Self-Location in Interactive Fiction

Paal Fjeldvig Antonsen

The aim of this paper is to make sense of a characteristic feature of interactive fictions, such as video game fictions, adventure books and role playing games. In particular, I describe one important way consumers of interactive fiction 'take on the role' of a fictional character and are 'involved' in the story. I argue that appreciative engagement with such works requires imagining being someone else and imagining parts of the story in a self-locating manner. In short, consuming works of interactive fiction involves imagining the story from the protagonist's perspective.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to make sense of a familiar feature of self-involving interactive fictions, such as narrative video games, adventure books and role playing games. Appreciative engagement with such works requires a level of participation over and above what we normally do when we read a novel, watch a movie or attend a theatre performance (Tavinor, 2009; Gaut, 2010; Robson and Meskin, 2016 and 2017; Wildman and Woodward, 2018). The difference I have in mind is not a matter of emotional investment, vividness of experiences or degree of enjoyment. Rather, it concerns the manner in which we engage with interactive fictions.

I find the following example instructive. As we read the (non-interactive) comic book *Fables* we are introduced to a fictional world where familiar fairy-tale characters live among us mundane people. In one particular scene, The Big Bad Wolf, also called 'Bigby', comes across The Woodsman, who is busy harassing a young woman (Sturgus and Justus, 2015). The old rivals get into a brawl, ending with both crashing through the window and falling down several floors. The video game *The Wolf Among Us* (2013) takes place in the same fictional world. In fact, the same scene just described is portrayed in the game as well. What is different this time around, though, is that you play as the character Bigby. So not only do you need to contemplate the unfolding event, you also have to grasp that in this scenario you are to take on the role of Bigby and consider the situation from his point of view. The interactive version of the event involves you, the consumer, in some way.

In order to make sense of this common feature of interactive fiction, we need to explain what it means to say that the story 'involves' the consumer who 'takes on the role' of the protagonist. (I am aware that using the term 'protagonist' is misleading in some cases, but for simplicity's sake I will be referring to the character that fulfills the avatar role in this way.) In what follows, I argue that these notions can be explained in terms of imagining interactive stories in a particular manner. My focus here is limited to the self-involving kinds of interactive fiction, although I will throughout the paper simply say 'interactive fiction' for brevity's sake. In the example above, we happen to imagine the same series of events in both cases. Whether we are reading the comic book or playing the

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video game, we imagine Bigby and The Woodsman fighting and falling out the window. The way they come apart is that the same event is imagined in two different ways. When we read the comic book, we just imagine that Bigby and The Woodsman are fighting each other in some run-down apartment in New York. But as we play through the scene in *The Wolf Among Us*, we also imagine being the protagonist Bigby and contemplate the event from his first person point of view. Note that the notions I am trying to elucidate pertains to a *self-involving* interactive fiction with at least one protagonist. Although I am saying 'interactive fiction' for short, I am not assuming that this holds for all instances of interactive fiction. In particular, if a fiction does not include one or more protagonists serving the avatar-role, they will not be covered by the account outlined here. Furthermore, I am also not suggesting that *only* interactive fiction will ask us to imagine being someone else. Other fiction addressing the reader in a second-person way might also be doing so.

The account outlined here shares its basic idea with the view presented by Robson and Meskin (2016 and 2017). In particular, they also claim that self-involving interactive fictions are 'about those who consume them' (2016, p. 165) and that doing so involves first-person imaginings (ibid., p. 169). They leave it open, however, in what sense the consumer is part of the fiction—and so about them—and how we should understand the content of the requisite imaginings. In this paper, I flesh out the basic idea and provide further motivations for why we should accept it. In particular, in Section 3 I propose that imaginings induced by interactive fictions are a special case of *self-locating* (also known as *de se* or indexical) attitudes—that is, thoughts about oneself when one thinks about oneself in a first-person way. Section 4 argues that they way such thoughts are about oneself is not in the sense that they are about ones actual (or believed) self, but about the person one takes to be identical to oneself in the fictional worlds. I end with a description of how the contents of such imaginings can be described in terms of two-dimensional centred propositions.

