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María Zambrano's "El hombre y lo divino": Ethics beyond Nietzsche, aesthetics with Antonioni

«El hombre y lo divino» de María Zambrano: una ética más allá de Nietzsche, una estética con Antonioni

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In *El hombre y lo divino*, María Zambrano argues, like Nietzsche, that humans cannot attain truth rationally. She adds an ethical corollary to accept such limitations. But Zambrano goes beyond Nietzsche in assuming the implications of her claim. Also, her prescription to suppose that the world has some rationally unknowable portion (along with her praise of modernist art—Schoenberg and Picasso—for discovering the unknowable) means that a logical extension of this praise, were it to contain film, might include not the Italian neorealism referenced in Zambrano's writings on cinema, but the modernist Michelangelo Antonioni.

Keywords

María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*, Michelangelo Antonioni, Italian neorealism, rationalism.

Resumen

En *El hombre y lo divino*, María Zambrano sostiene, como Nietzsche, que los seres humanos nunca alcanzarán la verdad racionalmente. Agrega un corolario ético: hay que asumir tales limitaciones. Pero Zambrano va más allá que Nietzsche al aceptar las implicaciones de su postura. Además, su demanda de suponer que hay una porción incognoscible del mundo, unida a su elogio del arte modernista (Schoenberg y Picasso) por descubrir lo incognoscible, implica que una extensión lógica de este elogio, si incluyera el cine, debería contener más que el neorrealismo italiano al que Zambrano hizo referencia en sus escritos fílmicos, al modernista Michelangelo Antonioni.

Palabras clave

María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*, Michelangelo Antonioni, neorrealismo italiano, racionalismo.

Introduction

This article makes two arguments based on the following observations: that, in *El hombre y lo divino* [hereafter, *El hombre*], María Zambrano, consciously following Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of European philosophical rationalism, makes an epistemological claim—namely, that humans cannot attain absolute truth rationally or by any other means—with the ethical corollary that humans

should accept the need to live with such epistemological limitations, embracing what Zambrano calls the “nothingness” that defies rational conceptualization.¹ By maintaining, firstly, that Zambrano goes beyond Nietzsche in assuming the implications of an essentially limited human knowledge, this article follows Ana Bundgard’s analysis of the “greater radicalness” of Zambrano’s insistence that reason will always encounter some portion of the world “shrouded in shadows”,² and Pedro Cerezo Galán’s discussion of how Zambrano went “beyond and deeper than Nietzsche” in “[stripping] the human ego of any shred of vanity”, like what Cerezo Galán calls Nietzsche’s self-aggrandizing “will to create” (as opposed to an acknowledgement of the impossibility of such creation as the generation of knowledge) in the midst of an unintelligible “original chaos”.³ Secondly, this article maintains that, given Zambrano’s ethical prescription to suppose that the world contains some unknowable portion, since Zambrano’s aesthetic philosophy explicitly praises such modernist art as “atonal music” and “the painting from certain periods of Picasso’s oeuvre” for “[making nothingness] visible”, and since these artforms reveal nothingness not through such harmonic consonance or single-point perspective as might betray excessive rational confidence but through typically uncertain dissonance and perspectival instability, then a logical extension of this list, were it to contain film, might include the modernist Michelangelo Antonioni’s ‘alienation tetralogy’: *L’avventura*, *La notte*, *Leclisse*, and *Deserto rosso*. In her scarce writings on film, Zambrano referred favorably to Italian neorealism. However, relative to the uncomplicated moral theses of Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma, città aperta* and *Germany, anno zero*, Vittorio De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette*, and Augusto Genina’s *Cielo sulla palude*, Antonioni offers better cinematic analogies to Picasso’s cubism, Schoenberg’s twelve-tone scores, or Alban Berg’s *Lulu*, whose ability to “create the inaudible” or “turn disappearance into music” Zambrano explicitly lauded.⁴

