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Gregor Samsa's Spots of Indeterminacy: Kafka as Phenomenologist

Abstract

Kafka's presentation of Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* is explicable using Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art. The common heritage of Kafka's and Ingarden's theoretical commitments (Franz Brentano) might explain the conceptual parallel. More importantly, an Ingardenian analysis of Gregor Samsa demonstrates that (1) Kafka is at least implicitly aware of some of the central tenets of later phenomenology and uses them to literary advantage; and (2) Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art works particularly well in the case of Kafka's novel, which provides an example of some of the analysis' more obscure aspects (in particular, Ingarden's concept of spots of indeterminacy).

Keywords

Phenomenology, Ingarden, Ontology, Schematized Aspects, Indeterminacy

Chronology precludes, of course, the idea that Franz Kafka could ever have come to know Ingarden's theory of the ontology of the literary work of art by reading it; Kafka died four years before Ingarden started writing *The Literary Work of Art*. Nevertheless, the work of the literary master seems to exhibit the nuances of Ingarden's ontology. Kafka's presentation of Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* not only serves as an example of Ingarden's theory in general (providing support to the idea that Ingarden's analysis is correct), it embodies the potential for the manipulation of that ontology that Ingarden anticipates in his analyses. That is to say, despite the obvious anachronism, Kafka

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seems to take Ingarden's ontology as an assumption and then aim, in addition, to *play* with the ontology, demonstrating the potential of the literary work of art to present a world analogous to the real, except insofar as in the world Kafka has realized in *Metamorphosis*, there exists a large and grotesque beetle-like monster with a human consciousness who's quite concerned about missing his train.

There is a common ancestor to the theoretical commitments of both Kafka and Ingarden that may lead us to wonder whether Kafka's theoretical commitments were, in fact, as similar to Ingarden's as they seem (as we might expect because of similar philosophical heritage), or if Ingarden was aware of the work of Kafka and intended that his analysis be inclusive enough as to provide an explanation of Kafka's alternative realism (though Ingarden nowhere refers to Kafka in *The Literary Work of Art*). Barry Smith has already done significant work on Kafka's adoption of Brentano's conception of inner sense (an Aristotelian notion from *De Anima* III.2 which finds its way, after Brentano, into the foundations of phenomenology as explored by Husserl and subsequently Ingarden) (Smith 1997).¹ With this historical knowledge, we might proclaim that the theoretical commitments of Kafka and those of Ingarden have notable similarities because of their common heritages—the Brentano connection.

I take this as given and propose to extend the analysis of parallels between the work of Kafka and the foundational concepts of phenomenology.² Not only does Gregor Samsa exemplify the Brentanian concept of inner consciousness; upon further development of the ontology developed by early

¹ Barry Smith makes the connection between the Brentanian concept of inner consciousness and Kafka's narrative style, noting that, "such variant modes of experience, and the peculiar plasticity of the world which is their correlate, form a constantly recurring theme in Kafka's writings." Smith argues that Kafka's knowledge of Brentano contributes, for instance, to how we access the inner monologue of Gregor Samsa (Smith 1997). Smith credits Klaus Wagenbach with being the first to point out the Brentanian influence on Kafka's literary work.

² I am not the only one to apply Ingarden's theoretical work on the literary work of art to specific literary works of art to which Ingarden did not himself refer. These applications demonstrate that Ingarden did not need to cherry pick examples; his analysis applies to all literary works of art. (Ingarden's definition for what qualifies as a work of art is minimal. A work of art must have represented objects; this is why the analysis applies so broadly.) See the analyses in Jeff Mitscherling's *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics* of James Joyce's *The Dead* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*. Mitscherling's analysis, like mine, "serves to verify further Ingarden's conception of the literary work of art" (Mitscherling 1997, 152).

phenomenology, Gregor also comes to exemplify and extend our concept of the intentional object in the literary work of art, the acts of consciousness through which we access that object, and the malleability of the presented world in comparison to the material one, made possible by the quasi-judgments we form of the intentional object, its spots of indeterminacy, and its schematized aspects. (Schematized aspects will be variously indeterminate. For example, if an author says someone has "an average face," the fact that the face has a nose is determinate; whether the nose is a snub nose is indeterminate, depending on whether we interpret the average nose to be snub or not.) Such connections, while they can find historical explanations, are interesting not only because of their history, but because we can find in Kafka an exemplar of Ingarden's ontology of the work of art, which speaks to its accuracy. That is to say, I locate a common Brentanian model in Kafka's literary work and in Ingarden's analysis of literary works. Kafka's literary work provides an example of Ingarden's analysis, which reinforces the strength of that analysis, while Ingarden provides an ontological analysis applicable to Kafka's literary work, which reinforces the idea that there are philosophical concepts at work in Kafka's literature.

