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The Flesh of Stories of Pain and Suffering
Towards a Hermeneutics of the Ante-Predicative

István Fazakas
Bergische Universität Wuppertal

Abstract

The paper explores the difference between semiology and hermeneutics of pain and suffering by focusing on narrativity and the body. First, it recapitulates some historical distinctions between explaining and understanding in the context of psychopathology. It shows how the hermeneutic method culminates in the idea of the cohesion of life, constituted through biography and narrative. The second section deals with the relationship between narrativity and selfhood in stories of suffering. The third part addresses the problem of the lived body and the ante-predicative embodiment of suffering and pain, which fuse with the ambiance, coloring the lifeworld.

Keywords: hermeneutics; selfhood; narrative identity; suffering; flesh

Résumé

Cet article explore la différence entre une sémiologie et une herméneutique de la douleur et de la souffrance en se concentrant sur la narrativité et le corps. Il commence par récapituler certaines distinctions historiques entre expliquer et comprendre dans le contexte de la psychopathologie. Il montre comment la méthode herméneutique aboutit à l'idée de la cohésion de la vie, constituée à travers la biographie et le récit. La deuxième section aborde la relation entre narrativité et identité personnelle dans les récits de souffrance. La troisième partie traite du problème du corps propre et d'une incarnation ante-prédicative de la souffrance et de la douleur, qui teintent même l'ambiance et le monde de la vie.

Mots-clés : herméneutique ; ipséité ; identité narrative ; souffrance ; chair

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I. Introduction

Pain and suffering most often befall us without making, in the beginning, any sense at all, with a brute, ununderstandable facticity. And yet, it becomes our task—though we haven't chosen it—to make sense of these experiences. Sometimes, we may consult a clinician to identify the condition, at other times, it may be enough to allow time to heal. In other cases, pain and suffering might accompany us for a longer period and might even reshape our entire lives. Understanding pain and suffering has always been at the heart of clinical practice. But what do we mean when we say understanding? Is semiology a way of understanding? Is nosology a form of interpretation? And what about understanding the seemingly ununderstandable dimension of suffering stemming from its brute facticity?

In this paper, I take up Paul Ricœur's approach to understanding suffering in three steps. First, I focus on the difference between a semiological-nosological and a hermeneutical approach, as outlined in Ricœur's talk "Suffering is not Pain." I trace this difference to Karl Jaspers' early work on *General Psychopathology* and its roots in Dilthey's philosophy of life, using this text to highlight key theses that resonate with Ricœur's ideas. Moving from a semiology that treats pain and suffering and their expressions as a tool for classification and nosology towards a genuine understanding of pain and suffering implies that we must interpret them as connected to the nexus of life. The life that is understood is not the life that is described by natural sciences. The hermeneutics of suffering (especially of suffering we encounter in the psychiatric clinic) has been at the very core of Jaspers' psychopathology. In the first section, I emphasize Jaspers' idea of an existential understanding that confronts us with the ununderstandable—a paradox that lies at the origin of existential sense-making.

In the face of the ununderstandable, selfhood is revealed in its freedom to search for meaning, but also as fragilized, as vulnerable. This fragile freedom is attested in the story of a life or in what Jaspers called "biography." The Jaspersian notion of biography prefigures Ricœur's analyses of narrative identity and selfhood related to stories that make up the fabric of life. Suffering, coming from the horizons of the ununderstandable, threatens to pierce this fabric. Narrative can then be an important tool for thinking about how conditions of suffering are not only reflected but also coincide with the inability to tell stories. It can also help conceptualize the healing force of finding new narratives that reweave the fabric of life. Existential understanding and making sense of the ununderstandable challenge our self-understanding. In the second part, I focus on understanding selfhood in pain and suffering by focusing on biography and narrative identity.

Nevertheless, the self in pain and suffering cannot be understood only in narrative terms. I argue that we must take a step below and emphasize the anchoring of stories in the lifeworld and

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the body. The lifeworld is described by Ricœur as the reservoir of meaning, and as such, it is the very origin of the material of our narratives. Furthermore, our presence in the world is a corporeal participation. The task arises then to think the flesh of stories of suffering and pain. In the final part, I suggest that stories of pain and suffering have an *ante*-predicative dimension related to the lived body and its relationship to the lifeworld. The stories of pain and suffering are stories of the flesh, which is the element of the self who suffers. By focusing on the lived body, we can also reconceptualize the distinction between pain and suffering and grasp how even pain reveals something about the flesh that suffers rather than about the organic or physical body.

The progression of the paper follows an architectonic descent through different layers of sense-making: from nosology to hermeneutical understanding, from existential sense-making to the institution of selfhood and its narrative identity, and finally from self-narratives to the *ante*-predicative element of the flesh in the lifeworld.

II. Semiology and Understanding

Metaphors of Pain and Suffering

Only by taking a quick look at the history of the semiology of pain we can be impressed by the "many metaphors incorporated based on the real experiences of individuals."[1] Medical treatises speak of sharp, biting, pulsating, stinging, itching, burning, penetrating, and other types of pain, trying to meticulously distinguish different types of sensations by giving names to what we could call a primarily *ante*-predicative bodily experience. Primarily, we lack the words to describe this experience. The metaphoricity attests to a grafting of predicativity onto the pre-predicative experience, yet it also reveals a floating predicativity—one that remains in *porte-à-faux*, expressed through the play within the metaphor. And yet, this search for words for a still mute experience seems to have very little in common with a tentative of bringing it to a pure expression of its own sense.[2] The metaphors in question seem to primarily serve another purpose than expressing a special kind of truth and revealing something about the lifeworld.[3] They produce

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[1] Roselyne Rey, *The History of Pain*, trans. Louise Elliott Wallace, J. A. Cadden and S. W. Cadden (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 94.

