

# Cross the Line: Goya and Kant - Between the 18th and 19th Centuries



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After Goya, and to a large degree as a consequence of his work, art would increasingly define the conditions of its own possibility through its attempt to carry on with the practice of painting once the ethic of painting had been destroyed.<sup>†</sup>

The motif is familiar in Goya's *oeuvre*—a line, that cuts across the image, dividing the paper, canvas, or etched and/or aquatinted copper plate into two distinct yet, for all that, indeterminate planes or volumes. The line appears in virtually all of Goya's *Desastres de la guerra* collection of small paintings (1810-1812), although it is already evident in his *Caprichos*, published in 1799. The line of division, of course, has its variations. In *Pobrecitas* (*Caprichos*, plate 22), it has been rendered slightly blurred or indistinct, with the etched lines fading into the aquatinted area. In *Las rinde el Sueño* (*Caprichos*, plate 34), it is an arch with etched lines along its border, suggesting the thickness of a wall.<sup>1</sup> In *Ensayos* (*Caprichos*, plate 60), we cannot say for certain that the darker area is even a wall; and in *Duendecitos* (*Caprichos*, plate 49; see figure 1) the arch is a clumsy, hastily-scrawled etched broken line. The division does not even have to take on the motif of a wall. In *De qué mal morirá* (*Caprichos*, plate 40), a curtain suffices. In *El Vergonsozo* (*Caprichos*, plate 54), it disappears altogether, creating the effect of chiaroscuro, that is, of light streaming in from outside the illusionary space, and being diffused into an otherwise darkened area.

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<sup>†</sup> Cf. A. Cascardi, "The Ethics of Enlightenment: Goya and Kant," *Philosophy and Literature* 15 (1991) 189-211.

<sup>1</sup> Enumeration of these etchings corresponds to the original series by the artist. See *Goya: His Complete Etchings*.

Goya would return to this edge (subdued by the play of etching and aquatint in the *Caprichos*) ten years later, in the *Desastres de la guerra*, but with the brightness taking on a harsher tone: witness, for example, *Ni por esas* (*Caprichos*, plate 11), or *Ya no hay tiempo* (see figure 2). The latter, in particular, shows the drama of this division, as it plays across a woman's face, emerging from shadow to the full awareness of an approaching death. To speak of light and darkness in these works as a "war of oppositions" or even a "dialectic" of Reason and Unreason would be here unfair not only to Goya, but to all the artists before him who were artists before they were philosophers. If the line is to be situated in the context of Goya's work, it would seem to appear at first as an outright contradiction to the trajectory of his career as an artist. Over the span of the latter half of his life (after 1792) he sought in his drawings, etchings/aquatints, and paintings, to dissolve the line dividing light and darkness; and in that way to deepen our awareness of light's dispersion in a darkened room or in the play of tones and halftones on an aquatinted plate whose figures would emerge out of or return like phantoms into a Stygian night. This effect, as Goya's critics will constantly reiterate, was no doubt in part inspired by artists such as Rembrandt or Velázquez, both of whom Goya was said to admire.

How, then, can the reintroduction of the line as a stark division between darkness and light be understood? Why, after centuries of artists had endeavored to dissolve, relativize, reduce the importance of the line—perhaps beginning with Giotto's subordination of the line to a point somewhere just beyond our field of vision—does Goya deliberately bring the line back into the image: at times to highlight its lack of purpose (as in *Duendecitos*, plate 40), at times to invoke its sovereign power to frame and delineate our field of vision? This paper is an extended meditation on the line, and its relation to light and knowledge as they were conceived in Western art and Enlightenment (particularly Kantian) philosophy. Perhaps in doing so we can begin to understand how these subjects bear upon Goya's passion for experimentation in various methods of artistic media and for learning new techniques: a passion which, as Pierre Gassier proposes, drove Goya to Paris (passing through Bordeaux for three days, 1824, and returning there to settle for four years) when he was already seventy-eight years old, to learn the new art of lithography from the lithographers who had taught José María Cardano (the director of the first lithographic printing works in

Madrid in 1819).<sup>2</sup>



“The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in an empty space.”<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, the function of the line had changed by Goya's time. Perhaps, as Goya's interiors seem to suggest, the line had acquired entirely new powers. Let us take one manifestation of the line (perhaps one of the most common) in Goya, the arch of a wall. By and large, Goya's arches certainly do not frame the image as, for example, they do in paintings of the High Italian Renaissance. Neither does Goya seem to have a “Mannerist” intent, which would involve the deliberate displacement of an arch, using the rules of single-point perspective in order to reveal their limits or failings. Nor again do the arches refer to the monumental arches, sometimes depicted in ruins, that run through Italian Baroque and French Neoclassical paintings. As a final example, these arches more often than not offer no sense of symmetry of the background that might highlight a tension between it and the asymmetry of the foreground, as this design is dialectically played out in Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii*.

