The literary representation of reality

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Abstract
This article presents a reflection of the epistemological question of literary representation of reality. The epistemological status of literature is not obvious, because literature is fictional. Therefore, it is not evident in what way literature represents reality and to what degree the literary representation is true in the corresponding sense of the word. Through an exploration of Proust and his reflections on the same question in *A la recherche du temp perdu,* this article will analyse the representational question. This analysis will focus on a conflict between an essential understanding of truth, detached from the temporal reality, and a superficial referential realism. It will present an alternative phenomenological and semiotic realism, which connects the specific description in literature with a general conceptual level. In addition, the relationship between the perceptual and conceptual level will further be linked to cognitive semantics and Lakoff's concept of cognitive models.

Introduction

The ways in which literature represents reality have been discussed throughout the history of literature and literary criticism. The fictional ontology of literature has resulted in various idealistic and allegorical interpretations of literary representation of reality, as well as different kinds of mimetic causation (biographical, historical, reader-oriented). The question here is: How can we understand the literary representation, if not in an idealistic, allegorical or causational way? Is there a more realistic interpretation, where literature can be connected to reality, and which can transgress the opposition between fiction and reality?

In this article, I will present a semio-cognitive understanding of the literary representation of reality, which points towards conceptualisation as the link between literature and reality. Literature does - through its fictive descriptions - represent the concepts of our non-fictive ordinary life. The conceptual representation can be abstract (transcendental or categorical), but also - which I find significant for literature - specific, reflecting concepts of everyday understanding. According to Eco, "culture 'sees' the world" through a conceptual system, and it is through this system that literature reflects reality (Eco 1976: 274).

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From a cognitive point of view, Turner observes that literature and language are the same as the study of the everyday mind, since "Literature lives within language and language within everyday life" (Turner 1991:4).

This semio-cognitive understanding of the relationship between literature and reality will be elaborated in the following, but the article will begin with a wider analysis of the question of literary representation seen from a literary perspective. In conjunction with Proust and *A la recherche du temp perdu,* it will ask: What kind of reality do literary texts represent?

In the Proust research, what *A la recherche du temp perdu* is about, has been the subject of considerable debate, because it is about so much. Nonetheless, some aspects have been more central than others, among which are the philosophy and poetics of the novel, its narratology, and its biographical relationship to Proust (Swahn 1979, Descombes 1987, Henry 1989, Painter 1989, Genette 1966, 1972, Tardié 1971, Deleuze 1964, Merleau-Ponty 1945). There are, however, only a limited number of studies that have actually analysed the specific content of the realistic representations in Proust, despite the fact that there is a significant level of realism in the Proustian decriptions. The few analyses that actually focus on this do so with a specific focus on the banality of everyday life (Zaphir 1959, Segal 1981) or in a historically deterministic way, where it is the accurate correlate between the novel and its historical time, which is the topic (Sprinker 1987, Watt 2014). Accordingly, the research has focused on the idealistic, formal or mimetic caused representation in Proust, but has not analysed the specific realistic representation of reality. I would here argue that this realistic representation in Proust, however, represents an epistemological level which demonstrates the specificity of the literary representation of reality. *A la recherche du temp perdu* exposes more precisely the perceptual, i.e. phenomenological, ground of concepts, and shows that a conventionalised realism is dissolving this relationship. Proust himself has, however, difficulties in reaching this conclusion. Throughout the novel, he struggles to find a poetic understanding, which corresponds to his novel, and I will, in the following, describe his considerations to unfold a wider analysis of the question of the literary representation.

Fictional truth as a timeless essence

One of the major themes in *A la recherche du temp perdu* is: what kind of truth does literature represent? The long novel comprises a complex network of diverse topics, but is also meta-fictional, explores being a novel and, in particular, considers the truth of fiction[1].

Proust, represented by the narrator[2], seems at first to have a rather clear idea about the truth of fiction. He sees the involuntary memories, which the novel is so famous for, as revealing the truth about art. The most familiar of these involuntary memories is 'the Madeleine-scene', where Proust as a young man is drinking a cup of tea together with a Madeleine cake, and the flavour makes him remember his childhood vacation in the (fictive) France province Combray (Swann's way: 51ff/ Sw,I: 44ff)[3]. There are also other examples of involuntary memories in *A la recherche* (Time Regained:217f/Tr,IV:446f, Time Regained:226/Tr,IV:452), and in the final volume of the novel, Proust concludes that the involuntary memories reveal the truth, in which fiction is to be grounded, because they capture a pure essence outside time:

> …as I compared these diverse happy impressions, diverse yet with this in common, that I experienced them at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and I was made to doubt whether I was in the one or the other. The truth surely was that the being within me which

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[1] Reference to previous analysis.

