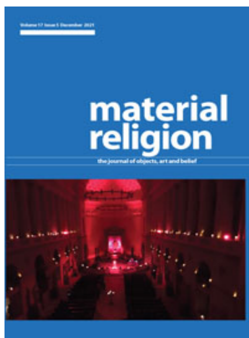

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Sounds of Children in Worship: Materiality and Liturgical-Ritual Spaces

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sounds of children in worship: materiality and liturgical-ritual spaces

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ABSTRACT

Bringing together concepts from the fields of material religion and liturgical studies, this article explores how adults and children manage sound-related affordances during worship. The concept of affordances—the possibilities an environment offers a person—is made sensitive to socialization and is related to the concept of liturgical-ritual space. Liturgical-ritual space comes into being through people's participation in an environment and is therefore defined as a type of lived-in space. The analysis of children's acoustic participation in two pre-Reformation church buildings shows how sounds made by children contribute to the creation of a liturgical-ritual space. It also brings to light tensions in how adults experience and interpret the sounds that children make. Attention to sound highlights the relationship between people and the material environment and shows that sound matters in Protestant worship with children, not only for the cognitive messages it may convey but for its affective qualities as well.

Keywords: sound, children, affordance, liturgical-ritual space, materiality, worship

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Introduction

> With a baptism, once, there was a minister who allowed the children to feel the water. They just won't forget that anymore! Was that water cold or warm? [...] If they [children] can sort of really use their senses in the ritual, then it has even more impact, right? (Interview with Leantine Dekker, team leader and youth work advisor at HGJB [Reformed Youth Alliance], August 23, 2016)

In the opening quotation, the minister recognizes that touching the water is a meaningful way for children to participate in the liturgy. Feeling the water is an example of an "affordance," a possibility for action that an environment offers a person (Gibson [1979] 2015, 119). Church practitioners in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands increasingly acknowledge that "children's full sensory immersion in services provides irreplaceable learning opportunities" (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019, 27). Studies in sociology and pedagogy underline the centrality of embodiment in cultural transmission (Vásquez 2011, 234–235). Moreover, research into religious education and children's spirituality affirms that children learn about the (religious) world around them through their bodies (Champagne 2003; de Kock and Sonnenberg 2012). Worship in old (pre-Reformation) church buildings provides ample opportunities for sensory interaction with their environment, which may give children "the experience that there is something bigger than themselves," as one respondent reflected. "It is not like you can only meet God in a beautiful old church … but it does do something!"[1] At the same time, the way children act in worship impacts the sensory landscape and affects how worship is envisaged and experienced by other participants. Children thus participate in the creation of worship spaces, which in turn, contributes to their own religious formation.

Our study on children's participation in environments of worship adds to literature in the fields of material religion and liturgical studies. Until now, child-related research in material religion has mainly focused on the production of religious objects and images for children, such as children's Bibles (Lindquist 2014), a cartoon figure used for evangelization (Bellotti 2010), and Sunday school pictures (Brewer 2005). Recent research on architecture and the arrangement of furniture for worship (Barnard et al. 2014; Barnard and Post 2001; de Jonge 2002; Pons-de Wit et al. 2019; Post 2010; Rijken et al. 2016) hardly ever considers how children affect or are affected by worship spaces. Our research on children in places of worship aims to extend childhood studies and child geography research, which mainly focus on educational settings, the home, and the urban environment (Nairn et al. 2016, 4).

Because we produced our ethnographic data in the context of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, we situate this study within the growing body of research on how materiality "matters" within Protestantism (Wharton 2014). Specifically, we

identify with a growing interest in the role of sound in religion (Hackett 2012) and, with Novak and Sakakeeny (2015), we consider sound as a material given. We situate sound in its material environment to underscore that worship is "a full sensory experience" (Engelke 2011, 224). Hearing is one of the senses through which people experience worship. In Protestantism, hearing remains an important faculty through which to connect to God. Thus, we find it useful to approach worship through sound and to enquire into the "anthropological and theological […] meanings of sound in the performance of worship" (Klomp 2011, 40). Like Klomp (2011), we move beyond the literature on liturgical and church music,[2] as studying sound broadens research into how "music-making in and by congregations reflects and shapes the performance of theology, the interplay of identities and religious experience" (Ingalls et al. 2013, 1). We bring to this growing field of scholarship our specific interest in the sounds of children in worship.

The main question we want to answer is how adults and children manage the materiality of sound in worship with children. We employ James Gibson's ([1979] 2015) theory of perception; in particular, we make Gibson's concept of affordances sensitive to socialization so we can analyze the sonic interaction between children and church buildings. We also refine the notion of liturgical-ritual space as developed by liturgical studies scholars Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener (Barnard et al. 2014, 297). After describing our methodology, we analyze sound-related affordances in two church buildings. Adults manage the sounds children make, and the children manage their own sound production to fit with the characteristics of the liturgical-ritual space. Children may also respond to affordances that produce sounds, which adults interpret as dissonant or disturbing in the context of worship. We conclude that children's sounds help to create liturgical-ritual spaces, but we also highlight some tensions in how adults interpret children's acoustic participation.