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, sometimes the line lies so subtly behind the aquatinted play of light and shadow that one would be hard pressed to find the exact origin of so stark a division. No doubt Goya found it supremely ironic that one's imagination could be dominated by the (im)possibility of seeing one line in an image dominated by lines,

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<sup>2</sup>“Of course, there were political and emotional reasons for his departure from Spain; but, leaving these aside, it has always seemed a matter for surprise that he should have left so hastily for Paris only three days after his arrival in Bordeaux.” The event is documented in Pierre Cassier, *The Drawings of Goya* (The Complete Albums), tr. Robert Allen and James Emmons (London, England: Thames and Hudson, 1973).

<sup>3</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introd. III.B 8-9. Throughout the text by CPR and CJ, respectively, I will be referring to the English translations of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), trans. by Norman Kemp-Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965 (1929)); and *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. by James Creed Meredith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988 (1952)).

hatched and cross-hatched upon a copper plate to create variations of shade. Yet the entirety of Kantian philosophy depends upon our discernment of the line, and upon the line's ability to maintain a distinction between the specificity of one kind of intuition, faculty, category, proposition—in short, the specificity of one kind of experience—and another. Perhaps of even greater importance is the question of what can and cannot be experienced at all; for behind Kant's rigorously nuanced system of what can be known there lies the vast night of the unknowable thinghood of things, as dense and impenetrable as any of Goya's silhouettes, bathed as they are in a brightness that renders them all the more imperceptible, mute, anonymous. From our point of perspective, in paintings like *The Plague Hospital*, or *The Interior of a Prison* (see figure 3), both of which represent products of Enlightened reform, we come from that darkness (indicated by the foreground), perhaps seated or in a crouched position, as the perspective of these paintings would lead us to believe. And we stare stonily at the effects of a chiaroscuro seen from the wrong side, where we are dispossessed of the play of hues, shades, and colors (if only we came from the light!) for bare outlines, shadows and silhouettes, figures stripped of grace and subtlety.

As is well known, the dissolution of the line, or at least the assumptions that would render the function of the line obsolete in Western art, begins with the Renaissance development of linear and single-point perspective. For with the creation of an illusionary three-dimensional space, objects would need the element of tone and shadow to supplement their existence and participation in a perspectival image. Eric Auerbach hypothesizes that pre-Renaissance representation in painting entailed a literal mimesis of the represented image by the representation: lines constituted or separated bodies and objects insofar as bodies and objects were seen to exist as separate entities in "waking" life.<sup>4</sup> However, the abstraction of the line to create an illusionary depth by fixing the viewer's eye to a point in the painting would only be maintained by the complicity of all represented bodies to that primary relation, a complicity achieved only by the deployment of composition as the interdependence of all individual representations to a representation of the

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<sup>4</sup>Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

whole. Heinrich Wölfflin, in his classic *Principles of Art History*, is thus able to propose a theory of art based upon “styles” (individual, national, period) that were nevertheless developed along general lines<sup>5</sup>—from the linear to the “painterly,” plane to recession, closed to open form, multiplicity to unity, absolute to relative clarity of the subject. Development in art (and art history) becomes possible with, on the one hand, the abstraction of the line to an invisible one, stretched taut between the viewer and the perspectival point organizing the third dimension, in conformity with the illusion of all other perspectival lines converging upon this point; and, on the other, the corollary configurative (as opposed to literal) representation of space. Through the deliteralization of the line on one level and its re-literalization on an abstract one, bodies are unhinged from their anchor in the logic of direct one-to-one correspondences (e.g. “this is a man, here is a picture of him, with other men”) and rendered subject to the infinite regress of a purely virtual source which recuperates and binds the sense of all representations (now “secondary” to the point of perspective) to its sovereign law.

However, the well-documented dispersal of this point, this abstraction of the line, throughout the centuries following the Renaissance, by means of various effects of light or *trompe-l'oeil* (I refer once again to Wölfflin’s book), does not mean that the point and the line have ceased to reign supreme: they are implied in every effect of chiaroscuro by the late da Vinci or Caravaggio, every shimmering surface in El Greco, every foreshortened limb of Hals or Rembrandt, every blurred object of Vermeer’s *camera obscura*.<sup>6</sup> The difference, as Wölfflin reiterates

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<sup>5</sup>Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1915; reprinted in 1930).

<sup>6</sup>Johannes or Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) was known to have used this device, which is a box with the open side facing the scene which the artist will depict, and a little hole on the opposite end for the painter’s gaze to peer through. This technique already presupposes a perspective that is not organized by abstract lines but by delimited space. The *camera obscura* also revealed a peculiar quality of vision; namely, that the objects furthest from the eye’s orientation will appear blurred or distorted. Hence was achieved a new way of capturing the eye (by blurring the edges) in representation. Velazquez’ solution was to blur everything in accordance with the eye’s central orientation to an object or group in a painting, thus complicit in coercing the eye at once toward a central point from which all other points reveal themselves in a startling clarity. See, for example, “*The Art of Painting*,” date unknown (he died in 1675).

unerringly, lies in the fact that what is rigorously ordered by a strict and uncompromising geometrical form in the high Italian Renaissance (in the case of perspective painting, the shape is conical or pyramidal) could be achieved by abandoning an imitation of perspectival space and miming instead the effects of *visual perception*. Such an illusion is carried to its extreme in painters such as Johannes Vermeer or Diego Velázquez of the seventeenth-century.