[2] *A la recherche* is a fictional autobiography closely reflecting Proust's life and with a narrator named Marcel (as Proust). This does not, however, mean that the narrator of the novel is identical to Proust. The poetic reflection in the novel is furthermore related to the fictional literary project in novels, and not to *A la recherche* as a novel. Because of the closeness between both the novel and Proust's life and the poetic reflection and the novel, the poetic reflection can be understood as representing Proust's general understanding of fiction, and the narrator will also be seen as representing Proust.

[3] The English translations of *A la recherche du temp perdu* are from Vintage edition of *In search of lost time* from 2000 in 6 volumes, first published by Vintage 1996. The name of the volume is indicted together with the page. The reference to the French text is from the Bibliothèque de la Pleida 1987-1989-edition. This edition is in 4 volumes, and the references are therefore also combined with the name of the volume according to the 7 volume structure of the novel. Since there are only references to the first and the seventh volume the reference will be: Sw,I for volume 1: Du côté de chez Swann, and TR,IV for volume 7:Le Temps retrouvé.

had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal, and this being made its appearance only when, through one of these identifications of the present with the past, it was likely to find itself in the one and only medium in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time. (Time Regained: 222f /TR,IV:449f)

Proust understands the involuntary memories as a transgression of the succession of time that makes it possible to be both in the past and in the present, therefore being 'outside of time', connected to the essence of things. Proust intend to base his novel on that truth "the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things" (Time Regained, 224/TR,IV:451).

However, this idealistic essentialist poetics poses different problems for Proust. The most striking one is that he has formulated an idealistic poetic, which is not consistent with a prose novel that takes place in the succession of time. This problem is crucial since Proust has, in fact, created a rather long novel, which is very much situated in time. Overall, the novel closely resembles a historical novel about the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, describing the struggle between the nobility and bourgeoisie and many of the major historical events in the period. The question is therefore, in light of the 'timeless poetic': what kind of reality does this temporal world in the novel represent?

Proust's dilemmas
Proust's timeless poetics cause him more than one problem, however. Firstly, the author himself acknowledges there are too few of these experiences outside time to make them the basis for his novel (Time Regained:258/Tr,IV:477). Secondly, he explicitly finds that the realistic literature that he reads is not consistent with life as he knows it (Time Regained:23ff/TR,IV:287ff), and he accordingly doubts that so-called realistic literature corresponds with any reality at all (Time Regained:203/TR,IV:435). This means that Proust, on the one hand, claims an idealistic truth, and on the other, is facing his own false literary realism. Proust is therefore confronting the basic fictional problem. Given that literature is fictional,

it would never be able to claim any realistic truth in the sense that it corresponds with facts in reality. In contrast to this, it can turn to a 'non-realistic' idealistic truth independent of the factual reality. This opposition is, however, even more complex. Namely, according to Proust, it appears that there is also some kind of truth in the representations linked to time, that is worthy of recognition:

> For I had decided that this [my book] could not consist uniquely of the full and plenary impressions that were outside time, and amongst those other truths in which I intended to set, like jewels, those of the first order, the ones relating to Time, to Time in which, as in some transformation fluid, men and societies and nations are immersed, would play an important part. (Time Regained:302/Tr,IV:510)

Proust himself feels, that there is, as he claims in my paraphrasing Proust 'some truth in the knowledge that our intelligence can be drawn directly from reality' (Time Regained:257/TR,IV:477). Proust is here sharing a common understanding of literature, namely the feeling that it contains some form of truth about reality; but it is not clear, what kind of truth this is! One could think that the trustworthiness of literature is connected to its closeness to reality; the closer to reality in regard to specificity and plausibility the truer a representation. For Proust, however, this is not the case - he sees it the other way around; the closer to reality as we know it, the more superficial and less true literature becomes. He considers that the so-called realistic literature, which presents a photographic surface, as if it were the truth, is detached from the life as we experience it:

> Gradually, thanks to its preservation by our memory, the chain of all those inaccurate expressions in which there survives nothing of what we have really experienced comes to constitute for us our thought, our life, our "reality," and this lie is all that can be reproduced by the art that styles itself "true to life," an art that is as simple as life whiteout beauty, a mere vain and tedious duplication of what our eyes see and our intellect records, so vain and so tedious that one wonders where the writer who devotes himself to it can have found the joyous and impulsive spark that was capable of setting him in motion and making him advance in his task. (Time Regained:253/Tr,IV:473)

If realistic literature is not going to be a false reproduction of life, how then can literature represent the truth of the 'lived reality', and what is the truth of the temporally diverse reality? Proust finds two answers to that question. On the one hand, he thinks that he can discern some general laws that transgress the temporality of reality, and which, in this regard, are similar to his essential truth. On the other, he thinks that literature should grasp the specificity of the 'lived life'. Here Proust is defining two ways of avoiding a false superficial realistic representation. The first solution is that the fictional representation captures general laws in reality, which exist outside fiction; the second is that the fictional representation captures phenomenological specificities, which escape superficial conventional reality. These two views are not immediately consistent, but before exploring this problem in greater depth, we will consider each of Proust's understandings.

