mauve, puis rien – vert chlorophylle, puis mauve, puis rien.

Cette femme, pensait Körberg, avait une minuscule tache de vin sur l’épaule.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> ‘This is a scientific book, because, actually, I have been acquainted with Skoltz and Körberg.’ In ironically alluding to the text’s fictional status, this first sentence, naturally, amounts to more than a mere clarification of the narrative situation. One ought to stress its insistently claiming objectivity – even to the point of a scholarly discursive quality –, while ironically undermining that claim by surprisingly and succinctly justifying it at the end of the sentence with the profane fact that “je [the narrator] les ai connus” (Deville 1988: 36).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Alexandre Skoltz was irritated. And yet, the first week of his stay with us, during which I met him once or twice, had been extremely pleasant.’

<sup>7</sup> “[...] auxquels un narrateur-témoin n’aurait pu avoir accès.”

<sup>8</sup> ‘Körberg thought that this was a good idea and regretted that he had not considered it himself, but his mind was slow-witted these days. Probably because of the

When applying conventional parameters to this and similar passages, one cannot but assume that one is dealing with an authorial narrator after all – an assumption that is, moreover, confirmed by partly bracketed and often ironic commentaries of that selfsame narrator, who, *at the same time*, none the less remains a peripheral first-person narrator and thus also a character belonging to the diegetic text world. Likewise, one could phrase it the other way round (in Genettian terms): we are faced with a homodiegetic narrator who nevertheless possesses knowledge and is endowed with properties that, according to narrative conventions, are imputable only to a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalisation.

Similar techniques with an even more clearly heightened complexity of the narrative situation are also applied in Echenoz' *Nous trois* (1992)<sup>9</sup>. Evidence of their perplexity can, in brief, be provided in a quote, in which the (at least at that point) clearly homodiegetic narrator specifically stresses the fact that he is leaving the scene of events and thus – as per convention – should not be in the position to relate what happens afterwards, but does so nonetheless:

Je m'éloignai.

Après mon départ, vers vingt-deux heures, Blondel était passé téléphoner dans le bureau de Poecile. Séguret, fit-il, c'est moi. Vous avez pu voir pour les vannes d'injection? On cherche, on cherche, assura Séguret. On va trouver. Oui, dit Blondel, est-ce que Meyer est encore là? A cette heure-ci? fit Séguret. Un instant, je vais voir.

Etouffant le combiné d'une main, l'ingénieur Séguret s'était retourné vers un vaste bureau dans le fond de la pièce, vers un autre ingénieur de haute taille, proportionné à ce bureau, penché sur lui.

– Meyer, dit Séguret, c'est Blondel qui demande après toi. Est-ce que tu es là?<sup>10</sup> (Echenoz 1992: 11f.)

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heat, he thought, undressing. He slipped beneath the sheets naked. [...] He looked at the three blades of the ventilator and at the rhythmical shadow play on the walls. On the street a neon sign was blinking: green, then mauve, then nothing – green, then mauve, then nothing.

This woman, Körberg thought, had a tiny birthmark on the shoulder.'

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive discussion cf. Schmidt-Suprian 2003, esp.: 93–100, Mecke 2000: 418, fn. 47 and 2002a: 107; cf. also Schoots 1997, esp.: 171 and see Tschiltschke 2000.

<sup>10</sup> 'I left.

After my departure, around 10 p.m., Blondel had gone to use the phone in Poecile's office. Séguret, he said, it's me. Did you have a chance to look for the injection valves? We are at it, we are at it, Séguret reassured him. We'll find them. Yes, said

What is crucial here is the narrator's departure at the beginning of the quoted passage: "Je m'éloignai" ('I left'), which is once again stressed immediately after – "Après mon départ" ('After my departure'). However, what follows is a detailed account of the very events which took place *after* this departure. Hence, if we apply conventional parameters, the first-person narrator here, too, boldly oversteps the limits of his competence.

There are numerous examples of novels by the jeunes auteurs de Minuit featuring such unnatural and perplexing narrative situations<sup>11</sup>. However, such a disintegration of conventionally distinguishable narrative situations is more than just remarkably frequent in these novels; we are rather faced with quite an ostentatious application of such narrative strategies that are, moreover, as the above quote shows, clearly denoted and highlighted as such<sup>12</sup>.

In the case of Deville's *Longue vue* the novel's title is already telling in that it refers not only to binoculars, in the use of which the character of professor Körberg delights, but also to the text's point of view and how it directs the reader's perspective. Furthermore, the question as to the narrator's level of awareness and the distribution of information is raised right at the beginning of the novel, when Körberg, through his binoculars, observes how Skoltz and Jyl, another central character in the novel, ride up a hill on a motorbike:

En contrebas, Körberg était debout sur de la mousse, les jumelles devant les yeux, et l'humidité traversait peu à peu les semelles en corde de ses espadrilles. Il va

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Blondel, is Meyer still there? At this hour?, Séguret asked. Just a moment, I'll have a look.

Covering the receiver with one hand Ingenieur Séguret had turned to a wide desk at the far end of the room, towards another engineer of tall stature, adequately proportioned for this desk he was bending over.

– Meyer, Séguret said, Blondel is asking for you. Are you there?

The quote denotes the end of the novel's first chapter. In Deville's *Longue vue* the narrator proceeds in a similar way: "[...], après notre départ, [...]" ('[...] after our departure [...]'; 2008: 20).

<sup>11</sup> See, e. g., Jean Echenoz' *Cherokee* (1983) and *Je m'en vais* (1999), Patrick Deville's *Le Feu d'artifice* (1992) and *Ces deux-là* (2000), Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *Fuir* (2006) or, in a slightly modified manner, also Marie Redonnet's *Forever Valley* (1986). On these novels see Mecke 2002a, Brandstetter 2006, Schmidt-Supprian 2003, Schoots 1997 and Schneider, U. 2008.

<sup>12</sup> The latter aspect has so far attracted surprisingly little attention in research with the exception of Schmidt-Supprian 2003; for *Longue vue* cf. esp. 155–159.

sans dire qu'il ne savait pas, alors, qui était Alexandre Skoltz. Ni, surtout, ce qu'il deviendrait. Il ne savait pas non plus que la jeune fille était Jyl. Non, Körberg l'ignorait.<sup>13</sup> (Deville 1988: 10 [my emphases])

The narrator pointing out Körberg's nescience four times indicates his *own* level of awareness and knowledge. At this point the reader indeed still perceives him in terms of a peripheral first-person narrator, who, however, soon after proves himself surprisingly 'omniscient' and is thus, respectively, linked to the distribution of information a traditional first-person narrator is not privy to<sup>14</sup>.

Before the backdrop of the frequency with which such perplexing narrative situations appear in the jeunes auteurs de Minuit's novels – and due to the texts moreover stressing that very perplexity and unnaturalness – traditional narratology such as, e. g., Genette's categories 'paralepsis' and 'polymodality' *alone* appear hardly sufficient to comprehensively describe and analyse the phenomenon in question<sup>15</sup>. In this context it is noteworthy that the addressed strategies do not represent a 'simple' 'change of narrative perspective' ("Wechsel der Erzählperspektive" [Mecke 2000: 418]) nor in most cases a *momentary* disruption of an otherwise dominant narrative mode, as would be the case for Genette's category of paralepsis. At first glance, his category of polymodality would therefore appear more suitable, as it, in principle, comprises strategies similar to the one at hand. However, it neither conceptually nor terminologically truly captures the perplexing

<sup>13</sup> 'Further down, Körberg was standing on moss, binoculars raised to his eyes, and the humidity was little by little creeping through the raffia soles of his espadrillos. It goes without saying that at the time he did not yet know who Alexandre Skoltz was. He was even less aware of what was going to happen to him. He neither knew that the young woman was Jyl. No, Körberg did not know that.'

<sup>14</sup> As a case in point cf. a passage in Deville's *Longue vue* (2008: 21f.), where the discrepancy between the narrator's distribution of information and his homodiegetic status is especially underlined by way of the explicit thematization of how his geographical position should actually, but does not, determine his (in)capability of witnessing the narrated events (cf. also Rajewsky 2008a: 333f.). The possibility that events he actually cannot know about as well as thoughts of, and conversations between, other characters might have been subsequently related to the narrator appears implausible due to the abundance of (frequently minor) detail in his narration. On similar observations in Echenoz' *Nous trois* cf. Schmidt-Suppran 2003: 93.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Genette 1972, esp.: 211–224. For an application of these categories to the texts of the jeunes auteurs de Minuit cf. Schmidt-Suppran 2003, esp.: 90–93; for a general treatment of paralepsis in first-person fiction see Heinze 2008.

narrative situations' specificity, since the latter involves strategies evidently affecting *two* of Genette's central structural features, 'mode' ('mode') and 'voix' ('voice') as well as their respective couplings<sup>16</sup>. One is, in other words, not merely faced with *polymodality*, but rather with a 'blending' or 'dissolving' of conventionally distinct narrative situations, which Stanzel describes in pre-empting what Genette later termed 'mode' and 'voix'. Central restrictions constitutive of certain narrative situations are not adhered to; conventionally established and long-term habitualised 'boundaries' of temporarily and especially initially suggested narrative situations are transgressed or undermined.

This is not to say that such transgressions of 'classical' narrative situations are per se entirely new; on the contrary: there are well-known precursors in literary history such as Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and notably, of course, Proust's *Recherche* (1913–1927), which, as is generally known, served Genette as a basis for developing his category of *polymodality*<sup>17</sup>. Comparable strategies are, moreover, to be found in *avant-garde* novels, a fact which has also been pointed out by Mecke, amongst others<sup>18</sup>. In this, one can indeed agree with Mecke, who, with respect to the 'change of narrative perspective', as he puts it, rightly notes that the "subtle difference" to the *nouveau roman* ("feine Unterschied zum *nouveau roman*"; 2000: 419) cannot lie within 'the change of perspective itself' ("im Perspektivenwechsel selbst"; *ibid.*: 418f.), but that what is rather significant is the 'way in which it is accomplished' ("Art und Weise, in der er vollzogen wird"; *ibid.*: 419). The same evidently holds true in comparison to similar strategies applied in, e. g., *Moby Dick* or Proust's *Recherche*.

This is not the place to draw a comprehensive comparison between the individual strategies. Four aspects which appear relevant in respect to the specific treatment of common narrative situations in the *jeunes*

<sup>16</sup> With reference to Toussaint's *Fuir* Ulrike Schneider tellingly talks about the 'dis-sociation between narratorial voice and focalization or centre of perception' ("Dissoziation von Erzählstimme und Fokalisierung bzw. Wahrnehmungszentrum" [2008: 153]).

<sup>17</sup> In addition, one also ought to at least mention Vladimir Nabokov's 'Künstlerroman' *The Gift* (1963). As to the overall context see Nielsen 2004, Phelan 1996 and 2004, Fludernik 2001; cf. Genette 1972, esp.: 214–224; see also Richardson 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Mecke (cf. 2000, esp.: 418f.) refers to Marguerite Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) and Claude Simon's *La Route des Flandres* (1960).

auteurs de Minuit's novels as compared to similar strategies in other texts and contexts ought to be pointed out, though. First of all it should be stressed that (A) the, in Genettian terms 'polymodal', techniques in Proust's *Recherche* can ultimately still be logically resolved, namely in terms of a 'dissociation from the act of *remembering* and from the act of *narrating* and *putting to paper*, respectively' ("Dissoziierung vom Akt des *Erinnerns* und dem Akt des *Erzählens* bzw. der *Niederschrift*"; Schneider, U. 2008: 157), which ultimately shows 'that the *Recherche* is not a classical autobiography' ("dass es sich bei der *Recherche* um keine klassische Autobiographie handelt"; *ibid.*)<sup>19</sup>. In contrast, the above described strategies, if measured against conventional parameters, can no longer be logically and, above all, 'mimetically' naturalised – a point we will have to come back to.

Due to their clearly marked actualizations, the strategies in question can (B) be, furthermore, set apart from other manners in which similar strategies are used and put into function. As for example Henrik Skov Nielsen has emphasised with respect to Melville's *Moby Dick* "the curiosity of such phenomena" frequently lies in the fact "that it is very easy to read the [relevant] texts without registering that there is anything unusual going on" (2004: 136)<sup>20</sup>; a factor which, beyond the strategies' specific implementations, is probably also substantiated through the 'primacy effect' and hence through the openings of the respective novels<sup>21</sup>. However, in the case of the jeunes auteurs de Minuit, the breach of traditional, conventional narrative patterns is, in contrast, overtly displayed and repeatedly called to the reader's attention in the course of the reception process. The strategies' specific implementations are therefore not geared towards concealing but towards actually *foregrounding* the fact that the reader is faced with 'unnatural'<sup>22</sup> constellations that undermine conventional parameters as well as probability. Furthermore, it is to be taken into account that (C) the literary and notably also the narratological background from which the jeunes auteurs de Minuit's novels emerged

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also Genette 1972: 221–224.

<sup>20</sup> Nielsen here refers to Phelan 2004.

<sup>21</sup> For the 'primacy effect' cf. Grabes 1978: 414f., 418f., Nünning 2001a, esp.: 24 and see Schneider, R. 2000.

<sup>22</sup> As for the term 'naturalisation' cf. Culler: "to naturalize a text is to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural or legible" (1975: 138).

was entirely different from that of Melville's and Proust's texts. In the course of narrative's evolving right up to the *nouveau roman* as shaped by *Tel Quel* and the parallel development of narrative theory, a kind of backdrop developed against which the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit* along with their specific narrative strategies ought and – if we consider once more how these strategies have been implemented and clearly denoted – apparently also want to be read.

Particularly in setting them apart from the *nouveau roman*, it, lastly, should be stressed that (D) the texts in question are clearly linked to a revival of storytelling which goes hand in hand with a certain return to aesthetic illusion. Illusion may also be (more or less constantly) laid bare as such in the texts mentioned<sup>23</sup>; nonetheless, the functional purpose of the 'discourse' in the novels under scrutiny, however, still remains to generate a story, contrary to avant-garde practice. The 'unnatural', perplexing strategies namely come to light *in the very course of a story being told*, or, more precisely, through the specific rendering of the act of narrating, which, despite the perplexing nature of the narrative situations, is after all (allegedly) bound to a personalised narrator, who is still as such constructed by the reader. The fact that the narrative strategies in question are directly linked to a return to storytelling is what constitutes more than just a 'subtle', but indeed a central difference to avant-gardist textualisations. Moreover, the specific potential and properties of the strategies under scrutiny are likewise linked to this very aspect, as will be shown in more detail in the following.

Particular attention ought to be drawn to the fact that, in spite of the perplexing narrative situations, the reader still constructs a character-like narrator who (allegedly) generates the story. This is where the concept of 'Erzählillusion'<sup>24</sup> (literally: 'narrational illusion')

<sup>23</sup> For more detail and further biographical references cf. Rajewsky 2008a, esp.: 352–359.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. Nünning 2000 and 2001a as well as even earlier Wolf 1993, who discusses the phenomenon within the context of his essential survey on generating aesthetic illusion in literature as 'secondary illusion' ("Sekundärillusion"). For a discussion of Nünning's conception of 'narrational illusion' see Fludernik 2001 and 2003 as well as Wolf 2004 and 2007. With reference to 'narrational illusion', Nünning in his eponymous paper also talks of 'mimesis of narrating' ("Mimesis des Erzählens" [2001a]), a term which I deliberately avoid here, as it implies the, in my view, problematic concept of a 'represented narrator' ("dargestellten Erzählers" [Schmid 2005:



comes to the fore. As explained by Nünning, the result of this specific, as yet underresearched form of textual illusion lies in the very notion that ‘the recipient is listening to, or addressed by, a narrative act in which a ‘personalised’ narrator functions as the sender and a listener, i. e., addressee, as the recipient’<sup>25</sup> (2001a: 25). The concept of ‘narrational illusion’ is thus directly linked to a narrative text’s level of mediation and to the narrative act as such; in fact, it is only by virtue of this very act of eliciting illusion that the reader envisions a flesh-and-blood narrator and therefore constructs the act of narrating in the first place. One could hence also talk of a ‘narratorial illusion’ or, with Wolf, of an “illusion of a narratorial presence”<sup>26</sup> (2004: 332). Usually, a mere few textual signals suffice to actualise such a notion of a narratorial presence in the reader and thus to initiate the processes of eliciting narratorial illusion, which is typical of first-person novels and generally appears to be plainly taken for granted. This also holds true for the above-mentioned texts of the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*, in which, at least initially, narratorial illusion is elicited according to established parameters. One just needs to think of how in Deville’s *Longue vue* sufficient clues for assuming and constructing a personalised first-person narrator are given in the very first sentence: ‘This is a scientific book, because, actually, I have been acquainted with Skoltz and Körberg’ (see above).

Although the mechanisms pertaining to triggering narratorial illusion and thus to the question of ‘how sentences on paper are turned into the notion of “narrators” and the act of narrating’<sup>27</sup> (Nünning 2001a: 23) have as of yet barely been empirically researched, one may nonetheless assume that the recipient subconsciously and automatical-

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45]), i. e., of an ‘imitation of narrative communication’ (“*Nachahmung* von narrativer Kommunikation” [Nünning 2001a: 21f. [my emphasis]]).

<sup>25</sup> “[...] der Rezipient sei Zuhörer oder Adressat eines Erzählvorgangs mit einem als ‘Person’ erscheinenden Erzähler als Sender und einem Zuhörer bzw. Adressaten als Empfänger.”

<sup>26</sup> In this wording Wolf takes up, and critically comments on, Nünning’s notion of ‘narrational illusion’ (cf. 2004: 332). In his own later paper, published in English, Nünning himself also tellingly talks about “narratorial illusionism” (cf. 2004, esp.: 17 [my emphasis]).

<sup>27</sup> “[...] wie aus Sätzen auf dem Papier Vorstellungen von ‘Erzählern’ und vom Akt des Erzählens [werden].” Nünning here seizes upon the title of Grabes’ 1978 publication “Wie aus Sätzen Personen werden ...”.

ly constructs narratorial illusion without further reflection. Besides the specific textual signals and strategies as well as the information contained in the respective texts, what plays a decisive role is the level of reader competence, which, not least of all, depends on the recipient's awareness of established narrative techniques and conventions that trigger habitualised reception patterns. In keeping with this, real-life schemes, which the recipient (usually also unknowingly) projects onto the text, become relevant (cf. *ibid.*: 24; see Grabes 1978)<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the perception and construction of a text's agency of enunciation in terms of a personalised, 'flesh-and-blood' narrator as well as apprehending the textual distribution of information as that narrator's narrative act, quite evidently both depend on the projection of anthropomorphic, real-life schemes onto the text. Accordingly, the common rendering of first-person narrative situations – and consequently their construction on behalf of the recipient – are based upon assumptions as to the potential and limits of a 'witnessing narrator'. In being part of the narrated world and in his or her testimonial function, this narrator figure is conventionally bound to the capacities of human cognitive faculties as well as to physical laws (provided that no specific inner-fictional constellations take effect that would render further capabilities of the narrator plausible). In so far, a first-person narrator is as a rule subject to certain restrictions and 'must not' be endowed with the narratorial privileges and licenses an authorial narrator – according to the respective narrative patterns – is undisputedly entitled to.

However, this is exactly what happens in the novels of the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*, which, in a nutshell, feature 'omniscient first-person narrators'. Consequently, we are facing a breach of the very convention which restricts the competences of a homodiegetic narrator to real-life frames, i. e., to narrative patterns that can be 'naturalised in a realistic way' (cf. Nünning 2001a: 27). Thereby elementary boundaries between first-person and authorial narrators, generally deemed self-evident, are blurred, which creates the very impression of 'perplexing' or 'unnatural' and inconsistent narrative situations.

Such a breach of narratorial conventions is, of course, in itself already a remarkable fact. It deserves attention, though, that the functional potential and impact of the strategies in question extend beyond

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<sup>28</sup> Corresponding every-day-life schemes, as is willingly neglected, naturally also take effect on the level of literary production in terms of the textual rendering of the 'discourse'.

a mere transgression of boundaries and breach of convention. By way of the latter, such strategies also lay bare the conventionalised nature and constructedness of the very narrative patterns which are generally conceived as consistent with the norms of mimetic real-life schemes. This is accomplished by means of initially, or at least temporarily, employing established narrative patterns that are subsequently undermined in the course of telling a story. In other words: the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*'s novels feature narrative situations which for the reader inevitably convey the impression that something actually impossible is going on. Unlike an authorial narrator, a first-person narrator 'cannot' know about the intimate thoughts of other characters, nor 'can' he or she convey what other characters have done, thought or said while geographically in a different location. However, the fact that this is none the less obviously the case in the novels under discussion makes it apparent to the reader that his or her assumptions as to the nature of established narrative situations are already based on habitualised reception patterns, established norms and boundaries which, as the texts show, could indeed just as well be constructed differently.

Hence, the delineated strategies do not 'simply' convey the impression of inconsistent, unnatural or 'erroneous' narrative practice or of an 'incorrect application of literary norms'<sup>29</sup>. Much rather, they highlight a horizon of 'natural' expectations concerning what is commonly experienced as consistent narrative practice, and thus these texts underline the backdrop against which they themselves first and foremost unfold their functional potential. This background is evinced in its own fundamental conventionality and dependence on rules. Thereby the constructedness of *all* narrative practice is ultimately foregrounded and, as will be discussed in more detail below, metareferentially brought to the recipient's attention. Breaking the prevailing restrictions of first-person narrative situations – i. e., a first-person narrator unexpectedly exhibiting an omniscience, which is neither logically nor mimetically resolvable, while nonetheless continuing to tell 'his or her' story –, inevitably confronts the readers not only with the artfactuality of the text but also with their own (ongoing) constructions and projections which synthesize the narrator as well as the act of narrating. The narrator is therefore, on the whole, not 'simply' disclosed as a linguistic construct and mere textual feature. What is also re-

<sup>29</sup> See the positions taken by Mecke and Brandstetter (above).

vealed and exhibited are the very conventions (production- as well as reception-sided) on which the notions and construction of narratorial figures as well as their narratorial acts are based. Here the emphasis is upon laying bare the constructedness of a narrator figure *in the course of telling* a story: the novels' perplexing narrative situations do not only distance the reader from the narrated story but above all from the act of narrating as such. On the other hand, narration still takes place and in some instances even convincingly so. Hence, one is faced with a meandering between two poles which, with reference to Wolf, could be described as "poles of immersion and distance" (2004: 329)<sup>30</sup>. Pertaining to the context relevant here, (near the pole of immersion) one could locate illusion-eliciting strategies that are based upon habitualised literary conventions and real-life experiences and hence allow the reader to construct a reliable narrator as well as his or her act of narrating. On the other hand, one could locate strategies near the pole of distance which undermine conventionalised and consistent narrators and their respective acts of narrating. However, in the case of the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit* this does not apply in the sense of 'unreliable narration' as it is generally understood, nor merely in terms of a general *foregrounding* of the mediation process, but rather in the sense of laying bare and exhibiting the conventions commonly determining our construction of the fictitious mediation process as well as the agent (allegedly) 'responsible' for it. This, in turn, happens 'from the inside': the respective conventions are not explicitly thematised but implicitly or indirectly pointed at *by way of* being broken. The first-person narrators – who can no longer be readily naturalised and envisioned as anthropomorphic – along with 'their' narratorial acts therefore implicitly point to the very conventions, constructions and projections rendering them narrators in the first place.

The specific quality as well as the potential impact of such narratorial practice is, of course, closely related to historically grounded and hence alterable conventions, which, once again, illustrate the important part the (historical) contextualisation of primary texts plays in analytic practice. This is where the recipient takes the leading role, on

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<sup>30</sup> I here seize upon Wolf's concept of aesthetic illusion in narrative texts: "Aesthetic illusion may [...] be represented as being located on a scale between the two poles of immersion and distance, maintaining, however, a relative proximity to 'immersion'. The poles themselves are excluded, since both total distance and total immersion do not yet, or not longer, qualify as aesthetic illusion" (2004: 329). See also Wolf 1993.

whose disposition and ‘cooperative reading’<sup>31</sup> hinges the degree to which perplexing narrative situations may unfold their potential impact: it might well be that such narrative situations that seem inconsistent from a 1980s/1990s (and even a present-day) perspective will soon be perceived as commonplace and hardly exceptional (e. g., due to paradigmatic shifts as brought about predominantly by film and television but also by literature itself). In this case, the impression of narrative inconsistency conveyed by such strategies would decrease along with their convention-breaking and hence also their implicitly ‘metareferential’ quality.

## 2.

Against the background of the above explications it should have become clear that the unnatural, perplexing narrative situations in the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*’s novels are to be classified metareferential as termed by Wolf. In applying the discussed strategies, the texts in question disclose their own constructedness and thus also draw the recipient’s attention to the conventionalised nature of comparably traditional narrations, that is, ultimately to narration *of any kind*. It is hence evident that the respective strategies are also endowed with an inherent illusion-disturbing function. This is a fact which is especially pertinent to questions pertaining to the functionalisation of these strategies, which I have discussed elsewhere (cf. Rajewsky 2008a, esp.: 352–359). In the following, I will define the perplexing narrative situations more clearly in terms of their metareferential qualities and position them within the broader context of different forms of metaization. It is therefore precisely the strategies’ formal particularities which are of interest here and thus *the specific way* in which the texts under scrutiny elicit a cognitive process and reflection on their own narrative structure and on the very fundamentals of storytelling.

In this context, as initially suggested, the debate about so-called metanarrative strategies comes to the fore. ‘Metanarrativity’ or ‘metanarration’ prevail, as Nünning puts it, ‘when the act of narrating or factors pertaining to the process of narrating are thematised [or

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<sup>31</sup> I here draw upon Wolf, who, in the context of ‘implicit metareference’ refers to the ‘cooperation of the recipient’ (“Kooperation des Rezipienten” [2007: 43]), which is particularly necessary in this variant of metareference.

commented on]<sup>32</sup> (2001b: 132). In received terms, we therefore perceive ‘metanarrative’ as ‘[...] all mediation oriented functions of narrators, i. e., all narrator comments, which primarily reflect upon the narrative process or on the communicative situation on the level of narratorial mediation’<sup>33</sup> (ibid.). Already, this designates two aspects central to the present context. For one, ‘metanarrative’ strategies are commonly bound to the level of narratorial mediation, which very clearly indicates the concept’s established frame of reference and its being linked to a narrowly defined understanding of narrative: we are dealing with oral or written, yet in any case with verbal, narrator-transmitted storytelling<sup>34</sup>. For another, the concept focuses on narrator comments which are ‘primarily related to the process of narrating’, i. e., to narrator statements that directly and explicitly refer to the process of narration as such<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> “[...] wenn der Akt des Erzählens oder Faktoren des Erzählvorgangs thematisiert [bzw. kommentiert] werden.”

<sup>33</sup> “[...] alle vermittlungsbezogenen Funktionen von Erzählinstanzen, d. h. Erzähler-äußerungen mit primärem Bezug zum Erzählvorgang bzw. zur Kommunikationssituation auf der Ebene der erzählerischen Vermittlung.” Cf. also Nünning (2004: 12), where metanarration is defined as “a narrator’s commenting on the process of narration”; see also Fludernik 2003, Wolf 2007 and Prince 1987. It should be noted that this kind of strategy does not necessarily have to relate to an illusion-disturbing or a ‘critical’ function sensu Wolf. In fact, ‘metanarrative’ narrator comments may actually even contribute to eliciting and intensifying aesthetic illusion, as long as they remain restricted to marking the act of narrating as such without triggering a distancing meta-awareness in the recipient by laying bare the constructedness of the respective text (see Nünning 2001a, 2001b, 2004; cf. Scheffel 1997, esp.: 48, 58). This can be illustrated with initial statements such as ‘I am (now) telling you the story of ...’.

<sup>34</sup> Nünning admittedly notes that “metanarration can also be found in many non-fictional narrative genres and media” (2004: 16; cf. also 2001b: 130) without, however, elaborating on this or providing examples. In accordance with common practice, his respective publications rather focus on metanarrative strategies in fictional narrative texts. Correspondingly, the term ‘metanarrative’ is based on a narrow understanding of narrative and therefore does not encompass meta-strategies which pertain to generating a story in a general, transgeneric and transmedial way. This may be an explanation for why Nünning deduces ‘metanarrativity’ and ‘metanarration’ as two, for him, synonymous nominalised terms. Yet, especially from the viewpoint of a broader conception of narrative, ‘metanarration’ undoubtedly proves to be the more apt of the two terms, as one is faced with strategies that concern the act of narrating, the narration.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the numerous examples in Nünning 2001b and 2004.

If one now relates the perplexing narrative situations to the above, it becomes evident that the propounded theorization of metanarration proves rather limited in regard to both aspects mentioned, ultimately obstructing the view of the respective practices' distinctive feature. In this context (and especially in view of the aspect last-mentioned), an early treatise of Klaus W. Hempfer's on the 'potential auto-reflexivity of the narrative discourse' ("potentielle Autoreflexivität des narrativen Diskurses"<sup>36</sup>) has proved insightful. In this essay Hempfer already anticipates the central notions currently discussed under the heading of metanarration. From a genre-comparative perspective of narrative and dramatic texts, his concept of the 'potential auto-reflexivity of the narrative discourse' ultimately aims at designating a *specific* 'meta-potential' in narrative (as compared to dramatic) texts. From an as to genres and text types more comprehensive point of view this may well raise questions which will have to be addressed later. However, at this point, it is above all relevant to note that Hempfer pinpoints the particular meta-potential of narrative texts proper in the very kind of techniques Nünning is also concerned with, namely '[...] narrative's *basic potential to make* not only the "story" but *narrating itself the object of discourse*'<sup>37</sup> (1982: 136 [my emphases]). This evidently correlates with 'metanarrative' techniques as defined above, i. e., with a narrator thematizing, or commenting on, the process of narration. As Hempfer further elaborates, narrative texts are hence generally capable of

'explicit auto-reflexivity on the level of discourse, which is where the specific meta-potential of the narrative discourse becomes apparent, as well as of implicit auto-reflexivity which unfolds on the story level so that the "story" or parts of the "story" refer back to the discourse'<sup>38</sup> (ibid.).

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<sup>36</sup> Thus the title of Hempfer 1982. With regard to the following discussion one should mention that Hempfer, too, proceeds from a narrowly defined understanding of narrative; he is at all times concerned with the narrative discourse proper and with narrative texts proper.

<sup>37</sup> "[...] die prinzipielle Möglichkeit des Erzählens [...], das Erzählen selbst und nicht nur die 'Geschichte' zum Gegenstand des Diskurses zu machen."

<sup>38</sup> "[...] autoreflexive Verfahren sowohl explizit auf der Ebene des Diskurses wie auch implizit durch Rückverweise der 'Geschichte' bzw. von Teilen der 'Geschichte' auf den Diskurs." Terming 'the story as referring back to the discourse' ultimately proves rather limited if one wants to subsume all story-based realizations of metareferential strategies. Those do not necessarily have to go hand in hand with a reflection upon the level of discourse but may, for example, focus on the text's overall conditions. In the following 'story-based strategies of metaization' are always to be under-

The latter aims at metareferential practices which can take effect in drama, too. Hempfer thus arrives at a differentiation between several possibilities of realizing ‘auto-reflexive’ (i. e., metareferential) techniques, coupling *two* criteria – this being exactly what is of significance with regard to the perplexing narrative situations. Firstly, this differentiation is directly linked to the question of the respective strategies’ *level of mediation* and, secondly, *explicit* strategies are juxtaposed with *implicit* ones. What is differentiated here are discourse-based and story-based strategies, the former of which can be deemed *explicit* in accordance with the definition of metareference as overtly thematising the narrative process, while its story-based counterpart is to be attributed with having an *implicit* quality as, e. g., in certain mise en abyme structures or metaleptic confusions of diegetic and hypodiegetic levels<sup>39</sup>.

Against this background, the perplexing narratives’ special status becomes immediately apparent. The above explications have already shown that in the case of this variant one is quite evidently *not* dealing

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stood in the broadest sense. What becomes apparent here, is that Hempfer by no means ‘confines [the term “auto-reflexivity”] to an immediate self-reference of remarks on the “narrative discourse”’, as Nünning implies (2001a: 34, fn. 46). Hempfer rather explicitly limits a specific form of auto-reflexivity to narrative texts proper, namely the possibility of (metanarratively) rendering the act of narrating itself the object of the discourse. It ought to be stressed that Hempfer is here concerned with genre specifics and thus with generic conventions, which may well be undermined in terms of ‘fundamental transformations of genre pertinent conditions’ (“grundlegende Transformationen schreibartspezifischer Gegebenheiten” [1982: 136]). In the case of drama, the respective generic conventions are geared towards the theatrical performance’s medial conditions, which explains why the (according to Hempfer) ‘specific’ meta-potential of narrative texts is generally not made use of to its full extent in drama (see also Rajewsky 2007, 2008a).

<sup>39</sup> Of course, explicit metareference is also possible on the story level, e. g., when characters discuss art or literature or comment on their own, intradiegetic story-telling; but this is not in focus here. However, it should be noted that in the case of explicit metareferences in embedded narratives – i. e., explicit metareferences bound to intradiegetic narrators, who are discussing, or commenting on, their own story-telling – we are actually dealing with explicit *discourse*-based metareferences on a *secondary level*, i. e., with explicit discourse-based metareferences *on* the story-level. From a metareferential perspective, intradiegetic procedures of this kind become highly complex when combined with metaleptic strategies, paradoxically leading to the intradiegetic narrators’/characters’ discussing, and commenting on, their own being part of, or being dependent on, the primary discourse of a given text.



with story-based metareference, since the device at hand is based on the salient ‘unnaturalness’ (sensu Culler) of the narrative situations and hence on the question of *how* the narrators relate ‘their’ stories. As has already been the case within the strategies discussed by Hempfer and Nünning, the reflexive moment, which takes effect here, is therefore located on the level of the texts’ communicative structure and is directly bound to the communicative functions of the narrator (cf. Hempfer 1982: 136, Nünning 2001b: 132; see also above), namely the specific rendering of the act of narrating itself. Consequently, this is where a significant analogy to ‘metanarrative’ strategies as defined by Nünning and (despite all differences) also Hempfer manifests itself. However, the perplexing narrative situations, revealingly, still *cannot* be captured by the concept of ‘metanarration’. What is missing as a core feature is the *explicit* momentum. One is not faced with narrator statements which ‘*thematise* the act of narrating or factors of it’ (“[... den] Akt des Erzählens oder Faktoren des Erzählvorgangs *thematisier[en]*”; Nünning 2001b: 132 [my emphasis]), since the strategies in question in no way *explicitly* relate to the narrative process but unfold their specific potential *in the course of telling a story*.

On these grounds, one is confronted with a ‘third way’ of narrative texts proper becoming metareferential. According to the common systematization of ‘metanarrative’ strategies this third way is located *on the level of discourse*. At the same time, – and this is what marks the crucial difference – it, however, takes *implicit* or indirect effect, which, according to Hempfer, normally only comes to bear in the context of story-based strategies<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> The following references to *implicit* vs. *explicit* strategies take up Hempfer’s above quoted distinction (cf. 1982: 136), however, in both cases now focussing on discourse-based forms of metaization. This application of terminology at the same time follows up on Wolf’s distinction between explicit and implicit metareference. The differentiation between ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ poses a general terminological problem, though: for one, the question arises as to whether or to what extent ‘explicit’ metaization strategies can also occur in non-verbal media (see Wolf and Nöth in this vol.). For another, even in the context of verbal narratives, this distinction inevitably suggests that implicit strategies are less ‘noticeable’ or distinct than their explicit counterparts. This may even be true in certain cases; however, it should be stressed, that differentiating between ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ strategies is not meant as a statement pertaining to their respective strikingness or effective potential (cf. also Wolf 1993, esp.: 233–235). In his discussions of metanarration, Nünning also peripherally bears upon so-called ‘covert’ or ‘implicit’ strategies, if with a different connotation (cf. 2004: 24).

At this point one ought to recall the above described functional mechanism of the perplexing narrative situations. In abstract terms, this mechanism rests upon an up to now widely neglected ubiquitous and potent principle, namely on a performative potential inherent to breaches of convention. The latter is by no means, as in the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*, exclusively bound to 'erroneous' narrating but it is ultimately inherent to *any* breach of convention. What becomes pertinent here is the well-known fact that upon breaking a convention that very convention *itself* becomes palpable for, and conspicuous to, the recipient. This means that the strategies at hand trigger and effectuate *more* than a mere breach or stretching of a given rule. It is these very dynamics that give momentum to the effective potential of the perplexing narrative situations in the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*'s novels<sup>41</sup>: in being broken, the respective conventions are, for one, made perceivable *as mere conventions*, *as* constructs, which might well take other shape. Accordingly, narrating 'against the rules' actually foregrounds established – and in the case of the perplexing narrative situations indeed *fundamental* – rules of narrating, and thereby implicitly refers back to itself in a (sensu Wolf) metareferential way.

This basic functional mechanism as such is not in the least exceptional or peculiar but can be found in numerous (story-based) implicit metaization practices. What is peculiar in the phenomena under discussion is the fact that the implicit metareferentiality of the perplexing narrative situations is located on the level of narratorial mediation, i. e., on the level of discourse.

This brings one to a first central conclusion. Namely, that differentiating between discourse- and story-based strategies can, and indeed has to be, uncoupled from the criteria of explicitness or implicitness, which are situated one level below. For it is only thus that one can fully fathom the fundamental kinship between those strategies usually subsumed under the heading of metanarration and those among which the perplexing narrative situations can be placed. What is crucial in both cases is their being directly bound to the level of discourse, which, based on their specific 'modi operandi', distinguishes them from story-based meta-phenomena (as, for example, certain *mise en abyme* structures).

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<sup>41</sup> This, of course, only applies provided the recipient perceives the strategy as a breach of convention, which depends on his or her disposition.

Despite not having yet been recognised in its pertinence for *implicit* procedures on the level of discourse, the differentiation between discourse- and story-based metaization processes is not at all new, as already Hempfer's above quoted contribution shows<sup>42</sup>. It may hence seem even more surprising that this criterion of distinction has so far been marginalised or fully ignored in transmedial approaches; a fact, which, however, becomes comprehensible if one considers that discourse-based metaization techniques have traditionally been associated with *explicit* strategies and were therefore understood and defined as limited to narrative texts proper. Correspondingly, Wolf in a 2007 article made a case for refraining from adopting the differentiation between discourse- and story-based metareferential strategies into a transmedial concept of metareference, 'due to the obviously reduced transmedial potential of this opposition so strongly bound to fiction'<sup>43</sup> (2007: 40, fn. 13). This appears largely self-evident when focussing on explicit discourse-based metareferences as, in fact, not restricted to fictional narrative texts but nonetheless inseparable from verbal statements. Strategies of this kind are thus indeed of limited transmedial relevance, as they pertain solely to verbal narratives in at least partially verbal media<sup>44</sup>.

However, one has to fundamentally reconsider such an assessment when also taking into consideration the strategies' *implicit* variant. From such a point of view, the differentiation between discourse- and story-based metareference indeed proves to be of particular advantage to a transmedial approach. The first significant observation in this

<sup>42</sup> See Hempfer 1982 and cf., for example, Wolf 1993, esp.: ch. 3.2.2.

<sup>43</sup> "[...] wegen des offensichtlich reduzierten transmedialen Potentials dieser stark an die [literarische] Erzählkunst gebundenen Opposition."

<sup>44</sup> Assuming a broader concept of narrative as well as of 'discourse', explicit discourse-based metareferences can take effect in any kind of framing or – on an inner-fictional – embedded 'character' remarks within at least partially verbal media such as theatre or film. This is where, e. g., the remarks of voice-over narrators and presenter figures incorporated into the respective filmic or theatrical 'over-all discourse' become relevant (on the status of presenter-figures in theatre see Rajewsky 2007). Moreover, analogous strategies can obviously be realised in factual narratives such as historiographical or autobiographical texts as well as in conversational storytelling. This makes apparent that these strategies do not necessarily require an *inner-fictional* narrator as suggested by the received, fiction-centred definition of metanarration. — For a more detailed justification of the link between explicit discourse-based meta-strategies and verbal forms of articulation see Rajewsky 2008a.

context is that implicit discourse-based metareferences, such as the perplexing narrative situations in the jeunes auteurs de Minuit's novels, also appear in other medial contexts, *without*, in fact, necessarily being bound to verbal statements. As can be illustrated by numerous examples, the implicit foregrounding of narrative acts (in the broader sense), as triggered by a breach of convention, can be effectuated by theatrical or, for instance, filmic means just as well as in narrative texts proper. This means that such foregrounding can take effect regardless of whether one is faced with reporting (diegetic) or performative (mimetic) communicative situations. One only need to think of the jump cuts in French Nouvelle Vague films, which from a present-day perspective may appear as a cinematographic commonplace, but at the time were perceived as a breach of filmic conventions which elicited a clear medium-awareness in the recipient by exposing the constructedness of the filmic discourse. As in the case of the perplexing narrative situations, what refers to the constructedness of the filmic discourse is here likewise the way in which (i. e., '*how*') the story is related and not the story itself. The Nouvelle Vague jump cut may accordingly be understood as an implicit discourse-based metareference<sup>45</sup>.

The transmedial relevance of the phenomenon at hand having become apparent, it is nonetheless insinuated that a differentiation between discourse- and story-based metareferences, too, is ultimately

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<sup>45</sup> One can further relate this to instances of an unconventional, or in canonic terms 'erroneous', utilization of the so-called subjective camera, which may likewise lead to the constructedness of a film's narrative act becoming apparent. This is, for example, the case in Robert Montgomery's famous as well as irritating attempt at conveying a first-person narrative situation by filmic means in his 1947 *Lady in the Lake*. Or in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), where the subjective camera in isolated instances is ostentatiously linked to certain objects as for example weapons in an open trunk. This leads to a (in Tarantino's case humorously-ironic) breach of filmic conventions that presuppose a character's or other animate subject's point of view to be adopted by the subjective camera. In such cases, *how* the filmic discourse is rendered lays bare the filmic discourse as such by way of breaking a convention. In the theatrical field, certain Brechtian dissociation techniques may be quoted as further examples for generating a similar distancing effect – at least in Brecht's day. Moreover, so-called intermedial references also gain relevance in this context. Within their framework, the illusion of an alter-medial quality is elicited within a given medial 'configuration' (be it a text, a film, a play, etc.) by its own medium-specific means, which in many cases at the same time leads to a medium- and meta-awareness in terms of the respective object medium (see also sec. 3 below).

insufficient. From the perspective of a broadly defined concept of narrative and assuming the duality of discourse and story as constitutive of all narrative genres and media, such a differentiation admittedly allows for the general debate about discourse-based meta-phenomena (and that includes the debate about strategies of metanarration) to be disengaged from its established concentration upon fictional narrative texts, thus widening the view to other generic and medial contexts. However, the latter only holds true for other *narrative* genres and media to which a distinction between discourse- and story-based metareferential strategies is inevitably restricted already on merely terminological grounds. Yet, the heuristic potential of a respective distinction actually goes beyond the narrower scope of narrative as shall be exemplified in the following.

### 3.

In terms of *explicit* discourse-based metareferences it has already been suggested that such strategies are primarily bound to verbal statements and that they are hence not merely applicable to fictional, but also to factual verbal narratives as well as to other at least partially verbal media. If one pursues this thought with respect to other text types and verbal articulations in general, it appears that comparable metaization techniques can also be substantiated in *non-narrative* genres and text types (be they written or oral). A case in point would be lyrical poetry, which can only in particular cases be attributed with a narrative dimension, while examples from an extra-artistic context would be art and media critical discourse (as it underlies this volume) as well as argumentative texts in general. What is ultimately crucial – at least within the representational media – is the applicability of a two-level model, in which one can differentiate between the level of ‘(re)presenting’ and the level of the ‘(re)presented’. In the context of the scholarly or argumentative discourse invoked here, one is, of course, faced with an entirely different field of discourse, a fact which would have to be taken into account in view of the potential forms and especially the potential functions of metaization strategies across media. Moreover, one evidently has to draw terminological consequences with respect to non-narrative genres and text types, since the differentiation between ‘discourse’ and ‘story’, or between ‘discourse-’ and ‘story-based’ metaization strategies, respectively, is not meaningfully

transferable (which, incidentally, also holds true for the term ‘meta-narration’).

Concentrating on the strategies’ *implicit* variant, such a reflection is by no means to be restricted to verbal forms of expression, but may as well be expanded to other non- or merely rudimentarily narrative art forms and media such as painting<sup>46</sup>. It is namely a fact that in representational painting one may also distinguish between the level of (re)presentation and the level of what is being (re)presented (that is, the *object* of [re]presentation). This allows for the assumption that metaization strategies, which are at least to a certain extent comparable to discourse-based metareferences in terms of their functional mechanism, can also be effectuated by painterly means.

At least in transgenerically and transmedially oriented research this aspect has as yet hardly attracted attention. So-called metapainting is typically associated with paintings that trigger a meta- or system awareness in the recipient by way of *what* they depict rather than by the specific *way* of depicting it (see, e. g., Stoichita 1993/1996). With respect to painting Wolf thus remarks in commenting on forms of implicit metareference that

[i]n painting, such potentially implicit metareference could, for instance, be assumed where the painterly medium or what is represented is employed in a highly unusual way so that the medium and/or the conventions of painterly representation are foregrounded (in this vol.: 46).

Against the backdrop of the above explanations this seems to capture in every respect the very functional mechanism of strategies earlier designated as implicit discourse-based metareferences. However, it is significant that besides a mention of “abstract painting” (ibid.) Wolf predominantly quotes painterly examples whose metareferential quality is not based on the manner in which individual pictures are executed but springs from what is being (re)presented in them, namely

[...] ‘impossible’ representations by M. C. Escher, [...] some paintings by Magritte and [...] the metaleptic, virtually frame-breaking cover illustration [of this volume] reproducing Pere Borrell del Caso’s painting “Escapando de la crítica” (ibid.).

Yet, it can be illustrated through examples from photorealist painting that a differentiation between forms of metaization, which implicitly emanate from the specific *manner* of (re)presentation as compared to

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<sup>46</sup> On the ‘narrative status’ of painting see Wolf 2002, 2008.

those originating from the (re)presented subject *itself*, may prove useful and rewarding also in the context of the visual arts<sup>47</sup>.

Photorealist painting owes its name to the fact that it focuses on eliciting an illusion of photographic quality in the beholder, as can be paradigmatically exemplified with streetscapes by the U.S. American painter Richard Estes<sup>48</sup>. In fact, photorealist paintings apply their *own* specific medial means and techniques in a way that activates viewing patterns in the beholder and pertains to experiences or frames commonly linked to the reception of photographic images, thus eliciting an illusion, a pretence, of photography. The fact that painting ‘merely’ elicits such an illusion through its own painterly means, which are indeed *unable* to bridge the gap to photography’s medial dimensions, is by no means to be deemed a shortcoming. The creative and reflexive potential of such intermedial practices much rather lies precisely in their ‘as if’ character and therefore in fathoming the painterly medium’s boundaries with respect to another medium. In other words one could say that it is the very perceptibility of medial differences between the object medium of painting and the medium of photography referred to which is decisive for a photorealistic painting’s functional mechanism, its way of constructing meaning and, what is most important in the current context, also its meta-quality<sup>49</sup>.

Referring to a *perceptible* medial difference between painting and photography might appear puzzling if one is, as in the present case, dealing with the photographic reproduction of a photorealist painting, and one would need a very perceptive and well-trained eye to recognise that *Illustration 1* is actually *not* a photograph. However, if one were to behold the original work, its materiality as *oil on canvas* would at any rate become evident upon taking a closer look. Moreover, an institutionalised frame, such as an exhibition providing paratextual information such as the title of the piece as well as the respective captions and explanatory wall texts, would also contribute to the beholder’s discerning the ‘true’ (painted) quality of the exhibited work.

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<sup>47</sup> See also Böhn’s contribution on “quotation of forms” in this vol.

<sup>48</sup> On ‘photorealism’ and related terms see, e. g., Lindey 1980 or Meisel 1980.

<sup>49</sup> On the relevance of *perceptible* medial differences in the context of intermedial practices see Rajewsky 2008b; on the pretence (or ‘as if’) character of intermedial references see Rajewsky 2002.



Illustration 1: Richard Estes, "Café Express" (1975). The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago<sup>50</sup>. (Orig. in colour.)

Photorealist paintings hence define and distinguish themselves *in relation* to the photographic medium and in a way 'appear' to be photographs, while nonetheless remaining *discernible* as paintings. This leads the beholder to scrutinise the respective paintings, and thus ultimately also painting as a medial system, in terms of their analogies with and/or differences to photography. This means that photorealist paintings trigger a reflection on the formal, aesthetic and material properties of *both* painting and photography in the recipient. At the same time, the constructedness of the paintings is evidently brought to the beholder's attention. In all that, the distinct 'truth values' of painting and photography also play an important part, since the indexical and mimetic quality of the (analogue) photographic image, and hence its specific force as a 'trace of reality', is bereaved of its existential-causal relation to the depicted object by way of overtly *simulating* photographic quality in the painterly medium<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Estes (American, born 1932), Café Express, 1975. Oil on canvas, 61 x 91,4 cm. Gift of Mary and Leigh Block, 1988.141.8. The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>51</sup> Dating into the 1970s, Richard Estes' paintings obviously relate to analogue photography. In the day of the digital image, photorealist paintings may well trigger other reflections in the beholder.



What is particularly pertinent to the present context is the fact that this form of metareference does not (primarily) unfold through the objects or 'sujets' depicted, but rather due to the *fashion and manner* in which those are rendered and executed. The metareferential quality of photorealist paintings is directly linked to the formal-aesthetic illusion which makes the image at first glance 'appear' to be a photographic one.



Illustration 2: Richard Estes, "Bus Reflections" (1972). Private collection, Ansonia, CT, USA. (Orig. in colour.)

This meta-quality, which is essential to photorealist paintings, can even be taken one step further. The basic functional mechanism of photorealist paintings is first of all based on a proximity to photographic style which is taken to an extreme. This at the same time constitutes a deviation from habitualised notions of painterly style. However, intermedial references of this kind prevalently do not aim at 'simply' eliciting 'the most perfect' illusion possible of the respective system of reference; in that case, photorealist works could ultimately be recognised as paintings *exclusively* due to their specific materiality. One is in general much rather faced with a twofold deviance: for one, photorealist pieces deviate from habitualised notions and viewing pat-

terms regarding the style of the painterly medium, while, *at the same time*, the medium-specific capacities of photography are modified and expanded. This can be exemplified in Richard Estes' "Bus Reflections" (1972; see *Illustration 2*).

In the foreground, Estes' painting displays a clearly exaggerated photographic style, which is most notably evident in the depth of field effect intensified by the various reflections in the shop and bus windows as well as in the conspicuous vigour of the primary colours applied in a way that is reminiscent of effects gained by using colour screens in photography<sup>52</sup>. Without fail, the gaze of the beholder, due to his or her viewpoint being at an angle to the facades, is initially directed to that right foreground area of the painting, where it is consequently captured by, and directed along, the painting's perspective lines to the sand-coloured building in the background. The latter's upper stories are distinguished, though, by a conspicuous blur that carries on into the clouds and haze in the left-hand upper corner of the painting. This extreme contrast between the (over-intensified) sharpness in the foreground and the blurring of the background irritates the beholder with regard to his or her (photography related) viewing patterns and 'unmasks' the painting as a *simulation* of photographic style, since – at least in analogue photography – such an effect could hardly be achieved<sup>53</sup>. As a consequence, the process of eliciting illusion is broken in a twofold way, which emphasises the metareferential dimension of the painting. As already in the case of the perplexing nar-

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<sup>52</sup> The facades of the houses in the right hand front corner of the painting have been executed in intense red and yellow; the same colours are taken up in the striped sun blinds depicted in the middle plane, in the red street sign and in the yellow taxi. Moreover, Estes adds the blue of the sky to this composition.

<sup>53</sup> The recipient's irritation may even be intensified upon turning to the details in the mirror images reflected by the various glass panes. The colour scheme, contours and texture of the clouds as depicted in the sky in the background considerably deviate from their reflected image in the shop window. This is to say that here the level of what is being represented advances the painting's meta-effect. Additionally, the eye-catching application of primary colours should, once more, be pointed out as it actually (implicitly) refers to the medium of painting itself. It is these primary or 'pure' colours (red, blue and yellow) which combine to create all other secondary and complementary colours in the spectrum. This means that, to a certain extent, everything we see in this painting has actually been 'made' or derived from these colours. It is thus the 'material' side of painting which is exhibited here in a twofold self-referential way.

rative situations, the metaization in Estes' painting is, again, rooted in the specific *rendering* of the work rather than its content.

It thus becomes evident that strategies of this kind do not constitute a specificity of narrative media and genres but that they should be considered a widespread phenomenon whose transmedial and transgeneric relevance goes beyond the context of narrative. At the same time, this evinces that a distinction which is analogous to the distinction between discourse- and story-based metaization strategies can be made concerning other non- (or merely rudimentarily) narrative media and genres. That is, provided they (re)present or convey a 'reality', 'object' or 'situation' of sorts, i. e., that they display an inherent bipolarity between what is (re)presented and the level of (re)presentation or mediation.

The terminology denoting such a comprehensive concept is to be left undecided here. With reference to Wolf's concept of metareference, I would tentatively – and for want of a better expression – suggest a differentiation between 'form-based' and 'content-based' metareference. This would allow for the metaization strategies in painting described above to be qualified as 'implicit form-based metareferences', which could be distinguished from content-based variants. Correspondingly, one could talk of explicit form-based metareferences to account for the strategies' explicit implementation in non-narrative contexts as, for example, in lyrical poetry.

Admittedly, such a notion of 'form vs. content' creates terminological ballast. Moreover, conceptualizations such as 'implicit form-based metareference' – which, where necessary, may even have to be augmented with additional distinctions (fictio/fictum, critical/non-critical, etc.) – prove to be unwieldy in practical analyses as illustrates this very contribution in referring to 'implicit' and 'explicit discourse- or form-based metareferences'. Whichever terminology one applies, though, it should in any case have become apparent that introducing a criterion that, generally speaking, aims at the *level* of mediation as the locus of a strategy of metaization and thus permits for a differentiation between such strategies on the basis of their specific *modi operandi*, would be advantageous in practical analyses and heuristically useful for the wide field of research in metareferential phenomena. Apart from specific *forms* of metaizations, this also calls into play their specific functions as well as various degrees of intensity. In addition, the perplexing narrative situations in the *jeunes auteurs de Minuit*'s novels, as well as comparable strategies in film, theatre and painting,

point towards the fact that – especially in the case of implicit discourse- and/or form-based metaization strategies – historically developed patterns of habitualization, conventionalization and norms play a decisive part as to the meta-potential inherent in certain medium-specific strategies.

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# Metalepsis and Its (Anti-)Illusionist Effects in the Arts, Media and Role-Playing Games

*Sonja Klimek*

After a short explication of the transmedial term ‘metalepsis’ as a paradoxical and, apart from some exceptions in performative arts, strictly artefact-internal phenomenon, this paper will explore the different effects of this device in parodic fiction and films, in drama, ceiling frescoes, illustrated children’s books as well as in fantasy role-playing games. The effect of metalepsis in these different arts, media and performances is not always – as it has often been suggested by scholars focusing on postmodernist experimental or comic fiction – to break the aesthetic illusion and to expose the artefact as such. Rather, metalepsis can, in some cases, even fulfil the external function of stabilizing the illusion of a coherent – transcendent or fantastic – world represented by an artefact.

## 1. Categorization of metalepsis as a transmedial and transgeneric phenomenon

To date, the transmedial occurrence of phenomena lately summarized under the term ‘metalepsis’ is reasonably well explored in single case studies as well as in studies concerning its theoretical basis. Coined in 1972 by the French narratologist Gérard Genette, the term ‘narrative metalepsis’ originally referred to paradoxical leaps across the ‘sacred’ frontier between two ‘worlds’ within a text: the level of representation (or the world “où l’on raconte”) and the level of what is represented (“celui que l’on raconte” [244f.]). In this article, the use of the term will be restricted to the initial definition of 1972, although it has in the meantime sometimes been widened (see, e. g., Genette 2004) narrowed (see, e. g., Häsner 2005/online) or redefined, and made applicable to art forms other than narrative texts in the way Wolf (2005) has shown.

Metalepsis is obviously a case of “transmediality” because it “occur[s] in more than one medium”, and there is supposedly not one single medium from which an “‘intermedial transposition’ [...] into another medium” takes place. In the case of metalepsis, the transfer of



terminology from narratology to other disciplines and forms of art has made it possible to “highlight [...] formal, functional and historical similarities” in the different arts and media (ibid.: 104).

In principle, the transgressions implied in narrative metalepsis can go into two different ‘directions’: when things or characters from the level of representation introduce themselves on the level of what is represented, one might talk about ‘ascending metalepsis’. By analogy, one might talk about ‘descending metalepsis’ to denominate phenomena of fictitious things or characters coming to life on the level that includes the representation of their own fictitious world.

For the term ‘narrative metalepsis’ to be applicable in the narrow sense used here for transmedial phenomena of the same basic structure, three criteria have to be fulfilled. First, the work under discussion must be a representation. Second, there must be a ‘stack’ of two hierarchical levels – which often has the form of some sort of *mise en abyme*<sup>1</sup>, a nested structure as, for example, a novel within a novel, a picture within a film, a play within a television series, or any other representation of a fictitious world within an artefact (be it via the nested representation of other media, or the self-same media). And thirdly, the hierarchical levels of representation and of what is represented have to be mixed up in a paradoxical way<sup>2</sup>, and this should not happen by mere accident but be part of the work’s ‘script’.

Besides ‘*métalepses ascendantes*’ and ‘*métalepses descendantes*’, there have been attempts to create a third category: the term ‘horizontal metalepsis’ was coined for transgressions involving two parallel worlds, ‘from one given order to another given order situated on the same narrative level’<sup>3</sup> (“d’un ordre donné à un autre ordre également

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dällenbach 2001: 11–14. He distinguishes three types of *mise en abyme*: the “*réflexion simple*” means a nested structure, such as the ‘*Binnengeschichte*’ in a ‘*Rahmengeschichte*’. When this structure is seemingly endlessly repeated, he talks about “*reflexion à l’infini*”. The third type is the paradoxical variant of a *mise en abyme*, the “*réflexion aporistique*, c’est-à-dire l’auto-inclusion qui boucle l’œuvre sur soi” (“the self-inclusion of a piece of art that mirrors the artefact within itself”). As a basis for metalepses, only a “*réflexion simple*” is necessary.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed list of criteria for a paradoxical phenomenon in the arts to become a metalepsis, cf. Wolf (2005: 89–91), who, however, also includes other phenomena in his definition.

<sup>3</sup> All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

donné qui se situent sur un même plan narratif” [Meyer-Minnemann 2005: 140]]<sup>4</sup>.

The establishment of this third category forces a decision on the scholar: if one includes transgressions between two parallel worlds in the term metalepsis, one gives up Genette’s condition that the transgressed frontier has to be that between the world of representation and the one of that which is represented (cf. 1972: 244f.), since this condition clearly excludes ‘horizontal’ jumps.

If one only focuses on the criterion that the borderline between any worlds is transgressed, one can also include ‘horizontal’ metalepses. In this case, metalepsis would no longer be a paradoxical phenomenon in the strict sense of formal logic, but only according to an everyday use of the word ‘paradox’: it would be against common sense, but not against the rules of the logic of representation.

To keep the transmedial phenomenon of metalepsis a paradoxical one, interferences between *parallel* worlds must therefore be excluded. Winnetou and Robin Hood meeting within the same novel or film, should, for example, not be termed a genuine ‘horizontal’ metalepsis since it is merely a kind of ‘intertextual game’, as ‘quoting’ a character already famous in world literature resembles a metalepsis.

This paper is a plea to respect Genette’s initial definition, even if it might seem to exclude some metalepsis-like phenomena. If one restricts the use of the term ‘metalepsis’ to strictly fiction-internal vertical transgressions of different levels of representation (i. e., fictitious [sub-]worlds), metalepsis stays a distinct paradoxical phenomenon, violating the ‘sacred’ frontier between the world of the creator (where the act of representation takes place) and the world that is represented (i. e., is created in the case of fictional artefacts).

During the process of ‘exporting’ the term ‘metalepsis’ from narratology into other fields of art, “transgression[s] between a work and the world of the author or recipient outside it” (Wolf in this vol.: 51) have also been included in this term. When, for example, an actor in a play hurts himself and cries out in pain in his own person, not as the stage character he actually plays, this ‘out-of-character’ utterance is clearly a paradoxical transgression between the level of representation (the performance) and of what is represented (the play). This example shows that metalepses in different media can occur in different forms. The fact that performance is an inherent element or characteristic of

<sup>4</sup> This idea first occurred in Wagner 2002: 247.

some art forms makes these kinds of transgressions between the real and the fictitious world possible. However, except in performative arts, metalepsis (understood in the strict Genettian sense) only involves the fictional levels of representation and of what is represented.

In contrast, narrative texts are not able to produce this kind of metalepsis. Even if an empirical author (e. g., Jean Paul) invents a fictitious character, giving him his own name (i. e., “Jean Paul”), his own looks and his own background, this character within a text is not the ‘real’ author that has entered the fictitious world. A literary character is merely what Gabriel called ‘an intensional construct only accessible through the respective text’ (“nur anhand des entsprechenden Textes zugängliche[s] Sinngebilde” [1991: 143]) – a figure represented only within a fictional text and only imaginable thanks to the information given in this text – while the author always stays a human being on the level of representation. The body of the actor in plays has a different nature, being at the same time the body of a real human being and the representation of a character within a play. Yet, apart from such special cases of metalepses in the performative arts, metalepses can only appear within artefacts, creating the impression of a transgression between a fictitious and a real world and hiding the fact that also the level of what seems to be ‘real’ is merely a part of the artefact, not of the reality outside the artefact.

Other examples of this type of metalepsis between the seemingly ‘real’ and the fictitious can be analysed in films, as done, for example by Jean-Marc Limoges (in this volume), dealing with the occurrence of ‘real’ cameras or mike booms in the diegesis of Mel Brooks’ films (see also Limoges 2008). Up to now, metalepsis has been studied in drama (see, e. g., Landfester 1997, Fludernik 2003, Genette 2004), film (see, e. g., Genette 2004, Schaeffer 2005, Limoges 2008), pictorial arts (see, e. g., Baetens 1988; see also Baetens 2001, Schuldiner 2002), and even in comics (cf., e. g., Wolf 2005: 95–97, see Schmitz-Emans 2005/2006<sup>5</sup>), and lyric poetry (cf., e. g., Wolf 2005: 100). In abstract painting and purely instrumental music, there can be no metaleptic structures because those arts, with the possible exception of programme music and other forms of extramusical meaning, do not represent anything. Therefore, in these cases, a “fundamental condition”

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<sup>5</sup> Schmitz-Emans does not use the term ‘metalepsis’, but analyses a phenomenon that is clearly metaleptic.

of metalepsis “is not fulfilled”, namely the “condition of representationality” (Wolf 2005: 100).

As this paper will show, the different constraints of each representational art form can cause different kinds of metalepses with different effects.

## 2. The anti-illusionist effect of metalepsis in parodic novels and films

In artefacts created in keeping with a certain kind of ‘realistic’ aesthetic, fictitious characters do not know about their own ontological status. The conventions of ‘realistic’ art demand that they accept their lives, just as we – the real recipients – do in the genuineness of our world and ourselves. Metalepses on the level of the ‘histoire’<sup>6</sup> reveal to the characters that they only exist within an artefact. If the author talks to them or enters their world, they must be fictitious. So a metalepsis “implicitly lays bare the fictionality” of the artefact as such (Wolf in this vol.: 54). This makes metalepsis an implicit form of metareference, even if the “meta-awareness” of the recipient is sometimes “minimal” (ibid.: 31) and often produces an anti-illusionist effect. Such an anti-illusionist metareferential quality can, for instance, be attributed to metalepses occurring in parodic fiction and artefacts. While the fantasy novels in the wake of *The Lord of the Rings* (often the results of hack writing) invite the reader to identify with the characters, parody renders such identification impossible.

Terry Pratchett’s parodic novels are a case in point. In his *Mort: A Discworld Novel* (1987), the extradiegetic narrator lays bare the fictionality of his story by metaleptically confusing discourse-level conventions and story-level events as in the following example: “‘You shouldn’t – – – them, then,’ muttered one of his henchmen, effortlessly pronouncing a row of dashes” (1993: 63).

In *Only You Can Save Mankind* (1992), Pratchett’s parody of science fiction novels, it is even the fictitious characters themselves who paradoxically recognize the discursive conventions that help create their own world: the boy Maxwell realizes that the heroine’s “voice

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<sup>6</sup> For the differentiation between ‘metalepsis on the level of discourse’ (“métalepse au niveau du discours”) and ‘metalepsis on the level of story’ (“métalepse au niveau de l’histoire”) cf. Cohn 2005: 121.

had a kind of penetrating quality, like a corkscrew. When she spoke in italics, you could *hear* them” (1992/2004: 62). A few paragraphs later, the girl defends herself, stating “That comes under the Sale of Goods Act (1983)”, and Maxwell muses that “[u]p until now he’d never met anyone who could pronounce brackets” (ibid.). It would be impossible to do this metalepsis justice by reading the text out loud. The narrative metalepsis in this novel relies on the visual quality of the medium in order to work.

In film, too, the anti-illusionist potential of metalepsis is used to distance spectators from the medium and/or to parody an original artefact<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, in Mel Brooks’ *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993), a distancing effect is created by anti-illusionist metalepses among other means. In one instance, a metaleptic short circuit<sup>8</sup> between the action of the film and the level of film-making is introduced. This short circuit, apart from having a comic effect, is also of consequence to the film’s plot. In an archery contest, Robin Hood is defeated by the archer of the sheriff. Surprised, he wonders: “I lost. – I lost? I’m not supposed to lose. Let me see the script” (Brooks 1993: 1:15:04–12).

The fact that the character Robin Hood is conscious of his part as the film’s hero is clearly a first metalepsis. Contrary to the *actor*, the *film character* should not be aware of this. Similarly, the film script does not belong into the diegesis of the film either. Thanks to his intervention, Robin Hood is accorded a second shot and wins. Thus, for a moment, the intradiegetic character of Robin Hood and the extradiegetic actor merge. The comic effect of this metalepsis is further heightened by the circumstance that none of the other characters are surprised by the intrusion of the level of film-production into their fictitious world.

Limoges describes a similar reaction to the recurring gag of fictitious characters being disturbed by real cameras in the films of Mel

<sup>7</sup> Schaeffer insists on the difference between filmic and literary fiction. He shows that filmic fiction is something different than the narrative synopsis of the represented story. ‘Filmic metalepses’ (“Métalepses cinématographiques”), as he calls them, are not the transgression of the frontier ‘between that which is narrated and the narrator, but of the one which separates the level of the [...] impersonated character from that of the actor [...]’ (“entre ce qui est narré et le narrateur, mais de celle qui sépare le niveau du personnage incarné [...] et celui de l’acteur [...]”; 2005: 327). This shows that filmic metalepsis is closer to dramatic metalepsis than to narrative metalepsis.

<sup>8</sup> For the term ‘short circuit’ cf. Lodge 1977: 239–245. Cf. also Genette 2004: 124.

Brooks in the following way: ‘These characters are not so much troubled by the camera’s presence as by the fact that it has impertinently interrupted their actions’<sup>9</sup> (Limoges 2008: 35).

In these cases of metalepsis, the latent knowledge of the spectators that what they are watching is only a film is here projected onto the level of the film action and of the intradiegetic characters. The parodic *Robin Hood – Men in Tights* therefore consciously destroys the aesthetic illusion which costume films and period pieces propose to the spectators.

### 3. Metalepsis in drama and its functions

Apart from the parodic function, the anti-illusionist effect of metalepsis can also fulfil a philosophical (or even metaphysical) function. This can, for instance, occur in combination with the baroque notion of the ‘world as a stage’. For, if the world is only a stage, there is at least the possibility to imagine that I as a human being (that is, as an actor) could jump off the stage and leave the play (i. e., this unreal life), thus facing the stage director and the audience (or God and the angels). Since the origins of the proscenium arch stage in the illusionist theatre of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there have been a growing number of plays that address this ontological issue by means of metalepsis.

The basis of many dramatic metalepses (except for those in which the body of the actor enters the play-world; see the example above) is, as can be frequently seen, e. g., in fiction, drama, or film, the iteration of the medium, that is in the case of drama, a play within a play. Shakespeare is famous for the metaleptic comments and reflections his characters make with reference to a play within the play, and in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) spectators even leave the space reserved to the audience to participate in the play on stage, and actors step out of their roles in order to observe the rest of the play from spectators’ seats.

In Ludwig Tieck’s early Romantic reading drama *Die verkehrte Welt: Ein historisches Schauspiel in fünf Aufzügen* (1798), a ‘Pierrot’ learns from a spectator who enters his fictitious world that he is only a

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<sup>9</sup> “[C]es personnages ne sont pas tant troublés par la présence de la caméra, que par le fait qu’elle a impertinemment interrompu leurs actions.”

character on stage. He then intends ‘to attempt the famous Leucadian leap into the pit, in order to see whether I will die or be cured and turn from fool to spectator’<sup>10</sup> (Tieck 1973: 279). In other words, he wants to precipitate himself from the fictitious world into the ‘real’ world – like the ancient poet Sappho, who jumped from the rock Leucade – to see whether he will die in the attempt or become a spectator himself.

Pierrot is obviously aware of himself being only a stage character. The fear of death should thereby not primarily be understood as referring to physical injuries resulting from the leap; it rather points to the ontological nature of the transition from one level to another that is involved in the character’s attempt to leave fiction and enter ‘reality’. However, fictitious characters cannot actually know if, after the Leucadian leap, there is a hereafter in the auditorium or only death in the sea – in Pierrot’s case, the jump only means moving from the framed play to the framing play. He does not reach the real auditory, but stays within Tieck’s play.

Metalepses of this kind deal with the question of whether or not a transcendent reality exists or. Quoting the baroque topos of life as a theatre play with God as the stage director (see, e. g., Calderón de la Barca’s ‘autos sacramentales’), they express humankind’s suspicion of its own fictitious (or created) nature and sometimes of the meaninglessness of its own level of existence. Humans seek knowledge of this transcendental reality (or of its non-existence) and – if convinced of the existence of a transcendental fate ruling their lives – sometimes wish to escape the power of the transcendental creator.

However, not all the metalepses addressing the issue of the fictitious nature of characters (and therefore spectators) give rise to such profound philosophical reflections. Some are just used for their comic effect: the dramatic poem *Peer Gynt* (1867) by Henrik Ibsen, which, in general, does not undermine the aesthetic illusion at all, contains an example of a metalepsis that is used as a comic side blow. After a shipwreck, the eponymous protagonist is drifting in the sea, fighting desperately to stay alive. Suddenly, a mysterious “passenger” appears and encourages Peer: “Des seien Sie nur unverzagt! / Man stirbt nicht mitten im fünften Akt” (Ibsen 1998: 117). The remark ‘Don’t worry! One does not die in the middle of act five’ is not the spontaneous

<sup>10</sup> “[...] über die Lampen hinweg den berühmten Sprung vom Felsen Leukate in das Parterre hinein[zutun], um zu sehen, ob ich entweder sterbe, oder von einem Narren zu einem Zuschauer kuriert werde.”

comment of a real actor, but the lines of a fictitious character, the “passenger”.

Yet drama in particular is a medium that invites unintentional metalepsis-like confusions between reality and fiction because it is performed live. If actors make a mistake, they have to integrate it into the play with the help of improvisation without the spectators noticing. Moreover, it is possible that (the real) spectators by mistake believe non-fictitious events to be part of the play and only realise later that this was not the case, as for example in October 2002, when Chechen rebels took the cast and the audience of Moscow’s Bolschoi Teatr hostage. In the beginning of this kidnapping drama, several people took the masked, armed men that ran onto the stage for actors in the military play they were watching. However, in this case, one cannot speak of a metalepsis because the intrusion of the level of representation in the level of what is represented was not intentional. Intentionality is a crucial criterion for metalepsis<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, there are plays that place one or several of their characters in the pit, as for example Arthur Schnitzler’s *Zum großen Wurstel* (1904). Here, a character sitting in the ‘real’ audience criticizes the end of the play on stage, thus provoking the author to show himself on stage, exclaiming: ‘I am the poet!’ (“Ich bin der Dichter!”). The man down in the audience answers: ‘You are also just appearing [in the play]!’ (“Ach was! ... Sie! ... Sie kommen ja auch nur vor!”). Whereupon the character of the stage director, not accepting the other man to be a real spectator, replies: ‘And you? [...] Are you trying to tell me you’re a real theatregoer?’ (“Und Sie? [...] Wollen Sie mir einreden, daß Sie ein wirklicher Theaterbesucher sind?” [1983: 140f.]). The characters in this case are clearly aware of their fictitious nature, even if each character would like to claim being real – as opposed to the others.

In Tieck’s comedy *Die verkehrte Welt* the ontological question of being ‘real’ or not is projected onto the real audience. Scävola, a fictitious spectator put en abyme sitting at the front of the stage, remarks with consternation: ‘This is rather crazy. Look folks, we are sitting here as spectators, watching a play, and in that play there are other spectators watching a play and in this third play yet another play is

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Limoges’ discussion (below: 396) of bloopers in film (such as the visibility of microphones).



performed for those third actors'<sup>12</sup> (Tieck 1973: 341). Thereupon another character introduces the idea of a further level of spectators, of a 'higher reality': 'Just imagine, folks, we might possibly be actors in some play as well and someone would see all this pell-mell! Wouldn't that be the confusion of confusions'<sup>13</sup> (ibid.).

Since André Gide's 1893 diary notice, the procedure to extend the idea of multiple nested levels of representation within an artefact to one's own reality and to ask for higher levels of reality than one's own can be identified as one of the effects of *mises en abyme*. *Mises en abyme* (especially in the case of the "*mise en abyme à l'infini*") can produce the effect of looking into an abyss and making the ground turn under one's feet (cf. Ricardou 1967: 172f.). Sometimes a *mise en abyme* structure is followed by a *metalepsis*, sometimes not. Due to the phenomenon of *metalepsis* in the different kinds of media, the border between fiction and reality seems to become permeable. The reality of the observer is – apparently – drawn into the fictitious world of illusion, an effect favoured especially by baroque painting and architecture.

#### 4. The illusionist (or immersive) function of *metalepsis* in architecture, illustrated books for children and role-playing games

The discovery of the mathematically constructed central perspective and its establishment in painting were the prerequisites of the baroque art of deceiving the eye (see Hollmann/Tesch 2005; see also Stoichita 1998). The use of the linear perspective made possible a hitherto un-attained degree of illusion in painting. Stepping out of a painted interior space into a painted surrounding developed into a *topos*, with painted figures (or objects) stepping out of painted frames.

<sup>12</sup> "Es ist gar zu toll. Seht, Leute, wir sitzen hier als Zuschauer und sehn ein Stück; in jenem Stück sitzen wieder Zuschauer und sehn ein Stück, und in jenem dritten Stück wird jenen dritten Akteurs wieder ein Stück vorgespielt."

<sup>13</sup> "Nun denkt Euch, Leute, wie es möglich ist, daß wir wieder Akteurs in irgend einem Stücke wären, und einer sähe nun das Zeug so alles durch einander! Das wäre doch die Konfusion aller Konfusionen."



*Illustration 1: Giovan Battista Gaulli, ceiling fresco (1674–1679). Chiesa del Gesù, Rome.*

The fresco on the ceiling of the Chiesa del Gesù in Rome, painted by Giovan Battista Gaulli between 1674 and 1679, is a famous illustration of this: the painted figures overstepping the sculptural stucco frame create the impression that the heavenly majesty of Jesus is spilling over into the earthly nave of the church (see *Illustration 1*). A contemporary religious observer will hardly interpret this metaleptic

trompe l'oeil as undermining aesthetic illusion. Rather than create a sense of fictionality, the aim of the trompe l'oeil is to suggest to the observer that the gate to heaven is wide open and that the world of the observer has opened up to the world of God. In baroque wall painting and architecture, there are innumerable examples of make-believe rooms, windows, passages and views of gardens.

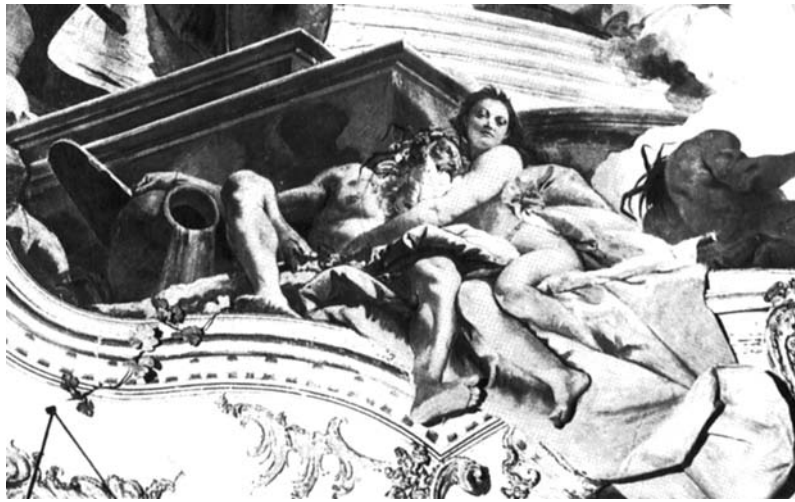


*Illustration 2: Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, ceiling fresco (1751/1752, detail). Imperial Hall, Würzburg Residence.*

In time, the initially religious trompe l'oeil technique was secularised and used for the sake of the pleasure of perfect illusion. Surrounded by stucco reliefs, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's large frescoes on the ceiling of the Imperial Hall in the Würzburg Residence (1751/1752) illustrate this point to perfection (see *Illustration 2*): a river god is sitting next to the frame of the central fresco, which is surrounded by a frame of gilded stucco. If one looks up at the fresco from the right angle, one sees that the river god has swung one of his legs out of the two-dimensional painting into three-dimensional space, where it dangles from the ceiling in the form of a three-dimensional stucco-appendage of the painted body (see Helmberger 1996). Metalepses like the frescos on the ceiling of the Chiesa del Gesù or the Imperial Hall do not only conflate the two-dimensional fresco and three-dimensional space but step out of a painted world by crossing a three-dimensional stucco frame with one leg. This is a type of metalepsis analogous to

the example of Pere Borrell del Caso's picture (see the cover illustration of this volume).

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Besides in narrative texts and paintings, hybrid text-picture media such as comics or illustrated children's literature also provide examples of the occurrence of (partially) illusion-compatible metalepses.

In *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* (2000) and *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (2002) by Lauren Child, the painted metalepses have their own function on the level of the 'histoire'. The hero of these tales, young Herb, loves listening to the good-night stories his mother reads out to him, but is always slightly afraid of the wolves that appear within these fairy-tales. His mother finds the fear of her son very amusing, because "she knew that storybook wolves are not at all dangerous" (Child 2000/2001: 5). Unfortunately, she is wrong: one night she forgets the book in Herb's room and the storybook wolves immediately leave the world of their book and come to life in Herb's bedroom. The frightened boy tries to satisfy the hunger of the beasts by feeding them with some pudding that he just tears out of another book for them – he uses an illustration of pudding that has become real pudding to feed the fantasy wolves that have become real wolves (cf. *ibid.*: 7–11). To finally get rid of the wolves, Herb asks the "Fairy Grandmother" from the book for help: "He shook it until she tumbled out of the book and onto the floor" (*ibid.*: 18). Using her magic, the old lady turns the big wolf into a caterpillar, "popping it back into the wolf storybook" (*ibid.*: 28f.). These magical metalepses do not just happen in the fantasy of the little boy but emphatically change the diegesis of the fairytale book: "The funny thing was, the next time Herb's mother came to read the wolf story, there was no wolf to be seen – just a tiny caterpillar trying with all his might to terrify a little girl in a red coat" (*ibid.*: 32). In the beginning, the mother wants to enlighten her son about the gap between fiction (e. g., storybook wolves) and reality by explaining to him the function of aesthetic illusion. In the end, she is confused because of the change in the fairytale book. It is Herb, the boy who experienced the magically metaleptical journey of the wolves into his own world, who can laugh about her and her seemingly realistic attitude. Far from breaking the aesthetic illusion, Lauren Child's books thus praise the power of fantasy by letting children's imagination rule over the world of the grown-ups.

In the sequel, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, Lauren Child uses even more paradoxical forms of metalepsis between a drawn and a told story-world. This time, Herb falls into the diegesis of a fairy-tale book while asleep with his head on its pages (cf. 2002/2003: 7). Herb learns that the whole world he now lives in is only the illustration of the fairy-tale book: he comes to a door and cannot open it because "[...] the illustrator had drawn the handle much too high up" (ibid.: 14). Later, he meets a queen and has to realize that the drawings he once added to his book are 'real' in this story-world: the queen has a beard, like the one he drew on the queen's picture some weeks earlier. As she recognizes him as the 'author' of her beard, Herb has to flee her, using his knowledge that the world he lives in is only a book-world: "by snipping a hole in the palace floor, Herb managed to wriggle through onto the next page" (ibid.: 21). The empirical page of *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* also has a hole in this place. So the 'hole' on the diegesis has become a 'real' hole, which is another form of metalepsis. This time, Herb is conscious of living in a fictitious world. Nevertheless, he plays his part in this world (even by using anti-illusionist devices), instead of deconstructing the whole story: Herb does not say to the queen that she is only a character and therefore cannot do him harm. By fleeing her, he accepts the fairy queen as being dangerous for him as a 'real' boy.

Lauren Child's innovative illustrations create new forms of metalepses between the level of what is painted and the level of what is told. Child thus explores the possibilities of metalepsis in hybrid text-image media, such as the illustrated fantasy novel for children, and expands their effect so that they can become compatible with a fantasy-fuelled aesthetic illusion.

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As these few examples show, the transmedial phenomenon of metalepsis is not only used for its anti-illusionist effect. It is true that metalepses probably occur most often in 'experimental' or parodic forms of art. Here, they develop their potential of marking the frame and 'denuding' the artefact as such by breaking the aesthetic illusion. Nonetheless, examples like Giovan Battista Gaulli's ceiling of the Chiesa del Gesù, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's frescos in the Imperial Hall or Lauren Child's fantasy books show that metalepses in the different arts and media also have the capacity to actually create illu-

sions (rather than only undermine them). This is why metalepses not only occur in comedies or ‘experimental’ forms of art (cf. Wolf 2005: 91), but also in artefacts that deal with the metaphysical – or at least with the strange and the fantastic.

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Apart from arts and media, metalepsis-like phenomena can also be identified in a social activity that is not generally accepted as an art form but clearly shows narrative characteristics: the classic pen and paper role-playing games. Every round of this multi-perspectival narrative game (cf. Zymner 2003: 308f.) follows a kind of script, only known to the gamemaster or organiser of the game. The real participants of the game choose certain heroic protagonists whose characteristics such as strength, intelligence, skill and endurance are defined in advance on a numerical scale. Then the gamemaster begins to read out descriptions of situations and the players have to state how their protagonists will react to these situations, individually or in groups. According to the protagonists’ actions, the master gives further input or – if the protagonists do not behave as expected – improvises outside of the given guidelines.

Zymner has noticed that, in the course of the game, the players can switch from third-person to first-person narration. For example, a (real) player might calmly describe what “his heroine does” at the beginning of the game, but switch to the emotionally involved “I will do this” at a moment of great tension and absolute immersion. Zymner concludes that the player in this case gives up the distance of ‘epic’ fictionality and adopts the immediacy of ‘dramatic’ fictionality (cf. *ibid.*: 311).

In this complete immersion of the player in the fictitious world, one seems to recognize something similar to the structural basis of what Genette called “la métalepse de l’auteur” (1972: 244), that is the metalepsis of the author<sup>14</sup>. But in the case of role-playing games, the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Genette 1972: 244, where he points to Laurence Sterne’s novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) and Denis Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1796) in order to show the metaleptic introduction of a fictitious narrator into the world of his story: “I have left my father lying across his bed, and my uncle Toby in his old fringed chair, sitting beside him, and promised I would go back to them in half an hour; and five-and-thirty minutes are lapsed already” (Sterne 1996: 162). Tristram Shandy says this, but of course he did not promise the

narrative transgression of a real person into the fictitious story-world (realized by using ‘I’ instead of ‘my character’) does not imply an undermining of the illusion. On the contrary, it is the expression of a perfect immersion in the game: the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ instead of ‘he’ or ‘she’ shows that for this moment, the real player completely identifies with his fictional character. The metalepsis-like transition from the distanced mode of ‘epic’ to the direct ‘dramatic fictionality’ can be seen as the opposite of an actor’s ‘corpsing’ or mistakes in a play or in a film. While the latter (which can be described as a ‘*métalepse ascendante*’) has an anti-illusionist effect, the former (which is similar to a ‘*métalepse descendante*’) proves the success of the illusion, resulting in complete immersion.

## 5. Conclusion

When exporting the narratological term ‘metalepsis’ to other forms of art, one should not generalize: the “strong anti-illusionist effect” of metalepsis that used to dominate the use of the device in secular contexts is not a “common function” (Wolf 2005: 101) of all metalepses. One function of metalepsis is often to draw attention to the artificial nature of the artefact in question (the novel, the play or the picture), i. e., poiesis as poiesis. In this respect, metalepsis is a form of implicit metareference. But metalepsis can also be used as one fantastic device among many others, especially in contexts of religion, metaphysics and contemporary fantasy fiction or role-playing games, and then its metareferential quality can become doubtful: once the spectators or readers have accepted the ‘transcendent’ or fantastic rules of the world represented, they can easily understand the metalepsis without continually being reminded of the fictitious nature of the diegesis. When a fictitious character steps out of his level of representation (as Pierrot leaving his play in Tieck’s *Die verkehrte Welt*, or the figures stepping

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two men to come back soon because he as the narrator is not part of the described scene, but exists on a different diegetic level. In the same metaleptic way, Diderot lets his narrator reflect on his own power over his heroes: ‘What would hinder me to marry the master to someone? to send Jacques to the islands? It’s so easy to make up stories!’ (“Qu’est-ce qui m’empêcherait de marier le maître [...] d’embarquer Jacques pour les îles? [...] Qu’il est facile de faire des contes!” [1994: 714]). Diderot also uses this device to break the aesthetic illusion by laying bare the story as an artefact.

over the frame of the ceiling in the Chiesa del Gesù), this metalepsis can also fulfil an ontological or epistemological function by questioning the limits of human knowledge about themselves and the existence of a transcendent reality.

Last but not least, however, ‘*métalepses ascendantes*’ can also mark the intrusion of a fictitious character on higher levels of fiction and thus poeticize the human capacity of surrendering to an aesthetic illusion, to mentally participate – at least for the time of the consumption of the artefact – in the fictitious world represented by an artefact.

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## **Metareference in Music**



## Generic Titles On Paratextual Metareference in Music

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Paratexts, in particular titles of musical compositions, have never been investigated as a metareferential device so far. The following essay is a first investigation in this field from a theoretical and above all historical point of view. Metareferences to individual genres in the titles of musical works are a modernist phenomenon with a prehistory dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Meta-operas, such as Gassmann's *L'Opera seria*, make the process of their own production part of their plot and mark their metareferential quality in their titles. In cases such as Ravel's *La Valse*, the metareference in the title points toward the entire history of the genre and its tendencies. Composers may also intentionally create ambiguous titles with metareferential qualities, such as "Sonata quasi una fantasia". Berio's *Opera*, as well as his *Sinfonia*, illustrate yet another variant of a metareferential title, one that is in harmony with the emphatic metaization characteristic of early postmodernism. As music can exist only within the framework of genres, some avant-garde composers aim at creating their own genres. This is exemplified in Dieter Schnebel's series *Re-Visionen* I, *Re-Visionen* II and his latest series of various works, where each composition represents a major genre of Western art music.

### 1.

The following discussion focuses on titles as important paratexts of musical compositions, in particular on those that may be said to contain metareferences by means of indicating genres in a way that deviates noticeably from standard practice<sup>1</sup>. This focus includes music-historical reflections on the relationship between individual compositions and given genres, but it also implies the following question: to what extent have factors of power, humour, and modernity exerted their influence on the process of 'metaization' which manifests itself in certain musical paratexts? When composers use generic titles for

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<sup>1</sup> On an analogous topic from the point of view of literary studies see Wagenknecht 1989 and Fricke/Wetterwald 2008, the latter of which includes a bibliography (cf. 8–9).

their compositions in a way that deviates from conventions, they often pose and reflect the problem of generic affiliation and stimulate certain ways of reception. In the following I would like to illustrate this by means of select examples.

By and large, the use of generic musical titles for metareferential purposes may be interpreted as a (post)modernist response to the crisis of the traditional system of genres, evinced by the flood of metaphors occurring in the titles of 20<sup>th</sup>-century compositions. However, such generic titles can already be observed as of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and therefore cannot be fully explained by the afore-mentioned crisis in genre history – indeed, comic inversions in particular played a role in music long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, before entering into historical discussions, a crucial theoretical question should be answered: when is a title metareferential and not merely ‘odd’? Long before Musil wrote a novel which he oddly entitled *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*), Ulysses referred to himself with a similarly odd name when he was asked about his identity by Polyphemus and gave the cunning answer “Outis” (i. e., ‘nobody’), thus saving himself and his companions by seemingly erasing his self (incidentally, this name inspired Luciano Berio’s opera *Outis* [1996]). As is well-known, the Bible also sports a highly unusual (generic) title, namely the Greek word for ‘book’ – thus suggesting that this ‘book of books’ was conceived of as *the* holy scripture, a text that had no (human) author and was not a ‘work’ in a modern sense. In examples such as these and in similar cases in literature and art it would be highly questionable if one interpreted such ‘oddities’ and also formulas of intensification, as in ‘book of books’, as metareferences<sup>3</sup>.

In our context, the question as to when one may speak of metareference is, in addition, complicated by the fact that metareferentiality in music cannot be readily compared to forms of ‘metaization’ in literature and art because the ‘change of levels’ postulated by Werner Wolf (see 2001 and the introduction to the present volume) here causes

<sup>2</sup> One may find inverted poetics in the title of the libretto *L’arte di far libretti* (1871) by Antonio Ghislanzoni, which, according to Anselm Gerhard (cf. 2006: 154), was not intended for composition but was nevertheless performed in 1891.

<sup>3</sup> This is especially true when one considers how Jean Paul in *Flegeljahre* (*The Awkward Age*) parodies the early Romantic obsession with such intensifications by naming a pub “Zum Wirtshaus” (‘The Pub’).

problems. In verbal titles, both for works of music and other arts, the creation or implication of a hierarchy of meta- and object-level should, however, be possible. Therefore, I will turn to the subject of generic titles as a problem of genre theory and history that shows clear parallels between music and other arts: how then do metareferential titles of works relate to genres?

Let me start with an anecdote from Italy that certainly may have taken place in Seldwyla as well. Decades ago, in the days of the post-war economic boom, I went to a nice Italian restaurant. Looking for the toilet, I found a door with the sign “donne – uomini”, oddly translated as ‘Frauen – Menschen’ (‘ladies – humans’). Clearly, we take this mistake as a joke: the levels of logical hierarchy have been violated. Yet there is more to this than a mere joke or mistake. Leaving aside the fact that the sign in question may unintentionally fuel a feminist gender debate, we can read the hierarchy of the Porphyrian tree which is here entangled not only as a fixed system but as a dynamic one, insofar as each level of this hierarchy can be transformed into a proper upper or lower level (cf. Danuser 1995: 1042f.). Art in particular operates with such unusual exchanges and transformations. Especially in present times there are works that create stunning effects by using notions as titles which actually ought to be located on a higher logical level (since they designate a genre and not usually a single work, which is just a member of the generic class in question). Cases in point are the play *Art* by Yasmina Reza (1994) and the motion pictures *Film* by Samuel Beckett (1965) and *A Movie* by Bruce Conner (1958). Whenever such and similarly salient deviations occur in paratexts, this may be read as a signal that we are entering the ‘meta-field’.

The historical reality of musical paratexts is, to say the least, rather complicated, and this is even more so when we enquire for possible metareferences in musical titles containing references to individual genres. Usually, metaization is not involved in the relationship between the titles of individual compositions and the generic name. The relationship is referential, not self-referential. However, since genres in the media in general (including the visual and performing arts, literature, music, film, etc.) do not form static entities but are subject to historical processes, there are dynamics involved that open up many possibilities for foregrounding metareference in titles through various forms of deviation from established conventions. This foregrounding is frequently not restricted to the title itself, but, since titles self-referentially refer to their respective works, they may also elicit a meta-



awareness concerning the entire composition in question. At any rate, it is titles with foregrounded metareferentiality upon which I will concentrate in the following.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were two basic options for the construction of titles of musical works, as illustrated by W. A. Mozart's own thematic catalog of his works<sup>4</sup>: either a structure on two levels or a structure on a single level.

The first option was especially important for the 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical theatre, with the main title often invoking the principal thematic idea or referring to the protagonist, while the subtitle mentions the genre of the work in question and the number of its acts, e. g., "*Così fan tutte; ossia La scuola degli amanti. Opera Buffa in 2 Atti*" (1790) or "*La Clemenza di Tito. Opera Seria in Due Atti*" (1791). In vocal music, a title or the beginning of the text is usually added, e. g., "*Ein Lied für Klavier und Singstimme – Das Veilchen*" (1785).

The second option – the single-level structure – was usually chosen for instrumental music, where it sufficed to identify genre and instrumentation, e. g., "*Ein Klavier Konzert. Begleitung. 2 violini, 2 viole, 1 flauto, 2 oboe, 2 clarinetti, 2 fagotti, 2 corni, 2 clarini, timpani e Baßo*" (1786, K 491 in C minor). Some instrumental pieces bear an individual title instead of a generic title, such as "*Ein Musikalischer Spass, bestehend in einem Allegro [etc.] – 2 violini [etc.]*" (1787, K 522), a piece Werner Wolf analysed as 'metamusic' (see 2009, forthcoming), but these are exceptions.

Usually, metaization is not involved in either type of title structures since there is no foregrounded deviation from standard practice in play (*Ein musikalischer Spaß* is, perhaps, a borderline case). And, of course, a composer may happen to create only a single work within a genre – as Beethoven did when he composed his violin concerto. In such cases we refer to the composition without its key (D major) and without its opus number (op. 61) as, e. g., 'the violin concerto by Beethoven' but do not impute any metareferential connotation to this title. Equally harmless incidences would be projected multi-volume works which, for whatever reason, remain single volumes, such as Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit: Erste Hälfte* (1927) or Ludwig Finscher's book *Die Entstehung des klassischen Streichquartetts: Von*

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<sup>4</sup> See Rosenthal/Tyson, eds. 1990. Mozart's original spelling is slightly modernized in the following quotations.

*den Vorformen zur Grundlegung durch Joseph Haydn* (1974), which are both first volumes without sequels.

As soon as programmatic ideas came into play – e. g., in the genre of concert overtures or symphonic poems – the title structure of instrumental music changed to a general two-level structure as well, e. g., Richard Strauss' "*Don Juan*, Tondichtung für großes Orchester" or his *Symphonia domestica* that specifies the concept of symphony. The transformation of traditional genres into 'Weltanschauungsmusik', an important process in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is reflected in titles, too, as we can see in the indefinite article of Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*. All of this, once again, does not qualify as salient metareference in the sense I want to discuss here.

Now, when does foregrounded metaization with reference to individual genres come into play? In order to answer this question, let us look back at the history of the concept of musical genre, whose development Carl Dahlhaus described as follows (see 2003b and 2000): up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a stable relationship between the individual work and its genre, insofar as the work only had to be an instance of a certain genre by realizing one of countless possibilities spelling out the generic convention; the work is subsumed under the umbrella of a generic category in a clear and logical manner. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the individual work was no longer conceived of in this way; the fixed and clear relation of subsumption gave way to an unstable and fragile relationship, in which the individual work began to emancipate itself from generic conventions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between genre and individual work eventually started to break entirely (according to Dahlhaus); it was almost annulled as the concept of genre lost its validity for composition and aesthetics within the avant-garde culture of 'New Music' ('Neue Musik'). As a consequence, the individual work appears to be completely emancipated (with or without a title) from any genre. Yet is this really or necessarily the case? Years ago, I reviewed Dahlhaus' historical account and came to a different conclusion: music without some relation to a genre, however conceived of and named, cannot exist, and thus genre is, to this day, indispensable (cf. Danuser 1995: 1055–1066). This finding is not without consequences for the issue of generic titles of musical compositions and their potential metaization. In the following, I would like to review some possibilities of rendering musical titles overtly metareferential by means of 'deviant' uses of generic notions.

## 2.

A first way of creating generic titles with foregrounded metareferentiality is based on the principle of ‘comic inversion’, turning the world (both the real and the artistic one) upside down. In these cases the harmony of the Porphyrian tree is distorted, even destroyed, when the generic name shifts from the level of the subtitle into the profile of the main title. This is illustrated by an oxymoron on the levels of titles in an exemplary mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century opera in three acts by Ranieri di Calzabigi (libretto) and Florian Leopold Gassmann (music)<sup>5</sup>: its main title, *L’Opera seria*, is linked to a subtitle, *commedia per musica*, indicating the exact opposite. Pragmatic and self-referential contexts interlock in this work in a way that assigns *L’Opera seria* to the prehistory of modernism although the composition does not seem to be more ‘progressive’ in terms of style than anything comparable by the early W. A. Mozart from the same time.

Comic inversion, which produces foregrounded metareference by means of salient deviations as in the aforementioned case, is based on the form and content of the title. In another context (see Danuser 2005), I have described these processes as turning the work into a venue of a contest between *seria* and *buffa* forces: the fictive work on the immanent level is in fact an embedded “opera seria” which bears the title *L’Oranzebe*; the inversion which occurs in the title is a comic turn which resembles the (fortunately past) paradoxes of *La serva padrona* or *Le donne che commandano*. We thus are confronted with a title structure that involves three levels, only the last of which is conventional: *Commedia per musica* → *Opera seria* → *L’Oranzebe*.

## 3.

A second possibility of creating titles with foregrounded metareferentiality consists in the ‘serious’ indication of the fact that the respective work is a ‘meta-opera’. When surveying the history of meta-operas, we find their beginnings linked to the contextualization of opera production, the ‘poiesis’ of staging. In this way, an opera is not presented

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<sup>5</sup> It premiered in Vienna in 1769. Calzabigi’s libretto for *L’Opera seria* was published in facsimile in Brown, ed. 1984. For a detailed interpretation of the opera, see Griesbach 2000.

on the stage in its ‘finished’ form but in the course of its gestation, dealing with the process of its production, the emergence of art from chaos with all its conceivable incidents, aberrations and contradictions. Many works of the musical theatre are in fact linked to this sphere of the poiesis of the work: instead of a fictional ‘story’, be it comic, tragic or something in between, they rather represent the production process leading to such a ‘story’.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the institutions and functions of musical theatre are in the limelight of such works, which indicate their meta-quality in their titles: examples range from *L’Opera seria* and *Il Maestro di cappella*, an ‘intermezzo giocoso’ by Domenico Cimarosa, to Richard Strauss’ *Capriccio*. Even individual works of avant-garde music still continue to bear titles referring to institutional concepts. However, they do so parodically and thus reflect the decline of the traditional genre system in ‘New Music’. *Staatstheater* (1971) by Mauricio Kagel and John Cage’s *Europas 1 and 2* (1987), both ‘open works of art’, represent this trend. Kagel’s ‘scenic composition’ in nine parts refers to the German type of ‘state opera’ while Cage entitled his works (before the introduction of the Euro currency) with a neologism derived from ‘European opera’ (see Fischer-Lichte 2003).

#### 4.

Yet another mode of eliciting metareference by means of musical paratexts is exemplified by the title structure used by Maurice Ravel for *La Valse* (composed in 1919–1920)<sup>6</sup>. All the numerous waltzes written by Chopin, Strauss and others lack the definite article that Ravel included in the title. *La Valse* is the individual main title of the work, and in this seems to be quite similar to Calzabigi/Gassmann’s *L’Opera seria*. In Calzabigi/Gassmann’s case, however, the definite article defines the genre of the embedded *L’Oranzebe*. Ravel’s title cannot be ‘naturalized’ in this way.

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<sup>6</sup> It had a subtitle – according to an old draft from 1906 written for Diaghilev –, namely “Poème choréographique”. *La Valse* had its concert premiere in Vienna and Paris in 1920 and its first ballet production, realized by Ida Rubinstein, in Paris in 1929.

