

**NOT VERY MODERN BUT VERY TWENTIETH CENTURY:  
AN INTERPRETATION OF JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET'S  
CATEGORIES FOR ART HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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I dedicate this thesis to all those who continue to encourage me to pursue my academic studies with child-like enthusiasm:

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It is a sad fact: art history lags behind the study of the other arts. ...while the last three or so decades have witnessed extraordinary and fertile change in the study of literature, of history, of anthropology, in the discipline of art history there has reigned a stagnant peace: a peace in which - certainly - a profession of art history has continued to exist in which monographs have been written, and more and more catalogues produced: but produced at an increasingly remote margin of the humanities, and almost in the leisure section of intellectual life.

What is equally certain is that little can change without radical re-examination of the methods art history uses - the tacit assumptions that guide the normal activity of the art historian. Here, perhaps, something can be done - and action is as urgent as it is belated. There are now fewer and fewer art historians who venture outside their specialty to ask the basic questions: what is a painting? what is its relation to perception? to power? to tradition? And in the absence of writing which does ask those questions, both the student of art history and the general public have either to rely on answers inherited from a previous generation, or to hand the questions over to professional philosophers.

Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting

## Introduction: The Enclosure of Art Historiography

Individuals have been writing the story of art for many centuries in Western civilization.<sup>1</sup> Already in ancient Rome, Pliny described in an anecdote the "painting competition" between Zeuxis and Parrhasius.<sup>2</sup> In the sixteenth century, an Italian artist, Giorgio Vasari, paid homage to the saints of painting in his hagiography, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori italiani.<sup>3</sup> But the story of art lacked academic discipline, systematic rigor, until the twilight of the nineteenth century. Art historians, such as Heinrich Wölfflin<sup>4</sup> and Alois Riegl,<sup>5</sup> opened the possibility of a systematic art

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<sup>1</sup>The origins of art historiography and art criticism cannot be documented; they are always already transcriptions. See Jacques Derrida, L'écriture et différence [1967], translated by Alan Bass as Writing and Difference (Chicago: University Press, 1978), p. 211. If one sees Pliny as the beginning, one must produce a difference between Pliny and earlier "false" sources, which need to be deferred, such as the myths about Daedalus and Homer's description of Achilles' shield in the Iliad. These earlier sources also depend upon more archaic sources and so on. The intertextuality of our interpretative practices hides its own starting point. Instead of trying to determine when the life of art historiography and criticism begins, I will start at the moment which most scholars consider as the birth of our practices - the work of Pliny. In no way should this imply that ancient Greek interpretations were merely preludes or fetal stages of art historiography and criticism. See J.J. Pollitt, The Ancient View of Greek Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) and his The Art of Greece 1400-31 B.C. [Sources and Documents Series] (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966).

<sup>2</sup>For those unfamiliar with Pliny's account of this contest, in Book XXXV of Natural History, he writes: "This last [Parrhasius], it is recorded, entered into a competition with Zeuxis. Zeuxis produced a picture of grapes so dexterously that birds began to fly down to eat from the painted vine. Whereupon Parrhasius designed so lifelike a picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should be drawn back and the picture displayed. When he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honor, he yielded up the palm, saying that whereas he had managed to deceive only birds, Parrhasius had deceived an artist." For more on Pliny and the natural attitude of vision, see Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup>Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori italiani [1550], selected essays translated by George Bull as Lives of the Artists (New York: Penguin Books, 1965).

<sup>4</sup>Heinrich Wölfflin, Renaissance und Barock [1888], translated by Kathrin Simon as Renaissance and Baroque (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1966) and his Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe [1915], translated by M.D. Hottinger as Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art (New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1950).

<sup>5</sup>Alois Riegl, "Kunstgeschichte und Universalgeschichte" [1898] and "Eine Neue Kunstgeschichte" [1902], Gesammelte Aufsätze (Augsburg-Wien: D. Benno Filser Verlag, 1928), pp. 3-9, 43-50, and his Das Holländische Gruppenporträt [1902], partially translated by Stephen S. Kayser as "Geertgen tot Sint Jans' The Legend of the

historiography. Unfortunately, their apologetic art historiographies had to defend their interpretive accounting of artistic development to positivistic conceptions of academic scholarship. Instead of opposing the positivism of their day, Wölfflin and Riegl surrendered to its methods.

Today, a hundred years later, art historiography still suffers from its early bond with positivism. Although the process of specialization has allowed us to deepen systematic analyses within the discipline of art historiography, it also has placed our discipline in jeopardy by opening the possibility of departmental isolation. Our field of study runs the risk of becoming an hermetic island. Art historians continue to ignore related research findings of scholars from other disciplines. For instance, art historians have turned their backs on studies in literary criticism. As Svetlana and Paul Alpers have described our weakness,

Literary scholars have had little occasion to notice the almost complete absence from art historical writing of the kinds of critical consideration which are normal, not to say basic, in the academic study of literature.... Indeed, professors of English, many of whom think of themselves as literary critics, may be surprised to learn that no self-respecting art historian would call himself a critic. In the field of art history, art critics are journalists, and what students of literature call criticism is patronizingly referred to as art appreciation.<sup>6</sup>

We are so preoccupied with being understood as scientific researchers that we close our eyes and ears to literary and art criticism. Most likely, this concern is rooted in the foundations of our discipline and its relationship to positivistic conceptions of scientific inquiry. But our past cannot become a permissible excuse for complacency in the present. Art historians need not become literary critics, but we can learn from them,

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124-38.

<sup>6</sup>Svetlana and Paul Alpers, "Ut Pictura Poesis? Criticism in Literary Studies and Art History," New Literary History 3:3 (Spring 1972), p. 437.



and literary critics can learn from us. As Norman Bryson has written,

One of the great weaknesses of prevailing art history must be its neglect of 'reading skills' and practical criticism. Whereas the students of literature regularly spend hours in class wrangling over the interpretation of texts, the level of reading among students of art history is hardly developed at all, but left somehow to take care of itself.... There is no reason for art history to feel this as a threat from an expanding lit. crit. On the contrary, all art history needs to do is to appropriate the advance, take from literary criticism everything of service to itself, making reading and practical criticism regular components of art historical training, and the discipline will be at once more stable, more mature, and more nourishing than before. What must surely be given up is the unadventurous assumption that strict archival methods, together with a strategy for converting paintings into documents, are all we need to deal with visual representation. That is impoverishment and a recipe for stagnation.<sup>7</sup>

Opening art historiography to the discoveries of literary criticism will not reduce our scholarship, as positivistic art historians believe, to the production of relativistic

ekphrasis. On the contrary, it will enhance our understanding of art and its history.

I have referred to the ignorance within art historiography towards another discipline, namely, literary criticism, but one can also detect, ironically, art historiography's naiveté concerning its own implicit philosophical categories. Art historians, unfortunately, have neglected to examine the prejudicial assumptions which inform their respective approaches. As Svetlana Alpers laments,

It is characteristic of art history that we teach our graduate students the methods, the "how to do it" of the discipline (how to date, attribute, track down a commission, analyze style and iconography) rather than the nature of our thinking. In terms of the intellectual history of the discipline our students are woefully uneducated. How many have been asked to read Panofsky's early untranslated writings, or Riegl, or Wölfflin? Supporting this is the prejudice for the original object and against the desk-bound scholar. To think, to write is itself somehow to forsake the works. At issue is not the method one uses but rather the notion of art and its history, the notion of man and the form that his

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<sup>7</sup>Norman Bryson, "Introduction," Calligram: Essays in the New Art History from France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. xxviii-ix.

knowledge of the world takes.<sup>8</sup>

Modern art historians have failed to recognize that any hermeneutic practice involves pre-understanding. They have been seduced by, in the words of Gadamer, a "prejudice against prejudice."<sup>9</sup> Commitments have been hidden from art historiography in the name of modern science.

The art historian needs to distinguish her or his objects of study, namely, works of art, from other objects of study. We cannot interpret without such a contextual framing.<sup>10</sup> None of us can describe "art-in-itself." A definition only makes sense within a cultural setting and in relation to something other than itself. We need to contextualize an object in order to define it. However, our definitions require some type of differentiation, even if no more than institutionally given.<sup>11</sup> Although studying objects other than artworks may prove helpful, the art historian concentrates upon one story, the history of art. In other words, the art historian does not investigate the character of oil wells, beaver dams, or trees per se, but may wish to study these objects in relation to art and its history.

Art historians need parameters, but constructed boundaries should not become walls of isolation. Boxing ourselves inside our self-made limitations, within our autofabricated enclosures, slams the door on the possibility of forming an academic

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<sup>8</sup>Svetlana Alpers, "Is Art History?," *Daedalus* 106:1 (Summer 1977), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* [1960], translated by Garrett Barden and John Cumming as *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1975), esp. pp. 235-74.

<sup>10</sup>This is not to suggest that we must define our terms by logical demonstration. Institutional argument by rhetorical persuasion is enough to guide our conversation. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), esp. pp. 268-92.

<sup>11</sup>The issue is how should our institution define art. For an insightful essay concerning the problematics of resolving this crisis, see David Summers, "Form, Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," *Critical Inquiry* 15:2 (Winter 1989), pp. 372-406.

community and also will result in "cabin fever." In exclusion we alienate our neighbors and imprison ourselves. Good fences do not make good neighbors, but deny our capacity to make neighborhoods. Not only should neighbors be able to glance across lot-lines, but gates must be installed, allowing one to enter into another's dwelling. Neighbors should dialogue. Consequently, our neighbors should be able to criticize our academic yardwork if they so desire. A radical re-evaluation of our parameters is the first step into a post-modern conception of art historiography. Such a strategy would expose us to our academic neighbors and uncover the implicit philosophical categories informing our interpretive practices.

In this thesis I will concentrate on the academic work of a "non art historian," who aspired to be nada moderno y muy siglo XX (nothing modern and very twentieth century),<sup>12</sup> José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). Although Ortega was a philosopher by trade, he did write articles concerning the history of art and the methodology of art historiography. I have chosen to investigate the work of a foreigner traveling within our academic territory because an outsider is more likely to take notice and question what appears normal protocol in our discipline.

Many philosophers have entered into our academic circle, but not on their own two feet. For instance, the philosophical works of Karl Marx, Ernst Cassirer, Karl Popper, and Martin Heidegger have been imported into the field of art historiography. But their presence is due to the daring feats of art historians such as Arnold Hauser, Erwin Panofsky, E.H. Gombrich, and Kurt Badt, art historians willing to travel beyond

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<sup>12</sup>This phrase, as well as the title of this thesis, derives from the title of one of Ortega's early articles, "Nada 'moderno' y 'muy siglo XX'" [1916], Obras Completas II (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 22-4.

their own backyards. Furthermore, it is difficult even to imagine the present state of art historiographic scholarship without the philosophical writings of Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel.<sup>13</sup> However, Ortega, although an outsider, has done his own art historiographic yardwork. Even though art historians such as Enrique Lafuente Ferrari and Wilhelm Pinder have translated his philosophical categories for their own respective art historiographic practices, Ortega can stand on his own.

Ortega is not the only foreigner to climb over our fences and enter our backyard by his own accord. Immediately, post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida<sup>14</sup> and Michel Foucault<sup>15</sup> come to mind. But these foreigners crossed the border fairly recently. If we spend a moment pondering the historical past, we may discover a few earlier adventurous explorers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty,<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger (after the Kehre),<sup>17</sup> Georg Simmel,<sup>18</sup> and Sigmund Freud.<sup>19</sup> Ortega is not alone in visiting our field

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<sup>13</sup>For more on the role of Kant and Hegel in the development of art historiography, see my "Affirming the End[s] of History: The [A]mazing Grace of Post-Structuralism," unpublished paper for Theories of Art Historiography (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia, 1989), pp. 1-42. On the relation of Kant to art history see the David Summers' article footnoted previously. E.H. Gombrich describes the hegelian presence in art history, see his "In Search of Cultural History," Ideals and Idols: Essays on the Value in History and in Art (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1979), pp. 24-59. Also see Michael Podro, The Critical Historians of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Podro offers a good introduction to the reception of Kant and Hegel by art historians; unfortunately, he provides a weak reading of German idealist philosophy.

<sup>14</sup>Jacques Derrida, Les vérités en peinture [1978], trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod as The Truth in Painting (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup>Michel Foucault, Ceci n'est pas une pipe [1973], translated by James Harkness as This is Not a Pipe (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1983) and his "Las Meninas," Les mots et les choses [1966], translated anonymously as "Las Meninas," The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (London: Tavistock, 1970), pp. 3-16.

<sup>16</sup>Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le doute de Cézanne," Sens et non-sens [1948], translated by Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus, "Cézanne's Doubt," Sense and Non-sense (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

<sup>17</sup>Martin Heidegger "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," Holzwege [1950], translated by Albert Hofstadter as "The Origin of the Work of Art," Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 15-88.

<sup>18</sup>Georg Simmel, Rembrandt. Ein Kunstphilosophischer Versuch (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919).

of study, nor can I say that he is the first, although he is probably among the first wave of travelers. I have chosen to investigate the work of Ortega not because of his locus within the history of interdisciplinary travel, but because his art historical writings, including his philosophical categories for art historiography, have been for the most part ignored or misunderstood.

Within the contours of this thesis, I hope to accomplish two goals. First, I intend to uncover our guest's categorical framework for art historiography within his historical context. Second, I intend to make a critical assessment of his conclusions concerning the art historiographic practice through examining both the baggage with which he enters our arena and the yardwork he has graciously done for us.

The first chapter of this thesis will provide a biographical sketch of José Ortega y Gasset. It is not meant to be a historiographic account of his life, nor is this thesis intended to be the "life and work of José Ortega y Gasset." The purpose of the first chapter is only to place Ortega's thought within the setting of his life and mission, in other words, to contextualize his writings. Chapters two through six will concentrate upon the contours of his categorical framework. Each of these chapters will focus upon one of the following categories: the primacy of life, the irreality of art, the metahistory of generations, ratiovital perspectivism, and personal authenticity. At the end of each chapter, I will provide a critique of one of Ortega's categories for art historiography, accenting the enlightening and misleading dimensions of his categorical framework. Finally, the concluding chapter of this thesis will be devoted to a brief summary of Ortega's place within the disclosure of art historiography.

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<sup>19</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Un souvenir d'enfance de Leonardo da Vinci* [1916], translated by A.A. Brill as *Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in Psychosexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947).

This thesis will seek to unveil Ortega's philosophical categories within their context. It is my contention that his writings participate within the rubric of the paradigm shift between modernity and post-modernity and are best understood in relation to the writings of other thinkers caught between these paradigms, including those of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Miguel de Unamuno, and E.H. Gombrich.

## Chapter One: The Adventure of Don José

If we only knew with certainty the secret of Cervantes' style, of his manner of approaching things, we would have found out everything, because on these spiritual heights there reigns such indestructible solidarity that a poetic style brings with it philosophical, moral, scientific, and political conceptions.<sup>1</sup>

José Ortega y Gasset

To introduce the reader to José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), I have decided to employ, as a starting point, his own self-perception, Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia [I am I and my circumstance].<sup>2</sup> The "I" refers to an adventurous Spanish hidalgo of the twentieth century with a love of Spain analogous to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the author of Don Quijote. His circumstance, fin-de-siècle Spain, provides the context of his mission.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Spain experienced hard times. The once powerful empire of the Habsburgs was brought to its knees. Many conflicts in the nineteenth century arose as telltale signs of the empire's demise.

First, civil wars over the throne, known as the Carlist wars, plagued the monarchy throughout the second half of the century. Second, the industrial revolution never grabbed hold of Spain. The cities of Barcelona, Bilbao, and Valencia were the only oases in an otherwise economic desert. Third, the federal government's eagerness for centralizing Spain in Madrid inspired national separatism among the Basques and the

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<sup>1</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], translated by Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marin, with an introduction and notes by Julián Marías, as Meditations on Quixote (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 45.

Catalans. Fourth, the conquistadors of America lost the remnants of their colonies to the Yankees. As Joaquin Costa, a political leader, lamented, "This nation [Spain] that we thought cast in bronze has turned out to be a hollow reed."<sup>3</sup> José Ortega y Gasset arrived to his parents in the midst of an historical crisis.

Ortega employed two metaphors to describe his Spanish circumstance: tibetization and invertebrate. First, fin-de-siècle Spain exists in the crisis of its own self-enclosure. As Ortega described it,

Spain, for the first time [in the reign of Felipe IV], rendered herself hermetic toward the rest of the world, including her own Hispanic world. This is what I call the "Tibetization" of Spain that happened at that time, a concept which should be understood in terms of magnitude of scale: the full meaning of that term is apparent only in Tibet but the fact is that within the Western world no other people has demonstrated as has Spain that tendency to withdraw and become absorbed in itself, to which for one reason or another, it always falls back.

.... It [Tibetization] is the self-absorption which Spain suffered at the time of our own adolescence. In that Spain of 1880-85, Madrid was not at all interested in the rest of the world.<sup>4</sup>

According to Ortega, fin-de-siècle Spain was so wrapped in its own present time and place, so hedonistic, that it failed to create any new cultural artifacts or listen to those outside of the crisis.

Ortega's second metaphor, invertebrate Spain, symbolized another national weakness. To Ortega's sensibilities, the lack of a developed university system attributed to his country's decline. The administrative power was controlled by unimaginative bureaucrats, "mass-men." Invertebrate Spain lacked an educational backbone. Ortega considered his homeland more a fantasy than a nation; it lacked the capacity for

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Robert Wohl in his The Generation of 1914 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Una interpretación de la historia universal [1960], translated by Mildred Adams as An Interpretation of Universal History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), pp.167-8.



tradition and ideas.<sup>5</sup> He believed Spain was desperate for education and solving this crisis would become Ortega's mission. Although I believe Ortega exaggerated the landscape of fin-de-siècle Spain, his interpretation of Spain's condition affected his way of life and, consequently, his writings.

Although a native of fin-de-siècle Spain, Ortega had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. His maternal grandfather and his father controlled Spain's leading liberal newspaper, El Imparcial. Later, Ortega would write many of his philosophical reflections in newspaper articles. Being the son of a journalist offered Ortega contact with many crusaders for a "New Spain" at a young age. He knew the leader of the Regenerationist political movement, Joaquin Costa, who called for the modernization or europeanization of Spain. Costa hoped for an intellectual elite to regenerate Spain. This desire remains present throughout Ortega's oeuvre.

The young Ortega was also acquainted with the poets, novelists, and the painters who comprised the "generation of '98": Azorín, Pío Baroja, Ramon Valle-Inclán, Jacinto Benevente, Ramiro de Maetzu, Ignacio Zuloaga, and Miguel de Unamuno. The poet Azorín derived the group's title from the words of Costa. The generation of '98 strove towards the regeneration of Spain through the arts. They nostalgically reflected upon medieval and renaissance Spain as a model for a new Spain. The generation of '98, like the French historian Hyppolite Taine, believed great artworks eternally contained within themselves the unchanging essence of a race. Consequently, many of them devoted their time to the re-interpretation of Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quijote. Miguel de Unamuno believed that out of the ruins of civilization would rise a new super

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<sup>5</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, España invertebrada [1921], translated by Mildred Adams as Invertebrate Spain (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1937), esp. pp. 58-87.

humanity - el hombre quijotizado. Although this new Spaniard has Nietzschean overtones, the superman of Unamuno is a resigned fighter; he is not so aggressive.<sup>6</sup> Unamuno's Quixote immortalizes himself through overcoming ridicule. According to Unamuno, Europe threatens the goodness of Spain. The Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Revolution are foreign to Spain and should not be imported.<sup>7</sup> Unamuno prefers "africanization" over "europeanization." Europe has lost its soul to reason. Modernization or europeanization à la Joaquín Costa may bring Kultur and Wissenschaft; however, it also will bring a new inquisition. In calling for theoretical orthodoxy, reason laughs and even hates personal beliefs. Don Quixote, in his madness, struggles against his destiny and the process of modernization. The world laughs at his impossible dream. But, Quixote does not lose his soul to rationality and finds salvation and immortality. Ortega would later criticize the quixotism of the generation of '98 in his Meditaciones del Quijote [1914]. Ortega still subscribed to quixotism, but not the quixotism of the generation of '98. Don Quixote, although highly imaginative and adventurous, has lost his senses. Don Quixote is a madman, a man without reason.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en hombre y en pueblo [1913], translated by J.E. Crawford Flitch as Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 297-330.

<sup>7</sup>Let the reader beware! At times, Unamuno seems to suggest a return to Catholicism. However, when Unamuno writes about Catholicism in positive terms, he is not describing what is traditionally understood as Catholicism. To his understanding, the goodness of Catholicism, unlike Protestantism which he believes subjects Christ to the "scalpel of criticism," is that it guarantees the immortality of Christ, especially in the Eucharist. The reader should keep in mind, Unamuno's dislike for St. Thomas Aquinas, who rationalizes faith and converted religion into theology. See Unamuno's Tragic Sense of Life, pp. 38-78. Surprisingly, in spite of his apparent appeal for Catholicism, Unamuno for the most part prescribes a form of Liberal Protestantism, analogous to that of Adolf von Harnack and Albrecht Ritschl. For Unamuno, the conflict is not between Christ and the world, between grace and nature, but between the Church and the world, a dispute caused by the Church's own misunderstanding of Christianity. For a good critical introduction to Liberal Protestantism, see H. Richard Niebuhr's chapter on "The Christ of Culture" in Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), pp. 83-115.

<sup>8</sup>Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quijote [1615], translated by J.M. Cohen as Don Quixote (New York: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 32.

Ortega desires imaginative insight but not at the cost of rationality. His quixotism is that of the "author," Señor Cervantes. He wants to possess the vitality that Cervantes gives his novel, not that of Cervantes' life. Ortega does not want to follow in the footsteps of Cervantes, but recapture Cervantes' point of view, his imaginative reflection into the human condition as found in Spain.<sup>9</sup>

Quixotism played a important role in Ortega's childhood. According to his elder brother, Eduardo, Ortega memorized the first chapter of Don Quijote at the age of seven to win a pony from his parents.<sup>10</sup> Although Ortega's father was sceptical of Catholicism he sent his sons to a Jesuit school in Málaga, probably to please his Catholic wife and to offer his children a classical education, one absent in the public school system. But Ortega never professed faith in Christianity. On the day he finished his studies there, it is reported he said to his brother, "If we had continued there, we would have ended up like the Indians in the missions of Paraguay; automata whose movements were governed by the bells that were rung by some of the 'reverends.'"<sup>11</sup> Later, Ortega would claim that the only things the Jesuits taught him were timidity and pedantic exercises.<sup>12</sup> During the summers of his youth, Ortega's father would spend many hours with his sons attempting to un-do the harm of the Jesuits, by opening their minds to the great works of philosophy and literature. To enhance his children's liberal

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<sup>9</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], translated by Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marin, with an introduction and notes by Julián Marías, as Meditations on Quixote (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), pp. 50-3.

<sup>10</sup>Victor Ouimette, José Ortega y Gasset [Twayne's World Authors Series. Spain; T.W.A.S. 624] (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 19. Quoted from Eduardo Ortega y Gasset, "Mi hermano José: recuerdos de infancia y mocedad," Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos XV:3 (May-June 1956), p. 199.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 19.

education, Ortega's father asked his friend Francisco Alcantara, an art historian, to guide the boys regularly through the halls of the Prado. The favor was granted.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout his life, Ortega considered Christianity a false religion. From Ortega's point of view, Christianity was equated with Roman Catholic asceticism, an irresponsible negation of this world in favor of another. Consequently, Ortega placed his faith in a new humanism, that of quixotism - one that calls for an imaginative and noble transformation of this world.

After receiving his doctorate at the Universidad de Madrid in 1904, Ortega left his homeland and traveled to Germany to continue his education, one he believed unattainable in Spain. Ortega referred to himself as a gerfalcon at this stage in his life. He lived as a bird of great insight meditating while perched upon the ruins of El Escorial, who flies to foreign lands in search of food, because of the scarcity within his own territory.<sup>14</sup> Ortega traveled to Germany hunting for philosophical prey. Between April and November of 1905, Ortega studied at Leipzig under Wilhelm Wundt and Theodor Lipps. Unsatisfied with his mentors Ortega transferred to the University of Berlin for the summer session. At Berlin he worked under the direction of Georg Simmel and probably had his first encounter with the Lebensphilosophie of Henri Bergson and Wilhelm Dilthey. But our gerfalcon searched for greater prey. In the fall semester of 1906, he flew to Marburg, home of the neo-kantians Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. During the next couple of years the thought of Ortega germinated under the direction of Cohen and Natorp. Hermann Cohen pushed Ortega towards systematic

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, pp. 18-9.

<sup>14</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo para alemanes" [1934], translated, with an introduction, by Philip W. Silver as "Preface for Germans," Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 29-30.

discipline and, most likely, it was Paul Natorp who introduced him to the phenomenological methods of Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl. His ideas also developed in the numerous conversations he had with a colleague at Marburg, Nicolai Hartmann. But neo-kantian philosophy was not the only significant part of his life in Marburg, for in these years he married a Spanish woman who was a devout Catholic, Rosa Spottorno Topete, was appointed Professor of Metaphysics at the Universidad de Madrid, and became a father. At Marburg, the couple had the first of three children, Miguel German, named after two saints within the Ortega-Spottorno household, San German the Catholic saint under whose day the child was born and "San Miguel" after Ortega's dear old friend, Miguel de Cervantes.<sup>15</sup> Upon capturing his prey, that of philosophical thought, Ortega returned to Madrid with his family in 1910, where he took up his chair in metaphysics, a position he was to hold off and on throughout his life.

Upon his return to Spain, many considered him another Germanophile, like Julián Sanz del Río, who attempted to bring krausian philosophy to Spain in the middle of the nineteenth century. But Ortega insisted his flight to Germany was for germination, not Germanization. As he described his travel,

The reader must not, therefore, imagine that my trip to Germany was the journey of a devout pilgrim who goes to kiss the Holy Pontiff's feet. On the contrary, it was a rapid predatory flight, the arrow-like dive of a hungry falcon on something fleshy and alive that his round, bright eye has discovered in the countryside below. In my distant, impassioned youth I was in fact somewhat like a young hawk who nested in the ruins of a Spanish castle. ...I was off to Germany to bring back German culture to a corner of the ruins and there devour it. Spain needed Germany. I felt my being - as you will see - so closely identified with my country that its needs were my appetites, my hungers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, pp. 32-3.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, pp. 29-30.

Ortega did not want to make Spain German, but raise its culture to what he saw in Germany.

Furthermore, Ortega did not accept the words of Cohen and Natorp wholeheartedly. He confesses to have lived within the confines of a "kantian prison" during his youth. But as many historians will tell us, there is little reason to believe Ortega was ever a neo-kantian, although this movement surely had an impact upon his scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, we can best understand this kantian prison as a metaphor of the birthplace of his thought. After all, Cervantes conceived of his masterpiece, Don Quijote, while confined in an Algerian prison as a prisoner of war.

In Spain Ortega tried to enculturate others. He wrote numerous philosophical essays in daily newspapers. Ortega founded a publishing company in 1923, Revista de Occidente. This company translated numerous philosophical texts, including those of Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger. It also published a journal under the company's name. Within the pages of this journal, the reader encountered short stories, poetry, philosophical essays, music and visual art reviews, all in the context of Spanish culture. Ortega had brought the cultural understanding of Germans back to Spain without losing Spain's own sense of culture. Unfortunately, for Ortega, Germany did not return the favor.

Ortega had formulated the meaning of aletheia as "discovery" over a decade before Heidegger, but continued to live in the shadows of German philosophy. The Castillian language is not a language that scholars are apt to read. The German, French, English, and Italian languages hold far more appeal to twentieth-century

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 69.

academics. Many of Ortega's essays remained untranslated until he reached his later years. Consequently, during his life, Ortega did not receive the exposure that he would have enjoyed if he had written in another language. But then again, Ortega considered Spain, not the whole of humanity, to be his audience. But Ortega is also to blame for being lost in the shuffle. One cannot understand his systematic agenda without reading a good portion of his Obras Completas. Ortega's medium - newspaper articles - limited access to his system of thought as a whole; and unfortunately, his Obras Completas were not compiled until after the Second World War. Consequently, Ortega's work was difficult to comprehend for Spanophone and non-Spanophone alike. Upon his return to Spain, Ortega also became involved in politics. Some readers who have passed through only the pages of his most famous text, La rebelión de las masas [1930], may be surprised to learn that Ortega did not consider himself a conservative elitist, but a socialist. However, Ortega's socialism should not be confused with that of Marx or of utopian socialists. He abhors the idea of a revolt of the masses. Ortega cries for revolution, but a "revolution of competence,"<sup>18</sup> replacing the technocratic bureaucracy. Ortega's socialism, perhaps, is best understood as similar to that of John Stuart Mill, a socialism with a liberalist flavor. Like Mill, Ortega wants the government to care for the common good, which amounts to no more than the sum of all particular needs of each citizen. He willingly accepts the dichotomy of the elect and the masses, so long as society eliminates cruelty and permits the individual freedom, the intellectual happiness of the culturati.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Obras Completas X (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp.226-7.

