The pre-reflective roots of the *madeleine*-memory: a phenomenological perspective

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Abstract

This paper investigates the *madeleine*-memory (so-called from Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*) as a case of pre-reflective experience, from the genesis of its sedimentation into the body. Indeed, I aim to address the question of the literary protagonist Marcel on the roots of his happiness and the genesis of his memories. Until now, the *madeleine*-memory has been described as bodily and involuntary. In phenomenology, a wide literature has confirmed the relationship between the sense of body ownership and pre-reflective self-awareness. I aim to build upon such a mutual link and show that the pre-reflective roots of the *madeleine*-memory have to be traced back to the genesis of the involuntary recollections. To this purpose, I will illustrate that the epistemological relationship between the object and the subject plays a relevant role in the way the subject remembers. First, I will present that *madeleine*-memory is a unique case of bodily memory, by analyzing the main features that characterize it. Secondly, I will analyze the original experience of the *madeleine* within the phenomenological logic of *transcendence in immanence*. For this aim, I will rely on the Husserlian notions of “epistemological inadequacy of perception” and “background experiences”. Through these notions, I will show that Proustian involuntary recollections are pre-reflective experiences because previously subjects have pre-reflectively experienced the content of recollections.

Keywords Prereflective self-awareness · Bodily memory · Embodiment · Proustian memory · Husserl · Phenomenology

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1 Introduction

The *madeleine-memory*, an evocative term used by Fuchs (2012) to point at a specific type of bodily memory which is well accounted in Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*, has been studied both within literature and aesthetic studies and within phenomenological and cognitive investigations. All these fields generally acknowledge that the work of Proust is an important contribution to the psychology of memory. Indeed, cognitive and phenomenological studies have already used Proust's work as an effective strategy for investigating memory (Fuchs, 2012; Groes, 2016; Rowland, 2017; Troscianko, 2013). From the standpoint of the cognitive sciences, the studies have been focused on the cognitively realistic aspects of the *madeleine-memory* (Delacour, 2001; Troscianko, 2013). Phenomenologically, the studies on Proustian memory have been part of more comprehensive investigations on embodied temporality and memory (De Warren, 2009; Kaushik, 2008). However, phenomenological investigations on the bodily features of involuntary memory are still missing.

In this article, I aim to address the question of the protagonist Marcel on the roots of his happiness and, consequently, on the genesis of the involuntary memory. As it is known, Proust's novel concludes that the source of happiness lies in regaining the "lost" past time through the manifestation of involuntary memory, which causes the enrichment of the present reality. Starting from this observation, Beistegui (2013) made an effort to understand this phenomenon within the architecture of involuntary memory. With the aid of Beistegui's research, in this paper, I will focus on investigating the bodily sedimentation of involuntary recollections.

In spite of the idea that the *madeleine-memory* may just be a literary expedient, it actually belongs to our everyday life. Anyone can testify to have experienced this phenomenon at least once in life: a sort of disruptive and intensive invasion of fragmented memories due to the presence of sensory triggers. A smell or the glare of light may become a window to a different time of our life: our past suddenly becomes a persistent manifestation before our eyes. Unlike the largest part of our memories, this kind of recollections does not present themselves in the form of autobiographical narrative but as a chain or an explosion of bodily sensations and emotions which vaguely tells us about a lived past and which we can not control; therefore, we can briefly claim that they are involuntary and bodily.

Traditionally phenomenologists have focused on bodily memory in terms of the sedimented behavioural dispositions stored in our body (procedural activities, habits, postures, etc.). Merleau-Ponty, (2012) has used the notion of "operative intentionality" to explain habits or bodily techniques. Let's consider, for example, the case of a pianist, who *knows* the symphony to perform (cfr. Fuchs, 2012). Obviously, in order to do so, she does not have to deliberately remember every single movement but she has this knowledge in *her hands*: "not in the anatomical hands, of course, but in their lived body" (Fuchs, 2012, 10). The category of bodily and operative memory is typically understood as implicit memory, different from explicit and declarative memory. As it is clear, though, operative memory can not exemplify a complex phenomenon as the Proustian one, which is more similar to

a bodily form of episodic memory than to procedural recollections. Nevertheless, here, I employ Fuchs' notion of body memory (Ibidem). He suggests considering that "there is no strict separation" between implicit and explicit memory. According to him, a bodily memory has to be considered a type of memory that "does not represent the past but re-enacts it" (Ibidem, 19) which may still open a door to episodic content, as in the case of the *madeleine*-memory.

However, phenomenological investigations have relevantly contributed to the relationship of bodily ownership with selfhood (Fuchs, 2005, 2016; Legrand, 2006; Tsakiris et al., 2007; Zahavi, 2003a, 2017) by detecting a link with the so-called "pre-reflective self-awareness". As Wehrle (2020, 503) highlighted, in phenomenology, "the body exists as lived and operative, lingering in the background of our consciousness remaining immanent as a potentially perceivable object". As is well known, Zahavi (2003a) has shown that it implies that there exists a self-consciousness as a pre-reflective, minimal, involuntary and non-objectifying form of being aware. On the basis of this detected link between corporeality and pre-reflectivity, bodily memories are a kind of activity of the pre-reflective self.

Within the background of these previous investigations and such a discovered mutual link, I aim to investigate the *madeleine*-memory as a case of pre-reflective experience, from its genetic moment of sedimentation of recollections in the subjective body. Here, I use the notion of "pre-reflective experience" in order to point at those complex experiences of the lived body (which include physiological, emotional and environmental sensations) that have not been *thematized* at the moment of first perception.

In order to do so, the article is composed of two parts. In the first part, I aim to show that the *madeleine*-memory is a unique case of bodily memory and a manifest case of pre-reflective experience (in terms of a conscious manifestation of pre-reflective self-awareness). In order to clarify the case of the *madeleine*-memory, I will analyze its condensed sensations and meanings through the analysis of Fuchs (2012) and Beistegui (2013). In the second part, I aim to argue that the roots of its pre-reflective nature have to be traced back to the genesis of the involuntary recollections. I will show that the way the subject *knows* the objects is deeply related to the way of remembering them. In order to do so, I will analyze the relationship between the subject and recalled objects in terms of the phenomenological logic of *transcendence in immanence*. Carrying out this analysis will allow us to consider the *madeleine*-object simultaneously as a recalled transcendental object and as a cluster of immanent lived experiences of the first perception. Besides, it enables us to consider the double nature of transcendental objects, namely their independent existences and their constitutions through cognitive operations. In other words, to explain the Proustian protagonist's frustration at his inability to grasp the mystery hidden behind the *madeleine*, I will treat the *madeleine* as a transcendent object and I will carry forward the analysis through the Husserlian notions of "epistemological inadequacy of perception" and "background experiences".

