

Towards an aesthetic of intimacy

A contribution to the critique of Mikel Dufrenne

Carlos Bizarro Morais

Catholic University of Portugal
Centre for Philosophical and Humanistic Studies

1. Across the works of philosopher Mikel Dufrenne, the category of *intimacy* occurs reasonably often – especially in *Phénoménologie de l'Expérience Esthétique*¹ and in the three tomes of *Esthétique et Philosophie*² –, almost always as a way to heighten the attributes of reciprocity, sharing, close friendship and communion of feelings which shape the bond between spectator and aesthetical object or artwork at the core of the aesthetic experience.

In this sense, *intimacy* is a reticular concept, interchangeable with “profoundness”, “interiority”, “connaturality”. Hence, the aesthetic experience is, in a way, a zenith of intimacy, a paradigm of “intimate life”, namely, the moment where spectator, artist and the work disrobe and reveal themselves – in other words, when they mutually share the complicit removal of the veils concealing them.

However, contrary to what such openness could suggest, the intimacy experienced herein does not designate a secret event, not even a private slice of the above actors’ *hidden* life. Intimacy is not placed in the domain of “intimism”, of particular affection, which a certain psychoanalysis tends to highlight. Mikel Dufrenne is keen to warn us against this possible misunderstanding – writing about the evocative and expressive power of a work of art’s originary speech, he asks us not to see it as a token private affair: «Do not believe that this speech voices its author and that, for example, it reveals its ghosts: the true work is not a symptom and should not be treated as such; J. F. Lyo-

1. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*. Tome I: L'objet esthétique. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953.

2. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I, II, III. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 1976, 1981.

tard illustrated this quite well»³. Converting intimacy into a pretext or grounds for a clinic, psychoanalytic function is of no interest to Mikel Dufrenne, as it corrupts the very aesthetic process. Otherwise, art would be no more than a therapeutic instrument for artist and spectator, a mere opportunity to mentally diagnose both, leading to the loss of the most pertinent meaning of its profundity⁴.

In this interpretative context, we intend, first and foremost, to consider the theoretical implications of Mikel Dufrenne's proposal about the theme of intimacy. We also intend to demonstrate that, by shielding the category of intimacy from the quite frequent risks of instrumentalisation, intimacy becomes available to assist in renovating the meaning of overarching phenomenological themes, such as intentionality and constitution. We also aim at illustrating how the aesthetic experience is a naturally intimate relationship, bestowing it with an ontological dimension from the very beginning. Following on this interpretation, quite beyond what the author made explicit, we wish to contribute to the proper critical appraisal of the thought of one of the greatest aesthetic philosophers since the second half of the 20th century: Mikel Dufrenne.

2. We will begin by exploring this issue in the context of the discussion on intentionality and aesthetic experience. Dufrenne changed the concept of intentionality by determining that this category can only properly qualify the relational experience – intimacy only achieves true meaning as part of a relationship, as no one is intimate to oneself but rather to someone else –, which the aesthetic experience allows a glimpse at if it encompasses the “common substract” between subject and object/work. A common substract, originary *Urstoff* which the true *a priori* of aesthetics is deeply rooted in; to wit, the affective qualities that, even though experienced by the spectator subject and which shape the existence of the artwork, seem to be pre-existing to both subject and object, endowing them and being generously shared between them. Let us take particular notice of this topic, since it is the cornerstone of this essay on intimacy: the philosophical reasoning, via phenomenology, that utmost intimacy resides in the sharing of the affective qualities unveiled by the aesthetic experience, and which «comprise specific *a priori(s)*»⁵.

3. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome II. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1976, 166.

4. Cf. Dufrenne, Mikel. “Le beau”. In C. Grégory (dir.), *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Éditeur à Paris, Vol. 3, 1977: 486 b.

5. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 60.