Spots of Indeterminacy in Gregor Samsa's Physical Form

The phenomenology Ingarden inherits from Husserl posits "the intentional object" to be the object, content, or material of an act of consciousness.³ The intentional object is that to which consciousness is directed, while the form of consciousness is the way in which consciousness is attending to that object. In Ingarden's ontology, objects represented in literary works are intentional objects. (They are the objects of consciousness of the author, who "realizes" them in the literary work of art, at which point they become possi-

³ The definition of an "intentional object" is adapted from Brentano's definition of a mental phenomenon, which is defined according to its reference to a content. The content is what I refer to here as the "intentional object." Brentano specifies, in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*: "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on" (Brentano, 1973, 88).

ble objects of consciousness for the reader. Represented objects within literary works include the characters, settings, events—any part or aspect of the fictional world of the literary work.) But a representation is never a complete representation, and therefore intentional objects have “schematized aspects”—aspects of the object that aren’t specified by the author, but are nevertheless posited to exist. We might think of the schematized aspects of intentional objects as analogous to the unfulfilled aspects of a spatiotemporal object; but whereas it is possible to turn a real object around to see its back side, we can’t turn an object represented in literature around to see what’s there. Thus, these schematized aspects allow for spots of indeterminacy—things we don’t know about them and perhaps can’t know.⁴ Gregor Samsa is an intentional object whose spots of indeterminacy allow for various interpretations of what exactly he *is*, and he serves as an example of the limitations that exist on the possible interpretations of a literary work of art. It is possible to imagine Gregor Samsa as any one of several types of beetle or possibly a cockroach. The word Kafka uses is *Ungeziefer*, or “vermin;” it is not specific enough to connote an insect (*Insekt*) or even a bug (*Wanze*).⁵ It is possible to imagine Gregor retaining some of his human characteristics, as he in fact does with respect to his size and the complexity of his consciousness. At one point, for instance, Gregor imagines how he would one day tell his sister all about how he would have paid for her to attend the conservatory, if only he hadn’t undergone his metamorphosis. Gregor imagines how he would kiss his sister on the neck:

After this declaration his sister would burst into tears of emotion, and Gregor would raise himself up to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck which, ever since she started going out to work, she kept bare, without a ribbon or collar (Kafka 1972, 49).

⁴ Ingarden explains “spots of indeterminacy” in section 38 of *The Literary Work of Art*. He explains, “If, e.g., a story begins with the sentence: ‘An old man was sitting at a table,’ etc., it is clear that the represented ‘table’ is indeed a ‘table’ and not, for example, a ‘chair;’ but whether it is made of wood or iron, is four-legged or three-legged, etc. is left quite unsaid and therefore—this being a purely intentional object—not *determined*. The material of its composition is altogether unqualified, although it must be some material. Thus, in the given object, its qualification is *totally absent*: there is an ‘empty’ spot here, a ‘spot of indeterminacy’” (Ingarden, 1973, 249).

⁵ Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who reports that Kafka and his friends would refer to the *Metamorphosis* as the *Wanzesache* or “bug-piece.” “Bug” is still a general enough term to allow for the indeterminacy I locate in Kafka’s characterization of Gregor. What kind of bug or vermin he is, is a spot of indeterminacy, in Ingarden’s sense.

There are, of course, various ways that we could interpret this. We could choose to believe that Gregor is, in fact, some kind of definite beetle with two rows of wiggling little legs and lips capable of kissing.⁶ We could alternatively imagine that Kafka means to indicate that Gregor himself maintains an incorrect notion of his capabilities. (This option seems unlikely, as by this point in the book Gregor has come to be able to manipulate his metamorphosed body with relative ease; it therefore seems as if his new body would be factored into his imaginations of possible future acts.) Or we might choose to skip over it entirely, as the addition of this possibility doesn't necessarily alter our conception of Gregor all that much. But if we have read our Ingarden, we will read it as a contradiction introduced by the author in order to create chaos in the consciousness of the readers, who will find themselves unable to reconcile Gregor's vermin form with the action of kissing his sister's neck, yet nevertheless do so.⁷ This is accomplished, according to Ingarden's analysis, during the reader's "concretization" of the intentional object (the literary work of art itself and whatever objects are represented in it).⁸ The author puts forth some potentialities (the limits according to which we might interpret what Gregor is), and then the reader concretizes Gregor as some kind of vermin, despite the fact that the information we have to go on to enact the concretization is contradictory—and Ingarden makes note of this possibility.