2 The Proustian phenomenon

2.1 A taxonomy for the *madeleine*-memory

In this paragraph, I aim to show that the *madeleine*-memory is a unique case of bodily memory. First of all, I will present Proust's work and the main features of his memory. Secondly, I will compare the Proustian account of involuntary memory with contemporary taxonomies. Since this is a complex phenomenon that includes autobiographical aspects, I will introduce two features provided by Fuchs (2012): the "temporal overlap" and the "nodal point".

Let's get familiar with Proust's work. The popular anecdote of *madeleine* tells the experience of the protagonist, Marcel, who tasted a cookie (the *madeleine*, precisely) immersed in herb tea again after a long time. Then he felt an unexpected sensation of bewilderment because of the explosion of memories, images, colours that he had (apparently) forgotten but suddenly remembered and *saw* as they were before his eyes. Through them, he felt that he was re-living (or *enacting*) the summers of his childhood he used to spend at Combray. So Marcel – confused by the images that had assaulted – tried hopelessly to follow the genesis or the *roots* of such experiences into the materiality of objects, without solving the puzzle that these sensations offer throughout the development of the novel.

He can finally get the essence of the just-lived moment and regain his past time, only apparently lost, when a similar episode to the *madeleine*-experience happens to Marcel again as many other times before: as he stumbles on uneven flagstones at the end of the novel, in *Finding Time Again*. This episode allows him to find the solution to the literary puzzle and to understand that the key to his happiness is hidden behind the involuntary memory. What is particularly interesting, though, is how Marcel talks about his revelation which occurs thanks to involuntary memory. At that moment, the Narrator lives a sort of suspension of his troubles and finally regains happiness:

At the moment when, regaining my balance, I set my foot down on a stone which was slightly lower than the one next to it, all my discouragement vanished in the face of the same happiness that, at different points in my life, had given me the sight of trees I had thought I recognized when I was taking a drive around Balbel, the sight of the steeples of Martinville, the taste of a *madeleine* dipped in herb tea, and all the other sensations I have spoken about, and which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to synthesize (Proust, 2002, 174).

Through this passage, the Narrator builds a metaphorical bridge between the present and the past. The stone has caused happiness which belongs to a different period of his life: which, in turn, re-evokes further images from the past. Thus, the protagonist understands that the stone-episode is the same kind of experience he has lived other times in his life (for instance, with the *madeleine*-episode), even though the images he *sees* and the smells he *perceives* were different from the other times.

The happiness that I had just experienced was indeed just like that I had felt when eating the *madeleine*, and the cause of which I had at that time put off seeking. The difference, purely material, was in the images each evoked (Proust, 2002, 175).

At that point of the novel, Marcel is ready to investigate the causes of his happiness, lying in the evoked images: the blue of the sky, the sights of trees, the taste of the *madeleine*. These are not just the photographic representations of past experiences but appear in a new guise, by having a so-called “surplus of meaning”, as Beistegui (2013) underlined.

Let’s sum up the key features which are possible to identify from the short description I provided. In the above-mentioned passages, Proust shows that bodily sensations evoke memories, or in other terms, an external factor inflames the Narrator’s memories, no matter if it is a taste, a smell or a tactile sensation. Consequently, such an evocation recalls further images and sensory memories in an associative way. In fact, the bodily senses are both the driving force and the material of memories. Further, the associative character has to be remarked upon, because it links all the senses: in fact, in the above quotes, for instance, Proust declares that the smell of the remembered-object (e.g. *madeleine*) evokes other *images*, and it’s possible to add colours, sounds, etc. So the involuntary feature does not concern just the will of subjects to remember, but also the material of recollections: throughout these phenomena, subjects do not have any control over the recalled material. Therefore, it is possible to define the *madeleine*-memory as bodily, involuntary and associative.

Proust had undoubtedly a clear account of these three key elements characterizing the *madeleine*-memory. In an essay written between 1895 and 1900, Proust (1971) presented the theoretical account of three types of memory, which would have a role in his novel: the *habitual memory* (*mémoire habituelle*), the *voluntary memory* (*mémoire volontaire* or *mémoire de l’intelligence*) and the *involuntary memory* (*mémoire involontaire* or *mémoire de senses*). The first type of memory concerns habits and procedural activities which the body stores through repetition: along with involuntary memory, it belongs to the body. The second type of memory characterizes broadly our life and fulfills the function to recollect information that is stored anytime. In Proust’s account, this latter type is also the source of disappointments and criticism of limitations of mind: that’s because every time we look for past happiness into voluntary memory, we only find a faded copy. Conversely, involuntary memory is where happiness is located and two temporal states come to communication (Proust, 1971, 304; and cfr. Beistegui, 2013, 56).

Scholars have made some attempts to analyze Proustian memory within a taxonomy of memory from the standpoint of both cognitive science (Delacour, 2001; Troscianko, 2013) and phenomenology. However, it seems reasonable to embrace the phenomenological tradition because it aims “to overcome the dualism of representational mind and external world [...] through the medium of the body” (Fuchs, 2016). On the other hand, cognitive and social science “conceives of the mind as a disembodied system of representations and predictive models that are separated from embodied action” (Ibidem, 218).

Embodiment is the primordial form of subjectivity, but it is at the same time spatiality, situatedness, directedness to a horizon of possibilities which offer themselves to the body. [...] If the world is constituted for us only in the ongoing interaction with it, and if we are always already bodily acting in the world, then there is no separate “inner” which could map, reconstruct or represent the “outer” (Ibidem, 217).

