

Diegetic Short Circuits: Metalepsis in Animation

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Abstract

This article explores a highly striking phenomenon termed metalepsis. A metalepsis is a fictional and paradoxical transgression of the border between mutually exclusive worlds that cannot be transgressed in our actual world. The hand of the animator reaching into the diegesis of his creations as well as characters communicating with the audience, escaping to the world of their creators, or altering their own worlds are all different types of metaleptic transgressions. Even though this phenomenon appears extensively throughout the history of animation, it has not been theorized in animation studies thus far. This article introduces transmedial narratological conceptualizations of metalepsis as an analytical tool for animation. It discusses a wide range of examples, testing the applicability of the framework to various animated forms.

Keywords

animation, metalepsis, metareference, narratology, narrative levels, self-reflexivity, transgressions

Movement in and out of the screen can be very painful
like acid in the face and electric sex tingles.

(William S. Burroughs. *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead*)

At the beginning of Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908), the photographic image of a hand quickly sketches a white clown onto a black background (Figure 1a). The animated clown then experiences a series of violent adventures and metamorphoses. After the head is severed from the clown's body, the live-action hand intervenes once again by reassembling and reviving the now inanimate character (Figure 1b). *Fantasmagorie* is an extraordinary film in several respects. There is, however, one specific aspect – quite characteristic of many animated films – that will form the focus of this article: the paradoxical amalgamation of two ontologically distinct worlds – in this case the world of a creator and the world of his creations, to which he could not have physical contact in our reality. Human beings are not able to actually enter a fictional world such as the represented world of the clown.

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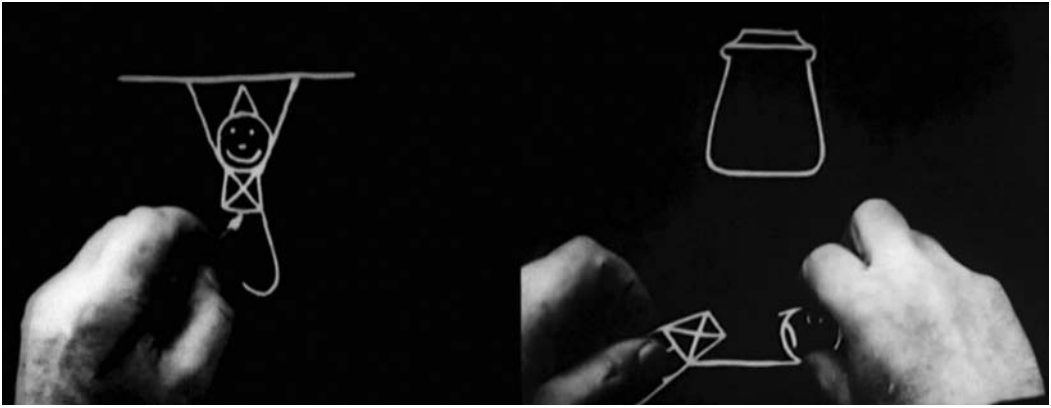


Figure 1a and 1b. The creator and his creation in *Fantasmagorie* (1908) © Gaumont, 1908.

These paradoxical transgressions of ontological boundaries and the fusion of distinct diegetic levels have been discussed from a variety of perspectives using different terminologies, not all of which are congruent with each other. Most notably, Douglas Hofstadter (1979) called these phenomena *strange loops* and *tangled hierarchies*. *Short circuit* is another term that has been used (Wolf, 1993: 357–58). However, Gérard Genette’s narratological reconceptualization of the rhetorical term *metalepsis* in *Figures III* (1972) and *Nouveau discours du récit* (1980) has proven to be the most successful term. He characterizes *metalepsis* as,

any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse (as in [Cortazar’s short story ‘Continuidad de los Parques’]), [which] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical (when, as in [Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*] or [Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste*], it is presented in a joking tone) or fantastic. (1980: 234–235)

Genette (1980) furthermore states that:

All 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 between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells. (p. 236)

Literary narratology has made good use of Genette’s concept and terminology since the late 1980s (McHale, 1987; Nelles, 1992; Wolf, 1993; Herman, 1997; Häsner, 2001; Malina, 2002; Fludernik, 2003; Genette, 2004; Patrick, 2008; Klimek, 2010), especially in the study of postmodernism. In film studies, the concept of *metalepsis* has been implicitly discussed in studies of self-reflexivity and *mise-en-abyme* in film (Metz, 1991; Christen, 1993; and Loquai, 1999; in particular Lindvall and Melton, 1997 as well as Siebert, 2005 and Siebert, 2007 for animation). The term *metalepsis*, however, has only recently been applied in studies of films (Türschmann, 2007; Campora, 2009; Thon, 2009) and television (Feyersinger, in press).

Metalepsis is a key phenomenon of animation, in which it is both widespread and deeply rooted. While the similarly important phenomenon *metamorphosis* has been recognized as one of

animations defining devices, this has not been the case with regard to metalepsis thus far. The term metalepsis, as it is discussed here, offers a means of systematically studying several transgressive devices that have until now been approached as separate phenomena (for example, the creative/intrusive hand of the animator). This article proposes a unified analytical framework that relies on a transmedial conception of metalepsis. Tools and insights from the study of metalepsis in other media can thereby be applied to animation. As a variety of narratological concepts are closely connected with metalepsis, its study can serve as a vantage point for explorations of further narrative and representational phenomena in animation, such as: narrative levels, narrative embedding, mise-en-abyme, fictionality, fictional entities and transworld identities, diegetization, the process of reception, possible worlds theory, and many more.