Zambrano’s epistemology

For Zambrano, humans must accept the limitations of their reason despite having a natural, even desirable aspiration to use it to find truth. She describes a hypothetical, pre-rational world where humans sense the “[overwhelming] inexorable presence of a superior force” that they “cannot identify”, which is their first contact with the sacred, or God: an unidentifiable, always invisible, higher being that “conceals reality” as it triggers what Zambrano calls a “visionary delirium”, or the paradox of humans’ first, clear-eyed rational meaning-seeking search for this awesome, elusive divine force, which is always accompanied by the madness-inducing feeling of being “watched without seeing” and unable “to see who is watching”.⁵ For Zambrano, humans’ desire to escape an original state of blindness by seeking the divine is both natural and essential to their existence, for “Man needs to see; he cannot remain in this blind

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

2. Bundgard, A., “Nietzsche y María Zambrano: nihilismo y creación”, *Aurora: papeles del Seminario María Zambrano*, n.º. 10, 2009, 25-27.

3. Cerezo Galán, P., “La muerte de dios, la nada y lo sagrado en María Zambrano.” In *María Zambrano: la visión más transparente*, González Fuentes, J. A. and Beneyto Pérez, J. M. (eds.), Madrid, Trotta, 346.

4. Zambrano, M., *Las palabras del regreso*, Gómez Blesa, M., (ed.), Madrid, Cátedra, 2009, 148.

5. Zambrano, M., *El hombre y lo divino*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012, 29.

6. *Ibid.*, 39; 91.

7. *Ibid.*, 41-42.

8. *Ibid.*, 132.

9. *Ibid.*, 78.

state". However, this step into rationalism is also limiting in that it makes humans' understanding of the world dependent not on any extra-rational reality, but on their own rationally conceived ideas, concepts, and abstractions.

Human reason is born when humans go deliriously in search of God. However, this search, along with the related endeavor to obtain truth rationally, is necessarily fruitless because God is not a discrete being, but an omnipresent one that, in Zambrano's words, "cannot be seen"—like the indiscernible God of Spinoza's pantheism, wherein God is everything and everything is God.⁶ In response to their inability to see God, humans make God appear, creating Him as an essentially rational product of the mind. God is the rational mind's first construction, and ultimately, all things existing in the world as seen by the rational subject are mental products.

Despite shortcomings of this way of seeing the world—e.g., that knowledge has no apparent basis outside the human mind—Zambrano believes that the rational thought that leads to an "appearance of the divine" is an essential step toward "mankind's being able to manifest itself as such", or "gaining a certain dose of freedom and a space in which to develop" as an essentially rational creature.⁷ Indeed, this process is both essential and beneficial, for, "in enabling the emergence of the profane world", "the divine presence introduces a degree of clarity in the more primitive, sacred world's previously undifferentiated reality". The rational mind's construction of God and the world is not entirely a bad thing, for without mentally constructed categories, concepts, and abstractions, human life is impossible. Moreover, Zambrano hypothesizes not only that "the greatness of human culture is due to humans' ability to make God appear" and depends on reason's so enabling man to make sense of the chaos into which, according to Zambrano's hypothetical, pre-rational world, humans are born, but also, more extremely, that "there has been no great historical action, none of those temporal monuments we call 'cultures', that has not been accompanied, as an essential element, by humans' first suffering and then creating God".⁸ Humans are thus fatefully gripped between delirium, or the torment of being watched but unable to see what or who is watching them, and the subsequent rational construction of their environment that forces them to live in a world whose truth they themselves have rationally generated. Humans cannot remain in a state of delirium and so their work to understand, by means of reason, their originally chaotic surroundings "saves" them, as Zambrano put it, from such an unendurable existence.⁹ But it also "condemns" them, by making their connection to reality exclusively mediated by their own, essentially inexact mental constructs.

