

Metalepsis (revised version; uploaded 13 July 2016)

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1 Definition

In its narratological sense, metalepsis, first identified by Genette, is a deliberate transgression between the world of the telling and the world of the told: “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...], produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical [...] or fantastic” ([1972] 1980: 234–35). After reviewing a few examples, Genette observes that “[a]ll of these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude—a boundary *that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself*: a shifting but sacred frontier [or boundary] between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells. [...] The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative” (236, original emphasis). Described as “taking hold of (telling) by changing level” (235, n. 51), narrative metalepsis combines the principle of narrative levels (Pier → Narrative Levels [1]) with “author’s metalepsis,” a narrative figure with roots in the trope of metalepsis. Narrative metalepsis constitutes a “deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding [...]: when an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative or when a character in that fiction intrudes into the extradiegetic existence of the author or reader, such intrusions disturb, to say the least, the distinction between levels,” producing an effect of “humor” or of “the fantastic” or “some mixture of the two [...], unless it functions as a figure of the creative imagination” (Genette [1983] 1988: 88).

These definitions, which remain foundational, providing the basis for a narrative category which, up to the early 1970s, had never been properly formulated, have been expanded, amended and refined by subsequent research, partly by Genette himself in his book *Métalepses* (2004), an exploration of the phenomenon not only in narrative fiction but also in theater, film, television, painting and photography.

These developments have come about with the realization that metalepsis is not a mere localized stylistic device or oddity, but also that it occurs in various forms, thus calling for the elaboration of typologies, that it can be found in media other than language and is indeed a phenomenon which is not inherently bound by or restricted to narrative, and that its effects are not exclusively anti-illusionistic. A survey of the literature suggests that the criteria for determining the occurrence of metalepsis and the conditions of its extension are the focus of as much if not more attention than the various definitions that have been set forth.

2 Explication

In addition to Genette's "transgression" of levels or to Wagner's (2002) "sliding" between levels, metalepsis has been characterized as "undermining the separation between narration and story" (Rimmon-Kenan [1983] 2002: 93); as a "strange loop" in the structure of narrative levels or a "short circuit" between the "fictional world and the ontological level occupied by the author" (McHale 1987: 119, 213); as a "narrative short circuit" causing "a sudden collapse of the narrative system" (Wolf 1993: 358); or as producing a "disruptive effect on the fabric of narrative" (Malina 2002: 1). Being the "embryo" or "outline" (*esquisse*) of a fiction, metalepsis triggers "a playful simulation of belief" (Genette 2004: 17, 25).

As can be seen from the diversity of these characterizations (among others), current research cannot be neatly classified into clearly identified paradigms. Nevertheless, three partially overlapping conceptions do seem to stand out, all deriving more or less directly from the definitions of narrative metalepsis listed above, although with little reference to its connection with the trope of metalepsis:

Rhetorical vs. ontological metalepsis

This distinction is contained implicitly in Genette's definitions and examples but is not systematically elaborated.

Transmedial dimensions

This approach expands investigations to include non-verbal and plurimedial manifestations of the phenomenon. A type of metareference, metalepsis, particularly in its ontological form, possesses a potential for self-reference and thus for laying bare the fictionality of the work in which it appears.

Metalepsis as paradox

Recentring on the original definition of narrative metalepsis, this approach insists not on the rhetorical/ontological distinction but on the logically paradoxical movements between at least two hierarchically

distinct text-internal narrative levels.

On the whole, discussions support the idea that metalepsis appears only in fictional contexts. Essentially, it functions with varying dosages of three parameters: (a) illusion of contemporaneity between the time of the telling and the time of the told; (b) transgressive merging of two or more levels; (c) doubling of the narrator/narratee axis with the author/reader axis. These features are illustrated by Balzac's "While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain..."—a "minimal" metalepsis (cf. Pier 2005: 249–50) which, being incipiently transgressive, leaps the boundary between narrator and extradiegetic narratee on the communicative plane and puts story time on hold while the narrator, in a relative cohabitation with the character, intervenes with a metanarrative comment, demonstrating the latent metaleptic quality of narrative embedding in general. This example leads to the idea that fictional narrative is by nature metaleptic, that it is bound to the paradox of "a current presentation of the past" (Bessière 2005), that it betrays "at least the potential for narrative metalepsis" (Nelles 1997:152).

