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Catching Ecstasy Proust and the *Tangibilia* Beyond Time's Dimension

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Abstract • The article starts recalling the barthesian notion of *Tangibilia*, referred to the concrete detail's device present in Japanese *haiku*, explicitly related to the *Recherche*. By retracing earlier Proustian texts it's shown the persistency of his tension toward this styleme conceived as key of an emotional writing, up to its complete realisation in the *Recherche*. In this *œuvre*, thanks to a finally defined conceptual architecture, the detail is invested by the idea of Time; at once, it decisively contributes to structure it and to make it communicable through the instant of Ecstasy. The article concludes with a brief review of interdisciplinary perspective about the detail. It also proposes a possible resolution to Barthes' problem of passing from Notation to Novel, suggesting that the latter could be considered a producer, more than a container, of the former.

Keywords • Proust; Barthes; *haiku*; concrete detail; idea.

Ledizioni 

Catching Ecstasy

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The aim of the present article is to show in which way the rhetorical device of the concrete detail acts in Proust's aesthetics as an access key to the joy of "extra-temporel" (Proust 1999c, p. 2266) *jouissance*, underlining its textual function of support to the dimension of conceptual reflection about Time as well as to the emotive and perceptive one, which brings up to the ecstatic sentiment.

I. Roland Barthes and the *Tangibilia*

To do so, although, we will start far from the Proustian text, and more specifically from the reflections proposed by Roland Barthes on the oriental poetry form of *haiku*,¹ as collected in two of his books: *L'empire des signes* (1970), the result of a personal authorial experience in Japan,² and particularly *La préparation du roman* (2003), which contains the lessons from the last two barthesian courses, held at the College de France before its death in 1980. Actually, the distance from our subject is only relative, because Barthes' purpose in its late lessons is exactly to establish a relationship between the two opposite polarities of the Notation, represented by *haiku*, and the Novel, represented by Proust's *œuvre*. The enchantment or phantasmatic Desire that Barthes feels for the Notation in its last years is linked to the other big spectre of that period: the Novel, the *Vita nova* project whose preparation leads him in front of the problem of "passer de la Notation (du Présent) au Roman, d'une forme brève, fragmentée (les 'notes') à une forme longue, continue" (Barthes, 2003, p. 53)³ – symptom of an arduous but direct communication between the two forms.

The part of Barthes' reflection which is involved into our path is its Latin-named category of *Tangibilia*, employed to describe the mimetic and 'visualising' aspect of *haiku* functioning. In the attempt of precisising this concept, Barthes calls them "sortes de microhypotyposes" (Barthes, 2003, p. 95), something that 'shows', that marks the irruption of the concrete dimension into textual abstraction. However, its definition's process is something intrinsically complex: Barthes accumulates synonyms, for instance "*Satori, Tilt, Incident, Epiphany, C'est ça*" (Galiani, 2010, p. 26), to "accercchiare" verbalmente" (Cometa, 2012, p. 203) and to say in the end that moment in which occurs, through the medium of language, the encounter with the 'thing'. This moment can be accosted to the contemplation of photographic detail, a form that in turn can reach and realise the *clic*.⁴

¹ On Barthes and the *haiku*, see Vercaemer, 1998; Gallerani, 2011; O'Meara, 2012, pp. 118-162.

² For a general framework, see at least Pinguet, 2009; Colucci, 2016.

³ The last Barthes oscillates in a 'dreamy' way between the 'R' of *Réel* and the one of *Roman* (Roger, 2007, p. 379). About this, see also O'Meara, 2012, pp. 163-199; Gallerani, 2013. On late Barthes in general, see Heath 1974; Lavers, 1982; Ungar, 1983.

⁴ Such a link is accredited from Barthes itself: see Barthes, 1980, pp. 80-82; Barthes, 2003, pp. 113-118.

This *clic* needs a proper habitat to preserve its integrity. So, Barthes (2003, p. 129) rigidly establishes two *haiku*'s limits: narration and concept, as absolutely extraneous tropes to the original and autochthone form of Japanese poem. In both cases, there is a deflection from the punctuality of contemplation, which therefore prejudices the experience of proximity with the 'thing'. Narration distracts moving away in a temporal sense from the present to diachronic concatenations of cause-effect structure; for its part, concept or metaphor alienates in a spatial sense towards other images and mental territories which come to superimpose over the gaze.

However, these types of deflection are familiar, intrinsic to European sensibility, which is essentially "prolix" (Barthes, 2003, p. 91) and for which the practice of Notation is therefore forbidden, as Barthes clearly states (2003, p. 58). In the same way Paul Claudel, poet and dramaturgist but also French ambassador to Japan (1922-1928), speaks about a "désir passionné de l'exactitude" (Claudel, 1965, p. 1121) from the French speaker; meaning for "exactitude" not the one of detail that we are exploring, but that of logic reasoning and argumentation, which leads to an accumulation of words in the attempt, always unfilled, to "expliquer et [...] s'expliquer" (Claudel, 1965, 1121). It dissipates and ramifies itself in an opposite sense compared to *haiku* operation: where, Barthes says, the lotus remains "*bouton*" (Barthes, 2003, p. 74), concentrated on itself, in a condition of perfect tension.

