

Metareference in the Arts and Media

The following text refers to a research project of which the planned conference is a part; it therefore may be helpful for anyone looking for more detailed information on the forthcoming conference.

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1. Introduction

In his "Introduction" to a volume dedicated to *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Dan Sperber speaks of a "metarepresentational capacity" of man that is "no less fundamental than the faculty of language. Understanding the character and the role of this [...] capacity might change our view of what it is to be human" (Sperber 2000a: 6f.). The present research project ultimately aims at contributing to this elucidation of 'the human' from the point of view of the humanities. This seems to be all the more necessary as the humanities, whose principal business is here concerned, have received little attention in this 'multidisciplinary approach', which assembles essays on meta-fields as diverse as linguistics, psychology, anthropology and primate research, and emphasizes a cognitive perspective as a potential common ground; indeed, they are represented mostly through linguistics, while the literature and other media receive only one indirect mention ("aesthetics" [6]) in an enumeration of fields that have contributed to the discussion in the field. This neglect is arguably not only due to 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 metaphenomena in the context of literature and other arts and media, in particular phrases betraying a 'theory of mind' such as "Bill thought that *the house was on fire*" (Sperber 2000b: 119)¹. Another reason for disregarding literature and other media may be that 'meta-research' in these areas – where it exists at all – has so far remained within the limits of individual disciplines and has hardly developed a theory that would be useful for contexts

¹ While the 'representation' of "the content of representations" (Sperber 2000b: 117) in one's mind or utterance is a genuine, self-reflexive metaphenomenon, it is both too covert and too general or, in other words, too little media-specific (in the sense of medium as an art or medium of expression) to have been investigated in art and media studies.

that transcend these disciplines, let alone the humanities at large. Admittedly, there is as yet a long way to go until a dialogue between the humanities and science can be carried out fruitfully in this field. Yet what can be done now is a first step in this direction, namely to intensify interdisciplinary research in metaphenomena within the arts and media and try at least to overcome the 'insularity' of the individual discourses in view of the larger aim, namely to shed light on the human meta-capacity.

'Metaization' – the movement from a first cognitive or communicative level to a higher one on which the first-level thoughts and utterances self-reflexively become in turn objects of reflection and communication – is a common feature not only of human thought and of language as a primary medium but also of literature and most arts as (secondary) media. However, research in this latter field has so far predominantly focussed on metatextuality in literature, in particular on what since 1970 has been discussed as 'metafiction'. This monomedial focus has led to a highly differentiated – albeit neither uniform nor complete – conceptual 'toolbox' for analysing metaphenomena in verbal texts and has permitted fruitful discussions of possible functions of metaphenomena in this field. Yet little effort has been made both within literary studies and from the perspective of other media to create bridges between these two areas in order to profit from this toolbox and its potential of analysis, functional and otherwise, for the larger context of the arts and media.

The present project aims to remedy this onesidedness within the framework of a 'transmedial' approach and generally to develop the study of metaphenomena in literature and other media. Drawing in addition on semiotics and a cognitive approach, it proposes – in a first step – to reconceptualize 'metafiction'/'metatextuality' as a more widely applicable concept that avoids the ad hoc *bricolage* that has so far characterized large parts of literary research, namely as 'metareference', which actualizes a 'secondary cognitive frame' in the recipient. On this broader basis, individual media shall, in a second step, be analyzed and compared to each other with respect to their metareferential 'capacities', in particular literature, the visual arts, film and music (where 'metareference' is all but unknown in research and where consequently the innovative potential of the transmedial approach is particularly high). In a third step, the systematic results from this investigation shall be used in a case study for a cultural-historical investigation of contemporary, postmodernist culture, in which metareference has acquired an unprecedented importance. All in all, the project should prepare the ground for further studies with reference to other cultural-historical contexts and also to more media than is possible within the limited scope of this pilot project.

In the following, the 'transmedial' framework in which this project shall be carried out, the concept of 'metareference' on which it is based, as well as the aims, the expected benefits, the methods used and the steps to be done shall be explained in more detail.

2. Interdisciplinarity in literary studies and the concept of transmediality as frames of research

Literary studies is an area that over the past few decades has been fertilized by a number of other disciplines, ranging from art history to psychology, sociology, linguistics 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'). The interdisciplinary cross-fertilization has also functioned the other way round. In fact, in particular in the recent past, we have not only witnessed a remarkable 'import' of non-literary concepts into literary studies 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 historical and film studies.

A fruitful theoretical frame for the promotion of such interdisciplinary cross-fertilization is intermediality theory, in particular the category of 'transmediality' as developed by Irina O. Rajewsky (2002: 206 and 2003: ch. iv.3.4.) and myself (Wolf 2002a and 2002b). As opposed to relations to other media 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 filmicization 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. They comprise 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 comprise 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 in the context of the interdisciplinary Faculty Programme 'Intermediality' developed at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Graz². 'Metareference' is also a concept whose interdisciplinary investigation, as proposed in the present research project, can be carried out within the framework of 'transmediality'.