Metalepsis is especially well-suited for a transmedial approach as it appears in similar configurations in a plethora of representational media (Wolf, 2009: 51), that is, in artifacts, utterances, and performances that are able to evoke mutually inaccessible, conceptually distinct levels or worlds: in narrative literature as well as in drama (an actress posing as an audience member intervenes in the play), in computer games (the interactivity of player and avatar can be thought of as systematic metalepsis), or in images (the confusion of levels in M.C. Escher's graphics). There are also pseudo-metaleptic phenomena in non-representational systems such as music (the illusion of the endlessly ascending tone of the Shepard scale) or geometry (the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle). The following media have been studied in the last few years: music videos (Chace, 2003), comics (Schuldiner, 2002; Thoss, in press), computer games (Neitzel, 2007; Rapp, 2007), theater (Stephenson, 2006), mixed reality performances (Hofer, in press) and several others (Hofstadter, 1979; Pier and Schaeffer, 2005; Ryan, 2006; Wolf et al., 2009).

Werner Wolf, who had already explored metalepses in literature in 1993, expanded Genette's notion of metalepsis even further in 2005, reaching a transmedial definition of the phenomenon that is quite versatile. He defined metalepsis 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).¹ A metalepsis combines the representations of contradictory concepts; two worlds that are perceived as mutually exclusive are connected at the same time. The perception of the viewers is important as their knowledge of reality and common sense determines whether two worlds are understood as mutually exclusive or not. As a cluster of audiovisual semiotic systems able to represent other semiotic systems, animation can evoke a wide range of levels or worlds that are perceived as discrete and exclusively disjunctive. Possible connections between these worlds are, amongst others: a partial or total conflation, movement from one place to another, communication between the worlds, sensory access from one to the other world, having/gaining knowledge of the other world, as well as the creation of a representation of the other world. A certain configuration is only perceived as metaleptic if this connection is impossible according to our common beliefs about reality. We believe that we can visually access a world represented by a film (because of its high iconicity), but we neither believe that we can actually see a world represented by a novel (because written words are mainly symbolic signs) nor that a character from a film or novel can see our world. It is also perfectly normal that we can gain imaginary access to a fictional world represented by a written text, but we would be shocked if we could physically enter this world. A metalepsis draws its striking appeal from this shock as it makes the physical transgression possible, albeit only in a representation.

As a paradoxical figure, metalepsis requires a level that is not affected by the metaleptic transgression. Hofstadter (1979) notes that 'in any system there is always some "protected" level which is unassailable by the rules on other levels, no matter how tangled their interaction may be among themselves' (p. 688). A Möbius strip is only paradoxical if the perceptual level of a

three-dimensional object with two sides is combined with the epistemological level that tells us that this object consists only of one surface. Similarly, a filmic representation (information on a recording medium) appears to be paradoxical only if the represented content combines levels that are perceived as mutually exclusive.

Metalepsis functions differently in different contexts. It can be, amongst others, comic, ludic, self- or metareferential,² illusionistic as well as anti-illusionistic, spectacular, and fantastic. Furthermore, a metaleptic transgression often emphasizes the role of the creator of a representation as well as the distinction of the representation and the represented (Wolf, 2005: 102–104, for various transmedial functions of metalepsis, which he develops from Ryan, 2005). Due to these functions, metalepsis is especially suitable for specific modes and genres of moving images. In live-action films, metalepsis is prevalent in comedies, in musicals, and in fantastic, experimental, and post-modern films. The device, however, appears throughout the whole spectrum of film; it can be (retroactively) naturalized as a dream or an illusion and thus serve to reinforce the illusionistic perception of a fictional world as real.

In animation, cartoons and other kinds of hand-drawn animation resort to metalepsis as they frequently employ exaggerated comedy, metareference, or the presence and omnipotence of an authorial entity, which are all supported by metalepsis. They are less frequently used in computer animation (due to its common aspiration for realism) and object animation (due to its specific production process based on a real three-dimensional space and its tendency to obscure the presence of the animator). Usually, neither computer nor object animation want to distract from the illusion of a perfect mimesis or the illusion of animate objects and accordingly these modes of animation do not employ metaleptic transgressions as often as drawn animation does. However, object and computer animation also resort to the comic, fantastic, and spectacular functions of metalepsis. Computer animation also uses the device as a historical reference to classical metareferential cartoons. Overt hybrids of live-action and animation (often found in commercial films, discussed below) or films that mix several animation techniques (often found in independent and experimental films) also seem to have an affinity for metalepsis. *Fantasmagorie*, for example, represents the world of the creator and the world of the character with conspicuously differing stylistics. The photography of a real hand represents the creator; drawn white lines the clown. Similarly, many films rely on radical stylistic contrasts to represent two mutually exclusive worlds, emphasizing their distinctness. As a metalepsis is often used for stunning effects, its constituent elements (exclusive worlds, their border, and the process of transgression) are usually foregrounded. A high level of contrast and salience is typical for a metalepsis, but also for animation in general, as many animated films are focused on a few conspicuous visual and narrative elements. Metalepses are often impressive and appealing in the same way as highly exaggerated, stylized, or abstracted designs and movements are. The metareferentiality of a metalepsis also matches the tendency of animation to reflect on its own medium and discourse. Finally, both metalepsis and animation feature the transgression of borders: ontological borders in the case of metalepsis; imaginative, aesthetic, or ideological borders in the case of animation.

