METALEPSIS AS A META-REFERENTIAL DEVICE IN PROFESSIONAL ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Our contribution focuses on the trans-medial concept of meta-reference. One of the main meta-referential devices is metalepsis which has been transferred from narratology to different other arts becoming a modern way of addressing the diegetic audience. We comment upon ascending, descending, horizontal metalepsis, and their effects in cinematographic art (e.g. Bergman's, Allen's, Haneke's movies). Based on broken aesthetic illusions and diegetic frames, these movies offer wide possibilities to analyze self-reflexive cinematographic devices. If there is a greater level of symbolic, diegetical and dramatic motivation, the device loses its anti-illusionist effect on the audience. The directors found ways to demonstrate that their rebel characters are of a sort of victims of the movies being no longer able to see the difference between reality and fiction, and believing that the world itself responds to a remote control or that everything is rewindable.

Keywords: artistic communication, meta-reference, metalepsis, cinematographic art

1. Introduction. Meta-reference, metalepsis and heteronymous Image

For many centuries the meta-referential phenomenon has been present in several arts and in humanities in general. The research work regarding this interesting aspect began later. Over the decades of the 20th century, fruitful essays and discussions have revealed meta-referential practice and strategy in other fields of media. As cinematographic art is considered one of the latest, meta-reference appeared and became an explicit expression of self-consciousness during the '60s and afterwards. Besides the aspect of self-representation, it also involves dialectic forms (essence vs. appearance; truth vs. illusion; reality vs. image, thing vs. sign) and the ambiguity of the aesthetic border. Self-reflexivity in cinema may be seen, from the director's point of view, as a kind of device revealing the enunciation, but, from the point of view of the audience, it is a reminder that they are watching a movie. The present contribution aims to highlight several meta-referential features in Ingmar Bergman's, Woody Allen's and Michael Haneke's movies. Metalepsis is a figure of speech in which one thing is referred to by something else that is only remotely associated with it. Often the association works through a different figure of speech, or through a chain of cause and effect. Often metalepsis refers to the combination of several figures of speech into an altogether new one. Those base figures of speech can be literary references, resulting in a sophisticated form of allusion. This device has been used by the directors in modern cinematographic art. In narratology (e.g. the theories of Gérard Genette), a paradoxical transgression of the boundaries between narrative levels or logically distinct worlds is also called metalepsis.

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2. Methodological basis

The contribution is based on principles of visual semiotics, theory of narrativity and style. This is a trans-generic attempt because it transposes a few of the openings of meta-referential research in other artistic fields into this one. It also capitalizes the mythical and the symbolic significances of the chosen cinematographic elements, trying to offer a more complete understanding of these several innovative artistic endeavors. Reassessing the contemporary cinematographic *heresies*, the contribution underlines the opposition to the aesthetic norm and the paradigmatic value of these masterpieces (Wolf, 2009: 31).

2.1. Boundaries between reality and fiction

The meta-referential aspect is a long debated and theoretically analyzed issue. From a semiotic point of view, it was established that verbal signs can be explicitly and implicitly meta-referential, while non-verbal signs are only implicitly as such. W. Nöth has clearly asserted (Nöth, 2007: 84):

> „Performers of nonverbal messages can only perform, but they cannot perform that they are performing, but this does not mean that implicit metareference is necessarily less strongly metareferential, i.e., that it creates less metasemiotic awareness than explicit metareference. An implicit metasign can lead to as much or even more reflection on the nature of signs as an explicit metasign can."

