Chapter 7
Street Art as Sacred Space
Heterotopia, Play, and Expansive Imagination

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1. Space beyond the Binary

In this chapter, we will continue our reflections on the space of the sacred and how visual arts contribute to or inhibit its constitution as sacred, moving between the institutionally defined sacred space of the church and urban, apparently secular or profane spaces. In the map of Rome by Giambattista Nolli (1748), churches as institutionalized ›sacred spaces‹ were marked as buildings but with an empty, white interior – signifying their conceptual position between the white of public space, like streets or squares, and the solid filled-in space of private buildings; and thus, they represent for Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, drawing on Foucault's notion of heterotopia, a third beyond the public/private binary.[1] However, in this chapter, we think about the space of the sacred as transcending the binary of the religious and the secular, created in the disruption of the norms and conventions that uphold their separation. We investigate where this space can be found, and what the conditions are that make it a space in which it is possible to imagine and experience – sensorially and affectively – a relationship of faith. Drawing on theories of space developed in multiple disciplines and engaging the cine-

1 Michiel Dehaene/Lieven De Cauter, Introduction: Heterotopia in a Postcivil Society, in: Michiel Dehaene/Lieven De Cauter (ed.), Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society, London: Routledge, 2008, 1–9, 1 and 6.

matic spaces of Andrei Tarkovsky and Ulrich Seidl, we argue that the privileged space of the sacred, in which religious experience – broadly understood as a disruption of the everyday, a moment of existential reflection or of being drawn beyond oneself towards the other or the transcendent – is possible, is the heterotopic, liminal space of the margin or the crossroads in which the norms and conventions that stabilize the center are disrupted and open up for something new. We then show that the ephemeral space of liminality and transgression created through street art can become such a space in which it is possible to freely and creatively imagine ourselves, our communities, and our relationship with God.

Visuality, and the arts in particular, contribute to the establishment, significance, and experience of space in multiple ways: they can make space for our imagination, but they can also close it down. The Italian writer Luigi Meneghello describes his childhood experiences of the visual arts in a church in the countryside of the region of Veneto as delimiting his imagination of the sacred: »Here in the village, when I was a boy, there was a God who lived in the church, in the immense space above the high altar where in fact one often saw his proud portrait up overhead between the rays of gilded wood. He was old but very fit (certainly less old than Saint Joseph) and very severe; but incredibly capable and for that they called him omniscient, and in fact he knew everything and, worse, saw everything.«[2] The aspect that for our context is the most interesting in Meneghello's memories of the God of his childhood church is the connection he establishes between the image of God and the space above the altar where it is located and offered to the gaze of the faithful. In spite of the vastness of space (»the immense space«), the image of God is very specific and clearly determined by iconographic and theological conventions: it is the traditional image of an old, angry, White man, and, given the iconographic tradition, we can imagine that he also had a white beard. There seems to be a contradiction between the vastness that the church holds in itself and the limits that it imposes on the divine image

2 Luigi Meneghello, Libera nos a malo [1963], Milano: Rizzoli, 1975, 7; in the original: »Qui in paese quando ero bambino c'era un Dio che abitava in chiesa, negli spazi immensi sopra l'altar maggiore dove si vedeva infatti spesso in alto un suo fiero ritratto tra i raggi di legno dorato. Era vecchio ma molto in gamba (certo meno vecchio di San Giuseppe) e severissimo; ma incredibilmente capace e per questo lo chiamavano onnisciente, e infatti sapeva tutto e, peggio, vedeva tutto.«

and thus on our imagination of the divine. Does the space define how the image is perceived? Or is it vice versa? Is there a connection between space and image at all, and what is it like?

In order to pursue these questions, it is important to keep in mind that an image is not a simple object that we look at but rather the outcome of a complex interaction between the material image (a man with beard, painted with specific materials on a particular foundation), our mental images (ideas we have about God, both subjective and socially or theologically constructed), and our embodied gaze through which these various mental and material images are put into relationship.[3] Although Meneghello's church seems to offer an immense space in which imagination and image can freely relate – the space above the altar is perceived as vast and limitless – our imagination is nevertheless limited by traditions and conventions so that in the end, all we can come up with in that limitless space is the old image of a White man with a beard. How could that happen in those vast spaces?

Of course, we might be critical, or even suspicious, of Meneghello's vision as a child of an old, angry, all-seeing God – after all, we think we know that God is beyond any images we can imagine. And yet Meneghello's reminiscences are a good example of how an image is produced in a series of perhaps unconscious perceptions and reflections (especially in a small boy and his memories) within a particular context, a given cultural and religious space, and in their impact on our imagination. Jean Piaget notes that the child develops the perception of time and experience through the perception of space.[4] This primary awareness of inhabiting a space with their body, the experience of above and below, left and right, is thus the place from which children begin to discover the world, filled with surprise, wonder, and amazement. Spatiality is not only at the beginning of experience but it is also the start of going *beyond* immediate perceptions: even the expression ›to go beyond‹ implies spatiality. Space and imagination, perception and signification are thus intricately connected.

Susanne Langer's reflections on architecture can help to better understand the relationship between space, imagination, and meaning. Accord-

3 Hans Belting, Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft, München: Fink, 2001.

4 Jean Piaget, Le développement de la notion de temps chez l'enfant, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946, 95–96.

ing to Langer, the primary symbolization of architectural space is the »ethnic domain«,[5] that is, the tangible, sensible space that can be perceived and that is created in the interaction with cultures and people. When »[t]he architect creates its [a culture's] image«,[6] culture does not impose its image on persons but instead allows the image to be activated by and in the people who move in the space in order to perceive ›something‹ in its perceptible vastness. These are images and schemata that present themselves vaguely and are not clearly defined, as »the alternations of sleep and waking, venture and safety, emotion and calm, austerity and abandon«.[7] As Langer writes, all artistic genres follow »the logic of non-discursive form«[8] and consequently invite non-discursive, affective encounter and feeling: form »*expresses* life – feeling, growth, movement, emotion, and everything that characterizes vital existence.«[9]

Following Langer's view of the openness of the images present in space, to be introduced into the space of the church does not mean to be anxiously guided towards a well-defined, discursive religious and cultural knowledge, as it happened with Meneghello and the eurocentric, patriarchal idea of God. Instead, entering this space means to *perceive*, sensorially and affectively, what calls out to me from this space and inspires me. If architectural space is to be considered ›sacred‹, it cannot persuade or impose itself with certain predefined ideas or images in any ordinary way, but, instead, it allows the subject to be, to breathe, and to enter into a space that is hospitable and welcoming, oscillating, as Langer says, between dream and waking, between being and becoming. In this kind of space, it is possible to freely interact with what I see, even if it is the old image of the angry, White man with the beard, and I can play with the image, take it to be God, or perhaps Saint Joseph, or somebody else, think about their relative fitness and age. Here, the space that surrounds me functions as mediation between what is and what might be, in interaction with my own being in the space, inhabiting and perceiving it.