What does it then mean when we are supposed to hear *the* waltz instead of *a* waltz? Carl E. Schorske interprets the work as a “symbolic introduction” (1980: 3f.) to a historic problem, namely the relationship between politics and psyche in fin de siècle Vienna as, e. g., Arthur Schnitzler and Hugo von Hofmannsthal perceived it – in Ravel’s own words: “J’ai conçu cette œuvre comme une espèce d’apothéose de la valse viennoise à laquelle se mêle, dans mon esprit, l’impression d’un tournoiement fantastique et fatal”<sup>7</sup> (qtd. in Marnat 1986: 472). The unusual title thus indicates a particular reflection on, and homage to, but also defamiliarization of, the genre ‘valse’ and thus qualifies it as foregrounded metareference.

With respect to the music, metaization in *La Valse* is related to those cases in which Beethoven’s ‘scherzi’, in contrast to the meaning of this concept, reveal quite a serious content, e. g., in the String Quartet in F minor, op. 95, characterized as a ‘quartetto serioso’ by the composer himself (see Fischer 1973–1977). Likewise, Ravel did not create a waltz that the audience could dance or listen to in a concert. Instead, and this is on an entirely different level, he created a symbolic vision of tendencies that are connected with this dance and release catastrophic forces. This is evident from the end of the work when *La Valse* builds up to a huge climax that collapses in a cataclysm.

## 5.

A particularly interesting phenomenon in the context of metareferential foregrounding of generic designations in musical paratexts comes into focus when we consider the intentional ambivalence that composers sometimes produce in the generic and formal classification occurring in the titles of their works. Such an ambivalence can often be observed to exist, for instance, between ‘sonata’ (or other established musical forms) and ‘fantasia’ in 19<sup>th</sup>-century compositions. Whenever a critic was either unable to conceive (or uncomfortable in conceiving) a bold innovation in terms of the standards indicated by the work or movement title – e. g., in an account of Beethoven’s Symphony no. 3

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<sup>7</sup> ‘I have designed this work as a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, which, in my mind, is connected with the impression of a fantastic, fatal upheaval.’ [My translation of a passage from Ravel’s autobiographical sketch (1928)]

*Eroica* from 1805 or in a review of Schubert lieder in 1824<sup>8</sup> – the troubled critic replaced the established and approved term ‘sonata’ resp. ‘lied’ by ‘fantasia’ in order to adequately express his experience of ‘aesthetic distance’ (Hans Robert Jauß) with this trope. Robert Schumann thought long and hard about an adequate title for the work that would later become his opus 17 – he considered more than a dozen titles, programmatic inscriptions, even the term ‘sonata’ (see Daverio 1993) – until he eventually titled the work ‘Fantasie’ for Piano in C major. Beethoven, on the other hand, chose an explicitly ambiguous title for the hybrid conception of his opus 27, the “Sonata quasi una fantasia” – Adorno later adopted it for a collection of essays. The title of both piano works (in E flat major and C sharp minor) intentionally preserves the formal tension between opposing tendencies and produces at least a certain deviation from established conventions and thus a more than ordinary paratextual metareferentiality.

Occasionally a foregrounded metaization takes place on the level of a single movement, e. g., if a tempo indication is qualified by a verbal addition. A classic case in point is the ‘minuet’ that is not an ‘actual’ minuet suited for dancing but the formal reflection of such dance music. Beethoven and other composers indicate this by the addition ‘tempo di’. It clarifies that its function is neither dance music nor the usual type of concert music based on dance music but an independent, ‘metaized’ form of dance music (a music that elicits an awareness about the particularities of dance music). ‘Tempo di’, as we find it, for example, in Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in E flat major, op. 31, no. 3 (see Finscher 1967) or in his Symphony no. 8, op. 93, which has also been interpreted as ‘music about music’<sup>9</sup>, is, then, nothing but a shift to another level, namely that of Romantic reflection.

<sup>8</sup> The Beethoven review was published in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (cf. Kunze, ed. 1987: 5), the review of Schubert’s lieder as well (cf. Dahlhaus 2003a: 104).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Goldschmidt et al. 1978: 95–175 for the round-table “Beethoven in der Werkanalyse” at the Beethoven conference 1977 in Berlin with Heinz Alfred Brockhaus (chair), Juri Cholopow, Peter Gülke, Christian Kaden, Diether de la Motte and Frank Schneider discussing the Symphony no. 8.

## 6.

At this point, I would like to digress somewhat into the neighbouring area of literary history and discuss two works from Weimar Classicism, namely Schiller's *Nänie*<sup>10</sup> and Goethe's *Novelle*, before returning to a curiously entitled composition by Luciano Berio. What do the titles of these literary works, a poem and a short story, mean in the context at hand?

'Nänie' is a generic term. In Greek and Roman antiquity it meant a lament for a deceased person. However, the generic function of the term was obsolete around 1800, perhaps even forgotten, so that Friedrich Schiller could use the word for the title of a poem. The lament, in its metareferential function, buried the neo-classical idea of beauty. (It became significant in music history when Hermann Goetz and Johannes Brahms later set it to music; see Hinrichsen 1997.) The poem, in which Schiller bid farewell to poetry, emerged as a poetological text, not as 'Nänie' occasioned by a biographically documented bereavement. Thus the metareferential function of the poetic content merged with the non-metareferential fact that *Nänie* is an instance of a former genre, too.

The title of Goethe's story "Novelle" is also remarkable concerning its reference to the history of the genre in question. In the history of the novella, Boccaccio's *Decamerone* from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century represents a collection of one hundred short stories without a title. They are told on ten consecutive days by seven women and three men, who each narrate ten novellas every day. Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*, twelve short stories from 1613, are a collection of stories each bearing individual hetero-referential titles. When Goethe did not assign a traditional, hetero-referential title to his late piece in fall 1826, his aim was arguably to go beyond traditional generic classifications in subtitles in order to elicit a meta-awareness that clearly focuses on the generic term in its historical context. The text is not simply meant to be just a novella – one among many others – but is also intended to include the meaning of the genre and its compositional idea in itself, thus resembling Berio's *Sinfonia* as we shall see later on. So Goethe gave a definition of the novella in the context of *Novelle*, i. e., as part of its text: "einen so unerwartet außerordentlichen Fall" ('an unex-

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<sup>10</sup> *Nenie* in the first edition.

pected, extraordinary event' [2005: 15])<sup>11</sup>, "vor dem seltsamen unerhörten Ereignis" ('before the strange, unheard-of event'; *ibid.*: 21). Compare this to the definition given in a conversation with Eckermann (January 29, 1827): "eine sich ereignete, unerhörte Begebenheit" ('a past, unheard-of incident'; *ibid.*: 76). The absence of a specific title that enhances the artistic content of the story corresponds very precisely to the requirements of the genre implied in the text of the *Novelle* itself.

Abandoning the two-level structure of the title that used to be typical of the genre, Luciano Berio, one of the great Italian composers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, chose a title for one of his operas that appears to suffer from the same deficiency that we noticed in the translation of 'uomini' as 'Menschen' as well as in the literary titles discussed above. This title is: *Opera*. Is there a trace of metaization in this seemingly absurd formula? Can we compare it with young parents naming their newborn 'Mensch' in a rush of emotions? Not only can we do so, we must. *Opera* is a work in four acts for ten actors, two sopranos, a baritone, a vocal ensemble, instruments and tape, premiered in 1970 at the Opera Santa Fe (a revised version was staged in Florence in 1977). Berio compiled the sources from texts by himself, Furio Colombo, Umberto Eco, Alessandro Striggio, Susan Yankowitz and the Open Theatre. The subject of death permeates all textual layers, insofar as they relate to Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the sinking of the Titanic and to a present-day intensive care unit (as presented by the Open Theatre in the play *Terminal*). As always, Berio plays with ambiguities, a crucial category in his aesthetic, which he sees not as deficiencies in need of remedy, improvement or correction. Originally, the work was not to be entitled *Opera* but *Opera aperta* – a reference to Umberto Eco's book *The Open Work* from 1962<sup>12</sup>. In this context the concept of 'opera' has three meanings: first, the plural of 'work' in Latin ('opus' meaning 'work'); second, the singular of 'work' in Italian; and third, the genre of 'opera', singular in Italian as well as in English. The reduction of Berio's title to just 'Opera' reinforces the ambiguity of these multiple readings. At least the last two of them may serve to elucidate the metareferential quality of the title (and with it, the entire composition in question): the title *Opera* (ironically?)

<sup>11</sup> All translations of Goethe are mine.

<sup>12</sup> See di Luzio 2007. The author offers a detailed discussion of various textual and musical sources Berio used in *Opera*.



indicates that this composition is an, if not *the*, (postmodernist) meta-operatic embodiment of the very idea of the opera as a traditional form of musical theatre.

The metamusical counterpart to Berio's *Opera* in the field of concert music is Berio's *Sinfonia*. This work from 1968/1969 follows a long tradition of vocal-symphonic music since Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 that combines text and instrumental music. However, a comparison between Berio's *Opera* and *Sinfonia* reveals that the relationship of these works to their respective generic context is different: the generic field of *Opera* as a part of Berio's music theatre encompasses several works so that an interpretation in the sense of metaization is inevitable, owing to the singularity of the use of the generic denomination in this exceptional case. In contrast to this, the generic field of *Sinfonia* within Berio's orchestral music has to be restricted to this single work as his only 'symphony' (in five movements, including quotations from the scherzo "Antonius' Sermon to the Fish" in Mahler's Symphony no. 2) so that an interpretation in the sense of a discernible metaization is merely one possibility. Do we, therefore, have to understand the title of Berio's *Sinfonia* as the analogue to Berg's *Piano Sonata*, whose title is less metareferential in spite of the fact that both compositions (as former works) are a composer's 'only child' in the respective genre<sup>13</sup>?

The example of Berio's *Sinfonia* most clearly illustrates a noteworthy fact, namely that we cannot assess the degree of metareferentiality implied in generic titles solely on the basis of logical criteria, because historical considerations also come into play. In Berio's case they have a threefold influence, which renders a metareferential reading of '*Sinfonia*' more plausible than of Berg's '*Piano Sonata*': first, by virtue of analogy, we may establish a link between the case of the symphony and the parallel case of the more overtly metareferential title of the opera since both date from the same period (around 1970). Second, we have to take into account that the concept of genre changes its meaning according to the context in which it appears: it means something different when the genre it indicates still has an actual validity in contemporary composition than when it has lost such validity and may be interpreted as a historical reconstruction. To be

<sup>13</sup> Alban Berg seems to mark a kind of borderline where different interpretations collide, e. g., regarding the question whether the title of the *Violinkonzert* is to be understood as a traditional genre or an individual work title.

sure, music of the 1970s revitalized the traditional categories of genre – even the genre of the ‘symphony’, which was utterly rejected by the contemporary avant-garde, had its renaissance – but Berio did not seem to join this particular tendency, since he wrote all further orchestral works in his oeuvre under auspices other than ‘symphony’. And third, in the composition itself there are many aspects that place Berio’s *Sinfonia* in the sphere of early postmodernism, and this also strongly supports the idea of an emphatic metaization<sup>14</sup> which starts with the very title as a marker of metareferentiality.

## 7.

As a last example, I will turn to a contemporary composer who plays a special role with regard to the issue at hand. Bearing in mind the claim that music can exist only within the framework of genres – despite Carl Dahlhaus’ aforementioned view that the category of genre has declined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century –, I propose that composers in the broader field of the avant-garde, even artists in general, can create their own genres. A case in point would be the Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto with his groupings of works such as *Architecture*, *Colors of Shadow*, *Conceptual Forms*, *Lightning Fields*, etc. (see Brougher/Müller-Tamm 2007) as well as Luciano Berio with his *Sequenza* pieces, solo music for various instruments and one for voice. These types of works and their titles do not fall under the category of metaization as we have discussed it so far.

However, the situation is different when we consider the German composer Dieter Schnebel. During his long career as an avant-garde artist Schnebel has been occupied with the creation of several series of works which he conceived of and entitled in various innovative ways. An overview illustrating Schnebel’s serial-like conception (see *Figure*

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<sup>14</sup> In view of the well-known phenomenon that the avant-garde – particularly after 1950 (Varèse being a forerunner) – preferred titles that were independent of genres, it should be pointed out that Berio still entitled his 1955/1956 composition for string quartet with the generic name; later on, however, he picked the individual titles *Sincronie* (1963/64), *Notturmo* (1993) and *Glosse* (1997), and vice versa, added a *Sonata* (2001) to his *Opera* and *Sinfonia* at the end of his creative life (*Sonata* displays a similar trend toward as salient metareference to genres as such in the title of a composition).

I) shows two groups of arrangements: *Re-Visionen I* (1972–1989) and *Re-Visionen II* (1986–1992).

|      | Title               | Source of the arrangement<br>Instrumentation                                                           | Year               |
|------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| I.1  | Bach-Contrapuncti   | I, VI, XI from <i>Die Kunst der Fuge</i><br>For spatial voices                                         | 1972–1976          |
| I.2  | Beethoven-Symphonie | Symphony no. 5 in c minor, op. 67<br>For chamber ensemble                                              | 1985               |
| I.3  | Webern-Variationen  | Variations for Piano, op. 27<br>For any instrument                                                     | 1972               |
| I.4  | Wagner-Idyll        | Good Friday Music from <i>Parsifal</i><br>For voice ad lib.<br>and chamber ensemble                    | 1980               |
| I.5  | Schubert-Phantasie  | Piano Sonata in G major, D 894,<br>1 <sup>st</sup> movement<br>For divided large orchestra             | 1978,<br>rev. 1989 |
| II.1 | Janáček-Moment      | Quote from <i>Sinfonietta</i> , 1 <sup>st</sup> movement<br>For orchestra                              | 1991/<br>1992      |
| II.2 | Schumann-Moment     | Quote from “Wiegenlied<br>für ein krankes Kind”<br>For voices/wind instruments,<br>harp and percussion | 1989               |
| II.3 | Mozart-Moment       | Quote from Symphony in A major,<br>K 201, Trio from the minuet<br>For small orchestra                  | 1986/<br>1989      |
| II.4 | Mahler-Moment       | Quote from Symphony no. 9,<br>4 <sup>th</sup> movement,<br>mm. 27–24 before the end<br>For strings     | 1986               |
| II.5 | Verdi-Moment        | Quote from <i>Falstaff</i> , beginning<br>For orchestra                                                | 1989               |

Figure 1: Overview of Dieter Schnebel's series *Re-Visionen I* (1972–1989) and *Re-Visionen II* (1986–1992)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This figure follows Krause 2005 and information Dieter Schnebel kindly shared with myself in a conversation in Berlin, September 8, 2008. Originally, Schnebel picked the title *Bearbeitungen* ('Arrangements') for these series, knowing that arrangements on the level of Webern's orchestration of the *Ricercare* from Bach's

The common ground as well as the differences between the two series are obvious. Both cycles (currently) encompass five pieces, each one a tribute to a composer. *Re-Visionen I* is a cycle which is complete in itself and sports five different forms as indicated by the titles. *Re-Visionen II* is a series which is still open for additions and contains, on the other hand, rather brief pieces, 'moments', in a similar manner.

The notion of 'series', exemplified in *Re-Visionen I* and *II*, apparently inspired Schnebel's artistic imagination to create a personal concept of genre so that 'series' becomes (analogous to) a generic denomination (he has in fact created a number of other series). This would result in the paradox of an 'individual genre' by a single composer, and this paradoxicality may at any rate be regarded as eliciting reflections on the notion of musical genre as such and thus betrays a metareferential gesture. In fact, in his – so far – latest series, which is still in progress, Schnebel creates works each of which represents one genre from the broad range of genres of European music history in a highly personal synthesis (see *Figure 2*).

The *Missa* (Dahlem Mass), as a synthesis of traditions in this sense, represents the genre mass – Schnebel's great mass. *Symphonie X*, a monumental work lasting several hours that parallels Pierre Boulez's three-hour *Polyphonie X*, which uses the mathematical symbol for a variable, represents the symphony – Schnebel's symphony. *Ekstasis* represents the oratorio – Schnebel's oratorio. And most recently, the *1. Streichquartett "im Raum"* (2005/2006) represents the genre indicated by its title – Schnebel's string quartet. As can be seen, metareferentiality is here based on the cyclic idea of a 'series' encompassing one single work in all the major genres and most important traditions of Western music. And so this latter series precisely documents the problem at the heart of our question: titles of compositions that do not merely classify the composition at hand with reference to a given genre or which contain any other conventional indication but mark a metareferential composition that, like these titles themselves, elicits reflections on the very musical genre in question.

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*Musical Offering* do not rank behind any original work. However, since the criteria for compensation by the GEMA are much lower for arrangements than for original music, Schnebel used the present title for the series of 'arrangements', a title that is iridescent in a very characteristic way implying transparency (re-vision) of something old, something new created out of something old.

| Title                                                     | Instrumentation                                                                                                                                             | Genre background | Year                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Missa (Dahlem Mass)                                       | For solo voices, two mixed choirs, orchestra and organ                                                                                                      | mass             | 1984–1987              |
| Symphonie X                                               | For large orchestra, four spatial orchestral groups, live electronics and tape; in part 3 additionally: speaker, four solo voices, children's voices, choir | symphony         | 1987–1992<br>2004/2005 |
| Majakowskis Tod – Totentanz (opera fragment and postlude) | Textual collage after Vladimir Majakovsky and Lilja Brik by Dieter Schnebel                                                                                 | opera            | 1989–1997              |
| Ekstasis                                                  | Textual collage [from 12 sources] for soprano, speaker, 2 children's voices, percussion, mixed choir and large orchestra                                    | oratorio         | 1996–2002              |
| 1. Streichquartett "im Raum"                              |                                                                                                                                                             | string quartet   | 2005/2006              |

Figure 2: Overview of Dieter Schnebel's series of a meta-genre that eventually will encompass one work from all major genres of Western music history (state of the cycle in 2008, to be continued)

Nonetheless, not all of Schnebel's compositions are metareferential; in fact there is a difference between metareferential and other works in his oeuvre. It allows one, for instance, to resolve apparent contradictions in the series; such as the number of the String Quartet "im Raum" (see Figure 2) or the fact that the theologian-turned-composer wrote two further masses: first, *Für Stimmen (... missa est)*, a three-part mass from Schnebel's avant-garde period (composed 1956–1969), and second, the liturgical *Missa brevis* (2002). Both the String Quartet no. 2 with the Freudian title *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten*<sup>16</sup> and the *Missa brevis* are occasional and non-metareferential compositions: they were created without the high claim of being autonomous works of art reflecting on their own medium. One can thus arguably say that the idea of metaization, in particular when Schnebel

<sup>16</sup> The second string quartet was commissioned by the 45<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Berlin in 2007, whose subject "Erinnern, Wiederholen & Durcharbeiten: Psychoanalyse und Kultur heute" ('Remembering, Repeating, Working Through: Psychoanalysis and Culture Today) inspired Schnebel's title. The Kairos Quartett and Valeri Scherstjanoi premiered the composition on July 26, 2007 at the Universität der Künste, Berlin.

created a series of 'metageneric' compositions which coalesce into a 'meta-genre', is most pronounced in his later works.

In fact, in his latest series, Schnebel advanced, perfected and suspended (in a postmodern sense) an important project of the musical avant-garde, namely the erosion of the traditional idea of genre as a framework for several works sharing several common (artistic, formal, instrumental, institutional, or aesthetic) characteristics. He did so by apparently creating (at least illustrating) the concept of a 'metagenre': a genre on genres, a genre located on a higher logical level than previous genres that always implied a multiplicity of works. After showing two ways in which one may handle individual series of new music in *Re-Visionen I* and *II* – one a series of various arrangements, the other one a series of similar arrangements in view of the idea of the 'moment' (presenting two ways that already provide an entirely different perspective on the category of genre than the one dominant until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) –, Schnebel's latest series advances the category of genre to its metaization. In fact, he here intensifies metareference to the point that one may indeed venture to entitle it 'Metagenre', since it becomes an instance of a genre of musical genres. No longer a category that forms the basis for many works with common characteristics (whatever they are) – a basis for unlimited productivity –, Schnebel's latest conception of the series turns this category of 'metagenre' into a framework which, on the contrary, restricts the number of possible instances of the individual generic illustrations to one. Should Schnebel, for whatever reason, add to this number and write, for example, another string quartet to summarize the generic tradition, the conception would collapse: another (almost 'normal') genre would hatch from the shell of the 'metagenre'.

To conclude: The denomination 'metagenre' would be appropriate for Schnebel's last series, but has not (yet) been used by the composer himself. It would, however, nicely show to what extent titles of compositions – mostly compositions that in themselves contain metareferential elements – can become a paratextual locus of metareference in or 'at the threshold of' music. As the preceding reflections have shown, contrary to what one may expect from a naive point of view, music, including instrumental music, has various possibilities of entering the 'meta-field' into which other media seem to be able to enter with less difficulties. Metareferential (generic) titles of compositions as verbal paratexts form one important option among these possibilities, an option which in principle is also open to other arts and media.

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“Music about Music”  
Metaization and Intertextuality  
in Beethoven’s *Prometheus Variations* op. 35

*Tobias Janz*

The term ‘music about music’ was introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in a much-quoted aphorism from *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. The aphorism, if read in the wider context of Nietzsche’s ‘Kulturkritik’, points at two closely connected aspects of metareference in music, a phenomenon that has only very recently come under consideration: first, it points at the fact that pure instrumental music can indeed, despite its often mentioned lack of reference to something beyond music, establish something like a distant second level or a meta-level on which music becomes the object of contemplation and reflection. Secondly, it points at a correlation between the phenomenon of metaization and the wider topic of cultural modernity, which Nietzsche presents as a reaction to an experience of loss – the loss of ‘innocence’ or, as one might say with Schiller, the loss of a certain naivety. Beethoven’s works, especially those of 1802 and after, form a rich and highly interesting field of investigation for the phenomenon under consideration. At the same time when the early German Romanticists Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis developed their ideas of aesthetic self-reflection, Beethoven developed strategies of a new and above all self-reflexive approach to musical composition. In this regard, the *Prometheus Variations* op. 35 are of special interest, since they show not only one but many different features that are responsible for the constitution of the above-mentioned meta-level.

## 1. Introduction

*Beethoven and Mozart* – Beethoven’s music often seems like a deeply affected *meditation* on unexpectedly hearing again a piece, ‘Innocence in Sound’, long believed to have been lost: it is music *about* music. In the songs of beggars and children in the streets, in the monotonous tunes of travelling Italians, at a dances in the village inn or on carnival nights – that is where he discovers his ‘melodies’: he collects them together like a bee, by seizing a sound here, a brief resolution there. To him they are *recollections* of a ‘better world’, in much the same way as Plato conceived of ideas. – Mozart’s relation to his melodies is quite different: he finds his inspirations, not in listening to music, but in looking at life, at the liveli-

est life of the *south*: he was always dreaming of Italy when he was not there.<sup>1</sup>  
(Nietzsche 1986/1996: 345)

When Friedrich Nietzsche introduced the term ‘music about music’ in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, he did not incidentally refer to the music of Beethoven. As we can learn from Scott Burnham’s survey of Beethoven’s reception in the past two hundred years, it had been a constant since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to perceive his music as “saying something beyond itself”, as “speaking of different things” (1995: 149). While many 19<sup>th</sup>-century critics did not hesitate to precisely identify what Beethoven’s music is supposedly speaking of with reference to certain extramusical contents (e. g.: heroic narratives), Nietzsche in 1880 seems to have been the first to hear Beethoven’s music speak about, or meditate, nothing but music itself. In a sense, Nietzsche can thus be considered as one of the first to have pointed to the metamusical qualities of Beethoven’s music. Although Nietzsche’s aphorism in no way develops a differentiated theoretical perspective on the problem of metamusic, his observation is nevertheless telling in the context of the ‘Kulturkritik’ developed in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. Moreover, it is of particular interest with regard to the historical understanding of the phenomenon of metaization in the arts.

The two volumes of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* are documents of alienation. In suggestive imagery of sickness and health, Nietzsche distances himself from Romantic art, to which his writings up to *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* were so deeply indebted and which he associated above all with Richard Wagner. In retrospect, Nietzsche later spoke of this anti-Romantic attitude as a diet or a cure, which seemed to be necessary after years of an exhausting devotion to a dionysian conception of art. In this regard, *Menschliches, All-*

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<sup>1</sup> “Beethoven und Mozart. – Beethoven’s Musik erscheint häufig wie eine tiefbewegte Betrachtung beim unerwarteten Wiederhören eines längst verloren geglaubten Stückes ‘Unschuld in Tönen’; es ist Musik über Musik. Im Liede der Bettler und Kinder auf der Gasse, bei den eintönigen Weisen wandernder Italiäner, beim Tanze in der Dorfschenke oder in den Nächten des Carnevals, – da entdeckte er seine ‘Melodien’: er trägt sie wie eine Biene zusammen, indem er bald hier bald dort einen Laut, eine kurze Folge erhascht. Es sind ihm verklärte Erinnerungen aus der ‘besseren Welt’: ähnlich wie Plato es sich von den Ideen dachte. – Mozart steht ganz anders zu seinen Melodien: er findet seine Inspirationen nicht beim Hören von Musik, sondern im Schauen des Lebens, des bewegtesten südländischen Lebens: er träumte immer von Italien, wenn er nicht dort war.” (Nietzsche 1980/1999, vol. 2: 615f.)

*zumenschliches* is one of the many texts after Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (1986) that formulates the idea of an end of art. "Romantic art" appears as a late and degenerate form of art, as "unclear thinking" (Nietzsche 1986/1996: 82), so that art as a predominant medium of culture has to be and will be replaced by science. As Helmut Lethen (1994) has shown, this conception has become an important impulse for what he called the 'kalte Persona', the predominant attitude of the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' some forty years later. It is interesting to note how at the same time as Nietzsche is anticipating ironical and historicist conceptions of art from the neo-styles of the 1920s up to postmodernism (i. e. conceptions of art *after* the end of art), *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* develops a high sensibility for composers of the past who seemed to embody that kind of distance towards music as a Romantic, expressive and dionysian art. Chopin appears as a composer who distantly plays with conventions, genres and styles instead of committing himself to them; Beethoven's music shows a melancholic, retrospective and thus distanced attitude towards the lost innocence of music. Later, Georges Bizet with his *Carmen* would become Wagner's great opponent as a composer of a lighter, yet at the same time stronger, 'southern' music, very similar to Mozart's, which in *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* appears as a dream and a representation of southern life and vitality. Nietzsche's gallery very clearly shows the two directions music can take under the auspices of emerging modernity: either to search for the 'other', for a different, new, vital (in Nietzsche's eyes: 'southern') music, or to play with the available music, be it music of the past or of the street – be it ironically or melancholically.

Less than a hundred years after Nietzsche the metamusical dimensions of Beethoven's music, especially the compositions around 1802, came into the focus of musicological discourse, where they have been discussed in a more specific way, albeit from a completely different critical perspective. Scott Burnham refers to a hermeneutic approach which was introduced by Ludwig Finscher and Carl Dahlhaus in the 1960s and early 1970s, and which, although never developed as a coherent theory and scarcely discussed within an interdisciplinary perspective, has since been quite present as a hidden narrative in German musicology, not only in relation to the music of Beethoven (see Janz forthcoming). Finscher (1967) and Dahlhaus (1974) "have argued" – as Burnham summarizes – "that the predominant feature of Beethoven's so called 'new way' [was] the appearance of a me-

tastylestic agenda” (1995: 149). Dahlhaus pointed to the ambiguity and the ‘processuality’ of certain musical elements in the compositions of the ‘new way’ (the Piano Sonatas op. 31, the Variations op. 35 and the *Eroica* symphony), which in Dahlhaus’ point of view tend to problematize and hence to reflect aspects of musical form, of musical genres or of musical time in general (see 1974, 1979/1980, cf. 1987: 207–222). Furthermore, Dahlhaus developed a rather differentiated explanation of the communicative function behind this form of musical metaization, following Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the ‘implied reader’ and introducing the notion of an “aesthetic subject” as an instance of mediation between the “biographical subject” of the composer and the recipient (1974: 50, cf. 1987: 60–73). This approach then complemented Dahlhaus’ highly influential (see Hinrichsen 2008) conception of the history of composition as a history of problems (see Dahlhaus 1979/1980). According to Dahlhaus’ interpretation, Beethoven’s piano sonatas as a whole are not just music, but music *about* the problem of composing a sonata. This means that in the particular case of Beethoven, one composer’s entire engagement with a specific genre results in metareferential music.

It would not be very difficult to translate Dahlhaus’ interpretation of Beethoven’s ‘new way’ into the concept of ‘implicit musical meta-reference’ under consideration in this volume without changing the outline of Dahlhaus’ argumentation and – of course – without gaining abundant new insights into the music. So why should it still be interesting to return to Beethoven’s *Prometheus Variations* and the phenomenon of metaization in music? My first answer to this question would be that Dahlhaus was indeed right to point to the metamusical qualities as a predominant feature of many of Beethoven’s works, but that he did so within the scope of a rather narrow analytical approach, excluding many features which can play an important role in musical meta-reference. Thus there is both the need and the possibility to go beyond Dahlhaus’ own analyses. The second answer would be that Dahlhaus’ approach is not only narrow with respect to technical details, but also since it restricts the metamusical aspect to the immanent problem of musical genre and precludes the cultural dimensions Nietzsche was so sensible about. The general aim of a study of Beethoven’s metamusical tendencies should therefore be to bring both together, to combine Nietzsche’s ‘Kulturkritik’, which concerns the interdependence between musical meta-reference and modernity, with

a music-analytical approach following and transcending Dahlhaus' hermeneutics.

Since this has to be developed in a wider context and cannot be done within a single article, I will confine myself to just a few remarks about the cultural and historiographic aspect of the topic. For the greater part of this article, I will present a kind of close reading of the variations as an attempt to apply the notion of implicit musical meta-reference to different levels of musical analysis.

## 2. Music 'listening' to its own genesis

Beethoven composed his Variations in E flat op. 35 between April and December 1802. In October, before finishing the score, he offered it to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig, emphasizing that he had written the variations in an 'absolutely new manner' (1996: 126 [my translation]). This 'new manner' would distinguish the variations, as Beethoven specified it in a second letter two months later, both from his own earlier fourteen piano-variations and from those of other composers. In these two letters Beethoven mentioned three criteria for what he called the 'new manner': first the "Größe", meaning not only the physical dimension of the cycle but its ideal greatness, which would allow us to add the piece to Beethoven's greater compositions by giving it an opus number; secondly a specific technique of variation; and thirdly the use of an original theme instead of the conventional use of a popular opera-tune as a basis for a series of variations (ibid.: 145). All these criteria have been discussed intensively, mostly by arguing that Beethoven in op. 35 emancipated the inferior genre of variation through the application of the higher principles of sonata-composition or through the invention of a new technique of variation. This is why op. 35 has frequently been called an origin of the so-called "developing variation" described a hundred years later by Arnold Schönberg (cf. Dahlhaus 1974: 53, Ringer 1994: 288, Stephan 2005: 179). Nevertheless, few critics have commented on the choice of the theme, a choice that is already quite interesting in the context of metamusicality. Around 1800 the composition of variation-sets was divided quite clearly into two different kinds, depending on the respective genre: while variations within the greater instrumental genres of sonata, quartet or symphony were normally based on a composer's

original theme, independent sets of variations, as a rule, took a popular but external theme as a basis for variation. The variation in these independent sets often had a communicative function. Each variation could be heard as a commentary on, or sometimes even parody of, not only the theme at the beginning of the set, but ‘intertextually’<sup>2</sup> the piece of music it originated from. Though the ‘Kontretanz’, which would become the theme of the *Prometheus Variations*, was, as Beethoven told Breitkopf & Härtel, indeed his own invention, it was not newly composed but came from Beethoven’s ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (which had premiered at the Burgtheater one year before) and was furthermore quite obviously derived from a sonata by Muzio Clementi (cf. Ringer 1961: 458). It is revealing that Beethoven, as he undertook to emancipate the variation from its conventional practices, decided to choose a kind of third way between the types of the original variation and the variation of an external theme. Ironically, Beethoven abandoned the convention of the fashionable variation-set on popular tunes, while at the same time fulfilling it by using a pre-existing and popular theme as a basis for variation which, in addition, was neither really original nor entirely foreign. The intertextual essence of the variation-set and its communicative function thereby obtain a rather complicated meaning. Each variation can now be perceived as the composer’s commentary on his own music, which was intertextually linked to the work of another composer. By letting the music point to another work of music as well as the model on which that work was based, the irony behind this self-quotation seems to question the autonomy of the artist, which Beethoven so proudly emphasized in his letter (cf. 1996: 145). Nevertheless, at the same time this self-conscious play with different intertextual references quite obviously serves to underline the very autonomy of the artistic subject.

While the idea of using a more or less original but pre-existing theme as a starting point is an interesting example of multi-layered musical self-reference, the way that Beethoven introduces the theme at the beginning of the set can be seen as an example of musical ‘self-

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<sup>2</sup> In the following, for want of a better expression, I will refer to what could also be termed ‘intermusical’ as ‘intertextual’ (although music is, of course, not a verbal ‘text’).

reflection<sup>3</sup> and as an instance of musical 'metareference' in many respects.

Introduzione col Basso del Tema  
Allegretto vivace

Opus 35

10

1

1

1.

2.

A due

p

poco adagio

Tempo I

f

p

A tre

p

adagio

Tempo I

p

<sup>3</sup> The term 'self-reflection' is used here in terms of the conventional philosophical application of the notion, following Hegel and the early German Romanticists up to Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. This concept of 'self-reflection' is much wider than the one proposed by Werner Wolf in the introduction to this vol. and includes the phenomenon of 'metareference' as one possibility of aesthetic self-reflection. The term 'metareference' is used to mark the media-specific and semiotic function of the phenomena under consideration.



The musical score is for the beginning of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Variations op. 35*. It is written for piano in B-flat major and 2/4 time. The score is divided into two main sections: *A quattro* (measures 1-11) and *Tema* (measures 12-19). The *A quattro* section begins with a complex, rhythmic introduction featuring various dynamics including *sf*, *f*, and *decresc.* The *Tema* section begins with a *dolce* marking and features a more melodic and harmonic development with dynamics like *p*, *f*, and *decresc.* The score includes first and second endings for measures 11, 15, and 18.

Example 1: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Variations op. 35*, beginning (Henle).

The piece (see Example 1) does not start directly with the theme, as would be usual in conventional variation-sets. Instead of the ‘Kontretanz’ from the *Prometheus*-ballet Beethoven begins with an “Introduzione” which, however, does not only lead to the later presentation of the theme but from the beginning presents the theme itself, albeit in the form of a fragment. The “basso del tema” that is heard after a

symphonic E-flat major chord with a fermata, which raises high expectations, is barely more than the skeleton of the later theme. Since the bass pauses for two bars of the 'Kontretanz', in that initial fragment of the theme one 'hears' two bars of silence, interrupted only by a short repetition motive to be played fortissimo. This naked bass alone does not make any sense in terms of proper written music, unless one already knows the original theme or can wait until the complete theme is heard at the end of the introduction. As with the choice of the theme before, Beethoven is again giving up a convention while fulfilling it at the same time: the beginning of the introduction is in a way already the theme as well as not yet the theme proper.

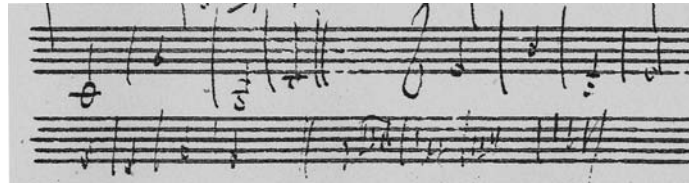
The main idea of the introduction then is to accumulate the four voices of the musical texture one after the other, combining the "basso del tema" in three sections labelled "A due", "A tre", and "A quattro" with new contrapuntal voices each time, while the "basso" is ascending through the gradually widening harmonic space from the bottom up to the top. In doing so, the introduction unfolds a process which can be heard as a reconstruction of the theme taken from the ballet. But one can also hear the introduction as a representation of the genesis of a musical theme in general. It is, however, not only the principle of writing down one voice after the other, which the introduction seems to exemplify, that draws the attention of the listener to the development of a piece of music rather than to its mere presence. Furthermore, there are different elements of the later theme which appear in the sections of the introduction in a state of latency before they are finally concretized in the 'Kontretanz'. In the section "A due", for instance, the upper voice foreshadows the melodic shape of the theme.

To a certain extent, this whole section resembles the workbench of Beethoven's sketchbooks, and a look into the Keßler sketchbook is indeed revealing as it shows Beethoven in search of a music that would sound unfinished, like a work in progress. Among the plethora of unordered ideas Beethoven noted down very rapidly<sup>4</sup> on the last pages of the Keßler sketchbook one can find brief sketches of counterpoint in terms of the Fuxian species-counterpoint<sup>5</sup> using the "basso

<sup>4</sup> For the early sketches of Beethoven's piano variations see Brandenburg 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Joseph Fux' *Gradus ad parnassum* (1725) had been the official textbook in the study of counterpoint in Vienna since the mid-eighteenth century. It was based on a system of species, starting with a counterpoint with one note in the added voice

del tema” as a cantus firmus. Strictly speaking there are sketches in first-species counterpoint (that is, with one note in the added voice against one note of the given voice):



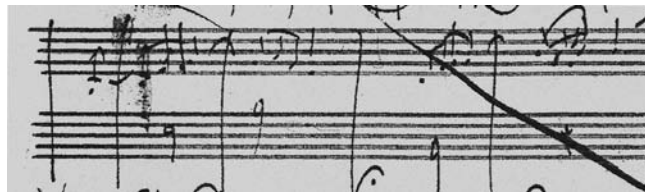
*Example 2a: Ludwig van Beethoven, Keßlersches Skizzenbuch (1976: extract p. 83r), bars 1–4, the lower staff has to be read as treble staff, the upper as bass staff.*

Or, on the same page written in pencil, in fourth-species counterpoint (that is, with continuous syncopation in the proportion 1:2, half notes against quarter notes):



*Example 2b: Ludwig van Beethoven, Keßlersches Skizzenbuch (1976: extract p. 83r), bars 1–4.*

In the first continuity draft of the introduction Beethoven then changed the proportion to 1:4 (half notes against quavers) while keeping the idea of continuous syncopation with a result very similar to Fux’ example for the fifth-species counterpoint:



*Example 2c: Ludwig van Beethoven, Keßlersches Skizzenbuch (1976: extract p. 85v).*

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against one note of the given voice and leading finally to the free or florid counterpoint as the fifth species.



Example 2d: Johann Joseph Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1966: 80).

The reference to the traditional school counterpoint, which is evident in the finished introduction as much as in the continuity draft of the sketchbook seems to be closely related to the general idea of representing the compositional process as musical form, to let the music listen to its own genesis. Since the production as a precondition of the work of art becomes itself a theme and a part of the product, the introduction can be considered as an example of aesthetic self-reflection in terms of Friedrich Schlegels notion of 'Transzendentalpoesie'. Thus Beethoven's introduction is an example of musical metareference, since it directs the informed listener's attention to a reflection about the preconditions of musical composition *in general*.

Apart from that, the "introduzione" with its stepwise reconstruction – or better: construction – of the theme has long been described as a deliberate recourse to the *history* of musical composition (see Flotzinger 1970, Kunze 1972, Heinemann 1992). The beginning with the bass alone seems to recall baroque techniques of ostinato-variation, namely the types of passacaglia or chaconne. The successive introduction of the four voices resembles principles of polyphonic composition, especially techniques of imitation. The treatment of the bass in the four sections uses the old technique of cantus firmus variation, that is to say the bass itself is not varied but the music around the bass-cantus firmus constantly changes. Thus, one can indeed interpret the introduction not only as a representation of the process of composition but also as a recapitulation of music history: in the introduction, the music seems to become not only aware of its own genesis but of the historicity of music as an irreducible fact. What is more, the irony of the introduction makes it very clear right from the start that the historical awareness here is not just retrospective or even restorative but above all a critical one. That is to say, the reference to elements of the history of composition is at the same time a form of a critique of the

old style of composing variations from which the ‘new manner’ of the following set of variations is going to depart. Concerning the formal outline of the variations, this introduction hence functions as a frame, as something external, since it evokes a preliminary stadium of the music as such, i. e., the process of varying the ‘Kontretanz’, which the listener hears subsequently to the theme.

### 3. Digression: Beethoven and early German Romanticism

The connections and indeed the distance between Beethoven and early Romanticism in Germany have only occasionally been discussed (see Longyear 1970, Herzog 1995). Too dominant was the affiliation of Beethoven with the concept of the classical, which indeed was not common among Beethoven’s contemporaries but prevailed from the 1830s while simultaneously the Romantic generation of composers set their course. Carl Dahlhaus may have been right when he spoke of an “inner distance” (1987: 104) Beethoven felt towards the Romantic movement. In addition, it is not clear whether Beethoven was aware of the criticism produced by the Jena Romantics or whether he read more of the literary production of the Romantics than E. T. A. Hoffmann’s reviews in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. It is likewise unclear whether he knew any of Jean Paul’s novels – a poet who was frequently compared to Beethoven by contemporaries (see Bauer 1987). Nevertheless, just at the time when he composed the *Prometheus Variations*, Beethoven got acquainted with a kind of musical early Romanticism via his former schoolfriend Antoine Reicha. Reicha, who after leaving Bonn had been living in Hamburg and Paris, was a radical modernist, but his modernism was strangely mingled with a pedagogical aim. When Reicha arrived in Vienna in the spring or summer of 1802, he had two extremely innovative works for piano in his luggage: the *36 fugues après une nouvelle méthode* and – probably not yet finished – *L’Art de varier*, a cycle of 57 variations for piano. Beethoven must have been irritated by the modernism of Reicha’s new compositions, for in the above-mentioned second letter to Breitkopf & Härtel he spoke in a rather unfriendly and distanced way about his friend Reicha – Reicha’s new method of writing a fugue would mean only “that the fugue is no longer a fugue” (1996: 145). But it has been argued quite convincingly that Beethoven’s ‘new manner’ could also be understood as an answer to Reicha’s modernism, as a conse-

quence of the irritation Reicha's new way may have caused in Beethoven (cf. Finscher 2005: 1467). When Beethoven claimed that his 'new manner' would distinguish his new variations from those of others, he possibly had Reicha's *L'Art de varier* in mind.

The relation of Reicha's variations and Beethoven's two sets opp. 34 and 35 has never been analysed in detail. It is not an intertextual relation in the narrow sense that one has to know one piece to understand the other. However, there has been an obvious influence from both sides. *L'Art de varier* is not only vast in its extension over 57 variations, it is also vast in its colourful mixture of eccentricities. The cycle is a mingling of at times quite bizarre modernisms in every dimension: surprising changes of meter, strange harmonic progressions and, furthermore, a piano texture which in its virtuosity resembles Paganini and foreshadows the piano writing of Schumann and Liszt some thirty years later. In certain variations, Reicha writes in the manner of an ironic historical awareness with references to baroque types such as the gavotte and the fugue. One of the most interesting aspects of Reicha's compositions around 1800 is that his aim was never to merely present bizarre and original musical ideas, but to combine the innovation with an exploration of the preconditions of musical composition. Many of Reicha's titles already point to that dimension, e. g., *Études ou Théories ou Exercices [...] dirigées d'une manière nouvelle* op. 30, (1794–1799 [?]) or the 36 fugues "après une nouvelle méthode", or "*L'art de varier*" (my emphases). With regard to the hybrid and indeed partly metamusical nature of his compositions one can already think of Reicha in terms of the music theorist and the author of an extensive treatise on musical composition he would become years later back in Paris. Together with the aesthetics of contrast, the taste of the bizarre and grotesque (that, by the way, shocked the conservative reviewer of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* [cf. 1807: 141]), the humour and irony of the cycle, and also the self-reflexive recourse to the history of music and composition (note the ironic reference to Bach's *Art of the Fugue* in the title *L'Art de varier*!), this poetological subtext permits one to regard Reicha's works around 1800 as a veritable instance of early Romanticism.

With regard to composers such as Reicha and the musical modernism around 1800, it would be necessary to discuss the notion of a musical early Romanticism (a notion which is conventionally used to set apart Schubert and Weber from the 'high' Romanticism of Schumann, Liszt and Chopin and the 'late' Romanticism of Mahler and Strauss)

once again and in a cultural-historical context<sup>6</sup>. Since early Romanticism as a literary movement is one of the well known ‘hot spots’ of metareference in the arts – just think of genres like the Romantic novel (Brentano, Hoffmann) or the Romantic comedy (Tieck) with their various forms of ‘Romantic irony’ – it is revealing to see composers such as Reicha and Beethoven using very similar techniques in their respective media, in ‘pure’ instrumental music. These correspondences between different media and across the boundaries of quite different aesthetic contexts may point at a metareferential turn around 1800<sup>7</sup>, which was not only a phenomenon on the aesthetic surface, but was rather caused by significant shifts on the level of the episteme as described by Michel Foucault. In musicology little effort has been made so far to link the cultural shifts around 1800 – the ‘crisis of representation’, the emergence of modern subjectivity, the transcendental crisis in terms of Kant’s critiques – to shifts in the history of musical composition and of music aesthetics occurring at the same time. To do so would not only open new perspectives on the history of Western music but could also be a way of bringing the concept of metareference into a diachronic frame.

#### 4. Ironizing the ‘ars combinatoria’

Let us now come back to Beethoven’s *Prometheus Variations*. Musical humour and irony do not only shape the introduction as shown above, but also – and at times quite roughly – the series of the first thirteen variations. Some of them are parodies (no. 1 has been called a parody of a Ländler [cf. Ringer 1994: 283], no. 11 seems to be the parody of an old fashioned dance type and so on). Some of the variations unfold their humour in a weirder and more grotesque style with no direct reference (i. e., nos. 9, 10, 13). For the self-reflexive meta-character of the composition it is interesting to note that, starting with the first variation, the mode of variation is changed immediately in comparison to the introduction. Instead of the old technique of *cantus firmus* variation used in the introduction, Beethoven, from this first

<sup>6</sup> For the notion of a “Präromantik” as an alternative to the classic-romantic dichotomy cf. Dahlhaus/Miller 1999: 33–56.

<sup>7</sup> Lüthy/Menke speak of a ‘self-reflexive turn in the arts’ around 1800 (2006: 8 [my translation]).

variation on, now varies with unchanged harmony. That is to say, the "basso del tema" is no longer the point of reference since the variation now relates to the harmonic structure and the melodic shape of the 'Kontretanz' – the modern way of variation has displaced the old-fashioned style. Of particular interest within this set of characteristic variations is a group of three almost in the middle of the set: the numbers 5 to 7. While the middle variation of this group harmonizes the melody of the theme in the parallel minor mode, the two framing variations are further examples of the ironic recourse to music history already employed in the introduction. Variation 5 combines a rather naive two-part beginning with a surprisingly dense stretto in the middle-section, and variation 7, one of the most interesting of the cycle, goes even further. One key to the understanding of this variation is that Beethoven wrote it at a very late stage of the composition. It is the only one for which no sketches exist in the Keßler and Wielhorsky sketchbooks (cf. Reynolds 1982: 82). Beethoven seems to have written it when the main work on the cycle had already been finished. It is not one of the hastily written ideas of varying the 'Kontretanz', but a particularly self-reflexive variation, written retrospectively with the almost completed cycle in view.

The variation is an octave canon – another reference to compositional techniques of the past, but possibly also a direct reference to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, in which the principle of canon is fundamental for the formal disposition of the whole cycle. In Bach's variations, every third variation is a canon, progressing gradually from the unison to the tenth. The comparison of Beethoven's canon with one of the ten canons of the *Goldberg Variations* is revealing as it shows Beethoven's ironization of polyphonic techniques, a phenomenon which will become an important aspect of Beethoven's late style.

In the 24<sup>th</sup> variation of the *Goldberg Variations* – entitled "Canone all' ottava" just like Beethoven's variation no. 7 – one can see how the principle of canon in a set of variations works. For Bach to write a two-part canon above the figured bass structure of the aria was a way to demonstrate his 'ars combinatoria'. The technical problem was to synchronize the polyphonic structure of the canon with the given fundament of the figured bass. Bach solved the problem by letting the first canonic voice start with the first chord of the harmonic structure and by finishing the imitating voice with the last chord of the figured bass. Due to the imitative shift, the first voice of the canon has to end



before the harmonic fundament reaches the final cadence and thus has to fill in a few notes which are not part of the canon:



Example 3: Johann Sebastian Bach, Goldberg Variations, no. 24, beginning.

Written at a time when the canon was no longer part of serious composition but considered an inferior genre used within musical jokes or on musical greeting cards, Beethoven's canon now obviously fails to synchronize the canonic structure with the harmonic structure of the 'Kontretanz' (see *Example 4*).

The first thing that is awkward with Beethoven's canon is the melodic shape of the imitated voice itself. It is neither a melodic variation of the melody of the 'Kontretanz' (only the endings of both sections show a close relation to the theme, the ending of section two in the canon being literally the ending of the 'Kontretanz' melody), nor an independent melody as in Bach's variation. On closer inspection it proves to be a perfect counterpoint to the Kontretanz-melody, which – of course – is not or only implicitly present in the canon. A counterpoint without its melodic counterpart sounds strange. Moreover, that strangeness yet increases when this isolated counterpoint is imitated in the canonic structure. As an 'implicit' counterpoint, the first voice is permanently connected with the harmonic and metric foundation of the theme. That is to say, the beginning of the upper voice is synchronized with the beginning of the harmonic structure, and its conclusion

coincides with the harmonic and metric cadences of the ‘Kontretanz’. The imitating voice, on the other hand, is constantly shifted against the harmonic and metric structure of the theme with the result that its last notes stumble down right after the harmonic and metric cadence.

Var. VII  
Canone all’ottava

Example 4: Beethoven op. 35, variation no. 7.

Example 5: Beethoven, Piano Sonata op. 106, 4<sup>th</sup> movement, bars 152–167 (Henle).

The effect is that of a musical joke, very similar to the famous retrograde section in the fugue of the *Hammerklavier Sonata* (whose soggetto is also a counterpoint without thematic counterpart; see *Example 5*). In this retrograde section the music does not sound like the result of highly elaborate polyphonic writing but rather like speaking backwards, like pure musical nonsense. In both cases the procedure has to be seen as a paradigm of Romantic irony, since the polyphonic technique is strictly observed, while at the same time the artistic meaning of the technique is undermined quite drastically.

It is revealing that the only negative statement in the extensive review of the variations op. 35, published in 1804 in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, regarded just the canon variation:

Now some remarks for the composer. [...] The octave canon of variation no. 7 is written indeed quite accurately and the polyphonic technique is strictly observed (for only once but deliberately the galant style is replaced by polyphonic writing), but this canon also seems to be quite laboured.

Mr. v. Beethoven would have been well advised not to include this affectation (it is nothing more than that) in these variations. What in a work of art speaks only to reason is at best an hors d'oeuvre. And that feeling will be missing out with this canon, Mr. v. Beethoven will have to confirm by his own feeling.<sup>8</sup> (1804: 338–345, 341 [my translation])

It is easy to say that the anonymous author simply did not get the idea of the canon, that he missed the point of an ironization of a traditional technique. Nevertheless, it is also quite interesting that he labelled the canon an “hors d'oeuvre”; something that speaks only to the intellect and therefore should remain outside the work of art. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to see in this critique an early comment on the function of musical metareference (albeit a negative one), for it speaks of the music as pointing at something beyond itself, as speaking to the listener's intellect and eliciting reflection on poetological problems rather than aesthetic pleasure.

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<sup>8</sup> “Nun noch einige Bemerkungen an den Komponisten. [...] Der Canon in der Oktave Var. 7 ist zwar durchaus, – nur ein einziges mal, aber absichtlich, wird die canonische Form gegen den galanten Styl vertauscht – streng und richtig gearbeitet, aber auch ziemlich – steif.

Hr. v. B. hätte verschmähen sollen diese Künsteley, (da sie nichts ist als das,) hier, in diese Variationen, aufzunehmen. Was in einem Kunstwerke nur zum Verstande spricht, ist wenigstens ein hors d'oeuvre. Und dass bey diesem Canon das Gefühl leer ausgeht, wird Hr. v. B. durch sein eigenes bestätigen müssen.”

### 5. The incongruous emergence of the heroic

Musical humour of that kind defines the set of variations up to variation nos. 14 or 15. Yet the aesthetic meaning of the irony is not understood until, in the finale of the set, the humorous touch of the music turns into a different tone, a more serious style, which may provoke one to speak of a breakthrough to the so-called 'heroic style' in the last part of the cycle. The change in style already happens in variation 14, the minore variation which seems to stop the endless chain of variations quite suddenly. The music pauses for a moment, and the variation appears more like a melancholic contemplation of the previous music, especially the introduction and the theme, than just another link in the chain of variations.

Formally, the minore can be heard as an introduction to the final section of the cycle, containing a slow movement, a three-part fugue and an extensive recapitulation of the 'Kontretanz' with a few further variations. The whole final section plays with the idea of recapitulation and thus has often been compared to the recapitulation in a sonata movement. The minore returns to the combination of the "basso del tema" and the melody of the 'Kontretanz' established in the introduction; the Largo is a richly coloured double of the 'Kontretanz'; the fugue repeats the idea of a polyphonic unfolding of the musical texture starting with the "basso" alone, followed by a complete recapitulation of the theme and another set of two variations. However, the whole recapitulation section is a repetition under different circumstances. It is revealing that the music of the final section not only changes its style or tone but also the employed technique of variation. Again, the minore variation is the crucial turning point as it is the first 'double variation' of the cycle, that is to say a through-composed variation in which each repetition of the two sections of the 'Kontretanz' is varied internally. All of the variations from no. 14 (the minore) on are through-composed variations. Starting with the fugue Beethoven, in addition, neglected to mark and number each variation, which led to much confusion in the correspondence with Breitkopf & Härtel. Particularly the design of the finale, in which the conventional set of variations seems to be suspended and replaced by a kind of free, prose-like through-composition, has been adduced to explain the qualitative leap one has associated with Beethoven's announcement of a 'new manner'. Even more remarkable than the emergence of a new style of composition in the final section is how the whole cycle per-

forms this emergence in a series of three stages: transforming the music first from the old style of polyphonic variation based on a *cantus firmus* to the modern type of harmonic, melodic, and characteristic variation in an open series and then again from that conventional type to the new 'heroic style'. The three different stages of the cycle present three different possibilities of the basic idea of varying a given music. As they themselves vary the common idea of variation they potentialize the idea of variation and thus become an example of what can be called the variation of variation, not only in terms of Arnold Schönberg's notion of 'developing variation', but in terms of a metaization of the principle of variation.

The progress of the piece seems to represent the emancipation of Beethoven's 'new manner', of his 'heroic style', from its predecessors similar to what is typical of the plot of a *Bildungsroman*. However, is the deeply ironic habitus of the first half of the cycle not at the same time a sort of precursory critique of the 'heroic style'? Not only in Beethoven's late compositions can one find forms of a deliberate distancing from the 'heroic'. Already within the works of the 'heroic decade' – the years between 1802 and 1812/1813 – there are numerous compositions which seem to function as a contrasting corrective to the 'heroic' compositions – one only has to think of the Piano Sonata op. 54, written at the same time as the famous "Apassionata" op. 57. Now, in the variations, Beethoven confuses the two manners: the Romantic irony of the first part and the heroic style of the finale seem to mirror each other in a distorted way, making each one a rather incongruous reflection of the other. The fact that Beethoven, in the *Prometheus Variations*, should combine, or even mingle the two sides, the 'heroic' as the emphatically new and critical irony, within one single formal conception, confirms not only the key position of the piece in Beethoven's artistic career, but identifies the variations as a decidedly modern piece: a piece, which brings two main paths of musical modernity into a howsoever fragile balance.

The metareferentiality of the variations op. 35 turns out to be a combination of different semiotic and semantic procedures. A reflection about the medium and the art of composition can be triggered first by the self-referential realignment of the intertextual, respectively intermusical modes of reference, on which the genre of the variation-set for piano is based. It can also be triggered by the reflexivity of the progressing form of the variations; that is by an arrangement of the musical form, which is not only driven by the process of variation, but

applies the principle of variation to the very process itself. Finally, it can be triggered by an inextricable ambiguity between irony (which in the *Prometheus Variations* is at the same time humorous and critical) and the pure affirmation of the heroic. In the former case, the reflection would be a reflection on a musical genre and its social context. It would be a reflection on a technique of composition and the historicity of music in the second case. In the latter case, it would be a reflection on the validity of a particular style, which seems to be the only biographically self-reflexive mode of metareference to be found in the *Prometheus Variations*.

Jürgen Habermas has argued that self-reflection in its wider sense was the imperative of modernity, the consciousness of a culture which "has to create its normativity out of itself" (1990: 7; cf. 6–16 [emphasis in the original]). He also stated that this self-reflexive condition of modernity first came "to consciousness in the realm of aesthetic criticism" (ibid.: 8). If this imperative is also the condition of the modern composer, Beethoven's *Prometheus Variations* may claim a distinguished place in the genealogy of musical modernity, indeed not only in terms of the history of composition, but of the history of culture. To problematize the cultural-historical dimensions of metareference in a more detailed way and beyond the semiotic and media-theoretic problems of the phenomenon seems to be an important task in the further discussion of the topic. For this purpose, the metareferential turn in instrumental music around 1800 could serve as a promising starting point.

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# Exploring Metareference in Instrumental Music – The Case of Robert Schumann

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Applying the concept of metareference is a difficult undertaking when it comes to instrumental music: how can a non-representational medium point to the means by which it is constructed and generate an awareness of its own mediality in the recipient? This paper proceeds from the assumption that, under certain circumstances, instrumental music can be at least implicitly metareferential. I will argue that this is the case in the short middle movement of Robert Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op. 26, which may be regarded as an example of a musical piece that, in containing markers for second-level reflection, triggers a critical evaluation of music's state of representationality in the recipient. To accomplish this, the present contribution also examines to what extent the musical setting of a song from Schumann's *Eichendorff-Liederkreis* op. 39 echoes the theme of illusion and, moreover, tries to connect notions of metareference to Schumann's concept of a music that can be split into several discursive layers.

## 1. Introduction

Upon looking at metareference as a transmedial phenomenon, instrumental music is a difficult case. Unlike any other medium, its referentiality is restricted to an, at best, highly specific and sketch-like dimension, which is why it has become a crucible of testing the possibility of applying the notion of metareference to a non-representational medium. In the past musicologists have often treasured the distinctness of their object impassionately, judging it inappropriate for transmedial comparison with representational media, so that the idea of music, and instrumental music in particular, being part of overarching concepts in the humanities is still an uncommon one for many. Thankfully, transmedial research in metareference opens up possibilities for the discussion of music while still taking into account the latter's undeniable 'otherness'. Trying to find modes of metareference in a medium that generally lacks the capability for hetero-reference may seem like the ultimate challenge in proving the concept's unrestricted transmedial quality – or, to quote a famous line from Frank Sinatra: "If you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere!".

Yet, as Werner Wolf points out in his introduction to this volume and as Tobias Janz and Jörg-Peter Mittmann demonstrate in their contributions to it, instrumental music cannot ride the metareferential train at full speed. As a non-representational medium that merely consists of sound, instrumental music lacks the ability to make meta-reference explicit and thus any occurrence of metareference in instrumental music can only be implicit. In this essay I will examine the ways in which a piece of instrumental music can arguably contain implicit metareference and generate an awareness of its own status as an artefact in the listener's mind. For this purpose I will take a closer look at the Scherzino from Robert Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op. 26 (1839). Schumann has by no means been chosen as a random example but, on the contrary, due to his being a significant figure of German musical Romanticism, in the literary equivalent of which the idea of a work of art commenting on its own artifactuality was anything but unusual. As shall be shown, Schumann can be credited with endowing a musical composition with the possibility of containing a metareferential comment on its own constructedness as well as on music's mediality at large. Despite it being difficult to indisputably prove a metareferential intention on behalf of a composer, I will try to point out several indicators for a metareferential reading of Schumann's piece. While focussing on the question of *how* instrumental music can employ metareference, I will also try to give an explanation for *why* this could be the case by placing Schumann's short middle movement in *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* within a wider scope of compositional problems that it appears to implicitly point to. In order to reinforce my hypotheses on instrumental metamusic, I would, however, like to resort to the Romantic 'Lied', which generically combines language and music, as a starting point for my discussion.

## 2. Boulevard of broken dreams: Romantic song and textual illusion

Those familiar with German Romantic poetry and song will have doubtlessly noticed that one of their recurring themes is 'illusion',<sup>1</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this is 'illusion' in the general sense of an erroneous idea, but not aesthetic illusion (a recipient's immersion in a medial work).

how it can be broken. One may, for instance, think of Wilhelm Müller's famous poetic cycle *Winterreise* (1821–1824) and Schubert's corresponding song cycle op. 89 (1828), in which illusionary deception figures as one of the main themes. However, also Franz Schubert, in setting the cycle to music, marked the theme of illusion through special devices so that music appears to 'disintegrate' throughout the cycle. This becomes apparent in popular *Winterreise* songs such as "Der Lindenbaum" or "Frühlingstraum" that illustrate Schubert's particular way of turning Müller's landscapes into music and thereby enhance its illusionistic effects: the topical world of Romantic poetry's common requisites corresponds to a musical setting that echoes the concept of 'songfulness' (see Kramer 1999) in a most exemplary way. Yet, as soon as these sceneries are revealed to be nothing but illusionary deceits, the music, too, changes abruptly and drifts far away from 'songfulness', which thus also turns out to have been illusionary. This becomes apparent when one tries to sing the darkly brooding middle section of "Der Lindenbaum" or the shout-like second part of "Frühlingstraum", bearing in mind that the songs' first sections had promised an easy task.

Illusion is also an important topic in Robert Schumann's songs and despite their being further removed from 'songfulness' than Schubert's, there still seems to be a tendency to unveiling illusion through music, even when the text does not actually suggest the existence of an illusion. In fact, Schumann occasionally marks certain utterances in the text as illusionary exclusively by musical means: the ballad "Die beiden Grenadiere" op. 49/1 and the last song of *Dichterliebe* op. 48, for instance, both employ texts by Heinrich Heine and disclose the singing personae's statements as illusionary by means of elegiac piano postludes (cf. Brinkmann 2004: 60–62). The harsh manner in which these postludes differ from the pieces' preceding musical characters makes them appear as if they were creating a kind of distance that critically scrutinizes the means of transposing a poetic image or situation into music. In both cases the postludes provide demonstrative alienation from the songs' main parts by breaking down strong rhythmic patterns of great importance to the songs' designs up until the point when the piano takes over. In "Die beiden Grenadiere", the drumroll-like march rhythm, which culminates in the direct quotation of the "Marseillaise", is entirely abandoned in the almost motionless chordal sequence with which the piano closes the composition, while the Andante espressivo that ends "Die alten bösen Lieder" is so funda-

mentally different from the piece's previous character, metric design and key that Beate Julia Perrey has rightfully called it an "ironic glance back" (2002: 208), not just on the song itself but on the whole song cycle *Dichterliebe*. But postludes are not everything: a song may also point to an illusionary content or distance the recipient from a content in the very act of setting a text to music, as can be 'seen' in the penultimate song from Schumann's *Eichendorff-Liederkreis* op. 39, "Im Walde" (see *Example 1*).

This short song consists of two stanzas, which, though interconnected in various ways, considerably differ from one another – textually as well as musically. In the first stanza, Schumann indicates music's capacity to answer the text's tendency to present common, if – as Reinhold Brinkmann has pointed out (cf. 1997: 76) – strangely disjunct motifs of Romantic poetry such as the wedding party, the French horn, a hunt and the evocation of an archetypal landscape by letting the music comment on them in its most illustrative way: the steadily moving accompaniment may well suggest a hunt, while the piano's jaunty inserts point to the use of the French horn in this context. Yet, in accordance with the poem changing tense and its resorting to a 'darker' and more frightful imagery in the second stanza, the music, too, changes considerably; it moves into the distant key of F-sharp major, the piano's inserts fade into obscurity, the continuous antagonism of 'ritardando' (voice) and 'Im Tempo' (piano) is straightened out, and the steadily moving rhythm of quarter and eighth notes is more and more reduced until the piece ends in utter stasis with the original 6/8 meter barely perceptible. Moreover, the return to the song's home key of A major, which plays such a prominent role in the first stanza, is suspended until the final bar, leaving the listener in a state of tonal no man's land. The music has literally travelled quite a way from its early, vivid illustration of the poem's imagery, and the common devices of setting a Romantic poem to music now seem left behind in this 'highly uncanny Abgesang' ("höchst unheimlicher Abgesang" [Adorno 2003: 93]).

Nº 11. **Im Walde.**

Ziemlich lebendig. *mf* *ritard.*  
Es zog ei - ne Hoch - zeit den Berg ent - lang,  
*p* *ritard.*

5

*ritard.*  
ich hör - te die Vö - gel  
**Im Tempo** *ritard.*

10

schla - gen; **Im Tempo.** da blitz - ten viel Rei - ter, das  
15

Wald - horn klang, das war ein lu - sti - ges Ja - gen!

20 *ritard.*  
Und eh' ich's ge-dacht, war al-les verballt. Im

26 *Tempo* *p* *ritard.*  
Die Nacht be-de-cket die

31 *p*  
Run-de, Im Tempo. nur von den Ber-gen noch rau-schet der Wald,

37  
und mich schau-ert's im Her-zens-grün-de,

43  
und mich schau-ert's im Her-zens-grün-de.

Example 1: Robert Schumann, *Eichendorff-Liederkreis* op. 39 (1840)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> 'A wedding party moved along the mountain, I heard the birds sing, when numerous shining huntsmen sounded the French horn in a merry hunt! And ere I'd thought it, it had all faded away. The night veils the scene, while only from the mountains the forest still rustles, and I am shaken to the bone.' [My translation]

It is not overly important whether we understand the birds, hunters and horns of the first stanza as well as the sounds corresponding to them as illusions or as mere recollections of a time past (“Und eh’ ich’s gedacht, war alles verhallt”/‘And ere I’d thought it, all had faded away’); what matters is that illusion as well as recollection are both presented from a distant point of view from which they seem to be critically reflected upon by the music alone, thus approving Hermann Danuser’s recent definition of Romantic reflection:

Reflexion spielt mit wechselnden Identitäten und Ebenen. Gegebenheiten, die fixiert erscheinen, erweisen sich als offen, scheinbar offene als fixiert. Das Subjekt, das eine klare Identität besitzt, verliert sie in dem Moment, da es von einer Spiegelung erfasst wird: Das Bild, das der Spiegel zurückwirft, ist [...] in aller Regel verzerrt, abgewandelt, bringt dasselbe jedenfalls in anderer Form zur Erscheinung. (2007: 475)<sup>3</sup>

To set the breaking of an illusion that is part of a textual representation to music obviously asks for a specific musical mode which is mainly characterised by overt reduction: what first appears metrically distinct becomes unstable, rhythmic motion comes to a standstill and explicitly diatonic constructions get blurred by chromatic or polyphonic devices. In other words: supposedly strong musical formations pave the way for parts of the composition that are decidedly more open than anything that preceded them. The sound of broken illusion can thus be understood as evidently disintegrating the metric and tonal resources that initially constitute a piece’s specific design while at the same time maintaining a certain link to it<sup>4</sup>. Faint echoes of the abandoned ‘regular’ music still appear but are called into question as when

<sup>3</sup> ‘Reflection plays with changing identities and levels. Phenomena that appear as fixed reveal themselves as open, apparently open ones as fixed. The unambiguous identity of a subject is lost, as soon as the subject is mirrored: the reflection in the mirror is [...] usually distorted, modified, and makes the same at any rate appear in a different shape.’ [My translation]

<sup>4</sup> Note Reinhold Brinkmann’s similar observation: “Die zitierten alten Techniken verbürgen gerade nicht Sicherheit und festen Halt, sondern werden im Gegenteil dazu genutzt, durch Umdeutung und Verkehrung ihrer tradierten Bedeutungen Doppelgesichtigkeit, Ungesicherheit, Bodenlosigkeit des Satzes darzustellen. Und dies nicht äußerlich abbildend, sondern als innere Form” (1997: 54; ‘The old techniques quoted no longer warrant safety and a firm grip, but are, on the contrary, used to represent the music’s double-facedness, incertitude and bottomlessness through reinterpretation and reversal of its traditional meanings. And this is done not through imitation of external phenomena but through inner form’ [my translation]).



the piano, e. g., tries to re-emulate the horn calls after “Die Nacht bedeckt die Runde” (‘The night veils the scene’, m. 32), but ultimately fails. Thus the well-balanced musical composition is here used to express illusionary visions or recollections of the past and becomes analogous to the poem, which marks exemplary Romantic symbols as artificially constructed. In this process metareference (to Romantic symbols) occurs, whereas in the case of the Eichendorff setting, it is the text that furthers the recipient’s reflections about both the text and music. But what about instrumental music? Is it also capable of meta-referentially referring to its own constructedness? And what does it actually construct apart from its own inherent structure?

### 3. Music, what is your point? – Instrumental music and hetero-reference

‘Illusion’ is certainly no common term in music theory, and the idea of music reinforcing or destroying an illusion may sound strange to some musicologists, since this would presuppose that music can comment on the truthfulness of a statement. Music has often been regarded as a medium whose artificiality and reclusiveness towards an object world are particularly strong. However, despite its having been prominent since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of music being a purely non-discursive and self-referential medium (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 21) has continually been called into question by scholars who champion the fact that music can, indeed, have a hetero-referential capacity: it can refer to things and events outside itself, but its mode of signifying differs from that of language. Following Nicholas Cook (see 2007), I would suggest at least two separate modes of hetero-reference in music – and especially in instrumental music:

- 1.) Instrumental music can call upon models of what, for lack of a better term, shall be called ‘functional sounds and music’, i. e., music that is usually situated outside or at the margins of the sphere of ‘absolute’ composition as, for example, all kinds of dance music, funeral marches, native folk songs, etc. Music can, furthermore, point to how certain instruments are employed as to their signalling functions – e. g. the notorious posthorn in Romantic music or the sounds of military drum rolls in the piano part of “Die beiden Grenadiere”. In some cases, music even quotes other music, which is particularly true for Schumann, who endowed his instrumental

music with a complex network of quotations and cross-references (see Todd 1994), thus making it a “Hausmusik für Eingeweihte” (‘family music for the initiated’), as Carl Dahlhaus put it (1980: 120). The incorporation of ‘music from elsewhere’ carries a strong referential value and helps absolute music to point to situations, moods or even historic events or people.

- 2.) Throughout the history of music there have always been imaginary catalogues of how certain states of mind are to be presented. Although the Baroque ‘Affektenlehre’ (‘doctrine of the affections’), which provided codified patterns as to how certain emotions were to be set to music for listeners to recognize them, was already considered commonplace in Schumann’s time, modifications of the concept lived on in the classical notion of ‘character’ or in the Romantic idea of ‘Tonfall’ or simply ‘Ton’ (see Danuser 1975, Oechsle 2001), roughly translatable as ‘idiom’<sup>5</sup>. Common to all these concepts is the fact that they rely on systems of convention in which specific musical traits are tied to standardised ways or modes of articulating emotional states. Although critical of ‘character’, Schumann often made use of these catalogues as can be seen in his sophisticated manner of assigning attributes such as ‘ungeduldig’ (‘impatient’), ‘festlich’ (‘festive’) or ‘innig’ (‘heartfelt’) to his piano music in order to indicate how it should be executed. Roland Barthes was obviously well aware of the fact that music has to rely on conventionalised patterns of presentation in communicating certain moods, pictures or connotations to the listener. In reference to Schumann’s famous diary entry from October 17<sup>th</sup> 1833, the night in which he feared he was going insane, Barthes states:

La douleur absolue du fou, Schumann l’a vécue prémonitoirement cette nuit du 17 octobre 1833, où il a été saisi de la plus épouvantable peur: celle, précisément, de perdre la raison. Une telle douleur ne peut se dire musicalement; la musique ne peut dire que le pathétique de la douleur (son image sociale), non son être. (1982: 262)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. especially Dahlhaus’ notion of a special ‘lyrical idiom’ (“lyrischer Ton”) as a signature of Romantic song (1980: 81–87).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Schumann experienced the absolute pain of the lunatic in a presentiment on the night of October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1833, when the most terrible fear befell him: the fear that he might lose his mind. It is impossible to express such a pain musically; music can only express the pathos of pain (its social image), not its essence.’ [My translation]

The referential potential of these devices may not be as strong in music as it is in language, but they nevertheless guide our perception of instrumental music. One may even go as far as asking the question whether music can also function in analogy to what Roland Barthes termed ‘l’effet de réel’ (‘reality effect’; see 1984), in clearly pointing to something outside the formal design of music and thus reminding us of the fact that, despite being highly artificial, music is, in a certain way, still capable of relating and referring to the ontological world. One must, however, bear in mind that all of this is done by way of conventions that demand much more of a specialist’s knowledge than understanding verbal language (especially in one’s mother tongue): we perceive of a movement as ‘dancelike’ or of a theme as ‘spooky’ and ‘shadowy’, when certain historically conventionalised musical patterns are employed. In referring to a movement as ‘funeral march-like’, to a theme as ‘heroic’ or to a fast moving accompaniment of 16<sup>th</sup>-notes chains as ‘impatient’ we seem to identify qualities inherent in the music itself, while, here too, our perception depends on acts of highly sophisticated social conventionalisation. Musical devices can thus acquire a status of “zweite Natur” (‘second nature’), as Dahlhaus (1982: 137f.) has called it, shaping the general as well as the scholarly discourse about music, which explains why we apparently often tend to assign referential value to absolute music. Musical character and ‘Tonfall’ can, in fact, trigger in the recipient an awareness of music as a second-order semiotic system that is in itself constituted by artificially organized sounds – and this is exactly what some of Schumann’s instrumental works point to in a metareferential way.

#### 4. A tale of two levels – inside and outside Schumanns’ music

What I would like to show in the following is that, in certain compositions, Schumann employs mechanisms of metaization, i. e., that the respective pieces contain a metareferential level on which, as Werner Wolf puts it in the introduction to this volume, “first-level thoughts and utterances, and above all the means and media used for such utterances, self-reflexively become objects of reflection and communication in their own right” (21). Such a meta-dimension can be ascribed to Schumann’s apparently splitting his pieces into multiple discursive layers, thus generating the notion of there being an ‘interior’ and an ‘exterior’ side to his music. Schumann’s aforementioned fondness of

quoting can be seen as an expression of this tendency since the intra-systemic references to other musical works challenges the notion of a musical piece as a self-contained whole. An example would be the Symphony no. 1, op. 38, in which the main theme is introduced as external at the beginning of the first movement and only sluggishly becomes integrated into the movement's thematic process as it passes, thus coining a notion of musical process that is remarkably different from the organic development so well known from Beethoven's sonata form compositions. Or one may call to mind the famous *Fantasie* op. 17 with its fully unexpected insert of the outlandish section labelled "Im Legendenton", which marks a sudden shift to a completely different realm of music midway through the composition, where absolutely no formal necessities call for it<sup>7</sup>.

As early as in 1981, Manfred Hermann Schmid referred to this phenomenon in his book *Musik als Abbild*, noting that 19<sup>th</sup>-century music tends to signify in two different ways; on the one hand by pointing beyond itself and on the other hand by disclosing second levels of meaning that are only obvious to the sophisticated recipient so vividly imagined by Romantic aesthetics. I have already mentioned "Im Walde" as an example of how music can distance itself from itself and thus make some of its own parts appear 'external' as if they were quotations. Musical idioms are rendered illusionary and constructed by contrasting an object-level that operates with tonal 'reality effects' such as, e. g., the post horn or the hunt rhythm, to a meta-level, where these effects are called into question. Closely related to this is the musical 'Subjektpaltung' ('subject fissuring') Hermann Danuser (cf. 2007: 473f.) has detected in Schumann's works: while compositions from the classical era strongly rely on a unifying 'aesthetic subject' (cf. Dahlhaus 1987: 60–73) that functions in a roughly analogous way to a narrator organizing the individual parts and characters of a story into a unified whole, this authority was shattered by Romantic thought and poetics. As in Romantic novels, the 'aesthetic subject' in music did not remain the guiding master of the work in question but became an object of criticism. We can thus hear several contradicting voices in

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<sup>7</sup> Recently Hermann Danuser has analysed this section as a musical mise en abyme, calling it an "Ereignis außerhalb der musikalischen Zeitprogression" (2007: 489; 'an incident outside the music's temporal progression'[ my translation]), thus providing another example for how Schumann's music can be split into inside and outside levels.

Schumann's music: one sings out loudly, while another criticizes just that, and we are left puzzled as to which one is more trustworthy. It is here that matters of context (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 26) come into play, as Schumann was strongly influenced by the ideas of literary Romanticism in which metaization is a well-known phenomenon (see Dill 1989). Despite there being no general agreement among musicologists on the matter, I am quite sure that Schumann was well aware of contemporary theories of 'self-consciousness' as well as of Romantic aesthetics, in particular as mediated through the works of Jean Paul and E. T. A. Hoffmann, both of whom he admired. Schumann was thus most certainly not only familiar with the literary phenomena of unreliable narrators and ever changing narrative perspectives, but also with the metareferential concept of an artwork triggering in the recipient a critical attitude toward itself and an awareness of its artifactual constructedness. For this is indeed what (at least some of) his compositions do.

##### 5. Staged artificiality: *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op. 26

An example of how Schumann's music indeed acquires a metareferential quality would be a piano composition from 1839, the *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op. 26 (see *Example 2*). This five-part composition subtitled *Fantasiebilder für Klavier* is among the last of the poetic piano cycles that constitute most of Schumann's work from the 1830s and has mostly been discussed for its strong links to Schumann's biography (see Krones 2005). Between October 1838 and April 1839 Schumann lived in Vienna and unsuccessfully attempted to establish his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* there. The *Faschingsschwank* has generally been considered Schumann's musical answer to his unfortunate experiences with censorship in Austria.

The first movement, once more, quotes the forbidden "Marseillaise" in order to make the piece point beyond itself by calling attention to Metternich's dubious political practices. In more structural terms, the piece's unique formal design has been described as a sonata cycle turned upside down, beginning with a Rondo and ending with a virtuosic sonata form movement (cf. Edler 2006: 240f.). The three middle movements, a Romanze and a Scherzino followed by an Intermezzo, have generally received less attention. It is the Scherzino, however,

that I will examine in the following, as I consider it an example of metareference in instrumental music.

### III. Scherzino.

M. M.  $\text{♩} = 112$ .

9

17

24

32

40

48

56

*Pedal.*

*ritard.*

The musical score is for the 3rd movement, 'Scherzino', of Robert Schumann's 'Faschingsschwank aus Wien' op. 26. It is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major, and consists of 120 measures. The score is divided into two main sections: a piano (p) section from measure 57 to 109, and a forte (f) section from measure 110 to 120. The piano section features a delicate, flowing melody in the right hand, often accompanied by a simple harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The forte section is more rhythmic and features a more active melody in the right hand, often with a more complex accompaniment in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as p, pp, and f, and a tempo marking 'accelerando' at measure 120.

Example 2: Robert Schumann, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op. 26, 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, Scherzino (1839).

Upon first listening, even a casual listener will surely notice that this piece ends in a very different manner than how it begins. But how does it begin? With a catchy melody that might very well keep ringing in other listener's ears as obtrusively as it did in mine. It is indeed dancelike and seems far removed from the world of through-com-

posed art music, mainly because it contains almost no hints of development whatsoever. Compared to other scherzo themes of the time, this one seems demonstratively simplicistic, its short two-bar phrases being almost alike and returning to the tonic of B-flat major quickly, leaving hardly any room for harmonic contrast, while actually differing only in register. While much older scherzo themes, by Haydn for instance, contain decisively more development of motivic cells, moving a motif through several harmonic states and modifying parts of it to generate musical suspense, none of this is to be found here. Other chords than the tonic are but occasionally touched upon, and as if to demonstrate the theme's inherent lack of developmental potential, the four bars are repeated as if negating any expectations regarding future development except the most formulaic one. In fact, compared to other Schumannian themes, for instance that of the following Intermezzo, in which a literal urge for development is palpable, this piece leaves not much more to expect than a contrasting middle section in the manner of a small contemporary social dance tune, and indeed this is just what follows. The following middle section is only slightly contrasted by generating a different motion through repeating the uprising metric formula of the first measure and by featuring the accentuated tonic chords in m. 12 and m. 16. There are, however, still no prospects for developing a continuation as would, e. g., be spinning off parts of the theme, changing its direction through inversion, etc. However, at the moment in which the strong formulaic outlook of the piece leads us to expect little more than a return to the main theme (m. 17), things change considerably. The basic motive of m. 1 is separated into two layers and starts to modulate through a considerable wealth of keys for no less than thirty-two measures. This inappropriately long sequence seems like a staged breakaway from the restrictive structure of the theme, now giving back to the music what it lacked most: harmonic change. Nevertheless, development is no main issue here either: the short motive is perpetuated without any apparent effect, continuing for much longer than actually suitable for such a blatantly uninventive section. What is thus laid bare and pointed at here, is the strictly formulaic character of this very part of the composition, an effect Schumann achieves by almost unnoticeably changing perspectives: when, after sixteen measures of downward motion, the motivic chain starts to rise again, enriched through octave trills in the left hand for eight measures, it seems to have turned into the piece's main event, leaving the listener only with shallow



recollections as to how the Scherzino started out. When the main theme returns in m. 49, it thus appears like an external interference, especially since it occurs in the remote key of A major of all things! It is, however, not only the audibly unfamiliar key that makes these eight measures appear alien to, or lying 'outside', the overall compositional proceedings; this effect is also caused by the unexpected return to the home key's dominant F major, which occurs by way of a chromatic shift of the relative dominant E major in m. 56 that makes this part seem as though it were either 'tested' for efficiency or rendered by an unreliable 'aesthetic subject' governing the music's progression in a questionable way.

In what appears like an attempt to set things straight, a shortened main theme reappears in the tonic (m. 57). After a return of the middle section, confusion is, however, restored, when a new character is introduced, consisting of monolithic chords oscillating between subdominant and tonic (mm. 68f.) and incompatible with the previously established metric pattern of the piece (hence the strange double bar line). For a moment the listener is metrically left lost with the sforzato octave in m. 84 falling strangely between the events like an exclamation mark. Then another return to well-known areas occurs (mm. 85f.), this time leading to an unexpected dissolution of the as yet untouched main theme, the authentic cadence of which is isolated and repeated four times, signalling its terminal abandonment (mm. 93f.).

While what we have encountered so far can also be attributed to the scherzo traditionally being the movement of witty play with the listeners' expectations, Schumann now definitely moves beyond tradition as he ends the composition by sketching three different solutions to the question of how to bring this untidy piece of music to an end: a chordal sequence – again touching far out keys such as B major (mm. 97–104) –, a jumping closing figure derived from the main theme's first measure (mm. 105–115) and a clumsy canonical section (mm. 116–121). En route, the piece, which has been characterised by a strong forward motion up to now, slows down twice: first in the erratic chords the direction of which is rather elusive at first hearing, and then again by rests which extend over entire measures before separating the second and third attempts at closure through a repeated cadence, both letting the music drift strangely out of time. Schumann thus moves away from the main theme in three different directions, none of which bring the movement to a truly satisfactory end so that only an accelerating octave run, which might as well have come from

a completely different piece of music, is able to 'shut the door' at last. Schumann introducing a new, entirely extraneous musical idiom to his Scherzino as a closing gesture is so salient a deviation from compositional norms that the informed listener is led to ultimately recognise the intentional foregrounding of the problems a composer apparently faces when having to integrate disparate musical elements into a unified whole and upon finding an adequate conclusion. In *Faschingschwank aus Wien* this problem remains unsolved as the polyphonic last section is so bizarre and extraneous that it can hardly be accounted for by explanations of formal expansion or play alone.

What Schumann stages here is a bemusing multi-layered play which may be said to be metareferential in laying bare compositional conventions through salient deviations. While the main theme remains untouched in its monolithic dance character throughout, thus appearing as something external and uninvolved in the movement's process, the other passages unsuccessfully try to lead away from its self-sufficient design and generate a development that, however, results in nothing but a single surprising shift of key without having any structural consequences on the theme. At other points, the music breaks down completely, thus letting the hermetic character of the dance theme appear as something resembling an illusion. Musical dead-end streets such as the meandering chordal sequence or the isolated cadences carry the music to a second level from where they appear like 'utterances' shedding critical light on the main theme's potential to govern the movement as a coherent whole. These instances of tonal aimlessness can be seen as blank spots pointing to the lack of developmental potential that makes this piece so difficult to navigate. The main theme, which seems so natural and dance-like to the listener as though it came directly from a Viennese carnival dance, is unmasked as a musical 'reality effect', which in truth is as artificial as the rest of the *Faschingsschwank*. Here we encounter another case of what Hermann Danuser has termed "inszenierte Künstlichkeit" ('staged artificiality' [2000: 134f.]); and the practice of staging is indeed essential: the main theme is not immediately sizable for the listener but lifted from the music surrounding it in order to be critically examined and evaluated. What John Daverio has said of Schumann's *Papillons* op. 2 also applies to this composition:

Arranged in an eccentric sequence and projected through a fragmentary consciousness, these dance-based conceits emit a peculiar and at times disturbing

aura. In a word, they are metamorphosed into *emblems of incomprehension* through the agency of the fragment. (1997: 88 [my emphasis])<sup>8</sup>

Schumann provides the listener with clues for a reading of the piece that goes beyond affirmative reception by activating a secondary frame, in which instrumental music's mediality and representationality become objects of awareness and reflection. And although the term doubtlessly points to something more than that, it is quite telling that Schumann had at first planned to provide the *Faschingsschwank* with the subtitle *Schaustücke für Klavier* ('Showpieces for Piano'), in which demonstrative showing plays an important part indeed and at the same time reveals the mode used for implicit metareference.

#### 6. Achieving critical awareness – Schumann and metareference

As Werner Wolf points out in his introduction to this volume, metareference is, as a rule, non-accidental and relies on signals put into the work deliberately by an author-figure (cf. in this vol.: 26). If Schumann thus really employs means of metareference in *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* by making certain parts of the music point to the constructedness of other parts as well as of the piece as a whole and if he denotes the compositional problems that result from incorporating an external musical character, why does he do so? I believe that the reason can be found in his critical attitude towards musical character and in his intermedial concept of a 'literary music'. The notion that certain musical effects can simply be elicited by employing devices from a compositional toolbox, be it 'Affekt' ('affect'), 'Charakter' ('character') or 'Tonfall' ('idiom'), was fundamentally opposed to Romantic notions of the composer as a world-creating genius<sup>9</sup>. Schumann's concept of a poetic music denounced the musically picturesque, relying instead on the idea of referring to the outer world only by way of the composer's impression, or, as Arnfried Edler describes it:

<sup>8</sup> Of course, this procedure is also closely related to the Romantic idea of the fragment that depends on loose ends and fragile moments as points of connection for an independent recipient.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Oechsle's observations on the effect of prefiguredness evoked by works employing 'Ton' (2001: 174).

Hier wird aber das geschildert, was Novalis als Poesie bezeichnet hatte: Darstellung der Vorgänge des Gemüts, der 'inneren Welt'. Bei Schumann konstituierte sie sich in inneren Bildern, Visionen, die während des Zustandes der 'Empfängnis' von Musik auftauchen, wachsen, sich in ihren Konturen verdeutlichen. Von solchen Visionen 'erzählt' die Musik ohne alle illustrative Absicht und ohne in ihrer Autonomie eingeschränkt zu werden: die Bilder sind unwillkürliche Begleiterscheinung, nicht Anlaß der Aktivität der musikalischen Phantasie, die zwar äußere Anregungen gern und willig aufgreift, jedoch um sie zunächst in den Fundus der Innenwelt zu versenken (sie zu 'er-innern'), aus dem sie dann irgendwann als 'Er-innertes' in poetischem Zustand aufsteigen. (1982: 92)<sup>10</sup>

In this respect the *Faschingsschwank*'s subtitle *Fantasiebilder* is telling indeed: music can only reproduce an impression of certain feelings or inner movements and is never capable of directly naming them. Taking this into consideration, Schumann follows an aesthetic in which an objective representation of something outside music is virtually impossible, or, as Schmid puts it: "Zwischen Schumanns Musik und ihr Publikum schiebt sich ein drittes Medium, der Komponist als subjektiver Hörer"<sup>11</sup> (1981: 27). This composer-listener cannot, however, avoid using conventionalised musical units that have gained a status of 'second nature' but foregrounds them and marks them as something 'external' in order to finally trigger an awareness of the medial limitations of music in the recipient. Metareference in the *Faschingsschwank* Scherzino thus serves a decidedly critical purpose: Schumann was anxious to make his poetic music evoke not a stereotyped but an individual reaction in the listener, and the problem of how to achieve this in a medium, in which certain idioms and formations are conventionalised so much that they always seem prefigured lies at the heart of the piece we are discussing.

In the paratexts there are, admittedly, no explicit markers of metareference since the work's as well as the movement's titles both rather

<sup>10</sup> 'What Novalis termed Poesie is described here: the representation of mental processes, of the "inner world". For Schumann they constituted themselves in inner images, visions that come up during the state of "conceiving" the music, then grow and sharpen their outlines. Music "tells" about such visions without any illustrative intent and without sacrificing its autonomy: the images are involuntary by-products, not motivation for the activity of musical imagination, which indeed gladly and willingly takes up external stimuli to first plunge them into the storeroom of the interior world (to "re-collect" them) from where they eventually rise again as "re-collections".' [My translation]

<sup>11</sup> 'A third medium inserts itself between Schumann's music and its audience: the composer as subjective listener.' [My translation]

point towards a carnivalesque reversal of rules and thus seem to refer to the standardized humorous play with formal expectations that is representative of scherzo movements but not necessarily metareferential. One may thus miss any potential metareferential dimension of the piece but still make sense of it. However, as metareference often relies on the idea of double-codedness, both interpretations can stand alongside each other. In these interpretations, a possible reading of this musical piece as being – at least in parts – implicitly metareferential would be based on: a) the notion that certain parts of the music appear to critically distance themselves from others, and this in a way exceeds expectations triggered by the genre ‘scherzo’<sup>12</sup>, b) the existence of an object- and a meta-level and c) on the evocation of an awareness of the work’s medial status in the recipient, making music’s precarious state of representationality the object of conscious attentiveness, thereby relying on a specific type of active recipient who is willing and able to see the meta-dimension. Whether or not this may also account for a general musical ‘crisis of representation’ in Schumann’s time still needs to be investigated.

## 7. Conclusion: Metareference on Broadway

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to point out and examine signs of metareferentiality in a piece of instrumental music. The crucial question that remains to be asked is: was it really worth the effort? What I regard as an instance of implicit metareference in instrumental music may, admittedly, be difficult to detect and become convincing only through extensive explanation of contextual intramusical problems not directly recognizable to most recipients. Due to its specific representational nature, instrumental music is also unlikely to display as strong and dominant a metareferential dimension as, e. g., paintings by Magritte or passages from *Tristram Shandy*. What Schumann does in the Scherzino is for me, nonetheless, reminiscent of the metareferential notion in Magritte’s “L’Inondation” as discussed by Werner Wolf (cf. in this vol.: 48 and *Illustration 3*): familiar and well-known shapes are partly exposed, but left incomplete and resolve into nothingness, thus making the recipient aware of the ‘wholeness’ (s)he is

<sup>12</sup> For a similar combination of humour and (potential) metareference cf. Wolf’s discussion of Mozart’s “Ein musikalischer Spaß”, K 522 (2009, forthcoming: sec. 4).

accustomed to. From this perspective, notions of metareference could prove essential to an understanding of the *Faschingsschwank*'s middle movement, the marked deviations being its main issue. This might even explain why it has been so rarely investigated up to now.

While I was travelling to the conference on metareferentiality in Graz, the Cole Porter tune "Let's Do It" kept coming to my mind. In the usual charming Porter fashion, the song is concerned with the ubiquity of falling in love: "Birds do it / bees do it / even educated flees do it / Let's do it / Let's fall in love!" In my mind, I kept adjusting the lyrics to the conference topic and if I were to stage a big meta-show on Broadway, it would certainly feature this tune: "Books do it / films do it / even operas and plays do it / How about music? / Does it do it too?" – and at this point I would like the orchestra to answer with a bright major cadence, not literally saying but quietly insinuating an answer in the affirmative.

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Phantasmic Metareference  
The Pastiche ‘Operas’ in Lloyd Webber’s  
*The Phantom of the Opera*

David Francis Urrows

Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (London, 1986) presents an interesting case of metareference. A so-called megamusical, it is a popular musical theatre piece in which opera itself is a kind of character, and which refers on many levels to opera, operatic conventions, and specific operatic musical styles. Departing from Gaston Leroux’s 1909–1910 novel, in which actual operas (notably Gounod’s *Faust*) function as important plot devices, Lloyd Webber and his librettists created three pastiche ‘operas’, parts of which are heard and seen in the course of the musical. These fragments themselves play important intracompositional roles in the plot. However, outside of the diegetic context of the musical’s story, they also possess extracompositional qualities which reference musical, historical, and dramatic events, as well as musical styles, repertoires, and even specific works. These metareferential aspects are amplified in the 2004 film version, where the cinema audience is able to observe not only the ‘operas’, but also the opera ‘audience’ within the production. Whatever one may think of Lloyd Webber’s music, these are provocative exemplars of what has been called ‘inter-musical system reference’. Here, in this case study, I propose a new category for evaluation, which I call ‘uncritical musical metareference’, or even ‘destructive homage’.

I take my cue from Werner Wolf’s article “Metafiction and Metamusical: Exploring the Limits of Metareference”, in which he mentions that “in all kinds of vocal music, metareference is not much of a problem” with regard to the limits alluded to in his title:

[...] thanks to the support of verbal language [...] songs can use explicit metamusicality by thematizing singing and music making, and metaoperas (such as Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, or Richard Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos*) and metamusicals (such as *The Phantom of the Opera*) can comprise extensive comments on, and presentations of, musical and operatic activities. (2007: 309)

To this list one could add of course, and I might just mention Hans Pfitzner’s much-neglected *Palestrina*. But what arrested my attention was the mention of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s 1986 *Phantom* in such august company. Lloyd’s Webber’s *musical* is more than that: it now

belongs to the category of ‘megamusical’. Such megamusicals, according to Jessica Sternfeld in her recent study, usually originate in Europe and are distinguished from earlier “golden age” musicals by “a sung-through score with no spoken dialog, lavish and complicated sets, and an extremely emotional, larger-than-life plot” (2006: 9). Sternfeld traces the megamusical from Lloyd Webber’s *Jesus Christ, Superstar* (1971) through all of his other hits, including *Cats* (1981) and *Phantom*, to *Aspects of Love* (1989) and *Sunset Boulevard* (1993), as well as to an expanding, international genre no longer confined to Broadway or the West End, including *Les Misérables* (1980) and *Miss Saigon* (1989). But *Phantom* is distinguished from the others by its *metareferential* qualities.

Wagner had no problems putting the *Lieder* of the Mastersingers into his opera: people sing songs in opera all the time. Pfitzner summoned an angelic choir to sing to Palestrina, composing his mass at the end of Act One of his opera – but such things happen in opera. A *musical* about opera, however, poses certain obvious practical and theoretical problems: how to get the ‘opera’ into the musical? Opera and the Opéra Garnier are such important figures – almost characters – in Gaston Leroux’s 1909–1910 novel<sup>1</sup> that it is hard to think how with the limitations of Broadway theater orchestras, the musical abilities of the singers generally employed, and the generic and cultural expectations of musical audiences, an adapted musical about *opera* could be successful. Here it might be pertinent to briefly trace some of the more important adaptations of Leroux’s novel and their salient departures, concisions, and expansions of his story, which fed into a more general mythological and popular entity called ‘The Phantom of the Opera’, and upon which Lloyd Webber’s musical greatly depends to get around this stumbling block.

It goes without saying that a novel about an ‘opera ghost’ must be as much about opera as about the supernatural. The more so since Erik the Phantom is only pretending to be a ghost, although he does in fact live a troglodyte existence below the Paris opera house. In the novel specific operas function as plot devices: they provide a journalistic verisimilitude, as one would expect from Leroux (1868–1927), who once worked as a court reporter. But on a deeper level the operas Leroux chose to link to his plot also have obvious reflexive roles to

<sup>1</sup> Serialized in the magazine *Le Gaulois* between 23 September 1909 and 8 January 1910. Published (in French) in book form 1910; first English edition 1911.

play. Gounod's *Faust* as well as *Roméo et Juliette* and Verdi's *Otello* are not only diegetic parts of the story but function reflexively on the subtextual level, underscoring and mirroring the highly romantic and operatic plot itself<sup>2</sup>. This mise en abyme has been greatly amplified in the numerous subsequent film and stage versions, as they themselves create distinctly framed 'representations within representations', ones which are perhaps not so clearly apprehended or differentiated in the novel.

The story of the tortured, deformed genius Erik the Phantom, his beautiful if tormented protégée Christine Daaé, and her inadequate lover the Vicomte Raoul de Chagny, draws greatly on the Faust myth and, in John Flynn's view, other "familiar stories of struggling, passionate artists and their demonic pacts" (2001: xi). In this sense, it also draws on the ancient story of Orpheus and Eurydice, as well as that of Phineus, "who loses his betrothed Andromeda to the handsome Perseus because he cannot invoke the muse of lyric poetry (Euterpe) to save her from the sea monster" (ibid.: x). In these stories a man defies fate and the gods and confronts the shades of Hades for the love of a woman. Closer to home (or at least to France) the fable of Beauty and the Beast is also a probable source of archetypes for the story. These "parables of human presumption" are united by their "challenge to the natural order of things" and "contribute much to our understanding of the circumstances behind Erik's tragic tale" (ibid.: xi). As E. T. A. Hoffmann put it so succinctly: 'The lyre of Orpheus opens the door to the underworld'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The commonly available 1911 English translation by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (1865–1921) is in fact an abridgement and concision of Leroux's novel, containing only about seventy-five per cent of the original text. This is a fact (apparently) not noticed by Lloyd Webber, his librettists, or even by many English-speaking writers and scholars who have examined the topic of the various adaptations of *Phantom*. While de Mattos' translation is for the most part very good, he has a tendency towards paraphrase where he does not omit sentences or even entire paragraphs. A number of important details regarding the nature of music as a reflexive element in the story and of the nature of Erik's 'compositions' are only to be understood when one reads the passages in question in full in the original French. As a result, I have felt it necessary to give quotations from the novel in both languages. Where de Mattos' translation is inadequate or nonexistent, I have supplied my own. I would here like to thank my colleague Frédérique Arroyas for reviewing my French translations.

<sup>3</sup> The usual aphoristic English rendering of Hoffmann's "Orpheus' Lyra öffnete die Tore des Orkus" from his essay "Beethovens Instrumental-Musik" (1960: 41). See

In addition to the novel's origins in popular myth, the presence of Gounod's *Faust* as a major reflexive ingredient raises the suggestion that Leroux may have been influenced by early silent movie treatments of the Faust story. These began as early as 1897, when the Frères Lumière filmed and released two short scenes from the first act of Gounod's *Faust*. This early effort was followed in 1904 by Georges Méliès' *Faust et Marguerite*, which Rose Theresa has called "one of the most famous, and most thoroughly documented of the adaptations of Gounod's opera" (2002: 9). Here in this early silent film, the sets, costumes, blocking, and choreography were all based on the Paris Opera productions. Three years later, in 1907, Alice Guy directed a *Faust* movie for the Gaumont Company. In this so-called chronophone (or phonoscène), twenty-two scenes were filmed and distributed with a wax cylinder for each scene apparently containing the appropriate parts of the score. In 1909 Edwin Porter directed a *Faust* for the Edison Company in the United States, followed in 1910 by a *Faust* film directed by Henri Adreani for the Film d'Arts Company. As far as I know, the question of what influence these early cinematic realizations of Gounod's *Faust* (and of the Faust story generally) might have had on Leroux and the genesis of his novel, first serialized in late 1909 and early 1910, has never been studied, although the influence of opera on early cinema has certainly attracted a great deal of attention<sup>4</sup>.

After the famous silent film of 1925, with Lon Chaney as Erik, which does present scenes from Gounod's *Faust*, the talkie era introduced treatments of *The Phantom of the Opera* where representations of actual sung opera were possible. Yet Leroux's reliance on *Faust* as a major source element was ignored from early on, and pastiche operas (sometimes called 'shadow operas') began to replace this connection. In the 1943 Universal Studios version *Faust* and Gounod's music disappeared entirely, their places taken by a few bits of Flotow's *Martha* and two pastiche operas, *Amour et Gloire* ('Love and

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also Robertson Davies' 1988 novel *The Lyre of Orpheus*, in which Hoffmann appears as a spectral character in modern-day Canada.

