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The Philosophy of Ortega y Gasset Reevaluated

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things and a clarity of deep things, there is a clarity proper to impressions, and a clarity that signifies the calm spiritual possession of things (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 788). As Ortega states in the first pages of the "Preliminary Meditation" of the *Meditaciones del Quijote*, the depths of the forest surrounding the Escorial Monastery are no less clear than its borders, which can be seen before entering it; but the depths will gain clarity only if I have entered them, having previously developed the organ of sight capable of perceiving them. Ortega calls "culture" this clarity of vision. Culture is not life or its depths. But—in the nice expression that Ortega uses—it is the commentary on life, not in the sense of something accessory to it, but as life itself led to its fullness.

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1 Introduction

An attentive reading of Ortega's essay production easily leads us to conclude that art and aesthetics are vital components of his philosophical system. For the Spanish thinker, there is an intrinsic link between philosophy and art, given the need for philosophy, as radical knowledge, to comprehend all forms of human activity and creativity: science, morals, aesthetics, and religion. In fact, his writings on art and aesthetics must be understood in the light of philosophical, phenomenological, and anthropological principles that underpin his historical and vital reasons (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2000; Molinuevo, 1984; Villacanas, 2004; Morón Arroyo, 1968).

As a thinker in search of his own method and as an intellectual committed to national regeneration, Ortega worked solidly from his youth on reflecting on and searching for solutions to the problems of Spain, which he believed, mainly in his first phase, to reside in Europeanization (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c). To accomplish this purpose, Ortega builds a humanizing program of culture, which progressively completes itself in accordance with the evolution of his dialectical thinking and the modern currents of his time, between Neokantianism in the early years and Husserlian phenomenology in his intellectual affirmation and consolidation phases, between 1912 and 1955. Influenced by Edmund Husserl on the need to look for the truth as a vital imperative and for the evidence of facts; driven by Heidegger's concept of life as authentic existence; and moved by the Platonic idea of recognition with a view to the implementation of a national regeneration project, Ortega focuses on social reality, looking deeply at Spain as "a problem to solve, a duty to accomplish" ("Un problema a resolver, una tarea a cumplir, un edificio a levantar: esto es patria") (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b: 340). Seeking to understand the "vital sensibility" of his time (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 562), Ortega assigns his generation the task of bridging centuries in order to better prepare the following one to fulfill Spain, as expressed in the following sentence: "España es una cosa que hay que hacer. Y es

una cosa muy difícil de hacer. Ya es difícil querer hacerla; pero, aún logrado esto, queda íntegra la suprema dificultad: saber hacerla" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004g: 605).

Ortega's thinking is profoundly humanistic, focused on the problem of life, understood as a drama that impels humans to action, in "eagerness to live" ("afán de vivir"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004x: 768). His ratio-vitalist humanism contains an ethics of intention, insofar as he conceives life as a radical reality, as a task or project to accomplish, and appeals to the fidelity of one's circumstance, in which each person will have to save their own life, filling it with dignifying occupations such as culture and art. Struggling for a balance between oneself and one's reality, Ortega's philosophy takes art as a manifestation of human creativity, mirroring a particular historical time in which each generation lives its executive reality. Life is therefore at the center of Ortega's metaphysics, the approach of which is undertaken through aesthetics, because it is focused on intuition and feeling as basic manifestations of life.

In the wake of Husserl, Ortega seeks to understand phenomena, moving toward the existentialist phenomenology that Heidegger will portray in *Being and Time* (1927), given the need to understand humankind in the existential, circumstantial world. Bearing this reference in mind, Ortega revises significant historical, political, and philosophical milestones in order to understand the phenomena and challenges of his time. Placing humanity in its chronological course and focused on the problem of Spain, Ortega gives attention to the "historical substance," fluid and dynamic, as the "intimate sensibility of each people in transformation" ("sensibilidad íntima de cada pueblo [...] en transformación"; Ortega y Gasset, 1990: 70). Transformation, grounded on "national vitalities" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004j: 718), through moral and cultural improvement raises the Spanish people's political, cultural, and artistic awareness (Ortega y Gasset, 1990: 23). Ortega advocates the establishment of a pedagogical science that ensures the intellectual and aesthetic means necessary for human growth (Ortega y Gasset, 1990: 44): "Politics has become for us social pedagogy and the Spanish problem a pedagogical one" ("La política se ha hecho para nosotros pedagogía social y el problema español un problema pedagógico" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004n: 97).

Along with new political thinking, Ortega aims to create a Spanish cultural system bearing on artistic manifestations of all forms: literature and the visual and performing arts. Under the influence of Neokantian idealism, particularly Cohen's tripartite philosophical system based on logics (reason), ethics, and aesthetics (Heis, 2018; Orringen, 1979), Ortega has meditated since his youth on the faculty of judging the work of art through sensation or sensibility and comprehension or understanding,¹⁹ as he declares in an attempt to look for its definition: "Art is a fact that happens in our soul when we see a painting or read a book" ("El arte es un

hecho que acontece en nuestra alma al ver un cuadro o leer un libro," Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 894). Sensation is at the level of the consciousness, which leads to awareness and ultimately reaches knowledge ("consciencia equivale a sensibilidad, capacidad para darse cuenta, conocimiento"; Ortega y Gasset, 1990: 22).

Aesthetics had already been one of the key concepts of the Generation of '98, by creating a Spanish philosophical style through pictorial narrative texts (Molinuovo, 1997). Nevertheless, demarcating himself from the aesthetic model followed by the previous generation, which he considers pessimistic and therefore of "negative sensitivity," Ortega assumes the mission, as a member of the Generation of '14, to bring a "new sensitivity" to the Spanish cultural milieu, faithful to the present and able to respond to the challenges of modern times (Molinuovo, 1997: 157).

After his contact with phenomenology around 1911–1912 (Morujão, 2018; García Nuño, 2014), it becomes clear to Ortega that art and aesthetics have an ontological-political dimension, aiming at saving social and cultural phenomena (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2001: 142). This idea of salvation is associated both with the Hegelian concept of overcoming limitations (*Aufhebung*) and with the Platonic idea of salvation to create a new concept of saving one's self and one's circumstance, as the Spanish thinker emphasizes in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914). Ortega progressively leaves the Neokantian school, which has in culture the object of its transcendental method, to embrace historical reason, turning the transcendental into the relative (Heis, 2018). On the other hand, art is raised to a universal metaphor, used to free the spectator of art from concrete reality. Music, painting, and literature (in its lyrical and narrative modes), as well as the stylistic resources of metaphor and irony, become the object of careful and critical analysis. Culture—be it art, science or politics—comes to be seen as an interpretation of life (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 237), rooted in the concrete facts of people's lives, allowing an understanding of the reality around us. Claiming the right to an integral human culture, Ortega imposes culture as a task, endowed with "scientific seriousness and social justice" (Ortega y Gasset, 1990: 37). Ortegaian cultural theory means clarity and sensibility in solidarity. It is therefore dynamic, in constant change, since new scientific theories replace the previous ones.

For all the abovementioned reasons and given the number of essays that the Spanish thinker devotes throughout his life to this innermost matter, we clearly realize that art and aesthetics have a vital relevance in Ortega's thinking, reflecting the new artistic trends in effervescence in the first and second decades of the twentieth century. Affirming on several occasions that he does not consider himself an expert in aesthetics or any particular artistic form, whether poetry, music, or painting, Ortega produces pertinent and innovative studies that prove to be invaluable contributions to the understanding of artistic creativity. His critical essays on art follow the philosophical and aesthetic evolution that took place during these decades, in an attempt to crystallize concepts, identify crucial traits, and, ultimately, create a guiding theory.