<sup>19</sup>Ortega's political stance is more akin to neo-kantian socialism found in the work of Hermann Cohen than to the utilitarian socialism of Mill. I compare Ortega to Mill instead of Cohen only because Mill is more familiar to North American readers. For a good introduction to the political thought of the Marburg School,

Between 1903 and 1923 the First Republic of Spain, organized in 1873 by abdication of its constitutional monarch Amadeo I, suffered or endured numerous unsuccessful administrations. Due to continual political unrest, Alfonso XII - against the constitution - declared Spain a military dictatorship under the direction of General Primo de Rivera. At first, the dictatorship was well received, even by some socialists, including Ortega y Gasset. Primo de Rivera's government gave Spain security, and he promised to return to a parliamentary government after the storm had subsided. But in 1929 he withdrew his guarantee and abolished the Cortes, that is, parliament, and also denied freedom of the press. In reaction to de Rivera's new policies, Ortega resigned his position as chair of metaphysics, protesting against these new policies which threatened education and academic freedom.

Upon leaving his university chair, Ortega gave lectures in a theatre, which were compiled posthumously as ¿Qué es filosofía?, wrote numerous essays including La rebelión de las masas, in reaction to Spain's political crisis. Many individuals criticized the actions of de Rivera, but the army and the Church continued to support him. In 1930 Ortega, with other intellectuals, wrote a manifesto Al Servicio de la Republica, in opposition to the dictatorship and the monarchy, calling for the organization of a second republic. Some army officers and their troops refused to obey the orders of de Rivera or the king. Two such officers were executed. Riots re-emerged on the streets in opposition to the dictatorship. Primo de Rivera was forced to flee Spain for France, where he died of natural causes in the second week of exile. The king was forced to call for elections and leave the throne. The Second Republic of Spain was formed.

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see Thomas E. Willey, Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), pp. 111-6.



Excited by the possibility of political reform, Ortega ran for office and was elected to the Cortes by the district of León. The Second Republic, however, never gained stability. There were too many clashes between Right-wing oriented monarchists and Catholics and leftist groups, such as socialists, communists, and anarchists. Disenchanted with politics, Ortega quit his position in 1932, and spent more time writing articles and books.

In 1936 the Second Republic went from bad to worse. Fearing for the life of his family and the success of his mission, Ortega exiled himself to Paris, where he settled for two years. After France, the Ortega-Spottorno family moved to Portugal. During this time Ortega declined an offer to teach at Harvard University. Instead, he went to Argentina. Ortega had made two previous tours of Argentina in 1916 and in 1928, but this time would be different. His first two trips to Latin America were profitable. Ortega reconquered Spain's lost colonies, but not with guns. He employed the weapons of philosophy and brought lebensphilosophie, existentialism, and phenomenology to Latin America. But the 1939 tour failed to meet his expectations. During the first two trips to Latin America, Ortega was treated with respect. Now, he was just another intellectual exile. Furthermore, this time Argentina was no longer a republic; instead, it was governed by a military dictatorship. Ortega suffered long bouts of depression. His homeland, devastated by civil war between 1936-9, saw another dictatorship with the blessing of the Church, that of Franco, and his "home away from home," Argentina followed suit. From Ortega's point of view, his circumstance remained shipwrecked and the revolt of the masses steamrollered over most opportunities to save his circumstance.

Ortega returned to Spain in 1942 and founded the Instituto del Humanitas with his disciple Julián Marías Aguilera. However, the Instituto never obtained any

communal force. Students anticipated that Ortega would make a political statement denouncing Franco's regime. When Ortega failed to deliver such a speech, they felt that Ortega lost the vital sense of his own mission. After all, he was neglecting the personal call to transform his circumstance.

Although Franco allowed the Instituto del Humanitas to open, he rejected Ortega's request to re-organize Revista de Occidente, his previous publishing company, and in 1950 Franco closed the Instituto's doors. Upon the failure of the Instituto, Ortega retired. He spent his remaining years giving the odd lecture, writing a few essays, and taking walks in Madrid's Retiro Park with Marías, preparing the leader of the next generation to continue his calling.<sup>20</sup> José Ortega y Gasset died on October 18, 1955, at the age of seventy-two.<sup>21</sup>

To my understanding, Ortega wrote in order to solve the problems of his life. His writings are best understood as therapeutic attempts to save his circumstance. Consequently, when he tells us about the history of art or about art history writing, he hopes to achieve far more than a simple demonstration of facts. Ortega wants to prescribe a vital interpretation, one capable of dealing with life's crises. His categories for art historiography participate within a greater mission, that of making life liveable. Hence, we should understand his categories as imperatives, norms for building a better Spanish civilization.

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<sup>20</sup>Not all orteguian would consider Marías to be a legitimate disciple of Ortega, because of Marías' attempt to synthesize Ortega's thought and Roman Catholicism. Note, that today, Marías is an adviser to the Pope. In spite of the religious differences between Ortega and Marías, Marías considers himself heir to Ortega's legacy and to my understanding he is. However, by no means does Marías' thought encompass the whole of the orteguian tradition. Non-Catholic thinkers are also legitimate heirs.

<sup>21</sup>There are many accounts which suggest that Ortega had a death-bed conversion to Catholicism. But whether or not this is true, it has no bearing on his philosophical thought. For more, see Carlos Rojas, Unamuno y Ortega: Intelectuales frente al drama (Barcelona: Editorial Dirosea, 1977), pp. 190-5.

## Chapter Two: Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia

To unravel the threads of José Ortega y Gasset's methodology for art historiography, we need to discover their place within the weaving of his entire philosophically crafted tapestry. Fortunately, the tapestry's weaver himself has pointed to the origin of all his interwoven strings, that is, to the basic orientation of his work. Ortega has announced life as the starting point of his philosophical weaving. But what is life, as interpreted by Ortega? And how does this understanding relate to his interpretation of art? This chapter will concentrate upon answering these questions.

I will, in this chapter and in those that follow, compare Ortega with other thinkers. Ortega, throughout his life, points to his philosophical innovations, even where they seem reorientations at best. He rarely footnotes the work of others and when he does, it is usually to critique them. Ortega does not report his indebtedness to others willingly. Consequently, it is up to the reader to make such comparisons. Throughout this thesis I will allude to Ortega's relation to others, at times illuminating his debts. This effort, I hope, will both deepen the reader's understanding of Ortega's writings and will help the reader contextualize his thought within the rubric of the philosophical tradition.

From Ortega's point of view, "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia" [I am I and my circumstance]. Each living person is the coexistence of two dimensions: being someone and being surrounded by things. My life consists of the dialogue between I, a perceiving subject, and my surroundings, the happenings around me. Without the duality of I and the not-I, that is circumstance, life is impossible.

Some readers will notice the fichtean overtones of Ortega's dictum. The German

idealist philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, describes the absolute ego as the union of two poles: the finite self and the finite not-self. Furthermore, Fichte refers to the self as a pure activity as opposed to the thingly character of the not-self. The self cannot be turned into an object of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Ortega describes life in a similar fashion. However, Ortega is not an idealist. Fichte opposes the self and the not-self but only within the greater context of the absolute ego. In other words, the absolute ego posits the difference between the two within itself and posits this as the ideal. Ortega interprets fichtean philosophy as extremism; Fichte absolutizes human subjectivity. Fichte, although he refers to the not-self, neglects our circumstance. He is interested only in the other so far as it is an object for consciousness. Fichte does not see the world beyond the framing of his own subjectivity. For Ortega, life cannot be reduced to being the mere spectacle of the mind. In fichtean philosophy, life loses its vitality. Therefore, although I believe that Ortega may have been influenced by Fichte, I do not believe that Ortega derives his interpretation of life as I and my surroundings from Fichte.<sup>2</sup>

To my understanding, Ortega's category of life is a philosophical modification of Jakob von Uexküll's theory of biology. Uexküll investigated the relationship of organisms to their surroundings, their Umwelten. Each organism contains an anatomical structure, its Innenwelt, which possesses the capacity to cooperate with its given

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<sup>1</sup>Johann Gottlieb Fichte, System der Sittenlehre nach den Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre [1798], translated, with an introduction, by Peter Heath and John Lachs as Science of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 20-50.

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to José Sánchez Villaseñor for his comparison of Fichte and Ortega, although he may overemphasize the connection. See his Pensamiento y Trayectoria de José Ortega y Gasset [1943], translated by Joseph Small as Ortega y Gasset, Existentialist: A Critical Study of His Thought and Its Sources (Chicago: Henry Regency Co., 1949), pp. 217-9.

circumstance, one which allows the organism to affect and to be affected by its environment. Consequently, the organism and its Umwelt adapt to one another's mutations. If equilibrium between the two fails, the organism will die. The possibility of life demands a balanced correlation of an organism's biotic structure and its circumstance.<sup>3</sup> Ortega transforms Uexküll's biological theory to shape his philosophical ontology.

Ortega does not accept Uexküll's theory wholeheartedly. He insists that human life is not just a biotic harmony between some person and his or her environment. On the contrary, it consists of a biography, a vital-historical writing. Life is not given to humans ready-made, but empty. We are condemned to choose how to live. Unlike the animal, who is always like the first of its kind, a human being does not start life at ground-zero. We are not eternal Adams and Eves, that is, carbon-copies of the original humans. Our lives are different from our parents. We live within the world that they have forged for us.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the vital fusion of being-in-circumstance poses a self-constructed problem. Life begins with a fundamental problem: how do I make this life my own? My life has been thrown upon me without choice. I did not decide to be-in-situation, but I must decide what to make of it.<sup>5</sup>

For Ortega human life is a historical drama; the homo sapiens is in reality a

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<sup>3</sup>Jakob von Uexküll, Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1909).

<sup>4</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Historia como sistema" (1941), translated by Helene Weyl as "History as a System" in History as a System and Other Essays Towards a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), p. 220.

<sup>5</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditación de la técnica" [1939], translated by Helene Weyl as "Man the Technician" in History as a System and Other Essays Towards a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), pp. 115-21.

homo faber, a maker.<sup>6</sup> Human beings form their own lives. Ortega's conception of autofabrication, hacerse, should not be confused with Henri Bergson's concept of becoming, devenir. In his L'Evolution creatrice Bergson describes human life in terms of an élan vital, a vital impulse, which determines our endless becoming.<sup>7</sup> Bergson defines life as biological. By contrast, Ortega defines human life as biographical. But Ortega's hacerse includes more than our evolution of self-creation. Life is essentially autofabrication to the second power. Not only do we have the capacity and necessity to make ourselves, we need to determine who we are going to be. We must select both how to form our lives and what form our lives should take.<sup>8</sup> For Bergson the energies of an enduring intuition determine human becoming. For Ortega human life is guided by vital or historical reason.

From all the possibilities our circumstance provides, each individual must select his or her actual being. Unfortunately, life is short and demanding. Our days are numbered. We cannot do everything. Our lives are limited. This is what gives life its value. We are forced to solve the problem of our lives swiftly and skillfully. Our finitude limits our possibilities. We must select one possibility of life at the exclusion of potential opportunities of occupying our time.

According to many of Ortega's commentators,<sup>9</sup> his description of the human

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<sup>6</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Unas lecciones de metafísica [1966], translated by Mildred Adams as Some Lessons in Metaphysics (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1969), p. 104.

<sup>7</sup>Henri Bergson, L'Evolution creatrice [1907], translated by Arthur Mitchell as Creative Evolution (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), pp. 89-97.

<sup>8</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "History as a System," pp. 201-2.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Stern, The Search for Meaning: Philosophical Vistas (Memphis TN: Memphis State University Press, 1971), p. 258; also see Robert William Jung, The Aesthetics of José Ortega y Gasset (Ann Arbor MI: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), pp. 8-9.

project resembles Sartre's notion of "being condemned to be free."<sup>10</sup> Both Ortega and Sartre refer to the facticity of freedom, that is, the necessity of choice; however, they define the humanity's thrown-project in different ways. Hence, one needs to be careful while comparing Ortega and Sartre. Ortega's hacerse is not akin to Sartre's project from existence to essence.<sup>11</sup> For Ortega to exist is to achieve one's essence, to bring into being oneself within one's circumstance; it is not possible to be without being something or someone.<sup>12</sup> There is no pure existence without essence. Furthermore, Sartre roots human freedom in human subjectivity. For Sartre, being-for-itself is the negation of being-in-itself by nothingness, that is, by human consciousness.<sup>13</sup> Freedom resides in selecting a path for being-for-itself.<sup>14</sup> As we later shall see, Ortega, like Heidegger, is leery of employing such a notion. To their understanding, Sartre's humanism would deny the historicity of thinking and destroy the preservation of one's circumstance.

For Ortega, the human project consists of discovering a point of orientation, a point of view, from our basic disorientation, as being shipwrecked with things. To his understanding, our vocation is not a chore, but a vital mission. Life is a drama. As Ortega describes human life, "... existing becomes a poetic task, like the playwright's or the novelist's: that of inventing a plot of existence, giving it a character which will make

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<sup>10</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Être et néant [1943], translated by Hazel E. Barnes as Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1956), pp. 619-37.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, pp. 45-9.

<sup>12</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Some Lessons in Metaphysics, pp. 68-70.

<sup>13</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp. 56-60.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, pp. 185-6.

it both suggestive and appealing."<sup>15</sup> Our circumstance to a certain degree demands that we take a stand, that we take a point of view. Being shipwrecked in the sea of circumstance, we need to make a world-to-be-in out of the terra, the earth, that is the dry ground which the circumstance offers, here lies our salvation.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, for Ortega, unlike existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Unamuno, and Heidegger, the thrownness of life is not just an agony, but an adventure.<sup>17</sup>

Our ability to suspend temporarily our relations with things, to search within ourselves, ensimismarse, to become self-internalizing or self-encompassing, allows us to make life-decisions. By contrast, animals cannot make such choices. They live in constant fear. Animals are always sensing their surroundings, looking for food and listening for predators. Circumstance rules the animal's life. The animal must always be alert to the other [in Castillian the otro, or in Latin the alter], for it lives in the state of never-ending danger, under the tyranny of the other. Its being is pure alteration, pure relation to another. When unthreatened, the animal takes a holiday from life. It simply goes to sleep, for it is temporarily hidden from the other. Humans, like animals, are surrounded by others; however, we are not puppets of circumstance, of the other. Animals affect their environment by accident. Humans, by contrast, transform their surroundings consciously. We possess the capacity to alter the alter, the other, our circumstance, through ensimismarse. As Ortega describes it,

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<sup>15</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo a *Veinte años de caza mayor*" [1942], translated by Howard B. Westcott as *Meditations on Hunting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>16</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote* [1914], translated by Evelyn Ruggs and Diego Marin as *Meditations on Quixote* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), pp. 96-101.

<sup>17</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de teoría deductiva* [1958], translated by Mildred Adams as *The Idea of Principle in Leibniz and the Evolution of Deductive Theory* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1958), pp. 310-3.



Far from losing his own self in this return to the other, he projects it energetically and masterfully upon things, in other words, he forces the other - the world - little by little to become himself. Man humanizes the world, injects it, impregnates it with his own ideal substance and is finally entitled to imagine one day or another, in the far depths of time, this terrible outer world will become so saturated with man that our descendants will be able to travel through it as today we mentally travel through our own inmost selves....<sup>18</sup>

In En torno a Galileo Ortega compares ensimismamiento to the essence of conversion in Christianity.

Given this mode of life [Christianity] characterized by instability, extremism, controversy, the sudden and complete shifts which are called conversion will be very frequent. Conversion is man's change not from one idea to another, but from one definite point of view to its exact opposite: life suddenly seems to us turned upside down and inside out. That which yesterday we were burning at the stake we adore today. Hence the word which St. Paul, John the Baptist, and Jesus used: metanoieite - become converted, repent; that is to say, deny what you were up to this very moment and affirm your truth, recognize that you are lost. Out of this negation comes the new man who is to be constructed. St. Paul used this term again and again - oikodome - construction, building up from the ruins of man; out of his ashes there must be raised a new edifice. But first he must abandon the false positions he occupied and come to himself, return to his intimate truth, which is the only firm base: this is conversion. In it the man who is lost from himself encounters the self that he has found, the self with which he is in agreement, the self which is completely one with his truth. Metanoia, or conversion and repentance, is therefore none other than what I call ensimismamiento - withdrawal into one's self, return to oneself.<sup>19</sup>

Upon recognizing ourselves as thrown-into-our-circumstance, as shipwrecked with things, we will search within ourselves, finding solutions for life, dis-covering securities from the other. Ensimismarse is to take a point of view, to find a plan for living life.<sup>20</sup> Our perception of the world will orientate our actions.

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<sup>18</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ensimismamiento y alteración" [1939], translated by Willard R. Trask as "The Self and the Other" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p.184.

<sup>19</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, En torno a Galileo [1933], translated by Mildred Adams as Man and Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1958), p. 151.

<sup>20</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "The Self and the Other," p. 181.

Ortega's notion of life is similar to Heidegger's notion of Dasein. Both thinkers describe humanity as a stranger in the world and define life in terms of a thrown-project, an existential mission of authenticity.<sup>21</sup> Ortega and Heidegger, well-acquainted with the phenomenological tradition, rejected early Husserl's epoché, the bracketing of the world.<sup>22</sup> Such an act of "pure consciousness" deprives thought of its most constitutive element - its vitality, as living-in-circumstance or being-in-the-world. The act of ensimismarse does not "bracket" the world, but reabsorbs circumstance from a vital point of view. Theoretical thought is neither divorced from nor determined by its historical context. Meditation is motivated by circumstance, yet, is somehow able to overcome it momentarily.<sup>23</sup> Neither Ortega nor Heidegger want to oppose subject and object via conceptual abstraction, but rather want to describe things in light of the coexistence of I and things. Ortega and Heidegger not only place the subject in situation, within an historical context, but open new ways of understanding human

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<sup>21</sup>Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit [1927], translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 184-5.

<sup>22</sup>Edmund Husserl, Ideen au einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie [1913], translated by W.R. Boyce Gibson as Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (New York: Collier-Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 99-100. Note that towards the end of his life, Husserl is no longer interested in philosophy as a rigorous science and changes his interpretation of human consciousness. He posits the Lebenswelt as the forgotten ground of meaning. Egged on by Heidegger's Sein und Zeit and historical problems of his age, Husserl revises his phenomenological method. In this new program, cultural idealities which cannot be pointed to, such as Raphael's Madonna and the Isosceles triangle, need concretization in an reproducible artifact. It belongs to the essence of ideality that it needs embodiment. Writing resolves the crisis of lost ideality and active reading allows one to reawaken the ideality. See his Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie [1936], translated by David Carr as The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) and his Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik [1939], translated by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks as Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). For a good critique of Husserl's understanding of writing and meaning, see Jacques Derrida, La Voix et le Phénomène [1967], translated by David Allison as Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). To my understanding, the late Husserl was belated and had little or no effect on Ortega's writings.

<sup>23</sup>In this sense, Ortega's ensimismarse is not even akin to the late Husserl's concept of Lebenswelt. For Ortega, the concrete motivates ideality, whereas for the late Husserl the concrete merely allows us to take notice the ideality that was always there.

beings. Beyond old theories of substance, which defined humans as rei, as things, they interpret humans as no-things in the presence of things. In spite of these similarities, we should refrain from equating Ortega's vivencia with Heidegger's Dasein.

Ortega, throughout his life, tried to distinguish his thought from Heidegger's. Criticizing Heidegger and existentialism as a whole, he wrote,

To exist, to be inside oneself, is contrary to what we call "to live," which is to be outside oneself, to be ontologically devoted to the other, be this other called the world or circumstance.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, Ortega misunderstands Heidegger's interpretation of existence. He thinks "Being-there" is a static a-historical interpretation of life. Ortega believes humans are the only beings which do not exist, but on the contrary, live.<sup>25</sup> Life is always a here and now co-existence with things, an inter-existence, as opposed to "being there" without having anything to do with one another. However, for Heidegger, the fundamental state of Dasein is Being-in-the-world and the essence of Dasein lies in its existence.<sup>26</sup> Even after the Kehre, existence is understood dynamically. In his Brief über den Humanismus, Heidegger believes to exist is to ek-sist, to step out or to come forth.<sup>27</sup> Hence, this supposed difference only betrays great similarity. Both thinkers direct humanity outside of itself, which is to say, no more than to place humanity inside the world. However, differences do exist. First, Heidegger understands the "there" of

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<sup>24</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Obras Completas V (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p. 546. Translation mine.

<sup>25</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El hombre y la gente [1957], translated by Willard R. Trask as Man and People (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1957), p. 41.

<sup>26</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 65-7.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus" [1947], translated by Frank A. Capuzzi as "Letter on Humanism" in Basic Writings (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 193-242. Note, however, that after the Kehre, Dasein is no longer the clearing where Being is revealed, language is.

Dasein as a burden. Humanity is free to choose its own existence, but it is powerless to be da or there. In other words, we can only decide how and where we are going "to be there." Like Ortega, Heidegger believes in the projection of human freedom humanity can choose only one finite possibility out of many opportunities. Recognizing this limitation, of singularity and finitude, allows Dasein to discover "freedom-unto-Death." Acknowledging the inevitable fate is the only freedom Dasein can take in relation to its own certain death. Humanity has no escape from his tragic situation. As a victim of finitude, Dasein can see the bullet of death leave the gun and view its on-coming demise.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, as we have seen, Ortega understands life as both tragedy and adventure. He believes Heidegger's notion of Dasein is too melodramatic and pessimistic.

Second, according to Heidegger, because humanity is estranged, it always questions its own Being.<sup>29</sup> To Ortega's understanding, Heidegger, like Dilthey, starts his thought as if philosophy were the most natural thing for humans to do. Heidegger, says Ortega, reduces humanity to philosophy. Ortega, by contrast, thinks that the questioning of Being is an historical event, originating around 480 B.C. and continues to interest a limited few in a certain number of places. To Ortega, philosophy starts from doubt, a loss of faith in traditional beliefs. It signifies a search for new universal truths. However, philosophy itself is not universal and may some day itself be superseded by something else.<sup>30</sup> Ortega interprets the questioning of Being as one possibility within the contours of life.

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<sup>28</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 304-11.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, pp. 24-32.

<sup>30</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Idea of Principle in Leibniz and the Evolution of Deductive Theory, p. 277.

Third, Heidegger describes a fundamental distinction between the ontic and the ontological, between beings and Being. Dasein is there where the onto-ontological difference takes place.<sup>31</sup> The human being is the only being for whom Being becomes an issue. Ortega, by contrast, believes that the onto-ontological difference is trivial and has outlived its usefulness.<sup>32</sup> Many people have lived without an understanding of Being. The problem of life is our circumstance not our Being.

What do all of these questions surrounding the problem of life have to do with the history of painting? Well, for Ortega art is an imaginative solution to life, a type of ensimismarse. Like Schopenhauer Ortega believes that art makes life tolerable, liveable.<sup>33</sup> But, unlike Schopenhauer, art, as a solution, does not possess a transcendental function, permitting us to escape our circumstance. Art substitutes vitality in an empty existence. It intensifies human life. Adventurous humans do not need art. We imagine due to boredom. It seems Ortega understands art as a freudian-like substitution for an absent vitality. Daydreaming fills the vacuum of our lives. It raises our consciousness of radical reality, of being shipwrecked. Through symbolizing our human condition, art allows us to write our history, to save our circumstance.<sup>34</sup>

The making of artworks, poesis, is an attempt to solve the problem of life. As Ortega describes it,

To orient ourselves to the sense of an art, one must convene to decide its ideal theme....

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<sup>31</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Idea of Principle in Leibniz and the Evolution of Deductive Theory, p. 287.

<sup>33</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Poesía nueva y poesía vieja" [1906], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p.49-51.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, pp. 30-1.

Man carries within himself a heroic-tragic problem: whatever he makes, all his activities, are only functions of that problem, steps to resolve this problem.<sup>35</sup>

Later in this essay, he writes,

Would it be, well, an extravagant event to say that the generic, fundamental, prototypical theme of painting, is that which Genesis proposes in its beginning? Adam in paradise. Who is Adam? Any one and no one in particular: life itself.

Where is paradise? The landscape of the North or of Noon? It is not important: it is the ubiquitous scenario for the immense tragedy of living, where man battles and is comforted only to return in battle.<sup>36</sup>

The human condition, being-in-circumstance, is the essential theme of all art. Art, as ensimismamiento, is not for autonomous self-absorption, that is to say, l'art pour l'art, but for the internalization of vitality, for the heroic salvation from our tragic circumstance of being shipwrecked. Consequently, Ortega has little patience with artists who neglect to discover the problem of life. As he warns the poet,

If you are not immersed in the great currents of subsoil which link and animate all beings, if you are not concerned with the great anguishes of humanity, in spite of your pretty verses ... you are not a poet, you are a philistine.... I do not believe that one can have art, in its noble meaning, which is not rooted in these perennial realities.... Is not the final reality pain? Poetry is the flower of pain, but not of the momentary and individual, but of a pain on which is based the entire life of the individual.... All art ought to be tragic. Without a seed of tragedy, poetry is doggerel or a rhetorical theme, art for poor little old ladies of brittle nerves and glass souls.<sup>37</sup>

Art cannot ignore the necessity to express the ultimate reality, that is to say, the problem of life; if it fails, then it is no more than Kitsch.

For Ortega the history of art, as the history of philosophy and that of literature, can only be the history of men. Writings are only historiographies when they offer a

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<sup>35</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Adán en el paraíso" [1911], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 478-9. Translation mine.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, pp.492-3.

<sup>37</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Poesía nueva y poesía vieja," pp. 50-1. Translation mine.

perspective on the human drama, that of life.

Ortega criticizes the art historiographic method of Heinrich Wölfflin. The history of art is not the history of seeing, that is to say, the self-governed cycle of style changes. Art history belongs within the whole of human history, as the history of human projects of hacerse by ensimismarse. Alois Riegl's concept of Kunstwollen, of "artistic will to form," recognizes the multiplicity of techniques, artistic purposes, and authorial intentions present throughout the history of painting. However, Ortega laments that Kunstwollen does not capture historical meaning. It examines only stylistic features. Ortega is not primarily concerned with how artists paint, not even what they paint. By contrast, he wants to discover why the artists of each epoch paint, and the role of the act of painting within the vital goals of each artist's life. Ortega concentrates upon the vocation of painting itself.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, he searches into the reasons why Velázquez, for example, was a painter. Ortega does not want just to describe the artistic occupation, but explain it. He hopes to un-cover Velázquez' world and life view, his Weltanschauung, the artist's point of view concerning his vital mission.

For Ortega, each of Velázquez' paintings are individual solutions for existence. Each of them is a product of his point of view. Consequently, to dis-cover the meaning of one of his paintings, for instance, Las Meninas, the beholder must investigate the vita of its artist, Diego Rodriguez da Silva Velázquez. Authorial presence, the artist's life, is essential to unveil the meaning of a painting.

In his "Introducción a Velázquez," Ortega searches deep into Velázquez' life, the

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<sup>38</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La reviviscencia de los cuadros" (first chapter in Velázquez) [1943], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Reviving the Paintings" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 212-3.

artist and his circumstance. Upon reflection he attempts to un-cover Velázquez' vocation, his circumstance, and the chance factor within that circumstance. According to Ortega,

Velázquez came from a noble family which had emigrated and became impoverished, and in which moreover the preoccupation with their lineage must have been obsessive. In their hearts the legend persisted that the Silva family stemmed from no less a person than Aeneas Sylvius, King of Alba Longa. But fortune had been cruel, and in their present circumstances the glorious family tradition was stylized and sublimated in myth and religion. In the initial and deepest layer of his soul, Velázquez found this commandment: "You must be a nobleman." But for the time being the incentive was schematic, remote and impracticable. Nearer to hand, more concrete, he discovered at the threshold of his life, a magnificent possibility: his incredible talent for painting.<sup>39</sup>

Ortega credits Velázquez' scarcity of paintings and his refusal of taking many commissions to his choice of vocation. Velázquez used the activity of painting, an imaginatively developed circumstantial talent, to achieve ennoblement. He aspired to be a great artist only to restore the nobility of his family. Las Meninas represents its artist's point of view. This painting is Velázquez' self-projection upon materials in response to his circumstance. His authority, his formative power, humanizes pigment and produces a new reality, that of a work of art. In Las Meninas we behold the artist's attempt to solve the crisis of his life through a discharge of artistic vitality.