<sup>4</sup> See Joe/Theresa, eds. 2002 for a number of articles on this topic. Michal Grover-Friedlander also studied the 1925 screen adaptation of Leroux's novel in her 1999 article "The Phantom of the Opera: The Lost Voice of Opera in Silent Film" and mentions it at several points in "There Ain't No Sanity Clause: The Marx Brothers at the Opera" (2002).

Glory'), using themes taken from Chopin, and *Le Prince de Caucasic* ('The Prince of the Caucasus'), contrived to music by Chaikovskii. This process reached a kind of climax of the absurd in the 1962 Hammer Films version, featuring Herbert Lom as the Phantom. Here the location of the story was moved from Paris to London, and the time updated to the end of the Victorian era. The Wimbledon Theatre stood in for a fictitious 'London Opera House', and the opera staged in the film was an original work on the Joan of Arc story by British television composer Edwin 'Ted' Astley (1922–1998). Since this was the 1960s, Astley's 'opera' (*The Tragedy of St. Joan*) was written in an anachronistically dissonant musical style, which apparently led one film critic to call it "the only genuinely horrific part of the movie" (Meyers: online). However, it codified the popular idea, only vaguely adumbrated in the novel, that Erik the Phantom was a composer of *avant-garde* music. This idea returns in force in Lloyd Webber's musical, as we shall see, along with several other details taken from the Hammer Films version. Brian de Palma's cult-film favorite *The Phantom of the Paradise* (1974) returned Faust to the story in a rock opera version.

The return of opera itself to *The Phantom* can be observed in the 1984 treatment by Ken Hill. In this version of the story, the libretto was set to a collage of pre-existing 19<sup>th</sup>-century operatic music. Hill's version was seen by Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh in the summer of 1984. After an unsuccessful attempt to take over Hill's production and the failure to create a similar version in which he "cobbled together" (Walsh 1997: 175) a quantity of out-of-copyright opera and ballet music (by Delibes, Massenet, and Gounod), Lloyd Webber was eventually persuaded by his producers to write a version with his own original score (cf. *ibid.*).

Lloyd Webber's musical greatly compresses the novel's somewhat rambling plot: major figures such as Raoul's older brother Philippe, Comte de Chagny, Mifroid, the commissaire of the Paris police, and the enigmatic figure of the Persian, who provides crucial clues to the secret of the story, are eliminated. The plot is flattened to an unlikely love triangle between Raoul, Christine, and Erik. Christine in the novel is a second-string soloist, underutilized and playing Siebel in *Faust* to the Marguerite of resident diva La Carlotta. In the musical Christine is somewhat oddly made a member of the *corps de ballet* to emphasize her close friendship with the ballerina Meg Giry. In this connection Lloyd Webber has stated that "The Phantom" – and I think

this goes for Lloyd Webber himself – “believes in her voice because it represents a new sound in music, purer than a conventional soprano”<sup>5</sup> (qtd. in Snelson 2004: 109). This nevertheless makes Christine’s ‘succès fou’ as a previously-unknown *singing* talent all the more improbable. Leroux’s Christine makes her triumph in a gala performance singing “a few passages from [Gounod’s] *Romeo and Juliet*” as well as “the prison scene and the final trio in *Faust*, which she sang in place of La Carlotta, who was ill”<sup>6</sup> (2001: 18). Lloyd Webber’s Christine makes her debut in an operatic performance abandoned by a temperamental Carlotta, which brings us to the three fictitious operas in the musical: *Hannibal*, by ‘Chalumeau’, *Il Muto*, by ‘Albrizzio’, and the Phantom’s own *Don Juan Triumphant*<sup>7</sup>.

Lloyd Webber’s first librettist for *Phantom*, Richard Stilgoe, was probably responsible for most of the texts as well as the plots of the three fictitious operas. At some point he was replaced by 25-year old Charles Hart. Stilgoe’s lyrics were seen by Lloyd Webber as too “wry” (Schumacher 2005), which I think meant ‘too sophisticated’ for the kind of audiences to which *Phantom* was pitched. This explains a discrepancy in tone, content, and even vocabulary between the texts of the fictitious operas and those of the well-known popular tunes, the musical’s ‘hits’. (Stilgoe and Hart maintain to this day that they do not recall who wrote which bits, but I find this disingenuous, to say the least.)

<sup>5</sup> As the role of Christine was written for Lloyd Webber’s second wife, Sarah Brightman, there is both a defensive note as well as a self-fulfilling prophesy in this statement.

<sup>6</sup> “quelques passages de *Roméo et Juliette* [...] l’acte de la prison et le trio final de *Faust*, qu’elle chanta en remplacement de la Carlotta, indisposée.” (Leroux 2005: 26)

<sup>7</sup> For convenience in identifying these three sections of the musical, I will refer to the DVD release of the 2004 film version (Schumacher 2004/2005). While the film version does not follow the stage version exactly, the operatic pastiche segments are equivalent enough for the discussion at hand here, especially as I will mention some of the metareferential issues attached to viewing the musical as film as opposed to being a member of the audience of an actual performance. (The film was not a commercial success, though it holds the dubious distinction of being the most expensive independent film ever made.) On the DVD the relevant sections can be found using the follow time codes: *Hannibal*, 0:07:30–0:12:25; “Think of me”, 0:17:30–21:05; *Il Muto*, 0:58:27–1:01:08; *Don Juan Triumphant*, 1:46:10–48:30. The original London cast recording can also be consulted. The libretto of the musical can be found in Perry 1991: 140–167.

The musical *Phantom* opens in medias res with a rehearsal for the fictitious opera *Hannibal* by 'Chalumeau'. Here we see a 'grand' opera scene, a triumphant and heroic return somewhat reminiscent of the second act of Verdi's *Aida*, although the name of Meyerbeer has been repeatedly invoked in reference to this scene. (In the 2004 film version, the poster outside the "Opéra Populaire" even more confusingly calls it an "opera seria".) The association with Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864) is tantalizing indeed, and creates a possible instance of extracompositional reference. David Huckvale has pointed out that Meyerbeer's operas are a "prototype of the mass media":

The socio-economic parallel between the grand operas of Meyerbeer and the musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber are particularly noteworthy. Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* of 1849 featured a highly-successful gimmick of a roller-skating ballet [in which the *corps de ballet* imitated ice skaters], just as the gimmick of Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express* is the roller-skating performers. As Martin Cooper describes it, Meyerbeer's technique was to create a kind of revue: "a drinking song followed by a prayer, an orgy followed by a church scene, a huge choral movement with an orchestra on the stage by an ingeniously [sic] 'simple' air, conspirators making way for lovers, a skating ballet."<sup>8</sup> (1994: 129)

In reality, however, the leap from a 'theoretical' to an 'actual' Meyerbeeresque opera scene is not terribly successfully made. Far from the powerful sounds and sophisticated harmony of Meyerbeer, let alone Verdi, what we get in *Hannibal* is a schoolboy imitation of Gilbert and Sullivan employing simplistic diatonic harmony, followed by a fragment of a slave-girl ballet scene to rather Borodinish music, leading to a grandioso restatement of the march. But for reference (or metareference) to occur, a thing need not be *like* the thing to which it refers – and at any rate, the possible reference here to Meyerbeerish grand opera is probably more a form of intentional parody, the raising of a stereotype<sup>9</sup>. Here it is enough to observe with Huckvale that while "popular culture decontextualizes operatic music" (1994: 135), meaning that often the ideological connotations are lost in the process,

<sup>8</sup> Huckvale is quoting Martin Cooper's essay "Giacomo Meyerbeer" (1955: 45).

<sup>9</sup> Not only a stereotype of opera but a stereotype of Meyerbeer as well, as Lloyd Webber's biographer John Snelson reveals (without any evident qualms): "The *Hannibal* scene is mock-Meyerbeer (an inside joke since Meyerbeer is practically synonymous with second-rate, overblown opera) [...]" (2004: 180). I suggest that this 'inside joke' is really a prejudice, and one far more likely to have been held in the generation of Lloyd Webber's father, the composer W. S. Lloyd Webber (1914–1982), than today.



opera's ideology in these pastiches becomes a possible source for satire, about which more later.

Whereas performances of *Faust* are diegetic parts of the narrative in the novel, the insertion of the fragment of *Hannibal* causes a dislocation: we, the musical or cinema audience, have been manipulated into viewing a *virtual*, not an actual opera – and this virtual opera provides a *metareferential* commentary on opera itself, if initially only in a crude sense. This sense might be explained as an acting-out of one of the hoariest of all opera clichés, here taking the form ‘it hasn’t started until the fat lady sings’. This cliché is intensified in the musical by making Carlotta Italian rather than Spanish: she becomes a grotesque caricature of ‘the fat lady’. Indeed, this caricaturing of Carlotta (played in the film in high camp style by Minnie Driver) is extended to almost all aspects of opera in the musical, bearing out Jeremy Tambling’s observation about similar situations in opera in which “mass culture takes a partial revenge on high art, but speaks so much under the authority of the colonizing power that it props up its auratic power. The opera-house remains the privileged site” (1994a: 9).

If there is any symbolic and reflexive value to *Hannibal*, it seems to be the vague theme of ‘encounter’, or ‘reunion’, which will shortly occur between Raoul and Christine. This ‘triumph’ sets the stage for the first of the big ‘hit’ tunes in the score: “Think of me”. This song makes no pretence to being operatic in any way (in the score, it is apparently marked “like Schubert”[!]) Only at the end does Christine (that is to say, Lloyd Webber) seem to remember that she is singing on an *operatic*, not a musical stage and wraps up this saccharine number with an incongruous Mathilde Marchesi-like cadenza, which critic Michael Feingold quite accurately likened to “a silk brocade train on a Benetton tennis dress” (qtd. in Sternfeld 2006: 418.).

All these markers provide far more commentary on opera as a *medium* than they do on the plot of the musical itself. It is true that set numbers in musicals such as “Think of me” advance the plot (Christine sings and Raoul believes she is singing to *him*). But at the same time it is framed by the pastiche opera *Hannibal*, which does not reflect the plot in the way *Faust* did but rather provides a metareferential commentary on *opera* and the ‘business’ of opera itself. It ‘points at’ the medium itself in an over-the-top way unlike *Faust* in the novel, and in Werner Wolf’s words it “implies an awareness of the medial status of the work or system under consideration and thus also an awareness of a logical difference between a meta-level and an object

level" (2007: 306). The musically literate at least perceive that discrepancy in the moment Christine's non sequitur of a cadenza begins. How it is interpreted by the average patron of a theater is another matter.

I have suggested that *Hannibal* may recapitulate one small aspect of *Faust*, that of 'encounter'. As Faust encounters Gretchen in the story through the workings of Mephistopheles, so in a sense does Raoul encounter Christine, his childhood playmate, through the indirect (and certainly unintended) machinations of Erik the Phantom. The second of the three pastiche operas, *Il Muto* by 'Albrizzio', goes further in recovering some of what was lost by the excision of *Faust* from the musical.

In the novel, Christine routinely sings the travesty role of Siebel to La Carlotta's Marguerite. Her talented voice is 'silenced' in this rivalry. Erik demands that Christine replace Carlotta as Marguerite in performances of *Faust*, but the opera managers disregard this. As a result, one night Carlotta loses her voice in mid-aria as Faust kneels to her. In the musical much more is made of a sexual rivalry between the two sopranos, which is only hinted at in the novel. *Il Muto* foregrounds this with its plot of an unfaithful aristocratic wife who is having an affair with her mute page (and it would take too long to parse all the operatic references here: Cherubino, Octavian and the Marschallin, Fidelio, Fenella, the mute girl of Portici, and so on). The music for *Il Muto* is a pastiche of Classical-era opera, perhaps more specifically modeled on the 'intermezzi' – short comic pieces meant to be played between the acts of a longer work – popular at this time. We later learn, however, that *Il Muto* has three acts. The name of Salieri has been raised in connection as a possible model, but it certainly references Mozart and Rossini as well. In the musical we see and hear about five minutes of the scene where Don Attilio (the cuckolded husband, played by the character Signor Piangi) catches his wife the Countess (played by Carlotta) in bed with the mute Serafimo (played by Christine, who obviously does not sing). Erik then causes Carlotta to lose her voice, the ballet from the 'third Act' is hurried on stage, and pandemonium ensues when the body of the lecherous stage manager Joseph Buquet crashes onto the stage<sup>10</sup>. Christine and Raoul flee to the roof of the opera house, and later, after an unspecified lapse of

<sup>10</sup> In the novel, Buquet is called a 'scene-shifter' ("machiniste"), and is described as 'very popular' ("très aimé" [Leroux 2005: 24]). See also fn. 22 below.

time, the curtain calls for *Il Muto* are seen, with Christine “conspicuously dressed in Carlotta’s costume” according to the libretto (Perry 1991: 154). At this point in the musical, at the end of Act One, the chandelier falls.

The music for *Il Muto* shares the same simplistic language as *Hannibal* but achieves a more convincing imitation of style, perhaps, through orchestration, melodic language, and textures. But like *Hannibal*, both music and staging appear to be more of a *parody* of opera than opera itself. Like *Hannibal* it makes an *extracompositional meta-reference* to the ‘business’ of opera, though again not in a complimentary way. Now parody, in post-modern society, is a very difficult concept to discuss. To pick up Werner Wolf’s article again: “there is a whole range of possibilities between noncritical homage and the kind of destructive parody [Beschädigungsaktion] [that] Adorno had in mind [...]” when he criticized Stravinskii’s neo-classical works (2007: 314). In this context Jeongwon Joe has pointed to the work of Linda Hutcheon, suggesting that “parody in postmodern art should not be confused with 18<sup>th</sup>-century notions of parody as a witty or ridiculed imitation of the art of the past” (2002: 68). For Hutcheon, according to Joe, parody is a “‘double [en]coding’ that both legitimizes and subverts, foregrounds and questions, and uses and abuses what it parodies” (ibid.). But for parody to be effective, it presupposes a familiarity with the repertoire and the referential objects it purports to parody, a ‘meta-awareness’. Where does Lloyd Webber fit, then, through his avatars of ‘Chalumeau’ and ‘Albrizzio’, in this continuum of extremes? And to what extent do his audiences even possess this ‘meta-awareness’?

I have to say that I never really know when Sir Andrew is being ironic. That is to say, I do not know for certain when either the content or the context is really intended to frame markers read as ironic. But it seems far-fetched to me to think that *Hannibal* and *Il Muto* are really late 20<sup>th</sup>-century evocations (on the level of *critical meta-reference*, or ironic parody) of late-19<sup>th</sup> century interpretations (on the level of *non-critical meta-reference*, or homage) of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical styles. I find that Lloyd Webber – and his audiences – have only an imperfect quantity of what Werner Wolf has called a “medium awareness, in particular a historical one, namely the competence of identifying [...] different compositional styles, forms and devices, as well as their historical incongruity” (2007: 315) in parody. No doubt *Il Muto*, like *Hannibal*, points beyond itself through intrasystemic musi-

cal reference to opera as such and does so in a metareferential way, thus constituting a metamusical statement. But as far as I can see this is neither critical nor non-critical: it is merely *uncritical* in its naiveté. And rather than being a noncritical homage (as in, for example, Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony) or a critical metareference (as in the quotation of Lehár's "Dann geh' ich zu Maxim" in Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony), it takes the shape of what I can only call a *destructive homage*, if such a contradiction in terms is possible. Rather than enhancing the recipient's pleasure including aesthetic illusion, the metareferential gestures made by the opera pastiches go a long way to annihilating it for the musically literate<sup>11</sup>.

*Uncritical metareference* might be described as the common situation that arises when an artist's referential reach exceeds his grasp: a noncritical homage turns into a mere parody through the inability or incompetence of the author to handle the materials he adopts, for example a musical system and its normative language. (This form of metareference is by no means restricted to music and we could easily imagine similar situations in other arts and media.) If we could be sure that the intent was ironic, it would probably qualify as critical metareference. But then, as I already said, I never know when Sir Andrew is being ironic. If there is homage in any sense here, it can easily wind up mocking and destroying the thing it reverences, despite its best (metareferential) intentions. (This sometimes results in what is popularly called a 'travesty'; I have avoided using this term, since it really means something else in the context of music, drama, and opera, despite its common acquired meaning in contemporary English<sup>12</sup>.)

Here is where I think Linda Hutcheon is on to something, when she gives postmodern parody the options of both "using and abusing" what it parodies. And to quote Tambling again, in *Il Muto* "mass culture" quite definitely "takes a partial revenge on high art". This is the triumph of the British music hall, in all its vulgarity, over the 'privi-

<sup>11</sup> This is obvious to many non-professional musicians and music lovers as well. *New York Times* critic Frank Rich was getting at just this point when he observed in a 1986 review that "[f]or every sumptuously melodic love song in this score [*Phantom's*], there is an insufferably smug opera parody that can't match its prototype" (qtd. in Walsh 1997: 204).

<sup>12</sup> "A burlesque translation or literary or artistic imitation, usually grotesquely incongruous in style, treatment, or subject matter; a debased, distorted, or grossly inferior imitation" ("Travesty" 2003).

leged' site of the opera house. In the film version this is made even more vivid because we, the viewers, are not the 'opera' audience as in the stage musical but the secondary viewers of a fictitious audience: a very privileged audience who are shown in the film to enjoy and applaud with great enthusiasm destructive parodies of opera, whereas in the theater the applause is for actual performers (while in the novel they applaud Christine's genuine artistic triumph). In this sense, the film version of *Phantom* (if not indeed the staged musical, under certain circumstances) may be felt to indulge in *satire* (making fun of social norms and the culture surrounding opera) as well as parody (which makes fun of the genre itself)<sup>13</sup>. In the actual theater there are similarly no doubt tens of thousands of patrons who have seen *Phantom* and have believed that in *Hannibal* and *Il Muto* they are hearing and seeing performed parts of actual operas by real composers. When one considers that metareferences to opera in *Phantom* are read by many theatergoers as references originating in actual operas, then we might think about Roland Barthes and would like to tell him that not only is the author indeed dead, but that his place is being usurped by impostors who never existed!

A fictitious opera by a composer who never existed – this brings me to the third of the pastiches, that of *Don Juan Triumphant* by Erik the Phantom himself. Contrary to popular belief, in the novel it is never stated that *Don Juan Triumphant* is an opera: Leroux explicitly calls it a “symphonie triomphale”<sup>14</sup>. This presumably links it generically to works by Beethoven (the *Eroica* Symphony), Berlioz (*Roméo et Juliette*, *Symphonie fantastique*, *Lélio*, *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, and even *Harold en Italie*); and perhaps also Scriabin (I am thinking of *The Poem of Ecstasy*), whom Erik as a composer, in Leroux's own description, seems somewhat to resemble. On overhearing

<sup>13</sup> Snelson offers an apologetic explanation along these lines: “The point of the onstage opera in *Phantom* is that it is generic, playing to present-day musical theatre audience's prejudices of opera, playing upon stereotypes. The onstage opera of *Phantom* is there for laughs” (2004: 108). While I think the actual situation is far more complex, this just reinforces the supposition stated in the next sentence of my article.

<sup>14</sup> This description (see the passage below, translated in fn. 15) is among the crucial lines in Chapter 13 which are not translated in full in de Mattos' English version of the novel. In turn, this has contributed to a persistent misapprehension of the generic nature of the Phantom's *Don Juan Triumphant*.

the completed work, Christine describes *Don Juan Triumphant* as follows:

J'assistai, anéantie, pantelante, pitoyable et vaincue à l'éclosion de ces accords gigantesques où était divinisée la *Douleur* et puis les sons qui montaient de l'abîme se groupèrent tout à coup en un vol prodigieux et menaçant, leur troupe tournoyante sembla escalader le ciel comme l'aigle monte au soleil, une telle symphonie triomphale parut embraser le monde que je compris que l'œuvre était enfin accomplie et que la Laideur, soulevée sur les ailes de l'Amour, avait osé regarder en face la Beauté!<sup>15</sup> (Leroux 2005: 176)

In any event it is not an opera, though Erik makes references to opera in describing it:

Ce *Don Juan*-là n'a pas été écrit sur les paroles d'un Lorenzo d'Aponte [sic.], inspiré par le vin, les petits amours et le vice, finalement châtié de Dieu. Je vous jouerai Mozart si vous voulez, qui fera couler vos belles larmes et vous inspirera d'honnêtes réflexions. Mais, mon *Don Juan*, à moi, brûle, Christine, et, cependant, il n'est point foudroyé par le feu du ciel!<sup>16</sup> (Ibid.: 170)

So, in short, the Phantom's *Don Juan Triumphant* is intended in some sense to rewrite Mozart and Da Ponte's opera, to provide a 'happy ending', at least for the Don:

Voyez-vous, Christine, il y a une musique si terrible qu'elle consume tous ceux qui l'approchent. Vous n'en êtes pas encore à cette musique-là, heureusement, car vous perdriez vos fraîches couleurs et l'on ne vous reconnaîtrait plus à votre retour à Paris. Chantons l'Opéra, Christine Daaé.

Il me dit:

– Chantons l'Opéra, Christine Daaé, comme s'il me jetait une injure.<sup>17</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>15</sup> 'Utterly destroyed, panting, pitiful and overcome, I witnessed the blossoming of these massive chords which deified *Suffering*; then the sounds, rising from the abyss, came together in an extraordinary and threatening ascent, whirling together they seemed to take flight like the eagle rising towards the sun; and this symphonie triomphale seemed to set the world ablaze such that I understood the work that had been completed; Ugliness, lofted on the wings of Love, had dared to look Beauty in the eye!' [My translation]

<sup>16</sup> 'This *Don Juan* hasn't been set to words by Lorenzo Da Ponte, inspired by wine, love affairs, and vice, ending in divine punishment. I will play you Mozart, if you like, for which you will weep beautiful tears and be filled with virtuous thoughts. But, believe me, Christine, *my Don Juan* burns, and yet he is not struck down by a bolt from heaven!' [My translation; this is another passage which de Mattos abridges to the point of confusion.]

<sup>17</sup> "'You see Christine, there is some music that is so terrible that it consumes all those who approach it. Fortunately, you have not come to that music yet, for you would lose all your pretty coloring and nobody would know you when you returned to

What they in fact sing is the Duet from Act Three of Verdi's *Otello*, Christine as the despairing Desdemona and Erik as the vengeful Moor<sup>18</sup>. It is at this juncture in the novel that Christine tears off the Phantom's mask, with well-known results. "When a woman has seen me, as you have", rages Erik, "she belongs to me. She loves me forever! ... I am kind of Don Juan, you know ... Look at me! *I am Don Juan Triumphant!*" (Leroux 2001: 128)<sup>19</sup>. After this outburst Erik crawls away 'like a snake [...] into his room [...]' ("comme un reptile [...] pénétra dans sa chambre [...]"; Leroux 2005: 174 [my translation]), and Christine says:

[...] les sons de l'orgue se firent entendre [...] C'est alors, mon ami, que je commençais de comprendre les paroles d'Erik sur ce qu'il appelait, avec un mépris qui m'avait stupéfiée: la musique d'opéra. Ce que j'entendais n'avait plus rien à faire avec ce qui m'avait charmée jusqu'à ce jour. Son *Don Juan triomphant* [...] ne me parut d'abord qu'un long, affreux et magnifique sanglot où le pauvre Erik avait mis toute sa misère maudite.<sup>20</sup> (Leroux 2005: 175f.)

As I have shown, the idea that *Don Juan Triumphant* is an opera, and one which Erik demands be performed with Christine in the lead female role, originated in the various film versions of the novel, scriptwriters and directors having been misled by de Mattos' incomplete English translation and perhaps the understandable if mistaken assumption that an 'opera ghost' must be composing an opera. In any event, in the novel Erik the Phantom only completes *Don Juan Trium-*

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the [Paris] Opera. Let us sing something from the Opera, Christine Daaé.' He spoke these last words, as though he were flinging an insult at me." (Leroux 2001: 127; de Mattos' translation)

<sup>18</sup> Leroux presumably intended Erik to know the 'Paris' version of Verdi's 1887 opera (which contains among other alterations the added ballet music for Act III), first performed at the Opéra on 12 October 1894. If so, this places the action of the novel not earlier than the second half of the 1890s, which is later than most adaptations assume.

<sup>19</sup> De Mattos' translation of: "Quand une femme m'a vu, comme toi, elle est à moi. Elle m'aime pour toujours! Moi, je suis un type dans le genre de Don Juan...Regarde-moi! *Je suis Don Juan triomphant!*" (Leroux 2005: 173).

<sup>20</sup> '[...] the sound of the organ began to be heard [...] It was then, my dear, then I began to understand Erik's contemptuous and stupefying words when he spoke to me about 'opera music'. What I heard now had no relationship to what I had enjoyed hearing up till then. His *Don Juan Triumphant* [...] seemed to me at first one long, awful, magnificent sob into which Erik had poured all his cursed wretchedness.' [My translation]

*phant* (along with settings of both a nuptial and a requiem mass) once he has abducted Christine through a trap-door during a performance of *Faust*. In the musical, Erik uses *Don Juan Triumphant* to arrange the murder of Piangi, whose place and role as Don Juan he literally takes on the stage, and effects the abduction of Christine after she has unmasked him.

However, as details about the storyline and music of *Don Juan Triumphant* are nonexistent (since it is not, after all, an opera but only a *reference* to a kind of dramatic symphony, and a virtual one at that), Richard Stilgoe – I presume – was faced with constructing a fragment of plot about Don Juan which would somehow make up for the deleted Prison scene from *Faust*. In the musical then, Don Juan (played by Signor Piangi) and his servant Passarino are planning the seduction of Aminta (played by Christine)<sup>21</sup>. This involves the old trope of the master and servant switching clothes. As the curtain goes up, a rowdy crowd of “ruffians and hoydens, proud of their master’s reputation as a libertine” (Perry 1991: 162), led by the Innkeeper’s Wife (played by Carlotta), shriek a demonic chorus in praise of the Don’s lust and conquests. Meg Giry even plays a village girl he is just paying off after a liaison at the moment he appears on stage.

The music which Lloyd Webber has written for Erik’s ‘opera’ follows the by now accepted idea, hinted at by Leroux but ultimately derived from the film versions, that Erik’s music must be too advanced for the listeners of the day<sup>22</sup>. This features violent, expression-

<sup>21</sup> The name of Passarino for the Don’s servant appears to have been taken from the earliest surviving Italian text of the Don Juan story, *L’empio Punito*, attributed to Giacinto Andrea Cicognini (1606–1650).

<sup>22</sup> This point is even more confused by what Lloyd Webber himself seems to believe. In a recent interview, he stated that “I constructed the idea that [Erik] wrote his own opera called *Don Juan Triumphant*, which was [sic] modern music, out of its time, and dissonant, and strange, and that’s what he wanted to lure [Christine] into singing” (Schumacher 2005). As we have seen, however, the idea that Erik’s music is ‘out of its time’ goes back at least to the 1962 Hammer Films version. Given Lloyd Webber’s birthdate of 1948, it is highly likely that he had seen this film, or at least that he and his librettists had absorbed this bit of the popular myth. And the novel does, in some degree, hint that Erik’s music was at least unusual: Raoul hears a bit of *Don Juan Triumphant* and calls it ‘astounding’ (“une musique formidable” [Leroux 2005: 273]). In addition, the shock effect of having Joseph Buquet’s garroted body fall from the flies onto the stage during *Il Muto* was taken directly from the 1962 film: in the novel he is found hanged underneath the stage, “in the third cellar [...] between a farm-house and a scene from the *Roi de Lahore*” (Leroux 2001: 26; “dans le



ist rhythms and orchestration, and melodic material based – as any self-respecting French avant-gardiste would have done – on the whole-tone scale. But above all it is Stravinskii and the infamous 1913 Paris premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* which is referenced here as an *event*, as well as the musical style of his early Neo-Classic works such as *L'Histoire du Soldat* and *The Rake's Progress*, sad stories of what you get for dealing with the Devil<sup>23</sup>.

Here, a fictitious opera and its negative reception – in the film version, the snooty opera audience is visibly confused and enraged – ‘point at’ the theme of the misunderstood genius, in particular the misunderstood composer whose music, like Beethoven’s late quartets, is ‘not for this age, but for a later one’. (Such is the force of metareference, at least for this writer, to ‘trigger’ through this particular scene contemplation of works by Beethoven which have not the slightest similarity to the music at hand.) Previous to this in the musical (though not in the 2004 film) is a scene (Act 2, Scene 4) of a rehearsal for *Don Juan* in which Piangi, Carlotta, Christine and the chorus are all trying to learn the difficult musical score<sup>24</sup>. Frustrated by its ‘modernity’ Carlotta speaks not only for the diegetic characters but also for a large segment of the concert-going public in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when she says: “*Ah, più non posso ... What does it matter what notes we sing? ... No one will know if it is right, or if it is wrong. No one will care if it is right, or if it is wrong*” (Perry: 160).

As it turns out however, *Don Juan Triumphant*, with its clever orchestration, irregular time signatures, and less-derivative-than-usual musical materials, is the most satisfying of the three pastiches, the one which least destroys the (aesthetic) illusions raised, and all this despite the fact that it’s the one meant to be a send-up of everything that was wrong with the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To return to Linda Hutcheon, parody in *Don Juan Triumphant*, as a form of metareference, escapes from its three creators (Leroux, Lloyd Webber, and the Phantom) to make a metareferential statement on its own: it “legitimizes and subverts” (Hutcheon 1985: 68) both of the composers’ – and the novelist’s – intentions.

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troisième dessous [...] entre une ferme et un décor du *Roi de Lahore*” [Leroux 2005: 24]), and not in view of the audience.

<sup>23</sup> This scene has been compared to Britten’s operas, in particular the disturbing, angry choruses of *Peter Grimes*.

<sup>24</sup> This is yet another scene essentially ‘lifted’ from the 1962 Hammer Films version.

In summation, this case study has tried to explore the application of some theoretical concepts developed elsewhere in this volume (and in the literature of intermedia and metareference studies in general) to examine a plethora of metareferential issues and possibilities located in one of the most successful and inescapable works of the popular musical stage of the past twenty-five years. Although the work is generically popular, the metareferential issues identified cause the musical version of *Phantom* to cross boundaries, and to refer to more 'serious' art forms. In the process, aspects of parody emerge at different levels, with different metareferential results, ending either in a successful enhancement of aesthetic illusion, or in a distinct failure thereof. I have endeavored to show how metareference, and the recognition of meta-levels, establishes various critical perspectives separate from the critical intentions of the creator, and – with a certain critical detachment – possibly also separate from the perspective of the intended 'recipients' or 'end-users' of these creative acts.

Without wishing to enter too deeply into theories of parody (see Hutcheon 1985), parodies of any description seem to be inherently metareferential, depending on the preparation, education, and the level of meta-awareness which various listeners, viewers, and readers (the 'end-users') may possess or be able to develop. It is also possible for such end-users to lack a highly developed meta-awareness and still perceive via metareference some sort of parody (and via parody, some sort of metareference), though of a different level and order than more informed people. Parody, however, is an extremely volatile compound. It has the potential to 'escape' from its creator's use and control (as noted, Hutcheon has identified this as a *subversion*), and to turn into a kind of *abuse*, resulting in situations where, due to incompetence or naiveté, critical perspective and intent is not (or is no longer) present. This in turn creates a kind of unintentional, destructive form of parody which I call *uncritical metareference*. Seen from this point of view, the pastiche operas of *The Phantom of the Opera* suffer from this tendency for the genie of Parody to be capricious on escaping from its bottle (or frame), and to turn on its creator in unpredictable ways. When the Phantom loses control of Christine, then we know that 'it's time for the fat lady to sing'.

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## Intramedial Reference and Metareference in Contemporary Music

Jörg-Peter Mittmann<sup>1</sup>

In comparison to intertextuality in the verbal arts the possibilities for intramedial reference in music are in some respects restricted. To make music refer to music requires the implementation of the reference object into the respective composition. In this contribution I would like to show that this implementation does not necessarily always imply metareference, but can do so under certain circumstances. I will thus apply the distinction between use and mention as made in language and linguistics to music as a criterion for intramedial reference. The actual step to metareference, as I put it, is defined by the reflection on a musical structure not only for a semantic purpose within a given work but as the subject of an artistic expression *sui generis*. In this way musical metareference paradigmatically appears in Berio's *Sinfonia*.

Sie stand auf ihren Ellenbogen gestützt, ihr Blick durchdrang die Gegend; sie sah den Himmel und auf mich, ich sah ihr Auge tränenvoll, sie legte ihre Hand auf die meinige und sagte: "Klopstock!"<sup>2</sup> (Goethe 1981, vol. 6: 26)

This quote from Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) shows the enviable ability of language to constitute intertextual reference by using no more than one single word. In the quoted passage it seems to suffice for Goethe's protagonist to simply say "Klopstock" in order to evoke a vivid albeit more or less vague impression, not of a man or an image of that man, but of a sublime poetic oeuvre that forms a certain contrast to the notion of roughness which the sound of the word 'Klopstock' might induce. The question arises to what extent we can find analogous means of quotation or 'intertextual reference' in other, nonverbal media and especially in music<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Camille Savage-Kroll, Jeff Thoss and Werner Wolf for their critical remarks on a previous version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> "Charlotte leaned forward on her arm; her eyes wandered over the scene; she raised them to the sky, and then turned them upon me; they were moistened with tears; she placed her hand on mine and said, 'Klopstock!'" (Goethe 2006: 18)

<sup>3</sup> Of course, we can think of similar cases in which we can point to certain atmospheres, impressions or emotions in other media by using *verbal* references, e. g., to

In the following I will use the term ‘intramedial reference’<sup>4</sup> as a general term for all types of reference in a given art or medium to objects generated within the same art or medium. Obviously, in non-verbal arts such as music this kind of reference cannot draw on markers such as proper names, definite descriptions or demonstratives to point out the reference. In order to identify a referenced work (or group of works) in a nonverbal medium, the actual occurrence (i. e. quotation) of the reference object in its entirety or at least in a perceivable part is requisite.

As for music, one might, however, be skeptical about its referential potential in general. The often-maintained exceptional position of music in the context of the arts is based not least on the assumption that music lacks any potential for pointing to reality and is hence non-referential. Arthur Schopenhauer, for instance, argued in his well-known investigation on the metaphysics of music that:

[...] die Musik [...] könnte gewissermaßen [sic], auch wenn die Welt gar nicht wäre, doch bestehn [...] Die Musik ist also keineswegs, gleich den andern Künsten, das Abbild der Ideen, sondern *Abbild des Willens selbst*.<sup>5</sup> (1977: 324)

However, this view need not conflict with the idea of reference *within the medium itself*. We could rather say that concerning music, this is the only possible (clear) reference in the world of appearances.

When we assert that intramedial reference in music requires the implementation of its reference object, the reverse conclusion might be drawn, the conclusion that we can describe all cases of ‘music in music’, except for accidental correspondences between different

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painters (‘Monet!’) or musicians (‘Brahms!’). But the question is how such references can be made exclusively by means of the ‘quoting medium’ itself without resorting to language.

<sup>4</sup> I prefer this expression to avoid misunderstandings which the commonly used term ‘intertextuality’ might induce. However, what follows is in some respect linked to the discussion of intertextuality. I will strictly confine my definition to intramedial reference as an *intentional* relationship. As my initially proposed term ‘*equimedial reference*’ (analogous to *equivocation*) aroused several objections, I will gratefully seize a suggestion by Werner Wolf and Winfried Nöth without, however, adopting their classifications in the following.

<sup>5</sup> “Music [...] is entirely independent of the phenomenal world, [...] ignores it altogether [and] could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all [...]. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself.” (Schopenhauer 1896: 333) For a short introduction to Schopenhauer’s musical aesthetic see Asmuth 1999.

pieces<sup>6</sup>, as instances of intramedial reference. This would include the popular genre of “Variations on a Theme of ...” as well as, for example, all kinds of arrangements. However, there is a considerable difference between the two ways of using the term ‘intramedial reference’ in this context: on the one hand we can relate it to the artist who refers to given music when creating his own work. On the other hand we can relate it to the composition *itself*. To say that the latter refers to some preexisting music means that this reference is part of the semantic texture within the piece, something which serves as a functional element in the communication between composer and audience. This does not apply to ordinary arrangements. Here the reference is outside the compositional scope. One need not know the oboe concerto of Alessandro Marcello to appreciate the corresponding harpsichord arrangement of Bach (BWV 974), nor would Bach himself have presumed such an acquaintance on the part of his audience. At least Liszt as the author of numerous piano transcriptions might have presumed such an acquaintance, but only to emphasize his amazing technique of transferring the effect of orchestral sound to the piano. In the same way the reproduction of a given theme in variations does not form a meaningful intracompositional reference<sup>7</sup>. The choice of a certain original theme is rather to be understood as a premise of the entire composition, but it plays no role within the dramaturgy of the work. Listening to such a theme as well as to any transcription or arrangement generally should give a more or less authentic impression of the original piece. The implemented music is *used* according to its primary aesthetic function, quasi as a section of an ordinary presentation of the original piece, that is to say like an independent contribution as part of a concert programme.

However, when, in contrast to this, preexisting music occurs as a referring element within a composition its role is completely different. To understand that preexisting music is used as an intramedial refer-

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<sup>6</sup> We would, for instance, not say that Beethoven implemented the beginning of Mozart’s “Bastien und Bastienne” into the first movement of his *Eroica*.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from some outstanding examples such as, for instance, Brahms’ intimate Schumann Variations, op. 9 with their sublime hints to the mysterious relationship between Brahms and the Schumanns, or Beethoven’s 15 Variations (and a Fugue), op. 35, the so-called “Eroica Variations”, which are the topic of Tobias Janz’s contribution to this volume.



ence in this case means becoming aware that here the music referred to does not appear to be simply used but rather *mentioned*.

The distinction between use and mention of expressions is based on medieval supposition theory<sup>8</sup> and was terminologically fixed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Quine (1940/1951). It is closely related to questions concerning metalanguage and semantic antinomies. To give an example:

(a) *William is monosyllabic.*

This proposition could be true (if William is a person who avoids speaking in words of more than one syllable).

(b) *'William' is monosyllabic.*

This proposition is definitely not true, because the name 'William' is not monosyllabic.

While (a) represents the use of the name 'William' to denote a singular person, (b) asserts something about the mentioned word 'William'.

Again we have to notice that the syntactical means of language are much more elaborate than in the semiotic systems of nonverbal arts. There is, for instance, no actual counterpart to the above-used quotation marks in music<sup>9</sup>. So we have to search for other devices to discern use and mention here. Because the arts do not deal with elementary scientific problems such as semantic paradoxes and antinomies, we should not expect a high level of precision in our typology. However, there are examples where it seems to be clear that preexisting music is not used according to its primary aesthetic function but instead serves as a meaningful referential expression for the semantic characteristic of the composition. This doubtlessly applies to the tradition of Dies Irae allusions (see the famous example in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*) but also to the quotation of Bach's choral "Es ist genug" in Alban Berg's Violin Concerto as well as to the peculiar transcription of Bach's *ricercar* from the *Musikalisches Opfer* by Anton Webern. 'Mention' in this sense also plays an outstanding part in nearly all the works of Bernd Alois Zimmermann. Yet, apart from this, we find

<sup>8</sup> Compare in particular the 'suppositio materialis': "Sed suppositio materialis dicitur quando vox supponit pro se aut sibi simili [...]" (Buridanus 1957: 201; 'But supposition is called 'material' when an utterance supposits for itself or something similar to itself' [my translation]).

<sup>9</sup> At best one may, in some cases, identify some musical gestures of special emphasis that are at least equivalent or similar to quotation marks in written language and underline the quotational character.

further examples in the traditional adoption of musical topoi. One may, for instance, consider musical-rhetorical figures such as ‘passus duriusculus’, ‘tirata’ or the well-known ‘lamento bass’, as well as exceptional composition techniques such as ‘fauxbourdon’, ‘folia’, the chromatic chord progression of the ‘Teufelsmühle’ and the cadence of falling fifths<sup>10</sup>. However, there might be some trouble concerning the determination of intended topological recourse. With respect to the cadence of falling fifths for example, it does not seem to be fundamentally wrong to assert that this chord progression has been continuously in use since 1700. But in view of the distinctive influence of the baroque style it could also be argued that historically aware composers of subsequent epochs have treated it as an adopted expression, not as part of their own musical idiom and hence as a topos endowed with a specific semantic quality stemming from a specific historical context. This applies, for instance, to Schumann’s Heine-song “Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen” from *Dichterliebe* (see *Example 1*), where the occurrence of falling fifths seems to underline the inexorable destiny of the unfortunate lover listening to the wedding music of his beloved (the initiation of the baroque scheme, in fact, predetermines the musical succession for a while in a similarly inexorable way).



Example 1: Robert Schumann, “Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen”, *Dichterliebe* XI.

Likewise, in the final movement of Bruckner’s Symphony no. 4 (see *Example 2*), the emphasised sequence of falling fifths sounds more

<sup>10</sup> ‘Passus duriusculus’ is a chromatically altered ascending or descending melodic line, ‘tirata’ a running figure ascending or descending in a stepwise motion (as if pulling something), ‘lamento bass’ an intervallic figure consisting of a (most often) chromatically stepwise falling fourth in the bass, ‘fauxbourdon’ denotes three voices proceeding in parallel motion in intervals corresponding to the first inversion of the triad (= false bass), ‘folia’ refers to standard chord progression within eight bars, ‘Teufelsmühle’ is a chromatic progression of dissonating dominant chords (first description by Abbé Vogler in 1776). For more details see Hartmut Fladt’s compendious yet very inspiring 2005 study *Modell und Topos im musiktheoretischen Diskurs*.

like an apotheosis of the baroque style than a compositional element within the harmonic idiom of the late Romantic era.



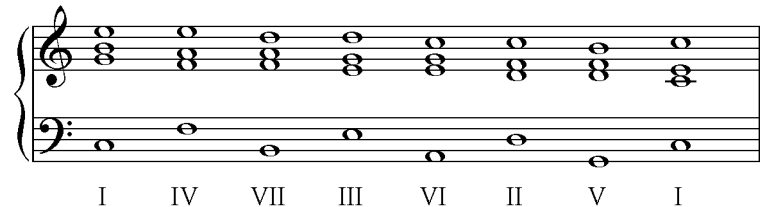
Example 2: Anton Bruckner, *Symphony no. 4 in E flat major, Finale*, bars 282–287.

The same chord progression also appears like an alien element – and hence like an intramedial ‘mention’ – in the harmonic environment of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata no. 7 (see *Example 3*). The question begging to be asked (though I will not try to give any answer here) is: what does Beethoven want to express or communicate by adopting this ‘old-fashioned’ cadence? What is the dramaturgic purpose of the curious ‘implantation’?



Example 3: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Piano Sonata no. 7 op. 10,3 in D major, 3<sup>rd</sup> movement*, bars 101–105.

Now, if we take a look at 20<sup>th</sup>-century jazz harmony, we will again find the cadence of falling fifths. Yet, in this case, it is a nearly omnipresent chord progression, the basic harmonic structure par excellence, and does by no means form any specific semantically motivated configuration.



Example 4: Cadence of falling fifths.

In sum, we have to differentiate in each case between compositional techniques which are conventionally used in a given period and the intramedial reference to certain techniques which are no longer current practice and are part of a particular semantic texture. In the latter case, the adopted preexisting musical structure is *mentioned* to convey a more or less complex message within the scope of the respective composition but is not *used* – and hence cannot be received – according to its primary aesthetic function<sup>11</sup>. Certainly it requires some cultural empathy to grasp this differentiation for “recipients who are willing and able to cooperate” as Werner Wolf notes with respect to metareference (in this vol.: 25).

However, as a means of communication musical topoi or allusions are in a sense also used (though not according to their primary aesthetic function) and not just primarily mentioned. And for this reason it will not be possible to simply identify intramedial reference with *metareference*.

The concept of metareference as I understand it is essentially based on the contrast with object-directed reference according to the linguistic differentiation between object language and metalanguage. Here, again, we encounter the problem of the ‘objectlessness’ of music. If we concede that music has no object at all, we may tend to argue that musical metareference is likewise impossible<sup>12</sup>. Yet in a broader sense music nevertheless allows one to distinguish between

<sup>11</sup> However, this indicates a problem somehow related to the hermeneutic circle, in this case a circle between grasping the entire semantic texture of the piece and determining the status of some part of it as ‘music in music’.

<sup>12</sup> Following George Steiner, Harald Fricke equally denies the possibility of what he calls “Potenzierung” in music, because ‘as such, music qua absolute music is without reference and therefore [...] cannot be self-referential either’ (“Musik selbst, als Absolute Musik, ist *ohne Referenzbereich* und kann deshalb [...] auch nicht *autoreferentiell* vorkommen” [2000: 111; my translation]).

types of ‘communicative functions’. When, in ordinary use, music induces movements (dance, march) or certain emotions (sorrow, serenity, loneliness, confusion, confidence) or formal reflections (for instance on the identity of or difference in motivic development), we can say that the suspension of these primary functions raises the music to another communicational level in a way quite similar to language departing from its ordinary function of object-directed reference. But we have to distinguish further, for the suspension of certain functions delivers a necessary but ultimately insufficient condition for metareference. Of course, there are a variety of conceivable situations in which one would agree that the primary communicational function of language or music is suspended while at the same time one would deny the existence of any metareferential implications (the newspaper within a collage, speaking or making music for a sound check, etc.). So we come to the crucial point: metalanguage, and accordingly ‘metamusic’, imply that the object is not only detached from its primary function but, in addition, that music becomes the *object of reflection*. Hence, intramedial reference merely serving a semantic purpose within the dramaturgy of a composition does not meet the conditions for metareference. Schumann’s aforementioned application of the baroque cadence of falling fifths therefore should not be considered as an instance of metareference, whereas Bruckner’s recourse to the same structure seems not to be merely a means to an end (namely a vehicle of generating semantic content) but makes this structure itself the subject of musical discourse, that is to say of the *artistic message*. Consequently, in Bruckner’s case we are entitled to speak of an intramedial reference which is at the same time metareferential.

In view of all this I would like to propose a distinction between an artistic communication *by means of* intramedial reference and a communication *about* objects of intramedial reference. This might concern a reflection on aspects of the expression itself – something like a musical metalanguage in terms of language criticism<sup>13</sup> – or on several

<sup>13</sup> In a previous study (see Mittmann 1999b) I have discussed the problem of reflecting musical language within music itself, an issue which Helmut Lachenmann advances as a crucial motive of present-day composition. Concerning his composition *Accanto*, which reflects Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto, he says: “Und so bedeutet für mich Komponieren, den Mitteln der vertrauten Musiksprache nicht ausweichen, sondern damit sprachlos umgehen, diese Mittel aus ihrem gewohnten Zusammenhang lösen und durch erneutes Einanderzuordnen ihrer Elemente Verbindungen, Zusammenhänge stiften, von denen diese Elemente neu beleuchtet und expressiv geprägt

circumstances of performance. In either case the audience has to leave the immediate level of musical experience and switch to a meta-level, where the actual sounding structure becomes an object of reflection. To achieve this, a break in perception seems to be required, which makes the recipient aware of the move from one level of experience to the other. In order to emphasize the intended change in reception extra-compositional metareference and musical self-reference in the narrow sense (intra-compositional metareference) can both employ similar devices, namely contrast, alienation, superposition, repetition, etc. The following examples may provide some tentative illustration of intracompositional musical metareference<sup>14</sup>. However, the classification will finally depend on a bundle of presuppositions that are based on cultural familiarization and intellectual background and will hence never be uncontroversial.

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werden" (1988: 63; 'Hence, for me composing does not mean avoiding the familiar means of musical language but using them speechlessly, taking them out of their common context and rearranging their elements to create new connections and contexts which shed a new light on these elements and give them new meanings' [my translation]).

<sup>14</sup> Even though I cannot present a review of contemporary intramedial metamusic here, some examples may nevertheless be mentioned in order to underline the widespread practise of this device. While composers such as Alfred Schnittke (*Concerti grossi*, 1976–1993; *Moz-Art*, 1975–1990) adopt the idiom of baroque and classical music without reflecting on it (following the manner of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, 1920), Klaus Huber (*Ein Hauch von Unzeit – Plainte sur la perte de la réflexion musicale*, 1972; *Senfkorn*, 1976) deals with source material by Purcell and Bach in a much more self-conscious manner. Wolfgang Rihm (*Fremde Szenen I–III*, 1982–1984), Wilhelm Killmayer (*Schumann in Endenich*, 1972), Peter Ruzicka (*Annäherung und Stille*, 1981) and György Kurtág (*Hommage à R. Schumann*, 1990) each in their own way refer to the Romantic composer Robert Schumann, who himself deals with the idea of musical reflection, as Danuser (2007) shows. Hans Werner Henze took up the topic of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in several pieces (*Tristan: Préludes für Klavier*, 1973, rev. 1991; *L'Amour à mort (film music)/concert version: Sonate für sechs Spieler*, 1984; *Präludien zu Tristan*, 2004). Some composers create references by the mere instrumentation of a piece (see György Ligeti's *Horn Trio*, 1982, referring to the Brahms' Horn Trio, op. 40), by means of using a specific title (Wilhelm Killmayer's *Brahms-Bildnis*, 1976, which, however, avoids any quotation of Brahms) or by means of other paratexts (Zimmermann's "Hommage à Stravinsky", first movement of the Oboe Concerto, 1952).

Let me start by using an example from a piece of my own, the scenic chamber music *Exkurse I ... dem All-Einen* (1999). The topic of the short scene is the discussion of pantheism in Germany in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period a new culture of discussion began to develop which was primarily cultivated in the private sphere of bourgeois salons and often included intellectual exchange with reference to music and literature. This general situation was my inspiration for a specific setting based on a picture by Moritz von Schwind, titled “Schubert im Kreis seiner Freunde” (painted in 1868 – forty years after Schubert’s death; see *Illustration 1*).



*Illustration 1: Moritz von Schwind, “Schubert im Kreis seiner Freunde” (1868). Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Vienna.*

The picture shows Schubert playing the piano closely surrounded by his friends. Some of them seem to be listening very intensely; others are perhaps having conversations. We do not know which music was being played and what the topics of the conversations were, but we can, I surmise, imagine some metaphysical-musical discourse, for pantheism was a very popular subject in those days, especially as it was represented by Jacobi’s *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785)<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, the musical style of *... dem All-Einen* can clearly be

<sup>15</sup> The essay created a scandal, for Jacobi associated the, until then, proscribed pantheistic philosophy with Lessing and Goethe (whose poem “Prometheus” is quoted at length).

identified as belonging entirely to a 20<sup>th</sup>-century idiom, and there is no intramedial reference until we reach the point which I will outline in the following. The piece forms a musical-metaphysical discourse between the musicians positioned closely around the piano. This conversation heads towards a climax where textual and musical fragments form an absurdly cumulated stretto (the expanding ambit of tone-pitches seems to correspond to the level of generalization of the concepts). Step by step attention is diverted from the question of divinity to the self. The polyphony of textual quotations is reduced to the singular German word ‘ich’. With an exclamation of the vocalist the music stops abruptly (see *Example 5*).

*Example 5: Jörg-Peter Mittmann, Exkurse I ... dem All-Einen (1999: 298–299).*

This exclamation – “Ach!” – is the beginning of a very fragmentally quoted section from Friedrich Hölderlin’s poem “Der Abschied”: “... wir kennen uns wenig, denn es waltet ein Gott in uns” (‘we know each other little, for one God prevails in us’ [my translation]). And in the recitation of it, exceedingly individualised words creep into the music of the second movement of Schubert’s Piano Sonata in A major, D. 959 (see *Example 6*):



4'' ca.21''

Ob. *mesto*

Stim. » wir ... kennen uns wenig. denn ... es waltet ein ... Gott ... in uns «

Vl. *f*

Va. *p, geheimnisvoll*

Vc. *p, geheimnisvoll*

Klav. *Andantino (hier ♩=66)*  
*sehr verhalten und leise, rubato, fast autistisch*  
*kaum artikulieren*

Example 6: Jörg-Peter Mittmann, *Exkurse I ... dem All-Einen* (1999: 299–300).

The motivation for this precarious association is the following: the ambitious search for the self as the ‘highest point of philosophy’, as Fichte maintained in 1794 (cf. 1971: §1), is in a way counteracted by Hölderlin’s words. There is an immediate counterpart to this in Schubert’s piece: the music is in no way ‘ambitious’, it lacks any development. The chordic structure simply swings between tonic and dominant, whereas the melody is restricted to a narrow ambit (the diatonic scale from G sharp’ to D’’) and avoids the tonic note F sharp. It starts on the third degree and needs 18 bars to meet the tonic degree for the first time! The result is an impression of a lack of direction, perhaps desolation, a timid floating over the tonal grounding, losing oneself in thought. It represents a radical privacy that in a way causes a performative contradiction to the publicity on stage.

Considering its compositional context, this quotation can certainly not be received according to its primary aesthetic function. Schubert’s music is not simply played in a concert but its interpretation is embedded in a setting which forms a kind of ‘metaconcert’, the performance of a performance of Schubert’s sonata. In addition to this, the quotation appears, with reference to the embedding performance, without any logic of formal musical development and is absolutely alien to the idiom of the preceding, embedding music. Hence, we have to classify this adoption as a clear case of intramedial reference. Now we have to ask again: is this implementation a means to an end? Does it only serve to transmit a semantic content, for instance to accentuate the character of Hölderlin’s words? Or does the occurrence of Schubert’s music in an alien context elicit (meta-)reflections on music, notably owing to the peculiar constellation of music and texts? Of course, I cannot evaluate whether such reflections are actually triggered in lis-

teners by the device but I can – as the composer – say that the adoption of Schubert’s sonata is intended, besides its role in the dramaturgy of the entire composition, to express my opinion on, or rather admiration of, this exceptional piece. And by taking the passage out of its context, I intended to draw the attention of the audience to its uniquely ‘minimalist’ character that could be missed under normal circumstances. The music is in a way commented on, not by means of alienation or emphasizing repetition but by *contrast* so that the timid restriction put on its chordic and melodic progression is underlined.

In addition, the conversation hints at a specific quality of Schubert’s slow movements. In what follows (see *Example 7*), the pianist suddenly stops playing and goes to write down the words from Hegel’s *Logik* (1830) “Die Rückkehr zum Anfang ist zugleich ein Fortgang” (1970: §244n, 393; “This return to the beginning is also an advance” [2007: 352]). This is meant to be understood as a motto not only for the architecture of ... *dem All-Einen* (the strings repeat a sequence of flageolets from the beginning of the piece) but also for Schubert’s *Andantino* itself.

*Example 7: Jörg-Peter Mittmann, Exkurse I ... dem All-Einen (1999: 302–303).*

The modest beginning is followed by a central part (bars 69–146, not quoted in my piece) completely different in its manner, troubled, energetically using a string of diminished seventh chords, chromatic scales and an extreme ambit (the striking contrast might almost remind one of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde). The final return to the beginning as demanded by the classical form of slow movements would be implausible after that. So there is a characteristically modified return,

‘contaminated’ by the central section so that a very significant element of that part, a triplet placed in the descant, makes us remember the preceding experience like an echo (see bars 159–175).

\* \* \*

The second example is taken from Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia*, a composition for eight vocalists and an orchestra in five movements. Berio himself described the third movement as follows:

The third part of *Sinfonia* [...] is perhaps the most experimental work I have written. [...] The piece is a tribute to Gustav Mahler (whose work seems to carry all the weight of the last two centuries of musical history) and, in particular, to the third movement of his *Symphony No. 2 ‘Resurrection’*. This movement is treated as a generative source, from which are derived a great number of musical figures ranging from Bach to Schönberg [...]. In this way these familiar objects and faces, set in new perspective, context and light, unexpectedly take on a new meaning. If I were asked to explain the presence of Mahler’s Scherzo in *Sinfonia*, the image that would naturally spring to mind would be that of a river running through a constantly-changing landscape [...].<sup>16</sup> (Berio 1986/2001: 2f.)

The exceptional accumulation of quotations occurring in *Sinfonia* and their parodistic quality which produce similarities to quodlibet forms do not elicit metareferential reflections on a single work as in my first example but on the entire tradition of symphonic music<sup>17</sup>. Not only the music itself but also elements of notation and even of musical teaching (solfège) are involved in a process, which besides all vitality may give the impression of a retrospection on a closed chapter of music history. And maybe in listening to this composition and trying to understand it, we ourselves have to bear the “weight of the last two centuries”, which Mahler’s work was already said to carry as a burden. All in all, *Sinfonia* with its intramedial references creates a noticeable distance between its (instrumental) music and the audience, a distance that is enlarged by the fact that Berio’s score includes eight voices. Their part is sometimes to comment on the music. These comments are not very profound but rather designed in the manner of sports reporters simply describing what happens<sup>18</sup>. They seem to break the

<sup>16</sup> For German translations and a detailed discussion see Budde 1972, Ravizza 1974, Altmann 1977, cf. Gartmann 1995: 117–126.

<sup>17</sup> For this general intention see also Danuser in this vol.

<sup>18</sup> For instance: “Oh Peripetie!” (Berio 1969: 35; this is the title of a piece quoted from Schönberg), “then two flutes” (while, of course, two flutes are starting to play in

traditional code of behavior that forbids any spoken word during a concert. This applies also to the final acknowledgement addressed to the conductor (“Thank you, mister ...” [Berio 1969: 97]), which we would usually expect after a lecture or a speech but not in the context of the highly ritualized form of a concert. Occasionally the vocalists also have to reproduce some instrumental parts which are more or less incompatible with singing. Here it should be noted that it was the progress of instrumental idioms which characterized the symphonic tradition for two centuries. Be that as it may, singing along during a concert seems to be a bad habit.

With all this in mind, we can conclude that Berio abandons the idea of creating an immediate, quasi naive musical impression in the performance of his composition. The performance, the concert as an institution, is brought into focus and the audience is invited to reflect upon it by the purposeful break with the traditional code of behaviour. And by introducing a level of vocalists that function, as it were, as some sort of reporters, Berio makes it clear that all performed music is the object of a very special attention, perhaps best compared to viewing animals in a zoo (behind the bars) or to a collection of butterflies (behind glass). Perhaps this association is influenced by the fact that the frame of Berio’s piece is formed by Mahler’s Scherzo from the Symphony no. 2 *Resurrection*, which itself goes back to a song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* entitled “Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt”<sup>19</sup>. If communication and especially sermons do not induce any change in mind and behaviour (as the fish in the song text do not change their way of life), we have to question the basic communicational function of language. In this sense, the primary aesthetic function of the mentioned music in Berio’s *Sinfonia* is not only suspended through intramedial reference but also questioned – albeit not in such

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this bar [ibid.: 36]), “in three eights” (spoken in an “annoyed” manner [ibid.: 39]), “three thousand notes” (ibid.: 41), “and the chromatic again” (ibid.: 42), etc.

<sup>19</sup> Mahler himself characterized the song as follows: “In der ‘Fischpredigt’ [...] herrscht [...] ein etwas süßsaurer Humor. Der heilige Antonius predigt den Fischen [...] Und wie die Versammlung dann, da die Predigt aus ist, nach allen Seiten davon schwimmt: und nicht um ein Jota klüger geworden ist, obwohl der Heilige ihnen aufgespielt hat! – Die Satire auf das Menschevolk...” (qtd. in Bauer-Lechner 1984: 28; “Anthony of Padua preaches to the fishes. The sermon was splendid, but all remain as they were. It is an ironic view of Man’s sinister nature.” [qtd. in Hamburger 1999: 79]).

a radical manner as was proposed around the same time by Pierre Boulez, whose provocative proposal to blow up all opera houses is often quoted (cf. 1967: 167). However, the tootling sixteenth notes of Mahler's Scherzo, which constantly accompany<sup>20</sup> the more and more desperately uttered request to 'keep going', seem to evoke, through their quotation, the idea of the continuity of a musical tradition which threatened to perish during the crises of the late 1960s<sup>21</sup>. Considering this as well as the aforementioned devices, we can say that Berio's *Sinfonia* represents a comprehensive statement concerning the entire tradition of symphonic music and forms a paradigmatic contribution to what I call metamusic.

Despite several differences, the two examples discussed, *Exkurse I* and *Sinfonia*, show to what extent music offers devices for constituting metareference by means of intramedial reference. As we have seen, intramedial reference in music always requires the implementation of at least some of the significant elements of the reference object into the composition in question. While many cases of such implementations are merely formal and use preexisting music according to its primary aesthetic function – I hesitate to call the relation formed in this way 'reference' at all – there is a particular class of composition in which the adopted music is to be understood essentially *as* an adoption. To grasp the meaning of such musical passages implies an insight into the intramedial reference as such as well as into its function. The adopted music here is not used according to its primary aesthetic function but is mentioned as a meaningful allusion similar to the mention of salient traditional topoi which are meant to be identified as such and thus contribute to the semantic texture of the composition in question. As has become clear, intramedial reference enables artistic communication by means of the adopted music. As for the question

<sup>20</sup> In a sense one could draw a parallel to Schumann's aforementioned Heine-song "Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen", in which the permanent movement also expresses or causes desperation.

<sup>21</sup> In contrast to this rather pessimistic interpretation one could point out that by inviting the listeners to identify the quoted pieces, *Sinfonia* may be informed by a certain educational eagerness. So, is *Sinfonia* a kind of guessing game? This is definitely not the case. The fact that individual titles of the quoted works are often indicated by the composer himself clearly disproves the idea that Berio's composition implies such a "Bildungs-Appeal" ('educational appeal') with reference to its audience – an idea which Altmann (cf. 1977: 46) considers and also rejects.

which is of special interest in the present volume, namely whether such intramedial reference also implies the basic idea of *metareference* as a reflection on the musical objects themselves, the examples discussed above have hopefully served to elucidate this issue. All in all, we have to concede that the relation between intramedial reference as a vehicle of generating semantic content and the metareferential reflection on preexisting music is a complicated affair. Raising our attention to topoi, allusions and quotations generally serves as the initiation of reflection on various aspects of the musical texture. Berio's accumulation of musical allusions *prima facie* serves to express merely a semantic content (e. g., the continuous sixteenth notes of Mahler's Scherzo represent the notion 'keep going'), my quotation of Schubert's *Sonata* *prima facie* underlines the idea of individualism in contrast to the universality of metaphysic concepts. Yet the conscious application of these musical devices inevitably leads us to reflect on their purpose in addition to a reflection on the nature of the adopted music itself, be it as a particular work, or as a member of a certain class. In this sense intramedial reference in music may, in fact, be said to also imply metareference.

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## “Please Play This Song on the Radio” Forms and Functions of Metareference in Popular Music

*Martin Butler*

This contribution explores phenomena of metareference in popular music through an analysis of a variety of songs from different musical genres and from different historical periods. Focussing on the verbal dimension, but also taking into account the musical and the performative dimensions of the sung word, it illustrates that popular musical forms of expression show a medial and generic self-consciousness and bear the potential to create an awareness of their economic, social and cultural embeddedness by foregrounding and critically reflecting on the processes of their production or composition, their marketing, their distribution and their reception. Moreover, the contribution ponders on possible explanations for the dramatic increase in metareferential phenomena that has occurred in the last two or three decades and thus maps the territory for further research in the field.

### 1. Exploring a ‘built-in feature’ of popular culture: on the aim and scope of the present contribution

Today, a wide variety of popular cultural forms of expression exhibit a distinct and often critical awareness of their own medial and generic status within the economic and institutional framework of the culture industry and an ever-growing market for entertainment. Be it Hollywood movies, television series, internet broadcasts or – what I will be concerned with here – popular music: in all of these forms of cultural expression one finds numerous examples of metareferentiality, which, so it appears, has become an almost ‘built-in feature’ of popular culture. However, it seems equally valid to claim that there is still the need to analyze the various elements of ‘metaization’ in closer detail both from a historical and from a generic, or transgeneric, perspective.

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to closing this gap by exploring various modes and strategies of exposing and reflecting on specific compositional elements, ideological implications and generic idiosyncrasies or limitations in songs from different musical genres and different historical periods. In doing so, this contribution attempts to provide answers to the questions of how and – what is more

important – why songs highlight their medial and generic status by employing signifying practices that “elicit a cognitive process or reflection on themselves, on other elements of the (sign) system or on the (sign) system as a whole” (Wolf: online)<sup>1</sup>.

It goes without saying that such an endeavor needs to acknowledge the plurimedial character of popular music, which is characterized by the intricate interplay between a verbal, a musical and a performative dimension. Yet, as “[s]ongs can use explicit metamusicality by thematizing singing and music making” (Wolf 2007b: 309), my investigation will, in most cases, start with an analysis of the verbal dimension of popular music, as it is here that instances of metareference appear most frequently. By including aspects of music and performance whenever they contribute to the metareferential momentum of the songs at stake, I nevertheless hope to illustrate that metareferential strategies are not at all limited to the verbal component of the sung word, but may also incorporate musical as well as performative elements<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Metareference then and now: on the historical dimension and recent developments of metareferential strategies in songs

To begin with, instances of occasional metareferentiality in contemporary popular music abound. One need only think of song titles such as Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song”, Robbie Williams’ “Let Me Entertain You”, R.E.M.’s “Radio Song”, or Bon Jovi’s “This Ain’t a Love Song”, all of which – in one way or another – point to themselves as songs. Yet, though there are numerous examples of such occasional metareferential elements in popular music, it is, in fact, a more limited

<sup>1</sup> In the description and analysis of forms and functions of metareference in popular music I draw upon the terminology provided by Werner Wolf in his systematic approach towards the phenomenon (see 2007a, 2007b, online, and the introduction to this vol.).

<sup>2</sup> The following analyses greatly benefited from some fruitful discussions I had with a number of colleagues during the conference “Metareference in the Arts and Media” on which the present volume is based. Among others, I would like to thank Fotis Jannidis, Tobias Janz, Henry Keazor, Karin Kukkonen, Andreas Mahler, René Michaelsen and Werner Wolf for drawing my attention to a number of issues which, in one way or another, contributed to shaping the final version of this contribution – those whom I forgot to mention may forbear.

(but still substantial) number of songs that bear the potential to create a more sustained awareness of their medial status and that may thus be said not only to contain metareferential elements but become metareferential as a whole (cf., e. g., Wolf 2007: 306). It is these songs in particular that I will be predominantly concerned with in the following.

That this contribution primarily focusses on more recent examples of popular music must not, however, mislead us to assume that metareference in popular musical forms of expression is a particularly new phenomenon. On the contrary, ever since songs have been employed to entertain people, to tell stories, to criticize social and political injustices or to articulate individual or collectively shared feelings, concerns or visions, they, at least at times, have included metareferential elements on the lyrical, the musical and the performative level alike. Metareferential elements can, for instance, already be found in early English ballads such as “A True Tale of Robin Hood” (1632), in which, in a very traditional manner, the singer/narrator directly calls for the attention of the audience – “Both gentlemen, or yeomen bould, / [...] / Attention now prepare” (Child 1956: 227) – and thus creates an awareness of the medium’s performative character as well as of the circumstances of the specific communicative situation. Moreover, the narrative character of the ballad and its potential function are foregrounded by emphasizing that “It is a tale of Robin Hood / Which I to you will tell / Which being rightly understood, I know will please you well” (ibid.). Other examples of this kind of introductory address of the audience so characteristic of the early English ballad tradition are, e. g., the lines “Come bachelors and married men / And listen to my song” (Chappell 2004: 341) from a black-letter ballad probably written in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or – in a more individualized manner – “Come, Jack, let’s drink a pot of ale / And I will tell thee such a tale” (ibid.: 358), which may indeed be qualified as metareferential.

However, despite the fact that different periods in cultural history indeed saw the emergence of a considerable variety of metareferential phenomena in song, it has only been in the last two or three decades that the quantity and the quality of metareferential elements in popular music seems to have undergone a significant change. Not only have instances of metareferentiality dramatically increased in number and occur now in a wide variety of musical genres and styles; there also seems to be a continuously growing number of popular songs in which the function to elicit an awareness of their medial and generic status as

well as of their contexts and conditions of production and reception within the institutional framework of the music industry assumes a particularly dominant position. Against the backdrop of these developments and the ever-widening spectrum of metareference in popular music, the present approach takes into account a range of more recent examples, but also considers the historical dimension of the phenomenon by starting with a case study from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.1. Between parody and homage: metareference as a means to create an awareness of a medium's historicity

A first metareferential mode in popular music, which I have detected in a number of songs that I found to be of a particular 'meta-quality', may well be characterized as the resuscitation and/or perpetuation of particular musical traditions and styles. It may either be achieved by (critically or non-critically) resorting both to textual and musical fragments of a song or to musical traditions that are regarded to have been especially influential (or popular), or by explicitly paying homage to particular bands, singers or songwriters who have significantly contributed to shaping an artist's personal musical development. Examples of the former kind of engaging with the lyrical and musical past are particularly frequent among politically motivated songs of various genres (ranging from rap to reggae to folk music and punk rock), in which the technique of parody – as a form of implicit extracompositional metareference – has become an established strategy to articulate ideological opposition rather than continuity. At a very early stage, political activist and singer Joe Hill – one of the most prominent representatives in the American tradition of the political song – perfected this technique in his numerous parodies or, in musicological terms, contrafactions of religious hymns. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these hymns were sung by Salvation Army bands in the streets of the big industrial cities in order to spread an ethics of suffering among

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, I cannot provide a comprehensive history of metareference in popular music here; nor is it possible to come to terms with the whole spectrum of metareferential strategies to be found in contemporary popular music. What I can and will, however, provide is an analysis of a selection of examples which I consider illustrative and enlightening as regards the metareferential potential of the sung word. As any thorough examination of possible reasons for the 'metareferential turn' hinted at above would also exceed the limits of this contribution, I will restrict myself to a very brief discussion of this issue in the concluding section.

the dissatisfied and often unemployed laborers. By using the tunes of the original songs, and by combining them with radically socialist lyrics, Hill turned the Salvation Army's propagation of an apology of suffering topsy-turvy (cf. Greenway 1953: 174–177; Hampton 1986: 67–69; Butler 2007a: 152–154).

One of the most famous songs that was ridiculed by Hill was the well-known religious hymn “In the Sweet Bye and Bye” (1868), that promises a heavenly reward for all those who accept and endure their suffering and toil on earth, starting with the following verse and chorus:

There's a land that is fairer than day,  
And by faith we can see it afar;  
For the Father waits over the way  
To prepare us a dwelling place there.  
In the sweet (in the sweet) by and by (by and by)  
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;  
In the sweet (in the sweet) by and by (by and by)  
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.<sup>4</sup>

Hill's parody-version of this hymn is called “The Preacher and the Slave” (1911) and employs the same melody. Thus, in a very effective manner, it conjured up a framework of associations the contemporary audience was extremely susceptible to, as it was, most probably, familiar with the Salvation Army tradition. However, as soon as Hill's rewritten lyrics set in, the ideological ‘message’ of the original was abruptly called into question:

Long-haired preachers come out ev'ry night,  
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;  
But when asked about something to eat,  
They will answer with voices so sweet:  
You will eat (you will eat) bye and bye (bye and bye)  
In that glorious land above the sky (way up high)  
Work and pray (work and pray), live on hay (live on hay),  
You'll get pie in the sky when you die (that's a lie). (IWW 1995: 49)

Hill's song explicitly points to the “[l]ong-haired preachers” who wander the streets of the big industrial cities to convince the workers of their ideas and thus unmasks the medium of song as a means of propaganda employed to calm down the dissatisfied workers. At the

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<sup>4</sup> The song is credited to Samuel F. Bennett and J. P. Webster (online). The lyrics are taken from the same website.

same time, he draws upon the *same* means in order to spread his critical attitude and to articulate political opposition by ridiculing the cliché-ridden imagery of the song's pretext, which is revealed as a mere strategy of delusion ("that's a lie"). The effect of Hill's parody, as one may argue, is thus based on his listeners' expectations for a certain musical piece, and – to apply Margaret A. Rose's findings on the metareferential implications of parody – "the disappointment of those expectations with the distortion of the text" (1979: 69). If we, moreover, allow ourselves to follow Rose's argument, Hill's contemporary audience was, on the one hand, satirically criticized having been highly responsive to the Salvation Army tradition. On the other hand, it may well identify with the ideological standpoint of the parodist both as critical reader and as author (cf. *ibid.*).

However, the relationship between text and pretext does not necessarily have to be critical as in Hill's parody, but may also be characterized by non-critical affirmation, that is, e. g. by explicitly paying homage to a particular artist through the perpetuation of his musical and lyrical heritage. An example for this kind of extracompositional metareference is Bob Dylan's well-known 1962 tribute to the American folksinger Woody Guthrie, Dylan's musical and political role model. In his "Song to Woody", Dylan acknowledges Guthrie's impact both on his own songwriting and his ideological convictions:

Hey, Woody Guthrie, but I know that you know  
 All the things that I'm a-sayin' an' a-many times more.  
 I'm a-singin' you the song, but I can't sing enough,  
 'Cause there's not many men that done the things that you've done.

(Dylan 2005: [my transcript])

Interestingly enough, it is not only the lyrics that turn the song into an homage to Guthrie, who is directly addressed and praised for his remarkable musical and lyrical achievement; the tribute is also inherent in the musical composition, as Dylan drew upon the tune of "1913 Massacre", one of Guthrie's best-known songs, for this sung appreciation of his dedicatee's impact on his own musical development. Thus, one may well argue that both the lyrical and the musical reference to Guthrie's 'pretext', which can be characterized as explicit extracompositional metareferences, here function to 1) pay reverence to Guthrie and his lyrical as well as musical heritage in a non-critical, affirmative way; 2) to fashion Dylan as Guthrie's musical and ideological successor, who will be able to follow in the former's footsteps and to both combine and enrich the stylistic features of Guthrie's sung legacy with

his own creative impetus, and 3) to create an awareness of the fact that, generally speaking, both the theme and the musical composition of a song are, more often than not, far from being original, but indebted to established poetic and musical topoi and traditions<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.2. Metareference as a critical reflection on compositional strategies and conventions

Metareferential elements are, however, not only employed as a means of paying homage to or parodying musical styles and thematical traditions. They are also used for what one may describe as an explicit exposition of and reflection on the various compositional conventions popular music has to adhere to in order to become a bestselling commodity within the economic framework of production, marketing and distribution. To be precise, there are indeed a number of songs in different genres that, verbally and musically, foreground the thematic and structural features which may help turn a song into a hit, thus triggering reflections on the compositional characteristics of pop songs as mere products of economic or marketing-related factors. One striking example is “Please Play This Song on the Radio” by the Californian punk rock band NOFX, which appeared on their 1992 album *White Trash, Two Heebs and a Bean*. Right from the beginning, the song comments on its own verbal and musical features. Apart from the song foregrounding its own inherent structural elements and patterns, it could, however, also be argued that this kind of intracompositional metareference, moreover, elicits a more general reflection on the restrictive compositional patterns a pop song has to resort to in order to be put on a radio station’s playlist. In so doing, it reminds its

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast to classical musical compositions, in which parody and homage are also employed as metareferential strategies, but, more often than not, in a comparatively complex and intricate way, it seems as if popular musical parodies or homages, as the above examples may have illustrated, refer to their musical pretexts in a more obvious and marked way, e. g., by reference to larger, easily recognizable compositional patterns, by abrupt breaks, insertions, samples or by salient deviations. Of course, this phenomenon might be explained by the (alleged) target audience of popular music in contrast to that of classical (instrumental) music. For the use of parody (and homage) in classical instrumental music, see the contributions by Hermann Danuser, Tobias Janz, Jörg-Peter Mittmann (all in this vol.), see also Wolf 2007a and Schneider 2004. For a more detailed account of homage in politically motivated vocal music see Butler/Sepp 2008.



listeners of the fact that producing a hit single is, to a great extent, determined by a clear-cut prefabricated compositional template which is, in turn, predominantly shaped by marketing-related factors:

We wrote this song, it's not too short, it's not too long  
 It's got back-up vocals in just the right places  
 It's got a few oohs and ahhs  
 And it takes a little pause  
 Just before I sing the F-word  
 Please play this song on the radio  
 Almost every line is sung in time  
 And almost every verse ends in a rhyme  
 The only problem we had was writing enough words  
 Ooh ... aah  
 But that's okay, because the chorus is coming up again now  
 Please play this song on the radio  
 Please play this song on the radio (NOFX 1992: [my transcript])

As the listener will easily notice, all the features that the band claims to have incorporated into their composition in order to make it suitable for radio promotion, are 'put into musical action', so to speak, shortly after they have been announced in the song: on the musical level, there are back-up vocals underlining the very phrase "in just the right places". While the singer proclaims that there are "a few oohs and ahhs", we hear some in the background; and the singer deliberately mispronounces the word "rhyme" as [rim] to make his immediately preceding observation that "*almost* every verse ends in a rhyme" (my emphasis) come true. The confession that "the only problem we had was writing enough words", which nicely mocks the thematic 'flatness' of the majority of popular songs, is then followed by an unmotivated repetition of the "oohs and ahhs", before the singer announces the second chorus, which indeed sets in immediately afterwards and is repeated in variation, seemingly bringing the song to an end. It is surely only the singer's announcement that he will make use of the "F-word" after "a little pause" that suspiciously disturbs the pop discourse of the song and makes us aware of the fact that there is still something more to come<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Critical voices could argue that the first verse is not self-referential at all, as it is spoken in a 'different voice', thus assuming the status of a quotation, so to speak, of a number of schematized views of the compositional features of popular songs – a phenomenon the audience of NOFX is certainly aware of. Though I agree, to a certain extent, with this argument in that the song does not critically comment upon itself in all of its parts, I would like to emphasize that it still bears a particular metareferential

And indeed, the song does not end. Instead, it takes an unusually long break before another verse begins that does not at all comply with, but deviates from the established standards of pop lyrics. Its explicit language, as the band concludes in a variation of the chorus that sets in after this second verse, makes it unsuitable for radio promotion:

Right about this time  
 Some shithead will be drawing a fat fucking line  
 Over the title on the back sleeve  
 What an asshole!  
 So Mr. DJ, I hope you've already made your segue  
 Or the FCC is gonna take a shit right on your head  
 Can't play this song on the radio  
 Can't play this song on the radio (ibid.: [my transcript])

Here, the band leaves the realm of politically correct pop discourse and includes a number of verbal 'don'ts' that lead to their rightful estimation that their song will eventually fall victim to the censorship of the FCC, i. e., the Federal Communications Commission of the United States, which is responsible for identifying songs with explicit lyrics and to delete them from the playlists of both radio stations and music television nationwide<sup>7</sup>.

One may argue that such a 'sung analysis' of the 'dos and don'ts' in the production of a hit single not only foregrounds the song's artifactual character. It also, and more importantly so, elicits a critical awareness of the predictable compositional and thematic features of the majority of popular songs that indeed resort to a number of highly schematized verbal and musical patterns, while, at the same time, avoiding others which might harm the rather conservative moral standards of a mainstream audience. In an ironic manner, the song thus lays bare the demands and expectations of the producers, the me-

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potential as it draws the audience's attention to the logic of pop composition and the marketing of popular culture as a commodity *in general*. Following the plausible assumption that the song is addressed to a particular group of people who share the ideological convictions articulated in the song, one could even go so far as to conceive of the song's metareferential mode (including the 'quotation' of the first verse) as a strategy of contributing to the feeling of a shared identity.

<sup>7</sup> "The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is an independent United States government agency. The FCC was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and is charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable." [<http://www.fcc.gov/aboutus.html>; 16/08/2008.]

diators and the recipients of popular music who expect certain patterns to be employed in a song that may then – and only then – be considered a ‘good’ and ‘playable’ one. And, taking into consideration that the band NOFX, as the second verse of their song might have indicated, is one of the most explicit and outspoken Californian punk rock bands, which has always been critical of mainstream pop and the commodification of forms of cultural expression, such mockery might not come as a surprise.

### 2.3. Metareference as a reflection on the role of the artist and the social and cultural significance of his/her medium

Another metareferential strategy in songs is related to the performative character of popular music, i. e., the social dimension of the sung word as a form of oral communication between artist and listener, and may be characterized as the reflection on the artist’s patterns of behavior and his ideological and political role as a performer. In other words: there are elements of metareference in popular music that critically foreground the artist’s *habitus* on and off stage, which is, as a rule, strongly tied to specific generic conventions. These conventions are, in turn, “governed by a definite set of socially acceptable rules” (Frith 2002: 91), i. e., shaped by the audience’s expectations. Thus, time and again, popular music not only deals with the established lyrical and musical repertoire it usually draws upon, but also comments on its performative character as well as on the highly standardized ritual of its being mediated to its listeners.

One of the most intriguing examples of exposing this ritual in song is Bob Dylan’s gig at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965: Dylan, who has always been at least one step ahead of (or beyond) the musical labels people had continuously been trying to attach to him, walked on stage dressed in “rock and roll clothes – black leather jacket, yellow pin shirt without the tie” (Mike Bloomfield qtd. in Marcus 2005: 155). He plugged in a heavily distorted electric guitar and sang with an equally distorted voice<sup>8</sup>. Through this act of neglecting and, at the same time, exposing the performative conventions of the traditional protest song, which was usually accompanied by an acoustic guitar,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Marcus 2005: 155–159 for a more detailed account of Dylan’s gig, which, “as a performance [...] has grown into perhaps the most storied event in the history of modern popular music” (ibid.: 155).

sung with a clear and straightforward voice, and staged without any kind of glamorous decoration, Dylan trod on the toes of the entire folk community, who had, already at the beginning of the 1960s, started to fashion him as the ultimate folk icon. The people at Newport were shocked by his appearance, and one of his comrades, folk singer Pete Seeger, remembered that:

[y]ou could not understand the words, and I was frantic. I said, 'Get that distortion out.' It was so raspy, you could not understand a word. And I ran over to the sound system. 'Get that distortion out of Bob's voice.' 'No, this is the way they wanna have it.' And I said, 'God damn it. You can't understand it. It's terrible. If I had an axe, I'd chop the mike cable right now.' (Qtd. in Raab 2007: 178)

As the emotional response among the listeners indicates, Dylan's conspicuous non-fulfillment of expectations indeed had the potential to trigger a meta-reflection among the audience. As one could argue, his listeners were forcefully reminded of the 'framedness' (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 28) of their reception at the very moment they felt confused or even annoyed by Dylan's unconventional and extraordinary appearance on stage, which may be characterized as an implicit metareference. As "a marked deviation from conventionally stabilized expectations" (Wolf: online) of the folk community, Dylan's gig in Newport thus definitely succeeded in creating an awareness of medial and generic restrictions and limitations by deliberately suspending them at the very moment of his performance on stage.

Furthermore, the lyrics to his first song on the set list contributed to the metareferential momentum of his most scandalous gig: Dylan started with a song called "Maggie's Farm" that implicitly alluded to one of Dylan's concerts at a place called Silas Magee's Farm, where he had raised his voice for the civil rights movement as a protest singer only two years earlier – back then, by the way, he had conformed to the expectations of his audience. In 1965, however, everything was different. The existing live recording of his gig immediately reveals his refraining from the clear instrumentalization of the politically motivated folk song, with the lyrics contributing their part to his sung renunciation of the generic conventions he somehow felt restricted by:

I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.  
No, I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.  
Well, I try my best  
To be just like I am,  
But everybody wants you  
To be just like them.



yes  
 revolutionary words bein  
 digested with  
     bubble gums  
     popcorn an  
     ice cream  
 in tall inter conti nental  
                     buildins

(Mutabaruka 2005: *The First Poems*: 56)

Besides pondering on the changing, or changed, status of the protest poet, Mutabaruka's poem also comments on the quality of their compositions, which are said to be "babbl[ed] out" rather than thoughtfully composed and arranged. In so doing, the poem points to the fact that the Caribbean protest culture has long been ideologically hollowed out (cf. Gymnich 2007: 236f.). Moreover, it critically reflects on the reception (or misreception) of its allegedly political 'message', which is "digested with / bubble gums / popcorn an / ice cream / in tall inter conti nental / buildins", once again implying that authentic protest and political opposition have long been replaced by a culture of entertainment, in other words: that subversion has long been contained by the mainstream (cf. *ibid.*).

Mutabaruka's "Dis Poem" also foregrounds aspects of the production, the reception and the ideological implications of political poetry as a medium of protest and opposition. As Marion Gymnich observes in her analysis of the poem, lines such as "dis poem is watchin u tryin to make sense from dis poem" (Mutabaruka 2005: *The Next Poems* 10) constantly remind its listeners of its medial status and highlight the process of its reception. Moreover, as Gymnich (cf. 2007: 237) continues to argue, the poem also reflects on the status of political poetry within the Caribbean literary system, as it points out that "dis poem will not be amongst great literary works / will not be recited by poetry enthusiasts / will not be quoted by politicians nor men of religion" (Mutabaruka 2005: *The Next Poems*: 10).

### 3. Towards a systematic analysis of metareference in popular music: mapping the territory for further research

Admittedly, the rather limited number of 'metasongs' analyzed above, some of which could be characterized as being politically motivated

and thus by definition attentive to questions of (sub)cultural authenticity and the thin line between sell-out and subversion, does not really allow for a systematic and comprehensive typology of the forms and functions of metareference in popular music<sup>10</sup>. Yet, in spite of the necessarily unrepresentative sample that forms the basis of this study, it may still be legitimate to infer that popular musical forms of expression have indeed developed a medial and generic self-consciousness and bear the potential to elicit an awareness of their economic, social and cultural embeddedness by foregrounding and critically reflecting on the processes of their production or composition, marketing, distribution and their reception. Though the metareferential elements are most often manifest in a popular song's verbal dimension, both its musical and performative dimensions could be shown to also enhance this awareness on the part of both the producer and the recipient. I have also illustrated that metareferential strategies are indeed employed in a number of different genres and for a range of different purposes.

The metareferential strategies which I have detected in the course of my analysis and which contribute to creating a distinct medium awareness, may basically be categorized into three groups. There are, as a first group, those strategies that elicit reflections on 'music as a historically developing system' by highlighting the songs' *indebtedness to* and their *embeddedness in* particular lyrical and musical traditions either through artistic and ideological subversion or through non-critical affirmation and perpetuation of these traditions. A second group includes elements that uncover the standardized compositions of (the majority of) popular songs and critically expose their status as cultural commodities, thus shedding light on the economic (marketing-related) aspects of their production and dissemination. Yet another group of metareferential strategies in popular music foregrounds the social dimension of the sung word, critically reflecting on various as-

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, though it is certainly true that metareferential strategies can indeed be employed as means of protest and resistance, e. g., when they are used to denounce the music industry and undermine established compositional standards and conventions, and though it seems as if popular music were (by way of metareference) indeed increasingly engaged with itself as a mass medium and the contexts of its production and reception, I would like to point out that it would, of course, be simplistic to assume that popular music, in general, has a tendency to be subversive and critical – one must not forget that one of its main functions is entertainment.

pects of performance, on the role of the artist and the expectations of his or her audience as well as on the social, cultural and ideological significance of popular music as a (mass) medium.

As already hinted at, the tripartite division outlined above is, in the first place, meant to be understood as a heuristic framework rather than a comprehensive and clear-cut typology. Moreover, a number of songs discussed may well be grouped in more than one category, as the boundaries between these types are indeed both 'fuzzy' and 'porous' and certainly need to be continuously redrawn. However, by taking a first step towards a more systematic and comprehensive approach towards phenomena of metareference in popular music, I hope that this contribution helps create an awareness of the necessity for digging deeper in this field.

Yet, against the backdrop of the above observation that, ever since the 1980s, there seems to have been a dramatic increase in metareferential forms of popular culture in general and popular music in particular, further research should not only concentrate on elaborating on a more clear-cut and specific conceptualization and systematization of metareference in this realm of cultural production; what is also needed are hypotheses about possible reasons for this 'explosion' of metareferential phenomena in the last few decades. Can it be traced back to a specific development in that period, e. g., the emergence and the institutionalization of music television and the subsequent rise of a financially potent and influential media network of unprecedented size, which made popular music turn to itself in a very critical way, thematizing aspects of its production, reflecting on its channels of dissemination and entering a dialogue with its audience? Or is the dramatic increase in metareferential phenomena in popular music a mere by-product of a general tendency towards a commodification of culture and a medialization of society, in which an ever-growing range of medial forms of expression and mediate ways of communication determine human relationships and interaction and thus particularly lend themselves to be critically reflected upon? Following from this, could it not be the case that the almost inflationary use of metareference in popular music (and culture in general) is but a marketing strategy to increase sales of popular cultural commodities, which otherwise would lose their appeal to an audience who is already used to the 'meta-effect'? Or is the growing tendency towards metareferentiality just another attempt to escape the prejudiced view of popular culture as being inferior to 'high' art and to elevate it into the realm of aes-



thetic and political relevance? Questions like these, which might best be answered through a thorough examination of the social, political, economic and cultural environments of metareferential forms of cultural expression – including, e. g., the respective contexts of reception and the specific forms of (sub)cultural knowledge and media competences of audiences – should thus guide further explorations of the metareferential phenomena in popular music (and popular culture in general), which, in turn, might help to come up with plausible explanations for what might well be labelled the ‘metareferential turn’.

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## **Metareference in the Visual Arts**



“L’architecture n’est pas un art rigoureux”  
Jean Nouvel, Postmodernism and Meta-Architecture

*Henry Keazor*

When thinking about ‘meta-architecture’, the first thing that springs to mind is postmodernist architecture: its collecting and combining diverse historical styles from different epochs in a very conscious way are a clear sign of a highly self-referential attitude. Considered in the context of the present volume’s terminology, postmodernist architecture appears, moreover, as seemingly critical but actually quite ‘harmless’ metareference. However, the underlying assumption, namely that architecture is a medium in which metareference can occur, may appear debatable. This assumption is discussed here with the help of a historical as well as a methodological survey of the efforts to view and analyze architecture as a means of communication. Finally, the dilemma of postmodernist metareferential architecture is focussed by comparing it to another form of more critical meta-architecture which has been developed by the French architect Jean Nouvel: coming to terms with the reasons and motives that generated postmodernist architecture, but without adopting its solutions, Nouvel conceived an ‘architecture critique’ which uses postmodernist strategies in order to voice critique and protest.

“Une architecture parlante, et qui fera parler.”  
(Chaslin 2008: 25, on Jean Nouvel’s “Collège Anne Frank”)

### 1. The dilemma of postmodernist architecture

According to the architect and historian Charles Jencks modern(ist) architecture<sup>1</sup> died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1972 at 3.32 p.m., when the sub-

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<sup>1</sup> Jencks’ nomenclature is far from being consistent or well sorted: thus, he talks about “modern” architecture where he obviously means ‘modernist’, deliberately confusing the term ‘modern’, which usually refers to contemporary architecture, with ‘modernist’, the notion used for a specific architectural movement of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This gives him the possibility of opposing ‘modern’ to ‘postmodern’ and thus of making the latter look like the rightful successor of all ‘modern’ architecture. Cf. in this context also the critique by Lampugnani 1986: 195. Fischer therefore corrects Jencks by stating that he actually describes the death of functionalism and that he wrongly equates the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe with the death of modern(ist)

urban housing complex Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri was blown up (cf. 1977: 9). Conceived and built according to the advanced ideals and principles of the architect Le Corbusier and the CIAM, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (a series of international conferences of modern architects between 1928 and 1959), the design of Pruitt-Igoe had been awarded a prize by the American Institute of Architects in 1951 and had been realized in the following years, between 1952 and 1955 (cf. also Newman 1996: 10). However, a mere twenty years later it turned out that the rationalistic and puristic style thought to equally promote rationalistic and morally pure behaviour among its inhabitants<sup>2</sup> had actually been perceived by them as cold, sterile and anonymous, and instead of provoking virtuous behaviour, it had made them turn their frustration and aggression against each other as well as against the surrounding architecture itself: the Pruitt-Igoe complex had the highest crime rates in St. Louis, and at the time the buildings were blown up, they had been badly damaged, besmirched and disfigured over the years by their inhabitants (cf. *ibid.*: 9–11).

Although Jencks' claim that with the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe the "Death of Modern Architecture" (1977: 9) had taken place seems rather exaggerated (since, e. g., even after the destruction of these buildings, equally rationalistic examples of the modernist style continued to be built)<sup>3</sup>, it is clear why he interpreted the end of this architectural complex in such a dramatic way: with it, the failure of some of the most central ideals of the modern(ist) movement in architecture became seemingly evident. Rational and simple forms, following function rather than the dictate of sumptuous décor, and ornament-less purity – all believed to turn the inhabitants' minds toward an equally

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architecture (cf. 1991: 9). For the fundamental distinctions between 'modern' and 'modernist' see also Heynen 1992.

<sup>2</sup> For the idea of a positive influence of 'good' architecture on its inhabitants cf. Taut 1929: 7; the central idea behind this concept has been aptly put into words by Theodor W. Adorno, who in his 1965 lecture "Funktionalismus heute" states that an architecture worthy of human beings thinks of them than better they actually are (cf. 1967: 120).

<sup>3</sup> Opposing Jencks' position, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, e. g., refutes the latter's rendering of the case by stating – among other things – that the failure of Pruitt-Igoe did not only have architectural but also political, social and administrative reasons, that the ominous date of 1972, which Jencks named as the dying-hour of modernist architecture, is more or less arbitrary and that Jencks' use of the term 'modern' is rather vague and confusing (cf. 1986: 194–197 and see fn. 1 above).

pure honesty and rationality – had apparently been perceived as boring, dull and even oppressive.

No wonder Jencks proclaims the evident crisis and the death of modernist architecture in the early 1970s, a period that saw the birth and rise of postmodernist architecture, whose full bloom, according to Jencks himself, coincided with the fall of modernist architecture (cf. 1977: 81–132). Postmodernist architecture had thus not merely been prepared for during the late 1960s but can, from Jencks' perspective, also be described as the response and exact counter-movement to modernist architecture.

Hence, modernist architecture mainly promoted credos such as Louis Sullivan's "Form follows function"<sup>4</sup> and Mies van der Rohe's "Less is more" (an absence of ornament was felt to come as a relief after the often exaggerated décor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), which postmodernist architects – in the wake of earlier critics such as Saul Steinberg, Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno<sup>5</sup> – turned into critical responses such as "Less is a bore" (Venturi 1966: 25). They considered merely rational and aesthetically severe design as leading to desolate and meaningless results. While modernist architects had expected the viewer and visitor of a building to be influenced and impregnated by its rationality, the postmodernists pointed out that viewers and visitors did not feel anything in front of such buildings. It was thus claimed that architecture, instead of waiting for the viewer to approach it and be influenced by it, had to try to actively communicate with the recipients again, to actually make a communicational 'move' towards them by approaching them through signs and elements they known and are familiar with<sup>6</sup>. This also explains the heavy recourse of postmodernist

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<sup>4</sup> A minimal use of material was promoted in opposing the 19<sup>th</sup>-century practice of paying exaggerated attention to aesthetic ideals that led to the material actually used often being hidden or camouflaged.

<sup>5</sup> See Steinberg's 1954 caricature "Graph Paper Architecture" of a skyscraper consisting of nothing but a blank piece of graph paper; cf. Bloch 1977: 20–29; 1959: 858–863 and Adorno 1967: 110f., 114, 123.

<sup>6</sup> The concept behind this idea had already been voiced before by Jacques-François Blondel in his *Cours d'architecture civile*, published in Paris in six volumes between 1771 and 1777, in which he stresses the fact that beauty does not lie in the object itself (as someone holding an idealistic point of view would argue, a position which was then taken up by the modernist architects), but in the experiences of the beholder; in the wake of Boffrand (cf. 2002: 8) objects thus have to show a certain 'affirmative'



architecture to the rich and multifaceted tradition of architectural styles and symbols that were considered to appear as familiar and easily recognizable for the viewer.

Yet, if taken seriously and followed rigidly, this recycling of tradition would only have resulted in a revival of 19<sup>th</sup>-century architectural historicism which had chosen certain, seemingly appropriate traditional styles for given building projects (e. g., the style of Gothic cathedrals for railway stations or of Greek and Roman temples for banks or museums). Given, however, that already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century uncertainty had arisen concerning questions of how to adequately answer the demands of new building forms<sup>7</sup>, and since postmodernist architecture wanted to escape rules and regulations in favour of a playful, surprising and humorous appearance of its buildings, eclecticism as well as free, provoking variations were the key notions. It thus becomes understandable why architecture itself and its history were often made the topics of postmodernist buildings: not only was the old topos that the façade of a building corresponds to a human face (with the eyes being the windows of the soul and the mouth the passage way for communication)<sup>8</sup> frequently taken up, but one also often encountered the iconic forms of a house inside a house<sup>9</sup>.

Moreover, it also becomes clear why a prominent forerunner of the movement such as Robert Venturi found a prime inspiration for postmodernist architecture in the aesthetics of the Las Vegas Strip with its loud, big and heavily symbolic, ornamental and decorative advertising

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and 'appealing' character (cf. Blondel 1771–1777: vol. 2, 229f.). Cf. also Krufft 1985: 162, 167.

<sup>7</sup> See the programmatic title of Heinrich Hübsch's 1828 publication *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen* and also Walther 2003: for the general context cf. Schwarzer 1995: 51–53 and see Walther 2003.

<sup>8</sup> This reminds one of a statement by Louis Sullivan (qtd., e. g., in Joedicke 1991: 6) that behind every façade the face of the person who designed it becomes visible. For the topicality of this approach see, e. g., the Los Angeles conference "Faces and Façades: The Structure of Display in Renaissance Italy", organized by the Renaissance Society of America in March 2009; the conference organizers stressed the same etymological origin of the two notions and the early modern sources and compare them.

<sup>9</sup> As another example see, e. g., Oswald Matthias Ungers' architecture for the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt am Main (1979–1984) which features a house stretching along the full length of the building in order to emphasize the fact that it is a museum about architecture. For this motive and the project cf. Ungers 1983: 59–67.

signs and buildings, which, as Venturi puts it in his book tellingly entitled *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, “accommodate existing needs for variety and communication” (1966: 49). But apart from the resulting frequent combination of diverse and often heterogeneous elements which should guarantee the “variety” and a pluralism of possible ‘meanings’<sup>10</sup>, it was still felt that a building also had to take into consideration its architectural surroundings. While the projects of the modernists were accused of often having ignored this, thus having ‘arrogantly’ placed (as it was felt) architectural solitaires in a context for which they were unsuited, the postmodernists claimed to be more aware of the importance of achieving a pleasant and harmonious result when inserting a new building into a given context<sup>11</sup>. This, however, sometimes caused complications, as, e. g., when, upon designing the Clore Gallery (an extension to the London Tate Gallery), the architect James Sterling had to revise its façade five times in order to match it with the continuously changing appearances of the buildings in the neighbourhood (cf. Jencks 1977: 166).

All these aims are summed up by the postmodernist battle cry of the three closely related notions “wit, ornament and reference” (Klausner: online), the “wit” often being achieved by making “reference” (i. e., architectural self-reference) to historical elements and their “ornament[s]”, presenting and mixing them, however, in an unexpected and surprising way.

The nature and quality, but also the shortcomings, of this approach can perhaps be best illustrated with “the most telling example of post-modern architecture” (Rosenblum 1996: 53): Charles Willard Moore’s

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<sup>10</sup> One of Venturi’s other books (Venturi/Scott Brown/Izenour 1972) carries the telling title *Learning from Las Vegas*. See also the exhibition “Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City” organized by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in 1976 at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C. Its intention was defined as “to show that the elements of architecture have symbolic meaning and give messages about the environment that makes it comprehensible and therefore usable by people in their daily lives” (Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners 1976: s. p.).

<sup>11</sup> Jencks (cf. 1977: 110) refers to the movement of ‘Contextualism’, which started in the early 1960s at Cornell University, and he quotes Graham Shane’s 1976 article as an example of discussing its possible concrete architectural implications. For the current development of Contextualism see Tomberlin, ed. 1999 and Stanley 2005.

“Piazza d’Italia” (see *Illustration 1*), designed and built between 1976 and 1979 in New Orleans, Louisiana<sup>12</sup>.



*Illustration 1: Charles Willard Moore, “Piazza d’Italia” (1976–1979). New Orleans, LA.*

When the project was accepted, it was supposed to serve three main purposes. First, it was meant to foreground the Italian community’s contribution to New Orleans’ multiculturalism. Up until then, the Italians had felt rather eclipsed by their French, Spanish and Afro-American compatriots, which is what the inscription “Popoli Italiani Novae Orleaniensae fecerunt hanc fontem” on the entablature refers to. Apart from thus being a sort of monument for the Italian community, the “Piazza d’Italia” was, secondly, meant to grant the Italian as well as other inhabitants of New Orleans a space where they could gather and spend time together. Finally, since the city was concerned about the increasing demolition rates in the central business district, the “Piazza d’Italia” was welcomed as a sign of revitalisation, which is why the city was immediately ready to subsidise the project.