2. The Imagination Assumption

The suggestion I outlined for what is characteristic of interactive fiction makes an assumption about fiction in general: that appreciative engagement with works of fiction involves adopting counterfactual attitudes about individuals, situations and events. By 'counterfactual attitude' I mean a thought one can entertain while taking its content to be false. Although desires, hopes and wishes are all examples of counterfactual attitudes, it is imaginings which are central for our discussion. Since this idea is an important background premise of my main claim, I will call it 'The Imagination Assumption'.

As we read McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), for example, we imagine a bleak, post-apocalyptic world in which a man and his son struggle to overcome hardships and perils. I am not making the presumption that we are imagining *everything* that takes place within this fictional world, only that we mentally track the principal events holding the narrative together. As said, I assume this imaginative process to be playing out whether we are engaged with a traditional fiction like *The Road* or an interactive fiction. So when we are playing Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* (2014) we also imagine a similarly bleak world, where a man looks after a young girl as they traverse ruined landscapes. An imagining, as

I am using the term here, is a cognitive attitude with propositional content. Appreciative engagement with fiction certainly involves a lot of mental imagery as well, but that part of the process will not play a role in my argument. Likewise, engagement with fiction involves conative attitudes, but in this paper I want to remain neutral on whether this calls for full-blooded desires, fears and the like, or whether they are best understood in terms of some other kind of mental states, such as aliefs (Gendler, 2008), i-desires (Doggett and Egan, 2012) and quasi-emotions (Walton, 1978).

Apart from its intuitive appeal, I think there are two central motivations for The Imagination Assumption. The first comes from the fact that it is supported by another plausible claim, namely that storytelling, whether conceived of as a speech act or some cognate, involves a proposal to imagine the information conveyed (Currie, 1990; Walton, 1990; García-Carpintero, 2007 and 2013; Stock, 2011). If the act of storytelling that φ comes with an invitation for the audience to imagine that φ, it is integral to the resulting work's status as a piece of fiction that it facilitates acts of imagining.

Storytelling, on this account, works analogously to assertion. The crucial way in which they differ is the mental attitude in play: assertion involves a proposal to believe, while storytelling involves a proposal to imagine. If someone asserts that φ, and everything is going as it should, we normally understand them to be expressing their belief that φ and proposing that we start believing it as well. But when we recognize that someone is telling a fictional story—for example, by them saying something like 'once upon a time'—we do not take them to be expressing a belief they hold nor suggesting that we actually believe what they have told us. If we fail to realize that McCarthy is not trying to prompt an update of our beliefs concerning the events described in the novel, we are failing to treat it as a work of fiction. On the other hand, if we fail to imagine central parts of the story, we are not in a position to contemplate its content and appreciate it in an aesthetic manner. We can, of course, decline the invitation, but that would be tantamount to refusing to take part in the aesthetic experience it might facilitate. As long as the standard account of storytelling is on the right track, The Imagination Assumption follows.

Saying that storytelling involves an invitation to imagine does not entail that authors of fiction are not also trying to influence our beliefs and desires. On the contrary, I suspect that doing just that is a motivating reason for many authors to produce fiction in the first place. For example, by giving such a flattering portrayal of a fictional Alexander the Great, Mary Renault was probably trying to make us also believe that the historical Alexander had all kinds of admirable attributes (Renault, 1969). Novelists like Dickens and Tolstoy, and video game directors like Ken Levine and David Cage, use their fictional works as vehicles for political and philosophical commentary. So although storytelling involves an invitation to imagine, on my view, that is not all creators of fiction are up to. Sometimes the whole point in getting us to imagine a fictional story is to prompt a change in our attitudes as a result of us contemplating that very possibility.

The second motivation for The Imagination Assumption starts with the observation that actions and emotions are regularly explained by reference to a combination of cognitive and conative attitudes. Suppose John give Kaidan a cake. The explanation might that he wanted to cheer Kaidan up, and believed that giving him a cake would do just that. Suppose Lisa is being particularly somber. The explanation might be that she imagined her missing cat being run over by a car, when she so strongly desired to protect and play with Sir Pounce-a-lot again. A good explanation is often one that permits generalisations leading to reasonably accurate predictions in relevantly similar cases. Without assuming that the emotions we experience when consuming fiction and encountering the events in real life are exactly the same, they are at least very similar. And if we apply the standard model of explanation to emotions that come as a result of engaging with fiction, imagination is the most plausible cognitive component (see also Weinberg and Meskin, 2006; Doggett and Egan, 2012).