Our aim here, therefore, is to analyze Ortega's most relevant writings on aesthetics in the light of his philosophical ideas at a given point on his philosophical journey, be it within the framework of Neokantian idealism, clearly expressed in "Adán

¹⁹ Carlos Morujão states that Ortega soon understood that "neo-Kantian aesthetics did not provide him with the concepts that would articulate such an understanding," since the contemplation of Zuloaga's paintings, for instance, focusing on the "anecdotal aspects of life," contradicts the "essence of the artistic" (Morujão, 2018: 190) raising new emotions and therefore demands a new aesthetic conceptualization (Morujão, 2018: 187).

en el Paraíso" (1910), or in the context of the phenomenology that is already glimpsed in "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" (1914) or *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914), and is fully mature in "Elogio del murciélago" (1921), *La Deshumanización del arte e ideas sobre la novela* (1925), or in the last essays in the 1950s dedicated to painting, in particular to Goya and Velázquez (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h, 2010i).

2 The Idea of Art and Aesthetics in the Young Ortega

Ortega turns his attention to literary criticism at an early stage of his philosophical career, from "Glosa," "De la crítica personal" (1902), and "Moralejas" (1903), focusing not only on the novels of Valle-Inclán, one of his favorite Spanish writers, but also on the aesthetics of the new poets, namely, the Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a: 29–33). As we will see in the following pages, Ortega's deep knowledge of the most relevant Spanish and European writers and artists is spread across numerous critical essays, with in-depth and diversified studies in the field of art criticism and aesthetics, proving his aesthetic feeling of life as eclectic and encompassing diverse phenomena, following closely social and cultural transformations between centuries.

One of Ortega's first public references to art is uttered in an essay called "¿Una exposición Zuloaga?" (1910), published in *El Imparcial*, written between May and August 1910, after his studies in Germany and particularly his contact with the Marburg school, strongly influenced by Neokantian idealism. Closely linked to the civic activity and educational policy that Ortega will be devoted to in the following decades with his action in *Liga de Educación Política Española* (1913) and *Agrupación al Servicio de la República* (1931), this essay expresses his concerns about the modernization of Spain, starting by bringing the "anonymous mass" closer to culture through inviting European personalities to deliver conferences in Spain and to organize an exhibition dedicated to the Spanish painter, in order to raise in the public opinion "high concerns" and "motives of superior vitality" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c: 342). The accomplishment of this exhibition, suggested to the Minister of Public Education, would bring to the public square the discussion about the controversies portrayed in Zuloaga's paintings, triggering the "Spanish problem," which resides in the devotion to traditional ways expressed in the form of the "castizo" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c: 343), a trait that Unamuno² and other members of the Generation of '98 would emphasize, except for the young Ortega, an enthusiastic supporter of a modern Spain, guided by German science and thinking. Zuloaga's paintings would consequently function as "spiritual exercises," leading to a "national assessment" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c: 343).

Nevertheless, "Adán en el Paraíso," published in the same year, is a decisive text in Ortega's increasingly solid thinking on aesthetics, and mainly on Spanish artistic

peculiarities, despite the public's difficulty in understanding it in full (Ortega y Gasset, 2004d: 437). The myth of Adam represents the beginning of human existence, him being the first one to perceive human life as a problem: "Adán in Paradise is the pure and simple life, it is the weak support of the infinite problem of life" ("Adán en el Paraíso es la pura y simple vida, es el débil soporte del problema infinito de la vida"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 65). Subscribing to Neokantian idealism and especially Nietzsche's philosophy of overcoming, that human beings should always strive for betterment ("Ser hombre es un perenne superarse a sí mismo"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004o: 123), Ortega understands art as a device capable of creating infinite and clear insights and perspectives on the problem of life. Engaged in the activity of giving sense to things and understanding their relation to human being, Ortega analyzes artistic activity from an ontological point of view, since he starts from the premise that "the life of a thing is its being" ("la vida de una cosa es su ser"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 66). In that sense, the Spanish thinker places artistic creation in the vital, concrete, and unique, which does not imitate nature, because nature is stable and life ephemeral, even equivocal and contradictory. The dichotomy between nature and culture will be further developed in "El Greco en Alemania" (1911), where Ortega associates nature with the instinct for conservation and culture with people's lives, and therefore it is subject to decay and change (Ortega y Gasset, 2004e: 525). Aesthetics, on the other hand, has the purpose of systematizing knowledge about art: it is a form of organizing sensibility and assessing culture through rational forms such as logics and ethics (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 58).³ If culture is a product of the traditional condensation of pre-concepts ("pre-juicios"),⁴ there is always an evolution in the passage of knowledge from one generation to the next, emphasizing the historical approach to aesthetics. As we have already stressed in this text, the generational problem, as method, is a recurrent topic in Ortega's thought, closely linked to his historical and vital reasons, and discussed throughout his work from different perspectives, since it is Ortega's intention to make a diagnosis of past and present Spanish generations to formulate a Spanish thought.

Ortega also stresses in "Adán en el Paraíso" the difference between science and art. While science is the method of abstraction and generalization, art is the method of individualization and concretization, as is patent in literary works such as *Don Quixote*, capable of arousing in readers' minds a "sudden and spontaneous revelation" of the ordering of all things, elevating it to a higher intuition (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 68). The same happens in the visual arts, where the artist's mission is to portray the "form of the totality of life," merging nature and spirit. In opting for the category of relation over the category of substance, Ortega stresses that there is a whole world of ideal unities, of internal energies that characterize and individualize

³According to Carlos Morujão, Neokantianism understands culture as a science that "allows the human being to overcome the contingency of the sensible knowledge that is passive in relation to the impressions coming from the outside world" (Morujão, 2018: 191).

⁴Nelson Orringer states that the word "prejuicio" is the exact translation of the term *Begründung*, which means "foundation" this being the basis of the concepts that produce aesthetic judgment (Orringer, 1979: 65).

²On this matter see *En Torno al Casticismo* (1902) and *Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida* (1912).

artwork (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 66). That is the case in Zuloaga's paintings: Ortega states that the artist transmits both reality and "something transcendent," even unreal, creating an interior world that gives unity to the painting (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 59). From a radically opposite perspective to what Ortega will find years later by analyzing avant-garde movements, in these first years, under the influence of Neokantian idealism, which values form over matter, Ortega expresses what the artist should strive for, by replacing trivial and patent forms with artistic, deep, and secret ones, raising the artistic object to a symbolic level. This idea is further developed in "La Estética de El Enano Gregorio El Botero," also published in 1911, where the Spanish thinker stresses the eclecticism of Zuloaga's painting, given the confluence of methods, traditions, and antagonistic influences expressed in his work (Ortega y Gasset, 2004o). The "vital dynamism" portrayed in this painting translates a "living force at war with matter" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004o: 119). The dwarf represents the Nietzschean image of man, between the animal and the superman, and the painter, by contextualizing the dwarf in an unreal landscape, saves the character from his tragic condition, elevating him to the symbol of "the tragedy of race," which, according to Ortega, is perishing by its conservation instinct (Ortega y Gasset, 2004o: 122).

Back to "Adán en el Paraíso": Ortega notes that art is under different evaluation systems and each reality is a new perspective, "each pair of eyes sees a different thing" ("cada par de ojos ve una cosa distinta"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 69). In this quest, and under the influence of Leibniz and Nietzsche (Ortega y Gasset, 2004p: 153-182), Ortega analyzes the work of art in a first approach to his later developed theory of perspectivism, since each individual has their own vision of things, a topic to which Ortega will devote deep attention in "Sobre el punto de vista en las artes" (1924), at that time clearly under the authority of Husserl's phenomenology. Also in "El Greco en Alemania" (1911), and possibly having in mind Carl Justi's bibliographical approach to the study of painting, Ortega emphasizes the need to understand the circumstances that led the painter to create a work of art. This approach will culminate in the bibliographical method of analyzing the creation process, to which Ortega will be faithful until his final studies on Spanish painting, especially in "Papeles sobre Velázquez y Goya" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 603-774).

