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TWO OPPOSING VISIONS OF ART**

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET AND MARÍA ZAMBRANO

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Abstract: Art occupies a large place in the work of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) and María Zambrano (1904-1991). Both philosophers devote a large part of their written reflections to it, but their ideological differences and their dissimilar conceptions of politics and the role that the intellectual should play in it lead them to think of it in opposite ways. The former admires the "new art" of the first two decades of the twentieth century for its ability to divide society between an elite capable of understanding it and a mass that abhors it, as well as for its return to what, for him, should constitute the essential principles of art—de-realisation, dehumanisation, autonomy, purity—which nineteenth-century art forgets. The latter, on the other hand, criticises the disappearance of the human and the destruction of the forms operated by avant-garde art and defends a rehumanisation that recovers the existential function that, for her, corresponds to all art: to serve as a mirror for human life to see itself. This article sets out to compare these two positions by means of a comparative analysis of *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), the fundamental essay for understanding Ortega's aesthetics, and *La destrucción de las formas* (1944), the essay in which Zambrano responds to the artistic questions posed by her mentor.

Keywords: José Ortega y Gasset, María Zambrano, Art, Derealisation, Dehumanisation, Avant-garde.

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THE DEHUMANIZATION OF ART: JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

Attentive to the latest developments taking place outside of Spain in virtually every field of knowledge—from philosophy and psychology to biology and physics, as evidenced by the wide range of topics he wrote about and the extensive knowledge he demonstrated—José Ortega y Gasset was naturally also interested in the trends emerging in the art of his time. He dedicated a substantial portion of his writings to this topic throughout

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almost his entire intellectual career.¹ The most representative essay of Ortega's aesthetics or theory of art, which marks its centennial next year, is undoubtedly *The Dehumanization of Art*, published in 1925, a pivotal date for the rise of "new art"² or avant-garde art in Spain.³

However, Ortega's essay is not a reflection on the various artistic forms generated by the avant-garde, nor is it a description of the differences between them. He does not discuss specific artworks, and he himself states that in writing *The Dehumanization of Art*, he aims to "seek the meaning of the new artistic intentions," that is, the philosophical foundation underlying this new art, rather than creating a theory or critique of the art itself (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 876). According to Antonio Gutiérrez Pozo, the "philosophical will for openness and intellectual tolerance, which leads him to

¹Although *The Dehumanization of Art* is the essay that has gained the most prominence among Ortega y Gasset's works dedicated to art, the ideas it develops are already present in earlier texts, such as *Renán* (1909), *Adam in Paradise* (1910), *Meditations on Quixote* (1914), *Essay in Aesthetics as a Prologue* (1914), *Musicalia* (1921), *Meditation on the Frame* (1921), *Artistic Apathy* (1921), *The Theme of Our Time* (1923), *On the Point of View in the Arts* (1924), *Ideas on the Novel* (1925), *Art in Present and Past* (1925), and *Truth is Not Simple* (1926). Ortega continued refining these ideas in other writings on art, such as *The Idea of Theater* (1946), *Goya* (1946), and *Velázquez* (1943–1954) (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2012b: 1–2).

On the other hand, Ortega addresses art for various reasons: at times he appeals to a particular author (*Calling for a Goethe from Within*), a specific work of art (*The "Gioconda"*), or everyday situations (*Aesthetics on the Tram*). In other instances, he delves more deeply into aesthetics (*Essay in Aesthetics as a Prologue*) and art itself, as is the case with *The Dehumanization of Art* (Esteve Martín, 2018: 73).

²Although Ortega y Gasset does not make it entirely clear which artistic movements he includes under the term "new art," Antonio Gutiérrez Pozo, a professor of Aesthetics and Philosophy at the University of Seville, argues that the Madrid philosopher is essentially referring to avant-garde art from the first decades of the 20th century when he wrote the essay, although he also extends the label to artists such as Debussy, Mallarmé, or Verlaine, who do not fall within the avant-garde movements (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2012b: 1–2).

³1925 marks a decisive moment for the phenomenon of the avant-garde in Spain, not only due to the publication of *The Dehumanization of Art* as a unified essay—after it had appeared in the form of articles in the newspaper *El Sol* throughout 1924—but also because of the *First Exhibition of the Society of Iberian Artists* held at the Retiro Palace in Madrid. This exhibition featured prominent artists such as Rafael Barradas, Alberto Sánchez, Salvador Dalí, Ángel Ferrant, José Gutiérrez Solana, Benjamín Palencia, and Ucelay, among others. The exhibition was accompanied by the publication of a catalog and a series of lectures, in which Ortega y Gasset participated. He reflected on these contributions in *Art in Present and Past* (1925).

