

Are Background Feelings Intentional Feelings?

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Abstract

I address the problem of the intentionality of “feeling”, considering the study-case of “background feelings” (malaise, tension, etc.) in **Damasio (2003, 2010)**. Background feelings, in fact, are “border case” feelings: These feelings seem lacking intentionality, at least by the meaning that their intentional content is not any object in the world they refer to. Differently from other feelings connected to intentional states (such as emotions, for ex., feelings are mainly considered arising from), background feelings reveal a bodily nature of feeling at its core, while intentionality of feelings, when any, rather depends on the intentionality of the states feelings concern. Background feelings reveal an intimate, immediate relation to our own body we can’t catch considering feelings always and only connected to emotions. The intimate relation to the body, coming in “foreground” in these feelings only, should shed more light on another key feature of feelings, namely their phenomenality, more than their “supposed” intentionality.

Keywords

Feelings, Emotion, Intentionality, Bodily Self, Damasio, Phenomenal Consciousness

1. Introduction

To this day we do not have a shared taxonomy nor a definition of *feeling*, agreed upon neither among nor within the various disciplines contributing to the so-called “affective science”. Each approach even employs the *same* term “feeling” in order to refer to very *different* phenomena. It may not be expected that the various disciplines contributing to an affective “science” (by the meaning of “rigorous analysis”) such as psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, comparative literature, cultural anthropology, sociology, and history agree on jointly accepted definitions. Worse, however, is that even *within* neuroscience, within psychology, and within philosophy, etc. there is no general agreement on how to classify and define feelings, emotions or other related affective phenomena.

We encounter as many classifications and definitions of “feeling” or of “emotion” as theoretical perspectives. In order to bypass this difficulty, claiming *explicitly* what is understood as “feeling” or “emotion” time by time is necessarily required, but even this move should be not enough.

In literature, the label “feeling” is mostly connected to *emotions*. It may be useful, rather, acknowledging that “feeling” has a wider extent: We can *feel* a broader collection of states such as pains, itches, needs, desires and motivations. Moreover, in the philosophical texts—especially in the English language—the words “emotion” and “feeling” are even usually used as synonyms, which is misleading, because not every *felt* state arises from an emotion. De Sousa, for ex., recognizes not only similarities between emotions and feelings, but also important differences. In particular, he considers the case of the so-called “epistemic feelings”—feelings involved in inquiry, knowledge and metacognition: These feelings can be attributed also to *sub-personal* levels (while emotions occur at a personal level) and they usually are less complex than “full-fledged” emotions (De Sousa, 2009: 140). The term “feeling” thus includes a broader array of possible *felt* states: Emotion is only *one* of them, neither the more interesting one, I guess. Even if in a common-sensical and somehow metaphorical way, in everyday language too “feeling” is in fact used in a broader extent: Above all in the English language, people frequently say “I feel good” with reference to *health*, or they can say “I feel that” when someone *touches* them, or when they have a *pain*. Sometimes people also say “my *feeling* is that *p*” to mean “my *opinion* is that *p*”. Even by a superficial, previous linguistic analysis, then, we should understand something remarkable about feeling. We might ask, for instance, why we usually *report* of “feeling” only of certain kinds of states, but not of others. In a pregnant analysis of the case of *needs* as “felt” states, Castelfranchi has rightly pointed out that we usually say, for ex.: “I feel the *need* for...”, “I feel the *desire* of...” or “I feel the *motivation* to...”, but we don’t say “I feel the *intention* of...” or “I feel the *belief* of...” (Castelfranchi, 1998: 56-57). What do states we report *feeling* really have in common? According to him, we do not report feeling (and probably we can’t feel at all) those states exhibiting a stronger cognitive structure—such as intentions or beliefs: They all show no manifest *perceptual, sensori-motoric* components. “Feeling”, whereas, seems subsuming only kinds of states connected to the *body* in a more intimate and direct way.

Really, *feeling* is a misty, or, at least a polysemic word: That’s why I suggest using here the word *feeling* in order to refer to the *entire array* of possible felt states, including emotions, of course, but also to many other phenomena, e.g. pains, itches, needs, motivations, desires. My general questions, thus, are: What does it mean, in general, *feeling* anything? What is required that certain state or processes can be “felt” and others cannot?

In order to answer these questions, we will take into account mostly Damasio’s approach because he offers a neuroscientific description of both emotions and feelings, providing interesting remarks on the fundamental *role of the body*. He particularly stresses the role of the so-called “background feelings”—kinds of feelings clearly revealing an *immediate*, intimate connection to the body. We usually are not able to recognize such an evident relation to our own body in feelings of intentional states like emotions, for ex.: These feelings always refer to some *object* or event—specific or a-specific—in the world they are mostly focused on. In feeling arising from emotions, in fact, the body remains “unattended”, both psychologically and, so to say, theoretically. Whereas, background feelings—such as “tension” or “malaise”, for ex.—or other *a-specific* processes such as “moods” (background feelings differ from, even if they are connected to in a very intimate way) reveal an *immediate, unique* relation to our own body. We usually can’t qualify this immediate access to the body than metaphorically or in negative terms (as “non-linguistic”, “non-propositional”) or using “proto” adjectives, such as “pre-reflective”, “pre-conscious” and so on. The general aim of this paper is contributing to pave the way towards a possible definition also in *positive* terms about the relation to our own body that feelings—above all background feelings—reveal: The strategy adopted here is considering questionable the main view on feeling, that is generally oriented in recognizing its *intentional* feature. My intuition is that if we consider feeling *always* and *only* as connected to emotions and also as being an *intentional* state itself (as emotions are mainly supposed to be), we will hardly be able to understand what is this kind of “immediate” access to our own body, feelings—especially background feelings—nevertheless reveal.

2. Mirroring Background Emotions

Damasio introduces the concept of “background feeling” in *Descartes’ Error*. By this notion, he wants to stress the intrinsic *bodily* nature of this specific kind of feeling: “I am postulating another variety of feeling which I suspect preceded the others in evolution. I call it *background feeling* because it originates in ‘background’ body

states rather than in emotional states” (Damasio, 1994: 150). Background feelings do not develop from proper¹ emotions but from basic *body states*, from those collections of bodily changes Damasio christens “background emotions”. In this respect, it might be helpful to see background emotions and feelings in a mirror relationship to each other. The neurobiologist even uses more or less the same vocabulary in order to define both emotions and feelings at the *background* level:

When we sense that a person is “tense” or “edgy”, “discouraged” or “enthusiastic”, “down” or “cheerful”, without a single word having been spoken to translate any of those possible states, we are detecting background emotions (Damasio, 1999: 52; my emphasis).

Prominent background feelings include: Fatigue; energy; excitement; wellness; sickness; tension; relaxation; surging; dragging; stability; balance; imbalance; harmony; discord. The relation between background feelings and moods is intimate: Drives express themselves directly in background emotions and we eventually become aware of their existence by means of background feelings (Damasio, 1999: 286; my emphasis).