The feeling of the general

As mentioned, Proust has the felling, that "these truth which the intellect educes directly from reality were not altogether to despised" (Time Regained:257/Tr,IV: 477). He furthermore perceives the reality in a certain way, which has a special quality and which he identifies with "the feeling for generality"':

> There is a feeling for generality which, in the future writer, itself picks out what is general and can for that reason one day enter into a work of art. And this has made him listen to people only when, stupid or absurd though they may have been, they have turned themselves, by repeating like parrots what other people of similar character are in the habit of saying, into birds os augury, mouthpieces of a psychological law. He remembers only things that are general. (Time Regained:260/Tr,IV:479)

The general is, as also mentioned, a way to transgress the temporal reality as a succession of singularities, and is thereby reminiscent of the timeless essence, which Proust states clearly in the following quote:

There was in me a personage who knew more or less how to look, but it was an intermittent personage, coming to life only in the presence of *some general essence common to a number of things*, these essences being its nourishment and its joy (…) I was interested in what had always, because it gave me specific pleasure, been more particularly the goal of my investigations: *the point that was common to one being and another.* (Time Regained:33f/Tr,IV:296, my italics)

This similarity between the timeless essence and the 'essence of generality' has made one of the central researcher on the work of Proust, Jean-Yves Tadié, connect the two poetic assumptions into one poetic for the whole novel, united in a metaphor-poetic (Tadié 1971: 428ff). According to Tadié, the metaphor connects two elements, which are separated (in time), and these structures are identical in the involuntary memories and in the 'common in different things': individual elements are connected by similarity.

The equation of iterativity

Another central Proust researcher, Gérard Genette, has described how Proust's search for the general is expressed in the rather radical iterative narrative form of the novel (Genette 1972:145ff, Davidsen 2006: 167ff). To describe once what taken place many times (i.e. Saturday lunch, dinner at Guermantes etc) is a well-known literary form. It is, however, often used to create background information in traditional novels and is mixed with descriptions of series of singular events, which are linked together in a singular story. In contrast, in *A la recherche,* it is the other way around - it is the iterative descriptions that dominate the novel, and they are not linked together by a singular narrative story. This is one of the most peculiar characteristics of the novel: the singular events support the iterative scenes. This also means that the singular scenes often have an iterative function (such as the dinner at Verdurin). They describe once what one must assume have taken place repeatedly (at Combray, at Saturdays, at walks in the countryside, at dinners, at visits etc.).

The iterative descriptions are often describing an opening scene where Marcel first meets a new social environment or group, but their primary function is not to

create the singularity of the scene; it is to be typical or paradigmatic (Genette 1972:142f). They are used to extract the general of the scene, which often involves social and psychological characterisations (like courtesy or cruelty in the nobility, or stupidity and superficiality in the bourgeois, Davidsen 2006: 191ff). The iterative function of the singular scenes is further stressed by Proust's widespread use of digressions. The digressions are used to give more information or analyse aspects of the general content in more detail. Genette points out that the many digressions make the scene a syllepsis, which connects separated elements and thereby transforms the scene to a paradigm.

This use of the iterative form does not mean that there is no singular event in *A la recherche*, but the singular events do not have the dynamic impact on the story, which they have traditionally. Genette observes that this is because Proust is not able to connect two separated points in time, if he cannot see a similarity between them (Genette 1972:169). This is, for Genette, what he phrases as the 'the strange equation' of the law of iterativity (ibid).

The use of the iterative form shows that Proust's search for the general is manifested to such a high degree in the narrative form of the novel, that it has dissolved the traditional narrative succession of time and the traditional narrative dynamic. In contrast, the fictional universe in *A la recherche* presents itself as a static universe oriented towards regularities.

This search for similarities is something other than pointing out aspects that are repeated or redundant, or occurring often; it is the search for regularities, which represent laws in human life:

> If I went to a dinner-party, I did not see the guests: when I thought I was looking at them, I was in fact examining them with X-rays.
>
> The result was that, when all the observations I had succeeded in making about the guests during the party were linked together, the pattern of the lines I had traced took the form of a collection of psychological laws…" (Time Regained:34/Tr,IV:297)

It seems clear that Proust does not need to escape the temporal world to find a truth worthy of fictional representation. He can extract a general truth from the temporal reality, and he can thereby answer the question about the literary representation of reality. According to this poetics, literature represents general laws in the human life.

It is, however, not, in a philosophical sense, clear what the epistemological status of these laws is. They seem similar to scientific laws in the way that they are deduced from empirical (though fictional represented) observations, but they are not grounded in any general theory or methodological systematic. Therefore, they merely manifest assumptions, which can claim no truth. One can furthermore ask polemically what point there is in learning about the regularities or laws in the human life from 'random literature', when one can learn about it from human and social science and philosophy? More positively, one could ask: what is particular about the literary representation of general laws?

