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Temporal Traces of Experience: The Ontology of Orma. A Phenomenological Approach to Experiential Traces in Natural Language and Pain Narratives

1. Phenomenological perspectives on the trace: from trauma to linguistic signs

The relationship between the past and narrative in phenomenology is explored through the notion of the *trace*. In phenomenological terms, the trace represents the lingering presence of the past within the present, a concept that is pivotal in understanding how history and memory shape human existence. Paul Ricoeur, a prominent figure in this field, delves into the concept of *narrative identity*, emphasizing how the self is constructed through the interplay of memory and narrative. Ricoeur's work underscores the significance of the trace in the formation of *narrative identity*, illustrating how individuals and communities continuously reinterpret their histories to construct meaningful narratives that guide their present and future actions¹. According to Ricoeur, the trace is not merely a passive remnant of the past but an active element that informs and transforms the present². One of the most compelling examples of the trace in phenomenology is *trauma*³. Traumatic experiences⁴ leave indelible marks on individuals, influencing their current behaviors, emotions, and narratives⁵. Building on this, Bergson's concept of the past further elucidates the ontological determination of experiential temporality. The

¹ P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984.

² Id., *The human experience of time and narrative*, in "Research in phenomenology", IX, 1979, pp. 17-34.

³ S. Mezzalana, G. Santoro, V. Boichicchio, A. Schimmenti, *Trauma and the disruption of temporal experience: a psychoanalytical and phenomenological perspective*. in "The American Journal of Psychoanalysis", LXXXIII, 1, 2023, pp. 36-55; and also F. Brencio, K.D. Novak, *The continuum of trauma*, in *Topography of trauma: Fissures, disruptions and transfigurations*, Brill, Leida (Netherlands) 2019, pp. 11-24.

⁴ For instance, the trauma of war can profoundly shape a veteran's identity and worldview, affecting how they interpret and engage with their present reality.

⁵ B. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Viking Press, New York 2014.

French philosopher posits that the past exerts a retention of itself in the present, creating a continuity where past, present, and future are not merely linguistic labels but moments of the same continuum of becoming⁶.

According to Bergson, the past is not static or fixed; instead, it dynamically retains itself in the present. This means that every moment of the present contains within it the entirety of the past, albeit in a contracted, condensed form. This retention process is not a passive occurrence. Rather, the past actively survives in the present, continuously influencing and reshaping it.

The past, therefore, is not merely a collection of bygone events; it is a living, breathing entity that remains embedded within the fabric of the present. This survival of the past occurs through a process of contraction and dilation, where the past is condensed into a more manageable form in the present.

Moreover, Bergson asserts that this dynamic interaction between past and present allows the past to be constantly reinterpreted and redefined. As the past extends into the present, it creates a fluid temporal reality where all moments are interconnected.

This interconnectedness blurs the distinctions between past, present, and future, highlighting the continuous and ever-evolving nature of time.

This phenomenon is also evident in language and narrative.

The past experiences of a living being leave their trace in linguistic signs, where each sign is a trace of something other than itself, carrying the memory of its experiential and narrative use in a given context⁷. Indeed, the trace of the past in narrative is a fundamental index also for understanding the *differential nature of meaning*, including linguistic meaning, a meaning that is always in *différance* because it depends on the relationship between *presence* and *absence*⁸. The sign is, therefore, inherently a trace of the past because it is a differential process rather than an episodic snapshot. The linguistic sign is a trace of something else, always encompassing the past of the experiencing subject.

Additionally, the photographic trace offers another dimension to this discussion⁹. While a *photograph* has a more extended temporal resistance compared to an *echo* or an *imprint*, as it can be revisited and relived, it

⁶ H. Bergson, *Histoire de l'idée de temps. Cours au collège de France 1902-1903*, PUF, Paris 2016; and also S. Guerlac, *Bergson, the Time of Life, and the Memory of the Universe. Interpreting Bergson: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020, pp. 104-120.

⁷ F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1916.

⁸ J. Derrida, *Of grammatology*, Jhu Press, Baltimore 2016.