<sup>12</sup> For the “Piazza d’Italia” cf. especially Douglas 1979: 255, Klotz 1984: 137–140, Johnson 1987: 78f. and Jencks 1988: 146.

Moore created an architecture that takes up all these implications. The need for revitalisation was, for instance, articulated by the fact that the whole square as well as the architecture is dominated by the water from the St. Joseph's fountain, which at the same time forms the centre and the apex of the entire complex. While quoting classic elements from Roman Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance such as the five historic orders – Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite – that lead hierarchically up to the fountain, Moore seizes the opportunity to playfully develop and term new architectural forms emerging from the connection between architecture and water such as his 'wetopes', i. e., a form of metopes (the rectangular spaces above the architrave between two triglyphs) normally consisting of a painted or sculpted block of stone, but in Moore's case empty squares filled with water shooting up from small nozzles at the bottom of each square.

Moreover, seen from above, the irregular platforms and steps of the fountain's basin turn out to depict the boot of Italy. At the same time, all this is closely embedded into the context of the complex at large: not only do the references to Italy match the fact that the American Italian Renaissance Foundation has its museum and library adjacent to the "Piazza d'Italia", but the architecture is also visually embedded into its surroundings. Thus, the concentric stripes of the pavement, encircling the fountain and leading towards it, connect the square and the black and white surface of a modernist skyscraper in the background (cf. Jencks 1988: 146).

As can easily be shown, Moore's "Piazza d'Italia" meets all the demands of postmodernist architecture by trying to oppose the criticized "univalence" of the modernist architecture (Jencks 1977: 15) with complexity, often achieved by aiming at double encoding (cf. Jencks 1988: 5f.):

- 1) Postmodernist architecture is pragmatic and functional, yet at the same time funny, playful, ironic and full of surprises. Instead of merely presenting a bare, simple fountain or a historically correct, however dated and boring neoclassical ambiance, this architecture develops traditional and as such recognizable ornamental forms further, modernizing them, moreover, through combination with contemporary materials (such as steel or neon-lights) and strong colouring.

- 2) As always in postmodernist architecture, the setting is modern without, however, appearing puristic, while it is at the same time conventional without being conservative.
- 3) As is typical of postmodernist architecture, the “Piazza d’Italia” is popular and elitist: it is popular inasmuch as it is accessible to every viewer and visitor not only by providing the fun of a vivid fountain, but by also inviting communication via easily understandable forms and shapes such as the elements of classical architecture or the boot of Italy. On the other hand, it is elitist inasmuch as there are numerous references which are lost on those without a broader architectural and/or art-historical background<sup>13</sup>: not many will recognize auto-portraits of the architect in the fountain’s water-spouting heads, nor will everybody understand that the aesthetics of the “Piazza” with its flat and shallow scene-like, colourful arches and walls intermedially refer to Giorgio de Chirico’s “Piazza d’Italia”-paintings from the 1950s, but especially to his “Gare Montparnasse – La Mélancolie du départ” from 1914 (see *Illustration 2*), whose clock tower in the background is almost literally quoted in Moore’s ensemble (see *Illustration 3*)<sup>14</sup>.

Yet on the other hand it is due to these very self-references and set-like designs that postmodernist architecture itself was soon criticized and finally considered a mere short-term fashion<sup>15</sup>. The quotations from other eras and styles were soon perceived as rather arbitrary, self-indulgent and as having an end only in themselves; the facades were condemned as being but flat cosmetics behind which the actual emptiness and lack of truly original ideas were concealed (‘architec-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Douglas: “It seems inconsistent that the vernacular ‘pop architecture’ of the Piazza – with its academic references – is too obscure for the general public. [...] Perhaps with the Italian Piazza, ‘pop architecture’ has advanced into ‘elite architecture’; and that may be the ultimate architectural paradox” (1979: 256).

<sup>14</sup> For a view of the “Piazza d’Italia” as “a walk-through reconstruction of de Chirico’s Italianate motifs” in general cf. Rosenblum 1996: 53. For de Chirico’s “Piazza d’Italia”-paintings cf., e. g., the version in Toronto (Art Gallery of Ontario) from ca. 1950 in Taylor 2002: 209, no. 36; for the “Gare Montparnasse – La Mélancolie du départ” from 1914 cf. Schmied 1980: 286, no. 34.

<sup>15</sup> See for this, e. g., the criticism below (in fn. 45) or the view voiced by Fischer (cf. 1989: 88), who sees the present ruinous state of Moore’s “Piazza d’Italia” as a symptom of the fact that it was the ideal incarnation of postmodern architecture and thus had to suffer the fate of all short-termed fashion.



*Illustration 2: Giorgio de Chirico, “Gare de Montparnasse – La Mélancolie du départ” (1914). Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. (Orig. in colour.)*



*Illustration 3: Charles Moore, “Piazza d’Italia” (1976–1979), view of the clock tower. New Orleans, LA.*

ture mensongère' or 'facadism' were the negative keywords here<sup>16</sup>); their colourfulness was soon considered tiring, and the whole movement was in the end accused of ironically toying around with the actual problems without, however, developing a clearly defined position towards them, which in the end made postmodernist architecture a playful but blind alley.

## 2. Architecture, language and the question of (explicit) metareference

The inherent dilemma of postmodernist architecture, which started as a way out of the modernist dead end but turned into a dead end itself, becomes clearly apparent from a metareferential point of view<sup>17</sup>, from which it appears as a form of explicit and originally critical metareference.

However, before drawing conclusions, the question of whether architecture can be considered capable of explicit metareference in the first place has to be raised and answered. Given that a postmodernist creation such as the "Piazza d'Italia" clearly defines architecture and architectural history as its main topic by way of its media-specific means<sup>18</sup>, with the apparent intention of making a critical statement about the surrounding modernist architecture, this seems to be the case. As Werner Wolf states in his introduction to this volume (cf. 44), there are, however, positions according to which explicit metareference is restricted exclusively to the verbal media, and this "would automatically reduce all metareference outside at least partially verbal media (such as literature, film, the musical theatre etc.) to implicit

<sup>16</sup> For the tradition of these notions cf. Pennini 2008: 155.

<sup>17</sup> As far as I can see, up to now the only effort to discuss architecture in metareferential terms has been made by Susan Wittig, who tries to present the works of architects such as Michael Graves, Peter Eisenman and Robert Venturi as examples of "metalingual", "metaderivational" and "metacommunicative" strategies (1979: 972–974). Yet despite the fact that in her theoretical introduction, she establishes the terminology used throughout the article ("channel", "code", "information") more or less consistently, in the end her distinct analysis appears as based on vague literary analogies to certain poets and authors rather than as relying autonomously on the previously defined notions. For one of the rare occasional occurrences of the term 'meta-architecture' cf. also below (334), Preziosi 1979b: 65.

<sup>18</sup> "Explizite Metareferenz: Die Metaisierung wird mit den medienspezifischen Mitteln klar angezeigt [...]" (Wolf 2007a: 44)

reference” (ibid.)<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, Wolf already envisions the possibility of degrees of explicitness and in particular that ‘explicitness’ could alternatively be defined and understood as an obvious (i. e., negative and contradicting or positive and affirmative) reference to “conventional world-knowledge” (ibid.). “Explicit metareference would then be the quality of representational signs or sign configurations that are clearly metareferential owing to a conventional meaning in a given context, a meaning that unmistakably refers to (aspects of) a medium.” (Ibid.) Beyond the status of ‘quasi-explicit’ metareference, bestowed upon a number of paintings in Wolf’s introduction, this definition can be fruitfully applied to architecture without trying – as has repeatedly been done in the past – to force architecture, as it were, against its grain into the same category as language and thus regard it as similar to a verbal medium. However, it is certainly not by chance that Jencks tries to do exactly that: in the central second chapter of his book on postmodernist architecture he does not only play with metaphoric notions such as “the classical language of the Doric” (1977: 39) or “architectural grammar” (ibid.)<sup>20</sup>, but goes so far as to state that “there *are* various analogies architecture shares with language and that if we would use the terms loosely, we could speak of architectural ‘words’, ‘phrases’, ‘syntax’ and ‘semantics’” (ibid. [emphasis in the original]). Jencks defines these ‘words’ as “known units of meaning” (ibid.: 52) and identifies them with architectural elements such as doors, win-

<sup>19</sup> This argument is also often used with reference to the fact that architecture does not generally resort to using representational signs. However, as Mitchell has already stated: “Representation is an extremely elastic notion which extends all the way from a stone representing a man to a novel representing a day in the life of several Dubliners” (1995: 13). In fact, architecture has its representational aspects, too, inasmuch as all its elements can be interpreted as more or less referring back to the so-called “Primeval Hut” (a concept introduced by Vitruvius and then emphasized again in 1753 by Marc-Antoine Laugier in his “Essai sur l’architecture”) and its original materials and features (such as columns standing for tree trunks etc.). Moreover, it will be argued here (cf. below: 347) that the different and specific reading habits of each medium should be respected: what in the eyes of literary scholars might hardly appear as ‘explicit’, since they apply their own, language-based frame of communication, might strike architectural scholars as blatantly ‘explicit’ (and the other way round). I would thus plead in favor of an approach which covers these differences instead of ignoring them or limiting itself to only language-based explicitness.

<sup>20</sup> See this direction continued, e. g., by Mitchell 1990, especially ch. 8, where he tries to define the “Languages of Architectural Form” by showing, e. g., that architectural orders can be understood as a grammar.



dows, columns etc. (cf. *ibid.*). How these ‘words’ are combined more or less depends on “certain rules, or methods of joinery” (*ibid.*), which are partially also dictated by functional necessities and the laws of gravity and geometry, and Jencks labels them as the “syntax of architecture” (*ibid.*: 63). Finally, ‘architectural semantics’, in Jencks’ view, describes the way in which given styles are associated, understood and interpreted by a society (cf. *ibid.*: 64–79), which makes an architect choose – to return to the aforementioned examples – e. g., the Gothic style for a railway station (which should be viewed as a cathedral for technical progress and velocity) and the model of Greek or Roman temples for banks or museums (as they should look dignified and sublime, but at the same time firm and sober).

Jencks was not the first scholar to interpret architecture as a proper language – his efforts are rather to be considered in the context of the long-lasting and close relationship between language and architecture<sup>21</sup>, a relationship that has often been associated with communicating information, memories, impressions and emotions. Already in antiquity architecture was conceived of as supporting human memory by providing blueprints for a sort of mnemotechnical building which helps orators to remember certain arguments by linking them to distinct stations along a purely imagined walk through that mental architecture<sup>22</sup>. When outlining the technique of transforming the elements of an elocution into vivid images (“imagines”), Quintilianus – while crediting the poet Simonides of Keos with the invention of this method (1975: 590)<sup>23</sup> – tells us that some orators focus on certain points of a familiar, imagined building in order to pick up on them later during their speech, a process conceived of as a virtual walk through a mental architecture in order to retransform the images back into language (cf. *ibid.*: 592–594).

In later times, this close association between words, images and architecture turned less intellectual and more poetic and architecture became expected to create a constructed, physical equivalent to poetry. Thus, in 1743 Giovanni Battista Piranesi wrote about “parlanti ruine” (‘speaking ruins’; 1972: 115, 117<sup>24</sup>), meaning that they should

<sup>21</sup> For a brief, recent survey see Schöttker 2006.

<sup>22</sup> See Samsonow 2001, Tausch, ed. 2003.

<sup>23</sup> For the context see Goldmann 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Piranesi 1972: 115 (for the Italian original) and 117 (for the English translation followed here).

‘talk’ to the beholders and bestow upon them the emotions usually evoked by lyrical poetry. This concept was taken up and further developed forty years later by an anonymous German author, who in 1785 published *Untersuchungen über den Charakter der Gebäude* (‘Inquiries into the character of buildings’), in which architecture was not only explicitly paralleled with poetry, but actually praised to have the artistic primacy in evoking feelings in the audience since it was considered as “unter allen bildenden Künsten die einzige, die eigentlich auf die Einbildungskraft wirkt” (Anon. 1986: 17; ‘the only one among the fine arts to really work upon the imagination’<sup>25</sup>). These ideas were then adapted and shifted into the direction of a more precise communication of meaning in the context of the so-called Revolutionary architecture in France. In his treatise on architecture, written before 1793, Étienne-Louis Boullée demanded that public buildings should be like poems, evoking in their beholders a feeling that exactly corresponds to the purpose for which they were built (cf. 1968: 47f.), and it was in this respect that the notion of an ‘architecture parlante’ (‘speaking architecture’) was coined (cf. Kruft 1985: 162f., 185)<sup>26</sup>.

Despite architects such as Germain Boffrand and Francesco Milizia having claimed as early as in 1745 and 1781, respectively that the elements or materials constituting a building are like the words in a discourse<sup>27</sup>, it was not until the development and emergence of linguistic and semiotic methods at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that the parallelization between language and architecture could draw upon more than mere metaphors, analogies and comparisons (cf. Guillerme 1977: 22).

<sup>25</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

<sup>26</sup> Vidler traces the notion back to Léon Vaudoyer, the son of a Ledoux-epigone, who introduced it in a pejorative sense in order to criticize the designs by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (cf. 1988: 8).

<sup>27</sup> “The profiles of mouldings, and the members that compose a building, are in architecture what words are in a discourse.” (Boffrand 2002: 9) “I materiali in Architettura sono come nel discorso le parole, le quali separatamente han poca, o niuna efficacia, e possono esser disposte in una maniera spregevole; ma combinate con arte, ed espresse con energia muovono, ed agitan gli affetti con illimitata possanza.” (Milizia 1785, vol. 1: IX–X) A century later, Ferdinand de Saussure also compared an “unité linguistique” to a specific part of a building, e. g., a column, in order to illustrate his notions of “rapport syntagmatique” and “rapport associatif” (1916: 171).

In trying to find answers to the questions “*how* does architecture produce meaning, and *what* meanings can architecture produce?” (Dunster 1976: 667 [emphasis in the original]), Umberto Eco broke ground with his 1968 book *La struttura assente*, in which he systematises and clarifies earlier efforts (such as, e. g., those by Giovanni Klaus Koenig and Christian Norberg-Schulz<sup>28</sup>). Instead of merely establishing the vague and often criticized direct parallel between architecture and language<sup>29</sup> (as earlier as well as later authors have done<sup>30</sup>), Eco analyzed architecture as a form of communication and thus addressed it not as a language, but rather as a code<sup>31</sup>. Interpreting architecture as a “sistema di segni” (1968: 197; ‘system of signs’) and examining the functions, interactions and meanings of these signs, he drew up an expansible catalogue by means of which he analyzed architectural elements and (historical) styles in terms of syntactic and semantic codes<sup>32</sup>. He came to the conclusion that ‘architecture is thus

<sup>28</sup> See Giovanni Klaus Koenig’s *Analisi del linguaggio architettonico* from 1964, which is mentioned by Eco (cf. 1968: 198) and Christian Norberg-Schulz’s *Intentions in Architecture* from 1965, one chapter of which (III.5.) is – similar to Jencks’ later approach – entitled “Semantics”.

<sup>29</sup> For a critique of these approaches see Guillerme 1977, which appeared in the same year as Jencks’ *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, where exactly these parallels are drawn. Furthermore, Guillerme (cf. 1977: 23) refers to the critical objections raised by Gilles G. Granger in 1957 and by Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue in 1968. Recently, Thomas A. Markus and Deborah Cameron have taken yet another approach by warning us that “treating architecture as a language has the unfortunate effect of obscuring the role played by actual language, speech and writing, in shaping our understanding of the built environment” (2002: 8). They thus plead in favour of an “interactive rather than an analogical” (ibid.) relationship.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., e. g., Fischer (1991: 17), who lists parallels such as heterogeneity of products in both language and architecture (ranging from newspaper text to drama and from a museum building to a simple garage), the different styles that have been used, the long process in which they have been developed in both language and architecture, their repertoires and rules, the existing rhetorics and typologies, their definable dialects, sociolects and idiolects and finally their integration into social processes.

<sup>31</sup> Jencks uses the notion and concept of the “visual code” (1977, e. g.: 42), but without specification, which is why he can take recourse to the less general analogy between architecture and language at the same time.

<sup>32</sup> Eco thereby practices what Guillerme still reluctantly envisions as a possible methodological approach: “Theoretically, one could try to construct codes of architectural forms, which are distinct and even classifiable in paradigmatic series and which

a rhetoric in the sense<sup>33</sup> that it (continuously fluctuating between redundancy on the one and information on the other hand [cf. *ibid.*: 87]<sup>34</sup>) ‘encodes only those unexpected relations that, as unusual as they might be, *can still fit into the listener’s system of expectations*’<sup>35</sup>.

Indeed, architecture usually follows certain rules (partly dictated by practical necessities, partly established by aesthetic traditions) and thus also shapes habits and expectations in the beholder<sup>36</sup>, who, thanks to the context of a building and its ‘architectural code’, is able to classify and understand it as belonging to a certain type:

[...] if these type characteristics are then linked with certain other characteristics, such as those of function, economy, or ritual, they evidently generate meaning in such a way that a cultivated observer looking at a building belonging to his cultural universe has the ability to come close to grasping the architect’s intention, or more precisely, the intention of that particular social collectivity that has incorporated and determined the architect. (Guillerme 1977: 23)

However, a building, respectively its architect, might break rules and habits with rhetorical intent, thus making the beholder actively aware of these rules while at the same time provoking him or her to wonder and try to understand why and with what intention they have been broken. Or, to put it in the words of Donald Preziosi:

Communication consists of the transmission of information regarding the perception of similarities and differences. The system of the built environment, like any

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take into account the necessity of discontinuity in the process of establishing meaning. Each series thus formed could be called an ‘architectural type’” (1977: 23).

<sup>33</sup> “[...] architettura è allora una retorica, nel senso [...]” (Eco 1968: 225)

<sup>34</sup> Eco calls this the “curiosa contraddizione della retorica” (1968: 87; ‘peculiar contradiction of rhetoric’). In order to convince a listener, rhetoric must on the one hand tell him something he did not know before (information), but in order to do so it has to start with something the listener already knows (redundancy), which then allegedly leads to the desired conclusion. I do not have the necessary space to critically discuss Eco’s concept in all its strengths as well as weaknesses. However, the critical objections raised by Guillerme (1977) are too general and not concise enough to really refute Eco’s approach.

<sup>35</sup> “[...] codifica solo quelle relazioni d’inaspettanza che, per quanto inusitate, *possano integrarsi al sistema di attese dell’uditore.*” (Eco 1968: 88 [emphasis in the original])

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Guillerme speaks in this context of “the systems of expectation in the domain of perception within a given community” (1977: 23).

semiotic code, is a complexly-ordered device for the cueing of such perceptions. (1979b: 1)<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, while it is certainly exaggerated that “every architectonic object comprises a commentary upon, and interrogation of, its own code” (Preziosi 1979a: 54) which it is a realization of, such metareferentiality may well be claimed in certain cases. In these, metareference may, for instance, be

[...] realized architectonically through historical reference, as when a formation consciously alludes to a set of stylistic characterizations of non-currently-dominant formations. *Historical allusion* takes many forms in architectonic systems [...]. Such a function, which we may term *meta-architectonic*, since in the broadest sense it calls into conscious attention an architectonic code itself, coexists with the aforementioned functions to a greater or lesser degree of dominance. A formation may function meta-architectonically to a very minimal degree, wherein allusory reference is confined to details of material articulation such as baseboard moldings, or maximally, as in the case where a house in Wisconsin purports to be a Spanish hacienda. Allusory reference may also be quite subtle [...] (Preziosi 1979b: 65 [emphases in the original]).

Such metareferential subtexts may also be observed in cases in which the proportional scheme or plan of a building from another historical or national context is quoted (as an example cf. the analysis of such references in Le Corbusier’s architecture by Rowe [1976: 15]).

Although Preziosi calls this “a meta-codal function, patently correlative to the metalinguistic function of verbal utterances” (1979a: 54), and despite the fact that he also points out that verbal language and built architectural code are both panhuman phenomena<sup>38</sup>, sharing “features by virtue of their generic functions as human semiotic systems” (1979b: 70), he rightly emphasises that in the realm of the architectural code “not everything is meaningful in quite the same way” (ibid.: 2) and points out that, on the contrary, “the study of architectural meaningfulness is a mare’s nest of conflicting opinion” because “the medium of the linguistic system is relatively homogenous and narrowly circumscribed compared to the architectural medium” (ibid.: 61). Thus it is not only meaningless, but also wrong and misleading to expect architecture to communicate messages which could

<sup>37</sup> Preziosi also considers the “architectonic code” as being a “system of relationships/relational invariance” (1979b: 2).

<sup>38</sup> “Like verbal language, the *built environment* – what will be called here the *architectonic code* – is a panhuman phenomenon.” (Preziosi 1979b: 1 [emphases in the original]).

rival with clear verbal utterances (unless they are, e. g., incorporated into the building<sup>39</sup>). Here, a distinction such as the one suggested by Gillo Dorfles (1971: 93) between “lingua” (meaning the specific verbal language) and “linguaggio” (denoting particular means of expression for communicating messages in, e. g., science and art) comes at hand because it makes clear that the messages articulated by architecture should not be mixed up with those expressed through words. However, Dorfles does at the same time not deny architecture’s communicative capacity – and this capacity should be acknowledged.

As shown above, the architectural ‘linguaggio’ is – thanks to its institutionalized code – capable of communicating what Dorfles calls “hinreichend präzise Mitteilungen” (ibid.: 94; ‘sufficiently precise messages’). These might become even more obvious in the context of breaking rules that were established out of (former or current) necessity. A column, for example, is generally supposed to fulfil a static function; it may, however, also serve as a merely decorative element, in which case the notion of its firmly supporting another structural element nonetheless remains. Since architecture – as opposed to other art form such as literature – primarily has to serve a pragmatic purpose and is thus always rigidly considered under this aspect<sup>40</sup>, purely aesthetic elements that blatantly contradict any practical function (such as a column supporting nothing or hanging down from the entablature instead of carrying it) strike the beholder accordingly. They will immediately make him or her aware of the fact that rules were not only broken with a very specific intention, but that this transgression is, moreover, obviously staged in order to be noticed at any

<sup>39</sup> As an example see Robert Venturi’s “Guild House” from 1960/1963, a residential home, the name of which, written onto the building, is part of its architectonic design, as Venturi explains (cf. Venturi/Scott Brown/Izenour 1972: 100f.). For a more contemporary example see the use of words by Jean Nouvel in his design for the building complex “Anděl” in Prague from 1999/2000 (see Keazor 2009, forthcoming).

<sup>40</sup> See Jan Mukařovský 1970 and 1989, who distinguishes five functions of architecture: 1) its direct, current purpose; 2) its historical purpose (i. e., its relationship to a given canon and its respective norms as well as the comment a building thus makes about, or implies with regard to, history); 3) the way identity and territoriality of the builders and users are manifested (and, e. g., symbolized) in architecture, and the question of how a building situates itself in that context; 4) the individual functional horizon (i. e., the question whether and how a building deviates from the traditional norms); 5) the aesthetic function of a building (which might have a dialectic relation to its direct, current purpose).

cost. At the same time, since the elements used (to stay with the example of the column) are thus defamiliarised and isolated from their usual context, the beholder will understand them as mere set pieces, making him or her aware not only of the rules they break, but also of the realm to which they belong, i. e., architecture in general. Or, to say it with the (slightly adapted) words of Charles Jencks: “They call attention to the [... ‘linguaggio’] itself by misuse, exaggeration, repetition, and all the devices of rhetorical skill” (1977: 64). The architectural ‘linguaggio’, if considered in its own right and contexts, is thus capable of metareference and even of approaching the quality of explicit metareference to a certain extent.

Depending on the context and the way architectural metareference is presented, the deviation might be understood as harmless, funny toying or as a critique – in the way that also postmodernist architecture had conceived of itself as a critical movement. As shown above, it mainly started and was understood as a reaction to modernist architecture, which was accused of being monotonously puristic, faceless and of having lost all meaning. Thus the postmodernist architect was supposed to “communicate the values which are missing and criticise the ones he dislikes” (ibid.: 37) in his architectural message. Given this aim, it is no wonder that Jencks repeatedly made the (problematic) claim that architecture can be equalled to language<sup>41</sup>. This notion of linking architecture and language – which has been propagated throughout history in order to ennoble the architect’s profane profession and raise it from mere builder to humanistic scientist<sup>42</sup> and to distinguish him from the engineer<sup>43</sup> – can, however, also be seen as a re-

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Jencks, who continues the above quoted passage as follows: “But to do that he must make use of the language of the local culture, otherwise the message falls on deaf ears, or is distorted to fit this local language” (1977: 37).

<sup>42</sup> Guillerme (cf. 1977: 22, 24) explains the association of architecture with language from such a sociological point of view, stating that the profession of the architect was enhanced in its prestige by linking it with the humanistic reputation and making the architect appear as an artist-architect.

<sup>43</sup> “It might be said that the success of the analogy between architecture and language occurs during critical periods of socio-professional stratification, expressively when the task of the architect appears to be taken over by the activity and talents of the engineers.” (Guillerme 1977: 24) Thus, Guillerme sees the rise of the linguistic analogy closely linked to “the upsurge of technological rationalism which marked the emergence of the first generation of polytechnicians; and again during the last twenty

curing symptom of a crisis that Manfredo Tafuri already observed in 1968: “the semantic crisis that exploded in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century still weighs on” the development of modern architecture (1980: 173) and it also conditioned the earlier as well as later stated pleas for an architecture featuring a ‘legible’ physiognomy and character, even a face<sup>44</sup>, and which communicates once more with the beholder and carries ‘meaning’. As mentioned above, postmodern architects considered “wit, ornament and reference” the means to achieve this goal. However, the critical impulse behind this slogan was constantly in danger of fading away, a dilemma also to be sensed in Moore’s “Piazza d’Italia”, where the entrances, abstractly quoting classical architectural elements (such as temple-like structures and allusions to rustica-forms which – given that here they are not made of stone but painted – appear as purely decorative), anticipate the fact that visitors are about to enter a space concerned with architecture, its history and the continuation of its classical heritage in the modern era. The “Piazza” in its colourful, playful and vivid appearance can be understood as a critique of the dull and boring modernist skyscraper in the background that does not seem to ‘respect’ the architecture surrounding it. However, due to the visual connections Moore establishes between the “Piazza d’Italia” and the modernist building, the latter is included and welcomed into the new complex and thus aesthetically ‘redeemed’. It therefore becomes apparent that the “Piazza d’Italia” may not only be understood as a benign complex harmlessly toying with slightly modernized, historical references, but as a piece of architecture that downplays the fundamental problems posed by its times instead of critically visualising and tackling them<sup>45</sup>.

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years or so, when a crisis in the doctrine, teaching, and practice of architecture has developed in successive waves” (ibid.).

<sup>44</sup> See, e. g., the writings of Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who as early as in the 1920s, in the presence of ‘faceless’ industrial buildings and modern houses, called for an architecture with legible ‘vivid features’ and ‘faces’. This idea already becomes apparent in the telling titles of his publications such as “Die Physiognomie der Industriebauten” (1923) or *Das Gesicht des deutschen Hauses* (1929).

<sup>45</sup> Cf., e. g., Joedicke 1991: 6, who criticises postmodernist architecture for its mere indulging in the beautiful surface.



### 3. Towards a post-postmodernist meta-architecture: Jean Nouvel

Given the problems linked to postmodernist architecture, it is not surprising that the architects of the following generations displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards this kind of architecture: Jean Nouvel, e. g., on the one hand considers Robert Venturi one of the ‘most important contemporary architects’<sup>46</sup> while on the other hand accusing him of condemning modernist architecture in too general a way and of being inconsistent when he, despite this, designs buildings with simple, clear and modernist forms (cf. 1984: 9f.). Moreover, according to Nouvel, Venturi – perhaps without wanting to – became the mental father of architects such as Robert Stern and Michael Graves, whom the French architect simply considers as proponents of ‘phantoms’, providers of an ‘alibi for the historicists’<sup>47</sup> and of an architecture that loses all its sincerity because Venturi’s recipes and formulas have been over-used and falsified.

This explains Nouvel’s rejection of Moore’s “Piazza d’Italia”, which for him falls into the exact category of the ‘Venturian recipes gone wrong’: ‘a little bit of pop art, three symbols, two historical references, all this bound together by sociological sauce and sprinkled with irony’<sup>48</sup> which in Moore’s hands becomes ‘a very basic and redundant symbolism, a scenography made of cardboard, a farce of a

<sup>46</sup> “Venturi, Rauch et Scott-Brown. Ils sont pour moi parmi les architectes contemporains les plus importants.” (Nouvel 1984: 9)

<sup>47</sup> “[...] il [Venturi] est, malgré lui peut-être, devenu le papa – naturel ou adoptif – des architectes du simulacre, des Stern et des Graves, l’alibi des historicistes [...]” (Nouvel 1984: 10)

<sup>48</sup> “De fait, j’aime bien les cocktails venturiens bien dosés: un peu d’art pop, trois symboles, deux références historiques, le tout lié à la sauce sociologique et saupoudré d’ironie. Mais depuis que la recette est appliquée dans tous les fast-food, pour peu qu’ils se trompent dans les dosages, ça donne des aigreurs d’estomac. Arrêtons [...]” (Nouvel 1984: 10) Despite Nouvel claiming that he likes the Venturian cocktails, his wording shows a certain contempt for their formula, which becomes evident when he introduces ‘Venturi and Co’ as generally ‘intelligent’ and worth discussing with the words “Et pour conclure disons, sans ambiguïté [...]” (ibid.: 10), hinting at the fact that his former statements have been rather ambiguous and ironic.

kind of “*commedia della architettura*”, a scene for a musical comedy,<sup>49</sup>

This, however, does not make Nouvel an advocate for a return towards modernist architecture, whose representatives such as Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier he, on the contrary, frequently criticises in his writings<sup>50</sup>. He also contradicts their proponent, the historian and architecture critic Siegfried Giedion, who in his writings claimed that (as Nouvel sums up) “architecture is a rigorous art, subjected to strict laws”, by turning these words into the exact opposite: “L’architecture n’est pas un art rigoureux, soumis à des lois impérieuses”<sup>51</sup> (1993: s. p.) – a phrase that could have also been voiced by a postmodernist architect. And Nouvel even stated his opposition against the typical academic position while taking sides with a communicating architecture in the wake of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Revolution architecture when stating in an interview that “[a]cademicism renders the architect expressively speechless. I would much rather produce a referential architecture – une architecture parlante – even if it verges on the loquacious [sic]” (Garcias/Meade 1983: 44).

Given this, Nouvel’s violent attack on the postmodernists and their, in his view, slapdash use of irony as a merely decorative and self-protective ingredient<sup>52</sup> is even more surprising, especially since he himself, at the end of a 1984 fictitious and ironic self-interview, upon accusing himself of not being serious enough, replied: “Pourtant je le suis, j’ai toujours fait de l’architecture comme Borgès dit qu’il écrit: ‘avec le sérieux d’un enfant qui s’amuse’ [...]” (1984: 14)<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> “C’est une symbolique primaire et redondante, une scénographie de carton pâte, une farce de la ‘comedia (sic!) della architettura’, un décor d’opérette [...]” (Nouvel 1984: 12)

<sup>50</sup> Cf., e. g., Nouvel (1993: s. p.), where he contradicts Le Corbusier’s definition of architecture as “le jeu savant, correct et magnifique des volumes assemblés sous la lumière” (‘the skilful, correct and magnificent interplay of masses assembled under light’).

<sup>51</sup> ‘Architecture is not a rigorous art, subjected to strict laws [...]’ Nouvel does not give a precise source for the wording.

<sup>52</sup> Nouvel thus observes but denies postmodernist architecture its recourse to what Werner Wolf has called “protective irony” (see 2007b) – used here as a strategy in order to legitimize the decorative, historical references – by declining its “Solidarisierungssignale” (‘signs for pleading for solidarity’), as analyzed by Wolf (2007b: 43).

<sup>53</sup> ‘And yet, I am serious – I have treated architecture always in the way Borgès says he would write: ‘With the seriousness of a child amusing itself’ [...]’

The impetus of Nouvel's critique becomes clearer when looking at his earlier buildings from the late 1970s and early 1980s: at the very time Moore started realizing his "Piazza d'Italia", in 1976, Nouvel received the commission to build a private house at Saint-André-les-Vergers (in the vicinity of Troyes, Aube) for the gynaecologist Bernard Dick, a fan of contemporary architecture. Together with the client, Nouvel designed a house where round forms such as vaults and cupolas, supposed to make the whole "very warm and reassuring" (Boissière 1996: 36), were used in order to shape, e. g., the living-room and the area for the children. But the local authorities denied the building permit for the project arguing that the architecture as designed would not fit into the local context since its forms (usually known from church architecture) made it look "too Byzantine" (ibid.). Unwilling to concede, but determined to get the necessary permission, Nouvel sought an expedient (see *Illustration 4a*): without changing anything internally, he steeped the incriminated elements almost entirely in thick maroon brick walls. But in order to make the beholder aware of the fact that the few small fragments still peeping out are merely parts of entire hidden forms, he traced their concealed contours and volumes on the walls, using bright brickwork, thus pointing at that which remains covered by the murals; where parts of the hidden elements are still visible, Nouvel has made the stonework look wobbly and disturbed around the outlines, as if the forms were starting to rebelliously regrow through the walls, thus disrupting the masonry (see *Illustration 4b*). By using stonework in order to 'draw' and 'project' suppressed forms onto the walls that actually hide them, thus visualising these forms in the manner of architectural cross-section plans, as well as by seemingly animating the concealed elements, Nouvel tried to develop strategies of visual protest against the authorities and their aesthetic dictate. While in this case he already made architecture itself one of the main themes of the building by referring to the construction devices used in this discipline (plans) and by making the house a stage where paradoxically two of the main Vitruvian principles of architecture – "firmitas" ('firmness') and "venustas" ('delight', 'beauty') – apparently clash (the elegant rounds of the vaults and cupolas trying to break through the strong, plain stonework), Nouvel's metareferential intention in creating an "architecture critique" (1981: 56) became even more obvious with the "Collège Anne Frank" (see *Illustration 5*), a junior high school complex he was commissioned to design and built

between 1978 and 1980 in Antony, a municipality in the southern suburbs of Paris.

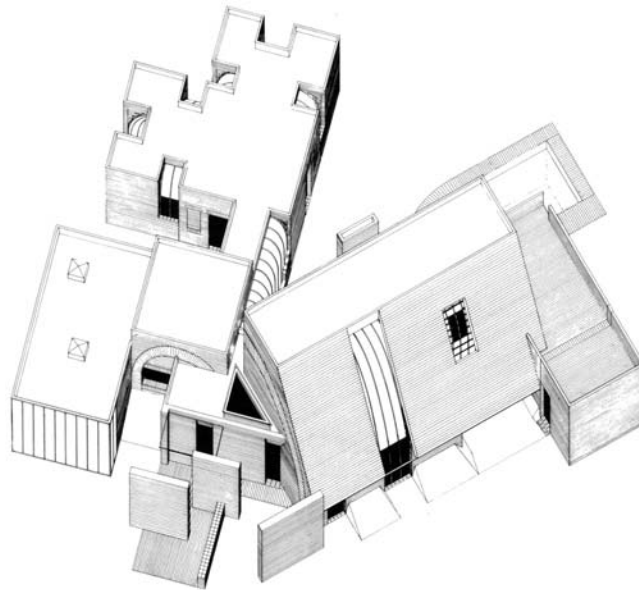


*Illustration 4a: Jean Nouvel, "Maison Dick" (1976), south-east axonometry. Troyes.*

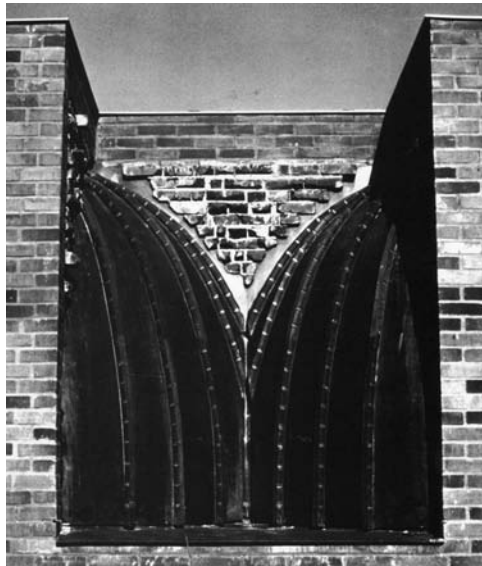


*Illustration 4b: Jean Nouvel, "Maison Dick" (1976), detail. Troyes.*



*Illustration 5: Jean Nouvel, “Collège Anne Frank” (1978–1980). Antony/Paris.*

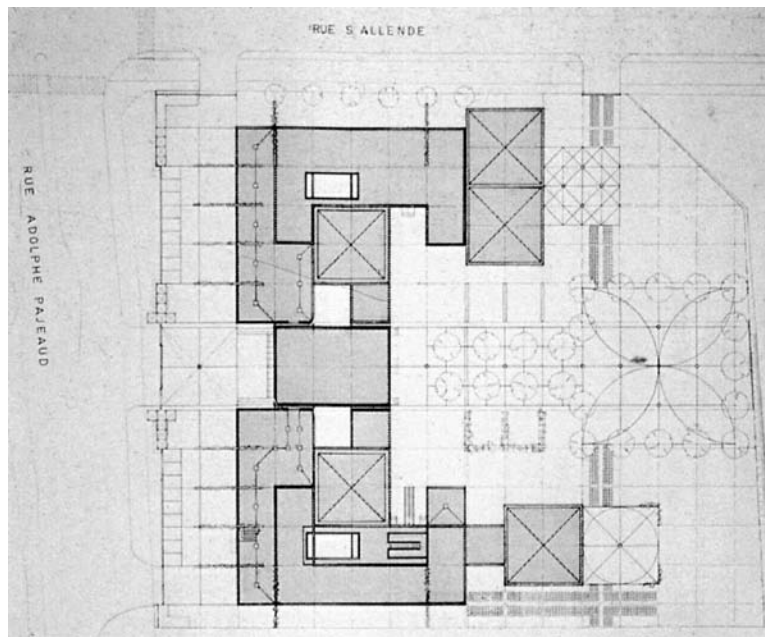


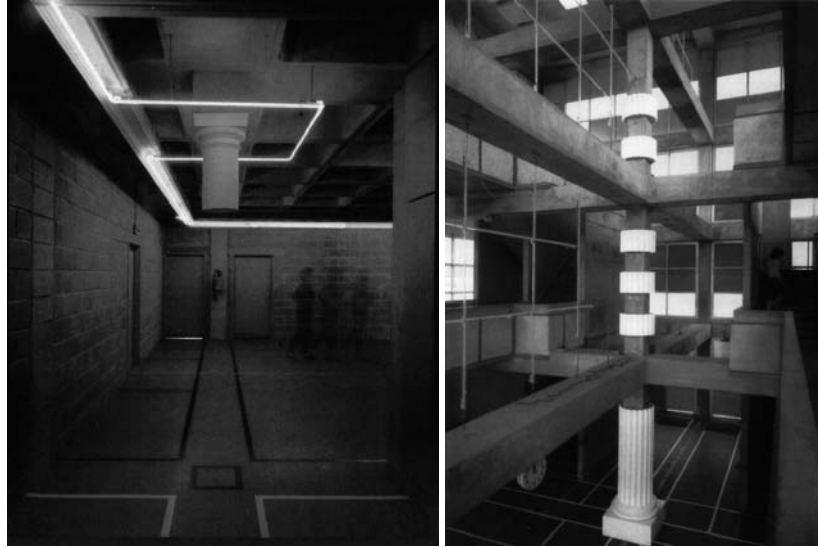
*Illustration 6: Jean Nouvel, layout of the “Collège Anne Frank”.*

As in the case of the “Maison Dick”, Nouvel again suffered the fate that his ambition to include the future users of the building-complex (school children, their parents, teachers, administrators) into its design process was opposed by the authorities, who in France prescribe that school buildings have to be constructed from an industrialized modular system-kit of fifty prefabricated pieces. In order to (once more) synergistically merge the realization of his architectural goals with

rigid building regulations that he, at the same time, meant to protest against, Nouvel accepted the rules imposed on his project. He, however, also polemicized against the regulations by following them in so exaggeratedly radical a manner that he reduced them to absurdity and thus exposed them in a clearly metareferential way. Out of the fifty prefabricated and decreed pieces Nouvel only chose four – a post, a concrete beam, a façade panel and a truss (cf. *ibid.*: 63) –, which he excessively repeated, often combining them to a grid-like form that has become the main theme of the “écriture architecturale” (*ibid.*). Their repetitions as well as their brutal and bland functionality are, moreover, put into an even enhancing contrast to the whole layout (see *Illustration 6*) which clearly follows the typical ground plan of a symmetrically arranged 18<sup>th</sup>-century castle with two side arms extending from its central risalit. Nouvel thus refers to and stigmatizes the absolutistic power of centralism, which imposes given architectonical schemes without, however, granting at least the possibility of creating a beautifully adorned building out of prescribed elements. This is put further into evidence by the exterior of the building, where symmetrical geometrical patterns are painted to form a rigid, graph paper-like grid on the concrete ground that refers to typical schemes of 18<sup>th</sup>-century garden plans, while the actual and physical presence of classical beauty is reduced to a few draped statues, isolated and scattered on the roofs of the side buildings. This clash of the blandness of the prescribed industrialized elements with classical architectonical beauty is continued inside the building, where (sometimes excessively amassed or turned upside down and thus) meaningless numbers are stencilled onto the walls while only here and there short fragments of classical moulding are strewn above the doors. Moreover, the ceiling lights were hung from stucco paterae stuck into a bare concrete ceiling coffer.

The fact that architecture itself and the tension arising from its shortcomings, which are juxtaposed to its ideally free form, is the theme of the whole building becomes unmistakably clear when one considers the floor with its grid of coloured stripes that seemingly dictate the routes through the building. Those routes are, however, now and again obstructed by variations of classical columns, some of which are intact, while others have been severely mutilated and reduced to their cut-off upper parts that hang down from the ceiling instead of supporting it (see *Illustration 7*); even others (like the one prominently exposed in the central hall) have eroded and been sliced

up into pieces, which were then stuck onto the concrete beam like meat on a skewer (see *Illustration 8*).



*Illustrations 7 (left) and 8 (right): Jean Nouvel, columns in the “Collège Anne Frank” (1978–1980). Antony/Paris.*

Yet Nouvel evidently does not want the beholder to get the idea that (s)he was witnessing the simple opposition between a brutal, bland modernity and beautiful, but helpless classical architecture. This is why the exterior as well as the interior of the complex feature depictions of the ‘Modulor’, a representation of the human body designed by Le Corbusier in 1943 to show that his modern buildings were made according to the measures of the human being. That this principle is in Nouvel’s view perverted when buildings such as schools have to be constructed from prefabricated industrialized elements becomes apparent when the ‘Modulor’ (like some of the numbers labelling the walls) is turned upside down and linked with a figure of typical Bauhaus-style appearance and thus reminiscent of the Bauhaus’ efforts to create mass-produced daily-use products of high aesthetic and qualitative standard – the “Collège Anne Frank” shows what can become of this idea if it is handled the wrong way.

But in order for the school to not merely remain a polemic architectural statement, but to become “a critical and at the same time positive design” (Garcias/Meade 1983: 44), Nouvel added elements that at least turn the complex towards the attractive, without, however,

indulging in smoothing placability. The bright colours of the façade panels might thus look friendly and inviting, but at the same time they remind us of the primary colours Le Corbusier used for his creations and which are here reduced to absurdity in order to reflect French bureaucracy. They, however, also clearly refer to the gaudy colours of children's toys (as, e. g., the Swiss construction toy 'Constri', which shows a remarkable similarity to Nouvel's school building not only in the colours, but also in the shape of its parts<sup>54</sup>). By taking up these colours, neon lights illuminating the staircases and corridors inside the building (see *Illustration 7*), in turn, contradict the image of a typical school and refer to adolescent culture.

In quoting classical architectural elements but altering and combining them with contemporary materials such as neon and steel, Nouvel thus drew on similar techniques as Moore in his "Piazza d'Italia". The French architect even states that irony is also "pointed up as a series of kitsch elements" in his building, but he claims that his irony "makes formal criticism of imposed bureaucratic brutalism" (Garcias/Meade 1983: 44f.), something he seems to miss in Moore's creation, which he obviously considers harmless and farcical.



*Illustration 9: Charles Moore, Williams College Museum of Art (1981–1987). Williamstown, MA.*

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<sup>54</sup> Nouvel himself linked the prefabricated elements and their principle to the famous 'Meccano' toy (cf. 1981: 56 and Garcias/Meade 1983: 44).



These factual differences in their approaches become evident by focussing on a single detail used by both architects. Thus, in both Nouvel's "Collège" from 1978/1980 and in Moore's design for the extension of the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Massachusetts from 1981<sup>55</sup> a mutilated column appears which in both cases turns the original function of this architectural element upside down: instead of supporting the ceiling or the entablature, its capital is stuck to them. In Nouvel's case (see *Illustration 7*), the fact that a fundamental and traditional architectonic rule is thereby violated is additionally stressed by the truncated shaft hanging down from the ceiling with all its weight, while Moore makes the cut directly below the capital (see *Illustration 9*), thus making the latter appear to float above the clipped shaft which is firmly standing on the ground. Nouvel, moreover, makes the mutilated element resemble a classical Doric column that usually represents manly beauty and strength<sup>56</sup> (both foiled here). In this case – as a quotation of classical architecture – it is, however, furthermore put into sharp opposition to the modern style surrounding it. Moore, instead, blends the classical with the modern style by reducing the capital to the typical outlines of a classical Ionic column, which traditionally stands for female beauty and daintiness<sup>57</sup>, so that the lightness, achieved by cutting off the capital and making it float above the shaft, fits in well. In Nouvel's case mutilating the column and emphasizing the already thematised opposition between modern and classical is to be understood as an ironic sign of protest against rigid bureaucracy turning the beauty and strength of architecture upside down, while in Moore's interpretation of it as an "I(r)onic Order"<sup>58</sup>, the motif simply serves as a clever and surprising gag.

It is perhaps this very difference not in the means but in their use, intended impact and thus in their meaning which angers Nouvel in postmodernist creations such as Moore's "Piazza" or his museum building. While the French architect uses architectonic set pieces in order to criticize a straitjacketed architectural formula and rebels

<sup>55</sup> For this building complex cf. Johnson 1987: 79–81.

<sup>56</sup> "Ita dorica columna virilis corporis proportionem et firmitatem et venustatem in aedibus praestare coepit." (Vitruvius Pollo 1987: 170)

<sup>57</sup> "[...] muliebri subtilitate et ornatu symmetriaque [...]" (Vitruvius Pollo 1987: 170)

<sup>58</sup> As Whitney Stoddard has baptized this element (qtd. in Johnson 1987: 81).

against it, postmodernism does not only tend to devaluate such elements with their harmless twiddling, but even turns them into something positive and funny – or, to put it in even clearer metareferential terms: while Nouvel uses the inherent potential of (explicit)<sup>59</sup> architectural metareference to critically point out the precarious state of contemporary architecture and its modern(ist) heritage under certain administrative conditions, postmodernist creations such as Moore's "Piazza d'Italia" rather opt for a non-critical and therefore in some way affirmative use of explicit architectural metareference.

It is thus perhaps not surprising that after the completion of the "Collège Anne Frank" Nouvel did not return to his former strategies and devices, which he had obviously come to consider as compromised<sup>60</sup>.

One may therefore agree with Olivier Boissière, who described the "first phase of Nouvel's architectural career" as characterized by "the jubilant keynote" of a "modern post-modernism" (2001: 20). Taking up this terminology, one could understand Nouvel's subsequent approach as guided by a post-postmodernist perspective, as having – beyond simple partisanship for or against modernism and post-modernism – adopted a position which condemns neither in general (as Venturi did in the case of modernism). Nouvel's position rather reflects on the qualities as well as the shortcomings of either and tries to make the most of the lessons learnt. Like the postmodernists Nouvel demands of the responsible architect to consider the purpose of a new building as well as of its future context, and he therefore proposes a series of stages of reflection, designed to help him see the different possibilities given by a site, be it that the already existing architecture is sided, enhanced or counter-balanced in its effect by the new build-

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<sup>59</sup> See above, fn. 19.

<sup>60</sup> In the wake of Robert Stern's 1980 "Strada nuova", Nouvel returned to postmodernist forms but once more, in order to ironically mock them: in 1982 he used the whole range of postmodernist vocabulary for his leisure centre "Les Godets", a building complex which mainly serves as a playground for children. As if to show that this type of architecture could by then only be used in flippant, childlike contexts, Nouvel called up all the extravaganzas of postmodernist architecture such as the house inside a house, bouncing windows, absurd forms, a whole parade of variations on the history of the column and the clashing of different materials and colours. For "Les Godets" cf. Boissière 1996: 54–59.

ing<sup>61</sup>. Given that the architect will sometimes also find rather deplorable conditions, Nouvel – as his postmodernist predecessors – clearly envisions the possibility of giving his buildings an inherent critical impulse. At the same time, again like the postmodernists, he claims that architecture has to communicate with the viewer. But, unlike postmodernists such as Moore, he does not take refuge in the reservoir of classical architectural elements in order to do so – he, instead, on the one hand reflects about architectural history by hinting at his predecessors, without, however, copying them but rather by developing them further; on the other hand he tries to fulfil his claims of visualizing the values of society by making recourse to its images as presented in contemporary media, especially in the visual arts and film<sup>62</sup>.

In his buildings Nouvel thus realizes what he voiced in the above quoted context when taking up Giedion's words and turning them into their opposite: "Architecture is not a rigorous art, subjected to strict laws. [...] it enjoys great freedom of expression. It goes beyond the limits traditionally imposed by its era [...]. It is the very nature of architecture to go beyond these limits" (1993: s. p.). The fact that Nouvel does not merely transgress limits but, in his buildings, clearly renders such transgressions a comment on the history and function of architecture at the same time renders his buildings remarkable specimens of contemporary, post-postmodernist meta-architecture.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nouvel 1993: s. p., where he explains a series of notions designed to help the architect in his choices and decisions when confronted with a given and already constructed site, pointing into the different directions of integrating a new building or making it stand out, and of thus changing, enhancing or opposing the already existing character of the surroundings.

<sup>62</sup> See for this Keazor 2009, forthcoming.

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Of Museums, Beholders, Artworks and Photography  
Metareferential Elements  
in Thomas Struth's Photographic Projects  
*Museum Photographs* and *Making Time*

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The photographic medium has thus far merely been brushed by the academic discourse on self-referential phenomena<sup>1</sup>, and this contribution, in fact, constitutes the first investigation into medium-specific metaizations in photography. As cases in point, this paper will focus on *Museum Photographs* and *Making Time*, two closely intertwined photographic cycles by German photographer Thomas Struth. In these projects, Struth artistically – and, as this paper will argue, to a large extent also metareferentially – investigated the relationship, interaction and interplay between objects of art, their beholders and the ‘art space’ surrounding them from a photo artist’s point of view. The contribution discusses four types of metaizations inherent in the two photographic projects at large and/or in certain individual pieces: 1) general metapictorial elements, 2) the metaization of the reception act of art, 3) the metaization of the ‘art space’, and 4) metaphotographic reflections upon the creative process in ‘unstaged’ photography. A brief concluding section will offer for discussion questions pertaining to the notions of (referential) ‘system’ and ‘work’.

“Where the mechanisms of spectacle—of the contemporary museum business—are staged, my photographs can offer a reflection about the very situation.” (Struth 1999: 116)

## 1. Introduction

Thomas Struth (\*1954) is one of the internationally most renowned photographers to have emerged from the so-called Becher or Düsseldorf School of photography, named after the analytically-documentary-oriented photo artists Bernd (1931–2007) and Hilla (\*1934) Becher, who taught at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie and whose conceptual photographic approach Struth as their student adopted. The

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<sup>1</sup> For an exceptions see Nöth 2007 and Kirchmann 2007 on self-reference in photography.

present contribution will focus on selected examples from two of Struth's larger photographic projects, *Museum Photographs*<sup>2</sup> (1987–2004) and *Making Time*<sup>3</sup> (2007), which are closely intertwined and both metareferentially concerned with the interplay between pieces of art, their recipients, and their (institutionalised) settings.

The idea for *Museum Photographs* was conceived in 1987, when Struth was working on a portrait of the Scottish art collector Giles Robertson, which depicted the latter with his collected pieces in the private space of his home and was followed by the photographic portrayal of a Japanese collector's family, also amidst their collection. Struth then went on to capture conservators in their workplace San Lorenzo in Naples in 1988, while the main and central part of the series, a body of thirty-nine large-scale Cibachrome stills<sup>4</sup> of famous artworks, was photographed between 1989 and 2004 in various museums as well as directly in situ. *Museum Photographs* as a cycle artistically – and, as this paper will argue, to a large extent also metareferentially – investigates the relationship, interaction and interplay between objects of art, their beholders and the 'art space' surrounding them. Moreover, the *Museum Photographs* address the generic pictorial properties of, and the relationship between, the media of painting and photography as well as notions pertaining to their specific natures, such as, e. g., that of the 'original'.

Starting at the Musée du Louvre in Paris, Struth selected some of the world's largest, most renowned and, as to their collections, also most important museums<sup>5</sup> as 'hunting grounds' for his project. There he perched, waiting for the 'decisive' moments to shoot photographs which would establish (in most cases formal) correlations between the exhibited works and their viewers as well as between both of the latter and the 'art space' surrounding them. In addition, certain masterpieces were also photographed directly in situ, as, e. g., Raffael's frescos in

<sup>2</sup> For the documentation of the project see Struth/Belting 2005.

<sup>3</sup> For the documentation of the project see Struth/Estrella 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The full cycle comprises forty-four photographs.

<sup>5</sup> The museums Struth chose for his project are: Musée du Louvre, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Gallery, London; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Alte Pinakothek, Munich; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice; Pergamonmuseum, Berlin; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; National Museum of Art, Tokyo.

the Stanze of the Vatican. Yet, the series was not restricted to the depiction of paintings. *Museum Photographs* also includes architectural stills of church and temple in- and exteriors in Europe as well as other parts of the world; for example, the Sicilian cathedral of Monreale with its Byzantine mosaics or the Iglesia de San Francisco in Lima. Furthermore, the cycle comprises photographic accounts of the sculptures from the Berlin Pergamon altar and of craft works in weapons collections in Japan and the United States.

Already at this point, without having taken a closer look at any one specific piece in the series, it becomes apparent that the project on the whole conveys a metareferential notion in that it generically encompasses the photographic re-presentation of individual, largely prototypical (Western as well as non-Western) examples of all major art forms and a substantial number of their respective (sub-)genres. In additionally covering various historical epochs, which chronologically range from antiquity to twentieth-century Abstract Expressionism, *Museum Photographs* as a cycle or project may thus be regarded as an artistic attempt at conveying a 'world history of art'<sup>6</sup>. The project in its entirety hence constitutes an indirect metaization of the system and history of the visual arts at large.

In the spring of 2007, Thomas Struth completed as well as complemented the *Museum Photographs* cycle with a project entitled *Making Time*, which he had conceptualised for the new exhibition space in the extension of the Prado in Madrid. Starting from Diego Velázquez' (1599–1660) famous "Las Meninas", which Struth, as in all his museum photographs, contextualised with its viewers, the artist expanded the project into a museum installation: he placed eight of the original museum photographs produced in the course of the initial project as well as additional pictures executed in the same style and manner at the Prado itself among the canonical works on display in the Madrid collection. The large-scale photographs, measuring up to 2 x 2.5 meters, were hung in direct vicinity to pieces correlating with them in various ways, be it as to artist, period, genre, or formal parameters. The dialogue between the spectators and the viewed art objects as captured in the individual stills was thus extended into the larger context of the canonical pieces among which they had been placed as well as into the 'art space' surrounding both of them.

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<sup>6</sup> According to general art historical practice, this contribution will use the term 'art' synonymous with 'visual art' or 'the visual arts'.

That very ‘art space’ was also taken up as a subject by Struth’s fellow Becher School representative Candida Höfer in her 2005 series *Louvre*<sup>7</sup>, which comprises eighteen photographs of deserted picture and sculpture galleries taken on days when Paris’ largest museum had remained closed. Devoid of people, the rooms as Höfer captures them, e. g., in “Musée du Louvre Paris XVI 2005 – Salle Mollien, Romantisme” (see *Illustration 1*), appear disconcerting, but at the same time allow for the dialogue between the exhibited paintings and the architecture housing them to be foregrounded. All photographs display strict geometrical and symmetrical compositions, in which Höfer, in contrast to Struth, does not concentrate on individual exhibits but on the ‘art space’ as such in architectonic as well as ideological terms.



*Illustration 1 (left): Candida Höfer, “Musée du Louvre Paris XVI 2005 – Salle Mollien, Romantisme” (2005). (Orig. in colour.)*

*Illustration 2 (right): Thomas Struth, “Louvre 4, Paris” (1989). (Orig. in colour.)*

*Illustration 2*, “Louvre 4, Paris”<sup>8</sup>, the first example from Struth’s *Museum Photographs* to be discussed, was taken in the very same Louvre exhibition room as Höfer’s still, the Salle Mollien, one of the galleries fashioned and decorated in 1863, when the Louvre collection officially became Le Musée Napoléon III, the imperial museum, the notion of which is architectonically conveyed by the room’s red and gold decor (cf. Louvre: online). The very choice of the depicted room, in Höfer’s

<sup>7</sup> For the documentation of the cycle see Höfer 2006.

<sup>8</sup> In the following, the titles of individual museum photographs will be given in the full when first mentioned, including the location of the respective museum. In subsequent mentions the locations will be left out for ease of reading.

as well as in Struth's case, hence already metareferentially reflects upon the Louvre's transition from palace to museum, from political space to art space. For the average recipient without respective background knowledge less easily perceivable, and thus more strongly implicit, the metaization inherent in Höfer's photograph is primarily restricted to the formal and ideological dimensions mentioned above, while Struth's picture takes the scope of metaization(s) several steps further.

In his photographic portrayal of the Salle Mollien, Struth has captured a group of museum visitors in front of Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) only history painting, "Le Radeau de la Méduse" ('The Raft of the Medusa', 1818/1819), which depicts the disastrous 1816 shipwreck of a French ship and the survivors' unsuccessful attempt to attract the attention of a passing rescue boat. We will return to the Salle Mollien and Struth's depiction of Géricault's painting at several points to discuss in more detail the individual metaizations it contains. However, at this introductory stage, "Louvre 4" is as yet confined to serving as an exemplification of, and explanation for, how the main parts of this paper will be structured. In order to do so, the attention of the reader (or viewer, for that matter) is to be drawn to a threefold *mise en abyme* contained in Struth's "Louvre 4", which corresponds to the first three kinds of metaizations this paper will discuss: most obviously, the first *mise en abyme* is that of a 'picture within a picture' or, more precisely, that of a painting depicted within a photograph. Assuming as a macro-system of reference the pictorial media at large, this can be classified as an intra-systemic, intra-compositional self-reference. However, it should not go unnoted that, upon differentiating between the media of painting and photography as individual art forms within the visual arts, the self-reference would have to be considered as *inter-medial*. A second *mise en abyme* is constituted by the fact that the photograph shows Géricault's painting as hanging on a museum wall. That is the very same place – or 'art(istic) space' – in which the photograph itself is meant to be exhibited as a piece of art. Hence, when the original photograph is on display in an exhibition, the spectator is not only confronted with the depiction of an art space within a photograph but also with the pictorial representation of an art space within an art space. What ought to, and will be, scrutinized in more detail in this context is the notion of the system of reference. Lastly, the third *mise en abyme* contained in, or rather anticipated by, "Louvre 4" is that of the photograph's real-life beholder viewing the

(intra-pictorial) spectators of Géricault's "Le Radeau de la Méduse". This makes the reception of art the subject of the third self-reference inherent in this image.

Accordingly, the first three kinds of metaization in *Museum Photographs* and *Making Time* this contribution will concentrate on are: 1) general metapictorial elements, 2) the metaization of the reception act of art, and 3) the metaization of the 'art space' or 'art system'. In addition, a further section will be dealing with 4) metaphotographic reflections upon the creative process in 'unstaged' photography. A brief concluding section will offer for discussion questions pertaining to the notions of (referential) 'system' and 'work'.

## 2. 'The picture is in the picture': general metapictorial elements in *Museum Photographs*

We would like to start our analysis of general metapictorial elements in Struth's photographic projects with a second example from *Museum Photographs*: "Art Institute of Chicago 2, Chicago" (see *Illustration 3*). However, before turning to the photograph itself, it is germane to the explication of the metapictorial elements it contains to first examine the painting at its centre, Gustave Caillebotte's 1877 masterpiece "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie" ('Paris Street, Rainy Day'). Although it was still uncommon for visual artists of his day, Caillebotte (1848–1894) was notably intrigued and influenced by the new medium of photography, the aesthetics of which had a conspicuous impact on his style as a painter. In his works, which by impressionist standards are noticeably realistic, he endeavoured to seize everyday life in its instantaneous, transitory quality. "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie" conveys this notion of randomly capturing a prosaic instant, a fleeting moment of a couple's stroll along a Paris street in the rain. From a formal, compositional point of view, what is pertinent to the metapictorial quality of Struth's photograph is the fact that, in viewing Caillebotte's original painting, the eye level of the spectator coincides with that of the two strollers. This fact is in part constitutive of a pulling effect generated in the painting together with the image's central viewing point being located at the very same (eye) level on the geometrical horizon behind the lamp post's topmost knob (see *Illustration 5*), the

couple's rendering as a repoussoir<sup>9</sup> and the (in an almost photographic manner) cropped male back figure at the very right hand margin of the canvas.



*Illustration 3: Thomas Struth, "Art Institute of Chicago 2, Chicago" (1990). (Orig. in colour.)*

On the part of the observer, this pulling effect towards the central viewing point elicits the illusion of essentially 'walking towards' the couple in the picture and thus of 'entering' the depicted scene. In this manner, Caillebotte already established a direct relationship between his painting and its beholders by way of formal, medium-specific illusionistic devices which create depth in two-dimensional artworks and at the same time channel and direct our gaze in(to) the composition.

In turning to Struth's photographic depiction of "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie" at the Art Institute of Chicago, what needs to be pointed out first of all is that in not using, e. g., a telephoto but a wide-angle

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<sup>9</sup> The repoussoir is a compositional means to direct a viewer's attention by placing figures or trees at the front and (mostly) towards the margin of a picture to function as a framing device and create depth behind the foregrounded figures.



lens, Struth has ‘flattened out’ the picture plane so to speak. While Caillebotte created the illusion of depth in his painting, Struth creates that of flatness in his photograph. He thus makes the actual ontological (three-dimensional) space of the museum gallery resemble a (two-dimensional) picture plane on which he ‘positions’ his figures. If it were not for the painting’s prominent golden frame, the scene Struth captures would almost appear like a spatial continuation of Caillebotte’s canvas. This notion is notably intensified by the reduplication of the repoussoir figures in the young woman standing close to the painting and the cropped male figure in Caillebotte’s streetscape being complemented, if not almost completed, by the likewise cropped depiction of the man behind the picture wall (see *Illustration 4*). However, what is most striking is the fact that, as shown in *Illustration 5*, the central viewing point of the photograph precisely coincides with that of the painting, and that, provided the real-size photograph is viewed while hanging on a wall, the recipient’s eye level, once more, coincides with that of Caillebotte’s couple. The painting’s illusionistic pulling effect pointed out above is thus emphasised and made actively perceivable in the fact that the woman with the pram depicted in the photo’s foreground appears to be on the verge of walking into Caillebotte’s painting.



*Illustration 4: Thomas Struth, “Art Institute of Chicago 2, Chicago”, detail.*



Illustration 5: Thomas Struth, "Art Institute of Chicago 2, Chicago" – the grid indicates the central viewing point(s) of the photograph and in the depicted painting.

"The Art Institute of Chicago 2" hence contains an implicit metaization of how formal, compositional pictorial devices are employed to elicit illusionist effects in the beholder. What ought to be noted once again is that whether this metaization should be classified as intra- or inter-medial depends on the generic or systemic frame of reference applied – that of the pictorial media at large or that of painting and photography as individual art forms. In the latter case, the metaization would have to be read as a juxtaposition and comparative foregrounding of the *media-specific* devices applied to create illusionist effects in painting on the one and photography on the other hand.

The woman with the pram apparently bound to 'enter' Caillebotte's canvas in "Art Institute of Chicago 2" has been shown to function as a constitutive part of the above discussed metaization(s). However, she can likewise be cited as an example of how Struth metareferentially lays bare other pictorial conventions. For one may assume it not to be a coincidence that the visitors in *Museum Photographs* are frequently depicted from behind. As already noted in the comparison between Candida Höfer's and Thomas Struth's photographs of the Louvre's Salle Mollien, Höfer's picture conveys a disconcerting notion which results from the room's voidness of people, as average museum visitors traditionally do not enter a museum gallery all by themselves. For this reason, we, as viewers, are reluctant to identify with the camera gaze despite the image's inherent potential for allowing so. Albeit, in Struth's photograph the same inherent potential takes effect

to a decidedly higher degree. This difference in intensity derives from Struth employing, and at the same time metareferentially foregrounding, a further formal pictorial device: that of the 'Rückenfigur'.

The motif of the 'Rückenfigur' can be traced as far back as to late-medieval painting, functioning similarly to, or even as one of, the above-mentioned repoussoir devices: that is, as a formal aid to create depth in a two-dimensional picture plane and elicit the (almost meta-lectic) illusion of the world of the painting being linked or open to the ontological reality of the beholder. Moreover, it is a means of drawing the viewer's attention to specific parts of a tableau. However, notably since Casper David Friedrich, the 'Rückenfigur' has also, and as a matter of fact predominantly, turned into a conventionalised inner-pictorial representation of, and identification figure for, the spectator in the pictorial media at large<sup>10</sup>. It is this dimension of the 'Rückenfigur' motif as applied in a great number of the *Museum Photographs* which, as compared to Candida Höfer's respective Louvre image, to a large extent accounts for the more readily palpable metareferential quality of Struth's stills. This is due to the fact that the 'Rückenfigur' inevitably effects the identification of the spectators *in front* of the photographic image with those depicted *within* that image. In metareferential terms, one can also say that on an object-level the beholder is confronted with a photograph showing one or several people as they are looking at a painting, which on a meta-level triggers the real-life beholders' awareness of the fact that they themselves are currently engaged in the very same process of actively perceiving a piece of art.

As a matter of fact, "Louvre 4" even features a reduplication of the 'Rückenfigur' motif in that Géricault's shipwrecked sailors on the raft are executed likewise (see *Illustration 6*). Géricault underlines the dramatic dimension of the depicted situation by way of a triangular composition ascending from the dead bodies in the foreground to the quite literal 'glimmer' or 'ray' of hope on the horizon. This compositional feature is extended into the formal composition of the photographic image in that the left leg of the triangle appears to rise from the left bottom corner of the photograph, 'through' the museum visitors and subsequently the bodies on the raft, to the topmost sailor at the triangle's peak. This leads to a formal-compositional connection between the photographically depicted figures and those in Géricault's painting. The gaze of the (intra-pictorial) museum visitors in Struth's

<sup>10</sup> For the historical development of the 'Rückenfigur' see, e. g., Wilks 2005.

still hence finds a continuation in that of the sailors. It should be brought to attention, though, that the general view axis actually originates *outside* the photographic image, namely in the viewpoint of the real (extra-pictorial) observer. In actively directing the extra-pictorial spectators' gaze to specific areas within his photograph, Struth therefore visually supports and strengthens this axis which he effectuates by making use of the view camera's specific properties, which allow him to apply depth of field in a 'lasso-like manner' diagonally across the picture plane of the photograph (cf. Belting 2005: 112). Thereby, Struth does not only sustain the general view axis but also engineers the above-mentioned continuation and reduplication of Géricault's triangular composition in the intra-photographic group of spectators.



Illustration 6: Thomas Struth, "Louvre 4, Paris" (1989). (Orig. in colour.)

As in the Chicago photograph of Caillebotte's "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie", the aesthetic (compositional as well as colour-scheme related<sup>11</sup>) correspondences between the intra-pictorial beholders and the art

<sup>11</sup> As the illustrations in this volume are in black and white, we have generally refrained from discussing the photographs' colour schemes and their compositional effects and impact.

objects they observe constitute an intra-compositional self-reference comparable to, e. g., rhyme in poetry (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 21). However, since the photographs reduplicate, and in consequence also foreground, such formal structures, and as they lay bare the pictorial conventions and strategies which trigger certain effects and reactions in the recipient, these self-references are at the same time metareferential. It is of relevance, however, that for non-visually-trained beholders these metaizations are more strongly, and in some cases even exclusively, palpable when standing in front of the actual photographs – i. e., when the viewers are engaged in the actual act of reception.

### 3. ‘The beholder is in the picture’: the metaization of the act of reception

In view of the fact that Struth’s projects under examination are generally concerned with the relationship and interplay between works of art and their observers, it is not surprising that the metapictorial elements described above are likewise closely linked to the metaization of the reception act. This can already be inferred, e. g., from the fact that, in activating the respective cognitive frame in the recipient by way of effectuating a conventional pictorial device, Struth’s foregrounding of the ‘Rückenfigur’ leads to the identification of the extra-pictorial with the intra-pictorial viewer. As a result, the photographs trigger meta-reflections on the immediate act of art reception, as Kynaston McShine, partly in quoting Thomas Struth himself, has noted:

The interesting interplay happens when museum visitors confront a Struth photograph of museum visitors: it is as if they somehow step through the glass and become part of the situation they see. “Therein lies a moment of pause or of questioning”, Struth remarked; “Because the viewers are reflected in their activity, they have to wonder what they themselves are doing at that moment.” (1999: 17)

Before this backdrop the question arises whether photographs such as “Louvre 4” or “Art Institute of Chicago 2” should not be classified as *explicit* rather than implicit metaizations of the act of reception. Admittedly, the photographic images indeed do not verbally address a viewer standing in front of them, stating: “You, visitor, are standing in front of an artefact looking at it”. Yet, due to the almost life-size of the individual stills and photography’s perfect mimetic quality as well as its indexical nature and specific representationality as a medium, this

is the very insight the beholder gains from the metareferential representation of the viewing act. To a certain extent, this metaization can even be – and, as a matter of fact, has been – visually quoted: reminiscent of an infinite mise en abyme or “réduplication à l’infini” (Dällenbach 1977: 142), exhibition visitors have actually positioned themselves in front of individual museum photographs to produce new images depicting them in the same situation as the spectators captured by Struth<sup>12</sup>.

However, as Ann Goldstein has pointed out, Struth’s museum series are not merely restricted to thematising the specific act of viewing art. The artist is likewise interested in the relationship established between the spectator and the artworks he or she encounters (cf. 2002: 172).



*Illustration 7: Thomas Struth, “Alte Pinakothek, München, Self-Portrait” (2000). (Orig. in colour.)*

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<sup>12</sup> An example of such an amateur shot can be viewed on an internet blog at [http://community.livejournal.com/writing\\_prompts](http://community.livejournal.com/writing_prompts).

A special case of addressing the relationship between one specific masterpiece and one specific recipient is that of “Alte Pinakothek, München” (2000; see *Illustration 7*). This museum photograph shows *the* best-known Albrecht Dürer self-portrait, “Self-Portrait” (1500), in which the artist depicted himself at the age of twenty-eight in resemblance to Christ Pantocrator, i. e., “[...] fashion[ing] his likeness after icons of Christ [...] and thus] analogizing artist’s portrait and cult image of God in celebrating this art as the *vera icon* of personal skill and genius” (Koerner 1996: 53 [italics in the orig.]). Rather atypical of the project, Struth’s photograph shows but one single viewer in front of Dürer’s panel. The male figure on the right-hand margin is cropped to the extent that only his left arm and a part of his back are visible. Additionally, as opposed to Dürer having executed his own likeness with utmost attention to detail, the onlooker in the photographic image is rendered entirely blurred (cf. Goldstein 2002: 172). Consistent with one of the leitmotifs of the series, the act of beholding and reception is indeed also thematised here. Albeit, due to the specific formal and compositional rendering of the painting-viewer constellation in “Alte Pinakothek, München”, which constitutes a variation of the theme within the cycle, the recipient is already alert as to an additional dimension potentially comprised in the image. This dimension can be veritably inferred from the photograph’s title, which contains pertinent paratextual information, identifying the still as a metareferential reflection on the genres of portrait and self-portrait. In contrast to all but one other photograph in the cycle, Struth has added the specification “Self-Portrait” to the title of this piece, thus revealing that the cropped, blurred figure in front of Dürer’s self-portrait actually depicts the photo artist himself (cf. Seidel 2005: 137). Playing with the notions of re-presentation and (self-)re-presented object (or subject, for that matter), of portrayer and portrayed, of beholder and beheld before the backdrop of the intimate relationship between spectator and viewed artefact, the image’s actual denotation, at first glance, appears as blurred as the back view of Struth himself. However, upon taking a closer look, several layers of metareferential reflection can be discovered.

Struth’s photographic self-portrayal (markedly the only one in his entire oeuvre!) *as a recipient* of one of art history’s most discussed self-portraits clearly implies an artistic meta-reflection on the very genre of which both images are representative. At the same time, the choice of Dürer’s 1500 panel as the photograph’s referential subject

also bears implications to the status of the *photo artist* as compared to that of the ‘mere’ *photographer*. Joseph Leo Koerner has described Dürer’s “Self-Portrait” as an “emblem of the originary and productive power of the artist”, which “assert[s], once and for all, the Renaissance painter’s ascent from craftsman to artist” (1996: 53.). In directly contextualising himself with Dürer’s self-depiction as ‘divino artista’, Struth, likewise, metareferentially implies the photo artist’s ascent from craftsman to artist. Moreover, as Ann Goldstein indicates, Struth, by embedding his self-portrait into a museum photograph, makes a statement as to how he as an artist perceives the notions of observing and being observed, in which he ultimately foregrounds the relationship between the artist and his or her work: ‘As a self-portrait [... Struth’s still] is [hence] a portrait of [artistic] self-reflection’<sup>13</sup> (2002: 173). For the recipient, all of these implicit metaizations would, however, not be perceivable without the explicit paratextual metaization in the title.



*Illustration 8: Thomas Struth, documentation of Making Time (2007). Museo del Prado, Madrid. (Orig. in colour.)*

When including the Munich photograph in the *Making Time* installation, Struth even intensified the metareferential discourse on the subjects of art reception and the relationship between the artist, his work and its beholder. As shown in *Illustration 8*, Struth placed his own photographic self-portrait to be ‘framed’ on the left by the Prado’s

<sup>13</sup> “Als Selbstporträt ist [... Struths Foto demnach] ein Porträt der [künstlerischen] Selbstreflexion.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are ours.



1498 Dürer self-portrait, depicting the painter in a self-confident manner, and on the right by Dürer's "Portrait of an Unidentified Man" (1521). In the large-scale photograph, Dürer's Munich panel appears in its almost exact original size, which in the context of its framed position evokes the notion of *museum presentation* rather than that of *pictorial re-presentation*. However, with reference to the metaization of the reception act, what is most interesting to note is that, as to their postures, both of the portrait subjects are essentially turned towards Struth's photograph. From a museum visitor's point of view, this induces the impression that they were actually looking towards Struth's photographic image and hence 'joining' the spectator in the act of reception. Lastly, what cannot go unmentioned with regard to further explications is that in Struth's own photographic documentation of the Prado project (see, again, *Illustration 8*) a third portrait is added to intensify the deliberate confusion between the notions of beholder and beheld. The camera assuming a position and view point not directly in front of Struth's photograph (as a visitor would upon regarding the piece in the exhibition) but at a relative distance and angle to it, the view is opened into the adjoining room, from where the portrait of a woman appears to be gazing towards the camera. In fact, the viewing points of all four portrait subjects meet in the very place where the camera and thus the artist, respectively, are positioned. The images and the artist are ergo virtually 'exchanging gazes'. This constellation brings to the fore a general reciprocal relationship of exchange involving artist, artworks and museums, which the Director of the MoMA, Glenn D. Lowry, has described as follows:

[Artists] are, at once, visitors and users of the institution [museum] and the creators of the objects that constitute the institution. Museums, for them, are thus both venues of stimulation and ideas and home to the results of those inspirations and ideas. This means that artists are constantly negotiating a delicate balance within the museum between being the observer and the observed. (1999: 6)

However, in Struth's documentary photograph of the Prado project, the oscillation between observer and observed does not stop at the artist. Since Struth's own appearance as an – if but rudimentary – 'Rückenfigur' in his self-portrait allows for the beholder of the photograph to identify with the camera gaze, he or she 'steps into' the position of the artist behind the camera and hence likewise 'mutates' from viewing subject to viewed object. In an 1999 exhibition catalogue Struth himself expressed his metareferential intentions while still working on *Museum Photographs*:

What I want to achieve with the series [...] is to make a statement about the original process of representing people leading to my act of making a new picture, which is in a certain way a very similar mechanism: the viewer of the works seen in the photographs finds him/herself in a space which I, too, belong [to] when I stand in front of a photograph. The photographs illuminate the connection and should lead the viewers away from regarding the works as mere fetish-objects and initiate their own understanding or invention in historical relationships. (1999: 116)

Yet, not all instances of museum photographs thematising the reception act bear upon equally intimate exchanges between artworks and their beholders. “Uffizien 1, Florenz” (1989), e. g., depicts two elderly ladies in front of Giotto’s “Madonna di Ognissanti” (ca. 1310), however, not as close-up ‘Rückenfiguren’ but in half-profile from a comparatively far distance. Bent over a book, one of the women is reading (possibly out loud) what information the text conveys about the piece, while the second one is attentively looking at the panel itself. “Museo del Prado 3, Madrid” (2005, see *Illustration 11*) features a group of museum visitors gathered in front of Diego Velázquez’ “Las Hilanderas” (‘The Spinners’) or “La Fabula de Arachne” (‘The Fable of Arachne’, 1657). The group are attended by a guide, who, with his back turned to Velázquez’ painting, is talking to a family with a child, while a young couple is engaged in a conversation of their own. Finally, in “Louvre 2, Paris”, Struth has captured a group of children and a teacher or museum educator, who – geometrically mirroring the oval form of Veronese’s “Giove che fulmina i vizi” (‘Jupiter Hurling Thunderbolts’, 1554–1556) on the wall above them – are sitting on the floor in a circle, the children’s attention unfailingly fixed upon the teacher rather than the Veronese.

Photographs like these go beyond explicating the intimate relationship established between art and its recipient in the mere act of viewing. These pictures metareferentially address and exemplify the manifold ways in which an individual as well as society at large can gain (aesthetic, sensory or even sensual) pleasure as well as knowledge from personally interacting with art objects in the ‘art space’ of the museum or by engaging in more or less ‘educational’ activities as offered by the museum as an institution, which brings us to the next topic of this contribution: the metaization of the ‘art space’.

4. 'The museum is in the picture and the picture is in the museum': the metaization of the 'art space'

It should by now have become apparent that Struth's photographic projects under discussion do not unfold their full metareferential potential unless they are exhibited and viewed in a museum or gallery space – that is to say, in a specific and distinct 'art space'. In the case of *Making Time* at the Prado, the museum itself was even an integral, constitutive part of the installation and hence of the 'art work' as such, which due to its generic nature as an installation only existed as long as Struth's photos remained within the 'art space' of the Prado.

A large majority of artefacts belonging to the visual arts require an ontologically existing space or spatial framing in order to be perceived and viewed by recipients, a systemic requirement the visual arts to a certain extent share with (at least partly) performative media such as drama, music, dance, or poetry. In the case of architecture this could be any given outdoor space, which also holds true for certain types of sculpture as, e. g., statues cast in metal or from stone. Yet other sculptural media such as wood or clay need indoor spaces in order to endure and persist, as do most forms of painting. In their dimension as cult or sacral objects, works of art have thus frequently been retained in their respective places of function. However, in their dimension as artistic representational objects they have also adorned private homes as well as public sites for centuries. Yet, private collections have not, or only to a very limited extent, been publically accessible. It was not until the museum as an institution with the aim and responsibility of collecting, preserving and exhibiting artefacts came into being in the eighteenth century<sup>14</sup> that artworks which are not originally and permanently located in publicly accessible spaces, became available to be viewed by the general public. In this context and function, the museum has become a constitutive part of the 'art system' at large.

It is indeed in the museum, in a collection or in situ – and only there – that a spectator is faced with original works of art, which in their entirety constitute the very 'world history of art' that the cycle of Struth's *Museum Photographs* as a whole metareferentially tries to convey. Hans Belting stresses the fact that Struth started his depiction of museum visitors at the Louvre, which used to be considered *the*

<sup>14</sup> The first public state-funded museum was London's British Museum, which opened at Montagu House in Bloomsbury in 1759 (cf. Waidacher 1999: 91).

museum of the old world, from which the first pictorial accounts of museum visitors as ‘viewers of “visible art history”’ (“Betrachter der ‘sichtbaren Kunstgeschichte’” [2005: 120]) emerged in the nineteenth century. Belting, moreover, notes that most Parisian painters of the time started their careers copying (i. e., *reproducing*) the old masters’ works at the Louvre (cf. *ibid.*). As has been shown above in sec. 2, Struth has in a way metareferentially extended this tradition into his own artistic medium. However, as explicated by McShine in the catalogue to the 1999 MoMA exhibition “The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect”, museums do not merely house the contemporary artists’ paragons; as an institution and ‘art space’, they, moreover, have

[...] great meaning for contemporary artists [...] who] have probably spent a lot of time in the Museum and been influenced by individual exhibitions. [...] Most artists’ education involves the habit of visiting museums and reflecting on what is seen there. This, of course, also has led to artists thinking about museum practices. (1999: 12)

The works of more than sixty contemporary artists shown at the 1999 MoMA exhibition hence featured as their (to a striking extent metareferentially sustained) subjects “[...] everything from the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of the institution [museum] to its ethical and financial practices and international politics” (Lowry 1999: 7). The exhibition was meant to give an idea of, and insight into,

[...] the rich, varied and complex relationship that exists between artists and museums. It argue[d] that during the twentieth century, if not before, the museum ceased to be simply a repository of objects and became, instead, an independent locus of artistic inspiration and activity. (*Ibid.*: 6)

Upon recalling what has been expounded in the previous sections, it becomes evident that in terms of the metaization of the museum as ‘art space’, the museum photographs discussed above, especially when on display and viewed *in* an ‘art space’, are bound to activate the beholders’ awareness of the museum’s relevance as a cultural institution and integral part of the art system. This mental process is primarily effectuated via the ‘real’ museum visitors’ personal identification with their portrayed counterparts, while on a more implicit level it is reinforced by the choice of the depicted museums as well as the therein observable and observed pieces, either of which are quite likely to be recognised due to their general renown. In the case of Caillebotte, also the choice of artist proves interesting from a metareferential point of view, as the informed beholder might know that Caillebotte, born into a well-to-do family, was not only a painter but also a collector and

patron. In addition, Struth's inclusion of the actual portrait of the collector Giles Robertson in both *Museum Photographs* and *Making Time* can be interpreted as him highlighting the museum's dimension as an institution that collects art in order to make it accessible. Such a reading can be sustained by pointing out that Struth likewise included the portraits of the San Lorenzo conservators in his initial cycle and even chose them to be among the small number of stills to be exhibited at the Prado. In that, Struth also reflects upon the museum's aim and function to preserve the artefacts it accommodates.

As to the Prado project itself, one ought to explicitly stress, once more, that here the museum as such – in its ontological dimension as a building or architectural space as well as in its socio-cultural dimension as one of the world's most important collections of art, i. e., as 'art space' – was an actual and constitutive part of the artwork which was 'created' by Struth placing his photographs among the canonical pieces on display.

The fact that Struth chose to contextualise his photographs exclusively with pieces that (at least for the informed viewer) are clearly discernable as important canonical works is undoubtedly worth mentioning, too. For an art object to have entered the art historical canon means for it to have been recognised as, and granted the status of, 'serious' art, which notably also holds true for an art object that has been acquired by a museum. Hence, the museum as an institution does not only collect, preserve and exhibit works of art; it also endows them with the notion and status of being of art-historical relevance or, as Claudia Seidel puts it, '[w]hen a work of art enters the museum space, it inevitably becomes history'<sup>15</sup> (2005: 133). Especially in the context of *Making Time* this is a pertinent fact upon which Struth metareferentially reflects. By having 'entered' the museum as 'art space', i. e., by having been placed among the original pieces in the Prado collection, his museum photographs – which are notably reminiscent in size of the works they depict as well as of those which 'frame' them – were also endowed with art-historical importance comparable (and actually compared) to that of the paintings encompassing them. Upon entering the museum, they had also 'entered' the canon. However, this remained only the case for as long as the installation was on display.

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<sup>15</sup> "Gelangt ein Werk der Kunst in den musealen Raum, wird es unwillkürlich Geschichte."

In leaving the museum, the photos also left their canonic status behind.

The metaization of the museum as actual 'art space' can, moreover, be seen as extending to related notions such as, most notably, that of the 'original' piece of art. Ever since Walter Benjamin established the paradigm of an artwork's aura in his seminal 1936 essay on "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ('The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'), the immediate interaction between an original piece of art and its recipient (so clearly thematised in Struth's photographs) has been established as a *sine qua non* for the latter to experience the aura of the work beheld, which only exists and becomes perceptible in the 'here and now' of an artefact: 'Even the most perfect reproduction lacks *one* element: the artwork's here and now – its unique existence in the place where it happens to be'<sup>16</sup> (Benjamin 1963: 11). Photography as the medium of mechanical reproduction par excellence is naturally among those art forms most prone to be strongly engaged in artistic reflections upon the subject. Struth photographing (i. e., mechanically reproducing) original art objects in museums and in situ (i. e., in their respective 'here') at the moment when they are being viewed (i. e., a photographically recorded 'now'), constitutes an implicit metaization of the paradigm of the original artwork's aura. In portraying museum visitors in a state of deep contemplation of, and immersion in, a specific art object, photographs such as "Louvre 4" – despite their paradigmatic inability to mechanically reproduce a depicted piece's aura itself – moreover elicit the notion of photographically conveying the individual viewers' *perception* of the an artwork's aura. Furthermore, since in photography several identical prints can be produced from one negative, technically speaking, a photographic print does generally not exist as *one* 'unique existence'. However, in placing them among the Prado's original painting, Struth endowed his individual prints on display, too, with an implied 'original' quality.

Before this backdrop, it is pertinent to note that the only (by now) thoroughly established major art form *Museum Photographs* fails to include in the 'world history of art', which the cycle can be understood to represent, is photography – the very medium of artistic (re-)presentation itself. At the same time, it is also the very medium –

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<sup>16</sup> "Noch bei der höchstvollendeten Reproduktion fällt *eines* aus: das Hier und Jetzt des Kunstwerks – sein einmaliges Dasein an dem Orte, an dem es sich befindet."

or virtual rather than ontologically existing space – which in the context of artistry, art history and the general public reception of the visual arts has to a large extent *replaced* the museum or in-situ location as the most prominent ‘place of interaction’ between the piece of art and its beholder. However, as the above explications have shown, Struth’s photographs have, in turn, to be viewed in that very ‘art space’ to unfold their full artistic potential (be it metareferential or not).

5. ‘The photograph was taken at the *decisive moment*’:  
metaphotographic reflections upon the creative process  
in ‘unstaged’ photography

In the introduction to this contribution it has already been indicated that the picture-within-a-picture *mise en abyme* contained in so many of Struth’s museum photographs can either be seen as an *intra*-medial self-reference with regard to the pictorial media at large, while from a media-comparative point of view it ought to be specified as an *inter*-medial self-reference on grounds of a *painterly* image being depicted in a *photographic* image. For the viewer there are likewise two different approaches towards Struth’s photographs: he or she may either ‘simply’ consider them ‘pictures’ or plain pieces of art as which they are located on the same level as the painted artworks they visually comprise; or, the beholder may regard them as inner-pictorial juxtapositions of two essentially different media (cf. Belting 2005: 116). As the discussion of metapictorial elements in “Art Institute of Chicago 2” has shown, both ‘readings’ are possible depending on the recipient’s level of background knowledge and focus. An art historian, e. g., will readily identify the formal and compositional devices applied and effectuated in both Caillebotte’s painting as well as in Struth’s photograph. Moreover, he or she is likely to be aware of Caillebotte’s leaning towards the medium of photography and will thus perceive traces of photographic notions inherent in “Rue de Paris, temps de pluie”: its instantaneous quality, the cropped figures conveying motion, the widening background being reminiscent of a wide-angle shot. On the other hand, it may take the expert knowledge of a photographer to recognise the perfect technical rendering of Struth’s still, which might make one wonder whether the picture was not purposefully constructed rather than the photo artist having closed the shutter at the decisive moment to capture the perfectly executed com-

position in its technical sophistication. However, a non-visually-trained observer may simply behold the image of a woman with a pram who appears to be walking towards, and on into, a painted street-scape. The photograph's metareferential quality will without doubt trigger reflections in all three of these onlookers. The respective subjects of their reflections are, however, bound to differ. The more affinity one has to the visual arts, the more likely one is to reflect about how Struth's images compare and contrast medium-specific aspects of painting and photography to one another. Regarded from a photo-historical and -theoretical point of view, *Museum Photographs* may even elicit an intermedially induced metaphotographic reflection, as will be shown in the following with reference to several characteristic features of Struth's photographs.

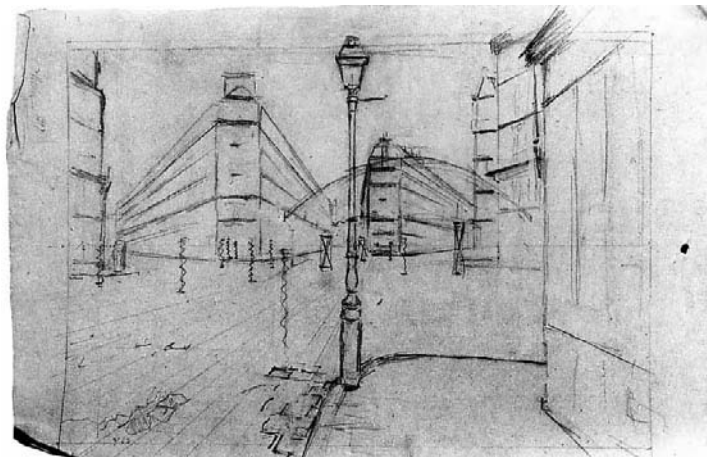


Illustration 9: Gustave Caillebotte, study for "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie".

The first feature of Struth's photographic approach can be explicated by returning to "Art Institute of Chicago 2". *Illustration 9* shows a study for Caillebotte's "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie", which reveals how the artist formally constructed his painting. The picture plane has been laid out, the geometrical horizon and three vanishing points have been constructed along the street level of the background buildings, and the lamp post at the centre of the drawing has been erected to vertically split the image into two halves. However, the street is void of people, for the figures to be inserted into the background of the scene are as yet reduced to mere indicators of their future positions, while the circle segment which is meant to turn into an umbrella is



barely visible. As Struth was laying out *his* picture plane, focussing the view camera at Caillebotte's finished painting in the Art Institute of Chicago and aligning the painting's as well as the photograph's central viewing points with the beholder's eye level (see *Illustration 5*), he actually did much the same as Caillebotte had done in the preparatory study for his painting. Both artists formally constructed and consciously set the stages for the respective scenes they were planning to depict. As a painter, Caillebotte completed his streetscape by inventing, constructing and finally executing the 'protagonists' that were to take the stage he had set for them. Throughout the history of photography, there have always been individual photo artists as well as photographic movements 'making' rather than 'taking' photographs in a likewise manner. Due to carefully constructing and (re)presenting a fictionalised reality in their images, this branch of photography has tellingly been subsumed under umbrella terms such as 'staged photography' or 'photography of invention'. Struth, by contrast, having adopted a Becher-School-shaped analytical-documentary approach, clearly and strongly opposes such staging techniques. Instead of actively *placing* his protagonists on the picture plane, he *perched* in the museums, waiting for them to appear *on* (rather than *in*) the scene of which he took his shot at the 'decisive moment'. In that, he was waiting for reality to provide him with moments that 'held' images formally and aesthetically as well as in terms of their contents indicative of what he was intent to convey. Therefore, the moment of chance having in part been constitutive of his 'unstaged' museum pictures does not mean that Struth approached his subject without consideration. Had he not intended, e. g., to lay bare the illusionist pulling effect in "Rue de Paris, temps de pluie", his Chicago photograph could not be considered metareferential. In fact, his directly capturing images as reality 'composes' them can potentially even be regarded as metareferentially foregrounding the immediacy of the creative act in photography – especially within the frame of his photographs intra-compositionally juxtaposing painting and photography in a media-comparative manner. In a *Washington Post* interview Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004), who in his 1952 publication *Images à la sauvette* established the notion of the 'decisive moment' in photography, in an interview explained how

[p]hotography is not like painting. There is a creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that

life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative. (Qtd. in Bernstein 2004: online)

What is interesting to note is that in 1954 Cartier-Bresson, too, took a photograph at the Louvre's Salle Mollien (see *Illustration 10*), which allows for a remarkable comparison with Struth's "Louvre 4". As to their common subject, both stills show a group of museum visitors in front of a history painting. Also on a formal level the images coincide in mirroring the geometrical constellations of the respective paintings' inner-pictorial figures in those of the beholders in the photographs, the latter of which in both cases are 'Rückenfiguren'.



*Illustration 10: Henri Cartier-Bresson, "Musée du Louvre" (1954).*

However, most important from a metareferential point of view is that both stills also appear to be foregrounding the 'decisive moment in photography' by media-comparatively juxtaposing it to the 'pregnant moment' in painting. As notably Lessing in his 1766 treatise "Laokoon, oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie" ('Laocoon, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry') expounded, painting and sculpture as spatial and static media (as opposed to temporal and dynamic media such as, e. g., literature or nowadays film) are forced to choose to depict "[...] only one single moment of [... a narrative's] action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant, from which what

precedes and follows will be most easily apprehended”<sup>17</sup> (1985: 99). Géricault in his painting chose the moment in which the rescue boat on the horizon makes the doomed sailors rise up with hope only to pass by, while the tableau by Jacques Louis David<sup>18</sup> (1748–1825) which Cartier-Bresson has captured in his image relates the moment in which Napoleon, after having crowned himself emperor, is about to bestow royal powers upon his empress Joséphine.

In painting, pinpointing or ‘extracting’ the pregnant moment of a narrative is part of the creative act, and the apt choice of one amongst many possible instants is part of a piece’s artistic merit as much as is its formal and aesthetic rendering. This (deliberate) choice of the painter’s is the result of a *process of conscious reflection*, whereas in photography which adheres to the doctrine of the ‘decisive moment’ the photographer’s creative choice is one of *instantaneous intuition*, in that the photo artist intuitively *anticipates* the decisive moment in which to close the shutter of his or her camera. Struth hence metaphotographically foregrounds the creative act as it is distinctive for photographic movements that refrain from staging their sujets. This metaization is to be understood as critical, especially in photos which, by way of depicting paintings that, in turn, adhere to the doctrine of the pregnant moment, designate the differences between painting and photography in terms of how they (may) generate their subjects.

This is, at the same time, linked to a metaization which directly addresses a general ‘fictio’- vs. ‘fictum’-related quality (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 41f.) in painting on the one and photography on the other hand. Hans Belting refers to painting as a medium of distance as compared to photography as a medium of immediacy: ‘Distance and immediacy [however] are not put to the test until one understands them as fiction and reality’<sup>19</sup> (2005: 114). In drawing upon what Roland Barthes in *La*

<sup>17</sup> “Die Malerei kann in ihren koexistierenden Kompositionen nur einen einzigen Augenblick der Handlung nutzen, und muß daher den prägnantesten wählen, aus welchem das Vorhergehende und Folgende am begreiflichsten wird.” (Lessing 1987: 115)

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Louis David, “Le Sacre ou le Couronnement. Sacre de l’empereur Napoléon Ier et couronnement de l’impératrice Joséphine dans la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, le 2 décembre 1804” (‘The Consecration of the Emperor Napoléon and the Coronation of Empress Joséphine on December 2, 1804’), 1806–1807.

<sup>19</sup> “Distanz und Unmittelbarkeit werden [jedoch] erst dann auf die Probe gestellt, wenn man sie als Fiktion und Wahrheit versteht.”

*Chambre claire* (1980) termed the ‘noema’ of photography<sup>20</sup>, Belting elaborates that photography constitutes a ‘proof of reality’ (“Wahrheitsbeweis”) in that it depicts ‘the reality of a sujet’ (“die Realität eines Sujets”), which is what sets it apart from painting, which, in turn, is able to invent its sujets (ibid.)<sup>21</sup>. Belting draws the viewer’s attention to the fact that museum visitors whom Struth captures in his photographs are a reality which is directly compared to the fictionality of what is depicted in the paintings they are viewing (cf. ibid.: 109). Walter Grasskamp, too, points out the two different ‘levels of fictionality’ (“Fiktionsgrade”) which Struth juxtaposes in his photographs (2005: 129f.). This ‘fictio’ vs. ‘fictum’ metaization becomes especially apparent in “Museo del Prado 3” (see *Illustration 11*), which shows a group of visitors in front of Velázquez’ “Las Hilanderas” (see *Illustration 12*).



*Illustration 11: Thomas Struth, “Museo del Prado 3, Madrid” (2005). (Orig. in colour.)*

<sup>20</sup> “Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence, the *noeme* of Photography. [...] The name of Photography’s *noeme* will therefore be: ‘That-has-been’ [...]” (Barthes 2000: 76f. [emphases in the orig.])

<sup>21</sup> This observation is, again, more strongly applicable to ‘unstaged’ photography, which draws its images from real-life situations.



Illustration 12: Diego Velázquez, “Las Hilanderas” (‘The Spinners’) or “La Fabula de Arachne” (‘The Fable of Arachne’, 1657). Museo del Prado, Madrid. (Orig. in colour.)

In having embedded or ‘woven’ the fable of Arachne into a genre scene, Velázquez himself had already established two levels of reality in his painting by way of depicting two different instances or moments within the same mythological tale of the goddess Minerva punishing Arachne for having challenged her weaving skills. Symbolic of the combat, Minerva disguised as an old woman is depicted at a spinning wheel in the foreground with the likewise spinning Arachne to the right. A small flight of steps leads up to a second room in the back-ground, where besides three elegantly dressed women Minerva appears as she is punishing Arachne. A tapestry displaying the woven copy of Titian’s “Ratto d’Europa” (‘The Rape of Europa’, 1562) covers the wall and thus forms the background of the scene. However, the slightly blurred rendering of the Minerva-Arachne group makes the two mythological figures appear as if they were actually part of the scene depicted in the tapestry. Velázquez’ incorporating a tapestry (which, in turn, re-presents a Titian painting) as a second representational medium into his original canvas already constitutes an implicit

painterly metareference along with the curtain as a framing device being pulled away in the foreground. In that he captures the guided group of visitors in front of “Las Hilanderas”, Struth in principle ‘adds’ a third room to the ones already depicted in the Prado tableau. In combining as well as comparing and contrasting photography, oil painting and tapestry in one image, Struth hence induces a fictio-related metaization of the individual media’s differing suggestive powers or potentials as to plausibly evincing an image of reality. Due to its medial capacity and capability of producing mimetically perfect pictorial representations of (at least a section of) reality, photography has a stronger potential of plausibility. Struth foregrounds this in a mise en abyme of different representational media, whose mimetic accuracy gradually decreases from photography via painting to tapestry. At the same time, “Museo del Prado 3” also contains a fictum-related metaization which corresponds to the content of the scenes in the mise-en-abyme images. The scene at the Prado itself has not been invented. In its ‘unstagedness’, it is the photographic account or record of a real-life instant, rendered in perfect photographic mimesis. The next lesser level of reality is the one captured in the genre scene of “Las Hilanderas”. In depicting a scene as it might well have taken place at the royal tapestry manufacture of Santa Isabel in Madrid, the subject matter retains an affinity to reality. The mythological scene in the background, however, is clearly an invention. In a (due to his sober, documentary-oriented photographic approach) non-critical metaization, Thomas Struth hence juxtaposes photography and painting as to how they generate, formally and medium-specifically render, and visually communicate the images they bring forth.