Proust's other, and at first glance contrasting, solution to the representational problem, namely that literature grasps phenomenological specificities in the human life, offers another view of that question. This understanding will be further described below leading to a presentation of a synthesis of the two seemingly opposing comprehensions (the general and the specific representation of reality).

The realism of the 'lived-life'

The reason Proust dislikes traditional literary realism is because he sees it as a superficial realism, that reduces life to a conventional realism, where, as he puts it, "reality were indeed a sort of waste product of experience, more or less identical for each of us, since we speak of bad weather, a war, a taxi rank, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers, everybody knows what we mean (Time Regained:246/TR,IV:468). Proust finds this conventional realism 'a boring and fruitless reuse of what our eyes see and our mind observes' (Time Regained:253/TR,IV:473). He furthermore finds that the falseness of the realistic causes us to confuse reality and convention:

…I was confirmed by the thought of the falseness of so-called realist art, which would not be so untruthful if we had not in life acquired the habit of giving to what we feel a form of expression which differs so much from, and which we nevertheless after a little time take to be, reality itself. (Time Regained:235/Tr,IV:459)

Literature should instead capture the 'lived life' in its particularities:

The greatness, on the other hand, of true art, of the art which M. de Norpois would have called a dilettante's pastime, lay, I had come to see, elsewhere: we have to discover, to reapprehend, to make ourselves fully aware of that reality, remote from our daily preoccupations, from which we separate ourselves by an ever greater gulf as the conventional knowledge which we substitute for it grows thicker and more impermeable, that reality which it is very easy for us to die without ever having known and which is, quite simply, our life. Real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated – the only life in consequence which can be said to be really lived – is literature, and life thus defined is in a sense all the time immanent in ordinary men no less than in the artist. But most men do not see it because they do not seek to shed light upon it. And therefore their past is like a photographic dark-room encumbered with innumerable negatives which remain useless because the intellect has not developed them. (Time Regained:253f/Tr,IV:473f)

In opposition to the 'false realism' Proust wants to capture the unconventional life as we experience it. This poetic understanding is, as it was also the case with the focus on generality, manifested in the literary form of *A la recherche*. I am not going to go into detail here about the different narrative expressions of the 'lived life' in the novel, but I will mention some of them to illustrate the consequence of this 'lived realism'[4].

Proust manifests the realism of the 'lived-life' in different ways. First and foremost, in the temporal form of the novel, as Genette has analysed in detail (Genette 1972), and in the use of points of view, as Tadié has shown in his analysis (Tadié 1971). Even though Genette and Tadié are commenting upon the connection between the lived-life and the formal structures in *A la recherche*, they

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[4] It is also relevant here to emphasise that it is exactly this aesthetic forming of the content in literary texts, that is one of the major particularities in the literary representation of reality. Nonetheless, we do not know what kind of truth about reality it reveals.

do not interpret the connections as consequently as I do[5]. Nonetheless, Genette makes note of the many jumps in time, along with the widespread use of anachronism as an illustration of the realistic memory of the past time. The many jumps in time in *A la recherche* illustrate that we often do not remember the correct succession of events, and that there are leaps and omissions in our memory (Genette: 180ff).

The dramatic variations in the narrated time in *A la recherche*, the changing between short summarising of time and long iterative scenes (cf. above about the iterative form) also expresses that we experience some parts of our life very fast and others slowly and in detail. Moreover, the iterative form itself reflects the way in which we remember; we are compressing a series of similar events to one memory (i.e. our summer holidays, Sundays or visit to grandmother's).

Tadié highlights the realistic correlate of the use of limited points of view in *A la recherché* (Tadie 1971: 34ff, Davidsen 2006: 161). The limited points of view has the effect that the reader only can see and know what Marcel experiences. This limited points of view is similar to our realistic perception; we also have a limited perspective of the world in real life. Tadié furthermore points out Proust's use of multiple points of view: the same event or series of events are narrated from more perspectives. This demonstrates the 'lived fact' that there are different interpretations and perspectives of events, and it simulates the realistic experience that people around us interpret the same event in different ways. From a reader's perspective, both point of view techniques confuse the reader, and in many instances in the novel the reader, as well as Marcel, does not know what is true!

The focus on the specificities of the lived-life is also expressed in an interest of the banal and trivial elements of the lived-life (getting dressed, standing up, getting to sleep, Zaphir 1959, Segal 1981), and it is shown in detailed descriptions of the experienced reality and its uncountable variations. This last aspect I find especially central in relation to the literary representation of reality, because it

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[5] Genette thinks that the realistic understanding of the temporal structures in *A la recherche* is a late justification for Proust who, according to Genette, seemed more occupied with the technicalities of the play over time (Genette 1972:182, Davidsen 2006:161*)*

appears to capture the specific literary representation. In the following, I will illustrate what this means through an example, which can also illustrate the relationship between the general and the specific representation.