3. Metareference: the concept in literary studies in the context of related concepts³

'Metareference' is, however, not yet a received notion in the humanities. In literary studies, one may instead encounter a babel of partly overlapping terms which all have various degrees of affinity with 'metareference', in particular 'self-consciousness' (Alter 1975), 'self-reference' or 'self-referentiality' (Cornis-Pope 1997), 'autoreferentiality' (Nemec 1993), 'self-reflexivity' (Huber/Middeke/Zapf, eds. 2005), 'reflexivity' (Williams 1998), 'metanarrativity' (Nünning 2004), 'metatextuality' (Kravar 1987), 'metafiction' (Currie, ed. 1995), 'metanovel' (Lowenkron 1976), 'introverted novel' (Fletcher/Bradbury 1976) 'metadrama'/'metatheatre' (Hornby 1986, Schmeling 1982), 'metapoetry' (Müller-Zettelmann 2000). A clarification of the term thus imposes itself.

² See, for framing, Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2006, for descriptivity Wolf/Bernhart, eds. forthcoming, and for narrativity, Wolf 2002c, 2003, and 2004.

³ For a detailed discussion of the ramifications of self-reference and the position of metareference within this larger field see Wolf 2001, and 2007a forthcoming.

One way of clarifying 'metareference' makes use of a semiotic approach (for an alternative, or rather supplementary way see below). Metareference is a special case of 'self-reference', which in turn may be opposed to its 'other', 'hetero-reference'. This first distinction, self-reference vs. hetero-reference, is basic for any reflection on self-reference, as it concerns this notion in contradistinction from its 'other', although, in medial practice, individual phenomena can display both basic variants of reference, to a greater or lesser degree, so that functionally hetero- and self-reference are less a strict binary opposition than a bipolar scale with many gradations between two poles: the first pole, '**self-referentiality**', can be defined as the quality of signs and sign systems that point to themselves or to identical or similar elements within one and the same semiotic system – in contradistinction to its opposing pole, '**hetero-referentiality**', which denotes the 'normal' quality of signs, namely to point to what conventionally is conceived of as 'reality outside' the semiotic system. 'Pointing to' here not only means a semiotic referential function but also an expressive/emotive or an appellative/conative use of signs in a communicative act (see Jakobson 1960). Of course, the term 'system' also requires clarification: in the case of literature, music and other media, I see a need to differentiate between a narrow and a broad definition of such a system: in the narrow sense it would coincide with a given medial work (a literary text, a musical composition). I call self-reference operating within these narrow confines '**intra-compositional self-reference**'. As opposed to this, self-reference in the broad sense operates within the entire area of the media and arts. This variant, which I term '**extra-compositional self-reference**', includes, for instance, intertextual and 'inter-musical' references between different texts and compositions as well as intermedial references, for instance the relation between literary texts and music embodied in verbal descriptions of works of music.

Independently of the extension of the self-referential system which has just been outlined, self-reference can occur in basically two variants. This second basic distinction has rarely been made in research on self-referentiality but is crucial for interpretations from a functional point of view as well as for the context of metareference (I am here drawing on, but also modifying, Michael Scheffel's research [1997] and a typology which I have published elsewhere⁴). Self-reference can mean, first, the fact that a sign (system) merely '**points at**' itself or to similar (or identical) elements within the same system (this is a vast field that includes, e.g., formal, semantic or motivic recurrences, which Jakobson [1960] attributed to the 'poetic function' of literary texts). Second, self-reference can also denote a signifying practice that creates a self-referential **meaning**, in other words, elicits a **cognitive process or reflection** on itself, on other elements of the system or on the system as a whole, in other words, implies a **metareference**. It is with this semantic variant of self-reference that the present project is concerned.

Metareference 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. In fact, metareference – like so many other critical concepts in the field of the media – is actually a bi-polar phenomenon: it is not restricted to simple 'givens' within a work, text or artefact – these are 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 essence of metareference, the eliciting of a medium-awareness, takes place.

In other words, and this is where the semiotic approach to metareference must be supplemented by a cognitive one, metareference activates a certain **cognitive frame** in the recipient's mind. All arts and media use primary phenomena or 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 (1974), one may say that the understanding of such second-order systems (which also includes play-acting and games) presupposes in the recipient a **secondary macro-frame** which he or she applies 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 (2000a) this awareness would already be what he calls a 'meta-representation': the at least passive knowledge that something is not 'reality' as such but a reality thought, felt or represented by someone else, in short that this is a phenomenon or a 'reality' processed through a 'medium'.