Affordances and Liturgical-Ritual Spaces

Affordances

Gibson ([1979] 2015, 119) coined the concept of affordances to describe what the environment offers, provides, or furnishes a particular person. Affordance is a concept used widely in a range of fields, from psychology to anthropology and from design to STSS (science, technology, and social studies). It is part of a broader theory of perception. Perception, for Gibson ([1979] 2015, xxi), is multisensory and grounded in the environment.

The environment consists of material components, including objects and people when they are present.[3] For our analysis, it will suffice to say that the environments we investigate, pre-Reformation church buildings in the Netherlands, consist mostly of hard stone and wood (the substances) and air (the medium),

with surfaces between the two (Gibson [1979] 2015, 27). Considering that "sound is vibration that is perceived and becomes known through its materiality" (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 1), the characteristics of the environment affect its affordances in relation to sound production: stone affords sounds to bounce off it; an uneven floor surface affords tripping and falling to a person running across it, producing a thump; a building with a large volume of air and hard surfaces affords amplification of voices.

Because an affordance has to do with the complementarity of environment and person, recognizing an affordance has as much to do with the characteristics of the human as with those of the environment (Gibson [1979] 2015, 121)[4]: "Knee-high for a child is not the same as knee-high for an adult, so affordance is relative to the size of the individual" (120) and "a stream or a lake […] may afford floating or swimming, but you have to be equipped for that, by nature or by learning" (124). We perform actions like swimming through the particular "techniques of the body" (Mauss [1934] 1992, 71) that we have learned in our cultural context. Thus, bodily characteristics and socialization affect affordances.

Vásquez (2011, 14) sums the point up nicely when he writes that "our bodies and the environment in which we act 'afford' each other, they make each other available. Our bodies, which have been shaped by the surrounding environment, which includes cultural artefacts of various kinds, allow us to perceive, transform, and accommodate to the environment."

We now consider how environment and people interact in the creation of liturgical-ritual spaces.

Liturgical-Ritual Spaces

Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener draw on the work of Soja to describe worship through three kinds of space (the material, imagined, and lived-in). Of these, lived-in space represents a "way of thinking beyond the binary oppositions that characterize Firstspace and Secondspace, as the material and the mental, respectively" (de Haardt 2010, 175). Barnard et al. (2014, 297) propose that worship becomes a fourth kind of space, a liturgical-ritual space, which "incorporates […] physical [material] and existential [lived-in] space, but liturgical ritual wants to transform and transcend these spaces into […] imaginative and anticipatory places." Creating a fourth category for worship risks a seeming separation from the material.[5] However, Barnard et al. pay close attention to worship as embodied and material. For example, they describe anticipation as "an attitude of expectation"[6] (Barnard et al. 2014, 304) and note that worship both effects the imagined change in reality and feeds the sensory experience of reality as being changed (Barnard et al. 2014, 296–297). Meyer (2009, 6) similarly describes the interplay between the material and the imagined and speaks of participation in worship as "per*form*ative" (Meyer 2009, 7).

We think Barnard et al. cast liturgical-ritual space as a fourth kind of space to capture the "otherness" of worship, as they approach worship from a distinctly theological perspective. Citing Long, they see worship as accomplishing "more than its context would suggest" (Barnard et al. 2014, 1). Nevertheless, precisely because worship is embodied and material but also comprises "something more," we think it fitting to characterize liturgical-ritual space as lived-in space (Thirdspace). Soja draws on Lefebvre and Foucault to emphasize that Thirdspace always denotes "something more" than the sum of its parts and is per definition elusive and hard to pin down (Borch 2002, 113–114). Therefore, we think characterizing worship as lived-in space leaves room for a theological interpretation of worship.

Affordance helps to further theorize liturgical-ritual space. Every place is a possible liturgical-ritual space (Barnard et al. 2014, 303), independently of whether the space is used for a one-time event or has been a place of worship for centuries. However, the notion of affordances helps us understand that the location of worship is not arbitrary. People need to perceive that liturgical-ritual activities are possible in a particular environment. Some places are more inviting for (particular types of) worship than others, precisely because of their affordances.

A place may be more inviting for worship due to earlier changes: Gibson ([1979] 2015, 122) states that humans alter their environment to change what it will afford. People change an environment for worship by imagining what actions a changed environment will enable.[7] Good examples of large-scale changes to the environment are the initial building of a church and later renovations and adaptations. Small-scale changes may be how people rearrange chairs, bring in musical instruments, flowers, or craft supplies, or open windows or doors. These changes influence the social dynamics and atmosphere in worship. The connection to outdoors is significant for worship spaces because, in the Northern hemisphere, the liturgical year is linked to the cycles of sun and moon and therefore to the turn of the seasons (Barnard et al. 2014, 281). Furthermore, furniture and other arrangements reflect decisions about the location of particular groups of people in the environment. These changes create social boundaries and influences how, for example, adults and children will experience worship.

Sound-related affordances influence the creation of a liturgical-ritual space. Following Novak and Sakakeeny (2015, 1), we define sound as vibration and add that sound is more than materiality: The metaphors and "conceptual fields used to define sound—for example, silence, hearing, or voice—[…] inform experience." Thus, it is significant how adults interpret the sounds of children in worship. Adults also manage the sounds that children make in the environment, which underlines that "childhood is not merely a social construction […] but a spatial one" (Nairn et al. 2016, 4). Before going deeper into the

relation between children's acoustic participation in worship and the creation of liturgical-ritual spaces, we present our methodology.