6. Does the museum belong to the ‘system’  
and what is a ‘work’?

In delineating the individual metaizations explicated in the previous sections, two questions have arisen, which, especially in the context of investigating metareference as a transmedial phenomenon, appear worth putting forward to discussion as they cannot be solved within the scope of this contribution. One question pertains to the notion of the ‘system’ of reference as it underlies the concept of metareference in the present discourse, while the other concerns the directly related notion of the ‘work’.

At first glance it might appear paradoxical to address the two notions separately, especially when taking into account that the term 'system' in its broad sense of "cover[ing] the entire area of the media" (Wolf in this vol.: 19) actually comprises the notion of the 'work' as the referential system in its narrower sense (cf. *ibid.*). However, in the course of this contribution it should have become apparent that for example, and especially, in the case of Struth's *Making Time* project one faces a considerable problem when trying to define the 'work' as such. As an art *project*, *Making Time* was constituted by a body of photographs, each of which may be considered a 'work' in its own right. Some of these photographs even stem from a previous photographic cycle, *Museum Photographs*, which in its entirety, likewise, may be regarded as a 'work'. Moreover, as has been pointed out, the Museo del Prado in its dimensions as architectural as well as art space was an integral part of *Making Time* and hence *actively* involved in constituting the installation's artistic merit, which would render the museum for the duration of the project a part of the 'work'. Finally, the actual *Making Time* project – which has been discussed in its metareferential dimensions in this contribution – no longer exists. Nonetheless it was possible to point out specific metaizations it contained, mainly due to its documentation that, in turn, was photographically conducted by Struth himself and hence resulted in photographs which may be regarded as yet another layer of 'sub-works' involved in constituting the *Making Time* project. In a case like this, the differentiation between direct and indirect metareference is problematic, if at all possible. Similar difficulties may also arise, e. g., upon investigating metareference in conceptual art due to a possible lack of a 'work' in an ontological dimension.

As to the 'system' in its broad sense, particularly sec. 4 of this contribution has shown that from an art historical, art theoretical and also from an artist's point of view the museum in particular and the 'art space' in general are commonly considered as essentially belonging to the visual arts. The MoMA's 1999 "Museum as Muse" exhibition has already been cited as an example of how artists have reflected and still reflect upon the museum as a (socio-cultural as well as historical) concept, as a (cultural and educational) institution, and as artistic inspiration. In organizing an exhibition on this particular topic, the MoMA, in turn, foregrounded the multilayered relationship between the artist and the art space in its reciprocity. This relationship is also the central concern of James Putnam's *Art and Artifact: The Museum*

as *Medium*, which endeavors to pinpoint “a museological tendency in art which is matched by the use of the traditional museum as a site for artists’ interventions” (2001: 7). Listing and discussing several hundred individual pieces and installations, Putnam’s volume does not only illustrate the museum’s influence on individual artists and their works but is moreover concerned “with showing that there is an ideological exchange taking place where artists exert an equally powerful influence on museums” (ibid.). In accordance with Putnam, who defines “*The Museum as Medium*” in the subtitle of his publication, the German art historian Walter Grasskamp also considers the museum a medium – a medium of (*immediate*) *presentation* rather than of (*mediated*) *representation*:

We rarely think of the museum as a medium, but it is a medium, even if it is very specific and distinct from the other mass media of the modern age. Museums carry and transmit images according to their own rules: Unlike television or magazines, museums don’t transport images into the viewer’s home; indeed, the viewer has to go to the museum [...]. (Grasskamp: online)

It is before this background that the present contribution has defined Struth’s artistic references to the art space not as hetero- but as self- and in further consequence as metareferential. In the introduction to this volume, Wolf has defined self-reference as “refer[ring] to texts and media and *related issues* – in a broad sense as yet regardless of their also being conceived of as part of ‘reality’ or a represented world or not” (22 [my emphasis]). Metareference, accordingly,

[...] establishes a secondary reference to texts and media (and *related issues*) as such by, as it were, viewing them ‘from the outside’ of a meta-level from whose perspective they are consequently seen as different from unmediated reality and the content of represented worlds (ibid. [my emphasis]).

Especially from a transgeneric and transmedial perspective, a closer investigation of ‘media-related issues’ clearly constitutes a field for future research, in part geared towards a possible extension and media-specific refinement of the ‘system’ notion in studies of metareference.

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## **Metareference in Film/Cinema**



# The Gradable Effects of Self-Reflexivity on Aesthetic Illusion in Cinema

*Jean-Marc Limoges*<sup>1</sup>

Even though they are clear and precise, the current discussions concerning self-reflexive cinematographic devices are insufficient for the purpose of the present contribution, which explores why various such devices, though similar in *form*, can nonetheless generate different *effects*. More precisely, I will try to establish different conditions one should take into account when assessing the actual illusion-breaking potential of self-reflexive devices. Thus it will become explicable why two formally identical devices which are commonly recognized as breaking aesthetic illusion can at times suspend, at other times encourage our belief in the represented world. In order to do so, I propose five points or conditions that should be kept in mind when talking about the effects of individual devices with an anti-illusionist potential: their perceptibility, the context of their reception, the genre in which they appear, the modalities of their occurrence and their motivation.

## 1. Introduction

When reading about self-reflexivity in cinema, one notices that its definition vacillates between two poles: self-reflexivity is (according to enunciation theory) any device which reveals the film's enunciation, or (according to theories about aesthetic illusion) any device which reminds the audience that they are watching a film. In other words, self-reflexivity is defined at times by *what it is*, at times by *what it does*. In fact, one does not necessarily imply the other, and I hope to show here that when self-reflexivity does indeed reveal the enunciation, it will not necessarily always remind the audience that they are watching a film. Two *formally* identical self-reflexive devices may at times break and at other times maintain the audience's aesthetic illusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from French by Johanne O'Malley. For their help, I would like to thank the Faculté des Lettres and the Département des Littératures of the Université Laval and the AELIÉS (Association des étudiantes et des étudiants de Laval inscrits aux études supérieures).

To this end, I have opted for the “*démarche insoucieuse*” (‘carefree approach’)<sup>2</sup> conceived by Christian Metz in *L’Énonciation impersonnelle* (1991: 35). Focussing on self-reflexive devices I have encountered haphazardly, I have simply attempted to understand why, despite the formal similarities between some of them, the aesthetic illusion was broken in some cases, and maintained in others. The conditions I will survey here – which could be applied to varied works of art – will constitute a list to be used in explaining why a self-reflexive device does not break the aesthetic illusion. I have named these conditions, which are, of course, to be widely interpreted, as follows: ‘perceptibility’, ‘context of reception’, ‘genre’, ‘modalities of occurrence’ and ‘motivation’. I will seek to address the definitions of these five conditions, exemplify them and discuss their relevance. The question to be answered is therefore: *How could two otherwise identical self-reflexive cinematographic devices nonetheless have different effects on the recipient?*

## 2. Self-reflexivity narrowly defined

Defining what is meant here by ‘self-reflexivity’ is essential, especially within the cinematographic arts – and most certainly in the context of a volume dealing with concepts such as ‘self-reference’ and ‘metareference’. A definition seems to be all the more requisite as this concept had been ascribed a plethora of meanings (see Limoges online). Pursuant to the definition provided by Jacques Gerstenkorn in the introductory notes to the first issue of *Vertigo* (1987), entitled “Le Cinéma au miroir”, I contend that self-reflexivity is given in *any device that intentionally reveals (by showing or hinting at) the enunciative apparatus of the film itself* (cf. 8). I will therefore differentiate between proper ‘self-reflexive’ devices and merely ‘reflexive’ ones. The latter refer to devices that do not reveal ‘the’ device (i. e., the *film itself*), but rather ‘a’ device (such as, for example, a *film within the film*). This distinction is, on the one hand, important for the way in which my (narrow) definition is different from what Werner Wolf calls ‘self-reflexivity’ (cf. in this vol.: 19, and cf. 2007: 305f.), but, on the other hand, allows self-reflexivity in my sense to be placed under

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

what Wolf calls 'metareference'<sup>3</sup>; my version of self-reflexivity is therefore different from Wolf's self-reflexivity but included in his concept of metareference<sup>4</sup>.

This distinction is also significant since, by comparison with merely reflexive devices, self-reflexive devices should more readily suspend our disbelief in the autonomy of the diegesis. Since self-reflexive devices highlight the enunciative apparatus of the film itself (i. e., everything that permits its production and that is normally hidden to us), they break the diegetic frame *and* our belief in the autonomy of the production's diegetic world. In order to do this, cinematographic language relies upon a plethora of processes: exposing the presence of the camera or the microphone; allowing characters to address the audience; forwarding, rewinding, burning or cracking the celluloid; revealing the set, technicians or special effects; introducing the actors, or even the directors, *as themselves* within the diegesis.

The concept of filmic self-reflexivity thus defined requires some further clarification for the purpose of discussing its (anti-)illusionist potential. There are cases where, despite the fact that *the* filmic enunciative apparatus of the film is laid bare, the illusion can nevertheless be maintained, while in other cases revealing *an* enunciative apparatus could break the illusion. Therefore, I would like to refine the definition that I have just posited: I will talk about a 'self-reflexive device' when the enunciative apparatus pertains to the film itself *or when it supposedly pertains to it* owing to conventional attribution. To exemplify this, let us compare different images that from a strictly *formal* perspective resemble each other but differ in terms of the *effect* they generate, specifically by virtue of the enunciative apparatus to which they refer *by convention*.

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<sup>3</sup> One could even be more precise by saying that my examples of self-reflexivity should be named, from Wolf's perspective, 'intra-compositional' or 'direct' (and, in addition, 'implicit', most of the time 'non-critical' and 'mediality-' or 'fictio-centred') cases of metareference. See Wolf in this vol. for an explication of these terms.

<sup>4</sup> The problem raised here is that the term has (also in French) at least two meanings: reflexivity could be defined in a *cognitive* way (to reflect on something, to think) or in a, let us say, *mirroring* way (to reflect something, to return an image). It is in the sense of mirroring that the term interests me here. To say it more prosaically: self-reflexive devices in my narrow sense are devices in which the artefact is *looking at itself in a mirror (and showing us what is normally hidden)*. For an exemplification see *Illustration 1*.



Though it is possible to see the *extradiegetic camera* in a mirror in Brian de Palma's *Body Double* (1984; see *Illustration 1*) – the very camera that captures the scene – it must be immediately specified that the appearance of the camera in question is not an instance of filmic self-reflexivity in the aforementioned sense since the camera is an *element of the diegesis*: the man visible behind the camera is not de Palma, but the director of the pornographic movie within the movie in which Jake Scully (played by Craig Wasson) appears. Inversely, at the end of Federico Fellini's *E la nave va* (1984; see *Illustration 2*), the camera that appears in the field of vision at the end of the movie is obviously not the camera which filmed the scene. However, since this camera is not supposed to be in the diegesis, it is by *convention* assumed to be part of the extradiegetic enunciative apparatus of the *film itself*. The device of filming a filmic camera should in this case therefore be classified under the category of a self-reflexive device in the aforementioned sense<sup>5</sup>.



*Illustration 1: Body Double, a Brian de Palma film. © 1984 Sony Pictures.*

<sup>5</sup> One could say the same thing about the screenplay that appears in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993, dir. Mel Brooks), discussed in more detail by Sonja Klimek in this vol. Though it may not be the (real) screenplay of the film itself, we should nonetheless by *convention* assume that it is. Thus, by revealing a piece of its enunciative apparatus, by integrating it into the diegesis (where it should not exist), this device must be called self-reflexive. On the other hand, the screenplay that appears in *Earthquake* (1974, dir. Mark Robsen) is the real screenplay of the film itself (see its trivia section on IMDb: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071455/trivia> [10/10/08]). However, it is not presented as such; it is only 'a' screenplay. Thus, this configuration should not be called self-reflexive in any sense.

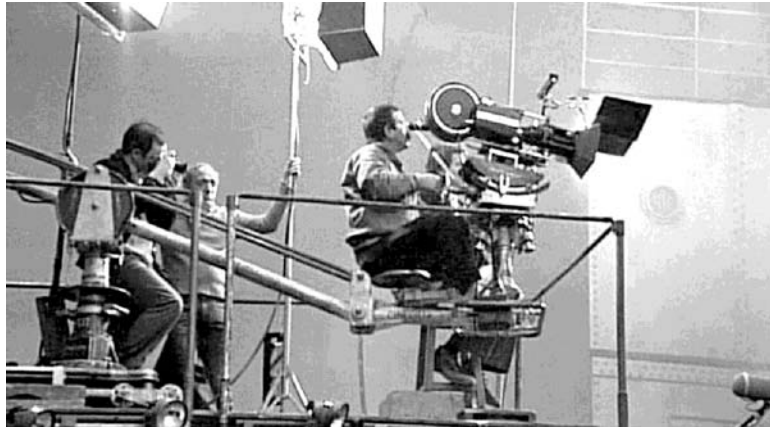


Illustration 2: *E la nave va/Et vogue le navire*, a Federico Fellini film. © 1984 GAUMONT/FRANCE 2 CINEMA (France)/Vides Produzione/RAI – Radiotelevisione Italiana/Società Investimenti Milanese (Italy).

Yet a further specification of the concept of filmic self-reflexivity is required: it concerns the question of whether all instances where the (assumed) enunciative apparatus of the film one is watching is revealed, and which should therefore arguably have a highly illusion-breaking potential, can be meaningfully qualified as self-reflexive. Since I consider intentionality to be a necessary constituent of any self-reflexive *device*, I must conclude that they cannot. There are, in fact, cases when the enunciative apparatus itself is revealed *accidentally* rather than *intentionally*. In such cases, it seems out of place to categorize these as self-reflexive devices – even if they affect our aesthetic illusion. Two apparently similar examples may illustrate this point<sup>6</sup>: in Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* (1987), the camera that appears in

<sup>6</sup> Compare Wolf's conception of metareference (cf. in this vol.: 30); he, too, assumes that metareference, as a rule, is non-accidental. Frank Wagner also discusses intention with reference to a specific kind of self-reflexivity, namely *metalepsis*: '[Certain metalepses,] far from being motivated by an *intentional* revelatory strategy, [...] can nonetheless be interpreted as perverse effects due to their *involuntary* nature' ('[Certaines méalepses,] loin de relever d'une stratégie dénudante *intentionnelle*, [...] peuvent être interprété[s] comme autant d'effets pervers, en tant que tels *involontaires*' [2002: 238]). These are metalepses 'where the author *involuntarily* attracts the attention of the reader to the conventions that govern the act of writing' ('où le scripteur attire *involontairement* l'attention lectorale sur les conventions qui régissent son activité d'écriture') and which reveal 'if not a proper *failure*, then at least a *perverse and uncontrolled effect*' ('sinon d'un *ratage* à proprement parler, du moins d'un effet

the field of vision when the boom operator is struck by Dark Helmet's (Rick Moranis) sword is not one of the cameras used by the crew. Yet, as I have said, that camera is not supposed to be in the diegesis, hence it should, by *convention*, be assumed to be part of the *film itself*. A similar example is offered in Mel Brooks' *High Anxiety* (1977) when Dr. Richard H. Thorndyke (Mel Brooks) finds himself face to face with an exhibitionist in an airport bathroom. It is in this very moment that, most fortuitously, the microphone is seen at the top of the frame<sup>7</sup>. Although these two phenomena are similar in both their *form* and in their *effect*, they fundamentally differ in that the former is intentional – and thereby self-reflexive in my sense – whereas the latter is merely accidental. In sum, a self-reflexive cinematographic device can now be defined as consisting in those metareferential moments where the enunciative apparatus (or *supposed* apparatus) of the work is *intentionally* revealed.

I now wish to highlight five conditions which allow us to understand how devices which reveal or intentionally remind the audience of the (supposed) enunciation device can break the aesthetic illusion to various degrees. Let us review the five points relevant to the

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*pervers et incontrôlé*" [ibid.: 240; my emphases]). It is worth mentioning that this concept of intention is debatable. Indeed, how can one know and be certain that the author (if I may here rehabilitate this notion) had truly intended to reveal the enunciative apparatus and thereby break the aesthetic illusion? Note that I adopt François Jost's definition initially provided in *Un Monde à notre image* and again in *Le Temps d'un regard*. Jost posits that intention has nothing to do with the *real* intention of the author: 'Indeed, one must avoid [...] confusing the intention inferred by the audience from the work with true intention' ("En effet, il faut se garder [...] de confondre l'intention inférée par le spectateur à partir du document avec l'intention réelle" [1992: 70]). The intention is therefore not the one conceived by the emitter but the one perceived or supposed by the recipient. Jost later restates more directly that 'audiovisual documents take their meaning [...] only in relation to the [...] *intentions assumed* from them' ("les documents audiovisuels ne prennent sens [...] que par rapport aux [...] *intentions* qu'on leur *suppose*" [1998: 11]). Therefore, each film is interpreted 'through an anthropomorphization of the enunciative instance, if only through the *construction of an intentionality* which resurfaces upon the image's reception' ("en fonction d'une anthropomorphisation de l'instance énonciative, au moins sous la forme de la *construction d'une intentionnalité*, qui rejaillit sur la réception de l'image en tant que telle" [ibid.: 91; my emphasis]).

<sup>7</sup> It is worth mentioning as an indicator of the accidental nature of the device in question that this microphone is eliminated from the re-edited DVD version of the film.

actualization of the illusion-breaking potential of self-reflexivity: ‘perceptibility’, ‘context of reception’, ‘genre’, ‘modalities of occurrence’ and ‘motivation’.

### 3. Towards assessing the actual (anti-)illusionist effects of filmic self-reflexivity (I): perceptibility vs. imperceptibility

To begin with, it is obvious that the (anti-)illusionist effect of self-reflexive devices depends upon their being perceived by the viewer; for a device, even a highly self-reflexive one, which is *not* perceived, would not break the aesthetic illusion. In some cases it is in fact debatable whether all viewers are able to actualize the illusion-breaking potential of given self-reflexive devices. This is why I establish the first condition which allows us to nuance the effect that self-reflexive devices could have: ‘perceptibility’.

I will exemplify this by addressing one of the ‘components’ of the enunciative apparatus: the director, who, although ‘invisible’, is crucially important<sup>8</sup>. The appearance of the director in his/her own movie is a device which can in principle break the aesthetic illusion at least for as long as this appearance lasts. Yet the director must catch the eye of a recipient able to recognize him/her. *The Man Who Knew too Much* (1956) is a film in which, twenty-five minutes into the film, virtually anyone can recognize the indolent rubberneck with his bald head and the round silhouette as the “master of suspense”, Alfred Hitchcock, making a cameo appearance (not least because it is his trademark). Hence the aesthetic illusion is broken, if only for a short moment. But will it also be broken by the seemingly identical device in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, 1963)? Few of us, presumably, will realize that the hurried passer-by behind the two main characters, nineteen minutes into the film, is none other than the Italian “master of horror” Mario Bava.

If a disinterested recipient cannot perceive a self-reflexive device where there is one, an astute one could conversely perceive one where, a priori, there is none. There are indeed cases that could expose, albeit indirectly, the cinematic device, and in such cases we

<sup>8</sup> I am here taking up the expression used by Christian Metz in *L'Énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, who posits that the actor is the ‘most visible component of the device’ (“pièce la plus visible du dispositif” [1991: 90]).

could paradoxically posit that it is the capacity to *concretize* a self-reflexive potential that can affect the aesthetic illusion. A shrewd recipient could, for example, discern a strip of film in the mirror in which Truman (Jim Carrey) contemplates himself in the opening scene of Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998): do the small holes on each side of the mirror not remind us of sprocket holes<sup>9</sup>? This same audience member could also discern not only a symbol of time passing but also of a movie projector in the watermill from Tsai Ming-liang's *What Time Is it There?* (2001): do the shape and rotation of the mill not resemble those of a film reel<sup>10</sup>?

#### 4. Towards assessing the actual (anti-)illusionist effects of filmic self-reflexivity (II): context of reception

It seems relevant to distinguish between perceptibility and the next point which highlights the therefore anti-illusionist nature of self-reflexivity: contexts of reception (i. e., contexts that stabilize or destabilize aesthetic illusion)<sup>11</sup>. As I have already underlined the role of the recipient relative to *perceived* devices, I must also consider the contexts (be they epistemological, historical, geographic, etc.) in which these devices are *received*. For example, being presented with an array of self-reflexive devices during a conference (or in this volume) on metareference undoubtedly has an impact on our reception; if in such

<sup>9</sup> However, the recipient could also perceive a (symbolic) motivation and contend that the metaphor purports that Truman is truly permanently filmed and that his entire life is *in fact but cinema* (for those watching the film at least). Through this one can discern the paradox of such a work: a *perceived* self-reflexive device can, by virtue of its *motivation*, reimmerge the recipient into the fiction.

<sup>10</sup> Here too, the recipient can extrapolate this perspective by recalling that the troubled lover is also a *compulsive cinephile* – he watches François Truffaut's *Les 400 coups* (1959) over and over. Again, this self-reflexive configuration, once *perceived*, could eject the recipient from the fiction, and, once *motivated*, could immediately reimmerge him in it.

<sup>11</sup> Wolf discusses this point in great detail with respect to metareference (cf. in this vol.: 26). Wagner, on the other hand, proposes the 'transgressive potential' ("*potentiel transgressif*") of metalepsis while specifying that the 'achievement of this potential [...] is subject to the fluctuations inherent to the *diversity of concrete receptions*' ("*l'effectuation de ce potentiel [...] est soumise aux fluctuations inhérentes à la diversité des réceptions concrètes*" [2002: 238; my emphasis]).

a context a film were shown or an extract of a novel were quoted, we could be certain that our aesthetic illusion would be impaired, since we have not convened at a conference – or read this book – to be the (consenting) victims of aesthetic illusion in the first place. Contexts such as ‘conference’, ‘university lecture’, or even ‘film society’ or ‘film library’, encourage certain expectations and thus a kind of reception that can have an influence on the aesthetic illusion (cf. Odin 1983: 77).

The historical and geographic context can impact on our reception and must be considered in order to better understand the varying effects on aesthetic illusion of formally similar devices. Consider, for example, the final ‘re-framing’ in Mario Bava’s *I tre volti de la paura* (1963) during which, once Boris Karloff concludes his final speech as Wurdalak, the camera recedes to reveal the set and special effects to which we have been the (consenting) victims. Even to this day, this kind of process would certainly affect our aesthetic illusion. But let us recall that in the 1960s, the US producers decided to categorically cut the aforementioned scene from the original version of the film in order to avoid, so it is told, displeasing audience members who may not have enjoyed having their belief affected so suddenly at the end of a scary movie<sup>12</sup>. It can thus be stated that this device was certainly felt to be more therefore anti-illusionist back then than it is now, where we are privy to the original ending.

##### 5. Towards assessing the actual (anti-)illusionist effects of filmic self-reflexivity (III): the genre

This being said, one could add that the “genre” could also be a point that should be considered: it goes without saying that a break in the genre of horror movies, which demands greater immersion from the

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<sup>12</sup> In his book *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (2007), Tim Lucas recalls: “Needless to say, when they got a look at Bava’s method of toning down the chills, Arkoff and Nicholson [from the AIP, the “American International Pictures”] had kittens” (508). He adds what Boris Karloff stated in an interview given at the time: “The producers in Hollywood didn’t like it, and they had a very valid point. If there had been any suggestion of comedy in any of the three stories, then this would have tied-in. But there was no suggestion whatsoever, and this would have come as such a shock that [they believed] it would have destroyed the film” (ibid. [brackets in the orig.]).

audience<sup>13</sup>, more greatly risks affecting the immersion than a similar situation in, let us say, a ‘film d’auteur’, where the audience is more disposed to having their immersion displaced<sup>14</sup>. Therefore the same device will breach the aesthetic illusion *more or less* according to the genre or the filmography in whose frame it is viewed. If a definitive break of illusion can be upsetting at the end of a Bava film, it is undoubtedly more anticipated (or indeed, expected) in a Fellini film such as *E la nave va*. Thus, every time a character looks into the camera in one Mel Brooks’ absurdist comedies or Tex Avery’s iconoclastic cartoons, this is less surprising than when the same is done by Lee Holloway (Maggie Gyllenhaal) at the end of Steven Shainberg’s *Secretary* (2002) or by Stuntman Mike (Kurt Russell) in the middle of Quentin Tarantino’s *Death Proof* (2007).

#### 6. Towards assessing the actual (anti-)illusionist effects of filmic self-reflexivity (IV): modalities of occurrence

I could also contend that the modalities of the occurrence of a self-reflexive device – i. e., whether it occurs at the beginning, in the course of the film or at the end of a work – will render otherwise stylistically similar devices *more or less* anti-illusionist. Instead of offending the viewing contract, self-reflexive devices can in fact fully participate in it. Bava’s (or even Fellini’s) shifts of scenery more

<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning that the modern horror genre inversely enjoys punctuating its films with (self-)reflexive devices of all kinds.

<sup>14</sup> Here I take up Francesco Casetti’s position, who notes in *D’un regard l’autre: Le Film et son spectateur* (1990) that the ‘prohibition’ (‘l’interdit’) related to looking into the camera, for example, varies based on the ‘genres in which [it] is manifest’ (‘des genres où [il] se manifeste’ [41; emphasis in the original]). Indeed, he continues, ‘if it is generally prohibited to look into the spectator’s eyes in an adventure film, it is relatively less so in the case of a comedy or musical’ (‘s’il est généralement interdit de regarder le spectateur dans les yeux dans un film d’aventures, ça l’est relativement moins dans un film comique et dans une comédie musicale’; *ibid.*: 41). Jost’s position is similar when he writes in *Le Temps d’un regard: Du spectateur aux images* (1998) that ‘far from drawing attention to the camera, the close relation between the cinematic environment [concerning audience addresses] and a music hall environment probably has the inverse effect’ (‘loin d’attirer l’attention sur la caméra, cette parenté de la mise en scène [concernant l’interpellation du spectateur] avec celle du music-hall avait probablement l’effet inverse’ [36]).

strongly affect our belief because they are revealed only *at the end* (what I call, in French, ‘déboîtement énonciatif’)<sup>15</sup>, after more than an hour and a half of seemingly useless interpretative investment: everything in which we believed turns out to have been merely a film! But will this effect be the same when the shifts of scenery are revealed *at the start* of a movie (what I call, in French, ‘emboîtement énonciatif’)<sup>16</sup>, as they are in Anders Rønnow Klarlund’s *Strings* (2004) or Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* (2003)? They may not affect our belief to the same extent, since they are part of the viewing contract *right from the beginning* and thereby part of our horizon of expectations<sup>17</sup>.

7. Towards assessing the actual (anti-)illusionist effects of filmic self-reflexivity (V): (high or low) motivation vs. lack of motivation – diegetization, symbolization, dramatization

While the above-mentioned conditions have been studied by a number of critics, less has been said about a last one, which should allow me to qualify the effects of self-reflexive devices even more precisely, namely motivation<sup>18</sup>. I effectively believe that self-reflexive devices will impact on our aesthetic illusion *more or less* according to the *greater or lesser* level of motivation we could find in or for them. In

<sup>15</sup> Dominique Blüher, following Greimas and Courtès, talks about “embrayage”, “révélation après-coup” (1997: 116) or “trompe-cadre” (ibid.: 118). Naturally, these modalities of occurrence affect the aesthetic illusion more strongly because “le spectateur (réel) est alors contraint de réinterpréter ce qu’il vient de voir à la lumière [du] nouveau contexte” (ibid.: 116f.; ‘the (real) spectator is then forced to reinterpret what he [or she] has just seen in view of the new context’). She also states that these devices are “plus complexes et troublantes” (‘more complex and troubling’) in that only these devices “peuvent créer un véritable effet d’étrangeté ou de *désillusion* dans le sens brechtien, chez le spectateur (réel)” (ibid.: 118; ‘can create a genuine effect of estrangement or disillusioning in the Brechtian sense in the recipient’; my emphases).

<sup>16</sup> Blüher calls this “débrayage” (1997: 116).

<sup>17</sup> Let me point out here that Werner Wolf and some conference attendants agreed to elect the *moment* (in which self-reflexive devices take place) as well as the *length* (or the extension) and also the *frequency* as additional relevant criteria which allow us to differentiate the gradable effects self-reflexive devices can have on aesthetic illusion even further – proof, if any is required, that there is still work to be done.

<sup>18</sup> Wagner (cf. 2002: 239) uses this term but with a different meaning than the one I have ascribed to it here.



other words, the more a device will be ‘gratuitous’, the more forcefully the diegetic boundary and our belief in the aesthetic illusion will be broken. Conversely, once a device becomes perceived (by the recipient) as diegetically, symbolically or even dramatically motivated, it will be ‘naturalized’ and will somewhat lose its anti-illusionist effect.

This being said, we can now understand that, while self-reflexive devices are often (seemingly) unmotivated and therefore anti-illusionist, simple reflexive devices always appear to be motivated and are thereby much less anti-illusionist. In fact, the revealing of ‘a’ device will never – or, let us say, rarely – break the aesthetic illusion as long as it is perceived as being *part of the diegesis*<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, there will be cases where a fictionalizing reading could also be maintained in the presence of self-reflexive devices, pursuant to their motivation (be it diegetic, symbolic or dramatic). It is therefore owing to this motivation, in other words, owing to the possibility or impossibility of ascribing a motivation to a given (self-)reflexive device, that one can explain why in certain cases the aesthetic illusion is breached *more or less*.

And so, addressing the audience – of which ‘looking into the camera’ is but one variety – will not produce the same effect if it is aimed at a *diegetic camera* (and through it, to a diegetic audience) as when it is aimed at the *camera itself* (and through it, to the audience *itself*). In

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<sup>19</sup> This fact is stated both by Dominique Blüher and Christian Metz. In her doctoral thesis *Le Cinéma dans le cinéma: Film(s) dans le film et mise en abyme*, Blüher contends that flashbacks, subjective points of view and dreams are not always ‘deployed for explicitly *metadiscursive* purposes [and] can be completely *absorbed by the diegesis*’ (“déployées à des fins explicitement *métadiscursives* [et] peuvent être complètement *absorbées par la diégèse*” [1997: 90; my emphasis]). Prior to her, Metz proposed in *L’Énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*: ‘If the audience is shown a cinematic crane [...] it is therefore located on the same level as any other object in any other shot, and it is thus permanently surveilled by the *diegesis*’ *power of attraction*. Outside of a particular construction, the camera’s presence within the shot is not more striking than that of a gun. In terms of the enunciative instance, it is merely a kind of allusion, a weakened recall [...]’ (“Si on montre au spectateur une grue [...] elle se retrouve ainsi sur le même plan que n’importe quel objet filmé, et elle est, comme lui, guettée en permanence par la force d’*attraction de la diégèse*. En dehors d’une construction particulière, la présence d’une caméra quelque part dans le rectangle n’apporte rien de plus que celle d’un fusil. Par rapport à l’instance d’énonciation, ce n’est qu’une sorte d’allusion, un rappel affaibli [...]” [1991: 87; my emphasis]).

other words, looking at the camera is not necessarily self-reflexive (and anti-illusionist) if it is (diegetically) motivated. Therefore comments spoken by Eddy Peckurny (Matthew McConaughey) in *Eat, Drink and Be Merry* (1999, dir. Ron Howard), who is filmed 24 hours a day for a reality TV show, turn out not to be addressed to the camera itself (nor even to the audience itself) but to diegetic cameras and through them to the TV show's diegetic audience. Conversely, the fortuitous asides undertaken by Alvy in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) cannot be diegetically motivated; he does not speak to a diegetic camera but instead directly to the extradiegetic camera and through it to the film's audience. In this case, the self-reflexive device breaches the frontier between audience and film as well as our aesthetic illusion.

The sudden appearance of the mike boom in *Spaceballs* has a similar effect. However, the appearance of mike booms in Catherine Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* (2002) and in Pierre Falardeau's *Elvis Gratton* (1981) keep the boundary intact and hence our aesthetic illusion too, for the simple reason that they could be motivated, *diegetically* in one case and *symbolically* in the other. In *Sex is Comedy*, the mike boom and the boom operator belong to a movie filmed by a director *within the film*; this instance is therefore diegetically motivated. In contrast, the mike boom and the boom operator appearing at the very end of *Elvis Gratton* could very well breach our aesthetic illusion since there is no film being shot within this film. However, this device, although not *diegetically* motivated, could be *symbolically* motivated. Indeed, the instance of this boom operator, who, like all people in this final scene, is wearing an Elvis Presley mask, might cease to disturb us once we take it to mean that we are all – characters, technicians and even the audience – 'Elvises' or, in the perspective of the film, victims of the 'American Dream'.<sup>20</sup>

Two of Michael Haneke's movies, *Caché* (2005) and *Funny Games* (1997), offer further examples of devices that are both *diegetically* and/or *symbolically* motivated. At the beginning of *Caché*, a long shot focusing on a Parisian street is fast-forwarded, thereby reminding us that *what we see is a movie*. This sharp reminder may break the aesthetic illusion, but only for a short moment, as we then learn that a video tape is being watched in fast-forward by Georges

<sup>20</sup> The credits ultimately confirm this interpretation; the first names of all cast members are changed to "King", the director himself, Pierre Falardeau, appearing as "Elvis Falardeau".

(Daniel Auteuil); the device is therefore *diegetically* motivated and could continue to generate or be compatible to aesthetic illusion. A similar case is featured in *Funny Games*. Towards the end of the film, Paul (Arno Frisch), panicked by the death of his sidekick, reaches for a remote control and rewinds the movie – the movie itself – to a moment when his friend was still alive. This process is certainly surprising and should break the aesthetic illusion. However, we could understand it in such a way that it is not meant to remind us that *what we see is a movie*, but rather that these two rebels are ‘victims’ of movie (or television) violence to the point that they can no longer tell apart between reality from fiction and believe that the world itself responds to a remote control and that everything is rewindable (and replayable). Hence this device might lose its therefore anti-illusionist nature the very moment it appears motivated, even if only *symbolically*.

Finally, one could also compare cases where the celluloid is cracked, burned or unravelled. These are, again, similar images from a *formal* standpoint but different in terms of their *effect* (since their motivations are different). In Andrew Douglas’ *The Amityville Horror* (2005) and in Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966), the celluloid unravels and burns. In the former case it is the celluloid of a movie watched by George (Ryan Reynolds) *in the film*, in the latter case it is the actual (or supposedly actual) celluloid of the *film itself*. However, if the former case is *diegetically* motivated, the latter case can be motivated *symbolically*. Indeed, if one maintains that at this very moment in the movie Nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson) is herself *torn*, that she is *self-consumed* and susceptible to a *loss of identity*, it is highly possible that we might immediately reimmerge ourselves into the diegetic fiction.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper has tried to show that the typologies defining self-reflexive devices, though clear and precise, can quickly find themselves insufficient and incomplete with regard to the *varying effects* that *ostensibly identical cases* can generate. In order to account for these effects, it is imperative to recognize a certain number of points or conditions that are often absent from these typologies. It seems that the conditions suggested here show a way towards explaining as to why two similar devices can differ not in what they *are* but rather in what they *do*.

Two questions remain: is it possible to establish further points or conditions to nuance the effects that self-reflexive devices have on aesthetic illusion? And will these conditions also allow one to differentiate – much as this volume seeks to do – self-reflexive devices found in other art forms? I believe that both questions can be answered affirmatively. It remains to be seen how the respective ‘enunciative device’ is revealed within literature, within theatre, within painting, within music, etc. I have sought to show that the general assumption which would have us believe that self-reflexive devices (as a subcategory of metareferential devices) necessarily affect the recipient’s aesthetic illusion was not flawed but required some refinement.

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Novel in/and Film  
Transgeneric and Transmedial Metareference  
in *Stranger than Fiction*

Barbara Pfeifer

Marc Forster's *Stranger than Fiction* (2006) is one of the most recent examples in a series of self-reflexive Hollywood films often labeled 'Charlie Kaufman movies', referring to the writer of the critically acclaimed *Adaptation* (2002) and *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Contrary to earlier metareferential motion pictures which predominantly comment on the creative process of filmmaking, *Stranger than Fiction* transgresses medial boundaries and relates the story of Harold Crick, a man who finds out he is a character in a novel. Based on Werner Wolf's notion of metalepsis as a "transgression between (onto)logical levels suggested by works of various media" (2005: 84), which emphasizes metalepsis' transgeneric and transmedial nature, this paper seeks to analyze the mechanisms of metaization employed in the novel-within-the-film structure of *Stranger than Fiction*. Apart from formal references to the differences in literary and cinematic discourse, the metamedial device of a novel within a film also alludes to crucial concepts in literary theory and criticism.

1. Introduction

*Stranger than Fiction* (2006) belongs to the same genre of such innovative Hollywood metafilms<sup>1</sup> as *The Truman Show* (1998), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and particularly the Charlie Kaufman-Spike Jonze collaborations *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002). Pushing the limits of cinematic storytelling, all these metareferential motion pictures play with ontological borders, manipulating two essentially different levels of what is perceived as reality both in the minds of the characters and the audience (cf. Aubrey 2002: 18). Although "[t]his blurring of boundaries" (Martínez-Alfaro/Plo-Alastrué 2002a: 9) is a central feature of postmodern culture, not all meta-narratives can be considered postmodern (cf. Aubrey 2002: 17). Ever since Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Man with a Movie*

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<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to this volume, Werner Wolf discusses the "partially misleading" definition of metafilm as mere 'films about film' (31f.).



*Camera*, “narrative films about the process of making a narrative film have become a familiar topic in twentieth-century cinema” (ibid.: 18). In contrast to meta-narrative films that are explicitly about filmmaking, postmodern meta-narrative films explore broader issues of identity and the distinction between reality and fiction, truth and illusion (cf. ibid.).

In this context, the concept of metalepsis, which Werner Wolf has aptly defined as “the paradoxical transgression of [...] (onto)-logically distinct [...] levels [of] representation” (Wolf 2005: 91), is used to “dramatize [...] the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality endemic to the postmodern condition” (Malina 2002: 2). An originally narratological term coined by Gérard Genette<sup>2</sup>, metalepsis has a “fundamentally disruptive effect on the fabric of narrative, on the possibilities for achieving coherent readings, and on the very distinction between fiction and reality” (ibid.: 1). Basing my analysis on Wolf’s comprehensive approach to metalepsis as a means of describing transmedial and transgeneric phenomena outside narrative fiction (cf. 2005: 101), I will show the applicability of this concept to narrative film by citing examples from *Stranger than Fiction*. Subsequently, the recent fashion of metaization in contemporary movies will be explored against the background of the extensive use of meta-referential devices in the age of postmodernism.

## 2. *Stranger than Fiction*: a case study in metareference

*Stranger than Fiction*’s main character, Harold Crick, is a generally solitary tax inspector whose daily routine is determined by his wrist-watch and the almost compulsive need to measure and quantify everything in sight, from footsteps to his bus stop to working and taking coffee breaks by the clock. One Wednesday morning, Harold suddenly starts to hear a female voice inside his head narrating every detail of his efficiently organized life. In fact, the omniscient voice-over narrator belongs on a separate story level, to nearly forgotten British author Karen Eiffel, who is struggling to write the end of her

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<sup>2</sup> Genette defined metalepsis in a narrow way as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (1980: 234f.).

most recent novel *Death and Taxes*. Harold appears as the novel's main character whom Karen has to 'kill' in order to finish the story.

## 2.1. Fiction and film: creating media awareness through metaization

According to Wolf, "the transmedial and transgeneric employment of a term such as 'metalepsis' highlights similarities and contact zones between different media and genres" (2005: 101). *Stranger than Fiction* uses the cinematic medium to reflect upon the mechanisms of literary writing, thus pointing to the fact that film and narrative fiction operate within different formal and stylistic constraints. The opposition between novel and film in terms of resources, in particular with regard to differences in narrative communication, is highlighted as early as in the film's initial sequence:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This is a story about a man named Harold Crick. [...] Harold Crick was a man of infinite numbers, endless calculations and remarkably few words. (Helm 2006: 1)<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the question "Who speaks?" in narrative film, the role of the narrator is commonly assigned to voice-over narrators. Generally, the voice-over accompanies the opening moments of a film, explaining the images and launching the plot before eventually surrendering to the visuals (cf. Chatman 1999: 322). As Sarah Kozloff has observed, "[b]ehind every film we sense a narrating 'voice', a master-of-ceremonies-figure that presents and controls the text" (1988: 1). In the present example, the audience is given the impression that the events are mediated through a heterodiegetic voice-over narrator, providing us with her omniscient point of view, exemplified by the camera assuming the spatial position of the narrator to show us what she 'sees'; that is, Harold Crick precisely calculating brush strokes while cleaning his teeth, "38 times back and forth. 38 times up and down" (Helm 2006: 1). As a result, we perceive Harold's actions as being motivated by the imagination of the voice-over narrator. Only later do we learn that this third-person omniscient narrator, author Karen 'Kay' Eiffel, actually exists in the film's diegesis.

In terms of cinematic technique, the use of voice-over narration in connection with Karen's position as omniscient narrator considerably affects the perception of the audience, in a way

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes refer to the published screenplay (Helm 2006).

that one accepts the voice-over narrator as if he or she were the mouth-piece of the image-maker<sup>[4]</sup> either for the whole film or for the duration of his or her embedded story. We put our faith in the voice not as created but as creator. (Kozloff 1988: 45)

Correspondingly, the spectator relates the camera's gaze to the heterodiegetic narrator; Kay's voice-over perspective is equated with the camera's point of view. In other words, she appears to be the creator not only of Harold's narrative, but of the film as whole. In voice-over narration, however, the narrative voice only speaks occasionally and does not mediate every aspect of the story. Actually, the narrator's presence is only salient at the moment he or she speaks. Otherwise, the combined force of sound and vision dominates, thus suggesting that things are happening right before us, without any apparent mediation. Therefore, the voice-over narrator is not in control of the story to the same degree, or in the same manner, as a literary narrator. As a result, the use of voice-over may be said to question Kay's authorial power over Harold's narrative already at the very beginning of the film, indicating that she is perhaps not entirely in control of her character.

By covertly referring to the specific communicative situations typical of novel and film, *Stranger than Fiction* reminds the viewer of the implications of the different media, confirming Werner Wolf's proposition that "[i]mplicit metareference shows the necessity of a cooperation on behalf of the recipient in a particular clear way" (online: 7; cf. also 2007: 43). This becomes particularly relevant in the case of metaleptic transgressions as it necessitates that the audience acknowledge the fictionality of the represented world (cf. Wolf 2005: 103). In order to support a metareferential reception, *Stranger than Fiction* employs additional markers of metareference; its title alluding to the famous Mark Twain quote – "Truth is stranger than fiction [...] because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't" (1996: 156) – as well as to a Bad Religion song of the same name (cf. Doran 2006: x).

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<sup>4</sup> In practice, theorists have proposed a variety of options in an effort to locate the narrating agent in film. The term 'grand imagier', or 'grand image-maker', was first coined by Christian Metz, who endorsed the view that narrative films have 'filmic narrators', the cinematic counterparts of 'verbal' narrators in works of literature. According to Metz, filmic narrators select and arrange film images instead of sentences in a linguistic text (cf. 1974: 21).

The essentially disruptive effect of blurring the boundaries that separate fact and fiction becomes even more violent considering that one generally assumes that film presents the ‘reality’ of a narrative in a way that would go beyond the scope of a written text (cf., for instance, Jahn online: section F5.3). The cinematic “effet de réel” (Chatman 1978: 40)<sup>5</sup>, film’s inherent tendency towards realism, is highlighted as well as undermined by the often strongly anti-illusionist effect of the metaleptic device (cf. Wolf 2005: 103). In other words, “[w]hen a film juxtaposes two realities of different ontological status, it engages the audience in comparing and judging those realities” (Aubrey 2002: 18), challenging their perception of what is ‘real’ and what is ‘fictional’.

## 2.2. Explicit and implicit metaization: tragedy, comedy, and the narrator

Apart from foregrounding “[t]he fundamental difference [...] between written word and visual image” (Cohen 1979: 88) and medial conventions inherent to novel and film respectively, *Stranger than Fiction* uses metamedial reflection to examine the process of literary writing, including writer’s block, publishing companies, and literary theory experts.

In an attempt to find out who is narrating his own life – “[a]ccurately, and with a better vocabulary” (Helm 2006: 27) –, Harold seeks the advice of a professor of literature, Jules Hilbert, who only becomes interested in Harold’s auditory sensations after Harold tells him of the unknown female voice foretelling his death by utilizing the phrase “little did he know”, informing Harold of the fact that he has written articles and “nearly taught a course on ‘Little did he know’” (ibid.: 33):

PROFESSOR HILBERT

[...] Harold, “little did he know” means there’s something he doesn’t know. That means there’s something you don’t know. That’s ... Christ ... the voice is literally in 3<sup>rd</sup> person. Did you know that? (Ibid.: 33)

In his seminal study *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Arthur C. Danto analyses a key constituent of narratives which he calls ‘narrative sentences’. According to Danto, these are propositions whose “most general characteristic is that they refer to at least two time-sepa-

<sup>5</sup> Chatman obviously refers to Roland Barthes (cf. 1968: 84–89).

rated events” – the event of the story and the event of the telling (cf. Harpham 1992: 182) – “though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer” (Danto 1965: 143). That is to say, they create a meaning for an event by relating it to some later event; “the first is fixed, while the second is free” (Harpham 1992: 182). As Danto points out,

a particular thing or occurrence acquires [...] *significance* in virtue of its relations to some other thing or occurrence in which we happen to have some special interest, or to which we attach some importance [...]. Narrative sentences are then frequently used to justify the *mention*, in a narrative, of some thing or event whose significance might otherwise escape the reader. (1965: 167 [emphases in the original])

For instance, a novelist may interrupt the story to make a narrative comment on something to which he wants to draw our attention, “for example, ‘Little did Smith know that his innocent sally [sic] was to cause the Bishop’s death’” (ibid.: 167).

In her position as omniscient narrator, Kay Eiffel must know things her character, Harold, does not know (cf. Danto 1985: 356; Harpham 1992: 167). The narrator’s knowledge, Danto observes, stands “*logically outside* the order of events he describes” (1985: 256). When Harold learns how his narrative will turn out, he utterly destroys the “structure of narration” (ibid.: 356). To Professor Hilbert it is clear that Harold himself is now “perpetuating this story” (Helm 2006: 57). He devises a catalogue of questions encompassing the canon of world literature from Greek myth to *Frankenstein* in order to rule out works of fiction Harold cannot be part of. In addition, the professor tells Harold to discern whether his life plot is more akin to a tragedy or comedy:

PROFESSOR HILBERT

[...] To quote Italo Calvino, “The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death.”<sup>6</sup>

HAROLD

(pause)

What?

PROFESSOR HILBERT

Tragedy you die. Comedy you get hitched. (Ibid.: 41)

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<sup>6</sup> Significantly, Hilbert quotes from Italo Calvino’s highly self-reflexive novel *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*: “Il senso ultimo a cui rimando tutti i racconti ha due facce: la continuità della vita, l’inevitabilità della morte” (Calvino 1979: 261).

Faithfully following Hilbert's instructions, Harold begins to look for signs to find out whether he features in a tragedy or a comedy. Actually, he has a penchant for comedy and potential love interest in a young woman "who [he] just met who [he] know[s] really really doesn't like [him]" (ibid.: 44). When Harold's latest audit for the IRS leads him to Ana Pascal, a Harvard Law School-dropout who now owns a bakery and deliberately withholds some of her income taxes each year to protest against the government's military spending, he thinks he knows what he is in, telling Ana that

I know this'll just sound like gibberish to you ...

(pause)

... but I think I'm in a tragedy.

(pause)

And if I am ... it's no one's fault but my own. (Ibid.: 55)

After Harold confesses to Hilbert that he "totally failed at the comic hero thing" (ibid.: 57), the professor suggests that he try something else: "Don't do *anything* that may move the plot forward. Instead, let's see if the plot finds you" (ibid.: 58). Although Harold tries to prevent the forward movement of the narrative by locking himself in his apartment, destiny finds him in form of a wrecking ball crashing into his living room. Evidently, he is not entirely in control of his own fate; Harold has to move within the boundaries his narrator has set for him.

### 2.3. A character in search of an author, an author in search of herself: metaization and postmodern film

Significantly, the scenes with Professor Hilbert interrogating Harold about the nature of his life narrative are contrasted with Kay desperately trying to find a suitable way to kill her protagonist. Kay attempts to overcome her writer's block by visualizing potential ways of dying. One of these scenes features Kay standing on top of a building, looking down on the world beneath her from an all-knowing, god-like perspective, having the extraordinary power to move people (or rather, characters) with a little wave of her hand (or rather, with the stroke of a typewriter key). Nevertheless, Kay Eiffel is completely unaware of her very power; she does not know that her character is real. However, when Harold first hears Kay's voice breaking into his life, the "predictable arithmetic" (Baker/Downing 2007: 38) of his dull routine begins to fall apart.

In the search for the mysterious voice-over, Harold goes to seek the advice of a psychiatrist, who straightforwardly tells him that he is showing classic signs of schizophrenia. Interestingly enough, the postmodern conception of schizophrenia as a reaction to the strain of contemporary life (cf. Peterson 1997: 148) supports the argument that the use of metareferential forms increasingly occurs in postmodern artefacts (cf. Wolf 2007: 60): according to Brian McHale, schizophrenia is “the most evocative manifestation of [the] fragmentation of personal identity [and] the crisis of the self” (1987: 11) in postmodern literature and film. This crisis – as it also concerns the conception of character – is at the same time a favourite type of postmodernist meta-reference laying bare the constructedness and lack of authenticity of characters or the conception of the self in general for that matter. Harold, too, experiences this instability, or, as McHale puts it, the “suspicion that this ‘I’ which is myself may be a mirage, [t]he product of someone else’s dream” (ibid.: 11). As a result of such deconstructions of the self as the core of reality and its perception, metareferential forms such as metalepsis “[have] run rampant in the postmodern era of the collapse of master narratives, the dismantling of the category of the real, and the deconstruction of binary and hierarchical systems of understanding” (Malina 2002: 1f.). In other words, “beyond the amusement that the [metaleptic] device affords both playful authors and sporting readers, it provides an apt tool for depicting and enacting some of the key philosophical reconceptualizations of postmodernity” (ibid.: 2).

Just as Kay has figured out how to kill Harold, he eventually manages to track down his narrator, pleading with her to spare his life, which has drastically changed ever since he followed Hilbert’s advice to “go make it the one you always wanted” (Helm 2006: 64). He buys an electric guitar, stops wearing ties, starts dressing in colorful sweaters and falls in love with Ana Pascal, who helps him to abandon his clockwork routine. The moment he tells Hilbert that “[s]he’s fallen in love with me” (ibid.: 83), thus rendering the narrative of his life a comedy, he happens to notice on the TV in the professor’s office an old interview with Kay Eiffel, who is talking about her next book, *Death and Taxes*. Harold immediately recognizes her voice as that of his narrator and is devastated when Jules Hilbert informs him that Kay “kills people [i]n every book” (ibid.: 86). In spite of the fact that the author is practically “untraceable” (ibid.), Harold finds her phone

number in an old IRS audit file and calls her as she is typing the end of her novel, just as she is typing the words, “The phone rang ...”:

HAROLD  
(through the phone)

Is this Karen Eiffel?

KAY  
(pause)

Yes ...

HAROLD  
(pause. through the phone.)

Hi. My name’s Harold Crick. I believe you’re writing a story about me. (Ibid.: 92)

With this scene serving as a perfect example of “[t]he paradox involved in (ontological) metalepsis [which] often has a startling or also comic effect” (Wolf, 2005: 91), Harold eventually inverts the former ‘top-down’ metalepsis (concerning a paradoxically intrusive author-figure) by walking through Kay’s door and thus creates a ‘bottom-up’ metalepsis<sup>7</sup>, in which a character intrudes upon the realm of his/her author. Kay is accordingly left completely stunned at the fact that her ‘creation’ is actually real:

KAY

[Oh my god ... Oh god ...]  
[...]

HAROLD

Ms. Eiffel ...?

KAY

[Your suit ... your, your *shoes* ... your *hair*, my god ...]

HAROLD

Hello. I’m Harold Crick. (Helm 2006: 93f.)

After Harold has read Kay’s first draft of his death, he is so intrigued by the story that he simply resigns and prepares to die. He steps in front of an oncoming bus to save a little boy from being run over. In the next scene he is alive, though severely injured. Professor Hilbert, however, “is not so pleased that Harold lives” (Baker/Downing 2007: 38). In his opinion, human existence has to succumb to an immortal work of art, which is why he finds Kay’s novel “[n]ot the most amazing piece of American literature in several years but [...] okay” (Helm

<sup>7</sup> This corresponds to Genette’s ‘*métalepse ascendante*’ (see Klimek in this vol.).



2006: 117). When Hilbert asks Kay – who is one of his favorite writers – about her revisions, she replies,

It's a book about a man who doesn't know he's about to die ... then dies. But if the man *does* know he's going to die, and dies anyway ... dies willingly, knowing he could stop it [...]. Isn't that the type of man you want to keep alive? (Ibid.: 118)

While Professor Hilbert clings to an idealized form of art that has to adhere to certain conventions, evaluating literature according to some prefabricated models such as the perfect ending, Karen asks herself if she, in fact, killed her other characters: “Every book I’ve ever written ends with someone dying. Every one. Really nice people too. [...] I ... I killed ... I killed ... [...] I *kill* them all” (ibid.: 104). As McHale puts it, by means of respecting and taking delight in the characters’ independent existence (cf. 1987: 222), by “loving his characters”, “the author creating the fictional universe imaginatively lifts the characters onto his own ontological plane” (ibid.: 30).

As a consequence, the metaleptic disruption of “narrative hierarchy in order to reinforce or to undermine the ontological status of fictional subjects or selves” (Malina 2002: 2) is extended to the critical concept of the author. Harold’s violation of the boundaries between the level of representation and the level of the represented, between two incompatible realities, deconstructs Kay’s “demiurgic or quasi-divine function” (McHale 1987: 29) as the narrator of his life; as a consequence, she appears to exist on the same (diegetic) level as her character. This metalepsis harbors a ‘human’ side: like Harold, who manages to escape his extremely well-organized but dreadfully monotonous life, Kay Eiffel fundamentally changes from the reclusive, seriously blocked novelist with a disgusting cigarette-smoking habit into a considerate woman wondering about the writer’s responsibilities for her creations and her readers (cf. French: online). Like Harold’s, Kay’s metamorphosis is genuinely reflected in her outward appearance. When meeting Jules Hilbert in his office to show the professor the final version of her novel, the writer is no longer wearing her signature black clothes; the unkempt hair and pink-rimmed eyes marking her state of exhaustion are gone.

With Harold gradually taking over his own story, Kay is losing her all-knowing perspective also in terms of cinematic technique. In the beginning, her storytelling powers are rendered cinematically by the camera continually following Harold everywhere he goes, and recording most of what Kay sees, which is to a large extent what she

writes. However, following Harold's decision to take his life into his own hands, the story is more consistently presented from his perspective. In practice, this is emphasized by a number of point-of-view shots, showing what Harold would see. In addition, the numerical elements and graphics displayed around him representing his ever-counting personality disappear as he gets more and more distracted from his obsession with numbers. Ironically enough, it is his wristwatch, whose workings have always timed Harold's everyday activities, that saves him from being killed. In the hospital, the doctor explains that a shard of metal from the watch obstructed a severed artery that would have caused him to bleed to death: "And so it was ... a wristwatch saved Harold Crick" (Helm 2006: 122).

### 3. Towards a canon of metacinema?

Of course, *Stranger than Fiction* plays with an idea that has already been addressed in other (both literary and cinematic) artefacts, the most widely known example being Luigi Pirandello's play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) about a writer confronted by his creations (cf. McHale 1987: 121). In his novel *Niebla* (1914), the Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno presents the reader with a multitude of characters in an unnamed town. Unamuno himself takes the role of God – he has created his characters, one of whom even goes to see his creator (cf. also Wolf 2005: 102). Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) also features a heroine who starts hearing her narrator's voice. In the 1960s, various French pictures made use of metareference to explore issues of creativity and identity, albeit in a less playful style: in Agnès Varda's *Les Créatures* (1969), a novelist works his neighbours into a novel and then plays a strange chess game with one of them for the fate of the others; in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europ-Express* (1968), "a screenwriter [is] conjuring up a script on a train from Paris to Antwerp and its characters spring to life around him" (French: online). In John Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995), an insurance investigator discovers that he is living out the last novel of a missing horror writer (cf. Eggington 2001: 218). Perhaps most reminiscent of the situation in *Stranger than Fiction*, the 1982 French television film *Je Tue Il*, directed by Pierre Boutron, features a character who suddenly learns that he is not a real human being, but a

fictional construct. Contrary to Harold Crick, who decides to handle his fate, this character tries to commit suicide.

Clearly, *Stranger than Fiction*, like the metareferential works mentioned, which, since Unamuno's *Niebla* increasingly focus on metaleptic paradox, raises questions of consciousness, identity, free will and the inexplicable ways of fate, as well as the relationship between creators and their creations. As director Marc Forster puts it, "[a]t the heart of *Stranger than Fiction* is one man's journey to the true nature of his existence" (2006b: vii). In this context, metareferential devices are used to emphasize the ontological crisis that defines the postmodern condition (cf. McHale 1987: 9f.). Not surprisingly, the "past several years have seen a surge in the number of films that call into question the nature of the reality represented within the diegetic borders of the screen" (Egginton 2001: 207). Though critically acclaimed, most of these metafilms do not attract blockbuster audiences, pointing to their elitist approach by requiring a certain knowledge of medial conventions from the recipient<sup>8</sup>.

In any case, the recent boom in metareferential motion pictures can be ascribed to a rising critical awareness of the multitude of texts, images and representations characteristic of contemporary (popular) culture (cf. McRobbie 1994: 26). Metareferential works created in this context illustrate and often enough criticize the entwinement of image and reality in our media-generated age: "Instead of referring to the real world, much media output devotes itself to referring to other images, other narratives; self-referentiality is all-embracing, although it is rarely taken account of" (ibid.: 17). In view of the increasing number of metareferential texts or films such as *Stranger than Fiction* one wonders, however, whether what McRobbie claimed in 1994 is still applicable. After all, metareference has become so prominent that it can hardly not be taken account of anymore – at least from a scholarly perspective.

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<sup>8</sup> See also Werner Wolf's detailed discussion of the functions of metareference in his introduction to this vol.

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## **Metareference in Literature**





Narrative Fiction and the Fascination with the New Media  
Gramophone, Photography and Film  
Metafictional and Media-Comparative Aspects of H. G. Wells'  
*A Modern Utopia* and Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie*

*Hans Ulrich Seeber*

Taking H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998) as its examples, this essay explores the uses of explicit (discursive) and implicit (structural) metareferences. In *A Modern Utopia* reflection or explicit metareference dominates because of Wells' attempt to create a new type of literary utopia by presenting utopia both as a problem and as an aesthetic experience. This means that two types of fascination or attraction, a cognitive and an affective one, interact to produce the desired effect. Instead of viewing the rational, distancing element of reception merely as an irritation, I stress its positive potential for the reception of a literary work. Wells' text is also implicitly media-comparative and therefore not only intermedial but also metareferential since it takes drama, photography, film and gramophone as models for a literary structure. This is also true of Bainbridge's *Master Georgie*, a novel which tries to capture the fascination of photography, i. e., striking detail, the contingency of reality, including death (R. Barthes), for the neo-realism of a metareferential postmodern novel. After Wells self-criticism and metaization eventually produce, after the anti-utopian parodies and negative utopias of the thirties and forties, complex postmodern utopias (Ursula Le Guin) that transgress traditional boundaries and binaries. Conventional labels such as anti-utopia, negative utopia or positive utopia do no longer fit, while science fiction begins a self-referential play with its own conventions.

1. Metaization and the aesthetics of fascination

When we speak, with respect to fiction, of 'scenic', 'photographic' or 'filmic' structures and effects, we are actually using implicitly media-comparative analogies and metaphors. One medium (narrative fiction) is described and explained in terms of another one, i. e., drama, photography or film. But this kind of media-comparison also triggers the question whether the analogy used is really appropriate or whether, as the basis of a 'merely' illustrative metaphor, it leads us astray. The

metaphor conceals and suggests a theoretical problem. After all, reading fiction and watching a film are quite different activities.

The metaphors mentioned imply an aesthetics of fascination. In fascination the reader or recipient is completely absorbed or overwhelmed by what he sees (hears) on the stage or (with his inner eye) on the page. In a metafictional passage of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which deals with the effect of a novel (the “yellow book”) on the reader, Oscar Wilde makes an important distinction through his fictional character Dorian:

‘[...] That book you sent me so fascinated me that I forgot how the time was going.’

‘Yes; I thought you would like it,’ replied his host, rising from his chair. ‘I didn’t say I liked it, Harry, I said it fascinated me. There is a great difference.’

(1988: 157)

Apparently, fascination involves more than just pleasure. It resembles an existential experience. In the experience of fascination the object of perception seems to have a power, even a magical life, of its own which overwhelms the recipient. An intensity of perception is created which seems to be particularly triggered, due to their visual and audiovisual effects, by scenic, photographic and filmic modes of presentation. Their intense vividness fascinates, i. e., they invite the recipient to become emotionally immersed in what is a fictional equivalent of life. However, perception including visuality in fiction is always mediated and refracted by the medium of language. This is why the film’s close-up, for example, seems to fascinate more than its fictional equivalents, i. e., scenes which in traditional novels usually highlight the climax of an action or emotional development. Already in 1899 H. G. Wells was apparently aware of the superior attraction film seems to have for many viewers due to the “unnerving vividness of the medium” (Seed 2005: 62):

In *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), the time traveller Graham finds one wall of his room taken up with a screen near which stand what prove to be video cylinders of stories by Kipling, Conrad, and James. This device is named the ‘kinetoscope’, after Edison’s ‘kinetograph’, which Wells saw as the mechanical prototype of the film projector. Once a ‘performance’ starts – in colour and with sound – Graham finds that his attention becomes totally engrossed, and in a throw-away-comment Wells anticipates the later fears of redundancy expressed by novelists: ‘He had been absorbed in the latter-day substitute for a novel, that he awoke to the little green and white room with more than a touch of the surprise of his first awakening’ [...]. The trope of cinema-viewing as dream is used here to underscore

the realism of the new medium, a realism so vivid that Graham returns to the machine to see another video. (Ibid.)

Generally speaking, it is extraordinarily difficult to locate the source of fascination since it is a response which also depends on the tastes, the predilections and the dreams of the recipient. In a work of art there are basically two sources of fascination and pleasure: content and form. In the case of Wilde Dorian is apparently fascinated by the amorality (content) and vividness (form) of what the “yellow book” refers to, namely Huysman’s decadent novel *A Rebours* (1884). The other of the text proves to be a version of Dorian’s and the reader’s own self. This is precisely what triggers fascination according to the psychotherapist Verena Kast:

In der Faszination kommt uns das Unbekannte, Fremde unabweisbar und mit großer energetischer Anziehung entgegen [...] In jeder Faszination begegnen wir letztlich uns selbst, [...] Die jeweils konstellierte Inhalte unseres Unbewußten – nicht einfach das Unterbewußte als Ganzes – üben diese Faszination aus und lassen das Ich einen Zustand der Unfreiheit erleben.<sup>1</sup> (1998: 3f.)

Commentary and reflection undermine the power of this kind of affective experience by appealing to the cognitive aspect of fiction and reception. ‘Metaization’ functions as a kind of intervention which curtails the power of the aesthetics of fascination. However, argument and reflection also create an appeal of their own which is indispensable for the truth-telling of fiction. Decoding, for instance, the meaning of a linguistic or visual sign can be an exciting interpretive exercise. The business of the writer/novelist is not confined to the “method of picture-making” as Percy Lubbock (1921/1960: 118) would have it in his influential study *The Craft of Fiction*, which is evidently influenced by Henry James’ aesthetic and by the experience of the filmic medium. It is also compatible with rational distance, which creates a *fascination of its own*. To this extent, fascination is comparable to aesthetic illusion. In fact, even without the presence of explicit metaization, aesthetic illusion, unlike delusion or becoming the victim of magic, always involves a certain degree of rational distance and awareness (see Wolf 1993). I therefore assume, instead of simply op-

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<sup>1</sup> ‘When we are fascinated, the unknown or alien comes at us with great attractive power, and we cannot ward it off [...] In everything which fascinates we encounter, ultimately, ourselves [...] The contents of our consciousness, in ever-varying constellations – not simply the unconscious as a whole – exert upon us this fascination, and permits our ego to experience an absence of freedom.’ [My translation]

posing immersion and distance, the presence and cooperation, in a literary text, of two types of literary fascination, one based on emotional immersion and identification, the other on cognitive participation. The fact that metareferential interventions and structures can undermine aesthetic illusion does not, as Wolf himself points out, necessarily impair the emotional and cognitive power of the work, i. e., its fascination. In comic operas and comic fiction metareferences, on the contrary, often heighten the entertainment value of the work. There the exuberant play with illusion represents a method and a set of rules which the recipient quickly accepts and enjoys. In other words, metatization itself can, as for example also in concrete poetry, produce fascination because it appeals to the recipient's aesthetic awareness and sophistication. It can strengthen both the recipient's emotional and rational fascination.

My historical case study will explore these problems by analysing the metareferential implications of the use of photography, film and gramophone in fiction by, among others, Wells and Beryl Bainbridge. In Wells the revisionist, metareferential focus on the genre of narrative utopia involves both its conceptual and medial innovation. Bainbridge's implicit intermedial dialogue between photography and narrative fiction invites media-comparative reflections on the part of the recipient both inside and outside the fiction. Her historical novel is a photo novel in the sense that it defines the novel's structure and its preoccupation with Victorian photography with the help of a photographic metaphor ('plate'). My terminology takes up the suggestions made by Werner Wolf (see the introduction to this vol.). His basic opposition between explicit and implicit metareference may also be seen as a contrast between (overt) discursive metareference, which requires explicit verbal statement ('this tale'), often in connection with a deictic expression, and (covert) structural metareference, where the conspicuous mode of presentation (for example typographical devices) indirectly invites the reader/recipient to reflect upon the question of how fiction and its medium are created.

## 2. Meta-utopian and media-comparative aspects of H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*

Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905) represents a new departure in the history of utopian thought and its chief medium, the narrative utopia.

Its innovations are inextricably linked with (2.1.) meta-utopian and (2.2.) implicitly media-comparative reflections.

## 2.1.

Wells' meta-utopian stance is part and parcel of his discursive, quasi-philosophical or rather quasi-sociological exposition and discussion of the aims and principles of a "modern utopia". The very title of the book announces a meta-utopian awareness. A "modern utopia" implicitly detaches itself from the conventional utopias of the tradition. Since Wells views his own utopia in the light of the genre's known system, the title implies an intertextual self-reference to that system. It is therefore, in the terminology of Wolf, an extracompositional meta-reference. Both the introductory matter and the main text of Wells' work abound in such metareferences. The traditional solutions and literary conventions of the genre, i. e., the medium of literary utopia, become the object of critical reflection in what Wells calls his "philosophical discussion" (1967: xxxii). The very first paragraph of the text is a demonstration of this exercise in 'meta-utopianism':

The Utopia of a modern dreamer must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things [...] Change and development were dammed back by invincible dams for ever. But the Modern utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages. Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float upon it. We build now not citadels, but ships of state.[...] That is the first, most generalised difference between a Utopia based upon modern conceptions and all the Utopias that were written in the former time. (Ibid.: 5f.)

Although this is the very first paragraph of his utopian fiction, Wells does not make any attempt to create the illusion of space, time and experience. Mimetic representation is supplanted by the voice and the style of a theoretical discourse on utopia. In this opening, the appeal of the text is purely intellectual. Some important oppositions are introduced. Modern utopias must no longer be "static but kinetic", they do not offer timeless structures of order based on the principle of equality, but social compromises susceptible to change and the reality of individuals. Wells believes in the functional necessity of a social elite which he calls Samurai. This importance attached to the concept of individuality also shapes his aesthetic thinking about utopia. As Wells

emphasizes in §2, not quoted here, the “artistic limitations” of the traditional utopias have to do with their failure to do justice to individuality: “That which is the blood and warmth and reality of life is largely absent; there are no individualities, but only generalised people” (ibid.: 9). The problem with his own text is, of course, that we hardly encounter individualised utopian characters.

It is not my task here to present at length Wells’ conceptual modernization of the genre. What is important to note is the fact that reflection embedded in the individual work is Wells’ chief method of referring to the medium of utopia as such. Metareference and reflection are inseparable.

## 2.2.

Meta-utopian awareness also implies an attempt to critically evaluate the disadvantages of the narrative methods literary utopias used to employ. Innovations do not only concern traditional social assumptions and solutions of literary utopias, as for example equality and communism, but also the question of whether the medium actually fits the intended enlightening function of utopian writing. The aim and the function of utopias are, according to Wells, to present a plan of the future state of society not only in terms of fictional vividness and concreteness of experience, but also in terms of rational thought. In fact, the art of ironic realism, of creating, with the help of *vraisemblance*, the illusion of reality for a construct which evidently has no existence in this world, does no longer suffice. In the age of sociology there is also an increased need to make demands on the reader and to challenge his critical faculty. A modern utopia must not merely “pander to the vulgar appetite for stark stories” (ibid.: xxxii). In other words, for Wells the emotional immersion of the reader in a simulacrum of utopian life cannot be the ultimate aim of utopian fiction. Instead, Wells proposes a thorough modernization of the classical medium called ‘narrative utopia’. In *A Modern Utopia* this new emphasis is explained in two introductory segments preceding the main text, first in “A Note to the Reader” and secondly in another introductory passage to the main text, given in italics, about the “owner of the voice”. In addition, there is a concluding passage also in italics. The author and sender of these passages is evidently Wells himself. The shift from roman type to italics and vice versa is an implicit reference to the question of medium and authorship. This typographical arrangement reminds one of

how printed plays distinguish between the main text and the author's stage directions and explanations. Wells transfers typographical methods common in printed plays to the text of *A Modern Utopia*.

What emerges in the explanatory prose of these segments and their metaphors is a multi-medial communicative situation which is fairly complex and suggests interesting media-comparative implications. Abandoning the straight-forward illusion-making of traditional narrative utopias, Wells adopts a new method, a combination of philosophical discussion and narrative: "I am aiming throughout at a sort of shot-silk texture between philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other" (ibid.: xxxii). Clearly, such a structure would be incompatible with the aesthetics of fascination if one understands by it an attempt to lure the reader into the text by avoiding any kind of metaization and commentary and by privileging the dramatic and quasi-filmic mode. The latter is not absent in *A Modern Utopia*, but its constant shifts from the scenic to the philosophical mode, combined with meta-utopian reflections, activate the reader's reflective attitude. Wells offers, very much like More, an intellectual rather than an emotional adventure. This no doubt creates, as the enthusiastic reception of many utopias shows, a fascination of its own.

The complex communicative situation analysed in Wells' metareferential move with the help of analogies from other media such as the theatre, the lecture hall, the film and the gramophone consists of three levels.

There is first of all the real author himself speaking to the reader in "A Note to the Reader" and the opening and concluding passages in italics. Wells describes his role as that of a "chairman" (ibid.: 3) who permits himself the interventions given in italics. The situation implied is that of a lecture. And indeed, Wells distinguishes between himself and his role of a lecturer on the topic of Utopia which he characterises as the "Voice".

This "Voice" articulates an individual vision of Utopia and represents the second communicative level. It belongs to a bald little man who lectures to an audience with the "manuscript in his hand" (ibid.: 2). Because of the tropes of the "Voice" and the implied lecture the reader is not supposed to read but to listen to a lecture. Wells describes a written communicative situation in terms of an oral one. The first person of the main text is, in fact, given two roles. It refers both to the speaker of the lecture and to the first-person narrator who tells



us about his encounter with utopia in the company of a quarrelsome, anti-utopian romantic and botanist.

The interactions between these two visitors to Utopia and their interactions with utopian interlocutors and spaces represent the third level of communication. These interactions are rendered or rather interpreted as “moving picture[s]” (ibid.: 3), which are constantly interrupted by discursive interventions of the “Voice”. This “Voice” is, as Wells explicitly states, his “medium” (ibid.: 2). The combination of “cinematograph entertainment” (ibid.: 3) and the “Voice” is described as follows:

*The image of a cinematograph entertainment is the one to grasp. There will be an effect of these two people going to and fro in front of the circle of a rather defective lantern, which sometimes jams and sometimes gets out of focus, but which does occasionally succeed in displaying on the screen a momentary moving picture of Utopian conditions. Occasionally the picture goes out altogether, the Voice argues and argues, and the footlights return, and then you find yourself listening again to the rather plump little man at his table laboriously enunciating propositions, upon whom the curtain rises now. (Ibid.: 3f.)*

Paradoxically, Wells announces a reading experience which he mainly explains in terms of a visual and auditory experience. Referring to a text, the term “moving picture” is really an implicit metaphoric reference to another medium, which Wells, however, also makes explicit by classifying it as a trope, as an “image”. The model he has in mind is obviously the recently invented medium of the silent film. Again, the term “Voice”, when applied to a written text, only makes sense when one treats it as a metaphor for a specific – in this case academic – quality of style. It suggests a separation between enunciating voice and the body of the speaker whom Wells discloses in the opening paragraph. Such a rupture is reminiscent of the gramophone, which was just coming into use in Wells’ time. Wells refers explicitly to the “phonograph” (ibid.: 239) in the main text. In the light of such implicit and explicit references to the new media, which are at the same time explanatory self-references to his own medium, one must conclude that the logic of the metaphors allows the critic to read and to reconstruct the text of *A Modern Utopia* as a recorded lecture interrupted by filmic illustrations. However, the concluding metaphor of the above quote also permits the critic to view Wells’ project as a theatrical event. Possibly influenced by Henry James’ poetics of the novel and Continental tendencies (Spielhagen and others) to give it the structure of drama, Wells’ modernization of the medium is evidently informed

by the idea to abandon the model of the novel and to emulate new media as well as the theatre.

It seems to me that the symptomatic significance of Wells' explanatory analogies culled from the theatre and modern media is far greater than their cognitive value. In fact, the analogies do not "signal a special visual dimension to *A Modern Utopia*" (Seed 2005: 63). Modernizing the traditional genre means for him to associate it with the effects of modern media no matter how much the structure of textuality still and inevitably prevails. Both the first person of the "Voice" (in roman type) and the first person of the author himself (in italics) engage in constant reflections about what utopian thinking and its medium are and about the specific structure of the work at hand. Reflection in its proper sense of thought and medium turning upon themselves is Wells' chief mode of metareference.

By way of (further) illustration, let us consider the following three examples, the first of which focuses on the combination of poetological reflection and metaphoric self-reference (a), the second on the problem of ontological and typographical collision (b), and the third on the use of metareference to create a proper awareness of the problem of utopia (c).

(a) Just before the narrator and lecturer leaves utopian London for the drab reality of real London he reflects that utopia is only a fragile construct of the imagination. It is a "bubble" ("Chapter the Eleventh: The Bubble Bursts"; Wells 1967: 352) that can burst at any moment. The word "bubble" metaphorically conveys the insight that utopias are quintessential fictions, both literary and philosophical:

As I walk back along the river terrace to the hotel where the botanist awaits me, and observe the Utopians I encounter, I have no thought that my tenure of Utopia becomes every moment more precarious. There float in my mind vague anticipations of more talks with my double and still more, of a steady elaboration of details, of interesting journeys of exploration. I forget that a Utopia is a thing of the imagination that becomes more fragile with every added circumstance, that, like a soap-bubble, it is most brilliantly and variously coloured at the very instant of its dissolution. (Ibid.)

As long as both the experiencing narrator and the reader are absorbed by the literary and philosophical fiction in the sense Oscar Wilde described as fascination, they tend to "forget" the world, time and the fact "that Utopia is a thing of the imagination". The 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge) lasts until they are woken by the shock of reality and the insights of reflection.

(b) In Wells the collision between fiction and reality, the musings of the “Voice” and the disquisition of the author, abstract speculation and imagistic glimpses of real early twentieth-century London (which is actually rendered as a satiric caricature by Wells) reminiscent of photography and film is reinforced by a typographical collision:

There will be many Utopias. Each generation will have its new version of Utopia, [...] Until at last from dreams Utopias will have come to be working drawings, and the whole world will be shaping the final World State, the fair and great and fruitful World State, that will only not be a Utopia because it will be this world. So surely it must be —

*The policeman drops his hand. “Come up,” says the ‘bus driver, and the horses strain; “Clitter, clatter, cluck, clak,” the line of hurrying hansoms overtakes the omnibus going west. A dexterous lad on a bicycle with a bale of newspapers on his back dodges nimbly across the head of the column and vanishes up a side street.*

*The omnibus sways forward. Rapt and prophetic, his plump hands clasped round the handle of his umbrella, his billycock hat a trifle askew, this irascible little man of the Voice, this impatient dreamer, this scolding Optimist, who has argued so rudely and dogmatically about economics and philosophy and decoration, and indeed about everything under the sun, who has been so hard on the botanist and fashionable women, and so reluctant in the matter of beer, is carried onward, dreaming dreams, that with all the inevitable ironies of difference, may be realities when you and I are dreams. (Wells 1967: 370f.)*

The utopist or owner of the “Voice”, who is sitting in the bus and is viewed objectively by the author, yet nevertheless resembling him, is presented as a dreamer fascinated by or in love with his own dream (“rapt”) which may, however, become a reality. Wells plays discursively with the shifting position of dream and reality. What is merely a fiction may eventually become a reality, and reality may turn out to be a dream. Furthermore, the abrupt transition from roman type to italics is an implicit metareference since it reminds the reader of the problem of different communicative levels.

(c) Although at the end of the text there is an emotional rhetorical flourish corresponding to the author’s fascination with and desire for utopia, implicit and explicit metareferences prevail to present Utopia as a problem rather than an emotional experience. To make the reader aware of the problem, Wells introduces a clash between a supporter and an opponent of utopia, and, in order to stress the relativity and individuality of the vision, he separates the author from his medium, the “Voice”:

Utopias were once in good faith, projects for a fresh creation of the world and of a most unworldly completeness; this so-called Modern Utopia is a mere story of personal adventures among Utopian philosophies. (ibid.: 372)

The medium of a “conflicted form” (ibid.: 373) is needed to give expression to a modern, individualistic, both hopeful and sceptical presentation and discussion of utopia.

The analysis of Wells’ classic work yields the following results:

1. Wells’ frequent use of metareferences is a direct consequence of his experimental attitude to the genre of narrative utopia. It is necessary for justifying and explaining his innovations, both conceptual and formal, and therefore documents the author’s cultural creativity.
2. Explicit reflection concerning the medium of the narrative utopia can be found, with no noticeable difference, both in the main text of the fiction communicated by the “Voice” or narrator and in the introduction communicated by the author.
3. Explicit auto-reflexivity, i. e., explicit metareference communicated via theoretical discourse, can avail itself of implicit metareferences. In Wells’ text the chief of these are metaphors and the montage of typographical collisions. Metaphors such as “bubble”, “moving picture”, “cinematograph” and “Voice” invite the reader to view the adopted medium as one which is indebted to other media. The collision of the typographical layout stresses the relevance of different communicative levels. Such formal devices and semantic substitutions mean that straightforward reflection is at least complemented by the suggestiveness of aesthetic form. After all, Georg Lukács, writing shortly afterwards, proposed that art is ‘suggestion with the aid of form’<sup>2</sup> (“Kunst ist: Suggestion mit Hilfe der Form” [1971: 118]). In the case of Wells one has to concede, however, that his art is a purely didactic one in *A Modern Utopia*. Still, suggestion as a basic method of art is clearly linked to implicit metareference.
4. It seems to me that quotations, collisions and intertextual references can be regarded as implicit transmedial methods of metareference which can also be observed in the other arts and media whereas explicit metareference, which needs verbal signs for its communication (see Nöth in this vol.), cannot and must be replaced by functional equivalents such as, for example, mise en abyme.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

However, as Werner Wolf points out in his introduction to this volume, *mise en abyme* and intertextuality do not necessarily have a metareferential function.

5. Obviously, the concept of implicit metareference entails considerable problems from a scholarly, and extraordinary potential from an aesthetic point of view. It is entirely a question of the reader's knowledge (of genre conventions, historical styles, etc.), intellectual ability and readiness whether or not he or she takes up the metareferential suggestions of the metaphors and structural strategies. Even repetition functioning as *mise en abyme* can be easily overlooked whereas the arguments of explicit reflection cannot. Often, however, it is not clear whether a metareference is intended or not or whether it is really the product of the reader's imagination.
6. Wells' "conflicted form" (1967: 373) avails itself of all varieties of metareference – reflection, intra-compositional and extra-compositional metareference, explicit and implicit metareference, metaphoric transfers for purposes of intermedial illustration, typographical juxtaposition.
7. As for the possible functions of metaization, the example of Wells provides an interesting double answer. For while it is true that the metareferences of *A Modern Utopia* are meant to encourage a rational, detached approach to the problem of utopia and thereby undermine emotional illusion-making, it is also true that this metaization creates a fascination of its own. Thus the term fascination allows us to do justice to the double effect of a cooperative structure which aims both at rational reflection and, at least to some extent, also at emotional immersion. As for the latter, the reader listening to the Voice is not only expected to be affected by the occasional enthusiasm of its rhetoric but also by the scenes interrupting the disquisition.

### 3. The dialogue between text and photography (a footnote on the problem of implicit metareference)

What I wish to focus upon in this section is the dialogue between different media such as, for example, narrative text and photography. This metaphoric dialogue, which happens in the recipient's mind, is clearly a form of implicit metareference since it assumes and triggers

an awareness of what the different media are and what their cooperation can possibly achieve. If the relationship is one-sided, one of the two media involved is relegated to the function of illustration and explication.

Nineteenth-century aesthetic discussions usually deplore the merely imitative, or to be more precise, indexical nature of photography which does not allow the imaginative play expected in expressive poetry. However, Georges Rodenbach in his seminal 1892 photo novel *Bruges-la-Morte* takes a different view. So does W. G. Sebald a century later. Since the grey city of Bruges functions as a symbol of the protagonist's dead wife and his own grief, the illustrative function of the city views represented by the 35 photographs added to the text is constantly transformed into a symbolic one (see Steinacker 2007). The dialogic relationship between the text and the photos enacted by the reader's imagination produces suggestive symbolic meanings and a metareferential awareness.

The case of Beryl Bainbridge's quasi-historical novel *Master Georgie* (1998) is somewhat different. Actual photos of the Crimean War are *not* added to the story of homosexual George, who is eventually killed in the Crimea. The novel consists of six chapters narrated by three narrators, by Pompey, the homosexual photographer and George's lover, by the orphan girl Myrtle, whose love for George is hopeless, and by Potter, the intellectual, who happens to be unhappily married to Beatrice, an ironic reference to Dante. All eventually travel to the Crimea. Although, unlike in Rodenbach's novel, actual photos are not included, the motif of photography is nevertheless dominant throughout the text, and its use for scientific documentation, war propaganda and deception are shown again and again. There are also media-comparative reflections by Potter in the vein of nineteenth-century aesthetic scepticism towards the medium. The novel is therefore used as a medium to comment upon the uses of another medium and to document a Victorian obsession. At one point Potter reflects:

I don't know that I think much of the camera. It appears to hold reality hostage, and yet fails to snap thoughts in the head. A man can be standing there, face expressive of grief, and inside be full of either mirth or lust. The lens is powerless to catch the interior turmoil boiling within the skull, nor can it expose lewd recollections – which is all to the good. (Bainbridge 1998: 163)

Being confined to the reproduction of the visual surface of reality, which can be deceptive, the medium of photography is at a disadvantage, since it cannot, unlike the novel, explore the inner life of a per-

son. Potter's implicitly media-comparative reflections (there is no explicit comparison between photographic and novelistic representation) also implicitly refer to the work itself in which they are expressed.

Apart from Potter's reflections concerning the limitations of photography there is also (implicit) structural metareference. The emblem-like structure reproduced in *Illustration 1* and originally to be found on an otherwise white, empty page in *Master Georgie* invites the reader to view the chapters as photographic plates:

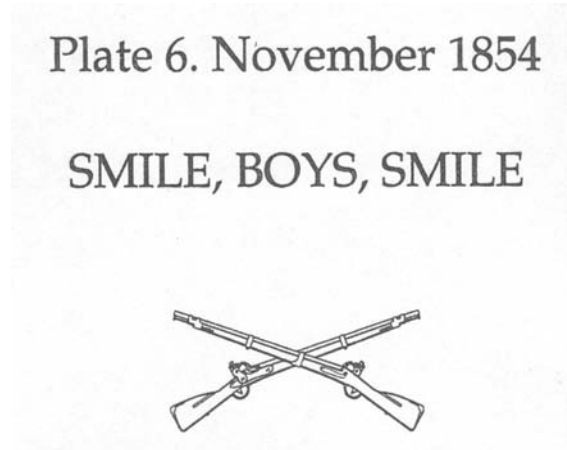


*Illustration 1: Beryl Bainbridge, Master Georgie, Chapter/Plate 6.*

As with the use of film in Wells, the use of the photographic medium as a metaphor for the overall composition of Bainbridge's novel gives it a decidedly metareferential twist in the sense of implicit metareferentiality. Each chapter is preceded by a title which combines (a) the indexical sign of the photo, referred to by the symbolic signs of language ("Plate 6. November 1854"), (b) a subscription or theme ("SMILE, BOYS, SMILE"), quoting the lies of journalistic discourse, and (c) the iconic *and* symbolic graphic sign of crossed rifles. The subscriptions vary, but the metaphor of the plate, the reference to the time of action and the sign of the crossed rifles occur in each of the chapter titles, whose spectacular positioning guarantees that special attention is paid to them. The reader is not given, as in Rodenbach or Sebald, an actual photo; he or she is rather expected to compare an imagined photo with the storyworld of the text. Since the photos taken of the Crimean War have been widely disseminated and discussed in recent years, the reader may even be expected to activate the optical

information provided by these photos of chaotic, destroyed fortifications and a valley strewn with canon balls. The unmarked quotation “SMILE, BOYS, SMILE” represents an intracompositional self-reference to the last scene of the novel, where live and dead soldiers are practically forced to pose as smiling victors for a newspaper photographer. The self-referential repetition of “smile” emphasizes the monstrosity of the incident.

We are here dealing with a cooperative structure which provokes the reader to reflect upon the medium of the novel as a composition which is in a sense modelled on Victorian war photography. And indeed, the striking contingency of life documented by the indexical sign of the photo (if the photo’s mechanical reproduction of real objects can be called a sign at all), which registers the light emitted from the photographed object, also seems to rule Bainbridge’s narrative interpretation of chaotic life. The dark leitmotif of this interpretation is death. The novel opens with the undignified death of George’s father in a brothel and ends with the accidental death of his son, the non-combatant George, on the battlefield. The ultimate contingency of death escapes the attribution of meaning. In the light of this the use of the word ‘plate’ instead of ‘photo’ may even imply a sinister, nihilistic meaning. If the ‘plate’ is not exposed, it simply offers blackness, nothingness. It is more likely, however, that the word is meant to evoke the old-fashioned Victorian technology of taking photos. Furthermore, the extraordinary, photographic vividness of the world evoked by a text whose narrators never engage in explicit metafictional commentaries on their own narratives produces fascination.

According to Roland Barthes the powerful photo astonishes and pierces (“Le *punctum* [...] me point”/“The *punctum* [...] pierces me” [1980: 49]). He rejects the term “fascination” (‘fascination’ [ibid.: 37]) and prefers the term ‘punctum’, but he is in my view really talking about fascination when analyzing the photo’s peculiar power of attraction. Barthes argues that the characteristic dazed condition (“l’hébétude” [ibid.]) of fascination is not compatible with the ‘inner excitement’ (“agitation intérieure” [ibid.: 26]) felt by him in the presence of certain photos. I believe that this analysis does not do justice to the paradoxical nature of fascination, which implies that the viewer is captured and imaginatively released (see Seeber 2005) by what Barthes calls the ‘punctum’ of the photo. According to him the viewer of the photo is attracted, pierced and shaken by the contingency of the real, the striking visual detail (cf. 1980: 69), the photo’s insinuation of



death (the pastness of the past) and its truthfulness of expression. Significantly, his rhetoric of emotional impact is quite compatible with the language of fascination. When he stresses the photo's attraction ("qui m'attire" [ibid.]), the curious, quasi-magical life of the photographed object (cf. ibid.: 49), the difference, as in Wilde, between mere 'liking' in the Kantian sense and being 'pierced' or overwhelmed ("elles me plaisent ou me déplaisent sans me poindre"; ibid.: 50), the metaphor 'bewitch' ("m'echantent" [ibid.: 54]) and the photo's mystery, the impossibility of saying what it really expresses and communicates, Barthes seems to me to describe the experience of fascination. Not surprisingly, photography is for Barthes not a version of art but magic ("une magie, non un art" [ibid.: 138]), a 'picture without a code' ("une image sans code" [ibid.]), it is an 'emanation of the reality that once was' ("une émanation du *réel passé*" [ibid.]). In fact, from antiquity to the early modern period fascination belonged to the repertoire of magical practices and has been handed down to us as a concept in a secularized, aestheticized version.

For Barthes, the powerful photo astonishes and pierces also because it fixes the reality of a situation, a person or an action long past. It is this claim which is also made by Bainbridge's novel and which is communicated through the metareferences of her emblem-like titles. Thus the impenetrability of death is present in a double sense. The photo and its narrative equivalent constantly remind the recipient that he or she is contemplating a reality which, on the one hand, no longer exists (1854), and, on the other, continues to be relevant for the present. After all, the reality of the past and of the present is ruled by final farewells, departures, by death. Evidently dialogue is a crucial concept when one considers the implicit metareferential potential of intermedial structures. This is just another way of saying that the discovery of implicit metareferences and their aesthetic implications very much depends on the reader's knowledge and interpretive imagination.

Bainbridge's novel *Master Georgie* continues or rather resumes the mimetic, realist tradition of narrative fiction. But one does not really confound it with the Victorian or modern (Hemingway) version of realism. The reasons for this are twofold. For one thing, recognisable moral or ethical values do no longer determine the evaluation and the outcome of the actions represented by the text. Secondly, Bainbridge modifies and estranges the realist tradition through the use of implicit metareference in a comparatively unobtrusive and subtle manner which is quite different from high modernism's spectacular experi-

mentalism. This is, as Herbert Grabes (see 2004) has argued, characteristic of recent postmodernist fiction. I have already discussed the function of photography. One even suspects that Bainbridge is aware of Barthes' reflections on photography. In addition, the novel's strategy to use several narrators whose different cognitive frames produce different versions of reality also implicitly invites metareferential considerations.

#### 4. Conclusion, with a glance at Ursula Le Guin

In terms of genre and literary history the two texts discussed are quite different. Wells innovates the genre of the narrative utopia conceptually and formally, whereas Bainbridge presents us with a postmodern, neo-realist historical novel which is not realist or historical in the traditional sense. However, in both texts the innovations are linked to a combination of two interests, one in metareferentiality and the other in the imitation of the new media (photography, film). One would expect the use of photographic and filmic models to strengthen the fiction's function of creating illusion and hence its power of attraction or fascination. One would also expect the use of metareferential commentaries and devices to weaken precisely the power of the aesthetics of fascination. In both cases, however, the story is more complicated.

In *A Modern Utopia* Wells wishes to present utopia as a problem rather than merely a fictional experience. This is why he creates a new structure which combines philosophical or rather speculative sociological discourse with film-like scenes illustrating life in utopia. Both methods are meant to produce fascination inasmuch as this can be done in didactic fiction at all. Rather than merely immersing him- or herself in a story, the reader is also expected to be gripped by innovative arguments and models which often, through the use of explicit metareference, distance the new model from the old narrative utopia. The complexity of a new individualistic, both hopeful and sceptical view of utopia is emphasized by a communicative situation which also typographically, and therefore in an implicit metareferential way, distinguishes between the voice of the author and the voice of the narrator or lecturer. In Wells' text rationality and metareferentiality, both implicit (collision, metaphors) and explicit, are given a fascination of their own, otherwise the text would be dead. And this fascination is complemented by the fascination scenic or quasi-filmic segments

produce. The latter are introduced and explained in the introductory, explicit metareferential reflections on what would constitute a proper medium for a modern utopia.

One could argue that Wells' innovative structure is not a novel at all. Such an argument would be impossible in the case of Bainbridge where, with the exception of the intellectual Potter, very little distance is discernible between the level of the narrating and reflecting and the level of the perceiving and experiencing I. Although incidents, lively dialogues, descriptions and striking details all invite the readers to immerse themselves in the fictional (and quasi-historical) world of the three narratives making up the novel, the isolated emblem-like titles at the same time create aesthetic distance since they implicitly – by using the photographic metaphor “plate” as the key-word of chapter titles – raise the intellectually exciting problem to what extent the chapters must and can be read as Victorian photographs translated into a text. After all, photos may suggest consciousness, action and the movement of time, but are incapable of representing them. Still, the implicit metareference which goes along with this intermedial device creates and strengthens ways of reading the text which seem to me productive. Thus the novel can be related to Barthes' categories of the ‘punctum’ (which I view as fascination), the striking detail, contingency and death, which define and explain the extraordinary attraction certain photos have for him. Bainbridge's novel documents a renewed interest in the relationship between photography and the novel, which is the subject of a recent study by Steinacker (see 2007). From a trans-medial point of view one can say that implicit metareference is an important and elusive concept which allows reasonably controlled interpretation only if it is close to an explicit metareference (as for example in the case of the metaphor “plate”) or confirmed by explicit metareference.

It has often been observed that genres with a clear profile and an easily recognisable set of conventions are prone to become objects of parody and self-reflection. Literary utopias and SF novels clearly belong to this category. In most cases, however, the extra-compositional self-reference of many utopias is not visible because of the absence in the text of unquestionable markers and the focus on conceptual, political self-reflection and revisionism. Morris' pastoral *News from Nowhere* (1890) corrects Bellamy's vision of a socialist future shaped by the application of machinery (*Looking Backward*, 1888), E. M. Forster's “The Machine Stops” (1909) and Huxley's *Brave New*

*World* (1932) are intentional parodies of Wells' dream of a functional, technology-oriented world-state. This has profound consequences for the treatment of media. Huxley uses and represents filmic techniques of representation, just as Wells purports to do. But in Huxley they signify, from the perspective of cultural criticism, the disconcerting and alienating speed – the exposition implies a camera focussing on different scenes in quick, accelerating succession – and the entertainment industry of the modern world of the 1920s. Huxley's text, just as Forster's does, clearly indicates a quite critical or at least ambiguous reflection on the media film and television. The reader who is not aware of the Wellsian context of these texts cannot, however, be aware of their implicit metareferential aspects since explicit markers enforcing such a reading are missing.

Still, this covert and sometimes not so covert metaization and criticism governing and propelling the development of modern utopias, which are no longer merely positive or negative, is more and more coming to the fore in theory (see Moylan 1986 and Seeber 2003) and fictions alike. Self-criticism has become a crucial strategy of utopian theory and texts. Although it did not spawn immediate successors because of its too close alignment with sociological discourse, Wells' *A Modern Utopia* anticipates a later trend which is impressively powerful in the work of the American writer Ursula Le Guin. The subject is so vast that a whole book would be required to deal with it properly. Furthermore, the role played by intermediality in this process has to my knowledge only been touched upon. Even Adam Roberts, in his useful book on science fiction (2000), does not, in his case study of Frank Herbert's classic SF novel *Dune* (1965), mention Herbert's use of filmic immediacy for the purpose of appealing to an audience conditioned by visual culture (see Seeber 1986).

In conclusion, I confine myself to referring to two examples. (1) Ursula Le Guin's classic, profoundly innovative novel of the future *The Dispossessed* (1974) escapes conventional classifications since it is neither a positive utopia nor a dystopia or an anti-utopia. Harking back to Wells and significantly rejecting his concept of utopia, she gives her book the subtitle "an ambiguous utopia". This is a clear case of explicit and implicit metareference since the new classificatory label refers (a) explicitly to the semantics and the structure of her novel and (b) implicitly (i. e., if the reader notices it!) to the Wellsian tradition of utopia and utopian thinking. Ambiguity is engendered by presenting unresolved, unfinished processes involving, among other

subjects, an anarchist utopia (Anarres) about to betray its anarchist ideals, a capitalist 'utopia' (Urras) on the verge of collapse, and a physicist and anarchist (Shevek) trying to break up the stalemate of the two systems and his own marriage. Utopia is, in other words, tested and explored from various perspectives in a postmodern, inconclusive manner with ecological concerns, however, occupying a pivotal position. Le Guin's masterpiece *Always Coming Home* (1985), a predominantly positive, ecological utopia featuring the culture of the Kesh people, proves to be a multi-medial postmodern construction in the sense that it was produced by an author (for the text), a composer (for the music available as a CD) and an artist (for the illustrations of the text) whose combined creations – story and fable, fictive autobiography, poems, artwork and music – are, however, not used with a media-comparative intent but for the purpose of 'capturing' the reader in the network and polyphony of a different, 'organic' culture critical of modernity as we know it. This is why film and photography are not given a role in the text. Their conspicuous absence, as the absence of most modern technology (only technology compatible with ecological concerns is allowed albeit hardly mentioned at all), amounts to a strong implicit comment on the Wellsian tradition of technology-oriented utopianism and rationalism. Explicit criticism of the modern notion of civilization is to be found in the section entitled "Time and the City".

The text abounds in explicit metareferential statements explaining the procedures of the different voices. "Pandora", the fictitious author, constantly indulges in fictitious author-reflexive, metalinguistic, meta-narrative ("A Note and a Chart Concerning Narrative Methods" [ibid.: 500f.]) and meta-utopian reflections. The segments assembled in the novel or rather encyclopaedia to represent textually the oral world of Kesh culture are identified – with obvious metareferential implications – as different genres ("romantic tales", "histories", "dramatic works", "poems", etc. [cf. "Contents", s. p.]). Unlike utopian fictions adhering to the tradition of mimetic realism *Always Coming Home* thus assembles, in a non-linear fashion, voices and fragments of a different matriarchal, anarchist culture developed from Indian models, including its counterpart ("Condor"), a patriarchy based on power and inequality. Very much like Wells, Le Guin explains her method, which evidently favours 'archaic', 'old-fashioned' modes of expression and communication, in an introductory "A First Note":

THE PEOPLE in this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California.

The main part of the book is their voices speaking for themselves in stories and life-stories, plays, poems, and songs. If the reader will bear with some unfamiliar terms they will all be made clear at last. Coming at my work as a novelist, I thought it best to put many of the explanatory, descriptive pieces into a section called *The Back of the Book*, where those who want narrative can ignore them and those who enjoy explanations can find them. The glossary may also be useful or amusing. (1985/2001: xi)

The contorted syntax of the first sentence (“might be going to have lived”) suggests, in an implicit metareferential way, the author’s ambiguity concerning the time of the action. In fact, the (utopian) past is as much a part of the future as vice versa. There is also the characteristic interplay between the emotional and the cognitive aspect of reception (narrative vs. explanation) with, paradoxically, the cognitive dimension seemingly providing more joy (“enjoy explanations”) than mere narrative (“those who want narrative”). The poetics of utopia epitomizes, it seems to me, the double nature of any literary artifact.

(2) If proof was needed for the hypothesis that closed genre-systems engender metaization, science fiction provides it in ample measure. Roberts shows how the classic film *Star Wars* (1977) is filled with references to SF novels and SF films (“a web of intertextual quotations and allusions” [2000: 87]) which appeal to the sophistication of knowing fans:

SF intertextuality, then, is one of the key ways in which this film text operates, and our response to the film is conditioned by that fact. The intriguingly double-edged relationship of the film to its own imagined history, and to the history of the genre of which it is some sort of apotheosis, exemplifies the concern of that history. To put this another way: one of the factors of SF fandom is an intimate knowledge of the canon and conventions of SF itself – in short, a knowledge of the history of the evolution of the form itself. This gives the initiate a double reading or viewing experience: the text, such as *Star Wars*, can be enjoyed on its own terms and simultaneously be enjoyed as a matrix of quotations, allusion, pastiche and reference. Many texts outside SF can be enjoyed in this latter manner, too, of course; but it is the intensity of the devotion of SF fans for their subject that permits these dense and sophisticated intertexts (texts that connect with many other texts) in a popular idiom. The SF text is both about its professed subject and also, always, *about* SF. (Ibid.: 18)

Granting the metareferential awareness of SF fans, what does this awareness imply? Does it imply that they engage in reflections concerning the medium SF, possibly even its problems? Or do the allusions of the film-maker rather indicate a gesture of flattery which ac-

compleishes its purpose when the viewers gleefully and joyfully (“enjoy”), possibly even with fascination, recognise the references?