Additionally, in 1925, Rafael Alberti's *Marinero en tierra* and Gerardo Diego's *Versos humanos* were awarded the National Poetry Prize. Manuel de Falla composed *Concerto for Harpsichord*, and Guillermo de Torre published *European Avant-Garde Literatures*, a book described by Alejo Carpentier as "a kind of bible" for understanding the European avant-garde in Spain (Nieto Yusta, 2007/2008: 285–286).

constantly engage in reflective dialogue with contemporary issues,”⁴ drives Ortega to contemplate this novel artistic experience. In Ortega’s own words, “the purpose of this essay is merely to identify the new art through some of its distinctive traits” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 870). His goal, on the one hand, is to reveal the general essence of art, and on the other, to discern the role it plays in contemporary societies.

As may be seen in this first section, Ortega y Gasset interprets the artistic revolution taking place in the first two decades of the 20th century through the lens of his sociological theory, as he is primarily interested in the new social sensibility it produces. In fact, the Madrid philosopher begins his essay by citing the French author Jean-Marie Guyau, who wrote *The Art from the Sociological Perspective* (1888). Ortega describes Guyau as “brilliant” for paving a path that, despite initially seeming “sterile”—since “to approach art through its social effects is much like pulling a radish by the leaves or studying a man by his shadow”—proves fruitful and useful for Ortega himself in distinguishing between traditional and new art (ibid.: 847). In the essay *Musicalia*, found in Volume III of *El Espectador*, Ortega addresses the new era of music—which for him begins with Debussy. In *The Dehumanization of Art*, he intends to “speak more generally and refer to all the arts that still have some vigor in Europe; therefore, alongside new music, new painting, new poetry, and new theater” (ibid.). Ortega maintains that all artistic manifestations of a given era share the same aesthetic values and, consequently, produce the same sociological effects.

The study of art from a social perspective gained special relevance in the 19th century, owing to the emergence of a new factor in understanding, evaluating, and conceiving art: the audience. The “first form of democratization in the reception of artworks,” as Valeriano Bozal puts it, began with the appearance of the Salons in France. This development also marked the start of modern aesthetics, making it possible to categorize art as either popular or unpopular based on its reception by the masses.⁵ From Ortega y Gasset’s

⁴Antonio Gutiérrez Pozo and José Luis Villacañas use the term “phenomenology” to describe the philosophical approach Ortega y Gasset adopts toward art in this essay (Cf. Gutiérrez Pozo, 2012a,b; Villacañas Berlanga, 2024).

⁵The full quote is reproduced here: “Los salones fueron una institución real y continuaron siéndolo a lo largo del siglo XVIII; pero produjeron efectos que desbordan esos límites. [...] el salón crea un público que disfruta contemplando y valorando las obras expuestas, público que tiene acceso a lo que antes sólo era privilegio cortesano. El salón difunde las tendencias y propone gustos, excita el juicio y promueve tanto la información como la crítica. En una palabra, aunque de una forma inicialmente tímida, el salón constituye la primera forma de

sociological point of view, what characterizes the new art of the early 20th century is its unpopularity: “All young art is unpopular, and not by chance or accident, but by virtue of an essential destiny” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 848).

Far from viewing this negatively, Ortega appreciates the new art created by young artists⁶ precisely because it divides society into two opposing groups: on one side, a select and cultured minority capable of appreciating the originality and artistic relevance of the avant-garde; on the other side, the “formless mass of the crowd,” which rejects it because it is unable to understand it or see itself reflected in its images (*ibid.*). In other words, “the characteristic feature of the new art, ‘from a sociological perspective,’ is that, far from uniting society or providing a common set of recognizable images, it “divides the audience into two kinds of people: those who understand it and those who do not” (*ibid.*: 849).

As José Luis Villacañas notes, for Ortega, new art:

No longer adhered to any educational program, common sense formation, or the need to foster a moral community. In reality, new art had departed from that old program of mediation toward a new morality. Now art did not aspire to create community. It still projected itself onto social life but did so by creating social fractures rather than unity. [...] The community, now abandoned to the form of the masses, responded to this eruption of the artist’s personal freedom with a certain hostility (Villacañas Berlanga, 2024: 29).

Throughout his essay, Ortega is critical of 19th-century art, primarily romantic and naturalistic, not so much because it was popular but because it minimized strictly aesthetic elements, reducing the work to a mere imitation of human realities. Hence, both romanticism and naturalism share their “common realist root” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 852). Realism, then, is the

democratización de las obras de arte, en claro paralelismo con lo que sucedía con el teatro dieciochesco y las restantes prácticas artísticas” (Bozal, ed., 2000: 22).

⁶Ortega speaks of the new art as an art championed by the young, which shakes, or seeks to shake, the convictions of the old: “¿Por qué han de tener siempre hoy la razón los viejos contra los jóvenes, siendo así que el mañana da siempre la razón a los jóvenes contra los viejos?” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 860). By “viejos,” he must be referring to those who, like Antonio Machado or Miguel de Unamuno, belonging to the Generation of ’98, condemn pure poetry, while by “jóvenes,” he may be referring to those who, like Dámaso Alonso or Jorge Guillén, are renewing poetry. However, these figures would eventually renounce their initial principles.