[2] *Cf.* "Der Anfang ist die reine und sozusagen noch stumme Erfahrung, die nun erst zur reinen Aussprache ihres eigenen Sinnes zu bringen ist," Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen* (Haag: Nijhoff 1973), 77. The English translation by Dorian Cairns distorts somewhat the original: "Its beginning is the pure—and, so to speak, still dumb—psychologically experience, which now must be made to utter its own sense with no adulteration" (Edmund Husserl *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns [Dordrecht: Springer, 1960], 38–39). This passage has been also famously taken up by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who comes back to it at several points in his *œuvre.* Husserl is, of course, not referring to pain or suffering in particular, and not even only to bodily experiences, but to any kind of experience, formulating thus the task of phenomenology in general. This general task can however be applied to a phenomenology of pain and suffering.

[3] Ricœur has devoted important analyses to the truth of metaphor in Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 291–302. On Ricœur's "metaphorology" (to borrow a term from Hans Blumenberg) and the

differentiation for a medical semiology that is primarily concerned with the classification of different sensations in the framework of nosology. The metaphors of pain in medical semiology are not directed towards the search for meaning; they are not there to be interpreted and understood as metaphors but only as signs associated with different types of pathologies. For example, when I say, during a medical examination, that I have a burning pain, the clinician will not—and thankfully not—be interested in the idea that the lived body can burn from an unreal fire, that this burning reveals something about our embodied existence, but they will identify this sensation as a sign of an inflammatory disease and treat me accordingly.

Nonetheless, we do not only use metaphors to express sensations of physical pain but also a completely different kind of suffering. We say, for example, that "guilt weighs down on us," that "our heart is broken," that we feel "burning shame" or that our "existence is shattered." Such expressions seem to speak less of the body and physical pain than of another kind of suffering. In a colloquium for clinicians addressing the position of the psychiatrist confronted with suffering, Ricœur distinguished pain from suffering. The thesis is already expressed in the title of his talk: "Suffering is not Pain." Ricœur suggests using, "the term pain for affects felt as localized in particular organs of the body or in the body as a whole, and the term suffering for affects that are open to reflexivity, to language, to the relationship to oneself, to the relationship to others, to the relationship to meaning, to questioning."[4]

This distinction suggests that pain and the body of pain would not be open to reflexivity, language, or meaning. It would be a purely physical pain related to the organic body, to what phenomenologists call the *Körper*. Suffering, on the other hand, raises the question of understanding. There is a biology and a semiology of pain, and there is a hermeneutics of suffering. The hermeneutical approach to suffering is opposed to nosology in the sense that it does not aim at classifications and explanations of pathologies, but it primarily must deal with understanding the human condition. However, Ricœur immediately puts his distinction in perspective, claiming that "purely physical pain remains a limit case, as is perhaps suffering as supposedly purely psychological, which rarely occurs without some degree of bodily experience."[5] Indeed, aren't the metaphors of pain already evidence of a quest for meaning, even if their metaphorical aspect is often overlooked? And don't the metaphors of suffering that speak of the weight of sadness, that locate anguish in the stomach or mourning in the chest, say something about the flesh of suffering?

The question seems to be less about the distinction of the body and the psyche[6] than about two different kinds of approaches to an embodied existence that suffers. The first approach would consist of an explanation of pain and suffering. Pain is thus conceived as the result of biological processes and neuronal activity, and different types of pain can be associated with different types

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lifeworld *cf.* Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, "La métaphore « réserve de sens »," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, vol. 113, nº 2 (2015), 247–261.

[4] Paul Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain", trans. Luz Ascarate and Astrid Chevance, *Ricœur Studies*, vol. 15, nº 2, 18.

[5] *Id.*

[6] Indeed, this distinction seems to artificially divide or split affects that are simultaneously lived in both the "body" and the "psyche." The phenomenological notion of *Leiblichkeit* was introduced by Husserl precisely to overcome this metaphysical dualism.

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of biological phenomena. A tingling sensation in the stomach might be a sign of food poisoning, for example. But seemingly nonphysical suffering can also be explained biologically: depression is a lack of serotonin; anxiety is an excessive release of adrenaline and cortisol. However, when it comes to such explanations of suffering, we grasp the fact that suffering is something more. We can then turn to behaviorist or cognitivist explanations,[7] which describe how subjects react to pain by altering their behavior or cognitive processes. In the end, however, these explanations seem to fall short of grasping the meaning of suffering; they do not address what it means for a person to suffer or how it changes one's destiny beyond behavior and cognitive patterns. Ricœur is right to insist on the fact that suffering inevitably raises the question of meaning; it urges us to reinterpret our relation to ourselves and others and to reflect on our place in the world. As such, suffering confronts us with the task of understanding.

Explaining and Understanding

The difference between an explanatory and interpretative approach has been at the very foundations of phenomenological psychiatry. Karl Jaspers, one of the major influences on the early Ricœur, argued already in his *General Psychopathology* for an understanding psychology (*verstehende Psychologie*):

> "In the natural sciences we find causal connections only but in psychology our bent for knowledge is satisfied with the comprehension of quite a different sort of connection. Psychic events 'emerge' out of each other in a way which we understand. Attacked people become angry and spring to the defence, cheated persons grow suspicious. The way in which such an emergence takes place is understood by us, *our understanding is genetic*. Thus, we understand psychic reaction to experience, we understand the development of passions, the growth of an error, the content of delusion and dream; we understand the effects of suggestion, an abnormal personality in its own context or the inner necessities of someone's life. Finally, *we understand how the patient sees himself* and how this mode of *self-understanding* becomes a factor in his psychic development."[8]

Jaspers builds on a distinction previously made by Wilhelm Dilthey, Johann Gustav Droysen, and other authors in the philosophy of history. Inscribing psychopathology in the lineage of Dilthey and Droysen implies conceiving it as part of the humanities, or more precisely, of what in German is called *Geisteswissenschaften*. In his seminal work on *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, Dilthey stresses that

> "the nexus of lived experience, expression, and understanding is everywhere the distinctive procedure by which humanity is present for us as an object of the human sciences. These

[7] See for example Peter S. Staats *et al*, "The psychological behaviorism theory of pain and the placebo: its principles and results of research application," *Advances in psychosomatic medicine*, vol. 25 (2004), 28–40.

[8] Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 302–303. The first edition of the works dates from 1913 and it has been re-edited several times, always with important modifications or additions by Jaspers. The English translation I am quoting was based on the editions from 1923 and 1946.

