

Jeff Thoss

Metareference in the Arts and Media

An International Symposium Organised as Part of the Intermediality Programme at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz, 22-24 May 2008, English Department

The term ›metareference‹ refers to any form of self-reference where one moves from a first cognitive and communicative level to a higher one on which thoughts, expressions and elements from the first level become objects of reflection and communication in turn. In literary studies, this phenomenon has already been studied for a while, yet efforts to explore metareference in other arts and media have remained sparse so far. Thus it is not surprising that after Kassel (2005), Gießen (2005) and Edinburgh (2007) the Graz symposium »Metareference in the Arts and Media« was only the fourth one that explicitly aimed at remedying the one-sidedness of hitherto existing, predominantly mono-medial ›meta-research‹ through a transmedial approach and thus contributing to an adequate study of metaphenomena not only in literature. For this purpose the anglicists Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart invited international speakers from the humanities to Graz for three days. At the same time, the conference also served as starting signal for the research project »Metareference – A Transmedial Phenomenon«, which will be pursued over the next three years through several PhD theses and a further conference (on the remarkable, unprecedented proliferation of metaphenomena in contemporary culture).

The symposium opened with a series of lectures devoted to general theoretical issues of metareference. To begin with, **Werner Wolf** (Graz) delineated the area of research, established metareference as a particular case of self-reference and proposed parameters with which one can further differentiate this phenomenon. By asking whether metareference was rooted in the recipient and/or in the medium, and whether the categories of explicit and implicit metareference could be distinguished rigorously, Wolf raised issues which were extensively discussed over the next three days. Next, semiotician **Winfried Nöth** (Kassel) outlined his notion of ›performative metareference‹ and offered a detailed examination of the specifics of language as compared to non-verbal media. **Irina Rajewsky** (Berlin/Cologne) analysed forms of implicit metanarration that question the concept of narrative mediation and criticised the common practice of ›exporting‹ narratological concepts into other media without paying attention to their particularities. How an adequate ›export‹ might look like was subsequently demonstrated by **Sonja Klimek**'s (Neuchâtel) lecture on metalepsis, a concept she illustrated with examples taken from literature, theatre, film and painting. **Andreas Böhn** (Karlsruhe) introduced the term ›quotation of forms‹ and – distinguishing between intra- and intermedial contexts – made clear under which circumstances this type of quotation could be considered metareferential. Next, **Hans Ulrich Seeber** (Stuttgart) pleaded for a distinction between rational and emotional factors in metareference and explained how English literature reacted with a metareferential impetus to the emergence of new media like film or photography around the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. **Claus Clüver** (Bloomington, IN) argued that concrete poetry is by its very nature metareferential since it always refers to its own means of production and furthermore frequently includes references to other media. The first section of the conference ended with a talk by **Karin Kukkonen** (Mainz/Tampere), who

highlighted forms of covert metareference in the comic *Fables* by means of the concepts of ›textworld‹ and ›storyworld‹.

The symposium's second section dealt with the intricate question of metareference in music, a question that was answered in the affirmative by all speakers, albeit from very different viewpoints. **Tobias Janz** (Hamburg) showed how Beethoven's »Prometheus-Variations« reflect the circumstances of their own genesis and make use of parody and irony. **Hartmut Möller** (Rostock) emphasised the crucial role played by context when it comes to spotting metareferences in music. His notion of explicit metareference in music gave rise to intense discussions as this possibility had previously been ruled out by Wolf and Nöth. Afterwards **Jörg-Peter Mittmann** (Detmold) returned to the topic of quotations and explained their metareferential potential in contemporary music with the ›use/>mention‹ distinction: only in the case of ›mention‹ can one speak of metareference. A different approach was chosen by **Hermann Danuser** (Berlin), who identified titles as a versatile instrument to denote metaisation in musical compositions. **Harald Fricke** (Fribourg) treated metareference in opera and used his revised typology of ›itération‹ to classify various kinds of metaphenomena in this medium. In analogy to Janz, **René Michaelsen** (Cologne) recognized irony and parody as prime strategies of metareference in music, which he illustrated with Robert Schumann's instrumental music and its affinities with literary Romanticism. While up to now classical music of the past had been the focus of attention, the last two speakers proved that metareference is also very prominent in today's popular music. **David Francis Urrows** (Hong Kong) shed light on Andrew Lloyd Webber's partly affirmative, partly critical treatment of music history in his *The Phantom of the Opera* and coined the term ›destructive homage‹ for this purpose. Finally, **Martin Butler** (Duisburg-Essen) dealt with pop music, especially political pop music, and clarified to what extent text, music and performance can contribute to metareference in this case.