The visual arts allow a special undertone and an extremely spectacular feature and for this method to create a variety of connotations. The cinema-field confirms this remark. The directors and the fim production designers were captivated by the opportunity to achieve, through fantasy, bridges between the fiction-world and reality. A simple chronological unfolding of more or less predictable events, the effort to come into notice due to various visual or sound effects were no longer enough to require more from the spectator's spirit of observation and interpretative ability. The masters of cinema wished new challenges and a different message of their creations. In this contribution, we opted in favour for a few comments upon the works of Ingmar Bergman, Woody Allen and Michael Haneke. Woody Allen has flirted with the idea of „film within film" almost since the beginning of his career. In an interview, he said that it was not Buster Keaton's attempt (*Sherlock Jr.*) the one which inspired him, but his own self-interest. „The idea to enter the screen was a thought that came much later" (Stig Björkman; 2013, 164). Thus, after 25 years he watched Keaton's film, Allen directs "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985) which is an obvious example for getting over from fiction into reality and vice versa. A double-crossing between fiction and reality takes place in this film. The female character, Cecilia, idealizes the fictional world and enters the screen following a character, the archeologist Tom Baxter, who also has descended into the real world. Both crossing of the aesthetic border occur under the pretext of a quasi-traditional love-story. Therefore, the viewer watches two films in which the main characters have dual membership to different fictional levels, and the meta-referential aspect becomes the principle theme of meditation for the director and for the audience. Woody Allen was fascinated by the possibility to blur the limit between fiction and reality. The proof can be found in his previous works. For example,

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in *Annie Hall* (1977), the main characters talk explicitly about this trans-medial aspect. Waiting in a movie-line, the male hero Avy brought Marshall McLuhun himself to support his opinions that contradict the emphatic speech of another character. This personality, apparently inaccessible to ordinary reality, appears metonimically behind a poster. He is an element of imagination which becomes reality. McLuhan is kind of *correctio*, an incarnate *anthorismos* joining the world of ideas with the concrete world (Dragomirescu; 1975, 67). In the same series of interviews, W. Allen admits that he tried to persuade Ingmar Bergman ori Fellini to appear in his film, but they refused, though appreciating the originality of his idea. In "Purple Rose of Cairo", the female character, the waitress Cecilia leads a monotous life and has an unhappy marriage, so attending theatre and idolizing the heroes on the screen. Being in love with the stereotype male hero, so characteristic for inter-war films, she draws fictional Tom Baxter into reality. The archeologis Tom Baxter lives in the world and has a life in complete opposition to Cecilia's living. „The film within the film" is announced also by the exergue *Now playing The Purple Rose of Cairo*; it glows alone above the cinema-building in that depressing and dark social context. Woody Allen's film suggests a very interesting process of aesthetic para-perception (Arhip, 2013: 129). Cecilia embodies the chosen character that understands the structure of fiction and can live in it (Eco, 1991: 180-181). She enters the screen convinced by Baxter's remark („In my world, people are very consistent. You may count on them.") and by Gil Shepard's interference. The latter is a character belonging to both narrative levels. He has a trans-world identity and looks upon real world as a construct (Poulet, 1987: 249). Cecilia sublimates the fiction and the personages of the films watched become her idols. Allen's movie deals with a kind of para-aesthetic reception-process. Cecilia is the chosen character who sees the imaginary structure and can live in it.

The aesthetic attraction to blur the border between fiction and reality may be noticed in Michael Haneke's films as well. He is an Austrian director who was born in Germany. We refer by choice to "Caché" (2005) and "Funny Games" (1997/remake in 2007). In the first one, a more subtle exergue for self-reflection can be noticed. In the first one, the audience watches the life and house of the Laurent family mainly through a static camera installed on the street symbolically called Iris. Iris is a visual diaphragm of the eye which controls the amount of light reaching the retina. From a mythological point of view, Iris was the messenger of the gods, a female correspondent for Hermes. The sight of the audience is presented metonymically due to the video cassettes and drawings received by G. Laurent. In the other Haneke's movie, "Funny Games", the strange killing doublet Peter and Paul looks straight to the camera several times and talks to the audience and to the director about their opinion regarding the usual course of the action and the usual predictable happy-end which it is not the case of their murder-game. In addition, Paul literally rewinds the film with a television remote and he goes for a turn in reality. According to the biblical perspective, Paul and Peter are martyrs and symbols of revealing the true knowledge and faith. Woody Allen inverts the original meanings and the normal evolution of the events. "Persona" (1966), I. Bergman's movie, presents expressively a film take-up spool and the audience is asked to offer answers to a lot of intellectual and emotional issues presented in this abstract and complex cinematic expression. A prologue and an epilogue of visual metaphors anticipate and conclude the significance of this film. Like other Bergman's

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works, it is a cinematic pursuit of the self, of the identity. In all these movies the screen is a penetrable diaphragm (Arhip; 2013, 130).