> sciences are founded upon this nexus of lived experience, expression, and understanding. Only here do we obtain a clear criterion by which the delimitation of the human sciences can become definitive. A discipline belongs to the human sciences only if its object is accessible to us through the attitude that is founded upon the nexus of life, expression, and understanding."[9]

Contrary to natural sciences, which treat their phenomena from the outside, proceeding by causal explanation and classification, human sciences must delve into the very nexus of life and lived experience.

We can, based on this distinction, have two kinds of psychopathology: one that explains human suffering through natural causal laws and treats them through classifications in an abstract nosology and one that seeks to understand pathological experience as an expression of life. Grounding his psychopathology on understanding Jaspers takes the second road. But what kind of understanding is at stake here?

Jaspers distinguishes several kinds of understanding: phenomenological, static, genetic, empathic, rational, etc.[10] It is noteworthy that each act of understanding is always embedded in comprehensive horizons. This leads to the identification of three distinct modes of comprehensive understanding—cultural, existential, and metaphysical—that transcend mere psychological comprehension. Concerning the cultural dimension, Jaspers insists on the fact that we can only truly understand the psyche if "we understand the element in which it lives," "the pattern of ideas, the images, symbols, ideas of obligation, ideals, etc." in which a person defines himself.[11] Existential understanding comes into play when "[i]n the act of understanding psychic connections, we come up against the limits set by the understandable."[12] And metaphysical understanding is characterized by Jaspers as reaching "after a meaning into which all the other limited meanings can be taken up and absorbed."[13]

I propose focusing on existential understanding, as it is the most important for a Ricœurian perspective on suffering. It is existential understanding, or more precisely, the illumination (*Erhellung, éclarcissement*) of existence, that Ricœur and Mikel Dufrenne also highlight in their work on *Karl Jaspers and the Philosophy of Existence*.[14] Existential understanding is defined as an

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[9] Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, trans. Rudolf A. Makkreel and John Scanlon (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 109.

[10] It would be too long to quote all the distinctions. For a recapitulation by Jasper himself of all these distinctions see Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, 307. I'll come back to phenomenological and genetic understanding later.

[11] *Ibid.*, 307–308.

[12] *Ibid.*, 308.

[13] *Ibid.*, 309.

[14] *Cf.* Mikel Dufrenne and Paul Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'existence* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2014 [1947]) and especially the chapter « L'existence et la méthode qui l'éclaire ». Dufrenne and Ricœur review the different senses of existence and the methods that may be appropriate to discuss it. In doing so, they rely more on Jaspers' work that follows his *General Psychopathology*. Nevertheless, we can already find the outlines of what he calls the clarification of existence in *General Psychopathology*.

understanding that goes beyond psychological understanding and is in touch with the ununderstandable.[15] I argue that the core of suffering is precisely this: it is an ununderstandable fact that never ceases to call for meaning. Beyond explanation and psychological understanding, suffering confronts us with the ununderstandable, which, however, imposes the necessity of elaborating its meaning.

For this relation to the ununderstandable, which goes beyond psychological understanding, Jaspers speaks of an illumination (*Erhellung*). The body is explained, the psyche is understood, existence is illuminated.[16] The illumination of existence reveals something about the sense of self:

> "Through the psychology of meaningful phenomena, existential illumination comes into contact with this something that goes beyond understanding, with the reality proper that lies in the possibilities of autonomous selfhood."[17]

If we return to the question of suffering, and more precisely to the suffering we encounter in psychiatric care, we can say that beyond the psychology and even the psychopathology of suffering, we must confront something ununderstandable that illuminates existence and selfhood. In suffering, existence is revealed as vulnerable, the autonomy of selfhood as fragile. Selfhood here is an existential notion, going beyond psychology and biology—it refers to the facticity of being oneself, and it is connected to freedom. As Jaspers notes, when the empirical situation becomes a limit situation (*Grenzsituation*) and awakens existence to its selfhood, "[t]he ununderstandable *from the existential* aspect presents itself as a freedom, which discloses itself in free decisions."[18] Isn't suffering precisely such a limit situation that reveals the inexorable assignment of the self to itself beyond understanding? And if this is the case, can we follow Jaspers and say that suffering is a

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The heart of the issue is precisely the encounter with the incomprehensible. As Dufrenne and Ricœur also emphasize, existence seems to elude understanding (Dufrenne and Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'existence*, 101). Nevertheless, it is precisely this excess-driven elusiveness that opens the way to a more radical understanding, or what will be called illumination. As René Rosfort also notes "Karl Jaspers played, as mentioned, a foundational role in Ricœur's philosophical development. Jaspers's philosophy of existence was the topic of his first two books, and particularly the dialectical character of Jaspers's thinking has left an enduring mark on Ricœur's work" (René Rosfort, "Paul Ricœur", in *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, eds. Giovanni Stanghellini, Matthew Broome, Andrea Raballo, Anthony Vincent Fernandez, Paolo Fusar-Poli and René Rosfort [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018] https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803157.013.9).

[15] As Simon Calenge puts it in a commentary on Jaspers: "La condition de la compréhension existentielle est de la même manière l'expérience du scandale de l'incompréhensible. Le réel empirique contient ainsi des situations qui offrent un tel aspect monstrueux, absurde et grotesque" (Simon Calenge, "Les conditions d'existence. Karl Jaspers et les limites de la liberté existentielle," *Le Philosophoire*, vol. 2024/1, nº 61 [2024], 124).

[16] Dufrenne and Ricœur also insist on this difference in Dufrenne, Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'existence*, 91–109, in particular the note 10 on p. 96.

[17] Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, 309.

[18] *Ibid*., 308.

moment of freedom for sense-making? Isn't it precisely in suffering that the self reveals itself to be powerless, dependent, and non-autonomous?

