

Music as a Lens to Study Death Rituals

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1. Introduction

Time to say goodbye, *Ave Maria* and *Waarheen, waarvoor* (where to, wherefore) are frequently played during funeral rituals in the Netherlands.¹ The way we think of life, death and afterlife is reflected in the way funeral rituals are shaped: life-style and death-style are connected.² One of the remarkable developments in the funeral culture in the Netherlands is the increase in the number of cremations. The first cremation in the Netherlands took place in 1914,³ and in one century of cremation rituals we see an increase of the percentage of cremations from 2% in 1950, 4% in 1960, 14% in 1970, 35% in 1980 to 63% in 2015.⁴ Douglas Davies described the 20th century as the ‘Era of Cremation’ and linked the rise of crematoria and the growing popularity of cremation rituals to important cultural developments: “Ideas regarding civic health and sanitary urban planning, along with a degree of religious-ideological freethinking, found opportunity in the engineering skills established through the industrial revolution to produce crematoria.”⁵ In our opinion, ‘religious-ideological freethinking’ is one of the main causes of the increase in the percentage of cremation rituals from the 1960s onward. Cremation rituals in the Netherlands are to a certain extent individualized and de-institutionalized rituals. This is in line with the development of the position and role of both religion and ritual in the second half of the twentieth century. As our colleague Paul Post has shown, the ritual repertoires of the institutionalized churches, which influenced all aspects of life, disappeared in quite a short period.⁶ Prescribed, collectively performed ritual repertoires, and the discourses regarding meaning and morality related to these

¹ We thank our colleague Paul Post and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

² D.J. DAVIES & H. RUMBLE: *Natural burial. Traditional-secular spiritualities and funeral innovation* (London 2012) 13-14.

³ W. CAPPERS: *Vuurproef voor een grondrecht. Koninklijke Vereniging voor Facultatieve Crematie 1874-1999* (Zutphen 1999).

⁴ See www.lvc-online.nl/aantallen [retrieved on 12 November 2015].

⁵ DAVIES & RUMBLE: *Natural burial* 9.

⁶ P. POST: ‘Na de lange jaren zestig. Liturgiewetenschap en ritual studies: opkomst, typering en actuele uitwerking van een relatie’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 22 (2006) 89-111. Post refers to the British professor of Church History Hugh McLeod, see: H. MCLEOD & W. USTORF: *The decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge 2003). And also: H. MCLEOD: *The religious crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford 2007).

repertoires lost their plausibility.⁷ In the past, funeral rituals were controlled by institutionalized churches. Instead of this top-down repertoire, the bereaved ‘invented’ their own rituals in an inductive way.⁸ Although we should not exaggerate the extent of self-reflection leading to self-expression and ritual creativity – undertakers and other ritual presiders lend a lot of structure to the ritual –, we discern the crematorium as a place of ritual freedom.

This freedom is expressed, among other things, in the choice of music as one of the building blocks of the cremation ritual. Most crematoria in the Netherlands are well equipped with a modern sound system and have an online playlist that the bereaved can choose tracks from to be played during the cremation ritual. The playlist of the Tilburg crematorium in the South of the Netherlands, for example, contains well over 3,500 tracks (April 2013) and consists of tracks that have sounded in cremation rituals in the past decade.⁹ The amount of time the employees of the crematorium need to invest in a careful handling of the musical wishes of the surviving relatives has noticeably increased over the last twenty-five years.¹⁰

The role of music in the cremation ritual is quite a dominant one. It is surprising therefore that in the literature the theme of ‘music and cremation’ has received so little attention. In the relevant *Encyclopedia of cremation*,¹¹ music is not even a separate entry. This squares with the lack of attention for music as part of a ritual or a ritualized context in general. Although ritual scholars in doing fieldwork and researching all kinds of rituals do hear the music, the description, analysis and interpretation of music in and as ritual is often absent. For example, in Catherine Bell’s much used handbook of ritual studies, music as a keyword is lacking.¹² Ronald Grimes, one of the founding fathers of ritual studies, hardly pays any attention to music in his publications. In his autobiographical book *Marrying and burying* he writes some moving chapters about the death and burial of his son, his grandmother, his mother and father, but it is only in the description of the burial of his mother that music is mentioned at all: one short paragraph.¹³ In his latest book about the craft of Ritual Studies,¹⁴ Grimes describes the role of music in ritual in a seven page section, introducing the work

⁷ P. VAN ROODEN: ‘Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlandse christendom’, in *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 119/4 (2004) 524-551.

⁸ G. LUKKEN: *Op zoek naar een geloofwaardige gestalte van de dodenliturgie* (= Liturgische handreikingen 19) (Breda 1994); IDEM: ‘De liturgie rond een overledene. Over inductieve en adequate dodenliturgie’, in *Rond de Tafel* 55/1 (2000) 3-14.

⁹ This is the situation in April 2013. Data were made available by Crematorium Tilburg.

¹⁰ K. DE LEEUW: *Leven met de dood. 25 jaar Crematorium voor Tilburg en Omstreken* (Tilburg 2009) 96.

¹¹ D.J. DAVIES: *Encyclopedia of cremation* (Aldershot etc. 2005).

¹² C. BELL: *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions* (New York / Oxford 1997).

¹³ R.L. GRIMES: *Marrying & burying. Rites of passage in a man’s life* (Boulder etc. 1995) 136.

¹⁴ R.L. GRIMES: *The craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford / New York 2014).

of the cultural musicologist Christopher Small (1927-2011).¹⁵ Unfortunately, his approach to music remains abstract and is not very innovative.

