

# I am hungry, therefore I am. Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology as a model for food existentialism

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*Abstract:* By focusing on the hunger drive and the act of eating as existential dimensions, this essay considers the possibility to extend Paul Ricœur's thought in the direction of food philosophy. By conceiving his hermeneutic phenomenology as a model for food existentialism, this paper aims to discuss hunger and eating as interrelated aspects of human beings' embodied existence that are involved in the social world. I will begin with a phenomenological description of hunger and eating referring to Ricœur's analysis of the corporeal involuntary as offering the base features to develop what I will call an "interpretive existential philosophy of being hungry and eating". Then, I will turn to hunger and eating as involved in the real complexity of temporal experience. These reflections will lead to examining the interplay of cosmic time and lived time in relation to hunger and eating, opening up the discussion of the gustatory time through the intersection of the objective time of the clock and the subjective time of the stomach.

*Keywords:* hunger; eating; food philosophy; embodiment; gustatory time.

Hunger is a primary mode of being related to a complex array of neurophysiological states. On the one hand, in its most general sense hunger is an involuntary phenomena correlated with the act of eating. On the other hand, though, human hunger is far more complex than the hunger of other animals. Far from being just an automatic bodily mechanism, hunger goes beyond our senses, bodies, and brains. We train, resist, and stimulate hunger, that is, we manage it as part of our education (see Borghini 2016). Therefore, human being's relationship to nourishment cannot be reduced to a matter of pure sustenance. Representing the most complex ecological relationship in which we take part, as well as the most fundamental origin of the encounter between ourselves and the otherness of the world, hunger is a complex natural, cultural, and social aspect of human existence that call for interdisciplinary analyses. The recognition of the centrality of hunger and eating to the understanding of our existence results in the current explosion of food studies in many disciplines, among them those of the natural and social sciences, humanities and

cultural theories. The possibility to produce critical knowledge in relation with hunger and eating as topics of high theoretical and practical relevance, has opened up the space for the development of the field of food philosophy. The question “how are we to eat?” (Boisvert *et al.* 2016: 7) arises in today’s food-oriented philosophical thinking as one of the deepest problems a food philosopher could analyze. This essential query involves different meaning shifts ranging from health issues to cultural appropriateness. Profoundly affecting human being’s access to the meanings and values belonging to different spheres of human life, such as the practical, nutritional, ethical, aesthetical, physical, ecological, epistemological and ontological sphere, hunger and eating undoubtedly deserve a thorough philosophical investigation.

The analysis of hunger and eating as hot topics in the philosophical field is a fairly recent phenomena. The reason for the increasing number of contributions to the branch of food philosophy can be briefly explained as follows. Whereas in the modern philosophical inquiry hunger and eating were seen as aspects connected to human being’s instincts and bodily condition considered as the lowest degrees of human existence, the attention given to the lived body in twentieth-century philosophy, which invites us to consider the profound importance of embodiment in how we think and act, enables philosophers to focus on hunger and eating as significant themes in the current philosophical debate. The renewed attentiveness to the phenomenon of human corporeality makes hunger and eating arise as complex conditions of human existence. The specific meaning of hunger and eating for the human being cannot be, then, understood without paying attention to our embodied existence and to our interdependence with the social environment as essential surrounding and lived space in which our life takes place together with all other animate species and inanimate things (see Vendra 2020).

It is from the consideration of the inspiring reflections on food-related matters elaborated in the dynamic field of food philosophy that the present contribution takes its point of departure. Relying on Ricœur’s concern with the structure of lived experience, I suggest to consider the fruitful intersection between food philosophy and Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology. Rather than focusing on food as object of study, the attention will be oriented toward the discussion of the lived experience of being hungry, as a primary mode of being in the world, and of eating, as an act formed by inner physical and outer cultural and social mechanisms. Yet, given that the scope of Ricœur’s philosophical thought is very broad, the present contribution does not seek to offer a comprehensive account of his work in the context of food philosophy. My claim is more modest. Following his work and taking a critical step beyond it, my article aims at considering Ricœur’s heritage to innovatively improve

researches on food existentialism. His seminal phenomenology of embodiment and his attention to the elusive nature of time elaborated in his narrative hermeneutics, can be involved in the development of what I call an ‘interpretive existential philosophy of being hungry and eating.’ I will take a look at these moments by way of suggesting new directions for a critical thought on hunger and eating as existential problems which shape our perception of the world and the temporal dynamics of our personal and collective life. By applying Ricœur’s oeuvre to the current debate in the philosophy of food, my essay will prove helpful to Ricœurian scholars interested in employing his thought to address prospects in philosophy and other fields that respond to emerging issues of importance. Yet, I believe that also philosophers of food can benefit from the extension of Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology to the field of food philosophy as long as it offers valuable methodological resources for exploring how food mediates our experience (see Kaplan 2020).

