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Alternative Forms of Historical Writing: Concepts and Facts in Goya's *Disasters of War*

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Between 1808 and 1814, the war referred to as the Peninsular War in the Anglophone world and in the Spanish as the *Guerra de la Independencia* took place in Spain. In the wake of this conflict, which formed part of the series of Napoleonic Wars in Europe, the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) produced up to a total of eighty-five etchings known as *Disasters of War*.¹ Taking these as a reference, in this chapter I wish to present some reflections on historical writing, particularly Goya's heterodox way of narrating the war. To do so, we will also give a heterodox interpretation of these works, by reading these images as an expression of a concept rather than as art in itself.²

Notwithstanding the quality and depth of the many studies dedicated to Goya's work, the *Disasters* allows a reading of a historical subject which goes beyond the artistic, indeed encourages it. Taken as an expression of a concept, we may thereby understand the *Disasters* as an aesthetic result of a specific interpretation of this war, and as a sign of a new era. Thus, a reappraisal of the relationship between aesthetics and historical writing is proposed, thereby affecting important aspects in the theory of history, whether "source," "fact," "memory," or "truth."

Both the Peninsular War and Goya's prints have received exhaustive attention.³ This chapter is particularly interested in how the conflict may be catalogued as a national and religious war, which raises a comparison with the logic of representation used in the *Disasters*. In these etchings, Goya represents the ravages of war as contrary to traditional rhetoric based on a final battle between

* Translated by Sarah Hartley.

good and evil and without any element of religious identification. In spite of their differences, the people in arms will develop and intensify some of the features of the religious wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The consecration of ultimate reason and the secularization of the apocalypse are characteristic of modern warfare, especially in what has been called the first total war;⁴ and whereof Goya's prints provide his historical account.

Taking the case of the Peninsular War, I examine narrative and rhetorical aspects of the apocalypse and the ways in which it is represented. In particular, I show the possibilities that the radical renewal of the traditional aesthetic codes in Francisco de Goya's painting and his *Disasters of War* offer for history-writing. Through these prints we can see how, unlike the traditional rhetoric about the final combat of good against evil, Goya is representing, without any denominational element of religious identification, the ravages of a war that ironically contains traits of a religious war. It is often argued that these prints are a direct antecedent of photographic war reporting and even valuable documentary evidence of the horror of all war. However, this chapter reads the images as an expression of a concept and not as a proper piece of art. What Goya offers to historical writing with these *Disasters* is incompatible with objectivity and irreducible to the category of historical fact. This approach, in addition to the reflection on the methodological implications of the history of concepts and theory of history, seeks to contribute to a shift both in the wider fields of History and Art History toward a higher level of complexity and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Goya and history

Following Hayden White, we could say that the task of the historian is not to understand the past. Rather, the historian presents an account of the past that is comprehensible to others. In this (re-)production of the past's meaning, the historical actor's experience of the period is essential.⁵ That is to say, the question of historical understanding, the meaning ascribed to those who experienced the events, is part of a long-term account. Here the rhetoric "the general language," or "the code,"⁶ plays a decisive role, in the way that the assignment of meaning both shapes a typical perception of the era, and forms a central element of the ways in which this era is thought.⁷ It is at least as important to be aware of this in cases of images as of words. Images are not mere reflections of reality; they construct reality. They have indicative value, but also contribute to one experience or other of a historical era.

The case of Goya's *Disasters of War* is interesting as a threshold of modernity and in the changes evidenced by their subsequent reception. From social, political, and cultural viewpoints, their performative potential remained paralyzed, unpublished, and secret for decades, since they were not published until 1863. Their subsequent reception has drawn on this potential according to the interests or needs of the interpreter. Significantly, this expressive potential, what the work shapes or constructs, develops in tension with an indicative or informative aspect that we have traditionally called historical.