In this article we focus on music as a 'lens' to understand death rituals in general and cremation rituals in particular. It is linked to current research on music and death, performed by the first author, and can be considered as a programmatic presentation of a PHD project, running from September 2015 onward, performed by the second author. The programmatic and theoretical character of this presentation is completed with results from two pilots on music as part of cremation rituals. Accordingly we will first discuss the state-of-the-art and present recent research on crematoria and cremation rituals. Secondly, we will conceptualize the notion of music as a 'lens' to study rituals, in particular death rituals. In the third section we will elaborate on the research questions of the PHD project by Bruin-Mollenhorst. In the last section we will present the results of two pilot studies; the first on the style of music related to the crematorium as both a physical and a ritual place, the second on music and emotion in the context of cremation rituals.

2. State-of-the-art: literature on crematoria and cremation rituals

The crematorium and cremation rituals have been an object of research from several perspectives, and authors have elaborated various aspects of this research domain. For an overview of the research, we refer to the excellent *Encyclopedia of cremation*, edited by Douglas Davies.¹⁶ In the following overview of the literature, we will categorize the various topics and perspectives, focusing on the Netherlands¹⁷ and elaborating those topics that are relevant for our subject matter: music as part of cremation rituals.¹⁸

2.1. Cremation in the Netherlands

Although cremation is not a new phenomenon in the history of humanity, it was a new manner of disposal of the body at the end of the 19th century. The

¹⁵ GRIMES: *The craft of Ritual Studies* 217-223. Grimes refers to: C. SMALL: *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening* (Middletown, CT 1998).

¹⁶ See note 10.

¹⁷ A brief overview of cultural and ritual changes in the Netherlands regarding death styles and death rituals is given in: E. VENBRUX, J. PEELEN & M. ALTENA: 'Going Dutch: individualisation, secularisation and changes in death rites', in *Mortality* 14/2 (2009) 97-101.

¹⁸ Part of the literature regards the environmental effects of the cremation. See among others: E.E. KEIJZER e.a.: *Milieu-effecten van verschillende uitvaarttechnieken – update van eerder TNO-onderzoek* (Utrecht 2014). This type of literature will not be dealt with in this article.

history of cremation has been described by several authors, referring to both technological and cultural developments. For the Netherlands, the studies by Wim Cappers are relevant.¹⁹ In 1874 the Association for Cremation [*Vereniging voor Lijkverbranding*] was founded, striving for the introduction of facultative cremation. In the Netherlands at that time, cremation was forbidden by law. The Association established the first crematorium in the Netherlands: in 1913 the crematorium in Velsen was opened, in April 1914 the first cremation took place. It lasted until 1954 before a second crematorium was opened. In 1955, cremation was legalized in the Netherlands. Compared to the UK, the start of the ‘Era of Cremation’ in the Netherlands was relatively late. In the UK,

[s]tarting in the 1880s among the upper echelons of English society the practice of cremation was slow to gather popular speed until the First, and then the Second World Wars (...). By the mid-1960s cremation was taking over from burial as the dominant form of English funeral but with practically no serious liturgical change to match.²⁰

As we have seen, the increase in the percentage of cremations in the Netherlands took place a few decades later. Moreover, in comparison to the UK, a major change in ritualizing death took place: most cremation rituals in Dutch crematoria are secular rituals, or rather, rituals not linked to institutionalized religions, which had held a monopoly on death rituals for centuries.

2.2. Cultural attitudes towards death

The history of cremation is closely connected to the history of cultural attitudes towards death. The historical account of human in the face of death by Philippe Ariès might be read as a critique on the way society dealt with death in the 1970s.²¹ Ariès published his book in 1977 and contrasted the ‘long Middle Ages’ as an era of the ‘tamed death’ with the denial of death in the 70s. Ariès described a new type of dying, especially in the more technologically developed and urban areas. The essence of this ‘new’ death is invisibility, a desire for death to retreat from the family and to be confined to hospitals and hospices. For the Netherlands, views of death and afterlife have been summarized and researched by Joanna Wojtkowiak in her dissertation about the post-self and notions of

¹⁹ CAPPERS: *Vuurproef voor een grondrecht*. CAPPERS: *Aan deze zijde van de dood: funeraire componenten van seculariserende cultuurlandschappen in Nederland 1576-2010* (Amsterdam 2012). See also: I. FRANKE: *Crematie in Nederland 1875-1955. De Vereniging voor Facultatieve Crematie en de Wet op de Lijkbezorging* (Utrecht 1989).

²⁰ DAVIES & RUMBLE: *Natural burial* 9.

²¹ P. ARIÈS: *L'homme devant la mort* (= *L'univers historique*) (Paris 1977). English translation: P. ARIÈS: *The hour of our death* (New York 1981).

immortality in contemporary Dutch society.²² Similar to Ariès, she points at the privatization and professionalization of death in the twentieth century, adding for the Netherlands the individualization of death with more focus on individual wishes and the growing importance of personal meaning in contrast to institutionalized – religious – meanings. This resulted to less focus on transcendent views of immortality with notions such as soul and heaven, and more on symbolic or social immortality.²³ This led to ritual embarrassment: the top-down rituals no longer fitted the individual interpretive frameworks and new ritual strategies were not yet available.