This article consists of two entangled sections. First, I will consider Ricœur’s work *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1966) as presenting relevant elements for opening up an inquiry of hunger and the eating as existential aspects defining the human condition. By focusing the attention on the corporeal involuntary, the phenomenological analysis of hunger and eating will be developed through the consideration of bodily needs, motives, and values. Hunger and eating will be analyzed as involved in the correlation between the involuntary bodily functions and the voluntary creative adaption to them. Then, I will shift the emphasis from the phenomenological approach to hunger and eating to the hermeneutical understanding of the connection between these dimensions and our experience of time. Developed in his monumental work *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur’s conception of time as a combination of cosmological laws and lived experiences provides us with critical tools that help us think in a more consistent manner the differences and the continuity between clock-time and stomach temporality (see Boisvert 2006: 40), i.e., the quantitative and the qualitative component of the gustatory temporality.

1. *Hunger and eating at the edge of the will. From Homo cogitans to Homo appetens*

Ricœur has never elaborated a philosophy of food nor left any major work dedicated to nutritional issues. However, I believe that his thought can provide tools for exploring the meaningfulness of our food experiences. Arising in the midst of the problems of real life, i.e., in the conceptual confusion pool of everyday world and its multiplicity of conflicting meanings, Ricœur’s oeuvre

offers us concepts and methodologies that help us to puzzle out the way we experience our bond with food as indicative of our relationship with our lived body and, by extension, with ourselves as acting and suffering beings living together with others in a socially shared environment (see Ricœur 1992: 23). Throughout his writings, Ricœur shows a constant interest in human agency. Denoting the basic manner in which human beings exist and inhabit the world, human agency is not understood as pure spontaneity; rather, human actions connect the voluntary and involuntary structures of our will, individual projects and worldly events. Actions involve “not only doing and making but also receiving and enduring, the latter being a joining of receiving and doing” (Dauenhauer 1998: 100). Following Ricœur’s attention to the tensive structure of agency, I claim that Ricœur’s thought can be significantly entangled in the development of a philosophical thought on hunger and eating as dimensions connected to the tension between passivity and activity characterizing our embodied existence. More precisely, Ricœur’s early phenomenology of the will and his hermeneutical approach to the cosmic time and the phenomenological time of experience can find a renewed appropriation in the domain of food existentialism (see Kaplan 2019: 150). With that in mind, let us first focus on hunger and eating within Ricœur’s phenomenological analysis of the corporeal involuntary.

Inserting his thought into the contemporary philosophical debates on the topic of the lived body, Ricœur’s analysis of this subject finds its originality at the intersection of existentialism and phenomenology. Ricœur’s aim is to develop an inquiry of human being’s mode of incarnation in the world through a descriptive methodology. Otherwise put, according to Ricœur, the intuition of human being’s incarnate existence inherited from existentialism has to be examined through a rigorous method that calls for a reconsideration of Edmund Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology. Against the modern conception of the body as an obstacle to mind prefigured by the Cartesian Cogito and culminating in Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), in his phenomenological analysis of human will Ricœur recomposes the integral experience of human being as marked by a relation of correlation (*corrélation diagnostique*) between the body and the intentional structures, bodiliness and consciousness. Contrary to any Cartesian dualism, which separates subjective mental thoughts from bodily movements, Ricœur stresses that there is “a single universe of discourse in which thought and movement would be homogeneous” (1966: 217). Thus, he claims that “the reconquest of the Cogito must be complete: we can only discover the body and the involuntary which it sustains in the context of the Cogito itself. The Cogito’s experience, taken as a whole, includes ‘I desire’, ‘I can’, ‘I intend’, and, in a general way, my existence as a body” (1966: 9). Accord-

ing to Ricœur, human being is an embodied being whose life is characterized by the preservation of a fragile equilibrium between the subjective experience of the incarnate will and the objective aspects of the natural structure. Following his line of thought, the corporeal dimension is the primordial source of most original needs, motives, and organic values, arising from the spontaneous demands of life and echoing in the depths of our lived body. Let us examine now how these aspects of the corporeal involuntary relate to hunger and eating. The analysis of needs, motives, and values, enables us to understand the irrevocable intertwining between the carnal and the cognitive, the inner and outer horizons of our hunger and eating experiences.