Secondary frames which regulate this special reception – and here one needs to elaborate on cognitive approaches such as Goffman's or Sperber's – 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 world in a state of aesthetic illusion without confusing it with reality [see Wolf 1993]). On the other hand, there is what one may call a **meta-reflexive 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 the becoming aware of the 'framedness' of perception and cognition). The cognitively principal and most immediate function of **metareference**, indeed its prime feature, is thus to **trigger such metareflection, to render the mediality or representationality implied in the secondary frame an object of active awareness**. As this

⁴ Scheffel was among the first to attempt some systematic ordering in the vast field of terms such as 'self-reference', 'auto-reflexivity', 'metafiction' etc. which have mostly been used as mere synonyms (see Scheffel

reflection 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. This 'backgrounds', at least preliminarily, possible emotional responses as well as the hetero-referentiality (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 function and perhaps even evolutionary effect of metareference for the training and development of human cognitive faculties).

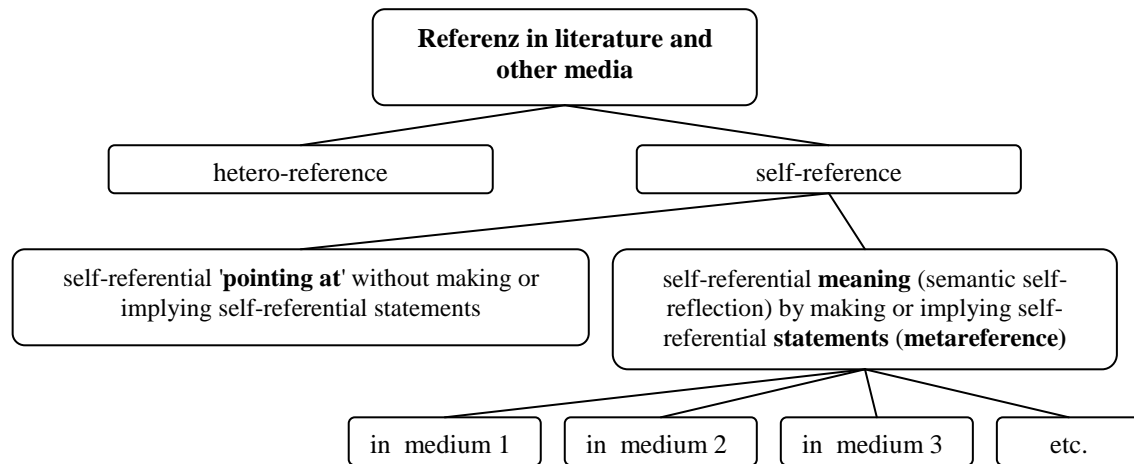


Figure 1: Reference in literature and other media

Metareference can thus be described by the following three distinctive traits:

- a) the existence of an **intra-systemic reference (self-reference)**;
- b) the **semantic quality** of this intra-systemic reference; in other words, the fact that it consists of, or implies, a **self-referential statement** and is thus **self-reflexive**;
- c) a **medium-awareness** on the part of both producer and recipient as an effect of acknowledging the trigger of the secondary cognitive frame: mediality or representationality; this medium-awareness is implied or even explicitly thematized in the self-reflection and thus gives it a meta-dimension (this meta-dimension also implies the existence of a **logical difference between the object level and the level of the meta-statement**).

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

Meta-elements occur in a remarkable variety of forms, for which some typologies have been devised with reference to fiction. Among these manifold forms four pairs of opposition merit attention which I have derived from Linda Hutcheon (1980/84) and my own research on metafiction (Wolf

1997, notably 46-49); in Wolf 2001, I elaborated on Scheffel's distinctions.

1993: chap. 3.2.), as according to preparatory research they may be said to possess a considerable transmedial potential (see Wolf 2007a and b forthcoming). In order to ensure the transmedial applicability of these forms, the original terminology must, however, be adapted so that it avoids an exclusive reference to fiction. The four pairs of forms under discussion are:

- a) intracompositional or direct vs. extracompositional or indirect metareference;
- b) explicit vs. implicit metareference;
- c) *fictio* vs. *fictum* (or generally medium- vs. reference-centred) metareference;
- d) critical vs. non-critical metareference.

It should be noted that the forms of these four pairs can be combined with one another.

Ad a) The first of these pairs of terms has already been introduced in the discussion of the extension of self-reference. In fiction, **intracompositional** metareference can, e.g., be observed in metalinguistic comments by a narrator on his or her style, 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 Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, namely in the narrator's complaint about readers who are eager to be let into the secrets of the story: "I know there are readers in the world [...] who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last" (Sterne 1767/1967: 37f.). Of course, such indirect metareference is frequently only a disguised form of the direct, intracompositional variant, but this indirection merits nevertheless to be given a separate form. For both direct and indirect metareference analogies may be found in other media. Thus, a painting can, for instance, foreground the very painter who has produced it (this would be direct metareference) or draw the viewer's attention to some general feature of the art of painting (e.g. its competition, as a representational art, with other forms of representation, in particular maps and mirrors – this would be an indirect form of painterly metareference).

