“Afwijkende mensen.” Formulating perspectives on the Dutch ULTRA scene.

MA Thesis

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“Goedenavond. Vanavond afwijkende set, afwijkende gelegenheid, afwijkende mensen. Veel instrumentaal.”

Wally van Middendorp, introduction to the first ULTRA evening, Oktopus club, Amsterdam, September 1980. (Quoted in Harold Schellinx*, ULTRA, Opkomst en ondergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978-1983)* 26-27.)

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Throughout the spring of 2012, a number of events, exhibitions and publications were unveiled in the Netherlands to celebrate the Dutch punk and post-punk counter-cultures that flourished between 1977 and 1984. Many were timed to coincide with a major retrospective on the era; the *God Save the Queen: Kunst, Kraak, Punk 1977-1984* exhibition at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht; which ran from March 3 to June 10, 2012. A small number of books based round the subject were published by Amsterdam's Lebowski Publishers, who also printed a "box set" special issue of *Vinyl* magazine.[1] *Vinyl,* which ran from 1981 to 1988, was often seen as the mouthpiece of the ULTRA or the "ultramodernen" scene, a short-lived but "puur Nederlandse stroming" of *avant garde* post-punk music; one that drew impetus from both New York's No Wave scene and British post-punk.[2] The band most commonly – and internationally – associated with ULTRA, Amsterdam's Minny Pops, reformed and toured England to acclaim; playing a final show at De Melkweg in Amsterdam before once again splitting up. And a national TV and radio magazine, the VPRO *Gids* devoted its February 25, 2012 issue to the period; its contents including the *God Save the Queen* exhibition, Minny Pops' English tour, and the graffiti artist Doctor Rat.

It soon became apparent that many of the events based round this celebration were quick to cite the influence of the era's Anglo-American musical counter-culture; with many of the music-related slogans and images used to promote the events being of Anglo-American origin. Utrecht's Centraal Museum set the tone by naming their retrospective *God Save the Queen*; the title of the second single by legendary British punk band, The Sex Pistols. The cover picture of the VPRO *Gids* edition for February 25, 2012 was based around an image of Siouxsie Sioux, the lead singer of British post-punk band, Siouxsie and the Banshees. Siouxsie Sioux's image was surrounded by other British musical *aide memoires*; the name "Sex Pistols" and the phrase "No Future", lifted from the Pistols' song, *God Save the Queen*. By contrast, only one Dutch musical reference was shown; the ULTRA logo. The practice of preferring Anglo-American, to Dutch musical prompts to trigger or construct memories about this era is common.[3] The VPRO TV programme, *Andere Tijden/Spoor terug: Die jeugd van tegenwoordig: Punk*, broadcast on January 29, 2009, exclusively used music from British bands, such as Southern Death Cult and New Order, as well a clip from Joy Division's performance of *She's Lost Lost Control,* taken from a

[1] For example, Martijn Haas, *Bibikov for president: Politiek, poëzie en performance 1981-1982* (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers 2012).
[2] Muziek Encyclopedie website, "Geschiedenis van Ultra," last accessed May 5, 2014, http://muziekencyclopedie.nl/action/genre/ultra.
[3] A recent example is The Dordrechts Museum's exhibition, *Stop making sense*, *Nederlandse schilderkunst in de jaren tachtig*, which ran from October 12, 2013 to January 19, 2014. The title of the exhibition was built round a song title from American new wave band, Talking Heads.

regional British TV programme; Granada TV's *What's On*. This practice can be linked to three points. Firstly, a perception that the Netherlands' music industry produced nothing of worth in the period, and that this lack of worth gives Dutch media tastemakers little choice but to employ cultural markers from larger and more established music industries. Secondly, this perceived lack of musical worth also generates an institutionalised "cultural cringe", whereby anything created in Holland in this period is assumed to be suitable only for frivolous reminiscence.[4] Thirdly, the Dutch musical counter-culture of the time offered output of a quality that was equal to that from other countries, but simply lacked the impetus, cultural power or socio-economic framework to make anything more than a temporary mark; resulting in a lack of a strong profile and a concomitant ignorance of its output amongst those now setting the cultural agenda. Looking back to literature from the era itself, there are glimpses of evidence for all these points. An interview with Minny Pops' singer Wally van Middendorp for a British fanzine from Sheffield, *Different for Grils* in 1980, highlights both Dutch "cultural cringe" and a lack of Dutch promotion of Minny Pops' qualities.

> It's a strange situation, us being in England doing a single and hardly getting any press back home in some way. It's getting better since we're doing this Factory single, but before that people said, 'Well, you know, your music is not so good...' The music hasn't changed between April and now, but since we could tell people we're doing a single for Factory they say, 'Yeah - I always thought your music improved a lot over the past few months'.[5]

However the interview – through van Middendorp's mention of Minny Pops releasing a single (*Dolphins Spurt*) on Manchester's prestigious Factory Communications label – also hints that the band was valued in Britain. In fact, during its short lifetime there was a significant amount of collaboration and cultural transfer between ULTRA and the post-punk scenes in Britain and America. British bands such as Josef K played the weekly "ULTRA" nights at the Oktopus club in Amsterdam. Driven by her collaborations with American musicians, Plus Instruments' singer, Truus de Groot moved from Eindhoven to New York in 1981. And as well as the aforementioned *Dolphins Spurt,* Minny Pops released the single *Secret Stories* on Factory Communications and an LP, *Sparks in a Dark Room* on Factory's Belgian imprint, Factory Benelux. Image making was also part of this cultural exchange; a process that drew on, or influenced

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[4] An example of this frivolous tone can be seen with this back cover text. "We genoten van Kees van Kooten en Wim de Bie, we lachten om Sjef van Oekel, we zongen mee met de Dolly Dots." Erik Somers, and Paul Brood, *Het Jaren Tachtig Boek* (Zwolle: Nationaal Archief 2010), quoted in Jouke Turpijn, *80's Dilemma, Nederland in de Jaren Tachtig* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker 2011), 23.

[5] Interview with Wally van Middendorp by Garry M. Cartwright, *Different for Grils* fanzine, Issue 2, 1980, 10.

regional and national identities. Celebrated British designer Martin Atkins created the sleeve for *Dolphins Spurt*, one that "played on the Philips corporate house style, offering an ironic nod to the group's Dutch heritage".[6] Dutch photographer Anton Corbijn's work with Manchester's Joy Division also created definitive images of that band in its home environment. Finally, ULTRA's activities were often celebrated abroad in print by well-known British rock journalists of the 1980s, such as Dave McCulloch of *Sounds*, and Paul Morley and Andy Gill of the *New Musical Express* (*NME*). Given that the Netherlands is often keen to promote instances of its own cultural and artistic success abroad, however minor, or "difficult", it seems strange that ULTRA's message is currently such a mixed one; that of past – and recent – foreign acclaim, against fairly constant Dutch indifference. Why would ULTRA's trans-national influence be either ignored or unexploited by the Dutch music industry at the time, or apportioned a minor role by contemporary taste makers in the Netherlands? In order to understand why this is so, this thesis attempts to analyse to what extent was ULTRA determined by its national background?

It is reasonable to assume that studying the available literature on ULTRA would help answer these questions. However, since its brief heyday between 1978 and 1982, ULTRA has received hardly any literary attention. To the author's knowledge, this is the first international academic study of ULTRA to be written. Many of its expressions are long out of print, with only a selection being re-released and re-evaluated. This lack is also exacerbated by the fact that ULTRA is often associated with a concurrent musical movement; punk. In the Netherlands, punk enjoyed a later flowering, and, in consequence, developed different, stronger, and more lasting societal elements than in many other countries. The word "punk", therefore, has become something of a blanket term into which related or then-contemporary countercultural movements or underground music scenes in the Netherlands are swept up. Though Dutch punk is an increasingly popular academic subject, the accent of these investigations is tipped towards national or regional social analyses, with "punk" as a term providing a broad framework.[7] And outside of Leonor Jonker's *No Future Nu*, (2012)[8] no study can be found that makes mention of ULTRA, let alone an attempt to define it – or its aesthetic or social impact – alongside the punk movement. Harold Schelinx's part history, part autobiography, *ULTRA, Opkomst en ondergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978–1983)* (2012)[9] is the

[6] "Minny Pops," LTM Recordings, last accessed March 30, 2014, http://www.ltmrecordings.com/minny_pops.html.
[7] An example is Dorien Zandbergen, "Computers in Actie. Hoe twee groepen in Amsterdam politieke overtuigingen combineren met een passie voor computertechnologie" (MA thesis, University of Leiden, 2004).
[8] Leonor Jonker, *No Future Nu* (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers 2012).
[9] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA, Opkomst en ondergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978 – 1983)* (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers 2012).

the only popular work that specifically deals with the ULTRA scene. Therefore, in defining how ULTRA was affected by its Dutch background with reference to the current historiography, it is impossible for this study to ignore works that utilise punk. And when examining the available literature the period has produced, the net has to be cast fairly widely to give a picture of how Dutch pop music culture then operated, and how ULTRA would have reacted to, or been affected by it.

The literature that deals with the Dutch pop music scenes of the 1970s and 1980s falls into three broad camps. Firstly, there are works that use pop music to address the more political elements of the Netherlands' musical scene of that era. Articles from Van Elderen (1989)[10] and Rutten (1993)[11] concern themselves with how the Netherlands' social system and governmental policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s affected Dutch musicians. These articles are useful in understanding how the Dutch musicians could work with the state to find opportunities to play, practise and tour within the socio-political funding structure of their day. Van Elderen and Rutten's works deal primarily with the socio-economic aspect of pop music in the Netherlands; and in so doing, define all musicians as one social grouping; primarily evaluated through economic indices, such as employment levels. However; these matter of fact analyses do uncover the tensions that arose in the dealings between *Stichting Pop Nederland*, (the body that then looked to represent Dutch acts), and the Dutch governmental authorities responsible for its budget. Dutch pop music is seen as the preserve of the amateur, where musicians had to "compete for money […] with the jogging track, and the old ladies' book club."[12]

Secondly there are works that use Dutch pop music to document the era's social identity. Pop music can be used in a regional or urban setting; such as Erik Brus en Fred de Vries's *Gehavende Stad: Muziek en literatuur in Rotterdam van 1960 tot nu* (2012),[13] a title that looks to document Rotterdam's post-war cultural output. Whilst an entertaining and informative read in terms of defining Rotterdam's musical identity – for instance highlighting the importance of Peter Graute's Backstreet Records shop in the rise of punk and post-punk music in the city – their approach is often anecdotal; which, when defining a proud city like Rotterdam, can lead to a spiky approach based round intercity rivalries. Other

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[10] P.L. van Elderen, "Pop and Government Policy in the Netherlands," in *World Music, Politics, and Social Change, Papers from the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Music and Society*, ed. Simon Frith (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 190-197.

[11] Paul Rutten, "Popular Music Policy: A Contested Area - The Dutch Experience," in *Rock and Popular Music, Politics, Policies, Instruments*, eds., Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepherd and Graeme Turner (London: Routledge, 1993), 37-54.

[12] P.L. van Elderen, "Pop and Government Policy in the Netherlands," 197.

[13] Erik Brus and Fred de Vries, *Gehavende Stad, Muziek en literatuur in Rotterdam van 1960 tot nu* (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers 2012).

titles are national in scope. The primary study that uses popular musical trends in the Netherlands of the 1980s to give a sense of a national identity is Jouke Turpijn's *80's Dilemma* (2011).[14] *80's Dilemma* is a useful work; both in proposing that the era was vulnerable to contradictory social and political ideologies, and in arguing why this period in Dutch history needs to be re-evaluated before it becomes prey to over-generalisation. But Turpijn's strength in using political over musical analysis becomes painfully clear when pop music is discussed. Whilst able to successfully incorporate the Dutch pop chart music of the day into his argument, his use of more radical musical examples (such as citing the Dutch "squat punk" band The Ex, or the wilfully maverick Scottish band The Jesus and Mary Chain, to highlight changing social goals in music) is vague at best. Quotes from these acts are made to fit sweeping points; with little understanding of those bands' artistic trajectory, or surroundings. An appreciation of the subtleties of the era's often contradictory musical trends is missing.

Thirdly, there are works that inspect the era in a primarily musical sense. Two studies handle pop music from the period to create an aesthetic appreciation of what happened musically in the Netherlands; though both deal with the broader punk scenes rather than the ULTRA scene. The inspiration for many current studies of Dutch punk is Jerry Goossen and Jeroen Vedder's *Het gejuich was massaal: punk in Nederland 1976-1982* (1996).[15] This is a richly illustrated and informative general overview that looks to catalogue the punk explosion in the Netherlands. The book's use of key actors, such as *Oor* writer and Paradiso organiser Fer Abrahams, is instrumental in creating a clear framework for how punk was valued; both socially, and in relation to the Dutch music industry. However, outside of a few tantalising actor reminiscences and general asides about the small nature of the Dutch scene, little if anything is made of a wider Dutch musical aesthetic or international legacy. Possibly the most rounded study that looks to place Dutch punk and post-punk in an international context is Leonor Jonker's *No Future Nu*, (2012). Whilst wide-ranging in its scope, and despite the lack of information on seminal Dutch punks The Ex, Jonker's study often shows a careful and sensitive evaluation of the transfer of identities and fashions between the Anglo-American and the Dutch markets. *No Future Nu* is also makes fleeting mention to the ULTRA scene as a part of the general counter-cultural landscape. Finally – and dealing with ULTRA itself – there is Harold Schellinx's *ULTRA: Opkomst en ondergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978-1983)* (2012). *ULTRA* is a highly

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[14] Jouke Turpijn, *80's Dilemma, Nederland in de Jaren Tachtig* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker 2011).
[15] Jerry Goossen and Jeroen Vedder, *Het gejuich was massaal: punk in Nederland 1976-1982* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Jan Mets, 1996).

personal and impressionistic book that also contains vital information from key actors and primary sources; and includes a decent selection of source material. However Schellinx's work must be treated with some caution, as he is a key figure within ULTRA; and one who presents a biographical account. As such he is wholly detached from or dispassionate towards his subject matter. Schellinx does not look to create a social analysis that could define the ULTRA movement in an academic context.

Whilst examining the literature available for the period 1977-1984, it is noticeable that, outside of Schellinx and Jonker's works, how inward-looking these studies are. The works contain broad and non-analytical generalisations regarding the smallness of the Dutch scene in terms of competing with the Anglo American music market. They also acknowledge that new forms of music such as punk were brought into the Netherlands by a wide range of local and international actors. But there is almost no attempt to evaluate how Dutch pop music operated in the international "popular music" market, or how these scenes were evaluated aesthetically. Examining similar international scenes may allow clearer examples – and a guideline – to show how a counter-cultural music's idea of national self can be driven, determined or judged by the workings of a state or an international music industry.

Some studies of a music scene's sense of "self" are able to use powerful reactionary elements or political precedents to define that music's place on a national map. Studies of the "non-official" music from the Eastern Bloc of the 1970s and 1980s reveal that an overbearing socio-political framework allows a music's identity to be identified in terms of a stark social or aesthetic contrast; against dominant political (and by extension) national consensuses.[16] Trever Hagen's work on the Czech Underground (2011)[17] is a good example of how a strong social contrast allows music to present its own narrative. Hagen describes and evaluates the Czech Underground on a number of scales; internationally (via the connections between the musical underground and internationally known social protest movement, Charta 77) nationally (via Hagen's use of official Party reports) or on a personal, almost microscopic scale, using actor reminiscence; as in Hagen's investigation of Czech bands like Plastic People of the Universe, the Czech New Wave and samizdat magazines such as *Vokno*. Hagen often quotes the actors; to both invoke their struggle in the face of a repressive regime and to reveal how they were able to continually reconstruct social and musical counter identities through absorbing new

[16] A good example of how punk and underground music arose, and survived under Communism can be found with the articles in "Mapping The Merry Ghetto: Musical Countercultures in East Central Europe 1960-1989," *East Central Europe* 38 (2011).
[17] Trever Hagen, "Converging on Generation: Musicking in Normalized Czechoslovakia," *East Central Europe* 38 (2011): 307-335.

members into an underground structure; as well as picking up on Western influences that then informed their own counter cultural identity. Hagen's use of interviews and quotes reveals a strong and ever evolving "non-official cultural space" where Czechoslovak underground music is defined in opposition to the current regime and in contrast to the Western rock tradition.[18] Here, Hagen quotes a review of the band Plastic People of the Universe.

