
ПРИ ИЗВОРИТЕ НА МОДЕРНАТА ЕСТЕТИКА

RUBÉN SÁNCHEZ MUÑOZ*, CINTIA C. ROBLES LUJÁN** AESTHETICS AND ESTIMATIVE IN ORTEGA Y GASSET: FROM NEOKANTISM TO PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract: In this article, we focus on Ortega's aesthetic ideas and the very important place that his work on estimation from a phenomenological point of view occupies in his philosophy. We want to show how important phenomenology was for the understanding of art and aesthetics in the works of the philosopher of the School of Madrid, and how phenomenology allowed him to overcome neo-Kantianism (albeit he later stated he had abandoned phenomenology). For this purpose, we first focus on showing Ortega's interest in Zuloaga's art and the philosopher's failure to understand the Spanish painter's art from the viewpoint of neo-Kantian apriorism; secondly, we will see how Ortega overcomes neo-Kantianism through phenomenology and adopts the latter as a method that allows him to attain sincerity in dealing with things. Thirdly, taking as a starting point the ontology of value, we are going to focus on the description of being conscious of the aesthetic object and its estimation. Then we will give some indications about beauty; finally, we will indicate some general conclusions and some pending tasks, such as the need for a deeper study of art and the dehumanization of art¹.

Keywords: aesthetics; estimative; neo-Kantianism; phenomenology; conscience; intimacy; the executive Self.

Резюме: В статията се разглеждат естетическите идеи на Ортега-и-Гасет и голямото значение, което заема в неговата философия оценъчната способност, разглеждана от феноменологична гледна точка. Искаме да покажем колко важна е феноменологията във философията на Мадридската школа за разбиране на изкуството и естетиката, както и по какъв начин феноменологията е помогнала на Ортега да преодолее неокантианството, въпреки че по-късно той ще каже, че е изоставил феноменологията. С оглед на тази цел ще се съсредоточим: първо, да покажем интереса на Ортега към изкуството на Сулоага и провалът на опита му да разбере испанското изобразително изкуство от позициите на неокантианския априоризъм; второ, да разгледаме как Ортега преодолява неокантианството посредством феноменологията, както и по какъв начин той адаптира този метод, за да му осигури автентичност в отношенията с нещата. На трето място ще се съсредоточим върху описанието на съзнанието за естетическия обект и на оценъчната способност, вземайки за изходна точка онтологията на ценността. Накрая ще се спрем на някои белези на красотата, ще направим по-общи изводи и ще очертаем предстоящи задачи като например необходимостта от по-задълбочен анализ на изкуството и неговата дехуманизация.

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¹ In this manuscript, we will cite the complete works of José Ortega y Gasset, published by Taurus editorial in 10 volumes. We cite OC for reference to each volume of Ortega's complete works, followed by the volume number and the page number. See bibliography at the end.

Aesthetics and art from neokantism

Ortega's interest in aesthetics can be found in articles as early as 1910's „Adán en el paraíso“² or the 1911 essay on „La estética en *El enano Gregorio el botero*“³. In them, Ortega showed a deep interest in Ignacio Zuloaga's paintings. I wanted to understand the Spanish painter's art and find a place for him within the schematics of aesthetics and art from the point of view of neokantism. In fact, at this time Ortega was a Newkantian. His idea of art and aesthetics, in particular, had brought them from Germany. The influence of Natorp and, above all, the influence of Cohen are very marked in these two trials. Thus, the neokantian Ortega tried to overcome positivism and materialism and maintained a critical position regarding science. His idea of culture was marked, as he himself says, by three fundamental prejudices: science or logic, ethics and aesthetics (OC. II, 58). Not finding Spain's place in modernity either from science or ethics, he thought he could do it from aesthetics. However, the neokantian idea he assumed about aesthetics did not allow him to understand Spanish art and aesthetics. The result he arrived at after analyzing and describing Zuloaga's works is that they were not art, but at most imitation.