"How willing we are to accept the artist's magic!" says Stanley Corngold in the introduction to the 1972 Bantam edition of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. (Kafka 1972, xl, footnote 6) In order to even begin questioning the possibility of Gregor placing a kiss on the neck of his sister (made possible here, not by specifying that he has lips, but by specifying she does not wear a ribbon or collar), we must assume from the beginning that it is possible that a man

⁶ As my reviewer points out, I am the one making the assumption that something capable of kissing definitely has lips. This is left indeterminate by the text, which only specifies Gregor's intention to kiss his sister. I introduce what I believe to be a general assumption—that kissing things have lips.

⁷ Ingarden says, "It may happen that the duality of the state of affairs does not split the identity of the represented object but rather attributes to it, as it were, two different properties, though in such a way that neither of them definitively pertains to the object but, instead, both simultaneously claim to pertain to it; consequently, neither of them is capable of fully entering with it into the primary unity of existence. From this there stems a certain tension in the object, a state in which equilibrium is destroyed" (Ingarden 1973, 254).

⁸ An intentional object within the literary work of art is "concretized" when it becomes an object of consciousness for the reader.

should become some kind of massive vermin while retaining human consciousness, despite the fact that we should know very well that the physical form he has taken *should* preclude the possibility of the complex nervous system Gregor would require to be so spiteful towards the lodgers mistreating his family.⁹ We are willing to accept, however, the idea that Gregor's hiding under the couch while his sister cleans is not due to any fear of light (as we might expect) but due to the fact that he is a particularly polite beetle-cockroach-man-monster. We accept the artist's magic using various forms of consciousness. On the one hand, we refer to the extensive body of knowledge we've acquired of the actual world in order to fill in the unfulfilled (schematized) aspects of the represented objects (to conceive of the object in its entirety, despite that it isn't presented that way). On the other hand, our consciousness of a giant but polite manbug *extends* the possible objects of consciousness for us, in ways made possible by the literary work of art. Ingarden describes how such consciousness becomes possible, while Kafka makes it happen.

Those aspects of the literary work of art through which its represented objectivities come to be represented determine these spots of indeterminacy. The fulfilled aspects of a represented object in a work of art are represented through various meaning units, which for Ingarden are apparent at every level of linguistic combination. The word, the sentence, the paragraph, and the chapter, in so far as they signify, are not just phonetic material but units of meaning within Ingarden's analysis. Even at the level of a single word, the use of it indicates to the reader one possible set of determinable indeterminacies, the fulfillment of which we assume would take the same form as a fulfillment in the non-literary realm. Ingarden uses the example of a rose:

As what, then, does the object 'this rose' appear in our state of affairs? As a 'red rose'? Or as a 'rose' with all its properties and features, with the exception of this single element of redness? Or, finally, in a third sense, yet to be determined? As we shall see, it appears in all three ways; and the fact that it 'does' so is especially characteristic of

⁹ "The character of dogged literalism of Kafka's writings seems therefore to be a device to catch the reader off his guard when the expectations of a natural or reasonable order in the external world which it arouses are upset. Kafka's depictions of bare reality are never superfluous, never introduced for merely ornamental purposes. But nor, either, does he take great pains to achieve any particular social or psychological realism in his descriptions, especially in regard to his subsidiary protagonists. The depiction of external reality serves rather the predominant end of allowing some particular aspect of oblique consciousness to show forth" (Smith 1997).

the formal structure of the state of affairs. If we begin for the moment with the last, the third mode, it is clear that one can speak of 'this rose' in the sense that one has only the rose 'itself,' so to speak, in mind, i.e., as a carrier of various properties, a carrier that is already qualitatively determined, according to the nature of the object, as 'rose,' but with no regard for the qualitative determinations of these properties (Ingarden 1973, 136–137).¹⁰

At the mere mention of a rose, we have already determined the qualities we might expect it to have. A rose is colored, either bloomed or still budded; it remains attached to its stem, or it does not; it is part of a bouquet, or it is still in the garden; but in every case of a rose there are limitations to its possible conception.¹¹ Still, it is true that the author of the literary work of art might choose to challenge these limitations to interpretation. The author might describe for us a rose that grows directly from the earth without the intermediary of a bush. The author might describe this very rose as the largest rose you have ever seen, and the reddest as well. Or the author might choose to defy the reader's expectations for some literary purpose, using the rose as a portent of things to come, by describing its scent not as sweet but as carrying with it the sour and lingering smells of death.