Background feelings/emotions are not ordinary notions we share in our conceptual armoire: On account of background feelings arise from the *awareness* of the correspondent “background emotions”, a preliminary clarification of these concepts and of the related taxonomy is here required, without aiming to provide an exhaustive view on the endless emotion-debate still going on nowadays². The classification of emotions proposed by Damasio, in fact, is only one among several others: Each taxonomy implies a different interpretation of what we do mean by “emotion” or, rather, how we do understand *each* distinct emotion. Strictly speaking, in fact, we would have to deal with every single emotion in a different way because, also by a neurophysiological point of view, *each* emotion involves *different* neural patterns: Research on the so-called “basic” emotions (Ekman, 2003), for ex., shows that, at least fear and disgust are realized by different neural pathways (see Panksepp, 1998). Nevertheless, summarizing, we might say that neurobiological literature (e.g. LeDoux, 1996; Damasio, 1999, 2010) usually backdates the emergence and the existence of emotions to less evolved beings, while cognitive theories (e.g. Nussbaum, 2001; Ortony et al., 1988; Frijda, 1986) support a more anthropocentric view. The different approaches to emotion mainly debate among the particular relevance of both the *bodily* and the *cognitive* dimension, and their mutual relationship.

Opposite to the dominant cognitive paradigm, Damasio regards emotions, especially at the most basic level, essentially as collections of *bodily* rather than cognitive states. In this respect, he follows the steps of the James-Lange theory of emotions (James, 1884; Lange, 1885). Damasio thus distinguishes three levels of emotional processes, according to their degree of complexity and evolutionary heritage: The so-called “*background* emotions”—complex collections of bodily changes, basic homeostatic processes, pain and pleasure behaviours; “*primary*” or (supposed) universal “emotions”—joy, sorrow, fear, anger, disgust, surprise; and, eventually, “*secondary*” or *social* “emotions”: Compassion, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, contempt, etc. We can generally differentiate emotions by their increasing degree of complexity: The emotions of higher complexity (e.g. secondary emotions) are installed on the previous ones (e.g. primary emotions), thereby integrating and increasing lower level capacities, by using their neural pathways and anatomical components. *Secondary* emotions are shaped more by cognitive aspects: Their expression and communication depend more on social and cultural influences than those of *primary* emotions, which are shared by different cultures and even species (Darwin, 1872; Ekman, 2003). Additionally, the brain systems as well as the other bodily systems underpinning different kinds of emotions are incorporated, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically.

Whereas many other approaches to affective phenomena might converge on the distinction between what Damasio calls “primary” and “secondary” emotions, “*background*” emotions are less recognized thus far. Background emotions subsume states such as enthusiasm, wellness, malaise, excitement, tension, edginess, relaxation, tranquility, etc.

When I developed this notion³, I began seeing background emotions as the consequence of deploying certain combinations of the simpler regulatory reactions (e.g. basic homeostatic processes, pain and pleasure behaviors, and appetites), according to the nesting principle noted earlier. Background emotions are composite expressions of those regulatory actions as they unfold and intersect moment by moment in our lives. [...] These include metabolic adjustments associated with whatever internal need is arising or has just been satisfied; and with

¹What Damasio calls “primary” or “secondary” emotions.

²I already proposed a more detailed reconstruction of this debate in 2010. About that, see also Deonna & Teroni, *The Emotions: A philosophical introduction*, Routledge 2012.

³Here Damasio refers to his *Descartes’ Error* (1994) [NoA.].

whatever external situation is now being appraised and handled by other emotions, appetites, or intellectual calculation. The ever-changing result of this cauldron of interactions is our “state of being”, good, bad, or somewhere in-between. When asked “how we feel”, we consult this “state of being” and answer accordingly (Damasio, 2003: 44).

Damasio regards all three kinds of emotions as *indexes* of regulatory mechanisms, but with different triggers and targets: Background emotions are more complex processes than drives, biological motivations and other bodily changes, but less complex than proper emotions. He offers the following taxonomy of mechanisms involved in regulating life, ordered by their degree of complexity:

- Secondary or social emotions;
- primary emotions;
- background emotions;
- drives and biological motivations;
- pain/pleasure behaviours (withdrawal/approach);
- immune responses;
- basic reflexes;
- metabolic regulation (Damasio, 2003: 31-34).

Therefore, background emotions are understood as *combinations* of simpler regulatory reactions (bodily changes) such as homeostatic processes, pain/pleasure behaviours, etc., with drives, motivations, pain and pleasure as their triggers or constituents—but they are *more complex* than these processes, which all contribute to regulating life.

In order to understand the distinctive features of background emotions we might distinguish them from the other *non* emotional regulatory responses. If it suffices to define particularly background emotions as nothing but complex collections of bodily changes, we might ask in what sense they differ, for instance, from other metabolic regulation processes or immune responses. Damasio invokes the background emotions’ higher degree of *complexity*, without providing any further detail. But this move is not very convincing because, by his own criteria, also immune responses should be considered as kinds of *proto*-emotional states: Immune responses too, in fact, are “more complex” than, for ex., metabolic regulation processes. At first, background emotions might look the same as *moods*, rather, and their connection, indeed, is intimate: Background emotions contribute to build up the (neural and behavioural) configurations identified with “moods” at a reflective level. But moods and background emotions differ, for ex., in that background emotions reveal the *temporary*, “on-line” inner situation of the organism—while moods are *long term* processes—and in the sharper identification of the stimulus (Damasio, 2010: 125). We can get up in the morning, for instance, feeling in “a very good mood”, going on the whole day, but this does not mean that we could not also have rather bad background emotions such as “tension” or “malaise” for short periods of time during the same day. If we are not affected by mood disorders, we usually don’t change a “good mood” immediately due to minor disturbances such as a short tension or malaise, provided that the duration of these background emotions is short enough and they do not occur too often, of course.

Furthermore, in qualifying this kind of “proto-emotions”⁴ as “background emotions”, Damasio stresses particular features: First of all, “background” means that the involved processes occur in our body, even when we are not *aware* of them and when they are not in the focus of our *attention*. Secondly, background emotions are distinguishable from “unconscious”—repressed—states (in a Freudian sense) since we can become aware of them *whenever* we direct our attention towards them. Thirdly, “background” means *a-specific* or *objectless*, a shared feature with states like moods, but a distinguishable feature from “proper” emotions, that usually concern *specific* objects or situations. When compared to proper emotions, further differences are that the “source” of background emotions is rather *internal* than external, and that they are less expressed by facial expressions and action tendencies than do “conventional” emotions (Damasio, 1999: 53; 342). By the way, as I already reported (Barile, 2010), this concept by Damasio is not completely original defined this way: In fact, “background emotions”—above all at the corresponding reflective level of background *feelings*—are similar to “vitality affects”, already proposed by Stern (1985) and renamed as “forms of vitality” in Stern 2010. As Damasio himself recognizes, background feelings were identified even before also by Langer (1942)⁵, a Whitehead’s disciple (Damasio, 1999: 287). Additionally, something similar to the concept of “background emotion” in the stratification of affective states was already attested in Scheler (1913, 1916), particularly at the level of *Lebensgefuehlen*⁶.