So, Zambrano critiques not human reason *per se*, essential and beneficial as it is, but any use of it that mistakes rational constructions for reality itself, or ignores that reason is initially triggered not

by the human mind, but an ever-present God and the delirium provoked by the sacred presence. For Zambrano, humans—particularly in the modern West—have indeed not adequately recognized God’s original role in rational thought, and have taken inappropriate credit as artificers of their world. In effect, they have replaced God, but in so doing have left themselves alone and isolated in the world. Having broken all “contact with God”, Zambrano argues, and ceasing thus to be “recipients of anything coming from above or anywhere else”, they have found themselves in the precarious position of being their only, solipsistic point of reference, out of touch with anything “that does not emerge from themselves”.¹⁰ In such solitude, having confronted the limits of their reason—which are set at least in part by an unknowable divinity—humans have predictably lost their bearings and sunk into nihilism, as Nietzsche had already observed. Zambrano cites the Roman poet Lucretius’s declaration that “if God exists, He does not concern himself with mankind” as a relevant articulation (nearly two millennia before the publication of *El hombre*) of modernity’s nihilistic tendency and of what Zambrano calls the “emptiness” characteristic of the human experience lived in epistemological, God-less isolation.¹¹ Zambrano warns that humans’ ignoring sacredness—which, based on God’s presumed original existence, must be “in fact more a denial of humanity itself than of the divine”—must harmfully condemn humankind constantly “to feel a void in the universe”, and so “to lose its being and turn slowly into an image of nothingness, a voiceless echo, a reflection of hollowness”.

10. *Ibid.*, 163.11. *Ibid.*, 142.12. *Ibid.*, 144.13. *Ibid.*, 166.

In addition to lamenting modern solitude and nihilism, Zambrano denounces the rational subject’s hubris in setting itself up as the epistemological center of the universe, forgetting God’s role in the birth of human reason. On this account, rational subjects are arrogant creatures, who seek in isolation to assert rational freedom, and inauthentically seek “to transcend that which is properly human”, or humanity’s necessarily tragic condition, according to which humans do not enjoy “pure freedom, without suffering, without tragedy” but are fated to “experience their freedom tragically” as coexistence with the unknown and unknowable.¹² Against such a rational subject, Zambrano asserts that humans attain freedom not by severing the bonds tying them to their circumstances, but in a more Spinozian (or perhaps Orteguian) sense, by being conscious of necessity and embracing their circumstances, both of which include God. Nineteenth-century idealism—which, in Zambrano’s view, “took the knowing subject to its most extreme limit” by making “Cartesian clarity [...] its ultimate horizon”, having the rational mind self-referentially “locate in itself any necessary guarantee of its existence”, and defining Kant’s “transcendental subject” as the source of “absolute knowledge”—represents in *El hombre* the greatest manifestation of the hubris of human reason and, in Zambrano’s decidedly modest philosophy, a paradigm to overcome.¹³

14. Nietzsche, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Trans. R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Penguin Publishing, 1961, 129; 44.

15. Nietzsche, F., *The Gay Science*, Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 194.

Zambrano's ethics: beyond Nietzsche

Zambrano's discussion of modernity's allegedly hubristic, free rational subject, marks the beginning of the theory of ethics she proposes to a society that, dominated by philosophical rationalism, has turned away from the sacred. She calls for overcoming the self-referential nature of rationalism and reestablishing contact with sacredness, or with the epitome of otherness that, driving humans to make use of their own reason as it places them face to face with the unknowable, resists humans' attempts to appropriate it for themselves. Zambrano urges humankind to accept a tragic fate to coexist with that which reason cannot comprehend—the unknowable that manifests itself as what Zambrano calls "voids" and "nothingness".

Zambrano develops a theory of ethics whose point of departure is an ideal human who accepts reason's limitations and embraces the need to coexist with the sacred, or rational voids or nothingness, without trying to conceptualize or eliminate them from her worldview. In developing this theory, Zambrano recognizes a debt to Nietzsche, incorporating several Nietzschean concepts, such as the German philosopher's own ideal *Übermensch*, eternal recurrence, and proclamation that God is dead. However, as I will discuss after a brief exposition on Nietzsche, Zambrano is nonetheless convinced that her ethical theory goes further than Nietzsche's in rediscovering man's original condition, or accepting the implications of humans' epistemological limitations.