To explore this congruence of animation and metalepsis, I will now discuss the specifics of several examples. While more exhaustive taxonomies have been proposed elsewhere (Nelles, 1992; Wolf, 1993; Malina, 2002; Fludernik, 2003; Ryan, 2005; Limoges, in press, Kukkonen, in press, and Feyersinger, in press), the examples discussed here represent the most common types of metalepsis in animation. Based on Genette's relational terminology for literature, the most basic embedded narrative levels of an animated film are: an *extradiegetic level* (the level of the first-degree representation), an *intradiegetic* or simply *diegetic level* (the world represented by the first-degree representation), and a *metadiegetic level* (a world represented by a

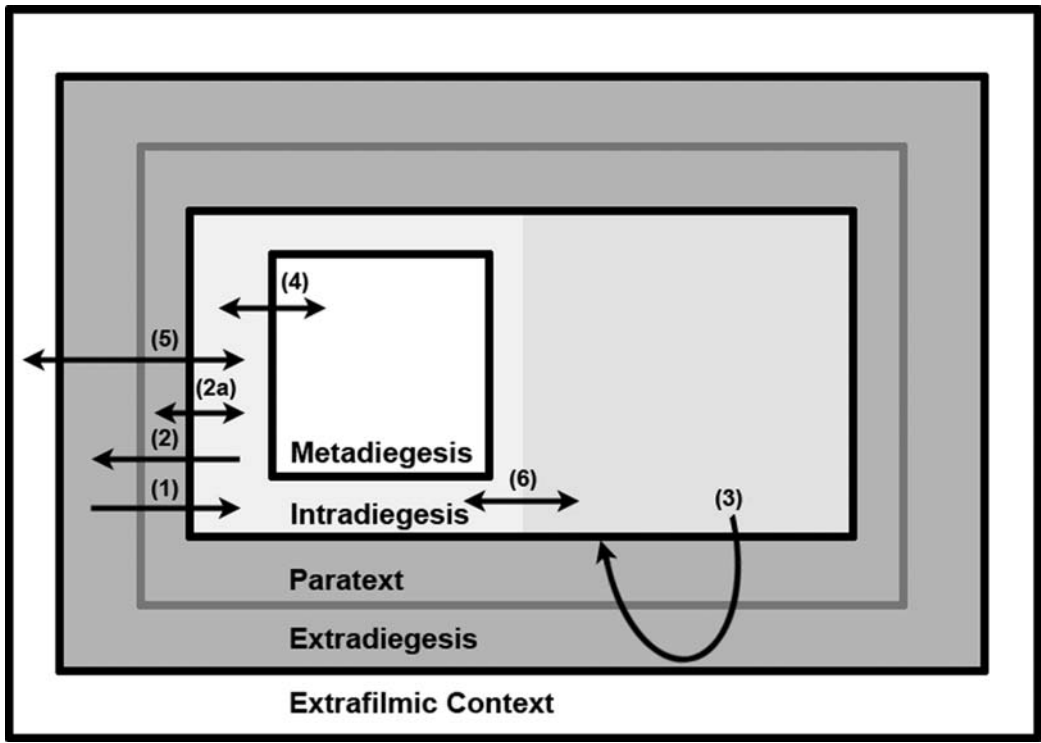


Figure 2. Diegetic levels and directions of transgressions in animation.

second-degree representation located on the diegetic level). The metadiegetic level can contain various other embedded levels, awkwardly termed *meta-metadiegetic*, *meta-meta-metadiegetic* and so forth (Genette, 1980: 227–31). While these are the main narrative levels, animation is able to represent various other worlds that are also mutually exclusive. Further levels, worlds, or domains that will be considered here are: paratexts as a specific sublevel of the extradiegesis, a (fictionalized) extrafilmic level, and several sub-worlds within the intra- or metadiegesis. Figure 2 shows possible directions of metaleptic transgressions, which will be discussed in the following sections: (1) From the extradiegesis to the intradiegesis, (2) from the intradiegesis to the extradiegesis, (2a) from the intradiegesis to the paratext or vice versa, (3) from the intradiegesis to the representation of the intradiegesis, (4) from intradiegesis to the metadiegesis or vice versa, (5) from the intradiegesis to extrafilmic context or vice versa, and (6) from sub-world to sub-world.

I. Extradiegetic intervention in the diegesis

The filmic representation of a painter/ animator’s extradiegetic intrusion into a world he has created – as in *Fantasmagorie* – is a common occurrence in the history of animation and has many variations (Figure 3). Often, the animator is not shown directly; rather, his pencil, brush, or hand establishes a metonymical reference to the animator.