2.2. The image-language – exergue

As it was already mentioned, the director of the movie decides to attach a written clue, an *exergue*, for a better and easier understanding. An obvious example is the name of the street in "Caché" – *Iris* - but, in the same movie, there is the expressive title of a film watched by the character Georges Laurent at the cinema on one afternoon – "The Brothers". The allegoric meaning of this title applies to the biblical brothers, Cain and Abel/Georges Laurent and Majid. Regarding Woody Allen's movie, the exergue is: *Now playing The Purple Rose of Cairo* – it underlines the fictional crossing over of the two characters, Cecilia and Tom. Above all, this is the clearest exergue for self-reflexivity and meta-referential intention on behalf of the director.

2.3. Symbolical, mythical and stylistic aspects

All these movies are very rich in symbolic elements which also imply biblical or mythical significances. The combinative perspectives of the directors are a strong proof of their intentions. They wish to modernize this art and to transform the audience into a more elevated and active communication-partner. The communication is based on words, gestures, looks, symbolical or mythical clues, trompe-l'œil, l'œil surpris, hors-d'œuvre or parergon, etc. which can be harder reached and figured out by the audience (Siguret; 1993, 171-177). The spectator is embedded in the visual field of the movie in which he finds his spiritual food. The illusionist character of the representation constitutes the source of the intellectual pleasure. There is a prominent, deliberate continuity between the representational level and the reality-level. The innovative directors have broken the standards of Hollywood or of any other filmic presentation ruled by classic norms.

2.4. The purple rose

The rose is a universal symbol of revival, love and accomplished perfection (Chevalier, Gheerbrant; 1995, 176). All these meanings comply with Cecilia's wishes and dreams. But they do not become true. Eventually, the movie itself is the Rose, the perfect, magical cinematographic jewel. Cecilia remained in her dreary life and her only offering for Tom Baxter/Gil Shephard is a merry-go-road which stands for the *simulacra* of the world. The purple colour represents the mystery of life and the nocturnal or feminine principle (Chevalier, Gheerbrant; 1995, 171). This colour apprises for danger and for norm violation. Woody Allen breaks the classical cinematographic norm.

2.5. The video-cassette

The Laurent family presented in "Caché" receive several video cassettes revealing their own slices of life and having a deceiving designation of threatening. In fact, this modern device stands for Laurent's recollections of his wrongdoing against his adoptive brother during their childhood. The cassettes and the drawings are projections of this guilt and his remorse. His present successful, fulfilling life cannot

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counter-balance the culpable past. His real sin is not his vanity, but his self-abandonment which is the main cause for not realizing the gravitas of his behaviour. George Laurent, the contemporary Cain, is guilty of violation of xenia. The Greek term *xenia* refers to the ritualized friendship and hospitality, both of them being not observed by George.

2.6. The cock

In "Caché", the characters receive also little pieces of paper with sketches of a blooded cock. The cock which is present in the drawings got by the Laurent family is another symbol. It stands for vanity and it is also the figurative image of reckless anger (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995: 345). Laurent's envy and hatred as a child against his adoptive brother, Majid, render the mythical conflict between Cain and Abel. The blood drawn in Laurents' received papers figures Cain's sacrifice in front of the divinity, but the tribute is not accepted. Georges Laurent carries up his sin and grief.