In order to interpret Ortega's methodology in the light of his vital circumstances, we should search into the ways his project corresponds to and/or differs from other writings focusing on related art historical problems. Recognizing Ortega as a visitor to our discipline, I would like to discover some art historians to greet his arrival. Through comparing his methodological categories to that employed by natives of our field of

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<sup>39</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Introducción a Velázquez" [1943], translated by Alexis Brown as "Introduction to Velázquez" in Velázquez, Goya, and the Dehumanization of Art (London: Studio Vista, 1972), p. 92.



study, I hope to find for Ortega a hospitable host. Upon revealing a possible dwelling for Ortega, I will appreciatively, yet suspiciously, examine the landscape where Ortega can drop his bags and call home.

First, we have heard Ortega's interpretation of Wölfflin and Riegl. Neither art historian can provide suitable lodging for our visitor. Wölfflin reduces the history of art to a spiraling cycle derived from its internal logic: the duality of an a priori schema, of binary oppositions in form, in cooperation with an externalization-to-form, a temperament.<sup>40</sup> Riegl confines the unfolding history of art to the rebounding determination of Kunstwollen, between haptic and optic vision, that is to say, between two ways of interpreting nature, through external physical sensing and through internal psychic feeling.<sup>41</sup> To Ortega's sensibilities neither categorical framework is acceptable. Although Wölfflin recognizes a duality within the structure of reality, he reduces the history of artistic life to the history of optics. His conception appears more biological than biographical, more abstractly scientific than historical. Forms, for Wölfflin, remain a priori structures. Riegl, on the other hand, recognizes the historical interplay between types of vision; unfortunately, Riegl's Kunstwollen neglects to account for the problem of life, one's irrational circumstance. Kunstwollen can only deal with the perceived image as an object for purely subjective attention. The aesthetic will-to-form constitutes its circumstance in itself. Consequently, Ortega interprets Riegl's approach as subjectivistic, one-sided, for it neglects the presence of the other, that distinguished from the

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<sup>40</sup>Heinrich Wölfflin, Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe [1915], translated by M.D. Hottinger as Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950).

<sup>41</sup>Alois Riegl, "Das Hollandische Gruppenportrat" [1902], translated by Stephen S. Kayser as "Geertgen tot Sint Jans' The Legend of the Relics of St. John the Baptist in Modern Perspectives in Art History: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Writings in the Visual Arts (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), pp. 124-38.

perceiving subject. Wölfflin and Riegl, in their search for an innocent eye, only describe the visible facts of art, at the cost of vitality.

Like the French neo-marxian art historian, Pierre Francastel, Ortega wants to examine the vital impulse within human life, life's autofabrication. Francastel accepts a bergsonian conception of becoming, devenir.<sup>42</sup> As I stated before, Ortega's notion of hacerse adds another dimension to becoming, that of determining what life is to be.

We should not confuse Ortega's emphasis on life, as a philosophical category, with the Lebensphilosophie of philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Henri Bergson. Dilthey and Bergson define humanity in terms of its cultural history, its creative evolution. By contrast, Ortega, as an existentialist, describes the human condition as being shipwrecked with things. Life begins in the insecurity of "being-there" confronted by the other, one's circumstance. Cultural activities belong to part of human history, but they do not absorb the whole of life. As Ortega understood it,

Culture is not the whole of life, but only a moment of security, of certainty, of clarity. And the Greeks invent the concept as an instrument, not for replacing the spontaneity of life, but making it secure.<sup>43</sup>

Later in Meditaciones del Quijote, he continues on this point,

Cervantes recognizes that culture is all that [all our loves and imagination], but that, alas, it is a fiction. Surrounding culture - as the puppet-show of fancy was surrounded by the inn - lies the barbarous, brutal, mute, meaningless reality of things. It is sad that it should reveal itself to us thus, but what can we do about it! It is real, it is there: it is terribly self-sufficient. Its force and its single meaning are rooted in its sheer presence. Culture is memories and promises, an irreversible past, a dreamed future. But reality is a simple and frightening "being there." It is a presence, a deposit, an inertia.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Pierre Francastel, L'Impressionisme (Paris: Denoël, 1974), pp. 34-5.

<sup>43</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Quixote, p. 96.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, pp. 144-5.

Culture is the secure world we make out of our circumstance, but our transformation, our creativity, is not technological formation, but is first and foremost our fantasies, our meditations, our ensimismamientos. Autofabrication, hacerse, is governed by our pre-technical inventiveness, by our efforts to discover blueprints for life's project.<sup>45</sup> The authentic point of view, one which recognizes our vital mission, gives meaning to culture, the creative possibilities, the securities, that our circumstance gives us. Culture is a gift of the situation, which provides the context of our adventure. Our culture offers us security; it is the opportunity to relax, to catch our breath. Unfortunately, it is a false refuge. Culture will not keep us above water. We must rely on our own abilities to swim and to discover dry land.<sup>46</sup> Upon unveiling Ortega's interpretation of life and its relation to culture, his existentialism is exposed. The history of art goes beyond cultural history; it participates within the history of intensely personal projects struggling for vital authenticity.

Ortega, like the art historian Kurt Badt, is more concerned with the artist beyond the scope of cultural life and with the artist's projected solution to his or her personal problem of being and existence.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, regarding Velázquez, Ortega concentrates upon the artist's point of view, his meditations actualized in paint, which give meaning to Velázquez' life. Ortega and Badt, although existentialistic allies, have different views concerning artistic production. Badt is interested in the ways, the "other,"

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<sup>45</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Man the Technician," p. 119.

<sup>46</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Goethe desde dentro" [1932], translated by Willard R. Trask as "In Search of Goethe From Within" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 136-7.

<sup>47</sup>Kurt Badt, Die Kunst Cezannes [1956], translated by Sheila Obligie as The Art of Cézanne (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 243-4.

that is the situation of artistry, affects the poesis of Cézanne. By contrast, Ortega hopes to unveil the ways Velázquez alters the other, that is, his circumstance.

Perhaps, the most friendly art historian for Ortega would be E.H. Gombrich, who interprets artistic activity in terms of a dialogue between producer and his or her environment. Gombrich understands artistic activity as the creative making and matching of an individual in relation to the given structure of the artistic tradition, to his or her environment.<sup>48</sup> One significant difference separates the methodologies of Ortega and Gombrich. Ortega concentrates upon the vitality of art and Gombrich upon the practice of art. For Gombrich artistic perception is pragmatic knowledge. Following Popper's "search-light theory," Gombrich, like Ortega, defines art as a record of human perception. But, unlike Ortega, Gombrich understands art as the result of ceaseless probing and testing of the human environment, the end product of countless experiments of trial and error.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Ortega focuses upon art's ability to participate within the formation of life, within the balance of humanity and its surroundings. Gombrich praises the technological advances of artistic perception and Ortega heralds the innovations of vital conversions, of ensimismamientos. With the support of Francastel and Badt, Ortega could dwell in the house of Gombrich.

Ortega sees the duality of life as the organizing principle for artistic activity. He breaks up the cosmic order into two dimensions, I and circumstance. In his cosmology Ortega gives the I priority and forces circumstance to serve the interest of the I. He grants the I redemptive power over the thrownness of circumstance, over our

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<sup>48</sup>E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 15-25.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid, p. 28.

shipwrecked situation. This split fragments and distorts our ontic reality. Although Ortega recognizes the diversity of life, including artistic activity, he clouds their unity in the deification of the I. The point of view is granted privileged status over the human situation. The world is meaningless without it. The history of art is perceived as the history of ensimismamientos, of searches into the human condition, of Weltanschauungen. Hence, the history of art is confined to the history of humanity, that is to say, the history of human consciousness. Ortega, although he heavily criticizes subjectivism, pushes towards anthropocentrism and still subscribes to subjectivism. Phenomenologists, such as Ortega, reduce the significance of artistic activity to the artist's self-expression, to the artist's intention. Ortega acknowledges that the artist's circumstance shapes the artist's painterly activity and agrees that the artist does inscribe meaning into the text. The loss of nobility, if it occurred, may have had an impact upon Velázquez and his paintings. But Ortega reduces the story of the art work to the subjective expression of a situated author, to a life perspective. Art is no more than a response to the duality of life, of being someone in circumstance. Although contextualized, the I remains at the center of the world. Ortega's thought remains anthropocentric.

In my judgment, we cannot experience the work of the artist apart from the material worked upon. Intuitions may be expressions, but they cannot be artworks in themselves. Unlike Benedetto Croce, Ortega recognizes the presence of the artistic medium as part of the artwork's circumstance, but he never goes beyond the parameters of the perceiver.<sup>50</sup> For Ortega, the method employed, as well as the purpose of the

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<sup>50</sup>Benedetto Croce, Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale [1902], translated by Douglas Ainslie as Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistic (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1983), pp. 7-11.

activity, has meaning, but the materials themselves are of little importance. By contrast, I understand artistic presence and media presence as intertwined in the production of artworks. Paintings also reveal the subjective presence of their media. They discover the character of pigment, brushes, canvas, and the framing materials as well as the artist's response to his or her media.

I hope my art historiography, like that of Kurt Badt, will disclose the presence of the materials employed within a given painting. For instance, in his writings on the work of Cézanne, Badt writes,

When he used a brush, the painter was forced to rely on the guidance of his hand, and inevitably had to represent the entire paint substance as being in motion. The palette knife, however, had the effect of spiritualizing the material of the picture in a less subjective, less personal, more universally valid way. One did not depend on the clever manipulation of the brush in order to create a wealth of color nuances, but could produce outstandingly clear, blended tones of intense effect and of the greatest variety, not by mixing paints vigorously with one another on the palette but by spreading them only lightly mingled with one another on the canvas. Particles of the pure colors then survived side by side. Isolated, they created an effect of their own, and yet when seen from a certain distance they dissolved into very fine and rich, blended tones; indeed in a mysterious manner they oscillated between these two effects.<sup>51</sup>

Not only am I concerned with the texture and color of the media, before and after their humanization, but like Badt, I want to discover the ways such media shape artistic activity itself. The media affects the production and hence, the reception of artworks. Both the artist's activity and the artist's media appear within the artwork. As I interpret it, the history of art is not the history of life-perspectives. The art historian does not investigate changes in points of view for and in itself, but only in relation to the unfolding of painting.

To my understanding, the artist is a craftsperson, who humanizes the world

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<sup>51</sup>Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne*, p. 247.

around him or her, but this is only half the story. Unfortunately in western civilization, this process has been understood as the whole story and has usually entailed that the artist is master over the media he or she employs. Such a view, however, neglects the ways in which the media affects the artist. I prefer to advocate a more humane use of the world, one in which the media has a say. In the next chapter, I will disclose why I, although concerned with the work of the artist, am unwilling to grant him or her any author-ity over aesthetic experience.

### Chapter Three: The Irreality of Art

Is there any meaning in painting? What, if anything at all, do paintings present or re-present? What is the meaning or meaningless makeup of artworks? In this chapter I will outline Ortega's conception of meaning in art, compare it with the interpretations of others, including that of art historians and philosophers, and evaluate the "meaning" of his category for art historiography.

According to Ortega the meaning of art resides in its ability to present truth. Artists manifest truth in their artworks. In his Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], Ortega describes the presentation of truth in art,

He who wishes to teach us a truth should not tell it to us, but simply suggest it with a brief gesture, a gesture which starts an ideal trajectory in the air along which we glide until we find ourselves at the feet of the new truth.

Once known, truths acquire a utilitarian crust; they no longer interest as truths but as useful recipes. That pure, sudden illumination which characterizes truth accompanies the latter only at the moment of discovery. Hence its Greek name aletheia, which originally meant the same as the word apocalipsis later, that is discovery, revelation, or rather, unveiling, removing a veil or cover. He who wants to teach us a truth should place us in a position to discover it ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

Ortega's definition of truth as dis-covery, a-letheia, predates by thirteen years the assumed original discovery of this concept found in Martin Heidegger's Sein und Zeit [1927].<sup>2</sup>

Both Ortega and Heidegger refer to truth as the process of clarifying being-in-the-world. This separates them both from sartrean existentialism. Sartre never deals with truth in this manner. He seems to accept the notion of truth as simply the logical

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<sup>1</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], translated by Evelyn Ruggs and Diego Marin as Meditations on Quixote (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit [1927], translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 256-63.



result of theoretical demonstration, as a correct statement. He misses the radical root of Heidegger's thought, and by implication, Ortega's thought as well, their interpretation of truth as the revelation of the human project itself. Sartre misses the connection between truth and projection.

But, if we delve deeper into the thought of Heidegger and Ortega, we will find that the similarity present in their respective interpretations of truth is superficial. Both thinkers describe life as a project, and truth as uncovering that project, but they differ in terms of the definition of that project and the discovery of it.

First, for Heidegger, truth is discovered in Dasein through taking up the mood of Angst, the anxiety of being-in-the-world as a being. The mood of Angst reveals that Dasein is not solely ontic, a being, but ontological, a being that is interested in its Being.<sup>3</sup> As I stated before, Ortega has no interest in the onto-ontological difference found in heideggerian thought nor does Ortega believe that a feeling of dread will solve the problem of our lives. Life is both tragedy and challenge. Although one sees the agony of being shipwrecked with things, from an authentic point of view, one also experiences this crisis as an adventurous mission. Ortega understands truth as the emergence of a point of view, produced by an act of ensimismarse, as the discovery of one's project of life. Truth, according to Ortega, is the act of reasoning out one's life. The project of hacerse is not a mission of unveiling the onto-ontological difference nor does one make one's life by taking up a mood of Angst.

Second, unlike Ortega, Heidegger believes truth includes both truth and un-truth. The mood of Angst discloses the truth of being, but closes the truth of the world of

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp. 228-35.

beings. In other words, it unveils the ontological, but hides the ontic. As Heidegger puts it,

In its full existential-ontological meaning, the proposition that 'Dasein is in the truth' states equiprimordially that 'Dasein is in the untruth.' But only in so far as Dasein has been disclosed has it also been closed off; and only in so far as entities within-the-world have been uncovered along with Dasein, have such entities, as possible encounterable within-the-world, been covered up (hidden) or disguised.<sup>4</sup>

Concealment and unconcealment both lie in Dasein. Only in the mood of Angst can one illuminate Being, yet this state entails the annihilation of the world of beings. This theme is absent in Ortega's understanding of aletheia. Ortega describes ensimismamiento as the act of uncovering latency in circumstances. Ensimismamiento is always partial truth, incomplete revelation, but always aims towards full discovery, that is to say, towards the salvation of life's crisis. In Ortega's cosmology the un-truth, the act of concealing, is foreign to all vital attempts of authenticity.

In spite of these differences, both Heidegger and Ortega describe the truth of art as something other than imitation. For instance, Heidegger, in his "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" [1935], writes:

Truth happens in Van Gogh's painting. This does not mean that something is correctly portrayed, but rather that in the revelation of the equipmental being of the shoes... [truth] attains to unconcealedness.<sup>5</sup>

Through Van Gogh's painting, the Being of shoes is illuminated. However, Ortega is not interested in unlocking Being. His concern is Van Gogh's point of view. Consequently, in Ortega's work, the truth of art will follow a different path than that found in Heidegger's writings.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" [1935], translated by Albert Hofstadter as "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 56.

For Ortega the truth of art is never a matter of copying, of imitation, of mimesis in the platonic sense. On the contrary, it is a matter of erasing. From Ortega's perspective the artist annihilates his or her media to create a new object, an irreal image of his or her imagination. Art is essentially de-creation of empirical reality, including its own material; it is the irrealization of a medium. The art object is neither its previous pre-crafted state, that is, the artist's medium, nor is the art object its mimicked reality, that which it represents.<sup>6</sup> Beauty begins where empirical reality ends. It lives within an imaginary world, within the ideality of ensimismamiento.<sup>7</sup> The medium for painterly activity serves its own demise, its de-creation. However, the medium is essential to painting. Without it the artwork cannot be realized, for there would be nothing for the I to internalize.

Already in the sixteenth century, the Italian Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, refers to sculpture as an art of subtraction as opposed to painting, an art of addition.<sup>8</sup> But, to Ortega's understanding, both sculpture and painting are arts of erasure. This difference may also betray Ortega's lack of concern with the crafting of paintings. He recognizes the necessity of a medium but he is not interested in the ways in which it is applied.

Artists, according to Ortega, should have no interest in depicting reality. They should conceive of beauty in quixotic fashion. Describing Quixote Ortega writes,

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<sup>6</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" [1914], translated by Philip W. Silver as "An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 136-7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, pp. 148-9.

<sup>8</sup>Moshe Barasch, Theories of Art: From Plato to Winckelmann (New York: New York University Press, 1985), p. 170.

In order to be able to acknowledge Dulcinea's matchless beauty, the merchants asked to see a portrait, even if it were only the size of a grain of wheat. Before acknowledging something they wanted to see it first and they were right. But perhaps Don Quixote wanted less, perhaps he only wanted them to understand, understand his words and the longing of his heart.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of artistry should differ from the project of acquainting people with something; it should attempt to describe the ideal in its irreality.

Because Ortega understands irreality as the aesthetic quality of artworks, he considers realist art as defective art. Realism, according to Ortega, is an easy and unimaginative aesthetic; "realism rules over them like a loved woman at the stage of orgasm."<sup>10</sup> Realist painters are unable to augment reality; they are artists without ensimismamientos. Theirs is an art of squinting, one which requires a cross-eyed viewer, a person capable of seeing the real and the unreal at once.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, iconoclasts, those who despise living forms, display aesthetic sensibility.<sup>12</sup> They recognize the irreality of art.

According to Ortega, art is like a crystal, a window, or a mirage. Approaching the object we can adjust our vision in two ways. We can look through the object to the world outside its transparency, or we can focus upon the art object itself, rendering the

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<sup>9</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Conciencia, objeto y las tres distancias de éste" [1915-6], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Consciousness, Object, and the Three Distances from the Object" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 122.

<sup>10</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Del realismo en pintura" [1912], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p. 567. Translation mine.

<sup>11</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La deshumanización del arte" [1925], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Dehumanization of Art" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, pp. 40-1.

translucent opaque.<sup>13</sup> The untrained eye and the self-centered viewer will not recognize the phantom itself; he or she will gaze right through the image and concentrate on his or her own life experiences, neglecting the presence of the image itself.

For instance, the unimaginative eye, upon viewing Las Meninas, sees the figures within the painting as people he or she knows: the dwarf, perhaps seen at the circus as a child; the event of seeing someone's portrait taken; and so forth. From this naïve point of view, Velázquez' painting appears realistic. However, when one can focus one's attention upon the image itself, one will discover that Velázquez is not a great realist painter, but a master of irrealization. As Ortega describes the work of the artist,

No one, in fact, has painted an object with fewer number of brushstrokes. Velázquez is, then, an unrealist. Making the things which surround us into impalpable, incorporeal presence is not a mean conjuring trick. In this Velázquez accomplished one of the most splendid achievements in the history of painting: the retraction of painting into pure visuality.<sup>14</sup>

Velázquez does not pay great attention to the objects he paints. Instead, the artist concentrates upon the surfaces of objects and upon the light reflected upon these surfaces.

Velázquez changed the artist's point of view. He distances himself from the objects painted. Objects lose their solidity, their volume, and are diffused in light.

Velázquez calls for a new type of artwork:

... he halts the pupil of the eye. Nothing more. Such a gigantic revolution. Until then, the painter's eye had Ptolemaically revolved about each object, following a servile orbit. Velázquez despotically resolved to fix the one point of view. The entire picture will be born in a single act of vision. It is a Copernican revolution,

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<sup>13</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La deshumanización del arte" [1925], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Dehumanization of Art" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Introducción a Velázquez" [1943], translated by Alexis Brown as "Introduction to Velázquez" in Velázquez, Goya, and the Dehumanization of Art (London: Studio Vista, 1972), p. 99.

comparable to that promoted by Descartes, Hume and Kant in philosophical thought. The eye of the artist is established as the center of the plastic Cosmos, around which revolve the forms of objects. Rightly, the ocular apparatus casts its ray directly forward, without deviating to one side or the other, without preference for any object. When it lights on something, it does not fix upon it, and, consequently, that something is converted, not into a round body, but into a mere surface that intercepts vision.<sup>15</sup>

Velázquez, by freezing his vision into a single ray of perception, eliminates the three-dimensionality of objects and reduces their form to flashes of color and light. He paints surface reflections ordered by the light of his vision.

Furthermore, Ortega believes Velázquez is a painter of distance. When one encounters Las Meninas, one will notice the absence of a foreground. Velázquez looks straight into the "background." But how can a background exist without a foreground? It cannot. Consequently, although the objects are perceived as distant, paradoxically, they move forward and gain proximity. The painting becomes planimetric, like the artist's canvas itself. Velázquez' painting represents the hollow space of air, the distance between subject and object, the single point of view, and his painting presents the surface sparks of light reflected by the paint applied on his canvas. In other words, Velázquez paints distant vision, the transparent character of art, and he paints paint itself, the opaque character of art.<sup>16</sup> Las Meninas is a painting of painting and Velázquez is a painter for painters. The painting presents a painter paint-ing painting at two levels. First, when one views the world through this metaphorical crystal, one sees a portrayer portraying a portrayal. Second, when one gazes into the crystal itself, the observer uncovers the duality of artwork itself, its translucent and opaque qualities.

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<sup>15</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Sobre el punto de vistas de las artes" [1924], translated by Paul Snodgrass and Joseph Frank as "On the Point of View in the Arts" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 121.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, pp. 121-4.

The reader by now should notice as she or he glances across these pages that Velázquez has a special place in the heart of Ortega. In my assessment, his high-praise of Velázquez should be interpreted in the context of Spanish quixotism. In his essay on the life of Quixote, Unamuno writes,

The geniuses of Velázquez and of Cervantes are linked by a profound kinship. Both painted brother knights..., both painted picaros, monsters, and rowdies.... To paint Don Quixote it is necessary to study Velázquez as well as Cervantes.<sup>17</sup>

In my view, Ortega would agree with Unamuno, believing that the revelation of Velázquez' point of view is essential to illuminating that of Cervantes and to grasping the quixotic challenge.

Ortega notices that the thing made manifests something other than itself. The humanization transforms the material into an art object, the physical entity is converted into an artwork, that is, a typically aesthetic phenomenon. Unfortunately, he divides the artwork in two, the real, which includes the ontic structure of art and its mimetic transparency, and the unreal, its intimate and opaque individuality, its "I."<sup>18</sup>

Ortega also describes women as crystalline artworks. Like paintings they exist to be penetrated. He writes,

Woman, according to Cervantes "a transparent, beautiful glass," appears likewise condemned to being "something other than herself" in the bodily as well as the spiritual realm; woman seems destined to be a perfumed passage for other

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<sup>17</sup>Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho [1905], translated by Anthony Kerrigan as Our Lord Don Quixote: The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho with Related Essays, volume 3 of the Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 353.

<sup>18</sup>Ortega's notion of the artwork's unreal "I" would not be confused with Mikel Dufrenne's notion of a "quasi-subject." See Dufrenne's Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique [1953], translated by Edward S. Casey et al as The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 379-398. Unlike Dufrenne, Ortega does not distinguish the author's or artist's "I" from the "I" of the artwork. The "I" of the artwork, to Ortega's eyes, is no more than the embodiment of the artist's point of view.

beings, allowing herself to be penetrated by both lover and child.<sup>19</sup>

Ortega prides himself on being a connoisseur of feminine beauty, so much so that he devotes an entire essay, "Estética en el tranvía" [1916], to girl-watching on mass-transit. Although this may appear unusual, relating the beauty of women and artworks is a common practice found in the history of art theory. For instance, Paolo Pino opens his Dialogo di pittura [1548] with a discussion of beautiful women. Furthermore, Ludovico Dolce chooses to describe feminine beauty in relation to art. In his Dialogo della pittura intitolato L'Aretino [1557], Dolce laments the lack of attractive women in his day and dreams of the beautiful women of classical antiquity. Apelles and Praxiteles could render their images of Aphrodite after Phryne, the most beautiful of courtesans, but Dolce mourns that his time is without such models.<sup>20</sup> Ortega, by contrast, is not interested in the relation between beautiful models and art. He does not conceive of art as imitation. Ortega describes feminine beauty in order to dispel notions of mimesis. In the essay, Ortega criticizes platonic notions of beauty, which understand beauty as the agreement between the idea of pure beauty and the actual object at hand. Ortega does not believe that any pre-established code of beauty exists. As he puts it,

There is no single and general model that real things imitate. How could I apply a pre-existent shape of feminine beauty to the faces of these ladies? It would not only be a lack of gallantry on my part - it would also be false. Instead of knowing what the highest beauty of womankind is, man perpetually searches for it from youth to old age. If only he knew it beforehand!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" [1914], translated by Philip W. Silver as "An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 139-40.

<sup>20</sup>Moshe Barasch, Theories of Art: From Plato to Winckelmann, p. 252.

<sup>21</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Estética en el tranvía" [1916], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Esthetics on a Streetcar" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 153.



One does not unveil beauty by measuring in accordance to a general law, but by measuring each being in terms of itself, according to the actualization of a potential beauty. Until proven otherwise, each woman possesses her own potential beauty within and has a beauty yet unforeseen. Sometimes the promise of beauty is unfulfilled. One will notice ugliness immediately. By contrast, uncovering beauty in its entirety takes time. Discovering beauty is an endless search in hope of discovering a sudden revelation.<sup>22</sup> To see a woman's beauty, one must unveil her aesthetic quality or irreality, a mission not easily accomplished.

To Ortega's understanding, beauty is something extraordinary and not to be confused with the everyday. Ortega believes nineteenth-century critics like John Ruskin weaken art. They domesticate art, converting it into ordinary household objects.<sup>23</sup> Ortega has no patience with such an aesthetic.

Arnold Hauser, a marxian art historian, criticizes Ortega's category of the irreality of art. He writes,

The work of art has been compared to the opening of a window upon the world. Now, a window can claim the whole of our attention or none. One may, it is said, contemplate the view without concerning oneself in the very least with the quality, structure, or color of the window-pane. By this analogy, the work of art can be described as a mere vehicle for experiences, a transparent window-pane, or a sort of eye-glasses not noticed by the wearer and employed simply as a means to an end. But just as one can concentrate one's attention upon the window-pane and the structure of its glass without taking note of the view beyond, so, it is said, one can treat the work of art as an independent "opaque" formal structure, complete in itself and in isolation, as it were, from anything external to it. No doubt one can stare at the window-pane as long as one likes, still, a window is made to look out of.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 152-60.

<sup>23</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface," pp. 128-31.

<sup>24</sup>Arnold Hauser, *Philosophie der Kunstgeschichte* [1958], translated anonymously as *The Philosophy of Art History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), pp. 5-6.

I believe that Ortega might respond to Hauser by saying that Hauser, by stating that windows are produced to see through, is guilty of reducing art to an imitative tool, a screen that catches the artist's ideology. Furthermore, if Hauser wishes to be materialist, he would be well advised to focus on the "materiality" of painting, its opaque surface. Ortega would say that Hauser, an art historian by vocation, has failed, for he has forgotten to look at the painting in front of him.

The analogy between paintings and windows is not an innovation of Ortega's. Alberti, perhaps, is known best for making the comparison. During the Italian Renaissance, he advocated a model of representation based on linear perspective. Alberti wanted the beholder to view paintings as she or he would see nature. Hence, in his Della pittura [1435], he describes pictorial surface as "an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen."<sup>25</sup> According to Alberti, the opaque surface of paintings should disappear so that the represented may be seen as in nature. Ortega inverts this albertian picture-box. To his understanding, it is reality that should be erased, not copied.

In my interpretation, Ortega recognizes that the materiality of the text is not a simple thing. Inscription is not a passive transmission of sense. The mark marks both the mark and the marked, that is to say, the signifier and the signified. Unfortunately, Ortega identifies the signifier as the true artwork. In other words, one side of the distinction grounds the split between them. He sees the other side, the signified, as no more than an illusion for psychic experience. Ortega believes the materiality of the artwork, its opaque character, is no more than the unreal point of view of its producer.

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<sup>25</sup>Moshe Barasch, Theories of Art: From Plato to Winckelmann, pp. 148-9.

His notion of art merely inverts the albertian picture-box model; it does not erase it. In Alberti's model, a schema partially based on platonic realism, the true or essential character of art is in the nature it represents, whereas the illusionary or false quality of art lies upon its apparent surface. Ortega simply reverses this conception. To his understanding, the irreal opaque surface participates within the truth, whereas the transparency of reality is false. He inverts the platonic or albertian interpretation, but still holds to the paradigm that sets up the real-apparent, truth-illusionary, essential-accidental distinction. The opaque character of art displays its intrinsic nature and signifies what art really is.

In my judgment, the problem with Ortega is that he stops the play of the artwork by setting up a stable structuring center.<sup>26</sup> The irreality of art becomes the resting point of interpretation. I prefer to continue the artwork, not stop it.