2. The young Proust and the Notation

On this advice of an impossibility, we can finally arrive to the young Proust,⁵ who in 1892, the year in which "Jacques Émile Blanche gli fa il ritratto" (Citati, 2008, p. 19), is still a *habitué* of social Parisian salons. In this way he has the possibility to immerge himself into Japanist cult, present also at that time after the acme touched between the Sixties and the Seventies with Universal Expositions.⁶ He "was surrounded by things Japanese" (Hokenson, 1999, p. 22), that he will incorporate in the future *Recherche*, whose "readers levelled the orientalisms together as historical markers of the era 1880-1915, to show that Proust accurately chronicles the popular fancies of his age" (Hokenson, 1999, p. 20).⁷

In this year Proust demonstrates its involving into the orientalist climate writing *Choses d'Orient*: an apologetic (Bongiovanni Bertini, 2017, p. 13) review of *Voyage en Turquie d'Asie: Arménie, Kurdistan et Mésopotamie* (1892) by Armand-Pierre de Cholet. Human more than literary mentor, Cholet "était lieutenant à Orléans, au 76° régiment d'infanterie, lorsque Proust, en 1889, y fit son volontariat" (Clarac, Sandre, 1971, p. 879). The itinerary of his trip, although it doesn't touch barthesian Japan, really touches the strings of an exotism which exerts its part of seduction on the young author. We can also remember in this sense the preference that Proust gives to Pierre Loti,⁸ together with Anatole France, when he's asked to indicate his favourite writer in the response of an early questionnaire (Proust, 1971b).

⁵ On the cultural milieu of the young Proust, see Rozzani, 2009, pp. 107-116.

⁶ Particularly London 1862 and Paris 1867 (Morena, 2022, pp. 31-33). See also the dossier by 'Gallica' on French discovery of Japanese art: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/html/und/asia/aux-expositions-universelles?mode=desktop> (last accessed 27/07/2023).

⁷ About the presence of Japanese objects in the Proustian *œuvre*, see, in addition to the classical Fraisse, 1997; Kawakami, 2005, pp. 30-38; Groot, 2019; Yoshikawa, 2020.

⁸ French master of travel writing. See Loti, 2018; 2021.

This is a first documented Proustian approach to exotism; or, to say better, to exotism's aesthetic and narrative, since it's always a second-hand trip, imaginary sprout of a man who remains "assai lontano dallo stereotipo del grande esploratore ottocentesco, diviso com'era tra il desiderio di conoscere paesi nuovi ed una borghese incapacità di rinunciare alle sue abitudini" (Oppici, 1983, p. 13).⁹

The successive article *Contre l'obscurité*, which appears in the "Revue blanche" on 13 July 1896, is more challenging. Moving from a fictional contradiction between "tout étudiant de vingt ans qui fait de la littérature [et] tout monsieur de cinquante qui n'en fait pas" (Proust, 1971c, p. 390), the author tries to "dégager de la littérature contemporaine quelques vérités esthétiques" (p. 390) which go against the excess of symbolism of new generation of poets, which is called precisely "la double obscurité qui en résulte dans leur œuvres, obscurité des idées et des images d'une part, obscurité grammaticale de l'autre" (p. 391). In this ambiguous rebellion – where Proust contests symbolic complexity only insofar as it seems not to correspond to an authentic complexity; and not invoking at its place the instauration of a generic 'simplicity'¹⁰ – he looks for a return to reality, the only one able to inoculate lifeblood to the poetic image, which otherwise risks remaining stunted, confined in undistinguished fields.¹¹ Proust theorize the necessity of a clear expression, as Nature does, by enumerating a series of concrete examples – the sun, the stars – which are felt as indispensables to contemplation and emotion: elements without which that experience is not even conceivable, and can't be taken as experience of truth.

Que les poètes s'inspirent plus de la nature, où, si le fond du tout est un et obscur, *la forme de tout est individuelle et claire*. Avec le secret de la vie, elle leur apprendra le dédain de l'obscurité. Est-ce que la nature nous cache le soleil, ou les milliers d'étoiles qui brillent sans voiles, éclatantes ed indéchiffrables aux yeux de presque tous? Est-ce que la nature ne nous fait pas toucher, rudement et à nu, la puissance de la mer ou du vent d'ouest? À chaque homme elle donne d'exprimer clairement, pendant son passage sur la terre, les mystères les plus profonds de la vie et de la mort (Proust, 1971c, p. 394, our italics).