Ad b) The second opposition, explicit vs. implicit metareference, refers to the semantic distinctness of the metareference as a quotable element: the numerous discussions of storytelling in, for instance, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* are all examples of **explicit** metareference, for they contain quotable metareferential phrases such as "my reader" or "my work" (Sterne 1767/1967: 94f.). Such metareferential expressions are apt to remind the reader of the print medium as such. In contrast to this, there are more covert devices which also may elicit reflections on the ontological status of the text as a medium without, however, using explicitly metareferential expressions. 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 deviating from it through the employment of iconic or indexical signs but also imply an awareness of the medial conventions as such. Implicit metareference shows the necessity of a cooperation on behalf of the recipient in a particularly clear way, for it is in principle possible to overlook the meta-implication of, for instance, typographical devices and consider them as a mere oddity. Consequently, markers are requisite in

order to ensure a metareferential reception. Such markers can vary in their obviousness and can range from the foregrounding of medial devices to the supplementary employment of explicit metareference in the vicinity of implicit elements (the many metalinguistic and metafictional comments on the uses and abuses of language in *Tristram Shandy* fulfil this condition). In painting, explicit metareference would correspond to a use of pictorial representation that in itself contains a metareference (e.g. by showing a painter at work), whereas a painterly counterpart to implicit metareference in fiction would, for instance, be the use of the painterly medium in a highly unusual way so that the medium and/or the conventions of painterly representation are foregrounded (as is the case in the 'impossible' drawings by M. C. Escher or in some paintings by Magritte).

Ad c) The third pair of opposing terms, *fictio* vs. *fictum* metareference, uses the **content** of the meta-reflection as its criterion of differentiation. In all cases, metareference *per definitionem* elicits the idea of mediality and of the ontological status of the work in question as an artefact. I have termed this generally medium-centred facet of the 'fictionality' which is thereby implicated '**fictio**-metareference' from which I distinguish the special case of '**fictum**-metareference'. In this latter, optional variant an additional facet of the term 'fictionality' comes to bear, namely a certain relation to reality. It should be noted that this reference-centred variant of meta-reflection also extends to suggestions of a positive relation to reality, although suggestions of only imaginary, 'fictional' reference are perhaps more frequent, in particular in recent literature. A by now classic example of this can be found at the opening of the famous chapter 13 of John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where the narrator admits: "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind." (Fowles 1969/77: 85). In painting, to remain with this medium, a generally medium-centred (*fictio*) metareference would be, for instance, the foregrounding of portrait-painting in Valazquez' famous "Las Meninas": here, several forms of representation are brought to the viewer's attention, including *mise en abyme* paintings within paintings and a mirror; all of these forms remaining 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 aforementioned 'impossible' worlds of M. C. Escher: as it is impossible in reality that, for instance, the viewer of an exhibition is himself a part of the painting he is gazing at, such a representation indirectly (through implicit metareference) reveals its status as 'mere' fiction.

Ad d) The aforementioned quotation from Fowles leads to the fourth, also content-related pair of terms, since it not only exemplifies *fictum* metareference but also self-**critical** meta-reflection. In the face of a tendency to overstress such critical 'laying bare of the work's fictionality' so often encountered in criticism (in particular on postmodernism) one should, however, emphasize that metareference can also be **non-critical**. Non-critical metareference can be used, for instance, for explaining aesthetic innovations but also in order to suggest that the story one is reading is authentic: such an assertion of the 'truth' of a story would be a non-critical *fictum* metareference. In painting an equivalent to 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, also contain critical implications concerning the implications of, for instance, the truth value of painterly perspective.

4. Existing research in the field

The overwhelming bulk of research on metareference stems from literary studies, and this is also why literary texts are the best-researched medium in this context. Most important is here 'metafiction'. Research in this field has been cultivated over decades and extends well back before 1970, the year when the term was coined in essays by Scholes (1970) and Gass (1970), for it had formerly been addressed under other rubrics, e.g. 'narratorial self-consciousness' (see Booth 1952)⁵. Yet, even the more recent research in the field continues this strong, not to say exclusive focus on fiction (see, e.g., Huber/Middeke/Zapf, eds. 2005). Indeed, the literary field has proved to be so fertile both with reference to the construction of metareferential typologies and historical (including functional) analyses (which have tended to concentrate on postmodernism and a few 'precursors' such as Laurence Sterne or Miguel de Cervantes) that today virtually all further research on metareference must take the results of metafiction research into account, and therefore literary researchers can benefit here from a privileged position.

Curiously enough, possibilities of transposing the findings of metafiction research into other fields are rare, even within literary studies. Indeed, there is considerably less research on metadrama or metatheatre⁶ and even less on metapoetry⁷, and most of it (with the exception, e.g., of Müller-Zettelmann 2000) has been carried out independently of metafiction research and without caring to build inter-generic bridges.