Methodology

The analysis we present in this article is based on participant observations, interviews, photos, and sound recordings. We researched twenty-one distinct liturgical rituals with children, all in the context of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. In our reports, we took care to note sensory information and to describe the architecture, furniture, and spatial arrangements.

We started our analysis by using the field reports and photos to note the characteristics of each worship environment, such as (building) materials, (liturgical) furniture, and ambiance. We then selected two cases and analyzed those in depth. We noted why and how people planned to use an environment and the way we actually saw them use it, focusing specifically on sound-related affordances. Discussions between the author and co-authors were crucial in the development of the presented analysis and argument.

The two practices we selected were both situated in Protestant congregations that celebrated their liturgies in buildings that were built before the Reformation as Roman Catholic churches. We selected cases from two different theological and liturgical traditions. Therefore, despite the similarities in environments, the children's sounds were interpreted and managed differently. The church interiors reflect these different traditions (see the abstracted illustration that accompanies each case).

Old church buildings have long been the locus of liturgical ritual studies and have found renewed interest as "iconic" places of worship in material religion scholarship (Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016; Knott et al. 2016; Verkaaik 2017). However, children's participation in these buildings is largely overlooked. We wanted to analyze children's participation in the main halls of old church buildings, particularly because there is a tendency to think of worship with children as something that happens in the side rooms, an annex building, nearby school, or even in playgrounds or park spaces. Such spaces were indeed among our research locations. They had in common with the analyzed pre-Reformation church buildings that adults made attempts to integrate the children's sensory interactions with their surroundings into the liturgy, using existing affordances or creating new ones by changing the environment.

Sounds Made by Children in Two Liturgical Settings

In this section, we analyze two practices of worship with children, focusing on the sounds that the church building affords the children to make, the orchestration of the children's sound production, and the interpretations of the sounds

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children make in worship. The first case focuses mainly on the children's singing and the second on the sound of children's movements during other parts of the service. In each case, those particular sounds were the main topic of discussion.

A Children's Choir in a Congregation Influenced by the Liturgical Movement

In the center of a large town in the Netherlands, a pre-Reformation building is open to tourists throughout the week. The church nave, the high arched ceilings and stone floor afford superb acoustics, enhancing the Sunday services, evensongs, and vespers held there. The building is also often hired for concerts.

The congregation that uses this building is influenced by the Liturgical Movement.[8] The set-up of the liturgical space is illustrative: The pews in this building face each other, and the pulpit and raised choir section are situated at either end of the pews (see Figure 1). This enables the seated congregation members to hear and see the pulpit and choir equally well. It grants similar importance in the liturgical-ritual space to the Bible reading and sermon at the one end and the choir's singing and the Eucharist at the other. Indeed, the congregation values music highly and employs conservatory-schooled church musicians. A choir or musical ensemble participates in the service each Sunday. Once a month, it is the children's choir's turn to sing.

High Quality Sound

Participating in a choir in this congregation requires time and effort: the adult choir practices twice a week and sings in the service almost weekly, and the children's choir practices weekly and sings in a service about once a month. Wytze, the cantor, directs both choirs: "I didn't distinguish between the song-material of the adult and children's choir," he recounts, "but now I make sure to give them more understandable pieces and shorter melodies." The current group has had less musical training than previous choirs, so Wytze reduces the difficulty of the music (language, melody, length) to maintain the quality of the performance. However, easier pieces become boring more quickly, and the choir children "feel less inclined to go again and invest in something that can be improved *just* that little bit more." When the children do not master a song sufficiently, the cantor decides not to perform it in the liturgy "because if we do something, we need to do it well." (June 13, 2017, interview with Wytze). Thus, the children's choir has to live up to high standards.

Something is at stake in attaining such a high quality of sound. During the week, when the church is open to the public, a television screen in a side aisle features a story about the choir. In it, the cantor says that "the color of the robes of the choir is red, which symbolizes passion, fire, and also—if you want to put it religiously—the Holy Spirit." (June 13, 2017, participant observation at field site no. 11). Thus, the choir music is central to the liturgical-ritual space of this congregation.

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FIG 1
Church interior with pews facing each other. The choir section is the platform at the far end.

Managing Affordances to Train Children's Voices

The cantor, Wytze, encourages the children to practice at home. The children reflect on their home practice in comparison to singing in church:

> Gaby and Renate, both six years old, recount how they use their parents' mobile devices to record themselves. Being in church

> building is "as if I am in a jungle" Renate says, "very different from at home. And then really a lot of people come to listen." "[At home,] I don't sing like in a church," Gaby agrees. At home "I sing at leisure," Renate adds, "just la la la, and then it doesn't really have to be beautiful, [but in church] it just has to be … just…" I ask, "In church it just has to be good?" "Yes," Renate answers, "yes, because then [at home] I am also not nervous." (June 18, 2017, participant observation at field site no. 11)

Children's homes afford them the opportunity to practice at leisure. In contrast, the image of the church building as a jungle is cryptic but seems to convey something about the space as big, uncontrollable, and full of sensations. The children are aware of the affordances of the environment and the (lack of) audience, and they modulate their voices accordingly.