Let us focus, then, on the phenomenological perspective. First of all, when talking about taxonomies, it is useful to be aware of two recognized types of memory: namely, explicit and implicit memory. Fuchs (2016) states that the essential criterion for such a classification involves the instrumental function of archiving and re-obtaining information stored. Briefly, the explicit memory has the function of consciously regaining the stored information; instead, the implicit memory is endowed with performative and bodily abilities. Accordingly the distinction between the two types of remembering accounts for two kinds of cognition: the representative and verbal form of *Knowing-that* and the performative form of *Knowing-how* (cfr. Fuchs, 2016). It is worth mentioning the work by Graf and Schacter (1985) in cognitive science that focused on the role of active consciousness in the two mnemonic systems, by claiming that explicit memory seems to require conscious thinking, differently from implicit memory.

Considering its relationship with the body, let's focus on the second type of memory. The main feature of the implicit memory concerns the bodily acquaintance with the manual techniques or adequate performance – also in social contexts: for instance, playing a symphony, dancing the waltz or recognizing what behaviour is required. These expertises have the quality not to be fully describable or decodable in verbal or linguistic ways but are stored in the body (cfr. Fuchs, 2016).

Amongst the most recent investigations, Fuchs (2012) and Rowland (2017) made an effort in order to detect a particular type of bodily memory, in which the grounding past episode is not stored in the form of episodic memory but remains in bodily forms in our lives. For this specific aim, Rowland compares two similar types of memory: the affective Rilkean memory and the Proustian one. According to him, in the novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* Rilke describes the purest form: a kind of memory that may undergo a bodily transformation that becomes essential in order to create art: “at some point and in some way [it] can ‘return’. When it does so, this is in a very different form: the memory has become *blood*” (Rowland, 2017, 54). Although this bodily transformation is also present in Proust's description, Rowlands detects other dimensions in Proust's memory, because it includes autobiographical and episodic aspects.

Fuchs (2012) has included some comments on these several dimensions that operate into Proustian memory in his article on the taxonomy of bodily memory. He distinguishes six forms: procedural, situational, intercorporeal, incorporative, pain and traumatic memory. Although the *madeleine*-memory is clearly identified through the features of bodily and involuntary, it cannot be reduced to any of previous forms: more likely, it cannot be fully understood as implicit, considering the tie which links the motivating factor of sensations and the episodic memory.

Body memory does not represent the past but re-enacts it. But precisely through this, it also establishes access to the past itself, not through images or words, but through immediate experience and action. Thus, it may unexpectedly open a door to explicit memory to resuscitate the past as if it were present as such (Fuchs, 2012, 19).

According to Fuchs' analysis, it is possible to find at least two main features of the *madeleine*-memory. The first one is its temporal dimension: this memory differs from explicit memory because present and past coincide in the act of enacting the previous self-awareness, creating an almost mystical experience.

If I return to the place of my childhood many years later, my former seeing reappears and my former feelings re-emerge. At the same time, I am seized by a particular alienation and bewilderment because the revived past strangely concurs with my present-day life (Ibidem, 19).

The temporal overlap between present and past induces the sensations of alienation and bewilderment, which also are the most popular features of Proust's descriptions of involuntary memory. Concerning the account of time in Proust, De Warren (2009) well explained such Proustian re-enacting of the past in terms of the Husserlian notion of the double intentionality: so Marcel has not just recalled the past but rather lived again his self-awareness of the past. In such a way, Marcel's intentionalities are directed toward two different selves: the one from the past and the one from the present. He is aware of himself remembering sensations and he is re-enacting his past awareness at the same time.

The second feature concerns the connection of the three dimensions: symbolic, emotive and bodily. In Fuchs' account, there exists a symbolic and emotive condensation in the bodily sensation. In other terms, re-gained sensations through the motivating factors are reverberating elements of past emotions, and consequently of autobiographical significance.

I would like to call such a complex a meaning core. It is a nodal point of bodily recollection into which the lived past has condensed, as it were, and from which new meanings may unfold. (Fuchs, 2012, 20)

In other terms, even though the *madeleine*-memory clearly has to be part of a taxonomy of bodily memory, its nature is much more complex and non-reducible to a simplistic definition. Despite being implicit, bodily and involuntary, it still preserves a form of connection with explicit memory. The Proustian form of memory is very far from the basic form of implicit memory, namely procedural memory, but closer to a bodily form of episodic memory. The tie which connects the symbolic meanings of the autobiographical sphere with the sensations of the bodily sphere shows an alteration of the established mnemonic systems.

In order to trace the genesis of meaning condensation, in the next paragraph I will present Beistegui's interpretation of the Proustian phenomenon.

2.2 The genetic roots of the *madeleine*-memory

One of the open questions throughout Proust's novel concerns why Marcel can not achieve the source of his happiness through examining the objects: "Where could it have come to me from – this powerful joy?"—Marcel asks. As it is known, Marcel's happiness consists of regaining the lost past time through involuntary recollections, by experiencing a temporal overlap of the present and the past time. Focusing on the architecture of involuntary memory, in this paragraph, I will examine this question through the notions of "unlived experiences" and "residue of reality" provided by Beistegui in his analysis of Marcel's experience. I aim to argue that Marcel's difficulty in grasping the mystery hidden behind the *madeleine* lies in the epistemological relationship between the object (i.e. the *madeleine*) and the subject (i.e. Marcel).

Let's consider again the elements of Proustian bewilderment. A sensory element that condenses the overlap of two different temporal dimensions (present and past) causes bewilderment. Confused by the phenomena experienced, Marcel wonders how the objects allow the assertive invasion from the past – uncovering a surplus of images and sensations, which are hard to grasp. According to Proust's narration, Marcel spends his life trying to understand the puzzle hidden behind the objects: trying to get closer to them with great attention, inquiring them, looking for the sensations that cause such phenomena. The objects stand in front of him, but Marcel gets no answers from them. Then he understands that the source of the surplus hidden in the motivating factor does not come from the objects themselves. Again, if sensations that come from the objects have caused the involuntary memory, then why are not the objects the source of such a surplus? On the other hand, if this surplus was solely caused by himself, why can't he then recall the memory whenever he wants? Let's consider, for instance, how Beistegui describes when Marcel looks for joy in hawthorns:

Because his pleasure is wholly contained in the flowers under his eyes, Marcel thinks that its origin can be grasped through the closest possible encounter with their materiality, by drinking in their presence and, intoxicated, embracing it completely. He wants to hold onto them at all costs. How? And what, exactly, does he want to hold onto? The flowers are here, present and available. He can come back to them, [...] and plunge his sense into them all over again. Something in them, though, escapes him (Beistegui, 2013, 21).

