



Meta-Emotion: How Films and Music Videos Communicate Emotions About Emotions

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Abstract: This essay outlines a conceptual framework for analyzing meta-emotions in audiovisual media. Meta-emotions are evaluative thoughts and feelings about emotions that are represented and/or elicited in the viewer. Based on a conceptual analysis of meta-emotion in terms of current emotion theory the essay concludes that meta-emotions are communicated on different levels of cognitive complexity. Cues to meta-emotion can be present in 1) the aesthetic representation of emotions; 2) the narrative context of emotions; and 3) symbolic elements that refer to cultural norms and values concerning emotions. The essay exemplifies this three-level framework using a film scene and a music video. Specifically, the essay analyzes the communication of meta-emotions about anger in *Fight Club*, and meta-emotions about sadness in *Frozen*.

Keywords: audiovisual media, emotional gratification, entertainment experience, meta-emotion

Introduction

Successful entertainment is often considered to be a matter of communicating emotions. Film audiences seem to expect above all that a movie makes them laugh or cry, or that it keeps them at the edge of their seats. In this article I will argue that audiovisual media do even more than represent and elicit emotions in their viewers. In addition to their primary emotional content, they also communicate evaluative thoughts and feelings about emotions. The communication of “meta-emotions” is of particular relevance in terms of explaining why audiovisual media like films or music videos provide their audiences with an opportunity to indulge and enjoy emotions that they would rather avoid in everyday life—such as fear and sadness.

The concept of meta-emotion draws on the analogy with meta-cognition. It states that people can have emotions about emotions much like they can have thoughts about thoughts (see Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold, and Viehoff 2008;



Mayer and Gaschke 1988; and Oliver 1993). One can be ashamed of losing one's temper, be afraid of falling in love, or enjoy being startled. The idea that human emotions form this kind of evaluative meta-structures may explain why intrinsically unpleasant emotions like anger, fear, or sadness are valued under certain conditions, and why intrinsically pleasant ones like joy or love are at times unwelcome. Although each emotion has a preferred hedonic valence, this valence can be modified by the simultaneous presence of a second emotion that reflects and evaluates the experience of the primary emotion.

Like primary emotions, meta-emotions can be communicated through audiovisual media, for instance by representing emotions in such a way as to make them appear fascinating, sympathetic, morally correct, or by representing them in grotesque and sarcastic ways. Such modes of representation communicate specific sentiments or affective appraisals concerning emotions,

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and thereby influence the viewer's experience of the primary emotions. Do we allow ourselves to be touched by the emotional message of media images, or do we distance ourselves? Do we take emotions seriously, or do we take them with humor? Such things are decided within a split second, on a largely preconscious level. However, the communication of meta-emotions in audiovisual media is by

no means accidental. Rather audiovisual media are characterized by a dense and artful arrangement of cues to meta-emotion that evaluate the primary emotional content and color the viewer's experience of emotions in a specific way (see Bartsch 2007a; and Bartsch and Viehoff 2003).

Cues to meta-emotion in audiovisual media can be found on different levels of complexity. The analytic framework I propose is based on the three-level model of emotional communication of Bartsch and Hübner (2005). This article starts with a conceptual analysis of "meta-emotion" in terms of current emotion theory. What does it mean to state that an emotion is about another emotion? The concept of meta-emotion can be construed in different ways, drawing on different theories of emotion. The model of emotional communication is used as an integrative framework to reconcile these different readings of the meta-emotion concept. The second part of this essay demonstrates how this framework can be applied to films and music videos. Specifically, I analyze meta-emotions about anger in *Fight Club* (directed by David Fincher, 1999) and meta-emotions about sadness in the music video *Frozen* (directed by Chris Cunningham for Madonna, 1998).

Defining Meta-Emotion: A Three-Level Approach

What exactly does it mean to state that an emotion is about another emotion? The answer to this question depends, of course, on how the term "emotion"

is defined. Defining emotion is a notoriously difficult task. Thus instead of trying to come up with the one and only definition of meta-emotion, I will propose a set of possible answers, each of which is based on a different emotion theory.

Appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991; and Scherer 1984) consider emotions as an outcome of cognitive appraisal processes. Situations are appraised with respect to a set of appraisal criteria including novelty, valence, goal conduciveness, agency, coping potential, certainty, and normative evaluation. Each emotion is characterized by a specific combination of appraisals that are typical of its eliciting situations—anger, for instance, is elicited by situations that are unpleasant, goal discrepant, normatively inadequate, and at the same time high in coping potential. Drawing on appraisal theories of emotion, we can thus conclude that meta-emotions should result when a primary emotion is appraised in such a way as to fit one of the appraisal profiles that give rise to emotions. For instance, a person may be angry with himself or herself for being fearful, because he or she perceives fear to be unpleasant, to obstruct the attainment of important goals, and to be normatively inadequate, and thinks that fear should be controllable.

A different understanding of the meta-emotion concept can be derived from *neuroscience models of emotion*. Neuroscience models assume that emotions are caused by the activity of emotional brain systems, as for instance the amygdala with its network of cortical and brain stem connectivity. Research by neuroscientists like Damasio (1994) and LeDoux (1996) has shown that emotional brain systems are plastic. Repeated exposure to stimulus or reward contingencies of emotions with other events lead to synaptic changes that encode these contingencies and adjust the system's response to them. Thus from a neuroscience perspective, meta-emotions can be construed as stimulus or reward contingencies of emotions with other emotions that have been encoded in the synaptic architecture of underlying brain systems. As a result, emotional brain systems are connected in such a way that activity in the brain system that underlies the primary emotion will trigger activity in another emotional brain system that gives rise to a meta-emotion.

Script theories of emotions (e.g., Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan 1990) yield a third interpretation of the meta-emotion concept. These theories describe emotions as sensorimotor action scripts. Emotional scripts are activated by way of associative schema matching. If situational cues match a subset of typical script elements, the missing script elements are activated. Drawing on script theories of emotion, meta-emotions can be conceived as higher order schemata that link two emotional scripts. An example of such a higher order schema is the fearful avoidance of aggression. Aggression is a typical element of the anger script. At the same time, it is associated with the fear script, because aggression can lead to harmful consequences for both aggressor and

aggressed. The higher order schema that links anger with fear serves to control aggressive impulses of the anger script that would otherwise go unrestrained.

Social constructionist theories of emotion (e.g., Averill 1991; and Wierzbicka 1995) consider emotions as symbolic concepts that are shaped by cultural norms and values. The rules that govern the use of emotion words and other symbolic expressions are thought to be equivalent to the social norms concerning emotions. That means, if a person finds herself in a situation to which a specific emotion word applies, this person has both the moral right and the moral obligation to experience the emotion, and to behave accordingly. From this social constructionist perspective, meta-emotions can be conceived as symbolic meaning structures. Emotion concepts can refer to other emotion concepts by virtue of their being embedded in larger symbol systems. If, for example, my love qualifies as “infatuation,” this implies that it is socially inappropriate, and that I should be ashamed of it.

All of the four emotion theories considered support the idea that emotions can be about other emotions. This is remarkable, given that these theories describe the processes that give rise to emotions in quite different terms. Thus the question arises whether these theories mean the same thing by “emotion.” In an attempt to clarify this question, Bartsch and Hübner (2005) considered central issues of disagreement between these theories and developed an integrative approach. This integrative framework is based on the assumption that different levels of cognitive complexity are involved in emotion elicitation: 1) innate stimulus-response-patterns, 2) associative schemata, and 3) symbolic meaning. Most emotion theories agree that a full-blown experience of emotion comprises all three levels of complexity, even though the emphasis put on individual levels varies between theories.