A closer look at the choir practice in the church building gives further insight into how Wytze uses the building to ensure that the choir will produce good quality sound:

> Halfway through the practice, Wytze leads the children's choir from the side room to the choir section in the church hall. The children stand on wooden chairs in a semi-circle in the choir section of the church hall. Wytze makes the practice a bit of a game. The children get a number and have to sing along with Miranda when Wytze calls their number. Wytze sometimes points at another child than the number he says, but the children are not distracted; they are good at this! Gerdina, a young girl who arrived late, gets a turn but stays silent so we only hear Miranda singing. Gerdina starts crying a bit. At Wytze's request, Miranda takes her to the pulpit. Wytze follows and walks toward the middle of the church. The children find this exciting and a bit scary. Quite a number of the tourists have taken a seat to listen to the singing. They seem surprised as suddenly the sound comes from the opposite direction, where Miranda is standing with Gerdina. (June 13, 2017, participant observation at field site no. 11)

The children's choir affords the tourists actions that were not evident before and vice versa. When the children start singing, the building rebounds and carries the sound of their voices across the space. The tourists amble around the church building-as-museum but the children's singing encourages them to sit to listen, facilitated by the pews. Conversely, the listening tourists afford the children's choir with an audience, creating a setting similar to a general repetition. The presence of tourists and children's choir creates new affordances but note that the church building brings these two groups together.

Wytze uses the furniture and spatiality of the building to train the children and help them deal with their emotions. When Gerdina starts crying, Wytze gives her time to recover by sending her to the more sheltered spot on the pulpit with Miranda. Furthermore, Miranda's position on the pulpit affords the children (and the audience) to spatially experience the

call-and-response form of the psalm. This contributes to the children's formation in antiphony, an important musical genre for this congregation. When Wytze walks into the main aisle, the children's singing voices, in order to reach him, have to fill the vaulted cathedral with sound. The children find this scary. Wytze uses the affordance of creating distance between him and the children to build the children's confidence. Having more confidence, in turn, leads to better voice projection. "The children really improved" one of the parents observes, "At first, they were really shy and didn't sing very well, but now they stand there with much more confidence." Thus, the choir practice is a form of training that creates the affordance of singing in front of others in this large space. What the children's singing contributes to, however, is a topic of discussion.

Negotiating the Interpretation of the Children's Vocal Participation

During the Sunday service, the church building amplifies the sounds of the children's voices. Thereby, it reinforces the aesthetic quality of the children's trained voices. However, how people interpret the children's voices partly depends on the imagination with which they approach this environment.

At key points in the liturgical year, the children's voices help create a celebratory atmosphere through the sound qualities they add to the liturgy. Miranda, a member of the adult choir and formerly of the children's choir, explains:

> There is a need for having a children's choir. There are special moments in the year—Palm Sunday and Christmas, of course—when, well … it's really a loss when [the children's choir] is not there. […] It's another vibe. Some people say it is happier, lighter. The mere fact that there are children in the church kindles the hope that there will be a generation that picks it up. (June 13, 2017, interview with Miranda)

In Dutch, as in English, "lighter" may mean both "less heavy" and "brighter." The combination of both meanings shows how the sound quality and the affect of the children's voices are connected: children's voices are less heavy than those of adults. Children's short vocal cords produce short airwaves so that they have high-pitched voices. Affectively, the children's voices have a different timbre; their bright voices help listeners experience the lightness at special liturgical moments. Thus, the children's vocal participation helps create a particular liturgical-ritual space.

Children's bodily presence also makes a difference: it "kindles hope." We interpret the presence of the children's choir in worship in light of a specific view on participation: This congregation is influenced by the Liturgical Movement, in which participation is a keyword that relates to the active, bodily participation of lay or non-ordained people in the liturgy (Barnard and Post 2008, 19). There is an understanding that

participation itself may constitute faith and understanding. Thus, it is significant that the cantor makes sure that the children learn about and experience key services throughout the year:

> I try to include a bit of liturgical catechesis. So I try to explain why on some days we sing "the shepherds lay at night" while on others we sing "the Lord has risen" and everything in between. Help them distinguish why we do what we do. […] It is important that they are there at the crossings of the church year, the big festivals, that they experience those. The Lent period is six weeks, so they always have a service then. I make sure it is their turn on Palm Sunday because then they have a large role with an actual grand entry. There is much to experience in that. So I always search for services or make something myself that offers much to experience so they won't be bored. (June 13, 2017, interview with Wytze)

The children's active, bodily participation throughout the liturgical year is an antidote to boredom. According to the cantor, it also facilitates embodied experience of something more:

> I find it *very* important that there is a substantial part of their culture that lets them experience bodily that there is more than the material. When they are twenty, they may decide whether to call that God or not. For now, for them, I think it is much more about feeling than about cognition.[9] If only they … well, if only they have had bread and wine, so to say. (June 13, 2017, interview with Wytze)