To take the famous *Las meninas* of the latter artist as an example, the painting as a whole provides us with the remarkable illusion of an artist's studio. By placing the illusory source of painted light in the foreground, the paint (which literally reflects the "real" light of a gallery or room) is able to illuminate the illusory room by its capacity to reflect the light necessary for the viewer to see the painting in the first place. Velázquez, then, is literally paralleling or "mimicking" the dispersion of "our" light, onto the painting. The interaction of "real" and painted light effects an equilibrium between our light and Velázquez' light, in a symmetry matched only by the arrangement of shapes, bodies, and gazes (all of which Michel Foucault described so brilliantly in his first chapter of *The Order of Things*<sup>7</sup>). Yet if our eyes focus upon any one particular aspect of the painting, the illusion comes undone. The bright carnation on the little Doña Margarita becomes a clumsy splotch of white and pink, anything but a flower; the pattern in her dress vanishes into a sea of cream-colored silk or satin; and her hand, upon close inspection, seems to possess more than five fingers.

Such a mode of representation, the mimicry of visual perception, must certainly have informed the Enlightenment philosopher John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690]. Locke's observation would serve to reverse the subordination of light to the line, as it would the mimicry of appearances to reality. It is now light that provides the art work with an internal illusory cohesion, an "inside" light that is nevertheless an effect of the outside. Where once we needed the line to guide us into the work of art, we rely instead upon a field of light, and the way which our eyes receive these rays of light as they are refracted from the painting. Jacques Lacan points out that "The essence of the relations between appearance and being... is not in the straight

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (ch. 1), trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books., 1973 [1966]).

line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which all reflections pour forth.”<sup>8</sup> His analysis shows that despite the disappearance of the line it continues to exist, to *subsist* as it were, in the multiple inflections of light and darkness that register in the viewer’s field of vision. To put it another way, one’s field of vision is no longer ordered by *visible* lines (still very much present in the late Renaissance); instead, the field of vision as infinite points of light *orders* vision. The abstract line between viewer and point of perspective has itself become abstracted; the line has come to signify every single aspect in one’s field of vision.

Kant, more than anyone, understands that the line as a principle for discernment cannot be perceived solely in concrete terms, i.e. as the discernment of form or appearance, or as abstract space or gaze. Indeed, the line in Kant is originary and abstract; indeed, it may be called the first abstraction, insofar as only the line is capable of giving to the imagination the representation of space and time by means of analogy. For Kant, space and time were unrepresentable: they *give* our imagination (or perception) the power to form experiences, without themselves being in and of themselves experiences. Hence, the line as a representation of space and time could only point to their significance by analogy, without this analogy in any way claiming to represent what at bottom was unrepresentable. Kant writes,

“To know anything in space (for instance, a line), I must *draw* it and thus synthetically bring into being a determinate combination of the given manifold, so that the unity of this act is at the same time the unity of consciousness (as in the concept of the line); and it is through the unity of consciousness that an object (a determinate space) is first known” (*CPR*, I. §17.B137-8)

“We represent a time-sequence by a line, progressing to infinity in which the manifold constitutes a series of one-dimension only; and we reason from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with this one exception, that while the parts of the line are simultaneous, the points of time are always successive.” (*CPR*, §6.B60).

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<sup>8</sup>Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Dover Books, 1978 [1973]), p. 94.

While emphasizing the analogous character of the line as space or time, Kant at the same time finds himself relying upon the act of drawing one to illustrate the manner in which the unrepresentable (space and time) connect with the categories of thought (which are the bases of transcendental deduction) in a moment of intuition. The synthetic moment of bridging the two thus comes as a paradoxical one, insofar as it assumes that at some point in the moment of the act, the unrepresentable has entered into representation. This paradox is illustrated in what he calls a figurative synthesis:

We cannot think a line without drawing it in thought ... Even time itself we cannot represent, save in so far as we attend, in the drawing of a straight line ... merely to the act of the synthesis of the manifold whereby we successively determine inner sense, and in so doing attend to the succession of this determination in inner sense ... The understanding does not, therefore, find in inner sense such a combination of the manifold, but produces it, in that it affects that sense (CPR, §24.B154-155).

The concept of the line again acts as the bridge between outer and inner sense. In drawing the line, Kant opens the field of investigating outer appearances to the inner sanctum of the unknowable; for, according to Kant, even the unknowable has a form, that of *inner appearance*. In other words, time, and with it the synthetic *a priori*, are the keys to the interior which all sensible experience as presupposed by existence in space has prohibited us from entering, penetrating. Knowledge, as Kant will say and Goya illustrate, is a line: all possible experience, indeed the possibility of experience itself, will be negotiated on this infinitely dissolving threshold between what can be represented and understood by reason and what remains stubbornly other.