The "individuelle et claire" form is a notion really close to the barthesian one of *relief* of the detail: what matters is again the absolute 'reality' of natural elements, as *Tangibilia* which can confer a grip power to the poetic word, rather than leaving it caught up in a "sens imprécis et difficile" (p. 394), which is the sense of claudelian logic 'exactitude'.

So, Nature is the great teacher of contemplation not only because it's the object of contemplative gaze, but also because it dictates the rules of a successful method of contemplation; and it has chosen, to express itself, the concrete detail, the material communicability of sun and stars – it 'makes touchable' its strength in the same manner of the *haiku*'s referent.

⁹ On the end of Proustian trips and on his reclusive existence since 1914, see the testimony of Albarret, 1973, p. 64.

¹⁰ In the sketches of the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* there is a consideration that seems to be in contradiction with the one cited above, but that is, in reality, a protestation against the opposite excess: "Aujourd'hui toute une école [...] a imposé à l'art un nouveau jeu [...] on commence par convenir que pour ne pas alourdir la phrase on ne lui fera rien exprimer du tout, que pour rendre le contour du livre plus net on en bannira l'expression de toute impression difficile à rendre, toute pensée, etc. [...] Il n'est pas difficile de faire le chemin au pas de course si on commence avant de partir par jeter à la rivière tous les trésors qu'on était chargé d'apporter" (Proust, 1971d, p. 237).

¹¹ In fact: "les œuvres purement symboliques risquent donc de manquer de vie et par là de profondeur". Proust, 1971c, p. 392.

We can also notice *en passant* that, between the few rules (Barthes, 2003, 64-65) of the *haiku* genre, there is the naturalistic theme: the “*Kigo* ou *Mot-saison*”¹² is the element that takes care of signal the period of the year when the *haiku* is set, situating its impression: “vous n’êtes jamais séparé du cosmos sous sa forme immédiate” (Barthes, 2003, 66).

This theoretical enunciation has immediately the chance to result in a practical incarnation: in fact, 1896 is also the year of publication of the first Proustian book, the collection of short stories and prose *Les plaisirs et les jours*, with which he makes his debut, commercially not memorable,¹³ into French literature. It’s a still immature Proust, who already faces themes which will become his typical – for instance “la morte, il tempo, lo snobismo” (Bo, 1981, p. IX), to which we can also add jealousy – but without proper expressive precautions. Denouncing its “eccesso di partecipazione e di passione” (p. XXXIII), that signifies then naivety, Carlo Bo recommends noticing that “la partenza di Proust è stata tutta letteraria, meglio ancora poetica e che la parte più vera, più *sua* del suo discorso è nata nell’ambito di una ripetizione o, meglio, di un’obbedienza a quelli che erano i canoni dell’estetica simbolista” (p. X): so, not yet equipped with a personal ‘voice’. “Proust [è] partito dalla pura e semplice ripetizione di certe forme normali d’invenzione letteraria e poi, a poco a poco [...] arrivato allo stato di decomposizione della *Recherche*” (p. XV). However, compared to a pure mannerism, it’s worth to measure in *Les Plaisirs* at least the intention of a difference with the current literary standard, admitting that “la lezione del naturalismo che, fra l’altro, era ancora ben valida a quegli anni, gli appare subito insufficiente e parziale” (p. XVI).

The lyric prose’s section named *Les regrets, rêveries couleur du temps*, opens with three titles which are representative of the links entertained with Nature: *Tuileries*, *Versailles*, *Promenade* – where a procession of floral metaphors decors briefs *tableaux* describing the ambience that appears under the eyes of the ‘I’ walking through Paris. Common characteristics of the group of texts, almost a continuous sylloge, are the lack of narrativity quotient; the *en plein air* setting; the paratactical and enumerative syntax; the strong objectual component, where referents are often accompanied by classic and aestheticizing images. Description remains here description: it doesn’t reach neither the grip of *haiku*,¹⁴ nor the transformation in a concept able to confer it an ulterior sense:

Au jardin des Tuileries, ce matin, le soleil s’est endormi tour à tour sur toutes les marches de pierre comme un adolescent blond dont le passage d’une ombre interrompt aussitôt le somme léger (Proust, 1971e, p. 104).

This metaphor, although well lathed and already at the same level of the major ones, integrated with a relative subordinate which expands the second term of reference according to a will of precision and accumulation, doesn’t serve any form of development or exemplification; but neither remains glued to its object, introducing the limit of concept, of similitude conveyed by the ‘comme’ (D’Angelo, 1990, p. 145) which forbids *haiku* realisation. Another way is the simple list:

¹² About the *Kigo*, see the dedicated paragraph in Reboul, 2022, pp. 29-33.

¹³ Not enough to discourage him: “Son premier livre, *Les plaisirs et les jours* [...] ne se vendait pas du tout, un jour, son éditeur lui a écrit en lui faisant part de son intention de se débarrasser des exemplaires qui restaient. Monsieur Proust [...] m’a dit: ‘Ah, Céleste, quel dommage que je n’aie pas de local où les entreposer, car je vous assure qu’il viendra un jour où ils se vendront’”. Albaret, 1973, p. 376.