As an illustration, the aesthetic experiences afforded by *The Road* is intimately linked to what we feel about the situations described in the book. These feelings must partly come about as a result of us having the requisite desires (or desire-like states) for certain outcomes—for example, that the young boy not be captured by lurking cannibals. Some kind of desire like that would have to play a part in the explanation for why we first feel dread as the cannibals approach, followed by relief when the boy manages to escape. Another part of the explanation will involve us also having some relevant cognitive attitude. Now we clearly do not believe that any of this is actually taking place, as we are under no illusion that McCarthy is giving an accurate portrayal of real events. In order for the appropriate emotions to kick in, then, we need to entertain the thoughts conveyed by the novel while not taking them to be true. In other words, we need to contemplate the fictional events under some kind of attitude that is both cognitive and counterfactual. The most readily available explanation for our feelings of dread and relief in this case is that we imagine the young boy being in danger, while desiring his safety. This does not exclude that there could be other ways of explaining such feelings, but the ease with which the standard model can be transported to cases involving fiction gives us some further motivation for accepting The Imagination Assumption.

3. The Indexicality Thesis

So far I have talked about what works of fiction have in common. In short, they invite us to imagine parts of their stories. From this point, the discussion will focus on what I think is distinctive about our imaginative engagement with interactive fiction. The suggestion I presented in the introduction can be divided into two parts. The first, which I will call 'The Indexicality Thesis', says that engagement with interactive fictions involves self-locating imaginings.

Before I go on to motivate this idea, I should briefly say something about self-locating attitudes in general. The most prominent feature of such attitudes is that they could be expressed using some suitable sentence containing the first-person pronoun. My belief that I live under a bridge is a self-locating belief, and my desire that I will get the last chocolate cupcake is a self-locating desire. The same goes for the other attitudes. In particular, my imagining that I am swimming with a herd of manatees and my imagining that I am kissing Tom Cruise are both self-locating imaginings. What these examples have further in common is that they are thoughts I entertain about myself in a first person way.

The most familiar semantic theories designed to handle self-locating attitudes employ some version or other of the Lewisian centred worlds account (for example, Lewis, 1979; Egan, 2006; Ninan, 2010). I will do the same for the purposes of this discussion. The Lewisian account is refinement of the idea that the content of agent's attitude is a set of possible worlds, such that an agent x believes a proposition p in a world w just in case all the possible worlds compatible with what x believes in w are contained in p. In order to model self-locating attitudes, Lewis suggests, we should replace possible worlds with centred worlds. A centred world is usually construed as a triple consisting of a possible world, a time, and an individual who exists in that world and at that time. Since we will be setting the temporal aspect aside, we can treat a centred world as a possible world w centred on an agent x in w. On this account, then, a proposition is a set of centred worlds. For example, the propositional content of my imagining that I am kissing Tom Cruise is the set $\{\langle w, x\rangle$: x kisses Tom Cruise in $w\}$. I happen to be imagining this particular proposition in a world w just in case every centred world $\langle w^*, x^*\rangle$ belonging to this set is compatible with that I imagine in w — that I am the x^* kissing Tom Cruise in w^*.