(a) I argue that it is in Ricœur's discussion of the set of vital needs, that we can find elements for a first phenomenological description of hunger. Since we are born hungry and we have been hungry even before we can remember being alive or "gaining self-consciousness of our own pleasures" (Borghini 2017: 2), hunger can be coherently defined as our primary mode of being in the world. Phenomenologically speaking, hunger is not experienced from a third-person perspective. Rather, as all other bodily needs, hunger is felt within a first-person experience of the lived body in relation to the world. Hunger epitomizes, then, the relation between our bodily dependence on food and the social universe of which we are a part. Ricœur argues that hunger "does not reveal my body to me but through my body reveals that which is not here and which I lack. I do not sense contractions and secretions – I am aware of the I-body as a whole lacking" (1966: 91). Analogously to all other vital needs (thirst, sexual urges, etc.), hunger can be defined as a pre-representational state of outness. Through the consideration of "the adherence of affectivity to thought itself" (1966: 86), we can state that the felt need of hunger adheres to consciousness, opening it up to a description of intentional type. As Ricœur observes "to feel is still to think, though feeling no longer represents objectivity, but rather reveals existence" (1966: 86). Hunger is, then, an indigence and an exercise directed toward something, "it is a consciousness of...an impetus towards...Even without an image of bread, my hunger would still carry me beyond myself" (1966: 90). Otherwise put, hunger carries an affective-intentional load. By rejecting the model of felt needs employed by objectivism, Ricœur invites us to think hunger neither as an inner sensation nor as part of a stimulus-response pattern, but as a referential or transcending behavior linked to conscious acts intentionally directed towards the world. As such, expressing the need to eat, hunger makes us experience our interdependence with the world, exposing us to the otherness of what is edible. This exposition might lead us to a pleasant fulfillment, but also to the risk of being disgusted or even to the danger of being poisoned. In this sense, hunger reflects human being's deepest vulnerability. It is in this context that Ricœur

concludes: “the will completes the separation of experience and need: while the impetus can be mastered by the will, the lack always remains un-coercible – I can refrain from eating, but I cannot help being hungry” (1966: 91). As such, “hunger is more fundamental than pleasure for the human condition” (Borghini 2017: 3). Therefore, the satisfaction of hunger “is more fundamental than sex. In the life of the individual organism it is the more primary and recurrent want, while in the wider sphere of human society it determines [...] the nature of social groupings, and the form of their activities take” (Mintz 1985: 4).

(b) Our vital needs are bound to bodily motives. Indeed, our body is not just the source of the most original needs, but also of primordial motivations deriving from the spontaneous demands of life. Considered in the context of our corporeality, motivation is an inner move emerging from the deepest realm of our lived body. More precisely, according to Ricœur, motivation is an intentional stream that inclines the will to decide for something “in order to” as well as “because of”. Thus, every motive is a motive for a decision that inclined the will towards its projects. As Ricœur stresses, “the circular relation of motive to project demands that I recognize my body as body-for-my-willing, and my willing as project-based-(in part)-on my body” (1966: 85). Considered as an inner urge, hunger is the main motivation to seek food and eat. In order to understand this point, we have to explain how hunger can give us a reason on the basis of which we are motivated to eat. The fact that feeling hunger is inherently motivating means that hunger is not a mere sensation, but it is an affective reaction because it involves “changes in affect, that is, positive or negative hedonic feelings and relatedly, felt states of attraction or aversion” (Ombrato, Philips 2021: 520). The agent’s motivation to eat is not just instrumental as directed to the alleviation of the unpleasant sensations associated to hunger at the personal, experiential level. Rather, it also involves a positive attraction we feel towards food, that is, an anticipated pleasure to satisfy our hunger. Thus, “hunger facilitates the elicitation of appetite, a felt desire for food or attraction to the prospect of eating, and that such phenomenon is recruited by hunger to further its motivational role, so that, ordinarily, we are at once driven by hunger and drawn by appetite” (Ombrato, Philips 2021: 518). Hunger and the related act of eating encompass the physiological, psychological, hedonistic, and broadly socio-cultural aspect of our existence. In this sense, hunger as a motive is interwoven with countless other motives such as those concerning the meal type, the type of food, the quality and the quantity of food, etc. Therefore, besides the biological mechanism, certain other personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors are connected to hunger. For example, given that I am vegetarian, my hunger is also to my ethically motivated refusal to consume meat and to hurt animals. Hunger is, then, involved in a complex framework of