These are precisely the questions Ricœur addressed in his talk on suffering and pain. He notes that suffering may come with an intensification of the sense of self "by the vivid feeling of existing, or better still, by the feeling of existing on the edge."[19] The one who suffers is "irreplaceable" in their suffering. Or even, "at the most virulent level," they might have a "fantasized feeling of being chosen to suffer."[20] Suffering can thus be understood as a limit situation in the sense of Jaspers, one that goes beyond its merely empirical and anecdotal dimension and reveals itself as a fundamentally constitutive moment of selfhood. However, it is constitutive of selfhood precisely as something beyond comprehension, ineluctably calling for meaning. Suffering primarily doesn't make any sense at all; its sense must be elaborated in a constant search for meaning. This is where freedom comes into play: it is a freedom for sense-making that can push the self to reinvent itself, but it can also be impaired, condemning the subject to merely endure the brute facticity of suffering.

Indeed, suffering also seems to fragilize meaning and sense-formation. It pierces through the fabric of established connections of sense, leaving the subject confronted with the inexpressible. Ricœur evokes the "damages done to the narrative function in the constituting of personal identity."[21] The freedom in the face of the ununderstandable might turn into its opposite: a sclerosis in making sense of something that befalls us without any possible distance. Consequently, it is necessary to turn to the constitution of selfhood and its narrative identity in the context of suffering. As a provisional conclusion to this section, it can be stated that beyond the semiology of pain and suffering—focused on deciphering and classifying signs—phenomenological psychiatry is concerned with understanding the narratives of suffering and selfhood. The task at hand is to better understand the connections between these narratives and selfhood.

III. Stories of Suffering and the Narrative Self

Biography and Narrative Identity

Focusing on narratives of suffering and what suffering does to stories has been at the very core of Jaspers' psychopathology. Jaspers distinguishes between a static method, which he qualifies as phenomenological, and that consists of "the presentification to oneself (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of psychic states, the bringing to givenness for oneself (*Sich-zur-Gegebehheit-bringen*) of psychic qualities."[22] This method is inspired by early Husserlian phenomenology, but it does not follow Edmund Husserl until the idea of finding essential structures.[23] It only consists of an intuitive

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[19] Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain," 19.

[20] *Ibid.*, 20.

[21] *Ibid.*, 21.

[22] Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, 27, translation modified.

[23] The development of eidetic phenomenology goes hand in hand with the growing influence of a transcendental perspective. Indeed, in the *Ideas*, Husserl defines transcendental phenomenology

presentification through empathy (*Einfühlung*). Phenomenology, for Jaspers, is nothing but this intuitive presentification.[24] This method is only a first step towards understanding patients. The static, phenomenological presentification of the lived experience of patients must be completed by a genetic approach that consists of "perceiving the meaning of psychic connections and the emergence of one psychic phenomenon from the other."[25] The genetic approach, however, is not qualified as phenomenological and does not draw on Husserl anymore, but on Dilthey and the hermeneutic tradition.[26] Jaspers notes that this genetic approach moves within the hermeneutic circle: it must understand the parts by understanding the whole, but it cannot grasp the whole without understanding the meaning of partial experiences.[27] He emphasizes the importance of genetic case studies over the search for essences, which elude facticity by ignoring the singularity of specific cases. Indeed, for Jaspers, psychopathological "experience is enriched not so much by the number of cases we have seen as by the depth to which we have penetrated in any one case."[28] We could see the culmination of this genetic method in the biographical method:

> "*Every good case-history grows into a biography*. Psychic illness is rooted in the person's life as a whole and it cannot be isolated from this if it is to be comprehended. We term this whole the individual's 'Bios' or life and any description or account of it we term his 'Biography'."[29]

The static phenomenology of presentification through empathy must be completed by a genetic hermeneutical approach to biography. Biography, as being about the person's life as a whole and especially as a temporal whole,[30] is related to what Ricœur has described as narrative

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precisely in these terms: "pure or transcendental phenomenology will become established, not as a science of matters of fact, but as a science of essences (as an *'eidetic'* science)" (Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book*, trans. F. Kersten [The Hague, Boston and Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982], XX). On Husserl's influence and Jaspers' anti-essentialism see Osborne P. Wiggins and Michael Alan Schwartz. "Edmund Husserl's Influence on Karl Jaspers's Phenomenology," *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, vol. 4, nº 1 (1997), 15–36.

[24] As such it differs considerably from the complexity and the ambition of Husserlian phenomenology.

[25] Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, 27.

[26] Husserlian genetic phenomenology addresses sedimentations and passive syntheses, rather than focusing on the hermeneutics of understanding and biographies. Although sedimentations can be seen as constituting a personal life history—as Husserl himself notes, for example, in *Ideas II* (Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer [Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1989], 313)—they are inscribed within pre-reflective processes of sense-formation. The task of a genetic phenomenology is to delve into the depths of this inchoative formation. The notion of passive synthesis is thus crucial to genetic phenomenology. Wolfgang Blankenburg's project in psychopathology takes up genetic phenomenology by examining precisely these passive syntheses.

[27] Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, 29.

[28] *Ibid.,* 253.

[29] *Ibid.*, 671.

[30] *Id.*

identity. The stories are not only tools for a genetic psychological understanding; they are also constitutive of the self's identity, of the fact that the self remains itself through time.

The analyses that Ricœur devoted to the hermeneutics of time lead, already in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, to the formulation of the idea that selfhood is constituted in and through narratives. Ricœur argues that the answer to the question "Who?" is always a story of a life, and adds: "the identity of this 'who' therefore itself must be a narrative identity."[31] Just as Jaspers, Ricœur also draws on Dilthey, and as a note makes it clear, the problem of narrative identity is a "new title" for that of the interconnectedness of life (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*) in the sense of Dilthey.[32] It is in this sense that Ricœur can grasp "life itself" as "a cloth woven of stories."[33] Biography, as the genetic connection of experiences that make up the fabric of life, is thus not only a second-order reflection but this very fabric itself.

Narrative identity is defined as the "fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction."[34] It is not an "objective" biography but incorporates the creativity of imagination. Stories are rooted in productive imagination,[35] in the freedom to invent our identity. They are not mere reflections of events passively endured but actively generate meaning, shaping the self's identity despite its constant changes. *Oneself as Another* is the title of this constant becoming, of the dynamics of selfhood and alterity in the enigma of the singularity of the self.[36] It is the enigma of this singularity that is elaborated—with varying degrees of freedom—in the stories that make up the fabric of the life of the self, and it is precisely this fabric that is challenged and fragilized in suffering.