This demonstrates the difference between the way in which we assign a meaning to a historical event and the inherent meaning such events may have. As historians, it is advisable to be conscious of the impossibility of accessing the ultimate meaning of narratives or the logic and rationality behind historical actions. Anthropologically, it can be assumed that these had intention and meaning, for all their contradiction and opacity. Historical narrative consists of presenting alternatives, not solutions, to this lack of clarity. In my view, this decentralizes the primacy of historic fact in writing about the past, while recognizing interpretative subjectivity as producing a web of meanings, which, although limited in their hermeneutic capacity, remain endless and always open to new associations of meaning.

Since the eighteenth century, the tradition of historiography has limited ability to differentiate images considered as works of art from expressions of the artist's individual spirit: "The image became a timeless, ahistorical object, whose use as a historic source became impossible, if not sacrilegious. The work of art stood outside of history in a type of semiotic void."⁸ In the case of the *Disasters of War*, this void has been filled with ideals that are not always mutually compatible.

Interpretations of the *Disasters* present a clear dependency on the political contexts and cultural understanding of the war. This has been the case since their publication and yet, this has not prevented these interpretations from being markedly depoliticized. For example, in his study on the reception of the first edition of the series in 1863, Allan E. Smith progresses from the "keen patriotic feeling" of the prologue⁹ to more abstract appeals about Goya's skeptical stance and his generic rejection of violence and war.¹⁰ This transition has not occurred without multiple contradictions about the interpretations of the etchings, or to vague explanations about the Aragonese genius's individualism. At the heart of these discrepancies lies the issue of Goya's reputation, not so much as a painter, but as a Spaniard, at once patriot and artist, during the years in which the liberal state wanted to assert its national character.

This need to morally justify the artist, but furthermore, in the process, Goya's support or lack thereof for the cause of Joseph I or Ferdinand VII, forms the touchstone.¹¹

Hence, it is surprising to see how important Goya scholars, who know the details of his life and works, present certain misunderstandings or simplifications when it comes to interpreting them. Historians grant absolute autonomy to the field of aesthetics, which is not only difficult to sustain but is also contradictory to the moral and political value given both to the works and the artist. Greater attention to conceptual history would not only enrich analysis of the works, but would also help to avoid certain errors. For example, in etching number 7, "What courage!," the figure standing next to the cannon and surrounded by cadavers has been repeatedly interpreted as the popular heroine Agustina of Aragón, despite this identification being incongruous with the rest of the series and based purely on conjecture. Other depictions of women have been judged in similarly anachronistic ways. Etchings such as number 4, "The women give courage," or number 5, "And are like wild beasts," have come to be seen as demonstrations of generous contributions to the national cause. However, it does not appear that Goya intended to praise this new behavior. In fact, the behavior implies the complete deregulation of the violence of war, as well as a brutality inconsistent with Goya's denunciation of the war. *Fatal Consequences of Spain's Bloody War with Bonaparte, and Other Emphatic Caprices*,¹² the title the author gave the series, is likewise ignored, as if Goya were referring to any war, and not the war that forced him to equivocate on his political loyalties. Recall that Goya, court painter for more than twenty years, did not dare to publish these etchings during his lifetime, and the first edition was made nearly half a century later, in 1863.

Goya's role as an *afrancesado*, that is to say, his political alignment with the supporters of King Joseph I Bonaparte, may explain why historians have tended to underline the abstract nature of these representations. Goya does not interpret the war from an obviously patriotic perspective wished by more nationalist historians, while commentators like Bozal have pointed out the deficiencies of this reading.¹³ By not exalting the merits of war, nor glorifying triumphs or military virtues, Goya moves away from a canonical style of representing the war. This ambiguity grants the works a universality. If one considers this series as work of art, universality is associated with originality or genius. For critics such as Tzvetan Todorov, these qualities combine with a humanism that appears characterized as a moral impulse without apparent internal conflict: "It is accurate to say that life and work merge without the slightest resistance."¹⁴ The historical

contrast is rather eclipsed by an interpretation of the figure of Goya in moral terms.¹⁵

This moralization of criticism does not rely on Spanish determinants. A contributing factor is the political imprecision in much of the analysis. Criticism that concentrates on the emotional and/or aesthetic elements depoliticizes the work and multiplies the possibilities of use. It ignores or marginalizes the conflict's historical specificity to talk about "war" in a way that does not disguise its presentism.¹⁶ This appropriation of the artwork may be legitimate. It may be useful to rhetorics of humanitarianism or pacifism. Historiographically speaking, however, this "moral approach" is less productive.¹⁷