The usurpation of Nature as an unknowable entity, which is one of the fundamental ramifications of Kantian philosophy at the stage of the first Critique, here employs the line to show that although the unknown can be known through its appearances, it can on the basis of its representation by appearance be manipulated by human reason. We might call this usurpation of the Nature-Man hierarchy (by means of Man's apparent subordination to Nature) a sleight-of-hand, Kant's *trompe-l'oeil*. The essential, ontological unknowability of Nature—what Kant withholds from human experience (content, "things in themselves") he



simultaneously returns with the *a priori* intuition of appearances, both outer (space) and inner (time). On the one hand, reason abdicates its right to distinguish among objects essentially, as discrete bodies. It was this right that religion once used to unite knowledge with truth:

What is truth? It is the agreement of knowledge with its object ... If truth consists in the agreement of knowledge with its object, that object must thereby be distinguished from other objects ... Now a general criterion of truth must be such as would be valid in each and every instance of knowledge, however their object may vary. It is obvious however that such a criterion (being general) cannot take into account of the (varying) content of knowledge (relation to its specific object) [CPR, 1.2.III.B83].

On the other hand, Kant finds the *condition of possibility* of all objects, real or imagined, insofar as they are intuited as a manifold and grasped and penetrated by categories of thought: “the categories [of pure reason] contain, on the side of the understanding the grounds of the possible of all experience in general” (CPR, I.β27.B167). This of course reiterates in muted form his radical statement from the first edition: “[The understanding, or Pure Reason] is *itself the lawgiver of nature*” (CPR, First Division, Book I, Ch.II, Sec. 2.A126—my italics).

What are the effects of Kant’s decision to fuse the representable and the unrepresentable in the drawing of a line? On the one hand, since intuition is possible only through analogy, space and time remain “creatures of the imagination, whose source must really be sought in experience” (CPR, I.β7.B56). On the other hand, they nevertheless prepare man’s transcendental justification for the use and abuse of a passively constituted Nature through the project of representation. The limit-line becomes the ground or field of human experience. Beyond the line that once divided what knowledge was available to God and what was available to humanity, Kant’s enlightenment sought to render visible *that which renders visible*—that is to say, light, time—in Western representation. One sees a parallel development in, for example, the work of Rembrandt and the Dutch painters: a new connection between the observer and the observed is established, wherein the painting only begins to “happen” as a phenomenon of light when the viewer’s eye falls upon it.

Here, then, are at least two faces of the Enlightenment, incarnated in light itself as the Enlightenment's primary agent. On the one hand, there is what Maurice Blanchot has called the double-deception of light:

Light illuminates - this means to say that light hides itself: this is its malicious trait... Light effaces its traces: invisible, it renders visible... Light is thus at least doubly deceptive: because it deceives us as to itself, and deceives us in giving an immediate what is not immediate, as simple what is not simple.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, we begin to witness a glimpse, however small, of the awesome and terrible power of light that has been let into the world of representation, a force that will later strip the figures in Goya's *Desastres* of intimacy, penetrate the darkest interiors of our enlightened institutions, question the will to illusion itself by renouncing the trappings of perspective and composition as so many masks and ragged props. A decade after Goya's death, the English painter, Joseph W. Turner, will begin to set his canvases on fire, to make them shine, shine in a light so beautiful that Vincent Van Gogh, in his impatience to reach it, could only brush pint after pint of pure unadulterated yellow paint fresh from the tube, into the madness of his howling fields.



*¡Qué escandalo no causará, el oír despreciar la naturaleza en comparación de las Estatuas Griegas, por quién no conoce ni lo uno, ni lo otro; sin atender que la mas pequeña parte de la naturaleza confunde, y admira a los que más han sabido!*<sup>10</sup>

If our intuition—in Kantian terms, space and time and its relationship to the understanding through the faculty of the Imagination—renders visible a world of appearances, a “manifold of experience,” on the condition that we disavow any claims to know “things in themselves,” what then do we make of the human will to create its own representa-

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<sup>9</sup>Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Nebraska Press, 1969; reprinted in 1993), pp. 162-163.

<sup>10</sup>The quote is, of course, taken from Goya's *Address to the Royal Academy of San Fernando Regarding the Method of Teaching the Visual Arts*, RASF, Archive, legajo 18-1/1.

tions, without any apparent practical end? Kant would dedicate his *Third Critique* to this very question. It would entail his return to the line, like the summoning of a material darkness that he had driven out of his Academy, only to pry it apart, and there confront, once and for all, an unknowable Nature that lay just beyond the grasp of the faculty of reason and just beneath the surface of shifting appearances discerned by the faculty of the the understanding. In philosophical terms, Kant had systematically outlined the problematic of visual representation: what lay just beyond the canvas of a supersensible single-point perspective, what lay beneath the play of chiaroscuro and the *trompe-l'oeil* of the *camera obscura*, was a Something so deep and powerful that it assaulted his system from all sides: war encroached upon the borders; madness emerged from the dark of the human psyche; famine and pestilence descended from the heavens; and from the interstices of human civilization, along the highways and in the forests emerged those mysterious figures so popular in Goya's work—swathed in the shadows of their cloaks and wide-brimmed hats (see figure 4), the "Friends of Crime" as Sade would proclaim with an exultant irony. How could Kant account for these horsemen of the Apocalypse, a task which had heretofore fallen under the jurisdiction of the monarch? What can we make of these figures of darkness which cannot be given to our experience by either the line or light? Figures which become all the more impenetrable in their overexposure; silhouettes, in a new complicity against Reason, that imply, threaten, or fall silent at that secret moment when the face turns away, draws the hood over the head, the cloak over the shoulders?