3 History of the Concept and its Study

It is important to bear in mind that although metalepsis has its roots in ancient rhetoric, narrative metalepsis is a recent concept in the history of poetics, with the practice itself, under different denominations, or none at all, reaching back to antiquity in both literary and visual forms, as copiously demonstrated by a recent anthology edited by Eisen and von Möllendorff (2013). The fact that metalepsis can now be theorized and applied according to definable criteria has opened up avenues of historical research that extend beyond the corpus of modernist and postmodernist works habitually taken into consideration in the study of the concept and the practice.

3.1 The Rhetorical Background

The etymology of metalepsis is disputed, but its sense can readily be grasped from the word's Latin equivalent—*transumptio*: "assuming one thing for another." Metalepsis has a complex history in that it has been regarded either as a variety of metonymy, a particular form of synonymy, or both. As metonymy, it has been identified (a) in simple form as an expression of the consequent understood as the antecedent or vice versa and (b) as a chain of associations ("a few ears of corn" for "a few years," the transfer of sense implying "a few harvests" and "a few summers"). Another possibility is to regard metalepsis in terms of an overlap between synonymy and homonymy in such a way as not to respect the semantic

demarcation between distinct signifiers, resulting in the use of an inappropriate synonym: *cano* ("sing") is a synonym of *canto* ("sing") and *canto* ("repeat") a synonym of *dico* ("relate"); therefore, *cano* is a synonym of *dico* (cf. Lausberg [1960] 1973: § 571; Morier 1961; Burkhardt 2001; Meyer-Minnemann 2005: 140–43; Roussin 2005: 41–4).

From the perspective of narrative theory, two positions derive from the rhetoric of metalepsis. Genette (2004: 7–16), drawing on the first of the two types above, notes that metalepsis shares with metaphor and metonymy the principle of transfer of sense, and he considers it (following Dumarsais) a metonymy of the simple type; he then expands it (with Fontanier) beyond the single word to include an entire proposition. Metalepsis of antecedent and consequent, he argues, is implicitly metalepsis of cause for effect or effect for cause. From such causal relations he forges the notion of author's metalepsis whereby an author "is represented or represents himself as producing what, in the final analysis, he only relates" (Fontanier). He also draws attention to the proximity for the two rhetoricians of metalepsis and hypotyposis (a figure in which the copy is treated, illusorily, as though it were the original, as in a present-tense description), but particularly to the fact that, with metalepsis, the narrator transgresses not merely the threshold of narrative but that of representation, resulting in a "reduced metadiegetic" or "pseudodiegetic" narrative in which, due to the lack of metadiegetic relay, the secondary narrator effectively takes the place of the primary narrator (see also Genette [1972] 1980: 236–37; a more radical form is "heterodiegesis," which "gathers in one single universe the world of production, fiction and reception"; Rabau 2005: 60).

There have also been proposals to refer narrative metalepsis back to metalepsis as use of an inappropriate synonym, notably by Meyer-Minnemann (2005) and Schlickers (2005) (see also Nelles 1997: 152–57). The emphasis here is not on authorial metalepsis as a type of metonymy, but on the transgression of boundaries, of which there are two main types: one at discourse level, with breaching of the "me-here-now" of enunciation (*in verbis* transgression), the other at story level, with violation of the coordinates of the enunciate (*in corpore* transgression) (see § 3.2.1 below).

Recent research has taken a somewhat different view of the rhetorical heritage of narrative metalepsis. Thus, Nauta (2013a), re-examining the sources of metalepsis from antiquity to Dumarsais and Fontanier, delineates two strains, one concerned with allusion (following Quintilian), the other with narrative (metalepsis as metonymy of the preceding and the following). The latter, he maintains, is a trope in its own right, "operating on an expression signifying the act of representing a

situation or action, in which such an expression is substituted by one signifying the act of creating or causing that situation or action” (477)—a conception which is close to the narratological definition: “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (Genette [1972] 1980: 234–35). Yet, in his more recent work on the topic, Genette advocated a special case of metonymy in which cause is substituted for effect or effect for cause, proposing, accordingly, “to restrict the term ‘metalepsis’ from now on to a manipulation—at least figural, but sometimes fictional [...]—of this particular causal relation which, in one way or another, connects the author to his work or, more broadly, the producer of a representation to this representation itself” (Genette 2004: 13–4). But from Nauta’s rhetorical perspective, “manipulation” of causal relation is not substitution of cause and effect, and it is, moreover, inconsistent with *metalepsis* as a reflexive relationship between narrative levels (2013a: 479–80; this position is also rallied to by Klimek 2010: 34–7).