¹⁴ Which, for Barthes, “ne décrit jamais: son art est contre-descriptif” (Barthes, 1980, p. 100).

Les liserons débordent follement des vases couronnés de géraniums. Ardent de soleil, l'héliotrope brûle ses parfums. Devant le Louvre s'élancent des roses trémières, légères comme des mâts, nobles et gracieuses comme des colonnes, rougissantes comme des jeunes filles. Irisés de soleil et soupirant d'amour, les jets d'eau montent vers le ciel (Proust, 1971e, p. 104).

It seems to read the Claudel of *Mies*, a poetry prose contained in *L'Oiseau noir dans le Soleil Levant* (1965, pp. 1195-1196) in which the poet affectionately decomposes reality, noting one by one its elements, entitling each one to be represented. It's an attempt of writing 'in the same way of' the *haiku* which remains suspended between European vocation to the analogy that dirties its concentration; and the limited and self-concluding character of these analogies, not able to redeem their presence in the text.

These are, in conclusion, short proses without an aim, without a centre;¹⁵ not *œuvres* conceptually completed. It's no doubt elsewhere that Proust brings its fundamental contribution to the concrete detail epistemology, through an "approfondiment stylistique" (Chaudier, 2019, p. 282): in that *Recherche* which paradoxically seemed to situate itself to the opposite pole of *haiku*, already for its remarkable mole, for its length that belongs to another planet compared to the seventeen syllables of the Japanese form.

3. The *Recherche*: the hawthorns

Proust's work is first characterized by the strength of its theoretical innervation. Proust himself cared about this dimension (Macchia, 2020, p. 126), confirming that his book, conceived in this respect as discontinuous from the "grandi opere del diciannovesimo secolo" that only had a "unità retrospettiva", on the contrary "era nata da un unico progetto architettonico, che folgorò Proust non appena aveva cominciato a scriverla. Quando il primo arco era già costruito, l'ultimo sveltava già nell'aria" (Citati, 2008, p. 215), in a constructive afflatus which knows from the first moment the direction to strive for. The start and the conclusion would be at the end the more ancient parts, the supporting architecture as in a cathedral, around which could flourish the decorations of statues or, metaphors aside, of additions not provided in 1909 – such as Albertine's diptych or First World War episodes. Thanks to this authorial suggestion, we can appreciate the way in which this solidity of the ensemble invests every text constituent, at every level (Beckett, 1957, p. 7; Chaudier, 2019, p. 299).

Having in mind the scholastic treatment of natural world shown in the *Plaisirs*, we can then compare it to the pages dedicated to Tansonville's hawthorns in *Du côté du chez Swann* (1913). The narrator, during one of his afternoon walks with the family, has to deflect its usual path from the Guermantes part to the Méséglise one, exploiting the presumed absence of Swann's family, with which there is no more feeling after the scandalous marriage between Charles and Odette.

Hokenson individuates a rising curve of Narrator's hermeneutic ability during the *œuvre*,¹⁶ until the apex of *Le Temps retrouvé* when, almost mature, he can intend in a profonde way these Japanese images that before remained for him extraneous: configuring his success as a writer compared to the decorative failing (Hokenson, 1999, p. 31) of

¹⁵ On the descriptive aesthetics of the *Plaisirs*, see Sandras, 2010, p. 82; Chaudier, 2019, pp. 270-282.

¹⁶ See Hokenson, 1999, pp. 29-30, where is highlighted the mutated Marcel's attitude toward Japanist representations of Nature between *Du côté du chez Swann* and *Le Temps retrouvé*.

Goncourt's *Journal*. But Marcel's story is always told from the adult Marcel: the 'style' is its style, while the past Marcel is just the character whose vicissitudes are followed. Therefore, it seems not necessary to postulate an evolutive movement in the stylistic treatment of *paysage*, if since the beginning it is managed by the wise Marcel: the Marcel that knows the ending of the story which he's recounting. This omniscience is confirmed also by some occurrences in the text, as in an episode of *Le côté de Guermantes* where the 'writing-I' (which is writing the text) deploras an occasion failed by the 'written-I' (which is written in the text):¹⁷ the adequate attitude during the 'friendship evening' with Saint-Loup "m'aurait évité ainsi le détour de bien des années inutiles par lesquelles j'allais encore passer avant que se déclarât la vocation invisible dont cet ouvrage est l'histoire" (Proust, 1999b, p. 1053). The style, already forged, that Proust employs to represent his youth period is consequently a sort of proleptic, narrative allusion to the successful accomplishment of this research whose first steps are being sketched.

