

José M. González García

The Eyes of Justice

Blindfolds and Farsightedness,
Vision and Blindness in the
Aesthetics of the Law



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Werner Gephart

The Eyes of the Observer: Looking at José M. González García's Gaze of Justice

Those that have read this book, maybe flipped through its pages, or looked from back to front in order to follow up on signs and traces of individual symbols are deeply impressed by the author's erudition and scholarliness. One finds the further nuancing of beloved ideas – such as on Lady Justice's blindfold that can also be transparent, half-open, and potentially even legally forbidden while, in another version, dominating half of a janus-like figure – and recognizes one's heroes: Albrecht Dürer or Francisco de Goya.

But one asks oneself: how is it possible to see so much and not be blinded by the light of deep insights into the law? How does the author still achieve integrating his subtle remarks on Max Weber, Franz Kafka, or Gustav Klimt without becoming eclectic? And how is it possible to draw a broad universal-historic line from Egypt to ancient Greece and Rome to the adoption of Roman Law, consider contexts of a religious and denominational type, and incorporate tendencies of the Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the Last Judgment where beliefs or actions will be weighed on the scale – and always maintain a close connection to the pictorial objects and their context? And how is it possible here that infinite amounts of literature are deliberately woven in without ever lapsing into an overtly didactic tone? All of this with methodological restraint: Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology, Aby Warburg's interpretive art, and Erwin Panofsky's iconological approach have become so ingrained in our very praised and revered author that simply mentioning them would be inappropriate.

The author remains discreet when simply bypassing the psychologizing interpretations on the artists' supposed intentions so that he can delve into the objective image content and use potential background information in abundance. Those who had the chance to experience how he spoke of »his« pictures with such bright eyes – such as the fellows and staff at the Käthe Hamburger Center for Advanced Study in the Humanities »Law as Culture« – know that he, similarly to Goethe, is an *Augenmensch* who in this instance points his gaze onto the eyes of others. Maybe this is why Lady Justice is blindfolded: not only to preserve her virtue of impartiality and lack of corruptibility, but also because we cannot even bear her gaze. The love of justice may not even be able to stomach the sight.

Everything we can know about emblems, the changing meanings of symbols, as well as animalistic and transcendental representations is – seemingly in passing – shared with us; and we can lose ourselves in the particularities with each new chain of themes and each new image. But the author pulls us out of these by connecting the images to material conceptions of justice up to John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* which, in all its analytical power, owes its effectiveness to one metaphor: the veil of ignorance. The gaze – indeed, the sociological gaze (*der soziologische Blick*) – to which, according to Georg Simmel, all sociological knowledge is due, is oriented in one thread of this web of text and images towards national-cultural traditions whose backgrounds feature legal cultures that appear as both framing and being framed by the figure of Lady Justice.

The secret of unmasking all of Justitiae's gazes lies in the eyes of the observer: it is a mild gaze; a humble, approachable and entirely objective curiosity that is simultaneously full of passion to learn more of Lady Justice, the omnipresent *gestalt* of an inner-worldly moral consciousness. In this respect, anyone interested in the infinite project of comparing visual cultures of the law will undoubtedly be enriched by reading this masterful work.

For Diony, my good reader,
in homage to her ninety years of age.
For my granddaughters, Julia and Jana, so that
they learn about the eyes of Justice.

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