
INTERPRETATIONS

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***UN ART AUTRE: MIKEL DUFRENNE ON POLITICS AND ART
BOOK REVIEW: MIKEL DIFREN, UMJETNOST I POLITIKA,
[MIKEL DUFRENNE, ART ET POLITIQUE], TRANS. JUGANA
STOJANOVIĆ, SVJETLOST, SARAJEVO, 1982***

The opinion that there are always direct and/or indirect interrelations and an interweaving of politics and art does not always nor exclusively appear in times of social and political turmoil or great wars. This opinion has been strongly encouraged and widespread all over the political and cultural map of Europe for several centuries, and thus, no wonder, philosophers of the most diverse orientations in various time periods and contexts have chosen it as the subject of their works.

Mikel Louis Dufrenne (1910–1995), a French philosopher of phenomenological orientation, regardless of the events that marked the ideological, political and cultural ambiance of Europe in the late 1960s, published a book entitled *Umjetnost i politika (Art et politique)* in 1974.¹ Although written in the time of a highly specific social and political ‘vibe’, it almost seems that this book asked to be read again on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the First World War, but

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¹ Mikel Dufrenne, *Art et politique*, U.G.E., Paris, 1974; Mikel Difren, *Umjetnost i politika*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1982.

now offering a different view of the relationship between art and politics, still topical even today.

Mikel Dufrenne's book, on the one hand, problematizes art and politics as 'institutions' (whose individual structures are described through the notions such as status, personnel, norms, material, activities)² – the first chapter, *Umjetnost i politika kao institucije (Art et politique comme institutions)*, the second chapter, *Pojam institucije (La notion d'institution)*, the differences and similarities between them, the points of intersection and divergence, dualities and individualities, the submission of one to the other – the third chapter, *Šta je zajedničko dvjema institucijama (Ce qu'il y a de commun aux deux institutions)*, and the fourth chapter, *Veze između dvije institucije (Les relations entre les deux institutions)*, while on the other hand, thanks to introducing the concept of *other art (un art autre)* – which permeates almost all the chapters in the book, thus becoming the central concept of the entire study – it suggests possible processes of going beyond the bounds of the foregoing institutions and their 'final breakdown' – the fifth chapter, *Utopija (L'utopie)*; the sixth chapter, *Razbijanje institucija (L'éclatement des institutions)*; and the seventh chapter, *Utopija i utopizam (Utopie et utopisme)*.

Namely, according to Mikel Dufrenne's words, the notion of *other art* refers to art that leaves its ghetto, art that transcends its traditional meaning, i.e. that goes beyond the bounds of acknowledged institutionalized art – art which was chosen, accepted, rejected or offered as art by artists and *clerks*, representing the institutions through aesthetic, economic and political cooperation.³ As a *utopian practice par excellence*, art, in Mikel Dufrenne's opinion, can leave its imprint on the entire society, i.e. the society where imagination would rule (*l'imagination serait au pouvoir*) and which, consequently, could be regarded as a work of art.

² Institutions understood as departments of social reality, which make specialized practical work possible, form a separate reality. Bronisław Kasper Malinowski (1884–1992) used the foregoing concepts/elements to describe the structure of these institutions, based upon cultural anthropology, which Dufrenne himself considered indispensable in his intellectual development. Cf. Mikel Dufrenne, op. cit., 77; Marivon Sezon [Maryvonne Saison], "Mikel Dufrenne: Jedna neobična priča" [original title unavailable], Miško Šuvaković, Aleš Erjavec (eds.), *Figure u pokretu. Savremena zapadna estetika, filozofija i teorija umetnosti [Figures in Motion. Contemporary Western Aesthetics, Philosophy and Art Theory]*, Atoča, Belgrade, 2009, 399.

³ Cf. Miško Šuvaković, *Diskurzivna analiza. Prestupi i/ili pristupi 'diskurzivne analize' filozofiji, poetici, esteticima, teoriji i studijama umetnosti i kulture [Discursive analysis. Violations and/or approaches of 'discursive analysis' to philosophy, poetics, aesthetics, theory, art studies and cultural studies]*, Univerzitet umetnosti, Belgrade, 2006, 448–450.

However, ideology – as a concept referring to a relatively connected and determined set of ideas, symbolic representations, values, beliefs and ways of thinking, expressing, presenting and acting which are common to the members of social groups, the individuals in political parties, state institutions or social classes⁴ – is almost inextricably linked with art and politics, as well. Thus, it is essentially important for Dufrenne’s study, although it bears no positive influence on the author’s perception of the relationship between art and politics. Dufrenne comes to the conclusion that the term *ideology* can only and exclusively be connected with the ruling class, since *the oppressed have no ideology, theirs is utopia*. In the very distinctive fabric of his formulation, one recognizes the author’s wish to take the original human freedom of thought, action and creation in the world and have it ‘defended from ideology’, from ideological theatrics and formalizations, offering the idea about the regress to *pure experience* – experience that will not tolerate influences of ideology, in which one feels the presence of reality and Nature, which Dufrenne feels is the only possible origin of a creative movement from freedom, a utopian road from *the primeval to other world*, that is to say *other art*. In this *other world*, this *other art* would finally bring to life the experience of original perception, and thus create a naïve and original viewpoint, unencumbered by any ideology, the author opines. In that respect, Dufrenne continues, such art would have the *power* of liberation from all *future* ideologies, given that it is also “à la source, l’afficher avant de vraiment – à savoir, la réalité perçue, la convivialité originelle de l’homme et le monde, ce qui est exemptée de l’obligation de devenir immédiatement soumis au jugement – ce qui ne lui permet pas l’objet de la représentation” [“on the source, depicting what comes before truth – namely, the experienced reality, the primeval union of man and the world, that which is free of obligation to become immediately an object of judgment – which does not allow us to make it an object of representation”].⁵ Being at such a source, art can be perceived in two ways, in Dufrenne’s opinion: on the one hand, as the point of origin and the emergence process of art in the historical sense, and on the other, as the birthplace of *other* and *new art in the utopian practice* of ‘our’ time. The first way of perceiving art speaks, in fact, about the source or primordial source of art as discovering the primeval (*l’originnaire*), discovering the *primeval union of man and the world*, pre-real, pre-objective experience of reality stemming from Nature as the basis, all this as an expression of an entire human community, as a popular expression in a *festivity (fête)* which encourages social changes, questions all

