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FICTA AND VIRTUALITY:
AN INGARDENIAN ONTOLOGY OF VIRTUALIZED FICTA

Abstract

In my paper, I establish an Ingardenian phenomenological ontology of “virtualized ficta”, i.e., fictional entities introduced to virtual gaming. The first Section of my paper provides an ontology of virtualized ficta, focusing primarily on their “existential moments”. But in order to have a firm grasp of the ontological aspects grounding the virtual work, it’s important to engage its strata. This is what I attempt to do in Section 1.2. Virtualized ficta’s intentional dependencies are strongly manifest in what I call the “strata of the virtual work”. That is, I repurpose Ingarden’s strata of the literary work, the picture, and the film to showcase that virtualized ficta, from the bottom up (i.e., from their pure ontology to aesthetics) are purely intentional entities. In short, I argue for a purely intentional account of virtualized ficta as *ficta-made-virtualia*, whose ontological status is determined by the creative acts of game developers and gamers.

Introduction

Fictional entities problematize our ontology. A fictum is any fictional entity in a story. A fictum can be Sherlock Holmes or his pipe; so, the term isn’t exclusively reserved for fictional characters. The problem with Sherlock and his pipe is that they are not real entities. We could revisit the 19th century London, and we would not find Sherlock residing in 221b Baker Street. In other words, Sherlock’s ontological status is not the same one actual objects possess. Introducing ficta to the virtual world, therefore, can only further complicate their ontology. On the one hand, we have fictional entities that we know from stories. Their identity, as the layman would have it, is comprised of the stories that ground them and the creative acts of an author who created them. On the other hand, we have ficta that are imported into the virtual world. Such entities’ identity, at least *prima facie*, appears to be comprised of the stories grounding their at-

tributes, the creative acts of an author, plus the constituents of the developers' mental acts and the platform that makes their virtualization possible.¹ It is safe to say that virtualized ficta's status can't be radically different from that of pure ficta. That's why it would be favourable to establish an ontology of ficta that would also accommodate virtualized ficta. In this article, I'm interested in the ontology of virtualized ficta (VF). By VF, I mean fictional entities introduced to "virtual gaming", where gamers play as characters borrowed from fiction. I will try to address two main questions here: 1- what ontological status do VF possess? 2- what do game developers and gamers add to the ontology of VF? To address these questions, I will devise Roman Ingarden's phenomenological ontology of the literary work, the picture, and the film.²

1. *An ontology of virtualized ficta*

To make matters easy to follow, I will take the virtual game *Sherlock Holmes: The Devil's Daughter* as the basis for my analysis. In this game, Sherlock and his friend Dr. Watson roam the 19th century London and solve mysteries.³ So, here we have virtual characters that are originally found in the work of Conan Doyle, namely Sherlock and Dr. Watson. By transferring them into the virtual world of the game, these ficta become *virtualized*.

Ingarden's account of pure ficta, I argue, provides a smooth transition to the virtual world. VF are, first and foremost, created *pure intentionalia*. Put differently, VF are a *subset* of pure ficta.⁴ They come to virtual life at a certain temporal stage, following the creative acts of the game developers. Considering VF pure intentionalia also proves helpful with their properties. The virtualized

¹ On a more technical note, it can be asserted, à la Ingarden, that virtualized ficta are inherently imbued with intricate ideal computational models and run on highly specific algorithms tailored to ground the software coding that ultimately gives rise to the development of virtual games (cf. Skowron and Stacewicz 2023. Please note that in their paper, Skowron and Stacewicz investigate the ontology of virtual objects, understood broadly, whereas I am interested chiefly in game objects). The technical specifications of the platforms via which games are accessed may also affect the latter's ontology and gamers' phenomenology. For example, a game played on a highly equipped gaming PC and a technically poor PC may lead to different experiences of one and the same game (I owe this remark to Witold Plotka). I will not offer a further elaboration of the (possible) implications of gaming platforms' technical specifications on the ontology of games and the phenomenology of gamers in this paper.

² I hope to show that VF present us with a "borderline case" that encompasses various components from different artworks

³ It's noteworthy that, while the game series (from which this game is adopted) is inspired by Conan Doyle's work, the Sherlock games sometimes explore new plots that aren't necessarily true to the original stories.

⁴ This rules out the prospect of VF being a different sort of entity *sui generis*.