Ethical reflection may shed light on the meaning of the *Disasters*. For example, Cascardi disputes the idea defended by Danto that Goya is antithetic to the moral cosmos represented by the art of the Enlightenment. For Cascardi, Goya's ethical impulse is to accept the internal tensions and contradictions which the Enlightenment held as an ideal of self-regulation, for which temporal context and tradition play a vital role: "Goya recognizes those powers [the constructive powers of self-regulating subject] by acknowledging this pictorial tradition, but shows in addition that the ethical demands (of truth, authenticity, self-legislation, freedom, and autonomy) internal to the culture of the Enlightenment could not be met by the practice of representation deemed essential to their constitution."¹⁸ Representation is determined both by internal boundaries and by contingent relationships with others: reason does not break free of the archaic substrate of beliefs and passions that evade every attempt at institutionalization.¹⁹

Studies have been made of the Neostoic tradition in Goya's works, through baroque emblems and highlighting his philosophical nature.²⁰ The series should not be read merely as the moral reflections on vice and ignorance of an Enlightened philosopher, who would come to depict the war as a kind of epiphenomenon of the world's chaos and degradation. This reading ignores: it as a matter of historical writing on specific events.

Goya and war

Defining the war can be seen as a strategy of political legitimation. Nationalist historiography appears to forget that Spanish people living through the war of 1808–1814 did not share a unanimous understanding of the conflict.²¹ Nor did those who fought against Bonaparte possess the same historical vision of this

period. For liberals, the war was a national revolution, a “sacred insurrection” against the despotism that had characterized the last decades of the *Ancien Régime* and an opportunity to establish a modern constitution for a sovereign nation of free citizens (e.g., *Diario Mercantil de Cádiz* 1813: 1006).²² The sanctity of this war helped to secularize the whole language of sacrifice that the fatherland and its martyrs had begun in the Revolution of 1789. For more conservative sectors, however, the battle was the natural result of a history of impiety, with obvious antecedents in the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. The adjective “sacred” was to create the same mobilizing effect as for liberals. However, by establishing a continuity with the body of Catholic traditions, reactionary clergy sought to a spiritual jurisdiction over the war. Military action should serve to protect preexisting privileges, and also the social and political amendments necessary to achieve a perfect double society, balanced between civil and spiritual powers. This discourse, amplified to the universal, pointed to the historic battle between good and evil, a battle that approached its final and decisive moment with the defeat of the Antichrist Napoleon.²³ The rhetorical function can be seen in the horizon of expectations: not an end times, but the establishment of a Spain cleansed of all modern ills.²⁴ This difference can be read when Goya’s images are regarded as part of the engraving tradition.²⁵

The *Disasters* are reminiscent of Albrecht Dürer’s illustrations of the *Book of Revelation* (1498).²⁶ Dürer’s work still belongs to the medieval world and, despite its technical and stylistic innovations, it follows the artistic conventions of the Christianity of his time (Figure 9.1).²⁷

Perhaps the greatest difference between Dürer and Goya emerges in their relationship to historical writing and narrative. Dürer produced illustrations for the Apocalypse of John. Goya instead proposed war as a secularized apocalypse, which offers no hope, and where only silence and melancholy remain. The relationship between text and image is also striking, as it reverses the explanatory function: it is not the image that, as an illustration, uses well-known codes of representation to explain the text, as in the case of the sacred medieval book. Rather, the words that accompany Goya’s drawings suggest a meaning that does not have clear codes of interpretation within the aesthetic tradition.²⁸

We can take the first plate as an example: “Sad presentiments of what must come to pass” (Figure 9.2). This etching recreates “waiting in despair” for the imminent event. In 1819, Goya would paint a similar composition with the title: “Christ on the Mount of Olives” (Figure 9.3) However, if one compares the attitude of both figures, while Christ prepares to humbly accept sacrifice,

Figure 9.1 Albrecht Dürer, *Book of the Apocalypse*, “The four horsemen.”

what appears to await the other figure is catastrophe. In the engraving, the figure raises the head and looks upwards. In the picture, Jesus inclines his body forward without lifting his head as a gesture of humility and acceptance to receive from the hands of the angel the chalice sent by God.