And we'll buy it. The reader will accept all of these various characterizations of the rose, even if there is no real world equivalent for the exact kind of rose the author describes, just because the author has said nothing beyond the *possible* fulfillment of the rose's unfulfilled aspects. Kafka takes it as an assumption that we will accept as true, within the world of *Metamorphosis*, that Gregor Samsa has awakened one day to find himself crusty on the outside, the helpless master of an innumerable number of wiggling little legs, set in two rows all of a sudden on his abdomen, and Kafka expects us as well to understand that, because of this situation, Gregor won't be able to continue his work as a traveling salesman—because that would be out of the

¹⁰ Jeff Mitscherling explains, "The word meaning of a determinate name, when used in a particular situation is an *actualization* of a *part* of the *ideal sense* (*des idealen Sinnes*) contained in the concept that 'corresponds' to the intentional object. It is this actualization, as determined in the word sound, that creates (*ausmacht*) the material and formal content of the meaning. Thus each 'ideal concept' has a number of word meanings for the same object. That part of the ideal sense which is to be actualized constitutes the *potential stock* of the meaning" (1997, 133–134).

¹¹ As we continue to read, the possible meanings of the individual word narrow; more of its content is specified. Cf. Luzewy: "That is, the potential stock of meanings gets winnowed as we read the text. This reduction of the ideal meanings identified with the concept is precisely the process of the word's meaning being actualized" (2016, 84).

question. Simultaneously, we recognize that Gregor Samsa has altered form to an extent that, while he maintains human consciousness and the human condition of wanting to be able to communicate and also to provide meaningful support to his family (emotional and financial), it is impossible for him to do so, because vermin of his sort don't work in traveling sales.

In short, the author of the literary work of art in some way dictates to us which features of the literary reality are going to prove malleable and which are not. We are probably all familiar with other works of art, which do contain worlds where it is possible for all species of creature to get and hold gainful employment. *But not here*, says Kafka.

While Stanley Corngold argues that, because of the way Kafka has chosen to represent Gregor Samsa, the only possible interpretation is a psychological one, where Kafka is not writing a story but a literary autobiography, this seems too simplistic. Corngold's statement that the proper real-world object on which we might base our conception of Gregor Samsa is the writer himself minimizes Kafka's bending of the very notion of literary form. Arguing against the idea that Gregor Samsa is any kind of beetle, Corngold proposes that Gregor is just a representation of Kafka's inner reflections on the nature of the author:

Hence, the apparent realism with which Kafka describes the vermin should not conjure for the reader an insect of some definite kind. [...] Sometimes he behaves like a low sort of human being, a 'louse'; but at other times he is an airy, flighty kind of creature. In the end he is sheerly not-this, not-that—a paradox, a creature not even of dust. He is a sign of that unnatural being in Kafka—the writer (Kafka 1972, xix).

But with Ingarden's conception of the aesthetic object and its indeterminacies, I argue that a better interpretation requires that no definite real-world object be sought at all, as an analogue or anything else. The indefiniteness of Gregor's form is itself clear, and while our immediate tendency is to *try* to figure out the exact object in the universe that Kafka meant for us to intuit as we read *Metamorphosis*, we should recognize in ourselves this immediate tendency, and also that Kafka meant for us to make this attempt, that he meant for it to fail, and that this indicates that he was at least implicitly aware of how the reader's consciousness of an intentional object depends on the limits of possible interpretations provided by the groundwork of knowledge we access through and ground in the real world—and he's messing with us.

In *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden explains the capacity of the author to mess with us in just such a particular fashion, and he argues that this particular form of messing with us is, for some literary works, what makes them what they are. That is to say, if at any point Kafka had told us, as readers, that Gregor Samsa had become a dung beetle, the story would have been ruined. Ingarden says:

The presence of such an 'opalescent' purely intentional sentence correlate is of particular importance for grasping the essence of the literary work. For the moment it should only be noted that there is a special type of literary work of art whose basic character and peculiar charm lie in the ambiguities it contains. They are *calculated* for the full enjoyment of the aesthetic characters that are based on 'iridescence' and 'opal-escence,' and they would lose their peculiar charm if one were to 'improve' them by removing the ambiguity (as frequently happens in *bad* translations) (Ingarden 1973, 144).