The hesitation of scholars to look across generic boundaries is even more discernible when it comes to the crossing of medial boundaries into non-literary fields. Admittedly, the notion of 'meta-film' or 'self-reflexivity' in film is by now not entirely unknown in film studies (cf. Stam 2000a and 2000b: 226f.; Žižek, 2000: 528f.⁸), but when it comes to meta-painting the situation changes (in spite of Stoichita's seminal study 1993/98 and a few other studies on painterly self-reflexivity, e.g. Lehner 1984 and Mitchell 1995: ch 1.2), and the equivalent in music ('meta-music') is – with rare exceptions –

⁵ The numerous studies on metafiction cannot all be named here; it may suffice to mention (even if they use a different term for metareference in fiction) an extract of a much larger bibliography ranging, in alphabetical order, from A to Z: 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, Hutcheon 1980/84, 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.

⁶ Examples are Abel 1963, Bigsby 1980, Blüggel 1992, Hornby 1986, Korthals 2003, Maquerlot 1992, Schmeling 1977 and 1982, Vieweg-Marks 1989.

⁷ Specimens of this sub-field comprise Ahrends 1987, Baker 1986 and ed. 1997, Finck 1995, Gohrbandt/v. Lutz, eds. 1996, Hinck 1989, Müller-Zettelmann 2000 and 2005, Weber 1971.

⁸ Cf. also the studies on film in Nöth/Bishara, eds. 2007 forthcoming (in particular the essays by Withalm and Siebert) as well as in Hauthal et al., eds. 2007 forthcoming (notably Gymnich and Butler/Sepp).

as yet virtually unknown⁹. Even where metaphenomena have come under scrutiny there is still a tendency to devise independent terminologies and to view these phenomena exclusively from a mono-medial perspective as if they were totally isolated from metafiction and other arts and media¹⁰.

5. Aims of the project and expected benefits

The lacunae of existing research pre-structure to a certain extent the following aims of the proposed project (A-C are predominantly systematic aims, D is predominantly a cultural-historical aim):

- A. reconceptualizing the originally literary concept of 'metafiction' with an eye to its interdisciplinary applicability to other media; i.e. providing a common conceptual and terminological framework for interdisciplinary comparisons and descriptions;
- B. 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, moreover for instance also sculpture and architecture);
- C. carrying out a comparative analysis of metareferentiality in several arts and media on the basis of the above reconceptualization in order to come to conclusions concerning both their general metareferential capacity and their ability to realize particular forms of metareference;
- D. enabling comparative (cultural-)historical studies of metareference-related phenomena; contemporary postmodern culture, in which metareference appears to play a particularly important role shall be singled out as a case study.

Ad A: As metareference is transmedial, 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 mono-medial focus has tended to produce categories such as 'story-transmitted metafiction' as opposed to 'discourse-transmitted metafiction', which have their justification for narrator-transmitted texts but would be difficult to apply, e.g., to painting. This points to the necessity of reconceptualizing 'metafiction' as well as the analytical terminology devised in this context so that it does not preclude any applicability beyond the confines of verbal texts from the start. As for the general reconceptualization of 'metafiction' in the light of a semiotic and cognitive approach, some has been said above, in section 1.3, concerning 'metareference' as an overarching concept that would be applicable to all arts and media. 'Metareference' is here arguably even a better term than 'meta-representation' as used, e.g., in Sperber, ed. 2000, for the component of Sperber's term 'representation'

⁹ The first use of the term in the above-mentioned sense seems to be Mittmann (1999, Xenakis [1967/71] having it employed, too, but only in the sense of a musicological theory of music); terms which seem to come relatively close to the concept of meta-music are 'musical self-reflexivity' (Danuser 2001) and 'music on music', a term which (drawing on a passage in Adorno [1949/75: 165-189] musicologists have used more frequently (cf. Dibelius 1966/98, Danuser 1996, Schneider 2004); 'music on music', however, is more diffuse than meta-music since it also includes musical homage in a very broad sense and compositions inspired by other compositions.

could, in the context of literature and other media, easily be misunderstood as denoting hetero-referential 'mimesis' and therefore would exclude, e.g., abstract, 'non-representational' paintings as well as music as an equally non-representational medium from the 'meta-field'. At least as far as abstract painting is concerned, it should be clear that this kind of painting can certainly contain metareferences to the medium of painting as such (although it is no 'meta-representation') and therefore cannot be excluded from the field investigated in this project. For a potential future contact between meta-research in the humanities and the life sciences a notion such as 'metaization' would perhaps form a common denominator, for it denotes what is under discussion in both areas: the human capacity of self-reflexively rendering simple references and 'representations' the objects of higher-level observations.

As for metareferential sub-forms, it will certainly be necessary not only to systematize the manifold forms under discussion in metafiction research but also to differentiate between transmedially relevant (and perhaps essential) sub-forms and media-specific forms that cannot be 'exported' into other media.