Figure 9.2 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 1: “Sad presentiments of what must come to pass.”

The secularization of religious motifs in Goya, far from signifying that their deactivation, neutralization, or elimination, can be recognized in their spatial signs. As Cascardi noted, in respect to the frescoes of 1789 in the San Antonio de la Florida Chapel in Madrid, there is a redefinition of the spiritual spaces that exceed their religious content, and a recognition of the impossibility and illusory nature of a complete secularization by the Enlightenment.²⁹ This tension is key to understanding the *Disasters of War* as a historical text that moderates the Enlightenment optimism and its faith in progress. It is important to point out that secularization is not only visible in the transfer of meaning and function from the spiritual to the worldly; paradoxically, the consecration of new spaces, social practices, and historic events, like those of the nation or the war, produces similar effects in dissolving boundaries between the sacred and the profane.³⁰ The political assumes religious characteristics, while religion is politicized as a national matter. From this point on, it will be possible to call for war in defense of the Catholic nation.³¹ These bases were used in different ways. For example, the constitutional protection of the Catholic religion (Article 12) was interpreted by the most traditionalist sectors as the subordination of spiritual

Figure 9.3 Francisco de Goya, “Christ on the Mount of Olives.”

matters to temporal sovereignty and a further step toward civil religion.³² These discussions extended beyond the meaning and aims of the war to the political consequences of its aftermath.

The religious pathos of this war, like that of the other wars of independence from Napoleonic expansion, exceeds the confessional to reach the national. All energies were to be given to the defense of a sacralized expression of historical life in peril. Using new aesthetic codes, Goya captures this shift in his *Disasters*, and it is here that we can relate a historical understanding of the violence to its representation. The association of *Disasters* with various motifs of religious iconography responds to artistic referents, but also to a profound historical change. The images end the understanding of war typical of European classicism. By

tying religious *pathos* to the political, the partisan war develops its revolutionary character. The violence in Goya's engravings, puts an end to the clear and distinct, classical identifications discussed by Carl Schmitt: war and peace, legal and illegal, combatants and noncombatants, military and civil, enemy and criminal, regular and uniformed, neutrality and nonneutrality, the recognition of the right to war, an enemy in agreement with this right, between states.³³ The relativization of hostility between armies bearing a *ius belli* was a fundamental condition of this classic law of war, which presupposed that enmity was based on strictly political grounds.³⁴

A contemporary of Goya, Carl von Clausewitz describes how in this new form of war, which marks the step from cabinet wars to wars of the people, from a war of positions to guerrilla warfare, "the people-nation has become an essential power factor in the political running of the state."³⁵ This, together with an intensification of the conflict tending toward the absolute, implies a progressive assimilation of politics with war, from "real war" to "absolute war." At this point we begin to speak of "total war." In other words, the historical experience of the national-popular war moves closer to the characteristic that best defines its essence: the extreme development of its possibilities of reciprocal violence and mutual annihilation. But it is not only a question of the power to bring about the other's destruction. Ennobling all these distinctions, the willingness toward sacrifice is an obligation of those who belong to the nation, of a people "who fight for their self-assertion against others."³⁶

The Peninsular War can be considered both an international conflict and a civil war since it supposes a fight between sides, associated with foreign powers, defending the legitimacy of different sovereign powers.³⁷ This implies the abandonment of the classic international law of the *Ius Gentium Europeaum* that had been consecrated after the end of the wars of religion in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia established a system of equilibrium that, by limiting the conflict to a cross-state issue, was incompatible with the war to the death. The war was subject to limits, both legal and economic, that refused the annihilation of the enemy on the assumption of a *iusta causa*. However, as José Luis Villacañas points out, civil war involves a criterion of distinction between friends and enemies that is both theological and nonethical. Thus, violence adopts a transcendent and sacred meaning.³⁸ To illustrate the force of the civil war for nationalism, Villacañas recalls Fichte: whoever is identified with the nation's own values will be the one who can best appeal to martyrdom and sacrifice in its name.³⁹