2.3. Ritual

The ‘invisibility- or taboo-thesis’, as expressed by Ariès and before him by Gorer,²⁴ has been criticized and nuanced in a 1991 article by the UK death studies scholar Tony Walter.²⁵ He pointed to “death being highly problematic for the modern *individual*, but not at all problematic for modern society – hence the lack of ritual surrounding it today.”²⁶ Now, a few decades later, the ritual embarrassment appears to have been replaced by what we can call ‘ritual enthusiasm’: people no longer feel embarrassed or unaware about how to shape a funeral ritual, but feel free to shape their own ‘personal’ funeral. This development is clearly reflected in two books by one of the initiators of Rituals Studies in the Netherlands, emeritus professor Gerard Lukken. In 1984, he published his book *Geen leven zonder rituelen* [*No life without rituals*].²⁷ Lukken discusses the ritual crisis in the 1970s and 1980s and regretted that the ritual aspects in our society had faded away. In 1999 Lukken published the book *Rituelen in overvloed*, translated and published as *Rituals in abundance*.²⁸ The crisis was over and rituals

²² J. WOJTKOWIAK: “I’m dead, therefore I am”. *The postself and notions of immortality in contemporary Dutch society* (Nijmegen 2012).

²³ WOJTKOWIAK: “I’m dead, therefore I am”. *The postself and notions of immortality* 47-65, 142-144. See also: Th. QUARTIER: *Die Grenze des Todes. Ritualisierte Religiosität im Umgang mit den Toten* (Münster 2011); J. BECKER, J. DE HART & L. ARNTS: *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland: verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie* (= SCP-werkdocument 128) (Den Haag 2006) 10, 23, 64-66; J. DE HART: *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (= SCP-publicatie 2014-10) (Den Haag 2014) 73, Bijlage B3.1 (www.scp.nl).

²⁴ G. GORER: *Death, grief, and mourning in contemporary Britain* (London 1965).

²⁵ T. WALTER: ‘Modern death: taboo or not taboo?’, in *Sociology* 25/2 (1991) 293-310.

²⁶ WALTER: ‘Modern death’ 307.

²⁷ G. LUKKEN: *Geen leven zonder rituelen: antropologische beschouwingen met het oog op de christelijke liturgie* (Baarn 1984).

²⁸ G. LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed: een kritische bezinning op de plaats en de gestalte van het christelijke ritueel in onze cultuur* (Baarn 1999); G. LUKKEN: *Rituals in abundance. Critical reflections on the place, form, and identity of Christian ritual in our culture* (= *Liturgia condenda* 17) (Leuven / Dudley, MA 2005).

received more attention. But in the meantime, something had changed: as mentioned in the introduction of this article, people did not fall back on the traditional rituals of churches and other institutions, but experimented with old and new elements of rituals, and looked for rituals in other places, for example the crematorium.²⁹ Reflection on these changes in Dutch funeral culture have been gathered in the volume *Rituele creativiteit* [*Ritual Creativity*], edited by Eric Venbrux, Meike Heessels and Sophie Bolt.³⁰ Guidance in the process of ritualization is now provided by so-called ritual counsellors, a new profession in the Netherlands.³¹ Moreover, a lot of books with ritual materials have been published.³²

2.4. Building

Together with the growing attention to rituals, the crematorium as a new sacred and ritual place came into vogue.³³ A lot of research has been carried out into the crematorium as a building.³⁴ In her Master Thesis, Laura Cramwinckel from Tilburg University compared six crematoria in the Netherlands from an architectural and religious studies perspective.³⁵ The comparison showed that the emphasis was on symbolism and ritual in building and restyling crematoria in

²⁹ See also: GRIMES: *Marrying & burying*; GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone: re-inventing rites of passage* (Berkeley, CA 2000).

³⁰ E. VENBRUX, M. HEESSELS & S. BOLT (eds.): *Rituele creativiteit. Actuele veranderingen in de uitvaart- en rouwcultuur in Nederland* (Zoetermeer 2008).

³¹ H. EMBSEN & T. OVERTOOM: *Hoe zou jij het willen? Persoonlijk afscheid nemen van je dierbare* (Kampen 2007). Embsen and Overtoom manage a training in ritual counselling, see: www.hetmoment.nu.

³² We are confining ourselves to some recent examples of Dutch publications: C. HARREMS: *De uitvaartplanner. Van stervensbegeleiding tot dankkaart* (Utrecht / Antwerpen 2012); M. VAN DEN BERG & E. DE MOOIJ: *Verstilde woorden: teksten bij afscheid* (Utrecht 2012); S. NIJLAND: *Om wie jij bent: teksten, gebeden en gedichten bij afscheid en rouw* (Baarn 2015); A. MAK: *UitvaartWijzer: gedachten, handreikingen en teksten bij dood en uitvaart* (Zoetermeer 2015).

³³ M.J.M. HOONDERT: 'Het crematorium: ruimte voor rituelen en rouw. Beleid van Crematorium Tilburg ten aanzien van rituelen, herdenkingen en rouw', in *Tijdschrift voor religie, recht en beleid* 6/1 (2015) 82-94.

³⁴ M. KLAASSENS & P.D. GROOTE: 'Designing a place for goodbye: the architecture of crematoria in the Netherlands', in D.J. DAVIES & C.-W. PARK (eds.): *Emotion, Identity and Death. Mortality across disciplines* (Farnham, Surrey / Burlington, VT 2012) 145-159; M. KLAASSENS & P.D. GROOTE: 'Postmodern crematoria in the Netherlands: a search for a final sense of place', in *Mortality* 19/1 (2014) 1-21. For the UK, see: H. GRAINGER: *Death Redesigned: British Crematoria, History, Architecture and Landscape* (Reading 2005).