> Grotesque and magical. Maybe it's the voice of mice in a labyrinth. Maybe that's why the music of the Plastic's is so different from the contemporary rock music in the West…. It mirrors a claustrophobic and complicated world, perhaps this world is too complicated for this meme to be communicable to anyone who is outside its walls.[19]

Music can also be created as a social counterpoint to, and in, an established market. In a seminal and near-exhaustive overview of the British (and elements of the American) post-punk scene, Simon Reynolds (2005)[20] writes how post-punk bands carved out an identity and operated; by using a social movement (punk), their appreciation of rock musical history, current (pop) market forces, and elements of their own (national) selves. These identities often sprang from, or were reshaped by their attempts to define social and political tensions through their own musical aesthetic. Reynolds' book can be used to help define ULTRA's social aesthetic in two respects. Firstly Reynolds is happy to use national "assumptions" as determining factors in evaluating British post-punk music.

> Not that I'm especially patriotic or anything, but it's also striking how both the sixties and the post-punk movement were periods during which Britannia ruled the pop waves. Which is why this book primarily focuses on the U.K.[21]

The boldness of this statement, paraphrasing a traditional, though often derided national song, *Rule Britannia* will, in part, owe something to fact that Reynolds sees the music emanating from Britain in that period as extraordinary; and the equal in quality and range to anything produced in another fabled era of British pop music history, 1963-1967. And to place such a premise on a global level doubtless shows Reynolds' unquestioning faith in the perceived power of Britain's position as a producer of popular and forward thinking music in a dominant Anglo-American music market. It is also worth noting

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[18] Trever Hagen, "Musicking in Normalized Czechoslovakia," 328.
[19] *Ibidem*, 330.
[20] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post Punk 1978-84* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).
[21] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, x.

that British popular music's aesthetics and the trans-national powers they possess are here seen as paramount; regardless of any contrary global economic indicators. Secondly, Reynolds clearly acknowledges that cultural transfer was vital in shaping British post-punk music, and cementing its international credentials. Reynolds quotes the prime instigator as being David Bowie's hugely influential and internationally successful residence in Berlin from 1977-1980. The book is littered with further examples of how other countries gave fuel to the British post-punk fire. British post-punk is seen as a "metamusical" movement that looks to Jamaica, Europe and the more perverse, non-blues elements of the American musical lexicon.[22] The debt many British acts owed to Europe (through the riches of its *avant garde* heritage and its socio-economic regeneration) is seen in this passage.

> For many of the post-punk persuasion, 1977's most significant singles weren't "White Riot" or "God Save the Queen," but "Trans-Europe Express," a metronomic, metal-on-metal threnody for the industrial era by the German band Kraftwerk, and Donna Summer's Eurodisco smash "I Feel Love," made almost entirely from synthetic sounds by producer Giorgio Moroder, an Italian based in Munich. Moroder's electronic disco and Kraftwerk's serene synthpop conjured glistening visions of the Neu Europa—modern, forward-looking, and pristinely postrock in the sense of having virtually no debts to American music.[23]

In Reynolds' and Hagen's works, there are strong trans-national, aesthetical and political identities already in place that allow them to define a musical counter identity. Here, Tim Edensor's point that the concept of national identity is, "dynamic, contested, multiple and fluid" can be exploited.[24] In the case of the ULTRA and Dutch punk scenes' literature, Edensor's remark still serves to muddy the waters. As stated earlier, ULTRA has been largely ignored and Dutch punk used to investigate specifically Dutch regional or socio-political topics; with little thought as to what made, or defined the music. Maybe using Reynolds and Hagen to highlight the lack of similar appraisals in the Netherlands is too harsh. Bands in the Netherlands had none of the aforementioned hurdles to contend with, or "historical birth rights" to enjoy. Despite instances of high profile social unrest in the early 1980s, the country was largely stable and prosperous. Did Dutch bands suffer an ambiguous collective identity because they operated in a stable and broadly tolerant socio-political environment that was, in its musical manifestation, both an insignificant player in a powerful international market; and a generous dispenser of state support?

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[22] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, xxvi.
[23] *Ibidem*, xxii.
[24] Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and the Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002), vi.

If the literature can provide only fragmentary evidence to answer how ULTRA was determined by its background, an analysis is needed of the available non-literary sources; such as interviews with key actors, and primary source materials. The first important source to investigate is *Vinyl* magazine. The reason for choosing *Vinyl* to help define ULTRA's social characteristics is that the magazine was clearly part of what Trever Hagen calls a "musical communitas".[25] In documenting the Czech Underground of the 1960s and 1970s, Hagen cites the work of Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2004) and Small (1998)[26] to both delineate and give social context to musical activities that fall outside of mainstream societal norms. Hagen utilises a term coined by Small; "musicking", which is "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance".[27] Hagen expands (through Pavlicevic and Ansdell's definition of the term) the remit of Small's "musicking" to describe a circumstance where socially restricted, unencouraged or unofficial groups of people can create a musical identity; the "musical communitas" a "common shared world of time, space, gesture, and energy, which nevertheless allows diversity and unity".[28] Hagen's broader definitions of "musicking" can therefore cover information sources and publications - in ULTRA's case *Vinyl* - that represent the actions of a specific "musical communitas". In the Netherlands, *Vinyl* was seen, by both its own editorial staff and other Dutch magazines, like *Elsevier's Magazine* and *Oor,* as representing ULTRA's spirit; namely cutting edge, modern music.[29]

The *Vinyl* issues this thesis refers to were published between early 1981, at the point when the "ULTRA" shows at the Oktopus club ended and spring 1983, when the magazine began to build on an increasing circulation and wider Dutch press attention. The timeframe is chosen because many of the musicians and actors connected with ULTRA then worked for *Vinyl,* and many were responsible for the magazine's editorial line, content and promotion; such as Harold Schellinx (Young Lions, Minny Pops), or André Bach and Arjen Schrama (Tox Modell). The issues were studied for evidence of these ULTRA actors' cultural convictions; through choices of cover artists, advertising shown, of the percentage of Dutch and foreign acts making up the magazine's content, and positioning of specific articles. In the

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[25] Trever Hagen, "Musicking in Normalized Czechoslovakia," 309.
[26] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), and Mercédès Pavlicevic and Gary Ansdell, *Community Music Therapy* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), quoted in Trever Hagen, "Converging on Generation: Musicking in Normalized Czechoslovakia," *East Central Europe* 38 (2011), 307-335.
[27] Trever Hagen, 309.
[28] *Ibidem*, 309.
[29] "De avant garde rukt op. Eigen blaadje, eigen plaatje, eigen disco", Paul Evers, "Ultra gids voor moderne muziek", *Muziekkrant Oor*, February 11 1981, quoted in Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA*, 267.

content, specific attention was given to instances of expressions of national "self" or cultural transfer; usually found in editorials and think pieces.

Another source of information can be found in interviews from the key actors in the ULTRA scene. Although interviews can often lead to difficulties as regards accurate historical appraisal, some scholars have provided useful guidelines to use and justify interview material *apropos* popular music. To justify the use of interviews from key ULTRA actors, the author has turned to the work of Tia DeNora (2000),[30] Andy Bennett (2012),[31] and Trever Hagen (2011).[32] All three see interviews as "expressing" inherent physical or spatial properties that can give a human agency to research. DeNora sees interviews as opportunities for people to explain how they physically or emotionally respond to music in their daily lives.[33] ULTRA's cultural transfer, social context, and aesthetic appreciation can be determined through interviewees' descriptions of what happened, or recollections of how material circumstances or geographies changed; and how an interviewee reacted to these changes. Placing the interview in a "new" space (effectively set against a recollection of a past time) can alter perceptions, and lead to a certain amount of revisionism. However, this reinvention may be a valid part of the process. Hagen states that a modern appreciation of past events need not be a matter for undue concern; the "new interview space" is dynamic; a "convergence zone, wherein the performance and rehearsal of knowledge along sociobiographical lines" allows an interviewee to create their own, flexible, "cultural resource".[34] Additionally, Bennett states that the "cultural memory" of a scene or era is something that can alter in meaning over time, whether through interviews or new re-enactments.

> (C)ultural memory, rather than presenting a fixed, intangible point in a collectively articulated past, is continually re-presented through its embeddedness in those everyday artefacts through which individuals re-produce their collective cultural selves in the present.[35]

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[30] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[31] Andy Bennett, "Popular Music, Cultural Memory and Everyday Aesthetics," in *Philosophical and Cultural Theories of Music*, ed. Eduardo De La Fuente and Peter Murphy, vol. 8 of *Social and Critical Theory*, ed. John Rundell, Danielle Petherbridge, Jeremy Smith, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Robert Sinnerbrink (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 243-262.
[32] Trever Hagen, "Musicking in Normalized Czechoslovakia," 307-335.
[33] Tia DeNora, "Music as a technology of self," *Music in Everyday Life*, 46-74.
[34] Trever Hagen, 311-312.
[35] Andy Bennett, "Popular Music, Cultural Memory and Everyday Aesthetics," 262.

The tasks of analysing and presenting material from the fragmentary and limited resources that ULTRA provides create a further problem; namely, how best to present the story of ULTRA. Studying any form of music for whatever purpose can throw up a multitude of interpretative or methodological hurdles. Whether the approach is contextual, such as Connell and Gibson's (2002)[36] socio-cultural, as with Adorno (1991)[37] ethnographic, such as DeNora (2000)[38] or sociological, as seen with Hebdige (1979)[39] and Bourdieu (1993)[40] it is important to choose one that avoids being overly dogmatic and makes fullest and most sensitive use of the available sources. In the case of analysing ULTRA, the task facing the author was twofold; to allow the ULTRA scene's story to be clearly told; free of overly restrictive or suggestive methodology. Secondly to show how ULTRA's sense of self was determined and evaluated by its cohorts, contemporaries and collaborators. To help carry out these two tasks, the author turned to the work of Simon Frith and the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM).

It can be but coincidence; but in the introduction to *World Music, Politics and Social Change, Papers from the International Association for the Study of Popular Music* (1989)[41] Simon Frith reminisced about the first IASPM Conference, held in June 1981, at the Armada hotel in Amsterdam; just after the "ULTRA" evenings had ended, and ULTRA as an independent scene was on the cusp of disappearing.[42] Through this, and later IASPM conferences, Frith proposed a set of simple principles for studying popular music.[43] Three can be usefully applied to answer the tasks set by the author in studying ULTRA. Firstly, that popular music boasts an inherent "universal pop aesthetic". Frith states all popular music is "shaped […] by international influences and institutions, by multinational capital and technology, by global pop norms and values. Even the most nationalistic sounds [...] are determined by a critique of international entertainment."[44] Secondly, Frith notes that studying popular music is to "study musical

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[36] John Connell and Chris Gibson, "Popular Music, Identity and Place," vol. 17 of *Critical Geographies*, ed. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 2002).
[37] Theodor W Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[38] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[39] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Methuen, 1979).
[40] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[41] Simon Frith, introduction and editor's note to *World Music, Politics, and Social Change, Papers from the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Music and Society*, ed. Simon Frith (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 2-7, 9.
[42] Details of the first IASPM conference can be found here http://www.iaspm.net/archive/Foundation.PDF. The conference's location was roughly equidistant from many of the centres that hosted the city's underground music scene; the former NRC Handelsblad building on Paleisstraat, the squats on Sarphatistraat and Waterlooplein, De Koer nightclub on Nieuwzijds Voorburgwal, the Oktopus youth club at Keizersgracht 138, the Paradiso nightclub on the Weteringschans and the original Vinyl offices in the Derde Oosterparkstraat.
[43] "Popular" here means; music created to perform in international, pop music markets.
[44] Simon Frith, introduction to *World Music, Politics, and Social Change*, 2.

change". Change here is meant as the competition between the various actors (for example; artists, record companies, media outlets and technologies) in the "universal pop aesthetic". This is defined as the "politics of pop."[45] Frith also notes that "the trickiest task of musical analysis" is "to explain the relationship of cause and effect" where the researcher defines how, or where, one musical style or movement influences another.[46] Frith's principles are simple prompts that give an impetus to finally tell ULTRA's story; free of any overly narrow analytical or methodological constraints. The ULTRA scene can, after over 30 years, be placed within an international framework of popular music and analysed as to how it operated there. Most pertinently for this thesis, Frith's notion of evaluating "cause and effect" can be employed to describe ULTRA's aesthetic and sense of self, and to determine what ULTRA's place in the "universal pop aesthetic" was; and what ULTRA's brief flowering revealed about the "politics of pop" in the Netherlands.

[45] Simon Frith, introduction to *World Music, Politics, and Social Change,* 3.
[46] *Ibidem*, 9.

Chapter 1 - *Vinyl* Magazine

In his book *ULTRA*, *Opkomst en ondergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978-1983)* (2012), Harold Schellinx reminisces about the chaotic launch party given for *Vinyl* magazine on February 14, 1981, at the newly opened Schafthuis Royaal club in the former NRC building, on the corner of de Paleisstraat and Nieuwe-Zijds Kolk, Amsterdam.[47] The party featured a number of Dutch bands the new magazine sought to champion; Haarlem's Steno, Den Bosch's Minioon and Nijmegen's Mekannik Kommando. The choice of bands was logical; as *Vinyl* saw itself as the mouthpiece of a new musical development unfolding in the Netherlands; mainly in Amsterdam, but also in cities such as Nijmegen, Eindhoven, and Den Bosch; one known as ULTRA. ULTRA, standing for "ultramodernen" was a loose musical term coined for a number of young Dutch bands who made *avant garde* post-punk music; bands such as Minny Pops, Mecano, Plus Instruments, Minioon, Mekanik Kommando, The Young Lions and Tox Modell. From that February 1981 issue, (preceded by a taster, known as the "Zero Issue"[48] in December 1980, which was incorporated into the first edition), *Vinyl* rapidly expanded; reaching print runs of 15,000 (as well as a print run of 3,000 for an English edition) during its second year (1982).[49] At its peak in the mid-1980s, albeit with a more populist editorial policy, *Vinyl* was an established presence in the Dutch music market. The magazine ran until February 1988.[50]

Harold Schellinx, himself a member of the ULTRA band The Young Lions, and the *Vinyl* editorial board till summer 1982, uses his book to emphasize a number of distinguishing factors about this new magazine. Firstly, many of the original writers and editors of the magazine were either ULTRA musicians or were primarily interested in experimental music rather than a career in pop journalism. The founders and original editing team, Harold Schellinx, Stephen Emmer, Arjen Schrama, Marc Honingh and André Bach, all played in ULTRA bands; (The Young Lions, Minny Pops and Tox Modell respectively).[51] Others, such editor Oscar Smit, worked in record shops such as Boudisque in Amsterdam, and were interested in the new musical developments on their doorstep. Precious few had journalistic credentials or aspirations. In *ULTRA*, Schellinx quotes one of the few out-and-out journalists at *Vinyl*, Joost Niemöller.