5 Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, 95.

6 Langer, Feeling and Form, 96.

7 Langer, Feeling and Form, 96.

8 Langer, Feeling and Form, 103.

9 Langer, Feeling and Form, 82 (original emphasis).

But not all the traditional spaces of the church have provided this space of free encounter to believers. The precise specifications for the construction of churches established in the wake of the Council of Trent, and the Baroque architecture developed at the time, translate the image of a triumphalist church into architecture and aim at filling all available space in order to confine the believers in a »liturgical immobility«,[10] limiting their imagination so as to align it with the ›official‹ Catholic imagination rather than offering a space to play and to imagine anew and differently. In fact, the intention of this kind of architectural space was precisely to protect the Catholic faith from any individual imaginative engagement which the Counter-reformation feared would lead to heresy, as the Reformation had shown. Instead of freely and playfully perceiving or sensing faith in space, according to the Counter-reformation logic, faith was to be guided and represented according to the parameters defined by the church both as an institution and as a space. But when space is only used to confine the sacred as well as the individual, there is no possibility for the subject's free interaction with the sacred in space. Not only does the spatial confinement of the sacred in the prescriptiveness of architecture and images inhibit the individual engagement with faith – the possibility for it to touch my existence in its deepest dimensions and become ›my own‹ – but it also delimits the ever-greater reality of God, and thus this spatial and imaginative limitation should be considered the real ›heresy‹.

Something similar to what was intended by Baroque architecture is still present in the churches of the 21st century, as becomes visible in Ulrich Seidl's documentary *Jesus, You Know* (*Jesus, du weißt*, AU 2003). For this film, the director invited believers to pray in front of the camera in a voluntary performance of prayer in the churches they usually go to – although certainly distorted to some degree by the presence of the director and his camera – arranging the prayer sequences like beads on a rosary, one after the other. In his framing of each praying individual, Seidl underlines the severe geometry of the churches, with empty rows of pews, series of columns, and other architectural elements that repeat themselves in a mechanical form similar to the prayers. The restrictive effect of the church architecture is reinforced

10 Roberto Tagliaferri, Saggi di architettura e di iconografia dello spazio sacro, Padova: Messaggero, 2011, 128; in the original: »immobilismo liturgico«.

by the static camera positioned in front of the praying individual, confining them in the frame: both cinematic space and architectural space appear as a prison in which the religious imagination of relationship with the divine is contained. The emphasis on the geometry of the space and the frame of the film image raises the issue discussed above with even greater urgency: does the ›sacred space‹ that surrounds me evoke and nourish my prayer as a free expression of my relationship with God, or does it enforce a rigid, repetitive formula of prayer, as Seidl's film suggests? As the director shows, the filmic apparatus invades less into the freedom of the protagonists to express themselves in their prayers than the architectural space in which they find themselves. The sacred space shown in Seidl's film is a space that protects by closing itself against the threats posed by the world outside, an image of the church as a fortress as it was imagined during the late 19th century in the face of the perceived threat of modernity. But if the church is a fortress, its protective enclosure also delimits the believers' freedom to relate with God. Here, the space that the faithful inhabit is not so much »an illusion, begotten by the visible expression of a feeling«,[11] as Langer says, but a space circumscribed by a material as well as theological boundary which defines the sacred primarily in spatial terms: inside and outside, center and margin, sacred and profane.

This echoes Mircea Eliade's argument that the spatial definition of the sacred helps to keep at bay the chaotic, hybrid relativities of profane space and to identify a center from which to encounter the world: the sacred.[12] Seidl's way of filming underlines this idea: hunched over in the center of the image, within the rigid confines of the frame, the persons who pray have a clear focal point, in Eliade's words, a »center [that] is equivalent to the creation of the world«.[13] But although reassuring in its stability, the center is also obstructive: the space of the believers is not one in which to move and relate freely; instead, it creates a trench that separates them from the world, and, paradoxically, from the sacred or divine itself.

In contrast to Eliade, we argue that the space of the sacred is not the center – static, defined, and focused – but rather the crossroads or the margin,

11 Langer, Feeling and Form, 99.

12 Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, translated by Willard R. Trask, New York: Harvest Book, 1959, 22.

13 Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 22.

a space without place, dynamic and undefined, which does not belong to us but in which we are welcome as guests, like the space created through street art discussed below. It is a space that does not define or circumscribe but nevertheless shelters us – not in the sense of ›my home is my castle‹, in the separation from the outside that stifles us inside with an immobilizing familiarity and expectations of who we are and how our relationships should be organized. Instead, in the space we are imagining through the visual arts we engage with here, we can be who we are and, even, who we will become.

This view of the space of the sacred can be further developed in conversation with Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault. Heidegger understands *Dasein* as *Geworfenheit*, being projected into the world which we inhabit and cultivate as our home, also through our embodied interaction with it, but within which we are not *at* home.[14] Being in the world presupposes spatiality, and the space of the world is thus a part of our imagination, meditation, and prayer. But this space does not rigidly dictate the conditions for these activities; instead, it prepares us for them through the foundational importance of spatiality in the development and practice of all human perception and imagination, as Jean Piaget says. And that is why we call it ›sacred space‹.

This understanding of the space of the sacred as constituted through dynamic relationships rather than a fixed location and boundary echoes Foucault's notion of ›heterotopia‹.[15] Although a notoriously ambiguous and hard-to-define concept taken into different directions by later theorists, heterotopia allows us to think space beyond the binaries of public/private, material/immaterial, sacred/profane. Heterotopias are ›real‹ spaces but, as Foucault writes, they »are outside of all places, even though they are actually localizable«.[16] They may contain incompatible spaces or multiple times, be both enclosed and open, limited and penetrable.[17] Especially in the postmodern development of Foucault's ideas, the openness of heterotopias has been emphasized, recognizing them as spaces of inclusiveness and connection that are often found at the margins of society or in the undeveloped and

14 Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927, 176.

15 Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces [1967], translated by Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, in: Michiel Dehaene/Lieven De Cauter (ed.), Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society, London: Routledge, 2008, 13–29.

