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Afterword

The emergence of metalepsis as a concept of narrative theory in the context of structuralist poetics is not a coincidence, nor is the occurrence of the phenomenon we now characterize as metalepsis restricted to post-modern or to avant-garde experimental fiction. A figure of substitution with links in the rhetorical tradition to the tropes of metaphor and metonymy as well as to synonymy, metalepsis (*transumptio* in Latin) entered narratology in the form of "narrative metalepsis," heir to such practices earlier known as *evidentia*, *phantasia*, hypotyposis, prosopopoeia and "author's metalepsis." As presented in Genette's foundational and still fruitful formulation, narrative metalepsis results from an intrusion of the world of the narrated by the world of the narrating, or vice versa ("anti-mimesis"), and has the sense of "taking hold of (telling) by changing level" (1972/1980: 235 n.51). With the violation of boundaries, such paradoxical maneuvers produce a feeling of "strangeness," or perhaps an effect of "humor" or of "the fantastic" (or some combination of the two); and indeed, creative imagination itself may be a function of metalepsis. Because it destabilizes the distinction between levels, narrative metalepsis represents a "deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding" (Genette 1983/1988: 88).

With the hindsight of nearly forty years, it now appears that the term "threshold" is appropriate to describe metalepsis in more ways than one. First conceptualized in the days of classical narratology, metalepsis, which drew only limited attention until rather recently, brings into the open a number of issues that seemed irreconcilable with the positions adopted by more formalistic theories. On closer consideration of these issues, however, it would appear that metalepsis was a threshold lying in wait within structuralist narratology, later to contribute to a new take on the theory of narrative and, more broadly, on various forms of artistic representation. Genette himself, during a conference in 2002, expanded the scope of narrative metalepsis from figure to fiction, declaring that "[a]ll fictions are woven through with metalepses" (2004: 131); and in doing so, he also stepped over the thresholds between genres and between media

and even those between disciplines in order to demonstrate the presence of what was earlier considered an isolated and local device of narrative in theater, film, television, painting and photography.

Among theories of artistic representation, metalepsis has the peculiar interest of having been formulated as a concept that was subsequently to serve as a framework for discovery. This has allowed for enlightened discussion, within a general theory of narrative, of a phenomenon that was often ignored, misunderstood or discarded as an artistic inconsistency or incoherence in the literary work: one need only refer to the obtrusive eruptions of the narrator in character discourse in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* or to the incompatibly multiple endings in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*—two works that illustrate the fragility of the boundary that separates the world of the telling from the world of the told. Thanks to this unique status and to a relative consensus with regard to its defining features (a consensus not shared by the disputed notion of implied author, for example), metalepsis provides a threshold toward redrawing the contours of the object of study in which it is found. A form of 'defamiliarization' in the sense proposed by the Russian formalists, it casts a new light on existing concepts and principles, establishes new connections or discovers old ones anew and opens up for examination and debate forms of expression that might otherwise remain off the radar screen.

Given this context, *Metalepsis in Popular Culture* is an outgrowth of a theoretical concept which is both natural and necessary. It is a natural outgrowth because the numerous varieties of transgression of boundaries in cultural representations of different types now find in metalepsis a powerful conceptual and analytical tool. And it is a necessary contribution due to the fact that, to date, studies devoted to metalepsis have concentrated mainly on works of high culture and tend to limit their investigations to avant-garde works in the written medium, with only occasional forays into the visual media or into works employing multiple media. By adopting a transmedial perspective on metalepsis such as the one outlined by Werner Wolf (but also with reference to Marie-Laure Ryan's proposals for a transmedial narratology) and by stepping over the threshold between high culture and popular culture, but also by examining a corpus of works as varied as it is extensive, the contributors to this volume offer not only a sustained look at the pervasiveness and multiple forms, effects and functions of metalepsis in popular culture but also penetrating insight into the workings of popular culture itself. As readers of this volume will come to appreciate, it is often thanks to the conjunction between genres or subgenres and various media, particularly through technical innovations, that the most novel and startling metaleptic effects in popular culture are achieved, and sometimes with the most far-reaching ramifications.