⁹ M. Pettersoon, *Depictive traces: On the phenomenology of photography*, in "The Journal of Aesthetics and art criticism", II, 69, pp. 185-196.

also highlights another temporal characteristic of the trace phenomenon. Some traces capture an instantaneous snapshot of the past, a fixed landscape, while others, like *linguistic signs*, especially those related to figurative rhetoric, extend processes. For example, metaphors such as *storm* or *wave* do not refer to a snapshot but to a lived experiential process. This understanding is crucial for comprehending the diverse manifestations of the trace, which vary in their temporal and experiential determinations. Episodic and momentary traces like an *imprint* or an *echo* have a more emergent and less dilated temporal tension compared to more enduring manifestations like trauma or linguistic signs¹⁰.

2. The role of past traces in pain narratives: clinical and therapeutic perspectives

One of the phenomena where the past and its trace in the narrative of experience are fundamental, even from a clinical and therapeutic perspective, is the experience of pain. Pain, by its nature, presents enormous challenges due to its private epistemic access¹¹. Beyond the chemical, physical, and electrical information provided by machines to clinicians, narrative emerges as a crucial element in the care and therapy of the suffering individual. Phenomenological investigation reveals pain as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon¹², emotionally rooted, essentially corporeal, with a value structure, endowed with motivational force and strong pervasiveness. This theoretical basis highlights the limitations of traditional clinical descriptions, such as those provided by the McGill Pain Questionnaire (MPQ), and suggests the need for an alternative categorization that can offer a more adequate assessment and measurement of the real experience of the suffering subject through language analysis¹³.

In the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of pain, a fundamental role is played by the narrative linguistic dimension, which has already been extensively highlighted by phenomenological hermeneutics¹⁴. The narration

¹⁰ The etymology of these words also reflects their nature, with *sign* deriving from *cut* and *imprint* from *pressure*.

¹¹ A. Serrano de Haro, *Is pain an intentional experience?* *Phenomenology*, 3, 2011, pp. 386-395; and also F. Svenaeus, *The phenomenology of chronic pain: embodiment and alienation*, in "Continental philosophy review", 48, 2015, pp. 107-122.

¹² S. Geniusas, *The phenomenology of pain*, Ohio University Press, Athens 2022.

¹³ R. Lanfredini, L. Cipriani, *Esperienza e espressione del dolore. Un'indagine preliminare tra fenomenologia ed ermeneutica*, Discipline filosofiche, Quodlibet, Macerata 2022, pp. 47-66.

¹⁴ H.G. Gadamer, *The Experience of Pain and Language*, in *The Phenomenology of Language*, DC: Gallaudet University Press, Washington 2008, pp. 53-59.

of pain allows patients to articulate their experiences, providing a means to externalize and make sense of their suffering. This process is not only therapeutic but also essential for clinicians to understand the subjective dimension of pain, which cannot be fully captured by objective measurements¹⁵. Narration and memory can provide a cathartic release for the traumatized, allowing them to revisit and reconfigure their past experiences in a way that promotes healing¹⁶. This cathartic function of narration is particularly relevant in the context of chronic pain, where past experiences of pain continue to influence the present and future well-being of the individual.

However, despite the contemporary medical paradigm recognizing the importance of past traces in managing suffering at all levels (physical, mental, moral, etc.)¹⁷, this initial intention is not fully realized in practice. Pain assessment and measurement tools, including lexical and narrative tools like the McGill Pain Questionnaire¹⁸, as well as other numerical and verbal scales and indices for measuring pain intensity, all present theoretical and ontological shortcomings. These tools often have an episodic and snapshot-like standard, neglecting the continuous interpenetration of the subject's present with their past (habits, memories, familiarity, traumas) and future (projections, expectations, desires)¹⁹. The MPQ lacks a processual temporality in its ontology and structure, failing to account for the continuous and thus transformative nature of the pain phenomenon²⁰. The episodic and extemporaneous character is even more

¹⁵ S. Bullo, "I feel like I'm being stabbed by a thousand tiny men": The challenges of communicating endometriosis pain, in "Health", XXIV, 5, 2020, pp. 476-492; and also M. Schulte, *Narrative and the study of suffering: narrative medicine and the experience of chronic pain*. Qual Health Res, XXV, 2, 2015, pp. 205-213.

