ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL
journal *of*
CULTURAL studies

Volume 7(4): 417–436
DOI: 10.1177/1367877904047862

Consuming pop music/constructing a life world

The advent of pop music

Wilfred Dolfsma

Erasmus University Rotterdam and Maastricht University

ABSTRACT Pop music is an important symbolic good, the advent of which in the 1950s and 1960s is not well understood. In this article I argue that this is due to the fact that its consumption is not usually analyzed. I therefore analyze survey and group interviews material to argue that pop music was not just an instrument in conflict between generations, but that it increasingly came to be associated with socio-cultural meanings such as success, independence and sexuality. In understanding the life world of consumers of pop music, I find that it is essential to know *whom* it represents but also *what* it represents.

KEYWORDS consumption • consumption institutions • life world • pop music • symbolic goods

'Look around and choose your own ground.'

Pink Floyd

Why did so many people in the late 1950s and early 1960s start to consume pop music? Why did they begin to listen to programs on the radio where pop music was played? What explains why broadcasters, record companies and other players in the music industry in many countries had to make dramatic changes in response to changing consumption patterns? The institutional changes on what can be called the production side are studied to a considerable extent. Increasingly, the argument in those studies was that

institutional changes were influenced by responses to them from the audience, from consumers. A systematic study of the consumption of pop music in this crucial era of its 'conquest' of most Western countries has not been undertaken yet. All the attention in research has focused on the production aspects of music and the music industry (Berland, 1990; Burnett, 1993; Chapman, 1992; Gillet, 1996; Negus, 1993, 1996; Peterson, 1990; Vogel, 1998). Instead, motives for consumption have been invoked, often based on the method of introspection, to pop music's consumers (Adorno, 1941; Ballantine, 1984; Frith, 1996), a strictly individualistic psychological approach is taken (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989) or a (latent) demand for this music is assumed (Peterson, 1990). In this article I aim to provide such an analysis, concentrating on the Dutch case.

Frith (1996) argues that one should ask the people involved to answer the question of why people consume pop music (for descriptions of pop music see Denisoff [1975], Gillet [1996] and Maultsby [1996]). Riesman (1950) has been the only one to take a similar approach to the one adopted here. Regularities in people's consumption behavior that they themselves explain or justify in similar ways may be called consumption institutions (Dolfsma, 2004). In this article, I seek to uncover the full range of reasons for people to consume pop music. Using and analyzing 'the subjective accounts people provide of their everyday experiences, . . . the propositions people actually use to persuade each other' (Callahan and Elliot, 1996: 91; cf Schouten 1991) in order to understand why and how people consumed pop music, I reconstruct the life world of consumers of pop music during the arrival of this new music.

De Gustibus Est Disputandum – some methodological comments

To contribute to an explanation of why pop music became so popular during the 1950s and 1960s, I take the consumers' perspective, although I am aware that the dichotomy between supply and demand is difficult to sustain (Falk, 1994; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Frith, 1996). Contrary to what is assumed in economics, for instance (Becker, 1996; Stigler and Becker, 1977), valuations and preferences are socially constructed and often ambiguous. They are set in a history of interactions between different people and organizations. To bring this out, I will carefully analyze the texts produced in group interviews and a survey. In a social setting, many goods are or may become symbolic goods – goods related to people's identity. Pop music-related goods are particularly strong symbolic goods (Frith, 1983, 1996). By reconstructing the meanings that consumers of pop music had, through 'thick descriptions', I aim to recreate the music fans' life world, 'sorting out the structures of signification . . . [the] established codes . . . and

determining their social ground and import' (Geertz, 1973: 9). Discussing the value of symbolic goods such as pop music is what many people do with one another (Frith, 1996). In reality, and unlike what is held by most economists, *de gustibus est disputandum*.

Even more than quantitative material, the questions I address here require qualitative data. The purpose of the qualitative material I have systematically gathered and analyzed in this article is to reconstruct the 'life world' of people who consumed pop music in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Schouten, 1991; Silverman 1993; Spradley, 1979). Life world (*Lebenswelt*) is, of course, a concept the German sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1987[1894]) uses.

As the appendix explains in greater detail, a questionnaire with open questions was sent to a population of respondents, forming a basis for the more informative series of group interviews. The literature on qualitative research recommends group interviews, instead of personal interviews, as a method to collect the material required to reconstruct people's life world (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988). Information on the participants in the survey, some of which is presented in Table 1, was crucial input for the group interviews.