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# Metareference and Intermedial Reference

## William Carlos Williams' Poetological Poems

*Daniella Jancsó*

In literary studies, the investigation of metareferentiality has focussed primarily on prose fiction, while meta-phenomena in drama and poetry have attracted considerably less critical attention. Yet metareferences in poetry, especially in twentieth-century poetry, are ubiquitous; in fact, it could be argued that metareferentiality is a constitutive feature of modern poetry. William Carlos Williams' oeuvre is a case in point; many different forms of metareference are observable in his poetry. This paper analyses a special case where reflections on the medium of language are elicited (or at least accompanied) by intermedial references. After exploring the metareferential potential of intermedial references in Williams' poetry, the paper considers their role in modern poetry in general and closes with transmedial reflections concerning the existence of analogous phenomena in other media.

### 1. Introduction

#### **A Sort of a Song**

Let the snake wait under  
his weed  
and the writing  
be of words, slow and quick, sharp  
to strike, quiet to wait, 5  
sleepless.  
—through metaphor to reconcile  
the people and the stones.  
Compose. (No ideas  
but in things) Invent! 10  
Saxifrage is my flower that splits  
the rocks. (Williams 1988: 55)

“No ideas but in things” – quoted in most studies of William Carlos Williams' poetics, this line from “A Sort of a Song” (1944) has become a token of Williams' poetic programme. That it originates in a poem – and not, say, in a poetological essay – directs our attention to the prominence of metareference in modern poetry. Metareferential

elements are, in fact, so ubiquitous in twentieth-century poems that a good case can be made for the claim that metareferentiality is a constitutive feature of modern poetry: “Modern poetry begins by radically questioning what a poem is and by raising that question not just once but repeatedly”, argues Jon Cook in his introduction to the most recent anthology of poetic theory (2004: 1). In poetry, as in other literary genres and other arts and media, metareference appears in many forms<sup>1</sup>.

Of the different types of metareference, intermedial references that are also metareferential constitute a particularly rewarding field of inquiry as they raise a question of great interest to the theory of metareferentiality: when is an intermedial reference also metareferential<sup>2</sup>? For an answer, the function of intermedial references with regard to their metareferential potential will be explored in selected poetological poems, primarily by William Carlos Williams. The abundance of intermedial references in Williams’ poetological poetry and the strong impact of his poetics on a generation of young poets render his work ideally suited for such an investigation.

“A Sort of a Song”, the opening piece of *The Wedge* (1944)<sup>3</sup>, is one of many poetological poems that can be found in Williams’ poetic oeuvre. What is poetry? What should a poem be like? Of what use is a poem? Whether in early works such as “The Uses of Poetry” (1910) and “Aux Imagistes” (1914), in poems from the midst of his writing career such as “Africa” (1937) and “The Genius” (1939), or in late poems such as “Poem (The rose fades...)” and “Poem (on getting a card...)” (both from 1962), these questions about the essence of the art of poetry recur. It is remarkable that a great number of Williams’ poetological poems are concerned not only with aesthetic questions pertaining to poetry, but also with the relationship between poetry and the other arts, thus employing intermedial references. “A Sort of a Song” is intermedial by virtue of its title, which evokes the medium of music. This intermedial reference has a metareferential potential as it provokes reflection on the similarities between the art of poetry – which is the main subject of the poem – and the art of music. The

<sup>1</sup> On the different forms of metareference, cf. Wolf in this vol.: sec. 4.3., for meta-poetry and its manifold forms see also Müller-Zetzelmann 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See also sec. 5.4. in the introduction to this vol.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in Williams 1988.

same agenda recurs in “The Poem” (1944), which begins with the lines “It’s all in / the sound. A song.” (Williams 1988: 74) and propagates the view that poetry should aspire to the condition of music, “It should / be a song”<sup>4</sup> (ll. 3–4). Even more frequent – and more intriguing – are poems which reflect on a variant of the old ‘ut-pictura-poesis’ idea, namely the relationship between poetry and painting, such as “To a Solitary Disciple” (1916), “The Botticellian Trees” (1930), “Raindrops on a Briar” (1948), “Still Lives” and “The Art” (both from 1961). The greater complexity of these texts can be connected with Williams’ lifelong preoccupation with the nexus between the fine arts and poetry, an interest that is well documented. In his poetological prose writings, he repeatedly articulates the position that “a design in the poem and a design in the picture should make them more or less the same thing” (qtd. in Halter 1994: 6). In the prologue to *Kora in Hell* (1920), which takes as its starting point a conversation with the art collector Arensberg about Duchamp’s works, Williams argues that “the inventive imagination must look [...] to the field of art for its richest discoveries today” (qtd. in Ramazani/Ellman/O’Clair, eds. 2003: 956). In an unpublished manuscript, Williams notes without further ado: “For poet read – artist, painter” (qtd. in Dijkstra 1978: 2). The fact that for Williams inspiration came from fellow painters rather than from fellow poets is also hinted at in many passages of his *Autobiography* (1951). In the chapter with the fitting title “Painters and Parties”, Williams describes the regular meetings of the circle of poets and painters at Grantwood, New Jersey, before World War I and remarks that “[w]e’d have arguments over cubism which would fill an afternoon. There was a comparable whipping up of interest in the structure of the poem” (ibid.: 136). The juxtaposition of these two statements suggests that the formal innovations in modern painting triggered the structural innovations in modern poetry. In an interview, which Williams gave shortly before his death, he explicitly identifies one particular modern painter as the source of his own poetics:

I was tremendously involved in an appreciation of Cézanne. He was a designer. He put it down on canvas so that there would be a meaning without saying anything at all. Just the relation of the parts to themselves. In considering a poem, I don’t care whether it is finished or not; if it is put down with good relation to the

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<sup>4</sup> “The Poem” is a reworking of “The Poet and his Poems” (1939), which starts with the following definition: “The poem is this: / a nuance of sound / delicately operating / upon a cataract of sense” (Williams 1988: 4).

parts, it becomes a poem. And the meaning of the poem can be grasped by attention to the design. (Qtd. in Dijkstra 1978: 3)

When Williams was asked, in the same interview, whether he and the painters spoke the same language, he replied: “Yes, very close – And as I’ve grown older, I’ve attempted to fuse the poetry and painting to make it the same thing” (ibid.). Accordingly, in criticism, the nexus between Williams’ poetry and modern art is characterised as one of “cross-fertilization” (Halter 1994: 1)<sup>5</sup> or, more frequently, as one of mostly unilateral influence. However, there are signs – often overlooked in criticism<sup>6</sup> – that indicate a more troubled relationship between Williams’ own poetry and the arts. Williams’ prose writings often hint at the tension and even rivalry between poetry and the visual arts, the competition or paragone between the poet and the painters<sup>7</sup>. These tensions are also perceptible in Williams’ poetological poems which employ intermedial references to painting. Many of these intermedial references are also metareferential, as I shall try to show in my analysis of three representative texts: “To a Solitary Disciple”, “The Botticellian Trees”, and “Still Lives”. Each poem develops, in its own way, a critical stance to painting and thus inevitably, if often indirectly, raises questions about the craft of poetry.

## 2. Reflections on poetry and other media in select poetological poems by William Carlos Williams

“To a Solitary Disciple”, first published in 1916, sets up a situation in which the speaker explains to an anonymous, perhaps only imagined follower what really matters in poetry – by way of the indirect means of contrasting poetry to painting.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Halter maintains in the latest monograph on the subject that William Carlos Williams “may be well called the paradigmatic case of a writer whose poetics are the result of a ‘cross-fertilization’ in the arts” (1994: 1). See also Hönnighausen 1986 and MacGowan 1984.

<sup>6</sup> A rare exception is Henry M. Sayre (1980), who gives a more nuanced account of the development of Williams’ aesthetics and its relation to modern art.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., for instance, Williams’ recollection of his encounter with Duchamp (1951: 137), his remark about the breakup of the circle of poets and painters at Grantwood (qtd. in Marling 1982: 45), and his efforts to distance himself from the most radical “iconoclasts” (1917: 27–36).

**To a Solitary Disciple**

|                                                                                                                                                           |    |                                                                                                                     |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Rather notice, mon cher,<br>that the moon is<br>tilted above<br>the point of the steeple<br>than that its color<br>is shell-pink.                         | 5  | of the hexagonal spire<br>escape upward—<br>receding, dividing!<br>—sepals<br>that guard and contain<br>the flower! | 25 |
| Rather observe<br>that it is early morning<br>than that the sky<br>is smooth<br>as a turquoise.                                                           | 10 | Observe<br>how motionless<br>the eaten moon<br>lies in the protecting lines.                                        | 30 |
| Rather grasp<br>how the dark<br>converging lines<br>of the steeple<br>meet at the pinnacle—<br>perceive how<br>its little ornament<br>tries to stop them— | 15 | It is true:<br>in the light colors<br>of morning<br>brown-stone and slate<br>shine orange and dark blue.            | 35 |
| See how it fails!<br>See how the converging lines                                                                                                         | 20 | But observe<br>the oppressive weight<br>of the squat edifice!<br>Observe<br>the jasmine lightness<br>of the moon.   | 40 |

(Williams 1986: 104)

In principle, one could read this poem as a defamiliarized description of a subjectively perceived work of architecture. Yet, for anyone aware of Williams' preoccupation with painting as well as owing to the expressions that point to painterly composition – in particular “converging lines” and “protecting lines” (ll. 14, 21, 31) – it should be clear that this is in fact an intermedial, in particular an ekphrastic poem referring to a real or imaginary painting. In criticism, this poem is often cited as evidence for Williams' uncritical embrace of Cubism:

The usual interpretation is that the poet is directing a “solitary disciple” of impressionism, who writes poems that are the verbal equivalent of a Renoir or a Monet, to pay attention to line, mass, plane and location – the tools of cubism. (Marling 1982: 130)

Accordingly, the poem has been associated with Charles Demuth's ‘ray-line’ paintings of steeples, paintings which reflect Demuth's interest in Cézanne and analytical Cubism (cf. MacGowan 1984: 51). Yet there is reason to believe that the connection between painting (be it impressionist or cubist) and the poem “To a Solitary Disciple” is more complicated. For one, it has been proposed that instead of having been inspired by a particular painting, Williams probably drew up-

on the slightly modified view from his own front door at 9 Ridge Road in Rutherford, New Jersey (cf. *ibid.*). Secondly, the wry undertone of the poem makes it difficult to uphold the proposition that Williams is urging a purely cubist approach to poetry. It seems to me that the poem, despite its emphasis on the visual, criticises the art of painting by showing its limitations as a medium. The poem is not primarily concerned with the question of which painterly technique a novice poet should follow; it rather demonstrates what one can do in poetry – and *only* in poetry. The poem thus tries to persuade poets to have confidence in their chosen medium – language. What is more, “To a Solitary Disciple” may even lay claim to the superiority of poetry over the art of painting. After the first three stanzas, which could still be interpreted as a propagation of the principles of Cubism over the principles of Impressionism in poetry, the poem moves beyond what can be represented in painting. The turning point comes in the fourth stanza, with the introduction of the first metaphor in the poem. When the imaginary extended lines of the hexagonal spire are designated as “sepals” (l. 25), the limitations of painting become apparent. One cannot paint this particular metaphor as it is exclusive to language. Furthermore, the last two stanzas create the impression that such unpaintable metaphors matter more than anything else; this is suggested by the argumentative movement from “It is true” (l. 32) to “But observe” (l. 37). It is only consistent that the poem culminates in a stunning metaphor: “the jasmine lightness of the moon” (ll. 41–42). The demanded action (“But observe [...]”, l. 37) is metaphorical, too: one cannot possibly *observe*, in the sense that a painter would use the word, the jasmine lightness of the moon. One can only *imagine* this ‘observation’. And that is exactly what the poem does, and what only poetry, only literature can do: it documents the *process* of making the imaginary explicit and observable.

This potential of poetry is exploited to the full in a poem written in 1930, more than a decade after “To a Solitary Disciple”:

#### The Botticellian Trees

|                    |   |                      |    |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|----|
| The alphabet of    |   | letters that spelled |    |
| the trees          |   | winter               |    |
| is fading in the   |   | and the cold         |    |
| song of the leaves |   | have been illumined  | 10 |
| the crossing       | 5 | with                 |    |
| bars of the thin   |   | pointed green        |    |

|                       |    |                           |    |
|-----------------------|----|---------------------------|----|
| by the rain and sun—  |    | until the stript          |    |
| The strict simple     |    | sentences                 |    |
| principles of         | 15 | move as a woman's         | 25 |
| straight branches     |    | limbs under cloth         |    |
| are being modified    |    | and praise from secrecy   |    |
| by pinched-out        |    | quick with desire         |    |
| ifs of colour, devout |    | love's ascendancy         |    |
| conditions            | 20 | in summer—                | 30 |
| the smiles of love—   |    | In summer the song        |    |
| .....                 |    | sings itself              |    |
|                       |    | above the muffled words—. |    |

(Williams 1986: 348)

Reading the title, “The Botticellian Trees”, one would expect an ekphrasis referring to a particular Botticelli painting, but what follows is, in fact, a series of metaphors, unpaintable even for a painter of Botticelli’s calibre. As in “To a Solitary Disciple”, the underlying issue is, once again, to define poetry in relation to the other arts<sup>8</sup>. Intermediality is thus again combined with metareference and indeed becomes a form of indirect metareference. Each stanza in the first part of “The Botticellian Trees” consists of images or ideas that can only be conveyed through the medium of (poetic) language, such as “the alphabet of the trees” (ll. 1–2) or “ifs of colour” (l. 19). It is as if each stanza were a variation on what Williams discovered at the end of “To a Solitary Disciple”: observation in terms of (verbal) metaphors. However, it seems that after ten different versions of the same theme, the ‘language-game’ has exhausted itself. The ellipsis that follows “the smiles of love—” (l. 21) may be indicative of the recognition that the excitement is gone; to continue the game would be tedious. The second part of the poem is a probing of new directions, a search for a new ‘language-game’ that the poet could play after having given up the old one: the expression “stript sentences” (ll. 23–24) marks the starting point of the pursuit. Yet in “The Botticellian Trees”, the search ends without satisfying results. First, as is to be expected, Williams turns to painting for inspiration: the sentences praising “love’s ascendancy in summer” (ll. 29–30) are compared to the movement of “a woman’s

<sup>8</sup> The poem is barely commented on in criticism. A rare exception is Bruce Comens’ article “Williams, Botticelli, and the Renaissance” (1983); however, the proposed reading of the poem as a celebration of the transition from Newtonian physics to relativity theory appears to be somewhat far-fetched.



limbs under cloth" (ll. 25–26): this image easily calls to mind Botticelli's "La Primavera". However, the idea that the art of painting in general, or this specific work of art in particular, could open up new perspectives for poetry is not pursued further: the dash after the verse "love's ascendancy in summer—" (ll. 29–30) breaks off the argument. The repetition of the phrase "in summer" (l. 31) introduces a new medium, a new possible source of inspiration: music. "In summer the song / sings itself // above the muffled words—" (ll. 31–33). With these lines, the poem comes to a close. This abrupt termination implies that one cannot go far in this direction either. Renewal in poetry cannot originate in music. Music has no referent, and it is therefore a too 'self-contained' form of art, at least for Williams' purposes<sup>9</sup>. This is suggested by the perplexing image of the song singing itself: it is like a serpent, an Uroboros, biting its own tail; fittingly, the multiple alliterations of the sound [s] onomatopoeically allude to a snake. Although the poem "The Botticellian Trees", unlike "To a Solitary Disciple", offers no new way of distinguishing poetry from other art forms, it is significant that it ends with an explicit metareference to the medium of language, to "words", even if these words are "muffled" (l. 33).

Williams eventually discovered the uniqueness of poetry in its narrative power. The fact that he started working on his epos *Paterson* in 1946 can be seen as an attempt to move away from an aesthetics based on the art of painting. In place of "muffled words", there came a flood of words. In his poetological prose texts, Williams increasingly focused on speech and metre, and he developed an idiosyncratic theory of measure<sup>10</sup>. His later lyric (meta-)poetry reveals a (self-)critical

<sup>9</sup> Compare Peter Halter's convincing argument that in Williams' poetry, there is a double fascination with the poem as a plastic medium *and* as an object endowed with the power of reference. "This means that both the formalist impulse and the will to establish that essential 'contact' with the empirical world are constantly at work in Williams' poems, which hence are largely the result of the complex ways in which these basic forces interact with, and work against, one another." (1994: 4)

<sup>10</sup> In "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948), Williams makes it absolutely clear that he takes the concept of measure to be of utmost importance: "And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality we can know is MEASURE" (1954: 283). That invention in poetry comes from speech (and not painting) is asserted in the same essay: "Now we come to the question of the origin of our discoveries. Where else can what we are seeking arise from but speech? From speech, from American speech as distinct from English speech [...], from what we *hear* in America" (ibid.: 289).

stance to painting, too. “Raindrops on a Briar”, a poem written in 1948, begins with a self-rebuke: “I, a writer, at one time hipped on / painting, did not consider / the effects, painting / for that reason, static [...]” (1988: 149). An ironic distance to the art of painting is also discernible in the posthumously published “Still Lives”<sup>11</sup>:

**Still Lives**

All poems can be represented by  
 still lifes not to say  
 water-colors, the violence of  
 the Iliad lends itself to an arrangement  
 of narcissi in a jar. 5  
 The slaughter of Hector by Achilles  
 can well be shown by them  
 casually assembled yellow upon white  
 radiantly making a circle  
 sword strokes violently given 10  
 in more or less haphazard disarray

(Ibid.: 378)

In criticism, the irony of these lines often goes unnoticed; it may be that Williams’ many enthusiastic statements on the art of painting in his prose writings have led the readers of his poetry astray. But would Williams, himself writer of epics, seriously propose that the depiction of a jar of narcissi could do justice to the most celebrated epos in the history of literature? Admittedly, the answer to this question can be only speculative. In any case, the frivolous remark “not to say / water-colours” (ll. 2–3) as well as the emphasis on violence – clearly absent from a still-life of flowers – suggest that claims about Williams’ unlimited enthusiasm for the art of painting should be treated with caution.

All three poems discussed endorse a position which cannot be easily reconciled with the widely held assumption that Williams saw painting as the art on which poetry should be modelled. Although it is not possible to pin down Williams’ exact views on the relationship between poetry and the fine arts, just as it is not possible to clearly define the connection between these views and the poems, this much can be stated: in Williams’ poems, the other arts serve as a backdrop against which poetry can be defined, they catalyse thinking about what really matters in poetry. The confrontation may stimulate rivalry;

<sup>11</sup> First published in *The Hudson Review* 16 (1963–1964): 516.



Which, deep in both worlds, can be still  
 As a painting, trembling hardly at all  
 Though the dragonfly alight, 25  
 Whatever horror nudge her root.

(Hughes 2003: 70)

The point at issue in Ted Hughes' "To Paint a Water Lily" is that it is not possible to "paint the long-necked lily-flower" (l. 22) in such a way as to convey precisely the thoughts that are formulated in the poem. In contrast, James Merrill's "Angel" (1959) is less confident about the superiority of poetry over painting. A miniature from the school of Van Eyck and the score of Satie's Sarabande no. 1 in the poet's study are a manifest challenge to the writer. The figure depicted in the painting is imagined "to say, or sing" the following words:

Between the world God made  
 And this music of Satie,  
 Each glimpsed through veils, but whole,  
 Radiant and willed,  
 Demanding praise, demanding surrender, 5  
 How can you sit there with your notebook?  
 What do you think you are doing?

(Merrill 2001: 160)

Yet, in spite of all doubt, the poet is reluctant to give up writing. The poem ends with the lines: "The tiny angel shakes his head. / There is no smile on his round, hairless face. / He does not want even these few lines written" (ibid.). But they do get written, and that is what matters. In the end, poetry is shown to be able to rival the arts of music and painting.

In Richmond Lattimore's "Collages and Compositions" (1960), the evocation of the media of painting, collage, and sculpture serves to convey ideas about craft. Rather than setting up an opposition between 'collages' and verbal 'compositions', the metapoem discovers the common denominator of all forms of art in the characteristics of the creative process and in the type of materials used:

Use force and chisel, be lapidary, not  
 any cut—  
 stone-arranger. Fear finished counters. Take  
 splinters, make  
 grammar out of nails, paper, rubber bands 5  
 placed by hands

bemused, rags, pins, a piece of string,  
 anything  
 but ready-made lovely matters: Flowers,  
 whose rapt hours' 10  
 arranging builds on material  
 glory al–  
 ready shaped and sweet: pebbles: snow–  
 flakes are no  
 stuff. Not perfections. Only broken stones, 15  
 potsherds, bones,  
 scraps of felt pinched in a wire vise  
 can surprise;  
 or willful sense flash taken wrong:  
 half bird song 20  
 misremembered, shining phrase reworded  
 not recorded,  
 used, abused, retaken from the cannibal heart:  
 this is art.

(qtd. in Wallace/Taaffe 1965: 171f.)<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion: metareference and intermedial reference in poetry and other media

Whether the issue is the assertion of superiority, the expression of a sense of rivalry, even anxiety, or the discovery of common traits, intermedial references in poetological poems are a convenient means of approaching fundamental questions about the nature and the 'use' of poetry. Since these intermedial references often fulfil a 'catalyst' function in poetological poems – they stimulate thinking about poetry – they are also (indirectly) metareferential. Perhaps one could even go so far as to claim that at least extended intermedial references in a poetological poem are automatically metareferential. In contrast, the metareferential potential of intermedial references occurring in poems that are not poetological appears to be minimal, if not negligible, even if these intermedial references are so frequent as in the following poem by William Carlos Williams, from his "Pictures from Brueghel" cycle:

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<sup>12</sup> First published in *The Griffin* 9/5.

**V Peasant Wedding**

|                              |    |                                |    |
|------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|----|
| Pour the wine bridegroom     |    | gabbing all but the bride      |    |
| where before you the         |    | hands folded in her            |    |
| bride is enthroned her hair  |    | lap is awkwardly silent simple | 15 |
| loose at her temples a head  |    | dishes are being served        |    |
| of ripe wheat is on          | 5  | clabber and what not           |    |
| the wall beside her the      |    | from a trestle made of an      |    |
| guests seated at long tables |    | unhinged barn door by two      |    |
| the bagpipers are ready      |    | helpers one in a red           | 20 |
| there is a hound under       |    | coat a spoon in his hatband    |    |
| the table the bearded Mayor  | 10 | (Williams 1988: 388)           |    |
| is present women in their    |    |                                |    |
| starched headgear are        |    |                                |    |

This suggests that explicit reference to poetological issues is a precondition of the metareferentiality inherent to such intermedial references. Since it is in the verbal media that explicit reference has its clearest forms, (in fact, it has been argued that explicit reference is restricted to the verbal arts<sup>13</sup>), the question to address is whether this phenomenon – intermedial reference (cf. Wolf 2002: 23) as a form of metareference – is observable also in other media, or whether it is restricted to the medium of literature? Can metareferential instrumental music evoke notions of another medium merely through musical signs? Can metareferential paintings reflect on issues pertaining to literature or music by using exclusively the signs of their own medium? I think that the answers to these questions vary from case to case, from medium to medium. In instrumental music, the evocation of another medium by solely using musical signs does not seem to be possible. (One has to keep in mind that with no recourse to other sign systems, even paratexts – e. g., titles – would have to be omitted.) Although a musical piece can be metareferential – Mozart’s “Ein musikalischer Spaß”

<sup>13</sup> On explicit metareference cf. Wolf in this vol.: sec. 5.1. and see Nöth in this vol. The fact that William Carlos Williams also saw explicitness restricted to the verbal arts is evinced by the following remark: “We live in a new world, pregnant with tremendous possibility for enlightenment but sometimes, being old, I despair of it. For the poem which has always led the way to the other arts as to life, being explicit, the only art which is explicit, has lately been left to fall into decay” (1954: 340). Ultimately, for Williams, media-specific differences provide the ground for ranking various art forms. As to be expected, the poet seeks the reason for poetry’s privileged position in its medium: language.

would raise metareferential questions even if it had no title<sup>14</sup> – it cannot evoke another medium without recourse to sign systems of other media. In contrast, it is possible in painting to evoke, and perhaps to some extent also to reflect on, other media: consider Vermeer's "The Art of Painting" (c. 1655) or Magritte's metareferential "L'Inondation" (1928) (see *Illustrations* 2 and 3 in the introduction to this vol.). However, in comparison with what can be accomplished in literature, the reflections elicited by intermedial references in painting remain vague.

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<sup>14</sup> See Wolf 2009, forthcoming.

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## **Metareference in Various Individual Media**



## Metareferentiality in Early Dance The Jacobean Antimasque

*Ingrid Pfandl-Buchegger, Gudrun Rottensteiner*

This paper introduces an as yet unexplored medium into the study of metareferentiality, namely dance. The metareferential potential of dance as a non-verbal, but partly representational medium is being investigated by focussing on the Jacobean or Stuart masque as an example of early dance. The forms and functions of metareferentiality are explored with reference to the *Masque of Queens* (1609) as the first masque to display a structural coherence between antimasque and masque, the antimasque providing a metareferential comment on the form and content of the main masque and thus eliciting a medium-awareness in the audience. As we try to show in our analysis, the use of metareferential devices was not only a means of relieving the sameness and static conventionality of the masque performance, creating new structural patterns in order to gratify the Renaissance taste for variation and novelty. It also served to introduce hitherto 'unacceptable' subjects into the frame of court entertainment and, through raising the audience's awareness of the representationality and constructed nature of the performance, may even subliminally have led the spectators to critically reflect not only on the discrepancy between the aesthetic conventions of antimasque and masque, but, on the thematic level, also on the discrepancy between the represented ideal and the real situation at the court of James I.

### 1. Introduction: 'omphaloskepsis', or self-contemplating art

Life is a Maske disguis'd & puft with pleasures,  
Whose ground is but a common Cinque-pace.  
The meaner sort doe onely tread the measures  
High lofty trickes note those of higher place.  
(Anon. qtd. in Walls 1996: 15)

The study of 'metaization' is a relatively recent phenomenon. Even though the potential for a self-reflexive investigation, within a work of art, of its ontological status as a work of art has probably existed almost as long as art itself (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 71), the concept as such has only been brought to our attention since the 'regular' emergence (in late 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century art) and more recent abundance of self-reflexivity in contemporary, predominantly postmodern culture.

Metaization is a concept that originated in the mono-medial context of literary studies only a few decades ago, and systematic investigations that led to the development of theoretical reflections and metareferential typologies were conducted mainly in the field of

‘metafiction’ (a term coined in 1970 by William Gass and Robert Scholes).

More recently the concept has been taken up (as have some other concepts developed in literary studies), in an attempt to adapt and ‘transfer’ it to other media, by intermedia studies (see Hauthal et al., eds. 2007, Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007, for a detailed discussion cf. Wolf in this vol.: sec. 2), a most conclusive and useful distinction being introduced by Wolf between self-reflexive and metareferential devices (see Wolf 2007) which will also be used in this paper.

One further attempt at bridging the gap between literature and the other arts and media was the conference on “Metareference in the Arts and Media” (organized at the Univ. of Graz in 2008) and the ensuing present volume, whose professed aim it is to contribute to the development of the study of meta-phenomena in a wider context calling for contributions on various other forms of art and media, such as film, music, painting, photography, architecture, computer games, etc.

In this paper, we would like to take a look at dance as yet another non-language based medium that has so far received very little attention in the discussion of meta-phenomena and only recently been introduced into the discourse of intermedia studies at large (see Pfandl-Buchegger/Rottensteiner 2008). It will be our aim to apply the concept of metareferentiality and its subforms to a particular form of dance in order to investigate whether dance, like other media, has a capacity for metaization, whether it is possible to trace evidence of metaization even in a very early form of dance, and if so, which of the subforms of metareferentiality are applicable to it.

For this reason, we have chosen, as an example for illustration, not contemporary dance but a historical form of a multi-medial courtly entertainment that was centred on dance, the Jacobean masque, which in addition to being an exceptionally rare and fortunate instance of a documented intra-systemic self-reference in early dance should be particularly interesting to explore with regard to the functions and possible reasons for the use of self-reflexive forms in a period perhaps not immediately associated with meta-phenomena.

For while reflections on dancing can be found in dance treatises and poems of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as for example in Sir John Davies’ poem “Orchestra, or a Poem of Dauncing” (1594), reflections on dance within the medium of dance itself are very difficult to trace in early forms of this art. This is due to the elusiveness of dance – as a performance art, dance (especially in times before filmic or electronic recordings were available) was an immediate and unique

experience of which there are hardly any records, and, as a non-discursive medium, it was subject to conditions that were different from reproducible art forms (see Franko/Richards, eds. 2000).

One exceptional case, however, of a thematisation of the form and content of a dance performance can be found in the court masque, a highly ornate festive entertainment at Renaissance courts featuring a multi-medial synthesis of dance, music, poetry, architecture and costume design. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the court of James I, the Jacobean or Stuart masque reached its heyday in the collaboration between poet laureate Ben Jonson and the famous architect and stage designer Inigo Jones and developed a special form of implicit 'commentary' to highlight the message of the performance by offering a contrasting 'prelude' to the main body – a so-called anti-masque.

As there is no 'explicit' linguistic evidence, it can only be called an implicit commentary (see Nöth in this vol.) with possible meta-implications, and evidence of even the 'existence' of such a commentary is difficult to trace in the work itself, of which there is very little left: no choreographies (due to the lack of standard choreographic notation and the fact that all the choreographies composed for the masques performed at Whitehall were lost), hardly any musical scores, some of Inigo Jones' sketches for costumes and stage design, and Ben Jonson's poetic texts. In spite of this, the Court masque is still "arguably the best-documented dramatic art form in early seventeenth-century England", according to Ravelhofer (2006: 5), who names booklets, eyewitness' letters, and financial records as offering additional information on the performances at court.

Jonson's masque texts have recently undergone a revival of critical interest focussing on a possible alternative reading to their professed panegyric of royal policies and courtly virtues. While the king, his censors (the Master of Revels, by whom the 'Argument' of the proposed spectacle had to be licensed) and critics for centuries read them as straightforward praise in favour of the monarch, contemporary critics claim to have detected evidence of subversive criticism in the masque texts. In 1929 Enid Welsford still deplored the lack of critical commentary and humour in the masques as a lost opportunity for improving the genre: "The poets might have done great things with the masque, if sometimes they would have turned the anti-masque into sly criticism or parody of the main masque" (1929: 391). More recent criticism (see Mickle 1999, McManus 2002, Ravelhofer 2006,

McDermott 2007 and others<sup>1</sup>), interestingly, by having recourse to extra-textual elements and the socio-cultural background of the period, reads into the antimasque precisely what Welsford finds wanting: the potential to undermine the intended effect of disorder metamorphosed into order and harmony in the main masque.

This paper wants to add yet another piece of evidence to this discussion using a different vantage point. While most critics rely on Jonson's poetical texts to illustrate the undermining effects of the antimasques, in this paper, we would like to analyze dance as a non-linguistic, and thus more subtle, form of subversion, one more difficult to detect by the Master of the Revels or even an audience that could be easily impressed by the resplendent surface of spectacular court entertainment or, as in the case of visiting foreign diplomats, the flattering attention of the royal family during or after the performance as a token of political favour<sup>2</sup>. As masques were predominantly dance events, we will focus on the performance character of the masque (using, as an example, the *Masque of Queens* as containing the first antimasque to become a structurally integrated part of the form) and support our arguments, due to the lack of choreographies, with reference to Jonson's annotations as descriptions of the performance.

By highlighting the differences in the aesthetic principles on which the masque and antimasque were constructed we would like to delineate the contrast between the two parts – a contrast that would have been so marked and so obvious to the aristocratic spectatorship that the performance of the antimasque could only be 'read' as a self-referential commentary on the conventions and signifying practices of the masque as a genre, as well as of the structure and content of the main body of the specific masque performed.

<sup>1</sup> See especially Mickle 1999 for a discussion of subversive elements.

<sup>2</sup> For the importance of the masque as a diplomatic as well as a social event see Braun/Gugerli 1993; cf. also Sullivan 1913: 2–11. As is shown by the comments and letters of various foreign ambassadors to their kings, masques were an index of the political orientation of the Court. The French ambassador Boderie, for instance, was happy to inform his king that "l'edit Roi & le Comte de Salisbury ont déclaré & rendu comme public que cette fête ne se faisoit principalement que pour l'amour de moi" (qtd. in *ibid.*: 218; 'the King and the Count of Salisbury have declared and made public that this festivity was arranged principally for my sake' [my translation]). The performance of the *Masque of Queens* was even postponed for almost a month (from Twelfth Night to Candlemas), until the Spanish ambassador had finally embarked for the continent, as the King wanted to invite only the French ambassador, but was also careful to avoid a political affront (cf. Jonson 1950: 497).

As we are dealing with an implicit, non-verbal form of metareferentiality, and the perception of metareferentiality thus depends on the cooperation of the audience and its awareness of frame-markers in the general setting of the performance, we will also include evidence from other dance-external 'ingredients' of the masque, which, as we mentioned earlier, was a multi-medial form, and support our arguments with reference to the use of music, language, costumes, and stage design in order to show that these contrasts on the level of dance were not accidental but a consistent, intentional device that can be traced on every other level of the performance, thus making the antithetical structure with its massive intra-compositional self-references part of the meaning of the masque.

## 2. The masque – a dance event

The masque developed out of pageants, mummings and disguisings which presented symbolic figures and allegorical and mythological themes around a masqued dance. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the masque had become a lavish and costly court entertainment that presented "an idealized vision of court life" (Knowles 2003: 531) and was used for celebrating festive occasions (Twelfth Night or Candlemas, weddings, etc.). At the time of the Stuarts, the masque was an instrument of royal propaganda for the celebration of the legality, pacifism and social harmony of James' regime (of his vision of a united nation of 'Great Britain') and provided a vehicle of pompous flattery for courtiers and artists.

Early masques were traditionally preceded by a dance of antics, a spectacle of acrobatic dancing and clowning (in the tradition of carnivalesque Misrule and foolery) performed by professional actors, that served as a liberating prelude to the serious allegory that was to follow in the masque. These 'dances of antics' developed into 'antic-masques', also spelt 'ante-masques' (as preceding the main masques), or 'anti-masques' (as providing a contrast to the main masque).

The main element was the dance, as is shown by the structure of the masque which was composed of antimasque, masque, and revels. All three parts contained dancing, but the highlights were the three dances of the masque – the entry dance, main dances and exit dance, that were introduced and commented on by songs – and the revels. The importance of dancing can also be deduced from the amount of



time dedicated to dancing (several hours), and to rehearsing (several weeks).

Another characteristic of the masque connected with dancing was its performativity as expressed in the inclusion of the audience in the revels: the masque came into being through being celebrated together – by the masquers descending from the stage and inviting the spectators to dance<sup>3</sup>. The singularity of historical performance in general thus applies to an even greater degree to the masque. Masque performances were unique experiences: the texts, music and songs, dances, and costumes were especially devised for the particular event they celebrated, which also accounts for the enormous amounts of money (several thousands of pounds, cf. Scholz 2005: 68, Jonson 1950: 491–493) spent mainly on costumes and scenery – for one single performance.

Dancing, in those days, was after all a royal pastime (both Elizabeth and the Stuart kings were skilled dancers<sup>4</sup>) and it was considered an ideal means of forming and exercising the body, in rigorous daily training from early childhood, for the proper accomplishment of one's duties at court according to the courtly ideal of control, refinement and grace<sup>5</sup>.

\* \* \*

Ben Jonson was the first to conceive of the masque not merely as an expensive 'great show', a moveable tableau made up of music, dance, dramatic dialogue, and spectacular costumes and scenery, but as an organic form: by integrating the theatrical element of the antimasque with the conventions of the masque he created a new coherence between the various parts of the masque that before him, especially

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<sup>3</sup> This transitoriness, the enjoyment of the present moment, and the awareness of participating in a live event were part of the attraction of the masque for the audience and the masquers.

<sup>4</sup> James I, though unable to dance himself, was well-known for his love of athletic dancing and focussed his attention primarily on the dance performance of his male favourites, on whom he lavished titles, honours and money (as in the case of George Villiers, later to become Duke of Buckingham, who was allegedly the best dancer of his age, and to whom the French dancing master François de Lauze dedicated an early dance treatise, *Apologie de la danse*, in 1623).

<sup>5</sup> This courtly ideal was also a guiding principle of the masque with its strong sense of decorum and ideal of classic order, balance and harmony (cf. Orgel 1969: 19).

during the reign of the Tudors, had been divided into distinct segments of dialogue and dancing in the masque, and of ‘antics’<sup>6</sup>.

The first masque to display this organic coherence was the *Masque of Queens*, for which Jonson invented an intentional thematic contrast between the show of antics and the main body of the masque, a contrast that was also expressed in the structure of the masque, – on the various levels created by the artists who collaborated in the composition of the masque: in dance (in the choreographies devised by the royal dancing masters), in the music (in the structural difference in the music between antimasque and masque, as composed by the renowned lutenist and composer Alfonso Ferrabosco), in the costumes and stage design (as devised by Jonson’s famous collaborator Inigo Jones), and in the use of language (by Jonson himself). On each of these levels, a ‘comment’ is provided on the ‘proper’ and ‘accepted’ way of performing the respective art through a differential ‘irregular’ use of the sanctioned rules.

### 3. *The Masque of Queens* as an example of metareference

The *Masque of Queens*, performed at Whitehall Palace on Candlemas, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1609, lends itself to an analysis in the context of metareferentiality not only because it was the first masque to have a structurally integrated antimasque. It also has, in its printed form (in the 1616 folio edition of the *Works of Ben Jonson*), the most comprehensive annotations, which far outweigh the masque text and are an invaluable source of information in their elaborate description of the actual performance. In addition to this it contains ambiguities on several levels, even for an audience at court. It was commissioned by Queen Anna, one of Jonson’s patrons at court, who had her own royal household at Denmark House and pursued her own private and political interests<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of the history and development of the masque see Lefkowitz 2007: online.

<sup>7</sup> And purportedly, her own religion – being a covert Catholic, as was Jonson (cf. McManus 2002: 138 and Knowles 2003: 531). Writing masques for the Queen or Prince Henry required skill and subtlety from Jonson who was intent on pleasing his patrons without contracting the displeasure of the King. In the *Masque of Queens* Jonson managed to include the whole royal family – he glorified Anna by assigning to her the role of Bel-Anna, Queen of the Oceans, who unites in her person all the virtues of the other queens presented in the masque; he flattered the King (including

At the request of the queen, Jonson, in this masque, introduced a new dramatic device that was to fix the norm of the masque for years and led to a significant redefinition of the genre:

And because her Ma.<sup>tie</sup> (best knowing, that a principall part of life in these *Spectacles* lay in they<sup>r</sup> variety) had commaunded mee to think on some *Daunce*, or shew, that might praecede hers, and haue the place of a foyle, or false-*Masque*; I was carefull to decline not only from others, but mine owne stepps in that kind, since the (In the *Masque* at my L. Hading. wedding) last yeare I had an *Anti-Masque* of Boyes: and therefore, now, deuise'd that twelue Women, in the habite of *Haggs*, or *Witches*, sustayning the persons of *Ignorance*, *Suspicion*, *Credulity*, &c. the opposites to good *Fame*, should fill that part; not as a *Masque*, but a spectacle of strangenesse, producing multiplicity of Gesture, and not vnaptly sorting w<sup>h</sup> the current, and whole fall of the Deuise. (Jonson 1941: 282, ll. 10–22).

In order to create a stark contrast to the main masque and its theme, Jonson thus invented a “foyle, or false-*Masque*” with twelve witches or hags as representatives of ignorance, chaos, disorder, and impropriety, as opposed to an equal number of legendary queens, symbols of order, harmony, and female virtue under the guidance of (male) Heroic Virtue in the main masque. The hags perform a kind of witches’ sabbat casting a number of spells in which they threaten to overthrow not only the order of the court but also the masque itself (“to ouerthrow the glory of this night” [Jonson 1941: 287, l. 113]) and unleash chaos upon the world. In the middle of their ignominious “*magicall Daunce*, full of praeposterous change, and gesticulation” (ibid.: 301, ll. 345–346), loud blasts of music are heard that send them running back into their “ougly *Hell*” (ibid.: 282, ll. 24–25) to be replaced, with a turn of the stage machinery, by the House of Fame, the palace of Good Fame (daughter to Heroic Virtue), on which the masquers are seated, waiting to descend and be introduced by the ‘Presenter’ Heroic Virtue. The splendour of the scenery, costumes and jewellery, and the ‘variety’ and perfection of the performance of the royal masquers was supposed to supplant all memory of the threaten-

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references to James’ *Daemonologie*, 1590) by contrasting the queens to witches in the antimasque, thus choosing a topic that was not only of great interest to an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience but especially dear to the monarch in his scholarly ambitions; to Prince Henry he dedicated the printed text, which, at the request of the Prince, contained copious annotations, a clever display of Jonson’s erudition and classical scholarship by lengthy references to his Latin and Greek sources. Additionally, Jonson, in collaboration with the dancing master, even found a way of including Prince Charles, the younger son and later King Charles I, by having the dancers form the letters of the Prince’s name in the main dance (see below).

ing and undignified disruption of the witches by reestablishing order, peace and harmony as emblematic of divine harmony and symbolic of James' reign (as the worldly representative of cosmic harmony), and as characteristic of the dances of the main masque in general.

### 3.1. Dance

Main-masque dances were demonstrations of graceful and vivid dancing. The performers were able to display their skill in dancing and perfect control of their bodies and, most importantly, – in keeping with the concept of 'sprezzatura' –, the effortless ease of their movements<sup>8</sup>.

The dancing of the queens is, accordingly, described by Jonson as "right curious, and full of subtile, and excellent Changes, [...] performed w<sup>h</sup> no lesse spirits, then those they personated" (1941: 315, ll. 733–735).

Another example of "the non-exhibitionistic display of graceful and alert movement" (Lefkowitz 2007: online) in the *Masque of Queens* and a culmination of order and symmetry is the geometrically arranged composition of the letters of the name of the younger Prince Charles:

[...] a more *numerous* composition could not be seen: *graphically* dispos'd into *letters*, and honouring the Name of the most sweet, and ingenious *Prince, Charles, Duke of Yorke*. Wherin, beside that principall grace of perspicuity, the motions were so euen, & apt, and they<sup>r</sup> expression so iust; as if *Mathematicians* had lost *proportion*, they might there haue found it. The *Autor* was M<sup>r</sup>. *Tho. Giles*. (Jonson 1941: 315f., ll. 749–756).

The masque dances (composed by Thomas Giles, the dancing teacher of Prince Henry) were performed exclusively by courtiers, in the case of the *Masque of Queens* by Queen Anna's ladies in waiting.

In contrast to this, the more acrobatic dances of the antimasque, that also contained elements of pantomime, were executed by professional actors who were also skilled in dancing. For the *Masque of Queens* the choreography of these dances was devised by Hierome Herne, who was Queen Anna's dancing master. The difference be-

<sup>8</sup> 'Sprezzatura', the ability "to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it", 'wearing a masque', so to speak, of nonchalance and grace, is described by Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier* (2002: 32) as the most important quality of a courtier, an essential asset for survival in a highly competitive society (see also Elias 1969 and Greenblatt 2005).

tween masque and antimasque is, in this case, even reinforced by the different personalities of the choreographers.

| Conventions:<br>world of the masque                                                                                           | Travesty of conventions:<br>world of the witches                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| order<br><i>in the performance of the dance and the design</i>                                                                | disorder (chaos)<br><i>chaotic performance of the witches</i>                                                                                                             |
| perfection (completion)<br><i>perfect accomplishment of the intended order and proposed design</i>                            | imperfection<br><i>inability to complete and carry out their design</i>                                                                                                   |
| geometrical forms<br>“a more <i>numerous</i> composition could not be seen: <i>graphically</i> dispos’d into <i>letters</i> ” | irregular form, disproportion<br>“ <i>praeposterous</i> change”, “strange phantastique motions”                                                                           |
| symmetry and harmony<br>“motions ... so euen, & apt”                                                                          | lack of symmetry and harmony<br><i>uneven and unapt (twitching) movements</i>                                                                                             |
| organised action<br><i>descending of Masquers, carrying out dances, binding and containing the witches</i>                    | lack of organised action<br><i>impotence to organise their behaviour, or call forth their leader Dame (3 attempts), unsuccessful summoning of evil spirits (9 charms)</i> |
| ease, regular movement<br>“in well-shaped figures”<br>“no lesse elegant [...] then the rest”                                  | irregular, unrestrained movement (abruptness, violence)<br><i>hip to hip, anti-clockwise, back to back, “strange and phantastique motions”</i>                            |
| variety and novelty<br>“subtle and excellent change”, “singular variety”<br><i>numerous compositions</i><br>“right curious”   | chaos and chance<br>“ <i>praeposterous</i> change”, “strange phantastique motions”, awkward                                                                               |
| propriety<br><i>virtuous queens</i>                                                                                           | impropriety<br>“see euery foote be bare; And euery knee” “ <i>praeposterous</i> ”                                                                                         |
| silence and musical harmony                                                                                                   | strange music, curses                                                                                                                                                     |

Table 1: Conventions and travesty of the conventions of the masque<sup>9</sup>

The dances used in the antimasque were made up of “all thinges contrary to the costume of Men” (ibid.: 301, ll. 347–348), as is illustrated

<sup>9</sup> For the quotations see the references in the text.

in the *Masque of Queens* by “a repository of all that was un-courtly” executed, moreover, by “transvestite professional male players” (McManus 2002: 24) – by strange absurd gestures, twisted and jerking movements of the head and body, abrupt changes and even anti-clockwise circles in which, instead of facing each other, the witches danced back-to-front, with their backs turned to the inside of the circle. Jonson describes their behaviour as “a spectacle of strangeness” that was “full of praeposterous change” (as opposed to the “variety” and “subtile, and excellent Changes” of the queens’ movements [1941: 282, l. 20]) and impropriety – baring their feet and knees (cf. *ibid.*: 296, l. 246), untying the knots in their hair or clothing before doing magic (as a sign of unrestraint, cf. *ibid.*: 295, l. 220<sup>10</sup>) or “beat[ing] the Ground with vipers” (*ibid.*: 298, ll. 288–289), movements described by witch-hunters’ manuals that must have had a very disturbing and threatening impact on a Jacobean audience familiar with these identifying marks of witchcraft (cf. Ravelhofer 2006: 193, and Howard 1998: 123f.):

At wh<sup>ch</sup>, w<sup>h</sup> a strange and sodayne Musique, they fell into a *magicall Daunce*, full of praeposterous change, and gesticulation, but most applying to they<sup>r</sup> property: who, at they<sup>r</sup> meetings, do all thinges contrary to the costume of Men, dauncing back to back, hip to hip, they<sup>r</sup> hands ioyn’d, and making they<sup>r</sup> *circles* backward, to the left hand, w<sup>h</sup> strange phantastique motions of they<sup>r</sup> heads, and bodyes. All wh<sup>ch</sup> were excellently imitated by the Maker of the *Daunce*, M<sup>r</sup>. Hierome Herne [...]. (Jonson 1941: 301, ll. 344–353)

In this juxtaposition of the different ways of dancing in the anti-masque and main masque, a number of oppositions can be distinguished that are indicative of the conventions on one hand and the travesty or parody of the conventions on the other: they can only be understood as an intentional *comical* self-reference that served to enhance the comedy and burlesque of the antimasque on the one hand, and the nobility and refinement of the main masque on the other, through a heightened contrast, and provided additional intellectual enjoyment to the spectators who were able to ‘perceive’ this connection between the established conventions of the masque form and the perverted performance of the witches. Such a comic effect – through the breach of the conventions and of decorum – cannot be achieved without eliciting, in the audience, some awareness of the medial conventions of the masque and of the semiotic system of dance that are

<sup>10</sup> Jonson explains this in the margin as “when they are going to some fatall businesse” (1941: 295).

being disrupted, and it also relies heavily on the familiarity of the spectators with the rules of decorum that apply to performances (and behaviour) at court, thus creating a double consciousness of an object-level and a meta-level and serving as a metareferential comment both on the conventions of dancing, and on the form and content of the main masque, and, additionally, also on the genre of the masque and the codified customs of courtly entertainment. Without such an awareness the spectacle would have lost the additional dimension of intellectual comical entertainment and would have been reduced to a magnificent but familiar, and thus flat and static show.

The witches' movements pervert the established, 'correct' order of dancing which leads to disorder and chaos, the "ultimate threat" to a Renaissance audience for whom "the villain", as Orgel points out, is always "disorder, misrule, Mutability" (1965: 134). This conflict between "the two kinds of dancing" is also the central action of the masque (cf. *ibid.*: 147), which otherwise has no room for conflict, being an emblem of a stable, platonic universe in which no change or progress is possible or even desirable. The structure of the masque is strictly antithetical, a juxtaposition of absolute good and absolute evil, of abstract virtue and abstract vice that is mutually exclusive and thus cannot be resolved but only supplanted by an elaborate scene shift (cf. *ibid.*: 138f.). The *Masque of Queens* is the first masque in which this antithesis is structurally coherent and provides a meaningful contrast, the main element of which is dance.

As mentioned before, this violation of order, decorum and propriety in the irregular and unrestrained movements of the witches on the level of dance is mirrored on every other level of the performance, on each of which a disturbed and perverted order has to be transformed and familiarized into order, harmony and proportion: on the levels of music, language, stage design, and costumes.

### 3.2. Music and instruments

The antithetical structure is also expressed in the music of the dances, both in the structure of the music and in the instruments used for its execution.

### 3.2.1. Music

In accordance with the general guiding principles of the masque of order and harmony, main-masque dance tunes were balanced and metrically undisturbed (two duple strains, often with a concluding triple strain). In contrast to this, antimasque dances tended to be longer, they often had more than three strains, their rhythm was less balanced, and they contained sudden and unexpected metrical changes.

### 3.2.2. Instruments

According to the established code of instruments associated with harmony, the main instruments used in the masque were lutes, violins and viols, but also harps and cornets. Thus, in the *Masque of Queens*, the first dance “was to the Cornets, the second to the Violins” (Jonson 1941: 315, ll. 735–736).

The instruments mainly used in the antimasque, which characteristically accounted for the difference in sound and rhythm, were mainly less dignified instruments such as tabor, bagpipes, pipe, tamburin, cymbals, flutes and percussion. In the *Masque of Queens* the witches are not only accompanied by a “hollow and infernall musique”, they themselves use even meaner objects to produce a “confused noyse” by means of “spindells, timbrells, rattles, or other *veneficall* instruments” (ibid.: 283, ll. 34–35) and add their own shouts and clamours to the ever-increasing cacophony of “barking, howling, hissing” (as Jonson describes it in the margin, ibid.: 283), as their incantations grow more and more urgent and insistent.

### 3.3. Language

It is significant that in order to ‘advance’ and carry out their charms and incantations, the witches have recourse to rhythm and movement:

“Àround, àround, / Àround, àround, / Till a Musique sound, / And the pase be found, / To wh<sup>h</sup> we may daunce; / And o<sup>r</sup> *charmes* aduaunce” (ibid.: 300, ll. 338–343).

They not only use wrong stresses to emphasize the dance beat (demonstrating their barbaric disregard of poetic and linguistic rules), the language in the antimasque in general is unrhythmical, made up of trochaic, iambic and dactylic meter and couplets of varying length, full of run-on-lines, internal rhymes, etc.



In contrast to this, in the main masque, the presenter Heroic Virtue and his daughter Fame (the only professional actors in the main masque, who also spoke – as opposed to the mute aristocratic masquers) largely speak in refined heroic couplets (rhymed iambic pentameter).

Even though language is used not only in the theatrical antimasque, but also to some extent in the main masque – though only in the songs and in the parts spoken by the ‘Presenter’, who presents the masquers and identifies the allegorical figures they ‘personate’, and delivers the all-important flattering address to the monarch – there are no linguistic metareferential comments in the text, apart from the afore-mentioned (implicit) contrastive use of language in the antimasque and masque.

### 3.4. Stage design and costumes

The most blatant visual elements that emphasize the division between the antimasque world and the masque world are the stage design and the costumes.

#### 3.4.1. Stage design

These two worlds were the “ougly *Hell*” of the witches (complete with fire and smoke) and the courtly setting of the “House of Fame” (“a glorious and magnificent Building”, *ibid.*: 301f., ll. 359–360), a deliberate reference to Chaucer’s description in his long poem, which the spectators were obviously expected to recognize (cf. also Jonson 1950: 494, 508). The introduction of new stage technologies and the latest achievements in pyrotechnics allowed for spectacular effects: the required metamorphosis from the lawless and chaotic ‘under-world’ of darkness of the witches into the world of light as represented by the court and the monarch was effected by the sudden turn of the ‘*machina versatilis*’, a much acclaimed invention by Inigo Jones, while the torches of the torchbearers and numerous candles behind multi-coloured glazing enhanced the glamour of costumes and jewels.

#### 3.4.2. Costumes

The costumes in the main masque were designed in vibrant colours and indicative of the historical figures of the queens and the ‘female’ virtues they represented. A closer look at Anna’s choice of queens,

however, indicates that the *Masque of Queens* held a certain amount of controversial potential beneath its smooth surface of ‘bad femininity’ (the witches) vs. ‘good femininity’ (the queens). Due to the combination of “martial leadership” and “marital virtue” (McDermott 2007: 45f.) the queens are not only “historical icons of loyal [faithful wives]” (ibid.: 6, cf. also Ravelhofer 2006: 194–196), but also strong and independent militant warrior queens (some of great ferocity and bravery), as is also expressed by their costumes (see, e. g., Penthesilea, the legendary Amazon queen in *Illustration 1*).



*Illustration 1: Inigo Jones, “Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons” (1608). Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.*

As such, they represent notions of ‘femininity’ that were certainly different from the ideals prevailing at court (determined by male authority), most particularly at the court of a king renowned for his love of peace who had an abhorrence of violence due to traumatizing childhood experiences (cf. McDermott 2007: 9). Considering Anna’s position at court, they may have been ‘viewed’ as an expression of feminine non-conformity on the side of an assertive queen by some<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See also the critical reactions of a rather more conservative audience than at other European courts to, e. g., the *Mask of Blackness* and other ‘female’ masques (cf. McManus 2002: 121f.).

McManus' description of the costumes as "transgressions of the courtly codes of feminine physical decorum" that "pushed the constraints of the genre convention of the English model of performance" (2002: 122) needs, however, to be relativized. Courtly performers who dressed up as dancing female warriors (with helmets and breast plates) were part of courtly entertainments at Italian and French courts of the time and thus familiar to the audience.

The real contrast to the queens is again presented in the antimasque, by the witches and their attire, "some, w<sup>h</sup> ratts on they<sup>r</sup> heads; some, on they<sup>r</sup> shoulders; others w<sup>h</sup> oyntment-potts at they<sup>r</sup> girdles; [...] vipers, snakes, bones, herbes, rootes, and other ensignes of they<sup>r</sup> *Magick*" (Jonson 1941: 283, ll. 32–40). Dame, the leader of the witches, appears "naked-arm'd, bare-footed, her frock tuck'd, her hayre knotted, and folded w<sup>h</sup> vipers; In her hand, a Torch made of a dead-Mans arme, lighted; girded w<sup>h</sup> a snake" (ibid.: 286, ll. 95–98), again perverting every 'established' notion of 'femininity' through her apparel (as she does through her behaviour) and much resembling a Fury (see *Illustration 2*).



*Illustration 2: Workshop of Henry de Gissey, fury costume from the Ballet des Noces de Pélée et de Thétis (1654). Musée Carnavalet, Paris.*

\* \* \*

As can be seen from this discussion, Jonson deliberately conceived of his masques as oppositional forms, establishing a contrast between masque and antimasque and drawing a distinct line between a grotesque 'antic' and its transformation into an elegant performance of the fashionable courtly dances. By integrating the antimasque in the structure of the overall design, and relying on the familiarity of his audience with the conventions of court entertainments to enhance this contrast, thus raising the awareness of the representationality of the performance, he changed the perception, and thus the meaning, of the main masque. The antimasque for Jonson, was not "a simple antithesis to the world of the revels, but essentially [...] another aspect of it, a world that", by metareferentially commenting on the form and content of the main masque, could "therefore ultimately be accommodated to and even included in the ideals of the main masque" (Orgel 1969: 13). What finally needs to be emphasized, however, is the fact that even in view of all these contrasts between antimasque and masque, every element of the performance at court still had to be contained within the boundaries of established decorum and the aesthetic norms of the period, "non-courtly dance did not involve dancing badly, but differently" (McManus 2002: 24) – "the ANTIMASQUE", as is also confirmed by *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, "gained its expressiveness by a kind of EXPANSION – but not removal – of boundaries" (Lefkowitz 2007: online).

#### 6. Forms and functions of metareferentiality in *The Masque of Queens*

In the introduction to this volume, Wolf defines metareferentiality in the arts and media as "a special, transmedial form of usually non-accidental self-reference produced by signs or sign configurations [...] located on a logically higher level, a 'meta-level', within an artefact or performance, [which] forms or implies a statement about an object-level, namely on (aspects of) the medium/system referred to", and thus elicits "an at least minimal corresponding 'meta-awareness'" (namely an awareness of the medial status of a work or of media-related phenomena) in the recipient (31).

As can be seen from our discussion, the antimasque (in the *Masque of Queens*) could be called a special form of non-accidental (i. e., in

the sense that it is intended by the ‘authors’) self-reference within an artefact or performance that forms or implies a statement about an object-level, namely on aspects of the system referred to, the system being both the particular masque under discussion and the genre of the masque in general, both heavily relying on dance as a medium. This self-reference by means of sign configurations located on a logically higher ‘meta-level’ (the comical travesty of the form and codified customs of the masque), arguably elicits, in the recipients, an at least minimal meta-awareness of the medial status of the work and of the semiotic system referred to – i. e., it triggers in the spectators an awareness of the forms and conventions of the court masque as a signifying system and renders the mediality or representationality of the performance an object of more or less active reflection (as the audience would certainly not have perceived the antimasque as mere tom-foolery and clowning unrelated to the following event, as in the tradition of the masque before Jonson).

This is achieved, as we have seen, by means of salient deviation from, and a subsequent defamiliarisation of, the conventions of the masque form (first and foremost on the level of dance, but also on several other levels): through the excessive, comical, even grotesque use of systemic conventions, such as contrast, mirroring (twelve queens vs. twelve witches), or repetition on various levels, thereby foregrounding and laying bare these conventions and, through the activation of a medium-awareness, creating an aesthetic distance.

## 6.1. Forms of metareferentiality

### 6.1.1. Implicit vs. explicit metareferentiality

Because it is a non-verbal form of art, dance as a medium cannot be ‘explicitly’ metareferential in the narrow sense of the term (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 46) and will always have to rely on the cooperation of the recipients for the emergence of the double consciousness required for bearing in mind, at one and the same time, the individual work of art and its mediality.

As a partly representational medium, dance can, however, imitate and ‘quote’ other forms of dance (or, e. g., represent a dancer in the act of dancing), thus presenting an obvious reference to the established conventions of these forms or genres (which is frequently the case in modern dance).

In the antimasque, dance can only provide an implicit form of self-referentiality with meta-implications through the deviant and highly irregular use of the accepted rules of the genre, thereby not only foregrounding the medial conventions, but essentially changing the reception, and thus the meaning, of the whole performance. It has to rely, for the recognition of these irregularities, on the one hand on contextual markers, such as the frame of an evening entertainment at court and its etiquette, and the willingness and ability of the spectators to perceive these differences and simultaneously appreciate the fictional performed world and the art of performance (which presupposes familiarity with and an internalisation of the medial conventions by the audience). On the other hand, one can also relate it to intermedial frames of reference (on other medial levels). As we have tried to show, this foregrounding of the conventional use of the signifying system on the level of dance is emphasized by parallel structural irregularities on all other medial levels. Even though there is a linguistic level, it does, however, not contain explicit metareferential expressions, but there is still the text-external linguistic evidence to be found in Jonson's "Argument of the Masque" (1950: 318) and in his annotations, which are a clear testimony to his intentions of creating a thematic and structural contrast to the main masque.

#### 6.1.2. Intra-compositional vs. extra-compositional metareferentiality

Jonson's masques are examples of both intra-compositional and extra-compositional metareferentiality. Intra-compositional metareference (operating within the work) is provided through comical contrast to the topic, the figures and the dances of the main masque, as anti-masque and masque are taken as one work of art, the antimasque having become an integrated part of the whole performance.

The antimasque also contains extra-compositional metareferential elements (that transcend the confines of the performance) in its implicit commentary on the genre 'masque' and its message and function in general.

Additionally, Jonson's texts are also highly intertextual (containing references to the classical authors, or, as in the case of the *Masque of Queens*, to James' *Daemonologie* and to current depictions of witches and witchcraft).

### 6.1.3. Fictio- or mediality-centred vs. fictum- or truth/fiction-centred metareferentiality

In contrast to music, with which it has a great affinity, dance as a non-verbal but at least partly representational medium also has a fictum-dimension. Dance can create fictional worlds and represent them on a stage and thus also address questions of fictional or real reference. As far as dance in the masque is concerned, it is important to keep the clear distinction between masque and antimasque in mind. Masques are not only a highly complex mixture of various media, they are also part of a social event (an evening entertainment at court). As a non-mimetic form that still retains traces of a ritual, the masque itself is a performative act. Whereas in the antimasque professional actors ‘enact’ their roles, which makes their performance a genuine ‘representation’ (with a fictional quality), in the main masque the courtiers ‘are’ the living embodiment of the virtue or allegorical figure that was assigned to them. Just as in a magical or religious context an idol or icon was not perceived as fiction, but as a living presence of the divine, the masquers are not perceived as enacting a role but, as Jonson calls it, “personat[ing]” it (1941: 315, l. 735). The masque still holds an almost religious message, that emphasizes the ‘divine’ status of the monarch: through the harmony, order and excellence of their actions and movements the dancers mirror and project, in their performance, the celestial harmony and order onto this world, which the spectators, by experiencing it, can share, admire and imitate (cf. Meagher 1966: 104). The change of frame from a serious religious context to the profane frame of an evening entertainment at court creates a hiatus between a medieval ritual and mimetic drama. As part of a social event it has a “social function with an esthetic quality” (Welsford 1929: 356) and elicits, not yet an aesthetic illusion, but an intermediate form between ritual and aesthetic illusion – namely ‘ludic illusion’ (see Wolf 1993).

As a structurally incorporated part and a travesty and distortion of the conventions of the masque, the Jacobean antimasque also foregrounds the fictionality of the performance, its character as a work of art, and thus its ‘fictio’-dimension. This awareness of the fictional quality of the antimasque not as ‘real’ but as ‘reality represented through a medium’, as a theatrical event performed by actors, was a prerequisite for the introduction of taboo topics and inappropriate comical or threatening elements (such as witches or gypsies). This could never have been the case in the main masque. In the main

masque, in a still almost religious context, the “metareferential foregrounding of the representational status” (Wolf in this vol.: 26) would have been extremely disturbing.

#### 6.1.4. Critical vs. non-critical metareferentiality

In the antimasque we encounter critical metareflexivity, which creates an ironic or grotesquely comical distance, the antimasque showing off the sameness and stasis of the masque conventions. Due to the taste for ‘variety’ in Renaissance aesthetics, masque writers were increasingly confronted with complaints about boredom and dullness<sup>12</sup>. The antimasque appealed to the spectators through its high entertainment value and potential for conflict as opposed to the well-worn panegyric and static splendour of the main masque. This inevitably led to the growth of antimasque elements – the antimasques developed into dramatic scenes of their own, and for some time threatened even to outgrow and consume the main masque<sup>13</sup>.

The metareferential self-contemplation on the structural level opened up a new potential for innovation and variation that at the same time also had a thematic impact: the antimasque offered a possibility of introducing ‘unpoetable’ or even taboo-topics and characters into courtly society (in the guise of ‘representations’). This is why a strict division had to be maintained between the two parts, between ‘acting’ and ‘personating’. Only in the form of a representation was it possible and ‘acceptable’ for witches, gypsies or Irish footmen to ap-

<sup>12</sup> Orgel in *The Jonsonian Masque* (1965: 71) quotes Nathaniel Brent’s letter to Dudley Carleton on *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618) which Jonson revised after its first performance: it was provided with a burlesque antimasque of comic Welshmen to become *For the Honour of Wales* which was then “much better liked”: “The masque on 12th night is not commended of any. The poet is grown so dull that his devise is not worth the relating, much less the copying out. Divers think he should return to his ould trade of bricke laying again”. Another comment stated that “the invention proved dull” and that “it came far short of the expectation & Mr Inigo Jones hath lost his reputacion in regard some extraordinary devise was looked for (it being the Prince his first mask) and a poorer one was never sene” (ibid.: 72).

<sup>13</sup> Even Jonson was forced to acknowledge this tendency in his later masques (as, for example, in *Oberon* [1611], which contained two anti-masques, or in *Love Restored* in 1612 and in *Visions of Delight* in 1617). Welsford characteristically censors the “tendency to multiply the grotesque dances and imitate the bizarre inconsequences of French *ballet de court*” (1929: 198). For a brief period, under Charles I, however, the masque returned to a form of visual entertainment and was stripped of dialogue.



pear in the restricted society of the royal court – purportedly as negative examples, to provide an even sharper contrast to the performance of the masquers, but in actual fact it could also be seen as the intrusion of ‘the profane’ into the world of the ‘ideal’<sup>14</sup>.

Metaization was not only a permissible form of criticism of the established artistic conventions of court entertainment but may also have given rise to a different perception of the content of the masque, undermining the general message of panegyric and idealization and implying a covert subversive critique of the ethics and behaviour of the court. The self-reflexive inspection on the structural level may well have led some members of the audience to ‘read’ the antimasque also as an implicit commentary on the values and virtues attributed to the monarch and the court, and the discrepancy between the ‘ideal’, the emblem propagated by the main masque, and the reality at court. Such criticism was less obvious in a non-verbal medium such as dance that, nevertheless, appealed directly to the senses and whose signifying system and conventions were as familiar to every spectator at court as was language<sup>15</sup>. The antimasque may thus have served as a vehicle for the subliminal expression of the ill-will amongst established courtiers against a ‘foreign’ king of bawdy taste and with a strong inclination towards male favouritism (as 20<sup>th</sup>-century criticism likes to point out from a sometimes too boldly modern perspective<sup>16</sup>).

Such a reading is also supported by the poet Jonson himself, whose personality and professed aim in his writings suggest a differential dimension of subliminal criticism in his art in general. As a poet Jonson could only survive through pompous flattery of his patrons at court, but he was well-renowned for his satires and criticism in his comedies and other writings, deriding not only the “natural follies” of the city (as, e. g., in the “Prologue” to *The Alchemist*), but also those of the court by castigating aristocratic vice and royal insufficiency, though obviously in a less blatant and more indirect manner<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Howard 1998: 122–132 for the introduction of ‘alterity’ and its incorporation into courtly harmony and control.

<sup>15</sup> Compare also Ravelhofer, who speaks of a “diversified movement culture” (2006: 267) and suggests that dance may have been used as a kind of “non-verbal lingua franca” (ibid.: 266).

<sup>16</sup> “[The] antimasques during the same period honed in with increased intensity on vices associated with James I as well as members of his court.” (Marcus 2000: 35)

<sup>17</sup> Contemporary comments refer to players “not sparing either King, state or religion, in so great an absurdity, and with such liberty, that any one would be afraid

Jonson, who had even spent time in prison for his satirical writings, always insisted that his aim was a didactic one – to instruct rather than just to please, and most particularly in the case of his royal benefactors, “to instruct through praise” (Orgel 1969: 2)<sup>18</sup>. He strongly believed that “publique Spectacles”, in particular, “ought always to carry a mixture of profit, with them, no less than delight” (Jonson 1941: 735, ll. 6–7)<sup>19</sup>.

In the closed world at court an educated audience could be expected to decipher the message, and Jonson was convinced, as he states in the *Masque of Queens*, that “a *Writer* should alwayes trust somewhat to the capacity of the *Spectator*, especially at these *Spectacles*; Where Men, beside inquiring eyes, are vnderstood to bring quick eares, and not those sluggish ones of Porters and Mechanicks [...]” (ibid.: 287, ll. 108–110).

It is difficult to establish through hindsight whether a Jacobean audience would have perceived the spectacle of bragging witches (*Masque of Queens*), cursing Irishmen (*The Irish Masque at Court*) or marauding gypsies (*The Gypsies Metamorphosed*) as just an emphatic contrast to reinforce the order and harmony propagated by the main masque, as a welcome distraction from the well-known pattern of panegyric and decorum, or as an indirect metareferential comment and

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to hear them” (Samuel Calvert to Ralph Winwood, 28 March 1605, qtd. in Chambers, ed. 1912: 325), which James was obviously still willing to forgive as long as the spectacle concluded with “protestations of loyalty” (Knowles 2003: 530). Marcus, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, notes that especially from 1616 onwards, when Jonson had been appointed Poet Laureate, his satires grew more direct: “This bifurcation of masque structure between negative antimasque and its banishment or reformation in the main masque became the prototype for more ambitious, even reckless antimasques later on by which he was able to satirize the court, and sometimes royal, vice at the same time that he celebrated the beneficent rule of the King” (2000: 35f.).

<sup>18</sup> Craig speaks of “didactic clowning” (1998: 190). Marcus notes that “[f]requently, the very courtiers satirized in the antimasque would actually dance in the main masque” and that Jonson obviously felt that “[b]y displaying their transformation, the courtiers would promulgate a mimetic process by which they themselves had been transformed” (2000: 35).

<sup>19</sup> The “Preface” to *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis* (a Twelfth Night masque for Charles I performed in 1631) is expressly entitled “To make the Spectators understanders”. It was these attempts to preserve the literary and artistic quality of the masque and keep it from becoming mere entertainment (as was the case with Jonson’s contemporaries Samuel Daniel, Campion and others) that led to violent quarrels with Inigo Jones and eventually ended their cooperation.

even a subliminal satirical criticism (in a time of censorship and absolutist monarchy) on the far from ideal situation at court. Being surrounded by Renaissance iconography, courtiers were certainly well-trained through the perusal of literary allegory, emblem books and pageants, in 'reading' emblematic tableaux and symbolic action (cf. Meagher 1966: 6), and had acquired the 'cultural literacy', through numerous festivities, celebrations and works of art (and finally, apologetic dance treatises<sup>20</sup>) to associate their 'correct' use in art with order, harmony and proportion. They would thus also be aware of salient deviations from the accepted style of dancing and performing as in the antimasque. Whether we may also assume that they would associate this structural device with a semantic quality, with the discrepancy between the 'ideal' world represented in the masque and the 'real' world of the court and whether the new structural and semantic unity between masque and antimasque, by "deestablishing the traditional shape of the form and reshaping its semiotic structure" (Mickle 1999: 102), would have encouraged a reversal of the balance, with "the subtext of dissent" (ibid.: 99) undermining the intended message of Royal propaganda of the performance, and thus challenging and disrupting the ideals of the masque so that although the ideological values of the masque were asserted and order was ultimately reinstated, "the whiff of dissonance [remained] in the air" (ibid.: 3), is a difficult question to answer<sup>21</sup>. Through the use of metareferential devices, the antimasque may have acquired an additional thematic and theatrical impact that could have made it into the 'more attractive' and thus more memorable part of the performance. Thus, in spite of Jonson's claim in the *Masque of Queens* that the main masque removed every trace of the evils represented in the antimasque as "the *Scene* altered; scarce suffering the memory of any such thing" (1941: 301, ll. 357–359), their effect may have been more permanent than that of the static, mute and hyper-idealized allegories of 'established order' and may well have lingered on in the minds of the audience long after the close of the evening (cf. Ravelhofer 2006: 198).

That something may indeed have been 'in the air' is also suggested by the comment of one observer who obviously preferred the comfort and safety of tradition, decorum and political stability. Chamberlain's

<sup>20</sup> See first and foremost Lucian's apology of dancing from the second century A. D.

<sup>21</sup> *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* (Ward et al. 2000: online) even claims that in the *Masque of Queens* the "antimasque quite eclipses its masque. The queens are mere wax-works after the witches".

complaint that the performance had become “more like a play than a mask” (letter to Dudley Carleton from 1613, qtd. in Chambers 1923/1965, vol. 1: 243) suggests an uneasiness with the growth and increase of the theatrical element in the antimasque, as though he could sense the dangers of instability and imbalance, without perhaps realizing the inherent subversive potential, which did eventually lead to more daring and gross breaches of ceremony and decorum: in fact it was none other than Buckingham, relying on the King’s favour, who finally dared transgress the sacred dividing line between professional acting and courtly dance in a masque he commissioned of Jonson that scandalised the more ‘conservative’ members of the court – *The Masque of Gypsies at Court* or *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), in which he and his friends dressed up as gypsies that spoke and acted in the antimasque, and then proceeded to dance in the main masque and the revels.

For the majority of the spectators the masque will most probably have been a glittering spectacle, “a complex assault upon [the] five senses” (Ravelhofer 2006: 6), and a very efficient tool of royal propaganda, but courtiers familiar with courtly life and courtly entertainment may well have resisted the perceptual triggers inherent in the performance of a court masque by seeing in it a true ‘mirror’ of the court and its values, but in a negative definition of these values in the guise of a ‘distorting mirror’ in the old tradition of Misrule and clowning (cf. McDermott 2007: 41).

In a time when the conventions of dance, and of courtly entertainment were so confined and so well-known as to a Jacobean or Elizabethan audience at court, the form of the masque was so well-established, the censorship exercised by the Master of Revels so pervasive, and the rules of courtly behaviour so strictly defined, any form of ‘digression’ would of necessity have to be very subtle and difficult to pinpoint. As in most cases it could only occur in ‘comical’ form (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 71), and had to be contained within the limits of propriety and the fundamental principles of harmony, order and decorum that were considered appropriate to art. That such a digression could be more safely promoted in dance as a non-verbal medium is not surprising.

## 7. Conclusion

“THESE things are but toys, to come amongst such serious observations”.  
(Francis Bacon. *Of Masques and Triumphs*. 1627)

In the foregoing discussion, we hope to have shown that even a royal “toy” such as the masque was a highly complex artefact that, upon closer inspection, displays the artistic mastery of the best creative minds of the period, and in spite of, or perhaps because of its ‘lightness’ and seemingly effortless perfection stands the test of most serious observations. It is fascinating to witness that even in a confined and prescriptive society, art could find a way of aesthetically circumventing the restrictions of censorship and convention by turning upon itself and thus drawing attention to its own constructed nature, thereby creating in the recipients an awareness of the artificiality and representationality of official discourse by pointing to the medium as such, and thus exposing the mediality of any ‘represented’ world not as a God-given and natural reality, but as a man-made discourse processed through a medium, and ultimately as ‘royal propaganda’.

It was our aim, in this paper, to add yet another example of meta-reference to the increasing catalogue of forms and media and to test the interdisciplinary applicability of the typology and sub-categories suggested by the editor in the introduction to this volume. By choosing an early form of metaization, we hope to have contributed not only to the fine-tuning of these tools and the suggested typology, but also to the search for cultural-historical functions of metareference in a more general historical frame both in the exploration of intermedial and metareferential phenomena.

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As any coded activity, the masque (and with it, dance) has a potential for metaization, for reflecting on its own form of presentation, especially at a time when the sameness and conventionality of the performance and the mastery of the conventions is no longer satisfactory for both audience and artist: various forms of ornamentation will lead on to transpositions and deviation and finally the subversion of exhausted formulaic forms and patterns, especially when innovation can safely be contained within the well-confined boundaries of tradition and convention, as in the case of the masque<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> For the tension in the court masque between tradition and the reassurance it provided for the courtiers and their craving for novelty, see also Bishop 1998.

Applying a relatively 'modern' concept such as metareferentiality to a historical, long-obsolete form of art such as the masque may seem a bold enterprise. And yet we hope that in having done so we have been able to uncover functions of metareferentiality that may no longer be evident in the contemporary Western arts and media (such as the use of metareferentiality as a means of expressing subliminal criticism in a restrictive, absolutist society) and thus help shed new light on the phenomenon of metareferentiality and the reasons for its immense popularity in contemporary (popular) art and media. By discussing some of the uses it was put to in former times we hope to have been able to suggest that art, or rather the perception of art and representation as distinct from the 'real' thing, perhaps in its very nucleus holds a potential for metaization, and that this potential of a perceptive distinction may well be part of a 'human' need or even a distinctive feature of the human mind<sup>23</sup>, of the faculty to make a 'difference' between 'natural' and imagined, 'artificial' realities, and to focus on the process and mechanisms of signification rather than on a referential signified. Man as a user of sign-systems, as a producer and reader of signs, also necessarily developed the ability to reflect on the use of signs and the efficiency of their use as a prerequisite for survival.

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Given the 'newness' of the medium of dance in intermediality studies and even more particularly in the highly innovative and underresearched field of metareferentiality in the arts and media, we have ventured, in this paper, "onely to tread the measures" and supported our arguments with contextual and intermedial frames of reference. It is to be hoped that further immersion in the concepts of metaization and metareflexivity will enable us to perform "higher and loftier tricks" focussing on 'mere' dance in good time.

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<sup>23</sup> Compare Sperber, who refers to the "metarepresentational capacity of humans" as "no less fundamental than the faculty of language" (2000: 6f.).

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# Textworlds and Metareference in Comics

Karin Kukkonen<sup>1</sup>

As characters meet their authors, display knowledge of their fictional status or turn the very conventions of storytelling against themselves, metareference presents fiction as a separate ontological level. The ontological level of fiction is the storyworld which is juxtaposed with the outside perspective of the ontological level of the textworld on which readers, authors and context knowledge are situated. As texts establish the secondary deixis of their textworld in addition to the primary deixis of their textworld, they ‘metareference’. This article will use the storyworlds model for three exemplary analyses of metareference in comics: covert metareference in *Fables*, overt metareference with a comical effect in *Iznogoud* and overt metareference with a critical effect in *Animal Man*.

## 1. Introduction

Since their emergence as a narrative mass medium at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, comics have taken their readers into many different storyworlds, from the fantastic dreams of a little boy in Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–1913) to the mean streets of Gotham City in the *Batman* comics (1939–) or the amusing antiquity of René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo’s *Astérix* (1959–). While designing such diverse storyworlds, tackling different subject matters and developing a broad variety of generic and personal styles over the decades, comics continually refer back to themselves and have become a medium rich in metareferences.

This contribution will explore metareferences in comics storytelling through three exemplary analyses: the covert metareferencing of Bill Willingham’s series *Fables* (2002–), the overt metareferencing

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to the other participants of the “Metareference in the Arts and Media” conference, to my supervisor Anja Müller-Wood and to David Herman and Alison Gibbons, who kindly agreed to read a previous version of this paper, for their helpful and critical suggestions. My thanks also to the editors of this volume for their astute and detailed comments. The feedback I received has greatly contributed to the improvement and clarification of my argument in this article. The Gutenberg-Akademie of Mainz University generously funded my attendance of the conference.

with a critical effect in Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* (1988–1990), and the overt metareferencing with a comical effect in the stories of *Le Piège de la Sirène*, volume 21 of the *Iznogoud* series (1992) by Jean Tabary<sup>2</sup>. Of course these three analyses cannot cover the breadth and variety in metareferencing which the medium of comics has displayed over the century of its existence. They have rather been chosen to highlight certain currents of metareferencing (not only) in comics. Comical metareferencing, such as we observe in Tabary's *Iznogoud*, but also in Donald Duck comics (cf. Werner Wolf's example, 2005: 96) or some of Tex Avery's classic cartoons, confronts the storyworld with the world of author and readers and has the one ridicule the other. In the genre of superhero comics, discussions of 'continuity', the coherence of different storylines with the same characters, have led to a distinct generic self-awareness by the mid 1980s, which Morrison's *Animal Man* uses to convey his critical point about animal rights issues. *Fables* can be read in the context of the many postmodern treatments of the fictionality of the fairy tale in novellas like Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, short stories like those of Angela Carter, A. S. Byatt or Neil Gaiman and films like *Shrek* or *Hoodwinked!*

The concept of the textworld, which informs these exemplary analyses, is an extension of the storyworlds model of narrative studies as developed by Herman (2002) and Werth (1999). As metareferencing provides a text with an outside perspective on the storyworld, it establishes a textworld, in which author and readers are located. Both storyworlds and textworlds are mental models and as such they are not tied to a particular medium. This facilitates the use of the storyworld model for a discussion of the multimodal medium of comics (combining words and images in sequence) and makes it a suitable candidate for the more general transmedial approach to metareference pursued in this volume.

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<sup>2</sup> The original conference presentation only featured a discussion of metareference in *Fables*. I am grateful to René Michaelsen for pointing out the metareferences in *Iznogoud* and to Jeff Thoss for our discussion of *Animal Man*, which facilitated the expansion of the presentation into this article.

## 2. Storyworld, textworld and their deictic sets

One of the fundamental insights which introductions to literary studies teach is that the exposition establishes a narrative's atmosphere and main themes. Analyse the exposition and you will know what is important in the body of the text. Yet the exposition of a narrative is a valuable key to analysis not because of its status as a time-honoured opening manoeuvre in the book of the aspiring storyteller, but because it answers to the basic cognitive necessity for orientation in a new surrounding.

As readers open a new comic or book, start watching a film or playing a videogame, they first want to find out where they are and look for the opening sentences or images to provide just this information. The opening panel of "La Craie Noire d'Iznogoud" (see *Illustration 1*) shows two characters in an Oriental setting with a mosque-like building, a veiled woman and palm trees. This setting and the dress of the characters refer to the fantastical realm of the stories of *Arabian Nights* and its visual rendition in films and illustrations. The exaggerated, cartoonish features of the two characters suggest a comical tone. This first panel provides the basic parameters of the tale's storyworld, its verisimilitude and narrative probabilities.



*Illustration 1: Jean Tabary, Iznogoud: Le piège de la sirène, Iznogoud 21. Goscinny – Tabary © Editions Tabary 2008.*

The storyworld is a mental model of the fictional world, in which the events of the narrative unfold. Readers construct it prompted by clues in the text and their own context knowledge. For the case of *Iznogoud* these textual clues are the building's onion dome and the characters' turbans as well as their exaggerated features, which elicit the context

knowledge of depictions of the Arabian world and of the stylistic conventions of the cartoon. The first panel lets readers know where the narrative is set and what to expect from it, as its textual clues provide the spatio-temporal and contextual deictics of its main storyworld.

Readers “recenter” their attention from the actual world, their physical surroundings, to the storyworld (Ryan 2001: 103), as they become immersed in the story they read. David Herman explains this recentering in terms of a “deictic shift” (2002: 14 [drawing on Segal 1995 and Zubin/Hewitt 1995]): in the example under discussion, the deixis of the actual world, of the sofa, the train compartment or wherever we happen to read the narrative, becomes replaced by the deixis of the storyworld, of the comical Arabian realm of *Iznogoud*.

Storyworlds are incomplete and heterogenous, as Lubomír Doležal points out in his treatment of the topic of possible worlds in fiction (cf. 1989: 233f.)<sup>3</sup>. They are incomplete, because no text can tell its readers each and everything about the storyworld it prompts. The mental model of the storyworld emerges as readers process textual clues and fill the gaps between them from their knowledge of the actual world and cultural contexts. For this construction of the storyworld the “principle of minimal departure” – a term coined by Marie-Laure Ryan (1992: 533) – applies: unless the text prompts them otherwise, recipients assume that the storyworld works according to the rules of the actual world, from which most inferences are made.

Storyworlds are heterogeneous, because a narrative rarely stays within the same place, time and perspective for its entire duration. Stories change their settings, provide flackbacks and flashforwards and present different ‘fictional minds’ (see Palmer 2004). For these, a new ‘deictic shift’ has to establish a spatial, temporal or mental ‘sub-world’ (see Werth 1999 or Ryan 1992) of the main storyworld. In comics, captions, panel frames or new establishing shots in the panels generally perform this function. The information “New York City. Three years earlier.” in the caption provides the new deictic parameters directly. A new establishing shot, point-of-view editing of the panel images or special panel frames like gilded flowery frames for

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<sup>3</sup> Doležal’s collection of 1998, Pavel 1986 and Ryan 1992, the three central early discussions of the storyworld model for literature, all refer back to the possible worlds theory of philosophy. According to them, a storyworld has a similar ontological status as a possible world in counterfactual logics: it refers to a state of affairs as it could have been.

memories (as in Willingham et al. 2002/2003: 37) perform the deictic shift in a less explicit way. Comics take many of their conventions concerning deictic shifts from film (e. g., the establishing shot and point-of-view editing), some from literature (verbally stating a new locale and time) and they have also developed conventions of their own (such as special panel frames).

As soon as a narrative employs metareference, the emphasis of storytelling lies no longer on the finished product and the object of its mimesis, the storyworld, alone, but with the process of storytelling itself (cf. Hutcheon 1980: 7). Readers have to recenter their attention out of the storyworld again as metareference tells them to take a step back and watch its workings. The narrative introduces a secondary set of deictic parameters and performs another deictic shift. As opposed to the primary deictic shift, which takes readers *into* the storyworld, the secondary deictic shift of metareference takes them *out* of it again.

The primary deictic set of a narrative provides readers with the basic parameters of the storyworld, the secondary deictic set draws attention to the textworld. The storyworld is the world in which the protagonists of the story, the characters, are located. The textworld is a textual representation of the world in which the author and the readers, as well as other and indeed all texts, are located. Here, the communicational actors of the reading process, the author and the reader, can be found, as well as the context knowledge of generic conventions and canonic texts, which facilitates this communication. This meta-level of the textworld is not the actual immediate situation of communication and its representation in the speakers' minds, which Werth, writing as a linguist, distinguishes as the "discourse world" (1999: 83f.), but a *textual representation* thereof. As such, it falls under the category of "discourses about the discourse world itself" and is for Werth part of the textworld (1999: 86). Werth's notion of textworld includes thus both what I have called storyworld and what I have called textworld. As opposed to Herman and Werth, who use the terms 'storyworld' and 'textworld' almost interchangeably<sup>4</sup>, my terminology makes a strict distinction between the two. Even though both text- and storyworlds can produce a deictic shift and a recentering of reader attention, the deictic sets they provide concern different ontological levels. The pri-

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<sup>4</sup> Herman focuses his discussion on narrative texts, which in his terminology have a 'storyworld'; Werth discusses mental models for a diversity of texts, which do not necessarily have a story, and he calls all of these models 'textworlds'.

mary deictic set provides the parameters of the fiction and the target coordinates for readers' immersion. The secondary deictic set provides the target coordinates for an outside perspective, for a meta-level, which reveals the storyworld as fiction.

Abiding by the *celare-artem* principle, most fiction only establishes a primary deictic set, but will obfuscate the possibility of a secondary deictic set, which would bring its fictional nature to the fore. A literal outside perspective on the storyworld through secondary deixis is provided in *Fables*, as the flow of narrative is interrupted by the librarian Priscilla Page "for a few important words of explanation" (Willingham/Sturges et al. 2007: 19). One of the characters, Jack, is currently telling other characters about his adventures as Jack Frost. Their attention being centred on the wintry subworld of Jack's tale within the primary storyworld of *Fables*, readers suddenly have to perform a secondary deictic shift, as the next page shows Priscilla in a classroom in front of a map of the storyworld (ibid. 2007: 19). Unhappy with the degree of accuracy in Jack's tale, Priscilla informs readers that she has decided to take it upon herself to educate them about the workings of the storyworld. For this, she explains, corrects and clarifies with the help of the map. Priscilla Page addresses readers repeatedly with the verbal deixis of 'you' and looks straight out of the panel, thus breaking the 'fourth wall'. Both the comic's verbal and visual elements bring the role of readers as protagonists in the reading process to attention and thus establish the secondary deixis of the textworld.

Once a narrative establishes the different ontological levels of storyworld and textworld, of process and product, it allows for all the different types of metareferencing which Werner Wolf distinguishes in his introduction to this volume.

### 3. Covert metareference in *Fables*

Covert and overt metareference is a distinction made by Linda Hutcheon for what she calls 'metafiction' in "narcissistic narrative" (1980: 17–35). It corresponds to the distinction between implicit and explicit metareference in this volume (cf. *ibid.*: especially 36–39). Overt metareference establishes the secondary deictic set of the textworld through direct deictic signals as *Fables* employs them in the Priscilla Page episode. These direct deictic signals can be both verbal and visual, such as addressing readers with 'you' or looking straight out of

the panel at readers in combination with an utterance (also) addressed to them. Covert metareference does not clearly establish a secondary deictic set, but rather hints at its possibility. It provides a moment of self-reflexivity, a moment of awareness of the textworld, without re-centering the readers' attention fully to it. Covert metareference lacks direct deictic signals, and it is therefore harder to determine whether covert metareference is actually a feature of the text or only in the mind of the reader. Still, if the covert metareference coheres with the general thrust of the text, as it does in *Fables*, it can be safely assumed to be an effect of the text and not a mere import of readerly imagination.

The vantage point of *Fables* is to place fairy tale characters into a world readers recognise as their own, which is then complicated through strongly genre-based storytelling. The interaction between the clearly fictional element of the fairy tales and popular genres and the realist depiction of the storyworld is favourable to covert metareferences. As examples of the series' covert metareferencing, I will discuss instances of what I term 'metacommentary' and 'metafictional strategies'. Both metacommentary and metafictional strategies are instances in which characters metaleptically display knowledge of the genre conventions of their story or the social conditions of its emergence. The protagonists of the storyworld have access to knowledge of the textworld. As they display it, the primary deixis of the storyworld is overlaid by the secondary deixis of the textworld. In metacommentary, characters comment on events of the storyworld from a textworld perspective; in metafictional strategies, they act upon this knowledge, trying to turn events in the storyworld to their favour. Both metacommentary and metafictional strategies are special cases of metareference.

The first story of *Fables* is told in the conventions of crime fiction. A metacommentary occurs when Bigby Wolf, the detective, admits: "Anyone who's ever fancied himself a detective, openly or secretly, longs for the day when he can do the famous parlor room scene" (Willingham et al. 2002/2003: 99). Bigby, a fictional character, has knowledge about the conventions of the very genre he acts in, namely the convention of the parlour room scene. In the conventional denouement of whodunnits in the tradition of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, all the protagonists are assembled in the parlour, where the culprit of the case is uncovered. The primary deixis of the storyworld of *Fables* has been established since the first panel of this



volume. Now, however, a secondary deixis is introduced, as Bigby points at the convention of the parlour room scene. The simultaneity of the inside and the outside perspective leads to a doubling of ontological levels, one holding the fictional character (the storyworld) and one holding the character reflecting about fiction (the textworld). However, the deictic shift involved here is only very shortlived and no secondary deictic set is established to last, as Bigby is tied in tightly with the ongoing dialogue in the storyworld and as he addresses the other characters but not the readers with this statement. The metareference only provides a moment of self-reflection, without disrupting the storyworld itself, and thus remains covert.

Having access to textworld knowledge, characters might decide not only to comment on conventions, but also to use this knowledge to their advantage in the story. From this intention metafictional strategies ensue. In the caper story “A Sharp Operation” the fairy tale characters need to set an entire apartment building asleep in order to destroy evidence compromising their existence in the human world. Bigby Wolf decides to employ the narcoleptic powers of Briar Rose’s curse for this undertaking. Again, a fictional character hints at his knowledge of the textworld, thus distinguishing the two ontological levels. Bigby relates his understanding of the effect of Briar Rose’s pricking her finger while she does so and the tenants of the apartment building fall asleep. The primary deictic set of the storyworld remains firmly established, as the events are shown to happen within the storyworld and as Bigby directs the explanation of his plan to Little Boy Blue (and thus only by proxy to the reader) (cf. Willingham et al. 2003/2004: 45). No direct deictic signals are involved in this metareference. The textworld knowledge is merely implemented in the storyworld, providing a moment of self-reflexivity in the redoubling of ontological levels, but no coherent outside perspective. The metafictional strategy of Briar Rose’s narcoleptic powers in the caper story thus also qualifies as a covert metareference, which is one of *Fables*’ central strategies in treating questions of fiction and reality in its storytelling.

#### 4. Metareference with a comical effect in *Iznogoud*

The conversation between the two characters of the opening panel of “La craie noire d’Iznogoud” (see *Figure 1*), which was discussed as an

example for a primary deictic set of storyworlds above, reads as follows: ‘What are you thinking of, Sidi? – Guess’ (“A quoi pensez-vous, patron?” – “Devine” [Tabary 1992/2004: 33])<sup>5</sup>. What Iznogoud must be thinking of is obvious to any reader previously acquainted with the character: being the grand vizier to Haroun El Plassid, he wants to take the ruler’s place and become caliph himself. All the instalments of the series follow Iznogoud’s schemes and failures in his endeavour to become ‘caliph instead of the caliph’. As we will see, some of these schemes rely on metafictional strategies, and this use of metareference in the series creates a comical effect.

Margaret A. Rose defines parody as “the critical refunctioning of preformed literary material with a comic effect” (1979: 35). Parody thus takes a text or genre and the frame of expectations accompanying it and contrasts it with a conflicting subject matter, as for example Alexander Pope’s use of epic conventions to render a bourgeois scandal in *The Rape of the Locke*. Through this questioning of the frame of expectations, parody elicits the awareness of its fictionality, and Rose characterises it as “a form of metafiction” (ibid.: 90). Generally, metareference with a comical effect does not necessarily parody a particular genre, but can be confined to questioning the convention of *celare artem*. Establishing the secondary deixis of the textworld can also be used to ridicule the storyworld. Throughout the *Iznogoud* stories Iznogoud’s faithful henchman Dilat Larath thus establishes a rapport with the readers by providing the secondary deictic set of the textworld. Dilat repeatedly turns his head (as indicated by afterimages and speed lines) to look out of the panel and address readers. This direct visual deixis establishes the textworld in which readers are located and directs Dilat’s commentaries at readers more than at the other characters of the storyworld. When Iznogoud states in a fit of rage that he wants to ‘become caliph in the caliph’s place’, Dilat’s gaze turns out of the panel, he points at Iznogoud and says ‘Here we go again’ (“Et c’est reparti” [Tabary 1992/2004: 18]). This rapport with readers ridicules the storyworld by juxtaposing it with the knowledge of the textworld that Iznogoud never wants anything but ‘becoming caliph in the caliph’s place’.

However, not only the storyworld, but also the textworld and its conventions can become the target of ridicule in *Iznogoud*. The beginning of “La Craie noire d’Iznogoud” is marked by a long narration

<sup>5</sup> All translations of dialogue from *Iznogoud* are my own.

stretching across several panels, which readers can identify as the narrating instance of the author<sup>6</sup>, a protagonist of the textworld (cf. *ibid.*: 33). The author describes the setting and introduces the characters in long-winded and wordy discourse until Iznogoud turns his gaze out of the panel and interrupts, exhorting the author with this metalepsis to stop his introduction ‘so we can continue’ (“on peut continuer?”; *ibid.*). The textworld is ridiculed here for its wordiness by protagonists of the storyworld. In the story “Le Piège de la Sirène” Iznogoud and Dilat cross a river and, as it is too deep, Dilat has to use a straw to draw air with while Iznogoud balances on his head. Iznogoud tells him not to worry, because ‘it works in all the comics’ (“ça marche dans toutes les B. D.” [*ibid.*: 5]). After the metafictional strategy fails, Dilat reproaches him that ‘that trick works in all the comics, except in yours’ (“sauf dans la votre”; *ibid.*: 6). Iznogoud and Dilat display knowledge of the textworld and employ it in a metafictional strategy. As opposed to *Fables*’ covert metareferences, the characters in *Iznogoud* explicitly state that it is a trick used in other comics and that they are themselves characters in a comic. The comical effect ensues as the textworld knowledge turns out not to be superior as would be expected.

The metafictional strategies which Iznogoud employs in his bid to ‘become caliph in the caliph’s place’ are quite varied. One is particularly interesting from the point of view of metareference: Iznogoud’s use of magical chalk in “La Craie noire d’Iznogoud”. If the illustrator of a comic draws a black circle on the paper, readers understand it to be a hole in the floor of the storyworld. The black chalk of the story’s title is a magical device which, when used to colour the floor black within the storyworld, turns the blackened spot into a hole, as if it were the illustrator’s pen, represented in the textworld. As Iznogoud snatches the magical chalk, a protagonist of the storyworld acquires a textworld device which gives him power over the storyworld. Whenever he uses the chalk to draw a hole in the floor and thus to lay a trap for the caliph, the comic engages in a metareference. The circular narrative of the comics series requires, however, that Iznogoud must never succeed with his schemes and, indeed, not even the magical

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<sup>6</sup> Even though ‘the author’ has been exposed as a construction through the criticism of Barthes and Foucault, it still is at work in the reception process. Readers rationalise a heterodiegetic narrating instance in terms of the author (cf. Genette 1972: 204 and Walsh 2007: 70–74 for an argument similar to mine).

chalk will break this rule. Iznogoud more than once underestimates the circumference of the caliph's stomach and an overeager cleaning lady repeatedly cleans away the holes until Iznogoud has no chalk left. The very parallelism of the storyworld and textworld in the device of the chalk determines that it can be used to create holes, but also to undo them. In their juxtaposition, the textworld is shown to have power over the storyworld by a textworld device creating the holes. But the storyworld can turn the means of the textworld against themselves and defend itself with humble cleaning duties, not heroics or elaborate scheming. The comical effect achieved here combines a parody of adventure tales with ridiculing the celare-arterm principle itself through a general metareference with a comical effect.

Metareferences in *Iznogoud* are usually overt. Iznogoud and Dilat directly address readers and author. At the end of "La Craie noire d'Iznogoud" they both fall into one of the holes and later emerge from a manhole cover on the sidewalk of a busy French road. The final panel thus establishes the secondary deixis of the textworld in which the power of the chalk is located (cf. *ibid.*: 46). Such overt metareferencing deliberately aims at making readers aware of the different ontological levels of textworld and storyworld. In *Iznogoud*, the awareness of both these levels and their juxtaposition results in metareferencing with a comical effect.

##### 5. Metareference with a critical effect in *Animal Man*

The comical and the critical are closely aligned. Especially comical metareferences have a distinct subversive potential as Rose stresses in her discussion of parody (cf. 1979: 33). Creating an awareness of both representation and reception processes in fiction, metafiction can elicit both comical ridicule and critical distance. The examples chosen for the discussion of the comical and the critical effect of metareference in this article, however, keep the analytical distinction between the comical and the critical and clearly emphasise one of the two aspects: in *Iznogoud* the comical effect and in *Animal Man* the critical effect.

By the 1980s many superhero characters had survived their creators. Superman's stories have been written by dozens of writers other than his inventors Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and the same is true for most other superheroes. Through its long history, the storytelling in the genre has proliferated into a confusing corpus of stories about

the same characters which began to contradict each other through their sheer variety. ‘Continuity’ became an issue and the superhero comics began to develop narrative explanations and remedies for these contradictions. DC Comics went to the drastic measure of a cataclysmic event in the 1985 series *Crisis on Infinite Earths* for reordering their universe of superhero characters and its continuity. Around the same time a number of old superhero series were relaunched, which created a surge of innovation in comics storytelling. Among these relaunched series are Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* (1989–1996), Alan Moore’s *Swamp Thing* (1984–1987) and *Watchmen* (1986) and also Grant Morrison’s *Animal Man*<sup>7</sup>.

After a short run in DC’s *Strange Adventures* series in the 1960s, Animal Man reappeared in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and was relaunched as a series in its own right in 1988 with Grant Morrison as the author. In *Animal Man* he is clearly concerned with animal rights and vegetarianism, but also with which political questions of the day such as apartheid in South Africa. *Animal Man* takes a critical stance and employs its metareferences to support it.