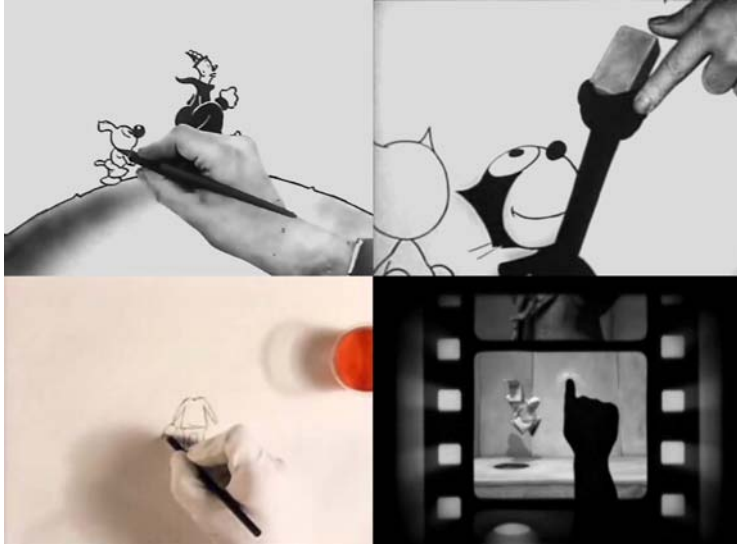


Figure 3. Pictured from left to right, top to bottom: the hand of the animator in: *Ko-Ko's Earth Control* (1928), *Comicalamities* (1928), *Manipulation* (1991) © TANDEM Films Entertainment, 1991, and *Tim Tom* (2002) © Romain Segaud and Christel Pougeoise/Supinfocom, 2002.

These intrusions had already appeared in early American cartoons before 1920 (Crafton, 1993: 173–174) but they can be found in all eras of animation.³ These intrusions evoke one of the predecessors of animated films, a vaudeville performance that has been labeled *chalk talk* and *lightning sketch*. These performances feature an artist on the stage who tells stories by quickly changing drawings on a blackboard (Crafton, 1993: 48–57). The immediacy of this performance and the proximity between creator and creation persists in animation. The animator draws, sculpts, and moves his creations directly with his own hands.⁴ The real animator, like the extradiegetic hand of the fictional animator, directly controls the shapes and movements of the film. He can change them in any direction he can conceive and the specific mode of production allows. The inexhaustible potential for metamorphic expression in animation is self-reflexively represented by the creative hand in the frame.

While authorial figures metaleptically intrude in various media, the frequency and persistence of this motif in animation is remarkable. A comparative transmedia approach to this type of metalepsis could be quite insightful. Due to its unique artistic potential and traditions, animation can contribute immensely to these transmedial studies. The intimate relation between the creator and his creations is another remarkable aspect of this type and the next type of metalepsis. Just as often as an animator tries to tease and torment his creations, these creations strike back and employ the next type of metalepsis to their own advantage.

2. Characters escape to a framing extradiegesis

The metaleptic intrusion of the creative hand demonstrates not only the power of the creator over his creations, but also the (fictional) independence of these creations. They can be manipulated, but they can also react to these manipulations as autonomous beings. Often, these fictional beings are

able to communicate with their creator (and the audience), thereby transgressing the border between intradiegesis and extradiegesis, either verbally or non-verbally (for example, with a glance). They are sometimes even able to physically leave their ontological level and escape into the world of the animator, who is often represented by live-action shots. Characters leave narrative and communicative frames, but they also leave actual frames – sheets of paper, drawing boards, film frames, and screens.

Animated characters can furthermore be part of paratextual elements of a film, which are, by definition, extradiegetic (type 2a in Figure 2). In *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, 2003), for example, characters swim around the end credits. Similarly, Bugs Bunny lies on top of the words ‘BUGS BUNNY IN’ at the beginning of several Warner Bros. cartoons. In these cases, however, there is no direct transgression of a diegetic border. They are not proper metalepses that presuppose a continuously identical character, which gains access to a seemingly inaccessible target world. Rather, we are facing two separate, non-continuous versions of the characters, which may or may not have a metaleptic influence on each other. The function of a transdiegetic separate version such as this is both ludic and ornamental. The character can reinforce its essential features and comment on diegetic events from an abstract, extradiegetic position. This configuration shows that metalepsis is only a part of a continuum of several world-connecting phenomena, such as multiple distinct versions, connected duplicate existences, proper metalepses, non-paradoxical crossovers, and various others. Even though metalepsis is a textual feature, the specific viewers have to assess the phenomenon at hand and decide where they locate it on the continuum. The next type of metalepsis is, however, usually a clear-cut case of metalepsis.

3. Characters alter their own worlds

A character does not need to move from the diegesis to extradiegesis in order to exert metaleptic influence. Characters can also influence their own world by metaleptically altering its representation. For example, Otto Messmer’s Felix the Cat transforms his tail into useful items such as a paintbrush, which he then uses to paint diegetic objects. In *Felix Saves the Day* (Otto Messmer, 1922), Felix builds a ladder by stacking several question marks – the symbolic depiction of his bewilderment in the face of a problem thus becomes the solution to the problem (Figure 4). In this case, he brings graphic signs from a paratextual to a diegetic level, a metaleptic strategy that also appears in comic strips, from where animation has appropriated these graphic elements.⁵

One of the most interesting features of this type of metalepsis is the (con)fusion of the creation of a world with the projection of its representation. While the animated film is pre-produced, its events seem to emerge while we watch it. Cause and effect are reversed. Like type (2), this type of metalepsis is a metareferential celebration of the creation process that every animator experiences. Like type (2), this type is the celebration of the autonomous character. These autonomous characters do not only want to meet their creators or refurbish their own worlds, but they also want to enter images themselves, where they can experience what is to them a fictional world.