According to Beistegui's analysis, a surplus of phenomenality exists and it does not depend on subjectivity or reality, but on the relationship between them. First of all, I need to underline the following clarification. In analyzing the Proustian phenomena, Beistegui distinguishes: on the one hand, the content of involuntary recollections (the objects and episode recalled which belong to the past) and, on the other hand, the motivating factors (the sensations which belong to the present) that cause the associative outburst of images. Keeping this distinction in mind, let us start analyzing the role of the subject.

To the question of what is the content of involuntary recollections, we would be tempted to answer that it involves the forgotten sensations. In Beistegui's investigation, instead, he suggests choosing another interpretation: Marcel cannot forget

such sensations because he has never lived them (at least, with thematic attention – I would add). According to Beistegui, Proust provides a concept of memory that does not concern a “collection of lived experiences”, but an infinite reservoir of *unlived experiences*,¹ defined as “the very residue that *exceeds* lived experience, the supplement or the share of unlived experience that’s particular to the lived experience” (Ibidem, 28, my italics), and that becomes the content of involuntary memories:

It’s not the past that involuntary memories bring back to me, then, but that part of the past that hasn’t yet passed. And it is not yet passed because it’s never been present, at least in the sense that we’d ordinarily understand it. [...] To the time of existence, to the time of death, the time that runs and slides through the world, we ought to juxtapose the time of insistence. [...] The time of memory, by contrast, is that of unlived experience (Ibidem, 45).

Beistegui provides an essential trait of the *madeleine*-memory and introduces a metaphysics of time that is the opposite of the traditional one. As opposed to chronological time, which is linear and leads us to death, the time of insistence rolls up and returns. (cfr. Ivi). Respectively, the conscious, voluntary and explicit memory belongs to the time of existence, in which some experiences that have been part of our conscious lives are stored as in an archive; and the involuntary memory belongs to the time of insistence, in which every single detail of our existences and experiences endures: the time of involuntary memory preserves the *unlived* experiences and allows them to *return* as for the first time.²

This interpretation raises questions on the exact nature of the *unlived* experiences and on what way such material can belong to involuntary memory. According to Beistegui, *unlived* experiences are those sensations that intelligence considers redundant due to habit (cfr. Ibidem, 49). But how is it possible that the repetition³ of redundant, marginal and uninteresting sensations can have a role in involuntary memory and such intensive happiness?

¹ Beistegui’s concepts of *lived* and *unlived experience* are traced upon Benjamin’s notions of experience: *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Benjamin’s theory aimed to argue against the Kantian idea of experience, and to tie experience to the structure of memory (as supplied by Bergson and Proust). So, as opposed to the concept of *Erlebnis* – as an experience lived explicitly and consciously – Benjamin suggests the concept of *Erfahrung*, that presupposes the unconscious hoarding of sensible data. This experience reveals itself retrospectively: the past time deposits unconsciously and becomes accessible only through involuntary memory and narrative (cfr Pinotti, 2018).

² More precisely, Beistegui presents two kinds of oblivion, which correspond to the described two types of time. In his account, besides the oblivion as an actual act of forgetting, there exists an *oblivion of the unlived experiences* where all the marginal sensations – not lived consciously – are preserved. To discuss the topic of “forgetting” in a coherent manner throughout the article, I refer only to the first type of oblivion. For a complete overview, see Beistegui, 2013, pp. 55–60.

³ It is worth pointing out that sensations can not return *identically*, because it does not concern the simple materiality. As Beistegui observes (cfr. Ibidem, 47–48), if it initially involves an intense sensation, its identical repetition would be disappointing because too distant from the original pleasure; and if instead “it involves [...] a feeling of relative indifference, its identical return won’t miraculously reversed into its opposite”. The joy is not linked to the previous lived experience or the present perception, but to what exceeds the experience itself.

The answer partially concerns the role of habit in our lives. Habit is a powerful drive that leaves everyday impressions, sensations and perceptions at the margins of attentive consciousness. In fact, during Marcel's childhood, the *madeleine*-experience is an experience that occurred every Sunday when he used to wake aunt Leonie up and eat her *madeleine*. As Beistegui highlights, the taste of *madeleine* infused in herb tea was not an intense pleasure, but an ordinary and uninteresting sensation: absorbed in everyday life, intelligence recognizes the taste as redundant because of habit but it remains available at the margins of the attentive consciousness (cfr. Ivi). Only in the moment of remembering it assumes a deeper meaning, demanding attention and triggering the memory of a lost time.

Moreover, Proust dedicated some pages to the role of attention, as the other side of the coin of habit. Let's consider, for example, a passage in *Contra Sainte-Beuve* (Proust, 1971, 231) in which Proust is still looking for the source of his happiness, believing it lies in objects. There, Proust told of the time when he forced himself to capture with *great attention* each single impression that he saw from the window of a compartment. Later on that day, he desperately tried to re-evoke the intensive impressions of the day, but he could not feel any joy. Thus, the attempt to capture the past impressions as photography leads only to a faded copy of the past joy.

However, habit and attention are not the only features in play. As is known, the reason for Marcel's happiness concerns regaining the past (only apparently) lost, and, consequently, experiencing a temporal overlap of the present and the past. So, what is the role of the *unlived experiences* in Marcel's happiness? And, consequently, what's their relationship with temporality? According to Beistegui's interpretation, since those marginal and ignored experiences have remained potentially available for being consciously enacted, they have persisted in the time of insistence. Thus, the involuntary recollections of marginal experiences are carriers of a *past temporality* that has persisted *unaltered* – despite the passing time of existence – and that manifests itself in its difference through encountering the present time.