The connection between the *metalepsis* of ancient grammar and rhetoric and narrative *metalepsis* is “rather tenuous,” as Nauta observes. Nevertheless, important work has been undertaken in the study of the *metaleptic* features of ancient literatures such as de Jong’s (2009) seminal discussion of *apostrophe*, the blending of narrative voices and other techniques in Greek texts, Baumann’s (2013) study of *metalepsis* in ancient *ekphrasis* or Nauta’s (2013b) considerations on *metalepsis* and *metapoetics* in Latin poetry, but also Cornils’ (2005) essay on the *metaleptic* effects of *evidentia*, a specific form of *phantasia* (characterized by a persuasive function) in the Acts of the Apostles, to mention only a few sources. One major finding of these studies is that, unlike modern practices, *metalepsis* in ancient literatures is a serious technique which is used not for comic or anti-illusionistic effects, but rather as a means for increasing the narrator’s authority and intensifying the credibility of the narrative. This suggests the need for further work on the rhetorical dimension of *metalepsis*, possibly in conjunction with pragmatics and the theory of argumentation.

3.1 Principal Approaches

3.1.1 Rhetorical vs. Ontological Metalepsis

One widely acknowledged group of theories, originally formulated by Ryan ([2004] 2006), consists in breaking *metalepsis* down into rhetorical (Genette) and ontological (McHale) forms. This represents an extension of Ryan’s theory of illocutionary and ontological boundaries, frames and stacks (cf. Pier → Narrative Levels [1], § 3.2.3) in so far as it incorporates the transgression of boundaries which, in principle, are

inviolable in narrative. The distinction remains implicit in Genette, she notes, although his more recent “figural” vs. “fictional” metalepsis corresponds roughly to her own. The rhetorical variety “opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of the boundaries” while the ontological type “opens a passage between levels that results in their interpenetration, or mutual contamination” (207). Taking a cue from McHale (1987: chap. 8), Ryan defines ontological metalepsis in accordance with Hofstadter’s (1979: 10, 621) *Strange Loops and Tangled Hierarchies*, and she further comments on the connection of the violation of narrative hierarchies with similar phenomena in logic, mathematics, language and science. As for Ryan’s rhetorical metalepsis, Klimek (2010: 65) finds this inappropriate, and, referring instead to Cohn’s ([2005] 2012) metalepsis at the discourse level and metalepsis at the story level, she proposes the term “discourse metalepsis.”

Ryan’s distinction has been further broken down by Fludernik (2003). On scrutinizing Genette’s narrative metalepsis, she concludes that this is an umbrella term which contains an implicit four-term typology: (a) authorial metalepsis (Virgil “has Dido die”): a metafictional strategy that undermines mimetic illusion, foregrounding the inventedness of the story; (b) narratorial or type 1 ontological metalepsis (in Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, the narrator invites the narratee to accompany him to Reverend Irwine’s study): transgression from the extradiegetic to the intradiegetic level is illusionary, drawing a fine line between the reader’s immersion and lifting of the mimetic illusion; (c) lectorial or type 2 ontological metalepsis (in a story by Cortázar, the reader of a novel is [almost] killed by a character in that novel): implication of the narratee on the story level or passage of a character from an embedded to an embedding level (also occurs in second-person narration); (d) rhetorical or discourse metalepsis (simultaneity of time of the telling/time of the told; cf. Pier 2005: 249–50 on “minimal” metalepsis).

A related group of theories, less focused on the rhetorical/ ontological divide, emphasizes what Wagner (2002) has termed “metaleptic movements.” Wagner divides these movements into three varieties: (a) from a higher to a lower level (extra- to intradiegetic or, jumping a level, intra- to metadiegetic; also intra- to metadiegetic: an author intervenes in her fiction); (b) from a lower to a higher level, proceeding in the opposite direction, as when a character transgresses the extradiegetic boundary; (c) “auto-intertextuality” between diegeses of the same level, thus confronting parallel heterogeneous fictive universes. He also takes up the question, largely neglected, of the compositional distribution of metalepses: their location, amplitude and frequency can have a significant impact on the strategy and readability of a narrative (on this point, see also Häsner 2001: 40–3). Two