³⁵ L. CRAMWINCKEL, 'Metamorfose in crematoriumarchitectuur. Terreinverkenning van recente ontwikkelingen op het gebied van vormgeving van een nieuw algemeen basaal-sacrale ruimte' (Tilburg University 2011). See also the ground-breaking article by D. DAVIES: 'The sacred crematorium', in *Mortality* 1/1 (1996) 83-94.

the years after 2000. The sober and functional building style that characterized crematoria until circa 2000 was abandoned: there was and is both a tendency towards resacralization and ritualization of place.³⁶ When building new crematoria, architects strive to materialize the sacral character of the building and the ritual that takes place there. They work with fragmented light fall and shadow, contrasts between openness and closedness, zones and thresholds to emphasize the liminal character of the ritual. In restyling crematoria the emphasis is on warmth and hospitality, on consolation and beauty. Cramwinckel wrote:

The decor of the auditorium is far from ‘commonplace’. In relation to the affective aspect, the designers speak of creating “consoling” atmospheres, places which inspire, allow one to ‘dream away’ or reflect. They are clearly defined places with an illusory character. For the material execution the stylists, as well as the architects make use of the evocative qualities of beauty, art and applied design. In order to allow for interpretations from different ideological backgrounds, consciously (and subconsciously) basal-sacral visual language and universal metaphors are used, such as nature, light, harmony, life and hope.³⁷

2.5. Ashes

In the policy of crematoria, the cremation ritual itself, the architecture and the design of the crematorium received more and more attention, but also the customs concerning the ashes of the deceased and the memorial landscape surrounding the crematorium became part of the policy of both crematoria and artists and urban planners. Since the 1990s crematoria have offered next of kin the possibility to save some ashes of the deceased in a piece of jewelry.³⁸ Since 1998 it is legal practice in the Netherlands to disperse the ashes at a self-chosen location. In her dissertation *Bringing home the dead*, Meike Heessels researched the material culture and rituals related to the dispersal of the ashes. Actually, the dispersal is an extension of the cremation ritual, an additional fourth phase to the ritual scheme by Arnold van Gennep.³⁹ As Heessels’ research showed, this fourth phase doesn’t aim at separation, as the cremation ritual itself intends to do, but at incorporation. In the fourth phase the ashes are dispersed at locations where the deceased is ‘at home’, or the urn is literally brought home and some ashes are carried in jewelry or used in tattoos.

³⁶ CRAMWINCKEL, ‘Metamorfose in crematoriumarchitectuur’ 60-68.

³⁷ CRAMWINCKEL, ‘Metamorfose in crematoriumarchitectuur’ 63.

³⁸ M. HEESSELS, ‘Bringing home the dead: ritualizing cremation in the Netherlands’ (Radboud University Nijmegen 2012).

³⁹ Arnold van Gennep distinguished three phases of rites of passage: the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phase. The liminal phase is ‘betwixt and between’ the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases. See: A. VAN GENNEP: *The rites of passage* (Chicago 1960).

2.6. Commemorations

With the increase of the number of cremations, crematoria are inclined to an extension of services. Besides the main function of facilitating the cremation ritual and the cremation, crematoria aim at becoming the places in our culture to commemorate the dead. The landscape surrounding the crematorium has been developed into burial places for the urns in a park-like landscape with trees, ponds and works of art. The bereaved are invited to visit the crematorium for commemoration activities, for example on All Souls' Day, 2 November; World Wide Candle Lighting, second Sunday of December and for lectures on mourning.⁴⁰

And what about music as part of the cremation ritual? As said in the introduction, there is hardly any research or literature regarding music and cremations. An exception is a special issue on music and death of the journal of *Mortality* in 2012 in which Brian Parsons wrote an article on the progress of cremation and its influence on music at funerals in the UK, 1874-2010.⁴¹ Parsons describes the development of the crematorium and relates this to the musical repertoires used at the occasion of cremation rituals. In the UK, where cremations have taken place since the 1880s, the possibility to make use of recorded music was introduced during the 1930s. Until the late 1970s, music at cremations tended to be of a religious or classical nature. Parsons cites the research by K. Lysons on music at crematoria, published in 2004, referring to a major change in musical and ritual repertoires in the crematorium from the late 1970 onward: a movement “to ensure that funeral services reflected the personality and beliefs of the deceased along with the preferences of the family.”⁴² Lysons attributes this change to the growth of consumerism, the growth of individualism, the spread of secularism and the lack of satisfaction with the traditional funeral. He also suggests that “music is one indication of the ‘liberalisation of funerals.’”⁴³ Parsons’s article does not only give a historical account, relating the development of the crematorium and the cremation ritual to musical repertoires, but he also reports the results of a survey undertaken by the author in November 2010 at the Mortlake Crematorium in West London. One of his conclusions is that music performed during cremation rituals is increasingly a fusion between religious and secular music. Besides, “[t]he broad range of requests indicates a desire for the bereaved to be linked with the deceased through the emotion of familiar music.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ HOONDEERT: ‘Het crematorium: ruimte voor rituelen en rouw’.

⁴¹ B. PARSONS: ‘Identifying key changes: the progress of cremation and its influence on music at funerals in England, 1874-2010’, in *Mortality* 17/2 (2012) 130-144.

⁴² PARSONS: ‘Identifying key changes’ 134.

⁴³ PARSONS: ‘Identifying key changes’ 135. Parsons refers to: K. LYSONS: ‘Issue of music at crematoria’, in *Pharos International* 70/1 (2004) 44-46. The quote is from p. 46.

⁴⁴ PARSONS: ‘Identifying key changes’ 142.

3. Music as a lens to study death rituals

In our opinion, studying music will broaden our understanding of both the way cremation rituals are composed, and their efficacy and impact on participants. Moreover, studying music will gain insights into death rituals in general and even more in culturally embedded attitudes towards death.

We have been inspired to use music as a lens to study death rituals by a recently published book, edited by Logan Sparks and Paul Post.⁴⁵ In this book, rituals are studied as a way into, or as an access to cultural phenomena. They embody beliefs, values, moral obligations, or, more generally, ideas.⁴⁶ From a performative perspective, however, we might say that rituals are not only the products or expression of these ideas, but also produce these ideas. There is no one-way traffic from idea to ritual: the relation is circular and as a researcher it is impossible to define the starting point of this circular motion.⁴⁷ It is this circular motion of ideas and their embodiment in rituals that we call culture, or at least, this motion is part of culture.