The Peninsular War is regarded as the first conflict in which the phenomenon of the modern guerrilla appears. Nonregular forms of harrying the enemy were

already known. However, the novelty in the war against Napoleon is the association of guerrilla forces with the regular army and their identification with a side in a struggle for sovereign power. Notwithstanding the existence of hordes of bandits or violent groups of peasants showing discontent with the precariousness of their standard of living in the way, for example, of the *Bagaudae* revolts, in this case, guerrilla groups continued the objectives of regular warfare, to the extent that they often counted among their members individuals of the army whose units had been dispersed, as well as deserters. Authorities initially recommended the formation of guerrillas and even, through the regulation of companies and squads (*Reglamento de Partidas y Cuadrillas* of December 28, 1808), gave guerrilla fighters “the opportunity to appropriate the spoil of the enemy and granted them the consideration of heroes in the war for independence and liberty.”⁴⁰ The profusion of regulations indicates an inability to keep these forces under control. In pursuit of this, they even invoked peculiar juridical figures like the “corsair of land” to legalize land actions previously germane to the field of maritime warfare.

In practice, especially in the early days of the conflict, the Spanish guerrillas⁴¹ operated according to characteristics of partisan war, which falls outside of regulation, and in which strength consists of surprise, unpredictability, and the absence of external signals that allow an attack to be predicted. In addition, the transformation of the battle into the “last war of humanity” implies a drive to annihilate the enemy which proves uncontrollable, literally impossible to reproduce in its detail and scale. The moral justification of hate requires the prior dehumanization of the other, to transform private hatred of the *inimicus* into the category of the public enemy (the *hostis*). “That is the logic of a war of *justa causa* [just cause] without recognition of a *justus hostis* [just enemy]. Thereby, the revolutionary partisan becomes the true central figure of war.”⁴²

The conventions destroyed by partisan war have their equivalent in Goya’s plastic language. The dignity with which the dead have been historically represented disappears.⁴³ The deformations that the human body suffers show that “the human body is no longer a manifest ideal shape that demands respect. It becomes, instead, a vehicle for expression that can be changed about and used with an almost offhand indifference.”⁴⁴ This transformation is not only aesthetic; it reflects a profound historical change at the specific moment of the national war, concerning the dehumanization of the enemy.⁴⁵

Regarding religious war and etchings, Jacques Callot provides an important precedent. If the war of a nation in arms revives and intensifies certain features of the religious wars, the *Disasters of War* radicalizes the *Miseries of War*,

Figure 9.4 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 29, “He deserved it.”

eighteen etchings published in 1633 in which the French printmaker represents the devastations of the Thirty Years’ War. I believe that the most interesting influence here is found not in the etching techniques, the contrasts, or the characteristic baroque excess, but rather in the type of violence represented and the type of warfare referred to. This is most relevant to the relationship between aesthetics and historical writings followed in this chapter. The Thirty Years’ War ended with the Peace of Westphalia, and with it the religious wars that had devastated the continent since the previous century. In 1648, a new order of balance between the European powers was established. This order would last until the Napoleonic Wars. It also regulated war, and thus provided a rationalization for the violence following the religious conflicts. These had been characterized by a level of devastation and barbarity that Callot invites us to consider as a landscape, a wide and precise panorama where the horror is clear.

Callot’s depictions of hangings (Figure 9.5) show clearly how the executed come accompanied by text in which the crime is described.⁴⁶ We witness the “just punishment” of a number of bandits. This is in contrast to Goya titles etchings 35 and 36: “Nobody knows why” and “Not [in this case] either” (Figure 9.6)—in Goya, motives no longer matter, nor does moral reason. While the moral

Figure 9.5 Jacques Callot, *Miseries of War*, “The hanging.”