Phenomenological realism in detail
A la recherche is a novel which is not only difficult to read because of its length, but primarily because of its transgression of traditional literary forms, which usually assist the reader in decoding and organising the meaning in literary texts. Instead, the reader is asked to struggle with the challenges of meaning creation one is faced with in real life, and the reader is asked not to use the conventionalised concepts they automatically use in their perception. They are asked to look at the experience-ground of their conceptions, and Proust reveals that this ground consists of an enormous number of details, variations and connections, that we normally overlook in the superficial conventionalised perception. This ground of perceptual aspects and specifications explores Proust from the very first page in *A la recherche*, where the novel begins with the trivial scenes: going to bed, not able to sleep:

> For a long time I would go to bed early. Sometimes the candle barely out, me eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to tell myself: "I'm falling asleep". And half an hour later the thought that it was time to look for sleep would awaken me;" (Swann's way:1/Sw,I:3)

These phrases are followed by a whole series of possible ways of awakening: he wakes up and thinks he has not slept, he wakes up and cannot distinguish sleep and reality, he wakes up remembering what he had just read. Then he varies the scene from a general 'not being able to sleep' to 'not being able to sleep when you are ill', then to 'not being able to sleep when you are ill and sleeping in a hotel room.'

Then he focuses on an aspect, namely the 'waking up', which he also describes in many details and variations: He wakes up briefly during his sleep to hear the noises of the room (the "creaking of the wainscot", ibid:2), or "to stare at the

shifting kaleidoscope of the darkness" (ibid). He also wakes up because of a bad dream (ibid) or because a sleeping position makes him believe that he lies together with a woman (ibid:3). These variations lead to a further specification, where the narrator reflects upon an aspect of the 'waking up', namely the degree of being awake or mixing together what he had dreamt and his awakened consciousness (ibid). After reflecting upon these variations and the access sleep gives to the whole world around the sleeper and to a melange of memories, the narrator focuses on a new detail, which he again describes in different variations, namely the rooms, where he awakes (ibid:4f): childhood room in Combray, a room at his friend Saint-Loup, 'winterly rooms', 'summerly rooms', historical rooms, geometric rooms.

Through these variations, Proust shows the richness of detail beneath the conventional surface, and the possibility of an infinite exploration of their elements, aspects and variations. These variations of variations are furthermore added digressions. Every little detail in *A la recherche* allows for the opportunity to search for new connections. The realistic truth Proust hereby captures is a kind of concrete or specific truth that is not represented in either philosophical or scientific generalisations of reality. Seen from the question about correspondence between fictional reality and empirical reality, literature does in fact represent something that actually exists (i.e. the experience of weakening up in a 'summerly' room).

One can now ask, what is the connection between this 'poetic of phenomenological experiences' and the search for general laws in the lived human life? As I will return to below, it is the specificity which represents the general law, but before this connection will be explained further, the phenomenological character of Proust's specifications will be linked to a semeiotic understanding of their representation.

Phenomenological realism and semiotics
From a phenomenological perspective, the different variations and aspects reveal different perceptive qualities - different angles of the same phenomenon, so to speak. This is analogous to the way in which one can see a tree in many variations and in many contexts. The variations and the connections are, however, not only

about direct perceptions of reality. They also concern the meaning of things. From a semiotic point of view, *A la recherche* shows that the different perceptions of reality - of waking up, rooms, bad weather, war, a brightly lit restaurant - are about the meaning of specific perceptive elements in their configurations. It concerns what Greimas calls figurative meaning (Greimas 1979:149): the meaning of figures or of the perceptive level in the world as a café au lait, a walk, apple trees, awakening etc. According to Greimas, perceptive elements in the world gain their meaning from the configurations of which they are part (Greimas 1983:60ff). Proust repeatedly demonstrates this point by showing that perceptive elements or aspects of them gain their meaning from the context from which they are part, like waking up has different meaning in different rooms or in connection with different dreams.

This configurative structure is also especially clear in the involuntary memories: the taste of a madeleine cake dissolved in tea gains its meaning from the Sunday mornings in Combray and from the childhood there. This suggests that Proust wrongly thinks that involuntary memories reveal an essential truth. However, on the contrary, they seem to reveal a semiotic non-essential realism, where things get their meaning from the context. Let us look at the quote from the famous madeleine scene demonstrating this, before further clarifying the configurative interpretation.