Hence, the intentionality that operates in the aesthetic experience provides us with the evidence that “something” of an affective nature is previously present across the entire relationship between a subject and an object; a foundational feeling, a structural intuition of *Es gibt*, that ‘something is’, ‘something exists’. “Something” which is experienced in a relationship of originary indistinction, a community life of sorts, a form of immediacy. We say “indistinction” because it precedes all ontological and epistemological dualisms, something truly «prior to explicit, formal divisions between “what is is”, “what is known or desired” and “one who knows or desires”»; even though these three elements are clearly *present* already and more or less conscious in its indistinction.»⁶ In other words, what is “given” is certainly so *thanks to a “feeling”* implying it *appears* to someone. Thus, «the conscience of *to appear* also occurs as a *conscience of a feeling of unity or union* – all of it spontaneously.»⁷ Only when systematic reflection takes place – combined with the process of rationalisation via the exercise of understanding – will the multiple planes integrated in the whole of the originary relationship of this “something prior” be distinguished from one another:

- the plane of *to appear*, of “existing as something”
- the plane of *conscience* to whom it appears as such: subjectivity
- the plane of the correlation between cognizant subject and its object.

But what is the true relationship meaning of this link between intentionality and the experience’s *a priori*? And what does it tell us about intimacy? Consider: if the affective qualities aesthetically experienced are previously present in the spectator subject (receiver, reader, creator), similarly to the artwork (aesthetic object, expressive object), the mutual openness from one to the other is then assured: «the relationship between subject and object presupposes not only that the subject is opened to the object or transcends into it, but also that something of the object is present in the subject prior to the entire experience and that, in turn, something of the subject belongs to the object’s structure prior to any project of the subject.»⁸

Summing up: if intentionality shows us the originary communication between subject and object, something in common must exist as the ultimate foundation of such communication; this is the very *a priori*, the *substratum* that both share. Hence, communication lies in the fact that both subject and object carry the *a priori* which, while keeping their specificities, they share and interact with at the same structure of

6. *Ibidem.*

7. *Ibidem.*

8. *Ibidem.*

aestheticity.

This point is of particular interest to us in order to shed a different light onto the issue of intimacy, since it establishes that the intentional analysis is in no way unidimensional, as occurred in traditional phenomenological versions; its starting position can either be the subject or the object, as both find themselves at the same convergence point of the *affective a priori*⁹. That is to say, the relationship of intentionality between subject and object accepts reversibility of movement. Starting from one or the other, it is always strictly noetic-noematic, excluding any primacy or seniority from whatever side of experience.

This means that the movement of affinity or intentionality from both subject-to-object and object-to-subject empowers the work of art with the ability to immerse the spectator into a «different world, completely unlike the objective world the spectator is placed in»¹⁰, which surprisingly allows it to appear as if endowed with the «virtue of a to-itself» or, as Dufrenne likes to say, allows it to emerge as “a quasi-subject”¹¹.

This is crucial to predicate intimacy not only as a characterising property of the aesthetic experience, but also as its actual realisation. As mentioned above, the category of intimacy designates a mode of relationship. This implies an alterity “in synch”, that is, a subjectivity in deep communion of feeling, as when one states: «I’m close with so and so». It thus becomes “sine qua non” that such alterity is something substantially different from a mere “thing”. It would be odd – quite odd in fact – that the vivification of our affective structures under the aesthetic experience would amount to an asymmetric “me-this” or “me-thing” relationship, without the true alterity of subjectivity. Mikel Dufrenne wards off such “thing-esque” danger from the artwork by reasoning it as an “analogon” of the animated subject; more precisely, a “quasi-subject”.

This focus prompts us to advance an hypothesis which, while not sufficiently explicit in Dufrenne’s thought, we find truly genuine: the aesthetic experience as a relationship of intimacy takes on additional meaning when analysed under a set of ontological references, namely an ontological aesthetic.

Let us outline it.

3. Dufrenne assigns the «aesthetic object’s in-itself a “to itself”

9. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome II. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1976, 29.

10. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 58.