My proposal is that imaginings induced by interactive fiction is an overlooked instance where we find ourselves entertaining self-locating thoughts. The main reason I find this idea attractive is that it explains the elusive notion that interactive fictions are in some sense about the people who consume them, in Robson and Meskin's (2016) terms. In the introduction I started with such an example: as you play through the brawling scene between Bigby and The Woodsman, the game invites you to 'partake' in the fighting with The Woodsman. The interactive nature of this engagement is accounted for if we say that rather than imagining the coarse-grained proposition *that Bigby is fighting The Woodsman*, you adopt a self-locating imagining whose content is the centred proposition $\{\langle w, x\rangle$: x is fighting The Woodsman in $w\}$. You are thereby not simply imagining the event taking place, you are doing it from Bigby's perspective. The sense in which you partake in the story is that you are imagining it in a first person way—as if it was all happening to you. This way of cashing out the 'involvement' component of interactive fiction draws the requisite distinction between how we engage with the comic book *Fables* and how we engage with the video game, even when the two fictions contain the same scene. When reading about the brawling scene in *Fables*, you are asked to imagine the proposition $\{\langle w, x\rangle$: Bigby fights The Woodsman $w\}$. Here the agent coordinate x is idle and varying it makes no difference to how the event is contemplated. So although the comic book and the video game asks us to imagine the same set of possible worlds—the worlds where Bigby is fighting The Woodsman—they differ in the manner in which we do so. Only the videogame invites us to imagine a proposition that involves thinking about ourselves as an agent x inhabiting the worlds comprising the fictional events and consider it from x's first person point of view.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that everything we are asked to imagine by an interactive fiction is self-locating. Similar to how most of the beliefs that I have about the actual world are not essentially about me, keeping track of an interactive fiction's narrative will involve adopting many attitudes that are not self-locating. For example, *The Wolf Among Us* also invites us to imagine that New York is a dangerous place, that there are talking pigs and flying monkeys, and that Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee are a pair of really nasty people. None of this involves adopting self-locating attitudes. The only parts of the story we imagine in a first person way are the ones that concern the protagonist. I am also talking loosely about '*x* inhabiting a world *w*', because I want to abstract away from metaphysical issues when it comes to existence in non-actual possible worlds. The account presented here is meant to be independent of one's particular metaphysical views.

The Indexicality Thesis can also be supported on linguistic grounds. The first is the observation that when consuming an interactive fiction we routinely report on the fictional going-ons using the first person pronoun (see also Robson and Meskin, 2016). For example, if you are playing through the scene where Bigby is fighting The Woodsman you can report on this event by saying 'I am fighting The Woodsman'. By itself this does not entail The Indexicality Thesis, but we do get there one some fairly standard assumptions. The first is The Imagination Assumption, that when we consume an interactive fiction we imagine the information that it conveys. So when the video game starts showing Bigby fighting The Woodsman, you imagine this event taking place. The second assumption, accepted by most accounts of fictional reports, is that when we report on fictional events we express propositions the fiction has invited us to imagine. Given this background, when you say 'I am fighting The Woodsman' you are expressing a proposition the fiction has invited you to imagine using a first person pronoun. In other words, a standard example of a self-locating attitude. Note that I am here talking about fictional reports used in the first-person way. We do, of course, also make first-personal statements that do not pertain to the fictional story (Patridge, 2017). That is, we say things like 'I pushed the X button' and 'I've replayed this section at least five time'. When making such comments, however, we are not talking about parts of the story conveyed, but the mechanical aspect of some video game. As such, they do not give us information about what's taking place within the narrative the game is used to reveal. My argument says that it is our use of first-personal *fictional reports* that gives us a reason to accept the Indexicality Thesis, because it is only such statements that are both expressing a self-locating attitude and reporting on the fictional story.

The second linguistic reason for accepting The Indexicality Thesis comes from observing the way we ascribe attitudes to people who are engaged with interactive fiction. To get the right set up, let us consider the non-interactive case first. Suppose you are watching your friend Betty reading *Fables* for the first time. She has just begun perusing the page where Bigby crashes into The Woodsman and the situation escalates into a brawl. Betty, you know, is well aware that Bigby is the physically more powerful one, and you can report on this by saying 'Betty expects Bigby to win the fight'. Moving over to the interactive case, things are slightly different. Suppose you are watching Betty playing through the same scene in *The Wolf Among Us*. You could, of course, make the same statement—that 'Betty expects Bigby to win the fight'—although that might be considered somewhat unusual. The noteworthy point is that you could also report on her attitude by simply saying 'Betty expects to win the fight'. In order to evaluate this sentence we usually ascribe to it a syntactic form along the lines of 'Betty expects PRO to win the fight', where PRO is a phonologically null pronoun whose job it is to pick out the individual that Betty expects to win. For the purposes of this paper, it does not really matter what precisely the correct semantics is for this sentence. As far as The Indexicality Thesis is concerned, it is sufficient to note that evaluating 'PRO' in a subordinate attitude clause involves ascribing a self-locating thought (for example, Chierchia, 1989; Schlenker, 2003). To get the right truth condition we must quantify over the centred worlds compatible with what Betty expects, treating the complement clause ‘PRO to win the fight’ as expressing the self-locating proposition $\{\langle w^*, x^*\rangle: x^*$ wins the fight in $w^*\}$. In short, ‘Betty expects PRO to win the fight’ is true only if Betty expects the proposition $\{\langle w^*, x^*\rangle: x^*$ wins the fight in $w^*\}$ in w, which she does only if it is compatible with what she expects in w that she is x^* in w^* and x^* wins the fight in w^*. So Betty’s expectation that PRO wins the fight is a thought she entertains in a first person way, which she could have expressed using a first person pronoun (‘I expect that I will win the fight’). The fact that we talk about people engaged with interactive fiction as if they are entertaining self-locating attitudes gives us another reason for believing that they actually do.