In the first story of the series (issues 1–4; see Morrison 1988–1989/2001), Animal Man investigates mutations, which leads him to save laboratory animals and put a scientist in their place. With the following issues Morrison then begins to develop a sustained system of metareferences. Issue 10 “The Myth of the Creation” introduces alien observers of Animal Man’s storyworld. The comic provides a (metaphorical) textworld in which the history of the character Animal Man in his different versions is reviewed and measures to correct the effects of the “assault on the continuum” (Morrison et al. 1989/2002: 12), which is the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* series, are taken. A secondary deixis establishes the realm of these observers. Within this metaphorical textworld all the storyworlds of the series then appear as images in a bubble. The alien observers are in need of Animal Man’s memory to heal the paradoxes and contradictions created by the reordering of the continuum in *Crisis* in order to “prevent the final catastrophic unbinding” (ibid.: 94). As the series continues, the borders of the storyworld become more and more brittle. Animal Man realises he

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<sup>7</sup> For a treatment of the narration in *Watchmen*, see Kukkonen 2008. These new superhero narratives and their cultural impact have been reflected in more recent series like Warren Ellis’ *Planetary* (1999–), see Kukkonen/Müller-Wood 2009, forthcoming.

can see the readers (Morrison 1989–1990/2003: 41), as a voice tells him to turn around and look out of the panel. The direct deixis of looking at readers and addressing them (“I can see you!” [ibid.: 41]) establishes the textworld proper, as opposed to the textworld of the alien observers, which presents a fictionalised version of the creative act. Aware of the textworld, Animal Man begins to break panel frames and leaves the cage of this limitation of the storyworld in order to influence the action within it from a superior level (cf. ibid.: 163–166).

In the final issue “Deux ex Machina” the liberated character goes to meet his creator in an extended metalepsis. A very detailed textworld is established, in which the author, Grant Morrison, is writing the issue as it unfolds. Morrison points to writing on a computer screen, which predicts how Animal Man will react in the following panel (cf. ibid.: 208) and confronts his character with the fact that he has absolute control over both his characters and the storyworld. Morrison explains that he had Animal Man concern himself with animal rights issues and become a vegetarian, “because [he] wanted to use you to draw people’s attention to what’s happening in the world” (ibid.: 218). He embarks on a recount of his own involvement with animal right issues, but realises that he has become “preachy” (ibid.). Morrison’s new strategy of persuasion is based on metareference: ruthlessly displaying his authorial demiurgic powers over the character on the following pages, he gives a more shocking revelation of the ‘might makes right’ philosophy of humanity against animals, which he decries explicitly, than in any of the stories in which Animal Man saves laboratory animals. Overt metareferencing and the metaleptic demonstration of the power of the textworld over the storyworld are employed in *Animal Man* to achieve a powerful critical effect.

## 6. Conclusion

As a multimodal medium, combining the conventional modes of expression of other media like literature, film and pictorial art, comics can resort to a rich repository for establishing both primary and secondary deixis. Apart from this, the medium has also developed conventions for metareference based on its own formal features such as panel frames as limits and filters for the storyworld and the space between the panels, the ‘gutter’, as outside of it, as part of the textworld. Visual and verbal signals can establish both primary and secondary deixis in

comics, both covertly and overtly, as the examples of this article have shown. The storyworlds model and its extension in the textworld allow us to order this textual deixis for an analysis of metareference which is coherent for different types of metareferencing and applicable across media boundaries.

Metareference in comics can address the very fictionality of the story we are reading, as in *Fables*. It can make us laugh at the storyworld and ourselves, as in *Iznogoud*, or it can make us realise a message about the storyworld and ourselves, as in *Animal Man*. And, certainly, metareference in comics is not limited to these uses, as a close analysis of comics such as David Mazzucchelli and Paul Karasik's adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1994, rev. 2004) and Alan Moore's *Promethea* (1999–2005) would and Winfried Nöth's (2007) analysis of M.-A. Mathieu's *L'Origine* (1991) does show.

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## Metareference in the Audio-/Radioliterary Soundscape

*Doris Mader*

This essay on metaization in audio-/radioliterature seeks to explore metareferential phenomena from the perspective of a medium hitherto rather marginalized both in studies of intermediality as well as in literary studies proper. Radio as a technical medium and audioliterature as its genuine 'literary' genre form the twin focus of an investigation of meta-phenomena in a generic medium that prototypically fits the category of an internal intermedial composite genre. This bipolar approach is intended to provide an understanding and foregrounding of the relevance of audioliterary meta-phenomena on the basis of their 'substance' as purely acoustic signifiers. It is also intended to shed light on the genre's overall capacity to reflect the aesthetic status of those ephemeral radio waves that are so heavily laden with meaning. Audioliterature as a genuine radio art form is shown to meta-aesthetically reflect its own technical prerequisites, its generic development as well as its status as an internal composite (inter)medium.

Examples from early to current BBC radio productions, as well as one from the 'Neues Deutsches Hörspiel' and an Austrian production serve to elucidate the wide scope of audioliterary metareference. The analysis of the specific forms and functions of meta-phenomena in radioliterature also requires an inclusion of the historical dimension of audioliterary metaization. Part of the effort to understand the extraordinary flexibility of audioliterary soundscapes and the genre's capacity to reflect itself is, therefore, to investigate how it even diachronically reflects its aesthetic properties.

In order to lend the phenomena of audioliterary metareference a proper analytical gestalt, the capacity of audioliterature to metareferentially reflect on itself is considered within the tripartite function of radio in transmitting, originating and adapting and/or inspiring other (audio)literary texts.

The survey concludes with an evaluation of the audioliterary meta-phenomena investigated and suggests further steps of meta-audioliterary research that could enhance the understanding of audioliterature's position within the literary and media system.

## 1. Exposition

### 1.1. Introduction

*Narrator:* (geflüsterte Einführung, sachlich)

In der Komposition eines Spiels (Radiospiels zB) kannst du nicht einfach emotional rotieren wie in einem langen Prosatext sondern es gibt da Zipfel, die irgendwie geknüpft : zusammengeknüpft werden wollen – man kann sie nicht einfach so herunterhängen lassen, sie können nicht aussehen wie Diwanquasten, wie es für ein längeres Prosawerk denkbar, ja wünschenswert ist, sondern sie müssen Richtung, Galopp, Frage- und Antwortkonstellation besitzen. Es ist also etwas ganz besonderes: es ist darin besonders viel Konzept und Kalkül, und das macht es schwierig und möglicherweise nicht so beglückend wie das Komponieren eines langen Prosatextes oder eines Gedichts, bei welchem wir vorzugsweise FARBE MALFARBE ANSTREICHERHANDWERK anzuwenden haben [...].

(Mayröcker 1997: 9)

The introductory segment of Friederike Mayröcker's award-winning radio work *das [sic] zu Sehende, das zu Hörende*<sup>1</sup> lures its listeners into what at first sounds like a discourse on the art of 'Hörspiel'. By means of meta-aesthetically stating the difficulty of fitting parts together and of avoiding 'loose ends' ("Zipfel") as well as by describing the difference between a "Spiel[]" ('play'), a "Radiospiel[]" ('radio play'), and a longish prose text, listeners become drawn into what deserves to be called an acoustic spider's web, the threshold between the meta-level and the primary level being blurred, so that the radiotext has already developed into a rather longish, at times even prose-like, audiotext before listeners become aware of having been trapped 'in' it.

Before these pages, quite similarly, 'entrap' their readers in any further investigation into the 'independent existences' of audioliterary texts (and their stories), it seems pertinent to pause and consider the general foundations and some of the implications of applying the frame of reference, namely metaization, on the study of audioliterature. These considerations claim to maintain a position appropriate for their subject matter, a marginal one within the context of this volume, yet one which metareferentially points to the very position audioliterature holds in both English literary as well as in intermedial studies.

Audioliterature has always been aware of its ephemeral status, its endangered position amongst other and more illustrious art forms.

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<sup>1</sup> It was awarded the 'ORF Hörspielpreis 1997'.

However, the meta-audioliterary discussion as exemplified here intends to reveal the medium's extraordinary flexibility as well as its manipulative potential. In addition, perhaps precisely because audioliterature is such a recent medium, it nevertheless has developed a sound 'historical sense' and a playful vigilance as to its production and reception processes.

After providing some definitions requisite for establishing the specificities of audioliterature, this contribution discusses four examples of the genre's self-reflection whose meta-audioliterary discourses differ widely in quantity, quality and as concerning forms and functions. The first, introductory example, *das zu Sehende, das zu Hörende* (1997), illustrates initial metaization as well as forms of metageneric metaization. The second one draws on a contemporary BBC production, *97 % Penetration in Finland* (2001), which exemplifies meta-audioliterary references related to the medium radio and its technical and historical prerequisites. Thirdly, an example from the highly experimental 'Neues Deutsches Hörspiel', *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* (1969), provides us with a meta-audioliterary text actually governed by its meta-discourse. Finally, a brief look at a Styrian production, *Mehr lernen – mehr wissen: Ein Hörspiel-Hörspiel* (1982), illustrates some of the 'local' awareness of the genre audioliterature, 'local' both in the sense of being a production by the Steirisches Landesstudio<sup>2</sup> and in the sense of 'localizing' and evaluating the recipient's role<sup>3</sup> in audio- and meta-audioliterature.

Friederike Mayröcker's radiotext is about the myth of Echo and Narcissus. It acoustically features a narrator and the mythical characters, who are endowed with one speaking and one singing voice each (Echo's voice dubbed by a mezzosoprano, that of Narcissus by a countertenor), as well as a servant character named Henry.

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<sup>2</sup> A local Austrian radio station.

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that the recipient-oriented discussion of audioliterature has a specific local origin and relevance: the Graz scholar Friedrich Knilli was one of the pioneers in theoretically profiling the potential of audioliterature. In his PhD thesis on the artistic format of the 'Hörspiel', *Das Hörspiel in der Vorstellung des Hörers: Eine experimentalpsychologische Untersuchung* (1959), he focussed on the listener's part in creating the audioliterary text. Later, he promoted an independent and autonomous concept for acoustic works by demanding a "totales Schallspiel", the purely acoustic 'total sound play' (see 1961).

When Echo and Narcissus are first introduced, it is inevitable for a listener engaged in the study of English literature to hear a long tradition and numerous echoes resounding – and to remember Hutcheon's diagnoses in her aptly entitled volume *Narcissistic Narrative* (1991). Since its definitions and distinctions, later amended by Wolf<sup>4</sup> and others, have proven useful for the elucidation of metaization in various art forms, they might also serve as a matrix for the analysis of audioliterature about audioliterature. It remains, however, to be explored to what extent drawing analogies will further this discourse.

## 1.2. Definitions

First of all, the subject proper of this contribution needs to be defined. To do so, I will take up reflections published elsewhere. The term 'audioliterature' covers "specifically composed radiophonic or audiotexts communicating solely by means of acoustic signifiers, usually belonging to several different codes: linguistic signs, noises, music and – silence" (Mader 2003: 4). Additionally, pauses are also part of the signifying practice in audioliterature, and for analytical and interpretative purposes they need to be set apart from silences:

Pauses and silences are to be distinguished from each other because a verbal pause need not be a total silence; when several codes are used simultaneously, the deletion of one of the codes – not necessarily the verbal one – results in some sort of pause, e. g. a background noise dies down while at the same time the conversation continues [...]. (Mader 2007: 183, fn. 4)

In terms of semiotic macro-modes, the narrative mode far outweighs the other modes in audioliterature:

Audioliterature [...] belongs to the semiotic macromode of narration, as the unity of any typical audioliterary artefact is derived from a story.[...] The term 'narration' here serves to cover a multitude of generic variations which consist in choosing either mimesis (the mode of showing) or diegesis (the mode of telling) or combining both in variable ratios. (Ibid.: 188)

However, the purpose of investigating the meta-capacity of audioliterature in the double sense of intermediality – namely both in audioliterature's essence as an intracompositionally multimedial genre as well as within audioliterature's extracompositional context – requires yet another terminological clarification: the term 'audioliterature' here serves as an umbrella term for various forms of broadcasts that are

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<sup>4</sup> See Wolf 2007 and the introduction to this vol.

quite heterogeneous with regard to the question of mediacy or immediacy as their discursive sub-modes. It covers a multitude of audio- and radiophonic literary forms without anticipating any genre specifications inherent in the conventional labels such as 'radio drama' and 'Hörspiel' (cf. *ibid.*: 183f.).

In delineatory terms it remains to provide a proper intermedial definition of the medium under discussion:

An audioliterary artefact is an 'internal intermedial composite medium', or, if one prefers to use the term 'medium' exclusively for the technical medium radio, an 'internal intermedial composite genre'. Although multimedial in themselves, these artefacts additionally often appear as various forms of intermedial transpositions, where changes of media are involved. (Mader 2003: 4f.)

The groundwork having been laid, it is now possible to turn to the 'narcissistic' dimensions of audioliterature: meta-audioliterature potentially provides, within itself, a reflection on its own status as audioliterature, its status as an intermedial audiosyntagma, its own production processes and its specific reception situation as well as its technical prerequisites and its historical developments.

Such a definition, apart from determining the logical status of meta-audioliterature, implies the autoreferentiality of meta-audioliterature, which employs the same selection and/or mixture of codes for its meta-discourse as for the object-discourse (primary discourse). Since this secondary discourse, the meta-audioliterary discourse, uses the same forms and combinations of signifiers as its object – audioliterature –, autoreferentiality is one of the prototypical features also of audioliterary meta-phenomena. This criterion contradistinguishes it from 'other' meta-phenomena, non-'literary' audio-meta-phenomena, but not necessarily from its paratexts. At least to this extent the analogies to meta-phenomena in literature may carry the purpose along.

Yet, it is here that we have to leave the paths of Hutcheon's and Wolf's treatment of purely 'literary' metaization, epitomised in their discussion of 'metafiction' and of the paratexts 'surrounding' metafiction. Audioliterature is a potentially much more comprehensive term than fiction, and is used here also in the wider sense of audiobooks, radio adaptations, genuine radioliterature, radio serials etc., as long as they fall within the defined category of an "internal intermedial composite genre" (see above) with a predominance of the verbal (hence 'literary') and are governed by the macro-mode 'narrative'.

It is, therefore, necessary to modify Wolf's basic definition of a meta-phenomenon (cf. in this vol.: sec. 3.4.) in order to define the

basic unit of audioliterary metareference as follows: the basic unit of audioliterary metareference is an individual audioliterary passage or segment or an individual element within such an audiotext which switches from the first (object) cognitive to the second (meta) cognitive level using (parts of) the same signifying codes or the same selection and/or omission of codes. Such meta-audioliterary phenomena can inhabit audioliterary texts to varying degrees, the wide range of possibilities spanning the scope from single or several such isolated audiosyntagmatic elements of segments in individual audiotexts to their systematic or even pervasive use in the form of 'meta-audioliterary texts'.

## 2. Development

### 2.1. From *Danger* to *das zu Sehende, das zu Hörende*: listening to begin with

The strongly suggestive title chosen by Mayröcker, *das zu Sehende, das zu Hörende*, paratextually thematizes sight even before the sense of hearing and thus not only anticipates the highly visual quality of this individual radiotext. Reverberating in this title are also two long-standing traditions in audioliterature and its theoretical discussion that can be encapsulated in the formula of 'the black hole of audioliterature's trauma'. It can be related to its usual relegation to a 'lesser theatre' or a 'theatre behind a closed curtain'. This original concept was largely reinforced by radio's major cultural function during WWII 'blackouts' that kept the theatres closed. A radioliterary work explicitly referring to the sense of vision (and of hearing, for that matter) does nothing less than offer its recipients a covert metaization of its alleged 'deficiency'. This first 'observation', so neatly alluded to in the title, concerns radio drama's 'inferiority complex', which is to do with specificities in media history, in particular with the original function of radio not as an originator, but as an ancillary medium, an 'inter'-medium. Its function was to provide larger populations with entertainment, and, however inadequately, it served to broadcast theatre and opera performances.

Following this infant status of the 'lesser theatre', audioliterature and its meta-discourse have been haunted by the visual, and more so, by the lack of it, and have always been obsessed with 'seeing', includ-

ing all its connotations. A case in point is Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* (1954), which acoustically features two narrators who keep telling their implied listeners that "[o]nly you can see", "[o]nly you can hear" and "[o]nly you can hear and see" (1989: 7f. and passim) as well as that, in a sexual innuendo, "moles see fine tonight" (ibid.: 3).

Since its beginnings and (after) wartime manifestations, audioliterature has overcome its mere function of – inadequately – broadcasting theatre performances and has long since started its own cultural career with its own genuine genre. However, although the medium radio has been originating rather than simply broadcasting works of a different medial provenance over long periods, it has nevertheless failed to fully overcome what seems to be a historical constant in the relatively short history (writing) of audioliterature – that it lacks the visual and therefore has to compensate for it.

The constant comparison with its 'elder brother' theatre is tellingly inscribed in the paratext of the very first radioliterary text ever aired, Richard Hughes' 1924 *Danger* – "a play for effect by sound only, in the same way that film plays are written for effect by sight only" (1966: 173). This interesting, though very problematic, media-comparative determination, is topped by the side-text in fact demanding this effect of 'blindness' even for a "direct presentation" (ibid.) in a small theatre. The 'play', at its fictional story level, exactly reproduces this "effect by sound only" in that it actually situates the 'action' in the "pitch-darkness" of a coal-mine disaster (ibid.).

Yet, radioliterature is said to be highly visual in that it often becomes inspired by images<sup>5</sup>, or is even inspired intermedially by paintings. Indeed, Mayröcker's 'extraordinary work' ("außerordentliche[] Arbeit"), which is 'inspired by two paintings' ("angeregt von zwei Bildern") and 'produces visual images of its own' ("selbständig Bilder erzeugt"<sup>6</sup>), is a case in point. Literary scholars, however, who are not experts on painting or any of the visual arts, have to leave a closer inspection of this form of interarts relationship and transmedial inspiration to other, competent, researchers<sup>7</sup>. In any case, this fascination

<sup>5</sup> "[M]any radio plays are first triggered by an image", we are told in a fairly recent practical handbook on writing radioliterature (McLoughlin 1998: 14).

<sup>6</sup> This is a transcript from the radio broadcast paratext (ORF 1997).

<sup>7</sup> However, a scholarly investigation of this supposedly 'blind' medium even from a predominantly 'literary' perspective ought not turn a blind eye to the existence of such visuals, be they 'verbal visuals', ekphrases, or simply intermedial quotations when-



with the visual adds to the somewhat paradoxical status of audioliterature.

A special version of this general audioliterary paradox can be found in Mayröcker's radiotext also on the level of narrative transmission. In the introduction, the extradiegetic narrator-commentator, in giving us a warning about what is to be avoided in audioliterature, in fact hypnotizes the listener into what he has first declared to be impossible, namely a radio play with a rather longish, yet not prosaic, but highly poetical prose text:

Es ist also etwas ganz besonderes : es ist darin besonders viel Konzept und Kalkül, und das macht es schwierig und möglicherweise nicht so beglückend wie das Komponieren eines langen Prosatextes oder eines Gedichtes, bei dem wir vorzugsweise FARBE MALFARBE ANSTREICHERFARBE anzuwenden haben, natürlich gründet auch das Gedicht auf KONSTRUKTION, aber es handelt sich dabei um eine *natürliche* Art von Konstruktion wie man es beim Aufbau einer Blume beobachten kann : Bei einer Blüte gibt es den Blütenpolster (das Zentrum) und rundherum gereiht die Blütenblätter – sehr genau und fein kalkuliert, oder die Blütenlocke und innen der Griffel, usw. (Mayröcker 1997: 9f.)

In the course of this audiotext, the narrator's discourse will combine with that of the characters (and their singsong, the pauses, the music, the effects of acoustic foregrounding etc.) to create a multimedial audioliterary text with a high potential of evoking visual images so typical of audioliterature's effort to provide material for the inner eye. Notably enough within an intermedial perspective, this piece of work has seen – and the metaphor is used here deliberately – its own intermedial transposition into book form, precisely because of its highly poetic language and its intricately woven prose. Yet, apart from the audiotext's obvious self-referentiality (in terms of its intricate 'poetic' handling of prose<sup>8</sup>), the explicit audioliterary poetics contained in

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ever they – even surprisingly – emerge. So for the sake of completion and possible further investigation into the matter, the artists whose paintings Mayröcker refers to in her audiotext need at least to be named. Mayröcker's narrator explicitly points out that "diese Beschreibungen können auch als Abpausung eines Gemäldes von Andreas Bindl [...] und eines Gemäldes von Andreas Grunert [...] verstanden werden" (1997: 13f.). The first painting referred to is "Ohne Titel Figur, Fenster" (1995; *ibid.*), the other one "Foldline" (1995; *ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup> A lyric example is Archibald MacLeish's Gerard Manley Hopkins-inspired *The Fall of the City* (1937) with its deliberate 'orchestration' by means of consonances, assonances, internal rhymes etc., which Frank describes as a "kalkulierte Synthese aus Rhythmus- und Klangelementen der zeitgenössischen Umgangssprache und poetischen Konventionen außerhalb der starken Tradition des Blankverses" (1963: 37; 'a calculat-

these initial statements unfolds into a wider genre-poetical metaization. The latter actually subverts the radiotext's own metareferential determination – or should it be said indeterminateness? – at the level of narrative transmission.

In contradiction to its programmatic meta-audioliterary introduction, Mayröcker's award-winning work also ingeniously re-establishes the tradition of the 'Hörspiel' as 'Wortkunstwerk' in that it makes the listener experience the relevance of the predominance of the verbal in audioliterature. Furthermore, this audiotext as a whole, drawing from various intermedial sources as well as abounding in intertextual references, beautifully exemplifies an internal intermedial audioliterary text with an intertextual, intermedial as well as a metamedial dimension.

This meta-audioliterary dimension, however, though positioned initially, is – if paradoxically so – still the relevant backdrop to the whole radiotext and to the understanding of both Mayröcker's individual poetological and creative doctrine and the audiotext's astonishing copiousness, which, as such, is deliberately understated if not defied by the narrator. Yet, more importantly in this context, when Mayröcker's narrator initiates the radioliterary work by metaphorizing the creative process, he likewise, if implicitly so, 'metaizes' as well as challenges a literary-historical attribution – namely that of the paradoxical audioliterary 'genesis' out of a deficiency abundantly compensated for.

## 2.2. *97 % Penetration in Finland*: putting you through to the beginnings

Despite its suggestive title, *97 % Penetration in Finland* by Clare Seal and Dominic Black (2001) has little to do with the Scandinavian country (except for the allusion to Finland's dominant role in the market of mobile telephony), and is less fascinated with sex than with oth-

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ed collation of rhythmic elements imitating contemporary colloquial speech and poetic conventions other than the strong tradition of the blank verse' [my translation]). It is also an example of heightened self-reference, where signs (sign systems) point to themselves, or rather, to similar elements within the same semiotic system (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 41). Also, this 'orchestration' relates audioliterature back to its 'oral tradition'. *The Fall of the City* therefore figures as a prototype of high degree intracompositional self-reference in a work of audioliterary art.

er forms of enthusiasm: the possession and use of mobile telephones having reached a penetration of (at that time) 97%, thus enabling ubiquitous and quicker, though not necessarily better interpersonal relations.

At the level of its double paratextual threshold, this audiotext in the opening credits kindly invites listeners to “dial D for drama”, thus short-circuiting two variants of the recurrent theme of telecommunication, namely telephone and radio transmission:

BBC Speaker: Dial D for drama [my transcript]

*Ringling telephone (electronic sound), then receiver is lifted.*

Operator (*telephone quality*): Hello, Operator Services, Joan speaking. You are through to the afternoon play.

(*Answering machine: button being pressed*) “You have one message”.

“Hi Richard, it’s me. I am not coming back. I’m sorry, I’ve left you for a man who can ... cook.”

Operator: Ninety-Seven Per Cent Penetration in Finland.

(Seal/Black 2001b: 2)

Shortly after the BBC speaker’s overt paratextual metaization, listeners are made aware of the medium they are participating in by operator Joan, who explicitly refers to the medium as an acoustic one and to the specific programme slot the broadcast belongs to. These initial metaizations prepare the ground for a fictional radio story to which recipients will become audio witnesses as the ‘eavesdropping’ Joan goes further and ‘puts listeners through’ to Helen’s and Richard’s telephone and other conversations.

Apart from fulfilling the traditional function of the Janus-faced ‘*Illusionsstörung*’ (breaking of aesthetic illusion), these metaizations are furthermore metamedially related to technical devices inherent in all long-distance acoustic connections on which the aesthetic format of audioliterature technically grounds. Moreover, this use of telephone services is a covert metareference in yet another sense: it relates the genre back to the beginnings of (English and German) radio technology (those of innocent as well as warfare purposes of ‘acoustic sharing’) and radioliterature, the latter frequently employing ‘telephone conversations’ so as to naturalistically account for the reduction to acoustic signifiers. Finally, the switching between different story levels by ‘putting us through’ metareferentially reproduces a technique introduced in the 1930s: the use of a control panel and several studio rooms in order to establish various spatial and temporal settings with the possibility of switching between them. *97% Penetration in Finland*, for example, itself oscillates swiftly between various temporal

levels and spatial settings and actually abounds in references to man's achievements by way of acoustically communicating over long distances.

But there are many more self-reflexive elements to be heard in this exemplary audiotext, which also flexibly alternates between immediacy (the mimetic mode) and mediacy (the diegetic mode). The latter is provided by the self-same voiced personification of the old-fashioned telephone operator, a narrator-commentator who establishes the internal metamedial discourse. She introduces herself in the following way:

This is my story, too. – Joan's the name, communication's the game – that's what I used to say – “Just connecting you now ...”. But did you ever think about how it's come to be that we can do almost anything these days, and be interrupted? It's marvellous, this world where radio waves and messages and words swim about like little fluttering fish around your head. But you know, it wasn't always so easy.

(Seal/Black 2001b: 15)

This quasi-authorial narrator – apart from literally referring to the “radio waves” that are a prerequisite for our participation in this very medial discourse – in the course of the subsequent forty minutes, navigates us through and comments on the early 21<sup>st</sup>-century love story presented. Also, she swiftly ‘connects’ us to various historical episodes with their respective enthusiasts for making telecommunication and broadcasting work, which is, as she explicitly points out, part of “[her] story, too” (ibid.).

By this, the narrator establishes a double hetero-reference<sup>9</sup> a) to the real inventors as well as b) to the characters imagined to exist ‘beyond’ the audiotext, thus creating a ‘double-codedness’ that typically informs metareferential works of art (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 24).

The acoustic quotations and allusions to historically different stages of ‘enthusiasm’ – also in the literal sense of ‘possessed by a god or supernaturally inspired’ – provide for the representation of various uses and abuses of ‘telecommunication’ in former and in current times. These penetrations into the past go back to the myth of man's creation, the Biblical story of Adam's ‘in-spiration’ by God, a concept which informs the operator's ekphrasis of Michelangelo's famous painting in the Sistine Chapel: “[W]hat passes between us is like electricity. Like God and Adam [...] [in] the Sistine Chapel” (Seal/Black 2001b: 8). Operator Joan also explains that “the first message of

<sup>9</sup> For this use of ‘hetero-reference’ cf. Wolf 2007: 319, fn. 11.

sorts was God telling Adam to get himself hither from the garden” (ibid.: 10).

The protagonists of the more ‘technical’ episodes of “[e]lectricity, the stuff of life” (ibid.: 8) comprise several historical figures, among them the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French abbot Jean Antoine Nollet (implied in the audiotext’s off-hand reference to the “French Abbot”), who, in his cruel and painful experiments with his brothers, succeeded in creating some sort of electrical current. Also, among the relevant great precursors of audio telecommunication, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Samuel Morse features, who provided for the first painless way of bridging spatial and temporal gaps when he invented the eponymous code in 1838. Quite significantly, the first ever message morsed was the Biblical Verse 23, Chapter xxiii, from *Numbers*: “What God Hath Wrought”. In the internal communication system, the inventor thus comments not only on his own invention, but more so on the death of his wife, the message of which reached him too late to attend services. In order to spare others the anguish and guilt he experienced, he provided for a device of quicker telecommunication. Hence, on a different plane (the external communication system), both the signals and their contents nourish the audiotext’s self-awareness of its own audio-telecommunicative medium. Furthermore, the acoustic gallery of impassioned audio inventors includes Alexander Graham Bell and Agner Krarup Erlang<sup>10</sup>.

The early use of radio telephony in the trenches of WWI plays an important part in yet another episode of this audiotext, which alludes not only to ‘war as the father of invention’, but more specifically to the first cultural and non-cultural uses of the new medium. The last but not least in a whole line of telecommunication enthusiasts, an ‘American Billionaire’ alias Bill Gates, states that he “got rich by bringing people together: e-mail, internet, WAP phones, and blue-tooth” (ibid.: 31) – and thus metamedially foregrounds the most recent technical innovation responsible for the second and indeed radical globalisation also of the medium radio and hence radioliterature.

Metareference, as is stated in this volume (cf. Wolf: 25f.), always implies an awareness of the medial status of the work or system under consideration and thus also an awareness of a logical difference between a meta-level and an object-level. This consciousness concerns the recipient as well as the author and the work (see ibid.: 30, *Figure*

<sup>10</sup> The latter is known to physicists for the Erlang formula on which our complex telecommunication networks and their mathematics are still based.

3). In order to qualify as a metamedial work, it is therefore not sufficient for the audiotext to provide such references to digitalised and other forms of audio-processing, but also demands the awareness of a(n) (all-too?) cooperative listener. In fact, metareference is more of a bipolar phenomenon that requires the actualization of such potential by recipients who are willing and able to cooperate, “for it is in the recipient that the most basic function of metareference, the eliciting of a medium-awareness, takes place” (ibid.: 25).

Recipients of audioliterature, among them continental BBC radio recipients, nowadays prefer to listen in on the internet rather than buy ever larger satellite dishes to catch up with the BBC’s varying policy in distributing their programmes ‘on air’. So, for those who ‘cooperate’ in every sense of the word ‘reception’, the pervasive thematization of the technical prerequisites for listening to (and, for that matter, recording, analyzing and also quoting) this fascinating self-reflexive audiotext cannot be dismissed as innocent. Rather, these references to the material quality of the seemingly immaterial technology reinforce the thematization of the now almost ubiquitous nature of (audio) reception.

On the one hand, the degree to which mobile telephony, satellite digital waves and internet streamline communication have become ever more ‘penetrative’ is a circumstance metareferentially foregrounded on the level of story: the way people avoid direct communication is illustrated in its problematical effects by the unsatisfactory affair of Helen, who by profession sells mobile phones (!) – the devices for digitalized ‘phatic’ communication – and plans to spend a weekend with her boss and lover, David, at a sales conference in Finland (where penetration, we already know, has reached 97%). The real present-day love story is then, significantly enough, triggered by Helen and Richard having to seek shelter from rain in an old-fashioned red telephone box. They become more and more enthusiastic about each other, and, finally, a pair of lovers – yet only after having been coerced to spend some time in direct ‘phatic’ communication.

On the other hand, this audioliterary text thematizes this ‘pervasiveness’ – one of the requisites of its very reception – also on discourse level. It becomes both paratextually metaized (when insinuated in the ambiguous title) as well as explicitly foregrounded, e. g., when critically observed by the operator Jane: “But did you ever think about how it’s come to be that we can do almost anything these days, and be interrupted?” (see above). Finally, the repeated (authorial) narratorial

evaluations of the characters' actions in connection with their communicative skills and options, contribute to the explicit medium-awareness as well as the audiotext's general penetration with forms of meta-discourse<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.3. Transition

The meta-audioliterary phenomena so far exemplified are closely connected with audioliterary illusion and the breaking of it. Both cases introduced so far are to be understood as distinguishing themselves from examples of completely illusionist design in which audioliterature – particularly the traditional format of the BBC radio play or the mainstream conventional 'Hörspiel' of the ORF-Hörspielstudio – luxuriates in.

Whereas in Mayröcker's *das zu Sehende, das zu Hörende* the overt meta-audioliterary reference self-reflexively concerns the internal structures of the acoustic text, laying bare its aesthetic principles of symmetry and perhaps even musicalization, the metamedial discourse in *97% Penetration in Finland*, however predominant, differs widely both in its forms and functions. In this radioplay, the acoustic representation of, and the reference to, technical developments preceding the development of radio(literary) waves are covert metaizations of the ways in which we – acoustically – connect and become connected to whatever meanings and messages might be transmitted, radioliterature usually being the medium of this message more often than its object. The audiotext actually abounds in references to man's technical and/'versus' human(e) achievements by way of communicating over long distances. But the medium, in its technical as well as in its literary aspect, is in fact also part of the message here and vice versa, and the message(s) is/are part of the medium, which has achieved such an important cultural significance exactly because of its global digital availability.

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<sup>11</sup> Much could be said about other, more content-oriented metaizations in this audioliterary text that mainly concern the development of the love story and are mostly dependent on the hetero-diegetic 'switchboard' from which the narrator-commentator Joan operates. However, since these devices, notwithstanding their relevance for fully appreciating the texture of this densely woven and entertaining audiotext, more or less resemble authorial metaizations in metafictional passages, they will not be further commented on here.

#### 2.4. *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels*: an autopsy of audioliterature

After these more or less diachronic penetrations into the historical and technical dimensions of audioliterary metaization we are now put through to its more synchronic dimension.

*Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* (1969) by Wolf Wondratschek, another award-winning<sup>12</sup> radioliterary text, offers the most experimental of the examples chosen for this essay, maybe also the most 'teutonic' in inexorably anatomizing its 'species'. The equivocal subtitle already suggests something rather lifeless, the 'body' of what could, under more lenient and more recipient-friendly circumstances, have become a 'Hörspiel'.

In the spirit of the revolutionary, if not anarchic, late 1960s, this radiotext embodies a somewhat adolescent, iconoclastic effort to cast off the shadows of the past (also of radioliterature), to revolutionize production processes (both the profane as well as the artistic) and to inaugurate something entirely new. As an example of the highly self-aware 'Neues Deutsches Hörspiel', *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* unremittingly dissects what audioliterature is composed of (namely speech, noises, sound effects, special effects such as stereophony, music, silences, pauses). It blatantly reveals the technical as well as the cultural medium's manipulative powers and impressively illustrates Aristotle's principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Wondratschek's radio text does all this without offering us a story and by aesthetically destabilizing illusion to the extent of destroying it. The rudimentary 'narrative' components include the long-distance lorry-driver Paul and someone with the name of Hugo, who, however, never come to interact with each other. If the essence of a 'radio play' proper, a traditional 'Hörspiel', is ruled out right from the beginning, so is the natural order of things (the 'ordo naturalis' in the handling of sequences and succession) as well as the conventional arrangement of codes, the alternating employment of noises and sound effects suitable or unsuitable to the 'situation' or 'context'. Furthermore, the audio-text's aesthetic strategy deliberately foregoes the usual separation of the final product from what acoustically features as the technical source material. Likewise, the expected narrative concatenation of the

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<sup>12</sup> It was awarded the 'Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden' in 1970.



vagabond (narrative) pieces is entirely left to the vain efforts of the however much receptive listener's mind. Whatever fictitious 'existents' (à la Chatman) begin to form in the recipient's mind, become hetero-referentially 'contaminated' by the ruthless interpolation of 'real', non-fictional broadcast material. This material contains sequences from political speeches and other unmarked quotations from programmes likewise played and juxtaposed with the other audio material without any markers provided for recipients, so that their textual status (intra- or extradiegetic) remains ambiguous.

The resulting forms of implicit metaization are complemented by the explicit commentary of a male-voiced 'explicateur' (rather than 'narrator-commentator') who, in fact, problematizes the whole notion of the '*Hörspiel*' in that he states:

Geräusch.

(*Beatles-Song "I'm so tired"*) Ein Hörspiel muss nicht unbedingt ein Hörspiel sein, d.h. es muss nicht den Vorstellungen entsprechen, die ein Hörspielhörer von einem Hörspiel hat. Ein Hörspiel kann ein Beispiel dafür sein, dass ein Hörspiel nicht mehr das ist, was lange ein Hörspiel genannt wurde. Deshalb ist ein Hörspieltext nicht unbedingt ein Hörspieltext. Und ein Satz in einem Hörspiel nicht unbedingt ein Hörspielsatz. Undsowweiter. Ich weiß überhaupt nicht, was sich ein anderer unter einem Hörspiel vorstellt. Ich weiß nicht, was ein Hörspiel ist. *Ein* Hörspiel ist nur *ein* Hörspiel! Dieses Hörspiel ist ein Hörbeispiel für das, was ich nicht mehr unter einem Hörspiel verstehe. Vielleicht kommt es aber dem nahe, was ein Hörspiel, wenn es aufhört, unbedingt ein Hörspiel sein zu wollen, sein kann [*volume up on music*]. (Wondratschek 1971: 48f. [emphases in the original]; cf. Wondratschek 1969: [my transcript])

While *97% Penetration in Finland* offers a voyage into the historical dimension of the precursors of radio waves and the technical prerequisites for their conversion to audioliterary use and distribution, *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* ingresses synchronically into the audioliterary matter and materials and their technical alias aesthetic composition. Instead of the archaeology of audio history, Wondratschek's experimental audiotext is a case of synchronic meta-audioliterary investigation which radically questions the medium's conventions.

With *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* as an exemplary experiment, audioliterature's hidden understructure emerges and its status as a technical work of art is rendered conscious. This is effected by the constant contamination of what is commonly the product by what the product is made of, both vertically and syntagmatically. The usually continuous syntagmatic flow of vertically accordant segments

is severely corrupted in their linear sequence and vertical concordance by what seems to be part of the production process. Wondratschek avoids any illusionist employment of acoustic signifiers, on the contrary, even the use of stereophony is deliberately foregrounded as the mere effect of a sound studio and never supports the listener in imagining a fictional spatial setting. Even the ‘opening credits’<sup>13</sup> of this rather demanding audiotext as well as its full title are provided only after recipients have listened several minutes into the audiotext.

Sprecher: Unter dem Wort ‘Hörspiel’ stellen sich die Hörer eines Hörspiels ein Hörspiel vor. Geräusch: [*piano music*]. Guten Abend, meine Damen und Herren. Hier ist der Westdeutsche Rundfunk mit seinem dritten Programm. Wir begrüßen Sie zu unserem Hörspiel-Abend. Im Hörspielstudio senden wir heute in einer stereophonen Aufnahme *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* von Wolf Wondratschek. Realisation Heinz Hostnig. Paul: Fünf Uhr früh. Auf der Gegenfahrbahn beginnt allmählich der Verkehr. (Wondratschek 1969: [my transcript])

The wording of the programme paratext itself, though, sounds as innocent as any opening credits could. Also, the author foregoes the intimate mono sound, the voice out of ‘nowhere’ that is so characteristic of the traditional ‘Hörspiel’, the ‘nowhere’ of phantasma, dream and the interior monologue.

The sinister arrangement of the various segments and sounds, on the one hand, lay bare the sound studio machinations usually responsible for creating ‘illusionist’ effects. On the other hand, despite the obvious devaluation of story, the decisive because manipulative, even potentially explosive force of concatenating, putting together, arranging and ‘juxtaposing’ those acoustic signals to signify existents is hammered home to the stunned listeners in several obliquely (dis)placed mirror-textualizations, all of them given in the same anonymous male voice:

Ich bin Arbeiter und arbeite in einer Staubsaugerfabrik. Meine Frau [...] könnte einen Staubsauger gut gebrauchen. Darum nehme ich jeden Tag ein Einzelteil mit. Zuhause will ich den Staubsauger zusammensetzen. Aber wie ich es auch mache, es wird immer eine Maschinenpistole daraus. (Wondratschek 1971: 56)

Ich bin Student an einer Ingenieurschule. Im Augenblick arbeite ich [...] in einer Staubsaugerfabrik. Die Arbeiter glauben, wir stellen Staubsauger her. Ich glaube aber, das ist nicht wahr, und die Fabrik stellt Maschinenpistolen für Portugal her. Diesen Beweis könnten wir gut brauchen. Deshalb nehme ich jeden Tag ein

<sup>13</sup> The published ‘text’ version demands that the radio station or company broadcasting the audiotext use its respective signature (tune) and lead-in announcements (cf. Wondratschek 1971: 47).

Einzelteil mit. Zuhause will ich die Maschinenpistole zusammensetzen. Aber wie ich es auch mache, es wird immer ein Staubsauger daraus. (Ibid.: 58)

Ich bin Ingenieur in einem Elektrokonzern. Die Arbeiter glauben, wir stellen Staubsauger her. Die Studenten glauben, wir stellen Maschinenpistolen her. Diese Maschinenpistole kann ein nützlicher Haushaltsgegenstand werden. Dieser Staubsauger kann eine nützliche Waffe werden. Was wir herstellen, das liegt an den Arbeitern, Studenten und Ingenieuren. (Ibid.: 60)

These references to various potential consequences of ‘putting together component parts’, or rather producing acoustic signifiers and conjoining them to potential existents, serve to mirror-textualize the ruthless procedure of the very audiotext in which these references feature. Indeed, these intracompositional metareferences perform the functions of, firstly, an implicit metaization of the aesthetic principle underlying this audiotext with its ‘displacement strategy’, its conflating of script and product, and its arbitrary superimposition of code sequences as well as that of an implicit metaization of the arbitrariness of the usual ‘soundscape reality’.

The second function of these textual metaizations is to give a metaphorical metareferential statement on the specificity of audioliterature in general in that they compress the three stages of conception (compare Mayröcker’s “Kalkül” [‘scheme’]), production and reception by means of using the banal but illustrative metaphor of tools, whose seemingly innocent parts become means to strikingly diverging ends.

Finally, Wondratschek, whose main issue is to unmask medial as well as political manipulation, uses these metaizations in order to provide a critical metareference to the potential of this literary genre’s material medium, namely radio, to be used and abused for manipulative and dissimulative purposes.

While all the individual components alias segments seem harmless, the audiotext as such undermines the homely genre into something rather uncanny. What *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* teasingly evokes by way of audioliterary potential never achieves its ‘full signification’ in the form of an acoustically appealing audio narrative. It lays bare its ‘skeleton’, anatomizes its production process, destroys sequential order, displaces elements, announces or implies sequences that then fail to occur, and acoustically features production directions as well as ‘represses’ any narrative thrust:

Verschiedene Geräusche, die etwas mit Paul zu tun haben. Geräusch eins: [sound of a truck motor]; Geräusch zwei: [sound of a hooter]; Geräusch drei: [hens cack-

ling]; Geräusch vier: [sound of an airplane] – Scheiße!; Geräusch fünf: [the clattering of a typewriter]; Geräusch sechs: [clapping of hooves, shooting noises and music of a Western]; Geräusch sieben: [silence]. (Wondratschek 1969: [my transcript]; cf. also Wondratschek 1971: 54)

*Paul*, therefore, combines some instances of explicit metareference with the large-scale employment of implicit forms of metareference, such as the foregrounding of stereophony for no other purpose than making the listener aware of it. The constant awareness of the audio-text's 'mediality' – in the sense of producing and manipulating a tape as well as in the sense of radioliterature as a dual genre (scores plus production) – in fact undermines listeners' efforts to establish a coherent cognitive level below this meta-level. So, *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* is also a case of critical fictio-metareference in terms of the typology presented by Wolf (cf. in this vol.: 41) as it refers to the power of manipulating, concatenating and juxtaposing acoustic signals so that they become signifiers and coalesce to become concepts in the listener's mind.

However, the distortion of acoustic material into whatever effects are intended goes beyond these textual contrivances. Apart from the purely verbal forms as quoted and discussed above, these acts of metaization can be traced into every layer and encoding of the audiotext, and can take the shape of purely acoustic non-verbal signs. In such a perspective, the seemingly unmotivated distortion of sounds, e. g. by which the phrase "Unter dem Wort 'Hörspiel' stellen sich die Hörer eines Hörspiels ein Hörspiel vor" (see above) becomes acoustically foregrounded, acquires a double metareferential significance: apart from being an explicit metaization in itself, this obvious act of quotation is metareferentially (acoustically) signified to be one, while at the same time one of the possibilities of radio sound modification becomes exemplified. So, apart from purely verbally and purely non-verbally encoded metaizations, Wondratschek combines these forms of metareference for his audioliterary dissection.

Such combinations of verbal and non-verbal acoustic signs offer even more fascinating options. In *97 % Penetration in Finland*, when the omniscient narrator tells us that "it wasn't always so easy" (see above), this narratorial statement is followed by a short segment of Morse signals. We can only recognize them to be signals belonging to a specific signification system without deciphering them, so they point towards the code whose signals themselves we cannot decipher as signs without technical help. Yet, what is conveyed here in Morse

code has a specific meaning translatable into the verbal code, namely that of “What God Hath Wrought” (see above). This is only given in the ‘scores’ that underlie the studio production, but has not been verbalised or otherwise acoustically ‘translated’ in the audio production itself. Consequently, this specific studio realization, whose producers were probably more engaged in providing a good and entertaining radio story than in adding to the awareness of metaization, in fact reduces the metareferential dimension inherent in Seal and Black’s highly intriguing audiotext<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast to 97 % *Penetration in Finland, Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels*, as the title prewarns, thwarts all expectations of a good story and aesthetic pleasure in what resembles a real post-mortem autopsy: this meta-radio play overtly displays the anatomy of radio literature, and also (ex negativo) evokes what is or was traditionally expected from the genre and what was placed under general suspicion in the course of the late 1960s’ efforts to step out of the shades of history. The notion of the conventional radio play as an extinct species was expressed by Cory’s interim statement in his 1974 study *The Emergence of An Acoustical Art Form*: “The era of the traditional Hörspiel has passed” (1)<sup>15</sup>. Since then, however, this statement has been falsified by both the numbers and scopes of world-wide audioliterary production.

## 2.5. The ‘Metahörspiel’ *Mehr lernen – mehr wissen: Ein Hörspiel-Hörspiel*: a biopsy of audioliterature

After the expedition into the nadir of audioliterature’s self-destruction a new horizon can now be reached, that of the recipient-oriented and rather recipient-friendly metageneric and, at least partly, story-telling audioliterary work. While Wondratschek strips the radio play naked, Günter Eichberger’s meta-radio play *Mehr lernen – mehr wissen*, subtitled *Ein Hörspiel-Hörspiel* (1982) discusses and acoustically illustrates the possibility of enriching – and thus saving – the genre (an ‘endangered species’) by means of a very different form of an ‘acous-

<sup>14</sup> With audioliterature, the ‘dual nature’ of the genre has to be kept in mind and, wherever possible, ‘scores’ and scripts need to be perused for analysis.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, this was at about the same time as the ‘death of the novel’ was propagated.

tic striptease': "Man muss es nur mit einem dezenten Strip anreichern" ('it has to be refined by means of a subtle striptease' [my transcript]).

The vertical dimension of audioliterature allows for the co-presence of several different syntagmas – procedures – to become acoustically and artistically juxtaposed. The two levels interacting and at times even counteracting each other in this case are presented in the form of an acoustic gestalt with foreground (two people in a tête-à-tête) and background (an educational radio programme), which reflects the actual listening situation of the real recipient. This covert metaization of the specific reception situation reduplicates the actual communicative situation of those who are this audiotext's recipients, a metareference which inevitably actualizes a certain cognitive frame in the recipient:

Am Anfang der Entwicklung standen die Stimmen im Dunkeln. Um den Wegfall der optischen Dimension plausibel zu machen, erfanden die Autoren Situationen, in denen den Handelnden, zumeist durch Katastrophen, das Licht genommen ist. Eines der ersten und gleichzeitig eines der bedeutendsten Beispiele für solch ein Katastrophenhörspiel ist *Danger* [...]. (Eichberger 1982: [my transcript])

This "Metahörspiel"<sup>16</sup>, in which two people listen to the radio, offers various instances and forms of (intra-compositional as well as extra-compositional) self-reference which recurrently elicit a further frame beyond the frame of medium-awareness. The meta-discourse thus entailed is impossible to miss even for the most uncooperative listeners (who are actually mirrored in the text). It results in the grandiose metaphorical equation of life and radio play: "Das Leben ist ein Hörspiel" (ibid.).

Despite the frame elicited by the programme slot 'Hörspiel', the knowledge that what follows is a 'reality' processed through a particular medium, still remains in the pragmatic zone of unendangered latent

<sup>16</sup> Klaus Edlinger refers to this audiotext as a "Metahörspiel" and paraphrases it as follows: "Das Stück [...] ist so etwas wie ein Metahörspiel [...]. Vor dem Hintergrund einer Schulfunksendung (Titel!) über die Geschichte des Hörspiels unterhält sich ein junges, typenhaft gezeichnetes Pärchen über das Gehörte. Sie wechseln, gelangweilt von der Problematik, das Programm und spielen zu lauter Unterhaltungsmusik statt des Hörspiels ein Liebesspiel" (1985: 117; 'The piece is something of a meta-radio play [...]. Before the backdrop of an educational radio programme dealing with the history of radio drama a young, stereotyped couple discuss the very content of what they are listening to. Bored by the subject-matter, they switch programmes, turn up the volume on popular music and then finally substitute the radio play with their love play' [my translation]).

awareness – or, in this case, lazy awareness. Eichberger's 'Meta-Hörspiel', however, quickly shakes listeners out of this 'lazy zone of latency' by providing a double frame of metareference.

The doubling of real listeners listening to fictitious listeners, however, is only the first and by no means the foremost form of metaization used by Eichberger – but certainly the most 'innocent' one. The specific reception situation is explicitly thematized by the female listener who comments on and thus metareferentially (also deictically) refers to the radio programme and the reception situation she shares with the male. With this shift from the implicit to the explicit metaization the cognitive meta-level is firmly established.

Yet, this metaization of the reception situation through commented *mise en abyme* only refers to the more general activity of listening in. The second level of this double frame of reference is brought about by a gestalt switch drawing our attention to what is actually presented on the radio on radio. This fictitious educational radio programme offers its real and its fictitious listeners a metamedial discourse on the medium radio, and more specifically, on its genuine 'literary genre', the 'Hörspiel'.

The continuous acoustic gestalt, by which the couple's conversation is underlaid with the radio speaker's rather monotonous discourse, plays theory off against practice:

[*Two people laughing*] Auch wenn im Folgenden ausschließlich die literarische Gattung 'Hörspiel' behandelt wird, so darf nicht vergessen werden, dass es sich dabei um einen Programmbestandteil des Rundfunks handelt [*the sound of wine being poured*], eines Kommunikationsmittels also [*female voice laughing*], das ein noch größeres Bündel an Einzelerscheinungen umfasst als etwa die dreihundert Jahre ältere Zeitung [*noise of bottle being put down on the table*] und der Jahrzehnte ältere Film [*the clinking of glasses*]. Gebrauchte man [*female voice*: "Hhmm"] den Rundfunk vorerst für die Vermittlung von Informationen, so besann man sich später seiner Möglichkeiten als Ausdrucksmittel [*coughing*], das Ereignisse und künstlerisch Gestaltetes nicht nur übertragen, sondern mediumsgemäße, eigenständige Kunstwerke schaffen konnte [*female voice*: "Ooohh"]. Der Begriff des 'Hörspiels' hat sich seit den Zwanziger Jahren unseres Jahrhunderts immer wieder gewandelt. Überblickt man die mannigfaltigen Erscheinungen dessen, was man seit den Zwanziger Jahren 'Hörspiel' nannte [*male voice, partly voice-over, partly interposed*: "Mit dem Hörspiel hab ich mich eigentlich ... ich hab mich eigentlich mit dem Hörspiel nie anfreunden können"], so lässt sich der Bestand an Spieltexten in zwei große Gruppen aufgliedern, die Hörspiele im weiteren und die Hörspiele im engeren Sinn [*female voice*: "Im engeren Sinn!"]. Für die erste Gruppe ist ihre Bildung nach Vorbildern, die Vorlagen wie die Bühne [*male yawns*], Theaterstücke, Filme geliefert haben,

charakteristisch [*female coughs*]. Die zweite Gruppe umfasst Spiele mit freier dichterischer Gestaltung. Wir wollen unser Augenmerk [*the two start kissing*] vor allem auf die Werke der letztgenannten Gruppe richten. Am Anfang der Entwicklung standen die Stimmen im Dunkeln [*male voice*: “Das ist was für akustische Voyeure”]. (Eichberger 1982: [my transcript])

In the programme(-within-the-programme) the medium radio is meta-comparatively introduced as a recent medium, which is more than 300 years younger than newspapers and decades younger than film. Furthermore, a sub-division of ‘Hörspiel’ into radio works based on stage plays and those specifically written for the medium is introduced. Provoked by the programme’s all-too meticulous systematics of the genre (“dichterisches Hörspiel”; “Katastrophenhörspiel”; “Spielcharakter”; “brillante Dialogführung”) and its ‘anatomy’ (“Wort”; “realistische und unwirkliche Geräusche”; “Musik von herkömmlichen oder elektronischen Instrumenten”; “wechselnde Raumakustik” etc. [ibid.]), the two people engage in a more and more off-handed discussion of the genre in question – the genre, in fact, that they, too, inhabit. This broadcast(-within-the-broadcast) arouses the couple’s interest and elicits a cognitive process of reflecting on their own reception situation as well as their own aesthetic, i. e., perceptive preferences, as to the radio play – also as opposed to other genres:

[*male voice*:] Das Hörspiel – ich bin kein akustischer Typ [...]. Die Reduktion ist völlig sinnlos. Wie nonverbales Theater. Nur umgekehrt. Gleich dumm. [...] Film, das ist ein Medium. Da ist für jeden was dabei. Hörspiel ist was für Blinde. (Eichberger 1982: [my transcript])

Moreover, the superimposition of the two levels in the external communication system allows for a constant cognitive process that elicits and provides for a higher awareness on the listeners’ part and on their potential position as ‘acoustic voyeurs’ (“Das ist was für akustische Voyeure” [ibid.]), by which the genre is tellingly slighted. The work even includes gender-specific remarks as to women allegedly being ‘better listeners’, a stereotype immediately undermined by the woman’s unwillingness to ‘surrender’ to the act of listening. What’s more, the radio programme within the radio programme opens up a further frame by actually quoting a short segment from radioliterature’s ancestor, Richard Hughes’ *Danger*. It thus provides recipients with self-reference in a further sense. This inter-audioliterary reference to another audioliterary text constitutes a case in point of an extracompositional self-reference, which metareferentially relates the audioliterary text back to the well-known ‘deficiency syndrome’. It is,



however, the latter that facilitates a further twist in both story and discourse – the superimposition of the various levels at some stage culminates in a total ‘conflation’ when the acoustic gestalt foregrounds the pair’s growing engagement in physical intimacy before the gradually receding background of meta-audioliterary commentary.

We have seen that such a multiple frame of reference allows for a multiple metamedial discourse and a multiple audioliterary metaization. As to medial metareference, *Mehr lernen – mehr wissen* also allows for metamedial transparency as to the reception situation and vividly comments on the ‘Hörspiel’ as a literary species endangered by competing radio programmes as well as other artistic media, particularly film. The impulse to tune in to alternative programmes as soon as things become too ‘tedious’ is exemplified in the pair’s switching to Ö3, a pop channel, and the male listener’s apostrophe of film: “Film, *das* ist ein Medium” (ibid.). In fact, the two people’s reactions to the genre and its metareferential discussion on the radio provide ample opportunity for further reflection, so that they have discussed the radio play as a genre ‘averse to light’ and a ‘shady’ one (“lichtscheue Gattung” [ibid.]), before they eventually ‘switch programmes’ in a double sense. They become engaged in analogic rather than digital communication in the form of sexual intercourse, the climax of which acoustically coincides with the high-pitched signal of the traffic news to which the pop channel by then has been switched.

Finally, the medium, having thoroughly ‘massaged’ its recipients, has incited them to more ‘direct communication’. So, all those complexities dissolve when the pair, eventually, turn from the more ephemeral and ethereal of the radio waves to the more physical and concrete of their love play. And yet, even this shift contributes to the metamedial and metageneric quality of Eichberger’s otherwise slightly scandalous audiotext. The intimacy of the medium, so often conjured up in the genre’s scholarly discussion, its particularly isolated and private reception situation is likewise implicitly evoked by this ‘coupling’ (of two levels as well as of two people). Unlike Wondratschek’s autopsy *Paul*, Eichberger’s biopsy of audioliterature as well as the vitality of 97 % acoustically demonstrate that the genre and its meta-discourse are more than just alive and kicking.

### 3. Recapitulation and prospects

Rounding off the preliminary investigation on audioliterary metaization, this conclusion briefly states what the findings are so far and what is still left to be investigated in the field of meta-audioliterature – and that is plenty.

Mayröcker's intricate audiotext *das zu Sehende, das zu Hörende*, the most 'lyrical' of the specimens discussed, has provided us with an example of metageneric reference, 'metageneric' here in the double sense of relating to the genesis of the individual audioliterary text as well as to the genre as such. It has also proven a case in point of intracompositional self-reflection combined with instances of extracompositional metaization which paradoxically reflects its own 'visual groundwork' and its 'visual' genesis as related to other literary genres. Metaization in this context has been shown to have the function of not only rebutting, but artfully undermining audioliterature's alleged 'deficiency syndrome'.

The major function of audioliterary metaization in Seal and Black's example concerns the effort to make 'audible' to listeners the technical prerequisites and developments the ephemeral genre is dependent on. While providing the nearest to a 'good story', 97% *Penetration in Finland* also amply discusses man's historical achievements in the field of 'tele-communication' (spanning the scope from the banal to the transcendental). In explicit and, more impressively so, in implicit forms it critically metaizes the ever-increasing possibilities and pervasiveness of audio communication in its cultural as well as in its questionable usages.

We have seen that the meta-audioliterary experiment at the hands of Wondratschek forces the audience's attention away from the semiotic macro-mode of narrative to the substance and semiotics of audioliterary structure. In the most unrelenting meta-audioliterary manner conceivable, *Paul oder die Zerstörung eines Hörbeispiels* traces the origins of segments and 'effects' back to the manipulative potential of studio equipment in the same way as the radiotext or product (material) as such becomes anatomized and rearranged as part of making transparent the medial (alias political) production process.

Finally, Eichberger's short and slippery contribution to the art of audioliterature has offered us the most thorough meta-audioliterary discourse among the examples chosen. While still upholding the basic function of story-telling, *Mehr lernen – mehr wissen* establishes a

multiple frame of metareference within which the reflection of audio-literary soundscapes has taken on its most comprehensive and convincing gestalt by incorporating the recipient as part of the total 'aural picture'.

For further investigations, the focus will have to shift from the phenomenological (of meta-audioliterary devices in individual audiotexts exemplifying the genre's semiotic idiosyncrasy) to the more historical and functional. This will have to include positioning audioliterary metaization on the map of literary and media history. Within such a diachronic view of audioliterature, the presence (or absence) of meta-audioliterary references within different periods of production and reception can be explored in their preconditions, functions, intensities and as far as the propensity towards such a form of 'self-awareness' is concerned. From such a wider perspective, the establishment of both a (historical) survey of the theory of audioliterature as well as the of the genre itself could profit enormously.

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## Metareference in Computer Games

*Fotis Jannidis*

This contribution offers a tour through various computer games and illustrates the amazing variety and ingenuity of metareferential devices employed in this medium, ranging from playful references to other games or game traditions to 'Easter eggs' and metaleptic mirrorings in paradoxical mises en abyme within certain particularly elaborate games. As opposed to high cultural metareference it appears that most of the metareferences in computer games – with rare exceptions (which are also discussed) – serve other functions, notably entertainment, or the enrichment of it, as well as consolidating 'aficionados' as a group of expert computer game players.

### 1.

Computer games are part of popular culture. In principle, there is nothing exceptional about this, were it not for the fact that in many areas of Cultural Studies the relationship between high culture and popular culture is still at least implicitly determined by what could be called the 'percolator model'. According to this model, high culture develops new forms and topics which, once they are there, sink down until, with suitable temporal distance plus proper trivialization and levelling, they are taken up by popular culture. However, such a view blindly neglects the numerous facts which suggest quite different processes of mediation and exchange. In particular, it seems to disregard both the highly visible role of popular culture as a motivation for, and source of material of, high culture and the manifest independent logic of popular culture which has developed in the past, and still continues developing, its own modes of production, circulation, and use. Computer games are a conspicuous case in point as the 'serious games', i. e., games which in their own understanding and mode of operation are conceived like traditional art objects or have a didactic purpose, are part of a relatively recent development. To conceive of computer games in general in terms of these 'serious games' does not do justice to the general technological development nor to the evolution of new 'gameplay', nor to the development of the basic logic and

the practices and innovations in the system of the genre, including its underlying aesthetic principles: all of these developments have taken place in the popular sphere and in analogy to developments in cinema and particularly in music. The popular world, in addition, shows an internal structure that consists of the two poles of 'mainstream' and 'independent'. Thus, when discussing metareference in computer games, one is not only discussing the appearance of a group of formal constellations in a particular art form, but also the relationship of this phenomenon, which is traditionally associated with avant-garde and postmodernism, to popular culture. That is to say, what emerges is the fact that metareference is no doubt frequently used in computer games – as probably in all popular culture – and that it is highly appreciated there; but it appears in a considerably different function. Yet more on this in my conclusion.

In what follows I will discuss a number of cases of metareference in computer games<sup>1</sup>. Yet I will not primarily describe them in a systematic way as given facts or structures, but rather as the result of a communicative process at whose end metareference emerges as a more or less distinct phenomenon<sup>2</sup>. In this rhetorical analysis of the signifying process, as triggered by elements in medial worlds, metareference can be found in various places. However, the term 'metareference', in this context, is slightly diffuse because, according to current research, metareference concerns not only direct and particular references of the work to itself but also, in a broader sense, more general and indirect references to categories that apply to the respective work, such as, e. g., references to its genre. When, consequently, as an example, a first-person shooter (FPS) discusses violence in games, this can also be seen as a case of metareference. However, in the context of computer games, it is difficult to determine the exact scope of metareference, in particular whether it should include references to any human artefact or only to medial products, to any fictional work or only to (fictional) digital objects, to any computer game, or only to the specific genre of computer games to which the referring work belongs, or whether it is merely a reference to that particular work

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<sup>1</sup> On the concept of metareference, see Wolf's introduction to this vol. and Wolf 2007 as well as Hauthal et al. 2007.

<sup>2</sup> For the notion of communicative process as used here cf. Keller 1995: part 3, Volli 2002: ch. 6, and Jannidis 2004: ch. 2.

itself, possibly also to its programme code<sup>3</sup>. In my view, a likely reason for this uncertainty rests in the very fact that we are not dealing with a homogeneous, static structure but with signification processes that are at any time individualized and share but one feature, namely that their results in one way or another show aspects of self-referentiality. One further aspect that complicates the analysis is the fact that the simulated world of computer games reduplicates – or at least potentially reduplicates – the whole world. Each object or activity in the simulated world can turn into a sign, which – in the case of metareference – can refer to itself, in the broad sense as just explained. Some objects, in turn, are themselves artefacts, medial products, fictional works, fictional digital objects, computer games, or a specific genre of computer games. Yet, in semiotic terms, they are mere signifiers, and it is in no way unquestionably clear whether the signified of a sign whose signifier is a computer game has anything to do with computer games<sup>4</sup>. Besides its virtual objects, the simulated world also contains – at least potentially – the complete sign world of the real world. Accordingly, references are possible, via images, texts, films, or spoken language, to artefacts etc., to genres of computer games, and also to

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<sup>3</sup> Ryan 2006 is one of the few systematic studies of metalepsis in computer games and discusses some examples of metaleptic computer art which refer to their own codes. Harpold 2007: online introduces the term ‘recapture’ in order to assess the limitations effected in the game world by the real-life restrictions of the hardware, and he interprets Ryan’s findings in such a way that, from this perspective, metalepsis needs to have a medial basis; which – as I see it – is incompatible with Ryan’s approach and also with the phenomenon under observation. Santaella 2007 has such an open notion of metareference in games that her seven classes include everything from commands in games to *mods* (user created content). Kampmann Walther 2007 uses a very different approach via Luhmann and Spencer Brown and comes to an even wider notion of self-reference in computer games; they are “inherently self-referential as to their ontology” (219). These approaches, it seem to me, do not offer any new insight into computer games, and one could use probably the same or similar arguments to defend the position that all sign use is self-referential. Neitzel 2007 takes a closer look at meta-communication in computer games as an instance of meta-referentiality. Rapp 2007 discusses some examples of self-reference using the concept in a similar vein as this paper.

<sup>4</sup> A special problem which I cannot address in detail here is the question whether metalepses are always self-referential. The basic consideration of those who adhere to this view maintains, roughly, that metalepses break the aesthetic illusion by forming marked deviations from the logic of possible worlds, thereby drawing the recipient’s attention to the fact that the work is something ‘made’ or ‘constructed’; see, e. g., Wolf 2008.



the respective game itself. These signs can either be interpreted directly as being self-referential – e. g., when a game shows an inscription “You are in a game” – or otherwise only in a complex inferential process.

In order to keep a clear focus on the concept of metareference as a special case of self-reference (in a narrow sense) I would like to reserve the term ‘metareference’ for those cases in which the reference also implies direct self-reference to the artefact (in my case: game) at hand (Werner Wolf would call this direct metareference as opposed to indirect metareference). If, for example, in a computer game we find a reference to another game, for my purpose, this should only be considered a case of metareference when this reference also implies a reference to the referring work itself, in particular its being a computer game as well.

Another preliminary remark seems in place. It relates to the fact that metareference cannot only be found in computer games themselves (as ‘absolute’ artefacts, as it were) but that it has, for quite some time, also been part of the interaction between games and users, notably computer game aficionados (as can be seen in their discussions about games). However, this phenomenon is generally not referred to by scholarly terms containing ‘meta-’ but is treated under the less dignified term of ‘Easter egg’<sup>5</sup>, a term that is less precise than is expected in scholarly conceptualisations. Yet it is highly descriptive, for it most frequently refers to a hidden element in a computer game (world) which elicits some sort of surprise when detected and constitutes a form of witty communication between the designer of computer games and the player which, in the framework of art, would be perceived as breaking aesthetic illusion (cf. Wolf 1993: ch. 3). A familiar case of such an Easter egg is the inscription found at a high-up and scarcely accessible point on a bridge in the game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar 2004): “There are no Easter Eggs up here. Go away”<sup>6</sup>. One of the first Easter eggs came from Warren Robinett, the programmer of the Atari game *Adventure* (Atari 1979). At a well-concealed spot in a room one can find the entrance to another room, the only content of which is the name of the program-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter\\_egg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_egg) (virtual).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. <http://kezins.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/noeggs-copy.jpg>.

mer as a wall inscription: “Created by Warren Robinett”<sup>7</sup>. In the meantime whole websites have been dedicated to collecting Easter eggs, and there are also hit lists of them<sup>8</sup>. A quick glance at these collections can show how widespread metareference is in computer games, and also how much enthusiasm it triggers in players.

## 2.

As shown above, the signifier of a metareference can be a computer game; it can either take the form of an explicit thematisation of computer games in the game world when this signifier is also a signifier within the game world, e. g., posters with pictures of computer games, or conversations about games; otherwise, the signifier may be an autonomous object within the game world, e. g., an arcade game placed in a bar that can be entered by a character in the game. In the second case, a further distinction can be made between a mere representation of the computer game as an object in the game world, and the possibility of activating the representation and playing a game within the game. In all these cases, metareference does not occur automatically but only as a consequence of specific conditions.

The thematisation of games frequently occurs in distinct variants, some of which have no (clear) metareferential quality as only simple elements of the game world are involved which are present merely for the sake of a reality effect (testifying to the fact that computers and computer games have become pervading elements of our experiential reality); the game industry has by now recognised this fact as an additional business opportunity<sup>9</sup>. There are, however, also clearly metareferential examples: in the game *Rainbow Six Vegas 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2008), the player has to, or is allowed to, fight his way

<sup>7</sup> The main motivation behind the creation of this message was “the tradition of artists [...] identifying themselves as the authors of their own works” (Robinett 2006: 712), and Robinett relied on the willingness of people to look for secret messages: “I remembered [...] how people played Beatles records backward, searching for secret messages” (ibid.: 713).

<sup>8</sup> Cf., e. g., <http://www.eeggs.com/>, where also Easter eggs in DVDs, books, and other media are collected. An example of a hit list is Gamespot’s “The Greatest Easter Eggs in Gaming”, <http://www.gamespot.com/features/6131572/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In-game\\_advertising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In-game_advertising); cf. also the introduction to this vol: sec. 5.3.

through the L. A. Convention Center; the first thing he encounters are the installations of a big LAN party and advertisements for first-person shooters, e. g., big posters for *Far Cry 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2008) – this being not the only example of sales promotion in the game. Nearby one can also find a poster for the game *Diplomate Ultimatum*, which, however, does not actually exist. In this case, the protagonist can sneak up on some of his enemies who discuss a game that, as can be supposed, is the game advertised:

- I've got to say: this is a cool booth.
- How much money do you guess these games make in one year?
- I have no idea.
- I have a cousin working on one of those war games. He says they want to make it non-violent. You know, with all that bad media.
- A video game about war with no violence? No rate. How are you shooting stuff?
- You don't. You choose not to attack and allow your diplomats to work everything out.
- So you control the diplomats?
- Oh no, you don't control the diplomats, you let them loose and they do – eh – diplomatic stuff and everybody's happy.
- And what is the point of the game?
- The point of all video games: to make mad amounts of money.
- Will it work?
- Hell, yes it will.
- Man we are in the wrong business. [Act IV; my transcript]

The conversation about the game, whose mechanics remains unclear to all people involved, is, most obviously, a satire on the criticism of violence in war games, because in real life violence, no doubt, is highly deplorable, but in games, where no real harm is intended, it is a device to make them more interesting. As these utterances are put forth in a game that offers a terror scenario and allows the player to fight terror with weapons, they, at least in the game, also constitute a self-reference, which implies that *Vegas 2* has very well understood what the point of a game is. Furthermore, the frame of the conversation must not be overlooked either: the mercenaries realise that they are in the wrong business and could make far more money with games – on the authorial level a clearly self-ironical, if not even bitter, comment on the job of a designer of computer games.

With comparable frequency one can find metaleptic thematisations in computer games. This phenomenon started with the above-mentioned room bearing the inscription “Created by Warren Robinett”, which for a long time was celebrated as the first Easter egg.

More elaborate and self-ironical is the self-reference in *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* (Troika Games 2004). In this role-playing game (RPG) the player can choose between various races of vampires, but his career always starts by becoming a vampire himself. In the middle of the game one finds oneself in a little shop and can hear the following commercial dialogue in the background on the radio:

- Commercial announcer: This fall:
- Old man: I am afraid I can't see too well these days. Do you think you can go to the nearest village and pick me up a loaf of bread.
- Monster [*screams*]: Bread! Good!
- Commercial announcement: The new horror rpg from Troika Games.
- Younger man: Well, I can tell you where the bakery is, stranger, but before I do, would you mind picking up a little girl from the lake?
- Commercial announcer: You are the monster [*scream*], or are you? Frankenstein, blockbuster, coming soon to a PC near you. [My transcript]

The parallels between the fictional game *Frankenstein* and *Vampire*, also produced by Troika, are striking. In both quest-oriented role-playing games the player acts as a monster, but in *Frankenstein* he or she can choose which moral course they want to take. In addition, this is an insider joke because in the first game produced by the firm, *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura*, one could choose "Frankenstein", among others, as a background for one's character.

The commercial clip takes turns with others on the radio so that a player can hear it only when he stays in the shop long enough. This is also a typical quality of most metaleptic elements in computer games: they appear only in the background, and in most cases the player need not concern himself with them; at times, he or she must even take up a particular position in the game in order to be able to perceive them at all. In games, metaleptic elements function in a way clearly different from that in a novel, where the linearity of the text always forces the reader into a specific perception.

The metalepsis in *Max Payne 2* (Remedy Entertainment 2003) occurs in a similarly incidental position. During a dream sequence, which, however, is not presented in a cut scene but as a playable episode, two central characters of the plot, Max's partner and his new love, the contract killer Mona, threaten each other with pistols and thereby try to draw Max Payne to their respective sides. This is a highly dramatic scene, in which a central conflict of the game is revealed. If one can avoid being caught by this scene and starts to explore the surroundings, in the adjoining room one can find a flip chart, which, as one is positioned directly in front of it, reads: "Wake

up! You are in a computer game!!!!” The cry, “Wake up!”, is ambiguous because the character happens to be in a dream at that moment – on the level of the fictional narrative audience within the game this is consequently no case of metalepsis –, at the same time, however, the player directing the character gets the impression that he himself is the addressee of the quoted imperative, and this renders the situation metaleptic.

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Games can also appear as objects in games, e. g., as consoles, game boxes, arcade games, or as games which have been installed on a computer. The medium makes it possible that these objects do not only represent the game as a sign but actually offer the option of playing a game. In the first-person shooter *Prey* (Human Head Studios 2004), e. g., the protagonist happens to be in his girlfriend’s pub just before an alien attack takes place. In a corner of the pub there are arcades that can be activated to play *Rune Man*, a slightly disguised variant of *Pac Man* (Namco 1980). There are a great number of games that contain such games within a game, which, for example, can be part of the normal gameplay, as in *Bioshock*, where the player, by using a variant of the game *Pipemania*<sup>10</sup>, reaches his goal of hacking a computer or breaking a safe. In *Fahrenheit* (Quantic Dream 2005), which shows features of an adventure and an action game, such a ‘minigame’, as this device is called, is inserted when the character fights or performs some other stressful action. This minigame is modelled on the well-known game *Simon*<sup>11</sup> from the 1980s. Generally, these games within a game have no metareferential qualities and are only part of the virtual game worlds.

However, in what follows I will discuss in more detail two games whose games within a game have metaleptic and clearly metareferential qualities. In the comical adventure game *Maniac Mansion: Day of the Tentacle* (LucasArts 1993), successor to the highly successful *Maniac Mansion* (Lucasfilm Games 1987), three friends search the home

<sup>10</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pipe\\_Dream\\_\(video\\_game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pipe_Dream_(video_game)). To be precise: the mini game in *Bioshock* is a further developed variant of a version of *Pipemania* produced by a Japanese firm as a arcade game; cf. [http://arcade.svatopluk.com/pipe\\_dream/](http://arcade.svatopluk.com/pipe_dream/).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon\\_\(game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_(game)).

of Dr. Fred, a place which on an earlier occasion almost became the starting point of a conspiracy by aliens. Every one of the friends soon starts searching a separate part of the house. One of the characters – the player directs all three of them in turn – explores a number of rooms and discovers in one of them Dr. Fred's tall son, Ed, who is brooding over his stamp collection while, to the right, a hamster is sitting in a cage and reading a newspaper. If you click your way through the dialogue options it becomes apparent that some crucial event must have taken place in the past which has supposedly turned the hamster into a dimwit and Ed into a peaceable creature. In the rear part of the room there is a computer that can be used. On it, the player can start the predecessor game of 1987, which is completely contained in the new one and tells the whole prehistory<sup>12</sup>. Actually the existence of the game *Maniac Mansion* is even a part of the plot of *Day of the Tentacle*. Later on in the game the three protagonists explore the same house but on three different time levels and the player can switch between them and manipulate objects by sending them back and forth in time. One of these is a contract between the company LucasArt Games and Dr Fred about the royalties for the first game, which provides the money to finally save the world. Metalepsis is generally defined by the fact that two incompatible narrative levels, one of which is mostly created by the other, overlap. In this case, one plot is distributed over two narrative levels – one of them, the past one, being a computer game in the fictional world of the present level. The result of the events on the former level determine the events on the latter level. This does not put the narrative into question but, more importantly, increases the entertainment quality of the comical story, especially for those who have also played the predecessor.

Far less cheerful and far more controversial is my other example, the *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* (Ledonne 2005)<sup>13</sup>. In contrast to most of the other games discussed in this contribution, this game was made by a single person, belongs to the 'independent' group, has artistic claims, and, as far as its function is concerned, is clearly oriented

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<sup>12</sup> Rapp points out that this is not an Easter Egg because the publishers advertised the fact that the predecessor is part of the game and even explained in the manual how to find it (cf. 2007: 263).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://www.columbinegame.com/>. There one can also find a documentation of the extensive discussion about the game. Ledonne, the author, was a film student at the time of completing the game and has meanwhile made a film on its reception.

towards the traditional mechanisms of high culture: it is supposed to irritate the recipient and put his perceptual habits into question. The game puts the player into the roles of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two adolescents who murdered thirteen people in Columbine High School. In this game, the player follows the two youths from their early rising to their brutal slaughtering of the victims and their final suicide. A considerable portion of the game is taken up by their running amok in the school: the player directs his character through the whole school building and grounds. The mere fact that a game with such a setting exists has caused great outrage. Ledonne defended his game by claiming that its aim was to “genuinely challenge social taboos or confront real cultural issues”<sup>14</sup>. The game is expected to provoke introspection by the player, which is why the game’s forums are so essential to come to terms with its social implications: “At the end of the day, the understanding of the Columbine school shooting is deepened and redefined. That is the *real object of the game*”<sup>15</sup>. From a gameplay perspective, the player has the implicit order to kill as many students as possible. This is so because what starts after the death of both youths is a markedly long level in hell in which the two ‘heroes’ have the task of killing countless demons. This task can only be fulfilled if the player, by having killed many students, has reached a high enough level. I do not intend to expatiate on the endless discussion of the game but will highlight only two important aspects<sup>16</sup>. Ledonne, in this game, has reused much information about the murderers, especially such information as was drawn on by the media for explaining the massacre. It is a fact of particular relevance that the two were passionate players of the first-person shooter *Doom*. Ledonne’s game starts with Eric Harris being woken in the morning, whereafter one can explore his room. Searching his computer results in the message: “I was the master – Now I can only hope they’ll download my levels and try to beat’em”. This obviously reflects a thought of the character.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.columbinegame.com/statement.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

<sup>16</sup> I want to mention at least one critical point, namely, that in my view (shared by others) the second half of the game is a failure because it is uneasily linked to the first half through the necessity of levelling up one’s character by killing all students. In addition, it also reduces the impression that is created by the well-researched flashbacks and the multi-faceted reconstruction of the deed and the doers in the first part and shifts the focus completely onto a few pseudo-philosophical pronouncements – Nietzsche, among others, again plays a role in the hell level.

Another message follows: “You scored ‘Doom’ for the PC. Let the desensitization to violence BEGIN”. This renders the voice of a commentator. The first message is related to the fact that Harris, as many others did, built his own *Doom* levels. As opposed to those media reports which claimed to have identified the killing spree’s essential trigger in violent computer games, this game in fact offers more relevant information and different explanations which it links up with numerous other factors that are revealed in various conversations and flashbacks.

Up to this point, the game would merely form an example of the thematisation, and also the object presentation, of computer games. However, after the death of the two youths the hell level is packed with monsters from *Doom*. This can be described in terms of metalepsis because both levels, the game world and the ‘real’ world, which *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* has so far distinguished, now overlap. It becomes even more complex due to the fact that the presentation of a ‘realistic’ game world itself takes place in the medium of an role-playing game, and this, furthermore, in a technical format which even at the time of its publication was below the standard of usual entertainment games. The main reason for this are the reduced technical skills on behalf of the author, Ledonne, who at the same time has declared it to be a conscious and freely chosen act. This also becomes evident in the discussion springing up every now and then about why he did not choose a first person shooter such as *Doom* as the authorial system. Ledonne’s answer:

The fact that the game IS an RPG helps it to succeed as a work of art because it challenges assumptions and forces people to reframe the debate about videogame violence; while many people believe videogames increase aggression, they generally aren’t talking about menu-based 16-bit games like SCMRPG [...] <sup>17</sup>.

To put it differently, had Ledonne opted for an FPS, he would have produced the clearest case of self-reference, which is exactly what he wanted to avoid in order to achieve an alienation effect. Ledonne obviously knows the topical arguments describing the functions of art and uses them to defend his design choices, including the decision to create this game in the first place. Yet I have difficulties in discerning how the choice of an RPG system to author the game could contribute to a reframing of the dispute.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.columbinegame.com/discuss/viewtopic.php?t=1300>.



## 3.

In contrast to what has been discussed in the previous section, the following one will deal with cases of metareference in which computer games are not explicitly thematised or represented by the signifiers, but in which computer games are only implicitly referred to and the references themselves can merely be inferred owing to hints.

My first example comes from the extremely successful MMORPG *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard 2004). In the middle of the jungle one encounters a group of hunters, who are all quest givers. The most important figure is a square-built creature that belongs to the race of the dwarfs<sup>18</sup> and whose name is Hemet Nesingwary; it is fairly easy to identify this name as an anagram of the name Ernest Hemingway<sup>19</sup>. This is an amusing allusion which definitely has humorous implications as a commentary because, on the one hand, the novelist is recognised as a big-game hunter, a fact which is stressed by the figure being the person who allocates the most important quests of the group; on the other hand, a dwarf remains a dwarf, even though, in the conventional fantasy setting, dwarfs typically show strongly masculine features. It is to be assumed that it is the function of the intermedial reference to entertain the recipient who, once he has recognised the anagram, may feel flattered because of his education and astuteness. *World of Warcraft* contains numerous similarly allusive names<sup>20</sup>.

As in all popular media, we find a considerable amount of intermedial references in computer games. Yet in most cases we are dealing with references which contain no direct self-references. Direct self-reference is, however, not in strict opposition to such intermedial reference nor to hetero-reference in general; rather, there is a continuum, i. e., hetero-reference as well as indirect self-reference can increasingly become direct self-reference, as some of the following examples will show.

<sup>18</sup> Many RPGs have a fantasy setting and follow, at least in principle, Tolkien's world conception, i. e., the worlds are inhabited by humans, dwarfs, elves, orcs, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Cf., as an extensive source, [http://www.wowwiki.com/Hemet\\_Nesingwary](http://www.wowwiki.com/Hemet_Nesingwary); there one can also find elaborate descriptions of the details of the allusion (e. g., the names of the rewards refer to Hemingway's books) and of the history of the character in the game, who has changed his location.

<sup>20</sup> For example, one character, whom the players need to address in order to travel by zeppelin, is called Hin Denburg; cf. [http://www.wowwiki.com/Hin\\_Denburg](http://www.wowwiki.com/Hin_Denburg).

The first example of a relatively high degree of self-reference is clearly a borderline case. It is taken from the game *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), which I will discuss in more detail below. In this game, the player strays through a devastated dystopian world which is dominated by violence-prone drug addicts. The beautiful architecture and furnishing in Art Deco design show many vestiges of destruction and dissolution. While crossing a market area, the player hits, among other things, upon a truncated piece of brown cheese that is lying on a wooden floor, which in turn shows traces of bullet shootings. From a particular perspective, when the player is standing right in front of the object and looking down, the row of hits directly leads him to the missing eighth of the piece of cheese. This situation conspicuously resembles one in the game *Pacman* (Namco 1980), with its famous yellow circle that devours the dispersed dots in the labyrinth. Thus, although at a first glance this scene appears to be a pure case of hetero-reference, at closer inspection it reveals a considerable potential for metareference: this situation draws our attention to the fact that it is a consciously, albeit covertly placed case of self-reference to a previous game; thus drawing our attention to a certain extent to the medial nature of the embedding computer game and not only to the content of the scene.

A second example of such a case of concealed self-reference can be found in the inscription “Max Pane. Bullet Proof Glass” from the game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar 2004): it refers to the homophonous name of the protagonist of two games of the same name, Max Payne (Remedy Entertainment 2001, 2003). These games belong to the same genre as GTA, the third-person shooter, and both are characterised by the feature that in their wild and also clearly self-ironical acts of violence much goes to pieces. This is often presented in cinematic terms as a stylistic means of dramatising the impact of the player. The appearance of the name of the competitive product, which came out a year before, as the name of a firm producing bullet-proof glass can, therefore, on the one hand, be understood as a case of ironical hetero-reference; on the other hand, it implies a certain level of self-irony and -reference with respect to genre identity and similarities in the modes of presentation.

In text-related narratology Peter Rabinowitz (1977) analytically distinguishes between ‘narrative’ and ‘authorial’ recipients as this dis-

tion permits us to describe different inferential processes<sup>21</sup>. One can use these concepts also in an analysis of computer games. The aforementioned hints and pieces of information are only self-referential on the level of the ‘authorial’ and not that of the ‘narrative’ audience. When, early on in *Bioshock*, the protagonist receives the instruction “Now, would you kindly find a crowbar or something” from his unknown friend through the loudspeaker, this is a simple cue on the level of the narrative audience to get hold of a weapon, which – in view of the monster that one has just escaped from – seems all too obvious. On the authorial level, however, this will be recognised as a reference to the best-known recent example of the FPS genre, *Half-Life* (Valve 1998), where the protagonist famously starts his run only equipped with a crowbar<sup>22</sup>. *Half-Life* redefined the genre, notably by its narrative technique. *Bioshock* is not only also a first-person shooter, it in fact most extensively and skilfully uses the narrative forms which Valve have developed for *Half-Life*<sup>23</sup>. So it is only on this level that the utterance is metareferential.

In *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl* (GSC Game World 2007), the reference to *Half-Life* works in quite a similar way, as I would argue. In a hardly accessible corner of the world, which is inspired by a Strugatzki Brothers story about a mysterious zone full of strange traps and artefacts, the player can find a corpse of one Gordon Freeman lying on the ground. This is also the name of the protagonist in the game series just mentioned, *Half-Life*. Here self-commentary – at least on the authorial level – is even more explicit as not only the name of the character is conveyed but also his rank: ‘rookie’. At the

<sup>21</sup> Both are aspects of the model reader and should not be confounded with the extra-textual, real reader. According to Rabinowitz’ distinction, the ‘narrative audience’ is the public that is addressed by the narrator and – in most cases – also shares his fictional world. For the narrative audience, the narrator’s discourse is therefore a report. In contrast, the ‘authorial audience’ appreciates the text, the fictional world, and also the narrator himself as a creation by the author. In my view, this distinction can be applied to equally well to films or computer games.

<sup>22</sup> This is also true for the successor, *Half-Life 2* (Valve 2004), where the handing over of the crowbar already happens quite self-consciously.

<sup>23</sup> Up to *Half-Life*, first-person shooters scarcely had a plot but only a frame story, which was even in part only attached to the game as a text. *Half-Life*, in contrast, tells an intriguing story with elaborately animated figures, and this not through cut scenes but through scripting in the plot world of the player.

same time this allusion implies that this game is more difficult and more sophisticated than the earlier one.

It is obvious that, on account of their variety, the functions of this kind of metareference can scarcely be classified. What they share, at the most, is that, in contrast to metareference in high culture, they are not charged with a claim to 'deep meaning' but more playful and geared towards entertainment. This is also true for more mediated forms of metareference which offer a game within the game, and which, at least in part, expect a considerable amount of active intellectual cooperation on the side of the recipient. Thus, in *Half-Life 2* (Valve 2004), the protagonist has to run through a dark corridor which is lit only by the unsteady gleam of his flashlight. On the walls – quite in keeping with the atmosphere of decay and dilapidation – one can see graffiti and scribbles. One of them says DMOZ, and worked into the first letter one can find the following sequence of numbers: 24724. DMOZ is an abbreviation of *directory.mozilla.org*, the former domain name of the Open Directory Project, which carries out a classification of internet links, realised by a group of volunteers. DMOZ works as a semiotic trigger<sup>24</sup>, i. e., as a clue to the fact that the chain of signs with its corresponding number serves a function that goes beyond a simple reality effect and the usual concomitant symptom qualities, namely, it functions as a cryptic 'metasign'. If one enters the aforementioned numbers into the index, one does not strike a hit. Instead, one is redirected to a search engine such as Google which in turn identifies 24724 as the postal code of a place called Freeman in West Virginia, a place bearing the same name as the game's protagonist. This way of embedding real elements in the game world is reminiscent of the 'alternate reality games', which operate in a similar way<sup>25</sup>. Comparable, above all, is the task of analysing given information and checking it against real data until a new piece of game information can be gained. In this case, however, the newly established information does not continue the game but only refers to itself by the enciphered name of the protagonist. As usual in such cases of cryptic metareference in computer games, what is important is not the goal, but how to reach it: the recipient, being aware of the structure and nature of the references,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jannidis 2004: 78 for an explanation of the term.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate\\_reality\\_game](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_reality_game); and Szulborski 2005: especially part 1.

knows him- or herself to be a member of the small circle of initiates who are able to have an adequate understanding of what is going on.

In the game *Half-Life*, one particular example of metareference shows a similar, if slightly different sign structure as, in this case, the circle of players who have the necessary amount of previous knowledge is even more restricted. On one of the doors which the hero has to pass during the game, a signpost is placed which identifies the owner of the office as one Dr Newell: "Chaos Theory R&D". The name is identical with that of the founder of Valve and the director of the development of the game, Gabe Newell. Newell, who had become a rich man by working for Microsoft before he left the firm to found his own, dropped out of university. The allusion to chaos theory in connection with the department of 'Research and Development' is obviously a similar joke for initiates. What to me appears as the crucial point in this is the fact that the intended audience of these allusions does not seem to be identical with the authorial audience. For the intended audience, this is a case of metalepsis.

In the game *SIN Episodes* (Ritual Entertainment 2006), the protagonist, in his breathless chase after the female villain, meets a green fish under water whose strikingly large front teeth jut out of its mouth. Paying a little more attention to his surroundings he discovers more green fish in the secret areas of the game. Aficionados will immediately know: the fish does not point to a specific game but to a generic tradition of game designs. Since the game designer Tom Hall had invented the figure of the *Dopefish* for *Commander Keen IV* (id 1991) he and a great number of other people working in the game industry have placed the fish into their works in one form or another<sup>26</sup>. In the game *SIN Episodes*, the player identifies the figure not only as an element that also appears in another game, but as something that game designers leave in their games just as others leave graffitis such as 'Killroy was here' on walls. To put it differently: in comparison to other cases of covert metareference, in this case the work is more visibly laid bare (for the authorial audience) as being a 'made' object, even as a particularly topical item within a generic series.

As typical of popular culture, most of the cases of metareference here described have no substantial effect on the meaning structure of the whole game. The two following examples, however, operate differently. *Max Payne 2* (Remedy Entertainment 2003) tells the story

<sup>26</sup> Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dopefish> and <http://www.dopefish.com/>.

of a policeman of the same name, whose wife was killed in the preceding game *Max Payne*. As its predecessor, the game uses a number of unusual stylistic means for its purpose: the cut scenes, in most cases, are kept in the form of black-and-white comics with few colour effects. The overall stylistic approach follows that of film noir, which is even more emphasised by the extensive use of voice over, particularly in the cut scenes. The dramatic commentary, which is full of tropes, considerably increases the emotional intensity of the game. In his chase the protagonist passes through a series of apartments. In some of them he finds TV sets on which commercials and episodes from a number of series can be watched. One of the series, *Address Unknown*, uses the typical stylistic means of the game – voice over, language full of metaphors, melodramatic music and sound configurations –, and these ‘coincidences’ are even combined with further similarities on the level of the plot: in fact, important elements of the plot represented en abyme in the TV series are identical with plot elements of the embedding computer game. This form of (in part metaleptic) metareference is no doubt entertaining, but at the same time the distinct and unbroken form of self-irony changes our awareness of the fundamental nature of the game as it persistently highlights its artificiality. If one checks all episodes of the series in their sequence<sup>27</sup>, the metareferential nature of the computer game in question becomes even more evident. In one of the mise en abyme episodes the protagonist says in voice over: “I was part of an elaborate game, complex for its own sake” [my transcript] – which is obviously another metareference to the embedding game. In the last episode, a telephone rings and the ‘hero’ answers it by giving the name of the murderer he is seeking, thus seemingly adopting a new identity:

- Caller: John Mirra?
- Hero: Yes, this is he.
- Caller: This is John Mirra. Welcome to the next level. [My transcript]

The embedded representation, the TV series mise en abyme, obviously mirrors elements of the embedding plot and narrative mode of the game – and the motive of the mirror is even taken up in the name of the villain in the TV series and in the announcement of the series at large; most intriguing are, however, the distinct references to the

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<sup>27</sup> The episodes are spread over the whole game, which makes it not so easy to see them at a stretch; but here, as usual, YouTube is a good source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUXUyItb1ys>.

frame ‘computer game’ since they highlight most strikingly the self-reflective, metareferential nature of the game at hand<sup>28</sup>.

This is taken even a step further by the game *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), designed by Ken Levine. The game starts with the main character sitting in an airplane in 1960 and holding a package on his knees. Suddenly the plane crashes and the player can barely rescue himself to a small island, on which he finds the entrance to a kind of elevator that leads him to an extensive underwater city, called Rapture. This city – as is revealed through documents and other sources which are found on the way – used to be a utopia but has developed into its opposite. When the protagonist alights from the lift a helper offers his services through the radio system, instructing and explaining the world to him. Toward the end of the game it emerges that this helper has only used him, and even more piquantly, that the hero himself, without knowing it, is from this city and has been brainwashed so that he now takes every sentence that begins with ‘Would you kindly’ as a command that has to be carried out unconditionally. By hindsight, many parts of the puzzle fall into place. Thus, for example, it said on the package which the player had on the plane that the package should not be opened. In addition, the instructions by the helper at the beginning always start with that formula. Instructions to players can be found in almost all games, particularly in first-person shooters. Frequently they are voices of a superior or any other instance in command. At times the game communicates directly with the player. It is exactly this game mechanism which *Bioshock* reflects upon critically in a marked way: the player subjects himself to the game and its instructions like someone who has lost a will of his own. This coincides with the player slowly changing, even physically, during the game, as he starts to gradually resemble the monster he is fighting against. This form of criticism can clearly be seen as part of a more comprehensive reflection in the game on self-dependent behaviour, which deals, partly in favour, partly critically, with Ayn Rand’s objectivism. By showing this kind of metareference, and by generally displaying profound reflections, *Bioshock* proves to be a clearly atypical kind of game: on the one hand, it exemplifies all features of a blockbuster and was, by

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<sup>28</sup> In this game, there is yet another metaleptic mirroring, which is at the same time an insider joke: Sam Lake, or Sami Järvi, the author who is responsible for the script of the two *Max Payne* games, was also the model for the protagonist in *Max Payne 1*, but in *Max Payne 2*, he is the model for the hero of *Address Unknown*.

comparison, a successful game. On the other hand, it uses numerous strategies which definitely belong to high culture<sup>29</sup> and are due, one would think, to Ken Levine's "useless liberal arts degree" (Levine qtd. in Perry 2006: 3).

#### 4.

Games have meanwhile become part of every-day culture, and it is part of the logic of exploitation in the popular sphere that anything that is successful in one medium, be it film, book, or game, will be taken up and further developed by another medium. Thereby smaller or larger multimedial universes are created, such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock Holmes*, etc. This has become every-day practice to the extent that the process itself has meanwhile become playfully available. The successful TV series *Entourage* (HBO 2004–) deals with a group of friends with thriving Hollywood star Vincent Chase at its centre<sup>30</sup>. His far less successful brother Johnny Chase, who has had no engagement for quite some time, had his most celebrated appearance as the hero Tarvold in a TV series called *Viking Quest*, which – in the world of *Entourage* – ran for one season. In September 2008, a website was created as part of a marketing campaign for the fifth season of *Entourage*, which is part of the fictional world of the HBO TV series and announces the publication of the DVD set of *Viking Quest*<sup>31</sup>. At the same time the website announces the forthcoming launch of the video game of the same name and invites the visitor to play two levels of the game on the web-

<sup>29</sup> The game series *Metal Gear* by Hideo Kojima, often discussed in game studies, shows very similar characteristics; cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metal\\_Gear\\_\(series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metal_Gear_(series)).

<sup>30</sup> I owe the reference to *Entourage* and the real website with the real game trailer for the fictional game to the fictional TV series to Ian Bogost's blog. Bogost starts his entry with the following statement: "I'm sure all our readers will agree that there is not enough mise-en-abyme in videogames. Sure, we have pomo self-referential examples like *Metal Gear Solid* or *Bioshock*, but nothing so turned in on itself that you have to scratch your very head to find your way in, let alone out." Bogost then describes this case as a counter-case. Cf. <http://www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000982.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking\\_Quest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_Quest) and <http://www.vikingquestgame.com>.



site. In reality, no video game by the name of *Viking Quest* exists, yet the two levels on the website can actually be played (Fuel Industries 2008)<sup>32</sup>. Where the usual rating in capital letters by the Entertainment Software Rating Board would be expected to be placed, we find a V: “Rated for Vikings, Violence and Vengeance. Play well enough it also Stands for VICTORY! May also contain a likeness of Johnny Chase”. ‘Victory’ is the war cry of Tarvold, who is also the protagonist of the game. He shows a distinct resemblance, especially in the opening and closing credits, to Johnny Chase, respectively actor Kevin Dillon, who plays Chase. The name of Johnny Chase in the above quote from the website is a link that again leads on to an HBO page, on which one can find a video clip in which Johnny Chase complains about the fact that the likeness is not particularly striking and that the character in no way looks like a great warrior. The ‘viral’<sup>33</sup> video first appeared on YouTube and shows the typical features of a self-made video: in the background we see a bedroom, and the film only ends after the speaker has left. Thus, what we have got is both a real and a fictional website with an equally real game trailer for a fictional game to a fictitious TV series from a real fictional TV series. The ‘mock launch’ of the website with the DVD and game commercials authenticates the fictitious TV series, and it is again authenticated by the protest of the character who represents the actor – all this, of course, is presented as a very entertaining game. One would expect recipients to understand this constellation with out great difficulty despite its not merly sounding but actually being complicated<sup>34</sup>. The game on the website itself does not show any metareferential aspects, but is rather a token in a metareferential game.

In this particular case, as also in most of the examples discussed above, metareference generally seems to function as entertainment<sup>35</sup>. Metareference enriches the game, allows the player to make new discoveries when replaying the game, and thus rewards him or her for

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the report by the comany about the aims of the game: <http://www.fuelindustries.com/casestudies/vikingquest/>.

<sup>33</sup> This is a description given by the production company, cf. <http://www.fuelindustries.com/casestudies/vikingquest/>.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the commentaries on YouTube, where, arguably, the video with Johnny Chase was first shown; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=711\\_gsvP96Zs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=711_gsvP96Zs).

<sup>35</sup> Cf., with regard to entertainment as the primary function of popular culture, Hgel 2007: part 1.

running through it a second or a third time. Thus, one can regard metareference as enhancing a game's entertainment effect. Players themselves are keenly aware of this function. One player commented on metareference and other 'Easter Eggs': "The developers of the game placed enough secrets throughout the roughly six hours of gameplay to merit multiple runs through the game"<sup>36</sup>. To put it differently: this kind of concentrated semiotic structure invites reuse. What popular and high culture have in common is the higher value attributed to works enriched in such a manner. What is very different, however, is the intellectual orchestration of how to deal with metareference. The often pompous self-dramatisation of high culture has for a long time been alien to popular culture, yet with the discovery of popular culture in the context of Cultural Studies, the frequent appearance of metareference has been hailed as a welcome occasion to attribute higher value to those works. Yet, at least in most of the cases discussed above I would qualify such a reading as a well-intended but nonetheless delusive misunderstanding which fails to account for the specific nature of popular culture.

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<sup>36</sup> User Ouroboros314 on the game *Sin Emergence* on the 3D Realms forums <http://forums.3drealms.com/vb/showthread.php?t=17710>; very similarly, the user cousyrules at YouTube on *Max Payne 2*: "i love this game, so many different things you can do, never gets old"; [http://www.youtube.com/comment\\_servlet?all\\_comments&v=QUXUyItb1ys&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DQUXUyItb1ys](http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=QUXUyItb1ys&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DQUXUyItb1ys).

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*Doom* (id 1993)

*Fahrenheit* (Quantic Dream 2005)

*Far Cry 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2008)

*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar North 2004)

*Half-Life* (Valve 1998)

*Half-Life 2* (Valve 2004)

*Maniac Mansion* (Lucasfilm Games 1987)

*Maniac Mansion: Day of the Tentacle* (LucasArts 1993)

*Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment 2001)

*Max Payne 2* (Remedy Entertainment 2003)

*Metal Gear* (Konami 1987–)

*Pacman* (Namco 1980)

*Prey* (Human Head Studios 2004)

*Rainbow Six Vegas 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2008)

*SIN Episodes* (Ritual Entertainment 2006)

*S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl* (GSC Game World 2007)

*Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* (Troika Games 2004)

*Viking Quest* (Fuel Industries 2008)

*World of Warcraft* (Blizzard 2004)



## **Metareference in More than One Medium**



## When Metadrama Is Turned into Metafilm A Media-Comparative Approach to Metareference

*Janine Hauthal*

Assuming that the study of adaptations of metaworks helps to develop and shape metareference as a transgeneric and transmedial concept, the present article focuses on the rare instances in which metadrama has become (meta)film. Attention is drawn to the fact that, in the change from one medium to the other, processes of both transformation and transposition occur. They serve as keys to the media-comparative research into the relationship of (meta)drama and (meta)film. Tom Stoppard's adaptation of his own *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* exemplifies an intermedial transposition of metadrama into film, resulting in a meta-dramatic film. Alain Resnais' two films *Smoking* and *No Smoking*, which adapt Alan Ayckbourn's *Intimate Exchanges* for the cinema screen, illustrate a media-specific transformation. The media-comparative point of view of these analyses points to salient perspectives and limits of a transgeneric and transmedial approach to metareference in the arts and media.