In an analogous way, we can use music as a lens to study culture. In our opinion, there are at least three closely connected ways to understand how music, cremation rituals and culture are linked. First, analogous to the complex relationship between ritual and ideas, we can refer to music and identity. Twenty years ago, the socio-musicologist Simon Frith, specialized in popular music culture, stated that the experience of music – both music making and music listening – is an experience of identity.⁴⁸ According to Frith however, music is not an expression of identity, but produces it. The experience of music is just another way of experiencing ourselves. This experience of identity, which Frith refers to as the ‘self-in-process’, is not an isolated reality, confining itself to the individual. The experience of music is also an experience of collective identity, it involves social movements. Frith links this experience of the social to musical taste:

⁴⁵ L. SPARKS & P. POST: *The study of culture through the lens of ritual* (= Netherlands studies in ritual and liturgy 15) (Amsterdam / Groningen 2015).

⁴⁶ We follow the Durkheimian approach of rituals and religion (as a social force). See: G. LYNCH: *The sacred in the modern world. A cultural sociological approach* (Oxford 2012).

⁴⁷ See also the discussion about myth and ritual, see for a summary of this discussion: F. BOWIE: *The anthropology of religion: an introduction* (Oxford 2000, 2006) 269-272.

⁴⁸ S. FRITH: ‘Music and identity’, in S. HALL & P.D. GAY (eds.): *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London etc. 1996) 108-127.

There is a mystery to our own musical tastes. Some records and performers work for us, others do not – we know this without being able to explain it. Somebody else has set up the conventions; they are clearly social and clearly apart from us. Music, whether teenybop for young female fans or jazz or rap for African-Americans or nineteenth century chamber music for German Jews in Israel, stands for, symbolizes *and* offers the immediate experience of collective identity.⁴⁹

This link to individual and collective identity does not disappear at the occasion of a cremation ritual, although the music is heavily framed by the circumstances, the building and the ritual. The world outside the crematorium is present through the music played during the ritual.

Second, we tend to speak of music as an art form that unfolds in time. However, music is also a spatial practice⁵⁰ turning the space where it is performed into a ‘musical place’. The activity of making and hearing music does something to the space in which it is performed and to those present in that space; music creates space. On the one hand, this is an acoustic and measurable phenomenon: the musical place is shaped by the objective aspects of the sound produced. On the other hand, the sound also influences those present in the musical place: appealing to the body and to associations, memories, meanings and emotions. These are the subjective aspects of the sound produced, which can be said to be physiological, psycho-acoustic and aesthetic dimensions.⁵¹ The music fills the place and in a sense is inescapable for all those present in that place. As an architectural place the crematorium is relatively stable and unchanging. As a ritual and musical place it changes according to the performance of the ritual, due to the basic emotions that are being communicated in music, readings and speeches.⁵² The music as part of the cremation ritual manifests itself in the physical place of the crematorium (the building) and in the ‘ritual place’. These three ‘places’ (building, ritual, music) are closely related, but are not one. The crematorium as a building is more than a ritual place. It also has office spaces and in many cases the oven room is not part of the ritual place and does not only contain the oven, but also installations that prevent the emission of toxic fumes such as mercury. In addition, the crematorium as a building is determined by the spatial practices. The space changes through its use: lectures can be given in the auditorium and during the evening it can be used for choir rehearsals. The space is not something that is, but something that is creat-

⁴⁹ FRITH: ‘Music and identity’ 121.

⁵⁰ H. LEFEBVRE: *The production of space* (Malden, MA etc. 2004).

⁵¹ F. FEIEREISEN & A. MERLEY HILL (eds.): *Germany in the loud twentieth century: an introduction* (New York / Oxford 2012); M.J.M. HOONDERT: ‘Contemplatieve abdijen als musical spaces: vervreemdend en aantrekkelijk’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 28 (2012) 51-64.

⁵² P.N. JOHNSON-LAIRD & K. OATLEY: ‘Emotions, music, and literature’, in L.F. BARRETT, J.M. HAVILAND-JONES & M. LEWIS (eds.): *Handbook of emotions* (New York 2008) 102-113.

ed; it is a matter of ontogenesis through what Dodge and Kitchin call ‘transduction’: “the constant making anew of a domain in reiterative and transformative practices”.⁵³ The ritual place consists of more than music alone. It is brought about by the interaction between physical place (light, smell, color, physical quality), words, gestures, other actions and music. It is also related to preceding rituals (for example at home or in church) and subsequent rituals like going to the oven or the funeral reception where condolences can be offered. The ritual place can transgress the borders of the here and now of the actual ritual through the use of photo presentations and videos. The music fulfils a ritual function, but does not correspond with it: the music does not only have meaning within the context of the cremation ritual, but also carries a wide variety of meanings. As described above, it refers to other contexts in which the music has been heard, it represents a specific culture or cultures which may become part of the meaning-making process that takes place during the cremation ritual, both connecting the participants with and distracting them from the ritual. So once again, although music is framed by the circumstances, by the cremation ritual and the crematorium as a ritual place and it is linked to the beloved dead person and the surviving relatives, it is much more than ‘music for the dead’. It evokes a range of emotions, connotations, diversions, lifestyles and cultures.