Indeed, all the children's choir members receive bread and wine during the Lord's Supper. Most of the children were not baptized and several of the parents were self-declared atheists but that was not a hindrance: Participation extends to children who are not members of the congregation. However, their role as choir members does make a difference, as we elaborate below.[10] The acoustic and embodied participation of the children makes them co-creators of a liturgical-ritual space where the cantor and congregation members assume that participation in itself constitutes a kind of embodied faith.[11]

The parents, especially those who know little about church, approach the participation of their children differently. According to Wytze, they find the role of their children as members of a choir in this building "an appealing prospect. It is of course a historical space that sounds beautiful and we have a large church music practice." A mother recounts that she likes to see the children's choir in church: "It's our heritage," she says, and she believes it is important that her daughter learns about this heritage through singing. For her part, however, she tries to temper the effect that the choir has on her daughter through critical discussions because "I wouldn't like it if she just one day turned around and said 'oh, I would like to …' you know, 'become a nun.'"[12]

The discussion between the parents and the cantor reminds us of Nicholas Cook, who writes that "music demarcates space and figures it with social values" (Born 2013, 225). Both the parents and the choir director appreciate the historic and acoustically beautiful character of the building. While the parents emphasize the beauty of learning to sing in this place and either do not mind or else try to mitigate the religious aspects of the choir, Wytze values how the building's qualities gets the parents involved. He tries to reframe how the parents interpret their children's participation:

> "When will we perform?" The children wanted this themselves but were also pushed by their parents. The parents wanted to say: "my child performs in the [name of this church building]." Well, we quickly have to suppress that because, of course, it is factually true but the context in which it happens does not validate such an attitude. [...] I try to change their perspective a bit so that they learn to see that the role of the choir—whether it is the children's or the adult choir—is within the Sunday service and actually has nothing to do with performing. (June 13, 2017, interview with Wytze)

The Dutch word used, "*optreden*," connotes performing in concerts and shows. The cantor frames the sounds children make in this building as a different kind of performance: "I told the parents about liturgy, church" Wytze says, "They didn't know what they were getting themselves into with their child [but] a big part of it is just doing a service." Wytze recounts that regularly, the question arises whether choir members should be asked for a financial contribution. He emphatically resists because "we are all serving the same whole, the worshiping community, and the children are part of that as much as everyone who has a service task. We all do so *pro deo*. End of discussion."[13]

The differing opinions of the parents and Wytze highlight the importance of imagination in Thirdspace. Wytze's management of the interpretation of the children's voices reminds us of the distinction Verkaaik (2017) makes between the iconic and habitual uses of a building. This building may be iconic, but Wytze frames what happens in it as a form of habitual use. For him, the children's acoustic participation is not a concert-type performance but a service that transforms the church building into a liturgical-ritual space.[14]

Reformed Sunday Service with Bible Class

The second building is an old pre-Reformation church in the center of town. It has a light and spacious interior, with pews that face a pulpit from three sides (see Figure 2). The building is an important meeting place for the congregation. The congregation is influenced by the *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Second Reformation or Further Reformation), which differs from but resembles both English Puritanism and German Pietism. The

FIG 2
Church interior with pews facing the pulpit from three sides. The Bible class-room is to the right.

individual believer's relationship with God is central. Participation in worship revolves around listening to the Word. Thus, the liturgical-ritual space has to afford concentration and reflection. We focus on how quietness in worship is created, maintained, challenged, and nuanced.

Creating a Quiet Atmosphere

The evening service illustrates the quietness that characterizes the liturgical-ritual space:

> In his sermon, the minister uses easy words, short sentences, and visual language. He employs silences and uses a lot of expression in his face, body posture, and movements. I notice that it is quiet in the church. A child has brought her stuffed animal to church and plays and cuddles with it. Her older sister later shows her mother her drawing book and whispers something in her ear. The mom looks, answers, and looks to the minister again as the child leans back and smiles, drawing up her knees and resting the drawing book on them to continue sketching. An older boy rests his head on his father's shoulder. The minister prays the evening prayer, tranquil,

solemn, and beautiful. It adds to the atmosphere of calm in the church. (January 15, 2017, participant observation at field site no. 1)

The minister's clear articulation, use of easy language, and expressive embodiment help the people in worship, including the children, to listen and understand what is said. The children engage in activities that sustain the quietness needed for listening. Sitting in the pews affords the children with writing, drawing, cuddling a stuffed animal, or leaning against a parent. These activities are quiet but also allow some movement. Quietness here is not the absence of sounds but the management of their loudness: the small sounds—a pen on paper, a whisper to a parent, a child changing position—reinforce rather than disturb the atmosphere of quiet.

The building itself reinforces the quiet:

> The minister notes that the building stands out because of its quietness. "The distance from me to the congregation is rather big," he comments, "so I don't see and hear everything. [The distance] muffles [sound]. I think this church is always very quiet. [. . .] Maybe the building aids this. Some congregations are much noisier. Often those are the newer church buildings where everything is closer together and a more informal atmosphere emerges. But here, in this building . . . I don't know, but the building may help for that quiet in the service." "When I first entered here," Zoe adds, "it felt very distant. I was indeed used to a much smaller congregation, closer together. Whereas here, you sit: many empty benches, grand, a small number of people in a huge church [. . .] so I understand that that gives a more restful atmosphere [and] affects the [lack of] hustle and bustle you experience." (January 15, 2017, focus group interview at field site no. 1)

As the minister and Zoe indicate, small sounds in a more crowded, smaller, and lower ceilinged building would probably add up to a more audible level of background noise. In contrast, in this high ceilinged building, quiet sounds feel insignificant because of the size of people's bodies in relation to the huge building. This creates "a more restful atmosphere."