other motives and it “would be futile to try to enumerate every food-motive for every food action” (Kaplan 2019: 153). In hunger and eating we find a “point of convergence between the rational and emotional aspects of human agency, as well as the point of convergence between humans as biological organisms and as expressions of culture” (Borgini 2017: 3). As such, motives relate to food choices and eating habits as “immensely important adornments on an inescapable necessity” (Mintz 1985: 3).

(c) The body is also the source of the most original living values. Following Ricœur’s lead, the body reveals the primordial layer of values: organic values. Although these are all directed toward the organic well-being, they are heterogeneous and concern for example assimilation, security, exercise, and rest. A value can reach and incline me only if it impresses my sensibility as a dignifying motive. Thus, Ricœur explains that since the body is the basic involuntary and the basic fundamental source of motivation, all other values are elaborated in relation to it (see 1966: 122). As he puts it, as long as the body is the affective medium of all values, these “assume a serious, dramatic significance through comparison with the values that enter history through my body” (1966: 85). In this sense, organic values open up the space for the level of history, i.e., for the meaningfulness of the cultural and social values. Ricœur invites us to think that even though we can actualize organic values in different ways, we need to attend all of them in some balanced fashion as necessary conditions of our existence. In the case of hunger, it inclines our will to pursue something perceived as good to eat for us. For example, hunger makes us perceive bread as good with its agreeable taste and its suitability for assuaging my lack of food. Therefore, food-values are linked to the so-called “omnivore’s dilemma” (see Fischler 1988; Pollan 2006). Since human beings are omnivore beings who have to eat in order to survive, in virtually any circumstance in which foods are supplied they are confronted with the choice of whether or not to eat them, and which ones to consume according to their personal and cultural values. Food-values are involved into the environment where we live. More precisely, we can state that our food-values are included within a complex gustatory environments in which they are susceptible to external influences and internal forces that are not completely under our control. Otherwise put, food-values are linked to preferences that consciously or unconsciously influence our daily food choices such as “price, convenience, taste, health, appearance, familiarity, novelty, mood, diet, and ethics” (Kaplan 2019: 154). These values can change through time depending on the evolution of the collective culinary imaginary and can also be manipulated or nudged by the society.

Ricœur’s phenomenological description of the corporeal involuntary, that is, of the lived body as primordial source of needs, motives, and values, leads us