According to María Luisa Maillard, this shift, carried out by some of the poets of ’27 who had developed a pure poetics in their youth, in line with the principles defended by Ortega y Gasset, is due to the influence of none other than Antonio Machado. At that time, Machado was producing poetry entirely opposed to that advocated by the Madrid philosopher, and with which María Zambrano would also find herself more closely aligned (Maillard, 2004: 102).

fundamental characteristic Ortega attributes to 19th-century art, an art that encourages the artist “to obediently follow the form of things, [...] to have no style,” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 860) and that, in *The Dehumanization of Art*, is reduced to the status of “mere mimetic representation, whether of objects or feelings” (Maillard, 2004: 104).

Moreover, Ortega opposes not only realist art, but also the idea of the inherent realism of Spanish cultural and artistic expressions — a notion widely accepted since the late 19th century by the Generation of '98, and later embraced by María Zambrano, as will be seen in the next section. Ortega harshly criticizes the supposed inherent realism of Spanish art: “It has been decreed that Spaniards have been realists [...] and, what’s even worse, that Spaniards must be realists, as if by force.” He views realism as “a lack of invention, a lack of love for form, poetry, and sentimental reverberations.” Thus, any realism, as mere imitation of the real, limits the artist’s imagination and is, “in all its letters, the negation of art” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004: 142, 145). For Ortega, “Spanish realism is one of the many vague terms we have used to cover the gaps of exact ideas in our minds,” and therefore, “it would be of great importance for a young Spaniard knowledgeable in these matters to take on the task of correcting this common notion that closes off the horizon like a gray wall to the aspirations of our artists” (ibid.: 144–145). It is no surprise, then, that Ortega celebrates the steps taken by young Spanish artists, who are breaking away from the realism of 19th-century art and giving rise to an art that, despite its unpopularity, represents a return to the unreality that, for the philosopher, must be the foundation of art.

When, in *Meditation on the Frame* (1921), Ortega describes the artwork as if it were an “imaginary island floating, surrounded by reality on all sides,”⁷ he defines it by its unreal character: art should not imitate reality, as 19th-century romantic and naturalist novels and paintings do. Instead, it should derealize itself, escape from reality, rely on itself, and play with its own resources to create something new, something that did not previously exist in reality. It is precisely this unreality, this virtuality, this fiction,

⁷The full quote is reproduced here: “El cuadro, como la poesía o la música, como toda obra de arte, es una abertura de irrealidad que se abre mágicamente en nuestro contorno real. Cuando miro esta gris pared doméstica mi actitud es forzosamente de un utilitarismo visual. Cuando miro el cuadro ingreso en un recinto imaginario y adopto una actitud de pura contemplación. Son, pues, pared y cuadro dos mundos antagónicos y sin comunicación. De lo real a lo irreal, el espíritu da un brinco como de la vigilia al sueño. Es la obra de arte una isla imaginaria que flota rodeada de realidad por todas partes” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004: 434).

that differentiates art, constitutes its essence, and makes it art rather than reality: “Life is one thing, poetry another [...]. Let’s not mix them. The poet begins where the man ends. The man’s destiny is to live his human journey; the poet’s mission is to invent what does not exist” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 864). Ortega separates life from art; art should not serve life, but should depart from it to illuminate something different. As Maillard explains:

From his earliest aesthetic reflections, Ortega separates art from the time proper to life. Art does not occupy a decisive place in the structure of human life, due to its imaginary nature that makes it a pause or respite from the seriousness of living (Maillard, 2004: 116).

Therefore, when Ortega speaks of “artistic art” or “pure art”—although he doubts whether totally pure art devoid of the human is even possible⁸—he refers to that which progressively eliminates “the human, all-too-human elements that dominated in romantic and naturalist production. This process reaches a point where the human content of the work is so minimal that it is almost invisible” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 852–853). The young artists Ortega refers to dehumanize their creations by omitting or directly removing human figures or allusions to everyday life—what Ortega calls “lived reality (*la realidad vivida*)” (Nieto Yusta, 2007/2008: 289)—which are elements that enable an emotional connection with the artwork. This is why, among the various terms he uses throughout his essay to define the new art—derealized, autonomous, pure—Ortega chooses “dehumanized” for the title, as it best captures the distinguishing feature of the avant-garde: “the new sensibility is dominated by a disgust for the human in art, similar to the aversion that the refined person has always felt toward wax figures” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 862). This new approach provides the spectator with a novel way of engaging with the artwork, one not based on recognizing human forms and emotions within it:

The art we speak of is not only inhuman because it contains no human elements, but because it actively engages in the operation of dehumanizing. In its flight from the human, it cares less about where it arrives, the heteroclitic fauna it ends up depicting, than where it departs from, the human aspect it destroys. It’s not about painting something entirely unlike a man, or a house, or a mountain, but about painting a man that resembles a man as little as possible, a house that retains only what is strictly necessary to witness its metamorphosis, a cone miraculously

⁸“Un cuadro, una poesía donde no quedase resto alguno de las formas vividas, serían ininteligibles, es decir, no serían nada, como nada sería un discurso donde a cada palabra se le hubiese extirpado su significación habitual” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 856).

emerging from what once was a mountain, like a snake shedding its skin. The aesthetic pleasure for the new artist emanates from this triumph over the human; hence, it is necessary to concretize this victory and present in each case the strangled victim (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 859. State Duma First Convocation).