11. *Ibidem*.

which realises its assumption and elevates it into a “quasi-subject”¹². It is true that Dufrenne gets to liken the aesthetic object to a being with body and soul, matter and shape: «the meaning expressed (by the aesthetic object) towards it is the shape of its body: a soul answering to ours, requesting it, “grabbing our soul and calling it on (forcing it) to love”»¹³ By revealing the object to us as its own “world”, gifted with a sensible-affective structure, we can establish with this object, this work, an empathic, intersubjective relationship, in every way analogous to the one developed at an interpersonal level, as equated by A. Pinotti¹⁴.

Under this conception of aesthetic object, important links can be made to the ontological rehabilitation of the sensible brought about by Merleau-Ponty and V. Basch’s theory of empathy. In contrast, it is not surprising that following on the doctrine of M. Dufrenne’s “quasi-subject”, many other authors expanded on this process of the artwork’s “antropomorphic” autonomisation, as seen, with some radicalism, among Murielle Gagnebin’s research, which reinstates the work’s autonomy, proposing to «acquire it as a *psychic functioning in itself*». The work becomes an instance-*person* assuming a *drama*, where a simultaneously psychic and morphologic game converge and which is the origin of every artistic happening. More specifically: the psychic conflict which generates creation is transferred from the domain of the author’s personality deep into the work’s heart, turning it into an individual being: «I place this conflict *inside* the work, definitely seen as a *living creature*. An organised *individual*, possessing a precise psychic structure, the artwork behaves, in my view, as a *person* with fortune (a fate), a destiny even»¹⁵. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, when referring to M. Dufrenne’s concept of a work as a “in-itself-to-us” or “quasi-subject”, considered that, although such a concept was not rigorously phenomenological, «it glimpses at an ontology between rationalism and personalism (the two opposite ends of existentialism), and encourages metaphysical perspectives»¹⁶.

The above extrapolations help us understand the virtualities of the doctrine put forward by Mikel Dufrenne, especially regarding the

12. Giovannageli, Daniel. *Écriture et répétition - Approche de Derrida*, Paris: U.G.E., 1979, p. 85.

13. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, p. 58.

14. Quoted by Carbone, Mauro. “Carne.” *Aut aut*, 304 (2001): 114.

15. Gagnebin, Murielle. *Du divan à l’écran. Montages cinématographiques, montages interprétatifs*. Paris: PUF, 1999, 20, 36.

16. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, Guido. *L’Esthétique Contemporaine. Une enquête*. Transl. by Marcelle B. Serre, Milan: Marzorati, 1960, 465.

anthropological and ontological potential of the aesthetic object as a “quasi-subject”, as posited in *La notion d’a priori*.¹⁷

The status of this “quasi-subject” provides it with an expressive *potency*, likening it to a subjectivity while still remaining a fabricated reality or a natural product¹⁸. This ability of the work to manifest a “quasi-subject”, to express its inside *by showing it as is*, is turned into something of an indelible heritage passed down from the human being who created it¹⁹.

The close affinity at play between the being of the quasi-subject and the spectator is something already on the threshold of an ardent affective relationship, as it allows us to «listen to the language of the aesthetic object, read the expression informing it», leading us to «plunge deeper into its intimacy.»²⁰ Dufrenne emphasises this passing into into the aesthetic object’s inner space as a very singular process of knowledge – not just knowledge mediated by understanding, but rather a co-birth, as so aptly evoked by the French language: «connaître, ici c’est vraiment co-naître»²¹.

We refer to the aesthetic object as a “quasi-subject” because it is endowed with affective-sentimental expressiveness: a “quasi” which «underlines the anthropological capacity of the work and how it was built, which shows the dialogue, which places it at the end of a genesis of meaning radicated in the aesthetic, which would rather underline the infinite in terms of presence (...) than in terms of “nothing”», as pointed out by phenomenologist Elio Franzini²².