4. From diegesis to metadiegesis: entering images

Moving from a framing world (intradiegesis) to an embedded world (metadiegesis) usually means moving from a level that seems more real to a level that seems more fictional. The embedded world is overtly fictional within the covertly fictional framing world. Based on this contrast, a transgression from the intradiegesis to the metadiegesis sometimes involves live-action characters (because their appearance is perceived to be more real) that transgress to animated worlds (perceived to be



Figure 4. Felix climbs on questions marks in *Felix Saves the Day* (1922).

more fictional because of the exaggeration and abstraction of animation).⁶ Mary Poppins (*Mary Poppins*, Robert Stevenson and Hamilton Luske, 1964) and the children she cares for jump right into a street painting, thereby entering the colorful world of Disney cartoons. Content-wise, this is yet another exciting and fantastic outing for the characters; aesthetically, the scene adds a stark visual contrast to an already highly imaginative film.

A metaleptic transgression to a metadiegesis, however, is not always a pleasant digression. In the music video *Take On Me* (Steven Barron, Michael Patterson, and Candace Reckinger, 1985), the female character, represented by live-action, reads an exciting comic book. The world of the comic book contains a rotoscoped male character (the singer of the band) who flirts with her. When the female character transgresses to the dangerous comic book world, she is also represented by rotoscoping (Chace, 2003: Chapter 4). Again, the diegesis is established as more real and the metadiegesis as more fictional. These two examples show the vast spectrum of metalepsis between playful and violent transgressions.

When a character enters a metadiegesis, not all its features have to be affected by the metalepsis. Characters may or may not age in the new world. The design of the character may or may not be affected by a differing style of the new diegetic level. Mary Poppins stays a live-action character even in a fully animated environment. The male character from *Take On Me* stays rotoscoped for some time even after he escapes to the live-action world.

The style of the new diegetic level can even have lasting effects when the character returns to the original diegesis, as in *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* (Joe Dante and Eric Goldberg, 2003). Warner Bros. stars such as Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny exist in their drawn form in a live-action world. In the Louvre, they enter the worlds represented by several paintings (i.e. parallel metadiegetic worlds) as Elmer Fudd once again chases them. In this case, metalepsis involves not only diegetic levels, but also the visual style of the representation; the design of Bugs, Daffy, and Elmer changes according to the style of the individual paintings that they pass through. The topics and the diegetic physics of the paintings also influence the gags of the scene. The final painting, Georges Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*, leaves its pointillistic traces as the characters return to the intradiegetic live-action world: Bugs is able to blow Elmer away like confetti because the style of the painting dematerializes his materiality.

5. Permeating the screen: the extrafilmic frame

We have discussed metalepsis between all of Genette's narrative levels. However, there are more borders that metalepses can transgress in animation. One of the most peculiar types is the transgression of the actual cinema screen, that is, an extrafilmic metalepsis. One of the most famous animated films that exhibits this type of transgression is Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914). During the projection of the film, McCay – dressed like a ringmaster – was present on the stage and gave orders to the animated dinosaur Gertie, which she reluctantly followed. But McCay's use of bidirectional metalepsis went further than the film's use of directive speech acts; we see him also throwing a pumpkin into the image, which Gertie proceeded to eat, and the physical intrusion of McCay himself, who, after disappearing behind the screen, reappeared in Gertie's world (Figure 5). A later version of the film is framed by a live-action scene that shows a wager leading to the creation of the animated dinosaur. McCay's orders are represented by intertitles in this version; the film can thus be shown without McCay performing in person during the projection (Crafton, 1993: 110–113; Bendazzi, 1994: 17). In this version, the metaleptic effect of the film is considerably weakened. Now, the metalepsis is, as discussed above, an extradiegetic intrusion into the diegesis – without the specific appeal of McCay's performance in flesh and blood.

Staging the projection of the film as a performance transforms the extrafilmic context (viewers watching a performance by an actor and a projection of an animated dinosaur) into a representation of this context (viewers acting as fictional viewers watching a ringmaster with an actual dinosaur). Thus, unusual or impossible events can be added to a seemingly real situation. As an actor and fictional ringmaster, McCay pretends to walk through the cinema screen, which is no longer a barrier; its permeability allows filmic action on both sides of it to flow through it, even when the bidirectional transgression is only based on acting, predetermined communication, and visual tricks.