comments, however. First, although he does not use the term, Wagner implicitly adopts Bal's "hypodiegetic" inversion levels, (a) being an ascending transgression for Genette and (b) a descending transgression (the latter dubbed "antimetalepsis" by Genette 2004: 27). Second, the metaleptic status of (c), later called "horizontal" metalepsis (dubbed "lateral" metalepsis by Thoss 2015 and "horizontal transmigration" by Alber & Bell 2012: 169), has been contested, notably by Klimek (2010: 67-8; 2011; cf. Hanebeck 2014: 63-4), who considers this feature to be akin to intertextuality or quotation. The phenomenon has been studied under the name of "transfictionality," defined by Saint-Gelais as "the phenomenon by which at least two texts, by the same author or not, jointly relate to a same fiction, be it by taking over characters, extending a prior plot or sharing a fictional universe" (2011: 7). The disputed status of these "horizontal" movements has recently been revisited by Lavocat (2016: 498-99), who proposes the notions of "transfictional metalepsis" and "self-referential author metalepsis."

Klimek herself is among those to subscribe to descending and ascending metalepsis (see § 3.2.3 below). But mention must also be made at this point of the model elaborated by Meyer-Minnemann (2005) and Schlickers (2005). Taking a cue from Genette, this model provides for metalepsis of enunciation (*in verbis*, at discourse level) and metalepsis of the enunciate (*in corpore*, at story level), where each functions either vertically (bottom-up or top-down) or horizontally, without change of level (dubbed "perilepsis" by Prince 2006: 628). To take only a few illustrations: (a) vertical metalepsis of enunciation (top-down) obtains when an extradiegetic narrator transgresses the intradiegetic boundary; (b) horizontal metalepsis of enunciation occurs with the juxtaposition of two communicative situations at the same level; (c) with transgression of the diegetic, ontological, spatial or temporal order there occurs a vertical metalepsis of the enunciate; (d) horizontal metalepsis of the enunciate is produced when, say, Woody Allen enters the world of *Madame Bovary*. In this system metalepsis is seen as producing an effect of strangeness, either comical or fantastic, but it is not considered a figure of fictionality in Genette's (2004) sense. The Meyer-Minnemann/Schlickers model of metalepsis forms part of a larger theory of "paradoxical narration" in which devices are employed either to *cancel out* boundaries (syllepsis, epanalepsis, the latter type including *mise en abyme*) or to *transgress* boundaries (metalepsis, hyperlepsis, the latter equivalent to pseudodiegesis: metadiegetic narrative presented as though it were diegetic). For an exhaustive typology following these parameters, identifying forty-one subtypes, see Lang (2006).

In an earlier model, Nelles (1997: 152-57) differentiates metalepsis as being either "unmarked" (occurring at discourse level) or "distinctly marked" (occurring at story level). The latter divides into "intrametalepsis" (movement from the embedding to

the embedded level) and “extrametalepsis” (movement in the opposite direction), with each type possessing analeptic and proleptic forms on the temporal plane (for the related notions of “inward” vs. “outward” metalepsis, see Malina 2002: 46–50). Rather than the rhetorical (discourse) vs. ontological (story) distinction, Nelles, invoking epistemic (vertical) and ontological (horizontal) embedding, adopts epistemological or verbal metalepsis (knowledge of the other world) as opposed to ontological or modal metalepsis (physical penetration of the other world). However, this latter pair partly reduplicates and contradicts the other distinctions while the classification as a whole leaves little room for the transgressive or paradoxical nature of metalepsis.

In a proposal that partly cuts across the above models, Pier (2005: 252–53) sets descending metalepsis off from ascending metalepsis. The former, which occurs in Fludernik’s authorial and narratorial (type 1 ontological) varieties, follows an intrametaleptic movement while the latter, found in the lectorial (type 2 ontological) variety, involves an extrametaleptic movement; as for discourse (or minimal) metalepsis, it remains poised, sometimes precariously, between the two movements. Moreover, intrametaleptic movements mark an affinity between narrator and narratee, and extrametaleptic movements an affinity between character and narratee. Finally, these movements pertain both in external metalepsis (between the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic levels) and in internal metalepsis (occurring between two levels within the story itself; cf. Cohn [2005] 2012).