In the view of Gianni Vattimo, Dufrenne’s concept of “quasi-subject” allows us to understand Heidegger’s notion of an artwork as “openness in the world”, as an “other” offering me an interpretation of the world which I see as a call I should face: «A “quasi-subject” is an “object” which finds itself in the world and will not let itself be regarded as a pure object. A work of art is a vision on the world, not a piece of the world. A novel, a painting, a symphony are not mere things adding to each other; they always contain the call to reinterpret the

17. Cf. Dufrenne, Mikel, *La notion d’a priori*, Paris: PUF, 1959, 219.

18. Golaszewska, Maria. “La conception du quasi-sujet chez Mikel Dufrenne”. *Revue d’Esthétique* 21 (1992): 195-196.

19. Cf. Barcia González, Javier. “La condición expresiva del objeto estético. Una reflexión en torno a Mikel Dufrenne.” *Taula, quaderns de pensament* 38 (2004): 258.

20. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 58.

21. *Ibidem*.

22. Franzini, Elio. *Il mito di Leonardo. Sulla fenomenologia della creazione artistica*, Milano: Unicolti, 1987, 366.

world somehow»²³.

The relationship of intimacy arises from accepting this provocation, with subject and object mutually challenging each other to a game where each shall be revealed through the other. The evidence is in the fact that conscience and object transcendently co-imply themselves in a reciprocal assembly of feeling. Indeed, none of them is offered fully ready and finalised, but actually as the offspring of the «act common both to the person who feels and to what is felt»²⁴ – an expression which became paradigmatic in the work of Dufrenne. Subject and object are, at once, mutually forged and differentiated in this common act which still confounds them – where their co-birth presupposes their connaturality. «Flesh on flesh, they are one single flesh, and in this flesh a subtle movement of dehiscence is what leads it to appear.»²⁵

We are thus immersed in an aesthetic experience retaking us to the originary event, the moment when something – to feel and be felt, body and shape – arrives in the time and place where «the flesh of the world trembles and turns at once sensible and sentient so as to be felt: so that something appears to become image»²⁶. A movement of “apparition”, whereby the background is revealed into figure. Such intimate life is witness to the unfathomable depth, the dynamism of Nature expressed into what emerges as sensible and felt.

It then becomes clear that the intimacy of the aesthetic experience invites us to also redefine the notion of “constitution”, refocused on this point where object and subject merge and co-determine themselves; and where consequently the subject is not so immediately “constituting” and sovereign, as is often the purpose of other sorts of experiences. The “constitution” occurring here happens in the subject as a movement away from itself and into the object’s other, «where it will not find itself unless it loses itself, where it will not possess itself unless being taken possession of»²⁷. Maximum complicity, just like man and woman see themselves «in the intimacy of a common act where the frontiers of individuality are experienced.»²⁸ At such involvement

23. Vattimo, Gianni. “Poesia e ontologia” / Interviste, Enciclopedia Multimediale delle Scienze Filosofiche - URL: <http://www.emsf.rai.it/interviste/interviste.asp?d=157> (20/06/1996); URL: <http://www.filosofico.net/intervistavattimo.htm#n2> (25/02/2019).

24. Dufrenne, Mikel. “Phénoménologie et esthétique” *Anal. Husserliana* 5 (1976): 243-244. E también Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 56.

25. Dufrenne, Mikel. “Phénoménologie et esthétique” *Anal. Husserliana* 5 (1976): 244.

26. *Ibidem*.

27. *Ibidem*.

28. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck,

stage, the constituting activity does not lie in producing or determining meaning, but rather in welcoming it, for it has been offered deep from within the vital pact established between subject and object. This activity is no longer subsidiary to a formal subject or an “otherness” seen as a separate, transcendent instance. It is the expression of a concrete totality, of a being in the world, incarnated in the flux of temporality. Essentially, an intimacy which no longer staggers along the idealism of the traditional phenomenological constitution, since it «discovers a subject deeply submerged in a primal world to which it grants an ordinary pact.»²⁹

4. Having thus explained the conditions and meaning of an aesthetic experience under the rubric of intimacy, it becomes key to look into its breadth. Given the structure and processuality of the aesthetic livingness, one wonders: is this an intimate relationship on the whole or just part of it? Is there any moment from which one can presume the intensification of the aesthetic attitude, of the work’s perception or its «iconic increase»³⁰, legitimising the aesthetic experience as a relationship of intimacy? This question is truly relevant, all the more so given that Mikel Dufrenne completed a very detailed explanation on the aesthetic experience’s own dynamism for three core moments: the moment of presence, the moment of representation and, lastly, the moment of feeling. Do they all follow the same pattern of intimacy or simply a few of them? Will some of them be more auspicious to this state of livingness? We are not aware that the author ever wondered about such matter, but we consider it of utmost importance, especially because it makes it possible to illustrate the originality of the author’s plausible theoretical view.

As such, let us posit the following hermeneutical hypothesis: if the aesthetic experience is a triadic, increasingly complex process, it would stand to reason that its “modus intimus” only occurred at a very advanced stage, eventually as a final, climatic “acmé” of the whole process... In our view, this is not Mikel Dufrenne’s aesthetic option. On the contrary, we are led to believe that the aesthetic experience is, from its most inchoative moment and already at the minimum threshold of significance, fully soaked in the co-relationship of intimacy explained

1967, 61.

29. Dufrenne, Mikel. “El arte” in Bottomore, Tom (coord.). *Interdisciplinarietà y ciencias humanas*, trad. de Jesús G. Pérez Martín, Madrid: Editorial Tecnos-Unesco, 1983, 270.

30. Ricoeur, Paul. *La critique et la conviction. Entretien avec F. Azouvi, M. de Launay*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995, 267.

above. Namely, we intend to sustain the thesis that the aesthetic experience is, from its very first moment of *presence*, a wholly intimate experience.

5. We will now lay out how Mikel Dufrenne asserts, in truly original fashion, this intimate sharing of “to be” and “to be felt” which unites subject and object under a relationship of *presence* – phenomenologically, the first moment of the aesthetic experience.

Dufrenne conceives the aesthetic experience as a *sui generis* relationship between the object (artwork) and the subject (spectator, receiver, reader) who perceives it. A relationship where each participant prepares the other while simultaneously presupposing it. Hence, the aesthetic object prepares perception at the same time it presupposes it by creating the conditions required by perception to realise it, while implicitly recognising it as the instance it itself will realise its existence as an aesthetic object. In other words, the aesthetic object “behaves” as if it was already “aware” that the activity of such perception is crucial to its own realisation, justification and legitimation as an aesthetic object. In turn, aesthetic perception readies itself for the aesthetic object it always presupposes, lending it its best attention and assuming an attitude of deferential recognition, knowing that without its presence’s prior calling, perception would turn out to be nothing but pure fantasy. Likewise, perception also “behaves” as if it was previously aware that it does not possess absolute, sovereign constituting power over the object, but rather the knowledge that it exists to answer the object’s requirements³¹. This experience thus emerges as a whole, a complex unitary phenomenon, comprised of the co-implication between the multiple facets of the subject’s livingness and the corresponding scopes of the aesthetic object.

As the term suggests, the first moment’s presence is defined by being present to an object, with no interposition of conceptual schemes. This relationship is a straight match to the immediate direct acquisition of this sensitive presence endowed with meaning. This way of livingness matches the most pressing call addressed by the object of *aisthesis* to the spectator: establishing a no-distance relationship, treating it as something with the same idiosyncrasy belonging to the same nature.

This is in truth an encounter-based relationship corresponding to the ideal of a pure proximity relationship grounded on purely immediate contact, as part of an almost physical, organic relationship with the object. Being under the presence carries the following connotation: to

31. Cf. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953, 419.

simply be present to the sensitive object calling to me, as I am, opening myself to it without the enclosures often cloaking us, with no concern other than to attend. This is why I do not worry about empowering myself with knowledge, wisdom, information, but simply becoming available and open to the meaning offered by this sensible.