Developed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* rejects certain metaphysical answers to questions about truth, such as Plato's positing that truth resides in the world of the Forms, or Christianity's placement of truth in divine revelation. For Nietzsche, while Plato and Christianity lead humans to disdain the mundane as essentially untrue, the *Übermensch* Zarathustra more desirably affirms his love not for those who "first seek beyond the stars" but "sacrifice themselves to the Earth".¹⁴

If the *Übermensch* proclaims an unequivocal love for worldly life, the eternal recurrence—a concept Nietzsche introduced in his 1882 book *The Gay Science* and developed further a year later in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—is a thought experiment intended to make humans ask themselves whether, if "a demon were to steal after [them] into [their] loneliest loneliness" and say, "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more", they would "curse the demon who spoke thus" or, owing to a love for worldly existence as great as Zarathustra's, they would answer: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine".¹⁵ Eternal recurrence is not a metaphysical affirmation according to which the same series of events occurs in an endless cycle, but a hypothetical question that Nietzsche puts to humanity, asking whether it could endure repeating the same life

ad infinitum, thus bearing what Nietzsche called “the heaviest weight”.¹⁶ For Nietzsche, to respond affirmatively is the ultimate rejection of certainty-seeking rational metaphysics and confirmation of one’s love of life. Of course, Platonists and Christians could not accept this challenge and also remain consistent with the worldviews of their respective systems of belief—Platonists would prefer to discover the world of the Forms and Christians would prefer heavenly union with God to the eternal recurrence of their time spent on Earth.

A main objective of Nietzsche’s philosophy is to encourage humans to attend to the reality of the world around them, rather than imagining more pleasing alternatives. Nietzsche believes that, by imagining the possibility of eternal recurrence, one equips himself with the kind of mental fortitude necessary to live well in this world, having been freed from the temptation of idealizing other possible worlds, whose presumed existence assuages the pain of existing in this one.

Another Nietzschean concept, the death of God, serves a similar purpose. The phrase “God is dead” appeared first in *The Gay Science*, notably in section 125, entitled *The Madman*, which is a parable about a hysterical man who runs into a town square to announce the title’s shocking news. Like the challenge of the eternal recurrence, the announcement that God is dead defies modern individuals to live without looking beyond the physical world for answers to questions or alleviation of suffering. By stating that “we”, modern humanity, “have killed [God]”, Nietzsche makes clear that he is not making a theological proposition, but describing the reality that Christian doctrine—“[w]hat was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned”—is, in fact, no longer Western civilization’s authoritative moral foundation, having “bled to death under our knives”.¹⁷ In God’s absence, Western civilization is devoid of ethical authority, and Nietzsche asks readers how the West should go about reconstructing its moral bearings. The danger of a world without God, or some such morally authoritative system, is a lack of a common notion of justice. Nietzsche draws our attention to the contemporary existence of this void and (despite openly speculating whether the “greatness of [the] deed” of divine murder that created the void is “too great for us”) urges our reflection on how it should be filled. Significantly, he appears to insinuate a response to his exhortation in the last question the madman puts to the townspeople: “Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of [God’s death at the hands of man]?” Perhaps the future of Western civilization will depend on the emergence of people that fill God’s void, living not by religious doctrine, but self-imposed morality.

Nietzsche and Zambrano’s philosophies react to fundamentally similar stimuli and pursue similar objectives. Both react to a civiliza-

16. *Ibid.*, 195.

17. Nietzsche, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op.cit.*, 129.

18. Zambrano, M., *El hombre y lo divino*, *op.cit.*, 20.
 19. *Ibid.*, 148.
 20. *Ibid.*, 147.

tion that no longer looks to God for answers, and both propose methods of living without the comforting cohesiveness of a shared concept of the divine. However, Zambrano points to two basic points of divergence between Nietzsche and herself—first, that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* errs as rationalism did by filling the void left by God with a theoretically limitless human consciousness; second, that announcing God's death implies a confirmation of God's existence, at least as a product of humans' imagination or object of love.