Judgement is the faculty by which Reason might finally lay its claim on Nature as a determinable object of knowledge. If the faculty of the understanding, pure reason, is the synthetic line of knowledge that connects the transcendental with the empirical even as it divides phenomena from noumena (understood solely in negative terms); and the faculty of Reason proper; and practical reason is that causal line of freedom that connects the supersensible principle of freedom with the hypothetical realization of final ends even as it divides each of us as noumena, or consciousnesses, from another; then judgement would have to be a line that places both the understanding and Reason on the same terrain by grounding them both; at once making them both

possible<sup>11</sup> and allowing them to enter into the field of sensible experience by endowing Nature with a principle of *finality* (the Aesthetic) and Reason with a principle of *determinability* (teleology). In visual terms, this line would negate once and for all the division of lines, triangulating the system to form a plane where man's tools of knowledge and desire meet each other as accomplices to the Grand Conspiracy of according or fixing Nature to her appearance as the appearance accords with the realization of the moral good.

Once again, in order to understand the power of judgment we need to return to the motif of the *trompe-l'oeil*: judgment, like the line, is at its strongest at the moment of its dispersion. Freed of its responsibility to legislate a kingdom, judgment authorizes Reason to assume a "supersensible substrate" of Nature, something which pure reason alone had no right to do. This was Kant's problem in the first Critique: are we as conscious "I's" (*noumena*, each of which is unknown to the other) any more than passive receptacles of a universe governed by chance and caprice? His answer was yes, on the condition that we accept the fact that the basis of our experiences, the manifold of perception, was not in any way subject to the rules and regulations by which we process them. So much for pure reason: now, as a reflective category, judgment authorizes practical reason to at once confirm its accordance with Nature (as this now "supersensible substrate") through the aesthetic, and to employ pure reason in the service of practical ends (as in the case of the sublime). If we recall, both of these objectives were unattainable in the *Second Critique*. We had to resort to the determination of "faith" given to us by the moral law in order to postulate the connection between (practical) Reason and the determination of final ends in agreement with the Objects of experience given to us by Nature; because if Nature is by definition indeterminate, i.e. without a supersensible substrate, how could we know whether or not these ends were realized [CPR, Dialectic: "On the postulates of pure practical reason in general"]?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kant writes: "Our entire cognitive faculty is presented with an unbounded, but, also, inaccessible field the field of the supersensible - in which we seek in vain for a territory, and on which, therefore, we can have no realm for theoretical cognition, be

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gilles Deleuze's essay on Kant, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963], p. 44.



