Understanding the aesthetics of Roman Ingarden has been consistently thwarted by his primary interest in the ontology of aesthetic objects. The best known of his "investigations on the borderline between ontology, logic, and the theory of literature," *The Literary Work of Art*, had to be supplemented with a second, primarily epistemological, text on how literary works of art are cognized — either preaesthetically, aesthetically, or postaesthetically. The preaesthetic cognition involves a description of the processes by which a given reader prepares a "concretization" of the multiply stratified work of art, which, as an *eidos*, is structured phenomenologically by a series of conscious acts founded one upon the other.

For literary works, there are four such strata: besides the eidetic imagery of the phonological stratum — which I prefer to call "the surface of the object" — developing in a temporal sequence that gives form to the qualitatively distinct vowel and consonantial values that themselves embody certain aesthetically valent properties, there are the associated values of the semantical unities "referred" to in the dimension of meanings — the second stratum — which are related in such a way as to represent persons, actions, and events of a fictional nature. This world of "represented objectivities" constituting the third stratum, like the others, possesses its quota of aesthetically valent properties; but yet contains certain spots of indeterminacy which must be filled in by the reader's attention to an author's hints and suggestions of fulfilling imagery. Such fulfilling imagery tends to complete the concretization of the object, accomplished by each reader according to his or her own best lights of interpretation. Such is the final stratum to be found in the eidetically determined intentional object identified by Ingarden as the literary work of art. His term for such fulfilling imagery is "schematized aspects."

As an aesthetic object, the literary work of art is therefore not a physical thing, such as a text. Being purely intentional, the literary work...
does not exist in space and time like the objects of ordinary experience; such objects exist, but only for the consciousness that intends them. Whence, the importance of the reader’s concretization, without which an individual work would never be cognizable. Texts may be said to “intend” the literary work, just as scores are said to intend musical objects; but texts and scores are mere physical means for guiding the consciousness that would contemplate a fully constituted aesthetic object.

Already here a problem suggests itself. If an individual work is accessible only through specific concretizations of an eidetically determined intentional object, the question is posed of how the eidetic description of the intentional object itself was performed: not, for logical reasons, on the basis of a simple phenomenological reduction of an individual work; that would make the process circular. Phenomenologically, reducing the physical text would yield only the appearance of a set of signs for producing an aesthetic object; and without the aesthetic cognition of an aesthetic object, there is no fully concrete intentional object to which an eidetic description may be given.

If we look into the two principal texts presenting the matter, moreover, we find no such reduction. Rather, we find an analysis of the structures of language — of word signs and their meanings at various levels — constituting, in a Kantian phrase, the conditions for the possibility of works of art, which, once they have been written by some author, are the means for attending to the “polyphonic harmony” of component value characteristics unified within the composite structure. In Husserl’s terms, both the aesthetic object and its embodiment of a value are “transcendent” to the consciousness that intends them.

Indeed, that is why Ingarden had spent so much time on the_preaesthetic cognition of literary works: to show what activities of consciousness are necessary for an individual work to be fully concretized. Once that is done, it becomes possible for a reader to contemplate the purely aesthetic properties of such objects, and to describe the features of the (intentional) object which determine its peculiar aesthetic value properties. It is only necessary to keep in mind here the importance of distinguishing between “artistic” and “aesthetic” values, i.e. between the values of the physical substratum — the text as a means, as opposed to the aesthetic object itself as the ends projected through those means; these end-values, of course, are found only in the act of consciously intending the aesthetic object itself as the intentional correlate of the contemplating consciousness.