Ik kwam daar als een journalist, die ook literaire ambities had. En bij *Vinyl* was het duidelijk: dit was geen

[47] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 266.
[48] *Ibidem,* 251.
[49] *Ibidem*, 352.
[50] "Maandblad *Vinyl* verdwijnt van de markt," *de Volkskrant*, February 11, 1988.
[51] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 17.

schrijversclub. Ik had geen behoefte om een plaatje te maken. Terwijl bijna alle medewerkers toch op een of andere manier in de muziek zaten. [52]

Rather, Schellinx presents *Vinyl* as another extension of the ULTRA scene; a continuation - in print - of the club night "ULTRA"; which ran at the Oktopus club at Keizersgracht 138 in Amsterdam, from September 1980 to April 1981. As the "ULTRA" nights petered out (Schellinx suggests that the nights' popularity would have led to a "watered down" programme)[53] many concerned themselves with working on *Vinyl* magazine. *Vinyl* would look to continue the "ULTRA" night's credo, promoting Dutch (and foreign) bands that shared a similar modernist, *avant garde* mindset; creating a trans-national space that would also give the Dutch bands a context that had previously been denied to them by the Dutch music press. Schellinx quotes André Bach's call to arms in *Vinyl*'s "Zero Issue" of December 1980 (which was later stapled into Issue 1) as one that actively looked to promote the ULTRA scene and by extension, all *avant garde* Dutch bands in the wider, international rubric of popular music.

'Gestart als reactie op het voortdurende gebrek aan belangstelling voor de ongebruikelijke muziek van nog onbekende Nederlandse bands is de Ultra-avond de basis geworden van een beweging die zich aan het verbreden is', schreef André. 'De Ultra-avonden in Oktopus zijn zonder uitzondering boeiend en verassend. Muziek met inzet en zeker kwaliteit'.[54]

Schellinx also infers that the Dutch mainstream music press's view of *Vinyl* followed suit; quoting Paul Evers' report in music magazine *Oor* published on 11 February 1981, three days before *Vinyl*'s launch. "Another take on music, and with a different mindset; a rising army of experimentalists emerges using new forms and standards. Finally something happens… is there is an Amsterdam School?"[55]

Thirdly, Harold Schellinx sees the magazine as one that was, initially, only concerned with writing about musical developments; usually idealistically. Throughout his book, Schellinx is often at pains to point out the slightly rarefied, apolitical atmosphere of *Vinyl*; quoting Joost Niemöller who saw the magazine as an "idealistic club, purely created round music"[56] and also printing out the meeting minutes of May 1981 (including the original underlining) to further this point.

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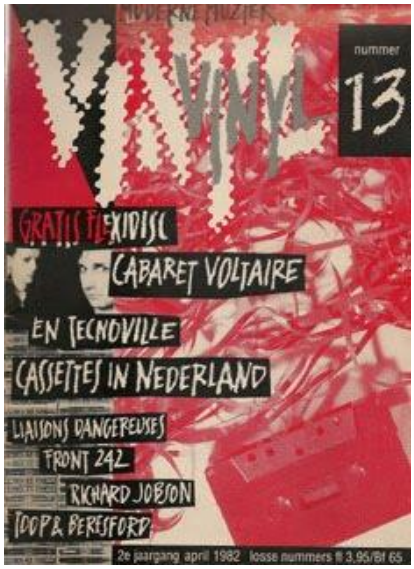
[52] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 282.
[53] Wally van Middendorp's press release on stopping the "ULTRA" nights, quoted in *ULTRA,* 247-248.
[54] André Bach, *Vinyl,* "Zero Issue" (December 1980) editorial, quoted in *ULTRA,* 251.
[55] *ULTRA,* 242-243.
[56] *Ibidem,* 282.

Onbevooroordeeld *Vinyl* stelt zich a-politiek op en streeft ernaar beïnvloeding verre van zich te houden. Er is dan geen plaats meer voor persoonlijke rancunes. Onderbouwende kritiek is belangrijk. Als tussenvoegsel: uitgaande van een kritiese doch onbevooroordeelde benadering. [Uit de notulen van de *Vinyl* vergadering van maandag 25 mei 1981.].[57]

Schellinx presents *Vinyl* as a magazine concerned with "the new" in music; and keen to note the artistic possibilities that any new developments (such as the introduction of cassettes) allowed. The magazine's policy towards cassettes and home taping for example – a trend which, according to Schellinx (to this day a cassette enthusiast) had "mushroomed" in Holland in the early 1980s[58] – was one that encouraged the experimental and revolutionary aspects of the medium. Issue 13 of *Vinyl* had a removable feature dedicated to cassettes. And in the following quote from his book, Schellinx emphasizes *Vinyl*'s high-minded embrace of the new and the idea that *Vinyl* would not look to denigrate the new medium through any demarcation with traditional media such as vinyl.

Vinyl nam, terecht, de cassette bijzonder serieus. Totdat Oscar Smit in de vierentwintigste *Vinyl* (april 1983), startte met Dolby, een speciale cassetterubriek, stonden besprekingen van cassettereleases gewoon tusen de recensies van grammofoonplaten. Onderscheid werd er nauwelijks gemaakt.[59]



[Cassettes on the cover of Issue 13 (April 1982)]

[57] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 281-282.
[58] *Ibidem,* 333.
[59] *Ibidem,* 333-334.

Schellinx's three points in his book, that of a magazine written by musicians, one keen on presenting an idealistic, non-judgemental view of the international modern and *avant garde* music, and one driven by the developments from the Dutch ULTRA scene, can all be seen when examining the content of *Vinyl* itself. The evidence is not hard to find. *Vinyl*'s cover often boasted the caption, "Moderne Muziek", a slogan not so far away from the ULTRA moniker's meaning, "ultramodernen". And *Vinyl*'s remit of promoting the new in the music world can be seen in the contents page of Issue 2.

Vinyl is een muziekblad, dat maandelijks verschijnt, en zich richt op moderne en experimentele muziek, met extra aandacht voor kleine beginnende bands.[60]

[The moniker, "Moderne Muziek" on the cover of Issue 11 (February 1982)]

A rough count of articles in the first 20 issues reflects a policy of promoting *avant garde* Dutch bands as equals alongside similar international acts.[61] Approximately 36% of these articles are dedicated to Dutch and Belgian acts (including the ULTRA and Belgian New Wave scenes) 31% to British; 14% to American

[60] *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 3.

[61] The count can only be a cursory one due to difficulty of obtaining copies of all *Vinyl*s in this period. The contents listed for the first 20 issues of the magazine were taken from "Vinyl Magazine," No Longer Forgotten Music, accessed May 10, 2014 http://vinyltijdschrift.blogspot.nl. They do not include single or album reviews or round ups, such as the regular "Signalement" feature (for example in Issue 15 on pages 12-14, featuring Dutch acts such as André de Saint Obin) or scene reports such as the Haarlem scene report in Issue 2 (pages 22-23) which lists the names of Haarlem bands such as Steno and Bizzkids. According to the contents listings given by the *No Longer Forgotten Music* website for issues 1 to 20, 82 main articles feature Dutch acts; against 69 for British bands, 30 American, 17 German, and 27 given for other lands. There are also 2 dedicated features on ULTRA, one in Issue 1 and one in Issue 17, and a special edition in Issue 7, "Ten zuiden van de grens", featuring the Belgian New Wave.

7% to German and 12% to acts from the rest of the world. Further examination of the contents of specific issues (in this thesis's case, Issues 2, 8 and 15) revealed that Dutch artists were just as likely to enjoy centre-page articles, or extended features – often running over two full pages - as a foreign band. In addition, the famous free flexi disc that was inserted inside each issue (often quoted as the main selling point of *Vinyl*) more often than not featured a Dutch ULTRA band.[62] In fact, ULTRA bands and (discounting the American ULTRA musician Stefan Weisser, *aka* Z'Ev) predominantly Dutch ULTRA bands such as Mekannik Kommando, Tox Modell, Soviet Sex, Gulf Pressure Ais, Minny Pops and Plus Instruments dominated the flexi disc up to Issue 9; when the first foreign, non-ULTRA bands (Britain's The Higsons and Ireland's The Virgin Prunes) were featured.[63]

[Flexi disc (one sided) of Nijmegen band, Mekanik Kommando – in Issue 1 (February 1981)]

Shellinx's point that *Vinyl* was apolitical in its approach to covering music is very noticeable; there are very few stridently political articles in the magazine, outside of general overviews; such as the Theatre of Hate interview in Issue 8, or quick asides about the era's "angst" as in the Minioon interview in Issue 2. Certainly no article uses politics as a call to musical action, or *vice versa*. Where *Vinyl* shows its radicalism is through its coverage of music. Issue 15 alone contains a plethora of wordy articles on such *avant garde* topics as Synaesthesia (p18-19) the "New Jazz" of British band, Pinski Zoo (p32) interviews with the American minimal classical artist, Joan La Barbara (p36-37) and British industrial music artists, Chris and Cosey (p24-25). In Issue 8, an interview conducted by *Vinyl* co-editor Harold Schellinx with

[62] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 253.
[63] Information for the artists featured on the flexi disc was taken from "Vinyl Magazine," No Longer Forgotten Music, accessed May 10, 2014 http://vinyltijdschrift.blogspot.nl.

Henry Cow's Fred Frith and his collaborator Bob Ostertag, is illuminated with an illustration of a guitar being played with scrubbing brushes; as well as the interview's text, written by Schellinx.

Bob werkt die avond met diverse cassette-tapes, Fred met een zelfgebouwd, liggend snareinstrument dat hij met handen, strijkstok, zaag, stokken, borstels, blikken doosjes, een stuk rubber, stofdoek, radio bespeeld [sic].[64]

Vinyl's content can also be used to show how cutting edge artists operated, often in limited social and intellectual spaces. Musicians and journalists often use *Vinyl* to voice reports of limited opportunities to play, and misunderstandings with the established network of clubs, promoters and record shops. It would be disingenuous, though, to say that this aspect of *Vinyl*'s content reflects only a Dutch point of view. In essence, all the bands featured in *Vinyl* – regardless of nationality – are frustrated at being marginalised in the industry; and know that their music is not often accepted. In Issue 8, Dutch minimal electronic artist Mental makes the point that all experimental musicians fail to reach a public regardless of country; pointing to the dissolution of British industrial band, Throbbing Gristle as evidence.[65]

Where the magazine develops a specifically Dutch context is through the reports of local reactions to the music, and well as how the Dutch music industry and club circuit viewed experimental sounds. *Vinyl* ran a number of scene reports in its first two years, including ones on France and Belgium (Issue 7, entitled "Ten Zuiden van de Grens"), Hamburg (Issue 2), Haarlem (Issue 2), and Groningen (Issue 18). In the Dutch reports, the feel of a country ignorant or dismissive of new music emerges; mainly through the highlighting of the social restrictions the musicians have to work in. In the scene report on Haarlem, the article's opening lines are unambiguous as to what the authors believe their fellow countrymen think of radical music.

Wij zijn derhalve op zoek gegaan in Haarlem naar nieuwe uitingsvormen, alternatieve omgangsnormen, de jungle van de vooroordelen trotserend.[66]

Haarlem is made to sound like a cultural wasteland, and the authors' sarcasm is palpable in the report.

[d]e totale smakeloosheid laat zijn beste kant zien in vorm van de Beyneshal. Er blijken, zo vertelt de juffrouw van de VVV sportevenementen en een enkele keer ook muziekconcerten voor de jeugd georganiseerd te worden. [...] Een voettocht voert ons vervolgens naar de oase: Amigo's, platen-annex kledinghandel. We komen er wat op

[64] "Fred Frith, It's Me Who's Doing It," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 19.
[65] "Mental, Het Mentalisme," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 34.
[66] "Op safari in Haarlem," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 22.

verhaal en horen bekende geluiden. Zoals: moeite met het vinden van oefenruimtes, weinig bewegende mensen, niet leuk om uit te gaan enz.[67]

Later in Issue 2, two programmers for the experimental show, "Radiola Improvisatie Salon", Willem de Ridder and Han Reiziger, outline the difficulties in getting experimental music played to a wider audience as part of company policy; in their report's case, through the "progressive" Dutch broadcasting station, the VPRO. Ridder and Reiziger recount their meeting with VPRO management.

De VPRO heeft in zijn doelstellingen staan dat het een open oog moet hebben voor de nieuwste ontwikkelingen en daarom stellen wij hierbij nogmaals voor dat de "Radiola Improvisatie Salon" naar Hilversum drie wordt verplaatst, waar het thuis hoort, en dat het liefst één maal per week te beluisteren is.

Ik haalde diep adem en keek de kring rond. Jan Donkers zat er nog steeds even slaperig bij. Dave van Dijk is een beetje boos. New Wave wordt wel gedraaid op Hilversum drie, en wel in het programma "Rubadub". Geduldig leg ik uit dat het niet om New Wave gaat, maar om experimentele muziek. Veel verdere discussie is er niet. Enthousiasme was ook het laatste wat ik verwachte [sic].[68]

In Issue 8, Mental criticises the Dutch record shops who stock things "uit pure winst oogmerken".[69] Mental also states he has a better chance to release music through the French TOAST & Sordide Sentimentale, or the Texan PNP labels, than through any Dutch equivalents. Issue 2 contains an interview conducted by Jacqueline Beuys with the singer from Leiden experimental punk band Cheap 'N Nasty, Herman de T., who talks about the problems his band faces from locals or workers on the circuit.

Al is wel getracht tegemoet te komen aan de behoefte om een redelijk onderdak te krijgen voor punkers, zegt Herman. Maar dat is een lachertje op zich, omdat bij de opening van het punk-café een in het LVC (jongerencentrum en bolwerk van hippie-achtige dertigers) de vooraanstaande groepen werden geweigerd, omdat ze teveel overlast zouden veroorzaken.[70]

In all these reports, Simon Frith's notion of the "politics of pop" can be seen at work – to deleterious effect – in the *Vinyl* and ULTRA scenes. *Vinyl* may well be reporting on (and by extension a part of) the power game inherent in the attempt of the "Radiola Improvisatie Salon" programmers to move their

[67] "Op safari in Haarlem," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 22.
[68] "En wat gebeurte ondertussen in Hilversum," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 32.
[69] "Mental, Het Mentalisme," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 34.
[70] "Cheap 'N Nasty," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 31.

show to a more accessible slot in the VPRO network; but it is a game that those sympathetic to *Vinyl*'s aims can never win. Aesthetical considerations or new trends often seem to lose out to commercial acumen in the Netherlands, as the Mental and Cheap 'N Nasty articles hint; and a certain amount of mutual mistrust is engendered, regardless of the appeal of the new (in these cases, *avant garde* punk, industrial music and cassette based music). Here, Frith's notion of "cause and effect" is also present; in the manner of reaffirming stereotypes; both "sides" react negatively with the other through a certain amount of intransigence. And this intransigence closes doors on opportunities; Cheap 'N Nasty can't play where they would like to in the Netherlands club circuit and Mental finds it easier to release his music on foreign labels. Harold Schellinx emphasizes this isolated spirit of the time in his book *ULTRA*, where he quotes *Vinyl* worker, Rachel de Meijer. De Meijer, looking back at the period 30 years later, gives a strong appraisal of the spirit of the Dutch underground of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

> Wij waren in die tijd de mensen met de goede smaak. Het was ook een soort van arrogantie natuurlijk, maar wij wisten wat goed was. Mijn angst was altijd, dat ik [...] zou moeten gaan werken met mensen die doorsnee, traditioneel, heel keurig burgerlijk waren. [...] Dat was mijn grote angst voor als ik ooit een keer een normale baan zou krijgen. Zo sterk was die subcultuur van ons toen. Je kon je echt zo verschrikkelijk van alle anderen onderscheiden door de muziek.[71]