Figure 1. Duendecitos



Figure 2. Ya no hay tiempo

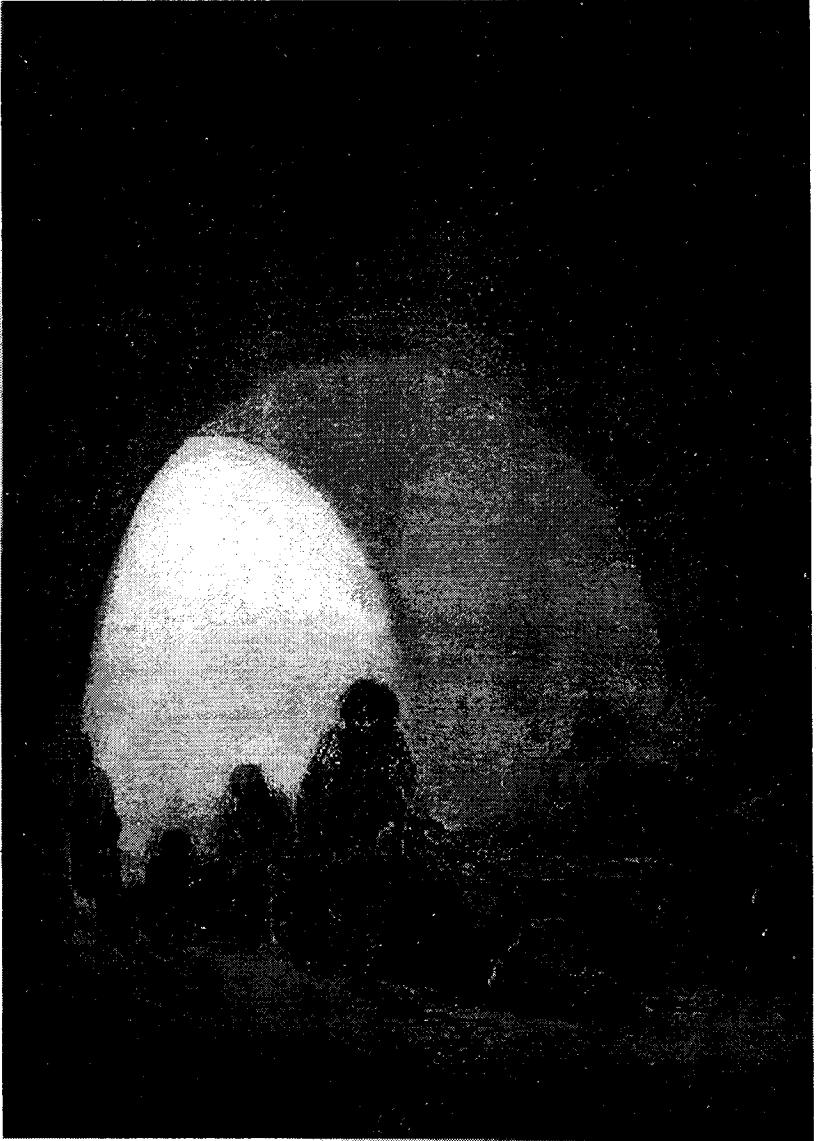


Figure 3. The Interior of a Prison



Figure 4. "Friends of Crime"

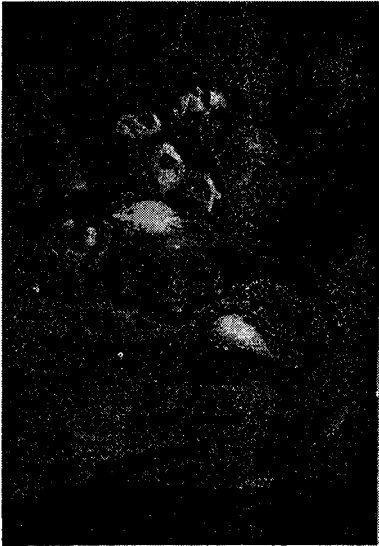


Figure 5. Buen Viage



Figure 6. El Gigante

Figure 7. Session  
of the Royal Company  
of the Philippines

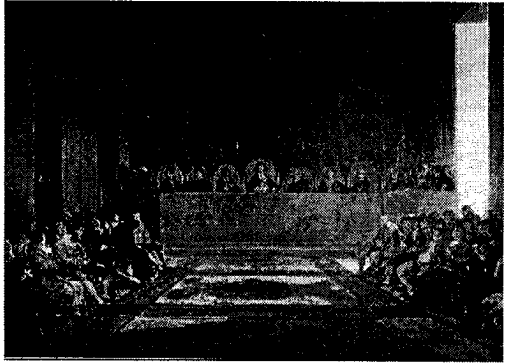


Figure 8.  
La desgraciada muerte  
de Pepe Illo



Figure 9. The Milkmaid of Bordeaux



The last word on Nature has yet to be said. Kant's thesis in the *Critique of Judgment* works like this: if pure and practical reason can be given, in the former case, a principle of finality, and, in the latter case, a principle of final ends, then the Imagination, understood as the mediating faculty giving the understanding access to the appearances of Nature and (practical) Reason various approximations of our ends as analogical to our objects of experience, would no longer be necessary.<sup>13</sup> What need would there be of it, once we bask in the full light of a knowledge of Nature? What need would there be to create analogies for objects of experience to explain the various directions our freedom is taking us, if we have already discovered the underlying truth beyond all analogy? The faculty of judgment will give us this provisionally. Kant illustrates this eventuality in the form of a promise of fusion between pure and practical reason through the experience of the sublime [C], §26-29]. This experience is the only experience that takes place without the imagination, or rather *in the exclusion or absence of the imagination*. Bereft for a moment of the capacity to process an experience, we feel a lack; in this moment of emergency, we appeal to the supersensible principle of Reason itself, which tells us, "Don't worry child, it is as contained within me as I in it." Or, paraphrasing Kant, in our failure to apprehend the unapprehendable we are yet saved by our ability to nevertheless *comprehend* it. The triangle is closed, and, together, the line and light, the line as light, evoke the world of Nature.

Nature in Kant has to be understood in the light of its unknowability to Reason. This can be a source of misinterpretations when we read Kant and understand Nature to mean plants and animals: Nature certainly takes these forms, but only in the sense that Goya's *burros* take on the clothes of human beings. Beneath those clothes lies an indiscernible force, a *Might* [§28]. Speaking like Blanchot, we would call this an infinite reserve, capable of saying both yes and no without contradiction. Kant's great reversal of satire entails his return to God *in the context of*

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<sup>13</sup>As one can deduce from the *First Critique*, ends can only be imagined in terms of analogies, since the final ends of practical reason cannot be known unless nature is accorded a supersensible substrate. Since the understanding has no right to do this except in the field of sensible experience, the function of the imagination in practical reason to offer substitutes will always be a source of illusions, understood as mere negative versions of "real" final ends.