In "Suffering is not Pain," Ricœur affirms that "[t]he disasters affecting storytelling stretch along the self-other axis. Suffering appears there as a break in the narrative thread."[37] We understand now that this break does not only consist of the impossibility of putting suffering into words for others but reaches into the very heart of self-constitution. It threatens to break the interconnectedness of life (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*), to pierce the cloth woven of stories that make up life itself. The paradox is that, on the one hand, suffering inexorably assigns the self to itself, revealing selfhood in its irreplaceable aspect and sealing its destiny; on the other hand, it fragilizes the very fabric that allows for the elaboration of a sense of self and ensures the cohesion of experience. Suffering is simultaneously a call for sense-making and something that remains ununderstandable. The two aspects—self-assignation and the fragilization of narrative identity—go hand in hand, and they constitute the very ambiguity of suffering.

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[31] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

[32] *Ibid.*, 305. See also Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 141.

[33] *Ibid.*, 246.

[34] *Id.*

[35] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), ix.

[36] I borrow the term "enigma" to Marc Richir. Richir has not only written a review article on *Oneself as Another*, but has also taken up some ideas of Ricœur, like the difference between the *idem* and the *ipse* or the idea of a "*mise en intrigue*", structuring the stories. Marc Richir, "Paul Ricœur: soi-même comme un autre," in *Annuaire philosophique 1989-1990* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 41–63; see also Marc Richir, *Méditations phénoménologiques* (Grenoble: Millon, 1992).

[37] Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain," 21.

Let me provide two brief examples of how these ideas have been taken up in contemporary psychiatric research: borderline personality disorders and narrative recovery. These examples serve only to illustrate the role of narrativity in specific cases, but it should be noted that the concept of narrative identity, or even the idea of a narrative constitution of the self, has been more broadly embraced in contemporary debates in psychopathology, extending far beyond the cases I use as examples here.

Examples: Borderline Personality Disorder and Narrative Recovery

Scholars in psychopathology have proposed to describe borderline personality disorders (BPD) as disturbances of narrative identity.[38] In a paper titled *Fragmented Selves: Temporality and Identity in Borderline Personality Disorder*,[39] Thomas Fuchs explicitly refers to Ricœur to conceptualize the fragilization of narrativity in BPD. He argues "that patients with BPD lack the strength to establish a coherent self-concept."[40] This difficulty of establishing a coherent self is related to the temporal experience in BPD. As Fuchs argues with Bin Kimura, the temporality of BPD is that of the present without past or future, which Kimura described as the *intra-festum* temporality. Patients are constantly "switching from one present to the next and being totally identified with their momentary state of affect."[41] The incapability to forge a coherent self-narrative correlates with this temporal instability. The lack of unifying narratives goes hand in hand with the fragilization of the continuity of being. As Fuchs puts it, we can observe, "a temporal splitting of the self that tends to exclude past and future as dimensions of object constancy, commitment, responsibility, and identity. Thus, borderline individuals exhibit what may be called a *fragmentation of the narrative self*,"[42] a fragmentation that is also "connected to an *incoherence of autobiographical memory*."[43] It is important to insist on the fact that, in the light of Ricœur's analyses of the narrative identity, the fragmentation of narratives is not a mere symptom of BPD, but a constitutive element of the disorder. The difficulty unifying different life episodes in a coherent story does not simply reflect an underlying temporal distortion but is this temporal distortion.

Narrativity also plays a central role in research on recovery from mental illness. The prestigious journal *Schizophrenia Bulletin* has, for example, a separate section for first-person accounts in their issues. Along the same line, Larry Davidson's *Living Outside of Mental Illness* is entirely based on narratives of users of psychiatry who relate their suffering and path of recovery.[44]

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[38] For an overview and a discussion see Cassandre Bois, István Fazakas, Juliette Salles and Tudi Gozé, "Personal Identity and Narrativity in Borderline Personality Disorder: A Phenomenological Reconfiguration," *Psychopathology*, vol. 56, nº 3 (2023), 183–193.

[39] Thomas Fuchs, "Fragmented selves: temporality and identity in borderline personality disorder," *Psychopathology*, vol. 40, nº 6 (2007), 379–387.

[40] *Ibid.*, 381.

[41] *Id*.

[42] *Id*.

[43] *Ibid.*, 382.

[44] See also Rosanna Wannberg, "Institution or individuality? Some reflections on the lessons to be learned from personal accounts of recovery from schizophrenia," *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, vol. 31, nº 1 (2024), 55–66.

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But besides qualitative studies that use narratives as their material, it has also been theorized that forging narratives participates in the very process of recovery itself since it implies the restoration of a continuous and coherent sense of self.[45] Being able to integrate suffering in the story of one's own life, making sense out of the ununderstandable that threatens to loosen the cloth of life by regaining the feeling of interconnectedness can be seen as the very path towards recovery. In this view, narratives are not mere reflections of a tacit experience of recovery, but they produce recovery.[46] Being able to integrate episodes of disturbed experience and finding a place for suffering in the plot that makes the cohesion of life is part of recovering from mental illness.

In both examples, the narratives that constitute the cohesion of life and the identity of the self as another are constitutive parts of the experience. Their fragmentation is the fragmentation of the self in a non-coherent temporality (and not a mere expression of it), their force to elaborate meaning out of suffering is constitutive of the recovery process (and not a simple reflection on it). If we take seriously the thesis that narratives are not merely expressions of underlying processes without any efficacy on these processes, not merely means of reflection, but rather contribute to the very formation of sense and meaning that constitutes the fabric of life, we must also consider the specific thickness of this fabric. Narratives are indeed not abstract constructions; they are lived, felt, and, as such, also inscribed in the flesh and made of flesh. The flesh is precisely what makes the difference between a narrative that would be a mere anecdote and a narrative that one can inhabit from within. This problem points to an ultimate horizon, the horizon of the inscription of narratives in an *ante*-predicative experience of the world and the lived body.

