

Stefanie Knauss | Davide Zordan

# Encountering Art

Theological Approaches to Visuality



Nomos





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Volume 11

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© Cover image: Mark Patterson, *Surfing Madonna* (detail), stained glass mosaic, 300 x 300 cm, 2011, Encinitas (USA). Photo: Stefanie Knauss.

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## Preface

When I first met my new colleague Davide Zordan, at the beginning of my post-doc at the Fondazione Bruno Kessler (back then, the Istituto Trentino di Cultura) in Trento, Italy, in 2007, we had about four or five different languages between us but none that we both spoke fluently. Nevertheless, we managed to communicate our shared interests in visual culture and arts in general, and in the cinema in particular. Davide was on the board, and later the President, of the film festival Religion Today, which still continues today in Trento, and had a vast knowledge and understanding of films of all genres and traditions, and I have enormously benefitted from his suggestions for films to watch and how to think about them. As our linguistic skills improved, we realized that we did not only share an interest in visual arts but also a particular approach to thinking theologically about the encounter with artworks, shaped by the French phenomenological tradition and foundational aesthetic theology. To this common set of resources and conversation partners, we each contributed our own particular interests and areas of expertise: for Davide, the French-Italian theological and philosophical tradition (he spent significant time in Belgium during his doctorate on the French theologian Louis Bouyet), for me, feminist and gender studies and cultural studies out of the Anglo-American context.

One day, Davide suggested to turn our informal conversations during our coffee breaks and over lunch into a more sustained reflection, which became our first co-authored article, »The ›Profane‹ Ecstasy of Saint Teresa«, originally published in Italian in the *Annali delle Scienze Religiose* in 2008 and republished as the first chapter of this volume. Writing this article was a real experience of thinking and writing together: it was not simply a matter of splicing together pieces of text written by two people but a process during which our ideas and words merged into a unified argument and text. This

was the beginning of a collaboration resulting in a series of co-authored articles and a co-edited volume on questions relating to art, cinema, imagination, faith, and theology (a bibliography of selected writings on theology, imagination, and the arts by Davide is included at the end of this volume), which also influenced our individually authored texts. I like to think that if Davide hadn't passed away much too early in 2015, we would still be discussing the latest films, our visits to museums and galleries, and our latest theological discoveries, and writing about them together. As it is, I often wonder what Davide might have thought of a particular artwork or book.

It was again Davide who, some time after I left Trento in 2011, had the idea to collect and revise some of our articles and publish them, together with new material, as a more fully developed theological reflection on visibility and visual arts. We decided together which material to include and what to add, and before his death, we were able to discuss the translations and planned revisions of previously published material and complete the draft of one of the new chapters («Street Art as Sacred Space», Chapter 7 of this volume). I am embarrassed to say that after Davide's death, it took more than ten years for me to conclude this last shared project. But hopefully, these intervening years have also allowed my thinking to mature some more and thus ultimately been of benefit to the volume. The Introduction, in which I provide a theoretical framing for the theological-aesthetic reflections to follow in the individual chapters, is rooted in our collaboration but also adds new material and ideas encountered since and thus reflects some of this development. Writing Chapter 8 on «The Utopian Longing of Musicals», based on initial ideas we had brainstormed together, and the Introduction, and revising the other chapters along the lines of what we had discussed felt like being in conversation with Davide again, and I am glad that finally these ideas will be shared with others as well.

Stefanie Knauss

## Acknowledgements

A project that is as long in the making as this one of course involves many individuals and institutions who have in different ways contributed to its development and finally, to its publication. First and foremost, my gratitude to Lucilla Ferraiolo, Davide's wife, for her friendship and generosity during our time in Trento and since then, and especially for her permission to revise and republish Davide's work here. Thanks to the Fondazione Bruno Kessler, in particular Antonio Autiero, the director of the Center of Religious Studies during my time there, Paolo Costa and our other colleagues, for providing the space to think about questions of art, theology, and imagination, and for their support and encouragement. My thanks to Villanova University, where I teach now, for a sabbatical in 2015 during which I was able to translate the chapters previously published in Italian and German and work with Davide on the volume during a brief research stay at Trento. I am deeply grateful that I had this last opportunity to spend time with Davide, discussing theology and art, watching films, and sharing meals, before his death the same year. For help with proofreading and bibliographies, many thanks to Joshua Johnston and Shayla Jordan, doctoral students in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova. I am especially pleased that this volume appears in a series co-edited with colleagues who also knew and appreciated Davide and his work: thank you to Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, Marie-Therese Mäder and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati for their feedback and comments on the manuscript and for including it in the series Religion and Media we edit together. To Beate Bernstein and Tamara Kuhn at Nomos my thanks for accompanying the volume to its publication.

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Chapter 2 is a translated and revised version of Knauss, Stefanie/Zordan, Davide, *L'aura nomade: Riflessioni sull'incontro con l'opera d'arte a partire da Walter Benjamin*, *Annali di Studi Religiosi* 11 (2010), 9–32. Used by permission of FBK Press.

Chapter 3 is a translation, with revisions, of Zordan, Davide/Knauss, Stefanie, *Presenza/assenza in blu: L'Arte, la fruizione e la trascendenza*, *Annali di Studi Religiosi* 10 (2009), 89–109. Used by permission of FBK Press.

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Chapter 6 incorporates revised material from two articles: Knauss, Stefanie, *The Language of the Senses: An Aesthetic Theology*, in: Esser, Anette/Gasser-Schuchter, Christine/Grevel, Sylvia/Jasper, Alison/Rapp, Ursula (eds.), *Feminist Theology and Visual Arts (Journal of the European Society for Women in Theological Research 19)*, Leuven: Peeters, 2011, 53–65. Used by permission of Peeters. Knauss, Stefanie, *Aisthesis: Theology and the Senses*, *CrossCurrents* 63.1 (2013), 106–121, copyright © 2013 for the Association for Public Religion and Intellectual Life. Used by permission of the University of North Carolina Press.

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