In a horizon in which Ortega maintains that each thing „is a piece of a bigger one“ and in which he affirms that painting a painting is to give it „conditions of eternal life“, Zuloaga's work did not seem to fulfill these conditions. Zuloaga's paintings were too particular and through them the Spanish painter had „the art of sensitizing the tragic Spanish theme“ (OC. II, 122). What Ortega calls „genius“, „gesture“ and „condition“ of Spain, „her fate“, is precisely that she has resisted the modernity of Europe. Spain, which had maintained itself with this „indomitable eagerness to remain, not to change, to perpetuate itself in the same substance“ (OC. II, 122), found in Zuloaga's artwork a special place, because the painter highlighted precisely these particular qualities of that non-modern Spain, on the fringes of European culture. But this means that Spain was a different thing from the science, ethics and aesthetics on which the idea of neokantian culture was based. Zuloaga's work, for wanting to reflect this particular condition of Spain, did not become art in the strictest sense. Ortega refers to it as „anecdotal art“ but anecdotal art, which can be „enjoyable“, „curious“ and entertaining, „is not art“ (OC. II, 122).

In the essay on „La estética en *El enano Gregorio el botero*“, which represents a profound analysis of Zuloaga's painting and in which he reaches the conclusions just mentioned above that it is an anecdotal art and that this is not art in the strict sense, he says that the dwarf represents „the survival of a people beyond culture“ and represents „the will of inculturation“. The painting, therefore, is not part of the culture, because in Spain there is no culture, there is something else. Zuloaga's painting is not art and his aesthetics is not. The painting represents

² Адам в Рая (Хосе Ортега-и-Гасет, Есега, т. 1, София: Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски“, София 1993, 87–109).

³ Естетиката на *Джуджето Грегорио разновсвача на мехове*. (Хосе Ортега-и-Гасет, пак там, 147–156).

what lies beyond culture, that other thing of culture that is not culture. Ortega refers to „nature“, „spontaneous“ and „elemental forces“ (OC. II, 123).

Culture in Spain is, to put it mildly, stagnant, in Spain there is no progress. „Culture – as Javier San Martín reminds us – implies progress; if you can't see the progression, there's no sense in culture“ (San Martín 1998: 41). Therefore, culture in Spain does not make sense from the neokantian perspective of art. Zuloaga wanted to represent in his painting what in man there is of „irreducible nature“ and the „precivilized impetus“ (OC. II, 123), the individuality of a Spanish people that „has not wanted to be another of what it is“ and that „has not wanted to be like another“ (OC. II, 122). For this very reason, culture in Spain is stagnating. Zuloaga's art allows Ortega to land his reflections on culture, but the conclusions he draws do not satisfy him at all, because it will seem that the neokantian theory is not sincere with things themselves.

According to Jonkus, in Ortega's critique of neokantism, it can later be understood that the most important thing „is that the expression of sensual data does not have to be overshadowed by theoretical diagrams and formulas, because that would not allow one to be observe and research the primordial ways of the sensitivity“ (Jonkus 2013: 240).

I executive and intimacy. The contribution of phenomenology to aesthetics

Aesthetics play a fundamental role in Ortega's philosophy, since it is thanks to aesthetic analysis that he makes the leap from neokantism to phenomenology. Dalius Jonkus, recapturing the analysis of Javier San Martín, affirms that it is possible to speak of two motifs that inspired the leap from one philosophical method to another. First, the understanding of literature as a method of disrealization – that is, understanding the writer, and the artist in general, as someone with the faculty to question the validity of the world of life and with the quality of creating new virtual worlds, worlds that may even be „dehumanized“ outside of culture. Second, „a cosmic meaning of sincerity without which a phenomenological return to the things themselves is impossible“ (Jonkus, 2013: 237).

Sincerity is understood as the description of the unbreakable bond that exists between life and culture, life as a complex web of experiences that goes to the most intimate subject and culture as a virtual world always latent. In both cases the starting point is aesthetics. In 1914 Ortega wrote his „Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo“⁴, and he did so at a time when he had already overcome neokantism after his third trip to Germany in 1911. In his encounter with the phenomenology Ortega was able to read Husserl's Logical Investigations and Ideas I, and had even dedicated an important review to H. Hoffmann's book „About the concept of sensation“ in 1913. We are interested in analyzing for now the notions of the executive self and the intimacy of which Ortega speaks in this essay of 1914 and its relations with aesthetics.