Marcel returns to home on a cold afternoon and his mother offers him a cup of tea together with "those squat, plum little cakes called "petites madeleines"" (Swann's way: 51f/ Sw,I: 44f). He soaks a piece of the cake in his tea and he experiences an extraordinary feeling of "exquisite pleasure" (ibid), and starts to search for the memory linked to this feeling:

And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (…), when I went to say good morning to her in the bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. (…)

And as soon as I had recognised the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me (…) immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the

little pavilion opening on to the garden (…); and with the house, the town, from morning to night, and in all weathers, the Square where I used to be sent before lunch, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country road we took when it was fine." (ibid: 53f)

The quote shows that the taste of madeleine dissolved in tea first is linked to the configuration 'saying good morning to aunt Léonie', then to her house in Combray (where Marcel spends his childhood summers) and then to the town. After this, the section in *A la recherche* about Marcel's childhood Combray begins without any further comment. It is not only the morning, as configuration, that grows out of the madeleine cake, or the city from Marcel's childhood summers, it is the whole novel! This is an extreme example of the rhizomatic nature (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) of the configurative structure: a novel can grow out of every single figure in the greimasian sense. In a more basic sense, the meaning of a figure *is* the configurations. The meaning of the taste of madeleine dissolved in tea, is saying good morning to aunt Léonie, the house in Combray', the town and childhood summers in Combray.

The configurative poetic

As the example shows, the 'essential truth' that the involuntary memories conceal, is not, as Proust thinks, the similarities between a moment in the present and a moment in the past that transgresses temporality. The excitement is instead evoked by the discovery of the context concealed in the taste. The truth therefore appears to be the context, which is connected to the figure

(cf. the other examples of involuntary memories: Time Regained:217f/Tr,IV:446f, Time Regained:226/Tr,IV:452).

It is, of course, controversial to question Proust's own understanding of his novel, but the structures in the novel, and especially the involuntary memories, express a configurative structure, which is not in accordance with the 'metaphoric poetics'. Genette also supports the interpretation that Proust has not fully understood his own poetics (Genette 1972:47). Genette sees the problem as a discrepancy between a metaphoric structure (representing similarities) and

metonymic structures (representing connectedness) (ibid, Davidsen 2006:325ff). According to Genette it is not, generally, the metaphor that is the dominant structure in *A la recherché*, but the metonymy, and he highlights the metonymic foundation of metaphors in *A la recherché* as an example. He shows that one and the same figure, in this case 'spires', are described through different metaphors according to their context (respectively a corn field and the seaside) (Genette 1972:42f). According to Genette, and in opposition to my interpretation, this results in Proust's 'irreducible irrealism': "The variations of the "described" object shows the indifference in regard to the referent and hence the irreducible irrealism of the Proustian description" (ibid:45, my translation). In contrast, I perceive it as an radical phenomenological and semiotic realism, which Genette also recognises in some respects when he says that sensations in Proust correspond or are equivalent with the context: "The sensation-signal becomes quickly in Proust a kind of equivalent of the context" (ibid:58, my translation).

In any case, Proust does not seem to support a superficial 'referential realism', where one thing, i.e. spires, always remains the same thing. It is exactly the differences and the variations emerging from the surroundings, that Proust is trying to grasp: "An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what I call reality is a certain connexsion between these immediate sensations…" (Time Regained:245f/TR,IV:467f).

What I here call a radical phenomenological realism has also been interpreted by Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze in relation to the sensible's becoming in its inseparable relationship to the sensed (Merleau-Ponty 1964, Deleuze 1964). Both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze represent, besides their differences, an anti-transcendental search for truth, which they confirm in Proust in the intertwined relation between the sensed and the sensible (Wambacq 2013, Merleau-Ponty 1945:195). They both, in accordance with Proust, stress the basic phenomenological assumption that reality gets its meaning in the sensation. At the same time, they dissolve the specificity of reality, because it is implied or immanent in the sensation. It is this immanence, 'the interior of the visible that is both manifested and hidden' which is central for Merleau-Ponty in his search of the

invisible in the visible in Proust (Merleau-Ponty 1945:195). For Deleuze, his anti-logos position is manifested in Proust in the plurality, multiplicity and coincidence of the signs (love for, example, can be manifested in many ways, and can one be sure it is love? Deleuze 1964:14f).

More generally, according to Deleuze, the signs (as the visible in Merleau-Ponty) simultaneously manifest and cover its representation. Through so doing signs mark the ultimate Difference (ibid:53), because signs always have a signification, which is different from the object, it designate: "We recognise the things but we never known them. What the sign signify, we confuse with the being or the object, which it designates" (ibid:37, my translation). As a consequence, literature cannot be understood as representation, and Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze's interpretations of Proust cannot, despite their focus on the phenomenological dynamic of sensations in Proust, contribute to clarification of the specific content of 'the differentiated lived reality'. Instead, the novel, in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze's view, repeats an abstract confirmation of the invisible or the Difference.