¹⁶ R. Kearney, *Narrating pain: The power of catharsis*, in "Paragraph", XXX, 1, 2007, pp. 51-66.

¹⁷ The multidimensional and complex nature of pain (with a processual temporal nature not confined to the present) aligns with the scientific definition provided by the International Association for the Study of Pain, an international scientific organization dedicated to pain research and management. According to the IASP, pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage.

International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP). IASP Terminology-Pain. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.iasp-pain.org/terminology/#pain>.

¹⁸ R. Melzack, *The McGill Pain Questionnaire from Description to Measurement*, in "Anesthesiology", CIII, 1, 2005, pp. 199-220.

¹⁹ L.J. Kirmayer, *Landscapes of memory: Trauma, narrative, and dissociation*, in P. Antze, M. Lambek (a cura di), *Tense past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, Routledge, London 2016, pp. 173-198.

²⁰ R. Lanfredini, L. Cipriani, *The experience of pain and its ontological modelling from a philosophical point of view: Phenomenological description and ontological revision of the McGill Pain Questionnaire*. in "Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice", XXIX, 7, 2023, pp. 1211-1221.

pronounced in pain intensity measurement tools²¹ like the VRS (verbal rating scale) and the VDS (verbal description scale) (used alongside the MPQ), where the intensity of pain is reduced to a numerical scale or index described at most with linguistic labels and/or gestalt figures that evoke somatic emotional expressions, as in the case of scales dedicated to pediatric, geriatric, or verbally limited patients like the Wong-Baker Scale²². In this case, too, the numerical symbol that should correspond to the intensity of a multidimensional processual phenomenon is clearly inadequate to account for the experience of the suffering living being. These limitations underscore the need for a more dynamic approach that considers the temporal traces of pain in the patient's narrative.

To concretely analyze the present and anticipate the future, it is imperative to consider experiential becoming, that is, its fundamental temporal nature even in the peculiar experience of pain. This study aims to explore these dynamics, offering a new perspective on the evaluation and understanding of pain in narrative-temporal terms. By recognizing the role of narration in the therapeutic process, clinicians can better address the complex and multifaceted nature of pain, ultimately improving care and outcomes for patients.

To further analyze the narrative from the perspective of the trace of the past within it, it is first necessary to undertake²³ a movement from the superficial phenomenon of the trace to its ontological structure. This involves tracing the origin of the phenomenon of the inscription of the past, which, in our study, is precisely the notion of the footprint. The next section will delve into a descriptive ontology of the concept of the *orma*²⁴ (trace), linked to the Husserlian notion of *motivation*.

²¹ R. Atisook, P. Euasobhon, A. Saengsanon, M.P. Jensen, *Validity and utility of four pain intensity measures for use in international research*, in "Journal of pain research", 14, 2021, pp. 1129-1139; and also K.D. Keele, *The pain chart*, in "The Lancet", CCLII, 6514, 1948, pp. 6-8.

²² D.L. Wong, C.M. Baker, *Pain in children: comparison of assessment scales*, in "Pediatric Nursing", XIV, 1, 1988, pp. 9-17.

²³ This backward movement from the manifest phenomenon to the originating source of the phenomenon is a typically Bergsonian movement. The French philosopher also introduces it in his few but precious reflections on natural language, that is, in his philosophy of the sign in Bergson, *Histoire de l'idée de temps*; and also K. Bankov, *Intellectual effort and linguistic work: Semiotic and hermeneutic aspects of the philosophy of Bergson*, in "Acta Semiotica Fennica", IX, Helsinki 2000; and also L. Cipriani, *Inverted Time: Unraveling Bergson's Philosophy of Language and Certainty*, in "Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio", XVIII, 2, 2025.

²⁴ The term *orma* (trace) is also used by Eco in his semiotic theory, where it is considered a type of indicative sign. Eco discusses how traces can represent the presence or passage of something, but their interpretation depends on cultural context and social conventions. U. Eco, *A theory of semiotics*, Indiana University, Bloomington 1976.