Sherlock is a purely intentional entity. His properties are merely *intended*. In other words, the creators of Sherlock (Conan Doyle and *Frogwares*) attribute certain properties to him within their works. These properties are to be contra-distinguished from his “strict properties” (i.e., properties whose truth value can be determined outside the books’/game’s narrative). For example, statement (a) is true in the literary works and virtual game containing Sherlock, and statement (b) is false by the same criterion:

(a) *Sherlock possesses the property of being a detective;*

(b) *Sherlock possesses the property of being a woman;*

The aforementioned statements are examples of propositions containing Sherlock’s intended properties. There are also “embodied properties” or properties in the strict sense, whose truth-value can be determined outside of the works containing Sherlock:

(c) *The virtualized Sherlock is developed by EA Sports* is false;

(d) *The virtualized Sherlock is developed by Frogwares* is true;

In short, (a) and (b) are propositions that contain intended properties of Sherlock, properties that can be assessed *within* the relevant works in which he lives. Propositions (c) and (d) contain strict properties of the virtualized Sherlock that can be assessed *outside* the game in which he is represented (cf. Ingarden [1964/65], Eng. tr. 2013: 115-116).⁵

In Ingarden’s doctrine, *ficta* are something over and above their property sets. Yes, they are described as having certain properties. However, we can’t make sense of their properties without associating them with the intentional acts underlying their *ascriptions*, namely: *let Sherlock be an Englishman, a genius detective, a cocaine addict*, etc. These ascriptive acts are not, *sensu stricto*, generative. That is, they do not bring into life *autonomous* entities, whose essence lies within themselves.⁶ By and large, the intendedness of *ficta*’s properties prevents them from acquiring *immanence* (Ingarden [1964/65], Eng. tr. 2013: 115-116, cf. 145).⁷ The same is applicable to VF. Mere sets can’t guarantee *ficta*’s fictionality, let alone their virtuality. The virtualized Sherlock is not just a set of properties. His identity is also comprised of a *fictional-made-virtual* component, without

⁵ In general, this is a feature of *creationist* accounts of *ficta* and fiction. Apart from Ingarden, Thomasson 1999 is an eminent example of Creationism.

⁶ An example of an “autonomous” entity would be an author’s creative acts. These acts exist regardless of the existence of other entities. This is what Ingarden means by an entity’s “being fundamental” being contained within itself. The existence of a fictional character, by contrast, say Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Warren Smith, is not contained within itself. In other words, this *fictum*’s fundament for its being is contained in another entity, namely Virginia Woolf’s creative acts and the acts of competent readers. This is why the latter are autonomous and the former is “heteronomous”.

⁷ I further analyse Ingarden’s account of *ficta* properties (in comparison with Meinong’s) in my paper, “Ingarden vs. Meinong” (2024).

which his virtuality wouldn't be fulfilled. I believe Ingarden's ontology of ficta provides a smooth passage to virtuality, as far as pure ficta are concerned. To elaborate, I will test the applicability of Ingarden's "existential moments" to VF.

1.1. Virtualized ficta's existential moments

"The opposition between autonomy and heteronomy is so radical that nothing can be automatically transferred from the one sphere into the other" (Ingarden [1964/65], Eng. tr. 2013: 152). The virtualized Sherlock is a purely intentional entity, which means that he is *heteronomous*. We can't conceive of the virtual Sherlock as an autonomous entity just because we can see him in a digital form. Heteronomy, *à la* Ingarden, excludes autonomy entirely. An object can't make the switch from heteronomy to autonomy, so ficta's virtuality does in no way entail a change in their heteronomous existential moment.⁸ But one might ask, how about the tools that make ficta virtual, do they change anything in ficta's existential moments? Pure ficta are documented in books, manuscripts, and various folkloric means. VF, *prima facie*, seem to be documented digitally. *Frogwares* developers create a virtual world, in which Sherlock and Dr. Watson solve crimes. The purely fictional world of the Sherlock Holmes stories is replaced with a virtual one. This is, however, merely a change of the formal tools needed to access Sherlock. The introduction of digital tools to get access to Sherlock and his adventures don't change his heteronomy. This line of reasoning would have been approved of by Ingarden. According to him,

the heteronomy of intentional objects is unaffected by whether they are specified and projected directly through an act of consciousness, or indirectly with the aid of some meaningful linguistic structure, or, finally, whether they are formed by an act of consciousness which is itself heteronomous in its intentional structure, as is the case in the instance where the spirit of Hamlet's father is a product of Hamlet's imagination (*ibidem*: 159).