2.7. The egg

The egg is a universal symbol referring to genesis (Chevalier, Gheerbrant; 1995, 391-395). It is the primary reality which contains the plurality of human beings. The egg is the anaphoric element of the series of crime-games played by the doublet Paul and Peter in "Funny Games" by Michael Haneke. One of the two strange young men comes to borrow eggs from their next victims. The egg also symbolizes order and the diversity of the origins. Although the egg is not essentially the first, it epitomizes the seed of diversity. Haneke's movie "Funny Games" proposes the reverse of a happy-ending for a thriller and a new category of para-characters is represented by Paul and Peter. They are completely dressed in white, wearing elegant clothes and gloves for golf instead of the classical black helmets or jackets worn by the negative personages. New rules of a strange game are announced by this dress-code. It is a paradox as the croquet-game from "Alice in Wonderland" (Petreu; 2013, 77). Paul and Peter violently attack Anna, George and their son and the brutality's intensity is ascendant. The movie itself becomes a loaded gun and the onlookers are molested similar to the characters. The para-characters disobey all the normal rules of a serial killer; there are no miraculous escape routes or techniques, no survivor, no justice. The movie deconstructs the modality in which media present violence. Virtually, the doublet does not commit crimes. As directors of the new genre of film about violence which they have offered, they kill or eliminate a category of predictable, oversimplified characters that they no longer want to be present on the screen and in the scripts. An element of the cinema-heroes paradigm must disappear. The egg appears again at the end when the doublet pays a visit to their next victim. Therefore the egg symbolizes also the mystery of human existence and the enigma of this modern artistic expression.

2.8. The double or the divided self

From a symbolic point of view, the double (*Doppelgänger* in German Romanticism) has a tragic and evil connotation. The double is our enemy who comes to fight against us and it forebodes the death (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995: 438). Paul and Peter, the doublet from "Funny Games", came to Anne and George Farber's vacation house and, after a prologue consisting of a bunch of lies, they took the family hostage. They

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represent the psychopathic enemy who proposes sadistic games during the next twelve hours. After the innocent guess-game of famous musical themes, a game played by the family before reaching their vacation retreat, the double Peter and Paul initiates them into sadistic games involving mental and physical violence. The characters finally die and this strongly argues against the traditional pattern of films presenting violence. Although the double in "Funny Games" is not formed by twins, there is a certain emphatic likeness at Paul and Peter. In a way, they may symbolize the ambivalence of the twins, a specific aspect for a turning point; they appear and decide the future maintaining a very tense atmosphere. Another connotation of their arrival to the house and on the screen may be that specific to the author/director as a "visitor" into his own creation. He becomes a semiotic instrument and he creates his self-portrait as a modern, iconoclast and contextualized film-director (Montaigne – "So, my reader, I'm the very dough of my book" – Montaigne: 2012, 16). Referring to this aspect, Woody Allen's monologues about film directing, fiction or his opinions regarding life and cinema are the most explicit ("Alice", "Husbands and Wives", "Annie Hall").

2.9. The golf-game

In Haneke's movie "Funny Games", golf may be seen as a metaphor for life or for the course of life. The sport golf is the only one not requiring a standardized playing area, but it involves definite rules and also hazard (unplayable situations). Paul and Peter play life-and-death golf on the greater field of the neighbourhood in which every family is a hole, but they also play golf with the Farber family, the death of each character being a hole. The final scene in which Anne fails to grab the knife and save her life being thrown from the boat is very figurative. The move resembles a skilled stroke of a golfer and her fall is like the roll of the white golf-ball into a hole. During their brief discussion with the Farbers, Paul and Peter try to impose rules and an exact period of time in order to win the game. A lot of inter-textual syntagmatic combinations can be noticed while the game is taking place. The standard plot is reversed and disestablished; the general assembly is a completely different one. The common thriller and the intellectual-film constitute *in absentia* rapport. They are mutually exclusive. The director also uses a sophism *extra dictionem*. The relative elements are intermingled with the absolute ones as in "Alice in Wonderland". The cinematographic sophism highlights *technè*, the art itself as the real subject of any film.