Thus, the nascent art of the 20th century recovers the essence that Ortega believes should define all art, which is not mimesis but rather unreality. This explains why, while romanticism — “which for the philosopher was par excellence the popular style” — is directed at everyone, as it seeks to reflect the vicissitudes of everyday life so that the public can see themselves in it, the new art, with its playful character, its tendency toward abstraction, and its departure from the reality of life, irritates the masses because they are incapable of understanding it. When one does not understand something, they feel “humiliated, with a vague awareness of their inferiority that needs to be compensated by indignantly asserting themselves against the work” (ibid.: 849). According to Ortega, this is because the masses confuse the true artistic enjoyment that art should provide, which has nothing to do with “rejoicing or suffering with the human destinies that the artwork might relate or present”:

People enjoy a drama when they manage to get interested in the human destinies proposed to them. The loves, hatreds, sorrows, and joys of the characters move their hearts: they take part in them as if they were real-life cases. And they say that the work is “good” when it succeeds in producing the necessary amount of illusion so that the imaginary characters seem like living people. In lyric poetry, they seek the loves and sorrows of the man pulsating behind the poet. In painting, they are only attracted by images where they find figures of men and women with whom it would, in some sense, be interesting to live. A landscape painting seems “pretty” to them when the real landscape it represents would be worthy of visiting for its pleasantness or pathos (ibid.: 850–851).

For Ortega, appealing to the emotions of the spectator “is to take advantage of a noble weakness in man, which makes him prone to the contagion of another’s sorrow or joy,” a contagion that “is not spiritual in nature but a mechanical repercussion, like the teeth-on-edge sensation caused by the scraping of a knife on glass” (ibid.: 861). Art interests the masses when it connects them “with interesting human things,” and not when the human element disappears from the work and is replaced by purely aesthetic elements that leave them unsure how to react because they do not understand them (ibid.: 851). The true artistic pleasure, which the masses are unable to experience, does not lie for Ortega in empathizing

with the fates of the characters in novels, symphonies, or paintings; rather, it must be an “intelligent pleasure” derived from contemplation, reserved for a select, educated minority:

Seeing is an action at a distance. Each of the arts uses a projector apparatus that distances and transfigures things. On its magical screen, we contemplate them as exiled, as tenants of an unapproachable star, absolutely distant. When this derealization is absent, a fatal hesitation occurs: we do not know whether to live the things or to contemplate them (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 861–862).

Although Ortega insists that he does not intend “to extol this new kind of art, much less denigrate the kind practiced in the last century,” it is evident that avant-garde art fits perfectly with his elitist view of society, even if, as Villacañas points out, it does not entirely align with his attempt to reconcile reason and life.⁹ He himself admits, “The particular directions of young art interest me moderately, and except for a few exceptions, individual works interest me even less” (ibid.: 857). His admiration for new art is based on what it says and demonstrates about society, aligning with his vision of it. For Ortega, society must be divided between the “egregious” and the “vulgar”; new art allows us to distinguish between them, as the former are attracted to it because they can understand it, while the latter reject it because they feel humiliated. This distinction, which Constanza Nieto Yusta aptly describes as “classist” (Nieto Yusta, 2007/2008:

⁹José Luis Villacañas asks whether this process of dehumanization and disdain for living forms implies, in turn, a process of devitalization, and therefore, whether Ortega might be contradicting himself by defending a new art that does not place life, radical reality, at its center:

“¿Cómo avanzar en el proceso de deshumanización sin avanzar hacia un proceso de desvitalización, de enfriamiento de la vida? Y si el arte nuevo deshumanizaba y desvitalizaba, ¿no avanzaba hacia una trivialización? Puede que aquella invitación a habitar en el arte como en un arrecife imaginario fuera algo diferente de una “huida del mundo”, un “afán de evitar la realidad”, ¿pero no se evitaba también la realidad de la vida? [...] Ortega dudó [...] entre un arte de inteligencia objetiva y un arte vinculado a la vida. Sin embargo, sólo un arte vinculado a la vida era orgánico con la época y, lo que todavía era más importante, con el principio de su filosofía. Así que se vio obligado a desplegar sus análisis para intentar mediar con una explicación. [...] Resultaba complicado relacionar los fenómenos del nuevo arte con la vida, pero algo parecía iluminarse cuando se relacionaba con la vida histórica”.