Some studies of young people's behavior written in that era, sometimes touching on the consumption of pop music, are available. These studies, however, are either highly speculative (Langeveld, 1953), based on a single

Table 1 Consumers of pop music (% of respondents)

Listened (mostly) alone[a]	85
Listened (also) with friends	24
Listened (also) with family	24
Bought magazine(s)	85
Favorite magazine[b]	1. *Muziek Expres* (52)
	2. *Tuney Tues* (29)
	3. *Muziek Parade* (29)
Favorite program/station	1. Tijd voor eenagers, Radio Luxemburg (61)
	3. Veronica (45)
Talked about music with/at:	1. friends (70)
	2. school (47)
	3. family (26)
Women (#)	17
n (#)	66

Source: Own survey (see also Dolfsma, 2004)

[a] Because respondents said they listened both alone and with friends or family, these figures add up to more than 100%. Whenever people reported to have listened to radio programs alone and with friends and family, they always mentioned having listened alone first.

[b] A number of participants in the survey listed more than one magazine. Some people reported they had read music magazines, but either could not remember the names or bought more than one on a regular basis.

case of a dance hall using participatory research methods (Krantz and Vercruysse 1959), or address issues ranging much wider and are sometimes much more normative than those focused on here (Goudsblom 1959; Hessen 1965; Saal 1950). Other studies implicitly argue that a direct link exists between the message of a piece of music (as evidenced from its lyrics) and its reception among consumers (Ballantine, 1984; Gillet, 1996; Tillekens, 1998). Frith (1987, 1996), however, rightly raises methodological and theoretical doubts about the possibility of linking the intentions of artists directly to the meaning inherent in music, and subsequently to the life world of its audience.

A broad division of the remainder of this article is between, on the one hand, looking at *why* pop music was consumed and, on the other hand, *how* people consumed music (Ulmann-Margalit, 1978). The 'why' question is further divided, along lines Falk (1994) suggests, into two parts. First, people consume pop music for *whom* it represents, because it allows them to relate to each other in relation to others, within *and* between generations. To its audiences, pop music represents something they perceive is inherently good as well, irrespective of who appreciates that good. Pop music is, therefore, secondly, bought for *what* it represents too. I take a broad view on what exactly consumption of pop music is – it includes listening to pop music on the radio, buying records and music magazines, listening to those records and reading the magazines, etc.

Representing who?

Certainly Ballantine (1984) is right to state that rock music, or pop music as it came to be known, was consumed because it presented a ready-made way in which to distinguish yourself from the older generation(s). This is the popular explanation and it is also supported in this study. However, this picture is not complete. The generations gap hypothesis implies that generations are homogeneous; one generation as a whole is thought to act in concert with regard to another generation. Pop music plays a role in the conflict between generations, but it is also used in making distinctions within generations.

Part of the thrill of pop music was that it upset, or at least baffled, parents and people of older generations generally. As John expresses it during the Amsterdam interview: 'I thought the nice part was, that you, well . . . there was music on the radio, and . . . there was music which made my father say: What is *this*? That was of course what you wanted.' A little later, when I asked him for clarification, he continued: 'Yes . . . that was what you wanted. "Can you turn down that noise!" I had to listen either in the living room when the others were elsewhere, or take the portable radio, the transistor to the attic.'

Posters of artists from music magazines were also used to shock parents. As Karel in Amsterdam recalls: 'Especially when larger posters became available . . . that was to shock your mother a little.' Some perceived their interaction with their parents as a 'fight' over the control of the radio, to be able to control the volume regulator. Such disagreements were most common in households where only one radio set was available. Transistor radios were not common at that time in the Netherlands and other countries in Western Europe, partly because they were expensive. Many households were connected to what was called the 'draadomroep' (cable radio), a built-in radio with a choice of four channels, two of which were the official Dutch channels while the other two would broadcast a selection of radio programs from public broadcasters in Germany, Belgium and France. Both radio sets and cable radio could only be listened to in the living room. In the living room, parents could, of course, control what their children listened to. Decreasing numbers of households relied on cable radio, however, as the number of transistor radios increased rapidly and households that possessed more than one radio were increasingly common. These two related developments created important conditions for subsequent events – conditions that are necessary though not sufficient to explain the advent of pop music (Dolfsma, 2004a, 2004b).