While McCay seems to address Gertie from an extrafilmic context, characters can also create the illusion that they are talking with the audience. Animated films use direct addresses of the audience both as a fraternizing, illusionistic device and as an anti-illusionistic frame break. Besides these addresses, there are various other possibilities for intrafilmic characters to intervene metaleptically in the extrafilmic world. Leonard Maltin (1987), for example, notes the following about the Mutt and Jeff film *Sound Your 'A'* (Bud Fisher, 1919):

Jeff appeared to converse with the conductor of the orchestra which was a standard feature of movie theaters of the day, and then proceeded to lead the band himself – his baton keeping perfect time for the tune being played. (p. 14)

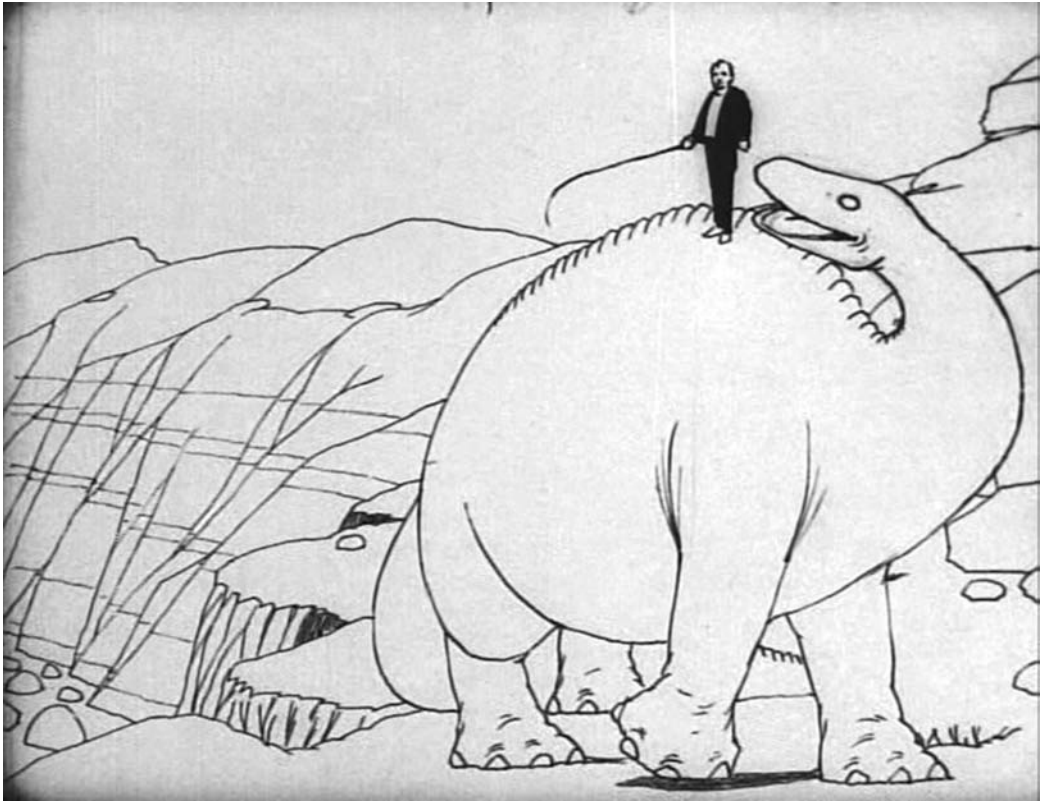


Figure 5. Winsor McCay has entered the world of *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914).

In these examples, performances are responsible for a metaleptic impression of the extrafilmic context. Not only covert performances, but also holographic projections of computer-animation can be used to create these deceptive and potentially manipulative illusions of a metalepsis in reality. Here, metalepsis raises questions about the connection of performance and animation as well as mixed reality applications (Hofer, in press).

6. Ontologically distinct elements within one diegesis

Thus far, I have been concerned with metalepses between distinct diegetic or (con)textual levels. I will now consider a special case: ontologically distinct subworlds within one continuous diegesis. Metalepsis, as mentioned above, is part of a continuum of world-connecting phenomena. Some of these are highly conspicuous and some are even invisible. For many years, Hollywood's spectacle films have shown homogenous worlds based on highly heterogeneous representational techniques, such as *King Kong* (Peter Jackson, Eric Leighton, and Christian Rivers, 2005), that seamlessly mix live-action shots with CGI. Often, we can distinguish these different modes of representation only because of certain revealing details or because of paratextual information, such as commentaries

by the filmmakers. Awareness of this profilmic ontological difference does not usually distract the viewer from constructing one coherent, consistent, and cohesive diegesis.

Not all hybrid films, however, conceal this difference. Throughout the history of animation many films, such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Robert Zemeckis and Richard Williams, 1988), *Pete's Dragon* (Don Chaffey and Don Bluth, 1977) or the German television series *Meister Eder und sein Pumuckl* (Ulrich König and Béla Ternovszky, 1982–1989), have visually exposed and stylistically marked the difference between live-action and animated characters, even if they share the same world. These worlds do not feature ontological boundaries or narrative hierarchies that have to be transgressed; they do not contain proper metalepses. They are, however, quite distinct from blockbusters that completely disguise their profilmic heterogeneity. Certainly, these films are so enchanting because they offer a dual perception of intertextually distinct domains co-existing within one world. Not only do different stylistic representations separate flesh-and-blood humans from animated characters, but they also distinguish between the conventions of genres, which assign different functions and places to them.

In *Roger Rabbit*, humans and toons live in two (film historically) different domains, which are locally separated by a tunnel and contrasted by the anarchistic behavior of the toons and the cliché-ridden film noir sentiments of the humans. In this film there is a clash of two different physical, social, and moral worlds, and even of two different kinds of perception.⁷ Toons and humans move in the same spatial environment, but they still inhabit different sub-worlds, which only partially overlap. This creates metalepsis-like situations. When Roger Rabbit drinks a tiny sip of liquor from a live-action glass his throat bulges disproportionately. The alcoholic liquid is not even visible, but its metaleptic transgression is implied by the radical change of volume and the extreme somatic reaction of the animated character. The liquor changes from real-life physics to cartoon physics.