Ingarden here refers to no work of literature in particular, but it is easy to see how *Metamorphosis* might fit this characterization. The creature which Gregor has become has an essential nature revealed to us through his experience of his new form. We see how he learns to manipulate his new body mass proportions in order to first get himself off of the bed, we struggle along with him attempting to turn the key in its hole in order to explain to his superior why he has not made the train this morning, and we develop for ourselves an idea of how it might be possible that an apple should become lodged in his backside (upperside) for such an extended amount of time that the wound along with Gregor collects dust, as our sense of resentment for his neglect at the hands of his ever more spiteful family grows. Were Kafka at any point to say, "Gregor is a beetle now," instead of, "His back seemed to be hard; nothing was likely to happen to it when it fell on the carpet" (Kafka 1972, 8), the story would lose its peculiar charm.

The difference is (as Smith 1997 elaborates) an awareness of the distinction between the intentional objects accessible to inner consciousness and the intentional objects accessible to consciousness through an intersubjective community. To identify Gregor's form as anything in particular is to apply learned concepts, universal terms that negate the differences between members of a class, and which are meant to eliminate ambiguities in our concept of a thing. Because something is a rose, we know that it has a color and a size and is an organic entity formed mostly of carbon. But to specify what Gregor is, on the other hand, would ruin him, for he is a magical brown vermin whose internal struggle regarding the furniture arrangement we

empathize with, despite our never having had to *actually* consider moving any furniture whatever to suit the best interests of a many-legged man beetle (cockroach). (On the one hand, his sister could arrange the furniture in such a way as to suit his new patterns of movements, determined by his physical form, but on the other hand, she might choose to leave them just as they are, because to adapt to his new circumstances is to lend permanence to the new form of being when Gregor [and we readers] still want it to be possible for him to wake up one day, human and just fine.)

The Schematized Aspects of Gregor Samsa

The spots of indeterminacy, which are made apparent in the words, sentences, paragraphs and the work as a whole (meaning units of every level of complexity), make it possible for us to interpret Gregor Samsa's physical form with some amount of freedom. Through these spots of indeterminacy, the theory that Franz Kafka had a particular vermin in mind when he envisioned Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis becomes just as likely as the interpretation that Kafka meant for the text to express the existential anguish of the author (i.e., some kind of metaphorical version of the author himself, one with many more legs). Ingarden hints at the possibility for such malleability when he examines the meaning units comprising a work of art, but the force of his theory really only becomes apparent when he analyzes the literary work of art's schematized aspects.

Beyond the physical foundation of the work, which provides the grounding of the work's existence in material reality (the physical paper on which the text is printed, or the graphic marks on the sheets of paper), there is, in addition, its meaning, or that which is expressed through the particular words used, the arrangements in which the author places them, and the more complex meaning units of which we come to be aware through a reading of the text that takes place over time. Words, and likewise the complex arrangements in which we place them, all have an "intentional directional factor," pointing to some element of the universe and which we generally characterize as "meaning" something.¹² Wherever something means, it has

¹² Ingarden demonstrates the capacity of various linguistic complexes to "mean" using several hilarious examples. As one example, Ingarden tells the story of Mr. X, who kills two children with his terrible driving. The point of the example is to illustrate to us the conscious processes going on which lead us to interpret the story in such a way that the children are dead, even though and *because* the terms are placed where they are within a larger meaning complex: "Mr. X doesn't know the first thing about driving. Moreover,

an intentional directional factor, and because of the very nature of the relation we call "meaning," there is always some variability in what is meant. That is to say, the sign never signifies what it signifies *completely* (what a sign signifies exceeds the sign itself). Ingarden notes this already in his exposition of the meaning unit stratum of the literary work of art:

Finally, it must be stressed that the variability of the intentional directional factor of a name is closely connected with the appearance of 'variables' in its material content. In fact, the directional factor is always variable if, in this content, any 'variable' is present which belongs to the determination of the individual constitutive nature of the object, provided that, at the same time, an individuating property is not determined in the material content through a special operation in compound names. This is always the case when an intentional object is conceived as if by a 'schema,' through a doubly dependent moment of its nature, so that the qualification of the variability of the directional factor that we gave above (pp. 65f) is equivalent to the one we have just now indicated (Ingarden 1973, 69).