According to Zambrano, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, like the modern rational subject, will, in his attempt to fill God's void, necessarily confront his own limitations. We might even understand Nietzsche as a continuation of the very rationalist-idealist paradigm he sought to dismantle. Rationalism exalts human reason to the point of denying God, but, Zambrano writes, Nietzsche fills the void left by God by "dreaming of the advent of a god born of himself".¹⁸ There is thus little difference between a God-like *Übermensch* and the deification of reason characteristic of rationalism. Both imply a life that projects itself into the future at the expense of a better understanding of one's immediate surroundings, or Orteguian circumstances. Indeed, in her critique of the *Übermensch*, Zambrano bolsters her argument with a reference to Ortega's critique of post-Cartesian philosophy's scant concern for man's circumstances and its "futurismo"—or its tendency to situate humans' perfect realization in the future, when reason may have yielded a more complete understanding of the world. Zambrano suggests that we should understand Nietzsche similarly, or as privileging the future over the present, for it is precisely "the future reality of this *Übermensch* that fills the void left by the disappearance of 'the other world'".

So, in Zambrano's reading of Nietzsche, God's existence is denied but again manifested as a human desire to emulate divine perfection. Humans may naïvely think that distancing themselves from God constitutes liberation from metaphysical constraints, but, according to Zambrano, the opposite is true—by separating themselves from or "killing God", humans lose what they love most; they "kill love".¹⁹ When Nietzsche announces that God is dead, he implicitly laments that God, the object of humanity's love, no longer exists; humans no longer have an ideal to which to aspire.²⁰ To further illustrate this idea, let us recall Zambrano's description of humanity's move from pre-rationalism to rationalism. Humans first use reason in attempting to identify God, or the persistent presence of the sacred they sense but cannot see. Humans fear this presence as what Zambrano describes as "the ultimate resistance to the divinization of humanity", but they no less adore it as constant, life-affirming stimulation of their desire to be one with God. And if Nietzsche, unable to tolerate separation between himself and the object of his love, aspires to eliminate it, or, as Zambrano alleges, "to immerse

himself in God, and so to be identical to God”, so that “there might be no difference between divine life and ours”, Zambrano, for her part, invites humanity to suppose the necessary existence of such a difference, or the impossibility of communion with the divine.²¹

21. *Ibid.*, 148.

22. *Ibid.*, 187.

23. *Ibid.*, 174; 180-81.

24. *Ibid.*, 185-86.

Zambrano’s aesthetics: with Antonioni

El hombre names the insuperable distance between God and humanity nothingness, or that unknowable, “irreducible space that human freedom encounters in seeking to be absolute”.²² In ethical terms, Zambrano calls on humans to reject any rationalist urge to comprehend such an essentially enigmatic void and fatally to accept their being in limbo between the desire to know and the presence of the incognoscible, which “cannot be made into an idea [...] cannot be thought”, and so resists rational apprehension, being “never still”, “never the same”, always “ambiguous”.²³ And Zambrano accompanies this epistemologically-based moral injunction with corresponding aesthetic approval of what she generally refers to as “modern art”, or, more specifically, “atonal music” and “the painting from certain periods of Picasso’s oeuvre”, which strive to render nothingness manifest by tapping into its ever changing, “irremediable dissonance”, or “bringing contrary elements together without fully joining them” and, thus, embracing “dissonance without resolution”.²⁴

A final hypothesis that I will explore is whether Zambrano’s ethics might find more adequate aesthetic expression not in Italian neorealism—which occupies a significant portion of her little writing on film—but in Antonioni’s ‘alienation tetralogy’, a major achievement in Italian film from a decade after the neorealist titles referenced by Zambrano. It must be so if it is the case that the neorealist *Roma: Open City*, *Germany: Year Zero*, and *Bicycle Thieves*—by relying, like Western tonal (not atonal) music or like one-point perspective (not Picasso-style) painting, on what one might think of as the harmonic consonance or relative clarity of moral perspective of traditional narrative structures—do not exhibit Antonioni’s cinematic analogies of atonal music’s dissonant harmonies or cubist allusions to a reality that is, quoting Zambrano, “never still” or always “bringing contrary elements [e.g. perspectives] together without fully joining them”.