Furthermore, Ortega's conception of art as a window suggests that painting has always been a framed picture-plane which unfortunately can be looked through. However, the skillful art historian, Meyer Schapiro, tells us of the historicity of such a pictorial surface. He writes,

The smooth prepared field is an invention of a later stage of humanity. It accompanies the development of polished tools in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages and the creation of pottery and an architecture with regular courses of jointed masonry. It might have come about through the use of these artifacts as sign-bearing objects. The inventive imagination recognized their value as grounds, and in time gave to pictures and writing on smoothed and symmetrical supports a corresponding regularity of direction, spacing, and grouping, in harmony with the form of the object like the associated ornament of the neighboring parts. Through the closure and smoothness of the prepared surface, often with the distinct color of the reserved background, the image acquired a definite space of its own, in contrast to the prehistoric wall paintings and reliefs; these had to

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<sup>26</sup>This critique relies heavily on the work of Jacques Derrida; see his *L'écriture et différence* [1967], translated by Alan Bass as *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), especially pp. 278-94.

compete with the noise-like accidents and irregularities of a ground which was no less articulated than the sign and could intrude upon it. The new smoothness and closure made possible the later transparency of the picture-plane without which the representation of three-dimensional space would not have been successful.<sup>27</sup>

Shapiro's statement, in a sense, puts Ortega's understanding of the picture-plane as the essential goodness of painting in jeopardy. The smooth and framed irreal space of the prepared field opens the doors for seeing real space.

To Ortega's credit, he does question the notion of "realism" as defined in traditional art historiography. Many art historians, unfortunately, try to deny the problematics of the materiality of artworks by supplying the concept of realism. To describe this bad tendency, I will look at one painting traditionally thought of as realistic, Velázquez' Las Meninas [1656].

Traditional interpretations of Las Meninas, such as those of Franz Wickhoff and Théophile Gautier, attempt to reconstruct it geometrically in hopes of discovering objective observation.<sup>28</sup> They miss the mark. Such interpretations wrongly reduce the painting to a simple and exact transcription of the world. They transform Las Meninas into something like a natural sign, suppressing the enigmatic quality of the work and the difficulty of its reception.

To avoid the entrappings of traditional art history, Ortega suggests that we suppress our psychic desires, which reinforce the platonic notion that words and images refer to things and realities, and contemplate them aesthetically by comparing them to other words and images. For instance, Ortega compares Las Meninas to Cervantes'

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<sup>27</sup>Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Sign," Semiotica 1:3 (1969), p. 224.

<sup>28</sup>Numerous viewers, especially those of the nineteenth century, refer to Las Meninas in photographic terms and compare it to camera obscura.

chapter on Master Pedro's puppet show in Don Quijote.<sup>29</sup> He writes,

The frame of the puppet show which Master Pedro goes around presenting is the dividing line between two continents of the mind. Within, the puppet show encloses a fantastic world, articulated by the genius of the impossible. It is the world of adventure, of imagination, of myth. Without there is room in which several unsophisticated men are gathered, men like those we see every day, concerned with the daily struggle to live. In their midst is a fool, a knight from the neighborhood, who one morning, abandoned his town impelled by a small anatomical anomaly of the brain. Nothing prevents us from entering this room: we could breathe in its atmosphere and touch those present on the shoulder, since they are made of the same stuff and condition as ourselves. However, this room is, in its turn, included in a book, that is to say, in another puppet show larger than the first. If we should enter the room, we would have stepped into an ideal object, we would be moving in the hollow interior of an aesthetic body. (Velázquez in The Maids of Honor [Las Meninas] offers us an analogous case: he is painting a picture of the king and queen and at the same time he has placed his studio in the picture. In The Spinners [Las Hilanderas] he has united forever the legendary action represented by a tapestry [the myth of Ariadne] to the humble room in which it was manufactured.) Along a conduit of simple-mindedness and dementia emanations come and go from one continent to the other, from the puppet show to the room, from the room to the puppet show. One would say that the important thing is precisely the osmosis and endomosis of the two.<sup>30</sup>

In my judgment, Ortega is on to something: the beholder is affected by the interplay between "real" and "fictitious" space in Velázquez' oeuvre. Many of Velázquez' paintings open the viewer up to an ambiguity of space. Las Lanzas [1634-5], also known as The Surrender at Breda, appears to show us an empirical account of an historical event; however, not only was Velázquez never in Breda, but the painting portrays an event that never happened, the meeting of the two generals. Furthermore, Velázquez splits the composition in half. On the right firm-footed mature Spanish gentlemen hold in unison their lances straight upward and on the left, the sinister side, an exhausted young Dutch mob relax. Finally, a figure on the far left seems to invade our space. He

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<sup>29</sup>Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quijote [1615], translated by J.M. Cohen as Don Quixote (New York: Penguin Books, 1950), part two, chapter xxvi, pp. 638-45.

<sup>30</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Quixote, pp. 133-4.

stares just at us, perhaps, in resignation. In the Rokeby Venus [1648-57], Velázquez paints the mythic figure Venus with her back to us. She holds a mirror in her hand which shows us her face. But, the mirror-image is blurry and although the mirror is positioned to reveal her genitals, we see her face. Ortega, in my interpretation, is correct when he describes the ambiguous spatial relations within Velázquez' paintings.

But Ortega is not the only non-art historian to write about Velázquez. The French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault, introduces his book, Les Mots et choses [1966], with a short essay on Las Meninas. He, like Ortega, believes that Las Meninas is no simple transcription of reality. However, Foucault's and Ortega's interpretations of the painting differ greatly. Ortega, as we have seen, believes Las Meninas defies reality. Foucault, by contrast, thinks it simply mirrors or re-presents it.

In Foucault's reading, Las Meninas sets up an occasion for the spectator to meet the painted figures within the painted framing. The beholder observes the painter and his models. The same light, that permits the viewer to see the artist and his models, allows the painted figures to see the viewer. Las Meninas opens up a stare-down between those inside and those outside its framing.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, the observer is represented on the other side of the artist's canvas. His or her portrait may be hidden from view.

If so, then the subject of the painting within the painting is absent, outside the parameters of the frame. The referent of the figures' attention is invisible to those who view it. It resides, although within the painting, on the wrong side of the canvas. Yet,

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<sup>31</sup>Michel Foucault, Les Mots et choses [1966], translated anonymously as The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 4-8.

within the pictorial space of the painted figures, although hidden from them, we can see the referent of their attention. We can observe their point of view. On the back wall of the painted scene, we notice a series of shadowed paintings, however, one rectangle on the wall glows with illumination. It shines brightly in the darkness. Within the framing of this rectangle, we see the referent of attention, the two sovereigns, Felipe IV and his queen. However, the absent king and queen paradoxically appear not in the painting, but on a mirror.<sup>32</sup> The viewer does not see them in a "painted box," narrated by analogy, but "re-presented," described by the ordering principle of a mirror.

Foucault thinks that Las Meninas re-presents the seventeenth-century Dutch mode of representation. In this interpretive mode, resemblance is no more than an illusion, a trompe l'oeil. Painting has ceased to narrate the world. It describes within the world. Painting mirrors reality. The artist attempts to map reality in her or his painting. Las Meninas represents representation in the age of representation. Hence, both Ortega and Foucault interpret Las Meninas as a painting about painting.

In the painting we find not the representation of the artist depicting this representation, but the representation of ordering principles. Las Meninas maps the organization of representation in a "table of contents"-like fashion. Within its framing, we see the producer, the models, the viewer, and the images of representation, but separated from one another. We observe the painter not paint-ing, the models not model-ing, the viewer not view-ing, and the painted representation not represent-ing. Las Meninas maps the contours of its epistemic age. The seventeenth-century viewer can

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, pp. 9-13.

see and know the order of representation, but not the act of representation.<sup>33</sup> Las Meninas mirrors the limitations of its age. It can clarify only representation and cannot render the source of representation. Here lies the difference between the interpretations of Ortega and Foucault. Whereas Ortega believes Las Meninas informs us about its artist, Foucault believes it cannot. For Ortega, the painting is a portrait of the portrayer's act of portrayal, whereas for Foucault, it is only a representation of representation.<sup>34</sup> Ortega and Foucault give different interpretations of Las Meninas because they understand representation differently.

Perhaps Ortega's definition of representation is much closer to that of E.H. Gombrich. First, both scholars understand art as a form of substitution. As stated in the last chapter, Ortega views art as the retrieval of lost vitality. Gombrich too, although without Ortega's existentialistic leanings, refers to art as the presentation of something absent.<sup>35</sup> To my understanding, this should not imply that Gombrich or Ortega think that art is a simple re-presentation. For both Ortega and Gombrich, the complexities of one's socio-historical context dictate the difference between artworks and non-artworks. A young child, for instance, may suck his or her thumb to replace his or

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid, pp. 10-6.

<sup>34</sup>It is interesting to note that Svetlana Alpers, an art historian with foucauldian sympathies, seems closer to Ortega in her interpretation of Las Meninas. She writes, "It [Las Meninas] confounds a stable reading, not because of the absence of the viewer-subject, but because the painting holds in suspension two contradictory (and to Velázquez's sense of things, inseparable) modes of picturing the relationship of viewer, and picture, to the world. One assumes the priority of a viewer before the picture who is the measure of the world and the other assumes that the world is prior to any human presence and is thus essentially immeasurable. See her "Interpretation without Reproduction, or, The Viewing of Las Meninas," Representations 1:1 (February 1983), p. 39.

<sup>35</sup>E.H. Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form" [1951], Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 1-11.



her mother's breast, but neither scholar would consider this act to be artistic. Such infantile behavior is determined simply by one's psychic condition and not the product of an intricate interplay within a cultural context. An icon depicting the Madonna nursing the Christ child, however, would be considered another matter. It participates in the cultural web of civilization.

Second, both Ortega and Gombrich understand art as an illusion-making screen, as a surface with the power of metamorphosis. To both scholars, art is an irreality, one which brings about the visual appearance of things other than themselves. For instance, Ortega writes,

It [A painting] is under a yard wide and even less tall. In it, nevertheless, we see a landscape several miles across. Isn't this magic? That piece of land with its mountains and rivers and city is there in an enchanted state. Contained in less than a square yard we see several miles and instead of canvas daubed with color we find the Tagus, Lisbon, and Monsanto. The material painting in our home is constantly transforming itself into the Tagus River, Lisbon, and its hills. The painting is an image because of this continual metamorphosis....<sup>36</sup>

But these same words could have been written by Gombrich, who loves to describe art as the "mysterious phantom that conjures up reality" and as the "magic of transformation."<sup>37</sup>

Some art historians may disagree with this comparison by noting Gombrich's great appreciation of realism. They might cite Gombrich's notion of pictorial skill, the perceptual talent to render naturalistic representation, to correctly observe reality. However, Gombrich does not believe in the possibility of an innocent eye. All

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<sup>36</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "The Idea of Theatre," p. 178.

<sup>37</sup>E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 6-8.

perceptions are conditioned by social conventions, by schemata.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Gombrich thinks that representations of empirical reality, those he calls "perceptual images," are unique to the West. The majority of representations, to Gombrich's understanding, are "conceptual images," which attempt to show what things essentially are, instead of how they appear in nature.<sup>39</sup> Finally, for Gombrich, the greatest realism is also the greatest illusion.<sup>40</sup>

In summary, for Ortega, the irreality of art, that is, the artist's point of view, is the true meaning of art. To his understanding, the informed viewer should attempt to bring the artist's perspective to light. The beholder does not produce meanings, but discovers them. In other words, he or she publicly reveals meanings which the text possesses in itself, before the presence of the viewer, namely the artist's point of view. For Ortega, successful art historiography depends on the mastery of the text by discovering artistic life-perspective and the irreality of art.

By contrast, I have little interest in unveiling the author-ity of the artist. To my reading, we cannot understand the artwork by seeking the person who produced it; there is no single voice confiding in us the truth of painting.<sup>41</sup> The artist does not originate the artwork, but participates within it. As Jacques Derrida writes,

The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united - a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid, pp. 19-25.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, pp. 117-45.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, pp. 63-90.

<sup>41</sup>Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" [1968], translated by Stephen Heath in Image-Music-Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 142-3.

reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, which signified presence always reconstituted by deferral, nachträglich, belatedly, supplementarily: for the nachträglich also means supplementary.<sup>42</sup>

The artist is not an inventor of images, rather he or she is an allegorist, one who confiscates images.<sup>43</sup> The artist, the maker of images, has no authority.

Like Michel Foucault, I would like to erase the notion of the author. Neither of us want to say the artist as a person is non-existent, but that the artist as author is non-existent. The authorial name is not a proper name. The proper name points from inside saying or writing to a referent outside the text. By contrast, the authorial name remains within the contours of textuality. Authority is a function of discourse itself. The author is a rational illusion, a constructed schema, within our discourse of reception which is projected into a discourse to explain its dimensions and its transformation.<sup>44</sup>

Authority is a structuring principle added to discourse. As Roland Barthes puts it,

Classical criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer [or artist] is the only person in literature [or painting]. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant, antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favor of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing [and painting] its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.<sup>45</sup>

To my understanding, Ortega's notion of the artist as author transforms the artist into a sovereign over both poesis and aesthesis. He makes the

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<sup>42</sup>Jacques Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" [1966], translated by Alan Bass as "Freud and the Scene of Writing" in Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 211.

<sup>43</sup>Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernity" [1980] in Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 205.

<sup>44</sup>Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" [1969], translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon as Language, Counter-Memory, Practice (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 114-31.

<sup>45</sup>Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," p. 148.

artist's point of view into the principle that structures the whole of artistic experience. Within his schema, the artist is omnipotent.

As stated in the previous chapter, I believe the author is not a master over his or her media. Ortega's notion belittles the power of the pigment. One can also cite his lack of concern for the model. Within his framework, one can decipher the presence of the artist's point of view, but not that of the model. For instance, as Ortega views it, in Rembrandt's Bathsheba [1654], one can see the artist's point of view, but cannot see that of Hendrikje, the model rendered as Bathsheba.<sup>46</sup> Hence, Ortega neglects the power of the media, of the model, and finally, that of the reader -- all in the sacred name of the artist.

I propose an alternative interpretation of meaning, one which emphasizes the effective presence of the reader, instead of the authority of the artist. As Stanley Fish writes, "...the reader's response is not to the meaning of the text; it is the meaning...."<sup>47</sup> To traditional art historians and Ortega, my actions might seem parasitical or perhaps, "parricidal," destroying good manners, and providing new alternative strategies, ones without principles. They might believe that I am substituting the standard sense of scholarship with anarchy, the indeterminacy of the text. Hence, although Ortega and traditional art historians may acknowledge that writers like myself offer new freshness to old paintings, they cannot condone our actions. To their understanding, by deconstructing the rules of academic play, we destroy the very possibility of the art historiographic game itself. Our endeavors result in scholarly suicide.

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<sup>46</sup>For a good description of the projection of models rendered in artworks, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, Works and Worlds of Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 17-32.

<sup>47</sup>Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 3.

Supposedly, we annihilate the possibility of correctly inscribing or discovering all texts, including our own, by making everything indeterminate. However, this is not the case. Indeterminacy is impossible. No one can separate oneself completely from one's context, from one's predecessors and anxiety of influence, or from one's interpretive community. The reader is never autonomous. We cannot separate ourselves from the context thrown upon us. As reader/writers we compose determinate meanings but only within a framing context. Meanings are determinate within the surroundings affecting the reader/writer.

Although interpretations are quite personal, one can convey determinate meanings and judge their utility if two share a similar situation. Texts do have literal meanings, but they depend upon one's assumed prejudices and practices within one's dated and located setting. Perhaps, we are not the one's committing academic suicide. After all, the methods of Ortega and traditional art historians imply that one ought to approximate oneself to the artist's mind set, that one suppress one's primordial desires and discover what artists, such as Velázquez, have signified.

Instead of killing ourselves as influential readers, we can continue the work by recontextualizing it. We need not search for universal agreement or communal consensus. Communication is not epistemological, but socio-historical. If we understand one another, it is not because we share common principles that can be illuminated through introspection, but because we share a common circumstance. Consequently, instead of trying to discover Velázquez' point of view, I prefer to revise his artworks into new ones, ones that suit my purposes. In the following chapter, I will critically investigate Ortega's interpretation of our circumstance, concentrating upon both its useful and its misleading dimensions.

## Chapter Four: The Concept of Generations

To ask an art historian a question about something concerning the historical context of art is to anticipate a trustworthy response. Unfortunately, many art historians assume they understand the contours of what has happened and what is happening without inquiring into the categorical framework informing their interpretation of the historical process. They neglect to discover that narrating the history of art assumes a certain methodological mapping. Whether one interprets "periodization" in terms of a dynamic process (such as Alois Riegl) or a fixed state of being whole (such as Heinrich Wölfflin), and how one installs boundaries in one's configuration of change, are inescapable issues that affect one's description of art's timely character.

Ortega believes history moves by leaps and bounds. He rejects faith in gradual evolution and in historical progression, mature perfection through gradual preparation. Ortega emphasizes the spontaneous appearances of new time-frames. New ages replace old ones almost without transition. Great distances can be covered by the leaps of history. These jumps are called generations.<sup>1</sup>

A generation represents a resting point in the normal rhythms of history. It leaps with the changing world. The world changes with every generation because each generation transforms the world, leaving it somewhat different from the way that generation discovered it. Generations do not have interpretations; they are interpretations of humanity, specific collective projects of ensimismamiento para hacerse

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<sup>1</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La misión de la universidad" [1930], translated by Howard Lee Nostrand as The Mission of the University (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1944), p. 23.

[searching-within-oneself to make oneself].<sup>2</sup>

However, sometimes new generations discover themselves alienated from their ancestors. The norms and ideas of their parents no longer make sense in the world and lack their previous vitality. At first, new generations are confused and do not know what to do. Without the security of a given orientation, generations feel lost in a world different from its parental generation. They live without a map for living, without a discovered route for autofabrication, for self-making. Such generations live in the abyss of historical crisis. During this stage of change, generations follow numerous false passageways. They repeatedly fail to discover the light at the entrance of a new world.<sup>3</sup> As Ortega described these generations within historical crises,

Entire generations falsify themselves to themselves; that is to say, they wrap themselves up in artistic styles, in doctrines, in political movements which are insincere and which fill the lack of genuine convictions. When they get to be about forty years old, those generations become null and void, because at that age one can no longer live on fictions.<sup>4</sup>

One must set oneself within the truth. Fortunately, however, within this dismal search for cosmic clarity, a generation with renewed faith orientation germinates within the darkness. They will discover a new way of life. Although their vision is unfocused and overpowered by the revealed daylight, this generation leaves the shadows of its historical crisis behind and enters into its landscape with orgiastic seizure.<sup>5</sup> Art, according to Ortega, establishes itself as the first faith within the new territory. Compared to

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<sup>2</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], translated by Evelyn Ruggs and Diego Marin as Meditations on Quixote (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, En torno a Galileo [1933], translated by Mildred Adams as Man and Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1958), pp. 83-101.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 88.

philosophy, however, art lacks sufficient orientation. Artworks are individual solutions to individual lives. By contrast, philosophical systems are universal solutions for life in general.<sup>6</sup> In an age of crisis, however, philosophy lacks the clarity to discover its own truths. When escaping the shadows, one is temporarily blinded by the truth of light. It is easier to concentrate on one thing than to see the whole. Consequently, art precedes philosophy into a new era.

To Ortega's understanding, Western civilization has experienced four major changes; the development of four new epochs --classical antiquity, the middle ages, modernity, and the twentieth century. Ortega credits the dynamics of generations and chance for making the transitions between these epochs. Only the greatest generations can bring about change at this level. Of course, Ortega believes his generation will close the door on modernity and open a new twentieth-century civilization. His generation will solve the crisis of its time --- the death of modernity. Ortega believes that the world of his generation is in ruins. As he describes it,

Today almost everything in the West is a ruin, but not, be it understood, because of the war. The ruined state was there before, it already existed. The last two wars have taken place because the West was already in ruins.... Almost everything is in ruins, from political institutions to the theatre, not to mention our other literary genres and the arts. Painting is in ruins --- Cubism is the debris, that is why Picasso's paintings have something of the tumbled-down building about them, of the corner of a Flea Market. Music is in ruins --- the most recent Stravinsky is an example of musical detritus. Economics is in ruins -- both in theory and as practiced by nations. And finally, even femininity is in ruins, in a serious state of disrepair.<sup>7</sup>

This quote should not signify a lamentation to the reader. Ortega is not simply

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<sup>6</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Adán en el Paraíso" [1910], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p. 483.

<sup>7</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Idea del teatro" [1946], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Idea of Theatre: An Abbreviated View" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 168.



mourning the "decline of the West." Restoring the ruins of modernity is the quixotic challenge of his generation. Ortega writes that repairing this debris is el tema de nuestro tiempo [the theme of our times].<sup>8</sup>

History, to Ortega's understanding, is not a psycho-history of individuals, but the dialogue, within the drama of human life, between an I and circumstance. Although each cultivator is unique in his or her vital-thought pattern, he or she lives in a situation with others. Consequently, historiography needs to account for each point of view in the context of its surroundings. As Ortega describes good history-writing.

History is not occupied solely with individual life as such; even when an historian proposes to write a biography he finds the life of his subject entangled with the lives of others - which is to say that each life is submerged in a specific environment of a collective life.<sup>9</sup>

Historiography must narrate the whole life of a person, one's I within one's situational framing.

According to Ortega human life generally falls into five stages consisting of approximately fifteen years: childhood, youth, initiation, dominance, and old age. At the first stage, childhood, a person is self-centered. The child spends most of his or her time trying to fulfill his or her specific immediate needs, such as food, shelter, and gaining attention. At this stage of development most of life consists of reception of one kind or another. The child does little in terms of cultural activity. His or her circumstance for the most part shapes the child. Although this is an important step in

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<sup>8</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo [1923], translated by James Cleugh as The Modern Theme (New York: Harper and Row, 1961). Unfortunately, Cleugh mistranslated the title of this book so that the mission of Ortega's generation is confused with the crisis it needs to solve.

<sup>9</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, p. 39.

developing, it needs to be overcome.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the "mass-man" remains at this stage, like an over-aged spoiled brat.<sup>11</sup>

In the second stage of life, between fifteen and thirty, youths desire to live together with peers of the same sex. They sense an "instinct of coequality," a call to be sociable. Vastly unformed as individuals, the youths neglect their individual immediate needs in service of their peers. They become absorbed into the anonymous personality of their coequals. Ortega cites the example of a young boy informing his mother that he needs clean-pressed clothes because we have started to like girls. Within the context of the club of young men, the youth feels strange and mysterious disgust for the familiar women.<sup>12</sup> He searches within his sharpened imagination for a woman in the distance, one alien and unseen.<sup>13</sup> In the primitive era, the youth took the central role in society. The first dwelling, according to Ortega, was not to house the family, but to shelter the youth. It served as the barracks, monastery, and casino for a secret society for young men only. Within the clubhouse secret rituals were exercised, preparing the youths for hunting and battle. Ortega also credits the primitive youths with originating war. Drunken with love for the distant woman, the youths enter other camps and raid the women. Upon the abduction of these women, an act which men of that tribe take unkindly, wars are initiated. To capture or rob the distant woman, man begins to fight

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid, pp. 55-6.

<sup>11</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Rebelión de las masas [1930], translated anonymously as The Revolt of the Masses (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1932), pp. 58-9.

<sup>12</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "El origen deportivo del Estado" [1924], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Sportative Origin of the State" in History as a System and Other Essays towards a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), pp. 24-8.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, pp. 28-31.

against one another. In the service of drunken love, or rape, battles are born. The erotic impetus of the age-class of youths, the brotherhood, alters human history. Ortega cites the brotherhood of Remus and Romulus and their rape of the Sabines as the foundation of Rome. Rape is intertwined with social evolution. In reaction to the "sports" of the youth, the mature men and women of the horde organize social structures suppressing the passions of the youth. Institutions such as the family and the Senate were constructed to diffuse the unbridled vitality of the youth. According to Ortega, however, the rapes of the primitive youths continue today in the twentieth century, but symbolically. The traditional custom of the groom not allowing the bride to touch the floor upon entering the honeymoon suite, carrying her over the threshold, symbolizes her rape. The word "rapture" also reflects the primitive ritual.<sup>14</sup> However, the youths of today possess scarcely the power found in primitive generations.

Ortega, I believe, refers to the avant-garde as the art of the young. Although they explore the irreality of art, in the exclusion of the masses, the young reduce art to farce and meaninglessness. Dehumanization is both a positive and a negative event. In its goodness, it segregates the intellectual nobility, those who understand art, from the hordes of the masses.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, in the process of dehumanization one can neglect the meaning of art, its truth-telling of the human condition. The young play without seriousness, without a sense of mission. For them art is a thing without consequence; it is doomed to the irony of self-ridicule.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Hans Sedlmayr who dismisses

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, pp. 31-40.

<sup>15</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La deshumanización del arte" [1925], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Dehumanization of Art" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 6-14.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, pp. 46-52.

twentieth-century art as "mere civilization without a sense of divine culture,"<sup>17</sup> as emblematic of the decline of the West, Ortega sees the art of the young as the birth of a new art, one in the post-modern age. Yet, Ortega is unsure of what will happen to this budding style of the young when it "grows up."<sup>18</sup>

At the third stage of life, the age of initiation, one begins to discover the path of one's life. In this gestation period, one reaches one's self-identity. Between thirty and forty-five the person recognizes his or her position in life's circumstance and discovers his or her unique point of view.<sup>19</sup> The youth plays at inventing, for the entertainment of the group. He ignores his responsibility outside the club. Unlike the youth, the initiators take life and creativity seriously. They attempt to form a blueprint for life. Because they have a sense of individual calling, they distance themselves from the group and initiate their unique project. Ortega also believes this is the best age for marriage. Between thirty and forty-five men have a sense of self and can become intimate with others. At this age, men have the vitality to judge beauty, the best women and artworks of their age. Some men will choose women twenty years their younger but this reflects their lack of maturity. The noble man between thirty and forty-five will always select a woman near his age, one like other artworks of his generation, one that displays the vitality of his lived-world.<sup>20</sup> These men invent culture in opposition to the status-quo, in

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<sup>17</sup>Quoted from Hans Sedlmayr's Kunst und Wahrheit: Zur Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte (Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978) by Michael Ann Holly in her Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 101-2.

<sup>18</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," p. 54.

<sup>19</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, pp. 58-60.

<sup>20</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Para la historia del amor" [1926], Obras Completas III (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 439-42.

their cultural activity a new germ of life is inseminated. The tension between their innovations and the present ruling categories for life moves history.

Men between forty-five and sixty control cultural life, that is, they live in the age of dominance. As masters they transform circumstance, according to their previous inventions for life. They develop and systematize their earlier inspirations. Men of this age reside in power; they supervise cultural activities. This age-class clashes with those initiating a new project for life, producing the impetus of history.<sup>21</sup>

In the final stage of life, after sixty-five years of being-in-circumstance, one's world is "out of date." The senior citizen lives in the past and is historically impotent. In the twilight years, one's formative powers are exhausted.<sup>22</sup>

These five stages of life, in which the member of each generation participates, sets up the tensions of historical unfolding. Each moment consists of five different "todays," depending upon one's stage of being-in-circumstance. The contemporary situation always includes the presence of five generations.

In Ortega's conception of historiography, one does not write a biography of average individuals. Not everyone participates within a generation. Only the "select minority," that is, the responsible and culturally active elite, belong to generations. These men separate themselves from the average-man; they raise themselves above the masses. The select minority do not think themselves superior to the majority, but demand more of themselves than of the masses. By contrast, the mass-man takes life for granted with self-confidence. The average person does not try to save his

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<sup>21</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 59-60.

circumstance; there is no perceived need. He does not attempt to change existence. The masses are at ease with themselves and their situation. Like spoiled children they do not recognize their limitations. The mass-man lacks the desire and the imagination to discover his circumstance. The average-man does not see the irreality of an artwork, but only its contents for his experience. He loses the aesthetic quality of art, its irreality, in the labyrinth of his psychic life. Being egocentric the mass-man does not search within himself, ensimismarse, because he sees no need. As Ortega describes them,

The masses, follow public opinion, they look, not contemplate, at paintings of those whose names they recognize. To appear cultured, they search for works of the great masters, without knowing what they stand in front of.<sup>23</sup>

The mass-man knows nothing about art; he only knows what he likes. Thinking himself sufficient, the mass-man sees no need to examine his circumstance, for life, to his mind, is without problems. To Ortega's understanding, the mass-man is a barbarian, an animal without instinct; for he does not even realize the fear of the other.<sup>24</sup> As Ortega writes,

The mass-man is he whose life lacks any purpose, and simply goes drifting along. Consequently, though his possibilities and his powers be enormous, he constructs nothing.<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, the elite-man searches within himself and discovers within his circumstance, the totality of vital possibilities, a path of autofabrication, a point of view, a vital mission. He will share his destiny with his fellow coeval elites, with those who discover crisis at the same historical level, that is to say, reveal the problem of their zone of

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<sup>23</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Apatía Artística" [1921], Obras Completas II (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p. 335.