It is quite informative to compare the four emotion theories with regard to their preferred level of reference because many issues of disagreement between them could be resolved if contradicting statements about emotions were considered as statements about different levels of complexity of the subject matter. Neuroscience models are primarily about innate stimulus-response patterns. The prototype approach refers to associative schemata. And social constructionist theories deal with symbolic meaning. The only approach that cannot be easily identified with any of these levels are appraisal theories. According to these theories, emotion-eliciting appraisals are processed on all three levels of cognitive complexity (see Lazarus 1991; Leventhal and Scherer 1987; and Smith and Kirby 2001). This assertion is compatible with the premises of other theories about their preferred level of reference (see Bartsch and Hübner 2005).

If applied to the concept of meta-emotion, this three-level framework leads to the conclusion that the relation of meta-emotions to primary emotions is as complex as the relation of primary emotions to their eliciting events. Emo-

tional stimulus-response patterns can be linked with other such stimulus-response patterns on a synaptic level. Emotional scripts can be integrated into higher order schemata that link them with other scripts. Symbolic emotion concepts can refer to other emotion concepts by virtue of their being embedded in larger systems of cultural meaning. All this can be understood as a process of appraisal that evaluates the primary emotion, thereby giving rise to meta-emotions. In an essay on cues to meta-emotion in the final scene of *Casablanca* (directed by Michael Curtiz, 1942) Bartsch and Viehoff (2003) have advanced the hypothesis that successful media entertainment cues positive meta-emotions in redundant ways, on all three levels of complexity.

On a *stimulus level*, emotions are represented in the context of aesthetic stimulus qualities that can be either pleasant and fascinating, or stressful and aversive. Cues to meta-emotions on this level are present in the stylistic devices of emotion representation—such as acting, camera perspective, light, color, music, sound design—that make the sights and sounds of emotion an aesthetically pleasant or unpleasant experience.

On the *level of associative schemata*, emotions are represented in a story context in which emotional behavior can be either productive, leading to positive events like success, social support, and so on, or be counterproductive, leading to negative outcomes like failure, loss, and the like. Cues to meta-emotions on this level are present in narrative devices that guide the viewer's hopes and expectations, thereby defining the touchstone of characters' success and failure at coping with emotions.

On a *symbolic level*, emotions are represented in a cultural meaning context that can either justify them and underscore their moral value, or present them as being morally questionable. Cues to meta-emotions on this level are present in symbolic elements that refer to culturally defined meanings associated with emotions. Examples are the use of national, political, or religious symbols, the use of motives and images with a conventional iconography, and quotations of canonical images, film scenes, and pieces of music.

In the following sections I will exemplify this three-level framework for analyzing meta-emotions using *Fight Club* as a film example and *Frozen* for a music video.

Meta-Emotions About Anger in *Fight Club*

Fight Club tells the story of two friends who create a club of men who fight for the fun of it. The nameless narrator (called Jack in the screenplay and played by Edward Norton) admires the self-conscious and rebellious Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) until the latter becomes uncanny. Tyler seems to build up a terrorist organization aiming at the destruction of banking. Finally, Jack realizes that Tyler is his alter ego. The movie is highly controversial. On the one hand it has been accused of glorifying violence; on the other hands its critique of

modern capitalism and consumerist society has recruited fervent fans and followers, including copyist clubs.

The film scene I choose to analyze in this article shows Tyler Durden's fight with Lou (Peter Iacangelo)—the owner of "Lou's Tavern," where the Fight Club meets for illegal bare knuckle fights. The scene marks a turning point in the filmic representation of violence. Whereas the early fights scenes are basically ironic, playfully reversing negative stereotypes about anger and fighting, the representation of violence becomes more serious in this scene. Negative pre-conceptions about anger and fighting are addressed and countered more directly in this and the following fight scenes.