⁴ Есе по естетика вместо пролог (Хосе Ортега-и-Гасет, пак там, 187–206)

The I executive refers to the first person. The „I“ is intimacy, it is the one where things are verified, are and are executed through acts. This intimacy „constitutes the true self“ of the things (OC. I, 668). When speaking of the aesthetic object, Ortega says that intimacy „is the true being of everything, the only thing sufficient and of whom contemplation would satisfy us fully“ (OC. I, 670). In the intimacy of this I executive is where all things are constituted, it is there where they reach their value and validity of being; outside of this intimacy are nothing or, to put it better, outside of our intimacy have no meaning.

The essay shows that Ortega has fully understood the meaning of phenomenological constitution and the place of consciousness in this process of constitution. In his review of Hoffmann's book he defines consciousness as „the definitive instance in which the being of objects is constituted in one way or another“ (OC. I, 632). Shortly afterwards he defines conscience according to intentionality. This plane of primary objectivity, in which everything exhausts its being in its appearance (*fainómenon*), is consciousness, not as a spatial tempo fact, but as a conscience of“ (OC. I, 633). Therefore, we can affirm that the reality of the aesthetic object can only be constituted or have meaning through the consciousness of the aesthetic object. And this is so because, following the a priori correlation, Ortega assumes and defends that all conscience is conscience of something.

Now, in the review of 1913, Ortega was right to maintain that any objective image „when entering our conscience or starting from it, produces a subjective reaction... that subjective reaction is nothing but the very act of perception, be it remember, vision, intellection, etc.“ (OC. I, 676). But you are wrong, in our opinion, to call all this „feeling“ (OC. I, 676). It is clear that not all acts of conscience are a feeling, or that not all acts generate or have as a consequence a feeling, and even in those acts of perception, remembrance or fantasy, etc., that produce a feeling, one should distinguish between some acts and others and not confuse them.

On the other hand, although Ortega confuses at a certain point in time the phenomenological meaning of the „phenomenon“ as an appearance, instead of appearing or showing itself, in the *Sistema de psicología* of 1915 the sense of the phenomenon of the hand of the concept of constitution is clearly exposed. There Ortega says the following:

„(...) wherever and however there is that which I call *conscience*, I always find it constituted by two elements: an attitude, or act of a subject, and a *something* to which that act is directed (...) that thing that we call *conscience* (...) seems to consist of the conjunction, complexio or intimate, perfect union of two totally different things: my act of referring to – and what I am referring to“ (OC. VII, 466).

Indeed, “object is everything that can be referred to in one way or another. And reciprocally: conscience is referring to an object“ (OC. VII, 467). Without doubt, it can be said that Ortega has appropriated phenomenology as a working method. Therefore, he can defend that the object is the object given to the consciousness and not something that is beyond it and alien or independent.

„Being itself, what sense (...) can the word be but to be before me? When I say that snow is white, is it what else clearly means more than finding whiteness in it? And when I say that snow is just snow, what else do I say but realize it, that it is before me or before another conscience like me? To be is to be for the conscience, for the I – it is the result of I activity (...)“ (OC. VII, 473).

Moreover, in Lesson VI of this same course Ortega defines the object as „everything that can be the end of conscience, everything that exists for me or before me is there or that I realize or that I mean“ (OC. VII, 477). And he sums them all up with the word conscience.

As early as 1912 in his essay „*Variaciones sobre la circum-stantia*“ Ortega defined the I as „an essay of increasing reality“ (OC. VII, 304). In his *Sistema de psicología* of 1915 he affirms, in this same line, that the acts of conscience, such as perceiving or fantasizing, are „diverse ways of reaching us to being“ (OC. VII, 465). In these modes of conscience we are given objects, things are given to us: in the acts of conscience, objects are constituted and become meaning.

From the foregoing we can infer that the validity of being the aesthetic object is based on its being shown or appearing. It is in consciousness that „all other phenomena float, and... all real or possible objects“ (OC. VII, 480). At this time, Ortega is convinced of the value of phenomenology and acknowledges that it is still necessary to develop „very new fields of inexhaustible fecundity“ (OC. VII, 479) and here Ortega is right to recognize that for each class of objects there are modes or classes of acts in which they appear.

Conscience of aesthetic object and estimative

The consequence of Ortega's analysis so far would be that the work of art and the aesthetic object by themselves are nothing, they have no meaning. The sense of beauty, the sense of art, is given in aesthetic enjoyment, in the emotion or feeling that they produce in the spectator. It is in intimacy that they reach their meaning and value. Outside of this enjoyment we do not know what they are as belonging to aesthetics and art (and not as objects of the world that can obviously be given through other acts of conscience).