16 Foucault, Of Other Spaces, 17.

17 Foucault, Of Other Spaces, 19–21.

liminal areas of urban spaces, established through relationships and practices that may empower marginalized groups through their counter-hegemonic or imaginative way of relating to a given space.[18] Dehaene and De Cauter describe heterotopias as spaces that »inject alterity into sameness«.[19] They see play as the activity typical of heterotopias that creates its own space and time, requires and enacts freedom and openness.[20] Like the space of play, heterotopias are usually temporary and fragile, constituted through practices and relationships. Yet, in their fragility, they can nevertheless be protective and sheltering, like Heidegger's home that is not stifling but a safe haven[21] for those who do not find their own place elsewhere and can be(come) who they are in the playful relationality among space and other beings in heterotopia.

In order to be experienced as a space of the sacred in this play of openness and shelter, the space of the church needs to be opened up and liberated from boundaries. An example for such a (de-)construction of sacred space – according to the logics of cinema and not of architecture – can be found in Tarkovsky's films. For him, the church is a space that does not delimit but where the walls as the boundaries between inside and outside are ruptured so that the light can enter and people freely move. In a poetic dream image in the final sequence of *Nostalghia* (IT/SU 1983), the protagonist Andrei Gorchakov is shown in his home, a Russian datcha in the middle of fields, when a slow zoom-out reveals that the datcha is in fact placed in the protective space of an immense cathedral in ruins, with snowflakes falling through the cracks in the ceiling and covering him up. Here, the church is an enclosure, but it is also openness; it seems to breathe, like the Tuscan cathedrals shown in other scenes of the film, and to flow, like the water that flows through the church in ruins here and that is also an important motif elsewhere in the film. A similar sense of an open, undefined, and heterotopic space is evoked in Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Rublev* (SU 1973) and in the works of the homonymous painter shown there. After the war and

18 Hilde Heynen, Heterotopia Unfolded?, in: Michiel Dehaene/Lieven De Cauter (ed.), Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society, London: Routledge, 2008, 311–323, here 317.

19 Dehaene/De Cauter, Introduction, 4.

20 Lieven De Cauter/Michiel Dehaene, The Space of Play: Towards a General Theory of Heterotopia, in: Michiel Dehaene/Lieven De Cauter (ed.), Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society, London: Routledge, 2008, 87–102, here 95–96.

21 De Cauter/Dehaene, The Space of Play, 97.

destruction waged by the Tartars, the disconsolate Rublev meets with Theophanes the Greek, who restores his faith in a conversation that takes place in a destroyed church. Both dialogue and space are constitutive of what happens here because, again, the destruction of material, built space is imagined as a possibility for openness, fresh air, and new creation. Again, snowflakes are falling, this time to cover the ashes of the wars, and the breaches in the church building are open like passages, like a prayer that is waiting to be said.

This openness of the architectural and imaginative space of the church permits Tarkovsky to initiate a conversation about what one might feel and hope, and hope to find in one's faith. Water and snow are for Tarkovsky like divine grace that enters into and suffuses the sacred space. Thus, the sacredness of the space lies not in its differentiation and separation from the rest of the world, as Eliade proposes, but rather in that which opens up a rupture or a passage, a current that cannot be blocked. The space that admits the sacred is the presence of something that is emptied out, that flows, it is a bridging point, a passageway. This space makes it possible to find an indication or directionality that invites the persons within that space in their embodied situation and with their feelings towards that which attracts them and allows them to find rest, to inhabit the space, and to play in it – in a liminal and momentary way, not in the sense of settling into one's home-castle, closed off from the others.

As Langer writes, architecture suggests to those who live in it and adapt to it, an »*imagined feeling*«,[22] not just of the form itself but in all that offers itself and moves in that space. One might discover a parallel between this understanding of space and the meaning of the liturgy.[23] Architectural space is like a resonant cavity for the liturgical play, its words and gestures. The ritual practice and its relationships structure the space and offer a language for our spatial sensibility. Consequently, the architecture of sacred spaces has to keep in mind the performative dynamics of this particular space: it is a space that I do not simply perceive at a distance but in which I live and breathe, that confronts me and, even more, that asks me to confront myself. Thus, the architecture of churches cannot limit itself to functional necessities but has to provide the vastness and airiness that makes space for God's

22 Langer, Feeling and Form, 177 (original emphasis).

23 Klemens Richter, Kirchenräume und Kirchenträume: Die Bedeutung des Kirchenraums für eine lebendige Gemeinde, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1998.

gratuitous grace and the imaginative character of the liturgy, which Romano Guardini describes as playing before God.[24]

To understand the liturgy as play is not a banalization of liturgical practice. On the contrary, and perhaps paradoxically, play is a serious matter that demands commitment in order to work and that involves the player's complete existence, and thus a heterotopic space is needed that provides space for this serious play and that allows itself to be constituted and reshaped through the imaginative creativity of play, as mentioned above. Thus, space, when it allows the experience of the sacred, is useless and without instrumental purpose, like liturgical furniture or accessories can appear useless or even utopian. There is nothing functional or efficient about the ritual actions that would give any reason to the architectural space; instead, the liturgical space is all about the imagination and disposition to play, that is, the liturgy. According to the liturgist Louis Bouyer, the canonical form of church architecture has no other norm than the celebration of the liturgy.[25] Only the space precedes and determines the sacred in the sense that it permits the realization of the encounter of human beings in their spatio-temporal existence with the sacred, not as a limitation but as an opening. This is serious play, indeed.

These thoughts about the sacred space as a heterotopic space without a predefined function or meaning, porous and inviting of imaginative play, might be disconcerting for those who could suspect behind this view a defense of pure form or even a de-mythification or delegitimation of the sacred space as it becomes a sacred void. But in fact, the sacred space has to open up in order to become a space of involvement and connection, just like the flowing water or the snow that falls into the ruins in Tarkovsky's films. The church as a fortress, as it is represented in Seidl's documentary, might offer protection, but it also shuts in the persons who enter it. It is protection without playfulness and thus without room to breathe or feel. Sacred space is created in imagination, play, and relationship; it is not *a priori* present in an ontological sense. It is ›there‹ but only in the sense of a promise, a possibility. The space of the sacred is thus like the construction of the void that is not simply empty in the sense of a subtraction or negativity but in the

24 Romano Guardini, Vom Geist der Liturgie, 6th ed., Freiburg: Herder, 1962.

25 Louis Bouyer, Architecture et liturgie, Paris: Cerf, 1967.

sense of offering space and possibilities for connections, relationships, and the free emergence of meaning. Invited to enter the space of the sacred, we are situated at the threshold between inside and outside, in a position that questions us and challenges us to be involved, to learn to inhabit this space, to play and to pray, and, in doing so, to assume the responsibility for realizing the promise of this space.