Music, for those sympathetic to *Vinyl* and by extension the ULTRA scene, therefore, is both the common denominator and the divider. This apartness of the early *Vinyl* scene is also defined geographically through *Vinyl*'s content. The limited physical spaces and meeting points afforded to those who bought and created the early issues of *Vinyl* can be seen through the adverts and listings placed in the magazine. Like the scene reports (which gave tips on where to go) the adverts help provide a physical framework for the readers' actions. Mainly they promote a specific number of record and vintage clothes shops in the major cities and towns. The listings are from the main pop venues associated with underground acts, such as The Paradiso, and The Melkweg in Amsterdam, or the Vera Club in Groningen and the (then) more adventurous venues around the Netherlands, such as Gigant in Apeldoorn. The adverts come, in the main, from specific shops dealing with punk, post-punk and new wave records, such as Bullit in Breda & Eindhoven, Haddock Records in Rotterdam, Amigo's in Haarlem, and Boudisque, RAF, Get Records, and Concerto in Amsterdam. The number of adverts for vintage clothes

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[71] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 378-379.

shops is noticeable too; by 1983, vintage clothing was, according to punk poetess Diana Ozon, as well as *Elseviers Magazine*, a sure fire way of identifying someone who was "an ULTRA".[72] The shops include, Via Via, Kamikaze and Salty Dog in Amsterdam, Brutus in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Haasje Repje in Haarlem, Lady Day in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and Trix in Rotterdam. The main centre for news for the Amsterdam underground, the Athenaeum Bookshop on Het Spui, has a modest advertisement in Issue 15.[73] There are also small adverts for copywriters, which may reflect the part time or self-employed positions *Vinyl*'s staff or readership held. These adverts also may betray a policy, as the early issues show very few, if any, national or multinational companies.[74] The change in the adverts' quality and clientele is noticeable by Issue 15, where the Dutch arms of major record companies target a recognisable, growing, and increasingly fashionable ULTRA market. Thus WEA target the *Vinyl* readership with an advert for three of the label's more adventurous acts; The Associates, Die Krupps and Steel Pulse, and add a curious mixture of collateral product placement (branded beer and soft drinks bottles) and a "DIY" aesthetic: "en van statiegeld kopen we 'n plaat…"[75] Two adverts from EMI appear; advertising mainstream British pop groups Duran Duran (p33) and Classix Nouveau (p37). Elsewhere in Issue 15, the *Vinyl* readers are portrayed as young self-starters in Postgiro's full colour page advert, one that shows a fashionable young man in his work and evening attire: "je begint je eerste baan."[76]

Given the frustrations originating from operating in a defined artistic, social and often physical space, and their later wariness of being turned into a fashionable commodity, how did the musicians define their own identity socially, and how did *Vinyl* report on their world view? On the whole, *Vinyl* seems to highlight the common sympathies between makers and lovers of independent music from all lands. Outside of a couple of opinion pieces, the notion of "The Other" is largely absent in terms of identifying or codifying any specific national identity trait; certainly in terms of any country's pop music pedigree. This may lead to a blasé manner when dealing with questions of identity, and an appreciation

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[72] "Jeugd '82," *Elseviers Magazine*, and Diana Ozon, "Lokken en rare broeken. Je weet amper meer waar je nou aan toe bent met die lui, denk je daar heb je weer zo'n corpsbal en dan blijkt het weer zo'n ultramoderne ULTRA te zijn.," quoted in Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 313-314.

[73] Ronnie Kroes, interview with the author, "Digging up Dutch undergrounds – interview with Ronnie Kroes," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/02/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-ronnie-kroes.

[74] Oscar Smit, interview with the author, "Digging Up Dutch Undergrounds – an interview with Oscar Smit and Marcel Harlaar of Vinyl Magazine," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/03/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-oscar-smit-marcel-harlaar-vinyl-magazine.

[75] "en van statiegeld kopen we 'n plaat…," WEA advert, *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 2.

[76] "Van Zakgekd Naar Salaris. Wordt Niet Tijd Voor 'N Postgirorekening?," Postgiro /Rijkspostspaarbankadvert, *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 4.

that a band's cultural worth may be affected by the limitations of the social or cultural space it operates in, as seen in an interview between *Vinyl* writer Danny van Tricht and Belgium's Cultural Decay.

Bij het grote publiek bestaat Belgische new-wave niet, iedereen zou Engelse groepen imiteren. Iemand dacht es [sic] dat we een groep uit Sheffield waren en vond ons daarom goed. Men is hier gewoon anti-chauvinistisch. Je moet eerst je sporen hebben verdiend en dan pas kent men je.[77]

As well as dealing with ignorance at home, it is also worth remembering that many of the featured musicians were – through touring – well used to leading itinerant lifestyles that led to frequent contact with other countries and cultures. When Minimal Compact talk about their Israeli roots in Issue 15, they make the pertinent point that, as musicians, they don't really feel at home in any place.

We zitten hier dus duidelijke op de juiste plaats. Anderzijds kan je moelijk van een thuis spreken, en af en toe bekruipt ons het pijnlijke gevoel dat we misschien toch beter in Israel hadden kunnen blijven. Maar ook daar voelden we ons niet echt thuis.[78]

A music's or musician's identity is often evaluated in the boundary of a local scene, and artistic currency is coined through an appreciation of a famous scene, (such as the mentions of the famous "Eric's" scene in Liverpool, in interviews with Liverpool bands Wah!, in Issue 8, and The Wild Swans in Issue 15). Belgian band Nausea, when dealing with a typically high-minded question from a *Vinyl* reporter – one that quotes Lucien Goldman – prefer to see themselves and their art as part of a specific scene (in their case Brussels) rather than an indication of a wider cultural rubric.

[..] het is niet zo dat onze muziek een weerspiegeling is van de maatschappij als objectief gegeven, maar wel van de maatschappij als subjectieve ervaring. Binnen vijftig jaar zal men in onze muziek niet gaan zoeken naar gegevens over de stad Brussel maar wel over het leven van de Nausea leden in de stad.[79]

When nationality is discussed, it is done through a number of oblique, maybe accidental ways. Firstly it is used to add weight to an aesthetic judgement on the music. Geographical definitions are couched in the vaguest of manners. Marc Hollander, the label boss of Crammed Discs and band member of Honeymoon Killers, talks of how his experiences in working in different countries. Rather than comment on the social or political differences he finds, Hollander talks of how the experiences affect his music.

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[77] "Depressie gas is opgettrokken. Cultural Decay," *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 30.
[78] "Acculturatieprocess. Minimal Compact," *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 26.
[79] "Nausea. Wij & nu," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 21.

Om de elpee niet te eenvormig te maken zijn we gaan opnemen in Zwitserland en in Engeland. De schok tussen de twee culturen. Het dwingt je constant na te denken over wat je doet. Het milieu waarin je beweegt beinvloedt je enorm, en als je je niet beperkt tot een bepaalde scene, garandeer je het multidimensionale van de muziek die je maakt.[80]

In the interview with Minimal Compact, *Vinyl* writer Jan Landuydt does not seem to bring any issues of the band's nationality to the table as a specific debating point; outside of suggesting some very general aesthetic connotations regarding geography and their sound.

Berry Sakharof, Malka Yoyo Spigel en Samy Birnbach hebben het toch aangedurfd zich uit hun Israelische milieu los te rukken om hier samen met Nederlandse en Belgische mensen (o.a. Dirk Polak) een apart soort muziek te maken, die Europese hardheid combineert met reminiscenties aan een achtergelaten Oosterse dromerigheid.[81]

National or geographical specifics such as the use of a different language – something that could lead to reflections or projections of identity – are often dealt with wholly artistically; by *Vinyl* and the bands alike. In Issue 2, in an interview with *Vinyl* co-editor Harold Schellinx, the Dutch band Minioon, from Den Bosch, explain at length – almost over two pages – why they use German instead of the standard rock language, English, as their choice of language for their lyrics. Very little if anything is made of the history between the two countries, even as an attempt by the band to confront this history; at times German is agreed to have an "unsympathetic sound to Dutch ears."[82]

de Duitse taal heeft, van de ene kant heel extreem...

Joke: militaristisch...

Toon: Ja, 't kan dus heel extreem zijn, binnen politiek, of binnen poëzie, maar 't kan ook overal tussenhangen als een soort absurdisme, waar je alleen maar verschrikkelijk hard om kan lachen.

Jan: Ja, 't leent zich voor heel dualistische dingen. Dat 't tegelijkertijd heel zwaar is, maar je ook kan denken van 'ha, ha, ha'. Een soort cabaret-achtige sfeer heeft 't. Iedere tekst kan volkomen serieus genomen worden, maar je mag ervoor mijn part om lachen. Dat moet je dan helemaal zelf weten.[83]

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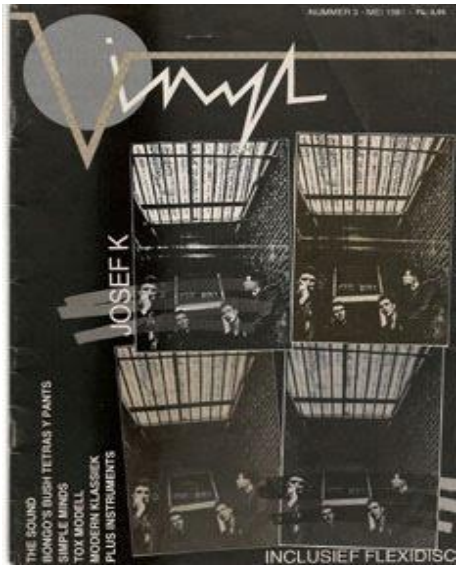
[80] "Crammed Discs. Fun & Cosmopolitanism," *Vinyl,* Issue 8 November 1981, 27.
[81] "Acculturatieprocess. Minimal Compact," *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 25.
[82] "Minioon. Persoonlijke Verwoording," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 10.
[83] "Minioon," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 9.

Sometimes, however there is some evidence that the *Vinyl* editorial board looks to address its own small and relatively isolated position in the Dutch – and by implication international – pop market to seek some commercial currency. As well as the seeming shift in policy on adverts mentioned earlier, *Vinyl*'s front cover regularly featured international bands; the first Dutch band to take the picture feature on the cover being Eindhoven's Nasmak in Issue 23 (April 1983). In this early period however, as mentioned earlier, the flexi discs mostly showcased Dutch ULTRA and Belgian New Wave artists.



[Edinburgh band, Josef K on the cover of Issue 3 (April 1981)]

This could be seen as a policy of using international artists to create an image of international importance for ULTRA and the magazine, whilst promoting the Dutch ULTRA and Belgian New Wave scenes through the flexi disc. *Vinyl* also looked to Anglo-American sources to gain inspiration and impetus. In Issue 2, the editors ask readers to send old copies of certain British rock magazines, specifically those that deal in underground or new music (*NME, Sounds*) to create an archive that will presumably be used as both a source of information on the bands as well as an indication of how these bands are valued in the UK.

Bij de start van dit nieuwe blad zijn we ook begonnen met de opbouw van een archief. Hiervoor willen wij gebruik maken van de jaargangen (of nummers) van *Sounds* en *New Musical Express*, vanaf 1977. Schrijf even een briefje als je denkt ons hierbij te kunnen helpen.[84]

[84] *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 3.

As well as covers featuring Anglo-American acts such as America's Pere Ubu (Issue 2) and Scotland's Josef K (Issue 3) the magazine printed an English language mini-issue, capitalising on the already existing links between *Vinyl* and British and American bands. Harold Schellinx confirms in *ULTRA* that the *Vinyl* editorial board saw this as a good way to test the Anglo-American market's interest.

De Engeltalige [sic] editie van *Vinyl* was een experiment, bedoeld om in te kunnen spelen op de buitenlandse belangstelling voor de bijzondere vormgeving van het blad, de fraaie foto's, en uiteraard, de flexidisc. Niet dat er een speciale Engelse versie van elke nummer werd gemaakt en gedrukt. Het was de gewone Nederlandse editie, maar dan met een extra katern dat de Engelse vertalingen van de artikelen bevatte, zo nu en dan aangevuld met wat extra foto's.[85]

Sometimes – in content that is not openly or obviously part of any editorial policy – the question of how the concept of how national identity can influence music appears; such as in Issue 15, where, in its advert for a mainstream act The Frog, Polydor NL adopts a common Dutch phrase (used to denote something worthwhile) "on-Nederlands goed". This advert – ironically – shows the Dutch mainstream industry's own difficulties in competing in the international pop music market.

De muziek van The Frog klinkt zeer on-Nederlands en swingt ruim 40 minuten lang de groeven uit.[86]

But only one article stands out due to its attempt to tackle the idea of Dutch national identity head on. This is an article in Issue 8, in the "Invalshoek" column, written by Dirk Polak, singer of Mecano and label boss of Torso records. It is important to note that this article is placed in a column that caters for personal points of view; (the Dutch word "invalshoek" alludes to a shaft of light shone on a spot, allowing the viewer to see that spot – or, in the most common sense of this word, to understand another's argument – in greater clarity). In his piece, Polak propounds that a religious doctrine that has played an influential social role in large parts of the Netherlands, Calvinism, is still an overbearingly influential element in Dutch society; and a doctrine that also that prompts many Dutch musicians, however *avant garde,* to unwittingly act in a non-cooperative and artistically debilitating manner.

In ieder geval is het noodzaak, dat in het moderne muziek-milieu alhier, gecollaboreerd wordt; voorbij jaloezie

[85] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 357.
[86] "Be Kind to Animals, Kiss a Frog," Polydor NL advert, *Vinyl,* Issue 15, June 1982, 43.

eigenbelang of afgunst, die vanwege onze Calvinistische Mentaliteit dagelijks de hoofdrol spelen. [..] Maar zodra dit patroon moderne muziek heet, kent men opnieuw eigenlijk alleen zijn eigen mensen, keert de vierkante meter terug en blijft kleinschaligheid hoofdbestanddeel in de ontwikkeling.[87]

According to Polak, social mores and behavior patterns stemming from Calvinist beliefs undermine any attempt made by Dutch musicians to collaborate, further develop their ideas, and broaden their outlook. Polak then goes on to compare this "Dutch fault" with a "fault" from another country – namely "British patriotism" to show how musicians can still work positively with their country's less appealing traditions and tropes to to further their own music's social and commercial presence.

Hanteren we het begrijp calvinistische mentaliteit als metafoor voor het chauvinisme in Engeland, dan blijkt dat men juist op dit begrip functioneert. Samenwerking voor het moment, flexibiliteit in het verkoopmethode trend, funderen het massale uitkomen van nieuwe muziek, dat wordt geintegreerd in het sociale leven als op geen andere plek in de wereld. Natuurlijke voordelen. De bakermat.[88]

It is interesting that Polak not only sees the British music scene as unique in its business methods, and as "the (creative) cradle", but also goes on to criticize patriotism as something that is narrow minded and a debilitating end in itself. Polak derides the shallow method in which British artists process artistic ideas; warning that this kind of working method can also lead to unhealthy obsessions with darker elements of Europe's past. But Polak's piece is a personal one; possibly borne of his frustrations with the bands he worked with as label boss and producer and not typical of the general tone of *Vinyl* when the influence of nationality is alluded to.[89] When reporting on scene members' experiences with an established and powerful industry such as the American music industry, *Vinyl* shows a less abrasive comparative analysis as regards Dutch music's presence and potential. This is seen in Issue 2 with the tour reportage for ULTRA band Minny Pops; a Dutch band playing the same scene – in effect being a player – alongside American "heroes" such as Suicide. In the report, the text suggests the idea that Dutch bands can easily rub shoulders with their celebrated peers.