Thus, Ortega gives the example of a cypress, and distinguishes between the royal cypress and the image of the cypress. Of the real cypress we can only know the image that we have of him, because the image of him is what is effectively given to our experience, therefore what we can account for. This image that I do not know of the cypress, as an image, “is only an image; but as for me it is a real state of mine, it is a moment of my ego, of my being“ (OC. I, 674). What we know of things is their image, their spectrum or concept as it will say in the *Meditaciones del Quijote*⁵, but it is precisely this image that is presented as „my executive state“, “as an action of my ego“ (OC. I, 676). This image for being or existing by virtue of the subject, Ortega calls it „virtual“.

One more note that is important in the aesthetic essay of 1914 is the idea of art as being essentially „unrealization“. Ortega argues that „it is the essence of art creating a new objectivity born from the previous breaking and annihilation of

⁵ Хосе Ортега-и-Гасет, *Размишления върху Дон Кихот*, София: Прозорец, 2003.

real objects“ (OC. I, 678). The function of art would be, as San Martín points out, the „creation of unreal or virtual worlds, that grant us access to the intimacy of being“ (San Martín 2010, 245). In another place San Martín says that this function of art is „to arbitrate a system that takes us to the executive, art gives us things from within themselves, in their executive reality“. In his analysis, Ortega concludes that art „is not real“, that it is „something other than what is real“; that the aesthetic object „carries within itself as one of its elements the executive of reality“ (San Martín 1998: 73) and that beauty „begins only in the confines of the real world“ (OC. I, 678). From this it follows that the aesthetic object is not real, that is, it is not material and, therefore, it is not given to us through the senses. But, that it is not given to us as an object of perception or, as Husserl would say, that it is not given to us himself in person through the sensitive experience, does not mean that it is no longer present, or even more so that it is not an object or that it is not given itself in person. The sense of object is broader than the sense of thing. We have already seen that „the object is everything that can be referred to in one way or another“. Things in a material sense do not exhaust the sense of the object.

So: what is the aesthetic object?, how do we refer to the aesthetic object, how is the aesthetic object given to us? „The aesthetic object is an intimacy as such – it's all about I“ (OC. I, 672). The act through which the aesthetic object is given to us is aesthetic enjoyment, we could also say an emotion or even a feeling. The experience of aesthetic enjoyment is important for Ortega because it relates us to the intimacy of things. How can we understand that a work of art pleases, dislikes, likes or dislikes us? Ortega responds by saying that: „the work of art pleases us with that peculiar joy that we call aesthetic, because it seems to make us feel the intimacy of things, its executive reality“ (OC. I, 672). So, „while the vital act of mine is being performed... this is the object that exists for me“ (OC. I, 675s).

In *Meditaciones del Quijote*, also from 1914, Ortega affirms that „aesthetic enjoyment is a sudden discharge of allusive emotions“ (OC. I, 753). And what is shown in these emotions, what makes aesthetic enjoyment possible? What is shown in estimating life is a value. Ortega says in his „Discurso para la real academia de ciencias morales y políticas“ of 1918, that to estimate a thing consists in „the recognition of the value itself, apart from whether or not it exists in the thing“ and there he points out that to estimate „must, therefore, be understood originally as the act in which the value is apprehended“ (OC. VII, 734). According to Ortega, through affective values „we respond to things“ and the lack of that hierarchy of values considers it the „deepest spiritual illness“ (OC. I, 891). It is as if the absence of this receptive capacity for values and allowing oneself to be filled with affective life would mutilate our intimacy in some way; as if something of our person were atrophied. Aesthetic experience, aesthetic enjoyment, or estimative in general, reveals to us the intimacy of things, but it reveals to us our own intimacy, our own executive nature, our own life in which all objects appear and the relationships we have with them. The objective of the estimation or „general science of value“ as he himself calls it, would be to describe that „system of

estimative laws which obliges us to condemn affections, appetites and, in general, the dynamic reactions of individuals in moral and juridical matters, in art and in social life“ (OC. VII, 736).

Aesthetic enjoyment belongs to estimative and occupies an important place for aesthetics and the study of beauty. In Ortega we find some valuable indications that we are going to recover.