It is therefore clear that the transmedial aim of the project presupposes some provisional fine-tuning of existing metafiction research as the source of the proposed export. Even so, it is expected that it is only after a thorough investigation into several non-literary fields that a genuinely transmedial typology of metareferential forms will be possible. Producing a genuinely transmedial terminological and conceptual toolbox for the description of metaphenomena in media beyond fiction is therefore a first important aim of the project. Ideally, the fine-tuning of the conceptual and terminological toolbox which was originally provided by metafiction studies (and which will be modified by a feedback process resulting from its application to other media) should create a common language for the description of a plurality of media, which in turn is a vital presupposition of efficient intermedial comparisons.

Ad B: The existence of films that discuss filmic matters (such as Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* or Nicoll/Weir's *The Truman Show*), of paintings that 'self-consciously' explore the art of painting (as collected in Stoichita 1993/98), even of architecture that self-reflexively refers to other architecture (as the ironic recycling of traditional forms in postmodernist architecture shows) – all of this points to the fact that metareference is indeed a transmedial phenomenon and should not be investigated from a merely mono-medial perspective. Indeed, the guiding thesis of the project is that there is virtually 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 the plastic arts or instrumental music, should be susceptible to metareference. This claim, however, has as yet to be substantiated. Therefore a first application of the reconceptualized

¹⁰ A rare exception is Hauthal et. al., eds. 2007 forthcoming, the proceedings of a conference in whose initial idea I myself have participated.

toolbox as discussed above should be to try to find (more) specimens of metareference in 'remoter' areas. As for instrumental music, I have pointed out elsewhere (Wolf 2007a forthcoming) that, for instance, marked deviations from conventionally stabilized expectations together with a metareferential title such as J. S. Bach's (?) "Kleines Harmonisches Labyrinth", which explores, through complex, 'labyrinthine' modulations, the conventions of tonal harmony, can justly be called an example of 'metamusic'. Yet more needs to be done here as in other metareferential 'problem fields'.

Ad C: As a consequence of these reflections, a further aim of the proposed project is to carry out a comparative analysis of metareferentiality in several media in order to test the applicability of the concept of metareference as such as well as of basic forms in order to assess the general metareferential capacities and limits of individual media, including their ability to realize particular forms of metareference. As a consequence, the conceptual toolbox could be validated or should be modified, as the case may be. The description of metareference in media outside literature could produce new tools of in-depth description, e.g. for art history or musicology, and in some cases (in particular in musicology) perhaps open perspectives on individual media that are entirely innovative; in a recursive loop, the findings that may be expected here may also have reverberations on the description of metaphenomena in literature itself. Indeed, one of the benefits of the proposed transmedial comparison would be that features of individual media – including the original source-medium, fiction – should appear in a clearer light as well as in a broader perspective.

Moreover, the comparison of man's arts and media could also contribute to the elucidation of man's perhaps anthropological capacity of metareference (an elucidation, which, of course, would also require trans-cultural as well as trans-historical enquiries). In fact, a particularly interesting extension of the field of meta-research would be to create a bridge between meta-research as carried out in literary and other media studies within the humanities and the ongoing meta-research in other areas as documented in the above-mentioned ground-breaking volume on *Meta-representations: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Sperber, ed. 2000).

Ad D: The creation of a transmedial conceptual and terminological toolbox should not only be advantageous for a clearer description of the profiles of individual media, i.e., for media-comparative and systematic purposes (hence aspects of *Grundlagenforschung* in the humanities), but also from a cultural-historical perspective. For instance, one of the most outstanding features of contemporary, postmodernist culture in the Western world is a hitherto unknown increase in metaphenomena. Originally more or less restricted to the traditional genres and media of 'high culture', metareference has by now not only reached 'net.art' (cf. Ryan 2007 forthcoming), but also children's literature (with Carroll's *Alice* stories being a noteworthy early example and Michael Ende's *Unendliche Geschichte* a particularly intriguing contemporary specimen) as well as comics (including Donald Duck comics distributed in German-speaking countries under the series title *Lustige Taschenbücher*), cinema films (one of the most recent metafilms being *Stranger Than Fiction* [2006, U.S.A., director Marc Forster]), and advertisements to a remarkable extent. In this context the transcending of generic as well as

medial boundaries also aims at providing means of comparative analysis of this 'metareferential turn' and thus prepares the ground for cultural-historical explorations aiming at elucidating the functions and origins of what may even be termed the current 'meta-rage'. It may, e.g., be asked whether this 'meta-rage' is an indication of an increasing media-awareness, and/or current concerns with the problem of reality and to what extent what Jürgen Peper has identified as one of functions of literature, namely to perform an 'applied epistemological criticism' ("angewandte Erkenntniskritik" [2002: xiii]) can also be ascribed to other arts and media.