⁴I would rather say “proto-emotions” since they might lack intentionality, as I will try to show later on in the paper.

⁵Damasio didn’t realize this fact in the first book (1994) where he introduced the concept of background emotion.

⁶Thanks to De Monticelli and Caminada’s suggestions, I already underlined this parallel in lexicon and in concepts in Barile 2010.

Prima facie, the “extra” level of the so-called background emotions—we should distinguish both from emotions proper and from non-emotional, mere regulatory processes—rather seems to overcomplicate a possible taxonomy of emotions than simplifying it. This taxonomy is already rich and problematic enough: Ockham’s razor might easily shave off this further level of “background” emotions. Nevertheless, the background dimension of these “emotions” is very useful in order to understand what background *feelings* are, rather. Background feelings are as unrecognized concepts as background emotions: These feelings do not arise from *proper* emotions as all the other feelings do, but they follow directly those complex collections of bodily changes Damasio christens “background emotions”. Background feelings, in fact, are just *felt*—aware—background emotions (Damasio, 1999: 286). These “proto-emotions” cannot be considered emotions proper: Rather, “the background feeling is our image of the body landscape when it is *not* shaken by *emotion*” (Damasio, 1994: 150-151; *my emphasis*).

3. “Background Feelings”: A Definition

Damasio introduces the further level of “background” feelings so to stress the role of lower background *bodily* states (especially these feelings arise from). This view is completely different from the denotation of feelings as “high order” mental states⁷. Traditionally, in fact, we understand feelings as subjective, inner experiences (*phenomenal*) and, more recently⁸, as *intentional* states too, above all those feelings following *emotions*. Opposite to this view, Damasio stresses the fundamental role of the *bodily* dimension that is evident especially in feelings *not* originating in proper emotion, such as background feelings.

Background feelings indicate the temporary inner “temperature” of the organism. What we feel are not discrete bodily changes as such, but more complex states, such as “wellness”, “relaxation” or “tension”: These are indexes of the condition of the body as a whole, perceptions, resulting at a reflective level from the awareness of the complex collection of bodily changes (the so-called “background emotions”).

It is probably correct to say that background feelings are a faithful index of momentary parameters of inner organism state. The core ingredients of that index are: 1) The temporal and spatial shape of the operations of the smooth musculature in blood vessels and varied organs, and the striated muscle of heart and chest; 2) the chemical profile of the milieu close to all these muscles fibers; and 3) the presence or absence of a chemical profile signifying either a threat to the integrity of living tissues or conditions of optimal homeostasis⁹ (Damasio, 1999: 286-287).

The role of the body is hence fundamental: The representation of the body¹⁰ is *always* there, even if *out of the attentional focus* or *unaware*—which is, by the way, one of the meanings of “background”. This representation of the *present*, “on-line” state of the body, as it changes at any one time, originates in cortical sites (sensory-motor cortical maps, topographically organized by signals coming from muscles) and on non-mapped sub-cortical sites, receiving signals from the *viscera*. The representation of the “potential” state of the body, whereas, results from *proprioception* and *interoception* (see Cameron et al., 2002). I intend here “proprioception” in the narrow sense, as the perception of muscles and skeletal structure, feeding back the sense of the position of the body in the environment, whereas interoception is the perception of the internal *milieu* and signals coming from *viscera*, concerning the sense of the homeostatic balance of the organism¹¹. The result of all of these bodily

⁷“Feeling” has been used in Western philosophy so to refer to mental states that, contrary to thoughts, have a rather vague content (see the entry “Gefühl” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*).

⁸I refer here to the contemporary debate on intentionality of bodily feelings I’m dealing with in the next paragraph.

⁹Experimental evidences of the existence of this kind of feelings are shown in such cases as asomatognosia and phantom limbs: Sufferers, in fact, exhibit an inability to reach those very background states via “on-line” informations about the present state of the body (see also Damasio, 2003: 192-193).

¹⁰In Damasio the concept of “representation” is very equivocal: It is sometimes even used in a very commonsensical way, as I already pointed out in a previous paper in Barile 2009. In neuroscience, the expression “neural representation”, for ex., usually refers to a complex neural pattern with a *specific content*: But this expression is *oxymoronic* in that the concept of “representation”, at least in the standard meaning, historically has been introduced so to indicate a theoretical entity *other* or *more* than the *underlying* neural pattern. Differently from neural configurations, in fact, we can’t observe representations themselves, but we have to *suppose* their existence in order to explain (supposed irreducible) “mental” states, that cannot be simply described in terms of “neural patterns”: In standard cognitive approaches neural patterns are simply considered “not enough” (see Anderson 1980 and RTM models).

¹¹In literature, interoception and proprioception are almost considered as the same phenomenon also because they can be separated just in a theoretical analysis, but they usually—that is, in non-psychotic cases—occur together: In particular, the role of *interoception* proper is mainly neglected. As many others (see, for ex., Tsakiris & Fotopoulou, 2008; Tsakiris, Schütz-Bosbach, & Gallagher, 2007), also Gallagher, in his seminal book *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2005), considers *proprioception* mainly, while the role of interoception proper is underestimated, at least. Although he discusses several meanings of “body perception” and even if he does not completely ignore other pre-noetic aspects, such as the role of the physiological dimension, nevertheless, most of his analysis in the book deals with proprioception and kinesia (see Ch. 6, 149 ff.).

feedbacks is the sense of the body as *a whole*, which is always present, at least on the background, until we focus our *attention* on it.

*Years ago I called attention to one of these groups and gave it a name: background emotions. Examples include enthusiasm and discouragement, two [background] emotions that can be prompted by a variety of factual circumstances in one's life but also brought on by internal states such as disease and fatigue. Even more than with other emotions, the emotionally competent stimulus of background emotions may operate covertly, triggering an emotion without one's being aware of its presence. Reflection on a situation that has already happened, or consideration of a situation that is a mere possibility, can trigger such emotions. The resulting background feelings are just a small step up from primordial feelings*¹² (Damasio, 2010: 125).

Feelings usually involve some *feedbacks from the body*: They are somehow connected to bodily changes such as homeostatic processes, simple reflexes, physiological reactions, autonomic responses, or hormonal changes. Even in case of feelings that seem quite far from a characterization in bodily terms, such as the so-called “*epistemic feelings*” analyzed by De Sousa (2009)—i.e. the “feeling of knowing”, the “feeling of rightness”, the “feeling of doubt”, etc.—an influence of bodily modifications is recognized at the neurotransmitters level. It is attested a role for acetylcholine and norepinephrine for “feeling of uncertainty” (Yu & Dayan, 2005), of oxytocin for the “feeling of trust” (Kosfeld et al., 2005), of drug as Prozac (Kramer, 1993) in regulating the “feeling of certainty” in OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorders). These bodily changes all occur at the *sub-personal, implicit* level of feelings, enabling *explicit* inferences or beliefs at the full light of awareness. Even if De Sousa himself recognizes that we have not to exaggerate the causal role of neuromodulators (De Sousa, 2009: 148 ff.), nevertheless he maintains: “we seem to see into the very point where physiological process and subjective feelings coincide” (De Sousa, 2009: 147).