In a footnote to his „Discurso para la real academia de ciencias morales y políticas” he says: “What I understand by Estimative would be a system of cordial *reason*” (OC. VII, 709 note). And in this speech, as well as in his 1923 essay: *Introducción a una estimativa*⁶, what are values? He dedicates important descriptions on the ontology of value and axiology in order to understand „what is value in general“. There he judges that the science of estimative „will occupy a symmetrical position with that occupied by the general science of being“ (OC. VII, 707). It is not surprising that Ortega develops his reflections around an ontology of value if we take into account the influence of Franz Brentano's work, Alexius von Meinong and his dispute with Ehrenfels, the ontology of Max Scheler's values and Edmund Husserl himself (cf. OC. VII, 718s).

In the above mentioned *Discourse*, Ortega begins by emphasizing that the consciousness of value is as general and primitive as the conscience of the object. And he places special emphasis on an element that Husserl had placed in parentheses in his analysis of the constitution of the world of thought in *Ideas I*, but which he develops in *Ideas II* and other writings that Ortega did not know. Ortega focuses his gaze on what we can call the affective constitution of the world. The fact is that the world of everyday life or the world around us is not constituted for our conscience only as a world of things or objects, but all this is in turn given as objects of value, pleasant or unpleasant. The objects

„(...) we find them organized in a different universal structure, for which it is not what is decisive what is or is not everything, but what is or is not worth, what is more or is worth less...[things] we estimate or disregard, we prefer or postpone them – in sum, we value them. And... insofar as they are valued, they appear to be accommodated in a very broad hierarchy constituted by a perspective of value ranges“ (OC. VII, 711).

A variety of concepts that are used in everyday life to refer to things let us see this affective or valuing layer that is supposed in them. Words like „good and bad, better and worse, better and worse, valuable or invalid, precious and trivial, estimable, preferable“ and many others, have a meaning that „refers especially and exclusively to the world of values“ (OC. VII, 711).

However, the question that must necessarily be answered is: what is a value or what are values? But this question can't be answered, says Ortega, “if we don't have any concrete case of evaluation“ (OC. VII, 712). And this indication is valuable for understanding the meaning of phenomenology, since we cannot understand what things are if they do not appear to us or present themselves in some way. It is in the things themselves where we find values, it is in the things where

⁶ Въведение в една теория на ценностите (Хосе Ортега-и-Гасет, пак там: 409–432).

we are able to experience the beautiful, the ugly, the good or the bad. But values are not material things: „values are not things“.

But what are values? Values are „*ideal qualities of objects*“ (OC. VII, 729). This does not mean that values exist in an overcast place, like Plato's Ideas. The values are not given to part of the objects. Certainly, values can be separated from things through an abstraction exercise. The estimation is for Ortega a „pure and over-empirical science“ that would be in charge of the study of values understood as ideal objects. As pure science, we can think of values as separate from things; the truth is that this is an abstraction; in the immediate experience of life it does not happen. Things themselves appear as valuable things or not. In the things themselves there is a kind of „estimative profile“ that is part of their qualities. But it is also true that it is not necessary that the perception of a thing and its qualities of value are given simultaneously, but that they can be given separately, with absolute independence. We can perceive a painting or listen to a melody and not realize its beauty, not experience with them the aesthetic enjoyment that produce the things we consider beautiful. This meeting can take place at another time or, in the worst case, never come. Thus, Ortega agrees with Max Scheler when he says that „value is extrinsic to arouse feelings in us, to be the goal of appetites and to be an end of the will“ (OC. VII, 725 note).

Ortega has very much in mind „that there is no goodness or beauty that is not goodness or beauty of something“ (OC. VII, 729). In husserlian terms we can say that there is no act of consciousness (*nóesis*) that does not have as its correlative pole an object (*nóema*). In Ortega's opinion, „such acts in which value is immediately sensed exist in the conscience“ (OC. VII, 727). And this act is called estimation and, in the opposite sense, underestimating. „To estimate a thing is to realize a positive value in it: to reject it, to find its negative value... By estimating it, the object puts everything before me: it is the immediate intuition of value“ (OC. VII, 728). The value is intuited by the conscience, but always has a close relationship with things as we will see below.