In this essay Ortega also endeavors to explain painting techniques, focusing on the notions of coexistence and contiguity to define the air-space equation in a painting accomplished by light (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 71). The painter interprets the problem of life by organizing a system of spatial relations in coexistence united by light (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 71). Ortega differentiates idealism from realism in art, the first being the illusion and pretense of art and the second the pictorial "res," translating the object that is copied or fictionalized (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 69). The meaning of art lies in the "radical sense of expression that there is in man, that is man" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 63), solving humanity's existential problems that science and morals cannot solve. Art is individualization, since things and reality itself are individuals, and for the Spanish thinker it is the reality of the painting that matters, not that of the copied object. He takes the example of Greco's seventeenth-century Toledan model, expressed in the painting "Hombre con la

mano al pecho." It is not the painted model that interests Ortega, but who is represented in it, the traditional Toledan man, individualized and eternalized in the painting. Here, according to the young Ortega, lie the fecundity, scope, and transcendence of the artist, which go beyond the time in which he lived (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c: 343). Influenced by Worringer's ethnic psychology, Ortega assesses the significance of Greco's paintings, synthesizing Spanish and Mediterranean cultures, as he states in "El Greco in Alemania" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004c: 525). Ortega seeks to find a formula that defines the ideal in painting, since art is the realization of an ideal, and each art form expresses a different aspect of human feeling (Ortega y Gasset, 2004o: 121).

He starts by focusing on the concepts of "true art" and the "true artist," this being one who seeks among the chaos of realities the guidance to master them, taking hold of the reality of things (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 70). Contrary to science and morality, in which the concept is sovereign, in art the feeling is central, making the concept a guideline (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 62); while science breaks with the unity of life, nature, and spirit, art recovers that unity, seeking totality (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 63). That is the case for Cézanne, who understood art as realization, possessing a radical sense of painting, a "huge aesthetic transcendence" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004m: 69). After reading A. Schmarsow and, mainly, W. Worringer's *Form in Gothic (Problemas formales del arte gótico, 1911)*, Ortega reformulates in "Arte de este mundo y del otro" (1911), and especially in "El Greco en Alemania," what he had stated in "Adán en el Paraíso." Understanding that the course of art history has shifted and that each epoch has a different aesthetic will, which is no longer the reproduction of nature, the ultimate tendency is to focus on an ideal, as necessary as religion or science. Approaching psychology of art, Ortega begins to make sense of what he will develop in *Meditaciones del Quijote*, focusing on the Spanish culture. He becomes interested in the ethnic aspect of art, understanding it as social work ("labor social"), because it reflects the "pathos" of each people, which will necessarily have a reflection on the artistic objects produced.

It is precisely his intention to contribute to the systematization of Spanish culture that leads Ortega in 1911 to write "Una visita a Zuloaga," published in *La Prensa* in 1912, after returning from Germany. He describes his visit to the painter's house in Paris as the starting point for an analysis of the problem of Spain, its sentimental awareness and sensitivity, appealing to the need for conceptualization as mediation between things and human beings (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 534), one of the guiding themes of his theory of culture that will be deepened in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914). The Spanish thinker insists once again on the ability of art to enhance sensitivity in humans, considering this to be the fourth dimension of the work of art, its mission being "bringing us into intimacy with the elemental mysteries of human confession, with the cardinal problems of the cosmos" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 532). Certainly under the influence of Unamuno, who had just published *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, Ortega considers that the artist lives with the basic tragedy of the human being. While other peoples have embraced social, moral, and intellectual change, Spain has been the only country to resist modernization, and it is this resistance that makes Spain's problem a tragic one. In that sense, Zuloaga is

the interpreter of the Spanish people, expressing the universal in the local: "[he] presents an eternal theme of history expressed in Spanish gestures" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 533).

And it is specifically the Spanish gestures expressed by another Spanish painter, Velázquez, that are highlighted by Ortega in "Tres cuadros del vino" (1911), an essay inserted in *El Espectador*, where the author returns to his reflection on the mission of art and of the artist, persisting in the idea that all forms of art—sculpture, painting, and music—translate "eternal themes" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004r: 192). With wine as a common topic expressed in three different paintings, produced at a particularly fruitful time in art history, between the Renaissance with Tiziano and the Baroque with Poussin and Velázquez, Ortega notes that each century brings a unique sensitivity to deal with the problems of humanity and that true progress lies in the "increasing intensity" with which the "cardinal mysteries" are understood (Ortega y Gasset, 2004r: 192). Still moved by idealism, Ortega meditates on the real in art, taking as a "higher meaning" the way in which the real is represented in connection with the ideal (Ortega y Gasset, 2004r: 199). Proceeding to an analysis of different historical periods and artistic movements, Ortega seeks to explain his contemporary era (free of mythologies and idealisms), which he calls the "administrative age." Ortega concludes that the cultivation of mythological themes, with its narrative that enhances perfection in humankind, provides an "ideal meaning" that "religious temperaments" such as Tiziano and Poussin, in their own way, sought to represent. That is not, however, the case with Velázquez, "the giant an atheist, an unholy colossal" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004r: 199), who places the figure of the "pícaro" at the heart of his mockery of classicism: "Es una valiente aceptación del materialismo, un desafío al cosmos, un soberbio malgré tout" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004r: 199). This "materialism" refers to the attention to objects in their corporality, which Ortega considers a characteristic of the Mediterranean spirit in contrast with the taste for abstraction and construction of the German spirit. As a result, Velázquez's paintings, to which the Spanish thinker will repeatedly return throughout his life, manages to bridge the gap not only to modernity, but to Ortega's historical-narrative reason, because it portrays, individualizes, and gives to artwork a real dimension of depth, guided by the demands not of beauty but truth.

3 Ortega's Meditations on Aesthetics in the Light of Phenomenology

From 1912 onward, Ortegaian studies on art will gradually be under the influence of phenomenology, becoming a method of inquiry (Holmes, 2007). The seminal "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" (1914), having as pretext the mission of writing a foreword for "El Pasajero" by Moreno Villa, an avant-garde poet from Malaga and a member of the Spanish Generation of '27, is converted into an essay on aesthetics and the value of metaphor (to which we will later give further

attention) and on the understanding of literature and philosophy to ultimately save the Spanish culture. Reflecting on the evolution of aesthetic thinking in the last two centuries, bearing in mind that "common sense" demands "plenitude, harmony and correction,"⁵ a work of art should also reflect originality. In an attempt to define the poet's essence and mission (a topic strongly cultivated throughout the nineteenth century), and focusing on the Husserlian concept of the executive self, Ortega highlights individuality in art, stating that poets/artists must aspire to be themselves and by their unique style are capable of increasing reality, converting matter into a work of art (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 665). The irreplaceable style of the poet is a peculiar way of unrealizing things. Art being "desrealización e irrealidad" is placed beyond the real world, converting the enjoyment of the poetic text into a "religious emotion," which the Spanish thinker himself confesses to experience when facing a true artwork (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 679). However, already perceiving a turning point in the creation and understanding of art, Ortega draws attention to the trend of vulgarization, giving the example of the English people's pragmatic relationship with art, and particularly of the Victorian art critic John Ruskin, who, according to Ortega, converts the artistic piece into a domestic object, bringing it closer to everyday life.

Considerations on art and especially on Don Quixote and the modern novel are broadly developed in *Meditaciones del Quijote*, published in the same year of 1914, Ortega's first book on Quixote criticism (Close, 2010), in a response to Unamuno's attack against the young generation who advocated Spain's approach to Europe and German science and thinking as a reference (Orrington, 1979: 169–170). Previous contributions to the critical analysis of the Spanish character, either in Spain (Unamuno, Azorin, or Marañón) or abroad (Schelling, Heine, Turgenev), are considered as "momentary and insufficient clarities" ("claridades momentáneas e insuficientes"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 241) that Ortega aims to overcome. These essays are first of all meditations of intellectual love to Spain, in the wake of Plato and Espinosa's idea of understanding as the madness of love (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 158), focusing on the union between things that it understands, that is, the intimate relation they have with each other. Ortega's philosophy is therefore optimistic, trying to present a synthesis of ideas with intervention in reality, admitting the fall and failure since they are centered on the problem of life, its limitations and possibilities (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 177).

Considering Cervantes a thinker, given his fidelity to the present reality and the way he saves them (Molinuevo, 1997), and *Don Quixote* as the "foundational novel," pioneer of the modern genre because it analyzes life, exploring the possibilities of existence, Ortega seeks to define a national aesthetics that works as national salvation. Against the "inert appearance" of tradition, Ortega advocates an ideal, a "creative organization" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 245) inspired by German scientific

⁵These qualities, which he calls "virtues of eternity" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 664), line up the best classical tradition regarding the literary, philosophical, and aesthetic canon of the work of art, especially if we bear in mind that to these "virtues" can correspond, along the line of Burke or Kant, the notion of beauty and even the sublime in art.

pedagogy (Villacañas in Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 107), to save the Spanish circumstance prefigured in the "Hispanic module," raising "ethnic consciousness" and fulfilling its role as the "spiritual promontory of Europe" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 242).