We can distinguish the following spectrum of ontologically distinct levels:⁸

- a) The live-action world and the animated world are on two different narrative levels and the transgression of the boundary is overtly represented: an animated character leaves the drawing desk in *Out Of The Inkwell: Modeling* (Dave Fleischer, 1921), human characters jump into an image in *Mary Poppins*.
- b) A shared world contains two obviously different domains; there are many connections and transgressions between them. Often, these domains are based on film historical conventions: for example, in *Roger Rabbit* or in *Space Jam* (Joe Pytka, Tony Cervone, and Bruce W. Smith, 1996).
- c) Characters with overtly different aesthetics (and profilmic modes) inhabit the same world. While their difference is apparent, they do not inhabit different domains. They are not based on film historical conventions. Often, fantastic characters (such as Pete's Dragon or Pumuckl) are represented differently to emphasize their supernatural abilities.
- d) Any profilmic difference is concealed. Various techniques and representations (for example, real and computer animated actors, stuntmen, body doubles and extras, matte paintings, miniatures, VFX) are mixed because they are the only way to achieve certain visuals or because they facilitate the production, for example in *King Kong*.

7. Conclusion: naturalized, violent, and continuous metalepses

As we have seen, metalepses are fundamentally paradoxical and aim at disrupting the illusion of a fictitious reality. A metalepsis, however, can also be naturalized, explained as fictional within a narrative and therefore not disruptive at all. A dream, a fantasy, an enchantment, or a hallucination

offer plausible explanations for a seemingly paradoxical transgression of a character to another world. This other world is often quite distinct from the world from which the character starts out. The distinction can be established by differing laws of nature, by different styles of representation (change of color, double exposure, sound effects, etc.), or by an overt depiction of the transgression, which can also be shown retroactively. These patterns have been frequently used in Disney's short and feature films since the 1930s. Within predominantly realistic worlds (even if they are fairytale worlds), paradoxical elements are limited to certain fantastic domains such as dreams – as in *Alice in Wonderland* (Clyde Geronimo, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, 1951) – or intoxication – such as the scene 'Pink Elephants on Parade' in *Dumbo* (Ben Sharpsteen, 1941). These fantastic excursions confirm the reality status of the intradiegesis by showing it as more real than the embedded fiction. These naturalized metalepses therefore have illusionistic effects, corresponding to Disney's idea of the *plausible impossibility*. However, once they are naturalized, they are not metaleptic anymore.

Metalepsis functions quite differently in the works of Disney's anarchistic and surreal predecessors and competitors such as Tex Avery (Limoges, in press). Avery's cartoons – superbly timed and highly exaggerated – are full of self-referential metalepses; transgressions that are at the same time very humorous and very violent. The physics of his worlds is seldom consistent and full of unexpected deviations that are unusual even for a cartoon. Avery often includes metafictional (written) comments, for example, 'corny gag, isn't it' in *Blitz Wolf* (1942) or simply a sprouting corn in *Swing Shift Cinderella* (1945). Intradiegetic characters often refer to extradiegetic elements – Screwly Squirrel in *The Screwly Truant* (1945), for example, reminds Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf of being in the wrong film by showing them the title cards. Characters that do not fit into the diegesis, such as the Disneyesque squirrel at the beginning of *Screwball Squirrel* (1944), get a rough beating and are removed from the film; in *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* (1939), a split screen shot of a phone call not only establishes a filmic connection between two distant locales, but also a physical connection – the police officer is able to reach across the screen to enter the space of the informant.

Furthermore, characters sometimes leave the frame of the filmstrip – in *Dumb-Hounded* (1943), for example, or in *Northwest Hounded Police* (1946), where the respective fugitive is running so fast that he slips into the void beside the edges of the filmstrip (the sequence is very similar in both films). Sometimes characters ignore the temporal order of the film and look at later scenes – to see what they have to do next as in *Screwball Squirrel*, for example. Even (virtual) audience members influence the films: A spectator in/of *Thugs with Dirty Mugs*, who is represented as a shadow on the screen, wants to leave the cinema as he has already seen the film from this particular sequence on, but is forced to stay in the cinema by the gangsters. Cut to the police station: there, the same spectator is able to help the police because he knows how the film will continue (Siebert, 2005: 148–49).

These metaleptic ruptures appear abruptly in Avery's films (and similar MGM and Warner Bros. cartoons). The effect is strikingly anti-illusionistic. Instead of these sudden changes, other films feature continuous changes of an instable storyworld, for example, Dave Fleischer's *Snow-White* (1933). In this film, there are hardly any distinct levels; everything appears constantly blended and in flux. Characters turn into pure form and vice versa; imaginative metamorphoses and an abundance of sight gags replace a coherent narrative.