It seems an obvious precondition that such a metaphysics of insistence is understood in terms of the mutual interaction between subject and object since only a subject can live “an experience”. Following this interpretation, I am going to investigate the access of these marginal perceptions to the attentive consciousness of subjects. The second part of the article will argue with Husserl that when Marcel first experienced the object, he did not pay attention to its background experiences. Because of this, they have been lived only pre-reflectively and it allows them to reappear under the form of involuntary memory: something which seemed forgotten and on which the subject has no control.

On the other hand, the ontology of reality also plays a significant role: to understand the surplus of sensations (images, sounds, smells), Beistegui observes that for Marcel to experience the surplus of phenomenality means also to have found the deep truth of reality.

The intensity of impression, its engulfing aspect, is the sign of a depth, a reality that's deepening and surpassing itself in the direction of something else that, in truth, is more like what it actually is. [...] [The pleasure] urges

us to grasp its origin and wonder whether there might not always be more than the present in the present (Ibidem, 22).

According to Beistegui, the experienced reality has got what he calls "extra reality": if so, the surplus of meaning – which can be described as a nodal point – depends on the ontological structure of reality. Beistegui (cfr. Ibidem, 20–25) suggests that when Marcel meets the motivating factors, he perceives an extra-reality: namely, the absent *corporeal* sensations that belonged to a past time.

To better illustrate this concept, let's briefly go back to Marcel's investigation of pleasure through examining the white hawthorns, as reconstructed by Beistegui. At first, Marcel thought that the extra-sensations came from his imagination: white hawthorns are linked to the image of Mary, the rituals performed in May and the church in Combray. However, the felt joy dissolved because it implies a divergence between the image and the real perceived object. As shown, neither perception can cause the extra-reality because every time he got closer to the raw materiality of the flowers, this feeling of joy disappeared. Finally, only when Marcel came across a pink hawthorn, he vaguely understood the truth about the extra-reality: the pink colour reminded him of a pink tasty cookie that we ate at Combray. The universe of his childhood, made by colours and tastes, as well as the freshness and creaminess of the cookie, allows the temporal overlap.

Thus, during the present moment of recollecting, the ontology of reality presents itself as deeper and more insistent through absent sensations, discovered through a motivating factor. As Beistegui pointed out, we can consider the residue of reality of the first experience metaphorically as the negative of photographic celluloid, developed, then, by the presence of a motivating factor. If reality gets an extra-reality which hits Marcel only when he does not pay attention, it may be necessary to wonder if the aspects of reality may be hidden to the subject during the genetic moment of the recollection. The following investigation has the goal of examining the epistemological constitution of the unity of transcendent objects. Thus, considering the mutual relationship between object and subject, I will show that the extra reality of the transcendent objects are – under a different perspective – the unlived experiences.

To sum up, considering the sensory character of this phenomenon, the puzzle may be lying on the perceived reality: in fact, I have discussed with Beistegui that an extra-reality belongs to the ontological structure of reality, which re-appears only through the mnemonic phenomenon. Then, investigating the role of the subject, I have discussed that Beistegui called the material of involuntary recollections as "the *unlived* experiences": paraphrasing, a kind of experience that has remained marginal to the consciousness but persists in our bodily memory. In the second part of the article, I will show that Husserlian analysis of the epistemological dynamics between the subject and the object can phenomenologically clarify both Beistegui's notions of "unlived experiences" and "the residue of reality". Husserl's genetic phenomenology takes into account the intrinsic and mutual relationship of subjectivity with objectivity in terms of *transcendence in immanence*, which provides an effective theoretical background for this investigation.

3 The epistemological dialectics in Husserl's genetic phenomenology

3.1 The temporal constitution of perceived objects in Husserl

In this paragraph, I will examine the notion of perceptive inadequacy and, consequently, the epistemological unreliability of perception in Husserl. In order to do so, I will analyze the dialectics between subjectivity and objectivity focusing on the notion of *transcendence in the immanence*. Secondly, since the immanent contents depend on how they are perceived, the role of subjectivity in the constitution of the unity of the transcendent object will be clarified through the condition of perceptive consciousness. Finally, I will show how temporal consciousness affects the epistemological acquisition of the object as a unity.

Costa (1999) has identified three intrinsic features of the external perception in Husserl: 1) *intentionality*, a characterizing feature of subjective acts; 2) *Leibhaftigkeit*, the trait of “being present in original”, quite different from reality; 3) the epistemological *inadequacy* to perceive the transcendent object. In order to understand the latter, Costa invokes the Husserlian distinction between “immanent” and “transcendent” objects. Let us examine such a distinction in detail.

According to Husserl (2001, 55), immanent objectivities depend exclusively on the manner of their perceptual manifestation. In such objectivities, “being” corresponds to “being given” to the consciousness (the *esse* and the *percipi* converge). The transcendent objects, which transcend subjectivity and endure even without subjective perception, are things in the manner of the spatial body (i.e. a table). “The *esse* (for transcendent objects) is in principle distinguished from the *percipi*” (Ivi). However, Husserl proposed the following specification:

[If] we turn our reflective regard toward the lived-experience and its “intimately inherent” components, we can also say that a transcendent object such as a thing can only be constituted when an immanent content is constituted as substratum. Now, this immanent content for its part is substituted, as it were, for the peculiar function of the “adumbration”, of an exhibiting appearance, of a being exhibited in and through it (Ibidem, 54).

Indeed, since Husserl breaks with the traditional ontology of the mind-world as two distinct entities, in phenomenology transcendence is always understood *in immanence*: this means that the transcendent object is a unity constituted by several immanent lived-experiences. If so, even the transcendent objects depend on their exhibiting appearance to subjectivity, and since the possible immanent perceptions of an object are infinitive, the object appears as inexhaustible to the subject.

Let us examine the constituted unity of an object in detail by observing the identificatory mental process. First of all, it can be useful to clarify the notion of “prospective adumbration” in Husserl, in order to show that the spatial object always appears perspectively, namely, by exhibiting and adumbrating parts of it. Such an “adumbration” is intrinsic to external perception. The movements of the object, that show previously adumbrated sides, hide what was previously shown.