That things are presented schematically is by no means unique to the literary work of art. The concept of schematized aspects in the literary work of art builds upon the more general notion of fulfilled and unfulfilled aspects, with which Husserl deals extensively.¹³ In the spatiotemporal world, unfulfilled aspects are those which are not immediately given to sensible intuition. For example, in an instance of vision, what is actually seen are the fulfilled aspects of an object, whereas what is unfulfilled are those which are not. It is always the case that at any one moment I see only one side of any wall, but it is never the case that because I do not see the other side, I assume it is not there. It is there, but it is "unfulfilled." This is a necessary result of the

he's clumsy and very irresponsible. Yesterday he took two acquaintances in his car, drove out to Y, and on the way ran over two children. Both are dead. An idiot like that can cause so much misfortune.' Only the determinate order of the sentences causes the expression 'an idiot like that' to refer to Mr. X and the word 'both' to designate the two dead children and not the two acquaintances of Mr. X. If we were to change the order of the sentences, their meaning would be altered and the connection between them would disappear or at least be deformed to such an extent that we would hardly be aware that any connection was present" (Ingarden 1973, 152).

¹³ Cf. Husserl's discussion in section 44 of *Ideas*, where he states: "Of necessity a physical thing can be given only 'one-sidedly;' and that signifies, not just incompletely or imperfectly in some sense or other, but precisely what presentation by adumbrations prescribes. A physical thing is necessarily given in mere 'modes of appearance' in which necessarily a *core of 'what is actually presented'* is apprehended as being surrounded by a horizon of 'co-giveness,' which is not givenness proper, and of more or less vague *indeterminateness*" (1982, 94).

mode of consciousness with which we are aware of spatiotemporal things. Because I access them through perception, and because perception is perspectival, it is never the case that all of the aspects of a spatiotemporal object are completely fulfilled in my consciousness of it, i.e., in its presentation as an intentional object. If I see the top of the table, I cannot at the same time see its bottom, and if I crouch underneath to see what is written on its bottom, I can no longer see its top.

In the case of the literary work of art, some of its aspects are always schematized. The world of the literary work of art is constituted in such a way that this is a necessary result. Whereas the spatiotemporal world is constituted of spatiotemporal objects, the world of the literary work of art is constituted of meaning units of various complexity whose determinations are always incomplete for, try as we might, it is impossible to represent the entirety of reality in words.¹⁴ And while we might try to specify as far as possible the nature of the object we try to represent, we find it instead more convenient to allow the human consciousness reading a text to fulfill those unfulfilled aspects for us, as is the human wont. We apply the habits of fulfilling unfulfilled aspects that we acquire in the real world to the fictional universe of the literary work of art, and then we are not in any way shocked by the fact that the author does not specify the color of this or that rose. We just assume that *it does have a color* and move on, in anticipation of whatever it is that Gregor will do next to delight us. This fulfilling of unfulfilled aspects of a work of art constitutes, for Ingarden, an independent stratum of its existence and, as Mitscherling emphasizes, defines for us the manner in which the work of art's represented objectivities (like Gregor Samsa) are *concretized*:

When consciousness attends to (or 'intends') a particular object, it is usually the case that only some of the 'aspects' of that object are presented immediately to consciousness, and these aspects are said to be fulfilled or unfulfilled. For example, when we look at a table from above, the table presents us with aspect of 'table-top' and 'table-bottom,' and the former is fulfilled while the latter remains unfulfilled [...] A similar situation obtains in the literary work of art, but here the reader is often forced to fulfill for herself many of those aspects that are presented by the author as unfulfilled, and

¹⁴ "Namely, one and the same intentional object can be represented or exhibited in various combinations of properties, states, etc., depending on which manifold represents it. The object is shown here from another side—as it were, in another perspective—and, figuratively speaking, in other perspectival foreshortenings, since, in the various manifolds of properties of an object, one and the same property seems capable of taking on a different role and importance in its total essence" (Ingarden 1973, 198).

she does so with regard to those aspects that are presented more fully, i.e., as fulfilled. The latter provide the reader with a direction to follow in her conscious activity of fulfilling these unfulfilled aspects, which are said to have been 'schematized.' This intentional activity of fulfillment of schematized aspects is a central component of the general activity of 'concretization'. As no character, for example, can ever be exhaustively presented by an author—no character, that is to say can ever be portrayed fully and completely determined—the manner in which this concretization is to proceed can only be schematically determined by a literary work of art through its stratum of schematized aspects (Mitscherling 2010, 143–144, footnote 10).¹⁵