In a recent critical overview, Lavocat (2016) identifies two major approaches to metalepsis, one favoring the boundaries of fiction (Genette), the other the erasure of these boundaries (McHale). Examining the issues through the possible worlds approach to fiction and emphasizing the relations between (narrative) worlds rather than hierarchical levels, she observes the tendency in the latter approach, which is focused largely on ontological metalepsis, to stress the fusion of worlds, thereby effacing the boundary between fact and fiction, a tendency favored, in part, by expanding study of the phenomenon to the various media. Lavocat insists, however, on the *intrafictional* quality of metalepsis—not its relation with the “real”—thus on playing with the boundaries, with reality-in-fiction and fiction-in-fiction, rather than suppressing them. Transgressive by its paradoxical nature, metalepsis owes its power to its *degree of literalness*, and on this basis she proposes, in place of the rhetorical/ontological divide, three “degrees” of metalepsis: (a) passage from one level of embedding to another through an act of enunciation or its equivalent in other media; (b) (non-)fictional representation of the author or reader/spectator, but at a level different from that of the characters; (c) authors, reader/spectators and characters in same world.

3.1.1 Transmedial Dimensions

Originally, metalepsis was formulated within the scope of language-based narratives, and its study was largely reserved to works of high culture and the avant-garde. Rather quickly, however, it was realized that the phenomenon also extends to other media as well as to works of popular culture, particularly those involving plurimedial and/or non-narrative forms of representation. Examples can be found in Genette (2004) and in Pier and Schaeffer, eds. (2005) but also in Kukkonen and Klimek, eds. (2011), not to mention a host of other publications too numerous to mention here. (On transmediality, see Ryan → Narration in Various Media [2], Ryan ed. 2004.)

An important step toward a specifically transmedial conception of metalepsis was taken by Wolf (2005) who, looking at examples from drama, film, comics and painting, laid the foundations for “exporting” metalepsis to media other than language. Four features are singled out that enable metalepsis to occur beyond verbal media: (a) it is found within artefacts/performances that represent possible worlds (cf. Ryan 1991: esp. chap. 9), but has no essential link with narrativity; (b) existence within these artefacts/ performances of distinct levels or possible (sub)worlds that differ from one another with reference to “reality” vs. “fiction” (the latter combining “fictio” as artefact and “fictum” as “invention without direct reference to reality”; Wolf 1993: 38–9); (c) actual transgression between or confusion of (sub)worlds; (d) paradoxical nature of the transgression with reference to a “natural” or conventional belief in the inviolability of these (sub)worlds in “normal” life and fiction. On this basis, metalepsis, in any medium, is defined as “*a usually intentional paradoxical transgression of, or confusion between, (onto)logically distinct (sub)worlds and/or levels that exist, or are referred to, within representations of possible worlds*” (Wolf 2005: 91, original emphasis; for a commentary, cf. Hanebeck 2014: 66). Note, however, should be made of the fact that this definition (as is the case with the partial redefinition in Wolf 2009: 50) is heavily weighted in favor of ontological (i.e. story level) metalepsis involving impossible physical transgressions, and that although rhetorical metalepsis is included in the discussion, the different types of metaleptic movements mentioned in the previous section are not taken into account. Also introduced is epistemological metalepsis, the “impossible” knowledge characters might have of their fictional status, the effect of which is to reflect the metareferential nature of metalepsis, although metareferential potential remains highest in the ontological form, laying bare the fictionality of the work (52–6). Following up on Wolf is Thoss's transmedial definition of metalepsis as “a paradoxical transgression of the line that separates the inside from the outside of a storyworld” (2015: 4) together with three “prototypes”: (a) transgressions between a storyworld and another imaginary world;

(b) transgressions between a storyworld and reality; (c) transgressions between a storyworld and the discourse that represents it.