Therefore, the object never appears completely. Even so, through the kinaesthetic movements, the apperceptive fulfillment of the missing sides and respective adumbration of the external object is also an acquired knowledge, implying that the process of knowledge does not start over from the beginning. Here, if the transcendent object shows only particular immanent contents, its unity has to be constituted by the passive synthetic operations.⁴

These passive syntheses provide stable and identifiable ‘objects’, which are temporally constituted in inner time consciousness (Wehrle, 2020). According to Husserl (1991, 2001), since the proper structure of perceptive consciousness is temporal, perception is always understood as retentive and protentive. Thus, the intentional object is always associated with its co-intentional sides: the hidden sides are given to the consciousness under another form, instead of in *original*. In other terms, the perception of the just-adumbrated aspects remains as retentive perception. In the same way, based on the previous cognitive acquisitions, the protentive perception takes place: in fact, the subject prefigures the supposed expectation. Only in this sense, the object is given as a whole,⁵ namely through retention and protention. In Husserl’s words:

That aspect of the object which has already appeared is partially lost again as it moves away from givenness, i.e., the appearance; the visible becomes non-visible again. But it is not lost. I remain conscious of it retentively and in such a way that the empty horizon of the appearance present at this time receives a new prefiguring that points in a determinate manner to what has already been given earlier as co-present (Husserl, 2001, 49).

It would be clearer if we consider, for instance, temporally-extended objects: we can grasp the unity of a melody, only because we can retain the temporal continuity of tones, and somehow prefigure the expected tones. A so-constituted knowledge has, conversely, “an occurrence that runs counter, namely, disappointment” (Idem, 63). That is, just because such “empty horizons” are intrinsic to perception, disappointment is a possible contingency: as Husserl wrote, every expectation, created and confirmed by habits, can be disappointed at any moment (Idem, 64).

In this way, Husserl reveals the double nature of the transcendent object: its existence is independent of subjectivity but, at the same time, it discloses itself as being so-and-so, in its unity, only because the passive synthetic operation has already occurred starting from the immanent perception. In other terms, the constituted unity of the transcendent object is the result of synthetic operations, which works by

⁴ This is possible because of the contribution of what he calls “horizontal intentionality”, namely the intuitive consciousness directed toward the horizon of absent objective determinations.

⁵ Here I am referring to the notion of “noema”, namely the object-as-it-is-intended. In other terms, the “noema” differs from the external object because it is the result of an act of consciousness (intentionality) that intends the several manifestations of immanent contents as manifestations of the same thing. Without delving into the so-called noema-discussion, it is worth mentioning the West Coast interpretation and the East Coast interpretation (Zahavi, 2003b). The first one sees the noema as an ideal entity which is instrumental in our intending the objects; the second one intends the noema as the object in its significance for us: namely, the object and the noema are the same thing differently considered.

starting from the immanent content of the *hyletic* data. These operations are called “transcendental apperception” by Husserl. Thus, the nature of the objective inadequacy is located in the logic of the *transcendence in immanence*.

To sum up, because it is independent of subjectivity, the object endures from any subjective operation; indeed, this resistance is shown by the series of perceptive modifications which give the object to the subjectivity. Even if we consider only one of the five senses (e.g. sight) the spatial and temporal perceptive modifications of the object depend on several variables, such as perspective, light, and so on: modifications that have to be considered cognitively *redundant* in order to avoid to constantly inquire the perceptual world. On the other hand, passive synthesis constitutes the unity of the object and tracks the persistent elements down *despite* the constant modification of immanent contents. In Husserl’s words:

If we observe an unchanging object at rest, for example, a tree standing before us, we pass over it with our eyes, now we step closer to it, now back away from it, now here, now there, we see it now from this, now from that side. During this process the object is constantly given to us as unchanged, as the same [...]. In a constant variation of modes of appearance, perspectives, that is, during a constant variation in the actual lived experience of perception, we have a consciousness that runs through them and connects them up, a consciousness of the one and the same object (Husserl, 2001, 34).

Operations which constitute the unity of the object are essential, otherwise, the subject would see a constantly changing and inexhaustible world. Such a cognitive attitude to simplify the complexity of perceptive flow is called by Husserl “the natural attitude to the world”, namely an intentional organization of reality at the expense of the flow of iridescent sensations allows subjects to have an epistemological structure of reality. Conversely, if subjects had to grasp objects in their constant changing aspects, then it would imply a constant inquiry of the knowledge of objects themselves.

3.2 Background lived-experiences

In this paragraph, I will examine the notion of “background experiences” and, consequently, the role of attention in modifying the *status* of an experience. In order to do so, firstly, I will discuss the levels of perception and focus on the basic level of the apprehension (*Auffassung*). I aim to discuss how the background experiences are lived without attention and so passively. In Husserl’s account, at the level of apprehension, the sensory contents of the background experiences can present themselves as available in consciousness, but the unity of the object composed by the sensory contents is not perceived. Finally, I will analyze the sensory contents in terms of *hyletic data*. Through the notion of *hyletic data*, it will be possible to underline the role of the body in the hyletic experiences.

Objects are not given to us in isolation, with no interaction with the background or other sensations that come from outside or inside our own body. In our everyday life, we are constantly immersed in a flow of sensations. During the activities we

usually accomplish, we tend to exclude and isolate the majority of sensations that are not immediately useful for our activities: for instance, we are inclined to exclude less intense sounds or the light of the sunset which comes from the window – until these sensations demand our attention (for example, when the sun has set and surprisingly we realize that we need to turn on the light of the room). Conversely, a flash of lightning in the night or the sharp whistle of a train are objects that get our full attention. Besides the external stimuli (which remain in the background), also the stimuli coming from our body may suddenly require our full attention (e.g. a feeling, a pain). These experiences are generally referenced by Husserl with the term “background experiences”. However, upon a closer look at Husserl’s account of attention, we can see that he presents terms with more fine-grained distinctions.

First of all, let us define what attention is. In *Husserliana* volume 38 (Husserl, 2004), he defines it as something that has the function to give “preference” (*Vorzug*) to certain objects among the variety of present objects, and thus attention allows perceivable objects to become perceived objects (Ibidem, 86). Here, Husserl attributes the name of “noticed objects” (*Bemerkte*) to all objects that get our attention: it is worth emphasizing that the noticed objects can be indifferently both the external objects and the lived perceptions and feelings. Briefly stated, the noticed object is what is perceived; the unnoticed background (*unbemerkten Hintergrund*) is what is *seen* but ignored (*Übersehen*). So the background is actually perceivable and immediately available to be perceived, but despite this, it is still ignored. What does it mean that background perceptions are always immediately available to be perceived? And why are they ignored?