Toegegeven was het ook een fantastische combinatie. Suicide en Minny Pops. Dromen werden eindelijk

[87] Dirk Polak, "Invalshoek," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 11.
[88] "Invalshoek," *Vinyl,* 11.
[89] Dirk Polak has repeatedly stressed his belief that Calvinism is a negative influence on musical creativity in the Netherlands; most recently in an interview with the author in March, 2014.

werkelijkheid. Bij elke beweging op de buhne laat een kluit meisjes een uitzinnig gekrijs horen. Geweldig. Wat een kick. [90]

Minny Pops, a band that suffered from their name being misspelt or confused with other acts that had less *avant garde*" connotations (as in Manchester's *City Fun* fanzine from April 1980, where they are named "The Minipops")[91] are quick to mention the fact that they get peer acceptance in their field.

En onder het publiek bevindt zich niemand minder dan Giorgi Gomelski. Die ons, als wij tevreden in de kleedkamer zitten, een hart onder de riem steekt. Giorgi Gomelski is de producer van de Yardbirds, Magma en Material). Hij zegt, jawel dat in de Minny Pops muziek onmiskenbaar angst, strakke lijnen en romantiek te herkennen is, volgens hem, de meest essentiele elementen in de muziek die de toekomst heeft. Die elementen zullen kenmerkend zijn voor de muziek die ons de komende jaren zal beheersen. Wij knikken.[92]

Also accentuated (with the full complicity of the band and *Vinyl* magazine, and doubtless used here as something to counter any negative reactions from the Dutch industry) is the weirdness of Minny Pops in American eyes; their alien nature is – if the American press is to be believed – a positive selling point. A small press cutting by Alan Niester, a Canadian rock journalist, is placed in the *Vinyl* article as an illustration; and the text starts with the statement, "How weird was that?" The band's trademark is their strangeness, their alien nature, their apartness.[93] Later in the same magazine, in a review of the Belgian New Wave act Names' single, "Nightshift" / "I Wish I Could Speak Your Language", (brought out on the prestigious Manchester label, Factory Communications), there is a touch of pride in the fact that both the Dutch and Belgians have found acceptance through such a fashionable outlet as Factory.

Konden wij als nederlanders [sic] een beetje trots zijn op het feit dat de Minny Pops op Factory uitkwamen, ook de belgen [sic] kunnen dat.[94]

Vinyl, then, displays the concept of "place" and "nationality" in many different ways; showing the bands it covers as being influenced through the machinations of the small scenes they operate in, usually at city or club level; or through their experiences on the international music circuit. *Vinyl* defines its audience through the adverts it shows, giving a physical dimension to ULTRA's *avant garde* world in

[90] "Minny Pops in Amerika. Jetlag en kou," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 14.
[91] "Near Riot At Joy Division Masquerade," *City Fun*, Number 22, April 1980, 2.
[92] "Minny Pops in Amerika," *Vinyl*, March 1981, 15.
[93] *Ibidem*, 15.
[94] "Platen," *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 36.

the Netherlands of the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Vinyl,* though, is also strongly international in outlook. Questions of nationality as a determining force in creating music or music scenes are rarely brought up; normally national tropes are subsumed in matters of musical aesthetics. *Vinyl*'s attempts to involve itself in Frith's "politics of pop" within the "global pop aesthetic" are also fairly understated; the increasing use of mainstream music company adverts, subtle placing of American and Canadian reviews for Minny Pops' North American tour, a small print run of an English language edition, or placing American and British bands on the cover. All of these actions still manage to avoid being brow beating, or patronizing and place the final aesthetic and social judgement in their readers' hands.

By way of contrast with *Vinyl*, contemporary British press articles that dealt with Dutch music of the post-punk era betray much more interest in defining the bands and their music through national characteristics. In his book *ULTRA*, Harold Schellinx quotes a piece written by Andy Gill, in the *NME* on November 22, 1980, entitled, "Why Not To Hate the Dutch". Schellinx uses Gill's piece to both settle an old score and to display, in retrospect, how the British perception of ULTRA's image had been formed. Firstly, Schellinx uses Gill's piece to demonstrate how perceived cultural worth can have a knock on effect; through the idea of where the Anglo-American market (in this case a British element of it) leads, the Dutch follow. Dutch music magazine *Oor*'s piece on ULTRA in from February 11, 1981 could be seen, Schellinx infers, as an attempt not to miss out; and to follow the lead of a powerful formulator of opinion, namely the *NME*. In an interview with Schellinx, the *Oor* writer, Paul Evers, whilst admitting he will have read the *NME* piece, contended that he was already looking to work in reports of ULTRA.

Ik verslond in die tijd Engelse bladen als de *NME* de *Melody Maker* en de *Sounds*, zegt Paul, 'en ik zal ongetwijfeld eind november 1980 het artikel van Andy Gill over de nieuwe popmuziek in Amsterdam hebben gelezen. Maar ik geloof niet dat Gills artikel voor mij de directe aanleiding was om gelijk daarna een groot artikel over Ultra voor *Muziekkrant Oor* te schrijven.[95]

However, Schellinx's remark about the new *Oor* policy to take ULTRA seriously is telling.

En dit keer niet in een van die stukjes in een hoekje die we gewend waren, met een kwinkslag en een denigrerende sneer achteraf.[96]

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[95] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 243.
[96] *Ibidem,* 242.

Schellinx then uses the meeting with Andy Gill to show how perceptions of music scenes (or how writers describe music scenes) often contrast with the mundane reality on the ground. Schellinx writes of showing an eager Andy Gill round the Minny Pops' "Spartan" practice space in the Marnixstraat in Amsterdam, and then reading how the meetings Gill had with Schellinx himself, Minny Pops and Soviet Sex, were transcribed in the *NME*. Schellinx is quick to point out *NME*'s tendency to overplay their hand, and their predilection to create something out of nothing.

In de pagina's die volgden in dat latenajaarsnummer van het gezaghebbende Britse muziekblad, dat in de dagen van punk en new wave al menige nieuwe stroming uit virtueel niks had weten te creeren, zette Andy Gill uiteen waarom muziekliefhebbers wereldwijd nu hoognodig hun oren bij de nieuwe Nederlandse popmuziek te luisteren moeten gaan leggen.[97]

But despite his warnings that Gill's perception was not always the ULTRA scene's reality; Schellinx concedes that Gill's piece does show both enthusiasm and adeptness for exploring other music, away from the "beloved Anglo-American outfits."[98]

Gill's piece can be analysed independently of Schellinx's arguments to show contrasting points between the British and Dutch independent rock press. Firstly, "Why Not To Hate the Dutch" is, despite its supportive spirit, broad-brush in approach. It is error prone and happy to paper over any missed nuances (such as Gill's incorporation of non-experimental, commercial Dutch New Wave bands such as The Tapes and The Nits) with enthusiastic acclamations of what was exciting about the ULTRA scene. Certainly, when compared to the highbrow analyses of *Vinyl* magazine, Gill's work reads like a general travel, or promotional brochure for Dutch underground music as a whole. Secondly Gill's piece is much more confrontational and nationalistic in tone than the vast majority of articles in *Vinyl*. Gill looks to position the *NME* readers in a specific camp; aligning them on the side of the Dutch independents; against the Dutch industry and the general Dutch public, and exhorts those readers to support a scene suffering from a "national inferiority complex", as well as to note that the Dutch seem to be almost institutionally ignorant, or dismissive, of new music from their own country. In an extraordinary ending (which contains Gill's misspelling of the band Scratch's name as Scratz) Gill mixes national stereotypes (flat landscape, unpronounceable names, and the colour orange) strange mistakes (replacing the Dutch national flag's colour blue with green) and ULTRA band names in a call to arms for his readership.

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[97] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 228.
[98] *Ibidem*, 229.

I love the Dutch I love them more than money. So why do we ignore their rock scene and think their names are funny? I like the Dutch; I like them more than my cat. And they've developed a rock scene that's scaling the heights (even if their country is flat). I love the Dutch hurrah for the orange white and green! [...] The six bands covered here - and there are more besides like Scratz, Tox Modell and Nasmak - are just as good as our beloved Anglo-American outfits but suffer from a national inferiority complex beyond their control. There's definitely something happening in Holland, but whether the Dutch realise it is another matter.[99]

Gill also looks to find a British equivalent, to better help British audiences understand the context of the ULTRA scene when compared to their own musical experiences; a tactic *Vinyl* rarely (if ever) employs. Gill sees the ULTRA movement as a carbon copy – in spirit - of the earlier punk movement in the UK.

There is an energy in the Amsterdam new music scene similar to the early punk scene in Britain. Though they're producing radically different music there's the same impression of small groups of people persevering against great odds…[100]

Finally ULTRA is presented as strange and interesting. Gill states that Wally van Middendorp is "decidedly odd". This oddness is noted elsewhere in other British music papers of the time. In a review of Minny Pops' debut LP, *Drastic Measures, Drastic Movement* in *Sounds,* January 5, 1980, writer Dave McCullough praises singer Wally van Middendorp's vocals; "[T]he Dutch voice which contains that eerie, insidious foreign-inflection that, for example, elevates much of Abba's material above its peers."[101] Foreign strangeness is, in the eyes of the British music press a good thing; and a quality that can elevate pop music. This is in stark contrast to *Vinyl*, where (outside of showing Minny Pops' treatment in the American press in the band's American tour report) musicians are not treated as odd, or quirky, or used to conjure up notions of "The Other". Gill's and McCullough's pieces also belie the then fashionable interest in Europe from British musicians. British bands of the post-punk period enjoyed adding a hint of continental allure to their musical image; in part driven by David Bowie's recording stint in Berlin from 1977-1980. And some acts used European names or toyed with the continent's troubled past, such as Bauhaus, Joy Division / New Order, and Durutti Column; as Dirk Polak's article "Invalshoek" inferred.[102]

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[99] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 229.
[100] *Ibidem*, 228.
[101] *Ibidem,* 120.
[102] Dirk Polak, "Invalshoek," *Vinyl,* Issue 8, November 1981, 11.

Though Gill's piece corroborates much of *Vinyl*'s reportage (namely that ULTRA was a small, often ignored scene working on the margins) the *NME* piece makes the ULTRA scene sound much more "Dutch" than *Vinyl*'s aesthetic, almost diffident approach does. Indeed, studying *Vinyl*, a small, apolitical, underground and high minded publication that does not address its country's social questions, may sound contradictory in terms of seeking out how any social group is determined by, or expresses its own identity. *Vinyl* was initially typical of all new, idealistic projects. By its own admission, it concerned itself with music that would never find a lasting foothold in the popular music charts of the day.[103] It originally had the aura of a fanzine; the famous front cover typo on the first issue – showing the year to be 1980, not 1981 – is beautifully illustrative of their idealistic approach.[104] And despite being run from Amsterdam, a city that had begun the 1980s in social and political turmoil – thanks mainly to the battles round the Vondelstraat squat evictions and the "geen woning, geen kroning" protests at the coronation of Queen Beatrix in the spring of 1980 – *Vinyl*'s content was not especially social or political. Topics such as the political climate in the Netherlands, squatting, or the seemingly inescapable "doom denken" Cold War angst (topics that, courtesy of hit songs like Doe Maar's *De Bom* in 1983 and Rubberen Robbie's *Twee Mobiele Ogen*, in 1980 also enjoyed national chart success)[105] were seen as secondary.

Despite engaging with the powerful Anglo-American music scene, *Vinyl*'s expressions of identity are more subtle, trans-national and maybe utopian; seeking a broader artistic alliance with all musicians who make new, cutting edge music. There is very little suggestion that *Vinyl*'s editorial board shares the musical inferiority complex that Andy Gill attributes to their fellow Dutch citizens. Notions of Dutch musical identity and its position in society are often couched as practical problems affecting local scenes, such as a lack of facilities or like-minded souls, and in the complaints of a wider ignorance of anything new, musically. The accent is on discovering the new (whilst, curiously, discovering vintage clothing). In this context, articles like Dirk Polak's "Invalshoek" from Issue 8 seem anomalies. In terms of acting in a *musical communitas, Vinyl* seems to carefully pick its way through a landscape that is initially uninterested in or unaware of what it stands for, looking to find allies who are interested in the new, regardless of nationality. And in that arena, *Vinyl* feels confident in its own, Dutch, skin.

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[103] *Vinyl,* Issue 2, March 1981, 3.
[104] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 267.
[105] Jouke Turpijn, *80's Dilemma, Nederland in de Jaren Tachtig*, 156-157.

Chapter 2 - Analysis of the ULTRA interviews

Whilst *Vinyl* describes how those affiliated with the ULTRA scene wanted to portray themselves, it is important to note that the actual "ULTRA" evenings – and with it a lot of the original ULTRA activity – suddenly stopped round the point when only a couple of issues of *Vinyl* had rolled off the press. The scene, ironically, had found a supportive voice to propel a coherent ULTRA image to a wider audience just at the point of its folding. In his interview with the author, Rob Scholte, singer in The Young Lions, agreed with the author's suggestion that *Vinyl* chronicled a "dead" scene.[106] The ULTRA's musical legacy did continue through the weekly "ULTRA"-inspired "D-Day" nights in the Paradiso, curated by Tox Modell's Mark Honingh. And elements of what defined ULTRA's music and visual style became fashionable in mainstream Dutch society; such as the use of synthesizers and a 1950s retro clothing look. But Harold Schellinx, looking back in *ULTRA* after 30 years, questions whether there was ever anything like a movement at all, let alone a powerful one.

Zo kwam er een einde aan Ultra. De geest was uit de fles. *NME, Oor, Vinyl*… Wally, Rob en ik hebben er heel hard om gelachen, want een beweging was er nooit geweest. Geestverwanten, dat wel natuurlijk. Maar een beweging? Het was ons idee geweest. Een hersenspinsel, fantasie, gebakken lucht.[107]

Given Harold Schellinx's quote, an analysis of *Vinyl* could be seen as an exercise in the recording of ULTRA's spirit, rather than a tangible cultural movement. But countering – or upholding – Schellinx's statement demands more than an interpretive analysis based on printed material. To further determine what defined itself as ULTRA, the author conducted a series of interviews with a number of original ULTRA participants in the early spring of 2014. The interviewees fulfilled various roles in the scene, from label bosses to band members; from fans and volunteers to editors of *Vinyl* magazine. As well as these original ULTRAs, interviews were also conducted with a number of persons who were not directly involved in the ULTRA scene, due to age, or location. These interviewees nevertheless still have an active interest in ULTRA; and, by virtue of their partial or non-involvement, present a more disengaged perspective. All the interviewees, participants, or non-participants were willing to talk, or write (via email) openly about their experiences of ULTRA; and happy to answer questions set by the author.

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[106] Rob Scholte, interview with the author, "Digging Up Dutch Undergrounds – An Interview with Rob Scholte – artist – and of The Young Lions and Suspect," Luifabriek, accessed May 20, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/05/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-rob-scholte-artist-young-lions-suspect.
[107] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 267.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of spaces; interviewees' homes, cafés, the author's home, and in Rob Scholte's case, his studio. The interviews in the main lasted around an hour, some around two hours, and were driven by "spur of the moment" questions based round certain broad themes such as; the interviewees' own connection with ULTRA; their perception of the legacy of the original ULTRA scene; international influences; and how they feel the Dutch musical, counter-cultural and national identity of the post-punk era is defined, both in the period 1977-84 and now.[108] When examined, the interview material reveals a number of recurring topics. These topics can be grouped under four broad themes; describing the ULTRA scene itself; the "relationship" with its own Dutch identity, and its legacy; contact with, and perceptions of, music scenes abroad; and ULTRA's relationship with the Dutch music industry. Each will be examined in this chapter.