Figure 9.6 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 36, “Not [in this case] either.”

reference is clear in Callot, in Goya the spectator is left uncomprehending, an ethical distance separating the unprotected bodies of the executed ones and the relaxed posture of the soldier. Moreover, the extension of space in etching 36, in which similar acts can be discerned, signals to us the mechanical repetition of the executions. In the words of Licht: “The episode is not finite, integrated, and meaningful within itself. Its significance lies precisely in the fact that it is

infinitely repeatable.”⁴⁷ It should also be added that there stands a relationship between the repetition of horrors and the material nature of the plates which are designed to allow unlimited reproduction.

Following Bozal, we could say that the indeterminacy of anonymous identities together with the extension of space beyond the represented limits creates a far more intense impression for the viewer, since it lays bare that, in extending these scenes to our world, anybody may be as much a victim as an executioner.⁴⁸ In this sense, the posture of the soldier invites further comparison with the image of Callot, in which the troops are active and occupied in establishing order. The soldier's passive contemplation in “Not [in this case] either,” in spite of his physical closeness to the corpses, expresses a void of emotion at their death. There is no pretense of order or rationalization of barbarism: his resigned and cynical acceptance shocks us as spectators.

Both the surface and the use of space have a multiplying effect in Goya. Licht describes the novel techniques used to create a sense of the infinite: “Goya's space no longer grows from a fixed center, and without a fixed center we cannot take our bearings in the directionless world he shows us (...). It is an abyss that stretches to all sides of us and even opens menacingly behind.”⁴⁹ The crucial aspect, from our narrative perspective, is the fragmented nature of the images, whose possible relationship in itself calls into question our judgment and our perception: “Goya insists on making us aware of the fractional, incomplete, and ephemeral nature of all human experience.”⁵⁰

In a lucid analysis, which takes the *Disasters of War* as a work of universal calling and the war as a generic event, Stoppani shows how the material dimension of the etchings brings interpretative perspectives that are highly relevant to the spatial relationship and narrative. If in the *Carceri d'Invenzione* by Piranesi (1761), “the hybrid technique of etching and aquatint offers an analytical tool that focuses on the detail (the line) while obfuscating its context (surface) both to obliterate it and to universalize it,” the study of space in Goya also reveals a similar effect used to “produce a distance that is not only graphic and spatial but also a process of moral distancing and social critique.”⁵¹ The same fragmented, incomplete and elusive style highlighted by Licht relates to Goya's etching technique itself, using a movement that shows the singularity of the event while rendering it intangible: “The line that surgically inscribes and the word that absolutely describes work together with the veiling acid and the darkening etched line to obliterate time and space.”⁵²

Guerrilla warfare is similarly described “as a movement of constitutive deconstitution”: the prenominal and subaltern nature of which is not only revealed in

the difficulties of identification in the specific moment of activity, but rather in that of historical and theoretical comprehension.⁵³ This dual aspect can equally be applied to my reading of Goya's *Disasters*. There is a rupture in the order of representation which consists in a resistance to interpretation or "to hegemonic appropriation." This obliteration of time and space restricts the possibilities for a stable and sure constitution of the specific historical referent. The material characteristics of the line in the Goya's engravings show affinity with the guerrilla in Moreiras's terms. As in the case of the guerrilla, exteriority to the norm, opacity, indeterminacy, unpredictability, and perturbation define the discursive strategy of the series, as well as its resistance to be reduced to mere instrument or propaganda.

Goya and the truth

I have shown that the *Disasters* are historically relevant for the understanding of a new concept of war. The relationship between aesthetics and historical writing uses an analysis of transformations within the representation regime of Goya as an indicator of change of period, but also as the iconic expression of a conceptual mutation that inspired the theoretical work of Clausewitz. The historical entity of the *Disasters* as a source does not relate the facts so much as a certain perception of them and their philosophical interpretation. When taken as a historical work, the *Disasters* push us to question their canonical interpretation, as well as *apriorisms* with which we operate history.