2. Sacred Play in the Streets

In this second part of the chapter, we turn to the analysis of how street art can be a part of the creation of a heterotopic space in which the vastness of space is not confined by norms and conventions but instead opened up for freedom, playfulness, and creativity so that it can become a space in which a new and always different image of God and a new and always different relationship with God can be imagined and experienced. Street art in its contemporary form can be traced to the Philadelphia and New York of the 1960s and 1970s but has older roots that reach back to the graffiti of Ancient Rome. The term ›street art‹ is used for a number of different forms and techniques ranging from performances to poetic assault to graffiti and murals, using words and images (or even, as in graffiti, words as images) in interventions in (mostly) urban space. Street art is a phenomenon that is difficult to capture, and its understandings and evaluations are as diverse as the forms it may take. It can be seen as vandalism because it is often created on walls, train cars, or buildings without the owner's permission, as the beautification of drab urban spaces, or as art. Street art might have a political message, like the murals that visualized the conflicting parties and their concerns in Northern Ireland, or messages of protest in some Latin American countries,[26] or it can be an expression of individual or group identity, such as gang tags. Street art might also be a critique of the commodification of urban spaces through advertising and commercialization, as in the case of the street artist Princess Hijab who understands her covering up of bodies in advertise-

26 Bill Rolston, Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland, Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992; Lyman G. Chaffee, Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.

ments with a hijab of black paint as an act of resistance.[27] Or street art may be a gift intended to enchant the urban space.[28] Because it is produced in a public space and can be created and viewed by anybody – without particular training or qualifications required of the artist or the viewer's payment of an entry fee – street art can be considered »a decentralized, democratic form«,[29] withdrawn from the control of elites or markets,[30] even though that distance from the conventions of the art world and its market is not absolute, as can be seen in more recent developments of museums dedicated to street art or art by street artists sold at auction.

While not uncontested,[31] for our purposes, Nicholas Alden Riggle's definition of street art is helpful as an attempt to somewhat delimit this vast field. He defines an artwork as street art »if, and only if, its material use of the street is internal to its meaning. […] The definition implies that street art is likely to be, among other things, illegal, anonymous, ephemeral, highly creative, and attractive.«[32] Riggle's definition underlines that for their creations, street artists draw on the street as their material – the walls of particular buildings, the pavement, the built material, natural growth and spatial organization, the play of light and shadow, as well as the population of those living in or interacting with the space in their various practices. That is, the space of the street is necessary for its creation, existence, and meaning so that separated from the street and its specific location, the artwork would no longer exist. With this definition, Riggle differentiates street art from public art in which the space of the street is transformed into a museum but not integrated into the work itself with all its materiality, everyday practices, and unpredictabil-

27 Annelies Moors, NiqaBitch and Princess Hijab: Niqab Activism, Satire and Street Art, Feminist Review 98.1: Islam in Europe (2011), 128–135, here 134.

28 Luca M. Visconti/John F. Sherry Jr./Stefanie Borghini/Laurel Anderson, Street Art, Sweet Art?: Reclaiming the ›Public‹ in Public Space, Journal of Consumer Research 37.3 (2010), 511–529, here 521.

29 Chaffee, Political Protest and Street Art, 4.

30 This is beginning to change as street art is integrated into the structures of the art market with art works being sold at auction and exhibited in museums.

31 See for a critique and alternative definition focusing on the criterion of aconsensuality Sondra Bacharach, Street Art and Consent, British Journal of Aesthetics 55.4 (2015), 481–495.

32 Nicholas Alden Riggle, Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 68.3 (2010), 243–257, here 246.

ities that might even endanger the work.[33] Street art draws on the street as »an arena for political and cultural expression, violence and crime, urban gender roles, advertising and commerce, and the street as a counterpoint to museums and other traditional art venues.«[34] Thus, the space of the street is essential for street art, and in the interaction between artists, work, viewers, and space, the space itself plays a constitutive role and vice versa, is constituted as a meaningful space through these relationships, as we will see below.

Given the diversity of forms, motivations, and evaluations of street art, we will focus here on a concrete example, the *Surfing Madonna* (2011) by Mark Patterson (1953–2023), before developing some more general thoughts about the imagining of space, community, and faith in and through street art in the concluding section. The *Surfing Madonna* (fig. 1) is a mosaic that was installed clandestinely by the artist Mark Patterson and his friend, Bob Nichols, on Good Friday (which in 2011 coincided with Earth Day, April 22), under a railroad bridge in Encinitas, an affluent, mostly White community on the coast of Southern California just north of San Diego. Shortly afterwards, in May 2011, Nichols and Patterson founded the Surfing Madonna Oceans Project, a non-profit organization that combines environmental activism for the protection of the oceans with community building, such as beach camps for children with special needs or veterans.[35] When the mosaic was first installed in Encinitas without a permit, it was considered vandalism, and, once the artist was identified, he was charged with the removal of the artwork and a fine. Eventually, the *Surfing Madonna* found a permanent home on the façade of Leucadia Pizzeria near the original site, close to an intersection with Highway 101 and about ten minutes from the beach. In front of the image and separated by a few steps from the sidewalk, a small cove-like area has been carved out with a bench under trees to one side, allowing viewers to visit with the image, read the plaque that describes its story, and find a moment of stillness, prayer, or meditation in this little niche next to the street and downtown area of Encinitas (fig. 2).

33 Riggle, Street Art, 254.

34 Lydia Yee, Introduction, in: Lydia Yee/Withney Rugg (eds.), Street Art Street Life: From the 1950s to Now: Essays by Katherine A. Bussard, Frazer Ward, and Lydia Yee, New York: Bronx Museum/Aperture Foundation, 2008, 6–7, here 6.

35 Surfing Madonna Oceans Project, Our Mission, https://www.surfingmadonna.org [accessed 17 April 2025].

Fig. 1: Mark Patterson, *Surfing Madonna* (2011), stained glass mosaic, 300 x 300 cm, Encinitas. Photo Stefanie Knauss.

Fig. 2: New permanent placement of the *Surfing Madonna* in a cove-like area. Photo Stefanie Knauss.

Fig. 3: Detail of Mark Patterson, *Surfing Madonna*. Photo Stefanie Knauss.