In describing the ULTRA scene, interviewees stressed three elements as integral to an understanding of its inception, and *modus operandi*. Firstly, the art school connection. Secondly, the smallness and local nature of the scenes, and finally ULTRA actors' cussed "DIY" integrity in doing exactly what they wanted; born of its connections with, (and maybe an exploitation of) the squatting movement. All these three factors led to the formulation of a confident, utopian, trans-national element in the scene; one which formed an impetus to communicate with like-minded souls throughout Europe and America. In terms of the art school connection, the interviews often point to the strong links with academies such as the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. Art schools have often played a part in formulating non-commercial, or independent music. Simon Reynolds notes that a "high proportion" of post-punk musicians had attended art school; and the progression from attending art school to being in a band was a long established tradition in the British rock scene.[109] Art school bands from all countries often used imagery or expressions dealing with politics, identity and national cultures. When asked what was specifically Dutch about the ULTRA scene, Oktopus volunteer and regular on the Amsterdam ULTRA

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[108] To counteract any charge of selection, or self-plagiarism in this work, the transcripts from the ULTRA interviews (excepting the email correspondence with Hillegonda Rietveld) were published in full on the English language website dealing with Dutch musical subcultures; http://www.luifabriek.com. The only texts omitted were overly personal details that either compromised an interviewee's family, or those the interviewee wished to delete after checking the pre-published transcript. And with the exception of the interview conducted with Rob Scholte, (where the interview tape is available on request; the transcript being the property of Rob Scholte) the full written transcripts (and subsequent email correspondence) remain the author's possession; and are available on request.

[109] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again,* xviii.

and punk scenes Ronnie Kroes stated that the Rietveld artists; specifically Marten van der Ploeg and Peter Klashorst (and their bands, Interior, later called Soviet Sex), often emphasized their Dutch roots as an element of their multi-disciplinary art.

A lot of […] the arts scenes from the Rietveld, they were really into being Dutch, and you had the New Nature Group, the New Wild Ones, with wild painters like Peter Klashorst and you had a small video art group and they [note: Klashorst and Maarten Ploeg] had their own disco, the Disco Bizar, and they did videos, and the Rabotnik TV […] I think they were doing the thing "as Dutch". It was more artistic but there were definite cross overs like Soviet Sex, which was set up by artists. The club they had played a lot of non-Dutch music, but they were presenting themselves like the new Dutch frontier in the arts.[110]

The reason why Ronnie Kroes stressed the "Dutchness" of Klashorst and Ploeg's work was left unexplained. Regardless of whether their work was (or was perceived as) inherently "Dutch" in character or ambition, what is to be noted is the Rietveld link itself. Like Marten van der Ploeg and Peter Klashorst, many of those active in or around ULTRA – such as Rob Scholte and Tim Benjamin from The Case and The Young Lions – attended the Rietveld Academy. The artistic ambience generated by places like the Rietveld maybe propelled these artist-musicians to dabble with, and present a sort of anti-music that became amalgamated as part of the ULTRA aesthetic; it was certainly a music that had very little to do with traditional rock tropes and attitudes. Rob Scholte, when talking of his first band, The Case, mentioned creating manifestos in magazine form to complement their music, and stated that their aesthetic was "an artistic movement that was as dry and business-like as possible".[111] Looking back in his interview, Scholte was keen to stress the shocking nature of ULTRA's aesthetic; seeing the ULTRA bands' art school approach as something that could create new, artistic, and experimental music; one that ran counter to what Scholte derided as the "conservative" punk scene.

[T]he punk thing reconfirmed that awful thing about the music scene, you know (gestures playing a guitar) that whole A-B, A-B thing (laughs). That whole scheduled way of just playing music. And the way we approached it was totally different; so, sounds... the repetition of sounds, the different layers, the manipulation of sounds, and melodies, even if they were not connecting, the contrast and different sound layers made our music, and of course, people couldn't get used to that. [112]

[110] Ronnie Kroes, interview with the author.
[111] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.
[112] *Ibidem*.

This radical approach certainly didn't sit well with the Dutch press. In his book *ULTRA*, Harold Schellinx corroborates Scholte's description of the ULTRA scene's radical, artistic nature. Schellinx takes some pleasure in remembering *Oor* writer Alfred Bos's reaction to a Plurex Records label night on July 11, 1979 in the Paradiso Amsterdam; where "Rietveld bands" Interior and The Case played alongside Minny Pops. Schellinx quotes Bos's quip that ULTRA had a musical parallel in the New York No Wave, an uncompromising avant garde music scene made famous by the *No New York* compilation album.

'Amsterdam heeft zijn eigen No New York,' schreef Alfred Bos [...] in *Muziekkrant Oor,* maar echt happy leek hij er niet mee te zijn. Een 'failliet' van de melodie', constateeerde Alfred in zijn recensie van het Plurex-avondje. [...] wat Peter Klashorst en Maarten Ploeg presenteerden was 'tot kunst verheven onkunde.' [...] Na afloop zat hij nog uren hoofdschuddend in de kroeg want 'bij dit sort muziek (want dat is het toch?),' stelde hij, 'staat je maar een ding te doen: zo snel mogelijk dronken worden.'[113]

When interviewed by the author, Harold Schellinx though "not a Rietveld guy at all" confirmed that "it was the thing to do at the time at the Rietveld; to make music, to do records, to do concerts."[114] In, *ULTRA* however, Schellinx, who had moved to Amsterdam from Maastricht in the mid-1970s, gently questions the influence of Rietveld as the sole and primary artistic force driving ULTRA.

In *Oors* Ultra-gids voor modern muziek verklaarden Klashorst en Ploeg dat de meeste mensen in de Amsterdamse scene via de Rietveld Academie en darmee hun waren begonnen. Op hún plekken, in hún bands, op hún apparatuur. Dat was wat overdreven. Maar niet zo heel erg veel.[115]

Rather, the Rietveld was one of a number of centres that formed the ULTRA sound and aesthetic. Bands from other Dutch cities, such as Den Bosch's Minioon, and Nijmegen's Mekanik Kommando had similar art school backgrounds. And the interviews reveal artistic developments independent of the art school aesthetic. In his interview, Mecano singer and Torso label boss Dirk Polak talked of the musical collaboration between him and the Israeli band, Minimal Compact, at the first exhibition of Polak's

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[113] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA*, 128-129.
[114] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author, "An Interview with Harold Schellinx of The Young Lions and Author of ULTRA," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/04/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-harold-schellinx-young-lions-author-ultra-2.
[115] *ULTRA*, 327.

paintings in Dordrecht, in 1982.[116] In her interview, singer with Nasmak and Plus Instruments, Truus de Groot (always keen to stress her enthusiasm for musical and artistic collaboration) also mentioned that similar groups of like-minded artists and musicians were then active in her home town of Eindhoven.

I […] played with Joop van Brakel and Maria van Heeswijk (wife of Dick Verdult aka Dick Eldemasiado). At that time Dick was a film maker and around him swirled an endless source of inspiration [sic] to create art on all levels. His home became one of the places that I would seek out, it was just all about art and creating it but not on a pretentious level. […] I would hang out in De Effenaar and there was a cool scene of visual [artists], musicians and just fans who all somehow were enamored with whatever wave explosion.[117]

Finding a musical shape and voice was also one that was nurtured by the then widespread squatting movement. ULTRA musicians such as Minny Pops' keyboardist Wim Dekker – though often cramped by the machinations of a limited and unsympathetic Dutch music industry – could take advantage of certain governmental policy directives of the time, such as the local or municipal authorities' attitudes to squatting, and national social security payments. Dekker stressed that the unfavourable economic climate of the time could lead (with a bit of ingenuity in playing the system) to relative artistic freedom.

For instance you had the old Haarlemse Dagblad offices in the middle of the city. They made rehearsal rooms and studios that kind of thing; and altogether that gave a kind of twist in Haarlem, that we had some really nice bands. […] It's more… "vrijblijvend" and it was also not really necessary to make money out of it because in the beginning of the 1980s there was a big subsidy thing with the social security. Everybody got the dole. If you left school you immediately got dole if you couldn't get a job. An army of workless squatters! […] I lived in an enormous villa in Aerdenhout, enormous with a big straw roof. And there were 10 or 15 people and we had a rehearsal room. And I had a room in the villa; the guy from Nexda lived there with me so we did some music things together.[118]

Making art-forms on the small, counter-cultural and socially independent level ULTRA operated at necessitated a great deal of solitary, self-financed and self-produced ancillary work; something that corresponded well with the punk, and squatter "DIY" aesthetic. A lot of the interviewees were keen to

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[116] Dirk Polak, interview with the author, "Digging up Dutch undergrounds – an interview with Dirk Polak of Mecano," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/02/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-dirk-polak-mecano.

[117] Truus de Groot, interview with the author, "Digging up Dutch Undergrounds – An Interview with Truus de Groot of Plus Instruments and Nasmak," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/03/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-truus-de-groot-plus-instruments-nasmak.

[118] Wim Dekker, interview with the author, "Digging Up Dutch Undergrounds – An Interview with Wim Dekker of Minny Pops and Blowpipe Records," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/04/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-wim-dekker-minny-pops-blowpipe-records.

emphasise the "DIY" side of ULTRA as instrumental; from bands producing their own material to the daily work round *Vinyl* magazine. Editor Oscar Smit talked of the chores he and fellow editor Arjen Schrama undertook in delivering batches of *Vinyl* magazine to retail outlets.

And talking about distribution, and the distribution of the magazine; we didn't have a real distributor in the beginning. In the beginning, Arjen with his car went to record shops outside Holland, outside Amsterdam. And I did Amsterdam, on my bike. I had this whole list of record shops and I went with my bike, all the *VINYL*s hanging […] "aan het stuur", in bags, and then I went to all these record shops…[119]

This self-sufficiency, whether borne out of the squatting ethos, or artistic or circumstantial necessity, could manifest itself as a form of insular – some interviewees such as Dirk Polak stressed a peculiarly Dutch – bloody mindedness or localism. During his interview with the author, Dirk Polak (who confessed his views on artistic collaboration were different than many in the ULTRA scene, as they were driven by his Communist upbringing) repeated the charges of non-cooperation between Dutch bands that appeared in his "Invalshoek" column in *Vinyl* Issue 8, written 33 years before. As clarification, Polak lamented the decision made by four Nijmegen bands, Vice, Das Wesen, Bazooka and Mekanik Kommando, to make individual records; instead of collaborating with Polak's label Torso, in making a Nijmegen sampler record; one that Polak feels could have brought greater commercial possibilities, and one that could ape the then highly influential British label, Manchester's Factory Communications.

This is the big difference with the Dutch! They think they can do the best themselves! Which is not true! I was so frustrated then, when I had this label, and I had some good ideas for design. I know these things would look great on vinyl! If we were more allowed to do it ourselves, it would have been MORE, [sic] like Factory.[120]

When asked how the ULTRA scene began to develop, Minny Pops singer and Plurex label boss Wally van Middendorp talked of meeting with Terrie Hessels, guitarist from the Dutch punk band, The Ex. Van Middendorp suggested that The Ex's approach was one that encapsulated an extreme "DIY" mentality that looked to antagonize the Dutch music industry; an approach that van Middendorp hinted was also present in ULTRA. Looking back on this meeting with Hessels, van Middendorp, (who managed to

[119] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.
[120] Dirk Polak, interview with the author.

whittle down his thoughts on ULTRA into a crisp and candid set of observations) presented the memory as illustrative of both the spirit of the times, and the difficulties of working with such an attitude.

I remember doing this little stencilled brochure, called *Start Your Own Label*. And I remember having a meeting […] at V&D cafeteria in Amsterdam with Terrie! […] We had a meeting and he asked at the time what to do. You know, at the time it was all about The Ex giving the middle finger to the promotional organisations. And I thought that's great, and great for them to position themselves like that but to a certain extent, you still need to get a record pressed. […] But they were all working on their own, especially The Ex, because they wanted to be on their own in some important ways.[121]

Given ULTRA's independent outlook, and the fact that the scene did not utilise traditional Dutch industry or media networks and middlemen to disseminate its message; there was no alternative but to visit, or write in person. When Wally van Middendorp talked of building his connections for his record label, Plurex, the picture he paints of the nascent ULTRA scene seems to be a fragmented, small and often insular one; one that maybe needed continuous personal contact to nurture it.

I think there were patches, people, local movements that were connected in a better way or a lesser way. I always think I had […] a very strong connection with Eindhoven and a strong connection with Tom or Carlos at Effenaar, who were doing advanced programming, and even Apeldoorn, where Gigant was sometimes more ahead of Paradiso. There were patches and open minded people. […] I remember two other things. I remember the starting scene in Rotterdam at the time […] and also what I call "The Ex crowd".[122]

Van Middendorp's view of ULTRA, a set of small, localised and militantly independent scenes that were often ignorant of each other, is one corroborated by Ronnie Kroes, who laconically described the underground music world in Amsterdam with its squat clubs and bars, such as Disco Bizar.

Everybody says, you know, it was over the country, but it was a really small scene, even in Amsterdam it was a really small scene. We had a few places where everybody went and you'd always meet the same people. It was like the art scene, the Rietveld… and it was also connected with the squatters, and then the music scene, and that was really overlapping with the punk scene. Everybody in the punk scene was also in the new wave and ULTRA, and

[121] Wally van Middendorp, interview with the author, "Digging up Dutch Undergrounds – An Interview with Wally van Middendorp from Minny Pops," Luifabriek, accessed April 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/02/interview-wally.
[122] *Ibidem*.

maybe later the punk scene became a divergent one, a spin off. And of course you don't have mobile phones so you'd have places where you'd meet and the scene was there, where you would meet. You could meet at the squat disco place like Disco Bizar or maybe the squat houses and some cafés and some clubs like Mazzo and De Koer […] but it wasn't such a big scene. […] But I never went out of Amsterdam, maybe Haarlem, I knew people in that scene but further in Holland? No.[123]

Further, ULTRA's reach was sporadic, and not one that could be classed as comprehensive. Quando Quango musician Hillegonda Rietveld, although making music that was definitely within *Vinyl*'s *avant garde* and modern remit, and a reader of *Vinyl*, was "a little ignorant of ULTRA as a movement at the time"; preferring to busy herself in a Rotterdam scene that revolved round Peter Graute's Backstreet Records, the funk-punk sound created by bands like Ted Langenbach's Dojoji and clubs like the Utopia project, Exit and Venster.[124] In looking to analyse why this lack of awareness, or insularity was so prevalent, Haarlem resident Wim Dekker touched on the power of the British musical press to set a counter-cultural agenda; as well as a lack of Dutch mainstream press interest, or support for its own counter-culture.

Probably because we could not imagine that something was happening in Groningen as well. Because how was it communicated in *Oor*? No. In newspapers? Hardly. So […] we saw the *New Musical Express* and the *Sounds* and the *Melody Maker*. We saw things written about the new English and American music. But not about the Dutch. That's why *Vinyl*, [..] when it started, it started to write about the Dutch bands. Or *Oor* wrote a few times about the Minny Pops, but they just erm…. They talked it down.[125]

Later in the movement's lifetime, *Vinyl* magazine allowed "a context"[126] where fans of *avant garde* music like Marcel Harlaar could discover there were likeminded souls in the Netherlands.

I moved from Vlaardingen to Hoofddorp in 1980 and then suddenly there was a new magazine that created something. And it had articles on cassette music and I was, [sic] oh well there are more like me![127]

As if to counter the fact that the Dutch alternative scene was adversely affected by its own localism, and

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[123] Ronnie Kroes, interview with the author.
[124] Hilegonda Rietveld, email correspopndence with the author.
[125] Wim Dekker, interview with the author.
[126] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[127] Marcel Harlaar, interview with the author, "Digging Up Dutch Undergrounds – an interview with Oscar Smit and Marcel Harlaar of Vinyl Magazine," Luifabriek, accessed May 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/03/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-oscar-smit-marcel-harlaar-vinyl-magazine.