In his "Meditación primera" (*Breve tratado de la novela*), in an attempt to define literary genres, Ortega presents humanity as the essential theme of art, and literary genres are seen as "irreducible aesthetic themes," as "wide views" of the human (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 252). In the wake of Cohen's *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (*Estética del sentimiento puro*, 1912), Ortega follows the idea that the human is the original model of art (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 252; Orringen, 1979: 173) and that each historical time has a radical interpretation of the human, adopting the genre that better suits its needs and expectations. Art, and especially literature, is a process, a reflection of human improvement, limited to time and the circumstance in which it was created, and the artist, starting from vital reality, launches creativity in all its aspects (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 240).

In *Don Quixote* two "spiritual continents" arise (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 270), the adventure side, where fantasy, imagination, and myth stand, and the reality side, the nobleman who, lacking discernment, leaves his village imbedded with his old-fashioned principle of saving the world. In Cervantes's novel there is, in Ortega's opinion, respect for the internal world of consciousness, saving the reality of adventure through irony (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 275). In this sense, Cervantes's humanist novel, combining idealism and positivism, inaugurates the modern Spanish essay, the one that best reflects the truth of the modern human. *Don Quixote* therefore meets Ortega's metaphysics of reality, in particular his theory of circumstance, and the historical and evolutionary approach to literary genres, combining epic, comedy, and tragedy to unveil the human as a "hero," in permanent struggle with the surrounding environment, trying to achieve humanization. In this sense, the novel is the literary genre of modernity, reflecting a new style of life.⁶

4 Language, Metaphor, and Irony

From his earliest writings, language is a key issue to Ortega. We may even say that the Spanish thinker was a precursor of cognitive semiotics, combining theoretical and empirical principles in the wake of the Husserlian phenomenological method, focusing on the consciousness and anticipating modern theories on language in the line of Chomsky, Vygotsky, or more recently Sonesson (2012) and Zlatev (2009). These contributions converge with Ortega's thinking, especially Zlatev's theory of

meaning based on hierarchical levels: life, consciousness, sign function, and language (Zlatev, 2009).

Therefore, a recurring topic throughout Ortega's philosophical discourse is the notion that the human being is gifted in the creation of signs and semantic activity, language and fine arts being semantic work, "a sign, symbol, or system of a human design" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 610). Ortega also stresses the importance of the word as a sign, containing a meaning and a signifier, which means that it carries a concept, a mental intention of conceptualizing something (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 506). Art is, for that reason, a semiotic system of communication, since an artwork is understood as an "apparatus of meaning," expressing the author's purposes (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 610),⁷ as is the case with painting. This "aesthetic organization" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 612), the most hermetic form of all arts, requires an effort of interpretation, mainly for avant-garde works, which are conceived as a challenge or game.

Ortega starts with the premise that language, as a means of communication and thinking, has the function of translating the unity of thought, since in the light of the phenomenological method, language supports ideas, verbalizing the human consciousness (Ortega y Gasset, 2004k: 916). Despite its limitations and the difficulty in keeping up with the ever-changing historical reality, language is vital for classifying the phenomena surrounding human beings. According to the Spanish thinker, communication in spoken language is essentially dialogue, expressing the idea of coexistence and a sense of wholeness when referring to, along the lines of Plato and Goethe, the "whole man" ("el hombre entero"; Ortega y Gasset, 2010a: 20).⁸ Following this principle, Ortega will find his own style in philosophical discourse, in permanent dialogue with his audience.

In the wake of Natorp's social philosophy, Ortega notes that language is a social product since the individual is a social being, living in a mutually influential community (Ortega y Gasset, 2004n: 94–95), seeking new ways of communicating the problems of science, philosophy, and aesthetics (Pérez Martínez, 2010). Having as a reference Schelling's *Filosofía de la mitología*, Ortega advocates that each community has its own identity, language being the distinctive element that intimately differentiates peoples. With this premise in mind, Ortega gives attention to the improvement of the Spanish language and culture, as is the case for the critical review of Menéndez Pidal's *Orígenes del Español. Estado lingüístico de la Península Ibérica hasta el siglo XI*, on the origins of the Castilian language (Ortega y Gasset, 2010b: 119).

Another of Ortega's concerns is the distinction between philosophy and literature. Following Dilthey's concepts, Ortega states that while literary expression is more expansive, returning to the reader all its meaning, philosophical expression is

⁷The Spanish thinker was at this time preparing the edition of *Principios de una nueva filología*, focusing on the relevance of the functions of language—transmitter, receiver, and context—as "radicales supuestos" and comprehension facilitators (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 613).

⁸An idea expressed in "Un libro sobre Platón" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010a: 20) and *La rebelión de las masas* (Ortega y Gasset, 2010c: 350).

⁶Ortega establishes a confrontation between characters in the epic and the modern novel, such as Elena and Madame Bovary, and between characters with poetic value, such as Achilles, and extrapoeitic characters like Sancho or Bovary. The realist novel reflects the problem of the harassed individual in the social positivist and evolutionist environment. Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, and Dostoyevsky are therefore considered "Labradores de la novela contemporánea" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004y: 249).

hermetic, uttered as a system of concepts, and is therefore inclusive. If on the one hand language is vital to communicate philosophical concepts and values (Ortega y Gasset, 2012b: 531–549), on the other hand it “imprisons ideas,” making it impracticable to strictly characterize them (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 529–530). This limitation is also extendable to translation, whose challenges and perspectives Ortega insightfully analyzes in “Miseria y esplendor de la traducción” (1940). Considering both in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914) and *La deshumanización del arte* (1925) that philosophy has no genre of its own, which led thinkers to create their own style, Ortega finds that the essay, as a hybrid genre, has rhetorical potentialities capable of merging literature and philosophy (Pérez Martínez, 2010). Nevertheless, the coexistence between aesthetics and language is complex. The philosopher finds himself in the “dramatic situation” of discovering and revealing realities never seen before, being obliged to create his own language and even a new terminology in order to meet scientific and aesthetic advances. The thinker must therefore possess a “denominator talent” (“talento denominador”) to reform language from its linguistic or etymological roots, as Husserl or Heidegger had advocated (Smith, 2013). Given the inability both of language to express real themes in their entirety and of the Spanish cultural milieu to understand philosophical text (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2001: 144), it becomes a pedagogical necessity for Ortega to decode philosophical notions through the use of metaphor, which soon becomes the prominent figure of speech in his philosophical discourse. In fact, at least from 1913, Ortega proposes the creation of a dictionary of philosophy, given the need to standardize and systematize new concepts (Ortega y Gasset, 2007).

Plurisignification of meaning is necessary to express ideas in philosophical discourse, from the surface to the depth of sense, which only metaphor can provide, turning ideas into a thesis (Ortega y Gasset, 2010j: 806). Metaphor represents for Ortega the most powerful trope used by humankind in all areas of knowledge. “[Each] metaphor is the discovery of a law of the universe” (“[Cada] metáfora es el descubrimiento de una ley del universo”; Ortega y Gasset, 2010i: 677).