<sup>24</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, pp. 61-77. In my judgment, this description of the mass-man suggests Ortega's nietzschean heritage. Note that in his Der Antichrist [1888], Nietzsche writes, "...man is ... the most unsuccessful animal, the sickliest, the one most dangerously strayed from its instincts." Friedrich Nietzsche, Der Antichrist [1888], translated by R.J. Hollingdale as The Anti-Christ (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 124.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 49.

dates, of their generation. Participation within a generation takes effort, a search for salvation, and only the select-minority is willing to meet the challenge.<sup>26</sup>

Ortega's dichotomy should not imply an aristocratic interpretation of society. His interest is between moral classes not social ones. His enemy is the self-centered bureaucrat, not the impoverished proletariat. In my reading, Ortega's distinction is best understood when compared to Nietzsche's distinction between active and reactive wills to power, that is, between an aesthetic inventive life and an anaesthetic denial of life. The reactive will of the mass-man operates on nihilistic principles built upon resentment, negating new ways of thinking and feeling. It cannot accept innovations. The vital will of the noble elite actively forgets the resentment of the past and affirms all names in history.<sup>27</sup> The active will joyfully accepts history as a whole against all suprahistorical views and embraces the intolerable, by re-evaluating all values beyond good and evil.<sup>28</sup> Ortega's mass-man is reactive and resentful. He hates twentieth-century art because he cannot understand it. By contrast, the noble elite is active and can accept his contingency. He willingly takes up the challenge to redeem his circumstance. Like Nietzsche, Ortega divides humanity by the power of will, not the power of the dollar.

Ortega also believes generations, although always consisting of noble members, are either active or reactive, creative or receptive. Generations always receive past points of view in order to make their own lives liveable, but some do so by producing a

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid, pp. 61-7.

<sup>27</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Götzendämmerung [1889], translated by R.J. Hollingdale as Twilight of the Idols (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 40-54; with an allusion to Nietzsche's letter to Jakob Burckhardt on 5 January 1889, translated by Christopher Middleton in Selected Essays of Friedrich Nietzsche (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 347.

<sup>28</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Zur Genealogie der Morals [1887], translated by Francis Golffing as The Genealogy of Morals (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 255.

new landscape while others choose merely to maintain the status quo. Describing the rhythm of history, Ortega writes,

There is in fact a pendulum movement latent in history which swings from ages subjected to the dominant influence of respectability to ages that surrender to the yoke of the female principle. Many institutions, customs, ideas and myths, hitherto unexplained, are illuminated in astonishing manner when the fact is taken into account that certain ages have been ruled and modelled by the supremacy of women.<sup>29</sup>

For Ortega, one of the dangers of his age is the women's liberation movement. It signifies an age of passive reception and sex role confusion. According to Ortega, confusion in women is not a defect, but an essential characteristic.<sup>30</sup> Women, for Ortega, are not weaker than men due to nature, but by historical invention. Studying her in terms of biology would be a mistake. She is far more like an artwork than she is like an animal.<sup>31</sup> For Ortega, her destiny, after all is "to be in view of men."<sup>32</sup> To his sensibilities, a woman is free to choose her own way of life; but like the mass-man, she is incapable of producing anything culturally significant. Ortega answers Linda Nochlin's now famous question: why have there been no great women artists?<sup>33</sup> But his response will please no feminist. Instead of blaming socio-historical conditions, he says it is no one's fault, because that is the way it should be. Ortega believes that women live by

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<sup>29</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Modern Theme, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El hombre y la gente [1957], translated by Willard R. Trask as Man and People (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1957), pp. 128-35.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, pp. 134-5.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup>Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" in Art and Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History (New York: Collier Books, 1971), pp. 1-43.



habitual modesty and have impoverished imaginations.<sup>34</sup> As Ortega puts it,

The man always leans more toward the extraordinary, at least he dreams of adventure and change, with tense, difficult and unique situations. The woman, on the other hand, feels a truly strange fulfillment in the details of everyday life. She is comfortable amid inveterate habits and, to the best of her ability, she will make a yesterday of today. ...the man goes to the woman as to a party or an orgy, to an ecstasy which will break the monotony of his existence, and almost always he finds a person who is only happy when engaged in everyday tasks, whether it be darning underwear or going dancing. So true is this that ... ethnographers show us that work was invented by women; work, that is, as the compulsory everyday chore, in contrast to enterprise, and such spontaneous activity as sports and adventure. For this reason it is the woman who creates trade: she is the first agriculturist, collector and ceramicist.<sup>35</sup>

To Ortega, the idea of man and woman playing together is nonsense, a false romantic dream. The distance between those who are engaged with chores and those engaged in adventure cannot be closed. Women are doomed to go to theatre as spectators, while men are destined to carry theatre within themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Ortega, in my judgment, definitely misconstrues gender relations. Women are capable to perform artistry when not thwarted by sexist societies. But, Ortega's words also display another message. In his understanding, everyday activities and the making of crafts have no aesthetic appeal. This interpretation, in my reading, suffers from two problems. First, it sets up a false dichotomy between high or fine art and the industrial, commercial, and homemaker crafts. He believes the former is inventive whereas the latter is merely repetitive. In my judgment, craft and fine art both include an acquired skill and imaginativity. He confuses craft with bad art, with that without imagination. Second, his words imply that work must be boring and non-aesthetic. From my dwelling,

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<sup>34</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Estudios sobre el amor [1940], translated by Toby Talbot as On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 119.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, pp. 125-6.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

a bourgeois Dutch-American home, I believe work can and should include imaginative play. Participating in everyday activities should not be understood as chores, as something that we have to do, but as opportunities for joy, as something that we are grateful to do. I am quite sure that Ortega would accuse me of fostering the uncultured barbarism of the mass-man. But, in my assessment, this is the only responsible attitude towards craft and daily labors.

Ortega worries about the women's liberation movement, but another transformation bothers him more -- the revolt of the masses. Barbaric fools, who think themselves perfect, are in charge of cultural life. As Ortega describes it,

The horrors of the revolt of the masses is that these philistines, due to liberal democracy, mass-education and specialization can, while remaining aesthetically insensitive, be cultural actors.<sup>37</sup>

Democracy, which calls for equality, erases the distinction between active and reactive humanity. It permits and encourages the mass-man to rule the world. Unfortunately, the mass-man is without rationality and, being insensitive to his circumstance, acts only out of violence.<sup>38</sup>

Because the mass-man is vulgar and unwilling to make an effort to solve the problems of his circumstance, he can never participate within a generation. He might think he does, but the generation will not let him into its exclusive club. To stop the on-coming masses, the artists of the generation produce artworks that will lack popularity.<sup>39</sup> In his "La deshumanización del arte" [1925], Ortega writes,

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<sup>37</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Musicalia" [1921], Obras Completas II (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 238-9. Translation mine.

<sup>38</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, pp. 68-77.

<sup>39</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Musicalia," pp. 235-7.

"From a sociological point of view" the characteristic feature of the new art is, in my judgment, that it divides the public into two classes of those who understand it and those who do not. ...The new art obviously addresses itself not to everybody, as did Romanticism, but to a specially gifted minority. Hence, the indignation of the masses. When a man dislikes a work of art, but understands it, he feels superior to it; and there is no reason for indignation. But when his dislike is due to his failure to understand, he feels vaguely humiliated and this ranking sense of inferiority must be counterbalanced by indignant self-assertion. Through its mere presence, the art of the young compels the average citizen to realize that he is just this - the average citizen, a creature incapable of receiving the sacrament of art, blind and deaf to pure beauty. ...Accustomed to ruling supreme, the masses feel that the new art, which is the art of the privileged aristocracy of finer senses, endangers their rights as men. Whenever the new Muses present themselves, the masses bristle.

...On the other hand, the new art also helps the elite to recognize themselves and one another in the drab mass of society and to learn their mission which consists in being few and holding their own against the many.<sup>40</sup>

The new art works as a sieve, separating the noble elite from the vulgar horde of the masses.

But, to which generation does a noble elite-man belong? What are the limiting frames of a generation? Ortega bases his dating of generations upon the generation he believes is the first born in modernity and upon the coming of age of its key innovator, René Descartes. Ortega writes,

In him [Descartes] we have the eponym of the decisive generation; having found him, the rest is a matter of mathematics. Let us note the date in which Descartes ended his thirtieth year - 1626 [his entrance into the life-stage of initiation], that will be the key date in Descartes' generation, a point of departure from which the others can be fixed on either side merely by adding and subtracting groups of fifteen years....

....Therefore, those who were then in their thirties belong to that generation, whether they reached their thirtieth birthday seven years before or seven years after that date.<sup>41</sup>

In his "Introducción a Velázquez" [1943], Ortega begins the article discovering the

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<sup>40</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," pp. 6-7.

<sup>41</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, p. 63.

artist's locus within his generation.

Velázquez was born in 1599, Ribera in 1591, Zurbarán in 1598, Alonso Cano in 1601, Claude Lorraine in 1600, Poussin in 1593, Van Dyck in 1599. All these famous painters belong to the same generation. Contemporary Spanish writers include Calderon, born in 1600, and Gracian, born in 1601. Also of this generation was Descartes, born in 1596.<sup>42</sup>

The contextuality of Las Meninas rests within the framing of its author's generation.

Velázquez' artistic oeuvre parallels the philosophical oeuvre of Descartes. Their perspectives are compared twice by Ortega. First, in his "Sobre el punto de vista de las artes" [1924], Ortega points to the "Copernican revolutions" of Descartes and Velázquez:

Let us jump to the year 1600, the epoch in which the painting of hollow space began. Philosophy is in the power of Descartes. What is cosmic reality for him? Multiple and independent substances disintegrate. In the foreground of metaphysics there is a single substance - an empty substance - a kind of metaphysical hollow space that now takes on a magical creative power. For Descartes, the real is space, as for Velázquez it is hollow space.<sup>43</sup>

In the "Introducción a Velázquez" [1943], Ortega continues his comparison between these two elite-men. He writes,

I find an exemplary parallelism between these two men. Descartes, too, in his profound solitude, turned against the intellectual principles still in force in his time; that is to say, against all tradition - as much against the scholars as against the Greeks. To him also the traditional method of exercising thought was hieratic formalism, based on blind conventions, and incapable of integrating itself in the actual life of each man. It is essential that the individual construct for himself a system of convictions wrought with the evidence produced in his personal nature. For this it is necessary to purge thought of all that is not a pure relation of ideas, ridding it of all the legends with which the senses overlay the truth. In this manner thought is brought to itself and converted to raison.

Just as Descartes reduces thought to rationality, Velázquez reduces painting to visuality. Both focus on the activity of culture upon immediate reality. Velázquez, perhaps the greatest connoisseur of the artistic past existing in his

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<sup>42</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Introducción a Velázquez" [1943], translated by Alexis Brown as "Introduction to Velázquez" in Velázquez, Goya, and the Dehumanization of Art (London: Studio Vista, 1972), p. 84.

<sup>43</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Sobre el punto de vista de las artes" [1924], translated by Paul Snodgrass and Joseph Frank as "On Point of View in the Arts" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 128.

day, probably regarded its huge bulk with admiration, but as being on a par with, say, archaeology.<sup>44</sup>

Even though Velázquez' early work, his bodegones, appear like the anti-Renaissance work of Caravaggio (an artist 30 years his elder), these paintings, according to Ortega, present pure viscosity. Velázquez' paintings are all different from each other; after all, they are artistic "light-experiments."<sup>45</sup> However, in spite of their differences, all Velázquez' paintings reside within the greater context of his life-project and that of his generation.

Each generation has its unique mission: to make their circumstance liveable. Previous generations have initiated the hacerse of life; it is the responsibility of today's generations to continue the project, to prepare life for the next stage. This task becomes the "theme of our times." Consequently, the purposes of art alter with each generation. Faced with an unknown future, the members of each generation use the only tool they possess, their ability to search within themselves and their past, ensimismación. Upon dis-covering their circumstance, these individuals invent new blueprints for living, that is to say, new personal projects to live by. Life, for each generation is a two-fold task. First, they should listen to the inventions of earlier generations, especially the immediately preceding one. Second, they need to look inside themselves and employ their own creative vitality. The generational task always consists

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<sup>44</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Introduction to Velázquez," p. 103-4.

<sup>45</sup>Although I appreciate Ortega's rejection of interpretations which describe Las Meninas in terms of photography and realism, I am leery of his understanding of the painting as a proto-impressionist work. Even though the technique Velázquez employs reminds one of nineteenth century impressionism, it is best to remember his baroque setting. What Ortega says of Velázquez could also be said of Frans Hals and Jan Vermeer. To my understanding, the "light experiments" found in these seventeenth century paintings are better framed in the context of psychological studies and the rhetorical tradition. Besides, Ortega's interpretation denies the richness of Velázquez' early works, his bodegones, such The Old Woman Frying Eggs [1618] and Los Borrachos [1628], which were not mere preludes to Las Meninas nor failed introductions to impressionism.

of reception and liberation from the past.<sup>46</sup> However, each generation resides upon a unique stage in the drama of human history. Members of a generation find their commonality in their circumstance, in being present under the same situation, but each member will solve the life crisis of age in unique ways, each will write his or her own adventure.

For instance, all great artists are elite-men, members of a generation, but this does not mean they all discover the same solution. Poussin and Velázquez both paint mythological scenes and movement, yet in different manners, corresponding to their unique practice of irrealization, to their individual styles. Poussin paints the gods; the human is missing. He laments the disillusion of the Renaissance promise. Human life is painful, ugly, and void of poetry from Poussin's point of view; so he paints the irreal gods in an irreal landscape, in another world, one of beauty. By contrast, Velázquez pokes fun at the gods. He paints Bacchus and friends as common drunkards, as borrachos. Velázquez laughs at the gods. They do not exist. Bacchus is no more than a shameful rascal. Velázquez asks his audience to forget the gods and live.<sup>47</sup>

Second, Poussin paints bodies in movement. Velázquez, on the other hand, paints movement in one single arrested moment. He stops time and paints hollow space. Although Velázquez and Poussin belong to the same generation, one with an anti-Renaissance mentality, analogous to the generation of Caravaggio, their work is

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<sup>46</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Modern Theme, pp. 16-7.

<sup>47</sup>Ortega's references are to Velázquez' Los Borrachos [1628]. Although Ortega believes that Velázquez is poking fun at the gods of antiquity, I believe that the painter also may be poking fun at the drunkards of his own day -- those who think that they are gods, but still remain peasants.

hardly synonymous.<sup>48</sup>

To Ortega's sensibilities, Velázquez' generation sets part of the stage for the artist's vital personal mission. As the context of his life and work, Velázquez' generation offers possibilities for living, potential opportunities for artistry. However, the artist searches within his or her self to find his or her unique point of view, his or her individual solution to life.

History proceeds according to the traceable rhythms of generations, the struggles of coeval groups, that is, generations living as contemporaries. The distinction between coeval and contemporary is crucial for grasping Ortega's conception of history. Coevals are the cultural leaders living within the same zone of dates, within the fifteen year schema of a single generation. They are members of the same age-class. By contrast, "contemporaries" delineates the conglomeration of all cultural leaders living today, of all generations present.<sup>49</sup> The flow of history depends upon the tensions between coeval groups living as contemporaries, upon the generation gap between parent and child.

The struggle between coevals and contemporaries, in Ortega's thought, may remind readers of what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence."<sup>50</sup> Both Ortega and Bloom describe historical development in terms of a battle scene. However, in my reading, Bloom would never subscribe to Ortega's way of thinking. For Bloom, there is no such thing as a point of view. Nor does Bloom believe that art can provide the artist

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<sup>48</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Introduction to Velázquez," pp. 96-105; also see his "Tres Cuadros del Vino" [1911], translated by Alexis Brown as "Three Bacchanalian Pictures" in Velázquez, Goya, and the Dehumanization of Art (London: Studio Vista, 1972), pp. 14-20.

<sup>49</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, pp. 51-5.

<sup>50</sup>Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

with a happy substitution from his or her historical crises.<sup>51</sup> The battle continues within the artwork. Finally, Bloom does not think, like Ortega, that a contextualized writer first receives the past and then creates a future. To Bloom, interpretation is always misinterpretation.<sup>52</sup> The question for him is whether or not an artist offers a strong misreading or a weak one. Ortega too describes generations as either weak or strong, but to his understanding, a strong generation does not gain its strength through active misprison, but rather, through its noble will to alter its circumstance. Bloom's notion of misinterpretation is absent in Ortega's writings. Thus, although both scholars interpret history as an anxiety which continually challenges the artist, Ortega and Bloom have different notions of how an artist responds to this crisis.

During the nineteen-twenties, a German art historian, Wilhelm Pinder, gave Ortega's methodology great praise and attempted to employ its categories in his Das Problem der Generationen in der Kunstgeschichte Europas [1926].<sup>53</sup> The crux of Ortega's theory, however, was lost in the translation from the philosophy of history to art historiography. First, Pinder limits the scope of the generation to include only members of the fine art community.<sup>54</sup> A generation from Ortega's viewpoint would consist of all cultural leaders found within a particular zone of dates. Second, for Pinder, a new

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid, pp. 5-11.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid, pp. 19-45.

<sup>53</sup>Wilhelm Pinder, Das Problem der Generationen in der Kunstgeschichte Europas [1926], 4a. ed. (Köln: Verlag E.A. Seemann, 1949), p. 24.

<sup>54</sup>For a good commentary on the generation theories of Ortega and Pinder, see Hans Jaeger, "Generations in History: Reflections on a Controversial Concept," History and Theory XXIV:3 (1985), p. 278.



generation was born every new moment.<sup>55</sup> Pinder concentrated upon the "noncontemporaneity of contemporaries," the polyphony of voices singing simultaneously.<sup>56</sup> Pinder argued for an "entelechy," an unfolding process ordered by an inner sense of single directedness, determined by some secret natural dynamis.<sup>57</sup> Ortega, by contrast, would define a generation as a structured zone of dates, and any conception which ties the vital rhythmic pattern of history to a particular year of birth would appear individualistic to his understanding. Neglecting the trans-personal character of a generation distorts the tensions between coevals. Pinder's conception, according to Ortega, diffuses the structure of the generation itself by reducing it to the flow of psycho-histories. Pinder's notion of "entelechy" reflects a closer connection with Riegl's Kunstwollen than Ortega's interpretation of generational mission.<sup>58</sup> Entelechy determines the vision of a generation without accounting for the circumstance of a particular generation. Pinder misses Ortega's distinction between coevals and contemporaries. Pinder implies that generations succeed one another without direct confrontation between them.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, although Pinder employs a generation oriented methodology, his position should not be confused with Ortega's categorical framework. Ortega would applaud Pinder's critique of Wölfflin and Riegl. No period contains one style alone. However, to Ortega, Pinder's method of art history-writing

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<sup>55</sup>For a good contrast between the generation theories of Ortega and Pinder, see Julián Marías Aguilera, El método histórico de las generaciones [1949], translated by Harold C. Raley as Generations: A Historical Method (University AL: University of Alabama Press, 1970), p. 117.

<sup>56</sup>Wilhelm Pinder, Das Generationen in der Kunstgeschichte Europas, p. 40

<sup>57</sup>Hans Jaeger, "Generations in History: Reflections on a Controversial Concept," p. 281.

<sup>58</sup>Robert Wohl, The Generation of 1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.75.

<sup>59</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and Crisis, pp. 51-4; also his ¿Qué es filosofía? [1959], translated by Mildred Adams as What is Philosophy? (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), pp. 33-5.

remains a perversion of his generation theory because Pinder ignores the zone of dates of a generation and the antagonism between generations. The difference between Ortega and Pinder may also betray a weakness within art historiography itself --- the temptation to see the artistic community outside of the rest of the cultural matrix and to view artists as solidary geniuses uncorrupted by political and economic aspirations.

Once a generation ceases to alter actively its circumstance, that is, transform culture, an artwork loses its formative power, its vitality. It becomes "dead to the world," a past response to a past life. For the present the past is always a memory. The remembered relic or monument is always in the past and its recollection is always in the present. Remembrance never resurrects the dead. The reminders of the past are always in and for the present, always before us as absent, as being the past.<sup>60</sup> Ortega catalogues past artworks within a museum, a mausoleum of past points of view. If we pay homage to Velázquez, it is not because he interests us as a person per se, but because he is related to us as our cultural ancestor. Velázquez is an ingredient in our lives. He initiated our present. He helped form our circumstance. In remembering his point of view, we can re-vitalize our own understanding of life. If we are to comprehend our own lives, our own person in circumstance, we need to commemorate Velázquez' point of view as a dimension of our circumstance.

Velázquez is a father of modern painting. The seeds of his labor gave rise to Impressionism and Cubism. He initiated the "irreal" point of view. Velázquez, unlike the pre-moderns, no longer painted things, but light. He turned his back on the public and the world of circumstance. Velázquez is concerned with subjectivity, the act of

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<sup>60</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *El origen y epílogo de la filosofía* [1953], translated by Toby Talbot as *The Origin of Philosophy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1967), p. 14.

seeing, that is to say, the activity of the I, the point of view. He invents modern art. Although his work still shows discernable objects, Velázquez opens the door for the painting of pure subjectivity.<sup>61</sup> Ortega describes the historical significance of Velázquez' work, as the presence of the past:

Can one help being astounded to hear that people of some formal standing [referring to Franz Wickhoff] call Velázquez a realist or a naturalist? With a mood of delightful inconsequence they suppress all of Velázquez' merits. If Velázquez had been concerned principally with things, res or nature, he would have been no more than a disciple of the Flemish and of fourteenth century Italians. These are the conquerors of the nature of things. And by no accident. Embrace the Tratado [Treatise] of Leonardo da Vinci by whichever part and you will find the theory of aesthetic realism.

The second half of the nineteenth century has placed Velázquez in the supreme summit of art. Not by us Spaniards, let it be noted, it was the English, the French who have educated us to look at Velázquez. It is not Lucas [Eugenio Lucas - 19th century Spanish artist] who has discovered with new eyes Velázquez and Goya. Lucas was incapable of this genius. Delacroix showed Lucas the secret of our two great painters; that the paintings they paint are like the jewelry one crafts, with precious materials, with mounting and brilliant colors. It is clear that Lucas did not find the lesson. Manet found and realized its potential. The Velázquez of the nineteenth century is not seen by the lifeless eyes of Felipe IV, but the Velázquez of Manet, Velázquez the Impressionist.

Well now, there is nothing more opposed to realism than impressionism. For there are no things, no res, there are no bodies, and space is not a cubic box. The world is a surface of luminous values. Things, which begin here and end there, are fused in a marvelous melting-pot and objects commence to flow inside the pores of others. Who is capable of recognizing anything in a painting of Velázquez' late period? Who is capable of pointing out where the hands begin and end in Las Meninas? One might aspire to have some day the languid, ivory body of the Mona Lisa; but that lady-in-waiting who hands the goblet to the little princess is as fugitive as a shadow, and if we intend to apprehend her she would remain in our hands only as an impression.<sup>62</sup>

Velázquez starts a copernican revolution for painting.<sup>63</sup> He begins the radicalization of the subject. His work initiates the painting of pure sensations [Impressionism] and the

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<sup>61</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "On the Point of View in the Arts," pp. 128-9.

<sup>62</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Del realismo en pintura" [1912], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 566-7. Translation mine.

<sup>63</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "On Point of View in the Arts," p. 121.

painting of pure consciousness [the art of the young]. In the after-life of Las Meninas, artists learn about their own contemporary vocation. They discover meaning in Velázquez' point of view. The new generation receives its training from artworks of the past, giving them a potential of opportunities to shape the future. Upon discovering the past, the members of the new generation turn towards the second dimension of their mission: the invention of new artworks characterizing their new plan for life.

Although Ortega's generation theory may appear naïve in light of our present notions of psychic and social development, his work does clear up some of the problems found in certain understandings of historical change. Ortega recognizes the multiplicity of mentalities given at a particular period. One single Zeitgeist or Kunstwollen cannot speak for an entire age. Within each historical moment we can discover a complexity of artistic styles overlapping one another.

Furthermore, Ortega recognizes that one cannot stop time in order to view history; the historian always evaluates the past in terms of the present. Criticizing structuralist linguistics, Ortega writes,

... De Saussure's famous distinction between "synchronic linguistics" ... and "diachronic linguistics" ... is utopian and inadequate. It is utopian because the body of language does not remain still even for a moment, strictly speaking there is not synchronism of all its components; but also because all that diachronism accomplishes is to reconstruct other comparative "presents" of the language as they existed in the past. All that it shows us, then, is changes; it enables us to witness one present being replaced by another, the succession of the static figures of language, as the "film," with its motionless images engenders the visual fiction of a movement. At best, it offers us a cinematic view of language, but not a dynamic understanding of how changes were, and came to be, made.<sup>64</sup>

Ortega understands, in my reading, that historians should not appeal to any fixed position within the world; life is always in a process of becoming. Art historians far too

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<sup>64</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Man and People, p. 247.

often have relied on monographs and "snapshot" histories. Ortega offers us an opportunity to notice the on-going development of art.

Unfortunately, we cannot accept his interpretation of historical unfolding wholeheartedly. Ortega reduces art history to the synchronic and diachronic interplay of generations. The "elite-man," the member of a generation lives in circumstance, but living in circumstance and being a member of a generation (which itself is a circumstance) only provide potential options for the "elite-man" and his unique point of view. Historical context offers opportunities for the "elite-man" to actualize. Ortega recognizes the plurality of styles within a given period, so he deconstructs the period into unique generations, and then, deconstructs generations into unique aesthetic points of view, into individual points of view. His conception forces us to view artists, and perhaps ourselves, as alone in the crowd, as alienated from one another, like the sculptured figures of Alberto Giacometti. Living in Toronto and riding the mass-transportation system, I have experienced a feeling of solitude while being surrounded by others, but I am hesitant to make this broken sense of community a norm for our human condition or a guiding principle for writing art history.

Perhaps, Ortega's dichotomy between nobility of the elegant elite and the average-ness of the masses is motivated by an existentialistic understanding of culture. Heidegger and Unamuno also call for an authentic personal project beyond the false securities of culture.

For instance, for the early Heidegger, when one overcomes the Alltäglichkeit, the everydayness of the "they," one discovers the authentic project of Dasein.<sup>65</sup> In

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<sup>65</sup>Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit [1927], translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 163-8.

averageness or everydayness, Dasein appears merely ontic; it comes across as an entity within-the-world, one individual substance in the presence of others. But when one conceals the ontic, when one uproots idle talk, one unveils the ontological, one discloses the clearing of being.<sup>66</sup> For Heidegger the authentic project of Dasein discloses the universal, being, while covering the individuality of beings. Ortega also describes the authentic project of life, quehacer, as the transcendence of averageness. Each one of noble elite takes up his or her unique mission beyond the level of his or her age. Unlike the self-satisfied masses, who are self-absorbed in their own doings, the active minority move beyond themselves to discover a point of view, to alter their circumstance. Only an elite is willing to unveil a solution to being-in-circumstance, a unique plan meeting life's challenge. Both Heidegger and Ortega think that only a responsible elite, unsatisfied with average life, can participate in authentic projects.<sup>67</sup>

Unamuno tells a similar tale. In his understanding, one lives an authentic life only if one can overcome the world. Unamuno believes Don Quixote, fighting the world for his dreams, lived the true existence. Instead of falling in love with the goddess of culture, Helen of Troy, Quixote falls for Dulcinea, the woman of his irrational fantasies. By giving the world cause to laugh at him, Quixote gained immortality.<sup>68</sup> Unamuno writes, "All men deserve to be saved but ... he above all deserves immortality who desires it passionately and even in the face of reason."<sup>69</sup> Both Ortega and Unamuno

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid, pp. 210-4.

<sup>67</sup>Note how easily this can degenerate into an elitist resentment, into hatred of the masses uninterested in philosophical meditation.

<sup>68</sup>Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en hombre y en pueblo [1913], translated by J.E. Crawford Flitch as The Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954), pp. 299-326.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, p. 265.

appeal to a quixotic existence for an authentic life. However, Unamuno and Ortega have different ideas of what the quixotic preoccupation is. Unamuno thinks Quixote fights culture, attacks "the modern, scientific, inquisitorial orthodoxy in order to bring in a new and impossible Middle Age, dualistic, contradictory, passionate."<sup>70</sup> By contrast, Ortega has no desire to return to the Middle Ages. He wants to be very twentieth century. To Ortega's understanding, one discovers an authentic life by finding a point of view beyond the security of one's culture.

Although Ortega orients his method in an existentialistic direction, towards solving the crisis of authenticity, the structure of his cosmology is analogous to that of E.H. Gombrich. Ortega's generation theory, with its emphasis on the individual point of view surrounded by common circumstance, like the methodology of Gombrich, illuminates the historical character of circumstance, of the viewed, but it hides that of the I, the point of view. The meaning-giving referent remains static. In other words, for Ortega, the I resides outside the flow of history.