There is, however, one aspect that is altered in the heteronomy of VF. The virtualized Sherlock is *borrowed* from the purely fictional Sherlock created by Conan Doyle. The pure fictum Sherlock, as Ingarden would argue, has his "immediate existential foundation" in the words and sentences of the works that contain him thanks to their "borrowed intentionality".⁹ These sentences, in turn, have their immediate existential foundation in the creative acts of Doyle. So,

⁸ Note that Ingarden draws a line between "existential moments" (autonomy/heteronomy, originality/derivativeness, etc.) and "modes of being" (being real, ideal, possible, etc.). "Existential moments are repeatable features that occur across different modes of being: they are moments because they are not themselves independent modes of being, and they are existential because they determine modes of being" (Simons 2005: 41).

⁹ Cf. Ingarden (1965), Eng. tr. 1973: 125-6.

ficta's existential foundation is "derivative".¹⁰ The virtualized Sherlock, I argue, keeps with him this moment of derivativeness. He is derivative with regards to (1) the propositions of the works that contain his descriptions (including virtual works), (2) Doyle's creative acts, *plus* (3) the creative acts of *Frogwares* developers.

This is where it gets tricky. How can the creative acts of the developers, which are themselves autonomous, be part of VF's heteronomy? To avert this difficulty, let me stress two components that are discussed by Ingarden. First, in Ingarden's system of dependencies, derivativeness doesn't exclude autonomy. A derived entity, following its genesis, can become autonomous. "[A derived, autonomous entity] can therefore be characterized by that immanence of its determinations that we have already discussed, but its being (as the being of a derived entity) does nonetheless have its origin in some other entity" ([1964/65], Eng. tr. 2013: 144). Second, Ingarden distinguished between the "source" of an entity and its "existential foundation". A derived heteronomous entity lacks both a source of its own and an existential foundation of its own. To put it another way, "in the latter case, not only does the *source* of its being inhere in some other object, but also the *foundation* of its existence" (*ibidem*: 145). I believe this distinction fits neatly the case of VF. The creative acts of Conan Doyle are the *source* of *Frogwares* developers' creative acts, which lead to the emergence of the virtualized Sherlock. Although they are derivative in this sense, the developers' creative acts are themselves autonomous (i.e., their existential foundation is immanent to them). This derivativeness, however, is only applicable to the creative acts leading to aspects of Sherlock that are true to the original creative acts of Conan Doyle.¹¹ As I have mentioned in my introduction, the Sherlock game series is not necessarily faithful to the original Sherlock stories as penned by Doyle. So, the derivativeness of the developers' creative acts only concerns the properties of Sherlock that they have borrowed from Doyle. New properties or story details that have been intentionally added by the game developers, I argue, have *both* their source and existential foundation in those very acts, which makes the generated VF purely heteronomous, *vis-à-vis* the developers' mental acts.¹²

So far, I have established an Ingardenian ontology of VF, focusing primarily on their existential moments.¹³ But I haven't said much about VF's world and our place in it. Recipients of art works occupy a high position in Ingarden's

¹⁰ Cf. Ingarden (1964/65), Eng. tr. 2013: 117.

¹¹ By "original", I simply mean the "first" creative acts that preceded those of the game developers. I certainly don't mean "original" as an existential moment, in the sense that the author's creative acts could not have been created (cf. Ingarden's [*ibidem*: 118-146] originality/derivativeness distinction).

¹² This formulation strengthens the status of VF as a subset of pure ficta.

¹³ Hence addressing the first question laid out in my introduction. The second question will be addressed in the following section.

ontology. They certainly are not to be treated as passive recipients. The same, I argue, holds for virtual gaming. In the following, I shall pinpoint the important role “gamers” play in determining the ontological status of VF and their worlds. To do so, I will devise Ingarden’s strata of the literary work, the picture, and the film to put forth my proposed “strata of the virtual work”.

1.2. *The strata of the virtual work*

The virtual work is essential for virtualized ficta’s life, in the same way the literary work is for pure ficta’s life. It is, therefore, important to tackle the various strata that make up the virtual work. To execute the latter, I will rely on Ingarden’s intricate strata of several art works. In his 1973, Ingarden defended an original account of the literary work’s structure. He outlined a number of strata that, together, constitute the literary work as a work of art. The Literary Work of Art (LWA) is comprised of various “heterogeneous strata”. From the literary work, the following strata can be repurposed to describe the virtual work’s strata.