"kleinschaligheid"[128] many in the ULTRA scene visited, worked alongside, wrote letters or swapped tapes with like-minded musicians or writers abroad. Harold Schellinx writes in *ULTRA* both of Wally van Middendorp's connections with Factory Communications and the Sheffield band, Comsat Angels, and his own correspondence with the British *avant garde* fanzine editor Nigel Jacklin, *aka* "Alien Brains" who came to stay with Schellinx in Amsterdam.[129] In her email correspondence with the author, Quando Quango's Hillegonda Rietveld talked of her collaboration in Rotterdam with Manchester deejay Mike Pickering after meeting him during a summer camping holiday in Terschelling.[130] Truus de Groot told the author how she indulged in an "enormous amount of cassette trading" with her contacts in Britain, Germany and America (American contacts including David Linton, then playing with Rhys Chatham's orchestra, Red Crayola's Mayo Thompson, and Lee Ranaldo, later guitarist in Sonic Youth) to both further her own art and raise awareness of what was happening in the Netherlands with ULTRA.[131]

I did correspond with a number of people all the time via glorious snail mail. I do believe we felt we were creating our own wave with an international appeal, no borders that is. And we felt like spreading that gospel. […] I was always sending cassettes back and forward it was the way to get stuff going.[132]

Through their communication with like-minded foreign musicians, many in and around ULTRA felt they were creating unique music of a comparable artistic quality as that from traditional pop music producing countries, such as Britain, America and Germany. And that it was deserving of a wider audience. Oscar Smit, a thoughtful and measured interviewee, was notably insistent that this feeling was one of the guiding principles behind the formation of *Vinyl* magazine.

Well for us it was important to show the outside that there was [sic] a lot of things happening in Holland where the normal person wouldn't write about [sic]. And that was the basic thing, especially in the beginning. […] in the beginning, it was […] a rule almost to write about Dutch things […] also we had some reports from other cities from Holland just to show there was a lot of things [sic] going on.[133]

In her interview, Truus de Groot – along with Rob Scholte one of the only interviewees to address the aesthetic as well as the socio-cultural elements of ULTRA's legacy – talked of the artistic and musical

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[128] Leonor Jonker, *No Future Nu*, 281.
[129] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA*, 226-227 and 238-241.
[130] Hilegonda Rietveld, email correspopndence with the author.
[131] Truus de Groot, interview with the author.
[132] *Ibidem*.
[133] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.

qualities of innovation, stoicism and a "machine-like", but soulful presentation that, to her encapsulated the "Dutchness" in ULTRA, in addition hinting that these qualities could make music as powerful as anything in Anglo-American post-punk.[134] Further, de Groot stressed that this squat-based, artistic and self-sufficient scene provided some very attractive advantages, such as a friendliness and hands-on immediacy; ones that visiting international musicians were quick to appreciate.

From my own experience, the musicians I have taken to Holland, they always were taken by the eagerness of people to start playing together. Just the social scene, this "Gezellig" thing, there are not many places in the world where that is so prevalent. You knock on the door and hang out, have a beer, shoot the shit and start making art! With the squats […] you could just plug in and make it a night.[135]

In getting the attention many felt they "deserved"[136] many interviewees talked about ULTRA artists encountering three problems; ones which resonate with Simon Frith's dictums on studying popular music. Firstly; ULTRA faced a battle to establish itself in the Anglo-American market; in essence to be noticed as part of Frith's "global pop aesthetic". Secondly, the scene fought a parallel battle for recognition in the Dutch popular music industry and media; indulging in Frith's "politics of pop". And finally there were practical issues of production, distribution and dissemination; all "causes" that had an "effect" on the music ULTRA bands made. In terms of establishing a presence in the dominant Anglo-American market, contact with abroad was of vital importance to ULTRA; as a justificatory exercise for themselves, to alert the Dutch music industry, as well as practical aid in widening coverage for the movement's music. Wally van Middendorp was ebullient in remembering his satisfaction when his band Minny Pops received positive British press.

On a very sort of personal level it was very pleasing and rewarding to get recognition […] from well-respected writers. I didn't know what their personal motives were, I trust they are…. they were great and professional writers; and were not looking for like, "let's find a new hip next thing from Holland". […] With us it was more Dave McCulloch, and Paul Morley. Most of the time with his single reviews, we were single of the week. So, I think it was rewarding because these people had shitloads of records in front of them and they could pick […] our record and say it there was something wrong with it. They could say, horrible track, what's wrong with this band?[137]

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[134] Truus de Groot, interview with the author.
[135] *Ibidem*.
[136] Luifabriek website, Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[137] Luifabriek website, Wally van Middendorp, interview with the author.

Some interviewees saw this contact with the British and American rock press as vital; due to two factors. Firstly the British press – in both its rock and mainstream forms – was often seen as a musical taste maker; and a body that could form, or cement perceptions in the Netherlands. In her interview with the author, journalist and author Leonor Jonker (herself too young to participate in punk, or ULTRA) pointed out that, whilst researching the effects of punk's first wave on the Netherlands, Dutch press coverage often followed British examples. Jonker, paraphrasing some observations set out in her book, *No Future Nu* (2012), talked about the strong knock-on effects British press articles on punk had in the Dutch press.

(T)he funny thing is that at those moments nothing special was going on here, punk wise, BUT [sic] you can see at the time something about punk was happening in the UK, the number of articles rose. Suddenly. […] I checked a lot of the press from the time […] (a)nd the most interesting thing was to notice how many articles there were when there was a lot going on in the UK [note: "a lot going on", in this context is a lot of punk news].[138]

Good exposure in the British press could, therefore, counterbalance negative dealings with the Dutch music industry and media. In his interview, Harold Schellinx confirmed to the author the remarks previously made in his book, *ULTRA* about Paul Evers' ULTRA piece for *Oor,* published on February 11, 1981; stating that those involved in the ULTRA scene "absolutely had that feeling"[139] that *Oor*'s belated attention for ULTRA was a direct result Andy Gill's feature in the *New Musical Express* on the Dutch post-punk scene.[140] This view (as well as *Oor*'s actions at the time) is not surprising. The power of the British rock press at the time was considerable; certainly in relation to the Netherlands' alternatives. Simon Reynolds estimated that in the post-punk era of 1977-1984, sales of the alternative British rock papers – in particular *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* and the *New Musical Express* – were often close to a quarter of a million copies.[141] Furthermore these papers were published on a weekly basis and widely distributed. This reach was in stark contrast to that in the Netherlands, as *Vinyl* editor Oscar Smit pointed out.

Well, the thing is that because we were a monthly, we didn't have that much influence […] in Holland it had to be a combination of an article in *Vinyl* and the radio and the attention of the VPRO. (A)t that time the English press

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[138] Leonor Jonker, interview with the author, "Digging up Dutch undergrounds – an interview with Leonor Jonker," Luifabriek, accessed April 10, 2014, http://luifabriek.com/2014/03/digging-dutch-undergrounds-interview-leonor-jonker.
[139] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[140] Andy Gill, "Why Not To Hate the Dutch," *New Musical Express,* November 22, 1980, quoted in *ULTRA*, 227-229.
[141] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again,* xxvi.

was weekly. […] That's the example I always give; in Holland if you passed through the land by train you would never see somebody reading a music magazine. And in England when people took a train they were reading *NME*, *Sounds* and all those things.[142]

Even relative success in the Netherlands – as experienced by Truus de Groot in her time with Nasmak, Doe Maar and Plus Instruments – could be seen as frustrating. De Groot saw the Anglo-American market as one that could allow release from the static nature of playing the Dutch circuit.

Well first of all Holland was very limited. There was only so far you could get there. After I played the 300th hole in the wall, I had seen all I wanted to see. In Holland you are to stay on a certain level [sic]. Even if you are successful it is not looked upon as some great accomplishment.[143]

These attempts to connect with, or find allies in the powerful Anglo-American market could lead to many adopting a pronounced Anglophone attitude. Though some ULTRA bands sang in German (such as Minioon, Suspect or, on occasion, Plus Instruments) and sometimes in Dutch (for example, Minny Pops' song, *Kogel*) most ULTRA bands sang in the accepted international rock language of the time, English. Harold Schellinx told the author that this attitude also encompassed a perceived limitation in using Dutch as a language for lyrics.

(E)verything back then was Anglophone in pop music. (W)e'd just dismiss the suggestion that we would do our lyrics in Dutch. This was out of the question. Without any argument you know? If you sing in Dutch it doesn't sound good![144]

There were also romantic assumptions that anything emanating from this industry was on a larger and more professional scale than anything in Holland. Though Wim Dekker praised the "professionalism"[145] of the rock scene during Minny Pops' tour of America and Canada in January 1981, Ronnie Kroes (who, due to her role as fan, and helper at Oktopus club, had no real experience of working with any element of an international music industry) openly talked of her naivety in her perceptions of the British underground, and her subsequent disappointments when visiting London.

(W)hen I was there I visited *ID* magazine because they were looking for a sort of trend spotter in Amsterdam, and I went there to ask for the job and he was just living in a normal house and… wow… I thought, is this really the great

[142] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.
[143] Truus de Groot, interview with the author.
[144] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[145] Wim Dekker, interview with the author.

ID magazine? [..] when you're abroad you think this must be the big scene and the magazines must have big offices and when you get there it's just a small scene. […] You'd read the papers like *The Face* and *New Musical Express* and *ID* and you would read about all the scenes and the clubs and think whoa, this must be a big thing. And then you'd come to London and see that it wasn't so big [sic] as you thought. Funny![146]

But, despite positive foreign press, occasional British and American tours and even despite the occasional realisation that not everything in Britain was the way it was presented in the media, the opportunities provided for ULTRA bands by both the Dutch music industry and the state would lead to tensions and a feeling of social and creative stasis. In describing how The Young Lions operated in the live circuit, Rob Scholte painted a picture of a relentlessly uncomprehending, hostile public attitude shown towards ULTRA acts. According to Scholte (an interviewee who was happy to present a number of forceful opinions on the Dutch counter-culture's relation to the state) nobody understood the ULTRA approach, or readily accepted it as part of the Dutch popular music scene.

Everything we did caused concern amongst critics and whatever public we had. And when we performed... I remember once we did a contest, a sort of talent contest outside of Amsterdam. And there people didn't even want to judge us, because we were totally out of their reference system. And the same happened with the public. The public was massaged by the Volendam sound[147] and the symphonic sounds of the left overs of the 70s and then they were getting used to punk, but to have a different approach? That was not welcomed. I remember that we had the public throwing beer or climbing onstage or trying to break the microphone, things like that. Wherever we went was always some controversy [sic]. And also of course, we did more show-like exhibitions [sic], a performance. And the places where you could play, all those youth centres, all fully subsidized, full of beer, every night and then these four guys came.[148]

The Young Lions were a particularly uncompromising *avant garde* band, fusing rock and art through a different approach to sound. They boasted a number of dedicated experimentalists such as Harold Schellinx and Peter Mertens, and were fronted by a determined and confrontational singer in Rob Scholte. Scholte's interview with the author 30 years later was laced with direct and forceful opinions; thus his description of the audience reaction is not so surprising. Scholte was also at pains to record

[146] Ronnie Kroes, interview with the author.
[147] The Volendam Sound, known as the Paling Sound ("eel sound") was a commercial, radio-friendly sound popular in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s; and based round chart bands that either grew up in, or recorded in the small North Holland fishing village of Volendam; such as BZN, Next One and the The Cats.
[148] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.

that the state would not actively support his band in the manner that Van Elderen (1989)[149] and Rutten (1993)[150] described. Though bands like The Young Lions could in theory apply to organisations such as the Stichting Pop Nederland, they were seen as an element of the Dutch music scene that could maybe run counter to the prevailing ethos of what the authorities were trying to promote, or support in Dutch youth cultures.

So if you talk how good it was in the Netherlands as a welfare state, then that was not really the case with us at that time, because we were all very poor. […] There were a lot of public subsidies going into the youth scene. But it was more social worker types who got that money, you know what I mean? [151]

This mutual mistrust and apathy could be down to two perceptions; one from the public, and a "reactive" one from the ULTRA scene itself. Firstly, the public were not primed to be interested in, or aware of a scene that was by its nature *avant garde.* When they did encounter it the reaction seems to have been (according to Rob Scholte's interview) one of angry shock. This shock had its roots in a national broadcasting policy that, although broad, multi-channel, and all-encompassing in general terms, in practice allowed few opportunities for counter-cultural or experimental music to be disseminated; via radio or television. *Vinyl* editor Oscar Smit – who also worked in the popular and high profile Amsterdam record shop, Boudisque – wryly hinted at the power of the radio playlists over the Dutch public.

I mean in that time the people who liked music, they knew when to listen. And it was one or two hours a week and two or four programmes a week and that was it – and outside of that if they wanted to listen to the radio they had to listen to crap, and so that's why VPRO and VARA, and there was a certain time with KRO as well, they had special listeners [sic] and then you heard the new stuff. And then you had the new names and then you could go to a record shop, and try and find something. I worked in a record shop so I know when people heard something on the radio they really came to a record shop and asked for it. But still the influence […] was a programme from the TROS and it was called the TROS album show or something like that. […] when they played the new Supertramp record, the next day you'd have all these customers. [152]

This broadcast policy was irrevocably linked into the existing networks of distribution and promotion created by the Dutch music industry. Harold Schellinx claimed that "the major record companies in

[149] P.L. van Elderen, "Pop and Government Policy in the Netherlands," 190-197.
[150] Paul Rutten, "Popular Music Policy: A Contested Area - The Dutch Experience," 37-54.
[151] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.
[152] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.

Holland were just subsidies of the big companies like EMI; almost back office areas".[153] These record labels also competed for space with direct import networks instigated by Dutch retail outlets, as Oscar Smit (someone who, due to his job at Boudisque, had considerable first-hand experience in these matters) pointed out.

> And record stores had this whole import system from America which was being led by a few distributors like Boudisque and Bertus; and they all knew how to order these records, and they all read in the *NME* what was the new thing [sic]. And for Dutch bands there wasn't such a system. When *Vinyl* came they could read about it in *Vinyl* but they still didn't know how to order these things. [154]

Secondly, some of the interviewees such as Wally van Middendorp (who described his home town as full of "black stocking" farmers)[155] and Dirk Polak, also saw this lack of communication and cooperation between ULTRA and the Dutch music industry and public as an example of the influence of inherent, long established tropes associated with the Netherlands; namely its Catholic and Calvinist traditions, and its trading history. When answering the author's question about why he thought the Dutch public preferred not to be challenged artistically, Wally van Middendorp stated that many Dutch behavioural patterns stemmed from Catholic and Calvinist doctrines; ones "deeply rooted in Dutch society". Polak, an eloquent and theatrical interviewee who relished providing the author with descriptive metaphors, saw Calvinism's influence as one that allowed Dutch public to (musically and artistically) "stay in the baby shoes".[156] It could be debated that the interviewees' answers regarding Calvinism were the result of a response to certain general questions about the Dutch character. And Dirk Polak's views on Calvinism (seen in his "Invalshoek" column in Issue 8 of *Vinyl* and his lyrics about "Calvinist bacteria" in Mecano's 1981 song, *Escape the Human Myth*) are more strident than many other ULTRA interviewees. Secondly, many, such as Harold Schellinx, Oscar Smit, Wally van Middendorp and Dirk Polak were at pains to note that the Dutch trait of "copying things"[157] or importing goods to barter on the home market was a deep rooted tradition that also acted as an impediment to creating and exporting a confident, international Dutch sound; whether *avant garde* or pop. This line of thought could lead to bands being graded like saleable goods, as Oscar Smit intimated.