3. The origin of “orma” (trace): etymothery and ancient traces

Before delving into the analysis of a possible descriptive ontology of the *orma* (trace) phenomenon, it is necessary to further justify the choice of this specific lemma. This choice is not stylistic but is essentially linked to the invaluable results of linguistic work that can be inscribed within the terms of an experience of the *orma* (trace) of the past in narration: the comparative reconstructive etymothetical analysis with an Indo-European background. This technique is a true “*leap backward from the known to the unknown*”²⁵ and is a method that analyzes historical languages to trace back in time, based on the level of the signifier through phonetic laws and on the level of the signified through general principles of semantics. This approach primarily allows for the reconstruction of entire words (protoforms) and, occasionally, even poetic formulas within a history of the interpreted word, addressing it in terms of continuity processes.

Following the etymothetical analysis of the word *orma* (trace) valuable elements emerge that harmoniously connect with a phenomenological description of the *orma* phenomenon of the past (also in natural language and thus in narration). In particular, the decomposition of the word into its radical part and primary suffix allows for the identification of so-called primary derivatives, which are true “*relics*”²⁶ that have remained almost unchanged over millennia of linguistic processes, starting from historically unattested phases to the languages spoken in the present. These are true original traces of the linguistic expression of a precise phenomenon.

In the case of the primary derivative of the word *orma* (trace) this backward path allows us to reach an original trivalence of the meaning and use of the word in different Indo-European contexts.

For this work, we are particularly interested in the radical part “*uer*” and specifically three of the thirteen lemmas derived from “*uer*” all three being determinations of the etymon *orma*²⁷. Below, we present the valuable etymothetical work just introduced.

In particular, the Indo-European root *uer* has three significant derivations:

a) To *connect, to align, to hang* (reconstructed from Greek). It has given rise to a large family of words in various languages. For example, in Albanian (*chain*), in Lithuanian (*bundle*) and (*long line*), in Russian (*line*),

²⁵ R. Ronzitti, *Sulle tracce dell’“Orma”: prassi etimologiche alternative e loro implicazioni di metodo nell’analisi del lessico italiano*, in “Romance Philology”, LXII, 1, 2008, p. 20.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 22.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 23.

in Old Indian (*pile, multitude, troop*), in Old Irish (*faction, group, troop*), and in Anglo-Saxon (*troop, multitude*).

b) To *find, to take*: this root is present in several languages, such as Armenian (*I take, I capture*), Ancient Greek and Lithuanian (*I find*), Old Irish and Old Church Slavonic (*I found*).

c) To *split, to carve*: this root appears almost exclusively with extensions. For example, in Albanian and Old Church Slavonic (*wound*), in Russian (*hole for oars on the back of the ship*), in Polish and Czech (*opening*).

4. The ontology of the 'orma'.

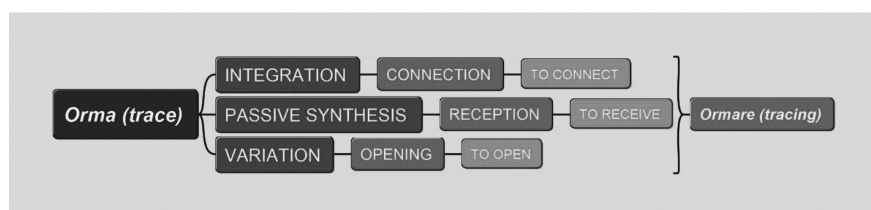


Fig.1

Building upon the etymotheoretical findings, we can now delineate the descriptive ontological structure of the *orma* (trace). By synthesizing the three etymological manifestations discussed, we arrive at three ontological modes: *connection, reception and opening*. These modes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the phenomenon of the *orma* in its various determinations.

This descriptive ontology aims to explicate the ontological categories that underpin the three modal determinations of the *orma* phenomenon, as derived from the etymotheoretical analysis. In this ontological analysis, we specify that the three modes – connection, reception, and opening – are modalities of three distinct ontological categories: *integration, passive synthesis, and variation*.