4. The Identity Thesis

My argument so far has tried to motivate the idea that some events that take place in interactive stories—events involving the protagonist—are imagined in a self-locating manner. In this section, I move on to the second part of my suggestion, which I will refer to as ‘The Identity Thesis’. It says that interactive fictions petition us to make one further imaginative leap: by taking on the role of the protagonist we imagine being that character.

In the previous section, I introduced The Indexicality Thesis to explain how we as consumers can be said to take part in an interactive story. What The Identity Thesis is meant to account for is that when we consume interactive fiction we play as characters distinct from our actual selves. Note that I am not saying that we *cannot* entertain such imaginings when consuming traditional works of fiction as well. Nothing prevents you from projecting yourself into the role of Lady Dedlock as she realizes that the sinister Tulkinghorn has discovered the secrets of her shameful past. The point I am making is just that you do not have to do so in order to appreciate Dicken’s *Bleak House* (1852-1853) in the appropriate way. It might be that to achieve the prescribed cognitive-affective response you must empathise more with Dedlock than Tulkinghorn, but that is not the same as having to imagine being either of them. In contrast, when engaging with an interactive fiction first hand, you really do need to play as one of the characters (the qualifier ‘first hand’ is meant to rule out instances where you watch other people play).

Imagining being someone else is not unique to fiction. It is just that some works of fiction accomplish their aesthetic goals by taking advantage of this familiar imaginative process. To get some independent grasp of what this involves, consider the following scenario from Lewis:

> Here am I, there goes poor Fred; there but for the grace of God go I; how lucky I am to be me, not him. Where there is luck there must be contingency. I am contemplating the possibility of my being poor Fred, and rejoicing that it is unrealized. I am not contemplating a possibility that involves any qualitative difference in the world—not, for instance, a world where someone with origins just like mine suffers misfortunes just like Fred’s. Rather, I am contemplating the possibility of being poor Fred in a world just like this one. (Lewis, 1983, pp. 26–27)

Here's a way to describe what is going on: Lewis indulges in an act of self-projection. He first contemplates the possibility of being Fred while suffering misfortune, and then mentally retreats back to his actual self to rejoice that this possibility is not realized. Lewis is not contemplating that he, David Lewis, could have suffered the misfortunes of poor Fred. Rather, he imagines himself being Fred, who happens to be the owner of the misfortune. Although the episode does not involve Lewis imagining his actual self under different circumstances, he is still himself involved in the imagined possibility.

What kind of 'possibility' does Lewis have in mind when he is contemplating being poor Fred? He is not talking about a different, yet possible world, since Lewis makes it clear that he is considering 'a world just like this one'. The only difference is that he has adopted the identity of poor Fred, leaving every other aspect of the world unchanged. I think we can make sense of Lewis' state of mind using the same strategy we employed to distinguish between the interactive and non-interactive version of the same fictional event. That is, when Lewis is imagining being poor Fred, he imagines the centred proposition $\{\langle w, x\rangle$: x is Poor Fred in $w\}$, where every w is compatible with what he actually believes. So although Lewis imaginatively conceives of the world in a different way—one where his personal identity is located in poor Fred—he does not imagine the actual world being any different otherwise from what he believes it to be.

Recognising that it is possible for us to imagine being someone else does not establish The Identity Thesis. I still have to argue that when we engage with interactive fictions we actually do imagine being the protagonist in a similar way to how Lewis imagined being poor Fred. To shift the example, suppose Betty is playing as the space hero John Shepard in the video game *Mass Effect* (2007), travelling across the galaxy on numerous adventures. Given The Imagination Assumption, this means that the game petitions her to follow the instruction 'imagine that you are John Shepard'. The problem for my view is that there are at least three ways in which she could comply:

(1) Imagining that it turned out that she is Shepard.
(2) Imagining herself having the properties ascribed to Shepard.
(3) Imagining being Shepard.