Radio programs played on these sentiments of rebellion. The very first program playing pop music, 'Tijd voor Teenagers', which began broadcasting on 11 September 1959, started by introducing the program, then played a song by an artist introduced as 'the Dutch Elvis [Presley]', and then stated:

> Good afternoon everybody, today we start with the one and only, unadulterated program for all Dutch teenagers, who some less sympathetic people sometimes called bobby soxxers ['tiener'].

The Dutch word 'tiener' used in this announcement would be perceived as denigrating by the young audience. The English word 'teenager' is used in Dutch too and appealed more to young people. Older people would, of course, be the 'less sympathetic people' who use the word 'bobby soxxers [tiener]', instead of using a word borrowed from the English language. Then, more than now perhaps, one would be revered for using English words.

In the Rotterdam interview, participants discussed strategies parents resorted to in order to try to stop their children from consuming the musical 'trash' of pop music.

Hans: Once they threw my radio down the stairs.
Emmy: They always pulled out the plugs.
Hans: Pull the plugs out in the evening.
Emmy: Pull the plugs out in the evening!

Hans: Your father would come in your room, the door would open with a bang, 'Quiet now! Stop it!'

A large part of the excitement that pop music produced for many young people then was that of the forbidden fruit. Cathy lived in a northern province of the Netherlands where reception of Dutch pirate station Veronica, broadcasting from the North Sea, would often be problematic: 'Veronica was most exciting; it was not allowed, but I loved it. Very exciting.'

Many listened to British pirates when these appeared on the stage from the early 1960s. These broadcasters played the latest songs, but also had 'real' disc jockeys. Real disc jockeys were people who presented pop music as if they were one with the audience, sharing the same frame of reference, making jokes and other remarks, the understanding of which required sharing that frame of reference. In these institutionalized ways of communication they created an understanding of 'us' and 'them'. Participants in the Amsterdam interview agreed when talking about Radio Caroline, other British pirates, and their DJs:

Wil: You had the feeling he was part of the conspiracy . . .
John: Against the older people . . .
Karel: Against the government.

For disc jockeys and the audience of radio programs alike, parents and people from older generations generally represented 'the establishment', an establishment that wanted to teach the Dutch youth the correct taste for music and the proper manners, an establishment that in the Netherlands, England and elsewhere wanted to get rid of the pirates. When 'real' pop music had to be played in those few programs on official Dutch radio that featured pop, it was felt that Dutch disc jockeys did this only reluctantly. In describing official Dutch radio, descriptions like 'docile' and 'too clean' are used. The audience felt 'watched' and 'controlled'. And, indeed, both the format of the programs as well as the content aired was held under strict control by the broadcasters (Dolfsma, 2004b). Real DJs were believed to play what they themselves liked, as opposed to what they were supposed to, let alone explicitly told to, play.

John: On Radio London, disc jockeys played what they liked themselves, what they *themselves* liked. Which they backed *themselves*. They had *personal* preferences. Allan Freeman had to play the English Top 20, but, of course, the English Top 20 set the tone for Europe then.

Even when disc jockeys had to play what was in the charts, which included songs not appreciated by fans of pop music, their behavior was explained away, rationalized. Disc jockeys with others stations, such as Allan

Freeman, although they were sometimes older than their audience, were seen by that same audience as a part of them.

John: On Sunday afternoon, on the BBC, Allan Freeman played the English Top 20. Half of the songs were unbearable. But I had the impression he *too* thought so. I had the impression that when he said 'and now for the seventh week on number one: Distant Drums by Jim Reeves' he was crying. Whereas when he said 'the latest song by the Who is new on number seven' he thought: Yes! This will succeed. And the way he said . . .

Wil: In contrast to this I always thought people on Dutch programs, like the one by Skip Voogd, when they had to play the better kind of music they thought: 'my God, do we have to play this?'

Dutch presenters were not treated so leniently. Dutch presenters were perceived as part of the older generation, part of the establishment. There thus seems to be a consensus about what makes a good disc jockey, although it seemed hard to describe – let alone define – what a good DJ was. Little things seemed to indicate whether a disc jockey was knowledgeable or not, whether he really liked the music he played. In Nijmegen:

Wilfred: But what did you hear [that made you suspicious about the authenticity and knowledgeability of a DJ]?

Clemens: Backgrounds, comparisons with other artists, origins of it.

Olav: Who plays with who . . .