Affirming the indisputably transmedial quality of metalepsis, Hanebeck, following a different line of reasoning, focuses on how this phenomenon resists the narrative structuration of (hermeneutic) understanding by denying the logical and pragmatic rules that govern the act of narration. "Metalepsis," he observes, "occurs when and if a recipient of a (narrative) representation feels that the logic of acts of (narrative) representation are violated or negated in such a way that the 'natural' spatial, temporal and hierarchical relationships between the domain(s) of the signifier and the domain(s) of the signifier no longer apply" (Hanebeck 2014: 69). Building on existing typologies (Nelles 1997; Fludernik 2003; Klimek 2010; Ryan [2004] 2006), Hanebeck goes on to single out four "scales" along which diegetic universes, represented through any medium, may either remain distinct or collapse: (a) temporal dimensions; (b) spatial dimensions; (c) worlds ("the holistically structured networks of meaning and relatedness") which coincide with diegetic levels; (d) hierarchical relations (37). On this basis, he proposes a "tree structure" of metaleptic types in which "figurative" metalepsis subsumes epistemological metalepsis and rhetorical metalepsis, on the one hand, and where ontological metalepsis breaks down into "recursive" and "immersive" metalepsis, on the other, each with a series of subtypes (73–99).

Exploring the transmedial dimensions of metalepsis poses the challenge, as the above proposals show, of rethinking narrative metalepsis so as to accommodate the features of visual and performance media, for which the language-based story-discourse distinction is not well adapted. One option is of course to address the issues through ontological reconceptualization. Another possibility is to take into consideration so-called media affordances, i.e. how the various media influence and shape the forms of representation, but also how, in the different media environments, metalepsis interacts with representation. This is the avenue chosen by the contributors to Kukkonen and Klimek, eds. (2011), a collection of essays on metalepsis in media-rich artifacts drawn from popular culture. In her introductory essay, Kukkonen (2011b) identifies the essential terms of metalepsis as worlds, boundaries and transgressions along with their types, effects and functions; she also provides a "basic matrix of types" applicable across media which allows for various combinations of the direction (ascending or descending) and mode (rhetorical or ontological) of metalepsis as well as for horizontal or intertextual metalepsis—a matrix that overarches the various models developed in the volume.

On the basis of an exhaustive typology developed out of this matrix, Limoges (2011) demonstrates the strong potential of animation film for illusionistic extradiegetic

transgressions, both ascending and descending. This is unlike comics, where the “gutter” between panels that governs the page layout offers possibilities of foregrounding such that a character might lift the corner of a page to hide an object in the image (or throw it out), thus highlighting the production process through ontological metalepsis (Kukkonen 2011a). Klimek (2011: 26–7) observes that if metalepsis in the performing arts has a potential for spilling over into the audience’s “real” world, this is not the case in narrative fictions, where it can occur only between levels *within* the artifact (on metalepsis in film, theater, the visual arts and picture books, see Klimek 2010: 73 ff.). Where Klimek considers horizontal “intertextual” transgressions not to be metaleptic, Feyersinger (2011), studying trans-world “crossovers” in TV series and spinoffs in which characters and situations are carried over from one show to another, sees crossovers and metalepses as two poles along a spectrum of world-connecting devices that share certain elements and effects. As shown by these and other essays, technical innovations brought in by the mass media and, more recently, by the digital technologies, have contributed significantly to the use of metalepsis and to the diversity of metaleptic effects in the popular culture corpus.

3.1.3 Metalepsis as Paradox

At the heart of metalepsis is transgression of the “sacred boundary” between the world of the telling and the world of the told. In the logic of representation, levels of existence are distinct, and their violation constitutes a paradox. In literary theory such paradox is often understood in the everyday sense of a statement contrary to received opinion or belief, something “unnatural.” In the technically logical sense, however, paradox is an issue that arises in self-reference, as illustrated by the liar’s paradox, where the principle that a proposition cannot be both true and false at the same time is contradicted (Epimenides, a Cretan, says “All Cretans are liars”)—a mind-bender also conveyed visually by the Möbius strip, Klein’s bottle and Escher’s drawings. Hofstadter (1979) examines various manifestations of this paradox in modern mathematics and science, even providing a recursive dialogue (103–26) that illustrates the problem of metalepsis, although the term appears nowhere in the book.

It is important to note that paradox has been integrated into the poetics of postmodernist fiction, a type of writing which, according to McHale (1987), “foregrounds ontological issues of text and world” (27). Adopting an ontology taken from possible worlds theory (33–6), McHale recasts Genette’s narrative levels in terms of ontological levels, and he goes on to describe metalepsis as “the ontological dimension of recursive embedding” (120). Metalepsis is characterized, on the one hand, as a “short circuit” between the “fictional world and the ontological

level occupied by the author" (213), a special case which, as observed by Klimek (2010: 57), corresponds to Genette's author's metalepsis. On the other hand, the violation of narrative levels in more complex forms of metalepsis is identified with the "Strange Loop," a phenomenon that occurs "whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started," and also with a subcategory of the Strange Loop, the "Tangled Hierarchy": "when what you presume are clean hierarchical levels take you by surprise and fold back in a hierarchy-violating way" (Hofstadter 1979: 10, 691; qtd. in McHale 1987: 119). Conceptually speaking, however, short circuits and strange loops/tangled hierarchies are not of the same order.