We can therefore put our attention on the first book. In the chapter about *Combray*, far from being fleetingly annotated in a neither photographic nor conceptual list, the hawthorns are now surrounded by a double sense. Firstly the symbolic one, intertwining the threads of which the Narrator declines his "non-European relation to nature" (Hokenson, 1999, p. 28) following a dense range of hermeneutic suggestions and proposals: instituting an interdisciplinary communication with other regions of his mental universe, now finally deployed thanks to the continuity of a long narration.

He can go from the moralising sentence about the eternal triumph of Nature over every form of human labour:

Mais dans ses créations les plus factices, c'est sur la nature que l'homme travaille; certains lieux font toujours régner autour d'eux leur empire particulier, arborent leurs insignes immémoriaux au milieu d'un parc comme ils auraient fait loin de toute intervention humaine, dans une solitude qui revient partout les entourer, surgie des nécessités de leur exposition et superposée à l'œuvre humaine (Proust, 1999a, p. 115).

to the comparison between its contemplation and the aesthetic one:

Le soleil posait à terre un quadrillage de clarté, comme s'il venait de traverser une verrière; leur parfum s'étendait aussi onctueux, aussi délimité en sa forme que si j'eusse été devant l'autel de la Vierge, et les fleurs, aussi parées, tenaient chacune d'un air distrait son étincelant bouquet d'étamines, fines et rayonnantes nervures de style flamboyant comme celles qui à l'église ajouraient la rampe du jubé ou les meneaux du vitrail et qui s'épanouissaient en blanche chair de fleur de fraisier (p. 116).

À m'unir au rythme qui jetait leurs fleurs, ici et là, avec une allégresse juvénile et à des intervalles inattendus comme certains intervalles musicaux [...] comme ces mélodies qu'on rejoue cent fois de suite sans descendre plus avant dans leur secret (p. 116).

Puis je revenais devant les aubépines comme devant ces chefs-d'œuvre dont on croit qu'on saura mieux les voir quand on a cessé un moment de les regarder (p. 117).

¹⁷ Genette (2004, p. 151) defines them, respectively, "je-narrateur" and "je-héros", underlining their "fluctuation manifeste".

to the festive intentions borrowed to her, through the styleme of personification,¹⁸ during the flowering period of the pink hawthorn – with terms of reference that reminds to the country environment proper of Combray:

Et certes, je l'avais tout de suite senti, comme devant les épines blanches mais avec plus d'émerveillement, que ce n'était pas facticement, par un artifice de fabrication humaine, qu'était traduite l'intention de festivité dans les fleurs, mais que c'était la nature qui, spontanément, l'avait exprimée avec la naïvete d'une commerçante de village travaillant pour un reposoir, en surchargeant l'arbuste de ces rosettes d'un ton trop tendre et d'un pompadour provincial (pp. 117-118).

The entire Nature is animated, involved with supersenses, with the elsewhere of metaphoric allusions, but without giving up in fact of loving botanic and colouristic precision; notations of plant species and of their characteristics remain in the text together with similitudes. For instance, in the comparison between the hawthorns and the church it can be noticed the resistance of a precision which is not limited to the systematic use of hyponyms and technicisms but employs them to descend into a meticulous decomposition of the single flower in its various parts: the stamens and the petals “fleur de fraisier” coloured – the barthesian *haiku* detail also unfolds the possibility of the metaphor. In the last arm of the tripartite metaphor – which therefore doesn't establish a coarse and all-embracing analogy between the hawthorns' hedge and the church, but three individual analogies between the sunlight, the flowers' smell and their posture, and as many elements of the second semantic field – in its last arm the notation of the ecclesiastic equivalent is no more placed at the bottom, following a regular A-B scheme in which ‘A is the same of B’. It is instead inserted *inside* the flower description, resulting in an A-B-A scheme, as a hyperbaton which physically enters, with the whole church ambience, between stamens and petals of the small flowers: transporting the Elsewhere into the Here.

Secondly, after the symbolic level, there is the sense of narration which situates the hawthorns in a determinate and contingent spacetime of the *récit* and connects them with the whole “milieu d'impressions contiguës” (Proust, 1999a, p. 342) of which is composed a complete memory. Their every characteristic is fixed and enclosed by the formula that suddenly register the crucial event to which their contemplation prepared – the first view of Gilberte:

Ainsi passa près de moi ce nom de Gilberte, donné comme un talisman qui me permettrait peut-être de retrouver un jour celle dont il venait de faire une personne et qui, l'instant d'avant, n'était qu'une image incertaine. Ainsi passa-t-il [...] déployant sous l'épinier rose, à hauteur de mon épaule, la quintessence de leur familiarité, pour moi si douloureuse, avec elle, avec l'inconnu de sa vie où je n'entrerais pas (Proust, 1999a, p. 119).