His writings on the relevance of this figure of speech in philosophical, scientific, and literary discourse reveal a keen intuition, and his reflections are pioneering of later contributions conferring validity to his thinking (Rodrigo Mora, 2002). Metaphorical discourse is, then, best suited to Ortega’s sui generis discursive mode, between academic essay and colloquial style, since his essays are in general either the reproduction of lectures addressed to his students or easily perceptible by his press readers (Aranguren, cited by Pérez Martínez, 2010: 124), as proven by the following passage where a Neokantian Ortega defines his monadology recurring to metaphorical speech:

Lodged in the material organ, each soul is an ideal spinner, producer of very subtle threads that pierce other twinned souls like sun rays, then others and others. Slowly the threads multiply; the fabric of culture becomes tighter and complicated. (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 43)⁹

⁹“Alojada en el órgano material es cada alma una hilandera de ideal, productora de hilos sutísimos que traspasan otras almas hermanadas como rayos de sol, luego o otras. Lentamente los hilos

One of the first of Ortega’s essays devoted to the theoretical approach to metaphor is “Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo” (1914). In this decisive study, Ortega reflects on the materialization and rationalization of the aesthetic object, which conveys an executive reality, reflecting the intimacy of the self: “es todo en cuanto yo” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 672). Taking as paradigm Rodin’s *The Thinker* (*Pensiero*), this artistic object of contemplation “works as a narration about us” (“[O]bra como una narración sobre nosotros,” Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 671), breaking the usually existing gap between what is given in the image and what it refers to. In contrast to narrative, which refers to facts in the past, the image offers a peculiar form of knowledge about the object, and whoever contemplates the work of art sees themselves projected on it. In the case of *The Thinker*, we have “the very act of thinking while being executed” (“[E]l acto mismo de pensar ejecutándose,” Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 671). Recognizing metaphor as a form of mental activity and as an “elementary aesthetic object” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 673), Ortega provides as an example a suggestive verse by the Valencian poet López Picó, “el ciprés es com l’espectre d’una flama morta,” explaining in detail the mechanism of metaphor where three operations take place: first, the comparison between two real objects, the cypress and the flame; second, the transference from reality to fictional transposition or mutual transfer between them; and third, a new sui generis corporeality created as a result—“ciprés-espectro de una flama,” placed on an imaginative and ideal level (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 677).

In the 1920s, Ortega rethinks the role of metaphor as a central rhetorical figure and distinguishes its use in science, philosophy, and the arts (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 505). In “Las dos grandes metáforas,” an essay written in 1924 on the second centenary of Kant’s birth, Ortega stresses the essential use of metaphor as knowledge, as a means of expression and intellection, capable of translating human thinking, and as a support in decoding what seems difficult to understand (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 508). Metaphor is hence capable of capturing and grasping complex concepts (Rodrigo Mora, 2002: 267–268), which in philosophy are constantly changing. Metaphor is a facilitating resource for understanding the phenomena of reality and ultimately an essential tool for speculative thinking. In this sense, the comprehension and use of metaphor, by both the transmitter and the receiver, are relevant for Ortega. The way we understand the mechanism of metaphor and how it reverberates in consciousness, of its realizing—“darse cuenta” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 516)—depends on our whole conception of the world, extending to the comprehension of morals, politics, and art (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 514). If metaphor performs a substitute function in science, it is constituent in poetry, since the aesthetics of metaphor is beauty, truth, and knowledge of realities (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 509). Poetry and science are, however, equal in the dimension of inquiring into positive facts, but while scientific law merely affirms the identity between abstract parts of things, poetic metaphor implies the full identification of concrete things (Ortega y Gasset, 2004w: 510).

de multiplican, el tejido...el gran artífice, el promotor del bien.” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 43)

As Ortega will claim a decade later, in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), metaphor is probably the most fertile power that humans possess ("la metáfora es probablemente la potencia más fértil que el hombre posee"; Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 865). Bridging reality and imagination, metaphor is a lyrical weapon because it has the power of creating new worlds: "Metaphor facilitates evasion and creates imaginary reefs among the real things, flourishing of weightless islands" ("la metáfora nos facilita la evasión y crea entre las cosas reales arrecifes imaginarios, florecimiento de islas ingravídicas," Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 865). And even further in 1946, he will state this trope to be a "mental atomic bomb" (Ortega, 2009: 839). Searching for the origin of this vital rhetorical figure, Ortega notes that it began as a taboo, as a result of human nature seeking to avoid reality (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 865). Metaphor in modern times serves the "imaginative faculty," springing from the intimacy of the subject to become fantasy, game, and humor. The new artist tends to recover this principle, transforming metaphor into poetic *rez*: "la poesía es hoy el algebra superior de las metáforas" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 864).

There is a radical change of perspective and a reversal in the aesthetic process in avant-garde aesthetics. Metaphor reverses the value of things, ceases to ennoble them, becoming the most radical instrument of dehumanization (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 866). That is the case for Expressionism/Cubism, "worldifying the internal and subjective." ("[M]undificamos lo interno y subjetivo," Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 868). Valuing imaginative consciousness, new art creates and annihilates objects at the same time, giving space to humor and irony. Also in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, instead of acting like people the characters act like ideas/schemes. Furthermore, Baudelaire's blasphemous "Black Venus" intends to subvert the order of things. This new approach to metaphor leads to irony, since the goal of art is game and farce, creating unreal worlds and teasing reality.

Irony, together with metaphor, becomes a vital trope of modern art. More than essential to the artistic style (literature, painting, and performing arts), metaphor and irony are central to Ortega's philosophy, serving the new ratio-vital narrative that overlaps the canon of pure reason initiated with Socrates and consolidated with Kant. In the representative chapter "Ortega's Philosophical Anthropology," "Las dos ironías, o Sócrates y Don Juan," of *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923), following Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, who redefined from 1700 onward the limits of reason within the scope of the irrational (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 592), Ortega includes himself in the generation responsible for opposing Socratic rationalism, rediscovering spontaneity (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 593).

The theme of our time, says Ortega, consists of submitting reason, culture, art, and ethics to life (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 593). This hermeneutic turn contains a "new irony," since the modern individual does not deny reason but represses and mocks its claims to sovereignty. On the other hand, in Don Juan the irony lies in the fact that the character himself rebels against morality, because it has risen against life (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 593). However, irony is also visible in the modern novel, as Ortega develops in *Meditaciones*, leading the heroic to ridicule and farce, converting tragedy into comedy.

New art saves life from seriousness, given the way it creates puerility in an old world. Through irony, art becomes understood in a playful way as a "fenómeno de índole equívocal" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 872), depriving it of transcendence (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 875).

5 The Dehumanizing Aesthetics of New Art in the 1920s

In the 1920s Ortega intensifies his production of essays on aesthetics, deepening the problem of the dehumanizing trend of new art, a process in which the Spanish thinker places avant-garde aesthetics in a time period between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In a significant contribution to Spanish art theory within the framework of European artistic currents, Ortega's essay "Sobre el punto de vista en las artes" (1924), published in *Revista de Occidente*, focuses on the evolution of philosophical and artistic thinking, questioning how to reconstruct the future of philosophy, bearing in mind that there is an inevitable "synchronic coincidence presiding over the phenomena" between the latest trend of consciousness-oriented philosophy and Expressionist/Cubist painting. Ortega returns to this topic in "Sobre la crítica de arte" (1925), stating that due to its iconoclastic nature, new art has no established principles and that traditional aesthetic standards are not applied, a breach that represents a challenge for critics (Ortega y Gasset, 2012d: 841–844). In the wake of Impressionist tradition, where ideal objects are produced independently from those who imagine or create them (Ortega y Gasset, 2010b: 171), and moving toward Expressionism, Ortega focuses on Cézanne's Cubism, which produces geometrical objects with unreal volumes, giving bodies a "metaphorical nexus," while Picasso annihilates the closed form of the object to retain himself in the symbolism of ideas (Ortega y Gasset, 2010b: 170–171).

A similar phenomenon occurs in modern literature as it is fully developed in *Ideas sobre la novela* (1925). Although considering himself "unfit" to theorize the novel, Ortega aims at filling the existing gap of solid reflections on the subject and decides to make his contribution. He starts by announcing a turning point in the public interest (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 884) and the decay of this literary genre (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 880), endowed with a limited number of themes (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 881) and more focused on characters than on plot. Like American movies, to which Ortega confesses being very attracted (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 885), the modern novel must focus on "idealizing attractive persons" ("ideal personas atractivas"; Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 888–889) and be dynamic and time-consuming, in which a long plot is developed around the character, as is the case in the works of Dostoyevsky, Proust, or Stendhal. As in classical tragedy, Dostoyevsky's novels have a concentration of space and time that reinforces their density (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 891), drawing Ortega's attention once again to the relevance of form over matter in art, stating that "la materia no salva nunca a una obra de arte" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 890). The "realism" of the Russian writer is not in the acts referred to, but in the way of dealing with them. It is not the matter of life that

constitutes its "realism" but the form of life (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 892). What is also noteworthy in the modern novel is the notion of presence, where the reader enters the world of the characters and lives in their atmosphere (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 882). Descending underground from reality, the artist (poet) deals with the irrelevant events of everyday life, lacking the drama that Ortega assigns to Spanish theater (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 894). The Spanish thinker is interested in the psychological dimension of art and the reader's inner experiences, considering that it is the drama that catches the reader/viewer's attention.