According to Husserl (Ibidem, 90), the sensory contents of the background experiences can present themselves in consciousness for a potential perception – and so they are felt (*empfunden*) somehow – but we cannot perceive the objects presented through the sensory content. These contents are just *apprehended* but not *intended*, and so they persist as undetermined and changing because of the missing intervention of the attention and intentionality (*Meinung*): in this sense, intentionality is not directed toward apprehended lived experiences.

To better understand this point, Wehrle (2010) discussed the several levels of perception in Husserl’s account. First, Husserl assumes a first basic level of pre-objective perception, which the material provides for an objective apprehension (*Auffassung*). Apprehension is the first stage of perception *before* the intervention of attention. The second stage is a special form of intentionality, *die Meinung*: this emphasizes something with an objective meaning and makes it thematic. However, the emphasizing function of this intentionality accounts only for the structural precondition of attention: the question remains, what drives us to pay attention to something rather than something else? Although many objective causes (intensity, notability, etc.) can be relevant, the subjective circumstances play a relevant role. More specifically, Wehrle underlines the role of interest that motivates and stabilizes this subjective relationship. She concludes that both interest and *Meinung* are essential aspects of perception.

To sum up, attention plays a role in modifying the status of objects from a background experience to a foreground experience. In the apprehension, the sensory contents are felt somehow but are not fully perceived as *intended* objects.

As Gander (2007) well summarizes, “attention thus appears as that process in which something becomes thematic that at first appeared as marginal”. Such marginal material is already pre-given to me, although I am not aware that the stimulus affects me (and competes for my attention). Instead, the status of givenness is achieved only when the Ego turns the attention toward the object.

Although the effective contents of the perceived object (*reell*) remain unchanged, in Husserl’s account the status of the object itself changes completely when consciousness changes its activity toward a transcendent object from a status of pre-objective experience to an objective and thematic experience. In fact, Husserl observes:

It is not like shoving things in a room away from the window into dark corners, where the things themselves remain unchanged. The moment a background lived-experience becomes present, that is, the moment the Ego becomes an Ego carrying out acts through it, it has, as lived-experience, become completely and essentially transformed. So too, *vice versa* (Husserl, 2001, 21).

What does it mean that the status of the experience changes? Again, if in apprehension the sensory contents of the background experiences can present themselves as already available in consciousness, but not the *intended* unity of the object composed by the sensory contents, what does this mean?

Here, it can be useful to introduce the notion of *hyletic experiences* provided by Gallagher (1986) to point to those experiences of the lived body (as well as physiological and environmental ones) which are “absently available”. In this way, he focuses on the connection between *hyle* and the body. As I already said in the previous paragraph, the immanent contents of *hyletic data* are the basis of all (perceived and perceivable) objects. They are the starting material for the constituted unity of the transcendent object, which is the result of synthetic operations. But what happens when the Ego does not *actively* orient itself in the constitution of sense? The *hyletic data* remain un-thematized, and thus “pre-given for the conscious apprehension that animates them” (Gallagher, 1986).

As Gallagher well explained, in Husserl, the term *hyle* assumes two different meanings: “(1) formless contents that have the potential to receive a form, and (2) something that is not directly perceived in conscious acts” (Ibidem, 132). Examples that fall under the definition of hyletic data are external sensorial data which come from an object (colour-data, touch-data, tone-data, etc.) and internal bodily data (pleasure-data, pain-data, etc.). Gallagher has identified nine features of hyletic data: amongst them, three are particularly interesting for the purpose of this article, namely their un-intentional nature, their pre-reflective feature and their Gestalt unity. Let us examine these features.

According to Gallagher’s explanation, hyletic data do not have any intentional reference: or in other words, the Ego does not actively operate on the objective sensations with an act of intentionality. This brings us to the next feature: presenting themselves as a mixture of sensations and belonging to the unity of consciousness, they can be grasped by the subject only abstractly through an act of *reflection*. As I have already shown with Husserl’s words above, Gallagher concludes:

[Husserl] notes that reflection "generates new phenomena" and transforms its object. [...] Hyletic data, *qua* Erlebnisse, have a non-objective being (see Hua IX, 163), but if they are made thematic in reflection they lose this non-objective status – they are abstracted and become objects for reflection (Ibidem, 134).

Finally, they are always in the form of a mixture or members of a sense-field or sense-*Gestalt*. They are constituted as an associative unity of sensations, in which one refers to another and vice versa. A reflective operation on the hyletic data would also mean a de-composition of their hyletic unity. Because of this constantly changing flux of sensations linked to one another, Gallagher proposes the term "hyletic experience" to emphasize this unitary and synaesthetic field.

There is no isolated datum. Primarily, before any reflection, there is always a field or a *Gestalt*, and the field is always a synaesthetic one. For this reason, I propose the term "hyletic experience" rather than hyletic data or sensations to signify this unitary and synaesthetic field (Ibidem, 141).

One last point has to be discussed. I already said that internal bodily data (i.e. pain) are hyletic experiences. Some critics have underlined, though, that if they are immanent contents, which compose the unity of transcendent objects, then they cannot belong to consciousness (for a complete overview see Ibidem, 137–140). Without delving into such a problematic discussion, here it is worth presenting Gallagher's counter-argument. If phenomenologists keep in mind the distinction between *being a body* (*Leib*) and *having a body* (*Körper*), any doubts about the existence of hyletic experiences are dispelled. Even if a reflective Ego does not objectify a hyletic sensation and so pay attention to it, it is still pre-reflectively endured through the lived body. Even though Gallagher understands the motivation behind the idea that it is hard to identify them as members of consciousness, he clarifies that the hyletic experience can clearly be a cluster of sensations that belong to the body. Here is Gallagher's answer: "the transcendence is, so to speak, located on the "near side" of consciousness: hyletic experience is an experience that belongs to the body" (Ibidem, 141). Bodily perceptions, as well as both physiological and environmental sensations, are constantly available, waiting to get attention from the reflective consciousness and modifying their status.