The link installed at first sight between the flowers and the girl is not only a manner to ‘make ends meet’ in that single scene from the point of view of the concept, putting in full regime the proleptic function of amorous *senhal* of the hawthorns. It's also the promise of a future development openly declared since from the verbal tense (“permettrait”) and the desiderative feeling (“peut-être [...] un jour”): it's already the germ of a ‘narration’ that will be unfolded in the future tense of the novel as in the future time of the reader. In every

¹⁸ This human-natural interchangeability is moreover a typical proceeding in Proust, who “ricorre spesso a metafore e similitudini vegetali. [...] Proust ‘animalizza’ gli uomini [...] ma altrettanto spesso li ‘vegetalizza’” (De Maria, 1987, p. XXXV).

Gilberte's apparition there will be those hawthorns, as well as behind every vision of Albertine there are the beach and the sea of Balbec, manifesting a "motivation narrative de l'image" (Perrier, 2011, p. 123): the punctual notation will travel into time, carried on the back by the characters to which it has clung.¹⁹

It's clear what happened, compared to the *Plaisirs*: Proust has found and brought into focus a strong idea, which represents the key to understand every passage of his novel, the idea that, more than any other, "ne manquerais-je pas d'y décrire" (Proust, 1999c, p. 2399): the idea of Time, pervasive 'fourth dimension' "qui nous reste habituellement invisible" (p. 2399) and in which, at contrary, "nous occupions une place sans cesse accrue" (p. 2399).

The contamination is therefore mutual and circular: single episodes *make* the sense, which after *makes* them in turn: "sotto la magica iridescenza del tessuto [...] affiora il centro tematico della *Recherche*", Giacomo Debenedetti (2005, p. 141) writes. This iridescence and this emerging are the terms through which reading concrete details' presence in the *œuvre*: not only invested and transfigured by theoretical construction, but also necessary to it and to its aesthetic and emotional success. A bottom-up movement (Lebon, 2016, pp. 56-59) blends with the top-down one, so that, despite the architecture, the *Recherche* "n'est pas un livre dogmatique ou un roman à thèse, car la théorie proustienne de la mémoire est profondément enfouie, voilée jusqu'au bout, et d'ailleurs débordée par le mouvement même de l'écriture" (Compagnon, 2017, p. 20).

4. The *Recherche*: the teaspoon hitting a plate

This second index of cohesion can be valued focusing on the 'thematic centre' detected by Debenedetti: the detachment between the reality apperceived by the Narrator and "l'incanto promesso dai nomi" (Debenedetti, 2005, p. 141), which causes that apparent "impuissance que nous avons à nous réaliser dans la jouissance matérielle" (Proust, 1999c, pp. 2270-2271) that only a closer relationship with Time dimension will be able to cure. Major example of this, moving from the first to the last volume, is the decisive revelation of unwilling memory as it captures the Narrator while he's in Guermantes Palace's library, waiting for the end of a concert to enter the salon for the concluding *soirée*.

Un domestique en effet venait, dans ses efforts infructueux pour ne pas faire de bruit, de cogner une cuiller contre une assiette. Le même genre de félicité que m'avaient donné les dalles inégales m'envahit; les sensations étaient de grande chaleur encore mais toutes différentes: mêlée d'une odeur de fumée, apaisée par la fraîche odeur d'un cadre forestier; et je reconnus que ce qui me paraissait si agréable était la même rangée d'arbres que j'avais trouvée ennuyeuse à observer et à décrire, et devant laquelle, débouchant la canette de bière que j'avais dans le wagon, je venais de croire un instant, dans une sorte d'étourdissement, que je me trouvais, tant le bruit identique de la cuiller contre l'assiette m'avait donné [...] l'illusion du bruit du marteau d'un employé qui avait arrangé quelque chose à une roue du train pendant que nous étions arrêtés devant ce petit bois (Proust, 1999c, p. 2263).

What happens in this episode, which is a sort of accomplished *madeleine*, taken this time *jusqu'au bout* of the contemplation, and that will lead to the Narrator's decision of starting the novel? It happens that all the extremely complex reason for being of the

¹⁹ "C'est parce qu'ils contiennent ainsi les heures du passé que les corps humains peuvent faire tant de mal à ceux qui les aiment, parce qu'ils contiennent tant de souvenirs de joies et de désirs [...] si cruels pour celui qui contemple et prolonge dans l'ordre du temps le corps chéri dont il est jaloux". Proust, 1999c, p. 2400.