On a *stimulus level*, positive meta-emotions are cued by aesthetic stimulus qualities of anger representation. The aesthetic representation of anger is partly a result of skillful acting. In the opening part of the scene we see Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) eloquently expressing his anger at capitalist society. The camera focuses on the emotional expression of his face and body in what Carl Plantinga (1999) calls a "scene of empathy." In the reaction shots we see the contagious power of his anger expression among the members of Fight Club. The combined effect of skillful acting and camera perspective creates an atmosphere of heightened awareness and acceptance of anger expression, thereby cueing meta-emotions of interest, linking, and aesthetic pleasure.

The scene is also a great example of "audiovisual metaphors" as defined by Kathrin Fahlenbrach (2005). Another related concept is Carl Plantinga's (2005) notion of "synaesthetic affects." Audiovisual metaphors are perceptual qualities that can be experienced in both auditory and visual modalities, thereby providing a common theme of aesthetic perception. Audiovisual metaphors associated with anger are hard, sharp, rough, and dirty stimulus qualities. These qualities abound in both images and film sound in this scene. We see a lot of hard movements, hard light, sharp contrasts, dirty colors, rough and dirty surfaces, and so on. David Fincher is a master of "dirty" images (consider, for example, his films *Seven* [1995] or *Alien 3* [1992]). In the sound track, we hear the hard, rough, and dirty sounds of rock music, angry voices, the noises of fighting bodies, and so on. This dense and artful arrangement of audiovisual metaphors gives anger a fascinating omnipresence in the filmic word, again cueing meta-emotions of interest and aesthetic pleasure (Figure 1).

On the *schema level*, meta-emotions are cued by the diegetic context of anger representation. When Lou appears on the scene, a classic conflict arises. Lou is standing in the way of Tyler's goals, and Tyler is standing in the way of Lou's goals. Tyler provokes Lou into fighting. Up to this point, the scene conforms to the typical script for anger. But in what follows, the anger script is violated. Instead of fighting back, Tyler lets Lou beat him up. In the first place, this violation of the anger script is motivated by the fact that Lou's bodyguard points a gun at Tyler. Chances are that Tyler will end up with a bullet in his



Figure 1. Aesthetic representation of anger: perceptual qualities associated with the bodily experience of anger such as hardness, sharpness, roughness and dirtiness serve as audiovisual metaphors of anger.

head if he loses control and fights back. This situation creates suspense, because we do not want Tyler to be killed. At the same time we do not want this character to lose his dignity. The suspenseful episode is resolved in a surprising way: the fight is decided on a psychological level. Tyler wins by confronting Lou with his own aggression, and Lou gives up, shocked and disgusted by the bloody consequences of what he has done. He accepts Tyler's demand to tolerate the Fight Club meetings and leaves the basement hurriedly. Thus, for Tyler the anger script comes to a happy end. He gets everything he wanted. After all, Tyler's dignity is fully restored. The character evidences a surprisingly mature, self-determined, and effective way of dealing with anger in this scene, thereby cueing meta-emotions of self-confidence and pride.

This conflict solution leads us to the *symbolic level*, because it conforms to the principle of passive resistance as advocated by historical and religious figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus. Gandhi is explicitly mentioned in one of the dialogues when Tyler and Jack talk about historical figures with whom they would like to fight. Jesus is present in the iconography of the scene's final shot when Tyler is dragged backwards by his friends, his arms extended in a cross-like gesture. The references to Gandhi and Jesus offer a symbolic message about anger: fighting is not equal to violence; you can fight for your goals and get what you want without being violent. Another sym-

bolic context is alluded to by Tyler's anti-capitalist speech at the beginning of the scene. Compared to the structural violence of capitalist society, the direct and honest violence of fistfights seems rather harmless. This idea is central to *Fight Club's* message about anger: natural, anger-related violence has its natural limits—as with Lou, whereas structural violence has none—as with Jack's company that kills people by knowingly selling defective cars. These apparently contradicting messages about anger are two sides of the proverbial coin in *Fight Club's* philosophy of anger and violence. There is nothing wrong with fighting—be it in the form of fistfights or passive resistance—as long as it is direct and honest. The real problem is one of structural violence in a society that tells people to avoid physical violence at any cost. Individual viewers may accept, or reject this symbolic message. In any case it is intended to cue positive thoughts and feelings concerning the moral value of anger and fighting (Figure 2).