Another possible counter-example of the role of bodily features in feelings might come from accounts concerning feelings of the so-called “secondary emotions”, such as the case of the “feeling of guilt” (see Gilbert, 2002). In Gilbert’s approach, judgments, beliefs and commitments are *constitutive* features, while “pangs” or “twinges” associated to guilt feelings are *concomitant* states only: That pangs and twinges might be hold as necessary conditions of guilt feelings is, for Gilbert, arguably at least. Nevertheless, the argument at issue in his paper is demonstrating the existence of *collective* guilt feelings as distinguished by mere *membership’s* guilt feelings, interpreted in terms of the collection of their members’ individual feelings. According to him, a “collective” is the plural subject of a joint committed action that is judged as “wrong”—in the case of the feeling of guilt—by the members of the group. His theoretical target, thus, is building up a notion of “collective” as different from the mere sum of the individuals: In true collectives, individuals are *jointly committed*, in the sense that this commitment can’t be split as unilaterally as a personal one. The commitment is foundational for the group itself and it gives the authorization for a collective action, even if each member of the group does not directly perform this action. Gilbert, in fact, does not deny that, at an *individual* level, there *are* pangs and twinges, responsible of the phenomenology of personal guilt feelings (Gilbert, 2002: 141-142). His argument is that collective and personal guilt are *indistinguishable* just by means of concomitant pangs and twinges (Gilbert, 2002: 135): The distinctive features are, thus, judgments and thoughts, rather. Nevertheless, in my view, the example of collective feeling arising from secondary emotions, such as the “feeling of guilt”, is not a counter-example for the constitutive role of the bodily dimension in *individual* feelings too. Gilbert’s emphasis about judgments and beliefs as constituents of feelings might be traced back to the same structure of the “secondary emotions” these feelings follow, that are more shaped by cognitive aspects: His view is based on the “plausibility” he concedes to cognitive approaches to emotions (Nussbaum¹³, 2001; Schaffer, 1983).

In my view, feelings rather show an immediate and intimate connection to the body that is not so evident in other mental states that are strongly cognitively structured, such as intentions, judgments, beliefs, etc. This does not necessarily imply that there is *no* bodily component involved in the so-called “conceptual thought”, but just that this connection to the body is not so manifest: If so, in fact, there would be an inexplicable evolutionary gap

¹²I am dealing with the further level of primordial feelings later on in this paragraph.

¹³Nussbaum’s example reported in Gilbert’s paper considers also the case of a so-called “primary emotions” as anger, in the case of “asymptomatic anger”: “my anger (...) is at times entirely asymptomatic (...) [it does not have] the phenomenology of ‘boiling’ so many people report” (Nussbaum, 2001: 61). According to Nussbaum’s and other cognitive approaches, emotions are forms of evaluative *judgements* (Nussbaum, 2001: 22). We might reply that she is dealing with *emotion* again here, not with “feelings”. Secondly, it is not that clear if “asymptomatic anger” is, rather, just a *recall* of the anger occurred at that time, and what is the difference about “thinking” and “feeling” anger itself (I already provided a deeper analysis of the differences between cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to emotions in Barile, 2009).

that would need for more clarification and that, by the way, is not at issue in this paper¹⁴. We might say, metaphorically, that some feelings go over the “border”, “out” (in the world), and the body is in the background, while others are “inside”—that are bodily feelings. We might shift attention from the body to the world and *vice versa*, depending on which kind of feelings we are dealing with. By the way, it seems that there are no *emotional* feelings that are not *bodily*. Nevertheless, as also Goldie underlines, feelings are neither simply bodily *changes*, nor *perceptions* of bodily modifications “as such” (Goldie, 2002: 237, note 7): We neither perceive homeostatic processes themselves, nor hormonal changes, which are unaware, automatic responses. What we perceive, rather—what we are *aware* of—is that “something” is happening with us, i.e. in our body (be it considered *as a whole* or as some specific *part* of it). Nevertheless, bodily changes and bodily feelings are not always connected: Bodily changes occur unaware most of the time, but we can just sometimes become aware of the resulting state of the body by means of bodily feelings. Hence, *whenever* we feel something, it refers to something changing in the body—not necessarily something we are aware of, however. The *passivity* of feeling experience hints us: Feelings just “happen” to us.

On this point, Gallagher would rather say that what we perceive (what we are aware of) may be *the world* (Gallagher, 2005), or a math problem, or another person, etc. Adopting a so-called “adverbial theory” of emotions/feelings, he rather maintains that we *sadly*, *joyfully*, *jealously*, etc. perceive the world, problems, others, etc. We do not perceive the body and then, on that basis, decide how we feel. We may angrily perceive the world without even knowing that we are angry (someone else may point that out to us): By the way, this is what he understands as “pre-noetic”. In Gallagher’s view, bodily states or processes condition, or color, or *shape* the way we perceive things, but those states or processes are not *themselves* the objects of our perception. When we do become aware that “something is happening with us” it is usually *after* the fact, in reflective awareness. Nevertheless, as many other philosophical approaches, Gallagher too considers feeling as “attached” to the *emotions*: Furthermore, I will analyze the body/world relation here at issue in the next paragraph.

Damasio’s background feelings, whereas—that do not arise from emotion proper—can also concern the sense of the body as a whole *only*, not of the world¹⁵: This is much clearer when we consider the more primitive level of the so-called “primordial feeling” he recently introduced (Damasio, 2010), background feelings are just a small “step up”.

There is some deeper feeling to be guessed and then found in the depths of the conscious mind. It is the feeling that my own body exists, and it is present, independently of any object with which it interacts, as a rock-solid, wordless affirmation that I am alive. This fundamental feeling, which I had not deemed necessary to note in earlier approaches to this problem, I now introduce as a critical element of the self process. I call it primordial feeling, and I note that it has a definite quality, a valence, somewhere along the pleasure-to-pain range. It is the primitive behind all feelings of emotion and therefore is the basis of all feelings caused by interactions between objects and organism (Damasio, 2010: 185; *my emphases*).

Damasio recognizes that, in essence, his definition of “primordial feelings” can be traced back to Panksepp (1998), i.e. to the notion of “early feelings”, even with some differences¹⁶. “Primordial feelings” and “early feelings” share that primordial feelings *precede* any interactions with the world or any feeling arising from emotions¹⁷. In his *Self Comes to Mind* (2010), Damasio also provides a deeper analyses of the relation between “primordial feelings” and “background feelings”. The “feeling of existence”, the feeling of being “alive”, pri-

¹⁴Stocker too calls against the so-called “ethical cognitivism” and considers, rather, that “judgements, questions (...) can be taken as essentially involving feelings” (Stocker, 1983: 22), and not the reverse. He deals with specific kinds of feelings such as “care”, “interest” and “concern” that are irreducible “psychic” feelings, as opposed to the feelings of emotions. These “psychic” feelings constitute, rather, “modes” of action, desire, reason and so on.