This *orma* is not merely a static trace but an active process of *ormare*²⁸ (tracing): to connect, to receive, and to open, marking the continuum of past experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the extended descriptive ontological schema of the *ormare* phenomenon, which we will analyze. The figure

²⁸ From now on, to remain faithful to the processual nature of the *orma* (trace) phenomenon, we will use the term *ormare* (tracing) as a synonym, as this is the sense in which *orma* is interpreted.

translates the three etymological senses of *orma* into three significant ontological categories. Connection is a modal determination of the category integration, reception of the category passive synthesis, and opening of the category variation.

The phenomenon of *ormare* (tracing) that conveys the trace of the past (even in narrative experience) unfolds in three specific determinations:

a) Connection of past elements and phenomena as motivational integration

A useful and coherent concept for the description and understanding of the first etymological determination of the word *orma* –connection– and the ontological translation we have chosen, as shown in Figure 1, that is, the modal determination –*integration*– can be found in Husserl's phenomenological concept of *motivation*. This concept explains what kind of connection of past traces retention, or *ormare*, involves, and the type of relationship that exists between the elements of the past that become traces for the present and future. While the static version of synthesis refers to the notion of a pole where the object's appearances vary while remaining identical, the genetic version of synthesis is based on motivation. According to this concept, the object's identity is given by the specific motivational link originated by an initial manifestation. What is currently given motivates further appearances, from the sensible to the more abstract and conceptual. Experience is not based on necessary motivational links but on certain motivational links essential for the progressive cohesion and integration of experience itself.

The notion of motivation, like that of sedimentation, refers to the dynamic, passive, processual dimension of experience, connected to phenomenological notions such as passivity, unactual background, and boundary phenomena.

Boundary phenomena can be spatial or temporal. Spatial phenomena refer to the horizon or background – the boundary that surrounds any experiential givenness like a halo. One can indeed be conscious in the sense of being attentive to something, as in the case of wakeful consciousness, but also in the sense of a blurred or background consciousness. Husserl's distinction between actuality and inactuality manifests this difference. To be conscious is indeed to be present in an attentive way, but it is also to be conscious in a diffused, indistinct, and blurred way. Consciousness, then, means both attention to something and the perception of the background against which that something appears. For Husserl, an essential law is the continuous and incessant shift from the actual to the non-objective dimension. The priority of presence is

given by the possibility of “reactivating” the “non-objective” dimension (implicit, tacit, passive) and making it objective (explicit, manifest, active) through a change of attitude that ensures the continuous transition between the two dimensions. In the case of the distinction between actual object and in-actual background, there is the possibility of the complete reversibility of one dimension into the other – of shifting from one to the other. This possibility can be considered an essential feature of experience.

This thesis, which suggests the unquestionable priority of the theoretical attitude, is tempered by the acknowledgement of the fact that the *bound* can have not only an extensive but also an intensive or temporal sense. In this case, it is emphasized that the objectifying attitude rests on a ground of passivity, pre-categorization, and pre-dating, a ground that Husserl does not hesitate to call “confused”²⁹.

For Husserl, all consciousness is temporal, in the sense that consciousness always has a tensional structure, with retentions, original impressions, and protensions. Time introduces a dimension that is not “present” to consciousness and therefore escapes it. The dimension that eludes the “irradiation” of consciousness is that of affect. This, combined with the element of retention, refers to «the entire realm of association and habits»³⁰, which includes «sensibility, what imposes itself, the pre-given, the driven in the sphere of passivity. What is specific therein is motivated in the obscure background»³¹. What Husserl calls «the case of the zero degree of affection» is formed by associations and habits that are proper to sensibility and impulse and hence fall beyond the rational grasp of explicit consciousness.

The reactivation of the retentive processes brings the “past” object back into the actuality of consciousness, restoring it to its “meaning”: an object qua object is given only by an active consciousness, and passive contents must avoid sinking into absolute unconsciousness to maintain the unity of consciousness. Thus, through the phenomenon of reawakening, the unconscious becomes my experience in every sense. Not only

²⁹ «Every spontaneous act, after being performed, necessarily passes over into a confused state; the spontaneity, or if you will, the activity, to speak of it more properly, passes into a passivity, although of such a kind that [...] it refers back to the originally spontaneous and articulated performance. This reference back is characterized as such by the I-can or the faculty, which evidently belongs to it, to “reactivate” this state»: E. Husserl (1912-1929), *Ideas Pertaining a pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, in “Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution”, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989, pp. 13-14.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 233.