These aims can be reformulated in 'research-guiding questions' that include the following:

- Is 'metareference' a viable reconceptualization of 'metafiction' so that the concept is valid for a transgeneric and, above all, a transmedial description of metaphenomena in literature and other media? What sub-forms of metafiction are relevant to what extent for other media?
- Do individual media possess a specific profile with reference to their capacity of 'metaization' (e.g., does print-transmitted fiction really possess a higher meta-potential than pictorial media since it does not rely on concrete representation to the same degree and consequently tends less towards referential 'naturalization', as has been claimed [Bode 2005: 323f.]), and if so, what does it look like?
- How can one adapt metafiction terminology so that it is applicable to other genres and media?
- What salient examples of 'metaization' can be found in other media than literature, where (for instance in English literature) a relatively well-known 'canon' of metafictional texts exists?
- Can it be claimed that all media have at least a basic capacity of metaization?
- Is there an evolution of meta-devices in individual media, and if so, can it be related to parallel evolutions in other media?
- Are there possible functions of metaphenomena in the reception process that go beyond what has been said with reference to metafiction? E.g.: to what extent is 'metaization' as a phenomenon involving rational reflection transmedially compatible with emotions triggered in the recipient? Is it compatible, in the representational media, with 'immersion' (aesthetic illusion) or does the rational distance implied in metaphenomena always lead to an undermining of immersion/aesthetic illusion? Is there a transmedially observable relationship between comedy/the creation of comic distance and the occurrence of 'metaization'?
- Are there 'peaks' of 'metaization' in cultural history that extend to more than the history of individual media?
- If so, can reasons be found for the intensification or rarification of 'metaization' in individual historical contexts?
- What are possible functions (gains as well as losses) of metaphenomena in larger cultural contexts, in particular if occurring in more than one medium at the same time?

All in all, it can be said that opening up the investigation of forms and functions of metaphenomena 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 enables fascinating perspectives on culture and the human capacity of metareference, or 'metaization'. Within the humanities the present project is 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 in focus in this context. In addition, it is only from this broader transmedial perspective that cultural-historical phenomena such as the remarkable increase in 'metaization' in contemporary postmodern culture can profitably be described and assessed.

6. Methods and phases in the planned project, timetable

The research-guiding questions adduced in 1.5. correspond to the following methods and planned activities:

- the scanning of primary works not so much in literature (where the reservoir of relevant works is vast) than in other media for particularly salient metaphenomena (collecting evidence)
- general theoretical and systematic reflection on descriptive concepts applicable to the evidence collected (devising a transmedial terminology for the description of metaphenomena)
- transmedial comparisons of individual phenomena (e.g. special sub-forms of metareference) in different works or artefacts, from a systematic and/or historical perspective with an eye to the fine-tuning of theoretical concepts
- case studies of individual works in various media with an eye to the plurality of forms and functions occurring in one and the same text or artefact
- synopses of metaphenomena in historical cross-cuttings in order to achieve historical profiles of individual epochs with reference to metaphenomena
- systematic and historical-functional research concerning individual metaphenomena, the combination of various meta-techniques in individual texts and artefacts, and the occurrence of 'metaization' in individual historical epochs (in particular postmodernism); reflection on the motivations for, and effects of, metaphenomena in these contexts and in general

In terms of research phases these activities will be structured as follows:

1. A preparatory phase in the planned project will be dedicated to complete the survey of existing research on metafiction and literary metareference at large with an eye to potentially new findings in theory as well as to new developments in the field of contemporary as well as historical practice. This can be done by employing the traditional text-based philological methods of analysing texts and their contexts.
2. A further preparatory phase in the research project will be necessary to reconceptualize the notion of 'metafiction' and its forms in order to constitute a conceptual toolbox that does not exclude a transmedia applicability from the start (as detailed above).

3. As opposed to the preliminary work in phases 1 and 2, which in large part can profit from existing research in the field, the major next step, the preparatory discussion of media other than literary ones including their theoretical descriptions, presents a challenge not only for a literary scholar such as the applicant, for it may not only lead into realms beyond the expertise of individual researchers but at times also into new ground. This challenge will be met by a) concentrating on a finite number of media and b) by continuing or establishing contacts to researchers who are experts in other media.

Ad a) In order not to overburden the proposed project and to use existing expertise in the applicant and his partner Bernhart the media to be investigated here are: literature (including all three of the major macro-genres fiction, drama and lyric poetry), moreover music, the visual arts (in particular painting) as well as film. Of course, these media do not cover all of the medial landscape of today's culture nor of the cultures of the past but are sufficiently differentiated to be used in what may turn out to be a pilot project for the investigation of yet further media.