It is via the subtle and extremely sensitive skin membrane that this exchange and reciprocity takes place, unmediated between subject and object. This is a «covering for the individual and a place of exchange between him and the medium; it is deep because it wears the profound and puts it in contact with the outside.»³² The skin is «the juncture between the bottom of the body and the bottom of the world.»³³

The first recognition of this common emergence from the same depths is described by Dufrenne as the happening par excellence, the first time one is before things, in complete intimacy: «moment of the immediate, of a proximity wedging no distance, where no mediation intervenes between what appears and whom it appears to. (...) moment of the contact with the originary (...) going back to what is a return to the source.»³⁴

It is certainly difficult to conceive a relationship of pure immediacy, as the human being almost always interacts with the world under multiple mediations – language, institutions, culture. Such constructs all make us distrust the possibilities of an originary experience. Is it not true that we are so often splintered, fractured, chiseled by the logic of dualisms, of dichotomies interfering with our relationship with the world, preventing us from a direct relationship with things? These mediations prejudice us and create idols... Dufrenne does not deny these circumstances, but admits and argues for an experience prior to the birth of these mediations, a direct, “per contact”³⁵ experience. In his last work, Dufrenne posits the same question precisely: «It is in it [the sensible] that proof is made of the presence, though a presence still without distance, where contact is driven to fusion (...). This immediacy does not support any mediation, or, rather, any difference. A borderline situation, because the separation between subject and object is always initiated already. Only the aesthetic experience (...) can lead us closer

32. *Idem*, 90.

33. *Idem*, 91.

34. *Idem*, 91-92.

35. Similarly, compare this with the comment by Nel Rodríguez Rial: «nevertheless, he [Dufrenne] believes that, in the very root of everything that allows man to distance himself, there is an experience without distance». Rodríguez Rial, Nel. “Hacia as fontes da Natureza... A fenomenoloxía arqueolóxica de Mikel Dufrenne: do home a utopía” *Agora* 5 (1985):120.

to it and maybe awaken nostalgia.»³⁶

Evoking nostalgia is quite significant because it suggests the persistence of this memory – reactivated by the aesthetic experience – simultaneously happy and painful, – i.e., truly nostalgic – of the embryonic melding between the entity and the being, beyond any intellectual, sensory, existential, cosmological differentiation. It is this golden age, in its images of symbiosis of intrauterine life, of the paradisiac Eden of infancy, that art and the aesthetic experience wish to feel again, in order to usher us in an intimacy of the actors amongst themselves and the “horizons of the originary”.

Such statement should not be read as a mere anachronic attempt to preserve an existential state, more or less psychological, typical of childhood. As pointed out by Maryvonne Saison, this mythical reappraisal through the theme of Eden or golden age «is less about reuniting with the memory of a dateable, countable initial happiness than, from ghost to fiction, build the myth or utopia of unity-totality and symbiosis»³⁷. A “wild” reinvention of an archetypal unity in constant realisation is what we gather from this experience of the presence. What draws us in is the call of the originary, a presence to the sensible within a zero-distance merging, even though only the duality of subject and object can in fact «be thought and lived.»³⁸

In the moment of the presence, perception does not resort to concepts, does not possess the judgement of understanding in its relationship with the sign nor any learning which guides it; it derives from an ancestral pact between man and world», it derives from a «perceptive faith»³⁹. Dufrenne provides an example: there are «certain significations which seem to be immediately understood under an immediate experience: children adapt to the world, understand the other’s gestures or language as soon as they are capable of certain behaviours and much earlier than repetition can elaborate and set stable associations»⁴⁰. Ob-

36. Dufrenne, Mikel. *L’œil et l’oreille*, Montréal: L’Hexagone, 1987, 71.

37. Saison, Maryvonne. “Le tournant esthétique de la phénoménologie” *Revue d’Esthétique* 36 (2000): 136. We thus understand the comment by Daniel Giovannangeli, when he invites us to see that in the heart of the whole of the presence’s symbiotic state there is hardly any place to an authentic founding alterity: «in the plane of the presence [...] faithfulness to the sensible forbids foundation in a transcendent alterity», leading to a «reflex towards perceptual immanence.» in *Écriture et répétition - Approche de Derrida*. Paris: U.G.E., 1979, 84-85.