In a refinement of this model, Wolf (1993: 349–72), considering the forms of disturbance of mimetic illusion caused by the failure to observe ontological boundaries, sets the "contamination" of extra-fictional reality with textually produced fiction off from that of inner-fictional boundaries. Unlike in McHale (1987), where metalepsis, short circuit and strange loop are employed synonymously, here it is only the latter, inner-fictional form that gives rise to metalepsis, also called "narrative short circuit" by Wolf, a metafictional technique whose effect is to trigger "a sudden collapse of the narrative system" (358). Narrative short circuits appear punctually either (a) between the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic levels or (b) between the intradiegetic and one or more hypodiegetic levels, although no distinction is made between descending and ascending metalepsis as discussed in the previous section. To these simple forms of metalepsis is added a complex form in which the previous two types are combined, setting in motion a recurrent Möbius-strip-like contamination of levels, as would be the case of a first-person narrator confronted with her own fictionality on reading a text about herself.

It is against the backdrop of a critical discussion of McHale, Wolf and other authors that Klimek sets out a theory of metalepsis, not in terms of ontology but rather of paradox. All metalepses, she argues, are paradoxical, but not all forms of paradox (e.g. temporal, spatial) are metaleptic. The "short circuit" metaphor is rejected and with it the idea that metalepsis "collapses the narrative system," thereby systematically disrupting aesthetic illusion. Klimek's conception is in fact closely aligned with Genette's original definition with which, not surprisingly, the expansion of metalepsis from "figure" to "fiction" (cf. "All fictions are woven through with metalepses"; Genette 2004: 131) is judged incompatible (Klimek 2010: 36).

The typology of metalepsis developed out of these considerations makes no reference to the rhetorical vs. ontological paradigm or to the reality vs. fiction divide evoked by many of the transmedial approaches. Rather, three major types are identified: (1) descending metalepses, passing (a) from extradiegesis to intra- or

hypodiegesis, or (b) from intradiegesis to hypodiegesis; (2) ascending metalepses, going in the opposite direction; (3) complex forms including (a) Möbius-strip narratives in which (1) and (2) fold recursively onto one another, the intradiegesis turning out to be the extradiegesis and vice versa, and (b) tangled heterarchy, where the representing and the represented are not hierarchically ordered (in computer science heterarchy is “a structure in which there is no single ‘highest level’”; Hofstadter 1979: 134) (Klimek 2010: 69–72; 2011).

It will be noted that with the introduction of complex forms this typology rules out horizontal metalepsis (e.g. Wagner 2002; Meyer-Minnemann 2005; Schlickers 2005; Lang 2006; Thoss 2015). This is due to the fact that the representation of parallel worlds belonging to the same level entails no transgression between the world of the telling and the world of the told (Klimek 2010: 68). Moreover, the complex forms, although compatible with Genette’s original treatment of metalepsis, were not foreseen by him, or in any case they were nearly ruled out ([1983] 1988: 88). Finally, underlying Klimek’s system is an explicit theory of metareference which incorporates paradox: (a) gradated metareference demanding a strict separation of sign levels; (a.1) infinite metareference, a gradated and never-ending circular repetition; (a.2) recursive metareference, e.g. mirror within a mirror; (b) paradoxical metareference, as in Escher’s *Drawing Hands* (cf. Fricke 2003, 2011: 256–57; Klimek 2010: 51, 330 ff.).

3.2 Effects

As research on metalepsis has advanced, so too has reflection on the conditions, diversity and nuances of its effects. Noted early on for the strangeness of its comic or fantastic effects or the mixing of humor and the fantastic and also as something “troubling,” metalepsis has been characterized as “a figure of the creative imagination” (see § 1 above). Between its deconstructive “mutinous nature as a narrative device that disrupts narrative structure” (Malina 2002: 132) and its immersive qualities there lies a store of positions on these issues.