Ilja: You hear it from how somebody says something whether he has lived it himself or he reads it like it is history. It's in little things, sometimes. A small difference of accent or a slip of the tongue. It's when you say: *there*! Now I've got him: he is reading it!

Joop: Or mispronouncing a name; it's when you think: Hey!

Olav: Or when he says it's an original when it is not.

Words like teenagers, or, worse, according to the people addressed that way themselves, the Dutch word 'tieners', were increasingly used to refer to young people and adolescents. Titles for radio programs reflected this. In all the group interviews, people felt this was used as a way of putting them down. They did not feel they were taken, were even repelled by them. The names for the programs were seen as just as condescending as the way in which presenters behaved in the programs. When I raised the point that 'Tijd voor Teenagers' had been the first to broadcast charts on Dutch radio, even before Radio Veronica introduced this institution, and raised the question of why this did not have a similar impact, the discussion in Rotterdam went as follows:

Wilfred: But 'Tijd voor Teenagers' also began to make their own charts in 1963. They phoned retailers to ask them for sales figures. Apparently, this did not have an impact.
Hans: Well, it may have had an impact, but not an overwhelming one.
Meertem: I think that if you should have told me then: You are a teenager, I would have said: Really? That word!
Cathy: Yes.
Wilfred: It does not have a nice meaning to you?
Meertem: It has no meaning for me. It is no word by which I . . .
Joshua: That's right, names for radio programs were very clumsy. 'For Twens' it would be called, or 'Bobby-soxers' [in Dutch: 'Bakvissen'].
Cathy: Tussen 10+ en 20–. . .
Joshua: Yes, that was a really annoying name to which I was not attracted.

Pop music was not only an important way for the young generation to distinguish itself from the older generations and the establishment, but because it was not homogeneous it was used to create distinctions within the young generation. Within pop music at that time, the fans themselves drew classifications such as 'progressive' versus 'commercial'. Those who generally liked 'commercial', middle-of-the-road music seemed to agree that their taste for music was not as well developed as others who were seen as 'progressive'. Those who liked what they themselves called 'progressive' pop were called upon to organize school parties. They were asked to be disc jockeys or to contact a band because they knew what good music was. School parties (sometimes called 'Big Nights') played an important role here. Kees organized such nights for his school. One of his central concerns was to make sure that 'outsiders' would not come into the room where the band played. Before the concert, it had to remain a secret that the band would come, but afterwards 'outsiders' had to be told so they would be jealous.

Kees: I really was not in favor of allowing everybody from Delft in.
Jimmy: It was your own school party.
Wilfred: It would make it less special . . .
Kees: Right.

Being an ostensible fan of pop music made one feel 'avant garde', as Wil put it. Knowledge of music and the programs had to be combined with the right behavior towards others and the right looks.

One may expect that consuming pop music was to a large extent a social activity. Some people in my research indeed 'confessed' they had started listening to pop music (more intensely) *because* they wanted to belong to a particular group. From this perspective it may come as a surprise to learn that the favorite way of listening to pop music on the radio was alone, even for those who were attracted to pop music *because* of the groups they could then belong to. Only if there was no other option, because there was only

a single radio in the house, for instance, would other members of the family listen to pop music together with the fan. Friends were not invited to listen together to a common favorite program for two reasons. It was not a custom to invite friends to the home and go to one's room to listen to the radio or to records. Most importantly, however, and this is mentioned in every group and also in the survey, fans did not want to listen to the radio together with friends, even if they could have done so.

> Mary: I didn't have the need to do that [invite friends over]. I wanted to do it alone, I liked that. Otherwise you get situations such as: I like this, and you like that, and then they start babbling when the music is on. I would probably do the same, but I simply didn't want that [talking when the radio was playing pop music]. I didn't consider that a problem, I liked it that way.

Listening together with friends would prevent fans from creating a fantasy world around the favorite music and musicians, as Olav in the Nijmegen interview has put it. It was also at odds with the idea that pop music was something personal, something to express your identity and the message you wanted to stand for, that you were an autonomous person. Although fans preferably listened by themselves, they knew or felt connected to many people. Meertem felt related 'to everybody . . . You had the feeling that so many people were listening. And the next day you heard others say: Did you hear this? Did you hear that? That is really cool.' Talking about what you had heard on the radio *afterwards* was, therefore, a completely different matter. 'It only starts to get fun . . . What *is* funny is to talk about it afterwards' as Ilja says. You would have to be among experts, however, as he said later. It would make you feel better when *you* knew some hit was a cover from a song that had remained somewhat obscure, but you could only talk about these things with others who could appreciate your knowledge. Otherwise 'you could not play with it', as Olav said.