³¹ Ivi, p. 234.

is the activity of consciousness rooted in passivity, but passivity itself is predisposed to activity. Everything in this scheme aims at the emergence of datitude and the transparency of consciousness to itself. The unconscious, however ingrained, is a “thing” of consciousness.

The case is different with the *Grenzprobleme*: although they constitute a necessary horizon of our experience, they are not susceptible to any conscious “grasping.” We are talking about latent phenomena such as birth and death, which, by their nature, preclude the possibility of direct experiential grasping because they are located at the inaccessible edges of our existence. In this context, reflecting on limit phenomena “requires that we describe the particular modes of givenness of the phenomena along with the phenomenological methods in which those phenomena become an issue”³².

The meaning of these phenomena is acquired when we adopt the standpoint of genetic phenomenology. Moving from the dimension of the constituted to the constituting, i.e., from passive syntheses, Husserl incorporates a regressive, archaeological movement from active cognition to passive kinaesthetic dimension. Here, Husserl examines how sense appears as a pre-constituted or pre-given affective dimension: the process of endurance itself cannot cease; endurance is immortal³³.

Strictly speaking, the phenomena of death, birth, and the deep unconscious are paradoxical. Through such phenomena, phenomenology would cross the gap from that which is given to phenomenological reduction to that which offers itself to consciousness as what cannot possibly give itself. The content to be thematized here eludes any direct, first-person thematization. Indeed, it is only possible to experience birth and death in the third person through the natural attitude, observing others being born and dying. But a direct, first-person understanding of our birth and death is not granted to us. This paradox also concerns the giving of the inaccessible, whether mundane (birth and death) or metaphysical (God).

So is it possible to think of a beginning and an end? Or should we think of the flow of consciousness without beginning or end?

Questions such as these presuppose a concept of limit understood as genesis, as the transformation of the obscure latency of consciousness (in a Leibnizian sense) in the direction of either the original emergence of consciousness (birth) or its final and definitive disappearance (death). The only way to address these borderline cases is to extend the

³² A. Steinbock, *Limit-phenomena and phenomenology in Husserl*, Rowmann & Littlefield, London 2017, p. 5.

³³ Ivi, p. 23.

scenario of phenomenological description to include a memory that is not only consciousness but also bodily memory, impersonal and not directly accessible³⁴.

Taking this step, however, means definitively leaving the transcendental approach and embracing an immanent monism in which the very concept of phenomenological limit undergoes a radical transformation.

b) Reception as passive synthesis of present learning

The second modal determination of *ormare*, that is, reception, can be effectively addressed through another phenomenological concept rooted in Husserl's philosophy: passive synthesis, which is intrinsically connected to the concept of integrative motivation. Infact, the concept of motivation and the integration *passive* among elements play a crucial role in the passive synthesis of present learning. According to Husserl, passivity refers to the dimensions of experience that do not arise from an active engagement of consciousness but from the pre-given, automatic processes that guide perception and understanding.

This involves the passive reception of sensory input and experiences that form the basis for more complex conscious activities.

The reception of the *orma* (trace) in this context signifies the passive and effortless assimilation of past experiences into the present consciousness without active intervention. Motivation functions here as a guiding principle that ensures the cohesion and continuity of experience. When an initial manifestation occurs, it naturally motivates subsequent appearances and interpretations, integrating them seamlessly into the fabric of lived experience.

This processual integration highlights how past experiences, sedimented in memory, provide a foundational background that passively informs present understanding. Therefore, the reception of the *orma* is not an arbitrary or selective process but a necessary function of consciousness that maintains the unity and coherence of experiential reality. Husserl's analysis of passive synthesis elaborates on this by explaining how these pre-given structures guide and shape perception and cognition. For Husserl, passive synthesis is a fundamental process that operates below the level of active consciousness, enabling the continuity and cohesion of experience.

³⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty (1945), *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London 1962; and also M. Merleau-Ponty (1964), *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968.

In *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*³⁵ Husserl describes how passive syntheses, such as association, affection, and sedimentation, contribute to the formation of intentional acts without deliberate effort. This integration “passive” among elements reflects how previous experiences are inherently retained and contribute to the structure of current perception and cognition. Just as sedimentation accumulates layers over time, so too does the mind naturally assimilate traces of past experiences, forming a coherent and continuous narrative. The passive synthesis facilitated by motivational links ensures that these traces are not merely static memories but dynamic contributors to the ongoing construction of meaning and understanding. Husserl’s notion of retention further explicates this process, wherein the past is retained in the present, forming a continuum of experience. The retention of past experiences allows for a seam less flow of consciousness, wherein each moment is informed by the previous ones.

This dynamic interplay between retention and passive synthesis underscores the importance of pre-given structures in shaping conscious experience.

It is important to note that while the reception of the *orma* is primarily a passive process, it is not exclusively so. Intentional and volitional actions play a role in how we choose to engage with certain traces based on our goals and evaluations. However, the act of *ormare* itself is not chosen; it is received. This balance between passive reception and active engagement highlights the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the continuity and coherence of experiential reality. Despite being a passive reception, this process does not initially have a specific objective or purpose; it is a *taking without wanting to take*. Nevertheless, it leaves residues or remnants of the *orma* within the experiencer, which are experiential variations. These remnants influence and shape the individual’s ongoing experience, modifying the subject as they “find without seeking” and ultimately obtaining some value through this transformation.

Thus, the passive synthesis of *ormare* ensures that the subject undergoes changes, highlighting the continuous and dynamic chain of past traces that modifies the experiencer. This passive integration plays a crucial role in the individual’s experience, as it is a fundamental aspect of the reception process that maintains the unity and coherence of experiential reality.

Therefore, the reception of the *orma*, as a process of passive synthesis, ensures the continuity and coherence of experiential reality. It highlights the essential role of pre-given structures and motivations in the formation

³⁵ E. Husserl (1920-1926), *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 2001.

of intentional acts and the seamless integration of past experiences into present consciousness.

c) Variation as a true opening that the trace makes and is in relation to the present experience

The third modal determination of *ormare*, that is, opening, can be effectively addressed through Husserl's concept of generativity *from within*³⁶. This concept explains how the *orma* (trace) not only retains and connects past experiences but also actively shapes the present and generates new possibilities for the future. *Generativity* refers to the internal process through which experiences and temporal structures continuously create new meanings and variations.

In this context, the *orma* is seen as an active force that influences the present and opens up future potentialities. This process highlights the dynamic and transformative nature of *ormare*, emphasizing its role in the ongoing construction of experiential reality. The *orma*, therefore, is not just a passive remnant of the past but a generative and varying force that impacts the present and future.

The third etymological sense of the term *orma* highlights its nature as a scratch or incision, thus opening *ormare* by leaving a trace through the connection of past traces. It does not merely retain and expand the past (retention). In doing so, it leaves a mark and produces a residual impact on the present experience, which is precisely the incision or scratch it makes – an opening through which future protention unfolds. The process of *ormare*, in its retention and expansion, does not remain identical to itself. Although the reception by the present consciousness is a passive synthetic type, the experiencer, or consciousness, is not entirely neutral or passive.

In agreement with Bergson's conception of *durée*³⁷, the continuous contraction and expansion of the past itself represents a constant change in the process like *ormare*. This happens continuously, for instance, in the ongoing linguistic practice of human beings. The very act of linguistic *ormare* and the continuous modification of the use of *past linguistic traces* clearly express this scratching of the present, modifying it and opening up future possibilities.

³⁶ V. Hadji-Pulja, *Collective Memory in Husserl a Reading Based on Generativity "From Within"*, in "Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology", 2024, pp. 1-18.

³⁷ H. Bergson (1896) *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*; eng. trans. *Matter and memory*, Courier Corporation, Massachusetts 2012; and also H. Bergson (1907) *Creative evolution*, Routledge, London 2022.