The mosaic shows the Virgin Mary, surrounded by a golden mandorla, on a surfboard riding a deep-blue wave that breaks above her head, her green cloak billowing in the wind around her, her hands folded in prayer, with the words ›Save the Ocean‹ written vertically in lighter color on a darker blue background along the left margin. While it might be unexpected to see the Virgin Mary on a surfboard with her feet in wetsuit booties showing under her dress (fig. 3) and the outline of her left leg suggested under her floating red dress, the figure is clearly recognizable as the Virgin of Guadalupe: the mandorla, the position of her head (slightly bending to the right, with her eyes cast down), her folded hands and her red dress with black tassels are all part of the traditional iconography of the Guadalupe,[36] whose image indeed inspired the artist in the long process of creation from a first sketch in 2005 to the mosaic's realization in 2011.[37]

Aesthetically, the *Surfing Madonna* is stunning, which is a major requirement for street art that has to compete against a multitude of visual impressions in the public square. Its vibrant color scheme is simple but effective with its combination of the intense dark blue of the water, Mary's green cloak, her red dress, the golden mandorla and the sparkling white of the surfboard. Artistically, the mosaic is carefully executed, with Mary's facial expression and other details of her figure, the shades of blue and white of the water and the breaking wave rendered clearly and with subtlety. The dynamic composition adds to the impact of the artwork, with the surfboard pointing down to the left, Mary's cloak billowing in the wind and her legs positioned for balance on the board.

Yet the strength of the mosaic's visual impact is not so much due to its colors or composition but to the incongruence of its motif: the Madonna

36 According to the legend, the Virgin appeared to Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill (Mexico) in the 16th century as a young, apparently Indigenous woman speaking Nahuatl, the native language of what today is Mexico. Combining Aztek and Christian religions, Indigenous and European cultures, local tradition and colonial power, the Virgin of Guadalupe has since become central to Mexican and, more broadly, Latin American identity. See Roberto Lint Sagarena, Making a There There: Marian Muralism and Devotional Streetscapes, Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation 25.1–2 (2009), 93–107, here 95; Guisela Latorre, Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008, 222.

37 Mark Patterson, Mark's Story, https://www.surfingmadonna.org/meet-mark-patterson-the-artist [accessed 21 April 2025].

on a surfboard? The idea is at the very least surprising, and thus the image cuts through the visual clutter of the busy road and downtown area. For some, the playful reference to the visual tradition of the Guadalupe, putting her on a surfboard – having her *play* in the ocean – might be blasphemous; for others it might be humorous; in others the motif might evoke feelings of devotion to the Virgin or of the spirituality of water and ocean; others yet might appreciate it as an expression of Latinx religion and Indigenous culture. These various reactions can be intuited from the dedications on the paving stones on the ground, some of which indicate the donors' religious or environmental concerns associated with the mosaic and the Virgin motivating their contribution to the creation of the cove. For those passing by in their cars or on foot, the aesthetic experience of the beauty of the colors, the dynamic composition, and the surprise of the motif momentarily suspends the space and time of the everyday, as if rupturing its structures or opening up a view into a different dimension, all the while being situated right in the middle of ordinary life with its routines. The mosaic creates a heterotopic space that is clearly localized – at the intersection of B Street and Highway 101 – and yet disrupts this space dedicated to transportation and commerce by offering a space and time that is not clearly defined but open to the playful imagination of those who enter and inhabit it.

In spite of its subject matter, the *Surfing Madonna* was not primarily created as a work of religious art – a category which we have sought to problematize throughout this volume in any case – with the aim to express or inspire religious feelings. The artist's intention was to raise the environmental consciousness of the population of this community which in many ways depends on the ocean. It is worth underlining, however, that Patterson chose to represent this ›secular‹ environmental message through a religious motif and that the apparently secular(ized) image of the Madonna has evoked a religious reception when people started to treat it as a shrine to the Guadalupe (although a very SoCal version of it), at times leaving candles in front of it. As mentioned, the paving stones also testify to this twofold – sometimes separate and sometimes intertwined – environmental and spiritual-religious significance of the work with dedications and intentions such as: »Mary, Mother of God, protect the innocent, always give us hope«, »Save the ocean, save the world«, or »To our beloved Mother Ocean«.

Aside from the artist's personal relationship with the Guadalupe,[38] the connection between the religious motif of the Virgin and the environmental message of the mosaic also has roots in traditional forms of devotion to Mary who is called *Stella Maris*, the Star of the Seas, and considered the patron of sailors and seafarers. As the encyclicals of Pope Francis, *Laudato si'* (2015) and *Laudate Deum* (2023), make amply clear, environmental and climate concerns are at the heart of the Christian faith in a creator God with the consequent human responsibility and care for creation, and thus the motif of the Madonna adds religious authority to the socio-political message of ocean protection. Furthermore, the connection with, reverence for, and care for nature are significant also for those for whom surfing is a spiritual practice and religious experience.[39] The *Surfing Madonna* can thus be understood as a polyvalent motif that is able to bring together Catholics and non-Catholics, environmentalists, political and social activists, surfers, and believers. This blurs the lines between politics and religion that are particularly controversial in the USA and opens up the clearly defined spaces that each – the church/religion and the state – have claimed for themselves. Disrupting the ordinarily binary separation between secular environmental discourse and religious devotional discourse, the mosaic and its cove become an extra-ordinary space, a heterotopia in which it is possible to imagine different forms of connectedness with creation, community, and the divine.

With its motif, the mosaic also taps into the traditions of its location and thus establishes particular relationships with the space in which it is placed. Although the artist himself is not Latino, the Southern Californian context in which he lives and works is strongly influenced by its large, and often marginalized, Chicanx and, more broadly, Latinx population, and consequently the Virgin of Guadalupe as the protagonist of Latinx religious devotion is a frequent motif both in public and private art in the area.[40] In addition, Southern California has a strong tradition of mural art, in particular as an expression of Chicanx identity, which functions in a twofold way to affirm the sense of self within the marginalized community and represent it

38 Patterson, Mark's Story.

39 Bron Taylor, Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Based Nature Religion, Journal of the American Academy of Religion 75.4 (2007), 923–951.

40 Sagarena, Making a There There, 94.

to outsiders.[41] Thus, both the motif and its form as a mural create a connection with the Chicanx and Latinx communities of Southern California. At the same time, by putting the Virgin on a surfboard, the artist relates to the surfing community along the Pacific coast. Most passers-by will recognize the position of Mary's feet and legs on the board, either from watching surfers out on the ocean or from their own experience. The fact that Mary holds her hands folded rather than spreading her arms to keep her balance riding the waves might make her even appear somewhat superhuman to those who have tried to stay atop a surfboard before. The cross between surfing and religion becomes even more apparent in the concrete place where the artwork is now situated. Mounted on the façade of Leucadia Pizzeria, the *Surfing Madonna* is close to the intersection of Highway 101 and B Street in Encinitas. Highway 101 is the historical highway that runs along the Pacific coast from San Diego all the way up to Olympia, Washington, with the section between San Diego and San Francisco approximating the old route connecting the Spanish missions – called *el camino real*, ›the royal road‹ – along which the missionaries brought Christianity and the Madonna to the region in the first place. B Street, on the other hand, runs west towards Moonlight State Beach and ends right at the ocean that the mosaic calls to protect, at a beach that is popular among surfers. Thus, it is not just the motif that improbably brings together the spheres of surfing, religion, culture, ecology, spirituality, and society, but these spheres intersect in the space where the *Surfing Madonna* is situated. Through the iconography chosen by the artist and the place in which it is located, the work serves as a visual marker of the communities – contemporary and historical – inhabiting this space and their concerns: surfers, environmentalists, Latinx, Chicanx, Indigenous communities, Spanish missionaries, Catholic believers, practitioners of ocean spirituality.