to consider hunger and the consequent intake of food through the act of eating in the context of the dialectic between involuntary and voluntary dimensions of human will. Following Merleau-Ponty's refusal of Sartre's voluntaristic excess (see Marsh 2008), Ricœur replaces the existentialist dualism of facticity and transcendence with a two-dimensional unity of human will in which the involuntary and the voluntary are complementary. However, unlike Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur claims that the description of human being's embodied existence cannot be separated from its ethical and theological implications. With reference to Marcel's Christian existentialism, Ricœur conceives the lived body as part of human freedom by defining it in terms of an "incarnate freedom" (1966: 33). In the context of our relationship with food, we can state that on the one hand, human beings are inescapably bound by hunger and eating as involuntary dimensions of the existence. On the other hand, though, our fundamental voluntary projects inform how we live hunger and the way we look for food. Let me explain this point further. Certainly, hunger and eating are the primal marks of life evoking the world as a great cosmic banquet. From a biological perspective, human beings have to eat as well as all other living beings in order to survive. Nevertheless, for human beings hunger and eating cannot be limited to the instinctive-animal level. These existential dimensions reflect human beings' original relationship with their own personal experiences, with the environment, with other living beings and inanimate things. Human beings are social beings whose behaviors are shaped and apprehended within the socio-cultural context. Hunger and eating figure, then, into meaningful agency taking on different meanings related to human beings' own understanding of their gustatory experiences. As creatures that seek meaning, produce meanings, and yearn from meanings, human beings have the power to make meaningful what in Heideggerian terms can be defined as the "worldhood of food" (see Kaplan 2019: 169). However, human beings are not transcendental masters of meanings since they are marked by their constitutive bodily finitude and existential frailty. Given that our will is embodied, the act of willing consists at once in the realization of freedom and in the reception of necessity. Human beings are free agents, that is, they are above the necessity of physics since they can act outside the pure scope of laws of mechanics. But, at the same time, they are determined by bodily necessities and by circumstances which are beyond total control. By applying these reflections to the understanding of hunger and eating, we can state that we necessarily need to eat in order to survive, but we are not forced to eat a determined food, like koalas holding into branches of an eucalyptus tree. Yet, even if we can freely choose our foods, we are not disengaged from our body and external influences. Thus, our freedom is bounded freedom governed and limited by the body and by the context of its



occurrence. Neither freedom can be content with simple acquiescence to the necessity of nature, nor it corresponds to pure arbitrariness. For example, my freedom to choose what to eat does not mean that I am free to eat all candies of the Halloween party. Certainly, I can choose to do that if I do not matter for my health. Contrary to Sartre's theory of absolute freedom and his thesis according to which human beings are "condemned to be free" (1956: 567), Ricœur conceives freedom as a 'bound freedom' inseparable from the opposition and the struggle with the involuntary, rejecting all negative sense of it as a state of condemnation. In this perspective, Ricœur displaces the question of the nature of human being from the quest of epistemological certainty to that of life as enjoyed: "I sense myself alive before I know myself as an animal" (1966: 411). Human existence is more a matter of what I feel and what I can do, rather than "I think". Interpreting the dialectic between hunger and eating in this context, hunger is more original than the act of eating and thinking. In conclusion, I claim that Ricœur's phenomenology of the embodied will allows us to coherently affirm 'I am hungry, therefore I am.' Ricœur's phenomenology opposes to *homo cogitans*, whose emblem is the mind, *homo appetens* existing as a betweenness of affection and intention.

## 2. *The temporal mediation between clock and gaster: the gustatory time*

We have just seen that Ricœur's phenomenology of the will presents significant elements to think hunger and eating as existential dimensions intertwined with our lived body. Having analyzed the phenomenological insights, we should turn our attention now to the productive tension between hunger, eating, and the experience of time. In other words, following Ricœur's line of thought, we have to move from a descriptive inspired phenomenology of hunger and eating to a hermeneutical phenomenology of the experience of these existential phenomena as linked to the temporal dimension of human existence. The phenomenological approach to hunger and eating becomes, then, more complex and nuanced. It is my contention that the movement from descriptive phenomenology to hermeneutic phenomenology shows a methodological and epistemological tension that inwardly affects the philosophical approach to hunger and eating. The changes of method implied by Ricœur's evolution from a descriptive phenomenology to an explicitly hermeneutic one, allow us to move from the conception of hunger and eating as existential problems connected to bodily necessities, in which a negative sense of constraint prevails, to the outline of hunger and eating as linked to the productive power of human experience, in which a more positive conception of these dimensions is at stake. Yet, insofar as Ricœur erects hermeneutics on the basis of phenom-

enology, we can stress that the two different methodological approaches to hunger and eating are dialectically related.