Ormare is, in itself, a variation that produces further variations, even while carrying traces of repetitions and habits, which are nothing but the marks left by the ongoing process of the past- defined here as *ormare*. In other words, the presence that *ormare* (the continuous tracing of the past) creates is a form of continuous *recontextualisation*, initially of different corporealities, and eventually extending to various social and cultural superstructures.

This determination of *ormare* allows us to clarify how the phenomenon of future protention is absolutely dependent on retention. Indeed, as Bergson and Husserl suggest, retention and protention are different moments of the same processual movement of a consciousness's real experience. It is the *ormare* of the past that guarantees an experience's ability to open up to the future in a diversified way, ensuring that consciousness never relives the exact same state, even when dealing with traces of the past. Thus, *ormare* guarantees *variation*.

5. Words-Orma of Pain: linguistic traces of the past in the narrative of the pain experience

In conclusion, we illustrate how certain words in the spoken narratives of our specific case study on pain highlight the way the past functions as a process of *orma* even in verbal language. To this end, we present a word cloud characterizing a dataset on the linguistic expression of pain, developed over the past two years. This dataset, consisting of over 800 texts in Italian³⁸, underscores how past experiences leave an imprint on present and future expressions, evidencing the continuity and variation inherent in the language of pain.

The following word cloud visualizes the most significant and relevant words from this dataset, highlighting their temporal characteristics and their role as descriptors of the pain experience.

³⁸ These words characterize the dataset on the language of pain constructed over the past two years, composed of over 800 texts in Italian. The texts were collected through the website www.ilinguaggiodeldolore.it. This study is part of a project within the context of The National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Investment 1.5 Ecosystems of Innovation, Project Tuscany Health Ecosystem (THE), CUP: B83C22003920001. In addition, we would like to mention that we are conducting other parallel ontological studies on a smaller dataset, consisting of more than two hundred texts and focusing on a specific case study – chronic musculoskeletal pain – thanks to our partner Promise@lab. You can read the initial results of this other dataset in M. De Marco, *et al.*, „Development and Validation of a New Qualitative Pain Assessment Model: Preliminary Results of the WORDSforPAIN Project, in “ForItAAL”, 13, 2024, pp. 189-205.



Fig.2

We have selected the most significant and relevant words from this dataset, which is still under quantitative and qualitative analysis, because they represent a useful sample to indicate how the weight of the past is significant (just as much as the firsthand experience of pain) in its linguistic narration. These words themselves synthesise the internal movements of *ormare* (tracing).

They all point to an act of confrontation between past and present, as the past is retained as a collection of traces (and therefore also of certain contracted habits) where pain, as the examined phenomenon and protagonist of this specific narrative, acts as a disruptive agent (*'never'*), often persistently.

This persistence, characterized by the word *'always'*, produces an experiential *'before'* of pain (including all aspects connected to it, such as therapies, etc.), a decidedly debilitating present, and an irrevocably compromised future, in essence, a variation guaranteed by *ormare* and the experiential *orma* of the past. The words selected, which include *always*, *never*, *debilitating*, *before*, *limit* and *persistent*, are powerful temporal descriptors. They highlight the temporal character of pain narratives and how the past continuously interacts with and shapes the present and future experiences.

Conclusion

In this exploration, we have delved into the complex relationship between the past and narrative, specifically through the phenomenon of *ormare* (tracing). By examining its etymological roots, ontological impli-

cations, and practical manifestations in language, we have highlighted how *ormare* functions as a dynamic process of connection, reception, and variation. The dataset on pain narratives further underscores the temporal and experiential dimensions of *orma*, illustrating the profound impact of past experiences on present and future expressions. This study not only enhances our understanding of the linguistic expression of pain but also highlights the significance of *orma* in shaping human experience and consciousness.

Acknowledgments

This publication was produced with the co-funding of the European Union-Next Generation EU, in the context of The National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Investment 1.5 Ecosystems of Innovation, Project Tuscany Health Ecosystem (THE), CUP: B83C22003920001

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