1.2.1. *The stratum of linguistic sound formations*

Words and *sentences* play an important role in Ingarden’s intentionality. It’s no surprise, then, that they have a stratum of their own. Words and sentences are components of *language*, and language, according to Ingarden, is the instrument that conveys the literary work’s artistic values ([1965], Eng. tr. 1973: 56). A sentence is characterized by a succession of word sounds, which brings about its *melody* through “rhyme” and “assonance”. The succession of word sounds in a sentence also plays an important role in generating its “emotional” or “mood” qualities (*ibidem*: 51-52). Determining one aspect of the LWA is not the only function that the stratum of linguistic sound formations has. This stratum is also important in “constituting” and “unfolding” the functions of the other strata. From an ontological standpoint, there are no word sounds without meaning. Therefore, to eliminate the stratum of linguistic sound formations is tantamount to eliminating the stratum of meaning units, which in turn would make the other strata meaningless. From a phenomenological standpoint, word sounds are what the “psychic subject” (reader) hears, and they are what *directly* give rise to an intentional act, which consequently uncovers the *intendedness* of a meaning (*ibidem*: 56-59).

The stratum of linguistic sound formations is applicable to the virtual work. The Sherlock game is characterized with a linguistic element as well. The characters, at times, converse with each other in English. A major difference between games and books is that gamers, sometimes, don’t even have to read the words and sentences displayed on the screen directly. Characters usually utter those words, hence resulting in more real-like scenarios. Sentences in virtual games have their “tempo” determined by characters. The melody of sentences in games also conveys their mood qualities. We can literally hear in Sherlock’s

voice (which is used to convey word sounds) that he is shocked his adopted daughter, Katelyn, is in his apartment, or angry when Dr. Watson tells him to reveal the identity of Katelyn's biological father to her. So, the most important difference between gamers and book readers is that gamers don't have to directly partake in the linguistic sound formations stratum. With that said, gamers still have to assign a meaning to the uttered word sounds. While their role as regards uttering word sounds may be *phenomenologically* indirect (i.e., through hearing uttered sounds of a written dialogue), it is important that they engage first-hand with the word sounds to ascribe them a meaning, for, *ontologically* speaking, the former are essentially connected with the latter. In addition, through hearing the uttered word sounds and ascribing them a meaning, gamers are presented with an immediate intentional act that makes the ascribed meaning merely intended.

1.2.2. *The Stratum of meaning units*

Ingarden acknowledged that not all word meanings are the same. He distinguished between words such as *table*, *chair* ("names"; their meanings are "nominal word meanings") and "syncategorematica" (*is*, *or*, *and*, etc.) ([1965], Eng. tr. 1973: 62-63). A word meaning, considering it an intentional act, is dependent, both for its origin and existence, on conscious acts. Saying that a name has this or that meaning means that the word intentionally *designates* a certain object. This act of designation can only be fulfilled by a conscious subject, who bestows a meaning on a certain word (*ibidem*: 100). The intentionality of meaning units is especially manifest when we consider sentences. Any *state of affairs* created by the sentence is purely intentional, and for that it should be distinguished from states of affairs that have the potential of *objectively* existing in an ontic sphere independent of that of a sentence (*ibidem*: 107-115). The literary work's intentional states of affairs may create the illusion of an autonomous ontic sphere, where in fact the world of fiction is merely intended (*ibidem*: 175-9).

The virtual world of Sherlock is no different. The states of affairs conveyed by the game's sentence units are purely intentional. For example, *Sherlock's solving Zacharias Greystoke's murder* is a sentence stating a purely intentional state of affairs. The meaning of this sentence is dependent for both its generation and existence upon the conscious acts of the game's developers and gamers. That is, they bestow upon the objects designated by the words making up the sentence a purely intentional meaning. In the sentence just stated, Sherlock's and Greystoke's nominal meanings correspond to the characters in the game by virtue of their heteronomy, as regards the conscious acts of the developers/gamers. The virtual work's purely intentional states of affairs make gamers engaged in a merely *quasi-reality*. All objects designated by purely intentional sentences can't live objectively in an autonomous ontic sphere. In the following sub-section, I will take on these objects that are created by intentional sentence meanings.