Metareference in the visual arts was the following section's topic. **Andreas Mahler** (Munich) stressed the fact that the deictic ›this‹ – as, for instance, in Magritte's famous painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* – has no clear referent to support the reflections on metareference he developed through a transmedial comparison of Shakespeare and Ahsbery. In Russian futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky's work, which encompasses poetry, painting, theatre and film, **Erika Greber** (Erlangen-Nürnberg) presented a lively example for an intermedial accumulation of metareferences in one and the same artist. **Katharina Bantleon** and **Jasmin Haselsteiner-Scharner** (Graz) discussed photographer Thomas Struth's cycle »Museum Pictures«, referring to the tradition of the ›gallery painting‹ as an intrinsically metareferential genre and emphasising the importance of the ›artspace‹ as an object of reference for processes of metaisation in the visual arts.

Cinema and TV formed the topic of the fourth part of the conference. **Jean-Marc Limoges** (Québec) spoke about different grades of metareferentiality taking place in films as a result of such criteria as coincidence or diegetic motivation. How metadramas are turned into metafilms was the topic of **Janine Hauthal**'s (Wuppertal) lecture, who distinguished transgeneric and medium-specific means of transformation. **Barbara Pfeifer** (Vienna) focused on the relationships between novel and film in Marc Forster's *Stranger Than Fiction*, which she identified as a new, intermedial type of metafilm. At the end **Joan K. Bleicher** (Hamburg) offered an survey of metareference in German television, paying particular attention to the fact that metaphenomena are not always grasped as such by the audience.

The last two sections covered media and art forms which had not been dealt with elsewhere. **Fani Paraforou** (Munich) coined the notion of ›performative metarepresentation‹ in relation

to a video by Eve Sussman which referred to Velázquez's *Las Meninas* as well as Michel Foucault's interpretation of it. Next, **Daniella Jancsó** (Munich) explored the connections between poetry and painting in the verse of William Carlos Williams and explained how Williams uses the differences between these two to elevate and criticise poetry at the same time. **Ingrid Pfandl-Buchegger** and **Gudrun Rottensteiner** (Graz) used the Jacobean masque as an example of metareference in dance, which in the case of the anti-masque manifests itself primarily in the form of deliberate deviations from norms and systemic conventions. In her talk on the forms and functions of metareference in audioliterature **Doris Mader** (Graz) elucidated how audioliterature as a composite intermedial art form can comment on its own development as a genre and its technical prerequisites. **Henry Keazor** (Frankfurt) dealt with meta-architecture, opposing the overt, ironic metareferences found in the work of the American postmodernists to the covert, more subtle ones present in the buildings of French architect Jean Nouvel. Eventually, **Fotis Jannidis** (Darmstadt) discussed computer games, which, as he argued, can contain anything from self-reflexive insider jokes and games-within-games to explicit forms of self-criticism.

In the final discussion, Werner Wolf tried to work out a common concept and a uniform typology for metaphenomena based upon all that had been said over the previous three days. Among other things, the participants questioned whether metareference always leads to ›medial awareness‹ in the recipient and whether one should not replace ›awareness‹ by ›focalisation‹. The participants were moreover reminded not to underestimate the diversity of functions and effects which metareference can possess or trigger. The discussion ended with the announcement of a follow-up conference planned to take place from 1–3 October 2009, once again in Graz, centring on the ›metareferential turn‹ in postmodernism and contemporary culture in general and the possibilities of explaining this remarkable phenomenon.

On the whole the symposium can be rated as a complete success. The lectures and discussions were consistently lively and on a high level, and the opportunity to meet researchers from other academic disciplines was felt to be very rewarding. The conference proceedings are set to be published in summer 2009 (Werner Wolf (ed.), *Metareference in the Arts and Media: Theory and Case Studies*, Amsterdam/New York, NY: Rodopi).

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2008-08-01

JLTONline ISSN 1862-8990

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How to cite this item:

Jeff Thoss, Metareference in the Arts and Media. (Conference Proceedings of: Metareference in the Arts and Media. An International Symposium Organised as Part of the Intermediality Programme at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz, 22-24 May 2008, English Department.)

In: JLTonline (01.08.2008)

Persistent Identifier: urn:nbn:de:0222-000279

Link: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0222-000279>