However, Ortega's most relevant considerations on modern art are expressed in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), written at the height of the Spanish artistic avant-garde,¹⁰ also in effervescence throughout Europe and America. Adopted by the Generation of '27 as its theoretical, critical, or historical manifesto, this set of essays aims at analyzing and structuring the aesthetic thinking of the emerging artistic manifestations in the early twentieth century. At the same time, *Revista de Occidente* had since 1923 played an active role promoting modern currents in all art forms and new talents in poetry. First published in the form of newspaper articles in *El Sol* in 1924, this book is an attempt to provide the general public with an understanding of the new art's sensibility, guided by "highly interrelated" tendencies, devoid of transcendence and seen as a sport or game.

Ortega identifies the common characteristics of the new artistic manifestations: "Si se analiza el nuevo estilo, se hallan en él ciertas tendencias sumamente conexas entre sí. Tiende: 1º, a la deshumanización del arte; 2º, a evitar las formas vivas; 3º, a hacer que la obra de arte no sea sino obra de arte; 4º, a considerar el arte como juego, y nada más; 5º, a una esencial ironía; 6º, a eludir toda falsedad; y, por tanto, a una escrupulosa realización. En fin, 7º, el arte, según los artistas jóvenes, es una cosa sin trascendencia alguna" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 853–854).

The effort to understand and even accept this new trend in art is not a sign of Ortega's contradiction of earlier writings, but rather a symptom of the dynamic evolution of philosophical and aesthetic thinking, in which Ortega is simultaneously actor and spectator.

Following Jean-Marie Guyau, Ortega approaches art from a sociological point of view, starting by identifying the most prevalent feeling around the new artistic expression: its unpopularity. Given both the disapproval by the general public and the artist's rejection of the public's opinion, the new art is simultaneously unpopular and anti-popular (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 848). Starting with this premise, Ortega focuses his analysis on the role of the public in the new art, highlighting the ambivalent reaction between those who understand the artwork, a minority, and those who reject it, the majority, also called the masses or crowds. The second premise regards the restricted profile of art nouveau's target audience, it being an art of caste, only destined to be understood by artists and educated people, "a specially gifted

¹⁰ According to Constanza Nieto Yusta, Ortega points out the date of 1905 for the beginning of the avant-garde movements. She also stresses, and we agree, that the term "deshumanization" is related to a certain social, political, and scientific ideology that Ortega intends to convey in his essay (Nieto Yusta, 2008: 288).

minority" ("va desde luego dirigido a una minoría especialmente dotada"; Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 849). Throughout this essay Ortega opposes nineteenth-century romanticism to new trends, conveying his conservative ideology. Under the extended influence of romanticism, the masses are used both to the seriousness and solemnity of art and to the emotional effect that the work of art has on them, totally incompatible with the new art's assumptions. In this sense, Ortega accuses the new artists of rejecting traditional art, considering it a sign of a grudge against art itself and of the very historical essence of Europe (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 872).

Firstly questioning equality between people, which romanticism had striven to achieve, this idea is then taken even further by stating that the crowd is a "secondary factor of the spiritual cosmos" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 849). This statement confirms that, in a way, *La deshumanización del arte* conveys an ideological program, reinforced by the elitist premises previously developed in *La España invertebrada* (1921) and further extended in *La rebelión de las masas* (1930). The third premise is that there is an identity common to all artistic manifestations expressed in painting, poetry, theater, and music (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 848), the emergence of new art being the logical result of all previous artistic evolution, and therefore it is a "new sense of art perfectly clear, coherent and rational" ("nuevo sentido del arte perfectamente claro, coherente y racional"; Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 853). Here clearly Ortega includes himself in the group of those who accept and strive to understand it in the light of philosophical and sociological assumptions. The fourth and last premise has to do with the iconoclastic nature of the new art, a symptom of political and social disruptions in process. Since Debussy and Mallarmé, new art tends toward the creation of new dehumanized worlds (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 198), which Ortega identifies as "suprarealism," and when dehumanization happens from a lived reality, Ortega calls it "infrarealism" (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 868).

With dehumanization of modern art's leitmotiv, which consists in distancing from human and lived reality, life is guided by the principles of abstraction, irony, and a new kind of metaphor that translates the disbelief in universal values. The new art is dehumanized insofar as it represents abstract objects and geometrical figures that seem to be alienated from human essence. Many interpretations have been expressed by the critique of the meaning of "deshumanization" (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2012). Clearly following the phenomenological method, Ortega argues the notion of "perspectivism" analyzing phenomena according to perspective to reach the "scale of spiritual distances between reality and us." Art nouveau artists move from lived reality to contemplated reality, the triumph of abstract ideas over the human. The degrees of closeness are equivalent to the sentimental participation of facts; the degrees of detachment are degrees of liberation. The actual event is objectified, converted into a "pure theme of contemplation." Instead of painting things, one paints ideas, one abstracts from the outside world to focus on inner, subjective landscapes (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 868). In *Meditaciones* (1914), Ortega already attributed to the modern novel the mission of describing an atmosphere that leads the reader to "contemplate" the antagonism between action and contemplation becoming a philosophical theme for him (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 895).

In search for a meaning and a methodology of interpretation of the new artistic manifestations in the light of their sociological scope, Ortega proposes that the spectator, a select minority, can find a new aesthetic sensibility, a new device that allows the decoding of nonhuman forms (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 858).

5.1 *The Role of Theater as Unrealization and the Actor as Universal Metaphor*

One of the most significant of Ortega's essays on theater is "Elogio del murciélago" (1921), included in "Incitaciones" of *El Espectador IV* (1925). A starting point for this essay is the Russian touring revue *The Bat*, directed by Nikita F. Balieff, which Ortega has the opportunity of watching in Madrid, his attention particularly drawn to the variety of different artistic manifestations performed on stage: sketches, dances, songs, choirs, and "buffoons" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 441). This innovative show triggers in the Spanish thinker a reflection on theater renovation. Imputing responsibility to the Generation of '98 for the failure to create a "new collective diversion that fully coincided with their sensitivity" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 442), Ortega calls urgently for a new theater that fits the new spirit of the time, allowing the reconstruction of the national spirit and capable of highlighting a solidarity and unity of style (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 443). Claiming that European theater has not adapted to the new artistic sensibility that takes art as "artifice, farce, thaumaturgic power to unrealize existence" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 447), Ortega alludes to the "purification of art" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 371), since only pure theatrical elements, which delight the viewer, are allowed.¹¹

It is essential that in theatrical work the necessary and substantive is the theater; therefore, that the scenic work consists primarily of a plastic and sound event, not in a literary text; may it be an irreplaceable fact executed on the scene. (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 446)¹²

Questioning himself on the mission of theater, and amazed by the impact on the public of the Russian show, Ortega announces a new age ("edad naciente") of theater (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 443), emphasizing that it is meant to cause a non-transferable pleasure, the play or performance being an irreplaceable event performed at the scene (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 446). Undertaking an in-depth

analysis of the differences between the dramatic text (eminently literary) and the theatrical text represented on stage, he gives as an example the role of the "sublime drama" of *Hamlet* in modern times, which, like other canonical dramatic works, does not require to be put on stage since cultured people do not need to go to the theater in order to enjoy a classic of dramatic literature (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 447). For Ortega, the new theatrical art resembles Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, taken by the same "phantasmagoria" that attracts the audience and that the thinker also finds in Zuloaga's painting (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 531). Fantasy is therefore a powerful asset of the modern theater, where an imaginary world is metaphorically represented to meet audience needs.