Recherche, the mole of characters and events that occupied more than three thousands pages, is actioned and justified by the clang of a teaspoon hitting a plate, that Marcel instinctively associates, re-cognizing it, to the sound casually heard a few days before, of the hammer of a worker that was repairing the train where he travelled to Paris: potential *haiku* material, that Proust doesn't describe but only notates, annotates. Only through the precision and, we can say, through the smallness of this referent, which doesn't carry any super-meaning, which is, as much as possible, a 'pure thing', the theory about the fourth dimension of Time can be explained and shown. As in the famous declaration opening the *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, intelligence is denied, it doesn't enter in the process of conquering of the sensation. It can, at maximum, arrive later, to "expliquer et [...] s'expliquer" (Claudel, 1965, 1121) in obedience to a "démarche volontaire du narrateur dans un but d'élucidation" (Simon, 2003, p. 880): but, if taken alone, it's not able to provoke the decisive condition of ecstasy. The experience which brings the Narrator's being beyond Time, for it is located in two different times simultaneously,²⁰ is possible only through a training of perception, which implies such a knowledge of the worker's hammer sound, that allows recognizing it in the teaspoon's frequency. This recognition can have a value only if it rests on an absolute certainty, if it is a total identity: if it is a contribution of the Notation.

As Proust himself states, in a letter of 1919 to his friend Daniel Halévy (Proust, 1965, p. 216) cited also by Barthes, "c'est à la cime même du particulier qu'éclôt le général": spasmodic precision of referentiality is the unique possible way to ensure the success of the idea, establishing a place of "participation between the ideal and the real [...] real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract" (Beckett, 1957, pp. 55-56).

5. Interdisciplinary perspectives on the detail

This we are told from many parts, in a sort of convergence of different disciplines on the heuristic value of the detail.

A psychanalyst as Elvio Fachinelli, for example, notes the direct proportionality between smallness of the sensation and importance of the connected revelation: "occorre rilevare *l'origine umile*, a volte perfino la sconvenienza, di queste preziose percezioni [proustiane]? Il che ricorda immediatamente la situazione analitica, in cui talvolta 'si verifica qualche cosa che ci convince che quanto è stato detto è illuminante'" (Fachinelli, 1989, p. 54). It seems possible, also in the situation of analysis, to experiment the sensation of immediate validation of a sentence, thanks to a *clic*, a *satori* of the perception and not of the intelligence – which rests delayed, collecting pieces of a truth strongly imposed on it, but that it can't initially understand.

From a more literary point of view, the emotional turn²¹ perspective allows us to enhance the performative quality of an emotion's writing as Proust's one. Far from providing a feelings' classification, a nominalization which pretends to signify in a satisfying way a state of mind through a categorical noun, it rather indulges on following the growing process of emotion, often even without need of nominate it. It cultivates it in the text, showing it from the inside of perception in place and not from the outside proper to the physiologist. It's an 'emotional anthropology', as Jean Pierre Martin (2013) writes: Proustian writing

²⁰ This movement corresponds to the one bringing beyond individuality, intended as the stratified merging and unifying process of those 'instants'. See Agamben, 1978, pp. 38-39; and the chapter 'Memoria, istante, rivelazione' in Poggi, 2011, pp. 73-89.

²¹ See for example: Bernard, Gefen, Talon-Hugon, 2016; Gasperina Geroni, Milani, 2020.

doesn't consist in representing the effect of the emotion, but it rather works describing the gradual emergence of a sensation in the Narrator.

Naturally, this strategy of construction 'in direct drive' of emotion can be not only representation of its occurrence but also *production* of it, increasing that immersivity function which contributes to the mind's reader involving into the text.²² Mind which is always avid and ready to pick up all the features that can help it to give a form, to 'saturate' the fictional world, as Doležel (1995, p. 209) would say. Like this, the teaspoon against the plate that resonates in the Narrator's perception, resonates at the same time also in the reader's one, which shares with him the same detail-based cognitive strategy: it helps the not only immanent but also communicative efficiency of the idea of Time, revealing its genesis. We also stumble with Marcel on the rough stones in front of Guermantes Palace; we also perceive with him the teaspoon's sound and, if we are careful readers, we can maybe instantaneously reconnect it to that moment of stop of the train which is, for us too, a memory: a paper memory,²³ from a few pages before.²⁴

Given all this we could say, with Barthes, that the flower which in the *haiku* was "*bouton*", in Proust is now "*extension*" and "*dépli infini*" (Barthes, 2003, p. 74), has become sign. Not in the sense that it has been dematerialized, losing in referential precision; but that exactly its extreme materialization has been able to open it to something other.