2.10. The silent character

Bergmar's character in "Persona", the actress Elisebeth Vogler, is healthy in all her aspects, but she does not talk. Symbolically, silence is openness to revelation and a passageway (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995: 343). From a semiotic point of view, silence is abhorrent to discourse (Raymond, 1982: 154). Symbolically, silence is openness to revelation and a passageway. The silence is characteristic for the period of time preceding and following the creative activity. It adds loftiness to Elisebeth's very formal behaviour. The former actress plays the part of her real life and her partner, the nurse Alma (*alma* means "soul" in Greek), has the role of delivering monologues. The illusionist artistic effect presents again commendable scenes and introduces us to a

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special dual character. Elisebeth Vogler reveals us the appearance of the protagonist and Alma discloses the inside aspect of the same character. The sequences, in which the husband is present, are the most eloquent for the existence of a single personage. This movie focuses on getting from the surface of a personage into its inner world. The non-verbal aspects are very conclusive and Ingmar Bergman could have produced a silent film as well. The meta-representation enriches the paradigm of personages. Elisebeth vanishes in her inner depth and the screen mirrors only gloom and death. The title of the film has the entire expressiveness that a threshold-sentence/*phrase-seuil* involves. *Persona* is the mask which the human voice gets through; *persona* is the *implied author* or an alter ego of the author. The unconscious appearences are so convincing so that C. G. Jung's insinuation might be very useful in this context; the ego itself can doubt its own identity (Jung; 1995, 80). The synthesis of word and image creates a complex language expressing the many aspects of consciousness. The final image of the female face complemented by coupling the two physiognomies conveys photo-realism that evokes transmediality. It may well trigger other reflections in the beholder.

2.11. Screen and camera - parergon

The screen acts as a modern mirror that highlights the relationship between truth and illusion, between reality and fiction. As well, the directors' camera in all these movies is the door for our fictional entering and the characters' reality disclosure. The relationship between cinematographic fiction and the reality of the onlookers has become a meta-artistic one. The movie itself is a parergon (Dragomirescu; 1975, 56), a work undertaken in addition to that of nonconventional communication between the audience and the directors. The latter bring to light the stagy elements and challenge the onlookers who become the real partners of the artistic communication. The lens of the camera has become an aesthetic border. The lens plays the role of a window or that of a door or of any other kind of specular surface in painting or in architecture (Stoichita; 2013, 216). In fact, we have to deal with the awakening of self-consciousness of the new cinema. The emerging cinema rests upon three convergent features and artistic impulses: illusionist representation (trompe-l'œil, l'œil surpris), the theme of the vanity of action/story and the meta-referential aspect of the artistic representation. The lens of the camera emphasizes the hiatus between two different spiritual attempts to deal with cinematographic art.

3. Conclusions

In the recent decades, the novelty of the meta-referential theory and of the meta-film concept has required attention and many case studies or scientific papers are devoted to this topic in Western Europe and in the United States of America. Therefore, this theoretic field may be a very fruitful one for the Romanian researches as well. Meta-reference takes into account different media, the message being a specific artistic work which lays itself into a particular cultural context, code and channel. The filmic image presents itself as being aware of its image-character expressing a desideratum: to accede to a new and superior existential and comment-level, a kind of meta-level referring to visual meta-signs. The meanings of the meta-

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signs offer the possibility to discover an entire new and different perspective in which the sender's visual expression is meant to be watched not like a mere transfer of information related to a storyline, but as a complex structure on the syntagmatic axis. This structure reveals genuine visual patterns which focus on a wide creative horizon unfolding multi-access to various interpretations. The film-art struggles for its specific autonomy and the onlookers are challenged to interpret, answer and act as diegetic audience, the border between reality and fiction being intentionally vulnerable. The present approach has obvious current deficiencies and our intention is to continue and to deepen the analyses. Our future contributions will have to take into account meta-syntax, meta-semantics and meta-pragmatics, all of them being related to the variety of aesthetic filmic forms.

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