In her introductory text, Karin Kukkonen sets out a blueprint for the study of metalepsis, and she does so in such a way as to allow for its mutations in the various environments in which it occurs. In order for metalepsis to apply across media, and not merely in written narratives, it is proposed that “levels” be expanded to “worlds” in a sense close to that of the possible-worlds theory of narrative. Within this context, metalepsis, which is incompatible with factual forms of representation, plays a singular role in the already notoriously elusive dividing line between the “fictional” world and the “real” world. A number of articles support the idea that metaleptic transgressions can occur not only between the world of the fictional work and external reality but also at the level of the “inner” reality of a work. The latter situation prevails in written narratives such as popular fantasy fiction where, as shown by Sonja Klimek, metalepsis operates according to ascending, descending and complex (or “Möbius strip”) patterns that occur within textual levels rather than in the space between fiction and external reality (see Klimek 2010 for a full-length study). This contrasts significantly with the lyrics of pop songs such as Carly Simon’s “You’re so Vain” as analyzed by David Ben-Merre. Here, due not only to use of the pronoun “you” and to the generic convention of “authenticity” characteristic of pop songs but also to the convergence of several media in musical performance, the urge to contextualize the song in the real world tends to override fictionality (hence for some fans, the “you” in this song designates Warren Beatty but for others, Mick Jagger). Arguing that pop music is by nature metaleptic, however, and stressing the deictic qualities of personal pronouns, Ben-Merre demonstrates that within the space of the song, Carly Simon’s “you” more likely designates the “I” of the performing persona than it does a “real” person. On the whole, the essays seem to suggest that although metalepsis is not a defining feature of fictionality, it nonetheless brings out into the open some of the thorny complexities of the issues by displacing or unsettling the constituents and parameters of storyworlds, reminding us of Nabokov’s observation that the one word never to be used without quotation marks is “reality.”

Kukkonen further outlines a “basic matrix of types” of metalepsis, a particularly crucial consideration given the diversity of genres and media employed by popular culture. Here again, the criteria are judiciously specified in transmedial terms so as to accommodate the various positions and typologies adopted by the contributors in their examination of specific corpuses: metaleptic intrusions between fictional and real worlds are accounted for in terms of direction (ascending or descending) and nature (rhetorical or ontological), while leaps across fictional worlds (which bear only some metaleptic qualities or effects) have been described either as

“heterometalepsis” (Rabau) or as “intertextual metalepsis” (Wagner). The most elaborate development of this matrix has been worked out by Jean-Marc Limoges. Rather than oppose fictional world and real world, however, Limoges adopts “actual real world” vs. “represented real world,” thus adding a third level so as to account for additional worlds produced by “embedded” and/or “parallel” structures, the boundaries of which are also susceptible of transgression. The “modes” of metalepsis are *in verbis*, or “verbal,” and *in corpore*, or “physical” (Meyer-Minnemann). However, to fully apprehend metalepsis in a genre employing multiple media such as cartoons, Limoges also introduces metalepsis in its “visual” and “auditory” dimensions.

It is in fact one of the achievements of *Metalepsis in Popular Culture* to demonstrate that if metalepsis is a transmedial concept, the various typologies derived from this concept are not immune from the medium or media employed or from the genre by which it is adopted. Thus Klimek finds that while metalepsis in the performing arts may spill over into “our” reality, in written narratives it occurs *within* artifacts; in the latter case, it is appropriate to focus on ascending, descending and complex (or logically paradoxical) metalepses. The other article devoted to written literature, by Liviu Lutas on detective fiction, points out the incompatibility of metalepsis with this genre in its traditional form and then examines a more recent metafictional corpus of “anti-detective novels” in which use of the device serves to allegorize the process of reading and writing. These aspects of metalepsis are all the more appreciable in that the remaining articles are concerned with artifacts that incorporate several media, language as a written medium (in cases where it is employed) being one medium among others. Thus analysis of comics, as Kukkonen shows, reveals the role of the space between panels (or “gutters”) in the transgression of boundaries between fictional and real worlds (e.g., when an element of a drawing is projected outside the panel into the gutter); consequently, the emphasis in comics falls on ascending and descending metalepses, but also on rhetorical and ontological metalepses. In his discussion of music videos, Henry Keazor adopts Monika Fludernik’s systematization of Genette’s implicit typology (authorial metalepsis; type 1 ontological or narratorial metalepsis; type 2 ontological or lectorial metalepsis; rhetorical or discourse metalepsis). He then goes on to examine cases of metalepsis in music videos which are either “represented” (e.g., a character transgressing the boundary between a fictional world and an embedded fictional world) or “enacted” (transgression of the primary fictional boundary, as when a music video highlights its own medium). A similar distinction is proposed by Keyvan Sarkhosh under the terms “fictional” metalepsis and “narrative” metalepsis in his article on popular

comedy film. Here, however, the emphasis falls on reformulating Genette's conception of metalepsis with the aim of investigating, within the framework of Souriau's "seven planes of existence of the filmic universe," the ways in which boundaries in the film medium are breached.