But more than just being a reflection of something that is already there, the *Surfing Madonna* also contributes to the creation of this space as a meaningful place in a new way for the people inhabiting it, permanently or in passing. It is not only situated at the street leading to the ocean but with its dark blue background, the mosaic itself seems to open up the space of the city onto the water, to offer a glimpse of the sea right next to the street, combining its message ›Save the Ocean‹ with a momentary experience of its depths.

41 Latorre, Walls of Empowerment.

In the middle of concrete and exhaust fumes, the mosaic creates a space of nature, aesthetically through the dark blue color, materially in the trees and shrubs flourishing in its cove, and conceptually through the reminder that nature and the oceans need our protection if we want to be able to continue to live in this world. At the same time, next to the traffic of the busy streets and the pizzeria, shops, and other businesses along Encinita's main street, the *Surfing Madonna* and its small cove constitute a space of stillness and meditation, relating to Chicanx and Latinx Catholic spirituality and non-denominational, nature-based spiritualities at the same time. Here, the space of the sacred is not ontological, pre-existent and defined by the norms of architecture and theology, but it is created through the artwork and the practices through which the people inhabiting the space relate to it. As a sacred space, it is not withdrawn or separated by a boundary from the world of the profane; on the contrary, it is right in the middle of the everyday. With its disruption of both the norms of the everyday and the ›norms‹ of the sacred, it is a liminal space that opens up for something that goes beyond it and allows for a playful and expansive imagination – be it the experience of the vastness of the ocean, the exhilaration of riding a wave, or a sense of relationship with the Madonna or the transcendent.

The experience of the artwork and what it offers is not limited to the individual but also includes a communal aspect. As a work of public street art, it is per se open to and a part of a community. This is expressed through its motif which, as mentioned, relates to and integrates the diverse communities of the space where it is situated, as well as in its reception and further development. When the authorities charged Patterson to remove the mosaic, financial and moral support was abundant: within a few weeks (the artwork remained at its original site only for about two months), the *Surfing Madonna* had become a part of the community who wanted it to remain in their midst. In the search for a new home for the artwork, then, the possibility to have free access to it and in particular, to be able to see it from the road, was one of the priorities. Furthermore, as the origin of the Surfing Madonna Oceans Project, the Madonna is not only at the center of the local community, those who pass by her on their way to work, to the beach, or to a bar, but also of the wider community of those concerned about nature in general, and the ocean in particular, and committed to their conservation. The mission of the foundation »to promote public displays of artistic expression,

create experiences of joy in natural environments, promote ocean awareness and save the ocean for all to enjoy«,[42] includes community building as a central tool. The *Surfing Madonna* and the foundation it inspired thus represent an example for the social dimension of street art as art that happens on the street and with the street and those who live in it, and that thus calls for the realization of right forms of community and relationship – with other people and with the environment – which artworks limited to museums as spaces set apart from the local context and with more individualized codes of aesthetic appreciation might not develop to the same degree.

The *Surfing Madonna* is far from the image of the old, angry God of Meneghello's memories. It is a secular work – although with undeniably religious dimensions and open to a religious or spiritual reception – placed in the middle of the city, with a socio-political message calling for environmental action rather than religious devotion. And yet, the city and the sacred, concern for nature and religious faith do not contradict each other. Playing with the religious iconographic tradition of the Guadalupe in the streets of Southern California, the artist reimagines what being-in-the-world means: responsibility for the communities and environment we live in, relationship, expansive imagination, and, not least, joy and beauty. The artwork and the physical and experiential space it creates are not defined and restricted by religious doctrine and regulations, nor do they prescribe what and how religion or faith has to be, but they are open to the meaning that those who pass by attribute to them when perhaps for a moment they are taken out of their habitual routines to enter into a different space, be it a spiritual experience of transcendence or simply (or perhaps not so simply) a moment of joy and humor. These experiences of space, constituted by the work and its reception, disrupt the separation of the everyday from the sacred, conceived by Eliade as a space set-apart, and allow the mosaic's viewers to see the world in which they live with different eyes – and perhaps to live in it in different ways.

42 Surfing Madonna Oceans Project, Our Mission.

3. In the Margins and at the Crossroads

Maureen O'Connell argues that street art, specifically murals, are »a popular, democratic, and prophetic form of art whose location on inner-city streets integrates the studio and sanctuary in a revelatory ecstasy« and that consequently they should become a part of the theological canon because they help make theology relevant, intellectually responsible, and transformative.[43] In this concluding section, we consider further the aspects in the aesthetic experience of street art which constitute spaces of the sacred not as closed and limiting but as open heterotopic spaces filled by the life and faith of the people who inhabit them. A central condition for this is that the space of the sacred, i.e. the space where the sacred can be encountered as life-giving and life-changing, is understood as a space that makes space for the ever-new and different presence of God. This means that it is a space that is created in the moment of experience by the subjects of this experience – God and human being in their free encounter – and not predefined by expectations about what or who God is or should be, closed in by rigid, stifling norms.

As we said above, in contrast to Eliade, we do not perceive the space of the sacred as the center with its implications of delimitation, power, and stability, clearly separated from the space of the profane situated on the margins. Instead, Foucault's notion of heterotopia as a space in-between, as a third between the private and public, helps us to discover the space of the sacred ›elsewhere‹. As Dehaene and De Cauter write, the heterotopic space represents »[t]he reinvention of the everyday: the ordinary and the extraordinary«.[44] That also includes, we think, reinventing the relationship of profane and sacred spaces beyond their binary opposition, as the liminal, dynamic space of the crossroads (literally so, in the case of the *Surfing Madonna*) and the margins. Street art creates such spaces of marginality in various ways: it is often situated in marginal urban areas inhabited by populations that are socially marginalized by poverty, unemployment, or crime, by their ethnic

43 Maureen O'Connell, The Streets as Studio and Sanctuary: Community Murals, Theology, and Social Transformation, Arts 19.2 (2008), 20–28, here 20. For her research of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and her proposal of an aesthetic ethics, see Maureen O'Connell, If These Walls Could Talk: Community Muralism and the Beauty of Justice, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012.