Third, the ways in which musical repertoires as part of cremation rituals change and have changed, can be seen as a change in deathstyle. In our opinion, this changing deathstyle is to be understood as a process of increasing the coherence or assonance between lifestyle and deathstyle.⁵⁴ Our culture is fragmented and individualized, also regarding the way we understand and deal with death. These characteristics become increasingly traceable in the way we ritually deal with death, with music as a strong indicator of this process. One of the parameters to investigate in the increasing assonance between lifestyle and deathstyle, is the role of technology. In cremation rituals in the Netherlands the use of CDs or other devices to produce music is dominant over live music. The practice of singing-along has decreased. As far as we know, there is no research on how and when the singing-along disappeared, and when CDs and online playlists took over. It is also unknown how this relates to, for example, the use of CDs, YouTube etcetera in music education at primary school. There is also no research about how online ‘funeral playlists’ on websites of crematoria, YouTube or Spotify influence the choice of music during cremations, and if and how this effected Dutch deathstyles.

To sum up, music is a powerful tool to study changes in our culture. Due to the relation between music and individual and collective identities, changes regarding secularization, individualization and diversity in views of death and afterlife can be traced by studying music of cremation rituals. The influence of

⁵³ M. DODGE & R. KITCHIN: ‘Code and the transduction of space’, in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95/1 (2005) 162-180, p. 162.

⁵⁴ DAVIES & RUMBLE: *Natural burial* 13-14.

technology comes into vogue through exploring music in an environment in which, at least in the Netherlands, technology has become dominant over live music.

4. A PHD research on music and cremation rituals

Brian Parsons's description of the development of cremation and music in the UK triggered us to question the developments of these same issues in the Netherlands. As Venbrux, Peelen and Altena have stated, there is "considerable mortuary variation in the modern West" and the Netherlands is, comparatively speaking, "one of the most secularized countries of the world."⁵⁵ We want to know how and which ideas about death are reflected in cremation rituals, and what music during cremation rituals tells us about the way Dutch people deal with death.⁵⁶ Therefore we have outlined a PHD project, called *'From organ to online tool'. The soundscape of cremation rituals in the Netherlands*.

4.1. Research questions

As outlined in the theoretical third section of this article, we will start with the musical repertoires. Music will be the lens to study the developments of cremation rituals from a broad, cultural perspective. At the beginning of the 20th century, as in cinemas, crematoria were equipped with an organ, on which a limited repertoire was played during cremation rituals.

Nowadays the bereaved can select any music from the often available online playlist, or add music to it. Although music is an important part of cremation rituals, we hardly know what music is used in the crematorium, how it functions as part of the cremation ritual, and what it means to the bereaved. This lack of knowledge leads to the following overarching research question: How does the soundscape⁵⁷ of cremation rituals in the Netherlands reflect and shape the ways in which death is dealt with in Dutch society? By exploring the musical repertoires in a century of cremation rituals in the Netherlands (from 1914 onwards), we will trace the development 'from organ to online tool'. By tracing this development we will have a lens to gain insight into attitudes towards death.

The main research question will be dealt with in four interrelated sub-questions, pointing at several aspects of music as part of cremation rituals in the Netherlands from 1914 onwards:

⁵⁵ VENBRUX, PEELLEN & ALTENA: 'Going Dutch' 97.

⁵⁶ R. HERTZ: *Death and the right hand* (Glencoe, ILL 1960 [1907]).

⁵⁷ K. KAUFMAN SHELEMAY: *Soundscapes: exploring music in a changing world* (New York 2001).

- 1) How has the production of music as part of cremation rituals developed?
- 2) What are the characteristics of the music played or performed as part of cremation rituals?
- 3) What are the functions and meanings of the music played and performed as part of cremation rituals?
- 4) Concentrating on music, what are the similarities and differences between Dutch cremation practices and those in several other European countries?

After having answered these questions, we will be able to answer our main question and reflect on how music during cremation rituals reflect deeper changes in Dutch society in the 21st century.

4.2. Methods

One of the characteristics of this PHD project is the variation in methodology, using methods from both the humanities and computer and information science.⁵⁸ We consider music as a practice⁵⁹ that can be studied from four perspectives: musicologically in terms of historical and systematic-analytical approaches, ritually with a focus on the ritual functions of music, culturally by regarding music as a meaningful practice, and sociologically with a focus on agency and power relations. The technology of producing music as part of cremation rituals is also taken into account. All these different perspectives and related methods are needed to reach the aim of our research: to contribute to a deep understanding of the ways in which we deal with death in Dutch society.

This PHD project contains historical research, in particular research in the archive of the Royal Dutch Cremation Society (founded in 1874).⁶⁰ Site visits to the crematoria will be part of the research in order to study the use and position of organs and other instruments, to consult the crematoria's archives and to interview employees of the crematoria.

Part of the research will have an ethnographic character, especially related to the third sub-question. Previous studies in the meaning(s) and function(s) of ritual music have proved that ethnographic research leads to deep insights.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See the brochure by The Young Academy (*De Jonge Akademie*) on chances and impediments of doing interdisciplinary research: *Grensverleggend. Kansen en belemmeringen voor interdisciplinair onderzoek* (Amsterdam 2015).

⁵⁹ SMALL: *Musicking*.

⁶⁰ CAPPERS: *Vuurproef voor een grondrecht*.

⁶¹ M.D. STRINGER: *On the perception of worship. The ethnography of worship in four Christian congregations in Manchester* (Birmingham 1999); M.D. STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography and the definition of religion* (London etc. 2008); M.E. MCGANN: *Exploring music as worship and theology: research in liturgical practice* (= American essays in liturgy) (Collegeville, MN 2002); M.J.M. HOONDEERT: *Om de parochie. Ritueel-muzikale bewegingen in de marge van de parochie. Gregoriaans - Taizé - Jongerenkoren* (Heeswijk 2006); M. KLOMP: *The sound of worship: liturgical performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (= Liturgia condenda 26) (Leuven etc. 2011).