In the morning service, more and younger children were present. In addition to the activities of the children who stayed in the main church hall, children aged four to seven went to Bible class in two separate rooms at either end of the church hall. In terms of sound affordances, each room is separated from the main hall by two consecutive doors, affording the sounds to remain on either side of those doors. "Bible class," the former minister explains, "started from the wish to let the children grow into the service." In effect, however, young children go to other rooms. One elderly woman comments that the sermon "does feel quieter" when the young children are not present. Christel, another Bible class teacher, notes that "as a mother, it is practical [and] nice that the children go to Bible class, then they are simply not there! [. . .] I find that the service changes, there really

ensues a sort of quiet, a peace. So you can really listen to the sermon." Christel describes quietness as more than the absence of sound: There is also less fidgeting. This quietness reinforces the affordance of listening to the sound of the minister's voice. As we noted, listening to the Word is central to the spirituality of this congregation. Thus, during the sermon and prayers, having the Bible classes in separate rooms creates a liturgical-ritual space in the main church hall that spiritually nourishes congregation members of eight years and older.

Managing the Sounds of Children in Worship?

The Bible class in the other rooms opens up new affordances that produce different and louder sounds. When Bible class started, the former minister recounts, people wanted to get involved, saying "Oh! I would like to tell [stories], and pray and sing with [the children]!" Bible class is "more social and fun," as one teacher enthuses. "It is our passion to in whatever way—cognitive or just on the level of feeling[15]—help [the children] get closer to eh. as a child of the congregation, as a child of God, closer to experiencing love." Telling (stories), praying, and singing also happens in the service. Yet, in the side rooms, these activities sound more vibrant and children's and adult's voices mingle more often.[16] Thus, the Bible class-rooms become separate liturgical-ritual spaces with their own social dynamics and atmosphere. This reminds us of the observation that childhood is a spatial construction.

However, the main hall of the church building also gives children more affordances than only sitting and listening, as becomes clear when the children return from Bible class:

> Leaving the Bible class-room, we walk around the middle section of the church. Some children are already running ahead. We sit on the benches near the pulpit. The children are restless. While the minister asks the children some questions about the stories they heard, two boys are running in front of the pulpit, laughing and taunting the others. (January 15, 2017, participant observations at field site no. 1)

Two boys respond to the affordance of running. The sounds made by their shoes hitting the stone floor reverberate across the church hall. The boys' laughter, taunting exclamations, and running afford looking at and listening to them rather than to the minister's conversation with the other children.

For Madelief and Chris, these affordances are in tension with their ideal liturgical-ritual space where everyone can listen to each other, both in Bible class and the service. Accordingly, they describe how they try to manage the children's interaction with the environment. In contrast, Edo challenges the emphasis on quietness:

> "I find it difficult because today two [of the children] started to run, in front," Madelief reflects, "I thought 'should I hold them, and risk

> that they start yelling? Or…?' Those are difficult moments. We didn't have the time today to say, 'now we enter the church quietly,' [this time] we just went." "Yes, but," Edo counters, "sometimes I wonder whether we could embed [the return to the church hall] in a rowdy moment. […] Do we want children who … do we really want to emphasize that quietness? Or is that er … I'm thinking … see, the quiet is lovely, of course, maybe quietness is important in our time, but I wonder whether we want to keep the children quiet or whether they er … are allowed more. What do we think?" Others comment: "If only others can listen." Edo continues: "Yes, but in Bible class? Er … I also notice that I want quiet to make a point about my story and that sort of thing, that's important, but still, does it always have to be quiet?" The others note that quietness provides safety, also for children with autism. Edo continues, "Yes, maybe it is beautiful if it is quiet because maybe children experience safety and attention then […]. But anyway I was searching for that: what is the balance between correcting and er … er … not correcting, letting go a bit." (January 15, 2017, focus group interview at field site no. 1)

Madelief and Chris want to train children to make sounds that are within a decibel and frequency range and of a nature that is reasonable for this congregation. Edo, however, wonders how to accommodate louder sounds in the service. "Not correcting, letting go a bit" remains closer to the lived reality. Edo proposes less management of the children's actions and sound production. He imagines a liturgical-ritual space that requires adults to be more accepting of the sounds that inevitably ensue when children "are allowed more."

Negotiating the Interpretation of the Children's Sonic Participation

Edo's call for less management of the children's sound-producing activities reminds us of the research done by Klomp (2011) on the sound of worship in a Surinamese Lutheran congregation in Amsterdam. There, the children chatted, ran around, and yelled during the service. Klomp (2011, 123) notes that this corresponds with the view that worship is "not an aesthetics exercise but […] for everyone to take part it in." In that congregation, the sounds children produce added to a liturgical-ritual space characterized by inclusion. Similarly, in the Reformed congregation, the idea of inclusion sustained the argument to accept the sounds that accompany children's participation.