IV. The Flesh of Stories

The Lifeworld and the Lived Body

Ricœur is undoubtedly right to say that suffering gives us something to think about (*donne à penser*),[47] but one still needs to be able to accept this gift (*don*) and find the means to elaborate its meaning. To understand where stories find their resources for elaborating meaning out of experience that first imposes itself as ununderstandable, we should take one step below and plunge into *ante*-predicative experience. We can distinguish the stories already elaborated and told from

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[45] Marie Koenig, *Le rétablissement dans la schizophrénie* (Paris: PUF, 2016). Koenig's thesis is clearly formulated at several points of her argumentation. For example: "« L'identité narrative », notion empruntée à la philosophie ricœurienne (1985, 1990), nous semble éclairer les remaniements identifiés dans l'expérience du rétablissement. En favorisant la reconnaissance de soi dans l'expérience du trouble, l'activité narrative vient nourrir un sens de soi continu, cohérent et complexe. Si la fonction de « synthèse de l'hétérogène », soutenue par la narration, peut être considérée comme particulièrement mise à mal dans la schizophrénie, c'est par conséquent cette synthèse qui constitue la porte d'entrée vers la restauration de soi" (*ibid.*, 163).

[46] Ricœur also suggests something similar, *mutatis mutandis*, when, in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, he affirms that "whole process" of psychoanalytic "cure" consists of substituting "for the bits and pieces of stories are unintelligible as well as unbearable, a coherent and acceptable story, in which the analysand can recognize his or her self-constancy" (Ricœur, *Time and Narrative III*, 247).

[47] Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain," 18-19.

an inchoative formation of life history.[48] The stories in which we are entangled, as Wilhelm Schapp, whom Ricœur likes to quote, puts it,[49] stem from an *ante*-predicative experience that points to the direction of a shared lifeworld.

In his seminal paper on *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, Ricœur speaks of a "kinship between the *ante*-predicative of phenomenology and that of hermeneutic."[50] He notes that Husserlian phenomenology progressively moves away from a static phenomenology of perception towards historical experience: "it became more and more evident that the presumptive, inadequate, unfinished character which results for perceptive experience of its temporal structure could be extended step by step to historical experience taken as a whole."[51] This shift from perception to history goes hand in hand with the thematization of the lifeworld.

Furthermore, Ricœur insists on the fact that "for Husserl the *Lebenswelt* is not identified with the vital and emotional layers of human experience, but designates by this expression the reservoir of meaning, the surplus of meaning of the life experience"[52] Our biographies, the stories that make up our narrative identity always draw on this reservoir. Without an appurtenance to a lifeworld that is the bearer of sense-making, there would be no possibility of elaborating a meaning of the enigma of selfhood. Narrative identity is thus always already related to the world, it is not only about the self but about the self in the world, shared with others.

Furthermore, the appurtenance to the lifeworld is conditioned by something else, which appears as an axis of the imaginative variations of identity. Although the imaginary variations of identity do not aim to uncover essences (*eidé*), they nevertheless reveal something about our belonging to the lifeworld: namely that this belonging is corporeal. In *Oneself as Another* Ricœur writes:

> "Literary fictions […] remain imaginative variations on an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world. Characters in plays and novels are humans like us who think, speak, act, and suffer as we do. Insofar as the body as one's own is a dimension of oneself, the imaginative variations around the corporeal condition are variations on the self and its selfhood. Furthermore, in virtue of the mediating function of the body as one's own in the structure of being in the world, the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally."[53]

Behind the constant alteration of the self, behind all the possible imaginary variations, there lies an originarily *ante*-predicative dimension of embodied existence that anchors the self in the lifeworld. Without this bodily relation to the lifeworld, we would have no access to the

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[48] This has been the thesis of László Tengelyi's, *The Wild Region in Life-History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

[49] Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt* (Freiburg: Klostermann, 2012).

[50] Paul Ricœur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *Noûs*, vol. 9, nº 1 (1975), 85–102.

[51] *Ibid.*, 100.

[52] *Ibid.*, 100.

[53] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 150.

reservoir of meaning that nourishes our stories. In this sense, the stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves also have their embodied dimension. Through embodiment, the lifeworld appears as the Earth, which "is the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring in the world."[54]

At this point of the argumentation, we come back there where we started at the *ante*-predicative experience of embodied existence. The body is no longer understood merely as a biological organism or as a *Körper*; it is not simply an organic body devoid of reflexivity but is revealed as the very element of sense-making that connects us to the lifeworld, as the axis of the self around which its alterations pivot in suffering.

In the conclusive remarks of *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur comes to address the problem of otherness in selfhood. In these analyses, "passivity becomes *the* attestation of otherness."[55] He proposes to work with what he calls "the triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness:" 1) the passivity of one's own body, 2) the passivity in relation to others (*i.e.* related to intersubjectivity), and 3) the passivity in the relation of the self to itself, that Ricœur grasps with the notion of "*conscience* in the sense of *Gewissen* rather than of *Bewusstsein*."[56] Among these three, the passivity of the body comes into play precisely when it comes to thinking, "the passivity of the *suffering* self."[57]

> "To articulate speculatively the modality of *otherness* that corresponds to this passivity, we have to grant to the metacategory of one's own body a fullness comparable to that suffering gives to undergoing or enduring. In a sharp-edged dialectic between praxis and pathos, one's own body becomes the emblematic title of a vast inquiry which, beyond the simple mineness of one's own body, denotes the entire sphere of *intimate* passivity, and hence of otherness, for which it forms the center of gravity."[58]

The body, only laterally addressed in "Suffering is not Pain," gains here a central role when it comes to understanding the passivity of suffering. Alterity appears in pain and suffering as that of the body, which, however, is not simply conceived from the outside—as it is in semiology—but is felt from the inside, revealing the sphere of an intimate passivity. As such, the body is the center of gravity for otherness but lived from within. It is the very "place" where suffering is lived as enduring. Enduring is "the first meaning of suffering," that Ricœur revisits in the conclusion of "Suffering is not Pain." There, he defines enduring as "persevering in the desire to be and in the effort to exist in spite of", and notes that "[t]his 'in spite of' draws the final border between pain and suffering, even though they inhabit the same body."[59]

Besides a reference to Spinoza's *conatus*[60], we might recognize in this passage an implicit reference to Maine de Biran, an author who has been one of the protagonists of Ricœur's early

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[54] *Id*.