Mary McGann, in her programmatic essay on doing research in music and worship, refers to ethnographic research as a ‘royal road’ “to develop sustained, detailed, and polyvocal descriptions of performance that are rooted in the understandings and categories of those who perform.”⁶² If we aim at understanding our culture, the lifestyles and the deathstyles, we have to be prepared to listen to the ‘small narratives’, trying to find patterns in the polyphony of ideas and meanings, performances and practices, if there are patterns at all. It starts with enduring the complexity.

In this PHD project we will also make use of tools to analyze large amounts of data. As outlined by Rens Bod, the humanities may take advantage of making use of collections of data, approaching them with new techniques and new questions.⁶³ The online playlists of the nearly 90 crematoria in the Netherlands will be analyzed computationally. Popular charts (the Dutch *Top 40* and *Top 2000*) will be compared with the playlists of the crematoria to gain insight into the characteristics of the crematorium playlists.⁶⁴ The focus will be on the analysis of musical characteristics, the analysis from an ‘emotional’ perspective and the analysis of textual or semantic contents. Programs like Echo Nest and Gracenote provide musical information about the tracks in the playlist and are used to analyze the crematorium playlists on musical characteristics.⁶⁵ Echo Nest for example, provides information about tempo, mode, duration, time signature and so on. By analyzing the crematorium playlists and comparing the results with earlier research in the field of music and emotion, we will be able to point to emotions in the crematorium playlists.

The results of the historical, ethnographic and computational research will be compared with musical repertoires from crematoria in other European countries. The international comparison is necessary for pointing at the specific Dutch characteristics of dealing with death. A provisional choice has been made for two European countries: the UK⁶⁶ and Germany⁶⁷.

Finally, by combining both diachronic (a century of cremation rituals) and synchronic approaches, we will be able to trace shifts in musical repertoires, both in production, function, meaning, content (lyrics) and musical characteristics. The results will be held against studies, both qualitative and quantitative, in

⁶² MCGANN: *Exploring music* 40.

⁶³ R. BOD: *Het einde van de geesteswetenschappen 1.0* (= Oratiereeks Universiteit van Amsterdam 457) (Amsterdam 2013).

⁶⁴ J. MOLLENHORST, M.J.M. HOONDEERT & M. VAN ZAAANEN: ‘Musical parameters in the playlist of a Dutch crematorium’, in *Mortality* 21 (2016) [forthcoming].

⁶⁵ See <http://the.echonest.com> and www.gracenote.com.

⁶⁶ PARSONS: ‘Identifying key changes’. We will also contact Lisa McCormick, who has done research on music and cremation rituals in the UK, see: www.sps.ed.ac.uk/staff/sociology/lisa_mccormick.

⁶⁷ A. FRANZ: *Liturgie und Bestattungskultur* (Trier 2006); S.A. REINKE: *Musik im Kasualgottesdienst. Funktion und Bedeutung am Beispiel von Trauung und Bestattung* (Göttingen 2010); F.R. SCHULZ: *Death in East Germany, 1945-1990* (Oxford / New York 2013).

(changing) attitudes towards death, mortality and immortality, and afterlife.⁶⁸ By using the results from the four sub-questions, we will be able to answer our overarching main question.

5. Two pilots

In the last section we will present the results of two pilot studies: the first on the style of music related to the crematorium as both a physical and a ritual place, the second on music and emotion in the context of cremation rituals. Both pilot studies concern the Tilburg Crematorium, close to Tilburg University, our home university. The aims of these pilot studies were to explore the musical repertoire of cremation rituals, to practice several methods of research and to test the usefulness of these methods.

5.1. Comfort music

For a pilot study on the style of music related to the crematorium as both a physical and a ritual place, we used the database of the crematorium in Tilburg.⁶⁹ We analyzed the music of ten cremation rituals that took place between 2 and 9 January 2013. In total, 45 tracks were used and listened to. Of these 45 tracks, 28 belong to the genre of popular music (pop, jazz, folk, easy listening), and 17 to the genre of classical music. Seven of these 17 classical tracks are instrumental. For six cremations a version of the *Ave Maria* (Bach-Gounod or Schubert) was chosen. *Con te partiro* (Italian text) or *Time to say goodbye* (English text) was played on five occasions, *Die letzte Rose*, *Et les oiseaux chantaient* and *The Rose* (English text) or *De roos* (Dutch text) were all played twice. Only a few tracks are explicitly connected with death and farewell: *Con te partiro* and *Time to say goodbye*, the *Introit* from the Gregorian Requiem Mass and the Dutch-language tracks *Trein naar niemandsland* [Train to no man's land], *Je naam in de sterren* [Your name in the stars] and *Zo zal het zijn* [That's how it will be].

Are there features that characterize the music of the 45 tracks, taken from the ten analyzed cremation rituals? With a certain amount of caution, we can conclude that a musical repertoire for cremation rituals is outlined here. It consists of the *Ave Maria*, *Time to say goodbye*, and slow, romantic music, of which Grieg's *Morgenstimmung* and *The Rose* are good examples. Of the 45 tracks of the ten cremation rituals mentioned above, there are only four compositions that do not fit this profile: *Blueberry hill* by Fats Domino, *Friends will be friends* and *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen, and Händel's *Hallelujah*. We can describe this type of romantic music as 'comforting music' creating a mild level of arousal. Nikki

⁶⁸ See for references our footnotes 18-22.

⁶⁹ See: M.J.M. HOONDEERT: 'Geruststellende klanken: muziek en crematierituelen', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 68/1 (2014) 120-131.