These prints are often highlighted as a direct antecedent of photographic war reportage, and, even, as valuable documentary testimony of the horror of war *qua* war.⁵⁴ *Contra* Licht, what Goya offers to historical writing with these *Disasters* is precisely their incompatibility with the objectivity and the irreducibility of the past to the category of historical fact. From this viewpoint, the potential offered by these representations is not their documentary-probative value, their ability to recount what has happened. It is their evaluative dimension that is deliberately vague and ambiguous. Against the usual principles of military or war painting, which Goya himself practiced elsewhere, there are no heroes, nor heroic events, in these works. There is no mention of dates or places.⁵⁵ We do not know the people depicted. In the majority of cases we do not even know facial expressions. What is more, and this is something of great interest as a practice of historical writing, these etchings by Goya were not completed as a series during the war, but rather afterwards (see note 1). They do not aim

to reproduce what is happening, but are instead an image of its memory. And, like every memory, they are imprecise, hazy, incommensurable with what, in fact, may have taken place.⁵⁶ Goya's treatment of sources—the memory of what Goya saw, the testimonies he had access to—does not pretend to any accuracy, information, or historical evidence. Their narrative potential goes beyond this purpose: the images recreate confusion and indeterminacy as a fundamental characteristic of Goya's vision of the Peninsular War. This vision contrasts with the narrative of clear boundaries between traitors and patriots, between good Christians and infidels, between Spanish and anti-Spanish, in short, with the antagonism of the friend-enemy as a self-sufficient explanation for what took place between 1808 and 1814. It is precisely the difficulty of defining this state of existential enmity that points to the heart of what is disastrous in war.

The power of these etchings stems from their imprecision, an incisive lack of detail. Stylistically this has been linked to subsequent artistic movements such as impressionism and expressionism.⁵⁷ It is important to insist that Goya titled the series *Fatal Consequences of Spain's Bloody War with Bonaparte, and Other Emphatic Caprices*, which implies an appraisal of a specific event, the Peninsular War. As historical writing, the *Disasters* do not record historic facts that are now revealed. Rather, they evoke memories and anticipations that are vague and impossible to discern clearly. This play between memory and imagination, so connected to traumatic experience and to prophetic language, is also characteristic of dreams and had been explored by Goya some years earlier. The best-known example is his *capricho* (caprice) “*The sleep of reason produces monsters*” (1799) (Figure 9.7). Even then,⁵⁸ Goya's representation of dreams moves away from the codes that the Trent Counter-Reformation had laid down and that dominated the whole of Spanish baroque painting.⁵⁹ The Catholic rationalization of dreams was specifically intended to control any prophetic or millenarian attempts.⁶⁰ Goya's heterodoxy at this point is also clear, liberating dreams and hallucination from any canonical pretention, of all hermeneutic privilege.

The plates that conclude the war series reflect the limits in narrating the past, and impact upon the conditions of possibility of historical writing. Among the representations of atrocities, etching 79 states “Truth has died” (Figure 9.8). Surrounded by the shadowy presence of a crowd of spectators, we see one of the fatal consequences of this war; we do not know whether they are trying to offer aid, preparing to bury her, mourning her, or welcoming her death. The etching shown in Figure 9.9 elicits the question “Will she live again?” The image does not encourage optimism. Even less so with the penultimate etching that appears to break the narrative sequence with the interruption of “Proud monster”

Figure 9.7 Francisco de Goya, *Caprices*, 43, “The sleep of reason produces monsters.”

(Figure 9.10) in which it is difficult to ascertain whether the creature is devouring or vomiting human cadavers.

In the whole series, as in the whole war, where nothing is assured nor can any meaning be established with absolute precision, the only certainty is pain.⁶¹ “This is the truth” states the title of the last image, where Truth, back turned to the sun’s rays, comes back to life after being disinterred by a dark figure who does not inspire confidence. We do not know who he is, only that he appears prepared

Figure 9.8 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 79, "Truth has died."

Figure 9.9 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 80, "Will she live again?"

Figure 9.10 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 81, “Proud monster.”

to care for her. Goya concludes his trajectory through the *Fatal Consequences of Spain's Bloody War with Bonaparte, and Other Emphatic Caprices*, through the *Disasters of War*, by returning once again to allegory and ironic distance (Figure 9.11).