### 1. Scenarios of turning metadrama into (meta)film

Despite the wide-spread dissemination of metareference in all kinds of media and arts (see Hauthal et al., eds. 2007), instances in which a meta-work is adapted from another medium or art form are rare. With respect to drama and film, there are only a few examples of metaplays which have become (meta)films. This article investigates different ways of adapting metadrama for the screen as exemplified by Tom Stoppard's dramatic and filmic versions of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Alan Ayckbourn's *Intimate Exchanges*, a series of plays which the French director Alain Resnais turned into the two interconnected films *Smoking* and *No Smoking*.

In general, two scenarios can be distinguished with regard to adaptations of metadrama into film. In the first scenario, a filmmaker *transforms* a play's medium- and genre-specific references to drama and theatre into reflections on film and/or filmmaking. This way of adapting a play for the screen is called a 'media-specific transformation'. It results in a metafilm in which the loss of the original play-script's metadramatic qualities is compensated by corresponding



metafilmic qualities. The second scenario occurs when a filmmaker *translates* the play into film, but, as it were, excepts the metadramatic elements from the 'intermedial transposition'. As the system of reference changes in the transition from drama to film, the play-script's intramedial, metadramatic references become intermedial ones. As we know from Irina Rajewsky's monograph on intermediality (cf. 2002: 150), not all intermedial references contain a reflection both of the medium which they refer to *and* of the medium in which they occur. An intermedial transposition of metadrama into film thus results in a metadramatic film in which the metareferential potential of the original script is not lost but diminished. As a prerequisite for comparing the metareferential potential of dramatic and filmic version, the focus of the following analyses will first lie on the metadramatic elements of the respective play-script.

## 2. Intertextual metadrama:

### Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

The central feature of Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is its metadramatic quality. The play's intertextual relationship to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* elicits a strong metadramatic potential<sup>1</sup> with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters in Shakespeare's play, appearing as main characters. Retaining Shakespeare's plot, Stoppard integrated scenes from *Hamlet* into his text in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are on stage or which the two Elizabethans overhear, which creates the impression that his play is happening off-stage with respect to *Hamlet*. Furthermore, Stoppard plays on the discrepant awareness between characters and recipients with respect to the actions in Elsinore: as minor characters in Shake-

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<sup>1</sup> Since *Hamlet* is a well-known text from the canon of dramatic literature, the indirect extra-compositional metareference of Stoppard's play is clearly marked and likely to activate a metareferential awareness in most recipients' minds. It is therefore not surprising that the play's intertextual relation to Shakespeare's play has been the predominant focus of analyses so far, most recently in Südkamp (cf. 2008: 86–107). Attention has also been drawn to intertextual references to Beckett (cf. *ibid.*: 102) and Pirandello (see Tanello 1993). The reference to Beckett is discernible, e. g. when the characters pass their time by playing games (see the coin-tossing, the question-and-answer game, and their playful inquiry of Hamlet in reversed roles), or in their inability to remember their most recent past.

speare's play, 'Ros' and 'Guil' have only very little information, whereas the (literate) audience knows about the tragic plot – or can presume from the play's title that, in the end, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will be dead<sup>2</sup>.

The absurdist, surreal quality of the intertextual world in which Stoppard's protagonists live is established at the beginning of the play when Ros and Guil are shown in a scene in which a coin is tossed and lands on heads ninety times in a row. The fact that this surprises both characters demonstrates that their reference world corresponds to the recipients' world. However, Ros' and Guil's world has obviously changed and been removed from the world readers participate in at the moment the messenger arrived and they became part of a (fictional) story. The 'new' world, in which realistic probabilities are no longer effective, is thus clearly marked as a fictional, imaginative space.

The intertextual world's absurdist and surreal characteristics emphasise what Manfred Pfister calls the "absolute nature of dramatic texts" (1991: 4). Stoppard's literal conception of drama's 'absolute nature' is shown, for example, by his restriction of the play's plot to the stage as location and of its temporal extension to a performance's duration as time frame<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, Ros and Guil remain on stage for the duration of the entire play. That the two main characters cannot leave the stage confirms that they are, like Pirandello's six characters in search of an author, literary characters 'as such' and do not represent 'real people'. The intra-compositional metareferences in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* thus stress that the play's world is not a hetero-referential representation, a 'slice of life', modelled after the lived-in world in accordance to dramatic conventions, but an intertextual world which is thematically and structurally linked to other dramatic texts.

In 1990, Stoppard adapted what had become a metadramatic 'classic' for the cinema screen. He both wrote the script and directed the film, which eventually achieved a cult-status among lovers of theatre

<sup>2</sup> An audience might also observe that Stoppard's alteration of the dumb show has the same revelatory function as "The Murder of Gonzago" in *Hamlet*. Unlike Claudius, however, Ros and Guil fail to recognise their future deaths in the metadramatic spectacle staged by the Tragedians.

<sup>3</sup> Ruby Cohn calls the overlapping of dramatic fiction and reality of performance with regard to time "theatereality" and defines it as a specific form of metadrama (cf. 1997: 92, 94f., 104 n. 3).

and film alike. Enquiring into what happened to the metadramatic elements in the process of adaptation, I will argue that Stoppard's film is an intermedial transposition of the play-script – with the exception of some interesting film-specific alterations, which will also be explored.

### 3. Intermedial transpositions in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* – the film

By and large, Stoppard's film stays close to the original play-script. The play's stage directions characterise the setting of the opening scene as "a place without any visible character" (Stoppard 1985/1998: 5). This however, poses a problem for the transposition into film: one can devise an undefined space in the medium of a written text – but can one project a place without visible character on stage or in film?

The way the play's first stage direction makes use of the written text can be described as 'novelizations'. According to William B. Worthen (cf. 2005: 47), 'novelized' stage directions contain or constrain information so that they can be easily imagined by readers of the play-script. At the same time, however, these novelizations present an impediment to transpositions from text to performance or to other media using visualisation and embodiment. As a result, readers who imagine the play-script as a performance or intent to perform it might become aware of the implicit metareferential potential of the novelizations.

In his film, Stoppard chose to realise the novelistic stage direction by a "white screen [which] takes on a texture and becomes grey/white stone" (1991: 1). By showing his protagonists in vast landscapes (mountains and forests), the film withholds points of orientation for its viewers. To some extent, the play-script's undefined quality is thus kept, but the metareferential potential of the play's stage directions is lost.

With its use of special effects the film compensates the potential diminishment of the play-script's metareferences which occurs in the intermedial transposition. For example, the coin which reveals 'heads' ninety times in a row in both play and film is shown tumbling down a mountain in slow motion. Hence, the adaptation exaggerates the surreal quality of Ros' and Guil's world for the filmic medium. Moreover, Stoppard inserted a musical score which functions as commen-

tary<sup>4</sup>. Instead of setting the entire action in one (undefined) space and thus conforming to, and – in this case – implicitly reflecting on the absolute nature of dramatic texts, the film incorporates an echo as audio-visual device which both connects the film's scenes and scenery (the mountains, the forest, Elsinore castle, and the boat) and highlights the intertextual quality of the filmic world<sup>5</sup>.

These and other filmic (special) effects complement the intermedial reflection on drama and theatre by adding implicit metareferences to the filmic medium. As Elizabeth Wheeler argues, the film is "more than a 'faithful adaptation' of the play" (1991), because of its ability to transform stasis into motion and add a series of funny 'sight gags' revelling in the detailed physicality of place, such as the laws of gravity or the draught in Elsinore castle (cf. *ibid.*). Lia M. Hotchkiss (2000: 162) makes a similar case: according to her, both Stoppard's play and its cinematic adaptation "are metadramatically reflective", but the film's thematic structure and iconography focus "more exclusively than the play does on theater *per se*" (*ibid.*) by cutting the play's philosophical musings and including additional scenes from Shakespeare's play. At the same time, however, "the film adds deliberate allusions to cinema as well as sequences that pointedly contrast theatrical and cinematic conventions of representation, thus demonstrating its concern with the relationship between the two media" (*ibid.*).

An example of a scene added to the film is the montage sequence portraying the series of deaths in *Hamlet* (cf. Stoppard 1991: 63). Hotchkiss points to the juxtaposition of theatrical and cinematic conventions in this sequence (cf. 2000: 183f.). Whereas, at the end of the sequence, the dead bodies form a tableau (see *Illustration 1*) reminiscent of an old theatrical tradition, the antecedent portrayal of these deaths is especially filmic as it makes use of close-ups and montage-

<sup>4</sup> See, e. g., the first scene in which the two protagonists appear on horseback: there, the rhythm of the accompanying soundtrack of howling dogs, mixed with a tune evocative of a western, punctuates Ros' loss for words when he tries to address Guil, but is not able to remember the latter's name, indicating – as directions in the script specify – that "the opportunity has passed" (Stoppard 1991: 1).

<sup>5</sup> This audio-device is accompanied by visual devices such as the cut between the scene in the forest (Stoppard's invention) to the first scene in the castle which Stoppard adapted from Shakespeare. The immediate cut suggests a connection between the Tragedian's stage and Elsinore castle and thus also emphasises the intertextual connection between both plays.

techniques to contrast realistic depiction with the staginess of the deaths performed by the Tragedians earlier on.



*Illustration 1: Frame enlargement from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.*

The metareferential juxtaposition of theatrical and cinematic conventions can also be illustrated by a scene in which Stoppard did not translate a meta-element from drama to film, but transformed it. This scene shows Ros' and Guil's death, which the titles of both play and film anticipate. It takes place after the Tragedians have performed a series of deaths and starts with Guil protesting against the seemingly romantic nature of the Tragedians' performance.

GUIL. [...] No ... no ... not for *us*, not like that. Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which will soon be over. ... Death is not anything ... death is not. ... It's the absence of presence, nothing more ... the endless time of never coming back ... a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound. ... (Stoppard 1985/1998: 140 [emphasis in the original])

In contrast to a romantic conception of death, Guil describes death from the point of view of a dramatic character and grounds his description in the principles of presence and absence. These principles fit well in the context of a play, in which the main characters cannot leave the stage. Furthermore, they arguably address definitions of the theatrical sign as a presence referring to an absence (cf. Pavis 1996: 303; see Horn 2005). At last, Ros' and Guil's deaths occur in exactly the manner Guil had described: the two characters leave the stage one after the other and thus 'disappear' from view (cf. Stoppard 1985/1998: 141f.).

For the filmic adaptation, however, this theatre-specific way of 'dying' has been transformed. Firstly, it has to be noted that Ros and Guil do not decide to disappear, but are hanged. By showing the cause

of their deaths, the film renders the characters' deaths plausible and thus naturalises them. Secondly, it is remarkable that in 'view' of their deaths Ros and Guil close their eyes (see *Illustration 2*). This, of course, could be interpreted as nothing more than an indication of the characters' fear of death. Yet I would like to point out that – similar to the stage-death of disappearing in the wings – the characters likewise disappear from view in the film after closing their eyes (cf. Stoppard 1991: 64). Consistently, the last shot of the death scene shows the two ropes straighten, but not the characters' dead bodies (see *Illustration 3*).



*Illustrations 2 and 3: Frame enlargements from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.*

Taking the concept of the filmic gaze into consideration (cf. Silverman 1996: 125–160), the media-specificity of Stoppard's transformation of this scene becomes apparent. Seeing or being seen and not seeing or not being seen can thus be regarded as the film-specific equivalent to the implicitly metareferential opposition of presence and absence in the play-script.

Additionally, Stoppard's transposition of metadrama into film results in a metadramatic film whose "cinematic self-reflexivity is filtered through its relationship to theater" (Hotchkiss 2000: 170)<sup>6</sup>. Fragments of scenes from *Hamlet* are often 'doubly framed' by windows and other openings that suddenly appear. Since the castle's architecture evokes stages from early modern and modern periods (cf. *ibid*: 173f.), it makes those framed scenes appear *as theatre* in the film (cf. Sheidley 1994: 108). Moreover, the insertion of "[l]oose pages of manuscript" (Stoppard 1991: 14) which are blown along the floor in

<sup>6</sup> The final sequence, which was added to the film and shows the Tragedians folding up their cart, allows one to interpret the action on the ship as taking place on the Tragedians' stage, as it reveals the ship's wheel on the cart's back (cf. Hotchkiss 2000: 177–180).

several of the scenes set in Elsinore, pointing to the authority of (Shakespeare's) text<sup>7</sup>, further attests to the thesis that the film rather reflects drama than its own medium. Thus, despite the fact that some of the media-specific elements of the play-script, such as the undefined setting of the first scene, are only indirectly translated into film, the overall impression prevails that Stoppard's film does not reflect on the change of medium as such as a problem.

This, however, does not apply to Resnais' adaptation of *Intimate Exchanges*. In contrast to Stoppard's, Resnais' film exemplifies a media-specific transformation from metadrama to (meta)film. As I am going to argue, this is mainly due to the metareferential quality of the original series of plays: since Ayckbourn's play makes use of the textuality of drama, it renders the transition from play-script to performance difficult and thereby elicits reflections on the constraints of theatre as a production system.

#### 4. Reflections on the theatre system in Alan Ayckbourn's multi-path series of plays *Intimate Exchanges*

*Intimate Exchanges* is the 29<sup>th</sup> of a total of (so far) seventy plays written by the British dramatist Sir Alan Ayckbourn. It premiered in 1982–1983 and was both directed by the playwright and performed in his own Scarborough theatre. Like most of Ayckbourn's plays, the theme of *Intimate Exchanges* concerns male-female relationships. The series of plays features a light-hearted, comedy style, as well as a typifying and clichéd manner of characterisation.

As the diagram in *Figure 1* shows, Ayckbourn's series of plays originates in one initial scene, which is divided into eight scripts and sixteen endings. The entire text consists of two books, each about 200 pages long. Each script encompasses four scenes plus two endings and lasts about the usual length of a theatre evening. Although each script contains four to eight characters, there are no more than two characters on stage at any given time during the entire performance, since an "author's note" preceding the play states that all female roles are to be played by one actress and all male roles by one actor only.

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<sup>7</sup> Other studies of the filmic adaptation ascribe a similarly symbolic function to the loose manuscript pages, cf. e. g. Tandello 1993: 40f. and Hotchkiss 2000: 182f.

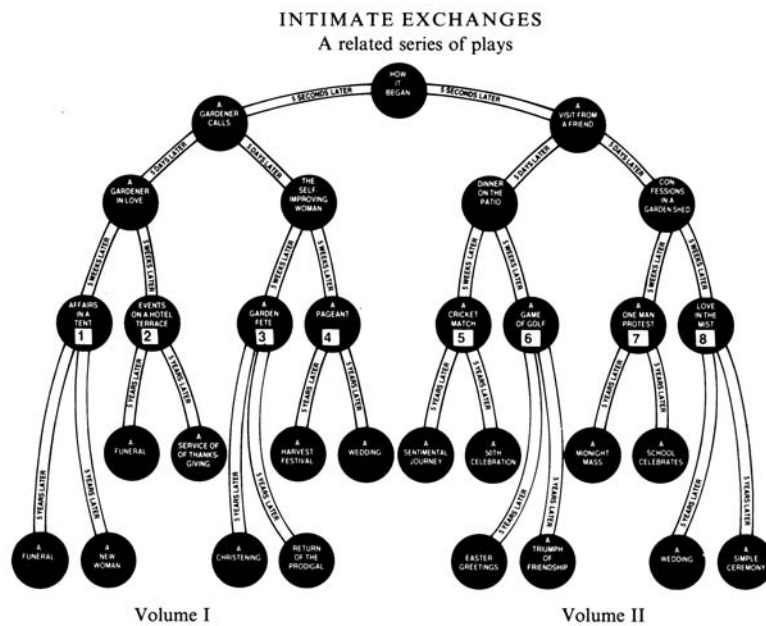


Figure 1: Overview of the 8 scripts and 16 endings of *Intimate Exchanges* (Ayckbourn 1985, vols. I/II: s. p.).

Furthermore, the “author’s note” asks theatre-makers to show more than one variant or – if that is impossible – to at least inform spectators about the author’s preferences with regard to the performance of his play as “[t]his would serve (a) to explain why the plays are so idiosyncratically constructed and (b) to let people know what they’ve missed” (Ayckbourn 1985, vols. I/II: s. p.). Indeed, the ironic dimension of Ayckbourn’s play with clichés and stereotypes can best be observed when one knows about the different variants of the plot. Only then is the singularity of Ayckbourn’s quasi-scientific fictional experiment in human nature and his exploration of the ‘what if’ perceived<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> An ironic potential stems from the fact that the vantage point of Ayckbourn’s series of plays is the trivial decision between smoking and not smoking. Only in later episodes, bifurcations occur at more incisive moments such as weddings, funerals, christenings and other celebrations.



The organisational and technical expenses for a full production of *Intimate Exchanges* present an insurmountable problem for the Western theatre system, especially in England, where theatres are not subsidised, six weeks of rehearsal time are common, and plays are performed en-suite<sup>9</sup>. Thus, a metareferential potential, which I have elsewhere specified as ‘contextual’ (see Hauthal 2009, forthcoming), results from the dimension of Ayckbourn’s series of plays that points to potential limits in the change of medium from written play to theatre performance. *Intimate Exchanges*’ strong metareferential potential, however, does not only stem from its sheer dimension, but even more so from the fact that Ayckbourn’s multi-path narrative deviates from traditional (dramatic) storytelling<sup>10</sup>. Instead of being structured in a single linear sequence, the play-script confronts the reader with a bifurcation at the end of each scene, providing two endings and thus enabling the reader to choose one of the two possible continuations of the story.

The consecutive division of scenes in Ayckbourn’s play-script, culminating in the sixteen endings, anticipates hypertext fiction which gained popularity in recent decades and exists in various formats ranging from (audio-)books to hypertexts accessible online. Comparable to hypertext fiction in this respect, Ayckbourn’s series of plays implicitly reflects upon general narrative structure in fictional representations and more specifically on what Seymour Chatman (cf. 1978: 53–56) calls narrative ‘kernels’: specific points in the narrative which allow bifurcations. In a (traditional) linear plot following a teleological principle, those bifurcations encourage recipients to speculate on how the plot will develop and thus increase a story’s suspense potential by

<sup>9</sup> The anticipated requirements of staging all eight scripts and sixteen endings could well be the reason why, since the Scarborough production had been transferred to London in 1984, the only other full production of the series of plays so far has been a revival in 2006, again both directed and produced by the author himself in his Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. Over two weeks in 2007 it was possible to see all eight scripts if one spent seven evenings and one afternoon in a row in the theatre. As it can be presumed that only a few people have seen *Intimate Exchanges* performed at all and even less so in its entirety, Colin Evans has a point in referring to Resnais as the “réalisateur” (1995: 45) of what he calls a “filmic play” (ibid.: 47).

<sup>10</sup> For a definition of multi-path narrative see Espen Aarseth (2005/2008). I am indebted to Werner Wolf for adverting my attention to *Intimate Exchanges*’ meta-narrative implications as a multi-path play-text and for indicating the connection to Chatman and Prince, which will be explored in the following (cf. Wolf 2002: especially 49).

referring to or considering alternatives which, however, as a rule remain ‘disnarrated’ (cf. Prince 2005/2008). Disnarrated elements, as delineated by Gerald Prince, consist of that which does *not* take place (but could have), thus giving rise to suspense and underscoring the tellability of the actualised narrative.

Multi-path narratives, in contrast, show more than one alternative, thus realising parallel or in retrospect one (or more) otherwise disnarrated (or non-narrated) element(s). Their effect on the recipient cannot be easily determined: on the one hand, readers’ expectations concerning narrative closure are met as the multi-path narrative gives one (or more) answer(s) to the otherwise non-answered question(s) ‘what if’. On the other hand, multi-path narratives subvert narrative closure and thus at the same time frustrate reader expectations as the contingency of the storylines which *are* realised becomes apparent. The causality of a narrative sequence no longer appears compulsory, but chance-driven or – and this creates a metareferential potential – driven by authorial decisions. Thereby, multi-path narratives point to the innumerable possibilities which (still) remain disnarrated and increase recipients’ speculations about alternative outcomes of the story. Moreover, the realisation of disnarrated (or non-narrated) elements draws attention to the act of narration, to the fictitious and constructed nature of the story, and thus comprises the aforementioned metanarrative potential.

For a media-comparative research on metareference, the question regarding how kernels and bifurcations in Ayckbourn’s multi-path series of plays are realised in the dramatic text, in a potential theatrical performance, and in the filmic adaptation is of particular interest. The moments in which choices/chances precede the splitting of one scene into two endings each leading to another script will therefore be the main focus of the following analysis.

In the dramatic text, a line on the page marks the moment where one scene splits into two different endings. The beginning of these transitions is marked by bold letters stating “EITHER he [or she] says” (Ayckbourn 1985, vol. I: 12) and “OR he [or she] says” (ibid.: 13). Where one scene connects to another, directions for continuation are given at the end, i. e.: “To: A GARDENER IN LOVE (page 15)” (ibid.). Both directives are manifestations of, or equivalent to, a narrator’s discourse. Moreover, the bifurcation facilitated by the kernel is clearly marked, and thus the narrativity of the play-script is brought to the fore. Individual readers of the play can decide whether and where

to continue reading and turn back or forth in the two volumes as they please. Linearity as a principle of traditional storytelling is thus both foregrounded and suspended. In this way, the printed play lets its readers experience the freedom of choice that textuality provides as a medium and elicits their metareferential awareness with respect to both the fictitious and the constructed nature of the dramatic story.

In performances of *Intimate Exchanges* to date, however, audiences have not been interactively involved in terms of being asked to decide on the story's progress. Moreover, only one script per evening was performed<sup>11</sup> and the theatre management had decided in advance which of the two endings of a script would be shown on a particular evening. Nevertheless, the audience is supposed to be informed about the existence of the alternative version, and this potentially increases recipients' speculations about alternative outcomes of the story as well as about the moment in which bifurcation occurs. However, since performances of the play so far have not marked the kernels as moments of choice, they remained unnoticeable for an audience. Thus, a spectator who, for instance, goes to a performance of *A Gardener in Love* actually sees a well-made play (except for the fact that all roles are played by just two actors)<sup>12</sup>. That he or she is watching *one* script out of eight and *one* of sixteen endings, is only to be found out with the help of the theatre programme. Since the explicit metareference of the play-script is reduced to an implicit one in the change of medium, its metareferential potential only unfolds in combination with the explicit marker of the theatre programme. As a result, spectators of (a part of) *Intimate Exchanges* tend to be less aware of the play's metareferential potential than readers and producers.

Ayckbourn's mixture of naturalism and experiment thus turns out to be a clever way of balancing artistic demands and economic constraints: the 'ordinary' holiday-maker at Scarborough's sea-side will see an easy-to-consume tragicomedy about typical male-female relationships, whereas readers as well as producers, directors and actors of the play are confronted with a challenge. For them, *Intimate Exchanges* holds a strong metareferential potential in stock, reflecting on the constraints of theatre as a production system on the one hand and

<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the title of an evening's performance referred to the name-giving script, e. g., *A Gardener in Love*.

<sup>12</sup> The multiple cast, however, can be naturalised and its metareferential quality thus be reduced if recipients view it with reference to the frame of 'artistic virtuosity'.

on the constructed and fictitious quality of the play on the other. The question remains, however, what happens when the series of plays is adapted to the filmic medium – a medium which, in comparison to a performance, and even more so to the play-script, further reduces interaction in the reception process and has developed its own strategies for storytelling as well as its own metareferential devices.

#### 5. Media-specific transformations in Alain Resnais' *Smoking/No Smoking*

Since Ayckbourn is known for not wanting his plays adapted for film, it seems rather exceptional that Alain Resnais was granted permission to do so. Maybe Ayckbourn's decision was supported by the fact that the French director belongs to a group of European 'auteurs', who established themselves in the context of art house cinema. Further, it can be assumed that Ayckbourn was in favour of Resnais' plan to likewise involve only two actors and use painted sets<sup>13</sup>.

Resnais made two films based on Ayckbourn's series of plays, each lasting almost two and a half hours. Their titles, *Smoking* and *No Smoking*, refer to the initial decision of Celia Teasdale whether to continue or quit smoking. *No Smoking* shows the events following her successful resistance to smoking; *Smoking* shows what happens after she has given in to temptation. Regarding the mise-en-scène of this and other moments of choice and/or chance, but also with respect to décor and cast, the film is a mixture of the experimental play-script and its rather conventional performance potential.

In both films, the first moment of choice is marked by a freeze frame and a musical climax: a close-up of Celia's hands, one in a pink rubber glove used for working in the garden, is frozen in the very moment in which she is about to take a cigarette out of the box she has picked up from the garden table (see *Illustration 4*). A crescendo on the orchestral soundtrack accompanies this freeze. Although Resnais uses no voice-over or other additional extradiegetic markers to indi-

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<sup>13</sup> Evans gives a detailed account of Resnais' "long courtship" (1995: 43), exploring linguistic and (inter-)cultural aspects of translation, transformation, and artistic influence in the encounter between the British playwright and the French filmmaker. He highlights that *Smoking/No Smoking* was the first instance for Resnais working from a foreign-language text (cf. *ibid.*: 41–45).

cate the kernel occurring here, the intra-compositional metareferential potential of this moment is presumably high as spectators were only shortly before faced with a choice similar to that of Celia Teasdale. Since Resnais insists that cinemas must show both films simultaneously, spectators have to decide, when entering the cinema, whether to watch *Smoking* or *No Smoking*<sup>14</sup>. Spectators are therefore likely to be aware of the connection between film title and the initial scene, as well as of the key function of this moment for the film as a whole.



Illustration 4: Frame enlargement from *Smoking*.

In contrast to this first moment of choice, other kernels are not marked at all in the film. Instead, Resnais decided, as Ayckbourn did for the staging of his play, to show the scenes of one script without interruption except for the captions which inform the spectators about the temporal gaps between scenes (five days, five weeks, or five years later) – thus, instead of indexically denoting, explicitly announcing temporal progression – or give them an idea of the setting by showing a coloured drawing of the scene of action before we see it filmed. However, whereas an evening in the theatre stops at the end of a script, Resnais' film starts over again once the end of a script is reached. Similar to the play-script, Resnais' multi-path film thereby suspends linearity as a principle of traditional storytelling<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> The film's trailer stages this moment of choice by showing a couple arriving at the cinema and having an argument about which of the two films to see first. Watching the DVD version involves the same initiatory moment of choice between the two films.

<sup>15</sup> Compare other multi-path films that likewise break with linearity, but exemplify different ways of presenting alternative storylines: whereas Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (1998) and Yimou Zhang's *Ying Xiong* ('Hero') (2002) tell their three and four

Exemplary in this respect is the scene at the end of the first script of “Le Jardinier Amoureux” (‘A Gardener in Love’), introducing Celia as a businesswoman who has split from her husband Toby. Celia is outside the church, waiting impatiently for Lionel, the ex-gardener who is now her assistant and driver, to come back from his father’s funeral. At the end of the scene, a caption reading “Ou bien” is inserted, followed by a drawing of the garden terrace and an image of Toby framed by the words “Ou bien ... il dit” (see *Illustrations 5 and 6*) and acoustically accompanied by the line that will be changed. The captions, which are reminiscent of authorial comments in novels or stage directions in drama scripts, take recipients back to the moment when Celia decided to leave her husband, and the alternative transition begins. In the second variant, however, Toby suggests that they go on a holiday. Surprised and moved by his suggestion, Celia decides to stay with her husband – and the story takes another, entirely different turn.



*Illustrations 5 and 6: Frame enlargements from Smoking.*

In the filmic adaptation, such intermedial borrowings from literary media can be accounted for in two ways. Firstly, Resnais uses voice-over in order to describe the initial setting of the film, incorporating a narrator into his film. Secondly, his insertion of captions, conveying what formerly were stage directions, is comparable to authorial commentary in narrative texts. In this respect, Resnais’ film resembles the play-script. Moreover, play-script and film can be distinguished from performances of the play-script, as they both explicitly display their narrativity (a narrator’s discourse). However, *Smoking* and *No Smoking* also resemble hitherto stagings of the play-script in that cinema audiences become aware of where a kernel and a bifurcation of the

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alternatives consecutively, Peter Howitt’s *Sliding Doors* (1998) and Woody Allen’s *Melinda & Melinda* (2005) follow a parallel structure, cutting episodes of their two alternatives against one another.

story occurred only in retrospect – except for the initial moment of choice. It can therefore be concluded, that only readers of the play-script are able to become aware of *Intimate Exchanges*' full meta-narrative potential.

Thus, Resnais' film shares with Ayckbourn's play the accentuated theatricality resulting from the fact that all characters are played by two actors and that the film makes no attempt to create realistic settings. Although the filmic medium would easily allow for scene changes, Resnais shot the scenes, which are exclusively set outdoors, in a studio. Moreover, the settings' implicit metareference relying on deviation from traditional audience expectations is explicitly marked by drawings of the settings preceding each change of scene in the captions. In adopting Ayckbourn's metatheatrical layout included in the "author's note" and keeping the restrictions of the theatrical medium with regard to the settings, the film obtains a stage-like quality. Instead of simulating novelistic and dramatic realism as is typical of film, Resnais' adaptation of *Intimate Exchanges* resembles theatre in showing reality *as simulated*. It can therefore be described as a "stacy" (Evans 1995: 97) film. Resnais' 'theatrical' limitation of the filmic medium, however, also constitutes an implicit, intramedial reflection on it, as spectators become aware of their expectations concerning a psychological approach to role-playing or realistic settings, adding a metafilmic quality to *Smoking* and *No Smoking*.

## 6. Summary and concluding remarks

Stoppard's and Ayckbourn's adaptations of metadrama into film display both processes of intermedial transpositions *and* media-specific transformation. However, different tendencies prevail. Stoppard's film keeps the play's metadramatic theme and uses filmic devices to enhance its metareferential potential. The film's structure thus differs from the original play as intramedial and intra-compositional references become extra-compositional and intermedial references in the film. Consequently, the film's metareferential potential is rather less marked than that of the play-script.

Unlike Stoppard's film, Resnais' adaptation of Ayckbourn's *Intimate Exchanges* not only keeps the play's metadramatic theme, but also its metareferential structure but transforms it according to the specificities of the filmic medium. Like the play-script, the film makes

use of explicit markers of verbal narrativity (voice-over and captions) in order to visualise that formerly disnarrated elements are realised. In comparison to the play-script, the film's metareferential potential is only slightly diminished, whereas it exceeds that of a theatrical performance by far. The present analysis thus suggests a nexus between a work's or medium's narrative and metareferential potential and leaves it to further analysis to validate if a work's or medium's general narrative potential as outlined by Werner Wolf (cf. 2002: 95–97) helps to determine its metareferential potential.

Studying adaptations of metaworks thus helps to develop and shape the transmedial and transgeneric conceptual toolbox at stake in the theoretical framework of the present volume. The differentiation of inter- and intramedial phenomena as well as the distinction between a metareferential structure and a metareferential function play an important role in defining the metareferential potential of an adaptation. Moreover, the media-comparative approach to adaptations of metaworks points to salient perspectives and limits of metaization in different genres and media.

In conclusion, if metaization is defined as “self-reference in the media with a meta-dimension”, structurally constituting a meta-level and functionally “eliciting ‘medium-awareness’ in the recipient” (Wolf in this vol.: 32, 30)<sup>16</sup> it could be argued that the metareferential potential of drama and theatre differs from that of film because both drama and theatre are characterised by what James L. Calderwood calls “duplexity” (1971: 12). In the case of drama, the ‘duplexity’ stems from the fact that a play-script is written to be performed, a paradox all script-genres share. In the case of theatre, the ‘duplexity’ originates from the grounding theatrical principle of the ‘as if’ in conjunction with the ‘here and now’ of performance. On stage, objects and persons are ‘double’, being present and representing an absence at the same time. Only Coleridge’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ makes spectators forget the theatricality of the performance in favour of the dramatic illusion. The fragility of this illusion becomes apparent if we consider that spectators can never be sure if what they see on stage is intended or not.

Like theatre, film is based on role-playing, and likewise on the principle of the ‘as if’. Films can therefore also include metareference to their medium, through characters such as scriptwriters, directors

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<sup>16</sup> See also Wolf 2007 and Hauthal 2008.



and actors<sup>17</sup>. However, since only the recording camera, the production team and the actors share the 'here and now' of recording time and not the spectators (they only witness later re-productions/ projections of the filmed material), there is no genuine 'duplexity' as in a theatrical performance<sup>18</sup>. As a result, film's main frame of reference is documentary and indexical and thus tends to be cognitively assimilated as a copy of reality and not as its representation. Nevertheless, metaizations in film can point to the materiality of the filmic medium – a hand-held or moving camera, objects on the camera lens or a juxtaposition of image and sound are popular means in this respect.

Contextual factors, however, might restrict scriptwriters, producers, directors, and/or actors in fully exploring the metareferential potential of films. Whereas both Stoppard's and Resnais' filmic versions of metaplays were aimed at a relatively small audience, there is also the example of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, whose 1984 filmic adaptation, directed by Milos Forman, was aimed at a mass audience. *Amadeus* was a big commercial success and won eight Oscars. The metadramatic elements of the play, however, were left out in the adaptation. The potentially metareferential resemblance between the frame narrative of Salieri's last confessional 'performance' in front of an imaginary audience and the actual performance situation, for instance, was psychologically motivated and thus naturalised in the film by showing Salieri in a mad house where he confesses his 'murder' to a priest. A transgeneric and transmedial approach thus has to take into account cognitive and contextual factors, as well as those related to media-specificities of production and reception.

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<sup>17</sup> See e. g. Marion Gymnich's 2007 article on metafilm and meta-TV for various examples of meta-elements pointing to conventions of 'audio-vision' in the sense of Michel Chion or of production and reception in film and television. For further examples of films, see also Withalm 2008, who likewise stresses the double nature of film as both text and sociocultural (and economic) system, forming the basis of self-reference and self-reflexivity in/of film. See also Limoges in this vol.

<sup>18</sup> Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* illustrates this by showing the movie character Tom Baxter, the 'filmic product' (played by Jeff Daniels), who leaves the screen from a film within the film, and the actor Gil Shepherd (also played by Jeff Daniels), who created Baxter during the filming process, as two independent individuals whose main difference is that one of them is fictional (and thus, as the film implicates, 'too good to be true'). Although the film claims the possibility of a meta-aleptic interaction between a fictional and the real world by showing Baxter leaving the screen, the film's storyline ultimately confirms its impossibility.

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# Quotation of Forms as a Strategy of Metareference

*Andreas Böhn*

This contribution explores the metareferential potential of quotations of forms. Therefore the concept ‘quotation of form’ is explained on the basis of a notion of quotation which stresses the aspect of pointing at, or referring to, the quoted rather than stressing the aspect of an imitation of the quoted. This reference to another sign or complex of signs which already refers to something outside the sign system creates metareference in cases where a quotation of form produces a salient and non-conventionalized discrepancy between the quoted form and its textual surrounding and medial context. The examples analyzed range from intramedial to intertextual and intermedial ones.

## 1. Introduction

Quotation has been a major topic in the field of research on intertextuality in recent times; however, the focus has been on the quotation of specific texts rather than on the quotation of structures, codes, genres and forms. The latter should be granted more attention as such quotations are a way in which art as well as everyday communication can reflect modes of representation and the history of these modes. It is this particular form of quotation and its potential to produce metareference, its capacity to implicitly reflect on fictional or non-fictional worlds or ‘compositions’ and their rules and structures as created by different media, which will be the topic of this contribution. Being a transmedial concept which may occur in any given medium, ‘quotation of form’ is not only (with reference to verbal texts) an intramedial but also an intermedial phenomenon<sup>1</sup>. Compared to the quotation of utterances, which is a special case of reference to individual texts, the quotation of forms can be seen as a special case of system reference, or, more precisely, of the mentioning of systems in Rajewsky’s sense (cf. 2002: 204f.). As the quotation of form, metaphorically speaking, belongs to the mode of ‘showing’ and not to the mode of ‘telling’, it

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘trans-’, ‘intra-’ and ‘intermediality’ are used according to Rajewsky (cf. 2002: 12f.).

can produce implicit metareference through a combination of formal imitation of as well as salient deviation from the imitated structure<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Quotation

I will start with some general remarks on the functional structure of quotation, using verbal texts as examples. The relation between the quoting text and the quoted pre-text is characterized by a combination of imitation and variation, of analogy and difference. Imitation is the 'quotation proper', whereas variation is the new contextualization of a quotation in the quoting text. "A quotation repeats a segment derived from a pre-text within a subsequent text, where it replaces a *proprie*-segment." (Plett 1991: 9 [emphasis in the orig.]) The relation between text and pre-text is often functionally relevant to the text and therefore ought to be noticed by the reader.

Thus, as a general rule, a quotation does not only include a single (isotopic) but two or more (poly-isotopic) levels of meaning that need to be interrelated by the recipient. This interrelationship [...] extends well beyond the quoted element and covers its primary and secondary contexts as well. (Ibid.: 10)

Knowledge of the quoted text (primary context) and the perception of its alteration in the quoting text (secondary context) are necessary conditions for the reader in order to perceive a quotation as quotation.

It may be argued that 'imitation' or 'analogy' are too vague when applied to quotation. Often, especially in literary studies, direct quotation has been regarded as the prototype of quotation and the strict identity of the quoted element in pre-text and quoting text as the main characteristic of a quotation. This position is based upon the insight that it is possible to repeat the same expression in different utterances and that conventions for quoting and the use of special quotation marks have been developed in spoken and written language over the course of time. However, this point of view is difficult to sustain when extended to non-verbal sign systems. Here it is difficult to define the exact meaning of 'sameness' in repetitions and to explain where the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Werner Wolf's introduction to this vol.: "Implicit metareference consists in certain ways of employing the medium in question so that a second-order statement centred on medial or related issues can be inferred. As stated above, foregrounding through salient deviation is the procedure par excellence in this context" (47).

term is inconsistent with its use in everyday language. A closer look at the logical status of quotations will explain the deficiency of this view.

In quoting someone, I may use the very same expressions he or she used, without, however, using them in the same way. That is, for instance, in quoting a promise, I am not promising anything; in quoting a question, I am not asking. The illocutionary force of a quotation is different from that of the quoted utterance. The quotation does not refer to the same as the pre-text; it rather refers to the pre-text itself. Nelson Goodman thus gives two necessary conditions for quotation:

- (a) containment of what is quoted or of some other replica or paraphrase of it, and,
- (b) reference to – by naming or predication of – what is quoted. (1978: 46)

It is not the strict identity of the quoted elements that renders a repetition of expressions a quotation, but a special way of using these expressions. Identical repetition is only one device among many; the quoted text can be contained in a more indirect manner within the quotation.

On this account, rather than indirect quotation getting its name by widening the application of 'quotation' beyond direct or proper quotation, direct quotation becomes a special case of indirect quotation. (Ibid.: 43)

One may even go one step further than Goodman and, following Donald Davidson, call into question whether the expressions used in a quotation refer to anything at all:

[...] in the case of quotations, we have agreed that the words within quotation marks help us to refer to those words. Yet what I propose is that those words within quotation marks are not, from a semantical point of view, part of the sentence at all. It is in fact confusing to speak of them as words. What appears in quotation marks is an *inscription*, not a shape, and what we need it for is to help refer to its shape. On my theory, which we may call the *demonstrative theory* of quotation, the inscription inside does not refer to anything at all, nor is it part of any expression that does. Rather it is the quotation marks that do all the referring, and they help refer to a shape by pointing out something that has it. (1984: 90 [emphasis in the orig.])

In short: "[q]uotation is a device for pointing to inscriptions (or utterances)" (ibid.: 91). To take up a well-known distinction in linguistics, by quoting an expression we do not merely use it, we mention it, i. e., point to it metareferentially as a quotation. Yet that does not mean we could not do both at the same time, as Davidson admits:

I said that for the demonstrative theory the quoted material was no part, semantically, of the quoting sentence. But this was stronger than necessary or desirable.



The device of pointing can be used on whatever is in range of the pointer, and there is no reason why an inscription in active use can't be ostended in the process of mentioning an expression. [...] Such tokens then do double duty, once as meaningful cogs in the machine of the sentence, once as semantically neutral objects with a useful form. (Ibid.: 91f.)

This possibility plays an important role both in everyday and in poetic quotation. When Bill Clinton, in a speech after the fall of the Berlin Wall, quoted John F. Kennedy's famous line "Ich bin ein Berliner", he said something about himself, too; similarly, the title of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* does not only point to Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (and the series of previous works copying Sterne's title), it also tells the reader that the book contains the autobiography of a cat named Murr. In both cases what is *mentioned* is – at least partially – also *used*, though in a somewhat different way than in the pre-text. A major part of this difference has to do with the fact of quotation. By quoting Kennedy's famous words, Clinton placed himself – not only on this occasion, as we know – in a line with Kennedy, a connection obviously inexistent when Kennedy uttered the sentence.



Illustration 1: Greek one euro coin (reverse).

A quotation may even create several layers of reference, as we can see in the following example. The Greek one euro coin<sup>3</sup> (see *Illustration 1*) shows an owl, a bird we all know and can thus identify as an iconic representation – the first layer of reference. The owl has always been

<sup>3</sup> In using a coin as example, I am mainly dealing with the image the coin shows on one of its sides and the different layers of reference this image contains. Therefore the question as to whether or to what extent a coin or money in general are media can be ignored.

the heraldic animal of the city of Athens, which also for allows the image on the coin to refer to that city – a second layer of reference. The particular image of the owl on the one euro coin, moreover, quotes the depiction on an antique four drachma coin (see *Illustration 2*), thus referring to this particular previous image of the same bird and symbol of the same city – a third level of reference. Most people will grasp the first referential level and identify the bird as an owl; not quite as many will know the relation between the owl and Athens, and even fewer will be able to identify the antique image in the modern coin and recognise the owl as a quotation of a coin within a coin. It is a most unusual quotation which at the same time points to the mediality of the quoted phenomenon (its nature as a coin) and is therefore metareferential (as defined in the introduction to this vol.). However, even for a person who reaches the third level of reference the Greek one euro coin will still iconically represent a bird and symbolically a city. In this case the metareference will not erase the reference, but enhance it with additional layers of meaning and reference, namely reference to the importance of the classical tradition in Greek culture.



*Illustration 2: Ancient four drachma coin (5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.*

In general, a quotation refers to a quoted text, but suspends most if not all functions of the common use of the quoted material. E. g., when someone is offended and sues the person who offended them, the quotation of the offensive utterance before the judge is in itself not offensive. The quotation can (and often does) use the quoted material in another way, dwelling on the way it was used in the pre-text. In our example the quotation of the offensive utterance is used to bring an action against the offender. An identical repetition of the way it was used in the pre-text is therefore excluded if it is taken as a quotation.

Quotations always refer to (or, speaking with Davidson, point to) other signs or other utterances of signs, which may be viewed as constituting a sort of metareference with respect to the reference of the sign the quotation refers to. Yet, on the other hand – as quotations may also refer to something that is not a sign by way of using the quoted signs, albeit with certain modifications as to their previous or habitual usage –, quotations can be referential *and* metareferential at the same time. We often have to differentiate the form of reference by means of gradation, changing dominances or pragmatic functions, which corresponds to Wolf's remarks in his introduction to the present volume concerning the relation between reference and metareference in general<sup>4</sup>. Famous texts such as Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* or Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* feature book-length postscripts by the authors which clearly indicate quotations that are crucial to the understanding of the texts. However, they also designate quotations that are not necessarily recognizable as such and therefore fail to be read as quotations, as in the case of various passages quoted from Martin Luther's writings in *Doktor Faustus* or from medieval theological scholarship in *Il nome della rosa*. These quotations do not necessarily work as quotations in the sense of pointing to their sources, but help to create an overall impression of a certain historical period on a much more general level than metareference to the respective pre-texts as texts would do.

Nevertheless, according to our shift from identical repetition to reference to the quoted material as the main criterion for quotation, we have to describe such intertextual relations merely as proto-quotations, which may develop into real quotations when read as self-references to a prior use of signs and therefore potentially as metareferences; or they may be taken for simple referential signs characterizing a certain kind of expression or way of thinking attached to a literary figure.

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<sup>4</sup> "Functionally, hetero- and self-reference including metareference are thus not so much a strict binary opposition made up of categorically opposed terms as poles of a scale with many gradations in between the poles." (Wolf in this vol.: 23) Wolf follows Nöth's distinction between 'self-' and 'alloreference' and renames the latter as 'heteroreference'. I prefer to adhere to the received term 'reference', which Nöth uses as a synonym for 'alloreference': "Self-reference is the opposite of alloreference or simply *reference*" (2007b: 62; cf. 2007a: 7–11), and which Wolf identifies with the "narrower linguistic sense of the term" (in this vol.: 18). As a counterpart to 'metareference' I find 'reference' more convincing since many 'meta-x' build on a simple 'x', like metaphysics on physics or metadrama on drama.

Their reception in actual communicative or aesthetic processes may therefore vary between the poles of mere reference and absolute self- or metareference with no reference at all – the latter being a mere virtual pole, because in reality no such sign exists and would be a logical contradiction (cf. Nöth/Bishara/Neitzel 2008: 10–12, 15). However, in order to move away from the pole of mere reference they have to be interpreted as quotations, for it is the quotational structure makes metareference possible.

### 3. Quotations of forms and their metareferential potential

What has been discussed above also applies to the quotation of forms or modes of representation<sup>5</sup>. If quoted, they are not used as modes of representation but to *refer* to modes of representation. In order to mark them as quotations, it is necessary to produce a noticeable rupture between a main form and the quoted form. This rupture has to be noticed as a salient and non-conventionalized discrepancy with reference to its semiotic surrounding, its medial context or generic and medial conventions in order to be taken as an indication of a quotation of form. In the case of intramedial quotation, this may be achieved through a combination of forms that do not match, because they point in different directions like the comic and the tragic, or because they are attached to different historical stages. In the case of intermedial quotation the change of the medium itself constitutes a rupture. However, we only speak of a quotation instead of a simple combination of different media when a ‘heteroreferential’ form is pointed at in a given work. Before this background of narrowing the notion of quotation, simple imitations or actual occurrences of artefacts belonging to one medium in artefacts adhering to another medium, such as a painting in a drama or a poem in a movie, are excluded from the concept of ‘quotations of forms’.

In research on intertextuality, reference to structures has been taken into account under the label of ‘system reference’ as opposed to reference to singular texts since Broich/Pfister, eds. (1985). Gérard Genette (1982) had brought forth his concept of ‘architextualité’ even two years earlier. Both notions try to focus on the relation of a single text to the structures which characterize classes or clusters of texts such as

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<sup>5</sup> For a more thorough explication of the concept cf. Böhn 2001: 33–44.

genres, texts from a certain period, a certain literary movement or a specific author. However, they have difficulties in separating the reference to such structures – which is simply constituted by the fact that a text is taken as a token of such a class of texts – on the one hand and metareference through a quotation of these structures on the other. Irina Rajewsky (cf. 2002: 65–69) has elaborated and refined the distinction between actualisation and mentioning of a system. The latter can be realised either through explicitly talking about, and reflecting on, a system or through the reproduction of elements and rules of that system in a way which sets it apart from its actualization. The second possibility corresponds to what I call quotation of forms.

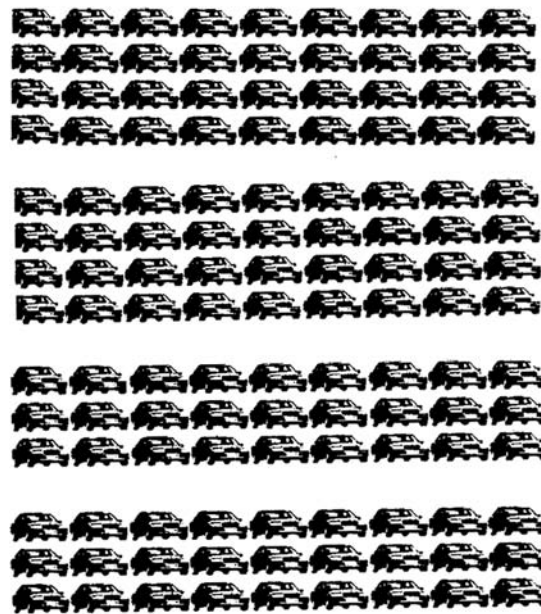


Illustration 3: Karl Riha, "Taxidriver-Sonett" (1990).

The proposed concept of the quotation of forms has the advantage of providing a reliable basis for discerning the actualization from the mentioning of a system. The quotation of form works in the same way as any quotation of signs. A sign refers to 'something else', its referent. 'Aliquid stat pro aliquo', as medieval semiotics already had it. A quotation of a sign refers to the sign (which refers to its referent), and therefore may constitute a metareference based on a reference prior to it. Reference and metareference in this sense do not contradict each

other, but may coexist in the same utterance or message with the possibility that one of the two dominates the other more or less extensively, as we have discussed earlier. The two levels of reference should, nevertheless, be clearly and distinctly separated. Compared to meta-reference, 'system reference' in the narrower sense of 'actualisation of a system' or 'architextualité' is mainly an effect of categorization. Certain characteristics we notice in things (such as their shape) are the reason why we subsume them under a certain category. When we see a telephone directory or a sonnet we probably notice significant traits at first sight that lead us to the assumption that we have a telephone directory or a sonnet at hand – and we recognize a sonnet even if it shows only some characteristics and does not meet our expectations in all respects, as in the case of Karl Riha's "Taxidriver-Sonnet" (see *Illustration 3*). This, however, does not mean that every telephone directory and every sonnet point to their respective classes of texts in a metareferential way. Otherwise any text that in our view belongs to a certain genre or text type would be metareferential, as, to a certain extent, would be any categorizable object.

An example of a combination of media which is at the same time an intramedial and potentially metareferential quotation of form is Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (first published in 1955). Consisting of photographs mostly taken from newspapers and magazines and subscript, it quotes a specific form of text-image combination: the emblem. In the baroque era the emblem was seen as a way of combining thought and sensation, of exemplifying verbal statements through images. The picture ('pictura') is intended to present things of the outside world to the senses, and the text ('subscriptio') is intended to explain how the picture mirrors eternal truths. Brecht, however, turns this upside down. The *Kriegsfibel* shows us that things are not what they seem to be when we merely use our senses and accept conventional interpretations of what we see too readily. The emblems subscripts mostly convey meanings that differ from what could be seen as the inherent meanings of the pictures. The function of the emblem was to present the sensible world as meaningful, and the fulfilment of this function was dependent on its specific combination of media and the formal relation between enigmatic picture (representing the world) and interpretive text (representing the sense of this particular aspect of the world). Brecht instead points to this form in order to make us aware of its established way of functioning, thus criticizing it: things may have different meanings that may even contradict our first im-

pression. He took illustrations from magazines, which often contained inscriptions, and combined them with four-liners positioned below the pictures. The pictures in the book are therefore reproductions of reproductions of photographs, which gives them a certain copy-of-the-copy look. A metamessage is constituted in that the pictures are re-framed through their combination with the four-liners and the black background (cf. Wolf 2006: 7).

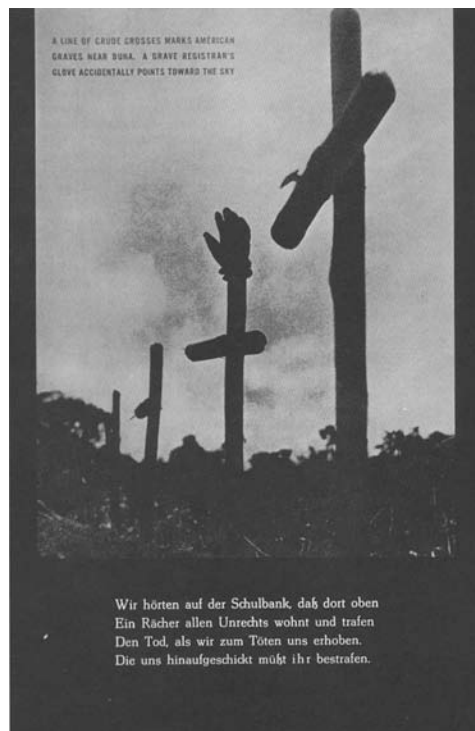


Illustration 4: Bertolt Brecht. *Kriegsfibel* (1955), "Nr. 45".

In my example, "Nr. 45" (see *Illustration 4*), the visual parallel to Renaissance and Baroque emblems, where pointing to the sky signified reference to a transcendental sphere, is quite obvious. In these older emblems, the pointing related the picture (and thus the represented part of the material world) in a more or less obvious way to its sense on the immaterial level, which is represented by the interpretation in the text. Brecht's version refers to this use of the visual element in emblems and at the same time distances itself from it. It quotes the formal qualities of the emblem while deviating from its ideological or

religious functions in its subscript. In this Brecht combines metareferential 'defamiliarization' with 'ideology-critical' content. The original inscription in the photograph reads: "A line of crude crosses marks American graves near Buna. A grave registrar's glove accidentally points towards the sky". The subscript to the photograph echoes the Christian belief referred to in the emblem on the left, which the magazine illustration at least alludes to as something we learn at school but find untrustworthy in the face of war experience. Justice can only arise from human actions, not from religious hope. The emblematic structures Brecht displays are an intramedial quotation of form, since they appear in the same combination of media as the emblems themselves, image and text. Yet, they also have a certain intermedial aspect, since Brecht uses photographs instead of prints, or, more precisely, reproductions of reproductions of photographs, which present the photographs as *pictures* of the outside world rather than simply presenting the outside world via photographs. It is the indexicality of photography as a medium and the attribution of documentary qualities to it which the *Kriegsfibel* refers to as a mechanism supporting ideological beliefs.

Another example of an intramedial quotation of form with an at least partially metareferential function is Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives* (1992), which is clearly a fictional film but also contains formal elements of documentary film, especially the hand-held camera that hastily follows the characters as they are nervously walking around talking to each other. The interview-like sequences in which the camera is – motionlessly and without changes of perspective – focussed on someone obviously answering questions inaudible to the audience are likewise more reminiscent of filmic documentaries than of fictional films. These formal elements are not integrated parts of the story as they are in Allen's *Zelig* (1983), where the documentary style is part of the fiction – comparable to well-known cases in literature, such as the aforementioned *Kater Murr* – with a fictitious editor claiming that what follows is a non-fictional, authentic story. Here the formal elements are quotations of forms as they do not have the effect of making the story more authentic but metareferentially refer to the notion of authenticity conventionally attached to them. A different case would be so-called mockumentaries such as *Opération Lune* by William Karel (2002), which an unsuspecting viewer could mistake for a documentary during the first half of the film before noticing that it is actually a fake. The characteristics of the documentary will first



lead to a categorization which then turns out to be false. Thus they appear as metareferential signs pointing to a genre the film does not really belong to.

#### 4. Intermedial quotations of forms and their metareferential potential

Intermedial quotations in themselves frequently have a particularly high auto-reflexive and metareferential potential. They tend to not only quote a work but also its formal qualities and its original medium. The reason for the high metareferential potential of this variant is the defamiliarizing change in formal conditions caused by the transition from one medium to another, which excludes a simple actualisation of the (partly) reproduced or imitated system<sup>6</sup>. Intermedial quotations are not to be confused with instance of media forming parts of the represented world in another medium as, e. g., when paintings, TV screens or theatre performances are shown in a movie. Unlike intermedial quotations of the kind discussed here, such instances are referential, but not necessarily metareferential. In many cases they will have no salient function at all, simply because we are constantly confronted with media in our lives, and a picture on the wall or a TV set are only perceived as part of the interior like a carpet or wallpaper. In other cases they may function to produce a *mise en abyme*, which also does not mean that they are automatically metareferential (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 58).

I am using the term ‘intermediality’ here in the narrow sense of ‘figurative’ intermediality, which means that formal aspects of one medium are displayed in another medium<sup>7</sup>. More basic types of rela-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rajewsky 2002: 205 (“intermediale Systemerwähnung”), and Wolf’s introduction to this vol: “As far as intermedial reference is concerned, one should be as cautious in equalling it with metareference as in the case of intertextuality. There is, however, a variant that is particularly prone to being combined with metareference, namely an experimental imitation of an ‘alien’ medium which goes ‘against the grain’ of the medium of the referring work [...]. Here, too, the salience of the reference, in particular where it is combined with a high degree of deviation from the traditional use of the medium in question [...], is an important factor for the implication of a meta-level from whose vantage point the mediality of the media involved, their potentials and limits, appear foregrounded” (62f.).

<sup>7</sup> See the summarizing articles by Siebert 2002 and Paech 1998.

tion between different media such as combinations of media, for instance the combination of language and music in songs, or media transfers such as a dramatization or a film version of a novel would therefore not be intermedial in this sense. Intermedial quotations of forms make formal qualities of a medium in general or of its specific genres, styles, etc. appear in another medium. They do not only occur in highly self-reflexive, avant-garde art, but also in very pragmatic types of communication such as advertising.



Illustration 5: Advertisement (ca. 1999). (Orig. in colour.)

In the late 1990s, when digital media, computers and the internet were still quite new to a broader public, print advertisements tried to point to the new media through quotations of formal elements such as the syntactical structure of directories, hyperlinks or the interface of operating systems including the cursor icon. Cases in point are the following examples: a bookseller presenting a bargain through a mixture

of directory path, file name and internet address (see *Illustration 6*), and an internet provider trying to show readers of a print advertisement in a newspaper what they could do on the internet (and cannot do with the newspaper; see *Illustration 5*).



*Illustration 6: Advertisement (ca. 1999). (Orig. in colour.)*

The first example surely has merely a minor metareferential potential, if any, but the second may cause the reader of the newspaper to notice that the simulated elements from the medial context of computer and internet do not really work in that of the newspaper, and thus lead him or her to a reflection on the different medial qualities of these two environments.

However, not only do old media refer to new ones, the reverse is also true. Over the past decades, photography and film have been quite frequently dealing with painting, exploring the differences and interrelations between the media (see Böhn 1999). Jean-Luc Godard and Peter Greenaway have used the 'tableau vivant' in movies such as *Passion* (1982) or *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985) in order to reflect on the dialectics of narrative and pictorial aspects of film through the antagonism of still and moving images. In Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* we find two tableaux vivants based on paintings by Vermeer, neither of which is an exact imitation of a specific piece. They rather combine elements from various Vermeer paintings and contain certain alterations, but each of them nevertheless clearly relies on one painting.

The first one, "The Art of Painting"<sup>8</sup>, is an allegory of painting in which the muse of historiography with a history book in her hands is depicted as the model for a painter who is sitting with his back to the beholder. In Vermeer's time, history painting was the most prestigious genre, to which, however, neither the painting within the painting nor

<sup>8</sup> See *Illustration 2* in Wolf's introduction to this vol. (46).

Vermeer's allegory itself belong. In Greenaway's film the model holds a book on Vermeer and bears the same name as Vermeer's wife; moreover, the place of the painter is occupied by a man taking photographs of the scene. He is called van Meegeren and said to be a relative of the most famous forger of Vermeer paintings. The camera draws back, and in the end the model leaves the scene. The reflection on the art of painting already inherent in Vermeer's painting is extended by the history of media and photography that replace painting in the tableau vivant.

The second painting Greenaway refers to, "The Music Lesson" (c. 1662–1665), is first shown in detail before we see the tableau vivant being produced. Here the camera statically adopts the perspective of the painting's beholder, but the actors keep moving until the arrangement resembles that of the painting. Camera movement and represented movement are symmetrically inverted with respect to the first case. The central figure's dress is sewed to the chair she is sitting on so that she cannot leave the frame of the picture.

In the first case, the sequence starts with a reduction of film to the typical formal qualities of most paintings: static images, a-temporality, and non-narrativity. Then camera movement sets in, a story develops from the dispute between artist and model, and the sequence ends with the model's leaving the 'living painting's' frame, which the camera angle has already transgressed. In the second case, the sequence begins with a demonstration of the formal qualities of film, the fast-cut montage of details of the painting, that is followed by the representation of actors' movement and dialogue and ends with a complete suspension of camera as well as of subject movement. Thus, both sequences are symmetrical in the way they shift from the formal characteristics of painting to film and vice versa.

This arrangement makes clear that the two tableaux vivants do not only point to the two Vermeer paintings, but also to the formal conditions of painting in general, contrasting them to the formal conventions of film. Symmetry is dominant throughout the film and tends to supersede the common instruments of creating structures that are characteristic of film: subject movement, camera movement, montage. Many sequences have minimal movement, no camera movement and no cuts. Symmetry is one structural paradigm in the film, associated with non-filmic, pictorial media, and opposed to another paradigm, evolution in time, associated with the medium 'film', narrative and the evolution of species.

The intermedial quotation of form that takes place in the *tableaux vivants* is metareferential since it is a means of making the audience aware of media history and of opposing the dominant conception of film as narrative film. It tries to overcome the boundaries set by the formal conventions of film narrative and to integrate the formal traditions of painting into the medium ‘film’, as, according to Greenaway, it is too important to leave it to storytellers.

I would like to conclude with yet another example of an intermedial quotation of form with a metareferential quality. In her series *History Portraits*, Cindy Sherman presents photographic variations of famous paintings such as Raffael’s “La Fornarina” or Caravaggio’s “Bacchus”, but also quotations of formal characteristics, be it of certain genres, periods, schools or individual painters.



*Illustration 7: Cindy Sherman, “Untitled Film Still #13” (1978).*

Even more interesting with respect to the notions under discussion (quotation, intermediality and metareference) is her earlier series *Untitled Film Stills* from the late 1970s. Film stills are photographs that refer to films. From an analytical point of view they are intermedial quotations because they seem to reproduce a frame from a film in an-

other medium, photography<sup>9</sup>, thus pointing to the mechanical qualities of the film and suggesting questions like ‘What was going on before that moment? what will follow? why does the person in the photo have this particular expression? etc.’. However, their metareferential impact is, as a rule, rather minor, as they are meant to draw audiences to the cinema, “to arouse enough prurient curiosity in the passerby to justify spending money and time in seeing the film to which the still points” (Danto 1990: 8). They do not invite to reflect on the film from which they are taken, nor on the medial conditions of photography versus film.

The still is one of the chief ways in which movies present themselves to potential ticket-buyers, and as pictorial inducements are steeped in the strategies of provocation. [...] The still is analogous to the lurid jacket on the paperback novel, which must compete with the other paperback novels on display for the reader’s attention, money, and time. Or like any advertising image calculated to arouse a desire for the product the viewer is caused to believe must be like its image. The still, like these, is seductive, enticing, and meretricious, and the taker of stills must therefore be an astute psychologist of the narrative appetite, a visual Sheherazade. The still must tease with the promise of a story the viewer of it itches to be told. As a visual tease, the still is especially important for the B-movie with its cast of minor actors. (Ibid.: 8f.)

Sherman’s *Stills* also refer to movies which do not exist. The artist intramedially quotes the formal traits of film stills, and by doing so leads us to notice their character as defamiliarized intermedial pseudo-references, thus creating an implicitly metareferential level of reflection in them. And whereas ‘real’ film stills quote singular films, Sherman’s *Film Stills* are formal quotations of patterns that make us think of genres, styles, plot structures and stereotypical characters.

As has been shown, quotations of forms can function as metareferential strategies of unveiling the ‘ways of world-making’ inherent to formal structures as modes of representation. In the case of intermedial quotations of forms this capacity extends also to media as conditional frames for the appearance of medial objects, and sometimes quotations of forms may even lay bare the metareferential side of pragmatic everyday communication that we usually do not see.

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<sup>9</sup> Actually, film stills are not single film frames or frame enlargements, but what is commonly also referred to as ‘production stills’, “that is, photographs made while [...] a film is being shot [...] and they are typically] used for publicizing the film” (Thompson/ Bordwell 1979/1997: 37). However, most movie goers are not aware of the terminological distinction.

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# ‘The Media as Such’: Meta-Reflection in Russian Futurism – A Case Study of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s Poetry, Paintings, Theatre, and Films

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The transmedial dimension of meta-phenomena is well traceable in the oeuvre of the multi-talent artist Vladimir Mayakovsky, who – in close relation to the emerging theories of Russian Formalism that anticipated the concept of auto-referentiality – created striking examples of metapoetry, metatheatre, and metafilm. In Mayakovsky’s works, strategies of self-reflection coincide with his notorious inclination to self-fashioning and form a kind of auto-medialization. This case study focuses on telling examples from various arts and genres, such as Mayakovsky’s movie 1918 *Zakovannaya Fil'moy* (*Captivated by Film*), which is the very first metafilm that features a transgressive metalepsis and metareferentially points to the filmic medium itself, thus triggering a comparison of ‘rivalling’ pictorial and performative media such as dance, painting, photography, and film.

## 1. Introduction

For a media-comparative analysis interested in highly self-reflexive and metareferential artifacts, the early avant-gardes yield a wide field of research opportunities. This is especially true for Russia, where French Cubist as well as Italian Futurist innovations found a continuation and led to even more radical phenomena such as abstract painting and trans-sense poetry, i. e., a kind of literary abstractionism foregrounding the pure medium. The first Russian Futurist manifestoes of 1912/1913 proclaimed not only a destruction of the old bourgeois world (“Slap in the Face of Public Taste”), but also explicitly called for “The Word as Such” and “The Letter as Such”<sup>1</sup>, thus radicalizing the aesthetic and cultural revolution and turning it into a semiotic (and eventually a political) one.

The Futurist slogans “The Word as Such” and “The Letter as Such” exemplify the leading position of literature and thus of literary auto-reflexivity, which seems to parallel the situation in present-day

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<sup>1</sup> The collectively published manifestoes were authored in various constellations; Mayakovsky had co-authored the “Slap”. Cf. the English translations in Lawton/Eagle 1988: 51–52, 57–62, 63f.

criticism and theory (cf. Wolf in this vol.: 3). The intense critical concern with literary meta-phenomena over the past few decades has, however, produced such a plethora of terms and concepts that it is not easy to transfer and transmedially apply them to meta-phenomena in other arts and media.

It might thus prove particularly fruitful – if not for finding a unified terminology then at least for discerning analogies across media – to explore meta-ideas expressed and manifest in the oeuvre of a multi-talented writer and artist such as Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), who – as a poet, painter, playwright, theatre and film actor, script writer and film director – worked in various media and genres and thus combines potentially different medial approaches in one and the same person. He was close friends with the young scholars of the emerging Russian Formalist school, Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, who devised a new theoretical approach that, for the very first time, focussed on the mediality of artistic production and anticipated the structuralist concept of autoreferentiality. The synergetic interaction of linguists, literary critics and avant-garde writers in Moscow and St. Petersburg gave rise to what we are now used to calling the ‘linguistic turn’. Language – and especially sophisticated literary language – was the guiding semiotic model, and ‘literaturnost’ (‘that what makes literature literary’) was to be the object of literary criticism. The early manifesto-like articles by Shklovsky – “The Resurrection of the Word” (1914) and “Art as Device” (1917) – were supplemented with the first notable theoretical Formalist study, Jakobson’s long article “Die neueste russische Poesie” (‘The Newest Russian Poetry’, 1919). In this analysis, Jakobson defined poetry as ‘language in its aesthetic function’ and demonstrated the poetic foregrounding of devices (“obnaženie priëma”/‘laying bare the device’) in Futurist poetry (cf. Jakobson 1973). In this exciting innovative atmosphere of mingling Formalism and Futurism and an intense blending of the arts, many ideas emerged that can be subsumed under the notion of metareference. Thus my paper is dedicated to the question of what kinds of parallels and reverberations arose within the interdisciplinary and intermedial constellations of the Russian avant-garde.

A few introductory words ought to be said about Mayakovsky, who seems to have fallen into oblivion due to his commitment to communism. Yet, for a study of metareference as a transmedial phenomenon he is one of the most well suited and challenging authors since his entire work is characterized by a co-existence of the political and

the aesthetic, of social commitment and self-referential play. His pre-revolutionary work is doubtlessly more interesting and innovative than his post-revolutionary production, but even after becoming actively politically engaged, Mayakovsky did not betray his poetic mastery: even his simplest propaganda lines or advertising posters have a definite artistic quality. While there is no doubt that Mayakovsky's most outstanding poetic works date from before the Revolution, his meta-cineastic ideas and works fall into the Soviet period. The practical reason for this was that a young film industry could only develop after the end of the Civil War, when the political situation had stabilized, whereas the programmatic reasons were that, even in ideologically hostile times, Mayakovsky wanted to keep up, or revive, certain truly avant-garde ideas. In the late nineteen twenties, proposing meta-reflexive fantastic art in Russia was highly political in itself and not, as is often assumed in the West, an escape into an unpolitical sphere. (Mayakovsky, e. g., did not receive permission to film some of his scripts.)

## 2. The media as such

From early on, Mayakovsky engaged in intense reflections on media and 'mediality' avant la lettre. Rereading his poetological statements one cannot but wonder why he did not invent the very term as it is just what he was effectively talking about.

A clear-cut proposition in his 1914 essay "Dva Čekhova" ('The Two Chekhovs') claims that even in the case of psychological realism, artistic merit does not result from subject matter but from verbal aesthetics. Mayakovsky draws an explicitly intermedial comparison and exemplifies it in terms of dealing with socio-political facts such as a servant beating a prostitute:

Ask a painter to draw it, a writer to describe it, and a sculptor to model it. The idea of all these works will apparently be the same: the servant as a rogue. Probably the idea will be most directly expressed by a politician. But how will the artists' thought differ from his?

Of course, only by means of expression.

The painter: line, colour, surface texture.

The sculptor: spatial form.

The writer: words.

And now let two different writers write about this fact. The difference will evidently consist in only one respect: the method of expression.

Thus, the task of the writer is to find the formally most distinctive expression for a cycle of ideas.

The content doesn't make a difference; but because each epoch has its specific need for new expressions, the examples which illustrate the verbal combinations and form the topic have to be contemporary.

Thus it is the words that are the writer's aim and purpose. (Mayakovsky 1955c: 266f.)<sup>2</sup>

In modern terms, Mayakovsky's proposition could be summarized thus: what counts is each individual art or medium's specific mediality and materiality, i. e., reformulated as a slogan in Futurist manner: 'the media as such'. This distinct medium-awareness forms the background for meta-reflection in his oeuvre.

Consequently, this literary, and often literal, focus is the dominant trait in Mayakovsky's self-conception as a writer, which becomes apparent in his autobiography *Ya sam* ('*I Myself*') that is structured as a sequence of short paragraphs with laconic headings and opens as follows:

The topic

I am a poet. That's what makes me interesting. That's what I write about. About the rest only if it is settled as word. (1955d: 9)

This idea is directly related to the early manifestoes, in which the young Futurists proclaimed the autonomy of the word; a peculiar image: 'settled as word' ("otstoyalsya slovom" [ibid.]) means sedimentation in verbal form. Mayakovsky's choice of expression thus underlines his conception: only the word matters, the word is matter.

### 3. Autography & auto-reflexivity – medium-awareness & self-consciousness

As a preliminary to studying metareference in Mayakovsky's artistic system, I should like to start with a hypothesis and some crucial questions. Many instances of (explicit or implicit) metareference are to be found in Mayakovsky's supposedly autobiographical texts. Reassessing these texts from a general meta-medial perspective reveals that in

<sup>2</sup> Where no English source is given, the quotation is newly translated from the Russian standard edition (Mayakovsky 1955a).

Mayakovsky's case medial self-reflection appears to be closely intertwined with personal self-reflection and the other way round. Therefore, the "poetics of self" described in recent Mayakovsky criticism (see Edmond 2002) is in fact rather a poetics of self-reflexive mediality.

There are two consequences to be drawn from this idea. Firstly, one has to reconsider the traditional label of 'autobiographical'. Readers and critics usually take great interest in Mayakovsky as an outstanding individual, and one could quote dozens of admiring or derogatory qualifications of his colourful personality. The poet is said to have been 'half athlete, half dreamer, a mixture of medieval minstrel and fanatic iconoclast', he appears as 'martyr, dandy, and clown', and takes on 'characteristics both of Christ and of Prometheus' (cf. Greber 1996: 511f.). These labels clearly show that Mayakovsky was a master of self-fashioning. He was, moreover, a great performer, easily assuming different roles and putting on various masks. The same is true for the lyrical 'I' of his poetry. However, in the eyes of his contemporaries, that persona was identical with the author. Friends like Ėrenburg and Jakobson called Mayakovsky a "Mayakomorphist" (Trotzki 1968: 126f.), thus indicating the semiotic nature of his self-fashioning. All of this, including his early suicide, adds up to a 'myth of the poet' (cf. Boym 1988: 206–334). The conceptions of mythopoesis and 'žiznetvorčestvo' ('life creation'), as used in the more advanced Mayakovsky criticism, prevent an autobiographical fallacy. I consider it possible to take this approach a step further and regard his life as being fully mediatized. In such a context the autobiographical discourse would not so much refer to authentic, real life, but rather to its emulation as a 'life effect'. The term 'autobiography' should therefore be replaced by 'autography', bearing the connotation of auto-reflexivity.

The second consequence resulting from Mayakovsky's 'poetics of self' being a poetics of self-reflexive mediality is the close intertwining of medial and personal self-reflection that in Mayakovsky's case calls to mind a very old terminology from the beginnings of meta-theory, namely the term 'self-consciousness' that has long been given up in favour of the 'meta-'paradigm, and for good reasons. Yet it seems to me that in this case (and possibly in others) the notion of self lurks at the centre of the metareferential system. When this young Futurist, in his enthusiasm for modern technology, strives for self-fashioning in the new media, medium-awareness and self-consciousness

become inseparable. Hence, one might even postulate that the specific ambiguity contained in the English word ‘self-consciousness’ is fully realized. The psychological situation of a very young man, still unsure of himself and of his becoming a writer and highly sensitive about his physical being, is reflected here in, and by means of, the medial constellation. (A similar pattern also seems to be staged in postmodern metafiction, in particular John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* and Raymond Federman’s *Double or Nothing*.)

I would thus like to ask how the notions of ‘self-’ or ‘auto-’ could be re-formulated within the ‘meta’-paradigm and the theoretical frame of metareference. This is not to say, of course, that psychological self-consciousness translates directly into auto-meta-reflection or that anthropological self-reflection is per se metareflexive in the strictly media-focused sense outlined in this volume. What is rather at stake is to assume certain historical conditions or individual motivations for heightened, intensified metaization. The broad range of auto-reflexivity in Mayakovsky’s oeuvre, which is extraordinary even in the light of the Russian avant-garde’s meta-artistic stance, seems to have been specially fuelled by self-exploration and self-fashioning.

One could, furthermore, speculate about the impact of ‘modernolatría’ and urbanist fascination with modern technology on the Russian Futurists’ acute awareness of aesthetic techniques, in particular the idea of the auto-mobile and the notion of *auto-/self-* in their manifestoes and critical writings.

Mayakovsky’s poetics of self-reflexive mediality pertains to his artistic practice in four fields, which I will now briefly analyze: literature, the visual arts, theatre performance, and film.

#### 4. Visual arts: ‘self-portrait’ (“avtoportret”) and the autographed book (‘samopis'mo’)

Before concentrating on Mayakovsky’s self-portrayal, one should at least briefly mention advertising and design as the main areas of his public activities. Among his early drawings, there are some famous portraits of fellow Futurists in which his style varies with the depicted objects. As to his self-portrayal, there are caricatures (see, e. g., *Illustration 1*), a painting in oil (see *Illustration 2*), and the humorous little pictures he employed as his signature in private letters to his beloved Lilya Brik (see *Illustration 3*).



Illustration 1: Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Self-caricature* (1915).



Illustration 2: Vladimir Mayakovsky, *"Avtoportret"* ('Self-portrait', 1918). (Orig. in colour.)

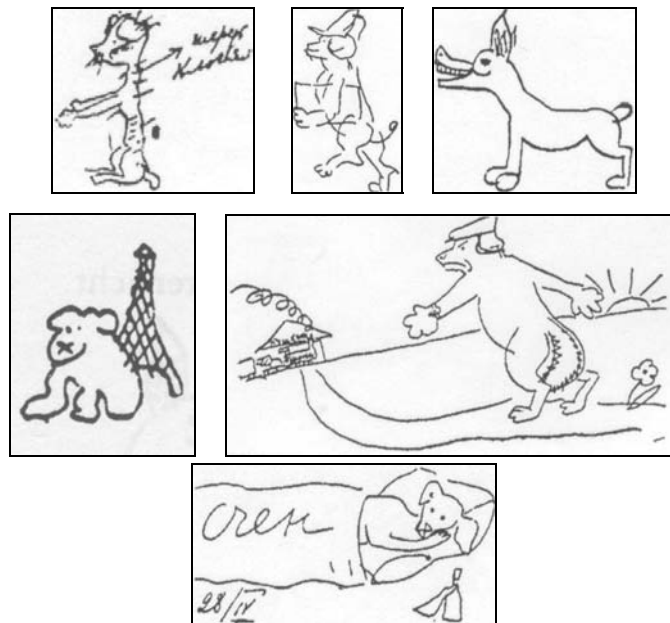


Illustration 3: Various pictorial signatures in Mayakovsky's love letters.



Most interesting is the self-portrait, which, in depicting the artist as a city, illustrates a shift from mimetic, iconic representation to the dispersed fractionations of Cubism. Of course, Cubism had reached Russia about ten years earlier (and had soon been superseded by Rayonism and Suprematism), and it thus has to be stressed that this type of abstractionist style was deliberately chosen by Mayakovsky. In painting a Cubistic self-portrait, Mayakovsky chose largely a non-iconic, urbanistic mode of artistic representation and thus emphasized pictorial mediality. The depicted object becomes less tangible as it appears to be more reminiscent of a city than of a person and in order to decipher it as a self-portrait, we have to rely on a paratext, namely the painting's title "Avtoportret" ('Self-portrait'). The extended title "Self-Portrait with Yellow Shirt" refers to a strange yellow shirt which Mayakovsky used to wear and which has a carnivalesque history and a gender-bending connotation (cf. the paragraph "Želtaja kofta" in the artist's aforementioned autobiography *Ya sam* [*I myself*], 1955d: 21). The yellow shirt is thus a metonymic image for Mayakovsky and as such appears as a frequent motif in his early poetry. In this painting of his, the colour yellow has been interpreted as an indexical sign referring to the painter himself, thus leading to the habitual title "Self-Portrait with Yellow Shirt". It remains, however, to be discussed whether this sign has metapictorial and metareferential quality in referring to an encoding of the person/artist as a colour. It could probably be described as a metareference of 'extra-artifactual' relevance, whereby the suggested term 'extra-artifactual' (instead of Werner Wolf's term 'extra-compositional') is meant to underline the real-life reference.

The next point I would like to discuss is the metareflexive quality of the Russian Futurists' printed books. In the manifesto "The Letter as Such", they called attention to the visual quality of script itself and to the changing expressivity of the literal gestalt. They created a new genre, the so-called 'autographed book' ('samopis'mo'), poems handwritten by an artist in wild looking handwriting and often bound in raw material. This primitivist conception was, of course, a provocation in the face of the exquisite print culture of Art Nouveau.

It is in such a 'samopis'mo' fashion that Mayakovsky's first book appeared in 1914: a cycle of four short poems entitled *I!* (or: *Me!*) with an exclamation mark (in Russian: *Ya!*)<sup>3</sup>. It was handwritten and designed by fellow artists. The title suggests an autobiographical con-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the bilingual presentation and analysis in Stapanian 1986: ch. 6.

tent, but the first subtitle, “A few words about my wife”, already leads the reader astray, as Mayakovsky was never married, and the wife referred to in the text turns out to be the personified moon, ‘Luna’. Thus traditional concepts are defamiliarized. As already explained, Mayakovsky’s autobiographical discourse is in part a discourse on the medium and a method of self-fashioning. The term ‘self-written’ by no means denotes authentic traces of the poet himself in his work, but the idea of a perceptibly mediatized artistic expression, stemming from a graphic artist.

Mayakovsky’s next book, his first drama, which was printed after having been staged, offered a theatrical mise-en-scène of the printed letter in the most literal sense: the dramatic text was formatted in free typography, resembling visual/concrete poetry<sup>4</sup>. In a certain way, these pages function like a musical score for the future enunciation by an actor. When Mayakovsky revised the text for publication, he strove to give the stage directions a significantly more pictorial quality in order to make up for the absence of the production’s visual features in the printed text (cf. Janecek 1984: 216, Perloff 1986/1994: 157). Thus typography becomes metatheatrical.

## 5. Autonymy

The ‘concrete’ play bears the author’s name: *Vladimir Mayakovsky* and is subtitled *A Tragedy* (1913). Ironically, the title seems to have resulted from a misunderstanding in the Soviet censorship bureau, but Mayakovsky accepted it happily due to its defamiliarizing touch. The seemingly traditional subtitle was deliberately inappropriate as the play was not a tragic piece.

This leads to the question of the metareferential dimension of titles<sup>5</sup> and of how they are chosen. Mayakovsky’s oeuvre is characterized by a frequent play with the indexical and symbolic potential of the personal pronoun ‘I’ and his own proper name. The most extraordinary case is indeed the early play titled *Vladimir Mayakovsky*. The device that exposes the very semioticity of a paratext could be referred

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<sup>4</sup> The complete facsimile was first printed in Kušner (1999: 128–183). Recently the Getty Center published a digitized facsimile of the original book (for the URL see the entry in the “References” section).

<sup>5</sup> See also Danuser in this vol.

to as ‘eponymy’ or ‘autonymy’. This was distinctly felt by contemporaries, as shows an apt comment by Boris Pasternak:

The creation was called a Tragedy [...] the tragedy was called *Vladimir Mayakovskij*. The title contained a simple and genial discovery, that the poet is not the author but the subject of poetry, facing the world in the first person. The title was not the surname of the composer but the surname of the composition. (1949: 191)

Owing to its acceptance by Mayakovsky, the play’s unusual title can be interpreted as a meta-sign. On the whole, it seems that Mayakovsky’s hyperbolic strategies of self-reference and self-fashioning should be discussed less in terms of autobiography than in terms of auto-semiotization or auto-mediatization.

## 6. Metatheatre and the actor as such

Mayakovsky’s *Tragedy*, in which he acted as director, producer and lead role, was part of the big theatrical events in St. Petersburg in December 1913. It was staged alternately with the Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, a scandalous production that represented a new anti-Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk featuring an early version of Malevich’s “Black Square”, dissonant modern music, unheard-of sound poetry, as well as an entirely defamiliarized conceptualization of the actor and the human figure<sup>6</sup>. The *Tragedy* caused considerable excitement among the audience and some critics, who acknowledged the author/actor’s stage presence and beautiful voice. Mayakovsky insisted that all parts were played by non-professional actors as he considered professional ones to be ‘spoilt’ by the practices of naturalistic theatre and thus unsuitable for avant-gardist anti-illusionist theatre. The urbanistic backdrop sketches have been preserved, and from eye-witness records one gets a vivid idea of the performance:

Mayakovsky as hero apparently appeared at centre-stage, dressed in the Futurist yellow blouse that was his trademark, whereas the actors surrounding him had costumes painted by Pavel Filonov on canvas stretched on figure frames, which they pushed in front of them. They thus appeared as cardboard puppets, each exemplifying a single trait: the Man with a Stretched Face, the Man without an Ear, the Old Man with Cats, and so on. (Perloff 1986/1994: 151)

The strange conception of the characters created problems for the production: how to show a ‘Man without a Head’ or a ‘Man with Two

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<sup>6</sup> For the best assessment of the piece cf. Ingold 1992: 145–174.

Kisses' on stage? A contemporary account of the anti-naturalistic procedure reads as follows:

The actors move, holding in front of them the cut-out cardboard figures which portray what they are playing and, when they speak, they look out from behind these figures. They move slowly, in straight lines, always facing the public (they cannot turn because there is no cardboard at the back or side of them). (Rudnitsky 1988: 13)

Here it is evident how the medium determines content and shapes the message. Overall, the play defamiliarized the established notions of theatre and actor, thereby implying a metareference to performance practices. It managed to expose 'the actor as such'.

#### 7. The auto-rhetorical, self-spun word ('samovitoe slovo')

In the following, some brief examples shall demonstrate Mayakovsky's ingenious manipulation of the verbal material for his meta-aesthetic aims. Mayakovsky's conception of the poetic word is closely related to the ideas launched in the manifesto "The Word as Such". In the preceding manifesto, "Slap in the Face of Public Taste", this had been prepared with notions such as word artistry, word novelty, and the 'self-sufficient'/'self-centred' word<sup>7</sup>. Underlining the performative poetics of the manifesto, the idea of the new word was presented by means of a new term: 'samovitoe slovo'. This neologism, usually translated as 'self-centered', has an intriguing etymology: it has to do with refined word-weaving and is derived from a root that signifies rhetorical sophistication via the ancient metaphor of twisting/weaving (cf. Greber 2002: ch. 2.8). The literal translation of the term would be 'self-spun' or rather even 'auto-rhetorical'.

This concept of complex word-weaving structures is to be found in many of Mayakovsky's best poems. The twisting of the words – by inversion, syncopic rhythm, sound clusters, split rhyme, ambiguity/amphibolia and puns – is nearly untranslatable. A good metapoetic example is to be found in the opening lines of the aforementioned cycle *I!*. Juliette Stapanian's translation in her unsurpassed study of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lawton/Eagle 1988: 51f. This manifesto is also easily accessible online on an amateur website: <http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/mayakovsky/1917/slap-in-face-public-taste.html>.

Cubo-Futurist devices preserves the linguistic mannerism and notion of urban disorientation and indicates polysemy:

Along the roadway  
 of my travel-rutted soul  
 steps of madmen  
 twist/weave feet/heels of harsh phrases.  
 Where cities  
 have been hung  
 and in the noose of a cloud  
 crooked necks  
 of towers  
 have congealed –  
 I walk  
 alone to sob,  
 that policemen  
 have been crucified  
 by the crossroad. (1986: 123)

The metareference contained in the phrase about the twisting of phrases is what Formalist terminology refers to as ‘laying bare the device’ (often translated as ‘foregrounding the device’). Foregrounding the formal, aesthetic and/or artistic devices inherent in a piece of art is in general a very effective metareferential strategy.

Even more such ‘word-twisting’ is to be found in Mayakovsky’s famous Cubo-Futurist poem “From Street to Street” on one of the broadsheets that came with the first Futurist manifesto in early 1913 and displays an urban scene in the form of Cubistic paper shavings dissecting individual words into multi-perspective polysemantic fragments. The ingenious opening lines are split into a kind of palindromic rhyme which is of course not directly translatable.

|                        |                                    |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| U-                     | The                                |
| lica.                  | boule-                             |
| Lica                   | vard.                              |
| u                      | Bull-                              |
| dogov                  | dogs                               |
| godov                  | of years                           |
| rez-                   | your faces                         |
| če.                    | grow steely.                       |
| Če-                    | Steel horses                       |
| rez                    | steal the first cubes              |
| železnyx konej         | jumping from the windows           |
| s okon beguščix domov  | of fleeting houses.                |
| prygnuli pervye kuby.  | [...]                              |
| [...]                  | (Wachtel/Kutik, eds. 2001: online) |
| (Mayakovsky 1955c: 38) |                                    |

This is a stunning case of auto-referential poetic function as theorized by Jakobson. In the terminology of this volume it might be called an implicit metareference to the verbal aesthetic of the poem<sup>8</sup>.

#### 8. Frame breaking and iconoclasm

The motif of icon painting at the end of the lyrical cycle *I!* allows us to address another aspect of metaization related to Mayakovsky's medium-aware poetics of the self.

The status of the icon within Russian avant-gardism is highly interesting because of its unusual combination of passéism and modernity. First and foremost, for an avant-gardist and revolutionary epoch such as Futurism, the Russian-orthodox and Byzantine icons naturally represented old-fashioned art and ideology, and countless icons and churches were in fact destroyed during the anti-religious campaigns after 1917, and the 'icon niches' for domestic devotion were emptied and abolished. Already in pre-revolutionary avant-garde literature and arts, Christian motifs would often serve as a basis for ideological debates, and obviously the motif of icon painting was especially prone to become a subject of iconoclasm. Thus it is evident with respect to ideology and religious discourse that the problematized icon had a blasphemic and iconoclast value. A kind of aesthetic iconoclasm is added with respect to painting techniques and art theory. Contemporary arts had turned down the supremacy of the Renaissance central perspective, and linear perspectivism was being replaced by non- or poly-perspectival organization. As the aesthetics of icon painting stems from pre-Renaissance medieval times, the icons, too, are free from central perspectivism. They are not ruled by convergent lines and the ocular logic of human sight, but by divergent lines, seemingly illogic proportions and plural or moving standpoints, which is thought to be a trace of God's ubiquitousness. This system – which is, by the way, in strict semiotic Peircean sense non-iconic – came to be called 'reverse perspective' or 'inverse perspective' (as theorized

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<sup>8</sup> The poem's visual shape varied between 1913 and 1918; sometimes it was left-aligned, like in the above English translation quoted from a professional Slavists' web anthology. A philological translation and multifaceted analysis is to be found in Stapanian 1986: ch. 4. For a media-centered analysis accompanied by two German translations, see Greber 2009.

by contemporary Russian art theory, especially Florensky [2002])<sup>9</sup>. In short, the old icons were so old that they could unfold an innovative power – something which has in the meanwhile been recognized as a unique source of the radical abstractionism initiated by Russian painters, namely Malevich and Kandinsky (see Krieger 1998). It is especially the latter aspect of iconoclasm which is relevant to Mayakovsky's metareflexive media aesthetics under discussion here.

In the cycle's fourth and last poem "A few words about me myself" (Mayakovsky 1955c: 48f.)<sup>10</sup> the lyrical 'I' – a kind of inverted Christ figure – is on a midnight stroll through the city and observes everything being turned upside down, a crazy cathedral galloping, and the icon of Jesus Christ empty: "Ya vižu: Christos iz ikony bežal" ('Christ has fled from His Icon'). In a great allegorical invocation, the 'I' addresses the Sun and, as another powerful force, Time. He compares Time to an icon painter of inferior ability, an 'icon-dauber', and demands that his own face be painted/daubed into 'the icon-niche of the epoch'. Here the rhetorics of iconoclasm combine with bold frame-breaking poetic iconography. The process of clearing the icon-niche is sketched as a blasphemous inversion. Instead of somebody removing the paintings, the painted figure has moved and has left an empty frame. The passage anticipates the idea of metalepsis, something which is at the centre of Mayakovsky's cinematographic experiments.

## 9. Metacinema and metalepsis

Avant-garde cinema did not originate in Western Europe, but in Russia (cf. Kirby 1971/1986: 122, Tisdall/Bozzola 1977/1996: 91) with the 1913 short film *Drama of the Futurist Cabaret No. 13*, in which Mayakovsky was, unsurprisingly, involved as an actor. He was among the few who were quick to acknowledge the artistic value of cinematography and the importance of film as a new medium, which he expected to replace theatre, and he soon began to publish in the young

<sup>9</sup> I am still using this established term though it has often been stressed that 'reverse' is an anachronistically incorrect and therefore misleading term; see the most recent overview by Kemp/Antonova 2005.

<sup>10</sup> For a complete bilingual presentation of the entire cycle, cf. Stapanian 1986: ch. 6.

trade journal *Kine-Žurnal*. His programmatic article “Theatre, Cinema, Futurism” (1913)<sup>11</sup> was the starting point for the idea of a ‘cinefication of theatre’ (see Levi 2008: online) and for a close cooperation with Vsevolod Meyerhold. Film theory and terminology were developed by the Formalist critics<sup>12</sup>, who proposed, e. g., the term ‘ëkranizatsiya’ (‘ecranization’) for the cinematic adaptation of dramas or novels. Two of Mayakovsky’s first films were ecranizations of rather sentimental novels (whereby these melodramatic films were often mistaken as expressions of Mayakovsky’s own sentiment) –, which is possibly why they proved more successful with the audience than his metafilms. His third film, *Zakovannaya Fil'moy* (‘*Captivated by Film*’, 1918) was truly original and innovative since it was the first ever film featuring a full-fledged metalepsis. In addition to these early works, two of his later film scripts also contain extraordinarily interesting metafilmic ideas, but in 1926, in the ideologically oppressive climate of oncoming Stalinism, he was no longer allowed to realize his playful and experimental metafilms. As script writer, director and actor Mayakovsky realized three films out of twelve that he had written.

Mayakovsky’s 1918 metareferential film *Zakovannaya Fil'moy* was destroyed in a fire and has thus been practically excluded from the historiography of Soviet cinema<sup>13</sup>. However, parts of it have been preserved and made accessible in printed freeze frames, together with a plot summary from later recollections by Lilya Brik, Mayakovsky’s great love and the film’s female lead<sup>14</sup>.

That the punning title is a reified metaphor is emphasized by a film poster which Mayakovsky designed himself and which shows the lady gripped by a celluloid strip (see *Illustration 4*). Within the movie, an intradiegetic film poster with a photograph becomes relevant.

<sup>11</sup> For English translations cf. Leyda 1960/1983: 412f. and Taylor/Christie, eds. 1994: 33f.

<sup>12</sup> The most comprehensive overview is offered by Beilenhoff, ed. 2005.

<sup>13</sup> For exceptions cf. very brief mentions in Leyda 1960/1983: 130, Bulgakova 1996: 88 and Zorkaya 2005: 85.

<sup>14</sup> The complete series of preserved freeze frames was published in 1980 in the German journal *Filmkritik* (Mayakovsky 1918a). The original film clip is used in the web video/sound installation “Vladimir Mayakovsky Remix” by Ancel Franck (2007: online).





Illustration 4: Poster for *Zakovannaya Fil'moy* ('Captivated by Film', 1918).

The metareferential and metaleptic plot is that of a painter to whom the people he meets become transparent to the bone and display in place of their hearts objects such as pots, bottles, a gramophone, or playing cards. When a beautiful gipsy the painter is about to portray even has a coin for a heart, he stops painting and goes to the cinema to see *The Celluloid Heart*, a film dealing with the world of cinema itself: Rodolfo Valentino, Buster Keaton and other contemporary stars admire a ballerina chased by cowboys, detectives, and rogues. After the film ends, the painter applauds until the ballerina steps off the screen and joins him in the 'real' world (see *Illustration 5*).

They leave the cinema, but he loses her as she is able to penetrate a closed door that shuts him out. The painter falls sick and has to take some medication which turns out to be wrapped in a film poster. When he unfolds the poster, the ballerina printed on it becomes alive again – or vice versa (see *Illustration 6*).



*Illustration 5: Zakovannaya Fil'moy ('Captivated by Film'), freeze frames.*

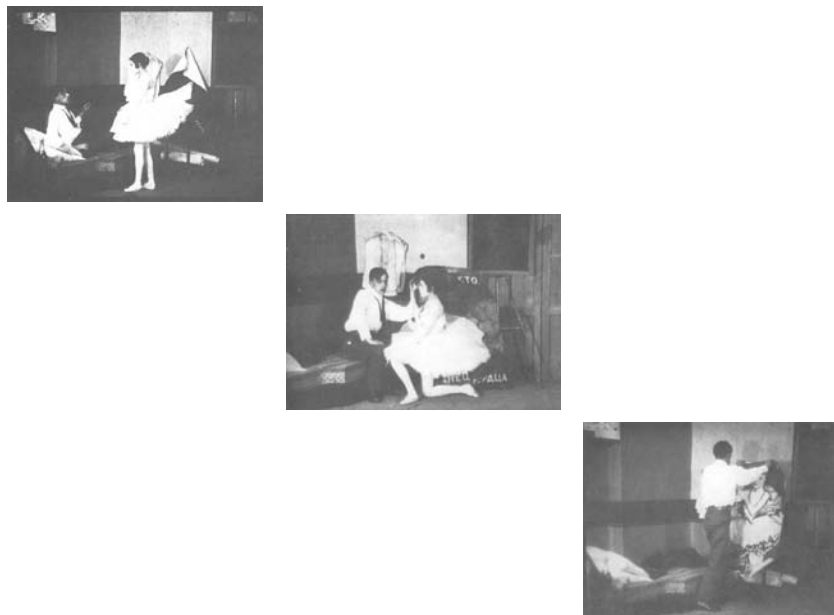


*Illustration 6: Zakovannaya Fil'moy ('Captivated by Film'), freeze frames.*

After they have gone off to the dacha, the ballerina misses and longs for the movie screen and starts to look out for white surfaces: a faded light-coloured picture, a white tablecloth. The painter hangs the tablecloth upon a wall for her to make a canvas (see *Illustration 7*). More plot complications lead to the gipsy trying to murder the ballerina, who remains unhurt, however, as the knife meant to kill her merely hits and penetrates the film poster pinned to a tree. In the end the ballerina is traced and captured by the other movie characters, and the film producer wraps her up with a celluloid strip, in which she dissolves<sup>15</sup>.



*Illustration 7: Zakovannaya Fil'moy ('Captivated by Film'), freeze frames.*

<sup>15</sup> For a somewhat different synopsis interested in the theme of unrequited love, cf. Brown 1973: 320f.

The plot contains many motifs from fantastic literature, particularly from the Russian Hoffmannesque tradition, mixed with later Western intertexts (especially the portrait stories by Gogol, Odoevsky, and Wilde, in which the painter acquires the magic gift of extraordinary sight and a painted portrait becomes alive). The heroine being a ballet dancer does not simply refer to the classical Russian ballet tradition but points even more at dance as one of the leading kinetic arts of modernity as which it made an interesting discursive object for film, e. g. in the legendary serpentine dance film of the Brothers Lumière (1896). The choice of a ballerina figure makes it thus possible for Mayakovsky to compare film as a kinetic medium with a static pictorial medium such as the film poster.

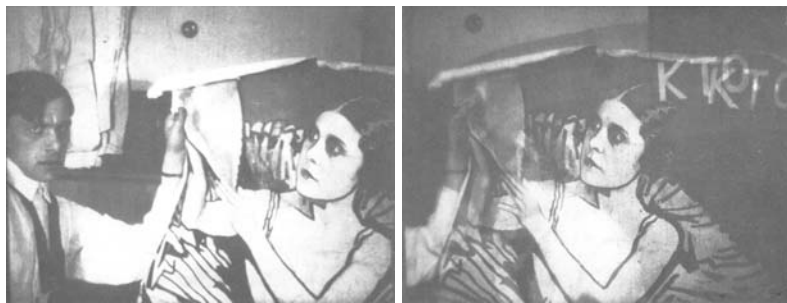


Illustration 8: *Zakovannaya Fil'moy* ('Captivated by Film'), freeze frames.

The film features several transformation scenes (see, e. g., *Illustration 8*). This is a significant and common trait of early cinema, as metamorphosis allows for the new medium to display its spectacular technical means and possibilities and to thus metareferentially foreground its own mediality. It is no coincidence that the most successful literary topic in early cinema was that of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (see Greber 2004). However, while metamorphosis has to be smooth and psychologically convincing in the Jekyll-and-Hyde films, transformations in *Captivated by Film* are non-naturalistic and meant to be visible. They aim to lay bare the filmic medium as such.

It appears that the device of metalepsis, though capable of breaking illusion, is here not applied as mimesis critique, but for the sake of exploring and demonstrating the technical means of the filmic medium, thus stressing its technological and material sides over narrative cinema's potential for establishing as well as breaking aesthetic illusion.

Metaization in *Captivated by Film* is also employed to indicate a paragone between the different pictorial and kinetic arts and media:

dance, painting, photography, film. The ‘winner’ is evident: this love story is a love affair with film.

The medium that offers the most distinct possibility for metalepsis derives from painting: the picture frame. This motif recurs within Mayakovsky’s poetry and film in various medial analogies: the empty frame of the icon – the door through which the heroine immaterializes – the frame of the faded painting – the white poster surface – the tablecloth. Thus, in Mayakovsky’s metafilm even the filmic canvas is modelled after the picture frame and takes on the shape of a tablecloth, as a transportable ‘moving picture’. Mayakovsky, so to speak, transforms the sublime Black Square into a pop-cultural cinematic White Rectangle.

## 10. Conclusion

Mayakovsky’s acknowledged high rank in the history of avant-garde poetry and theatre is, in great part, due to the constant attention he pays to metareference and auto-reflexivity. His fruitful poetics of metaization would be unthinkable without his accompanying work in the visual arts, especially cinematography, and his innovative ideas for meta-cinema (even though these are still underestimated by film historiography). In each and any of the media he used, Mayakovsky strived for self-reflexive manifestations of the specific medium, which adds up to an entire complex of meta-reflection in his oeuvre. Contemporary Formalist theory offered a number of terms and ideas for conceptualizing the specific aspects and functions of meta-reflection, even while it lacked (or avoided?) an umbrella term. As demonstrated, the new transgeneric and transmedial term ‘meta-reference’ is very useful as it allows us to see the leading principle underlying the broad range of arts and media used by Mayakovsky for self-reflexively foregrounding mediality and the media as such.

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