[55] *Ibid.*, 318.

[56] *Id.*

[57] *Ibid.*, 320 (my italics).

[58] *Id*.

[59] Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain," 27.

[60] *Cf.* the note of the translators in Ricœur, "Suffering is not Pain," 27.

philosophy of the will. The effort to exist "in spite of" is indeed a genuine Biranian theme. In the conclusive remarks of *Oneself as Another* on the otherness and the body, it is precisely to the philosopher of Bergerac that Ricœur refers to in the first place with the scope of articulating different degrees of passivity related to bodily existence.[61] He then goes on to recapitulate some of the phenomenological analyses of the body by introducing the difference between the *Leib* and the *Körper* and insisting on the primacy of bodily existence related to intersubjective encounters. "Myself as flesh, before the constitution of the alter ego"[62] is a new expression of being oneself as another that confronts us with the task of thinking the lived body as the place of pain and suffering. He finally turns to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, arguing that although we cannot find an explicit thematization of the flesh in this work, we can find important elements for thinking the ontology of the flesh, such as the place, the "in" of being in the world, the analyses of moods (*Befindlichkeit*) as an existential, the notions of thrownness, and facticity.

Through this cross-reading of the section on the body in *Oneself as Another* and the paper on suffering and pain, we can argue that the lived body is the basis and the articulation point of the two axes that Ricœur distinguishes in "Suffering is not Pain:" the self-other axis and the axis of acting-being affected. The body that is almost absent in *Suffering and Pain* is revealed through the analyses of *Oneself as Another* as being related to activity and passivity (Biran), to intersubjectivity (Husserl), and to being-in-the world (Heidegger). As such, it reveals an *ante*-predicative element of suffering, that of the flesh, which is the very "site" of suffering. We do not only suffer in our "mind" or "psyche", but suffering always has a flesh, and it inscribes itself in our corporeal relation to the world and others.

The Expressive Body and the Ambiance

If we take these theses on the role of the body seriously, we must rethink its function in pain and suffering, more than Ricœur has done. Descending into the *ante*-predicative dimension of pain and suffering implies that, before any stories are told, the body already expresses them, impregnating the lifeworld. In this section, I propose an interpretation of the lived body that completes Ricœur's analyses by focusing more on pain and adding some elements that Ricœur does not address directly in *Oneself as Another* or, *a fortiori*, in "Suffering is not Pain." Indeed, pain, which seems physical, is already a form of sense-making—even if more primitive: it makes me cry or shout, changes my presence in space, my posture, the tone of my voice, etc. Pain and suffering do not only inhabit the same body, but in the *ante*-predicative dimension of bodily existence, they are much more intertwined than Ricœur suggests. Pain does not concern only the *Körper* but reveals a primal expressivity of the lived body and even an existential dimension of our embodiment. When suffering appears in the lived body, it is not merely somatization, but an expression of the intimate passivity of selfhood and, as such, a pre-predicative sense-making of oneself as another.

[61] The passivity of the resistance that cedes to the effort, the passivity of feelings and moods that come and go like rain and sun, and the passivity related to the outer world and its objects.

[62] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 323.

Husserl grasped the *ante*-predicative expressivity of the body with the fine distinction he made between the *Innenleib* and the *Ausseinleib*, the lived body from the inside and the outside.[63] The key to understanding the importance of this distinction is that the *Aussenleib* is not the *Körper*. The *Körper* is the mere organic and physical body, the body that can be drawn, operated, penetrated by X-rays, etc. When we peek into the *Körper*—with X-rays for example, or during an anatomy lesson, we do not penetrate the intimate lived body. Just as the *Innenleib* is not the interior of the *Körper*, the *Ausseinleib* is also different, from its visible, outer side. The *Aussenleib* is the lived body in its expressivity, it is the flesh that makes the relationship with others possible through pairing (*Paarung*) and empathy (*Einfühlung*)—it is the body with which we can enter in a living contact that we touch when we hug someone or that we see when we exchange meaningful looks. It is an expressive body, the body that is already making sense, a body of gestures (as opposed to pure movements without meaning). The *Innenleib* is the interiority of the lived body, the place of the intimate passivity, and of the will and agentivity. It is what invisibly animates the *Aussenleib*: the expressions of joy when I smile are inhabited by the joy that I feel interiorly; my body posture is animated by the weight of despair that I feel in my *Innenleib*.

In a manuscript dating from 1924, titled *Appearing of Spirits. Empathy. Other-Experience*, Husserl addresses the question of how affects are divided between their interior side and their exterior appearing on the *Aussenleiblichkeit*.[64] By raising the question of affectivity in the flesh, we need to think directly about the body as a site or place of suffering in the broad sense of *pathos*. We are right at the point where we arrived with our analyses of Ricœur, reinstating the body behind the narratives of suffering. Husserl notes that affects "like anger, shame, anxiety, etc." do not only belong to the sphere of intimacy (to the *Innenleiblichkeit*), but they also have external sides (*Aussenseiten*). These external sides are not only visible in the gestures, but they also appear through specific sensations and feelings (*Gemeinempfindungen* and *Gemeingefühle*)[65] that surface on the body. Husserl gives the example of shame: "In 'burning shame' I also feel the burning in my cheeks."[66] And when I see others in shameful situations, I can see on them the burning shame and associate their blushing with the "burning" of shame. Consequently, affects are not only in a sphere of intimacy that is inaccessible for others, but they always already have an *aussenleiblich* aspect and as such they are intersubjective. The shame of the other that I glimpse in his blushing can also cause a feeling of shame in me, I can feel shame at their place. Just as their tears might also provoke tears

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[63] For a prolongation of the distinction in the context of a phenomenological analysis of the schizophrenic *Spaltung* see Marc Richir, "*Stimmung, Verstimmung* et *Leiblichkeit* dans la schizophrénie," in *Conférencias de Filosophia II* (Porto: Campo das Lettras, 2000), 57-69; see also Richir, *Méditations phénoménologiques*, 36–41.