Considerations on beauty

In the *Sistema de psicología* he states: „my feeling of pleasure or displeasure flows upon me, but as if coming from something that is pleasant or unpleasant“ (OC. VII, 466). What is this something that is sensed in the estimatory experiences? We sense values. These, in fact, are ideal qualities of objects, they are „unrealities“ or „virtualities“. They make sense by virtue of the subject. It is in the consciousness of value that they show themselves and it is through direct intuition that we grasp their essence.

This idea had already been put forward by Ortega in 1912 in his essay „*Variaciones sobre la circum-stantia*“ by saying that beauty „is always... a revelation, a more or less subtle intuition of a brand new reality that begins beyond all that it has been and what it is“ (OC. VII, 299). The aesthetic, however, lives on in a kind of virtual environment: „that imaginary and transcendent place, that virtual environment where the aesthetic lives cannot be found outside the real and transi-

tory“ (OC. VII, 299). Then he affirms that beauty „is not far from things but in them. In things, then, the artist surprises the aesthetic“ (OC. VII, 300).

However, in its *Introducción a una estimativa – ¿Qué son los valores?* of 1923, argues that the experience we have of values does not depend on the experience of things. How should we understand this proposition? That in some cases, we can achieve full awareness of „certain values without having to“ see „them realized in any way“. That in things the artist surprises the aesthetic can mean that the artist can start from certain intuitions, for example aesthetic values, that he knows that a painting or a poetry must have „and only then he finds the real characters“(OC. III, 545). Secondly, that the act of conscience through which we know the objects of the world around us is not the same as the act through which we know and experience values. Knowledge of values is only possible „for subjects endowed with the faculty estimative“ (OC. III, 544).

The knowledge of values, in this sense, is compared by Ortega with the knowledge of mathematical truths. Physical objects are known to us by scorches, through perspectives or series of approximations and always inadequately, but values are intuited „once and for all“, our experience of value is „absolute“ and when we see them we see them in their „integrity“. Therefore, it is stated that values are objective and in our way of experiencing them there is the part that can be considered subjective.

Spiritual values, such as the aesthetic value of beauty, are not dependent on or conditioned by the existence of objects. Indeed:

„(...) *beautiful* can be landscapes, rocks, plants, animals. And they can be full of meaning, even if they are fantastic. The painted landscape can be beautiful not only as real painting, but as such imaginary landscape. It is not, therefore, the value *beauty* (...) conditioned by the existence of an object, as happens with moral values or those of utility“ (OC. III, 547).

What we cannot go unnoticed is that the estimative or better the act of conscience that we call to estimate, is an act in which values are shown to us. But the essential uptake of values by an individual is conditioned or depends, if it can be said so, on the receptive capacity of the subject, depends on his intimacy, on how he experiences himself from within as a person. In fact, “beauty corresponds to pleasure and enthusiasm“ (OC. III, 547), therefore, through esteem we can see the aesthetic values.

Final comments

In this work we have shown the importance of aesthetics in Ortega y Gasset's philosophy. As we have seen, the Spanish philosopher wanted to understand the importance of Spanish art, especially Zuloaga's work, from the neokantian interpretation of art and this did not give him good results. So he abandoned neokantism because it seemed to him that this theory was not sincere with things. The knowledge of phenomenology during his third trip to Germany allowed him to approach aesthetics and art with new elements. The understanding of phenomenology is clearly exposed and occupies an important place to understand aesthetics and, in particular, the issues concerning ontology of value and estimative.

Ortega's contribution of the *I executive* understood as intimacy is of vital importance, because from them it is possible to see the pre-reflective sense of the I. The adoption of the intentionality of conscience allows us to see the two poles that are at stake behind each phenomenon, on the one hand, the acts of the conscience in which objects are given to us and, in turn, the objects or the sense of that which is given to us. Every conscience is conscience of something. So the conscience of the aesthetic object is conscience of an object (e. g. beauty), which is given to us in an act that Ortega calls estimative. The estimative, in fact, occupies an important place to understand not only the aesthetics, but the treatment itself with the world, with others and, for that reason, its relevance to speak of the ontology of value and ethics. Take this chapter as an approximation to a topic on which further elements can be explored, but which can serve as a guide. We have said almost nothing about art or the dehumanization of art, but several lines of this writing could expand in that direction.

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