*the Enlightenment*, insofar as God is the last and greatest imaginary approximation of Nature, of Might. Of all illusions, religion, for Kant, is certainly one of the most difficult to destroy, for it is attached to the most intense experience that a human being can undergo—the feeling of the sublime. Yet through the replacement of faith by comprehension, Kant reverses the relationship between God and Nature, as he had earlier reversed the relationship between Nature and Man. The final reversal, which judgment promises by offering us provisionally the experience of the sublime, would be the reversal of God and Man as both find their ground of possibility and final ends in Nature.

This moment, however fleeting, can be interpreted in at least two ways: for Kant, (and the hypothesis is by no means here adequately sketched), the faculty of judgment enables us to glimpse, if only for a moment, a coming into our full “maturity” as both beings of Reason and beings of Nature. Maturity here can be thought of as the blossoming of a rose; hence, Kant’s repeated evocation of flowers as symbols of aesthetic beauty. To trace the trajectory of Kant’s thought in terms of the line, one would have to say that this line is a limit that constitutes our becoming—that is, our coming into our selves as both Idea and Ideal. Philosopher Michel Foucault would return to this ethic towards the end of his life, and call it a *limit-attitude*:

We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers... The point is, in brief, to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.<sup>14</sup>

From another perspective, Kant’s Enlightenment authorizes the transcendental justification and practical method of exploiting Nature in the service of representation. Judgment enables Understanding and Reason to grasp Nature from both sides and penetrate her in a charade of maskings and unmaskings, all described with such systematic rigor by Kant. It is in this sense that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno write: “The universality of ideas as developed by discursive logic, domination in the conceptual sphere, is raised up on the basis of

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<sup>14</sup>Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 45.

actual domination.”<sup>15</sup>

While it would be possible at this point to compare Horkheimer and Adorno’s concept of the Enlightenment with any number of Goya’s images of rape, torture, mutilation, or incarceration, let us rather try to think of these images “on the lines” of Kant’s problematic of the Enlightenment as a whole. For Goya’s fascination with these figures in many senses does no more than parallel our own: their very existence not only points out the contradictions involved in various Enlightenment projects (penal reform, quarantine, the public use of reason); it also leads us to question on what terms might the Enlightenment be posed.

Goya’s *Interior of a Prison* (see figure 3) demonstrates Kant’s “opening of the line” as an interior wherein the drama of the Enlightenment is played out. The line that appears as an arch in Goya’s other images is, in this case, a kind of tunnel, given dimension by a grey-brown neutral half-tone. A light appears at the entrance, marking out the inner edge of the tunnel in bold relief at the crest, but at the same time betraying nothing of its origin, nor of the Outside. The line gradually merges with the light as it slopes down, creating an aura that dies out somewhere between a wall whose distance from us is entirely indistinct, and us, lurking somewhere past the dark foreground. The invisible darkness of the wall robs us of our ability to assess our bearings from our position with regards to the painting.

Here, then, we are presented with a conclusion to the development of the line into light, accelerated by an Enlightenment philosophy that, in its attempt to grasp the forms of essences, only succeeds in tracing their outlines. Like the prisoners, Kant’s Enlightenment had cast the *noumenon* outside the possible confines of knowledge, attributing to it a purely negative value (as out-law), but only to reintroduce it into the very heart of the Enlightenment project. Margarita Moreno de las Heras writes: “The Enlightenment set out to humanize penal law... Goya’s painting of a prison interior was executed in a special context: the coming into being of some of these prison reforms.”<sup>16</sup> The prisoners

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<sup>15</sup>Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Goya and the Spirit of the Enlightenment* (1989), hereafter GSE, p. 160.

depicted here strike the same pose: bodies half-hunched in the half-light, wrists and ankles manacled. Each of them has his or her gaze oriented toward a different part of the scene: outside, inside, the walls and crest of the arch, the ground, the prison bench. With Velázquez' painting *Las meninas* still fresh in our minds, we discern here a similar, perhaps "Classical" design, for by tracing the lines of bodies and gazes one can sketch two X's, both of which meet at the central figure's half-hidden face. The first X begins with the back of the prisoner's head who is staring into the light: this line intersects at right angles with another line that follows the length of the body of another prisoner who is stretched out in the foreground. The second X is formed by the curiously straight back of the central figure, which intersects at right angles with the trajectory of the body of another prisoner at the far right of the painting, silhouetted in shadow. The play of oppositions is varied: the well-lit face of the bearded prisoner leaning against the arch is juxtaposed to the utterly indiscernible face of another just beside him; the naked back of the prisoner facing the light can be juxtaposed to the clothed prisoner facing us, enshrouded in darkness, etc. However, to these two X's we may add a third: this last one connects the two prisoners leaning, each upon opposite sides of the arch, and the prisoner whose gaze goes ambiguously out to the viewer. This X differs from the previous two, however, in that it exists as a purely virtual yet indeterminate certainty. For we in fact are unable to see whether or not the prisoner on the left side is looking at the prisoner on the right; and neither can we tell whether or not the central prisoner can see us; we certainly cannot see his eyes, which would guarantee the reciprocity and recognition so powerfully portrayed in the Velázquez painting. The central prisoner's stare is made ironic by the fact that light, both represented and real, can do nothing more than heighten the obscurity of his gaze. For us, light has entered the interior, that we might see what cannot be seen *as what cannot be seen*. It appears he is unable to see us either, as the light falls well short of the foreground, where we presumably stand or sit in a half-hunched position, with our own wrists and ankles manacled.