Susan Sontag rightly relates the representation of pain and horror with the fact that “all the trappings of the spectacular have been eliminated: the landscape is an atmosphere, a darkness, barely sketched in.”⁶² As I have argued, there is a new kind of war that defies existing genres of painting. For this reason, I feel that Licht is mistaken when using Goya's moral stance on the subject to differentiate between Goya's *Disasters* and previous war painting is. According to Licht, Goya limits himself to bearing witness to the facts and leaves judgment to the viewers. This constitutes one of the reasons for unease when contemplating the work: the realization of worthless sacrifice and certain brutal acts that are interchangeable and equivalent, empty of meaning.⁶³ In my view, these accurate observations on Goya's modernity, including the role which the viewer is made to play, merit further debate as to the question of impartiality.⁶⁴ It could perhaps be claimed that this is political, but it is difficult to define it as moral. Goya represents the objects with impartiality, breaking with the compositional hierarchy dominant

Figure 9.11 Francisco de Goya, *Disasters of War*, 82, “This is the truth.”

since the Quattrocento.⁶⁵ However, I do not believe that it would be appropriate to translate that as moral impartiality. It seems more fitting, according to Licht’s own analysis, to speak of ironic distance or questioning: “The last remnants of declamatory pathos, the last remnants of deliberately pointing a moral lesson are rejected by Goya.”⁶⁶ It is this active rejection that does not correspond with the term impartial, and stands in need of a new pictorial syntax. In fact, I believe this is the reason why Licht himself observes that the ambiguity of the images at no point allows us to see superficiality or indifference in Goya.⁶⁷

This is the fundamental difference between the theoretical reflections of Clausewitz and the iconic representations of Goya. With the maximum logical rigor, Clausewitz pursues a phenomenology of war. With professional analytical distance, in the light of his military experience and his vast knowledge of war history,⁶⁸ he defines, explains, and values in pragmatic and functional terms to the objective of victory the constituent elements of war. The logical consequences of the perfection of real war with respect to absolute war will bring total war. In the case of Goya, however, these consequences are considered from a very different perspective. They have nothing to do with the technical development of any military logic, but with those of human drives that are irreducible to reason. We

do not speak of consequences in an abstract framework of logical causality, but of fatal consequences in a concrete historical context of a war whose intensity can no longer be expressed through the known aesthetic codes. The aforementioned prints depicting the participation of women in the war are, in effect, the image of a people in arms: a topic to which Clausewitz devotes a chapter of his treaty.⁶⁹ Unlike the military theoretician of the war, Goya does not wonder about the advantageous consequences or the effectiveness of these forces for victory. The same can be said of print number 28, not by coincidence titled "Rabble," a pejorative name which expresses anything but impartiality, or to insist on the rejection of the patriotic interpretation, admiration. One might wonder if the *Fatal consequences* of this bloody war against Napoleon are not the generic disasters of all war, but rather the fatal consequences of a national war of resistance.

The artist concluded the title of this series of etchings with *And Other Emphatic Caprices*. The recognition of excess, of the subjectivity of representation, the explicit rejection of presenting any proof, questions his own position as witness in plate 44 "I saw it" or 47 "This is how it happened," and undoubtedly contrasts with the historical accounts of his era determined to present a *Reasoned History...*,⁷⁰ an *Exact and Impartial Manifest...* or an *Impartial Examination...* of the facts, usual formulas of the historiography of the era.⁷¹ In the order of representation, what has been called the Goya paradigm "presupposes that the destruction of mimesis is the most appropriate way to represent facts that elude a clear rational understanding."⁷²

It is difficult to find here signs of the historical optimism of the Enlightenment. If eschatology offers an explanation and provides meaning to the experience of events that prove to be unbearable, Goya shows in the *Disasters* the tragedy of a world which already knows that behind these terrible events nothing remains but the critical and mistrustful reworking of the memory, and the ironic scrutiny of the imagination itself; in short, the tragedy of a world that already knows that after the Apocalypse no redemption will come. Only silence, perhaps.

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