Indeed, it is thanks largely to innovations in the mass media and in videographic technologies over the past century, now increasingly connected with the digital technologies, that popular culture has become so widespread. Although the essays in the present volume do not directly address the issues of digitization and popular culture (an undertaking requiring a volume in its own right), they do provide evidence of the role of "media affordances" in works of popular culture, and in particular the influence exerted by the affordances peculiar to each medium on metalepsis and related phenomena.

A case in point is the television "crossover" studied by Erwin Feyersinger. Whereas metalepsis occurs "vertically" between worlds that are ontologically inaccessible to one another, crossover, similar to transworld identity in possible-worlds theory, allows for a "horizontal" transfer between fictional worlds. Also called "intertextual metalepsis," a crossover joins worlds sharing the same ontological level; it is particularly relevant in TV shows, spin-offs and remakes that project a fictional world over a number of discrete broadcasts. On this basis, but also with an illuminating discussion of the dynamic and static modes of connection between fictional worlds, Feyersinger develops a graduated six-term typology ranging from realistic, non-paradoxical crossovers to intentionally paradoxical transgressions, or metalepsis, thus providing a medium-specific variant of the basic matrix of types. Equally medium-specific, though with less emphasis on typology, are the possibilities opened up by the remote control device that enables TV, DVD and VCR viewers, both extradiegetic and intradiegetic, to act on the fictional world or to be acted upon by it. Through the "metaleptic remote," as Jeff Thoss terms it, the viewer can feign transitions between the real world and the fictional world or become entangled in ontologically distinct worlds, and in works that employ this device, the story-discourse dichotomy may even be obliterated.

A survey of the literature will show that theories of metalepsis have developed along two lines of reflection, as encapsulated in Ryan's (2005) distinction between rhetorical and ontological metalepsis (see also Pier 2009/2010). All in all, the latter variety is heir to the problem of logical paradox in logic and mathematics resulting from the conflict between recursivity through the addition of meta-levels and self-reference. In *Metalepsis in Popular Culture*, these issues are addressed by Harald Fricke, who sets out a typology based not on the direction and nature of metalepsis that define the basic matrix of types, as outlined in the Introduction,

but rather on the problem of metareference derived from the Russell-Tarski theory of types. This typology develops along a spectrum extending from “gradated metareference,” which, together with its two subtypes—“infinite” and “recursive”—respects the hierarchical separation of levels, to “paradoxical metareference,” or metalepsis. Such a distribution, in following logical rather than ontological criteria in Fricke’s case, reconfigures metalepsis by placing it along a continuum with the traditional *mise en abyme* rather than within a rhetorical strategy in which the world of the telling is made to merge with the world of the told.

Readers of this volume are sure to have observed that the typologies vary as to the degree to which they reflect media affordances. Some (e.g., Fricke’s or Limoges’s) are not media-specific, while others (e.g., Klimek’s or Sarkhosh’s) are partly tailored to the characteristics of the medium in which a metalepsis might be found. It further appears that the occurrence of a metalepsis points to a certain correlation between medium/media and genre. Thus, one is more likely to find ascending, descending and complex metalepses in postmodern fiction than in television or cinema remakes, which seem to favor more “horizontal” forms of transgression. By combining several media, theatrical productions and certain types of pop music create an environment more conducive to ontological metalepsis than do works of popular fiction that employ only the written medium. These and similar insights are gained thanks in no small part to the necessity of accounting for the multimodal nature of works of popular culture. It is by drawing attention to such correlations that the contributors to this volume have opened up yet further avenues for future investigation.

Among a number of important insights to be gained from the essays collected in this volume is that theories which distinguish between rhetorical and ontological metalepsis do so largely with reference to single-medium works. Readers will find that, faced with the multimodal works of popular culture, this distinction needs to be rethought in part. If metalepsis can be defined as “the transgression of boundaries of the fictional world,” as stated in the Introduction, then the rhetoric of metalepsis—its effects and functions—must be understood in terms of pragmatics. Originally noted for its disruptive, anti-illusionistic effects, metalepsis has since come to be seen as inherently bound to no specific effect, but rather productive of a wide variety of effects, in some cases even illusion-inducing. This possibility is evoked in a number of the contributions to Pier and Schaeffer, eds. (2005), but it is with the corpus of multimodal works examined in *Metalepsis in Popular Culture* that this threshold in the study of metalepsis comes more clearly into focus.