To summarize, the representation of anger in this scene invites positive appraisals of this emotion on different levels of cognitive complexity. On a stimulus level, anger expression is represented in an aesthetically fascinating and attractive way. On a diegetic level, the main character displays a self-determined and successful way of dealing with anger. On a symbolic level, the film offers a philosophy of anger and violence that celebrates the virtues of direct and honest fistfights. Although *Fight Club* is special in many respects, I suggest that its principle of redundant cueing of meta-emotions is not. Successful entertainment like *Fight Club* is doing more than representing and eliciting emotions. It also communicates meta-emotions about the emotions that are represented and/or elicited in the viewer. The redundant cueing of positive meta-emotions provides an explanation of why media entertainment succeeds at making neg-

Figure 2. Allusion to Christian iconography in the final shot of the fight scene.



ative emotions like anger, fear, or sadness feel good. It can be assumed that the stable presence of positive meta-emotions affects the hedonic valence of the overall experience thus resulting in a rewarding feeling state that is characterized by a high level of arousal stemming from negative primary emotions, and a positive valence that is due to positive meta-emotions.

Meta-Emotions About Sadness in *Frozen*

My second example is the music video *Frozen* (1998). *Frozen* is a well-known concept video directed by Chris Cunningham for the singer Madonna. The reason I chose this video to analyze in this article is that I used it in a questionnaire and study (Bartsch 2007b), the results of which I will outline following the analysis.

The dominant emotion in *Frozen* is sadness. Love also plays an important role, but in the sense of frustrated love, which is a powerful elicitor of sadness as well. On a stimulus level sadness is communicated through a variety of ex-

pressive cues such as Madonna's sad facial expression, her slow lamenting voice tone, the large variations in voice pitch, her sad head gestures, slow movements, and so on. The video also uses innate elicitors of sadness like the apparent loneliness of Madonna in the vast and empty landscape, and the dark and cold atmosphere of the video. But the video does more than simply represent and elicit sadness. It represents sadness in an artistically purified and embellished way that makes the sights and sounds of it an aesthetically pleasant experience. Madonna's facial and gestural expressions of sadness are arranged in rhythmic ways as if she is dancing. Her vocal expression conforms to musical conventions like the minor key, and is mirrored in the sound features of the instrumental music—for example, the slow tempo, the large variations in pitch, and the “lamenting” violins. The color composition is harmonic and beautiful. Camera movements and cutting are rhythmic and in synchrony with the music. All this contributes to establishing a set of recurring stimulus qualities that provide a common theme of aesthetic perception across different sensory modalities; that is, “audiovisual metaphors” (Fahlenbrach 2005; and Plantinga 2005). The dominant synaesthetic qualities in the video are slowness, softness, and a recurring wavelike pattern of intensity. These qualities are typically associated with the bodily experience of sadness. Sadness is characterized by a decrease in muscle tone that makes movements feel slow and soft, and during episodes of intense sadness bodily arousal and expression occur in wavelike time patterns. This analogy of audiovisual metaphors with proprioceptive qualities associated with sadness can be assumed to foster an experience of “immersion” in, or “melting” with the video as an aesthetic stimulus—an experience that ampli-

The redundant cueing of positive meta-emotions provides an explanation of why media entertainment succeeds at making negative emotions like anger, fear, or sadness feel good.

fies the viewer's awareness of his or her own feelings, and is highly rewarding to many people.

In addition to synaesthetic qualities the video makes use of another aesthetic device, namely, the violation of perceptual expectations. Examples are the use of slow motion, time-lapse, filming of objects out of focus, and proliferation and morphing of objects. According to Patrick Hogan (2005) such violations recruit an innate orienting response that amplifies the intensity of emotional responses and makes the portrayed emotions more interesting for the viewer. Taken together, the stimulus qualities of the video contribute to linking sadness with positive meta-emotions such as interest, fascination, and aesthetic pleasure.

