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With the continuing boom of phenomena of meta- and/or self-reference in contemporary culture on both sides, the producers’ and the critics’, this essay volume is a timely book. The second of two volumes that originated from two conferences on the topic at the University of Graz, the essays collected in this book engage in the current scholarly debate on the forms and functions of metareference in a contemporary context. Following the lead of recent studies like Wilhelm Nöth’s and Nina Bishara’s *Self-Reference in the Media* (2007), Janine Hauthal’s and Ansgar Nünning’s *Metaisierung in Literatur und anderen Medien* (2007) and diverse essays and essay volumes by the editor Werner Wolf himself (e.g. *Self-Reference in Literature and Music*, 2010), the volume aims at finding explanations for the remarkable increase in manifestations of a ‘meta-culture’ in contemporary art and media: self-reflexive comments on, references to, or criticism of medial conventions, modes of production or reception and other kinds of media-related aspects in contemporary culture, from high art to pop. Indeed, the volume suggests that phenomena of metareference are so ubiquitous and all-encompassing in contemporary culture that, as Werner Wolf holds in his carefully crafted introduction, one could indeed speak of a ‘meta-referential turn’. According to Wolf, this turn exceeds academic discourse by far and reaches right into everyday life, where – as blockbusters like *Shrek the Third* and animated sitcoms like *The Simpsons* show – the devices that used to belong to the sphere of high art can now be found everywhere and encounter a media-trained audience.

One of the merits of the present volume is that it gives plenty of evidence for the ubiquity of and quantitative increase in metareference in contemporary culture. On almost 600 pages, the contributors explore an impressive...
array of artefacts that ranges from literature to visual arts, film, music and webcomics. While the biggest section is concerned with literary texts, the scope of approaches and variety of fields covered in this essay volume nevertheless leaves no doubt that metareference in contemporary culture has to be regarded as a transmedial phenomenon that both motivates and challenges current media production and reception. Another aspect that deserves accentuation is the diversity of functions that the authors assign to metareference in a contemporary context. Whereas the general idea that metareference is mainly a symptom of a “literature of exhaustion” that bids farewell to realism and self-consciously focuses on the condition of its production is not per se new, most of the essays manage to connect aspects of metareference to larger epistemological and cultural concerns. Thus, Andreas Mahler connects the topos of the writer’s block to the fundamental human condition of eccentricity and interprets it as a symptom of a heightened epistemological self-reflexivity in postmodern art of the 1960s. In her essay on fantasy fiction – a genre that is usually considered as inherently illusionist –, Sonja Klimek points to the relationship between metareference and aesthetic illusion. Her argument is that these seemingly irreconcilable aesthetic strategies have moved closer together in a postmodern age: metareference is not always anti-illusionist since recipients have learned to combine media-awareness with the appreciation of aesthetic illusion.

Although the essays collected in this volume explore the aesthetic, cultural and medial functions of metareference in an impressive depth and breadth, it is slightly disappointing that political aspects of metareference, or, as Dagmar Brunow has it, questions concerning the “relation between metaisation and subversion”, are largely neglected. This is, for example, the case in John Pier’s essay on metareference in William Gass’s Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife, where the erotics of the fictional text (in the vein of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag) are linked to the visual aspects of the book (they evoke a female body) without considering the gender aspect of this relationship at all. A positive example – and an essay that proves that focusing on the political significance of metareference can be very productive – is Dagmar Brunow’s essay on metareference in Black British filmmaking. Brunow successfully shows that films by John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien employ metaference in order to not only challenge dominant historiography but also to carve out spaces for identity, memory and history that would remain hidden in more traditional modes of representation.

As a whole, the volume is a very informative book for anyone interested in the aesthetic, cultural and philosophic significance of current media production and reception. It points to a multiplicity of metareferential functions in contemporary media and arts without trying to homogenize or to categorize it by way of a typology. Moreover, as a kind of by-product, it takes on the worthy task of unearthing a whole body of artefacts – mainly novels – from the 1960s to the 1990s that, for various reasons, have somehow dropped off the academic and public radar. Yet, the question that immediately arises from the reading is if the abundance of metareference in contemporary culture and academic discourse justifies the claim of a ‘metareferential
turn’. This does not so much concern the omnipresence of metareference in contemporary culture (that can hardly be doubted) as the analytic and explanatory value of the term. As Wolfgang Funk justly claims, a ‘turn’ becomes interesting and significant when it – much like the linguistic turn – starts to transform the very fabric of the phenomena it describes. In his essay, he thoughtfully demonstrates this potential of the concept of metareference by connecting it to strategies of authentication in postmodern literature. As he shows with regard to Dave Egger’s novel *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, metareference has the power to instantiate a new authenticity in the literary text and could, therefore, offer an alternative to the relentless deferral of truthfulness and authenticity that has become regarded as the hallmark of postmodern fiction.

Not all of the essays in this volume penetrate thus far into the epistemological deep structure of postmodernism. Yet, the book as a whole makes an engaging and nuanced read that will be relevant to scholars from a wide variety of fields.

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