In any case, Ortega “no podía sentirse cómodo con sus reflexiones finales ni con el estado que su filosofía había conquistado en 1925. Sus valoraciones del propio escrito son certeramente cautas. ‘Ilustre causalidad’ llamó a la probabilidad de que su análisis fuera acertado. [...] En todo caso, el resultado más poderoso de este escrito de *La deshumanización del arte* reside en la apuesta por la intelectualización del arte y su dependencia de la idea” (Villacañas Berlanga, 2024: 35–40).

296–298), differentiates between an intelligent, minority spectator capable of obtaining true aesthetic pleasure and a “contagious” spectator who derives emotional pleasure through identification with what they see. This division is directly related to the social theory that Ortega y Gasset presents in *The Revolt of the Masses*, whose key points are already anticipated in *The Dehumanization of Art*:

The time is coming when society, from politics to art, will once again be organized, as it should be, into two orders or ranks: that of the egregious men and that of the vulgar men. All of Europe’s discontent will eventually converge and be cured in this new and saving division. The undifferentiated, chaotic, formless unity, without anatomical structure, without governing discipline, in which we have lived for the last 150 years, cannot continue. Beneath all contemporary life beats a deep and irritating injustice: the false assumption of real equality among men (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 849–850).

This point, as will be seen in the next section, is what leads María Zambrano, from ideological standpoints very different from those of her mentor, to distance herself from Ortega y Gasset’s vision of art as presented in *The Dehumanization of Art*, a vision that has been succinctly outlined up to this point.

THE REHUMANIZATION OF ART: MARÍA ZAMBRANO

María Zambrano is thoroughly familiar with Ortega y Gasset’s stance on art, as evidenced by her reference to the work analyzed in the previous section: “Among the most lucid insights, perhaps at a late hour (a point too far along the process), is the admirable essay *The Dehumanization of Art* by Ortega y Gasset” (Zambrano, 2016: 380). Although Zambrano engaged with Ortega’s philosophy throughout her intellectual career — using it as a foundation to develop her own — when it comes to art, her response is most clearly articulated in *The Destruction of Forms*, published in 1944 and included at the end of her essay *The Agony of Europe* (1945). Before delving into this analysis, it is important to outline the points of convergence and divergence between Zambrano and Ortega during her time as his disciple.

Zambrano first met her mentor in an examination board in 1926. However, it was not until a year later, when she began her doctoral studies, that she established more direct contact with him. At Ortega’s invitation, she regularly attended the gatherings of the *Revista de Occidente*, joined the circles of Ortega’s followers, and became his assistant in the Metaphysics

department at the Central University of Madrid. Their intellectual relationship developed throughout the 1920s and 1930s—a relationship that, as Beatriz Caballero Rodríguez has shown, was by no means reciprocal¹⁰—until it ended definitively shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, due to their irreconcilable ideological differences.¹¹ Despite this painful rift, which left Zambrano deeply disappointed in Ortega¹², his influence can still be seen in several aspects of her philosophy: the idea that life is the fundamental reality of the human being; the need to propose a new, broader and less arrogant form of reason than the exhausted modern rationality, one that transcends the limitations imposed by rationalism on the subject's understanding of the external reality and of themselves; and a concern with the problem of Spain from a political, social, and historical perspective (Caballero Rodríguez, 2020: 72–73).

It is in this last point where the differences between Ortega's and Zambrano's thoughts are most pronounced and where we can find the key to understanding their divergent views on art. For Ortega, the intellectual, as a member of the cultured elite distinguished from the masses—among other things, by their ability to appreciate new art—should guide the nation's destiny through a program of social pedagogy. In this regard, Ortega's political action is, as Caballero Rodríguez describes, “more ideological and

¹⁰The significance of Ortega y Gasset's mentorship for Zambrano has not only been widely studied from various perspectives—in this article, the approach is from the point of view of art—but is also consistently acknowledged by the philosopher herself, who considered herself a “disciple” of Ortega until the end of her life. In 1987, she stated, “he sentido siempre como mi maestro y seguirá siempre sintiéndolo” (Zambrano, 2014: 720).

Caballero Rodríguez, however, questions the potential influence that the young María Zambrano may have had on Ortega y Gasset and concludes that, despite her efforts to influence him, particularly regarding his political actions, there is no evidence of either direct or progressive influence, despite the closeness and persistence of the thinker. This persistence was expressed in letters in which Zambrano urged Ortega to do more for the political future of Spain (Cf. Caballero Rodríguez, 2020: 71–86).

¹¹Antolín Sánchez Cuervo points out that both Ortega and Zambrano originate from liberalism, but from distinct forms of liberalism. Ortega's liberalism is moderate, quickly disillusioned with the republican project, and increasingly leaning toward conservatism, to the point of accepting authoritarian positions and even engaging in alliances with fascism, more circumstantial than ideological. Zambrano's liberalism, on the other hand, is vaguely utopian, somewhat naive, resistant to the logic of capital, and close to non-Marxist socialism, unequivocally republican, and radicalized during the war under the umbrella of the Communist Party (Sánchez Cuervo, 2017: 65).