1.2.3. *The stratum of represented objects*

Represented objects can be persons, events, states of affairs, etc. A literary work's represented objects are *derived* purely intentional objects. In other words, these objects have their immediate existential foundation in the meaning units that contain them, which are in turn existentially dependent on the conscious acts of an author and, ultimately, reader. So, represented objects are primarily "correlates of sentences" that form a unified ontic sphere, in which objects are said to exist. Represented objects' background is projected by the potential stock of word meanings. When an author writes that a character is sitting in a room, readers devise the potential stock of the word meanings therein to "place" the character in a real-like environment. To regard an object as being real, it must be represented as existing within space–time. This is a "unique" space–time that is reserved only for the represented real world. An important element that represented space–time borrows from actual space–time is "continuity". This is manifest in cases where an author "moves" a character from one spatial location to another without covering the travelled distance in the narration. The continuity of space *corepresents* the intervening space. This equally holds for represented time. The continuity of time is accounted for by readers, who help bridge the temporal gaps (Ingarden [1965], Eng. tr. 1973: 218-242).

Sherlock's virtual world is also a represented objectivity. The virtual world, along with its objects, is derived, in relation to the meaning units containing its descriptions, which are themselves dependent on the conscious acts of developers and gamers. The virtual background of Sherlock is projected by their potential stock (i.e., represented *virtualia* don't refer to actually existing objects). The elements discussed above are also applicable to virtual objects. In the game, when Sherlock has to travel from one location to another, gamers can just "fast travel" directly to their desired location. The continuity of represented space fills that spatial gap. As regards represented time, gamers *involuntarily* fill in any temporal gaps in the game.¹⁴ For instance, in the case of *A Study in Green*, the virtualized Sherlock conducts an investigation into the murder of Zacharias Greystoke. Sherlock's investigation leads him to Bernard Marley's foundry. Sherlock is dissatisfied with Marley's account and decides to break into the foundry at night with Dr. Watson. Sherlock's return to the foundry at night breaks the continuity of time as it is in reality. This break is made for by gamers, who involuntarily but intentionally fill the temporal gap in the game.

¹⁴ Ryan's "spatial immersion" and "temporal immersion" can help us make sense of the representation of space–time in narrative fictions. An important aspect that Ryan points out appertains to the nature of "immersion" in written texts and visual media. Ryan indicates that language can only immerse readers *gradually* in a fiction's space–time, whereas pictures immerse spectators *instantly*. "And unlike pictures, language is the medium of absence. It does not normally re-present by creating an illusion of presence to the senses, as do visual media, but rather evokes the thought of temporally or spatially distant objects (deictics being a notable exception)" (2001: 122).

Gamers' significance in determining the ontological status of virtualized ficta will be more spelled out in the following sub-section.

1.2.4. *The stratum of schematized aspects*

Schematized aspects transcend both the objects represented and the experiences through which they are represented. Schematized aspects can exist in both the states of affairs projected by sentences and in the represented objectivities. These aspects are "concretized" by the reader, who fills in any unfulfilled qualities in their content, relying on the contents of previously experienced *concrete* aspects. These schematized aspects are primarily touched in the concretization of simple states of affairs or represented objects. To consider a literary work a work of art, its schematized aspects, once concretized, must be represented in an aesthetic manner (i.e., they must be aesthetically valuable)¹⁵ (Ingarden [1965], Eng. tr. 1973: 255-268).¹⁶

The virtual world of Sherlock is filled with schematized aspects, some of which are fulfilled and some not. This is where gamers come in. The Sherlock game is full of represented objects: tables, chairs, houses, people, etc. For example, someone can say that Sherlock has two hearts. Neither Conan Doyle nor *Frogwares* developers have covered Sherlock's heart. It is, therefore, a "spot of indeterminacy". Gamers know that Sherlock is a represented objectivity mirroring an actually existing man, and hence assume he has one heart and not two hearts. Gamers are able to fill out such spots of indeterminacy because they are familiar with previously experienced concrete qualities of various aspects (e.g., that a man has only one heart). Moreover, schematized aspects govern the overall world that is projected by virtualized ficta. We can consider the virtual work containing Sherlock as a work of art only if its schematized aspects are concretized by gamers. By concretizing its schematized aspects, gamers determine the aesthetic value of the virtual work and act as "co-creators" of the work.