To sum up, without the contribution of attention and intentionality, the hyletic experiences are perceived passively and so stored as pre-reflective experiences: obtaining the features of un-thematic, pre-reflective and members of a mixed sense-field. For the purpose of this article, in the next paragraph, this analysis will clarify how the residual aspects of Proustian objects are Marcel's *unlived* experiences (in the Beistegui's sense) and what is the role of attentive consciousness in the dynamics between subject and object.

4 Conclusions

The Husserlian epistemological analysis of the transcendent object and the background experiences have provided tools for understanding the relationship between Marcel and the *madeleine*. In this paper, I investigated the genesis of involuntary

recollections by examining the objects and the motivating factors. I argue that the difficulty in grasping the mystery behind the *madeleine* lay in the subjective epistemological constitution of the unity of transcendent objects. Marcel's effort to consciously and attentively examine the intentional objects of his memory is not sufficient to understand the puzzle behind the extra-reality, because the content of the *madeleine*-memory involves also the pre-given hyletic experiences. Thus, the *madeleine* can be analyzed through the notion of transcendent objects and the *other recalled images* of his childhood as a consequence of the sense-*Gestalt*.

Beistegui's investigation has shown that the ontology of reality presents itself with a surplus or "extra", which characterizes a more complex structure of reality and comes to manifestation only through a motivating factor. I argue that the reason why Marcel cannot grasp the extra reality of the *madeleine*-object lies in the previous unreliability of perception to reach a whole knowledge of the object. As with every transcendent object, the *madeleine* gets changing aspects of the reality that the subject Marcel tends to cut off from his attentive awareness in order to have an organic account of its objective unity.

By telling the *madeleine*-experience in *The Way by Swann's* (Proust, 2003), Proust himself declares that the only sight of the *madeleine* did not cause any feeling, because meanwhile, Marcel had seen the cookies in other circumstances without eating them: in other words, the *madeleine* had acquired its epistemological unity, separated from the sensations of his memory. Only when he could taste them again immersed in his spoon full of tea, suddenly the involuntary memory re-appeared intense as it was before his eyes. In the epistemological relationship with the *madeleine*, Marcel pays more attention to the unity of the object. What remains outside of his reflective attention is, instead, the changing aspects of the object and the entire sensory world he was perceiving: the changing colors, the smoothness of the touch, the changed taste because of the herb tea, and so on. So the taste of the *madeleine* is the motivating factor to recall the sensory world he "has never lived" in an associative way,⁶ and that allows Marcel to access his autobiographical memory. In fact, if a consciousness were forced to take into consideration the epistemological complexity of an object, it would constantly find an unstable reality: as any subject would, Marcel left the surplus of his lived experiences out of his awareness. Finally, it is reasonable to embrace Beistegui's notion of "unlived experiences": thus, with Beistegui's metaphor, some aspects of the object have never been lived because they have been marginal at the moment when Marcel has lived the experience. In Husserl's words, these marginal experiences have been lived operatively, without attention.

As Proust supposed, the *mémoire de l'intelligence* is a source of disappointment because it stores exclusively the aspects of reality in which the passive syntheses have already operated, in order to get a temporal-endured object in its unity. As Wehrle (2020) observes with the aid of Husserl, the passive syntheses of inner time

⁶ Additionally, Herz and Schooler (2002) have "tested" Proust's theory: the senses of the smell and taste are a direct window to the memories without the linguistic elaboration, because they developed into the hippocampus. Instead thalamus – which can be considered a window to the consciousness – elaborates the other senses.

consciousness play an essential role in the reproduction of a mnemonic object: “we can only *remember* events or time passed [...] because it was temporally constituted as a stable and permanent object with a fixed position in time” (Ibidem). Instead, Proust is interested in those aspects of the reality that the human intellect cannot grasp: thus, the un-synthesized *hyletic* features – fragmented members of the sense-field – become content of the *mémoire de senses*. Both the intentional objects and the experiences – marginally and operatively lived – are part of the mnemonic content, but only the un-synthesized and unprocessed sensations characterize the bodily and involuntary aspect of the *madeleine*-memory: in Beistegui’s words, since those *unlived*⁷ experiences remain preserved in bodily memory, we can re-enact them.

With the help of the notions of background experiences and apprehension, I analyzed the immanent content of changing aspects in terms of hyletic experiences, as pre-reflectively lived. Indeed, to maintain the unity of the objects, other immanent contents are variables to ignore: the lights of the room, the emotions he was feeling, and so on. During the summers at Combray, the object *madeleine* was not isolated from the other background lived experiences. Marcel immersed himself in a cluster of sensations, which comes from both the environment in Combray and his own body. Considering the analysis of the hyletic experiences, it is possible to argue that Marcel lived all of the sensations pre-reflectively and, thus, Marcel’s body has *learnt* and stored all the mixed sensations, until a motivating factor brought them to his awareness for a brief moment. In fact, I conclude that the character of the bodily *madeleine*-memory is pre-reflective, because the way Marcel lived some aspects of the *madeleine*, the environment and affective feelings was pre-reflective: again, his body had perceived and stored all of those unthematic and pre-reflective lived experiences that Marcel’s reflective consciousness has not recorded. Those aspects of reality and feelings had only access to the pre-reflective self-awareness.

During the recollecting moment, when Marcel happens to taste again the cookie in his adult life, the taste is not just a familiar memory, but is deeply linked to all the other (forgotten) sensations and images he lived at Combray: the associative link of the hyletic sense-field allows the subject to enact them as an associative chain of memories. So when the pre-reflective memories re-present themselves, Marcel’s difficulty to grasp them lies in the fact that hyletic sensations have never been part of his attentive consciousness. To conclude, as Gallagher (1986, 148) says: “[The hyletic experience] is lived experience, but not necessarily conscious experience”.

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⁷ It is worth reminding that Beistegui’s notion of “unlived experience” is not the opposite of the phenomenological notion of “lived body”, since they belong to two different traditions. With the former notion from Benjamin’s philosophy of experience, I refer to the sensations experienced implicitly and unconsciously, left out by intelligence; with the latter one from Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s tradition, I refer to the implicit and pre-reflective experience of our body.

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Declarations

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