⁴ Cf. Miško Šuvaković, “Ideologija” [“Ideology”], *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti [Glossary of Art Theory]*, Orion Art, Belgrade, 2011, 319–321.

⁵ Mikel Dufrenne, *Art et politique*, op. cit., 104–105.

the values of cultural life and reveals the natural side to human survival, which culture conceals and covers.⁶ What is unexpected here, and yet so important, is that Dufrenne establishes a relation between discovering the primeval in the original art and the *utopian action* which defines the *new art*, and which is popular all the same, i.e. it transcends the boundaries of the institutionalized art of class society.⁷ Advocating the fellowship in *utopian action* (*action utopique*) – joint thinking, joint knowing, joint feeling as the essence of the popular – Dufrenne recognized the incentive (*anime*) for changes in society and the world, as well as the changes in art and politics as independent institutions under the ruling ideology. Thus, the author, precisely at this point, introduces the notion of revolution which is no longer a strictly political concept and which is valid in the domain of politics as an independent institution. On the contrary – now revised, the notion of revolution becomes, or rather, should become *the matter of life, of free action concerning the culture in its entirety*, which makes it possible to speak of *cultural revolution*. This means that the *new practice*, both as *utopian* and as *revolutionary*, includes not only art and politics, but all the other institutions as well, i.e. the whole of social and cultural life, opening the doors for the *other world*. In order to reach this other/changed world through other art, it is necessary, Dufrenne stresses, to resort to a completely specific type of organization – self-management. However, although self-management turns out to be the solution to the puzzle that is the relationship between art and politics, the author warns that it should not be understood only as a matter of social, political and economic organization, but on the contrary, as self-management that on the broadest democratic basis leads to the self-assertion of man's creative being, which is productive both in the natural and the cultural domains. And right now we come to the central concept of not only this book of Dufrenne's, but of his entire phenomenological thought, and that is *aesthetic experience*, defined as *metaphysical experience*.⁸ “Ono aktuelizuje vraćanje (*remontrée*) bića u svetu ka izvornom, ka drugom biću subjekta, odnosno ka osnovi koja u sprezi sa mogućnostima ‘rađa’ jedan *drugi/novi svet*” [“It actualizes the reappearance (*remontrée*) of the being in the world towards the original, the other being of the subject, i.e. towards the basis which, operating together with possibilities, ‘gives birth’ to the *other/new world*”].⁹ *Aesthetic experience* is an original experience

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 185.

⁷ Cf. Milan Damnjanović, “Za drugu umetnost u promenjenom svetu” (Predgovor) [“For other art in a changed world” (Foreword)], in: Mikel Dufrenne, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁸ More details in: Mikel Dufrenne, *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*, P. U. F., Paris, 1953; Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973.

⁹ Cf. Milan Damnjanović, “Estetičareve oči i uši” [“Aesthetician's Eyes and Ears”], in:

which precedes the separation into a subject and an object – the primeval experience of the world – and Dufrenne recognizes this original totality in Nature as an *aesthetically* available totality, primordial both in terms of time and being, as what is sensual, intuitive and emotional in a broad sense.¹⁰ And precisely this *aesthetically* available totality, i.e. Nature, guarantees the revolution, while “metafizika sa svoje strane ponovo nalazi s politikom i podstiče je; jer taj drugi svet, koji se može predosetiti iz *estetskog iskustva*, treba unapređivati [...] Ono što se u svakom slučaju može ostvariti iz tog sveta [...] jeste *utopijska akcija* [...] I ono što smo imenovali za umetnost u najširem značenju te reči je upravo utopijska praksa *par excellence*, i možda čak istina filozofije” [“metaphysics, in turn, meets politics and encourages it; because this other world, which can be intimated from an *aesthetic experience*, needs to be improved [...] At any rate, what can be realized from this world [...] is a *utopian action* [...] And what we called art in the broadest possible sense of the word is precisely a utopian practice *par excellence*, and maybe even the truth of philosophy”].¹¹

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

Mikel Difren, *Oko i uho* [Mikel Dufrenne, *L'œil et l'oreille*], Glas, Banja Luka, 1989, 13.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 14–15.

¹¹ Cf. Mikel Dufrenne, “Introduction: Les métamorphoses de l’esthétique”, *Esthétique et philosophie*, II, Klincksieck, Paris, 1976, 48. Quoted after: Milan Damnjanović, “Za drugu umetnost u promenjenom svetu” (Predgovor) [“For other art in a changed world” (Foreword)], in: Mikel Difren, *Umjetnost i politika*, op. cit., 24.