38. Dufrenne, Mikel. *L’œil et l’oreille*, Montréal: L’Hexagone, 1987, 74.

39. Barilli, Renato. *Per un’estetica mondana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964, 271.

40. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953, 422. David Gordon Allen already questioned the plausibility of this sort of demand which Dufrenne assigns to certain meanings, allowing them to be immediately understood in the spontaneous contact with the object, requi-

viously, the rational and analytical elaboration of significations which can later be done will certainly require the subject to gradually move and grow away from the lived object. Still, it originally presupposes that primal encounter, the livingness of the primordial signification. As such, any and all deciphering of signs – scientific, logical, technical, semiological, psychoanalytic, etc. – can only be done if those signs were firstly lived in an intimate experience of signification.

The conviction that there is an immediate livingness granting us direct access to the intimacy of the meaning present in the aesthetic object, even «before the constituting relationship of signification has been understood and explained»⁴¹, is also reinforced by the psychology of form. Dufrenne reappraises it, identifying it with the «existential plane of perception where the presence is realised before the world»⁴², the platform for an «existential collusion of the body with the world»⁴³; it is the plane of the pure lived, prior to dualism, to representation, to a deciphering, intellectualist reading. Perception as a “presence” assumes things as realities penetrating directly into us, given that «there is no “screen” between them and us; they are from the same race as us»⁴⁴. We are thus at the most archetypal plane of intimacy, when the gesture still has not accessed the word nor feeling has accessed reflection. A plane, more precisely, of the pre-reflexive.

At this plane, significations come forward with the strength of their immediacy, suffused with need and urgency, determining an answer from the receiver, not of intellectual nature or abstract kind, but rather an answer rendered into a behaviour assumed by the body. Such affirmative power of the presence denotes the perceived object as something which shares the weight of an irrefusable nature or gravity, making it closer, more familiar than any other object.

Furthermore, pre-reflexive intimacy allows for the generation of chiasmatic complicities – I live the other’s life as my own and the other lives mine as theirs – «forming an object-subject totality where object and subject are still indiscernible»⁴⁵, completing *one* prior to its slicing

ring no prior experience, such as when a child understands the mother’s gestures or facial configurations as an expressing kindness, anger, sadness, etc. Cf.: “Aesthetic Perception in Mikel Dufrenne’s *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*” *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978): 63, nt. 9.

41. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953, 422.

42. *Ibidem*.

43. Taminaux, Jacques. “Notes sur une phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 55 (1957): 98.

44. Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953, 423.

45. *Idem*, 425.

into *two*. Consequently, its encounter assumes the shape of “absolute” and “totality”, for at this level the spectator is not only completely engaged, moving inward and even *lost* in the work to find himself therein, but the actual work also lives fully in the subject’s life. This is why we say there is no distinction between subject and object, between a present body and presence of meaning.

Concluding, as demonstrated, we consider that the first moment of the aesthetic experience can never be by synonym to a prolegomenon or antechamber of the profound relationship of intimacy. On the contrary, in it we find the crucial ambition of the aesthetic-artistic phenomenon already made explicit, which poses, in our view, the leit motiv of aesthetic intimacy in its fullness: to realise the perfect convergence of subject and object, desideratum of the intersubjective intimacy.

An exciting, meaningful desire, prompting our piercing eyes to look deep into the most intimate of the real, until it becomes one with it, free from emptiness, free from caesuras, free from cisions, into a parmenidian contiguous unit. But which can also transform into its own risk, its ambition, its phantasmatic denegation⁴⁶.