The phenomenological description of human being's nature as determined by a discordant-concordance between the poles of the voluntary and the involuntary, freedom and necessity, is recast in Ricœur's monumental three volumes of *Time and Narrative*. His study of the relationship between time and narrative offers a provocative framework for examining the connection between clock-time and stomach-time (see Boisvert 2006: 40), that is, between what one can consider as the quantitative and qualitative temporal dimensions of our experience of being hungry and eating. In the first volume of *Time and Narrative* (1984), Ricœur focuses his attention on the antinomies affecting the conception of time. He takes as his starting point two of the most influential philosophical reflections on time: Augustine's question about how to measure time in Book XI of *Confessions* and Aristotle's study of emplotment (μύθος) in *Poetics*. Let me briefly review Ricœur's argument as essential for understanding the intertwining between clock and stomach time in the context of food existentialism. Ricœur begins his analysis of time with the reconsideration of Augustine's famously statement: "what, then, is time? (*Quid est enim tempus*) I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled" (11, 14:17). Augustine's question is to understand how time can be said to be since the past is no longer, the future is always not yet, and the present is always not always. Augustine's solution is to suggest that the temporal experience is a threefold present grounded on the distention of the soul across time. As he puts it, "some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I see. The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is expectation" (11:20). Thus, the distention (*distentio*) of the soul is stretched by the separate intentions (*intentio*) of expectation, attention, and memory. According to Ricœur, Augustine's threefold present does not resolve the enigma of time by displacing it to an internal problem. In order to think the relationship between the time of the soul and the time of the cosmos, Ricœur turns to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Whereas in Augustine's meditations on time the reign of discordance dominates over concordance, Aristotle's theory of emplotment (μύθος) offers a structure for thinking the concordance of events in an unfolding narrative over discordance. The emplotment is understood as an act of configuration in which the unity of the plot across time and the events, that make up the various components of the action, are balanced together. Therefore, emplotment is "the synthesis of the heterogeneous" (Ricœur 1984: 66). The aporia of time experienced as a concordant discordance in Augustine's thought, finds its remedial counterpart in Aristotle's idea of narrative

mimesis as discordant concordance. Aristotle's theory provides the guiding principle for the entirety of Ricœur's trilogy of *Time and Narrative*. The critical analysis of Augustine's philosophical reflection on time and Aristotle's discussion of poetics lead Ricœur to affirm that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (1984: 52). Going further than Ricœur, I claim that narrative is not only the medium through which we understand ourselves as living, acting, and thinking beings. Rather, narrative can be also applied to the understanding of being hungry and eating as rhythmic temporal experiences expressing our relation with food.

Hunger and eating are involved in the external structures of clock time, expressed by devices such as calendars, that split time up into homogeneous units such as days, months, years. As Ricœur puts it, the calendar "cosmologises lived time and humanizes cosmic time. This is how it contributes to reinscribing the time of narrative into the time of the world" (1988: 109). Through the clock time, the time of all human actions, whether individual or social in scope, is inserted into chronological and measurable time. Thus, clock time enables us to understand time with measurement. What the clock time measures is a quantity of duration, that is, a stretch of time. Clock time does not measure the endurance of time itself. Rather, it measures the motion of the internal components of the clock in terms of conventional intervals. More simply, the clock measures motions of temporal segments of varying lengths (e.g., seconds, minutes, hours). Therefore, our understanding of clock time tells us the measurement of intervals which have been commonly agreed as representing the stretches of time. Clock time stands in a close relationship to hunger and eating. The quantitative measurement of time provides the rhythm to ritualized celebrations, which differ from one culture to another and that are associated with community's ritual meals. For example, in the United States the last Thursday of November is the day of Public Thanksgiving, which is celebrated with a traditional meal of turkey, cranberry jelly and pumpkin pie, whereas in Japan each year on March 3<sup>rd</sup> is the Hinamatsuri (雛祭り) or Girls' Day celebrated with typical Japanese food. Clock time is, then, connected to our collective gustatory identity as part of a living culinary tradition. Yet, clock time is tied up to our daily eating routines, according to our personal and collective life schedules. Specifically, in our society the time of the clock triggers our breakfast time, lunchtime, and dinnertime. However, the time-based decision to eat does not always correspond to the physiological need to eat, i.e., to the hunger drive. Although the clock time regulates our daily schedules, it does not imply a direct correspondence between the expressions "it's time to eat" and "I am hungry enough to eat now" (Somov 2008: 24). There are also considerable differences among individu-