¹²See, in this regard, the article *A los que callaron*, published in 1940, in which María Zambrano described the silence of Azorín or Ortega y Gasset as “aterrador” and exasperating for “los que no callamos” (Zambrano, 2014: 259).

conceptual than practical and tactical, more pedagogical and enlightened than executive or governmental.”¹³ Zambrano, on the other hand, from a young age advocated for a more decisive engagement of intellectuals with the problems of the social majority, which is why she criticized the “mature” generation’s rejection of a more practical and leftist political approach.¹⁴ In a letter dated February 11, 1930, she urged Ortega to become more involved in the Spanish politics of the time:

History cannot be made from above, from the vantage point of reason; only those beneath history can one day become its creative agents. And in this — I believe — we differ, our generation from yours, if we are to be anything, which I sometimes doubt. Our joy lies in feeling ourselves as instruments, aspiring only to have a mission within something that envelops us: the historical moment. It pains me deeply to see your disengagement at this moment, Mr. Ortega y Gasset. [...] You must and can do more; your mission with Spain is greater.¹⁵

As we can see, Zambrano felt that she belonged to a generation more politically engaged with its time — a generation she often referred to as “of the bull” for its sacrifice during the war in defense of the Republican regime.¹⁶ Unlike the bourgeois and elitist intellectual Ortega, this generation

¹³That program of social pedagogy that Ortega considers part of his mission as an intellectual is expressed not only in his philosophical work but also in the multitude of press articles he publishes — some of them, such as *El error Berenguer* (November 15, 1930) or *Rectificación de la República* (a speech delivered on December 6, 1931), have a significant impact on the political course of the country — and in the founding of the *Agrupación al Servicio de la República*, through which he served as a deputy in the Constituent Cortes of the Second Republic from July 1931 to July 1932. His disappointment with the new republican regime led to his definitive withdrawal from politics (Caballero Rodríguez, 2020: 75, 79).

¹⁴Ana Bundgård points out that the intellectuals of the generations prior to Zambrano, while never completely disengaged from politics, were more concerned with safeguarding their individuality and freedom of thought than with political commitment, as “eran disidentes, despreciaban la política [...]. Manifestaban voluntad de intervenir en la vida pública desde una posición separada [...]. Se sentían élite frente a la masa [...]. Compartían la voluntad de regenerar a España, pero rechazaban cualquier tipo de organización comunitaria que fuera en detrimento de la ‘egolatría’ individualista que les hacía reconocibles para el público lector” (Bundgård, 2009: 28–29).

¹⁵Carta de María Zambrano a José Ortega y Gasset, 11 de febrero de 1930 (Zambrano, 1991: 15).

¹⁶In the *Carta al doctor Marañón*, perhaps the text that best expresses the distance Zambrano perceived between her generation and Ortega’s, the philosopher argues that the time had come “la hora que ellos no querían ver. La hora que los jóvenes sí veíamos, por la sencilla razón de que la sentíamos. Íbamos a ser la generación del toro, del sacrificado. Ellos, no. Ellos no se sentían sacrificados. [...] Para ellos, se diría que todo era espectáculo: estaban sentados, aunque no fueran a los toros, siempre en la barrera. A salvo, viendo” (Zambrano, 2014: 731–732).

shared a profound sense of unity with the Spanish people, as evidenced by the involvement of many of its members, including Zambrano herself, in the Pedagogical Missions and other cultural, educational, and modernizing activities of the Second Republic, with which they strongly identified. Zambrano did not see herself as an intellectual above the people, needing to guide them from the clarity of philosophy rather than through political action, as Ortega did. Instead, she saw herself as an intellectual *for* the people, in close contact and full communication with them. This is why philosophy and politics appear closely intertwined at the beginning of her intellectual career.

This different conception of politics is reflected in their contrasting views on art: if Ortega, as explained earlier, advocated for the “dehumanization” of art, Zambrano, in contrast, championed its “rehumanization,” in line with the ideas expressed by the writer and journalist José Díaz Fernández in *The New Romanticism* (1930), where he speaks of the “rehumanization of the arts” and calls for “art for life, not life for art.”¹⁷ Although Díaz Fernández argued that art should not be dictated by a specific ideology, he believed that the artist could never “remain indifferent to the conflicts of individual or collective struggle, nor to human reactions within social life” (Díaz Fernández, 1985: 25). Similarly, Zambrano, like most of her contemporaries — many of whom were part of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals Alliance formed right after the military coup of July 18, 1936 — advocated for a socially engaged art, one committed to moral values as opposed to the escapism of pure, autonomous avant-garde art.