These are all possible ways for Betty to 'take on the role' of Shepard in some sense. In the case of (1), Betty would have to imagine that her actual life story was somehow intertwined with Shepard's fictional one. She could, for example, imagine that she went through cosmetic surgery and entered the space soldier program. Although I am not denying that Betty could do so if she wanted to, it is fairly obvious that this is not what playing *Mass Effect* usually entails. The real candidates, then, are (2) and (3). The competitor to my view, (2), is the kind of imagining we engage in when we entertain counterfactual thoughts such as what we would have done had we been richer, stronger, of a different background, lost our legs or magically transformed into a dragon. We contemplate a change in our actual properties, but preserve those that remain unaffected by the alterations. If *Mass Effect* only requires Betty to do (2), she need only contemplate being herself in counterfactual circumstances.

It is difficult to pry apart situations where you imagine being someone else and situations where you imagine having most of their properties. Both (2) and (3) can be made to fit with The Imagination Assumption and The Indexicality Thesis. As Shepard flies to Mars, for example, both allow us to say that Betty imagines the centred proposition $\{\langle w, x\rangle: x \text{ flies to Mars in } w\}$. The question is whether Betty takes x to be her actual self—that is (2)—or whether she takes x to be Shepard, whom she also imagines to be identical to herself in w—that is (3). I'll spend the rest of this paper laying out two reasons for why I think we should believe that playing *Mass Effect* involves (3) rather than (2).

The first reason has to do with fictional importation. What is true in a fiction goes far beyond what we are explicitly told. We routinely flesh out a fictional world by drawing on information gathered from common knowledge, presuppositions and implicatures (Currie, 1990; Walton, 1990; Gendler, 2000). *Mass Effect* never tells us that Vancouver is north of New York, for example, but it is true in the fiction nonetheless. Likewise, many facts about the characters are never made explicit and we can only infer them using background information. The way we import information into a fictional world seems to satisfy what Friend (2017, pp. 32–34) calls 'The Reality Assumption': if φ is true in the actual world, then φ is also fictionally true, unless excluded by the work. The thing to note about The Reality Assumption is that it makes it much more likely that Betty is doing (3) rather than (2). If she were to imagine the story by way of (2), she would import facts about her actual self unless it was excluded by *Mass Effect*. This is, of course, what we usually do when we imagine ourselves in counterfactual circumstances, as (2) says is how we engage with fiction. But this does not square well with how we think of fictional characters in interactive fiction. Just because Betty loves strawberries, and *Mass Effect* is silent on the matter when it comes to Shepard, we do not consider it a part of the story that Shepard has a fondness for strawberries as well. Our reluctance to import facts about ourselves and our biographies is, however, exactly what you would expect if we are really imagining being someone else.

To give another example, consider how a protagonist's preferences are determined. When engaged with an interactive fiction we typically have to make choices that impact the story one way or another. In *Mass Effect,* Shepard has to decide on matters such as whether he should sacrifice civilians to achieve other goals, seek retribution for past injustices or whether he should go on a romantic date with his friend Liara. The fiction does not exclude the possibility that Shepard has more or less the same preferences as Betty has in the actual world. So if Betty were simply imagining herself in Shepard's circumstances—adjusting for what the fiction says about him—she would import her own psychology and attribute it to Shepard. But doing so goes against how most interactive fictions play out. It is up to Betty to decide what character she wants Shepard to be, and she might play Shepard as having preferences altogether different from herself. It is, for example, perfectly possible for Betty to desire going on a date with Liara *as Shepard* in the fiction, while at the same be of the opinion that were she in Shepard's circumstances she would not want to do so. Again, this is what we would expect if she is really doing (3) rather than (2). The fact that we do not usually import much information about our actual selves into the fiction supports the idea that we imagine being the protagonist. Since Shepard is a non-actual individual, there are no particular facts about him to import from the actual world. And that explains why his preferences are, as far as the fiction is concerned, indeterminate prior to Betty's decisions.