We are thus here confronted with two gazes: the knowing gaze of light and the Kantian understanding that would seek to recognize us in our appearance from out of the deep, into the realm of sensible experience; and the unknowable gaze of the prisoner, who as a conscious *noumenon* would seek with his line of vision, originating in the

supersensible principle of reason, to find a determinate end to his desire, and thus hasten his journey toward freedom. The painting parallels Velázquez' *Las meninas* to a tee, with the exception that the design held together by Velázquez' representations through reciprocity and recognition is here held together by, on the one hand, an empty and meaningless coincidence of equilibrium, all the more empty in that it remains incomplete; and on the other, the absolute need which the image evokes for another *noumenon*, namely, *the viewer*, to emerge from the shadows, complete the triangle, put to rest an Imagination that is running rampant in its desperation to find something in the darkness to which it can cling.

Such an interpretation would not be far off from the sublimity of *Judith and Holfernes*, from Goya's *Black paintings*; and even later *The Water-Carrier*, and *The Knife-Grinder*. Sublimity in this sense is to be taken with the full weight of Kant's *Third Critique*: our vision extends out into the immeasurable depth that is glimpsed in the shadows of the Water-Carrier's stark white blouse, or in the lacustrine reserve where we expect to recognize the gaze of knife-grinder. Failing to touch the bottom, we return to the appearance of the figures, both of which now must be accorded the beauty and terror of unknowability. This quality, defined negatively in Kant's *First Critique*, returns in the *Critique of Judgment* (as it does in the abovementioned paintings by Goya) as a *positive* moment. Once again, this positivity can be interpreted along (at least) two different lines. One might conclude that the illustration of this moment confirms Goya's cynicism, as well as the cynicism of his generation. A critique along these lines would make of Goya somewhat a tragedian who announces with despair the triumph of appearance over reality, or at the very least the black humor of a man who would write "*Nada*" on his gravestone. The anguish of his cry would reflect the anguish of the Spanish Enlightenment, abandoned first by the French Revolution and the consequent tyranny of Napoleon; forced to mature prematurely as a fugitive in secret societies, outlaw Juntas, and guerrilla troops; only to be betrayed again by the Restoration of Ferdinand VII. The final blow to Spain as a country which the rest of industrialized Europe was quickly leaving behind in a century of riots, reactions, and revolutions; leaving her people to the caprices, absurdi-

ties, and follies of religion, superstition, and feudal capitalism.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, in an inspired moment, one may also conclude (following Foucault) that the very darkness and unknowability of the present is what calls us, and never ceases to call us, into being. The dissolution of the line and light had been carried out to their conclusion in Western representation, at least along the lines in which the problematic of sovereignty had up until that time been posed. It was now time for philosophy and art to let Nature speak, and to hear what it had to say.



Returning to Goya's *Interior of a Prison*, let us say, for heuristic reasons, that the prisoner contemplating the great light of the outside is the Classical Goya, who bears witness to the utter dissolution and subsequent immanence of the line through light. Goya's experiments with various media bear testament to this: for example, he began to conceive of drawing, the primary technique for representing form, along the lines of painting. Eleanor Sayre writes: "[The drawings in *Album C* (1808-1814) onward] are clearly conceived in terms of brush and form often suggested by means of an interplay of light and shadow" (GSE, pp. cv.cvi.: cf. note 17). Yet Pierre Gassier (cf. note 2) has shown that the first two albums (1796-97) previous to *Album C*, already contain Goya's first attempts to turn sheets of a drawing pad into compositions of brush and Indian ink wash "that denote a first attempt to obtain an effect of *chiaroscuro*, which is extremely difficult on the pure white of paper." Perhaps not coincidentally, *Album B* is also the album where, "Of a sud-

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<sup>17</sup>Albert Derozier depicts a stunning portrait of this period of time in vol. VII of the *Historia de España* ("Centralismo, Ilustración, y agonía del antiguo regimen (1715-1833)," ca. VI (Madrid: 1980). In it he traces a trajectory that begins in 1766, with the Esquilache riot, to the war with Napoleonic France and afterwards the annual uprisings following the Restoration of the monarch and the reinstatement of the Inquisition. The thread he establishes between these events is the politicization of the crowd, the crowd as a political force that surges beneath all forms of political sovereignty (monarchical or constitutional). This force, like Nature in the Kantian sense, is the basis upon which all forms of political organization or order must rest but which cannot, of itself, propose or legislate political rule.