Zambrano thus calls for a realist art, one that is grounded in reality rather than distanced from it. Contrary to her mentor, who harshly criticized the idea of Spanish realism, the Andalusian philosopher aligns with Unamuno,

¹⁷José Díaz Fernández advocates for a return to the human as a fundamental distinction of an advanced literature that adapts to the new sensibilities of the present time and reflects the conflicts that have polarized the human soul. One of these is the commitment to history to construct a new morality, a new way of living, a new art, and a new literature that abandons the vague and imprecise conception of abstract ideals and instead expresses the unwavering reality of a new order of things, which literature and art must affirm and strengthen. For this, what is needed, ultimately, is a new romanticism, an art for life and not a life for art:

“Europa ya no puede más de cansancio, de escepticismo y de desconcierto. Dicen que el alma no puede vivir sin una religión. Nosotros, hijos del siglo más científico y mecanizado, hemos extirpado quizá toda clase de mitos y simbolismos; pero no podemos vivir sólo para esto, para esto tan breve, tan personal, tan egoísta y tan efímero. Necesitamos vivir para el más allá. No para el más allá del mundo, puesto que no es posible creer en una tierra detrás de las estrellas, sino para el más allá del tiempo. Es decir: necesitamos vivir para la historia, para las generaciones venideras. Los mejores espíritus de nuestra época preconizan para hacerse cargo de esta responsabilidad histórica” (Díaz Fernández, 1985: 56–57).

Machado, and the Generation of '98 in rejecting the pure and sophisticated art of the avant-garde and defending the inherent realism of Spanish art, a notion she would develop further in her essay *Thought and Poetry in Spanish Life* (1939). For Zambrano, this realism is not the 19th-century realism criticized by Ortega for its reliance on mimesis, but rather a mode of being in the world and knowing it, which she considers distinctive of Spanish cultural tradition — a form of knowledge she contrasts with European rationalism. Unlike the violence of rationalism, Spanish realism, as a loving understanding of the world, preserves the multiplicity of being and does not reduce all reality to mere concepts:

The voracity of love, the hunger for presence and real, “material” form — if the term may be allowed — characterizes love and distinguishes it from the mere hunger for scientific knowledge. In its exclusive focus on the figure, love aids knowledge and has the capacity to forge an idea (Zambrano, 2018: 524).

From this perspective of Spanish poetic realism, Zambrano advocates for a return to form in art, as forms represent the necessary limits that reality imposes on any idealism — a final stage of human divinization that forgets its limits (Maillard, 2004: 100). The destruction of forms that defines new art, for her, is the most evident sign of the dehumanization of contemporary societies, caused by the exhaustion of modern reason, which, in its ultimate development as idealism, cannot answer the existential questions that art can illuminate. Thus, if Ortega calls on the poet and artist to detach from life, Zambrano urges them to remain close to it, for all poetry and art are born from life's need to express and reveal itself in form: “Something serious was happening at the place where the need for expression is born, that is, in life, the root of art” (Zambrano, 2016: 380).

What art must do, then, is to connect the human being with a transcendent and creative truth. This is why Zambrano is not particularly interested in the artist's freedom or the expression of their personality in a specific artistic style. For her, the artist is not someone who creates an image of themselves but rather “a medium of visibility where reality can settle, reveal itself, and breathe” (Zambrano, 2019: 303). She criticizes much of the new art that “throws the artist's ‘I’ in our faces,” seeking nothing more than to “demonstrate that this ‘I’ exists” (ibid.: 286). For Zambrano, the importance of art lies in the truth it communicates, not in the intellectual pleasure provoked by aesthetic contemplation, as Ortega maintains. However, Zambrano believes that the art of the early 20th century can no longer

satisfy this need, as it has, like rationalist philosophy itself, distanced itself from the human.

Zambrano seems to share her teacher's view that all the arts of an era reflect the same aesthetic values when she states:

It was evident and seemed unstoppable—a will to destruction that encompassed all the arts and therefore could not stem from aesthetic demands. The evolution of art could have led to a certain exhaustion of forms in some of the arts; but the unanimity with which all came to the meeting forces one to think that this goes beyond what is commonly understood as aesthetic. [...] The human face, the face of mankind, and the face with which humanity saw itself, gazing into its reassuring mirror, was disappearing. Art, both of the figure and the word, ceased to fulfill this function of balance and appeasement that had been tacitly entrusted to it for so many centuries; it renounced being the medicine, remedy, and comforting stimulus. For the first time, it was, to the extreme, unsettling, sometimes even depressing (Zambrano, 2016: 380)¹⁸.

This passage from *La destrucción de las formas* (1944) perfectly captures Zambrano's sentiment regarding the exiled and dehumanized art so admired by Ortega. For Zambrano, it is an expression of the eclipse of the human caused by rationalism and idealism. These expand humanity's conceptual and scientific apparatus, turning everything into "content of consciousness" and internalizing the external and sensible world. Yet, they impoverish human experience, as feeling and life escape concepts and can only be expressed poetically through art (Sánchez Meca, 2009: 88). However, not through art such as that of the avant-garde, which destroys forms—"the human form, of course, being the first"—immersing the subject in unbearable hermeticism and losing its role as a medium of visibility for the human. Zambrano thus experiences *Nostalgia de la tierra* (1933), as she titles another of her early articles on art. In it, she addresses "the crossroads of so-called modern art," an art detached from the material, de-realized, where bodies no longer have weight in space, becoming "a diabolical world of rootless bodies, of men without land. Inhospitable, uninhabited, dehumanized space. Dehumanized art is nothing but exiled art" (Zambrano, 2019: 174).