> I think in the end of the 70s it was still that the best music was being made in England and America. And of course

[153] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[154] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.
[155] Wally van Middendorp, interview with the author.
[156] Dirk Polak, interview with the author.
[157] *Ibidem*.

we had some good bands, Golden Earring, but there were only a few bands considered international in Holland, and for the rest it was 'they're a nice Dutch band'.[158]

Perceptions and personal opinions, especially those applied in retrospect, can only partially answer the limited success of the ULTRA scene to reach a market. Most importantly, ULTRA's attempt to find a lasting place in the musical landscape failed due to a number of practical and "physical" impediments. The scene had very few tools at its disposal to counter, or ape the traditional working methods in the Dutch music industry. There was also no alternative independent distribution circuit to fall back on; in contrast to the national distribution networks – such as The Cartel – set up in Britain by independent companies like Rough Trade.[159] Rob Scholte noted that The Young Lions, like many other ULTRA bands, "had no booking agency. The telephone number of me and Peter Mertens was the booking agency. It hardly happened that somebody called. I think we must have had twenty shows or something."[160] ULTRA had no record pluggers, no Artist and Recording or marketing personnel, no independent strategists or "Svengali" figures to guide the bands (such as Factory Communications' Tony Wilson or The Zoo's Bill Drummond) no distribution networks, and very few professionally produced recordings.[161] Harold Schellinx, although still a committed exponent of the "DIY" mentality, and one of the instigators of the "ULTRA" club nights at Oktopus, contended that the fulfilment of these tasks and roles by members in the ULTRA scene was "absolutely not considered and nobody considered doing it."[162] Certain figures did juggle two or more roles, such as lead singer of Minny Pops, Wally van Middendorp, who produced and ran Plurex Records, and lead singer with Mecano, Dirk Polak, did similar with Torso Records. But the recording quality of the few releases available was – with a few brilliant exceptions – not what it should have been. Harold Schellinx thought that from a quality point of view some production values were "pretty lousy".[163] And Rob Scholte lamented the lack of professional guidance and studio craft in translating a live sound to the studio, and *vice versa*; something that meant The Young Lions' music could not be captured in its full potential.[164] However, Wim Dekker sardonically made the point that, due to the Anglophone nature of the Dutch media and music industry, fulfilling any

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[158] Oscar Smit, interview with the author.
[159] Richard King, *How Soon Is Now? The Madmen and Mavericks Who Made Independent Music 1975-2005* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 126.
[160] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.
[161] Richard King, *How Soon Is Now?,* xxii.
[162] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[163] *Ibidem*.
[164] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.

of these roles to promote ULTRA bands would probably not have had the same effect.

But why be a middle man when the press finds it more rewarding to write about an unknown Canadian band than write about one that is 20 kilometres up the road. And in that way our culture is really very international.[165]

Even worse (when considered from a traditional music industry perspective) there was an unwillingness for ULTRA bands to place themselves on the industry treadmill; as Harold Schellinx told the author.

(M)any of these ULTRA bands they never had the idea that they could be like British bands, they never had that same outlook. When I first went to London one of the first bands I met were The Birthday Party who were on tour and they'd just come from Australia. And they came there together and they came there to make a career you know? And this idea that everybody holds on and looks to just push it […] now that was not very Dutch. Not a Dutch idea.[166]

Many acts enjoyed the acclaim of the British press and regularly played the Dutch (and in the case of Minny Pops, British and American) circuit alongside foreign acts, such as Mecano playing alongside Wire, U2 and Echo & the Bunnymen.[167] However, Harold Schellinx, looking back in *ULTRA* at the politics round the editorial board in *Vinyl,* quotes *Vinyl* editor Stephen Emmer; who accused his colleagues and the ULTRA scene of laziness and dilettantism, borne maybe of favourable socio-economic circumstances.

En om een vergelijking te trekken met de punkcultuur in Engeland en Nederland: een middle class punk uit Amstelveen lult meer over muziek dan hij het maakt.[168]

When recounting *Haarlems Dagblad* journalist Joost Niemöller's enthusiastic review of Tox Modell in 1981 (where he uses the word "sensatie") Harold Schellinx remarks that enthusiastic, promotional hyperbole was something that was not shared between ULTRA bands and the media.

Aan een sensatie maak je natuurlijk meteen een eind. Zo dachten de echte ULTRA-groepen er over. Het was bijna – bijna – een onuitgesproken afspraak. Als je op het punt belandde dat je een sensatie was of dreigde te worden, dan was het tijd om iets anders te gaan doen. Dan hield je ermee op.[169]

Some of ULTRA's aesthetics started to find their way through the clubs and in the wider mainstream Dutch media, however. Harold Schellinx told the author that ULTRA ideas found a wider platform through the "D-Days" at Paradiso, under the curatorship of Tox Modell's Mark Honingh. These nights

[166] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[167] Dirk Polak, *Mecano, Een Muzikaal Egodocument*, (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers, 2011), 81.
[168] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA*, 356.
[169] *Ibidem*, 297.

were perhaps the closest in spirit to the original ULTRA ideals; and according to Schellinx, did a "really good job" in inspiring similar evenings on a nationwide scale.[170] In his book *ULTRA*, Schellinx cites an interview with in the *Haarlem Daily* on February 19, 1982 where *Vinyl* editor Arjen Schrama proudly noted *Vinyl*'s growth from "cut and paste fanzine" to a "proper music magazine"; one that began printing an English edition in 1982.[171] By 1982, elements of the ULTRA spirit and fashion sense were widespread enough to be attacked by punk poetess Diana Ozon, who sardonically noted that ULTRA had become a look comprising of, "lokken en rare brokken".[172] Schellinx stated in *ULTRA* that the *avant garde* spirit of ULTRA had evolved into something populist enough to attract the attention of the mainstream *Elseviers Magazine*.

In hun artikel 'Jeugd 82' dat in de zomer van 1982 in *Elseviers Magazine* verscheen, maken zij in hun karakterisering van jongeren in het jaar 1982 als Nieuwe Realisten die hun eigen lifestyle kiezen en die handhaven en veranderen door een sterke consumptiedrift, gewag van Ultra's welke, 'als Neo romantici, blitz-figuren en andere new wave-typen een gratuit soort sympathie hebben voor de kraakbeweging, maar met enig dedain praten over het jaren-zestigsfeertje in die scene'.[173]

In reading the interviews, and elements of Harold Schellinx's *ULTRA,* the impression is one of a movement still looking to come to terms with defining its own legacy; but one with is a strong sense of pride in its artistic achievements, however inexpertly delivered or short-lived. And many of ULTRA's most successful expressions, namely the bands Mecano, Mekanik Kommando, Plus Instruments and Minny Pops and to a smaller extent *Vinyl* magazine are still respected in the counter-cultural bracket of the Anglo-American market. However, the interviewees also resign themselves to accept that, at that time, the Dutch music industry was set up to serve, and profit from a wider public that looked to this same Anglo-American market. The Dutch music industry was certainly not set up to accommodate an antagonistic, "non-industry", *avant garde* musical counter-culture; however innovative and regardless of foreign praise. And the ULTRA interviewees readily admit that, through a lack of resources, opportunities, a level of business "nous", and often their own desire, they were unable or unwilling to take advantage of their "DIY" artistic independence; and the relative financial security afforded to them by the squatting movement, artistic subsidies and the state's unemployment benefits.

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[170] Harold Schellinx, interview with the author.
[171] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA*, 311-312.
[172] *Ibidem*, 314.
[173] *Ibidem*, 313.

Conclusion

Given the benefit of hindsight, it can be said that ULTRA was determined by its own national background in two radically different ways; being at once excluded from and irrevocably part of the workings of both the Netherlands' music industry and wider Dutch society. At the most basic narrative level, the story of the ULTRA scene is one that snugly fits in with that of the Netherlands of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The scene's name was an acronym created from the Dutch word, "ultramodernen". Its genesis, outlook and artistic expressions owed something to the social conditions created, or tolerated, by the Dutch government's socio-economic policies. Its actors – in the main a specific set of *avant garde* Dutch musicians, writers and artist-musicians – graduated through the municipal and national art schools based in the country's more prominent towns and cities. Many ULTRA musicians also squatted; and this affinity with the squat movement sometimes manifested itself in a bloody minded, parochial localism, and a refusal to play any artistic game but their own; a "small-scale attitude" that Dirk Polak criticised as the product of a Dutch Calvinist mentality in his *Vinyl* think piece "Invalshoek", in November 1981.[174] Further, although operating outside of popular music's mainstream, ULTRA bands played both the Dutch squat and national club and youth centre circuits, and later the "D-Day" ("Dutch Day") evenings organised by one of the most famous popular music venues in Holland, the Paradiso in Amsterdam. Indeed, most ULTRA bands stuck to this national circuit and rarely played outside of the Netherlands. The self-ordained voice of ULTRA, *Vinyl* magazine was primarily a Dutch language magazine that openly promoted new Dutch *avant garde* music through its popular free flexi disc insert; something which, for the first year of the magazine's life, overwhelmingly featured Dutch bands such as Mekanik Kommando and Minny Pops. *Vinyl* also looked to question media and musical policies in the Netherlands, through practical critiques of the Dutch music industry and "city scene" reports respectively. *Vinyl* magazine can therefore be seen as a publication often concerned with broadcasting a message to its own backyard.

At first glance, ULTRA is a scene that can largely be described through its own background; its "Dutchness" impossible to explain outside of this context. And certainly, the foreign rock press's perception of the scene's more successful acts was fed by what they saw as ULTRA's Dutch identity. According to some articles, European glamour and strangeness was invoked in the heavy Dutch accent of Minny Pops' singer, Wally van Middendorp's vocals.[175] At its most extreme – as with Andy Gill's article

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[174] Dirk Polak, "Invalshoek," Vinyl, Issue 8, November 1981, 11.
[175] Dave McCullough quoted in Harold Schellinx*, ULTRA,* 120.

in the enormously influential British paper, *New Musical Express,* from November 22, 1980; "Why Not To Hate the Dutch" – this interest manifested itself through national tropes and stereotypes, such as the colour orange and the flat landscape.[176]

However, the ULTRA scene was also defined by its marginal status; never being fully accepted by the regular Dutch music industry, or a wider Dutch socio-artistic society. In their interviews some of the original ULTRA participants talk of the denigrating manner in which they were represented in the Dutch media. None of its bands benefitted from a major label deal in the Netherlands during ULTRA's original lifetime. And Rob Scholte's assertion that his band The Young Lions was refused a judgement at a local pop talent show is telling.[177] In many ways this rejection was reciprocal; ULTRA's marginal status just as much the product of the scene's active rejection of the Dutch musical mainstream. Driven by punk's "DIY" spirit, many of the bands began almost entirely from scratch and showed no interest in the established industry or media; replicating elements of the existing music industry they needed at a micro level. Trans-national in outlook, ULTRA also explored modernist, utopian ideas and new technologies. The bands and *Vinyl* magazine looked to align themselves with like-minded souls abroad; preferring to operate in a shifting international *milieu* of modernist, post-punk and experimental musicians. Many bands sang in English and German rather than Dutch, though their reasons for doing so are wholly aesthetic; in his interview for *Different for Grils* in 1980, Wally van Middendorp whilst saying that Minny Pops should sing in Dutch more, stated that Dutch is "kind of ugly to use".[178] ULTRA bands also cared little for commenting on domestic political events through their music; at a time when many acts did, from The Ex to Doe Maar.

ULTRA's fierce "DIY" mentality, something which some interviewees claimed was an extension of a Dutch "localist" stubbornness, also ran counter to the "gezelligheid" and "vergadering" ethos beloved of many in the Netherlands, and often backfired; affecting both its *modus operandi* and output. The producers of the few ULTRA record releases were talented and broad minded enthusiasts who doubled up as label boss, band member and promoter. Its bands often split up, unwilling to embrace any notion of commercial success or playing the industry game. Most importantly – and in stark relief to the Anglo-American music scenes – ULTRA did not use middle men or pluggers, and certainly boasted no dedicated "Svengali" figures prepared to work with the established music industry whilst remaining independent; such as Factory Communications' Tony Wilson. This is ironic; as many of the ULTRA

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[176] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 229.
[177] Rob Scholte, interview with the author.
[178] Interview with Wally van Middendorp by Garry M. Cartwright, *Different for Grils* Fanzine, Issue 2, 1980, 9.

interviewees sardonically stressed that the Netherlands' long tradition of acting as a broker, or as a clearing house in any international goods market meant that, when faced with a native creative urge, the Dutch music industry's first response was to ignore it. In short, ULTRA disdained to use a national characteristic that it needed to exploit.

Simon Frith propounds that popular music boasts an inherent "universal pop aesthetic where all popular music is "shaped […] by international influences and institutions, by multinational capital and technology, by global pop norms and values." According to Frith, "(e)ven the most nationalistic sounds [...] are determined by a critique of international entertainment."[179] ULTRA certainly looked to be part of an international music scene but somehow – by also challenging the "critique of international entertainment" in its own country – ended up operating in a vacuum. *Vinyl* worker Rachel Meijer's observation about how those affiliated with the scene felt about their position in Dutch society over 30 years later, "(j)e kon echt zo verschrikkelijk van alle anderen onderscheiden door de muziek" is telling in this context.[180] And the bands' *avant garde* oddness and uncompromising experimentalism – seen by international commentators as qualities – won them no favours in the Netherlands' music industry. In terms of exerting itself through a Dutch version of the "politics of pop", therefore, ULTRA can be seen to have lost out; mainly through the ULTRA bands' insistence of doing it their way or not at all. In terms of Frith's "trickiest task of musical analysis" that of explaining "the relationship of cause and effect",[181] it is hard to see how ULTRA's fiercely *avant garde* electronic sounds affected the Dutch music landscape, outside of helping to prepare the ground a fashion for generic synthesized pop music; something that, according to Harold Schellinx, owed as much to the Anglo-American industry as to the Dutch *avant garde*.[182] ULTRA, however, despite its trans-national, utopian outlook, was indisputably hamstrung by the social and economic limitations it operated in within the Netherlands. It can be argued that it never fully escaped from the squat and art school scene from where it emerged, and its subsequent demise and inclusion as part of a broader "Dutch punk" narrative was the consequence. And in that respect, ULTRA was adversely affected by its own environment; due in part to its own antagonistic nature. However; given international press of the time, and the recent trans-national reappraisal of Minny Pops, ULTRA's position as the radical and often very Dutch wellspring of the post-punk movement seems assured.

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[179] Simon Frith, *World Music, Politics, and Social Change*, 2.
[180] Harold Schellinx, *ULTRA,* 378-379.
[181] Simon Frith, *World Music, Politics, and Social Change,* 9.
[182] *ULTRA,* 315.

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Appendix

List of interviewees

All the interviewees are now listed here in full; in alphabetical order and with mention to their specific roles in ULTRA or otherwise.

1. Truus de Groot - singer in Doe Maar, Nasmak, and Plus Instruments.
2. Wim Dekker - *Amigos* record store boss in Haarlem, keyboardist and programmer in Minny Pops and SMALTS.
3. Marcel Harlaar – original ULTRA fan and co-editor of *Vinyl 2012*.
4. Leonor Jonker – author of *No Future Nu*, (2012) and retrospective ULTRA fan.
5. Ronnie Kroes – original ULTRA fan and volunteer at the Oktopus youth centre, Amsterdam.
6. Dirk Polak – lead singer in Mecano and label boss of Torso Records.
7. Hillegonda Rietveld – *Vinyl* reader, founder member of Quando Quango, and deejay at the Haçienda nightclub, Manchester.
8. Harold Schellinx – guitarist and keyboardist in Minny Pops, The Young Lions, member of the editorial board of *Vinyl* during 1981 and 1982, and author of *ULTRA*, *Opkomst en odergang van de Ultramodernen, een unieke Nederlandse muziekstroming (1978-1983)* (2012).
9. Rob Scholte – artist and founder member, singer and drummer in The Case, The Young Lions, and Suspect.
10. Oscar Smit – worker at Boudisque record shop Amsterdam, and member of the editorial board of *Vinyl,* during 1981 and 1982.
11. Wally van Middendorp – lead singer of Minny Pops and label boss of Plurex Records.