Norman Bryson, in his introduction to Calligram, an anthology of post-modern French art historiographies, criticizes Gombrich's perceptualism; in my opinion his assessment of Gombrich holds true for Ortega's methodology as well. According to Bryson,

What Perceptualism leads to is a picture of art as apart from the rest of society's concerns, since essentially the artist is alone, watching the world as an ocular spectacle but never reacting to the world's meanings, basking in and recording perceptions but apparently doing so in some extraterritorial zone, off the social map.<sup>71</sup>

Although Ortega condemns the l'art pour l'art movement, he isolates the artist from

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid, p. 326.

<sup>71</sup>Norman Bryson, "Introduction," Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. xxi-i.

society and segregates aesthetic concerns from social relations.

In Bryson's book, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze, he reveals another handicap in Gombrich's method relating to history. Bryson writes,

In the Perceptualist account of art, the viewer is as changeless as the anatomy of vision, and my argument here is that the stress, in Gombrich and elsewhere, on perceptual psychology has in effect dehistoricised the relation of viewer to the painter: history is the term that has been bracketed out (hence the impossibility, under present conditions, of a truly historical discipline of art history).<sup>72</sup>

Like Gombrich, Ortega dehistoricizes the anatomy of vision. Although situated within diverse historical circumstances, the "eye" of the artist and the viewer are essentially the same. The artist gazes and the viewer repeats the gaze. The situational context for artist and viewer may differ; however, the human capacity to "make and match" or ensimismación remains the same, unaffected by time. In other words, the format of the activity remains the same, although its content differs with time.

For Ortega the presence of the past serves as a memory for one contemporary setting, in other words, as the illumination for its future. In itself the past has little power, but, when applied by an active and vital imagination, by a present point of view, it can alter our circumstance. The past provides the situation for discovery, but it does not form the I, that is the referent giving history its significance. Las Meninas does not shape Manet's perspective directly nor does it form the opaque character, the irreality of his works. The artist "makes and matches" his or her recollected circumstance, which includes memories of past perspectives. To Ortega, the artistic tradition is no more than a series of rehearsals or flash-backs, mementos, reminding the present vital perceiver of possible options for constructing the future.

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<sup>72</sup>Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. xiii.



Ortega, like Gombrich, believes the past is simply a conventional tool for the artist to use. For Gombrich, the artist makes and matches in the artistic conventions of her or his tradition by trial and error. Ortega describes the artistic tradition in a similar manner. It serves the point of view only circumstantially, something for the artist to de-realize. In my understanding, Ortega denies the intertextual being of the artist. For instance, he belittles Titian's influence upon Velázquez. He neglects the power of past paintings in poesis. Velázquez' paintings, for Ortega, transcend the problematics of coevality and contemporaneity. Ortega downplays the power of past images within present ones, all in hope of preserving the authority and creativity of the artist. It seems for Ortega the past only has force for the viewer, who is called to recover the artist's point of view.

## Chapter Five: Perspectivism

In this chapter, we will examine Ortega's epistemological alternative to modernity -- perspectivism. To expose Ortega's differences with modernity, we need to unveil the ultimate allegiances that exist within the metaphysical discourse of modernity and the implications of accepting modernity's authority. We need to illuminate the ordering principle of modern metaphysics, that is, its self-related simplicity, as Ortega understands it.

Ortega thinks that modernity is an outgrowth of antiquity and christianity. But this is no simple development. It includes the tensions of generations and the continual re-evaluation of the past by the present. For instance, modern idealism, in Ortega's understanding, inverts ancient realism. As he describes this reversal,

In realism, to live is to find oneself in a position of security on the firm ground of the world, because the realist world is the world of things that are already there, in themselves, by and for themselves. The realist - and note this well - has his world set so that it starts from his belief that it is found there, and nothing more. He will have to go on discovering in detail what kind of a world this is, what are the laws of its behavior and its being. But he knows in advance those laws are in it and it has a being.

The idealist, on the other hand, finds himself with the fact that certainty and the world with it have been pulled out from beneath his feet; all that is left as the sole reality is the subject himself. He must uphold himself, and, like the character in the folk tale, he must get out of the well by pulling himself up by his ears. This man must absolutely make for himself the world in which he is going to live; more than this, living for him is converted into constructing a world, because there is none; instead of learning what the world is by adapting himself to it, as the realist does, he must take the world out of his head. For the realist, living will be conforming to the world. Realism is conformity. But for the idealist, the problem will be one of creating a world according to our thoughts. It is not enough to conform to what is there, for what is there is not reality, it is necessary to make for oneself what is there - the things that are assumed - so that these are adapted to our ideas which are the authentic reality. Well now, this is the anti-conformist spirit, the revolutionary spirit. Idealism is, in essence,

revolutionary.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the ancient realist, who looks for eternal and stable ordering-principles he knows exist in reality, the modern idealist converts the world into his or her thoughts. Ortega describes the modern idealist, in words similar to Heidegger. Twenty years later, Heidegger criticizing the modernist writes, "For building is not merely a means and a way towards dwelling - to build is in itself already to dwell."<sup>2</sup> For Ortega, living precedes constructing. As stated in the second chapter, the "I" does not posit the "not-I," in the fichtean sense, rather it com-posites itself with the "not-I." For Ortega, the modernist negates his or her circumstance in order to set up the human ego as the structuring-principle of reality. As Ortega puts it,

The result is that the mind becomes the center and support of all reality.... This principle leads one to attempt a system of explanation of what there is, interpreting all that appears to be neither thought nor idea as consisting merely in having been thought, in being an idea. This system is idealism, and modern philosophy since Descartes has been idealist at root. ...philosophy becomes the world seen in reverse, a magnificent, anti-natural doctrine of the initiate, a secret wisdom, an esoteric creed, thought has swallowed up the world, things have been turned into mere ideas.<sup>3</sup>

Again, Ortega's critique of modernity reminds one of Heidegger. In "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" [1938], Heidegger tells the reader that the notion of a world-picture is a unique characteristic of modernity. "World-picture" denotes more than mere cosmological mimesis, the painting of the whole. A closer look reveals a more basic

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<sup>1</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Unas lecciones de metafísica [1966], translated by Mildred Adams as Some Lessons in Metaphysics (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1969), pp. 136-7.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken" [1951], translated by Albert Hofstadter as "Building Dwelling Thinking" in Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 146; also reprinted in Basic Writings (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 324.

<sup>3</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, ¿Qué es filosofía? [1959], translated by Mildred Adams as What is Philosophy? (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1960, 1960), p. 152.

distinction than that between "world" and "picture," namely, the difference between "subject" and "idea." The modernist perceives the world as a picture, as his or her ideas.<sup>4</sup> Ortega and Heidegger both describe modern idealism in terms of human subjectivism, the picturing of the world as the ideas of the human mind.<sup>5</sup>

Ortega thinks that the source of modern subjectivism is rooted in extremism; it rests upon human self-absorption, upon withdrawal to one corner of the room, that of the "I." This type of life reduction is a flight from one's circumstance, from the world. Modernity lives in extremism, a practice initiated by Christians and hermits. Extremists recognize the no-thingness of life, its "I," and the desperation of one's circumstance. They experience disorientation in life, but they see no way of re-directing life. The hermit lives in isolation, seclusion from the ills of society. Christians, for example, convert the desperations of their world into salvation. Through losing one's self-confidence to re-orient life, to order this chaos, the Christian, in Ortega's understanding, enters into a partnership with the divine. The Christian neglects this world for another, ignores mundane responsibility in the name of transcendence. The modernist discovers an ordering principle within science, the employment of human reason. He or she recovers self-confidence and faith in his or her thought. But the practice of extremism remains. The modernist negates the world, in so far as it lies outside the reach of his or her contemplation, all in hopes of securing a firm foundation in one corner of life, that

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<sup>4</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" [1938], translated by William Lovett as "The Age of the World-Picture" in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 128-32.

<sup>5</sup>For more on Ortega and Heidegger on the problem of modern subjectivism, see William V. Rowe, "Society After Subject, Philosophy After the Worldview," Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 156-71.

of human rationality.<sup>6</sup>

Modernism did not germinate outside of christianity but from within it. As Ortega describes it,

Now, there, note well that theology is occupation with the Divine Being, with its essence, attributes, and constitutive mysteries. That is what preoccupied men from St. Augustine until the fourteenth century, at which time religion comes to consist of a very curious thing. A most fortunate phrase will reveal to us the secret of a new form of sainthood, an intraworldly form of sainthood, a religion which will not be theological, or dogmatic, or a living faith, but a matter, of conduct in the world, as such. The phrase is this: imitation of Christ.

The life which consists of imitating Christ is, first, disinterested in the question of whether God in His Own Being, in other-worldliness, is of this kind or that. Second, one person is segregated from the Trinity - Christ. Third, one takes Christ, not in His character as a member of the Trinity, but as an exemplary man. Thus, by a curious sleight of hand, we have reached a form of religion in which, if I am right, we have secularized Christianity by emphasizing in God His unique human intramundane facet. This does not mean that man goes outside of Christianity; on the contrary, man changes Christianity over to the human point of view and action.... Ancient life [realism] was cosmocentric; medieval life [Christianity] was theocentric; modern life [idealism] is anthropocentric.<sup>7</sup>

Modernism, for Ortega, is a new version of extremism, one rooted in previous forms. But this does not tell us what suffers eclipse in humanity's withdrawal into rational self-relation. To Ortega's senses, modernity is nihilism; it negates three aspects of human life: tolerance towards the other, tolerance towards the world outside of human thought, and tolerance towards life itself.

First, modernity is less accepting of others, of those who think differently. Human rationality calls for universality, conformity to simplicity, to the one true revolutionary practice -- human subjectivism. According to Ortega, the medieval thinker is not concerned primarily with this world. Consequently, the medieval thinker is more

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<sup>6</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *En torno a Galileo* [1933], translated by Mildred Adams as *Man and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962), pp. 138-58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, pp. 194-5.

apt to allow others apathetically to do their own "apostate" thing. Ortega writes:

For medieval man, the Jew and the Moor were realities with full rights in the ranks and positions set for them within the hierarchical pluralism of the universe. In the fifteenth century it would not occur to anyone to suppress the Jew or the Moor. This did occur to the generation of the Catholic monarchs - the generation of 1450.

The expulsion of the Jews and the Moriscos is a typically modern idea. The modern believes that he can suppress realities and build the world to his liking in the name of the idea. In this case, it is the idea of a state which the Catholic Kings were initiative. Hence those who today expel the Jews in the name of a return to the Middle Ages are committing a lamentable quid pro quid. Moderns can hardly comprehend the substantial tolerance of medieval man.<sup>8</sup>

Ortega uses the Spanish Inquisition, which began in 1492 to explain the difference in tolerance between the medieval and modern ages.

This, however, is a poor reading of Spanish history. Ortega fails to present the intolerance of the medieval Christian. The medieval mind was hardly tolerant of the unconverted. For instance, although Jews were allowed to live in the Christian kingdoms, they could not hold substantial properties and were forced to pay higher taxes. Like the modernist, the medieval person is also totalitarian. The difference between the two rests in faith commitment. The medieval person suppresses difference through confessional dogma, whereas the modern person does so by logical principle. Both ages are hostile to the "other."

Second, Ortega writes, the modern thinker ignores the presence of the world outside his or her thought. Truth is determined by epistemological agreement, proved by methodical doubt. In modernity, being conscious of something places the object in the truth. Through ab-stracting objects, the subject's mind re-structures the object, as a thought. Reparar [repairing by amendment] the thing-in-itself through theoretical

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 216.

thought, the modern believes he or she captures the essence of the thing. However, he or she has failed to recognize that reparar presupposes the presence of the thing; they must contar con [count on or rely on] the existence of an I that views and the thing viewed before they self-consciously abstract it.<sup>9</sup> According to Ortega, we need to distinguish ideas from beliefs. The latter, beliefs, are basic assumptions, in the case of taking things for granted without thinking them. Ideas, on the other hand, are our fantastic dreams of what could be. All ideas depend upon the acceptance of some beliefs, but we think them precisely because we cannot believe them. However, Ortega later goes on to suggest that all beliefs start out as ideas; they are no more than old ideas that have obtained certainty.<sup>10</sup> Philosophy begins in doubt. By no means is this an original notion of Ortega's. His notion is already a translation of Unamuno's translation of Kierkegaard.<sup>11</sup> However, this type of doubting should not be understood as akin to the methodical doubt of Descartes and his rationalist followers. Philosophical doubt for Kierkegaard, Unamuno and Ortega begins in the passions of a concrete humanity, in the insecurity of one's utter contingency. Descartes, on the other hand, discusses doubt as theoretical security. In his schema, the ego doubts and thus it knows its own existence. For our three existentialists, Descartes' doubting is not authentic; it fails to notice the reason for reason, that is, our desperate and irrational contextuality in the world. Ortega, like Kierkegaard and Unamuno, exposes the pretended autonomy of theoretical

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<sup>9</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Some Lessons in Metaphysics, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Sobre la razón histórica [1979], translated by Philip W. Silver as Historical Reason (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1984), pp. 19-23.

<sup>11</sup>See Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en hombre y en pueblo [1913], translated by J.E. Crawford Flitch as The Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1954), pp. 106-10; also see Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments [1844], translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 133-72.

thought; a person employs reason because of an existential crisis. Modernism forgets both the shipwreckedness of life and the presence of the beliefs, the assumptions that we take for granted.

Third, modernism negates human life, its vital-historicity. Ortega describes the erasure of life in the systematics of cartesian metaphysics, the foundational writings of modern subjectivism. He writes,

In the system of Descartes, the father of history finds no place, or rather, is relegated to the dock. "Everything that reason conceives," he says in the Fourth Meditation, "It conceives rightly, there is no possibility of error. Whence, then, come my errors? They come simply from the fact that the will being so much greater in volume and extent than the understanding I do not confine the former to the limits of the latter but extend it to things that I do not understand; having no preferences of its own in this field it very easily goes astray and selects the fake as the true and the bad as the good: such is the cause of my mistakes and offenses."

History would then be substantially the history of human error. There can be no attitude more anti-historical, none more anti-vital than these. History and life are burdened with a negative significance and given a strong savour of crime.<sup>12</sup>

Descartes and the subjectivists that follow him deny the historical character of life, by reducing vitality to the formation of mathematic and geometric principles. Life remains a mere spectacle.

A life based on human reason is no more liveable than before. Ortega writes:

We [twentieth century thinkers] are beginning to suspect that history, human life, cannot and "ought" not to be ruled by principle, like mathematical textbooks.

It is illogical to guillotine a prince and replace him by a principle. The latter, no less than the former, places life under an absolute autocracy. And this is, precisely, an impossibility. Neither rationalist absolutism, which keeps reason but annihilates life, nor relativism, which keeps life but dissolves reason, are possibilities.<sup>13</sup>

Ortega sees dangers in cartesian metaphysics. Both the phenomenological rationalism of

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<sup>12</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo [1921], translated by James Cleugh as The Modern Theme (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 30-1.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, pp. 34-5.



the early Husserl and the existential irrationalism of Unamuno fail to discover a useful point of view for his generation.

For instance, although the early Husserl, in his Ideen, rejects the natural attitude of cartesian metaphysics, he suppresses vitality. Husserl does not deny the existence of the world beyond the subject's mind; he just denies that its existence is relevant to philosophy, due to its contingency. His phenomenology does not go beyond consciousness. It does not matter, to Husserl, if things are real or not. His only concern is the appearance of things as revealed to consciousness. Husserl, for example, is not interested in whether or not unicorns or horses exist as things-in-themselves, but is interested in unicorns and horses so far as they are intentional objects constituted by the transcendental ego, which gives them meaning. Husserl concentrates upon the ways the ego-cogito-cognitatum [the I-thinks-the thing thought].<sup>14</sup> Criticizing early husserlian phenomenology, Ortega writes,

Pure consciousness is an "I" that is aware of everything else.... This "I" does not want, it is only aware of wanting; it does not feel, but only sees its feeling.... This "I" is, then, a pure and impassive mirror; it is contemplation and nothing more. What it contemplates is not reality, but only a spectacle.... "Bewusstsein von" makes a ghost of the world....<sup>15</sup>

Husserlian phenomenology, in Ortega's assessment, neglects the dramatic side of life, that the I acts upon circumstance. Furthermore, Ortega rejects Husserl's notion of consciousness. He believes that there is no such thing as the consciousness of "X;" there is only the coexistence of I and circumstance. He writes:

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<sup>14</sup>Edmund Husserl, Cartesianische Meditationen [1931], translated by Dorion Cairns as Cartesian Meditations (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), pp. 27-55; also see his Ideen au einer reinen Phänomenologischen Philosophie [1913], translated by W.R. Boyce Gibson as Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (New York: Collier-Macmillan Books, 1962), especially pp. 72-165.

<sup>15</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo para alemanes" [1934], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Preface for Germans" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 62.

The term "consciousness" ought to be discarded. It was meant to stand for the positive, the given, ... but it has turned into just the opposite.... What there truly and authentically is is not "consciousness" and in it "ideas" of things, but rather a man existing in a landscape of things, in a set of circumstances that also exists. Naturally, we cannot do without man's existence, for then things would disappear, but, equally, we need the existence of things for without them man would disappear.<sup>16</sup>

Ortega rejects husserlian phenomenology. However, this should not suggest that he also rejects phenomenology as a whole. As we shall later see, Ortega, in a sense, "existentializes" phenomenology. Husserl's ego-cogito-cognitatum in Ortega becomes humanity-living-its circumstance. Furthermore, Ortega's philosophy, as most phenomenologies, begins with an epistemology grounded in a perceptual based model.<sup>17</sup> But in Ortega's judgment, husserlian phenomenology cannot solve the crisis of his times without radical transformation. Husserl, as Descartes, offers rationality, but only at the cost of vitality.

The existential irrationalism of Unamuno, in Ortega's view, is no better than husserlian rationalism. Unamuno offers life at the cost of reason. He wants to live by contradiction and perpetual struggle.<sup>18</sup> Unamuno is not interested in taking up a point of view; he would rather live in quixotic madness. For Ortega, Unamuno recognizes the tragic side of life, but is unwilling to take up the challenge of reasoning it out. Consequently, Ortega believes Unamuno's existential irrationalism cannot solve the modern crisis.

Ortega looks for a perspective which will affirm life and rationality without

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 66,

<sup>17</sup>Donald Ihde, "Ortega y Gasset and Phenomenology," Consequences of Phenomenology (Albany NY: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1986), pp. 145-7.

<sup>18</sup>Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida y en pueblo [1913], translated by J.E. Crawford Flitch as The Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954), pp. 13-4.

denying either. The result is what Ortega calls vital or historical reason.

Ortega believes that historical reason allows humanity to accumulate its past and make use of it. He believes that "man ... has no nature; what he has is history."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, to understand humanity, reason must not only discover humanity historically, but it must be itself historical. Ortega calls for historical consciousness, "the remembrance of things past." The historian's presence separates the past from the future, but, as their border, she or he unites them. The memories and expectations of the present historian give meaning to the past and to the future. History, that is, that which has happened, is the ruining of past ruins, the beating of dead horses. New points of view arise from the critical negation of past ones. Historiography itself is the presentation of the past; though unintentionally, it annihilates the past from the present through historical critique. It cancels the past from the present. Upon first reflection, historiography is the discrediting of the past. It reveals past points of view as a defunct world of errors.<sup>20</sup>

But, this does not conclude the historian's task. By understanding the past as a warehouse of recognized errors, the historian transforms the falsehood of past perspectives into beacons of truth for the future. The past, as a lighthouse of errors, provides warning for future navigators. It clarifies potential dangers. Hence, it reveals a portion of truth to its receptors. Past points of view are partial truths for the future.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Historia como sistema" [1936], translated by Helene Weyl as "History as a System" in History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), p. 217.

<sup>20</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El origen y epilógo de filosofía [1953], translated by Toby Talbot as The Origin of Philosophy (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1967), pp. 13-9.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, pp. 19-20.

However, the world of the past is not completely permeated by errors. No perspective is an absolute error. The past contains an element of truth.<sup>22</sup> As Ortega writes, "In the final analysis it is revealed to be an error not because it was untrue, but because it was not true enough."<sup>23</sup> Hidden within the drama of the past, the historian dis-covers (a-letheia) the partial truth(s) of past viewpoints. Presenting the past by historical reason allows one to discover an authentic pilgrimage route for life.

Ortega's "critique of historical reason," however, should not be confused with that presented by Wilhelm Dilthey. The two thinkers both emphasize the primacy of life, but differ in their interpretation of humanity's historical context. Although Dilthey writes, "Life is the dynamic interaction [Wirkungszusammenhang] that exists between the self and its surroundings,"<sup>24</sup> a notion very similar to Ortega's Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, Dilthey does not understand culture as a threat to authentic vitality; on the contrary, for Dilthey, cultural life is true vitality. The term Wirkungszusammenhang best displays the difference between Ortega and Dilthey. For Ortega, the I and its circumstance, although they co-exist, do not "work-together;" they work in different directions. The I and its circumstance are always opposed to one another. For Dilthey, however, the self and its surroundings are harmoniously fused. Culture, in Dilthey's understanding, is where humanity finds its meaning. For Ortega, this remains a false security; only an informed point of view can discover truth. Dilthey trusts that culture will provide a well-balanced life. Ortega is skeptical and believes one must search within oneself to provide

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 20-7.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted from Wilhelm Dilthey, "Das Problem der Religion" [1911], Gesammelte Schriften VI, p. 304, by Theodore Plantinga in his Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 73.

such balance. Consequently, Ortega writes that his thought is neither identical nor a continuation of Dilthey's thought; it is merely parallel. As Ortega describes his relation to Dilthey,

Parallels do not touch each other, because they start at different points.... Only two parallel lines can be certain never to coincide materially, for they are separated by a most radical difference, that of a distinct starting point. They tackle the problem on different levels, one more advanced and plenary than the other. With respect to the problem of life, living reason [Ortega's notion] makes the higher level than historical reason at which Dilthey's came to a halt.<sup>25</sup>

Not only does Ortega claim to be different from Dilthey, he claims, although a student at the University of Berlin when Dilthey taught there, to be uninfluenced by Dilthey. Ortega goes so far to say that he became acquainted with Dilthey's work in 1929 and did not know it well until four years later.<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that Ortega believes that Dilthey's thought is without value. Ortega thinks that his early work had suffered from not knowing the work of Dilthey. It could have helped him better articulate his own ideas on life.<sup>27</sup>

To discover one's life, that is to reason out one's circumstance historically, one needs to take up a point of view. Ortega is not arguing for an idealism, which posits an ontologically independent ego over the world. On the contrary, Ortega calls for a vital perspective from within the world. In the perception of circumstances the I does not constitute objects but offers possible convivencias, life-experiences.

Ortega's perspectivism does not ask the eye to record appearances as factual

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<sup>25</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Guillermo Dilthey y la idea de la vida" [1933-4], translated by Helene Weyl as "A Chapter from the History of Ideas - Wilhelm Dilthey and the Idea of Life" in Concord and Liberty (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1946), pp. 141-2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, pp. 136-7.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, pp. 139-42.

records. Unveiling the world always includes imaginative interpretation. Using Don Quixote as an example, Ortega writes,

So we laugh because Don Quixote takes windmills to be giants! So Don Quixote ought not to see a giant where he was really seeing a windmill! But, why should man know anything about giants? Where are there giants, where have there been giants? But if there were none, or have been none, man, the human species, must have at some moment in its history have discovered a giant where there was none - at that moment it was man himself who was Don Quixote.<sup>28</sup>

For Ortega, there is little difference between Quixote's giants and modern science's atoms. Both exist only in theory. Atoms are not facts but interpretations. Little difference exists between perception and hallucination. As Ortega puts it,

Perhaps everything that surrounds me, the whole external world in which I live, is only one vast hallucination. ...the characteristic thing about hallucination is that its object has no existence in reality. Who will assure me that this is not also true in normal perception? This differs from hallucination only in that it is more constant and its content is as relatively common to other men as it is to me. But this does not allow us to take away from normal perception its possibly hallucinatory character; we can only say that perception of the real is in fact not just any hallucination - that is to say, much worse than the other.<sup>29</sup>

In comparison with hallucination, normal perception is very monotonous and boring. Faced with a choice between them, Ortega would prefer to live by hallucination; it, after all, permits adventure. Ortega goes on to state, "What we call reason is no more than fantasy put into shape."<sup>30</sup> The importance of chimera lies in its ability to draw up plans for life.

According to Ortega, we view objects from three distances. First, we see visible and tangible things at hand. For instance, if we travel to the town of El Escorial, we

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<sup>28</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *¿Que es filosofía?* [1959], translated by Mildred Adams as *What is Philosophy?* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), p. 138.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>30</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, *Una interpretación de la historia universal* [1960], translated by Mildred Adams as *An Interpretation of Universal History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), p. 248.

can experience it as it is before us. The town from this distance appears to us as simply present. Second, we view images which present something absent. For instance, when we view an engraving of El Escorial, a printed sheet of paper, not the town, is in front of me and yet we can recognize the presence of the town on this page. In a sense, pictorial images are much like memories; they present something which is not presently here. Third, we view the world by means of words and signs. Unlike the previous two distances, which rely upon knowledge by acquaintance [conocer], this one rests upon knowledge by description [saber].<sup>31</sup> For instance, without ever coming in contact with El Escorial or an image of it, a person can come to know the town through the use of words. For Ortega, words unlike images have the uncanny ability to communicate the meaning of El Escorial without presenting it.<sup>32</sup>

From this distance, El Escorial remains unreal and yet we can intimately understand it.<sup>33</sup>

Although, to some, the previous paragraph may suggest that Ortega believes artworks participate in human experience from the second distance, in my judgment, this is not the case. I propose instead that Ortega thinks that artworks can be viewed from either the second or third distance, but that the third is the only authentic one. For

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<sup>31</sup>The terms "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description" remind the informed reader of Bertrand Russell. See his book The Problems of Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 46-59. But by no means do I suggest that Ortega subscribes to a russellian understanding of the world. Ortega is like Russell only in so far as he distinguishes two types of knowledge, one based upon the acquaintances of particulars and the other upon the description of universal ordering-principles.

<sup>32</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Conciencia, objeto y las tres distancias de éste" [1915-6], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Consciousness, the Object and Its Three Distances (Class Notes)" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 116-24.

<sup>33</sup>I wonder whether Ortega was directly or indirectly affected by St. Augustine's De genesi ad litteram, where three types of vision are described: the corporeal, the spiritual, and the intellectual. The first deals with things present, the second with images of things absent, and third with intellectual things without images. Unfortunately, any Ortega St. Augustine nexus is too far reaching for this thesis. For more on St. Augustine's theory of vision, see David Summers, The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 112-6

instance, when the mass-man views paintings, he looks for realities which correspond to his psychic experiences. From this distance, paintings serve as memories, as expressions which merely present what is absent. However, from the third distance, the viewer beholds the artwork in its irreality. From this distance, the elite minority are able to look beyond their own individual particularities and notice the artist's point of view.

Ortega believes a gap exists between psychic and aesthetic experience. This distinction may be in part the result of Ortega's epistemological training at the Marburg School. Both Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp tended to convert the rational processes of the mind into ontological absolutes. In other words, both Cohen and Natorp give the impression that the mind is able to constitute its own reality.<sup>34</sup> Ortega's notion of the irreal point of view seems to repeat this understanding to a certain extent. Although a perspective, for Ortega, is always a lived-experience, it can transcend reality and recognize a world of its own making, that of the irreal. Furthermore, Cohen suggests that each human being embodies her or his own ethical potentiality, a purpose to actualize.<sup>35</sup> Ortega seems to posit a similar interpretation when he describes the elite as those willing to actualize a point of view. Ortega's Marburg training may reveal in part his disagreement with marxian and hegelian interpretations of history. Like Cohen and Natorp, Ortega believes that marxians and hegelians close the distinction between that which is and that which ought to be. Hegelians and marxians suppress the human will that strives towards freedom from the determinations of nature and, for Ortega, from

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<sup>34</sup>Thomas E. Willey, Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p. 104.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, p. 113.



that of the human circumstance.<sup>36</sup> Ortega, like his teachers at Marburg, believes taking up a point of view, one which aspires to change the world from what it is to what it should be, is the ethical responsibility of humanity. Aesthetic experience opens the possibility for such moral activity. Unlike psychic experience, that is, unlike the relation between a person and something present at hand or present imaginatively, aesthetic experience focuses upon the irreality of what ought to be.

According to Ortega, it is not accidental that pictures live in frames. Pictures and frames belong together. However, this partnership is not akin to the relationship between a body and its clothing. The frame calls attention to the picture whereas clothing, although it may accent the human form, hides it from view. The function of the frame, for Ortega, is to illuminate the unreal by distinguishing it from the everyday. It separates the artistic from the empirical. The artwork, thanks to the frame, is an island of irreality surrounded by reality.<sup>37</sup> As Ortega describes aesthetic reception,

When I look at the painting, I enter an imaginary space and adopt an attitude of pure contemplation. Wall and painting, then, are two antagonistic and uncommunicative worlds. My spirit leaps from reality to unreality as if from wakefulness to dreams.<sup>38</sup>

The frame, a neutral entity according to Ortega, sets up the possibility of two different types of sight, the mere looking of everyday perception and the imaginative insight of aesthetic contemplation.