6. Roland Barthes and the 'Moments of Truth'

In the context of this mutual collaboration between sense and detail serving the literary organism, we can, at the end, also better clarify the terms of Barthes' initial question about a Notation-Novel relationship. He claims being able to individuate inside the novel a collection of 'Moments of Truth' as rare treasures in a textual tissue filled, for the rest, with false things, as in "une vaste et longue toile peinte d'illusions, de leurre, de choses inventées, de 'faux' si l'on veut: toile brillante, colorée, voile de la Maya, ponctuée, clairsemée de Moments de vérité qui en sont la justification absolue" (Barthes, 2003, p. 161). These moments of truth are essentially characterised as "moments de Mort et d'Amour" (p. 158) and would be drastically opposed to the inauthentic quotient of macro-textual structure, similarly to the Crocean distinction between poetry and non-poetry (Croce, 1980, p. 84): they are "quelque chose qui va sauter [...] qui aura tout l'esprit du *haïku*, mais en fait ne se mêlera pas à l'histoire" (Barthes, 2003, p. 158). Such a Moment of Truth-*haiku* leaves speechless (since it is "*surgissement* [...] du dernier degré du sens, de *l'après quoi plus rien à dire*", p. 159) and strikes the reader (it's "un fait de lecture, et non un fait d'écriture", p. 156); but it's also, and unlike *haiku*, a constructed, 'prepared' moment, for it is lived by a certain character in a certain narrative spacetime known to who reads. It's therefore inserted inside the novel as inside a particular ecosystem that, if also hosts it without apparently denaturing it, transforms it anyway. "La quantité, même si elle est l'élément prédominant, apparaît toujours comme plus ou moins mélangée de qualité" René Guénon (1945, p. 36) writes, warning from easy materialisms: no metaplasms of literary genre can think to be absorbed without producing any effect. In the same manner the various Moments of

²² See Caracciolo, 2014; updated in Caracciolo, 2020, pp. 5-16.

²³ On this see Perrier, 2011, in particular pp. 245-263 about "la mémoire involontaire des lecteurs" and Roland Barthes' experience.

²⁴ Proust, 1999c, pp. 2253-2254.

Truth in Proustian representation result to be profoundly inserted into the whole life atmosphere, indiscernible from the surrounding:²⁵

La moindre parole que nous avons dite à une époque de notre vie, le geste le plus insignifiant que nous avons fait était entouré, portait sur lui le reflet de choses qui logiquement ne tenaient pas à lui, en ont été séparées par l'intelligence qui n'avait rien à faire d'elles pour les besoins du raisonnement, mais au milieu desquelles – ici reflet rose du soir sur le mur fleuri d'un restaurant champêtre, sensation de faim, désir des femmes, plaisir du luxe – là volutes bleues de la mer matinale enveloppant des phrases musicales qui en émergent partiellement comme les épaules des ondines – le geste, l'acte le plus simple reste enfermé comme dans mille vases clos dont chacun serait rempli de choses d'un couleur, d'une odeur, d'une température absolument différentes (Proust, 1999c, p. 2265).

The death of a novel's character is therefore of a different nature compared to the gratuitous and anonyme death that *haiku* would set in front of the reader. It's not conceivable being able to extrapolate it from the entire novelistic complex performing a painless coring from its structure, detaching it as a starfish from its rock: it's substantiated of all the pre-existent preparatory material, as a co-function to which is "impossibil[e] attribuire meccanicamente [...] lo stesso valore in opere diverse" (Colussi, 2016, p. 103) and in different contexts. Rather, if, expanding Franco Moretti's formula (Moretti, 1994) to the founding properties of the genre, the Novel believes all the way in its vocation to constitute itself as an 'Opera mondo', as the creation of a new fictional cosmos and location of new emotions, then the *haiku*, the exclamation or *Kireji*²⁶ of an *Ahité* feeling, is possible no more *in* it but *about* it. If the Novel is really a new world's creation,²⁷ then, like the real world, it must have its own generative force: emotion which generates emotion in front of the internal events of a novel as in front of life, art that generates art, writing that brings to light, saving it from the dark, new writing: "per essere *scrittore, écrivain* e non *écrivain*, bisogna innanzitutto passare attraverso lo *status* di lettore, fase originaria [...] che si rende allo stesso modo passibile di Momenti di Verità [...] Il passaggio dalla lettura alla scrittura [...] è uno spostamento affettivo che chi vuole scrivere subisce [...] nel momento in cui si lascia *colpire* da un *incontro casuale* con i Momenti di verità dell'Altro" (Galiani, 2010, p. 28). Such a encounter "induce al desiderio di scrivere i propri momenti di verità, attraverso un processo che Barthes definisce 'pulsione di simulazione'" (p. 28), in an ideally inexhaustible chain of propagations from reading to Notation. It's in this way that Novel, more than a container, becomes object and reason, producer of countless *haiku*.

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²⁵ A fact of which the same Barthes shows himself aware commenting the episode, evidently lacking truth, of the street vendors' cries in *La Prisonnière*: "Naturellement, si vous remplacez les cris de Paris dans l'entour de l'énonciateur proustien, son demi-réveil, la chambre close, etc., vous retrouvez la subjectivité absolue du corps qui entend, vous retrouvez une *circonstance*". Barthes, 2003, p. 91.

²⁶ "Emploi fréquent et codé d'une syllabe exclamative [...] le *Kireji* = sorte de ponctuation poétique [...] peut-être le compte rendu d'un *satori*". Barthes, 2003, pp. 104-105.

²⁷ As Possible Worlds Theory suggests. For a recent overview, see Bell A., Ryan M.-L., 2019.

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