Ad b) The literary-philological research can be carried out mainly by the applicant and his partner in cooperation with other experts in the field; in order to profit maximally from the expertise of the applicant and his partner, who are both anglicists, the exemplification of literary texts here as in the other phases will predominantly be taken from literatures in English; as for the inclusion of scholars from other disciplines – which is indeed particularly necessary in an interdisciplinary project such as the present one – existing cooperations will be activated for the purpose and new ones established (see below, section 2).

In this third phase similar tasks will have to be carried out as in the abovementioned first preliminary phase, i.e. surveying existing research concerning metareference in the respective media with an eye to potentially new theoretical findings in the different theories within the humanities (but also beyond) concerning metareference (or 'metarepresentation') as well as to gathering material (both historical and contemporary) that is relevant to metareference in these media.

4. The fourth phase will be dedicated to the testing of the preliminary findings in the presentations and discussions of an international conference planned in Graz for the year 2008 on the subject of 'Metareference in Literature and Other Media'. At this conference, which will at the same time be a first means of disseminating the project, general systematic issues will be in the foreground as detailed above in section 1.5 (aims A to C). The conference will be followed by a workshop in which experts in the field will discuss results both from previous research and the conference with the applicant, his partner and collaborators. For the large-scale cooperation which is aimed at in the present interdisciplinary project, an international conference followed by discussions in the context of follow-up workshops is an appropriate, indeed indispensable frame, for it is only when pooling the expertise of several scholars in an in-depth discussion preparatory to, during and in

particular after a clearly focussed (and not too largely formatted) conference that multidisciplinary aspects, as implied in the present project, can profitably come into focus.

5. The fifth phase will mainly consist in editing the conference/workshop proceedings as well as in encouraging, supervising and producing further publications in the field (this phase implies a second means of disseminating the project results). The publication of the conference proceedings is to be expected for the year 2009.
6. The sixth phase will be dedicated to another conference planned in Graz for 2009 on 'Metareference in the Media of Contemporary Culture'. This conference purports to profit from the theoretical (systematic as well as terminological) findings of the previous conference and workshop and will be focussed on the occurrence (the forms and functions) of metareference in contemporary culture (i.e. in the past five decades); this corresponds to the aim D (see above, section 1.5.). It will also be followed by a workshop (see above).
7. The last phase will again consist in editing conference/workshop proceedings, in this case of the 2009 events, together with completing further publications in the field, in particular concerning the PhD theses of the post-graduate students employed in the project. This will at the same time be the last step of dissemination within the project.

7. Preliminary results

The following previous research and research preparatory to the present project proposal has been carried out by the applicant:

- metafiction research (Wolf 1993, in part. ch. 3.2.; 1997; 2001)
- general surveys of literary self-referentiality (Wolf 2001, cf. also 2007a and b)
- contributions to intermediality theory (Wolf 1999, 2002a and 2002b)
- contributions to transmedial investigations that are parallel to the inquiry into metareference as a transmedial phenomenon and can serve as test cases (on the transmedial applicability of narrativity see Wolf 2002c, 2003, 2004, framing see Wolf/Bernhart eds. 2006, and descriptivity see Wolf/Bernhart, eds. 2007 forthcoming)
- research in the possibility of exporting narratological concepts into other disciplines (Wolf 2007c forthcoming)
- research in the potential of metareferentiality in the visual arts (Wolf 2007c) and music (2007a and b forthcoming)

Owing to this research and other research in the field, the following preliminary results can be noted:

- a. The theoretical as well as terminological framework of existing metafiction research appears to be a widely useful instrument for transmedial research, although some fine-tuning is as yet necessary; this, for instance, concerns the in part conflicting terminologies which have been proposed by myself and Ansgar Nünning for similar phenomena: Nünning (2004), calls 'meta-narration' what is part of what I have termed '*fictio*-metafiction' (Wolf 1993: ch. 3.2.4.), namely metatextual

elements in narrative fiction which deal with aspects other than the question of a truthful or 'merely' fictional reference, as opposed to what Nünning calls 'meta-fiction' and myself '*fictum-metafiction*', which deals with this question.

- b. The concept of 'transmediality' is viable as a theoretical framework for the investigation of parallel or analogous phenomena in different media.
- c. Metareference is clearly an illuminating concept not only in fiction and other literary genres (in the form of metadramatic elements in drama and of metalyric phenomena in lyric poetry) but also in painting and film; however, as in the case of narrativity, music, in particular instrumental music, appears to resist such a conceptual transfer, but under certain conditions and in isolated cases can be shown to contribute to the field of transmedial metareferentiality as well.
- d. Western culture of the past few decades has brought about an explosion of metareference in almost all media; this may in part have to do with an increased media-'literacy' (at least as far as film and computer-transmitted media are concerned) but also with the postmodern condition in which ontological questions, in particular the opposition of fiction vs. reality, seem to have become an epistemic dominant (cf. McHale 1987). Yet further research must be dedicated to the elucidation of the reasons and effects of the 'metareferential turn' in contemporary culture.

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