Kafka, as philosopher, must be aware of such a thing as schematized aspects (and by "aware" here, I mean competently manipulates for literary effect). That is to say, Kafka is competently manipulating the indeterminacy of an object's schematized aspects; not only is he purposefully schematizing aspects of Gregor Samsa and his life, but he is taking advantage of the ambiguity introduced by these schematizations. We still do not know, for instance, the character of Gregor's voice after the metamorphosis, whether he was ever able to make his intentions known, as he seems to think he has in the beginning of the book, or whether he was always incapable of expressing himself through vocalizations.¹⁶ Unless the author deigns to fill us in,

¹⁵ Ingarden has an example: "Thus, when the author of a novel 'transports' us from place *A* to place *B* without showing us the entire distance between *A* and *B*, the intervening space between *A* and *B* is not positively determined and represented but again is only corepresented, by virtue of the impossibility of spatial discontinuity" (Ingarden 1973, 223–224). That is to say, because we conceive of space as continuous in general, when a spot of indeterminacy is left in the text, we fill it in with what we know.

¹⁶ Kafka writes, near the beginning of the story: "Gregor was shocked to hear his own voice answering, unmistakably his own voice, true, but in which, as if from below, an insistent distressed chirping intruded, which left the clarity of his words intact only for a moment really, before so badly garbling them as they carried that no one could be sure if he had heard right. Gregor had wanted to answer in detail and to explain everything, but, given the circumstances, confined himself to saying, 'Yes, yes, thanks, Mother, I'm just getting up.' The wooden door must have prevented the change in Gregor's voice from being noticed outside, because his mother was satisfied with his explanation and shuffled off" (1972, 5). Later, he provides us with another character's reaction to Gregor's voice: "'That was the voice of an animal,' said the manager, in a tone conspicuously soft compared with the mother's yelling" (1972, 13). Later again, Gregor expresses himself through hissing "[...] and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because it did not occur to any of them to close the door and spare him such a scene and a row" (1972, 44). My reading of this is informed by Aristotle's distinction between words and the vocalizations of animals. In the *History of Animals* 535a29–b2 Aristotle suggests that what is required for language is that an animal have lips and a tongue; here "language" is translated from *διάλεκτός*. In *De Interpretatione* at 16a27–9, Aristotle specifies that, "Even inarticulate noises (of beasts, for instance) do indeed reveal something, yet none of them is a name."

these aspects remain schematized and very possibly indeterminate. While it is possible to imagine a represented desk as any colour I want to imagine it to be, it *isn't* any colour in the world of the literary work, unless the author specifies its colour.

Brentano's concept of oblique consciousness can help to explain our consciousness of the schematized aspects of the literary work of art (Brentano 1973, appendix). For Brentano, the object of a perception is what is perceived—a sound, for instance. Through the sound, we are obliquely conscious of an object that sounds (despite the fact that technically speaking, we do not *hear* objects, we hear sounds; the sound is a sign of an object). Just as the hearing of a sound is immediately apparent to inner consciousness and obliquely refers to some external object making that sound, so what the reader is conscious of during the reading of a literary work of art are its complex meaning structures. We are (obliquely) conscious of its represented objectivities and their schematized aspects. Just as the blue of a wall signifies to us the existence of a wall (what is given in perception refers to what is given obliquely), so does Gregor's having an apple embedded in his flesh indicate that his flesh *is of the type* in which an apple could remain embedded for more than a month.¹⁷ In other words, the same thing that allows for our perception of something to be deceptive is what allows for our reading of something to have spots of indeterminacy, or multiple interpretive potentialities.¹⁸

These spots of indeterminacy are never immediately apparent, but must either be assumed or taken by inference to exist just from the fact that there are aspects to the represented objects of a literary work of art that are never made explicit. Nevertheless, the literary work of art always presents a uni-

¹⁷ "Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month—the apple remained imbedded in his flesh as a visible souvenir since no one dared to remove it—seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor was a member of the family, in spite of his present pathetic and repulsive shape, who could not be treated as an enemy; that, on the contrary, it was the commandment of family duty to swallow their disgust and endure him, endure him and nothing more" (Kafka 1972, 40).