als concerning the relation between eating and clock time: some people miss breakfast, while other have their main meal at noon rather than in the evening. These differences are determined by personal preferences, schedules, as well as cultural patterns. Linked to the clock time, hunger and eating appears as daily repetitions of the same habits. Contrary to the modern divorce between time and space announced by Newton's pronouncement that "time exists in and of itself and flows equably without reference to anything external" (Greene 2004: 46), clock time makes time understandable for us since it measures the endurance of something in space. In his theory of narrative, Ricœur highlights the connection between temporality and context, time and space, in describing the qualities of a coherent and meaningful narrative by means of mimesis. Indeed, according to Ricœur, time cannot appear separately from the contents of experience (see 1988: 23). With reference to hunger and eating, clock time is connected to the place where we live our hunger drive and perform the act of eating. The timing of our intake of food serves a social function for the formation of our personal and collective identity. Regulated by the clock time, hunger and eating are intertwined with the larger time frame of nature, of seasons and of the alteration of day and night, but also of the cultural and historical contexts. In other words, we can state that clock time measures hunger and eating including them in the framework of cultural and social phenomena. It does not mean that we always eat with someone. Even when we do not share food, as an act regulated by clock time corresponding to shared conventions, eating is involved in the social sphere. Therefore, the time of the clock is inherently connected to the rhythms associated with intersubjectivity, culture, traditions, as well as to the register of language and of the symbolic. Clock time is, then, an essential component of the gustatory time in which our gustatory identities are formed through events, stories, and common habits. Following Ricœur's line of thought, we can conclude that a reflection on the clock time with reference to hunger and eating does not involve just a question of "who I am in time", but also "who I am *with* through time", that is, it implies the problem of gustatory identity as temporally and socially constituted by external processes.

Hunger and eating are not regulated just by the quantitative time of the clock as external temporality. Through a coordinated biological system, our body performs certain tasks through what is called the bodily microbiological clock. Given that our body relies on the natural world, bodily time is adapted to manage daily environmental changes, such as the atmospheric lightness and darkness caused by the cycle of Earth rotation. There is, then, a complex synergy between the rhythm of our body and the cosmological flow of time, between the qualitative time of the body and the quantitative time of the clock. Among the bodily rhythms, stomach time deserves a special attention as an embodied time

asking for a necessary encounter with the external world. From the stomach time a centrifugal and a centripetal back and forth movement towards the otherness of the world begins. Contrary to other corporeal rhythms such as the circadian rhythm or the leaver metabolic rhythm, stomach time is personally lived. Indeed, the stomach time is a felt experience arising from the incessant demand for something lacking. The stomach time and its fulfillment testify human being's primordial relationship with the world. More precisely, the stomach time makes us experience an "immersion of our sensibility [. . .] and the agreement that we expect to find at first glance between our needs and the world" (Pelluchon 2019: 33). Therefore, through the stomach time we experience at once our dependence with respect to the world and the possibilities that this world, in which we move and constitute ourselves as social beings, gives to us. The satisfaction of hunger goes beyond the need to ingest some food in order to survive and not to perish. However, our relation of dependence and interaction with the world, might also lead our stomach time to be a context of pain and suffering. In short, the stomach can lead both to experience joy and pain, pleasure and sorrow. In virtue of our lived sensibility, the stomach time uncovers the existential character of being hungry and eating in relation with our being-in-the-world as embodied beings involved and touched by exterior things. For example, our stomach time becomes a time of pleasure when we come into contact with some foods that satisfy hunger. But it can be also a time of pain, if we do not come into contact with desired types of food or even with food itself in extreme cases. Yet, the stomach time can be experienced as an empty-fulness or as an ongoing emptiness as it is in the case of some eating disease such as anorexia, bulimia, and obesity. As such, the qualitative time of the stomach manifests through fullness or emptiness, slowness or rapidity, satisfaction or lack. Stomach time can be transformed also into a pure egoistical time accompanied by the popular statement that 'a famish stomach has no ears'. This sentence does not just have a literal signification in the moral sense that if we are hungry, we are unable to listen attentively and we might act in an egoistic way. Beyond its empirical meaning, this expression highlights the fact that the potentials of human conscious life depend on the meeting between the basic bodily needs and the external world. The stomach time reminds us, then, of our material dependence and permanent vulnerability.

