For some years now the heart of my theologizing has been the attempt to integrate everyday life and systematic theological reflection. I am interested in the ‘religious’ dimensions of everyday practices and in their theological meaning and interpretation, especially with regard to theological reflection on ‘God’ (De Haardt 2002a). With this focus on the everyday I follow developments in critical cultural studies, philosophy and theology (De Haardt forthcoming). In this approach everyday life is considered as both the starting point for all theoretical questions and a critical corrective to an epistemology and methodology in which ‘daily life’ too quickly turns into a technical theoretical model that has lost its relation to everyday reality. This loss is caused by—in short—academia's technical, monologic rationality, its need for conceptual ‘purity’, its desire for universality, and the pleasure and desire of ‘seeing the whole’ (De Certeau 1984). By restricting the everyday to this kind of conceptuality, scholars try to deny that what is ultimately impossible: daily life cannot be reduced to an all-encompassing systematic schema. It is here, at this point of breaking through the monologue of much academic reflexivity, including theology, that not only everyday life but narratives as well emerge as a starting point for systematic reflection. I understand ‘narratives’ here in a simple way, i.e., as life stories, stories about someone’s life. People can tell these stories about their own lives, about the lives of others or as imaginary stories. As sources for reflection, ‘narratives’ can consist of more or less autobiographical ego documents; research reports of more or less ethnographical data, or—as is the case here—in stories that are transformed into literary, filmic, or theatrical narratives. In this way I consider narratives to be stories that have to be told. This is a very loose definition, without much theoretical reasoning behind it, but it has

\* A different version of this chapter was published as De Haardt 2002a.

\[1\] This is neither to deny the considerable discussions on the concepts of narrative, narrativity, and narratology as such nor to deny the multiple and diverging disciplinary and/or methodological approaches to actual analysis of narratives.
functioned this way in my theological work over the years, starting with theological reflection on literature, and has gradually come to include ‘other’ kinds of narratives (De Haardt 1989, 2000, 2002b, 2009). What is distinctive in this approach to narratives, however, is the ‘interpretative’ element: the sense-making dimension of narratives (Ganzvoort ed. 1998; Ricoeur 1995). Narratives, (auto)biographical or not, can thus offer a kind of more or less ‘coherent’ sense with regard to a/one’s life or life in general, they are ‘stories we live by’. Before turning to my filmic example, let me point to yet one other and important element in this choice for narratives in relation to the everyday life. Here I refer to a kind of ‘religious attitude’ or, perhaps better, an ‘aesthetic’ or ‘spiritual’ sensibility, in addition to the political and epistemological elements mentioned above that can be discovered in narratives.

In naming this ‘sense of presence’, I refer primarily to a ‘sense of wonder’, a capacity located in and mobilized by ordinary life. It is a capacity for ‘being filled with wonder’, to let oneself be interrupted without leaving or neglecting ordinary life. It is a capacity to see or to experience a depth of meaning as well as the longing for depth and meaning in and through daily activities, practices, and words. This becomes theologically or religiously relevant if a person, be it the narrator or the interpreter of the narrative, is able to ‘see/feel/hear/touch’ and thus recognize or acknowledge in the experience of this ‘sense of wonder’ one of the many forms of the experience of ‘p/Presence’ and therefore to interpret reality and life in light of this ‘presence’. For me, this shift in theological attention to this ‘sense of wonder’ and this ‘sense of presence’ in everyday life has become the bedrock of all theological transformation and, more specifically, of a transformation in reflections on the ‘divine’ and/or the sacred.

In recent theology ‘art’ is considered able to express a ‘sense of presence’, (some would say a ‘sense of transcendence’) that is more vital and critical, that is more complex, polyvalent, and evocative than the monologic voices of many theologies (Bergmann 2009). Notably, Latino/a and feminist theologians have been broadening this interest in this aesthetic sensibility to the day-to-day practices, experiences, and sensibilities of ordinary people (Graham and Poling 2000; Isasi-Díaz and Segovia 1996). Others have broadened this perspective from ‘high art’ to ‘popular culture’ and the way in which

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2 I derive this notion of ‘being filled with wonder’ from Luce Giard’s (1998: xxi) description of Michel de Certeau. I increasingly came to consider this ‘sense of wonder’ as the central dimension of religion and spirituality and, as such, a central key to systematic reflection on religion. I elaborate extensively on this theme in my current project “A Sense of Wonder: Religion and Everyday Practices” (forthcoming).