In my judgment, Ortega's interpretation of aesthetic experience may be influenced

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>37</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditación del marco" [1921], translated by Andrea Bell as "Meditations on the Frame" in The Art of the Edge: European Frames 1300-1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 22-4.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, p. 23.

in part by the work of Konrad Fiedler. Ortega, like Fiedler, segregates the non-artistic or psychic world from pure aesthetic form.<sup>39</sup> As stated by Vicente Aguilera Cerni, Fiedler arranges his notion of pure visuality according to the kantian differentiation between the subjective and objective poles of perception, by sentimental determinations and the representation of things.<sup>40</sup> The same can be said of Ortega, who distinguishes artistic perception from ordinary perception. For both scholars, true art begins where empirical perception ends. In spite of these similarities however, Ortega does not subscribe to Fiedler's idealism --- for Fiedler even the simplest sense-impression is already a mental fact. The external world, in Fiedler's understanding, is really only the result of a complex psychological process.<sup>41</sup> Ortega, unlike Fiedler, would never posit that the laws of vision govern artistic activity. To Ortega, Fiedler's interpretation reveals positivistic nonsense. Art does not result from some natural principle, but out of historical necessity.

In an article entitled "Sobre el punto de vista de las artes" [1924], Ortega describes the history of art as the transition from proximate to distant points of view. He traces the history of art from Giotto to Picasso. In Ortega's view, Giotto paints bulk. The viewer beholds his painted world so closely that the viewer feels she or he could touch it. Every object depicted appears to be solid. Renaissance artists, such as Raphael and da Vinci, do not deny "substance" to the images they produce, but subject it to the

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<sup>39</sup>For a good interpretation of Fiedler, see Michael Podro, The Critical Historians of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 110-1.

<sup>40</sup>Vicente Aguilera Cerni, Ortega y D'Ors en la cultura artistica española (Madrid: Editorial Ciencia Nuova, 1966), p. 21.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted from Konrad Fiedler's "Moderner Naturalismus und künstlerische Wahrheit," Scriften über Kunst (Leipzig, 1896), p. 177. by E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 16.

geometrical idea of unity. Gradually artistic perspectives change. The paintings of the Titian, Tintoretto, and El Greco help to break down the renaissance model. Objects lose their hard contours. But although these artists paint objects as floating in the clouds, they still depict them in terms of volume.<sup>42</sup>

For Ortega, the radical break comes with the development of chiaroscuro. Painters, such as Ribera, Caravaggio, and Velázquez, disregard the object's solidity and focus their attention upon the light which illuminates the object's surface. Unlike the proximate vision of the renaissance, which dissociates and distinguishes objects, the distant vision of Caravaggio and others synthesizes objects and pulverizes the distinction between objects. Instead of painting the depth of objects, they depict sparks of color and light. As stated in the third chapter, Velázquez flattens the bulk and paints hollow space. The background of the painting is brought forward and paintings lose their three-dimensionality. Images lose their concave character and become convex surfaces. This innovation, however, is not radicalized until Impressionism, in which objects become completely diffused in light. Figures are indecipherable. The impressionist painter no longer paints seen objects, he or she paints the experience of seeing.<sup>43</sup>

The works of Cézanne and Picasso may return to an earlier mode of interpretation by painting volume. However, they no longer attempt to depict the empirical world that they see. On the contrary, they paint the volume of the irreal things found in the mind, in other words, the "contents of consciousness." Cézanne and

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<sup>42</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Sobre el punto de vista de las artes" [1924], translated by Paul Snodgrass and Joseph Frank as "On the Artist's Point of View" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 113-8.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, pp. 118-24.

Picasso paint ideas.<sup>44</sup>

Ortega's interests in the artist's point of view, however, are not compatible with Erwin Panofsky, an art historian usually connected with perspectival concerns. For Panofsky, different cultural ages possess different "period-styles," which direct the ways in which artists view reality. Within his schema, historiography amounts to the retracing of each time-frame.<sup>45</sup> Ortega, unlike Panofsky, is not interested in recovering the past as a series of discontinuous steps. On the contrary, he is interested in the continual alteration in the artist's point of view. In other words, Ortega is not primarily interested in the synchronic dimension of perspective, but its diachronic aspect, the ways the artist point of view changes in time. Furthermore, Panofsky suggests that the only way that we can see how things "really are" in art is from a point of view. Ortega, on the other hand, although he would agree that vision is directed from a viewpoint, does not think there is any state of "being real" beyond "being real" for a given contingent perspective. In my judgment, his interpretive approach is closer to that of Gombrich than that of Panofsky.

Ortega's distinction between proximate and distant vision, in my assessment, is similar to Gombrich's distinction between the southern and northern modes of interpretation. In the southern mode, as in the proximate, the artist uses light to define three-dimensional volume by modelling, whereas in the northern, as in the distant, the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid, pp. 124-6.

<sup>45</sup>Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'" [1927], Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Hessling, 1974).

artist uses light to describe reflective surfaces by highlighting.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps, this similarity is more than a coincidence. Both Ortega and Gombrich are well versed in the work of Riegl, who much earlier distinguishes between haptic and optic vision, between the proximate and tactile vision of the South and the distant and painterly vision of the North. Although I believe both Ortega and Gombrich are directed by Riegl's distinction, neither would reduce the history of art to the history of ornament. Ortega and Gombrich both want to contextualize these two modes of vision within the framing of contemporary social conventions. Furthermore, for Riegl, the two types of vision are merely possible types of visual attention, which seem to possess an immediacy of their own without any need for interpretation. Neither Ortega nor Gombrich would describe artistic vision as merely looking. The artistic point of view is always interpretive.

Not only do Gombrich and Ortega distinguish two modes of interpretation in a similar fashion, but they both describe impressionism as the depiction of painterly experience as opposed to the depiction of perceived objects. For instance, Gombrich refers to the achieved blurring effect in impressionism which demands the viewer to decipher actively the representation. Impressionism demands what Gombrich calls "the beholder's share." It requires that the viewer conjure up within her or his mind what is viewed. In impressionism, writes Gombrich, the images are no longer anchored on the

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<sup>46</sup>E.H. Gombrich, *The Heritage of Apelles: Studies in the Art of Renaissance* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 19-35. As an aside, Svetlana Alpers' now famous or infamous distinction between the southern or narrative mode of interpretation and the northern or descriptive mode may be dependent upon the work of Gombrich and may perhaps, go back to Riegl.

canvas, but produced within the beholder's perception.<sup>47</sup> Ortega seems to suggest a similar interpretation of impressionism when he refers to it as the painting of irreality or the "contents of consciousness." Both Ortega and Gombrich describe impressionism in terms of subjective experience, instead of in terms of objective truth, which is what impressionists thought they were painting.

According to Ortega, artworks are akin to ideas, not beliefs. They tell the viewer of things that cannot be counted upon in everyday situations. Artworks and ideas are always expressions of irreality as opposed to ordinary perceptions which are little more than beliefs. For instance, when Ortega distinguishes ideas from beliefs, he refers to the third dimension of an orange and the brilliance of a color prior to its present fadedness, things not seen in everyday reality.<sup>48</sup> In his understanding, these things can only be seen by the dialectics of human reason or artistic foreshortening, abilities which render things in depth while remaining a single point of view. Perceiving the unreal makes the apprehension of the whole possible and without the loss of the real aspect in front of the viewer. By contrast, ordinary vision can only show us particular aspects of the whole, without actually presenting us the whole. Ortega's notion of foreshortening fits well with his interpretation of renaissance art as a haptic or tactile vision. Touch, after all, allows us to experience things in three dimensions. Renaissance art is a form of intellectual touch. This is not to say that optic or distant vision does not allow us to experience irreality; after all, it is capable of apprehending human subjectivity.

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<sup>47</sup>E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 181-202.

<sup>48</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote [1914], translated by Evelyn Ruggs and Diego Marin as Meditations on Quixote (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. 68; also see his El origen y epílogo de la filosofía [1953], translated by Toby Talbot as The Origin of Philosophy (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1967), pp. 38-46.

Both types of aesthetic vision are irrealist points of view as opposed to realist perspectives, which have no business participating in art. As Ortega writes,

When this derealization is lacking, an awkward perplexity arises: we do not know whether to "live" the things or to observe them.<sup>49</sup>

To take up a realist point of view is to set up a faulty perspective, for one can never represent the ideal in "real space."

Art is always a matter of de-creation. According to Ortega style is the particular way a poet or artist augments reality to make something irreal. As he describes the relationship between style and the artistic process,

Life is one thing, art is another.... The man's lot is to live his human life, the poet's to invent what is nonexistent.... The poet aggrandizes the world by adding to reality.... Author derives from auctor, he who augments.<sup>50</sup>

Style, for Ortega, is always a matter of ideal invention.

E.H. Gombrich makes a similar statement when he describes the power of Pygmalion, in terms of his schema "making before matching."<sup>51</sup> For Gombrich, like Ortega, the primary function of an artist in the West is not to make "likenesses," but to rival creation. Style, for Gombrich, is the way in which a person transforms the canvas to create an illusion. Using a series of social conventions, the artist attempts to make something new. Artistic vision is different than normal perception, whereas the latter only asks us to see things, the former demands that we interpret things as altered by the

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<sup>49</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La deshumanización del arte" [1925], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Dehumanization of Art" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 28.

<sup>50</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," p. 31.

<sup>51</sup>E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation, pp. 93-115.

studio said, 'But, surely, the arm of this women is much too long,' the artist replied politely, 'Madame, you are mistaken. This is not a woman, this is a painting.'<sup>53</sup>

Gombrich believes artistic and ordinary vision differ. Only in the former can one experience style; it alone is the projection of the virtual world.<sup>54</sup> The latter is merely a system of seeing built upon the bundling of impressions. One can imagine Ortega saying the same thing. Both Ortega and Gombrich see style as irrealization and both distinguish artistic perception from everyday seeing.

In my understanding, Gombrich and Ortega, although they remove art from any immediate social context, both correctly deny the possibility of an innocent eye as well as any type of formal disinterestedness. Both destroy the notion that style is and/or reveals the a-historical essential side of painting. To their eyes, there is no a-historical side. Irreal points of view are always located with the framing of an historical circumstance. Unfortunately their respective interpretations simply substitute the real with the illusionary, replace the intrinsic formal quality of a painting with its accidental contextuality without rejecting the platonic picture which set up the difference between them. In other words, their interpretations do not get rid of the distinction between the ground and the grounded; their interpretations only switch the traditional model around. In their writings, the "real" becomes the "apparent" and the "apparent" becomes the "real." They replace what traditionally has been called the grounded, namely, the

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup>This interpretation of art as a virtual object and aesthetic perception as extra-ordinary, is reminiscent of that provided by Susanne K. Langer. She writes: "Anything that exists only for perception, and plays no ordinary, passive part in nature as common objects do, is a virtual entity.... We don't just dream we see it. If, however, we believe it to have the ordinary properties of a physical thing, we are mistaken; it is an appearance, a virtual object..." See her Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 5. The reader would be well advised to remember that Gombrich is leery of expressionistic notions, such as Langer's, which describe aesthetic forms as analogous to feelings. See his, "Expression and Communication," Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. pp. 56-7.



contingent and the subjective, with that called the ground, namely, the intrinsic and the objective --- without giving up this way of setting up the difference between them.

Ortega, like Gombrich, plays by what Norman Bryson calls "the logic of the gaze," instead of the by "the strategies of the glance."<sup>55</sup> In my judgment, Ortega appears to suggest that everything significant in a painting is in front of the beholder to see. He seems to imply, paradoxically, that irreality, which is absent in everyday vision, is present in its entirety when we really look at the illusionary surface of an artwork. In other words, Ortega suggests that when the viewer appropriates the proper manner of distanced vision, he or she will grasp absence in the form of complete presentation. The artist's irrealization or style will be seen in its totality. Such an interpretation, in my assessment, produces numerous unnecessary problems.

First, as stated in the second and third chapters, Ortega's emphasis upon the artist's point of view and the irreality of art, negates the materiality of the painting. Through a principle of contradictory coherence, Ortega presents the imageic surface of a painting by erasing its medium through the addition of pigment. According to Ortega's schema, in the act of painting, what the artist and viewer must first negate is the pictorial ground, that is, the pre-worked surface of the canvas, and then, each application of pigment must cover its own tracks.<sup>56</sup> The act of irrealization, by hiding

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<sup>55</sup>Although I am quite sympathetic to Bryson's advocacy of the glance over the gaze, I am skeptic of its healing power for the art historiographic enterprise so long as it resides in constant revolution, instead of continual preservation. Furthermore, Bryson at times comes dangerously close to transforming Derrida's traces into a new type of subject matter. Bryson may convert accidental ruptures back into what Derrida's hopes to avoid, namely, the metaphysics of presence.

<sup>56</sup>Note that a pictorial ground is not the same as a philosophical ground. Although both notions of ground suggest a point of departure, the pictorial ground is something eliminated in the act of painting, whereas the philosophical ground describes that which cannot be cancelled in the act of philosophizing. Furthermore, when I suggest that we recognize the pictorial ground, I am not proposing that we take it as some type of philosophical ground; on the contrary, I am only implying that occidental conceptions of art demand the existence of an absent point of orientation.

both the pictorial ground and the first colors rendered, produces an opaque surface. Ortega's writings suggest that each brushstroke must conceal the canvas as each stroke conceals others. In my judgment, Ortega is right in so far as that this is for the most part the way that western art has been understood by artist and art historian alike for centuries. However, I believe, that this notion has caused more harm than good. It denies the richness of the medium employed as well as the intertextual power of the tradition which makes materials, such as oil paints, brushes, and canvas, into media. In order to affirm the materiality of a painting, we must reject the traditional interpretation of art as presentation by irrealization and recognize that which is hidden from our sight.

Second, Ortega's notion of aesthetic contemplation, as stated in chapter four, denies the social function and productive dimension of aesthetic contemplation. It negates the effective power of the viewer. Ortega, by subscribing to the logic of the gaze in spite of its aspirations to include the historical, denies the historicity of the spectator. As Bryson writes,

The logic of the Gaze is ... subject to two great laws: the body (of the painter, of the viewer) is reduced to a single point, the macula of the retinal surface; the moment of the Gaze (for the painter, for the viewer) is placed outside duration. Spatially and temporally, the act of viewing is constructed as the removal of the dimensions of space and time, as the disappearance of the body: the construction of an acies mentis, the punctual viewing subject.<sup>57</sup>

Ortega's notion of perception, unlike the glance, freezes vision. By contrast, the glance reinforces active and temporal visual participation with the artwork.

Third, Ortega's distinction between everyday and artistic vision, implies that we all experience everyday reality in the same way. He suggests that "normal" vision is little

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<sup>57</sup>Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 96.

more than the pre-rational apprehension of sense-impressions and the geometry of vision. Everyday vision, to his understanding, merely represents that which we take for granted. But how ordinary is ordinary vision? In my judgment, all percepts are conventional. Our views refer to entities in the world only so far as they are given to us by an interpretive prejudices.<sup>58</sup> If Ortega is correct, then ordinary vision is divorced from all questions of interpretation, including those of style. This would mean that we could not correctly discuss things such as hairstyles, life-styles, or automobile styles. Art, I agree with Ortega, is the product of a "special" way of viewing, but not by ontological degree. On the contrary, in my assessment, it is different because a powerful institution has said so, that is, because the members of the "fine arts" community have prescribed it to be.<sup>59</sup> Whether aestheticians like it or not, no philosophical definition of what will dictate what will be called art. Instead, art historians, art critics, and museum curators, determine what will and will not be art. They decide what the public sees, and for the most part tell the public how to see it. When we think of style in terms of unreal perceptions, as does Ortega, we fall victim to all the pitfalls connected with notions of unreality and perspectivism. Within such an interpretation, style loses its durational quality, becomes the enslaved possession of the artwork at hand, and of artworks alone.

Instead of describing artistic style in terms of visual presentation, I propose that we interpret it as something the reader gives to a painting. As Svetlana Alpers tells us, "Style is what you make it."<sup>60</sup> Styles are constructed connections which help us to write

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<sup>58</sup>Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 268-92.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, pp. 97-111.

<sup>60</sup>Svetlana Alpers, "Style is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again" [1979], The Concept of Style (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1979; revised and expanded ed., 1987), pp. 137-62.

interesting stories and nothing more. Paintings do not possess styles. On the contrary, readers make them up. We should not answer the question, what is the style of a painting, unless we say something like "yes, there is a style in this painting and now I am going to tell you what it is, for I have painted it in this manner."<sup>61</sup> Borrowing from the words of Jeffery Stout:

My approach does not presuppose that [paintings lack style] or that the concept [of style] lacks a core. Suppose God next week revealed that [paintings have styles], that the core of the concept, say, pertains entirely to authorial [or artistic] intention and not at all to contextual significance of any kind. What would this show? Only, I think, that those of us interested primarily in contextual significance were not interested in [style] after all. Our interest has led us to the wrong word. We could then go on saying what we have been saying about contextual significance while eliminating the old references to [style].<sup>62</sup>

All I am suggesting is that instead of claiming to have captured the essence or style of an artistic interpretation, the art historian should claim that her or his reading of a given artwork continues the artwork for the interpretive community in more fruitful ways than do other readings by attributing this or that specific style to the artwork within her or his art historiographic description. In other words, the art historian should attempt to persuade the interpretive community that her or his particular stylistic prescription is better than the ones that others have suggested or are suggesting.

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<sup>61</sup>Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, p. 371.

<sup>62</sup>Jeffery Stout, "What is the Meaning of a Text?," *New Literary History* 14:1 (Autumn 1982), p. 4.

## Chapter Six: The Art Historiographic Vocation

What is the relationship between today's art history-writing and yesterday's historical documentation, between the art historian's history of painting and the artist's painting of history? In other words, how does the art historian confront the historical significance of painting? What does the art historian attempt to do? What is the mission of the art historiographic craft? In this chapter, I will explore Ortega's analysis of the art historiographic vocation and offer a critical alternative to his approach.

For Ortega, one's vocation is not simply one's profession and in many cases the two may differ within the same life. Ortega separates the practice of earning a salary from the act of taking up a vocation. In his interpretation, a vocation is a personal call to meet life's challenges.<sup>1</sup> Like Fichte, he describes the vocation of humanity as a moral imperative to produce ideas and values through action. However, Fichte and Ortega differ in what they hope to accomplish in their respective missions. Fichte aspires to free consciousness from dogmatism and to posit the self beyond the confines of the not-self or nature.<sup>2</sup> Ortega, on the other hand, interprets the goal of vocation as the salvation of one's circumstance, through the positing of the I within the not-I.

For instance, when we interpret artworks, Ortega asks us to make an I myself of the artwork. In his view, this is the only way that the artwork can cease being a thing for us. Ortega requests, in a way reminiscent of kantian ethics, that we do not use artworks as simply a means to an end, but as ends in themselves. In other words,

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<sup>1</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Sobre la razón histórica [1979], translated by Philip W. Silver as Historical Reason (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1984), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Die Bestimmung des Menschen [1800], translated by William Smith as The Vocation of Man (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1953).

Ortega asks that we do not treat artworks as mere objects. Instead, he proposes that we become intimate with them.<sup>3</sup>

Ortega's notion of intimacy should not be confused with the empathy theory of Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer.<sup>4</sup> Ortega believes their notion of empathy results in the modern disease of subjectivism. The artwork is reduced to the psychic experience of the viewer.<sup>5</sup> Criticizing Lipps, Ortega writes,

According to Lipps, I inject my "I" into the piece of polished marble, so that the inwardness of the Pensieroso [a sculpture by Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel] is my own in a disguised form. This is certainly false: I am perfectly aware that the Pensieroso is one thing and I another, that it is its "I" and not mine.<sup>6</sup>

For Ortega, aesthetic experience is not empathetic. We recognize the artwork's point of view is different than ours.<sup>7</sup> Yet, aesthetic experience gives the suggestion that we can come into direct contact with the inwardness of the artwork. This notion of intimacy, in my judgment, implies two things. First, although Ortega rejects the kantian notion of disinterestedness, he still thinks that in aesthetic experience it seems that we can penetrate the surface and enter into the inwardness of the artwork. I take this to mean that the opaque character of an artwork appears to be discovered in our encounter with

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<sup>3</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo" [1914], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 131-4.

<sup>4</sup>Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraktion und Einfühlung [1908], translated by Michael Bullock as Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), pp. 1-25.

<sup>5</sup>Jose Ortega y Gasset, "Arte de este mundo e del otro" [1911], Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), pp. 192-4.

<sup>6</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "An Essay in Esthetics By Way of a Preface," p. 138.

<sup>7</sup>Let the reader beware! Keep in mind that for Ortega the artwork is not a quasi-subject of its own, on the contrary, the artwork is no more than the artist's point of view. Hence, when Ortega calls for intimacy with the artwork, he is only saying that the spectator should fuse with the artist of the artwork.

it. Second, Ortega understands aesthetic contemplation, not in terms of a subject-object relation, but in terms analogous to Dilthey's notion of "the I in the Thou."<sup>8</sup> When Ortega describes the "I" of an artwork, he tells us that it is something other than us and yet, when understood as unreal it is apparently a no-thing, like us. Ortega's suggestion may also imply that in the act of interpretation the viewer discovers the artwork as part of her or his point of view, that is, exposes the artwork as a presented past perspective, one which helped construct the viewer's present point of view. In other words, the viewer while in aesthetic contemplation unveils the artwork as something other, a thou as opposed to being an I, but not as something completely other, for the viewer unveils her or his I in the thou.

The historical view of painting is not opposed to the aesthetic point of view. The mission of the art historian is to recollect the entire series of aesthetic points of view. Furthermore, our historical vocation requires us to revive the dead. We need to view the paintings of the past in their statu nascendi, in their state of birth. Without attempting to re-live [Erlebnis] the past, we cannot see the authorship of its partial truth, the dita penosa, the meditative fingers making the art object.<sup>9</sup> Ortega finds an example in the reception of Velázquez.

Velázquez is here an extreme example because his paintings and certain qualities of his style are so familiar no one will deny that at first glance they now seem voiceless, dull and rather bourgeois; whereas, when newly painted, they were just the opposite: formidable innovations, announcements of a new beginning, disquieting conquests, the results of a supreme darling. Perhaps they were also

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<sup>8</sup>Theodore Plantinga, Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 72.

<sup>9</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La reviviscencia de los cuadros" [1943], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Reviving the Paintings" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), pp. 219-20.

something that only Velázquez saw in them.<sup>10</sup>

Although historians cannot leave the present and enter the past, artworks can live in the present as the past. Historians should attempt to revive paintings in order to uncover their partial truths, their hidden aesthetic meanings and their hidden vital authorships.

Ortega believes the historian's vocation is different from that of the scientist.

The historian must grapple with a different set of problems. As Ortega puts it,

Human affairs, unlike the problems of astronomy or chemistry, are not abstract. They are historical and therefore in the highest degree concrete. The only method of thinking about them with some chance of hitting the mark is "historical reason."<sup>11</sup>

The study of the humanities demands historical reason as opposed to science which operates upon abstraction. The reason for this fundamental difference is simple.

Historians, as all scholars who study humanity, must struggle to present something that only can happen once. The scientist, on the other hand, treats things as if they never change. He or she must crystalize and de-humanize something in order to study it scientifically. Ortega writes:

The only radical difference between human history and "natural history" is that the former can never happen again.<sup>12</sup>

Ortega subscribes to Dilthey's important distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities. The former is viewed as disciplines of hard core explanation built upon abstract generalities, whereas in the latter, one throws oneself into the particularities of something concrete in hopes of understanding it. Ortega believes the West has been

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo para franceses" [1937], translated by Eleanor Clark as "Unity and Diversity in Europe" in History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), p. 78.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 80.



cursed with the overvaluation of Natuurwetenschap. Wrongheaded academics overemphasize universal consensus and commensuration at the cost of understanding life. They think that it would be better for the humanities if interpretation could be more like the explanation of facts. In Ortega's view, such a positivistic conception makes it impossible to study humanity, for human life is a drama, not a dead thing. He hopes to thwart the "terrorism of the laboratories,"<sup>13</sup> calling for a more pregnant approach to the humanities and for delegating only a minor role to the natural sciences within the university system. But Ortega goes one step further and writes that the natural sciences are dependent upon the humanities. As he describes it,

... the truth is that historical reason is the foundation, the base, and the assumption behind physical, mathematical, and logical reason, all of which are only particular and specific examples, and deficient abstractions, of the first one.<sup>14</sup>

Scientific inquiry, to Ortega, is a type of biography, a narration of life, but one which must kill its subject matter in order to describe it. The humanities, however, requires another type of biography, one which illuminates life as an eternal text, as an on-going vital alteration, as "the burning bush beside the road where God cries out."<sup>15</sup> The vocation of the humanities is to clarify the mission of life. Within humane studies, the thinker must listen to his or her personal call, the mission that he or she holds within him or herself, and describe what he or she has heard.

Participating in the humanities demands active interpretation. As Ortega

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<sup>13</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, ¿Qué es filosofía? [1959], translated by Mildred Adams as What is Philosophy? (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Una interpretación de la historia universal [1960], translated by Mildred Adams as An Interpretation of Universal History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), p. 108.

<sup>15</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prológo para alemanes" [1934], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Preface for Germans" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 57.

describes the practice of reading philosophy,

Philosophy cannot be read, it must be de-read - that is, one must re-think each phrase, and this assumes that you break it into the words which form the ingredients; you then take each one of them, and instead of resting content with surveying its agreeable surface, you must throw yourself headlong into it, submerge yourself in it, go down into the depths of meaning, look well to its anatomy and its boundaries in order to emerge again into the free air as master of its secret heart. When one does this with all of the words of the sentence, they stay united not side by side, but subterraneously, joined by the very roots of their ideas; only then do they compose a philosophic phrase. For horizontal reading, the kind that skips along, for simple mental skating down the page, one must substitute vertical reading, immersion in the small abyss which is each word, a fruitful dive without a diving bell.<sup>16</sup>

Ortega's distinction between horizontal and vertical reading, in my assessment, is similar to Roman Ingarden's distinction between passive and active reading.<sup>17</sup> Both Ortega and Ingarden suggest that the proper reading of a text involves an active interpretation. To discover the meaning of a text, the reader must dive head first into the text.

In his "Ideas sobre Pío Baroja," Ortega asks the reader to be sensitive to the intentions of an author. He writes,

Every writer has the right to have us seek out in his work what he has intended to put into it. After we have discovered his will and intention, we are entitled to applaud or revile it.... Before judging him we must understand him. The same thing occurs with the painter or the musician. He who, accustomed to realistic plastic art, looks at a painting of El Greco will usually not see it.... Since El Greco did not intend in a great many of his paintings to create these similarities, we of course do not find them, or, to put it better, we discover the absence of what we were looking for.<sup>18</sup>

The preceding quote should not suggest that Ortega's hermeneutic position is akin to

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<sup>16</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, ¿Que es filosofía? [1959], translated by Mildred Adams as What is Philosophy? (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), pp. 75-6.

<sup>17</sup>Roman Ingarden, Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks [1937], translated by Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson as The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 37-41.

<sup>18</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ideas sobre Pío Baroja" [1916], translated by Richard Ford as "Ideas on Pío Baroja," Critical Inquiry 1:2 (December 1974), p. 421.

that of E.D. Hirsch. Although Ortega hopes to uncover authorial intentions, he would never advocate Hirsch's meaning-significance distinction, that is, the intrinsic meaning of the text over against the extrinsic significance for the reader. Ortega has little use for any husserlian bracketing which suspends judgments of validity from human experience. In my judgment, Ortega subscribes to the hermeneutic circle instead.<sup>19</sup> Like Dilthey and Heidegger, Ortega believes interpretation is conditioned by a pre-understanding, one's socio-historical context. Instead of understanding Ortega's call as a bracketing of the present for the sake of an objective explanation of authorial intentions, I propose that we understand his call as something like Gadamer's interpretive proposals. Ortega does not want to get "inside" someone's head. On the contrary, he wants to connect with them, or in Gadamer's words, to discover a "fusion of horizons."<sup>20</sup> Ortega does not ask the reader to leave the present, but to listen to history by being open to its differences.

Karl-Otto Apel aptly describes the quarrel between the defenders of explanation and those of interpretation. As he puts it,

... the protagonists of "understanding" ... always attack the supporters of the theory of explanation ... from behind - and vice versa. The "objective scientists" point out that the results of "understanding" are only of pre-scientific, subjectively heuristic validity, and that they at least must be tested and supplemented by objective analytic methods. The protagonists of understanding, on the other hand, insist that the obtaining of any data ... [or] any objective testing of hypotheses ... presupposes "actual understanding" ... of meaning.<sup>21</sup>

In a sense, both sides of the argument posit good critiques of the other. However, both

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<sup>19</sup>See E.D. Hirsch, Jr., The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), especially pp. 1-13; for an interesting critique of perspectivism also see in the same book, Chapter 3: Faulty Perspectives, pp. 36-49.