Certainly, the stomach is an organ that has been often ignored by philosophers. The importance of the stomach as a current topic in food philosophy is grounded on the reconsideration of the body as one of the most important themes of contemporary philosophy. Specifically, we can develop a philosophical approach to stomach time only after what Ricœur calls the total reconquest of the Cogito (1966: 9), that is, after all rejection of the Cartesian dualism and the modern conception of human being as a thinking mind characterized by

the status of self-sufficiency. Coherently with the critique of modern philosophy as “mind-intoxicated” (Boisvert 2006: 42), I believe that Ricœur can be considered as a stomach-friendly thinker. The fact that we are stomach-endowed beings is not something negative or as a disgrace to be hidden in favor of our thinking mind. Put differently, our mind and consciousness only last as long as the stomach allows (see Minister 2015: 30). In this renewed perspective, the stomach time is not a burden, but it opens up our first intentional and interactive encounter with the world, making us understand temporality as linked to “opportunities surging forward” (Boisvert 2006: 42). As social beings, we are temporally intertwined with the gustatory environments in which we are embedded. Our stomach time is involved in the conjunction of actualities and possibilities evolving in response to contexts and in light of influences. Thus, the construction of the gustatory time deals not exclusively with the preservation of our identity in the process of time, i.e., in the chaining of temporal events regulated by clock time, but also with the productive power linked to a human being’s stomach-situatedness into a shared world. As Ricœur suggests, since my life story is caught up in the stories of others, the gustatory time of each human being cannot be just individual. Consequently, as well as the clock time, stomach time as part of our identities cannot be taken separately from the social nexus in which human beings exist. Stomach time is, then, inseparable from intersubjective practices and the active critical appropriation of the gustatory environment in which we live. We do not simply inherit a gustatory tradition. As interpreting beings, we can take a different attitude on what, when and how we eat, that is, we have a productive capacity to reflect and imagine new gustatory possibilities over time (see Borghini, Piras 2021).

### 3. *Conclusion*

In this article I have investigated the opportunity of a fruitful development of Ricœur’s thought in the direction of food philosophy. In doing so, I have proposed a critical reading of his hermeneutical phenomenology and shown how it can contribute to the formulation of a philosophical reflection attentive to hunger and eating as existential dimensions of human life. Ricœur’s work offers insights of hunger and eating that enable us to develop an interpretative existential philosophy of these key aspects of our being-in-the world as relational hungry and eating beings.

My interest was primarily focused on Ricœur’s phenomenology of embodiment as presenting relevant elements for a descriptive analysis of the hunger drive and the act of eating. I have drawn attention to these aspects as involved in the lived experience of human being as an incarnate cogito, that is, as a rela-

tional subject whose embodied experience is always and already in touch with the otherness of the world. By focusing on Ricœur's examination of the corporeal involuntary, I explained how hunger and eating relate to bodily needs, motives, and values, stemming from the spontaneous demands of life. In this context, hunger and eating arise as structured within the "double allegiance" of the human embodied condition (Ricœur 1992: 111): on the one hand hunger and eating are bound to the laws of the natural world, and on the other hand, these existential dimensions can be mastered through our limited freedom. Hunger and eating are, then, understood as structured through a series of dialectically related dualities, such as passivity and activity, identity and diversity. Ricœur's phenomenology of embodiment can be reinterpreted in the development of an existential philosophy of food, aiming at presenting hunger and eating as interrelated moments of our existence characterized as a mixture between the involuntary bodily functions and the voluntary adaptation to them.

The phenomenological-existential analysis of hunger and eating has been further developed through the correlated interpretative reflection of these dimensions as experienced over time. Through the reconsideration of Ricœur's theory of narrative, I explored hunger and eating as involved within the dialectic between clock-time and stomach-time. Contrary to the modern perspective of human being as un-hungry mind, the reconquest of human being's integral experience forms the basis for the development of any philosophical approach to hunger and eating as existential dimensions embedded in our personal and collective experience of time. The possibility of a dialectical intertwining between clock time and stomach time, interpreted as the quantitative and the qualitative dimensions our experience of being hungry and eating, has led to the formulation of what I have called the gustatory time as a temporality situated in the shared worldhood of food.

Hunger and eating involve a back-and-forth movement from ourselves towards the world, i.e., a give-and-take between the flourishing of our lives and the circumstances within which our aspirations can be realized. Human being as a stomach-endowed being, that is, as *homo appetens*, is an effort and a desire to exist. This dynamic potency that expresses itself through hunger and eating, opens up to our existence as a creative recipe in which we project ourselves through the ongoing tension between circumstances and new gustatory imaginaries.

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