¹⁵See the study cases of “tension”/“relaxation” in the last paragraph.

¹⁶“Panksepp’s views *differ* in the following ways. First, the simple feeling that he posits appears to be necessarily related to *external events* in the world. He describes it as ‘that ineffable feeling of experiencing oneself as an active agent in the perceived events of the world’. (...) In theory, primordial feelings occur *regardless of whether the protoselfs engaged by objects and events external to the brain. They need to be related to the living body and nothing else.* (...) Second, Panksepp relates this primary consciousness mainly to *motor activities* in structures of the brain stem (periaqueductal gray, cerebellum, superior colliculi), while I place the emphasis in *sensory* structures such as nucleus tractus solitarius and parabrachial nucleus, albeit in close association with the periaqueductal gray and deep layers of superior colliculi” (Damasio, 2010: ch. 1, note 17; *my emphases*).

¹⁷Damasio provides quite incoherent versions for that: He maintains later on in the same book that “as stated in note 17 of Chapter 1, Panksepp also gives emphasis to the notion of early feelings, without which the process of consciousness cannot proceed. The detailed mechanism is not the same, but I believe the essence of the idea is. More often than not, treatments of feeling assume that they arise from interactions with the world (as in James’s ‘feelings of knowing’ or my ‘feeling of what happens’) or as a result of emotions. But primordial feelings *precede* those situations, and presumably Panksepp’s early feelings do too” (Damasio: 2010, ch. 8, note 3).

mordial feelings feed back as the “sense of the body”, arises from several different bodily feedbacks—changing all over the time—and from interoceptive and proprioceptive more stable maps of the body as a whole. Background feelings occur at a *reflective* level, feeding back the “on-line” representation of the state of the body, updated at any one time. Opposite to Gallagher’s view, when asked “how do you feel?” we consult our internal state of the body *as a whole*—that is continuously updated—and answer accordingly (Damasio: 1994: 150-152). We usually do not focus our attention on that (this is, incidentally, one of the main distinctive features of “background” phenomena) when involved in relations to the objects or other people in the world—as in emotions, for ex. The sense of the body is a *continuum* whose absence or fragmentation in the several dimensions constituting what is intended as “me”¹⁸—from the lowest possible biological meaning to the most cognitively elaborate narrative reports—suddenly and dramatically comes in “foreground” when this sense is disrupted (see Tsakiris, Prabhu, & Haggard, 2006; Sacks, 1987). Both primordial and background feelings are *bodily* feelings that are not “attached” to emotions proper: Might we consider these feelings *intentional* too? In which sense, if so?

4. Feelings and Intentionality

I will take into account here Goldie’s and Ratcliffe’s approach to feeling: Both of them, in fact, share the theoretical effort of explaining how the *bodily* feature of feelings can be held together with the *intentionality* of the states feelings concern, such as emotions—that are mostly referred to something in the world. In the last section of the paper, whereas, I will take into account again Damasio’s approach. Differently from these and other theorists, in fact, he stresses the role of background feelings: These feelings are specific kinds of (bodily) feelings arising *not from emotions*, but from *bodily* states or, better, from that cauldron of bodily changes he christens “background emotions”—that are not “emotions” proper. As I will try to show in the following, differently from *emotional* bodily feelings, we can consider background feelings—and, above all, the recently introduced *primordial feelings* they develop from—“border case” feelings, *lacking* intentionality, at least in the sense that they might also lack the intentional reference to anything in *the world*. If so, we might consider these feelings as *counter-examples* of the “supposed” intentionality of bodily feelings: Furthermore, this should also let us reconsider the “nature” of feeling itself. At least in Damasio’s view, in fact, we can regard background feelings not only as specific kinds of bodily feelings, but also as the evolutive forerunners of all kinds of feelings (Damasio, 1994: 150).

Before jumping to these conclusions I will try to reach in the next paragraphs, a previous discussion on intentionality is here required: Most of the theoretical problems connected to this issue, in fact, depends on how we do understand intentionality at any one time. In the contemporary debate about the intentionality of “bodily” feelings in emotional experience (see Slaby & Stephan, 2008; Slaby, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2005; Ben-Ze’ev, 2004; Goldie, 2002), the intentional feature of feeling is understood, in fact, in very different ways. Intentionality is (standardly) conceived as a structural relationship between a mental state or process, on the one hand, and something this state or process is about or refers to, on the other (Brentano, 1874)¹⁹. What mental states or processes are about or refer to often are *specific* objects, properties or events. Nevertheless, as Slaby & Stephan (2008) outline, there are also mental states that are not about specific objects, but that we can still consider intentional, though in a *non-standard* way. These kinds of states comprise, for instance, “moods”, objectless emotions like “anxiety” and, in general, all *background* feelings. Among them we can recognize, in particular, the so-called *existential feelings* recently conceptualized by Ratcliffe as “background (...) relationship [s] to the world” (Ratcliffe, 2005: 45).

Existential feelings have been neglected by research on emotions for a long time: More particularly, they are defined as “ways of finding oneself in a world” (Ratcliffe, 2005: 50). Examples of this kind of feelings are, e.g. feeling “complete”, “flawed and diminished”, “unworthy”, “humble”, “separate and in limitation”, “at home”, “a

¹⁸“The me includes: (1) the perspective in which the objects are being mapped (the fact that my mind has a *standpoint* of viewing, touching, hearing, and so on, and that *the standpoint is my body*); (2) the feeling that the objects are being represented in a mind *belonging to me* and to no one else (*ownership*); (3) the feeling that I have *agency* relative to the objects and that the actions being carried out by my body are commanded by my mind; and (4) *primordial feelings*, which signify the existence of my living body *independently* of how objects engage it or not. The aggregate of elements (1) through (4) constitutes a self in its simple version” (Damasio, 2010: 185; *my emphases*).

¹⁹Here I deal with the so-called “third thesis” by Brentano, considering intentionality as the “hallmark” of the mental, without necessarily being engaged also in the other two theses. Because Brentano’s view is very controversial, I consider here just this feature of his analysis that is more connected to the discussion proposed.

fraud” (Ratcliffe, 2005: 45). The most relevant common features of existential feelings—as a specific group of (also “bodily”²⁰) feelings—are that they are not only a-specific, objectless, but also primarily background orientations in shaping our experience of the *world*. According to us, then, following Ratcliffe’s own definition, being *objectless* does not mean by itself being *non-intentional*. Of course, states as moods, objectless emotions, existential feelings and, in general, all *background* feelings are not intentional by the standard meaning, understood as referring to *specific* objects. More precisely, Ratcliffe (2012) defines existential feelings (as kinds of background feelings) “pre-intentional” rather than intentional themselves, i.e. as conditions of possibility of other intentional states. Nevertheless, in my view, we can still consider existential feelings intentional at least in the sense that they are always related *to the world*, that we experience as a *whole*. The “something” they relate to, in fact, is not a specific, well defined object, but the *whole* situation, environment, or life circumstances: When we are “not in the mood” it is the whole relation to the world—above all to the other people, for instance—that is compromised, and the same happens when we feel “unfamiliar” or “not at home”. Thus, the core feature of intentionality by Ratcliffe seems to be not the specificity of particular objects or events, but the relationship to *the world* rather—even if it is the whole world, including myself in my relationships to the other persons or to the environment. The philosopher, in fact, never considers the body as a possible object of perception, but as just that *through which* we perceive objects.