¹⁸ Barry Smith says, accurately, of Brentano: "Brentano's thesis of the primacy of inner perception, now, is a claim to the effect that it is the inner life, the inner perception of psychological phenomena, which can alone yield certain knowledge. The only objects of which we can have an absolutely secure apprehension are, as he conceives it, the acts and states of our own consciousness. Of these alone can we assert with an absolutely evident knowledge that they are in reality as they appear in consciousness. A consequence of this is that our outer perceptions, that is, our experiences of physical phenomena, *may always be deceptive*" (1997, 8 of the online version of this paper).

fied world where things that are not specified are assumed to exist, indeterminate but in principle knowable. Just as we never assume that *there is no bottom* to the table, we also never assume that the represented universe *ends* at some definite point, along with its representation. At no point do I assume that just because all of the action in this novel takes place within an apartment, that outside the apartment is nothing but void. I just assume there's something out there. In general, the schematized aspects of a literary work of art are indeterminate, but nevertheless always there. As Ingarden relates,

As we have seen, purely intentional correlates of connected sentences can enter into manifold relationships and interrelations. And since among the sentence correlates there are also states of affairs which occur in the ontic range of one and the same object, as well as states in which events and interconnections between individual objects are represented, the represented objects also do not lie isolated and alien alongside one another but, thanks to the manifold ontic connections, unite into a uniform ontic sphere. In doing so they always constitute—quite remarkably—a segment of a still largely undetermined world, which is, however, established in accord with its ontic type and the type of its essence, that is, a segment whose boundaries are sharply drawn. It is always as if a beam of light were illuminating part of a region, the remainder of which disappears in an indeterminate cloud but is still there in its indeterminacy (Ingarden 1973, 218).

What's more, whatever exists in the schematized aspects is not only assumed as a possible intentional object for consciousness, it's conceived of with the *habitus* of reality that Ingarden describes. We know that Gregor Samsa has really metamorphosed into some kind of giant brown vermin; it is not an imagined state of affairs, or a dream, or another alternative mode of reality which *too* might be represented in the literary work.¹⁹ It is not the case that Gregor has awakened a man with a distinct feeling that he *might* be a slimy creature with many small legs. We are aware that *it has happened*.²⁰

Where the analogy between our consciousness of space-time and our awareness of the objectivities of a literary work of art breaks down is with respect to their determination. Whereas the spatiotemporal object is completely determined (it is never the case that the table has no bottom, irre-

¹⁹ See Ingarden 1973, 220–222. Ingarden says, “This is seen quite distinctly if within the represented world there is a contrasting of ‘real’ objectivities with objects that have only been ‘dreamed’ by a represented person. In this instance we see not only that ontic characters are distinctly present in the represented world but also that the world that is ‘dreamt’ here is not truly but only quasi-dreamt” (1973, 222).

²⁰ See Peter McCormick's analysis of literary truths (1989).

spective of whether we know about it or not), the literary work of art might represent something that is *actually* indeterminate. That is to say, it is not something whose incompleteness is due to our lack of awareness of its unfulfilled aspects; it actually is indeterminate. This is a potentiality afforded to the author because of the alternate means of presentation of objectivities. To use words and complexes of words to represent, as opposed to perception, introduces a potentiality into the representation that perception does not have—the potentiality to introduce *actually indeterminate* entities. Franz Kafka takes advantage of this to present to us Gregor Samsa. As Ingarden says, “In principle, there can be literary works which do not trouble themselves at all with staying within the bounds of a particular type of object; but precisely because of this, they can make a particular aesthetic impression by representing a world that is actually impossible or one that is full of contradictions, going beyond the limits established by the regional essence of reality. We are then dealing with a grotesque dance of impossibilities” (Ingarden 1973, 253).

Conclusion

I argue that Gregor Samsa is not intended by Kafka as any determinate sort of monster, but as the indeterminate form of monster whose literary merit rests on its ambiguity. The presentation of such a creature is explicable through an application of the theory and terminology of Roman Ingarden, whose work on the ontology of the literary work of art shares a common ancestor with Kafka’s theoretical commitments (the Brentano connection). In particular, the possibility of ambiguity introduced through the spots of indeterminacy apparent in the meaning units of a literary work of art introduce aspects that are schematized, i.e., unfulfilled, which are there to be filled in by the reader in the work’s concretization. This concretization, however, is stymied by Kafka’s refusal to present Gregor as a member of any known species. Just as it is possible to convince someone that just on the other side of darkness lies a monster whose form is so terrifying it cannot be imagined, so Kafka takes advantage of the schematized aspects of the literary work of art in order to represent a creature whose essence demands indeterminacy. Such a presentation requires at least an implicit awareness of theory. Thus, Kafka is a philosopher and, at heart, a phenomenologist.

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