1.2.5. *The virtual work as picture*

Merely exploring the strata of the LWA and their application to the virtual world falls short in some respects. For starters, literary works and video games are remarkably different, and merely reducing the latter to the former would not be much of a contribution to contemporary aesthetics. One thing that is present in video games and absent from literary works is the *visual* aspect. The virtual world of Sherlock is comprised of various *pictures* harmoniously interacting with one another, resulting in a real-like virtuality. This formulation goes along the lines of Carroll's 1996 "moving image". That is, the virtual world of

¹⁵ For more on the LWA's aesthetic value and how it differs from its artistic counterpart, see my 2022.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of Ingarden's strata of the LWA, see Mitscherling 1997.

Sherlock is comprised of *moving images*.¹⁷ The pictures comprising Sherlock's world would be described as *presentational* by Ingarden. Put differently, these pictures present some objectivity in a real-like manner. This constitutes one stratum of the picture, namely that which "comes to appearance" or is presented. In the virtual world of Sherlock, the pictures therein present many things. The way in which these things are presented is intended by the game's developers to mirror reality, as to allow gamers to be fully engaged in the experience. The objects presented in a picture have an *aspectual* character. That is to say, they only present certain aspects, while leaving other aspects unfulfilled. In reality, we can inspect different aspects of an object, and hence eventually fulfil all of its aspects. We can't achieve this in the picture. We can only access the picture's objects as given aspectually. In short, these objects

are not real elements of the painting in the sense of the real thing hanging on the wall. Rather they constitute elements of the 'picture' as a work of art. As such, they are purely intentional formations that are constituted in other kinds of elements of the picture or of the painting, and are ontically relative to these, as also to certain intentional operations of the artist or beholder. But that wherein they are constituted in the picture forms a new element of it. This element consists of the visual perceptual aspects that are reconstructed in the picture (Ingarden [1962], Eng. tr. 1989: 146).¹⁸

It is the painter's job to "reconstruct" the perceptual aspects of a painting, as to allow the picture's presented objects to be perceivable to the viewer (*ibidem*: 149). The picture's reconstructed aspects shape its second stratum, which "form the constitutively most important element of the picture, without which there would be no presentational picture at all and also no aesthetic object belonging to the art of painting" (*ibidem*: 150). The aspects stratum is also present in the structure of the virtual work. The represented objects are only aspectually given at any moment. However, unlike that of the picture, the virtual work's aspectual character varies from object to object. For instance, in the game, Sherlock examines photos or maps. Gamers can closely inspect these objects by rotating them however they like. In so doing, gamers fulfil all the aspects of the examined objects. With that said, virtual objects are mostly aspectual in character, just like those in the picture. Moreover, a crucial component that the picture's strata add to the virtuality of Sherlock, which is absent in the case of literary works, appertains to his *individuation*. To elaborate, when we read Conan Doyle's work, we imagine a fictum that corresponds to the properties ascribed to Sherlock. When it comes to games, we don't have to imaginatively construct Sherlock according to his ascribed properties as we do when read-

¹⁷ Carroll attributes the "moving image" primarily to film. An investigation of the moving image in relation to videogames can be found in Meskin and Robson 2010.

¹⁸ Ingarden here contrasts the picture with the physical painting.

ing the fiction. The virtual Sherlock is reconstructed by the game's developers. This reconstruction renders our imagining of a Sherlock corresponding to his property set obsolete, for a *unified* Sherlock is instead presented to us. This allows gamers to imagine one and the same virtualized Sherlock when invited to picture an entity with Sherlock's property set.¹⁹ The strata of the virtual work as picture manifest that VF, just like pure ficta, are something over and above their property sets. Sherlock is not a mere property set. He is a created entity, with representational and reconstructive acts going into its virtualization. The imaginative acts underlying Sherlock's generation and property ascription are further foregrounded when we add a virtual component.

There is another picture stratum that can strengthen the fiction/virtuality link. This is the fourth stratum, which Ingarden describes as "going beyond" the presented. There are some pictures, whose presented objects take us beyond themselves into a "literary theme". In order to fathom such works, we need to deploy literary means ([1962], Eng. tr. 1989: 143).²⁰ The pictures comprising the virtual world of Sherlock perfectly exemplify this stratum. To contextualize the work's pictures, we automatically read into them a literary theme, namely Doyle's literary corpus. As far as VF are concerned, we can't isolate the fictional from the virtual.²¹ We often (involuntarily) situate the moving pictures in the world of the literary work. To put it another way, the virtual world is a re-representation of the literary world.