In a similar effort of explaining how we can still consider “intentional” *bodily* feelings involved in emotions—which cannot be easily said to be *about* something—, Goldie (2002) understands bodily feelings as intentional states too (as soon as we conceive intentionality in a “broader” sense, namely in the sense of “directedness”)—as being *directed* towards something: In this case, towards a given part of one’s own body. This broader sense exceeds the standard meaning of intentionality as “aboutness” (i.e. as being *about* something)²¹. Furthermore, in order to explain *in which way* we can consider “bodily” feelings too as *intentional*, Goldie introduces a distinction between “bodily feelings” and “feelings towards”, though in *emotional* experience these two kinds of feeling are always connected. “Bodily feelings” are feelings of the condition of the body, of the bodily changes (triggered from “*inside*”), while “feelings towards” are feelings towards the object of the emotion (triggered from “*outside*”). Following this distinction, we can consider both feelings as *intentional*, though in a different way. *Feelings towards* are intentional both in the sense of *directedness* (they are “directed” towards an object outside the body, in the world) and in the sense of *aboutness* (they are also “about” this object). *Bodily feelings*, whereas, are intentional in the sense of being *directed* towards the body (inside), but not of *aboutness*—they are not themselves “about” anything *in the world*. The intentional content of *bodily feelings* is some part—localized—of the body, rather (by the way, I find this expression misleading: A bodily feeling is rather *localized* in some part of the body and not *directed* towards it)²². In Goldie’s example of the hairs going up on the back of one’s neck in the emotion of fear (Goldie, 2002: 235), he considers the *feeling towards* the object of fear properly intentional, because it is *about* the object of the emotion—“the lion”, in this case, or something else in the world. Whereas, the *bodily feeling*, that is the feeling of the localized part of the neck where the hairs is going up on account of fear, is intentional in the sense of “directedness” only: This feeling is *directed* to a precise part of the body, that is the neck, but it is not “itself” *about* anything in the world. Bodily feelings show, thus, a kind of “borrowed intentionality”²³: Nevertheless, what they borrow is the *directedness to*, but not the *aboutness* towards the world (Goldie, 2002: 247).

In contrast to Goldie, Ratcliffe claims that also bodily feelings are *feelings towards* the world considered as a whole, *by means* of the body (Ratcliffe, 2005: 47-48). In his phenomenological account, body and world are always intertwined, both inextricably and ontologically. They cannot exist separately: Bodily feelings, in fact, are *in the body*, while the body itself often remains unattended and unaware—in the background. At the same time, bodily feelings are, rather, “about” the *world* beyond the body—than about the body itself. Thus, the body is not the intentional content of bodily feelings, but it is that *through which* we keep the intrinsic relation to the world.

²⁰Ratcliffe (2012) clarifies that existential feelings might be considered bodily as far as they comprehend more than just “feelings of the body”; the term “bodily feeling” is insensitive to a distinction between two kinds of bodily experience: The *feeling* body needs to be distinguished from the *felt* body. He considers existential feelings neither noetic nor noematic feelings, but just *way of shaping* the relation to the world.

²¹We might find the same distinction also in Searle, 1983.

²²Thanks to A. Stephan and the Osnabrueck IKW Ph.D. students group for having noticed this while discussing with me the paper in their journal club meetings.

²³Goldie further explained and developed this concept in Goldie, 2000.

According to Ratcliffe, this is clearly revealed by the “model case” of *touch*, in which the relation between bodily feelings and the world is fully intertwined, because “to touch is to experience a relation between one’s body and an object it comes into contact with” (Ratcliffe, 2005: 48). In line with Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of touching experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), Ratcliffe proposes also a detailed description of the phenomenology of feeling in touch. Additionally, he extends this explanation in terms of structural relatedness to the world to *every* kind of feeling experience.

In connect feeling dimension to *emotions*, both Goldie and Ratcliffe have to face the problem of how we can hold the *bodily* dimension of feelings involved in emotions together with the *intentionality* of the states feelings concern. I follow here a different strategy: Taking into account Damasio’s background feelings, that are specific kinds of feelings arising *not from emotions* (but from basic bodily states or, better, from that cauldron of bodily changes he christens “background emotions”—that are not emotions proper—), I wish to catch the *core* nature of feelings, independently (if so) from the intentionality of the states feelings are mostly related to. Background feelings (and certainly primordial feelings they develop from), in fact, seem *lacking* intentionality, at least in the sense that they might exist also *without* intentional reference to anything in *the world*. Background feelings are kinds of feeling in which the bodily dimension and the intentional one (in the sense of “reference to the *world*”) are *not necessarily* connected: In my view, this fact might let us consider questionable that intentionality is part of the core structure of *this* kind of (bodily) feeling, at least. Far from being a critical point in Damasio’s account, as many of his detractors have pointed out²⁴ (that *is* a critical point for the case of *emotions* and other related intentional states only), I rather think that the background dimension of feeling the neuroscientist outlines reveals something that is more fundamental for a better understanding of the core nature of *feeling* in general. As kinds of feelings that may also have *no intentional reference* to the *world*, background feelings only might clearly reveal, so to say, the “pure” *bodily* nature of feeling, as I will try to show in the last section of the paper.

5. Are Background Feelings Intentional Too?

In this last section, I want to suggest the hypothesis that we might consider background feelings, as defined by Damasio, as *counter-examples* of the more recently claimed intentionality of bodily feelings (Slaby & Stephan, 2008): Background feelings, in fact, seem *lacking* intentionality. In the following, I’ll take into account again Goldie’s, Ratcliffe’s and others’ understanding of intentionality and discuss whether it might be applied to background feelings too—as kinds of *bodily* feelings—as conceptualized by Damasio, in order to exclude any meaning of intentionality (standard or broader) according to which background feelings might be considered intentional states themselves.

Let’s be clear, first, about background feelings as understood by Damasio and Ratcliffe, because they share this concept only apparently. According to Damasio, the most distinctive meaning of “background” is that feelings of the background type allow us to experience our body in a very particular way, namely *as a whole*. Ratcliffe acknowledges background feelings as neurophysiological evidences for his own hypothesis of existential feelings (Ratcliffe, 2005: 52), he regards as *kinds of* background feelings. He also shares with Damasio the view that background feelings are a-specific and allow us experiencing things as “wholes”. A closer look, however, reveals significant differences between background and existential feelings. Existential feelings as understood by Ratcliffe concern a relation *to the world* considered as a whole, while Damasio’s background feelings might concern a relation *to the body only* as a whole, and not to the world²⁵—even if the body is *in* the world anyway, and it does not exist isolated, of course. This is even more evident in the previous level of “primordial feelings” background feelings develop from.