The second reason for why we should accept The Identity Thesis makes use of a so-called 'Lakoff case' (Lakoff, 1972). To set it up properly we need to change the example again. Suppose this time that Tom Cruise is playing a dating simulator game called *Lovely Angels*. In this game, Tom also plays as Shepard, the space soldier who always ends up dating famous people in Los Angeles. One night he is off on a blind date. While seated at the restaurant his partner for the evening arrives: it's Tom Cruise! At this point in the game, (actual) Tom Cruise must imagine something he could have reported on by saying 'I am dating myself'. In order to imagine this event, Tom Cruise must be able to distinguish between his fictional self and his actual self. But if he is doing (2), he cannot really differentiate between them in terms of denying their identity in the fictional world. Because according to (2), his fictional self just is his actual self in counterfactual circumstances.

On the other hand, if what Tom Cruise is doing is (3), it is not at all mysterious how it is possible for Tom Cruise to engage in this kind of imagining. He just needs to keep track of which individual he takes himself to be in the different worlds. As he is playing through the scene, Tom Cruise is imagining in the actual world w that in the fictional world w^* he is x^*, who is identical to Shepard in w^*, and that in w^*, he is dating x, who is identical to Tom Cruise in w, but not in w^*. In short, he is contemplating the possibility that his fictional self is dating his actual self. This fine-grained differentiation is only possible if Tom Cruise does not consider the person he is in the actual world to be identical, in the counterfactual world w^*, with the person he is in w^*. That means that Tom Cruise cannot be taking on the role of Shepard by simply contemplating his actual self in counterfactual possibilities. Rather, he must imagine being Shepard, a fictional character altogether distinct from the person he actually is.

In addition to supporting The Identity Thesis, the last example shows that contents of interactive imaginings are slightly more complex than mere centred propositions. When you consume an interactive story you do imagine your fictional self in a first person way, but you also have access to your actual (or believed) self. This is further witnessed by how easily we transition from talking about fictional self ('I fought the Woodsman') to talking about our actual selves ('I've lost this fight several times'). In the example above, Tom Cruise just happened to do so in a single imaginative episode. When he imagines being the protagonist on a date, he imagines the event from the protagonist's first person point of view, which includes his actual self viewed in a third-person way—or 'from the outside'. But notice that if Tom Cruise's thought *I am dating myself* was a centred proposition, it would be set of centred worlds $\{\langle w, x\rangle: x \text{ is dating } x \text{ in } w\}$. According to this thought, x simply dates x in w. In other words, it would have to be the same individual in those worlds, making centred propositions unsuited for distinguishing between Tom Cruise's actual self and his fictional self, as The Identity Thesis requires.

The most straightforward refinement we can make is to retain our established centred worlds approach, but describe interactive imaginings as having self-locating two dimensional contents (Ninan, 2016). A two-dimensional proposition has two centres, one centred on one's actual self and one centred on one's fictional self. By entertaining a proposition of this kind, Tom Cruise is able to keep track of his two distinct identities. Given the actual world, we first have the set of centred worlds compatible with what Tom Cruise believes (in particular, that he is Tom Cruise in those worlds). The second centre is established relative to the first, and consists of the set of centred worlds that Tom Cruise imagines (in particular, that he is Shepard in those worlds). So the content of Tom Cruise's imagining is the set of pairs of centred worlds $\{\langle w, x\rangle, \langle w^{*}, x^{*}\rangle\text{: x* is dating in x in w*}\}$, such that x is Tom Cruise and x^{*} is Shepard. When entertaining this dual self-locating thought, Tom Cruise is able to locate his actual self in the belief worlds and his fictional self in the fictional worlds. When his actual self is imported into the fictional worlds he no longer imagines his actual self in a first person. That role is played by Shepard.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested a way to explain what makes interactive fiction special. We started off with the observation that when we engage with interactive fiction we take on the role of one of the characters and that we are, in some way, involved in the narrative. To clarify the notions of 'taking on the role' and 'involved in the narrative', I suggested we should combine three ideas: The Imagination Assumption, The Indexicality Thesis and The Identity Thesis. Together they constitute the paper's basic idea that a characteristic feature of interactive fiction is that appreciative engagement with such works involves imagining being the protagonist and contemplating the story in a first person way.

Paal Fjeldvig Antonsen
University of Bergen
pal.antonsen@uib.no

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