At heart, this aesthetic version of intimacy brings to light its own mysterious nature. And this is where its greatest philosphical interest resides.

46. The face and the reverse of this experience are subtly reflected in the texts of: Marc Le Bot. “D’une folie ordinaire” in *Mikel Dufrenne et les arts*, dir. de Maryvonne Saison, Paris: Université Paris X, 1998, 79. António Pedro Pita. *A experiência estética como experiência do mundo. A estética segundo Mikel Dufrenne*. Porto: Campo das Letras, 1999, 110.

REFERENCES

- Allen, David Gordon. "Aesthetic Perception in Mikel Dufrenne's *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*". *Philosophy Today*, 22 (1978): 50-64.
- Barcia González, Javier. "La condición expresiva del objeto estético. Una reflexión en torno a Mikel Dufrenne". *Taula, quaderns de pensament*, 38 (2004): 241-262.
- Barilli, Renato. *Per un'estetica mondana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964.
- Bot, Marc Le. "D'une folie ordinaire". In *Mikel Dufrenne et les arts*, dir. de Maryvonne Saison, 79-82. Paris: Université Paris X (Nanterre), 1998.
- Carbone, Mauro. "Carne". *Aut aut*, 304 (2001): 99-119.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*. Tome I: L'objet esthétique. Tome II: La perception. Paris: PUF, 1953.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. *La notion d'a priori*. Paris: PUF, 1959.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. "Phénoménologie et esthétique". *Analecta Husserliana*, 5 (1976): 241-246.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. "Le Beau". In *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, dir. générale Claude Grégory, 481-487. Éditeur à Paris, vol. 3, 1977.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. *Esthétique et Philosophie*. Tome I, II, III. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1967, 1976, 1981.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. "El arte". In *Interdisciplinarietà y ciencias humanas*, T. Bottomore (coord.), trad. de Jesús G. Pérez Martín, 266-279. Madrid: Editorial Tecnos-Unesco, 1983.
- Dufrenne, Mikel. *L'œil et l'oreille*. Montréal: L'Hexagone, 1987.
- Franzini, Elio. *Il mito di Leonardo. Sulla fenomenologia della creazione artistica*. Milano: Umicolpi, 1987.
- Gagnebin, Murielle. *Du divan à l'écran. Montages cinématographiques, montages interprétatifs*. Paris: PUF, 1999.
- Giovannageli, Daniel. *Écriture et répétition. Approche de Derrida*. Paris: U.G.E., 1979.
- Golaszewska, Maria. "La conception du quasi-sujet chez Mikel Dufrenne". *Revue d'Esthétique*, 21 (1992): 195-196.
- Morpurgo-Tagliabue, Guido. *L'Esthétique Contemporaine. Une enquête*. trad. par Marcelle B. Serre, Milan: Marzorati, 1960.
- Pita, António Pedro. *A experiência estética como experiência do mundo. A estética segundo Mikel Dufrenne*. Porto: Campo das Letras, 1999.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *La critique et la conviction. Entretien avec F. Azouvi, M. de Launay*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995.
- Rodríguez Rial, Nel. "Hacia as fontes da Natureza... A fenomenoloxía arqueolóxica de Mikel Dufrenne: do home a utopía". *Agora*, 5 (1985): 113-133.
- Saison, Maryvonne. «Le tournant esthétique de la phénoménologie». *Revue d'Esthétique*, 36 (2000): 125-140.
- Taminiaux, Jacques. "Notes sur une phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique". *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 55 (1957): 93-110
- Vattimo, Gianni. "Poesia e ontologia" / Interviste, *Enciclopedia Multimediale delle Scienze Filosofiche*. URL: <http://www.emsf.rai.it/interviste/interviste.asp?d=157> (20/06/1996) URL: <http://www.filosofico.net/intervistavattimo.htm#n2> (25/02/2019)