<sup>20</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode [1960], translated by Garrett Barden and John Cumming as Truth and Method (New York: Crossroads, 1976), especially pp. 235-344.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted from Karl-Otto Apel, Analytic Philosophy of Language and the Geisteswissenschaften (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1967), p. 30 by Richard Rorty in his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 347-8.

sides fail to distinguish themselves from those they criticize -- because each side is uncritical of its similarities with that which it criticizes. Philosophers of science, such as Thomas Kuhn and Mary Hesse, have placed the objectivity of the natural sciences into question by proposing that "facts" are only the result of institutional agreement within an interpretive community of a given historical paradigm.<sup>22</sup> Objectivity is no more than communal solidarity.<sup>23</sup> The natural sciences are always subjective in character.

Protagonists of understanding, such as Ortega and Dilthey, fail to open up their fields of study beyond the confines of the natural sciences. No hermeneutic approach can offer the true meaning of something. Interpretation does not dis-cover or open up some deep dark secret, one which eludes the close-minded natural scientists who are satisfied with superficial descriptions. On the contrary, interpretation should be understood without any reference to essential meaning, as the weaving together of different contextualizations, as something that provides helpful prescriptions to a person's community.

For instance, when I find out that a beautiful fruit is poisonous, I have not discovered the real "truth" of the fruit, which was hidden from me, because I, overwhelmed by its beauty, thought it looked good. No, it is better just to say that there are a lot of things to know when one experiences fruit and that recognizing one thing, that it is poisonous, is something that would be good for us to know. Or consider this possibility. If I see Clark Kent and fail to see Superman, it is not that I have failed to see the "true" person behind the disguise, but that one thing I do not know about Clark

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Mary Hesse, "In Defence of Objectivity," Proceedings of the British Academy LVIII (1973), pp. 3-20.

<sup>23</sup>Richard Rorty, "Science as Solidarity," The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 38-52.

Kent is that he is also Superman. Consequently, in my understanding, hermeneutics cannot tell us what things really mean in truth. There is no essential meaning to be discovered. Thus, although I can understand why Ortega wants to separate the humanities from the natural sciences -- in order to open the possibility of studying human life in its vital subjectivity -- I cannot accept his distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities. In my opinion, this differentiation has outlived its usefulness. My differences with Ortega's opposition between the humanities and the natural sciences should not imply that I believe his theory of interpretation is without utility. On the contrary, I believe that Ortega's notion of vocation is where his hermeneutic shines.

Ortega thinks that interpretations are significant because they participate within the human project of authentic life. When Ortega discusses his interpretive imperative, he advocates that the reader should revitalize the past with adventure. To take up the problems of life is sportative activity; it is to occupy oneself with constructing a plan for life, one of happiness and delight.<sup>24</sup> Our meditations or ensimismamientos are not just laborious jobs. In them we do not just function mechanically. Our sportative occupation is not mundane or monotonous work. On the contrary, it is a serious and creative task, the most exalted part of life.<sup>25</sup> Sport, Ortega tells us, should not be confused with the triviality of play, for it is a very serious adventure. Playing games does not include a great deal of responsibility and creates

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<sup>24</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prológo a Veinte años de caza mayor" [1942], translated by Howard B. Wescott as Meditations on Hunting (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), pp. 24-5.

<sup>25</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "El origen deportativo del Estado" [1924], translated by Helene Weyl as "The Sportative Origin of the State" in History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), p. 18.

nothing. They are only diversions from life and serve only to pass away time.

Sportative activity, on the other hand, create possibilities for confronting the future by giving birth to new perspectives. Instead of passing time, sport produces time, by making tomorrow possible, by making life liveable.<sup>26</sup>

True intellectuals are not spoiled and revered by society, like football players, but usually jailed, persecuted, and/or ridiculed, like Cervantes and Quixote, for their projects. However, the sportative person cares more for her or his personal authenticity than the demands of so called civilization. Like the hidalgo Don Quixote, the sportative person does not occupy him or herself with daily labors and material necessities. It seems as though such a person is able to survive upon irrealties alone.<sup>27</sup> He or she occupies the majority of his or her time with ideas and dreams. So caught up in the delights of creativity that he or she wants them to last forever. Hence, each sportsman "would like to eternalize, to perennialize them."<sup>28</sup>

Ortega does not want us to return to the past, but to preserve it. He writes, "To excel the past we must not allow ourselves to lose contact with it; on the contrary, we must feel it under our feet because we have raised ourselves upon it."<sup>29</sup> Through memory we possess the past and the future. The recollection of partial truths and recognized errors allows us to predict the future. Historical reason shows us the

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<sup>26</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Historical Reason, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditación de la técnica" [1933], translated by Helene Weyl as "Man the Technician" in History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), pp. 133-4.

<sup>28</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Hunting, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Ensimismamiento y alteración" [1939], translated by Willard R. Trask as "The Self and the Other" in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 204.

possible and impossible paths to take in tomorrow's journeys. Humanity eternalizes itself. Self-eternalization is not to be everlasting, to endure throughout all of time. On the contrary, it signifies allowing the past and the future to exist as absence in our present, as memories and prophesies.<sup>30</sup> Historical reason allows us to play God. We can become all-seeing and all-knowing. Total recovery of the past produces in us the ultimate perspective. Our point of view is perfected by the multiplication of past perspectives. Historical reason allows us to reabsorb our circumstance, to solve the problem of life, of being thrown in the world. Clarifying all of life, historical reason grants salvation to me, I and my circumstance.

Though Ortega prescribes a schema in which reason progresses towards being absolute, his thought should not be misconstrued as hegelian. First, Ortega does believe that historical reason moves dialectically towards affirming life as a whole, but this notion is not akin to Hegel's Aufhebung. Reason, for Ortega, is not only historical in the sense that it moves, but is historical by its very presence. Ortega, unlike Hegel, does not begin with the foundation of the idea as a thesis, but with the premise that life begins in disorientation. For Ortega the real is not rational, only thought can be rational. If life were logical, then reason would be frivolous. As Ortega writes in "Historia como sistema" [1939],

When Heine, assuredly after reading Hegel, asked his coachman, "What are ideas?" the answer he got was: "Ideas?... Ideas are the things they put into your head." But the fact is that we can say, more formally, that things are the ideas that come out of our heads and are taken by us as realities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Origin of Philosophy, pp. 30-1.

<sup>31</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Historia como sistema" [1939], translated by Helene Weyl as "History as a System" in History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1941), p. 198.

Ideas, for Ortega, are no more than historical constructions attempting to sort out one's irrational contingency.

Second, as stated in the last chapter, Ortega, unlike Hegel, is not interested in the "real," but in the irreal appearance of things as experienced by someone. Like Gombrich, Ortega would credit Hegel with reinforcing the "physiognomic fallacy" that appearances express some deeper meaning, such as a Zeitgeist.<sup>32</sup> To Ortega's understanding, the opaque surface of an artwork reveals truth. Looking through a painting is to miss its point of view, its irreality.

Third, authentic perspectives, according to Ortega, are no more than hallucinations. All points of view unveil partial truths. To his understanding the only false points of view are rationalist or relativist, ones that claim to be absolute or unique truths. Hegel, obviously, would be seen as subscribing to the former. After all, in his Phänomenologie des Geistes [1807], Hegel describes truth as the whole, as an essence that consummates itself through its own development.<sup>33</sup> Ortega's notion of absolutization or eternalization, as we shall later discover, is closer to that of Nietzsche than that of Hegel.

For Ortega, one way humans discover the eternal is in their artworks. He writes,

The word "eternal," clearly does not say that which lasts always, because then we would have to wait until the end of time to begin making art. Neither is it that which has lasted to date, because many things have lasted which will perish

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<sup>32</sup>E.H. Gombrich, "André Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism" [1954], Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 82; also see his "In Search of Cultural History"[1967], Ideals and Idols: Essays on the Value of History and of Art (London: Phaidon Press, 1979), pp. 24-59. A good summation of Gombrich's critique of hegelianism is found in David Summer's "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," Critical Inquiry 15:2 (Winter 1989), pp. 382-4.

<sup>33</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes [1807], translated by A.V. Miller as The Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11.



tomorrow or have perished in the past. No, the symptom of the eternal is the necessary.

True art expresses a true aesthetic, something which is not an occurrence, which is not an anecdote, which is a necessary theme.<sup>34</sup>

The eternal, for Ortega, is a necessity of finding a solution for life, one capable of affirming all of life, its I and its circumstance. In his understanding, true art participates within the rubric of this project.

The eternalization of life, for Ortega, is not world-flight; the ultimate perspective is not suprahistorical. In El tema de nuestro tiempo [1921], he writes,

Now, this sum of individual perspectives, this knowledge of what each and all have seen and recognized, this omniscience, this true "absolute reason," is the sublime faculty which used to be attributed to God. God is also a point of view: but not because he possesses a watch-tower beyond the confines of the human area from which he can behold universal reality directly, as if he were one of the old rationalists. God is not a rationalist. His point of view is that of each one of us: our partial truth is also truth to him. ...The only point is that God, as the catechism says, is everywhere and therefore enjoys the use of every point of view, resuming and harmonizing in his own unlimited vitality all our horizons.<sup>35</sup>

Ortega's notion of "absolute reason" or the ultimate perspective, to my interpretation, is similar to Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return of the same. Ortega, like Nietzsche, believes hegelian dialectics is resentful; it claims to accept contingency and appearances, but can do so only by negating its differences with the initial identity of reason. Hegel absolutizes reason but at the expense of the historical. By contrast, both Nietzsche and Ortega affirm contingency. Nietzsche's eternal reoccurrence and Ortega's eternal perspective are not results of dialectics, that is, the negation of the negation. Instead, both attempt to affirm the repetition of appearances without negation. Ortega's ultimate

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<sup>34</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La estética 'El enano Gregorio el botero,'" Obras Completas I (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), p. 542.

<sup>35</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo [1921], translated by James Cleugh as The Modern Theme (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 95.

point of view, as I understand it, suggests that to accept all of life one must follow the nietzschean command: "To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into 'I wanted it thus.'"<sup>36</sup>

But before we hastily conclude that Ortega is nietzschean, we should remember the influence of Unamuno in his thought. Ortega is well aware of Unamuno's critique of Nietzsche and, in my reading, he accepts it. Criticizing Nietzsche, Unamuno writes,

His heart craved the eternal All while his head convinced him of nothingness, and, desperate and mad to defend himself from himself, he cursed that which he most loved. Because he could not be Christ, he blasphemed against Christ. Bursting with his own self, he wished himself unending and dreamed his theory of eternal reoccurrence, a story counterfeit of immortality, and, full of pity for himself, he abominated all pity. And there are some who say his is a philosophy of strong men! No, it is not.... His is the doctrines of weaklings who aspire to be strong....<sup>37</sup>

In my judgment, Ortega may believe that Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal reoccurrence is itself resentful. Nietzsche rejects the suprahistorical point of view; but he exchanges it for a unique perspective posited by his own contingent imagination, one beyond good and evil. Such an understanding, to Ortega, would be self-satisfied, that is to say, akin to the will of the mass-man. Unfortunately, Ortega does not describe the relationship between his notion of eternity and that of Nietzsche anywhere in his writings. However, I cannot imagine that Ortega would accept any philosophy which posits our ultimate contingency by asking us actively to forget the past.<sup>38</sup> To Ortega's understanding, in our present context we are not yet able to eternalize ourselves, to save our circumstance.

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<sup>36</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra [1883], translated by R.J. Hollingdale as Thus Spake Zarathustra (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 161.

<sup>37</sup>Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en hombre y gente [1913], translated by J.E. Crawford Fitch as Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954), pp. 50-1.

<sup>38</sup>See Friedrich Nietzsche's Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben [1874], translated by Adrian Collins as The Use and Abuse of History for Life (New York: Macmillan/Library of Liberal Arts, 1987).

For Ortega, art historiography is a way in which humanity can interpret its contingency in order to prepare for the future. Thus, his interpretation of the art historiographic vocation is antithetical to that of Wölfflin and Riegl. In his view, one cannot merely look at an artwork. Such an ordinary act would fail to notice the irreality of art. Nor is Ortega's interpretation like Panofsky's iconology. For Panofsky, art historiography scholarship begins with the gathering of pre-iconographic facts and ends with the interpretation of iconological or intrinsic meaning, that is, the artwork's culturally significant value within its period-style and within the western tradition as a whole.<sup>39</sup> However, Ortega has no interest in explaining the facts of stylistic development. Any pre-iconographic analysis, to Ortega's senses, would be worthless. To his understanding, facts and beliefs are no more than the result of historiographic interpretation. For Panofsky, art historiography and the rest of the humanities do not conflict with the natural sciences, but complement them.<sup>40</sup> As stated before, Ortega thinks that the natural sciences and the humanities are at odds. Consequently, Ortega has little patience for either positivistic explanations or iconological interpretations of the art historiographical vocation.

His notion of the art historiographic enterprise is more akin to that presented by Gombrich. Not only does Gombrich believe that a fundamental difference between the natural sciences and the humanities exists,<sup>41</sup> but, like Ortega, he believes that in this age of crisis, scholarship is in danger and may be lost. Both Gombrich and Ortega hope to

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<sup>39</sup>Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline" [1939] in The Meaning of the Visual Arts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 1-25.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup>E.H. Gombrich, "Research in the Humanities: Ideals and Idols" [1973], Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979), p. 112.

defend the academy from bureaucracy and specialization. Gombrich laments that the university under the guise of "professionalism" has reduced academic discipline to a question of how to pass examinations.<sup>42</sup> The university is in jeopardy; western civilization is at stake, for no one will be able to transmit general knowledge of our culture. Ortega tells a similar tale. In his "Misión de la universidad" [1930], Ortega mourns that:

Compared to the medieval universities, the contemporary university has developed the mere seed of professional instruction into an enormous activity; it added the function of research; and it has abandoned almost entirely the teaching and transmission of culture.<sup>43</sup>

Higher education has been diminished in the name of specialization by the cultural barbarians or bureaucrats in charge. Ortega believes that mass-education has invented something new, the educated ignoramus, a fusion of learned and unlearned humanity all rolled into one for the first time in history. For although this new person knows his own little specialized area, he or she is blind to that outside of it.<sup>44</sup> Both Gombrich and Ortega hope to revive the humanities and cultural life at large. In their understanding, the scientific method will not offer therapy in the age of crisis but will accelerate the need for a cure. Consequently, when Gombrich and Ortega describe the vocation of art historiography, neither is interested in explaining facts or in providing specialized study. On the contrary, they hope to promote communication between the humanities and to offer interpretations for understanding human history. Art historiography, in their view,

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<sup>42</sup>E.H. Gombrich, "The Tradition of General Knowledge" [1961], Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979), pp. 18-9.

<sup>43</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "La misión de la universidad" [1930], translated by Howard Lee Nostrand as The Mission of the University (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1944), p. 38.

<sup>44</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, La rebelión de las masas [1930], translated anonymously as The Revolt of the Masses (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1932), pp. 111-2.

should be seen in the greater context of the academy.

In spite of these similarities, Ortega and Gombrich describe the mission of the university somewhat differently. For Gombrich, education is a means for improving our gentleman-like skills of tracking down the polarizing issues and finding our past. In his work, it is difficult to distinguish between the knowledge of what to do and the knowledge of how to do it. In my assessment, his approach is pragmatic, in that the art historiographic vocation is understood in terms of a search for instruments of action, of an attempt to teach people how to operate the conventions of their day. Ortega, on the other hand, believes education in the humanities is a necessity if we want to save our circumstance and make life liveable. Furthermore, Ortega and Gombrich differ in their respective understandings of the crisis at hand. The desperation for Gombrich is the loss of knowing what to do and how to act as civilized people. On the other hand, for Ortega, it is the loss of authenticity and the inability to meet life's challenges. In other words, the danger for Gombrich is the erasure of the life of taste, whereas for Ortega, it is the erasure of the taste for life. For this reason, I believe that Ortega's interpretation of the art historiographic vocation may be better understood in relation to heideggerian thought than to Gombrich's.

Like Heidegger, Ortega describes the authentic human project in terms of care.

He writes:

The word 'curiosity'... has a double meaning, one primary and of substance, the other pejorative and abusive, like the word "aficionado" which means both one who truly loves something, and also one who is merely an amateur. The true meaning of the word 'curiosity' stems from a Latin root (Heidegger recently called our attention to this), the word cura, meaning the cared for, the cares, which I call preoccupation. From cura comes curiosity. Hence, in daily speech, a curious man is a careful man, a man who does what he has to do with attention, extreme care, and precision, a man who neither slights nor neglects whatever occupies him, but, on the contrary, is preoccupied with his occupations, Even in

ancient Spanish, cuidar meant to be occupied, to care. This original meaning of cura (care) or cuidados (cares) survives in our present terms curador (overseer), procurator (procurer), procurar (to procure), curar (to cure), and in the very word cura (curate) which is given to the priest because he has the care of souls. Curiosity, then, is carefulness, preoccupation. And, vice versa, inseguria is carelessness, lack of interest, and seguridad (security), securitas, is the absence of cares or of preoccupations.<sup>45</sup>

Both Ortega and Heidegger suggest that an authentic occupation includes preoccupation. For Heidegger, care is the pre-ontological way that Dasein interprets itself. Care cannot be derived from our urges, desires, or wishes, for all of these arrive from primordial care.<sup>46</sup> The ursprüngliche, the primordial or originary, make-up of care is structured as "ahead-of-itself-already-being-in-a-world."<sup>47</sup> Ortega tells a similar tale. In his thinking, genuine care is not the appetite to participate in culture, but a sincere love of the world prior to the desire to shape it.<sup>48</sup> Care is not an instrument for constructing life, but a way of living that inspires a person to save her or his circumstance. The curious sportsman does not pretend to care, as does the schooled mass-man, but is genuinely concerned with life. As an authentic human being, she or he is not a carnivore, but a Wahrheitsfresser, a truth-eater, a person who consumes previous points of view.<sup>49</sup>

Not only do both Ortega and Heidegger interpret vocation or occupation in terms of the preoccupation of care, but they both call for the recovery of humanity. For

<sup>45</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Unas lecciones de la metafísica [1966], translated by Mildred Adams as Some Lessons in Metaphysics (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1969), p. 20.

<sup>46</sup>Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit [1927], translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 225-8.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid, p. 236.

<sup>48</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, Some Lessons in Metaphysics, pp. 20-1.

<sup>49</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo para alemanes" [1934], translated by Philip W. Silver as "Preface for Germans" in Phenomenology and Art (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 51.

instance, Ortega writes:

...we must give ourselves à la recherche du temps perdu.... We must, then, represent ourselves, go back to resurrecting the dead presents, and this means that we must revive for ourselves those forms which have ceased to live.... History is so difficult a task for the very reason that it is repetition.... Heidegger was the first who renewed the Dane's [Kierkegaard's] idea of talking of Wiederholung....

...etymologically, Wiederholung means "to go back to take something that has been left more or less at a distance"; hence "to search" for it. But the so-called existentialists who are now noisy as jackdaws in France [Sartre and his followers]... now spill their clamor over into the philosophy of life; they think that by using the term "repetition" without its etymological resonance they can repeat Kierkegaard, not noticing that the Danish word which the latter uses means "recovery."<sup>50</sup>

For Ortega, the mission of life includes not only the repetition of the past, but its recovery. Interpretation, for Heidegger, is always an act of retrieval; it is the opening of what has been hidden in time.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Heidegger, like Ortega, describes the recovery of humanity in terms of cura, of care and cure. However, Ortega and Heidegger do differ in what they believe careful preoccupation will recover for humanity. For Heidegger, to be preoccupied with care is to question the meaning of Being, to retrieve Dasein's thrown-projection into the world.<sup>52</sup> Recovery is the repetition and retrieval of a lost presence, that of our uncanniness or homelessness.<sup>53</sup> For Ortega, on the other hand, recovery is the restoration of the past, the reabsorption of partial truths. In other words, for Heidegger, retrieval signifies the recovery of primordial absence, that is the disclosure of not-being-at-home. For Ortega, on the other hand, it refers to an opportunity to make life present again; it recovers past points of view. He

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<sup>50</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, An Interpretation of Universal History, pp. 103-4.

<sup>51</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 349-64.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, pp. 233-4.

suggests that through careful Wiederholung, the past moves from being a temporary absence to a permanent presence. Heidegger believes, as John Caputo states,

Dasein is what it is only by staying open to the distance that constitutes its very Being. To be a self is to have the courage for self-distancing, to keep the wound of finitude open - whereas inauthenticity collapses upon itself, collapsing into the present and the actual.... Authenticity is a matter of distancing, not of nearness.<sup>54</sup>

Ortega would see Heidegger's desire for distancing as an unnecessary self-inflicted pain of anguish. Heidegger, in Sein und Zeit, implies presence by using the word Da-sein, being-there. However, this presence is always understood in terms of where difference and distance take place. By contrast, Ortega, in his aspirations to meet life's challenges with adventure, closes the gap between the past and the future and that between the I and circumstance, for historical reason is that which reabsorbs circumstance. Although Ortega's notion of recovery allows him to preserve the ability to make life liveable, it, in effect, amounts to a metaphysics of presence, because it suggests the closure of the difference between past and future, and between I and circumstance through living the meditative life of an hidalgo.

Up to now, I have criticized Ortega from a post-modern understanding of art and its history. Using the work of Bryson, Derrida, Fish, Rorty et al, I have proposed an alternative to Ortega's schema. However, in this chapter, I believe Ortega may provide a better interpretation of the art historiographic vocation than do many post-modern critics. To me, in spite of his numerous handicaps, Ortega does suggest a therapeutic approach towards life, one that aims towards healing wounds as opposed to exposing them. Like Ortega, I hope that we preserve or continue the artwork through

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<sup>54</sup>John Caputo, "Hermeneutics as the Recovery of Man," Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy (Albany NY: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1986), p. 439.



interpretation, not dismantle it by making something else. Many post-modern thinkers are far too eager to destroy this world in hopes of constructing a new one, one which lives in constant crisis and revolution.<sup>55</sup> However, I am not willing to forfeit this world in hopes of playing the role of a nomad who endlessly wanders upon new plateaus in search of a new and improved language-game.

To my understanding, the earth is my home, where I dwell. I acknowledge that being a bourgeois Dutch-American heterosexual male living peacefully in the West makes this easy to believe. If I were on the lower rungs of the social ladder, I might think otherwise and the world might cease to be my home and merely be my house. There is unfortunately pain and suffering in the world, but my context keeps me from wanting to destroy it.

Although I acknowledge that I am on the upper side of society, by no means do I advocate the dominion over the world or others. As Paul Ricoeur describes dwelling:

To dwell is to be received as a guest. And construing is making, but in such a way that we do not make the world less worthy of dwelling in. Some kind of humility, accordingly, is entailed in the act of dwelling.<sup>56</sup>

To dwell is not to promote imperialism or mastery. On the contrary, it suggests care and stewardship of the world in which I dwell. When I interpret a work of art, I hope to preserve it, by opening it up. After all, they are beings that belong in the world with me. Ortega also calls for preservation and recuperation; in this sense, then, I prefer the mission of Ortega over that of many of the French new nietzscheans.

Unfortunately, although Ortega also advocates the affirmation of our world

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<sup>55</sup>This mentality is present especially in the writings of the French "new nietzscheans," for examples see the writings of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault.

<sup>56</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "Review of Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*," *Philosophy and Literature* 4 (Spring 1980), p. 118.

through acts of care, his notion is somewhat misleading. His categories for art historiography negate the power of art's materiality, the practice of effective reading, the artist's belatedness, and the interpretive character of everyday vision --- all in the name of the artist's unreal perspective, of his or her ensimismamiento. Ortega is preoccupied with art and the human circumstance only in so far as it is part of a vital point of view. Hence, he is unable to let other beings be, for he is engaged with them only in order to advance in his personal pilgrimage towards eternalization. Like Quixote's La Mancha, Ortega's Spain is little more than the setting for his adventure. Ortega only cares for points of view, and seems unconcerned with the terrestrial landscape outside its utility for life.

Art history, for Ortega, is interpreted only to illuminate a vital perspective. By contrast, I have little interest in clarifying the artist, except in so far as she or he is a fellow affective reader. When I write art history, my purpose is to continue the artwork by re-working it in ways that transform the status quo and continue the conversation in art historiographic circles by altering traditional interpretations. Whether or not I am successful in the preservation of artworks, I leave for others to decide. But in my assessment, the readings that I prescribe are the only responsible ones.

## Conclusions: The Disclosure of Art Historiography

Perhaps one of the best ways to describe the history of the discipline of art historiography is in terms of three hermeneutic paradigms - modernity, twentieth century, and post-modernity. In the first, modernity, art historians (such as Riegl, Wölfflin, and Worringer) aspire to bracket the contextuality of art in hope of finding its formal or essential character. In the second, to use Ortega's term - "the twentieth century," art historians (such as Badt, Francastel, and Gombrich), along with philosophers (such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Unamuno), dismantle the notion of bracketing in hopes of uncovering the context of art. However, it should be noted that twentieth-century thinkers do not deny the presence of the essential or the formal. To their eyes, the essential is the contextual and apparent. They simply turn the platonic picture on its head. By remaining open to contingent differences, the interpreter discovers truth. Although twentieth-century thinkers believe that formal analyses are sterile, they do not deny the possibility of formal analyses. Finally, in the third paradigm, post-modernity, critics (such as Fish, Bryson, and Derrida) aspire to deconstruct the platonic distinction which separates the real and the apparent, the formal and the contextual. To their understanding, such a dichotomy no longer makes sense. It does not work anymore. They want to affirm the contingent without any recourse to the formal qualities of art. Instead of searching for some epistemological ground for interpretive practice, post-modern thinkers, from their socio-historical setting, simply translate translations of others. Post-modern critics, unlike those of modernity and the "twentieth century," feel no need to demonstrate the rationale of their interpretation. They prefer only to prescribe their own reading within the endless play

of intertextuality.

I hope that it is clear for the reader where Ortega fits within this schema. To my understanding, Ortega is "nada moderno y muy siglo XX" [Nothing Modern And Very Twentieth Century]. He has fulfilled his mission. His work does fall outside the rubric of modern rationalism. But this should not suggest that Ortega is a "post-modern" thinker. Although Ortega historicizes reason, he still holds to an epistemological ground. Perhaps it is best to interpret Ortega's thought as situated somewhere between modernity and post-modernity; it is in this sense that his work is "twentieth century."

Although Ortega is not a post-modern thinker, his writings may have helped open possibilities for post-modern interpretations. His work, like that of Nietzsche, Unamuno, Heidegger, and Gombrich, exposes the bankruptcy of the modern paradigm. Furthermore, Ortega's interpretation, as that of other "twentieth-century critics," reveals the circumstantiality of our thinking. Although his writings are not post-modern, post-modern critics may be indebted to Ortega for breaking down in part the paradigm of modernity and for constructing an alternative which emphasizes the contingent and the apparent. Ortega has provided us with an opportunity to disclose art historiography's self-enclosure.

I hope this thesis will continue the process of disclosure. It is not written in hopes of creating a new and improved philosophical system for art historiography, for I have no desire to produce such a propaedeutic. In this sense, my own approach is somewhat post-modern. To my understanding, theory itself holds no privilege over textual practice, for it is itself no more than another textual practice. The purpose of this thesis is not to demonstrate how to build better walls, on the contrary, it is an attempt to prescribe ways in which we may stop and do something else. To me, there

are far more interesting things to do than reinforce our fences or produce better security systems for keeping out intruders, such as unlocking us from our neighbors, constructing new roads for interdisciplinary travel, and exploring terra incognito.

The yardwork of Ortega has helped us produce a post-modern understanding of art history. He did not solve all our problems and at times he added to them, but I thank him for the work he has done. Although the reader is approaching the final sweeps of these written lines, my yardwork is far from completed. These inquiries have not been answered in full nor for once and for all. After cutting the lawn, the grass will grow back and so, upon answering these questions, new questions will arise. But for now I am satisfied with a good day's work.

Through investigating the work of a foreigner such as José Ortega y Gasset, art historians can learn about their own backyards, their own categories for art historiography. Although my interpretation of art, historicity, and the art historiographic enterprise differs from that of Ortega, I have benefitted from his endeavors. He has forced me to think about issues within my own academic field of study, upon matters I perhaps would normally neglect. I hope this thesis, although it deals primarily with art historiographic matters, is able to help others discover new questions and formulate new responses regardless of their academic area. Finally, I would like to thank you, the reader, for gazing or glancing across these pages, for finishing this day's yardwork. Perhaps one day, my work will help you complete your yardwork, as you and Ortega have graciously helped me with mine.

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