The destruction of forms that characterizes avant-garde art, transformed into art for art's sake, thus causes it to lose its capacity as a mirror of human

¹⁸Zambrano had not yet written about cinema in 1944 when she penned *La destrucción de las formas*. However, a few years later, when she wrote her first article specifically focused on cinema, titled *El realismo del cine italiano* (1952), she would state that cinema had always shown from its beginnings a "vocación de fijar la cara de lo humano" and that it is the complete opposite of the art-for-art's-sake approach defended by Ortega (Zambrano, 1995: 300).

life. If, for María Zambrano, the face is the result of deciding to be a person, the inability of this exiled art to forge it represents a loss of knowledge about the human soul, which she believes must be the ultimate goal of all art (Pardo Salgado, 2011: 27–28). In this way, Zambrano confronts her teacher and ultimately advocates for the rehumanization of art, a return to the human, so that the person can find the truths their life needs to move forward — truths that neither rationalism nor idealism can provide.

CONCLUSIONS

José Ortega y Gasset and María Zambrano agree that the new artistic sensibility emerging in the early decades of the 20th century is characterized by a “disgust for the human in art” and that contemporary artistic creations exhibit a “flight from the human figure” (Ortega y Gasset, 2005: 962). However, for Ortega, “this preoccupation with the human element in the work is, fundamentally, incompatible with the strict aesthetic function” (ibid.: 851), which should dominate the contemplation of the artwork. In contrast, for Zambrano, this process of dehumanization distances art from its true root, which is to satisfy life’s inherent need to express itself. While Ortega believes that the purpose of young art is to enable the elite minority to recognize themselves as such and to learn their mission — to guide the masses — Zambrano argues that new art has forgotten its existential role, which is to provide vital truths to its audience — not only to the elite, but also to the masses — and to contribute to the transformation of society.

Thus, although Zambrano’s entire philosophy owes much, particularly in its early stages, to Ortega’s thought, when it comes to art, she aligns more closely with the Generation of ’98 and their conception of Spanish culture as essentially realist, as well as with José Díaz Fernández and his contemporaries in advocating for an art that is subordinate to reality, aiming to reveal and transform it. The opposing visions that Ortega and Zambrano develop regarding art are rooted in their differing views on the commitment an intellectual should have to the society they live in and their increasingly divergent ideological positions.

In summary, if Ortega defines the essence of art — found in new art — by its anti-romanticism, its unpopularity, its purity, its unreality or autonomy from reality, its disregard for human forms and emotions, its lack of transcendence, and its dehumanization, Zambrano, in contrast, advocates for a romantic, popular, realist art, grounded in human life, transcendent, and rehumanized.

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ДВЕ ПРОТИВОПОЛОЖНЫЕ КОНЦЕПЦИИ ИСКУССТВА

ХОСЕ ОРТЕГА-И-ГАССЕТ И МАРИЯ ЗАМБРАНО

Получено: 18.08.2024. Рецензировано: 06.11.2024. Принято: 24.11.2024.

Аннотация: Искусство занимает значительное место в творчестве Хосе Ортеги-и-Гассета (1883–1955) и Марии Замбрано (1904–1991). Оба философа уделяют большое внимание размышлениям об искусстве в своих трудах, но их идеологические различия и различные представления о политике и роли интеллектуала в ней приводят к тому, что они рассматривают искусство противоположным образом. Первый восхищается «новым искусством» первых двух десятилетий XX века за его способность разделять общество на элиту, способную понять его, и массу, которая его отвергает, а также за его возвращение к тем принципам, которые, по его мнению, должны составлять сущность искусства: дереализация, де-гуманизация, автономность, чистота, — принципы, забытые искусством XIX века. Вторая, напротив, критикует исчезновение человеческого и разрушение форм, вызванное авангардным искусством, и выступает за ре-гуманизацию, которая восстановит экзистенциальную функцию, присущую, по ее мнению, любому искусству: быть зеркалом, в котором человеческая жизнь может увидеть себя. В данной статье проводится сравнительный анализ двух позиций, основывающихся на эссе «Дегуманизация искусства» (1925), ключевом для понимания эстетики Ортеги, и «Разрушение форм» (1944), эссе, в котором Замбрано отвечает на художественные вопросы, поставленные ее учителем.

Ключевые слова: Хосе Ортега-и-Гассет, Мария Замбрано, искусство, дереализация, дегуманизация, авангард.

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