[64] This division replaces the metaphysical division between body and psyche.

[65] *Gemeingefühl* is the German translation of the notion *coenaesthesia*, introduced by Christian Friedrich Hübner and Johann Christian Reil in 1794 to describe the specific feeling that we have of our bodily existence. It is a pre-modal sensitivity, a feeling of being embodied through which we also perceive modifications of the body as a whole, for example when have a fever or when we are tired. *Gemeinempfindung* is mostly used as a synonym of *Gemeingefühl*, insisting more on sensations than feelings.

[66] Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905–1920* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 331.

in me. Suffering is always already inscribed in the body and expressed and shared.[67] It transpires from the *Innenleiblichkeit* to the *Aussenleiblichkeit* and makes the body the element of a first *ante*-predicative expression before the stories are told.

This tacit expressivity of the body is already a sense-making process that has its own historicity. The lived body is indeed not only the place of immediate expressivity but also the support of sedimentations. The gestures and even the mimics leave traces in the body, they weave their own fabric in the flesh that bears suffering. Suffering is inscribed in the wrinkles of the skin, in the gaze, in the postural patterns that are formed tacitly, over the long term, with each small gesture. In a certain sense, the body is already a story, one that is not told, but that is nonetheless written, precisely by the folds on and in the flesh. And even more mysteriously, this writing remains readable: certainly not like a novel or even like sentences, but when we meet someone with a story of suffering, we understand, after spending some time with the person, something of that story, even without talking about it. In their way of smiling, their movements, in the tone of their voice, there are traces of all the sedimentations that make up their life story and inscribe it irrevocably in the flesh.

From this idea of the body's expressiveness, we can return to the supposedly all-too-clear distinction between suffering and pain. From the point of view of the lived body, pain also expresses itself, it can be read on the *Aussenleiblichkeit*. Chronic pain will even leave sedimented traces in the flesh and change our being in the world—bringing it even closer to suffering. Furthermore pain—just as suffering—can not only leave its traces in the body but can also modify the constitution of the ambiance. As Eugène Minkowski notes in his *Lived Time,* "pain is one of our attitudes towards ambience. Usually passing, even momentary, it foists itself upon us and becomes lasting where it is not counterbalanced by its antagonist, the personal *élan*."[68] He also analyses how in some disorders pain can "fuse" almost completely with ambient space.[69] In some psychopathological conditions, pain can indeed completely penetrate the ambience resulting in the feeling that it is the world itself that is hurting.[70] This erosion of the boundaries between the inside and the outside, between the *Innenleiblichkeit* and the *Aussenleiblichkeit*, manifests pain as being illocalized, everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. Far from being confined to the physical body, pain permeates the lifeworld, imbuing the reservoir of meaning. But the fusion of pain with the ambiance does not have to be pathological.

Pain also fuses to some extent with the ambiance when it is not an extreme condition. This fusing has also been masterfully described by Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness*. He

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[67] For contemporary approaches to the embodied dimension of existential suffering in psychopathology see Thomas Fuchs' works on inter-affectivity and inter-corporeality (*Zwischenleiblichkeit*). See for example, Thomas Fuchs, *Randzonen der Erfharung* (Freiburg and München: Karl Alber, 2020), 21–125.

[68] Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time*, trans. Nancy Metzel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 188.

[69] Minkowski, *Lived Time,* 324.

[70] Minkowski provides a vignette: "The pain that she experiences invades her whole body, reaches her nails, and extends even further in the form of a wrenching *above* her gums and a pulling by invisible threads from 'outside of me.' The sensation of internal dislocation is also projected further into the ambient world. Everything seems broken apart in the clocks which ring, in the vehicles which pass, just as in her own body" (*ibid.*, 324–325).

takes the example of reading a book with hurting eyes. He argues that the pain is not localized in the eyes but becomes the medium of the act of reading, "the translucent matter of consciousness, its being-there, its attachment to the world, in short, the peculiar contingency of the act of reading."[71] It is not that, on one hand, my eyes hurt, and on the other, I am reading; rather, the pain in my eyes merges with the act of reading, with the book, with the light of the lamp. The qualities of the world appear through this coloration of pain. We could also speak, as Saulius Geniusas suggests, of an atmospherization of pain, of pain "as an *atmosphere* that covers my act of reading."[72] Far from being reduced to the *Körper*, pain becomes the very element through which I relate to the world and the objects of the world. This *ante*-predicative experience of pain that constitutes the ambiance sheds yet another light on the phenomenological dimension of passivity and activity in embodied existence. We not only continue to exist despite suffering but also despite pain. We counterbalance pain with effort, we leave it behind to go towards the world. But with this very action, we also bring pain with ourselves, we constitute the medium of actions as painful, and we let it fuse with the ambiance. If we think about the difference between pain and suffering not only from the perspective of narrativity, but also from the perspective of the lived body, we can say that they do not only inhabit the same body, but they also reveal the same flesh and the same lifeworld. The task at hand is therefore to explore in greater detail how pain and suffering permeate the reservoir of meaning under different conditions. This paper is, however, only an outline of the conceptual basis for this task, which must be pursued elsewhere.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that by shifting from a semiological understanding of pain and suffering towards a hermeneutical one, we see pain and suffering not as mere series of symptoms to be classified, but as fundamental structures of the human condition that call for deeper sense-making. Narratives of suffering reveal an original passivity and otherness in the very heart of selfhood, related to embodied existence. Biographies and narratives find their roots and resources in the lived body and the lifeworld. Recognizing the role of the flesh in our stories, we also discover the tacit inscriptions of suffering within the lived body. The lived body is then the support of stories of an existential vulnerability that never cease to call to be told. This vulnerability reveals a passivity that is not merely receptive but participates in the constitution of the ambiance and impregnates the lifeworld.[73]

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[71] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge), 333.

[72] For more detailed analysis of Sartre's phenomenology of pain, pain as atmosphere and for a phenomenology of pain in general see Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain* (Athens; OH: Ohio University Press, 2020); for the quote see p. 48.

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