Antonioni’s tetralogy renders visible what Zambrano calls reality’s “irremediable dissonance” by suggesting, in *L’avventura*, the improbability of structuring a story around a single character, Anna, who, despite appearing alone in the opening scene, does no more to announce what we might call this film’s tonic key than does *Lulu*’s basic tone row. In fact, as in Berg’s largely atonal opera—where the basic row’s initial C natural is transposed to the start of *Lulu*’s characteristic row’s second ascending 4-note set or deep in Alwa’s unique series, which strings together every seventh note of the basic sequence—in *L’avventura*, it is only through a cinematic analogy of

25. Zambrano, M., *El hombre y lo divino*, *op.cit.*, 185.

26. *Ibid.*, 184.

melodic variation, not harmonic structure, that Anna, following her sudden, early disappearance, resonates throughout the film: like when Claudia, a blonde, wears a dark wig to resemble her lost friend or when Claudia and Sandro, Anna's boyfriend, make increasingly seldom and perfunctory attempts to find her, before apparently forgetting her altogether.

Like Antonioni's beginnings—which, as Berg and Schoenberg's Second Viennese School did in music, broke with conventional narrative rules in film by not being primarily concerned with establishing durable themes—the middle sections of his films present the sort of non-hierarchical, horizontally-organized abundance of detail one finds in the optimally diverse pitch sequences of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, in such modernist art as Picasso's "Three Musicians" or the color fields of Mark Rothko (a kindred spirit of Antonioni in painting), or, through an ethical-aesthetic prescription, in Zambrano's call for an art whose source of "harmony" or "unity" is its sheer "plenitude" of surface information,²⁵ where all elements, by virtue of their being "never still", "never the same", and always "ambiguous", are also "without reference" or, as in a typical twelve-tone row, self-referential. Zambrano's plenitude—which I propose to understand as a state of unity where all things, including nothingness, achieve discreteness and mutual independence—characterizes the cinematography of Lidia's long walk through Milan in *La notte*, where Antonioni's signature *tempi morti*, or "dead time", alert the audience to a reality beyond the relatively narrow, plot or character-focused perspective one finds in *Rome: Open City's* conflict between righteous Romans and evil Nazis, or in *Germany: Year Zero's* focalization of post-War Berlin through the eyes of an adolescent boy. There is plenitude in *L'eclisse's* famous final sequence, where previously seen people, places, and things appear again not in service of plot or character development, but, as Zambrano might say, "unattached". And so it is in Picasso's "Three Musicians"—which, like René Magritte's "The Treachery of Images", really depicts just an abundance of independent lines, shapes, and colors that the viewer's mind assembles into a musical trio—and in *Pierrot Lunaire's* "*sprechstimme*", whereby (as in how Antonioni's camera captures both Lidia's plot-driving Milanese jaunt and the conventionally superfluous space outside her fictional world) Schoenberg, revealing aesthetically what Zambrano calls those things that, though believed "[to be] nothing", "are something",²⁶ accentuates both steady musical pitch and its absence by fleetingly suggesting and eliminating it from the vocalist's part. But such is not the case in *Bicycle Thieves*, in whose musical score harmonically consonant major and minor melodies repeatedly condition viewers' emotional responses, and in whose highly artificial, if extremely moving, final scenes, there is a neat coherence of all cinematic elements in service of the story's message: including recurring shots of a coveted bicycle set to tension-inducing music; Antonio's failed attempt to steal that bicycle, which underlines the injustice of another man's earlier,

successful robbery of Antonio's own, vitally necessary means of transportation; and the anonymous crowds' criss-crossing Rome, whose interaction with Antonio and Bruno is by turns punitive (berating the former for his misdeed) and indifferent (mechanically walking alongside the father and son, coldly inattentive to their need). Zambrano's plenitudinous abundance is thus typical not of neorealism but of such modern art as the atonal music and non-figurative art that she references elsewhere, as well as of Antonioni's cinema, which effectively pursues similar aesthetic goals as its modernist counterparts in other art media.