If considered on the *level of associative schemata*, the portrayal of sadness in *Frozen* seems to lack an explicit story context that would allow one to judge the success or failure of the protagonist's emotional behavior. On closer inspection, however, the video contains a number of micro-narratives that are implicit in the use of emotion metaphors. According to Zoltan Kövecses (2000) emotion metaphors revolve around a common master metaphor, namely "emotions are forces." Both the eliciting events and emotions themselves are thought of as forces acting on the subject—for example, natural forces, fluids, gases, animals, human agents, and spiritual forces. Success and failure at coping with emotions is typically expressed as success and failure of an agent who struggles with metaphorical forces. *Frozen* makes ample use of emotion metaphors. The "broken heart" metaphor for instance appears both in the song text and in the image of Madonna who falls backwards and breaks into pieces, which then transform into a swarm of birds. Falling and loss of bodily integrity are typical metaphors of overwhelming sadness. This image also refers to another common metaphor of emotion: "expression of emotion is a release of forces from inside a container." In this case, the container is Madonna's body, and the released forces are the birds. In all three metaphors the subject of emotion is portrayed as a passive victim who is overwhelmed by antagonistic forces.

The "release of inner forces" metaphor is given a somewhat more optimistic connotation, however, by the song's lyrics "love is a bird, she needs to fly." The "broken heart" metaphor of sadness is here semantically linked with the "open heart" metaphor of love. In contrast to the passiveness of the "broken heart" metaphor, the release of emotion is construed as a self-determined act of the subject in the "open heart" metaphor. This positive connotation of releasing inner forces as a self-determined and productive act is further substantiated in a second metaphorical image when Madonna transforms into a dog. This time, the released force does not just run away, it returns and becomes a supportive agent. The dog helps to comfort Madonna and to heal her loneliness, by social behaviors such as running toward her, making eye contact, being attentive, and so on. Thus the released force becomes part

of the solution of the emotion eliciting situation. Madonna is now prepared for the summit of metaphorical action. She starts floating in the air and imposes her will on natural forces like gravity, time, the weather, the moon and the stars, even on life and death—the blood running backwards into her fingers can be understood as the beginning of a new life. In this metaphorical image nearly all of the power relations that are implicit in common metaphors of sadness are reversed. The subject imposes her will on natural forces, the fluid returns into the container, the subject's body is healed, and so on. Thus, on the level of associative schemata the video tells the story of a protagonist who develops from a passive victim of metaphorical forces into an active agent with supernatural powers. This implicit narrative links sadness with meta-emotions such as self-confidence, determination, and hope.

On a *symbolic level* the video includes a number of symbolic references to religious meanings associated with sadness and suffering. The recurring image of the three Madonnas can be interpreted as both the Christian trinity and a six-armed Indian Goddess. The latter meaning is underscored by details like the henna tattoos on Madonna's hands and her symbolic hand gestures. Christian iconography is most explicitly present in the image of Madonna floating in the air—an image that reminds of classical paintings of Mary and refers ironically to the singer's artist's name Madonna. The staging of Madonna as a godlike character conforms to the singer's star image that is associated with a provocative stance toward the Catholic Church and a postmodernist, multicultural mix of religious ideas stemming among others from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Kabbalism. If considered in a religious context, suffering and loss are only transient. The transient nature of suffering is a shared belief among most religions. The suffering subject is reborn into a new life either in heaven or on earth. Another idea that is shared among religions is that loss and suffering are tests of faith. Some religions propagate the ideal of fatalism and detachment from worldly concerns. Suffering is understood as an inevitable condition of human life that needs to be accepted without self-pity and resentment. This meaning context is alluded to in the song's lyrics: "you're so consumed with how much you get / you waste you time with hate and regret."