In order to understand better the difference between Damasio’s and Ratcliffe’s conception, let’s analyze the process by which (firstly *unfelt*) background *states* of “relaxation” or “tension”, for instance, might develop into background *feelings* of “relaxation” or “tension”, where we might distinguish the following features:

-Our body can be in *states* of “tension” or “relaxation”—states of the body as a *whole*, not of particular *parts* of it²⁶;

²⁴In his critique of Damasio’s theory of emotions, Lenzen (2004: 302-307), for ex., points out that the neuroscientist does not take into account the *intentional* content of emotions, which is always something in the world, outside the body. Nevertheless, in Damasio’s taxonomy of emotions and feelings at least background emotions/feelings really *lack intentionality* in this sense, because they can also be not referred to anything in the world.

²⁵They might also have no relation at all to any object in the world, as Damasio himself acknowledges in his last *Self Comes to Mind* about the previous level of the so called “primordial feelings” background feelings are just a small “step up” (Damasio, 2010: 185).

²⁶Consider that, even if you might *localize* this feeling in your shoulder, for ex., this does not mean that tension is arising from your shoulder or your foot or your hand *only*: The feeling of tension results from the condition of the body as a *whole* anyway.

-we can perceive (become *aware* of) these states when we focus our attention on them: We can *feel* tense but, before noticing it, we simply *are* tense, as a “pure” bodily state permeating our being, our whole organism. Even when we do not focus our attention on these states, “tension”, e.g., is *already* in the background. Damasio would call such a state a “background *emotion*”, not a background *feeling* yet;

-when we become *aware* of these complex collections²⁷ of bodily states, we can sometimes correctly relate them to events in the world (“this tension *is due to* those unresolved conflicts”), we sometimes relate them wrongly to events in the world (false rationalizations), but some other times *we are simply not able to see any connection* between these collections of bodily states and any object or event—specific or a-specific—in the world;

-in the last case too we can still *feel* “relaxed” or “tense”, as a “pure” bodily perception arising from the organism as a whole, even if we have no belief at all, no knowledge—that is, no *intentionally* structured state—about possible connections between the corresponding bodily state and events in the world.

Let’s be clearer on this point: Saying that “we are sometimes not able to see any connection between these kinds of states and the world” does not mean that background feelings are not *caused* by anything else, but that this “something” is not the *intentional content* of a representational activity connected to or *constituting* the feeling itself. In a more detailed analysis of the difference between “causes” and “reasons” presented in [De Monticelli \(2003: ch. 4, §3-4\)](#), she considers the case of “moods”—which, incidentally, background feelings are deeply related to, though background feelings refer to a different (on-line) temporal window and they have a sharper recognition of the stimulus. Moods usually are “groundless” states, in the sense that they have not a definite intentional content we can recognize as *part of the structure* of the feeling or mood itself, as in the case of feeling arising from emotions (e.g. feeling the fear “of” the lion). By the way, this does not imply that moods—or background feelings²⁸—are not connected to any “cause” they depend on.

Assuming for a while that all bodily feelings—background included—do have an intentional structure, nevertheless we would need for a clarification on what their *content* is. One answer might be that it is *the body* itself, rather than the world, in the cases described above: But Ratcliffe, for ex., considers this idea misleading. “Thus accounts of bodily feeling which assume that what is felt must be the body are mistaken. Existential feelings are bodily feelings that constitute the structure of one’s relationship with the world as a whole” ([Ratcliffe, 2005: 59](#)). In his hypothesis of existential feelings as background relationships to the world that are *bodily* at their core, Ratcliffe distinguishes between a location *in the body* and what the feeling is related to—the world ([Ratcliffe, 2005: 44](#)). According to him, then, we cannot consider the body as the *intentional content* of the “bodily” feelings involved in emotions: The intentional content is always the world beyond, other than the body. The core difference between existential feelings and background feelings (in Damasio’s sense), we guess, results from Ratcliffe’s combination of Damasio’s concept of background feeling with a phenomenological account, in which everything is completely intertwined in a structural (ontological) relationship *to the world*.

Accepting Ratcliffe’s concept of existential feelings, [Slaby & Stephan \(2008\)](#) also provide a detailed taxonomy of this kind of feelings, that is comprised of four levels:

-“Pure” (bodily) existential feelings: Feeling “alive”, “fresh”, “tired”, feeling “having” or “being a body”, etc.;

-“social” existential feelings: Feeling of “familiarity”/“unfamiliarity”, feeling of “security”, feeling “at home”, etc.;

-more “specific” existential feelings, conceptually more sophisticated and culture-dependent: General “anxiety”, feeling “invulnerable”, “vulnerable”, “lost”, “like a stranger”, “generally unwelcome”, etc.;

-“emotional” feelings: Feeling “flawed” or “diminished”, etc.

Following this more analytical taxonomy, Damasio’s background feelings would then belong to the first level. According to him, in fact, the sense of *having* or *being* a body arises at the level of the “primordial feelings” and of background feelings themselves, by providing the representation of the on-line state of the body. Ratcliffe recognizes that Damasio’s background feelings comprise “the feeling of life itself, the sense of being” ([Ratcliffe, 2005: 52](#)); but the philosopher associates to Damasio’s idea of “the feeling of being” rather “the sense of *be-*

²⁷The integration into *a whole* is not just a matter of awareness: Even at the previous level of “unfelt”, “unaware” background emotions we deal not with discrete bodily changes, such as hormonal level variations, for ex., but with the *complex collection* of bodily states, namely “wellness” or “enthusiasm”.

²⁸[De Monticelli \(2003: ch. 3, §4\)](#) provides the same distinction also for Scheler’s *Lebensgefuehlen*, background feelings might be assimilated to.

ing-in-a-world". According to Ratcliffe, in fact, the "feeling of being" concerns a relation *to the world* conceived as a whole. On the contrary, Damasio's background feelings, and above all the even more primitive level of primordial feelings such as the "feeling of existence", the feeling of being "alive" they develop from, concern the sense of the *body* as a whole *only*, not of the world (Damasio, 2010: 185). In Ratcliffe's view, Damasio is *successful* in both identifying background feelings as ways of structuring our experience of the world and in providing a neurophysiological theory of *how* this is realized, but he is *wrong* in not taking into account the possibility of background feelings having *the world* as their content. If we adopt Ratcliffe's account of intentionality, whose key feature is the structural relationship *to the world*, then, in my opinion, we *cannot* consider background feelings (in Damasio's sense) intentional: If background feelings have an intentional *content*, then this has to be the body itself, rather than the world.