The church building affords the children the space to make quiet sounds and louder sounds that make their presence and participation more audible. Various congregation members, especially the parents, feel a tension between quiet listening and the children's audible presence. However, children's "noisy" activities in worship meets with more understanding than the initial impression of quietness in this liturgical-ritual space would suggest. The mother who said she enjoys the quiet when her children go to Bible class also reflects that "I wouldn't like it

when someone else can't listen because my child is continually drawing, eating sweets, you know, but … I've really never been addressed about it." The elderly woman who said that the service is more quiet when the young children are absent also mentions that "One lady thought the children's return to the service was 'messy', and that's true, but … that lady was eighty! Should you leave the children at home because of that? They do grow up with the tradition, […] they just belong; they are part of it!" In sum, the tension between quietness and the sounds that children's participation in worship inevitably brings is sometimes intentionally left unresolved.

Discussion

The adults in our study were aware of the acoustic qualities of the buildings they used but managed the children's sounds differently. Although beautiful singing and quiet listening seem very different, both create a liturgical-ritual space where people may meet God. In the congregation influenced by the Liturgical Movement, the way the children talked about choir practice showed that they sang differently in the church building: The children were aware of their role and audience. During choir practice, the cantor used the affordances of the church building to train the children's voices. In turn, the children's voices helped create a celebratory atmosphere at important liturgical moments. In the congregation influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation (reminiscent of Pietism and Puritanism), children made small sounds that helped maintain a quiet atmosphere in worship. During the morning service, Bible class for the younger children in sound-isolated side rooms afforded more quietness in the main hall. These modes of sound production and listening are central to the children's religious socialization.

On a more critical note, the voices of the children seemed to be more fully part of the liturgical-ritual space in the congregation influenced by the Liturgical Movement than in the Reformed congregation influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation. In the Reformed congregation, children's voices lent their tone color to the congregational singing. In the Liturgical Movement congregation, however, the congregation members recognized children's voices as a contribution to the liturgy, complementary to the singing voices of adults. The timbre of the children's voices was perceived as lighter and more joyful. The effort put into training the children's choir showed respect for children and their role. Yet, when they were not singing, the choir children made much the same sounds as their Reformed counterparts: the swish of swinging legs, scratching pens on paper, and occasional whispers. During most of the service, children who were not members of the choir attended children's church in another room. Thus, there was a similar dynamic of quietness in both congregations. In the Reformed congregation, the sonic contribution of children's participation was less evident. Paradoxically, the louder sounds that the

building afforded the children to make triggered an awareness of children's participation. Various adults questioned to what extent the children had to be quiet and wondered whether louder sounds could be embraced in the interest of inclusivity. Children would certainly value more movement and activity in worship (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., forthcoming). Note, however, that the connection between children's presence and sound (or "noise") is made by the adults.

Conclusion

In this article, we developed and combined the concepts of affordances and liturgical-ritual spaces to analyze how old church buildings allow children to make a range of sounds during worship. We also examined how adults manage the affordances to create a particular sound in worship. In a similar physical location, sensory interactions between people and their environment produced distinct liturgical-ritual spaces where different sounds prevailed. These differences were due to differences in liturgical tradition and theology. In the first case, the cantor managed the musical quality of the children's voices to add a "lightness" to the liturgy and let the children bodily experience that there is "something more," which they may or may not come to call "God" later in life. In the second case, the adults managed the loudness of the sounds that accompanied children's actions to ensure that others could listen to the Word. Simultaneously, they emphasized that children should attend church and that some extra sound production in the liturgy was acceptable because "they just belong."

Material religion scholars are fascinated by the observation that "in order to […] be experienced as real, imaginations are required to become tangible outside the realm of the mind, by creating a social environment that materializes through the structuring of space, architecture, ritual performance, and by inducing bodily sensations" (Meyer 2009, 5). Many studies on material religion focus on objects, buildings, and visual culture. Our research into children's sounds in worship invites scholars of material culture to explore various new directions. First, when approached as a material given, sound highlights how people, the material environment, and the imagined space are connected. Our elaboration of the concepts of affordance and liturgical-ritual space facilitates such analysis.

Second, sound is an avenue for studying affect in worship. Bialecki (2015, 97) defines affect as "the intensities and energies found in a particular moment or object that has consequences on others." He helpfully distinguishes affect from emotion: "emotion [is] that which follows affect once the moment is gone, and the 'affected' person finally becomes aware of the experience, framing it discursively." Bialecki reflects on the connection between embodied and linguistic language at an evangelical conference: different types of speech are all delivered in a certain way, each affecting the listeners differently. Reflecting on

the training required to produce a particular emotional response, Brennan (2012) analyses how a Nigerian Christian choir uses existing recording to perfect the emotional impact of their performance during worship. Similarly, we showed how children are trained to make certain sounds. The adults used the buildings' spatiality to manage the children's sound production and create a particular affect in worship. Thus, attention to sound shows the effort that goes into managing sound and its attributed meanings.

Third, the management of sound highlights social power dynamics. Oosterbaan (2008) connects sound, religion, and space in Brazilian *favelas*. Through the metaphor of spiritual tuning, he describes how people self-censure the sound they produce (music they play) in relation to their environment. In our research, we also found that children self-regulated their sound production in keeping with the existing liturgical-ritual space. However, the children also carve out a position for themselves by acting, moving, and speaking up (see van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., forthcoming). Thus, studying who is allowed to make sound, when and under what conditions, opens up questions about discipline and power.