In "El cine como sueño", one of Zambrano's few texts on film, cinema (and specifically neorealist, "postwar Italian cinema") is favorably compared to all other artforms for its special ability to capture life's "many faces" and "smallest fleeting gestures", and for doing so with exceptional "simplicity and immediacy".²⁷ To be sure, such an assertion of neorealism's naivete is certainly supported by the fact that it often features the candor of documentary film and the unaffected social and psychological diversity of non-professional actors. However, despite Zambrano's praise of neorealism's "not seeming to have any artifice", Genina's directorial hand is clear from *Heaven over the Marshes*'s first frames, in which a presumably reliable narrator eloquently extols the virtues of characters yet to appear on screen, whose suffering is made more moving and noble by a visibly bleak landscape, the obvious indignity of which seems intended to condition viewers' moral assessment of the drama to follow. And though, for Zambrano, Genina's film is so true to life that Ines Orsini "does not 'play' Maria Goretti, but herself",²⁸ it is rather Antonioni—who said his movies, like the modernist paintings of Mark Rothko, were "about nothing, but with precision"—whose works more accurately (or precisely) represent Zambrano's teeming reality of "faces" and "gestures", and do so, according to Zambrano's ethical prescription that humans acknowledge the unknowable, not by telling rationally-structured, realist stories like *Heaven over the Marshes* or *Bicycle Thieves*, but through what has been called Antonioni's "non-figurative spontaneity",²⁹ or what, quoting Zambrano, we might call his stories' apparent "simplicity" and seemingly unrehearsed "immediacy".

To see a Rothko painting or a film by Antonioni is to be instructed in Zambrano's ethics; that is, to confront immediately the "many faces" and "smallest fleeting gestures" of reality's plenitude. Like twelve-tone melodies, Rothko's color fields—which lack focal points, or anything facilitating an understanding of the whole, just as *Rome: Open City*'s opening and closing panoramas of Italy's capital straightforwardly affirms that city's role as a battleground between liberty and tyranny—establish no hierarchy of aesthetic elements and so invite exhaustive observation of their rich chromatic textures and, implicitly, the world beyond them. No wonder Rothko did not want frames around his pieces, in which he meant to

27. Zambrano, M., *Las palabras del regreso*, *op.cit.*, 301.

28. *Ibid.*, 304.

29. Gandy, M., "Landscapes of Deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's 'Red Desert'", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28.2.2003, 229.

30. Rothko, M., Gottlieb, A., and Newman, B., "Brief manifesto: Mark Rothko with Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman", *The New York Times*, June 13, 1943.

31. Zambrano, M., *El hombre y lo divino*, *op. cit.*, 186.

"reassert the picture [plane's] [...] flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth".³⁰ Likewise, Antonioni's *La notte* deliberately eschews any sense of illusionistic, artificial completeness inherent in such cinematic frames as *Rome: Open City*'s bookending cityscapes or *Heaven over the Marshes*'s unambiguously Christian ending. It does so by shifting visual focus away from what might have been the film's conventional resolution—namely, Giovanni and Lidia's marital reconciliation—to an open field, whose physical vastness and thematic independence from the human drama suggest that this story is not only about the titular night in the characters' lives. It is also about an immeasurable extra-filmic reality impossible fully to grasp, if eminently worthy of philosophical reflection aimed at "[revealing]" Rothko's "truth".