Although the authors do not specifically refer to the pragmatics of metalepsis, such a pragmatics effectively emerges from two interrelated considerations: discussion of the role of metalepsis in the communication-al strategies adopted by certain works or genres; the influence of fictional immersion which, in some cases, may actually be strengthened by meta-lectic transgression. One example, already mentioned, is the metalectic use of “you” in the lyrics of pop music (Ben-Merre), another being the allegorization of fictional communication when metalepses are introduced into anti-detective novels, thus challenging the rational nature of the traditional genre (Lutas). In a similar vein, the occurrence of metalepsis in comics and graphic novels is a metareferential device that contributes to the foregrounding of genre conventions, notably in superhero comics, where themes of good vs. evil are paramount: here, intermedial metalepsis serves both anti-illusionistic and illusionistic ends, as it enters directly into the power struggle between characters but also into the communication between authors and readers (Kukkonen).

Such issues are addressed in various ways by several of the contributions. However, they are brought to the fore most prominently in an analysis of metalepsis in fan vids and fan fiction and in a discussion of the highly illusionistic use of holographic projections in live rock music performances. Regarding the former, Tisha Turk contends that theories of metalepsis pertain, for the most part, to “read-only” cultures with a focus mainly on intratextual metalectic effects and destabilization of the boundary between reality and fiction. Vids and fan fiction, by contrast, are a phenomenon of “participatory” or “read-write” culture: they call into question the separation between audience and creator, producing extratextual metalectic effects, as it is the spectator/reader who intervenes in the fictional world rather than the director or the writer. These genres are thus characterized more by “performative” metalepses than they are by “narrative” metalepsis. By rendering boundaries “infinitely expandable,” they elicit a strong immersive response in the reader/ spectator.

If the pragmatics of vids and fan fiction engender immersive effects by redrawing the lines defining communicational roles, the use of holographic projections on the concert stage triggers a play between metalepsis and illusion through the intermingling of levels of reality. Conceding that with ontological metalepsis characters do not in fact step out of their fictional worlds, Roberta Hofer explains how, thanks to the artificially created optical illusions produced by holographs, a flesh-and-blood performer (Madonna), transformed into a projection perceived by the public to be as “real” as the original, appears in the same visual medium alongside a rock band (the Gorillaz), portrayed as three-dimensional cartoon characters. What is apparently a metalectic merging of ontologically

distinct levels is in fact a projection by means of the same holographic medium, and the spectators are tricked—though not always unreservedly—into seeing performing artists before their eyes at a level of physical reality identical to their own. Such technologically-enabled maneuvers not only confirm that metaleptic effects are potentially most dramatic in a multimodal environment, where the extradiegetic space favors heightened audience immersion, but they also stretch the Coleridgean dictum of “willing suspension of disbelief” to the limit.

The corpuses studied by the contributors to this volume are drawn from popular culture of the past few decades, and they emanate, in large part, from works and artifacts made possible by the modern mass media. However, popular forms of culture date back much further in time, a fact Fricke reminds us of by pointing to the popularity of the opera in Europe over several centuries. The opera repertoire is of course both richly intertextual and remarkably multimodal (cf. Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*), and comic opera in particular has proved from the beginning to be metareference- but also, at times, metalepsis-friendly. Within the framework of his metareferential approach to metalepsis, Fricke comments on the operas of Richard Strauss, and most notably *Capriccio* (1942), heir to a long tradition of metareferential opera and a noteworthy example of paradoxical metareference in the performing arts.

Metalepsis occurs with the transgression of boundaries—or “of the threshold of embedding,” as Genette has put it. But as suggested at the beginning of this commentary, the term threshold might also serve to describe the role of metalepsis: to act as a threshold of discovery—a point of entry—in a double sense. As a theoretical concept, metalepsis destabilizes categories and calls for new modes of analysis of existing and emergent genres with their various media affordances, taking account of the metaleptic potential of multimodality and of the disruptive/immersive impact of transgressive border crossings, not to speak of the nooks and crannies, yet to be explored, produced by this paradox-engendering device. As a practice shared by cultural representations of many types, metalepsis is a threshold that Henry James neglected to provide his “house of fiction” with: granted that this house is provided with a million windows through which to observe the world, how does one enter it? Metalepsis is a threshold to that house into which we may be allowed access or not, or over which we may be forced to leave or wish to flee.

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