1.2.6. *The virtual work as film*

Just as I described the virtual work as being comprised of "moving images", Ingarden describes the film as being comprised of "images":

What does a cinematographic drama present us with? A discontinuous manifold of 'images' that conceals its discontinuity, each image being a reconstruction by photographic means of a visual aspect of a determinate object or objective situation.

As the images move, Ingarden proceeds, they give rise to objectivities extended in time, "*events in their total concrete development*" ([1965], Eng. tr. 1973: 323-324). Film is the closest, ontologically speaking, to the virtual work. That is, film can be considered to be the sum of all the aforementioned strata. In film, we have a natural flow of pictures, each representing an objectivity concretely. Silent films apart, the film also contains a linguistic element, endowed with various

¹⁹ Granted that the appearance of Sherlock slightly varies from game to game, it is still the closest we have to a unified individuation of Sherlock.

²⁰ For more on the picture's strata, see Mitscherling 1997: 175-181.

²¹ This is also apparent in the identity of the strata found in the LWA and the virtual work (see 1.2.-1.2.4.).

meaning units. In a perfect world, the virtual work would be just as real as the film. Alas, we are not in a perfect world, and the two kinds of works differ in many respects. Yes, the virtual work is comprised of moving pictures, each being intentionally a representation of real objectivities, but the events represented therein are not concrete. That is, they are not taking place in a real space–time. Virtual objectivities are merely intended, and so is the world in which they are taking place. This is what Ingarden depicts as the film’s constituting stratum, namely *visual aspects*:

In other words, here the *sole* constituting ‘material’ is the *reconstituted* visual aspects, and they perform their constituting function by effecting the appearance of corresponding objectivities. For this reason they attain decisive importance here. Things and people are given to us in the happenings quasi-perceptually, ‘from the outside,’ so to speak, and everything that we experience about them – indeed, everything they are – must have its basis in the manifold of reconstituted aspects (*ibidem*: 324).

I’m not sure if the film’s events are given to us quasi-perceptually. I would rather say that we experience films perceptually and games quasi-perceptually.²² The reconstituted objectivities in the film are from our world; they’re just remade for cinematic purposes. A game’s happenings, by contrast, are merely intended to mirror real happenings. Everything about games, from their initial conceptualization to production, is merely intentional. The virtual work’s space-time, accordingly, is merely quasi space-time. Gamers’ interactions with the game’s happenings are also merely quasi-experiences. Ingarden could reply to my scepticism, stating that the reconstituted objects in a film, even if they are real objects, only play a “role”, and for that they are also purely intentional.²³ Even if true, this wouldn’t make filmic objects purely intentional, for their reality is independent of the roles they play. If you take them outside of the film, they would still be real objects. The same cannot be said about virtual works. Virtualized objects are purely intentional. Take them out of the virtual work, and they would cease to be. By and large, the parallels between the film and the virtual work would be those of reconstituted objectivities and moving pictures. Both the film and the virtual work strive to depict real-like happenings; with a crucial difference separating the two, i.e., *contra* Ingarden, the film’s reconstituted objectivities are externally real, while the game’s are purely intentional.

²² O’Shiel, too, takes gaming experiences to be phenomenologically distinct from perceptions (cf. 2022: 153).

²³ Cf. Ingarden (1965), Eng. tr. 1973: 327.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to establish a phenomenological ontology of VF as a subset of pure ficta, relying on Roman Ingarden's corpus. The first Section of my paper has provided an ontology of VF, focusing primarily on their existential moments. But in order to have a firm grasp of the ontological aspects grounding the virtual work, it is important to engage its *strata*. This has been the objective of Section 1.2. The virtual work's strata support its purely intentional ontological status. As has been demonstrated in my paper, each stratum is built intentionally and contains intentional elements within it. Put together, the virtual work's strata lay the ground for its *concretization*, which is necessarily correlated with its *aestheticization*. By and large, I have argued for a purely intentional account of VF as *ficta-made-virtualia*, whose ontological status is determined by the creative acts of the game's developers and gamers. Developers project VF's moments and strata digitally, and gamers unlock their world's aesthetic value through acts of concretization.²⁴

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