For a starter, it is more likely that metalepsis will be encountered in the baroque, in romanticism and in postmodernism than in classicism or realism, and also that it will be employed in the comic and fantastic genres more readily than in tragedy or in lyric poetry (Pier & Schaeffer 2005: 10–1). Moreover, the effects will vary widely according to the media and combinations of media in which metaleptic devices are employed (e.g. Wolf 2005; Kukkonen & Klimek eds. 2011).

The anti-illusionistic quality of metalepsis has never been called into question. Even so, there remains the thorny question of knowing under what conditions it is illusion-breaking or illusion-building. Metalepsis has been described by Wolf as a radically

disruptive metafictional device that prevents immersion and aesthetic illusion (Wolf 1993: 356 ff., 2005: 103; Wolf → Illusion (Aesthetic) [3]). But in consideration of his work on metareference, he has more recently come to the view that similar metaleptic devices may, subject to “filter factors” such as the intracompositional makeup of the work, generic frames and habituation, produce different effects and possibly contribute to immersion: “the feeling of experientially participating in a representation” (Wolf 2013: 121). Schaeffer (2005) takes a different view of the matter. From a cognitive perspective, metalepsis, as a representational technique, is not incompatible with immersion but serves, rather, as an “emblem” of the “split state” of immersion: “the dynamics of immersion involves metaleptic mental operations in the most literal sense of the term” (333; for a critique, cf. Wolf 2013: 121, n. 14; on metalepsis and “double-scope” cognitive blending, see Feyersinger 2012). Klimek (2010), focusing on the device itself, looks at the issues in the context of descending and ascending metalepses. The former, both as production (cf. author’s metalepsis) and as reception (cf. reader immersion), tends toward aesthetic illusion (231–33) whereas the latter (when for instance a character bursts out of the fiction) postulates a higher and purely fictitious reality (247–49).

It is also possible to consider the effects of metalepsis through the lens of defamiliarization. Metalepsis was never identified as such by the Russian formalists, but it can be associated with one of their key concepts: “laying bare the device.” Rather than a rhetorical figure, the violation of ontological boundaries or a paradox, and rather than culminating in the collapse of narrative categories or in the breaking of mimetic illusion, metalepsis conceived as laying bare the device enters the work’s composition via *sjužet* construction: more even than digressions, parallelisms, etc., it highlights the artificial relations between “form” and “material,” between *sjužet* and *fabula*, and thus supports the idea that art is “made” of devices. These principles were set out particularly in Šklovskij ([1921] 1990). This famous essay discusses the digressions and various techniques employed in *Tristram Shandy* for conflating narration and action in a conspicuous way so as to defamiliarize the objects of perception in the process of *sjužet* construction, compelling the reader to a heightened awareness of the constructedness of narrative (cf. Schmid 2005, [2005] 2010: 176–79).

3.3 Related Concept: *Mise en abyme*

Mise en abyme is founded on a relation of similarity between the embedded and embedding stories—“simple,” “infinite” or “aporetic” reduplication or reflection, according to Dällenbach (1977)—rather than on transgression. Although both phenomena are dependent on levels, they must not be confused. Even so, there is a significant coincidence between the aporetic form (“fragment supposedly including

the work in which it is included"; 51), or what Cohn ([2005] 2012) termed "pure *mise en abyme*," and metalepsis. The two are bound together by the troubling effect produced on the reader by the "unacceptable and insistent hypothesis that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to the same narrative" (Genette [1972] 1980: 236). Such a *mise en abyme*, triggering a sense of vertigo, is the product of a Möbius-strip-like metalepsis, or paradoxical iteration occurring in the system of metareference (cf. Fricke 2003, 2011: 257).

4 Topics for Further Investigation

More than a rhetorical flourish, metalepsis raises the question of the porosity of levels and boundaries in narratives and in other cultural representations, but not their dissolution. Research in recent years has expanded the scope of the phenomenon considerably and contributed to significant refinement of scholarly understanding of its workings and modalities. Among topics requiring additional study are the following: (a) relative weight of local vs. global effects of metalepsis; (b) metalepsis and fictionality (breaking/intensification of mimetic illusion, immersion, etc.); (c) the role of metalepsis in trans-/intermediality with regard to multimedia and to popular culture; (d) metalepsis and related practices in historical poetics going back to ancient narrative as well as a historical inventory of artistic movements and corpuses employing these devices; (e) the rhetorical potential of metalepsis.

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