44 Dehaene/De Cauter, Introduction, 4 (original emphasis).

identity or their lifestyles. Street art is also marginal in relationship to the artworld: it is often created by artists who have no formal training and might opt for anonymity like Mark Patterson did initially, and, sometimes, the artists are themselves members of the marginalized populations in whose environments they create their works, making of the margin a space of creativity and expressivity.[45] Also, as art on the street, it is not part of the dynamics of the art market with its structures of critics, galleries, fairs, exhibitions, and auctions. Street art cannot be sold, bought, transported to a museum or the safe of a private owner: if a piece is taken away from the street, it is no longer street art in its constitutive interaction with the material conditions of its location as defined by Riggle; it becomes a different work.[46]

While finding itself at the margins in multiple ways, street art is nevertheless right at the center: in the midst of everyday life, it is not set apart in the parallel world of the museum with its air-conditioned rooms where viewers are not able to touch the works, a space that in many ways is similar to the space of the church as represented by Meneghello or Seidl to which ›normal‹ people have no or only limited access and that only religious specialists are allowed to fully inhabit. In contrast, street art is part of everyday life; as Riggle writes, it is art that »join[s] the living«.[47] The flashes of beauty and surprise – perhaps even the moment of revelatory ecstasy that O'Connell mentions in her discussion of Philadelphia murals with reference to Paul Tillich's experience in front of Botticelli's *Madonna*[48] – that people experience in the encounter with street art are a part of and, at the same time, a disruption or ›reinvention‹ of their everyday lives, and only because of this paradoxicality are they able to impact this life. The space of the margin – the empty lot, derelict factory building, damp underpass, bleak highway intersection, considered barren and useless from the perspective of urban planning and real estate development – becomes a space of creativity, new relationships, surprise, and expansive imagination as the unexpected interrupts the routine of the everyday.

This is the case because, in spite of its presence in the everyday with its suggestions of routine, street art is characterized by an element of transgression

45 Latorre, Walls of Empowerment, 2.

46 Riggle even describes street art as antithetical to the artworld (Riggle, Street Art, 248), although this antithesis is no longer as stark as it may have been in street art's earlier years.

47 Riggle, Street Art, 256.

48 See Chapter 3 of this volume for a discussion of Tillich's theological engagement with art.

and surprise – realized to various degrees in different circumstances – which are essential for its potential to create, together with the viewers interacting with it, a space of openness and transformation which disrupts the binary of center and margin, sacred and profane. As the example of the *Surfing Madonna* has shown, street art transgresses legal norms if it is not commissioned and realized with permission of property owners and therefore considered vandalism and illegal. Street art is also transgressive in its use of forms and motifs that might not comply with what is considered polite or appropriate – such as placing the Guadalupe on a surfboard – and thus disrupt »the homogeneity of urban design that fosters a visual culture of advertisements, property signs and political propaganda«.[49] While transgressions of social and legal norms might hurt individuals and the social order and thus are seen as problematic by many, they are the necessary condition for change and transformation. Without the critique and disruption of the already known, new visions – let alone the motivation to realize them – would not be possible. The prophetic voice both denounces what is wrong with the status quo and imagines a new way of being. Transgression does not have to be violent or hurtful, but it can also occur in the form of play when the norms and regulations of the everyday no longer work in the world of play with its different rules.

The transformation realized in and through street art can be multifaceted. It is first of all a transformation of space from perhaps grey and drab to colorful and striking, from a space of conventional normativity to one of playful surprise. It is also a transformation of the artists who find a voice to express themselves, and of the viewers who are shaken out of their routines in a moment of wonder. Depending on the situation, a mural can also create and transform communities, as the Surfing Madonna Oceans Project is attempting to do, or as is already the case in the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program in which murals are planned and realized together with the local community in a long process that includes working through conflicts, healing wounds, and finding new ways of living together.[50] And finally, the various transgressions of street art can create a space in which the conventions of theological imagination are transformed. As Thomas Dicken writes, graffiti or street art can be seen as a powerful metaphor (and perhaps more) for

49 Silvia Loeffler, Urban Warriors, Irish Arts Review 29.1 (2012), 70–75, here 72–73.

50 Ruth Illman/W. Alan Smith, Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith, London: Routledge, 2013, 69–80.

doing theology and thinking about God in a way that is critical, shocking, and disruptive of truth claims, making it impossible to lock God into doctrines and ideologies.[51] Instead street art opens up new spaces of imagining a God who is a part of this world and encounters humans in ever new ways in their everyday life in experiences of beauty or healing.

An essential part of this transformative transgressiveness of street art is its ephemeral form. While the *Surfing Madonna* now has found a permanent home, many works of street art are removed or painted over within hours of their creation. And even if street art is created with permission and not in danger of being removed, it is still exposed to sun, rain, wind, and exhaust fumes and will decay under their influence. This might be regrettable, but it is part of what street art is: it is not made for eternity; it gains its meaning precisely from being here and now, in this moment, and it does not claim to extend this moment across time or space or to have validity beyond the here and now. The temporality of street art also means that it makes space for what others might have to say when the moment calls to them. In a sense, it is the art of the *kairós*, the qualitatively right moment (in contrast to a quantitative, linear understanding of time) when this – whatever it is – needs to be said (or painted) in order to create new possibilities and new freedom.[52] Street art thus never claims to have the last word but at most the second-to-last, as it is open to make space for new realities to replace it. And this is the most we can claim regarding our knowledge of God, as well (although theology often forgets its own contingency and preliminariness). We know as well as we can right now, and hopefully our knowledge, our images of God may give us a greater understanding of the divine and our relationship to it, but we cannot claim to know God absolutely, in all of the dimensions of God's being. Dicken argues that a graffiti that has disappeared has its own story to tell, and he draws the analogy to the empty tomb of Christ, calling it »a kind of graffiti-undoing-graffiti«, when the emptiness of the tomb speaks volumes about the presence it

51 Thomas M. Dicken, Graffiti Theology: Criteria and an Agenda, Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory 12.1 (2012), 82–99.