Proust's phenomenology subsequently appears to be closer to the idea in the Husserlian eidetic reduction that one can search for distinctive traits in the specific representations (Husserl 1962). The Husserlian phenomenology is, as with Proust, simultaneously retaining a specific and unique and a general and common perspective, whereas both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, in their search for an anti-transcendental truth, are merging the two perspectives together. Their anti-transcendentalism seems furthermore to be transformed into yet another metaphysical position, where one can apprehend the world in its anti-reduced interviewed tissueness or in its endless differentiated pluralisme. They thereby represent a deconstructive (Derrida 1967) version of an idealistic interpretation of literature. In doing so they elevate, as Proust, a radical specificity of the sensation, but they do not maintain the concreteness of it, as I believe Proust does, in his configurative poetic.

From this perspective, it still remains to answer how these specific configurations are connected with general laws. I will not go further into a

phenomenological interpretation of this from a Husserlian perspective, despite the epistemological similarities, because the transcendental orientation of Husserl's phenomenology also tends to disregard the specific realistic reality as it is manifested on the level of "bad weather, a war, a taxi rank, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers". It is this specific reality that literature is about, and it is manifested on a semiotic and cognitive level, rather than on a transcendental one. The configurative level will therefore be further explained from a semiotic and cognitive angle.

Semiotics, cognition and the phenomenological ground of concepts
Configurations can be defined as networks of perceptive elements or figures. From a semiotic point of view, configurations become conventional by cultural use and get captured in what Proust will say is a superficial and false representation of reality, where we think we mean the same when we say for example bad weather, restaurant etc. This means, that the nominalisation deletes the perceptual ground and all its possible variations and aspects. Bad weather or a restaurant can be manifested in many variations with many specific details. When concepts are apprehended as names with one referential ground these specific contents are erased.

It is not only the variations that are cancelled in the referential nominalism, but the specific and experiential ground of the content of concepts. More profoundly, it is the acknowledgement of the relationship between (general) content of concepts and specific experiences that is excluded. The connection between the specific description and the general laws is, namely, that the specific (experiences) is representing the general (laws).

One can understand this relation further within the framework of cognitive semantics. Cognitive semantics generally view the content of concepts as consisting of specific knowledge about the world, which is rooted in specific experiences (Lakoff 1987, Schank and Abelson, 1977). More precisely, one can understand the specific descriptions as cognitive models (Davidsen 2006, 2007), which function as categories that represent theories of reality (Lakoff 1987:45).

Each cognitive model consists of typical traits selected from the experiential ground, which represent a certain understanding of a given phenomenon (e.g. of bad weather, of a restaurant or a summer morning) (Davidsen 2006:44f). Any specific object or element can be understood in different ways, there are many variations of each phenomenon and therefore many submodels, but each one of them is created as a cluster of prototypical traits (ibid).

The literary representation of reality

This is the core of the literary representation of reality: literary texts select specific elements in the world, which represent a general understanding of the phenomenon in the world. They are what Proust calls the general laws that intelligence can extract from reality. Perceptions and experiences are transformed into hypotheses about phenomena in the world. These hypotheses are formed as cognitive models or configurations consisting of figurative networks and establishing the content of concepts. Literature represents the world on this conceptual level and reveals the perceptual ground of the conceptual meaning. Literature thereby, so to speak, keeps the semiotic door between the concepts and their figurative ground open and exposes the specific ground of general concepts.

More precisely, the literary representation of reality consists of configurations representing the conceptual understanding of reality. Consequently, literature and *A la recherche*, neither represents an idealistic or essential truth nor a false realism, but a pheno-semiotic realism, which is the realistic ground of our conceptual understanding of the world. According to Eco, as already quoted in the introduction, "culture 'sees' the world" through a conceptual system (Eco 1976: 274), and it is through this conceptual system that literature reflects reality.

Sleepless, summerly rooms and superficiality

As an illustration of this pheno-semiotic realism in literature, this article will conclude with some examples from *A la recherche* on specific literary descriptions which, as a cognitive model, implicitly represent general assumptions and reflects the general content in concepts.

The mentioned cognitive models for 'not being able to sleep' will first be analysed closer. Its description involves many different variations and sub-models, and each of them reveals different general aspects of 'not being able to sleep'. It is the specific variant of 'not being able to sleep when you are ill and sleeping in a hotel room', that will be analysed here. Proust describes it as:

> Nearly midnight. The hour when an invalid, who has been obliged to set out on a journey and to sleep in a strange hotel, awakened by a sudden spasm, sees with glad relief a streak of daylight showing under the door. Thank God, it is morning! The servants will be about in a minute: he can ring, and someone will come to look after him. The thought being assuaged gives him strength to endure his pain. He is certain he heard footsteps: they come nearer, and then die away. The ray of light beneath his door is extinguished. It is midnight; someone has just turned down the gas; the last servant has gone to bed, and he must lie all night suffering without remedy. (Swann's way:2/Sw,I:4)

This model of 'not being able to sleep' is a specific sub-model ('sleeping at a hotel') of the sub-model ('when you are ill'). Maybe not all of the details are typical for the sub-model 'sleeping at a hotel', but most of them are. The "streak of daylight showing under the door", together with the noises outside the door and the false belief of a releasing morning coming up are well known. The specific description expresses and represents the general sensation and understanding of 'not being able to sleep when you are ill (and sleeping in a hotel room)', namely the restlessness and monotonous experience of the slow running of time together with a vulnerable and isolated position.