Unstable diegesis is a similar concept employed in various independent productions. These films often make use of a transformational tracking shot, which shows the constant flow of a multidimensional world, for example in Ryan Larkin's *Street Musique* (1972), in Jacques Drouin's *Mindscape/Le paysagiste* (1976) (Figure 6a), or in Georges Schwizgebel's *78 Tours* (1985) (Figure 6b). Metamorphoses that connect single shots, such as in Caroline Leaf's *The Street* (1976), are

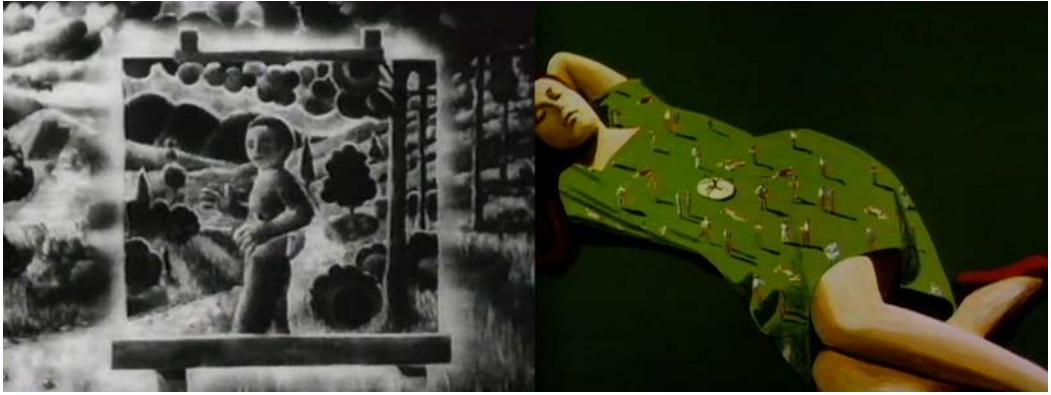


Figure 6. Metalepsis-like transformations in 6a: *Mindscape/Le paysagiste* (1976) © National Film Board of Canada, 1976 and 6b: *78 Tours* (1985) © National Film Board of Canada, 1985.

also similar to these transformational tracking shots (Wood, 2006: 140–43). In a sense, these micro-structural transformations and transitions between stable states and ensuing deviant states can be loosely termed as metalepsis. However, to achieve conceptual clarity, these transformations should not be regarded as proper metalepses.

Finally, we can reconsider the example from the beginning of this article, Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*, which is one of the earliest animated films (Crafton, 1993: 60). Just as with *Snow-White*, *Fantasmagorie* displays a continuously changing world: characters dissolve and transform into objects and vice versa. There are other features of Cohl's film that have been discussed above: A metadiegetic level, in this case a cinema screen, is created by a metamorphosis; this screen is not metaleptically permeated by a character, but its creation is based on the creative intervention of a diegetic being, the clown, who creates and transforms other characters and objects. And thus, one of the first animated characters is himself a creator, metaleptically shaping his own world.

Right from the beginning, animation has explored the potential of metalepsis. Since then, many different configurations of this stylistic device have been used for a variety of reasons: sometimes metalepsis foregrounds the creator, the creation process, or the specific material of an animated film; sometimes metalepsis is a useful tool for exaggeration; and usually it is used to amuse us, to surprise us, and to enchant us. Like its softer cousin metamorphosis, metalepsis lies at the heart of animation. The prolific narratological approach to metalepsis offers a wide range of tools and discussions that can be fruitfully applied to animation. More importantly, animation's unique narrative and aesthetic forms provide vital impulses for a transmedial study of metalepsis.

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Notes

- 1 Wolf reformulated his definition in 2009: 'Metalepsis can be defined as a salient phenomenon occurring exclusively in representations, namely as a usually nonaccidental and paradoxical transgression of the border between levels or (sub)worlds that are ontologically (in particular concerning the opposition reality vs. fiction) or logically differentiated (logically in a wide, not only formal sense, including, e.g. temporal or spatial differences)' (p. 50).

- 2 Wolf (2009: 15–25) offers a concise discussion of the terms *self-reference*, *self-reflection*, and *metareference*.
- 3 A few prominent examples include: Dave and Max Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series, where these intrusions serve as the starting point for each film (1920s); the helping hand in Otto Messmer's Felix the Cat in *Comicalamities* (1928); several Warner Bros. cartoons during the 1940s and 1950s, especially Chuck Jones' *Duck Amuck* (1953) and *Rabbit Rampage* (1955), where they are used as a metareferential element; Terry Gilliam's cutout animations for *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969–1974); Osvaldo Cavandoli's television series *La Linea* (1972–1991), where the intrusive hand both creates and solves problems; Daniel Greaves' short film *Manipulation* (1991), as a sadistic disturbance; Romain Segaud and Christel Pougeoise' computer-animated *Tim Tom* (2002), with similar sadistic intentions; a cursor on a Windows desktop in Alan Becker's *Animator vs. Animation II* (USA 2007).
- 4 This is mainly true for independent productions, where relatively few people are involved. Due to the highly specialized division of labor in commercial productions, many hands are responsible for shaping different aspects of the animated creature there.
- 5 Crafton (1993: 35–47) notes that comics did not have a big influence on animated cartoons even though a lot of gags from the former were used in the latter. However, some of the pioneers of animation and many animators from the silent film era worked originally as cartoonists for newspapers.
- 6 Wulff (2005: 61–66) discusses a motif that he calls 'going into the picture'.
- 7 This sub-division of the diegesis is based on Wulff, 2005: 56–57 and Wulff, 2007.
- 8 Schrey (2010) discusses the complex intermedial relations of animation and live-action.

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