In the Christian religion, acceptance of suffering is understood in a more heroic way, as self-sacrifice and martyrdom. The self-imposed suffering of Jesus is the touchstone of Christian ethics, and is associated with the promise of liberating mankind from its misery. Mary is closely associated with the Christian semantics of suffering. Like Jesus, her suffering has salutary powers. It is a vicarious suffering, which helps to alleviate the suffering of others. The symbolic references to Mary suggest that Madonna's suffering is of the same altruistic, vicarious kind that helps to heal the suffering of others. It is partic-

ularly meant to heal the frozen heart of the lover addressed in the song text. Thus, on a symbolic level, *Frozen* refers to a religious-meaning context of sadness in that the acceptance of suffering is morally valued and is attributed salutary powers. Of course, the use of religious symbols is not without irony. The willful collage of religious imagery and the immodest comparison of Madonna with Mary communicate an ironic stance that qualifies the religious pathos without denying it completely. The meta-emotions about sadness communicated on the symbolic level can be best described as a mixture of pathos and irony—a mixture that is quite typical of modern pop culture and accommodates the taste of a young audience.

In sum, the representation of sadness in this video is characterized by a dense and artful arrangement of cues to positive meta-emotions on different levels of complexity. On a stimulus level sadness is represented in such a way as to make the sights and sounds of it an aesthetically pleasant and fascinating experience. On the level of associative schemata typical metaphors of sadness are modified in such a way as to reverse the power relationship between the subject and the metaphorical forces, which are implied in metaphors of sadness, thereby communicating meta-emotions of self-confidence, determination, and hope. On a symbolic level sadness is represented in a religious-meaning context in that the acceptance of suffering is morally valued and is associated with salutary powers. The postmodernist play with religious imagery evokes meta-emotions of pathos and irony.

Meta-Emotion and Media Enjoyment: Outlook on an Ongoing Research Project

The communication of meta-emotions is a complex process. The exemplary analyses only considered meta-emotions of an intended viewer, as far as these can be inferred from the make-up of the film or the music video, respectively. To be sure, real viewers can dislike the style of the film or video. They can doubt the narrative or metaphorical message that anger is a productive emotion that can promote conflict solution, or that sadness is a “strong” and self-confident emotion rather than a “weak” one. Finally, the use of religious symbols can be considered as mere blasphemy. My argument is not to say that audiovisual media force certain meta-emotions on their viewers. Rather I propose that the successful communication of meta-emotions is an important prerequisite of media-enjoyment, particularly when the primary emotional content has a negative hedonic valence. In this case, positive meta-emotions are needed in order to make the experience of emotions enjoyable for the viewer.

I conclude with a short overview of an ongoing research project where we tried to substantiate the hypothesis that positive meta-emotions are essential to media enjoyment (Bartsch, 2007b). In one of the studies we used the video *Frozen* and another video of a heavy-metal band that plays with horror

film elements (*Mein Teil*, directed by Zoran Bihac for Rammstein, 2004). In order to assess meta-emotions we constructed a questionnaire measure that includes items such as “I like this feeling,” “I hate this feeling,” “I avoid this feeling if I can,” and so on. For both videos we found that enjoyment of the video was strongly correlated with participant’s report of positive meta-emotions. Another result was that enjoyment of the video was correlated only to a lesser extent with the hedonic valence of primary emotions, meaning that media enjoyment can be predicted more precisely based on meta-emotions than on the basis of primary emotions. Further, meta-emotions were related in meaningful ways to participants’ gender and genre preferences. Women and drama fans experienced more positive meta-emotions in response to *Frozen*. Men and horror fans experienced more positive meta-emotions when watching *Mein Teil*. This indicates that the communication of meta-emotions in music videos is gender-specific, and is based on similar mechanisms as those employed in genre films. These results are promising, but clearly more research is needed in order to substantiate the role of meta-emotions in media enjoyment.

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