The example shows that it is this specification which extracts the general laws from reality. The general content is not made explicit, but is instead expressed by the details. This content, both the specific and the general part, is probably not part of an explicit understanding of the conception of 'not being able to sleep'. One might have a vague feeling of it, but it is most likely difficult to describe it explicitly. However, this is exactly what literature does: it makes booth the specific (concrete) and general (abstract) content in concepts explicit.

Literature furthermore contributes with making concepts explicit, which are not part of the conventional dictionary, but nevertheless is part of the 'lived life', like for example the concept 'summerly rooms'. It is not a word one can look up in a dictionary, but we have experiences of summerly rooms and therefore vague conceptions of them, which Proust contributes to by the following description of a summerly room at night when you unable to sleep:

> - or rooms in summer, where I would delight to feel myself a part of the warm night, where the moonlight striking upon the half-opened shutters would throw down to the foot of my bed its enchanted ladder, where I would fall asleep, as it might be in the open air, like a titmouse which the breeze gently rocks at the tip of a sunbeam (Swann's way:7/ Sw,I:9)

This is, of course, not the only possible description of a 'summerly room at night' when one is unable to sleep, but it nevertheless captures, through its individual specificity, the general sensation of the diffusion of inside and outside, of freshness and illuminated nights. Other descriptions would elicit other aspects that could further contribute to the conception of 'summerly room (at night)'.

These specific cognitive models, which the descriptions form, do not only generate general conceptions, they are also used to understand abstract concepts. As in the example above, 'not being able to sleep when you are ill and sleeping in a hotel room', contributes to the understanding of abstractions as restlessness, monotonous, the relative nature of the passing of time, and being vulnerable and abandoned situation. The different abstract concepts can thus be understood in many ways and in relation to many kinds of specifications, and this is precisely the point: it is the different specifications that create the different interpretations of the concepts.

Literary texts can both make the specific content in known concept explicit and, indeed, can contribute with new interpretations, by the specific deceptions, to well-known concepts. This is also the case in *A la recherche*, where the huge amount of descriptions of social groups and the psychology of social stereotypes (one type

of cognitive models[6]) contribute to a large number of concepts central for the 'lived life' such as stupidity, superficiality, consensus, ignorance, courtesy, cruelty etc.[7]. I will just look at one example here of the concept of superficiality as superficial dedication to art. It is superficially which is the basic concept, but it is specified in a sub-model, where it is superficiality in relation to art that is described. This sub-model that some people have regarding a superficial relation to art is well-known, but it is not evident that the prototypical traits of superficiality or the 'superficial relation to art' are explicitly acknowledged as part of the concept.

The example is from the description of the Verdurin salon and describes what happens every time the pianist is going to play:

> "No, no, not my sonata!" she [Mme Verdurin] screamed, "I don't want to be made to cry until I get a cold in the head, and neuralgia all down my face, like last time. Thanks very much, I don't intend to repeat that performance. You're all so very kind and considerate, it's easy to see that none of you will have to stay in bed for a week."
>
> This little scene, which was re-enacted as often as the young pianist sat down to play, never failed to delight her friends as much as if they were witnessing it for the first time, as a proof of the seductive originality of the "Mistress" and of the acute sensitiveness of her musical ear. (Swann's way:247/ Sw,I:203)

The specific description exposes different prototypical elements of being superficial (in relation to art). It shows that putting oneself on stage through loud declarations of extreme sensibility are elements of being superficial. It furthermore demonstrates that these exaggerated expressions of affections are used to make the person exceptional.

These kinds of mechanism (putting oneself on stage through loud declarations of extreme sensibility…) are the general laws, which the literary description extracts from the specific and detailed pheno-semiotic realism of the

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[6] See Davidsen 2006: 53ff for three types of cognitive models.

[7] See Davidsen 2006: 191ff for a more comprehensive analyse especially concentred on the description of the bourgeois Verdurin salon and the noble Guermantes salon and the apparently opposition between them.

world. Mme Verduin does not exist in the real world and, in that sense, does not represent anything truthful, but the single elements and traits that she expresses do exist in the real world independently of literature.

Literature is the only art form (though in partial conjunction with other figurative art forms) that represents and reflects this specific realism of details of experiences in connection to conceptual understanding. Literature therefore represents reality in two ways: it represents reality through specific representations of the perceive world and through general assumption of its mechanism, and it exposes, on an epistemological level, the reciprocity of perception and conception.

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