Ortega challenges the new actors to lend plasticity, sound, movement, and surprise to the new theater, since they should gather all the characteristics of the performing arts—acrobat, dancer, mime, and juggler—so that their bodies become universal metaphors. As an example of the renewal of Spanish theater, Ortega gives a new approach to classical works, taking to the stage Calderon de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, valuing the decoration, costumes, rhythm, fantasy, musicality, and the dramatic sense of the new artists (Ortega y Gasset, 2004t: 446). The new art, a mirror of a changing society, makes use of irony as a critical and playful function, which gives it an aesthetic sense of life.

Returning to *Ideas sobre la novela* (1925), where Ortega refers to the modern drama, he makes an interesting comparison between French and Spanish theater. The first, influenced by Greek theater, deals with the psychological anatomy of the characters for ethical purposes, with a view to moral improvement given by the exemplary actions of its characters, mainly expressed in Racine's works; the second deals with sentimental and adventurous drama, provoking in the audience passion and intoxication as is characteristic of Lope de Vega's pieces.

In an essay also written in 1921, "Introducción a un 'Don Juan,'" Ortega fully develops a methodological approach to the Spanish myth, claiming its return to the national theater and raising the character to the essential symbol of the radical anguish of humankind, as an aesthetic category and myth of the human soul (Ortega y Gasset, 2010g: 188). In "Idea del teatro," a speech delivered in both Lisbon and Madrid in 1946, Ortega deepens the role of the actor and his ambivalent reality, because by denying his reality he replaces it with the character he performs, converting himself into a "universal embodied metaphor." In this essay Ortega also refers to theater as a "visible metaphor" placed in an imaginary world, where unreality and phantasmagoria take place. Theater thus has a vital function in modern society, helping the public escaping from reality (Ortega, 2009: 842). This new perspective meets the new artistic trends developed in the following decades, highlighting the audience's involvement in the show or play and letting them be carried away by the farce represented on stage (Roberts, 1998).

¹¹ Orringer presents the evolution of Ortega's thinking on theater: from 1914, when art is seen as escapism; then around 1921, when Ortega emphasizes the return to its purest elements; and finally in 1946, when the Spanish thinker stresses the historical approach in which the theater must adapt to social changes. Theater absorbs all art forms, becoming the universal metaphor of human problems (Orringer, 1994: 21–22).

¹² "Es preciso que en la obra teatral sea lo necesario y sustantivo el teatro; por lo tanto, que la obra escénica consista primordialmente en un suceso plástico y sonoro, no en un texto literario; que sea un hecho insustituible ejecutado en la escena" (Ortega y Gasset 2004t: 446).

5.2 Avant-Garde Music in Ortega's Aesthetics

To understand Ortega's thinking on music, we must consider his close relationship with composer and music critic Adolfo Salazar Castro, author of numerous conference papers and essays on musical reception published in *El Sol* and *Revista de Occidente*. Salazar was a keen diffuser of avant-garde musical trends, bridging the unpopularity of new art and being responsible, among other events, for the foundation in 1915 of Sociedad Nacional de Música to promote contemporary chamber music (Neves, 2012) and for the tribute to Debussy on his death in 1918 (García Laborda, 2005: 8). On the other hand, it is acknowledged that Ortega closely followed the activity of the Madrid Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1903 (García Laborda, 2005: 4), and attended the dynamic cultural circles of Madrid, Ateneo, El Circulo de Bellas Artes, and Residencia de Estudiantes, where Manuel de Falla, José Subirá, Conrado del Campo, and Adolfo Salazar delivered lectures on the new musical trend led by Debussy and Stravinsky. In 1915 Ortega attended one of those conferences, presented at Ateneo de Madrid by Manuel de Falla and entitled "Introducción a la Nueva Música," where the Spanish composer highlighted Debussy's Impressionist music as a milestone in musical innovation (García Laborda, 2005: 4; Neves, 2012).

Two months after attending the debut of Debussy's "Iberia" in Madrid in January 1921, and despite assuming his lack of musical expertise, Ortega publishes "Musicalia," a sociological essay on the new musical tendencies. Noting that the new art is only understandable by a select minority, this essay is a didactic exercise to enlighten the general public on the new musical style and is eminently aesthetic. In the wake of Nietzsche's "sovereign individual," Ortega stresses the value of those "selected men" who operate social change. This elite is capable of approaching the work of art as a spectator and understanding it as an unrealized reality, keeping a distance from feeling, in order to access a pure form of contemplation since "art is contemplation."¹³ But art, especially modern art, is also contemplation of the aesthetic object, forcing the viewer to keep a distance:

This music is something external to us: it is a distant object, perfectly located outside of our self and before which we feel like pure contemplators. We enjoy new music in concentration towards outside. It is what interests us, not its resonance in us. (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 373)

For Ortega, the new artist/composer has a different spiritual attitude to art, only concerned with expressing their own point of view (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 367) over the interests and emotions of the public and keeping a distance from the artistic object. To understand this new aesthetic perspective, Ortega distinguishes "inferior

art" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 373, 2012e: 861)—ruled by mediocre sentiments, profusely cultivated by nineteenth-century romanticism (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 370), giving as an example the aesthetic effect that Wagner's work had on the viewer of overwhelming emotion—from "superior art," which awakens a high feeling of aesthetic emotion, as is the case with Debussy's or Stravinsky's works, with less "ecstasy but more authenticity" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004u: 457). Inter-arts dialogue is symptomatic of cutting-edge movements, as with Debussy's *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune*, intended to be a musical overture to Mallarmé's poem "Le Faune" (Neves, 2012). Ortega highlights this artistic exchange, encompassing in his critical essays the different artistic manifestations from the trends of late nineteenth-century Impressionism/Symbolism with Debussy, Mallarmé (Ortingen, 1994: 13–14), Verlaine, Maeterlinck, and Rimbaud to the avant-garde Expressionism and Cubism (Harvard, 2007: 93).

In both "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" and "Musicalia," there is an attempt to convey a doctrine of art enjoyment but also to consolidate aesthetics as a discipline within a hierarchy of values that meets Ortega's perspectivism (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 372).

In "Apatía artística," also published in 1921, Ortega notes that each epoch corresponds to different aesthetic sensibilities, which is reflected in the change in attitude to works of art, and emphasizes the notion of perspective as the order, structure, and hierarchy necessary for the organization of life (Ortega y Gasset, 2004u: 458). He claims that there is dullness on behalf of the masses about pictorial and musical beauty, recovering the idea, also expressed in other essays, of a widespread prejudice against new artistic manifestations, symptomatic of the crisis experienced by public opinion. Ortega goes further by considering that the public's rejection of the new art is "artistic terrorism" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004s: 372).

The musical evolution of the last 50 years has therefore witnessed major changes on the part of both the artist and the public. Avant-garde music is iconoclastic because it breaks with the tradition of the past, based on sentimentality seizing romantic tastes, and imposes now a spiritual distance, exterior to oneself, depriving it of the human element, converting art into an aesthetic object.

Notwithstanding all these transformations, and remembering the place of music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ortega prefers to place music as a background curtain to our vital chores, rather than dissecting it at a public concert (Ortega y Gasset, 2004u: 459).

5.3 Ortega's Last Writings on Art (1950–1954), Under the Principles of Vital and Historical Reasons

In "Papeles sobre Velázquez y Goya," published in 1950, and after a lifetime dedicated to philosophy and aesthetic thinking, Ortega continues to claim that he understands little of art: "Before painting, I have been, therefore, nothing more than a

¹³ It is in 1911 when Ortega first refers to this term in the essay "El Greco en Alemania" (1911), considering that El Greco's work demands active contemplation, "una contemplación activa" grounded on intellect (Ortega y Gasset, 2004e: 523). Also in "Sobre el concepto de sensación" (1913), Ortega deepens this same idea of "contemplation" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b, 631) and in "Acción y contemplación" of *Ideas sobre la novela* (Ortega y Gasset, 2012e: 893–896).

passerby" ("Ante la pintura no he sido, pues, más que un transeúnte," Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 606). However, Ortega's contribution to the understanding of the Spanish painting of the last three centuries, which had been considered over decades, has here its highest maturation. In this treatise Ortega retrieves his ideas on art and especially the artist's motivation, conveyed since his first essays, as "a vast repertoire of human actions," reflecting the author's intentionality. Already in "Estética en el tranvía" (1916), refusing the Platonic normative of beauty, away from reality and Kantian idealism based on abstract criteria, Ortega appealed to the individual's desire to be faithful to their own reality and accomplish it: "Become who you are" ("Llega a ser el que eres"; Ortega y Gasset, 2004q: 181).