52 Daniel Weidner describes Paul Tillich's understanding of *kairos*, as developed in his first text on the concept from 1922, as a call to »enter into the very moment of change«. It is »the charismatic instant of the fullness of time; in other words, it is always loaded with tensions, possibilities, and impossibilities«; Daniel Weidner, Prophetic Criticism and the Rhetoric of Temporality: Paul Tillich's *Kairos* Texts and Weimar Intellectual Politics, Political Theology 21.1–2 (2020), 71–88, here 81.

replaces:[53] emptiness, disappearance, not-knowing can be even more expressive than presence or representation. Street art thus creates a space that is at the same time there and not there because in its presence, in the creation of its space, the disappearance and absence of this space are already implied.

In all its ephemerality, street art is nonetheless concrete and material; it is *there*, even though its presence foreshadows its future absence. In its presence, it participates in the re-creation of space together with all those who inhabit this space, permanently or temporarily. Henri Lefebvre argues that space is created through social relationships and practices.[54] This might happen in a conscious fashion when architectural constructions shape space in certain ways and for certain purposes, for example in the design of a town square where people meet each other, markets are held, and traffic is limited to make these interactions possible. But it might also be less conscious, for example when people keep moving across a piece of lawn between two points and after a while create a path which eventually is filled in with gravel so that a new passageway is added to the network of streets in a city. Relationships and practices attribute meaning to space, and, vice versa, they are given meaning by the space in which they occur. And of course it is entirely possible that the same space may have different meanings at different times (a church building might have been a place of worship once but then become a museum or a brewery at another point of time) or for different people (a courthouse will certainly have a very different significance for the lawyer or judge than for the defendant). Street art is part of these practices and relationships that create meaningful spaces: the *Surfing Madonna*, playing with a network of references related to the surfer and Latinx communities, to environmental protection and different religious traditions, creates a religious space for some who pass by, for others, the work makes out of a street corner a piece of nature, and for some it is both in the entanglement of the oceans with the Stella Maris. Even if street art is considered as vandalism that does not create spaces but instead destroys them, in this negative sense, it still has a transformative impact on the spaces of the city and the relationships taking place in them.

As Silvia Loeffler writes, street art is »a site-specific public forum, where political affiliations as well as sentiments of loss and trauma are publicly dis-

53 Dicken, Graffiti Theology, 91.

54 Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space [1974], translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

played.«[55] The spaces created through street art are both individual and collective spaces and as heterotopic spaces, they represent spaces beyond the binary of private or public. Sometimes, an artwork marks a significant space for an individual with a deeply private, intimate significance for them, but through its sheer presence in the public sphere, it makes this space public and meaningful for others as well (even if, perhaps, in a different way) and thus potentially creates opportunities for interactions that connect the individual with the collective. This was the case, for example, in the project *Linda's Ex*, a series of messages to ›Linda‹ from her ex-partner left for her on the walls of Berlin. This apparently individual expression of loss and desire acquired a collective meaning when people began to comment the messages or leave themselves letters to Linda or her ex and thus participated in the creation of this space of love, mourning, and comfort.[56]

Space is a necessary condition not just for human existence – we are in the world as our home but not at home in it, as Heidegger says – but also for our flourishing as human beings with agency.[57] Space signifies belonging, and, as such, it contributes to the identity and subjecthood of the individual or a group and is constitutive of their capacity to engage in relationships and actions. But as said before, in its ephemerality, the space created by street art is one of freedom and change rather than stability and confinement; it is a space of *becoming* rather than *being*. By creating and inhabiting a space in which we become ourselves in a dynamic sense, we also become responsible for this space in its material and social dimensions. This is clearly expressed in the *Surfing Madonna*, whose call for environmental protection and community building shows this sense of responsibility for the world in which we live and the beings with whom we share it. Street art as an art form is itself an expression of this sense of responsibility: it speaks into the public realm where people can see what it has to say so that the shared space can become one in which life is possible.[58] The space created by street art is thus one of possibilities and promises: perhaps expressed in the mode of critique or imagined as a utopian vision, like the Madonna riding the blue waves of the Pacific, or perhaps it is itself only the first step of creating new spaces of flourishing in

55 Loeffler, Urban Warrior, 74.

56 Kai Jakob, Street Art in Berlin, 4th ed., Berlin: Jaron Verlag, 2011, 164.

57 Visconti/Sherry/Borghini/Anderson, Street Art, Sweet Art?, 526.

58 Visconti/Sherry/Borghini/Anderson, Street Art, Sweet Art?, 522.

relationship to space, time, and other beings, as in the processes accompanying – but not limited to – the creation of murals in Philadelphia.

Given the multi-layered significance and effects of street art, it may be easy to lose sight of what it is in the first place that makes possible the creation of space, the transformation of worlds, and the imagination of new becoming: the aesthetic dimension of street art. Riggle helpfully reminds us that street art can never be understood through the analysis of the formal aspects of the work alone and necessarily requires attention to the space in which it is created and which it creates: »making sense of street art requires attending to a nonaesthetic feature of the work, namely, its material use of the street.«[59] And yet the aesthetic dimension of street art – including the aesthetic dimensions of the space in which it is placed and through which it is created – plays a major role in its own creation of spaces of imagination and transformation. Drawing on bell hooks and Paul Tillich, O'Connell affirms that beauty can be an occasion for the experience of transcendence.[60] The often striking aesthetics of street art – a necessity if it is to succeed in the visual clutter of the cityscape – make possible the experience of beauty that is even more stunning because encountered in places where we expect only ugliness and decay or, at most, functionality. The colors and shapes interrupt the grey of concrete and the black of asphalt, introducing a new dimension into the rectangular layout of buildings and streets. Turning a corner and seeing the Madonna on a surfboard in colors that appear both warm and deep, one experiences a moment of surprise that might turn into awe and a sense of wonder amidst the routines of the everyday. In street art, space is not opened up by cracks and crevices in buildings or streets through which the snow falls like in Tarkovsky's ruins of churches, but, instead, it opens in the unexpected aesthetic experiences of the beautiful, the disturbing, or even the ugly.

Street art is an example of a heterotopic space, a liminal space at the margins and crossroads that is both material and transient. It creates an open space in which, different from the paradoxically restrictive »immense space« of Meneghello's childhood church, we are invited to play and where we can imagine new relationships with each other and with the God who will forever surprise us. Fundamentally, in its transgressiveness and ephemerality, street art makes space to imagine differently, beyond conventions and norms, and

59 Riggle, Street Art, 249.

60 O'Connell, The Streets as Studio and Sanctuary, 20, 25.

in ever-new ways. With its presence that already includes its future absence, street art opens up the space of the street into a vastness that is hospitable to the visions and experiences of those who pass through or inhabit this space, now and in the future: it is a space of the not-yet, a space of becoming, promise, and surprise.

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