Rickard, in her research on music, emotion and arousal, speaks of ‘relaxing music’ and concludes that this kind of music significantly reduces skin conductance and the number of chills, which are physiological indications of an emotional response.⁷⁰ It appears that the main effect of the musical repertory of the analyzed cremation rituals is that it channels emotions.⁷¹ The romantic, comfort music that is often heard at cremations generally has a slow tempo, smooth rhythms and relatively few dissonant harmonies. According to Johnson-Laird and Oatley, by the absence of dissonance there can be no question of the mimesis of the basic emotion of ‘sadness’.⁷² The music does not express grief or sorrow, but rather it appears to have a therapeutic effect and to be aimed at bringing about a transformation into a different mood.⁷³ This mood or state of mind corresponds with what both the physical and the ritual space of the crematorium seem to evoke. The functions of the ritual possibly require a musical style that does not arouse strong emotions. In a certain sense the physical space appears to evoke ‘softness’: the warm colors of the furniture, the dimmed lighting and view of nature are reflected in the music.

5.2. Music and emotion

In a second pilot study, conducted in 2014-2015, we experimented with computational techniques, using once again the playlist of the Tilburg crematorium.⁷⁴ This playlist contains 3707 tracks. We analyzed this playlist on musical parameters and compared the results of this computational research with results of research on emotion related to musical parameters.⁷⁵ To gain insight into the musical characteristics of the crematorium playlist, we compared this playlist with two popular Dutch charts, the *Top 40* and the *Top 2000*.⁷⁶ The analysis and comparison was made possible by Echo Nest, a company that refers to itself as a ‘music intelligence company’. Echo Nest provides all kinds of musical information when given the name of the performing artist and the title of a song, for example mode, tempo, time signature, pitch and loudness. We matched the tracks of the Tilburg crematorium playlist with the songs known by Echo Nest

⁷⁰ N. RICKARD: ‘Intense emotional responses to music: a test of the physiological arousal hypothesis’, in *Psychology of Music* 34/4 (2004) 371-388.

⁷¹ LUKKEN: *Rituals in abundance* 54-73.

⁷² JOHNSON-LAIRD & OATLEY: ‘Emotions, music, and literature’.

⁷³ J. ROBINSON: *Deeper than reason. Emotion and its role in literature, music, and art* (Oxford 2005) 393.

⁷⁴ For a detailed report of this pilot, see: MOLLENHORST, HOONDERT & ZAAENEN: ‘Musical parameters in the playlist of a Dutch crematorium’.

⁷⁵ A. GABRIELSSON & E. LINDSTRÖM: ‘The role of structure in the musical expression’, in P.N. JUSLIN & J.A. SLOBODA (eds.): *Handbook of music and emotion. Theory, research, applications* (Oxford 2010) 367-401.

⁷⁶ D. DRAAISMA: *De muziek zegt alles. De Top 2000 onder professoren* (Amsterdam 2011). See also: www.top40.nl and www.nporadio2.nl/top2000.

and compared them with the tracks from the *Top 40* and *Top 2000*; see Table 1 for an overview of the properties of the three playlist.

	Number of songs	Number of songs known by Echo Nest	Mean tempo and standard deviation (in BPM)	Mode: % major mode	Mean valence and standard deviation (0-100)	Mean energy and standard deviation (0-100)
Tilburg Crematorium	3703	2099 (56.7%)	110.6 (30.7)	79.8	33.8 (23.3)	37.6 (21.0)
<i>Top 40</i>	13,273	9861 (74.3%)	120.0 (25.3)	69.8	61.3 (24.5)	66.2 (20.7)
<i>Top 2000</i>	2583	2583 (100.0%)	117.1 (26.8)	75.8	56.7 (24.9)	57.8 (21.9)

Table 1: Overview of properties of the three playlists

The comparison shows that the crematorium tracks have a significantly lower tempo, lower valence and lower energy than those in the *Top 40* and *Top 2000*. Next to that, surprisingly, the crematorium playlist contains a significantly higher percentage of songs in a major key (79,8%) than the popular charts (69,8% and 75,8%). This is surprising, because it is often thought that a minor key sounds sad and a major key happy.

Now that we have found that the Tilburg Crematorium playlist contains tracks with a relatively low tempo and predominantly in major mode, what does this tell us about the emotional impact of the music? According to Gabrielsson & Lindström,⁷⁷ a major mode is associated with emotion words like: happy, joy, graceful, serene, solemn, attraction and tenderness. A low tempo is associated with: serene, tranquil, dreamy, longing, sentimental, dignified, serious, solemn, sad, lamentation, excited, boredom, disgust, tenderness and peace. The emotion words which these musical parameters have in common are: serene, solemn and tender. Although we only used two musical parameters, the low tempo and major mode point to serene, solemn and tender music being played in the Tilburg Crematorium. We deliberately use the verb 'point to', because we know that there are many more musical parameters that influence the emotional impact of the music. What reinforces our conclusion, is that these emotion words match the way we generally say farewell in Dutch culture. In Dutch and Western culture we tend to say farewell to the deceased in a serene, solemn and ten-

⁷⁷ GABRIELSSON & LINDSTRÖM: 'The role of structure in the musical expression' 383-387.

der way and not – in contrast to other cultures – with intensely expressed weeping or wailing.⁷⁸

The research experiences of the two pilots will be helpful to continue our research and to analyze and interpret the large amount of songs of the playlists of all Dutch crematoria. Complementing this with historical research, observations during cremation rituals, interviews and an international comparison will lead to deep insights in the ways the Dutch dealt and deal with death. The use of music as a lens to study death rituals will lead to a fine-grained analysis of the cultural developments on both an individual and societal level that underlie the changing deathstyles.

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⁷⁸ R. HUNTINGTON & P. METCALF: *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual* (Cambridge etc. 1979) 23-43.