Emphasizing the relevance of history as a key to understanding other epochs, Ortega proposes a new method for the interpretation of painting and, broadly, the meaning of art from a philosophical perspective, articulating historical reason and aesthetic contemplation (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 621). A pioneer in this approach, later followed by phenomenologist Max Scheler in *The Essence of Philosophy*, which consists of first defining the artist and then his (or her) work, Ortega values the "circumstance" of being a painter, his motivations and biographical background, with reflections on his creation, analyzing the time in which the artist lived and what he is like as a human being, since a "painting is a fragment of a man's life" ("un cuadro es el fragmento de la vida de un hombre"; Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 622). Ortega emphasizes the painter's executive act as he paints, whether he depends on the time he lives in or is conditioned by the aesthetic currents of his time, as is the case with Velázquez, who, according to the Spanish thinker, underwent the most radical change in modern painting. Velázquez repeatedly draws Ortega's attention because his paintings meet Ortega's aesthetic hermeneutics, particularly his circumstantial philosophy, arguing that it is up to each being to look for all the mechanisms to faithfully follow oneself and build one's own path. It is therefore a new idea of painting, based on the function that painting plays in the system of human occupations (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 650).

Taking as an example "El Pabilllo de Valladolid," Ortega speculates on the evolution of art in the time of Velázquez, who, more than creating a "new style," operates a turning point in the direction of art. The Spanish painter fought against the aesthetic canon of his century, his paintings being ruled by hardness, "relentless, dismissive and distant" ("implacable e infinitamente desdoso y distante"; Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 620). For Ortega, life is intimacy; it can be seen from its interior, abstracted from the sequence of events to be converted into drama and tension. Yet life is also a vocation, given the ideal character that inhabits each person. This vocation clashes with circumstance and constitutes two magnitudes, which along with mischance form a dynamic system, and these three factors must be weighed when building a bibliography (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 636). Contrary to the tendency of the time, which elevated art to a "cismundo" level of fantasy and mythology, Velázquez seeks to make a "cismundo" art, seeking the root of all myth in reality (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 649). Painting thus ceases to be a mere craft and becomes "a system of aesthetic problems and intimate imperatives" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 648). Along with Descartes, Velázquez focuses the activity of culture in the

immediate reality. Belonging to the same generation, both face the same problem: how to get to things in their reality or in their materiality. Moving away from the themes of previous painting trends (which represented mythological, religious, or historical scenes), Velázquez became the painter of real things, focusing on the unreal of the real. In addition, more than representing things in their details, Ortega is interested in capturing their way of appearing, and in that sense the Spanish thinker measures the notions of movement and space in Velázquez's painting, which give life and grace to the Spanish people. Each painting is, thus, an "ethnic treasure," a repertoire of Spanish attitudes, a narrative that tells the elegance of "great Spain." Ortega's interest relies on the immediacy of a photographic-looking scene (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 654).

The work of art reflects the life stories that constitute the story, since "every life is a drama, and every drama has a certain plot" ("toda vida es drama y todo drama tiene un determinable argumento"; Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 726). Ortega focuses on the notion of space and depth in Velázquez's works and on a certain "aire en torno," an "atmosphere" that comes from the figures portrayed in a naturalist mode (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 740). Velázquez moves away from formalist beauty to represent the object in its daily life. When transposing reality to the canvas, the painter unrealizes the painted object, operating the metamorphosis of the unreal (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 644-645).

In addition to deepening understanding of Velázquez's pictorial work, Ortega's considerations also fall on Francisco Goya, the romantic painter of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Valuing life, the Spanish thinker states that while following the tradition of the pictorial past and the trends of his time, Goya's work is endowed with originality, portraying dramatic episodes of life that few testify to or imagine. Seeking to renew the dominant thinking about Goya's paintings, Ortega wants to challenge the preconceived ideas of populism, "plebeyismo," and "casticismo" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010h: 757) attributed to his work and proposes to do an inventory of themes portrayed in his painting, in order to understand the scope of his work. To this end, Ortega analyzes the social circumstances that have conditioned Goya's creativity. "Hombre de su tiempo" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010i: 751), Goya is a romantic painter, divided between the popular and the erudite, and the figures portrayed execute themselves in the form of "apparitions," intensifying the drama of absence and presence.

6 Conclusions

We have followed Ortega's philosophical journey during his years of formation, maturation, and consolidation, proving that throughout his life the Spanish thinker turned his attention to the definition and critical analysis of art and aesthetics, converting this theorization into a vital constituent of his philosophical system. In his own peculiar style, Ortega tries to understand the political, historical, and social disruptions of his time and their reflection in culture, aesthetics, and art in the early

twentieth century. Between 1908 and 1925, there is an evolution in Ortega, from Neokantian objectivism (rational reason) and his social, political, and cultural concerns to save the Spanish circumstance to a phenomenological turn, which leads to his racio-vitalist system. Orteguian vitalism consists in combining vital, historical, and narrative reasons to be capable of understanding reason as intellectual action in liaison with reality and the transcendent.

It is via speculative thinking that Ortega sees the world and in particular the creative phenomenon of art and the function of aesthetics, resulting in invaluable contributions to both modern philosophy and art. The Spanish thinker goes beyond defining what art and aesthetics are, clarifying the meaning of some of its inner elements like the relation between art and life, being conditioned by social, geographical, generational, and environmental circumstances, having nevertheless the freedom to choose one's own path, to save the circumstance following one's own perspective on the truth of life (Correa Camiroaga, 1982: 560). There is a totalizing sense that Ortega attributes to aesthetics, as a manifestation of human creativity and therefore vital since related to the notion of imperative sensibility, a historical phenomenon that aims to understand an epoch, in short "sensación radical ante la vida, de cómo se siente la existencia," as stressed in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (Ortega y Gasset, 2012c: 562).

Ortega's writings on the state of the art have a pedagogical purpose. They have an enlightening mission to reveal to the general public the phenomena that led to the rupture of traditional aesthetic values and the outburst of the avant-garde movements.

In the first phase, art is seen as a cultural ideal, allowing the highest elevation of the Spanish people and the human being (Morón Arroyo, 1967). Influenced by classicism and Neokantianism, Ortega stresses individuality in art, connected to the concept of the executive self, realizing unreality and even reaching transcendence. Art is, therefore, seen as a superior and ideal and should arouse higher feelings in the public.

In the second phase, due to a progressive transition under the principles of phenomenology and having in mind the human perception of things and events (phenomena), Ortega focuses on the capacity of metaphor to create new ideas, new worlds, or virtual universes. This new art brings new ethical and aesthetic values, which Ortega places in a philosophical and ontological perspective, between the real and unreal of being (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2012: 643). Rooted in unreality, the essence of the new art, crossing between dimensions, allows the artist to create new fictional, purified, ideal, and metaphorical objects. There is therefore a change of perspective in Ortega's thinking regarding art in general and painting in particular. Far from the idealism of youth, the Spanish thinker no longer understands art as a superior creation, but as an expression of the circumstance of its author, reflecting the time and narrative of his history. Aware of the new changing times, Ortega states that the new art demands distancing, the enjoyer of the work of art being a mere spectator, without sentimental attachment to the contemplated work. Along Ortega's philosophical journey, he will support the work of art as artifice and unreality. Yet if in the early years the work of art is seen as the representation of the human, in the consolidation and maturity phase Ortega's thinking falls on the eminently aesthetic

value of the work of art, in its metaphorical and ironic aspects. For all these reasons, we may say that Ortega was clearly an "aesthetician" (Close, 2010: 171), looking for the essence of art, and that vital reason conveys an aesthetic philosophy (Gutiérrez Pozo, 2000).

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