Even adopting a broader account of intentionality for bodily feelings—as background feelings also are—namely that of "*directedness*" proposed by Goldie (2002), again Damasio's background feelings turn out to be *not* intentional. According to Goldie, in fact, intentionality of *bodily* feelings involved in emotions can be understood both in the sense of *aboutness* and in the sense of *directedness*, but in a quite different way. If we conceive intentionality of bodily feelings in the sense of their being "directed" to some *parts* in particular (localized) of the body, as Goldie claims, then background feelings—that are kinds of bodily feelings too—*cannot* be considered intentional in this sense. There is, in fact, no defined part, localized in the body, background feelings are directed to, but these feelings are bodily in the sense that they result from the sense of the body as a *whole*. Differently from what happens in emotional experiences, involving other kinds of more *localized* bodily feelings (e.g. the feeling of the hairs going up "on the neck" for fear), background feelings concern the sense of the body as a whole rather than of a specific part of it. But also if we conceive intentionality along the more standard meaning of "aboutness", then background feeling, with much more evidence, are *not* intentional either, because they can also be *about* anything—specific or a-specific—in the *world* (as I already showed in the 3rd case of "tension"/"relaxation" example). In Goldie's words, differently from bodily feelings arising from emotions, background feelings might also not "borrow" intentionality, even by the broader meaning of *directedness* to the world. Furthermore, if we conceive intentionality by the narrower sense as "aboutness", then we have to admit that background feelings are mainly "about" *the body* itself, rather, experienced as a whole.

In both Ratcliffe's and Goldie's understanding of intentionality it turns out that background feelings *cannot* be considered intentional or, at least, that their intentional *content* can be also anything at all *in the world*: The intentional content of background feelings, if any, turns out to be the *body* itself, perceived *as a whole*, rather²⁹. As kinds of feelings that may also have no intentional reference to the *world*, background feelings clearly reveal their "pure"³⁰ *bodily* core nature. Background feelings are kinds of feeling in which the bodily dimension and the intentional one (at least in the sense of reference to the *world*) are *not* necessarily connected. If we would like treating also background feelings as intentional states, then we would have to accept the *body* itself, considered as a whole, as their intentional *content* rather than the world.

In my opinion, then, intentional stance in the sense of world-reference rather *pertains to the intentional states* feelings *concern*, such as emotions, but also needs, motivations, desires, etc. (as *felt* states), but not to feeling "itself", which turns out to be *completely bodily at its core*. One might hypothesize, then, that feelings *become* intentional when dealing with intentional states, but feelings are not intentional *by themselves*. This common

²⁹In an email correspondence (dated on 28th April 2008) with the same Damasio about the intentionality of background feelings, so he answered to my question: "In general I agree with your interpretation. My caution, however, is that in a very broad sense even those states are intentional (in biological and philosophical meanings) because they are 'about' the regulation of body states albeit in a messy, somewhat inchoate way. As you know, I believe that even in single cells, without any brain or mind, 'mean' serious business when they regulate life so as to permit survival". By the way, this is *not* the meaning of intentionality we are discussing here. Between background feelings and the body there is an immediate, implicit, pre-noetic relation since when background feeling occur at the level of the unattended, unaware background-emotions level.

³⁰In an email correspondence (dated on June 2011) with Gallagher he rejects this conclusion, maintaining that all bodily processes are "im-purely" conditioned by the environment, in a theoretical frame considering an integrated brain-body-environment system. I don't believe in dis-embodied as in dis-embedded minds too, but this is not the point at issue here, I guess. What I want to underline is that, even in this structurally "intertwined" ontology, there is at least a *boundary* (that is the *cutaneous* surface-standardly considered the reference for the so-called "*personal space*" in the case of our own body, even if this is flexible and can be extended to a certain extent. About this, see Gal-lese & Sinigaglia, 2011: 130-131) between body and environment, so that we can still *distinguish* our body from others' or from environment in general-even if they do not exist isolated, of course. If not so, everything would be completely *undistinguishable* from another and we would live in a kind of "magmatic" reality with no differentiation between the others and us. This happens, in fact, just in the earliest phases of life of the infant, when he conceives no difference between himself and his mother (see Meltzoff & Moore, 1977), or in severe psychosomatic pathologies (see Ulnik, 2005).

feature of feelings might be revealed only by the “border case” of background feelings because, differently from other feelings, they neither arise from (proper) emotions nor from any other kind of intentional state (the so-called background “emotions” they follow, in fact, are not intentional either). In this kind of feelings the relation to the body, that is mostly on the “background” in bodily feelings connected to emotions, comes evidently in “foreground”, in a way we can’t realize in other feelings, always focused on an object or event (specific or a-specific) in the world.

Nevertheless, I do not argue that *all* feelings are *only* bodily and that they are not intentional at all: I claim that feelings, as revealed by the “border case” of background feelings, are themselves *bodily* at their core, but they *become* intentional when concerning intentional states such as emotions, needs, motivations, etc. In Goldie’s words, but in a more radical sense, they “borrow” intentionality *tout court* (not only by the meaning of *directedness* to the world beyond the body) when concerning intentional states such as emotions. Among feelings, only background feelings reveal this *immediate*, intimate connection to the body, we cannot realize in bodily feelings of intentional states like emotions, always referred to something *in the world*, they are mainly focused on. If we consider feeling always and only connected to the *emotion*-debate and also as being an intentional state itself, we might hardly understand what this kind of “immediate” access is, what is this relation to “ourselves” feelings nevertheless reveal, that is, at the end, a relation to our own body. We are usually unable to qualify this relation than metaphorically or in negative forms, such as “*non* linguistic”, “*non* explicit” or as “*pre* reflective”, “*pre* noetic” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008) and so on, without any other further possible clarification. In this paper, I ought to contribute in paving the way towards a description of this relation to our body also in “positive” terms. In a nutshell, one might say, for ex., that this direct, unique relation to our own body as a whole, this kind of “immediate” access we all experience at different degrees of sensibility is realized by means of the *complex collections* of unaware physiological modifications occurring in our whole body. At a reflective level, *background feelings* themselves (“on-line”, actualized aware perceptions of the state of the body, continuously updated) and more stable neural maps provided by *proprioception* and *interoception* (maps of the “potential” state of the body) let the condition of the body as a whole—resulting from unaware, automatic bodily changes, occurring so to get homeostasis and staying “alive”—come to awareness³¹. My intuition is that this intimate relation to the body—background feelings reveal clearer than other feelings—should shed more light on another key feature of feelings, namely their *phenomenality*, more than their “supposed” intentionality.

But that’s another story.

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³¹The more primitive level of “primordial feelings” (background feelings themselves develop from), whereas, require just *wakefulness* (granted by the brain stem integrity), not necessarily awareness. In line with recent approaches to phenomenal consciousness maintaining a kind of isomorphism in between phenomenality and the physiological dimension (see Marienberg & Fingerhut (Eds.), 2012) Damasio sees in the brain stem systems interconnectivity a very first attempt to explain *why* these feelings “feel like” something (Damasio, 2010, 257).

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