So, Antonioni and Rothko are examples of Zambrano's preference that art communicate (or posit) ideas not as directly (or positively) as Genina's plainly pious finale or the morally repugnant hardships of the blamelessly destitute Antonio in *Bicycle Thieves*, a morally disoriented Edmund in *Germany: Year Zero*, or Christ-like Giorgio in *Rome: Open City*. Rather, in the "creative movement" of Zambrano's ideal art, "a conception's positivity depends on its negativity"³¹—in other words, aesthetic meaning derives, at least partially, from what is not put forward directly. On looking at Rothko's *No. 1: Royal Red and Blue*, an initial, naïve impression that it lacks depth should subsequently cast our view entirely across the canvas, catching over time myriad details of overlapping colors at the rectangles' edges, which enable a more intense, because delayed, appreciation of a most subtle third dimension—measuring only a thin layer of paint, and all the richer for having at first escaped the eye. Absence thus makes presence possible, or, quoting Zambrano, "negativity emerges positively", as in *Deserto rosso*'s scene of several characters' gathering in the awkwardly reduced space of an almost entirely red interior. Without background reference points or much sense of spatial depth, viewers are meant to scour the surface interaction of characters whose individuality and relative differences—like Rothko's colors (or the several paintings in Henri Matisse's *Red Studio*, whose solidly red interior and emphasis on painting's typical two-dimensionality influenced Rothko)—assume a degree of relief by way of mutual contrast that may be starker than, and is surely different from, what would be the case in traditional linear perspective. So it is from what Zambrano might call the "negativity" of the absence of naturalistic depth that there can "[emerge] positively" Matisse's suggested equation of humanity and nature in the works featured in *Red Studio*, seemingly infinite tones of red and blue in Rothko's *No. 1: Royal Red and Blue*, and *Deserto rosso*'s unsettled, nuanced juxtaposition of Giuliana's strange behavior (presumably triggered by her mental instability) and the not dissimilar strangeness of Corrado's demeanor, which is probably best explained by his fear of public revelation of his romantic interest in Giuliana, the wife of his business partner, Ugo.

Conclusion

Zambrano's ethics—according to which humans, ideally less self-assured than Nietzsche's Zarathustra, should be so epistemologically modest as to not extend their being into incognoscible divine space, or, in Zambrano's words, not to thus “seek to be absolutely”—has an aesthetic corollary that praises those artists who, with similar humility, stop short of the kind of confident moral affirmations or rationally accessible narratives typical of neorealist cinema and, quoting Zambrano, prefer rather not to “say” things directly, but merely “insinuate that which lies beyond all that can be said”.³² Though Zambrano never refers explicitly to Antonioni in her writings on cinema, she certainly captures in philosophy what the Italian master did in his four films discussed above, in which, as Donata Panizza has put it, each frame, like the lines, shapes, and colors making up Picasso's “Three Musicians”, is an “independent image” related to the others by mere “contiguity”, not “causality”.³³ Effectively, the space between Antonioni's often randomly, not logically connected takes—such as a trademark cut in *L'eclisse* between the low-angle shot of Vittoria looking up and beyond the camera toward her friend Anita calling her name at Verona airport, and an unrelated, adjacent scene on the steps of the Roman stock exchange that purposefully fails to follow the logical progression that would have shown viewers Vittoria's perspective upon raising her glance—is like that space separating two notes in one of Berg's twelve-tone scales, or like two facial features in a cubist portrait. Indeed, it is like artforms for which Zambrano made her affinity clear. Contiguous, not causal, this space is, finally, like the invisible causal link between David Hume's billiard balls, or the indistinct boundary separating knowable and unknowable, profane and sacred realms of an equally epistemologically cautious, Humean Zambrano. It is, to be sure, something that, “[lying] beyond all that can be said”, can only be alluded to, or, with Zambrano, [“insinuated”], but never the object of rational comprehension.

32. *Ibid.*, 187.

33. Panizza, D., “The Lady Vanishes: Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* and Photography”, *Photographies*, 7, 1, 2014, 85.