Fourth, the sounds that children (are trained to) make are crucial to children's socialization and highlights lived theologies. Ingalls et al. (2013, 9) argue that "while music as part of ritual is an important part of the sensual experience of embodying worship, [...] worshippers must be socialized into particular traditions in order to experience transcendence." Hirschkind, in *Keywords in Sound* (2015, 168), writes about "an art of listening" and notes that "more than serving as a vehicle for a symbolic content, sound and aurality are part of the material-sensory world that human life must accommodate and respond to." Therefore, we propose that future research could further explore how children are trained to make certain sounds in religion. Moreover, we would be interested in the theological meanings that children attribute to sound. As Ridgely (2005) shows in her study of children's interpretations of first communion, children develop their theological understandings through their senses. We thus propose a collaboration between sound studies, material religion and children's theology (for example, using theologizing with children as a research method).

In sum, our analysis highlighted the affective side of sound in worship rather than focusing on the purely cognitive dimension. Even in congregations like the Reformed congregation, where worship seems word-focused, sound is much more than content. Rather, like Ingalls (2015, 250–251) writes about congregational music, sound practices "can carry with them certain socially ascribed meanings, including theologies, beliefs and values." People's experience of religion is deeply rooted in how they affectively respond to sound (see Bialecki 2015). This brings us to the insight that, in Protestantism, although the message that words and music convey remain important, sound

in worship matters most for the experience it gives children. Children are socialized to interact with the environment within a space that provides the "possibility and mystery of an encounter event" (Barnard et al. 2014, 299). Moreover, children and the sounds they make actually help to constitute the liturgical-ritual spaces.

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notes and references

[1]We researched worship with children in a variety of environments but this quotation is fitting in view of our case selection (see Methodology).

[2] Next to melody, dynamics, and tempo, studying sound in worship broadens the possible parameters of study to include loudness, timbre, pitch, form, and silence (Klomp 2011, 40).

[3] People's presence in the environment creates affordances because a person can then undertake actions with or in response to those others; Gibson ([1979] 2015, 126) even states that "behavior affords behavior."

[4] Recognizing an affordance occurs automatically, like a reflex (Gibson [1979] 2015, 130). In our view, therefore, recognizing an affordance is akin to how Michael Schiffer defines registration: "the way that the human sensory apparatus responds to the world around it" (Dant 2005, 17).

[5] For example, Barnard et al. (2014, 296) write that for entering liturgical-ritual space "you need a transcending spirituality that lets you believe and anticipate such a transcendent space."

[6] This implies a bodily posture as well as a mental state (e.g. prayer positions, a concert audience right before a performance).

[7] Dant (2005, p. 76) notes that "imagination and mind create affordance at the immaterial level and continually mould and remould the material world to achieve that effect." We agree but would stress the interdependence of imagination and materiality: The notion of "occluding edges" helps illustrate that people imagine affordances based on the information that is available in the environment (Gibson [1979] 2015, xxii, 31, 149-150).

[8] The Liturgical Movement in the Dutch Protestant context involved liturgical renewal and experimentation, based on both a re-valuation of pre-reformation liturgical traditions and an emphasis on the participation of lay people (in the Roman Catholic context, this culminated in the Second Vatican Council) (Barnard and Post 2008, 9, 12, 19).

[9] The word used for "feeling," *gevoel*, may also be translated as "the sense of touch."

[10] See also endnote 13.

[11] Note how "expecting" refers to anticipation and imagination, both prominent aspects in the definition of liturgical-ritual space.

[12] When the interviewer asked, "That would be too much?" the mother replied "that would be too much, far too much!" Despite this mothers' ambiguous relationship towards her daughters' participation in a religious practice, the church building seems implicated in the continued encounters between church members and people who identify as non-religious. This topic merits closer inspection.

[13] The children's moment highlights the position of the children's choir in the congregation: "At that moment," Wytze commented, "they experience that they actually have a dual role because they are choir but they also just belong to the group of children that are there at that moment. So they step out of their role, into another… division, and when the children's story is finished they step back again." Spatially, the children traversed the church from the choir

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section to the minister at the other end of the pews and back again (see Figure 1)—another reminder that childhood is a spatial construction (Nairn et al. 2016, 4). Simultaneously, the children's choir members are also different from the other children: they sit in an opposite pew, wearing choir robes, are accompanied by the cantor, and return to the choir section. Therefore, the socio-spatial division between the choir and the congregation seems more fundamental than that between children and adults.

[14] We are reminded of Grimes' question "Are musicians sacred personages or only assistants?" in his book *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, cited by Klomp (2011, 41). The parents ascribe the children a more elevated position than Wytze.

[15] See endnote 9.

[16] Compared to the church hall, worship in side rooms more often draws from evangelical song repertoires. Together with the children's presence, these other worship spaces afford more movement, interaction, creative genres, and different media (e.g., a gong, CD player, toys, paint, no microphones, etc.). The insight that children's participation legitimates liturgical exceptions or changes incites further study.

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