With the exception of listening to pop music on the radio, girls appeared to have had slightly different consumption behavior. Cathy recalls how she spent many hours with one or more friends memorizing the lyrics of songs so she would be able to enjoy listening to the radio more. On her way to school, in a group on bicycles, Mary would sing the lyrics she memorized together with her friends. The competitive aspect is not stressed so much in the way in which the women in the group interviews talked about their experiences in consuming pop music as compared to the men.

Representing what?

As Falk (1994) argues, people consume not simply for the status that ensues. Consumer goods not only represent (groups of) people, they also present what somebody perceives as 'the good'. Goods can be perceived to be good

in themselves. If pop music were only used to make distinctions between groups of people and did not mean something for its audience besides this, pop music would be one of many fads. Instead, for many people pop music *also*, and probably more importantly, represented some things that were very desirable. People *experienced* pop music as being intrinsically valuable.

For its audience, pop music was more than simply a means of creating distinctions. If it were only that, listening to the faint broadcasts in English, which few really understood, by Radio Luxembourg, the Allied Forces Network (AFN) or the West Deutsche Rundfunk (WDR), for example, would not be necessary. Listening to the few programs on official Dutch radio stations would suffice. Why spend long hours in the evening or at night listening to the radio, hoping to hear new records, when many did so alone and did not talk about it much in detail with others?

It is striking to see how eager young people were for new music, programs and radio stations. Besides radio programs, music magazines were an important source of information, both on pop music itself as well as on how best to be able to listen to it. To get as much as possible from the money spent, the few records or magazines that were bought would be played until they 'were translucent' or 'read from cover to cover and vice versa'. Joop in Nijmegen said he 'drank' these magazines; others say they read them 'until they had memorized it all', they 'devoured them'. Of course, exchanging or sharing magazines and records was a common practice. Magazines and records would sometimes be bought together. The objective was to stay informed about new developments in the world of pop music, and especially to learn about what was happening in the US and the UK.

Lyrics were published in the Dutch magazines as well, first only by *Tuney Tunes*, but soon by the others too. Although everything in English was considered better almost by definition, fans did not understand much of what was sung.

> Joop: The nice thing about *Tuney Tunes* were the lyrics. I was 16, 17, and 18 then and had had English in school, heard the songs, but the quality of the sound was not very good either . . . you thought you heard a few things, but that was not. . . . And when you saw the lyrics it was a little different from what you thought. I can remember 'Singing the Blues', Guy Mitchell; the text was *completely* different from what I thought. I had fantasized a whole story to go with it . . . I thought I heard something in the song that made it even more romantic, which turned out, when I saw the text, to be a lot more banal [laughter in recognition from the others]. The song remained beautiful for me, that's not it, but it was a bit of a disappointment.

About songs in Dutch, Meertem said that 'it was not fast enough . . . they were not *at* it'. Hans said a little later in this conversation in Rotterdam that he thought English songs were 'more fun' because they had a different rhythm or beat. Everybody confirms this. Covers of English or

American songs by Dutch bands – keeping the same music while translating the words into Dutch – were considered a 'fake' because of, for instance, a 'bad' translation. As Clemens said it: 'the Dutch text, compared to the English, seemed a *world* of difference.'

The reason for disliking songs in the Dutch language seems more likely to have been that the English language was so strongly associated with speed, novelty, youth, autonomy, creativity and vitality that lyrics in the Dutch language stood little chance of being appreciated (Dolfsma, 2004a). Joop would like almost any music 'as long as it was in English'. Not just Dutch bands attempted to play into these perceptions by covering English and American songs, or by advertising themselves as 'the Dutch Elvis' or 'the Dutch Pat Boone'. Magazines had a similar strategy, for instance by publishing foreign charts. 'Tijd voor Teenagers' – 'your program entirely', presenters would imprint on their audience – would say it played songs of 'today's and tomorrow's rising stars', thus alluding to these very same socio-cultural meanings.

Tunes or jingles were an imitation of an American institution on the radio. The audience could easily recognize the program that played on the radio, or a feature within a program. Hans still knows them all, including the advertisements. To Meertem it was a signal that would tell him to 'turn up the radio or shut it off'. Tunes were an important way of alluding to the kind of meanings just mentioned. Radio Veronica was the first Dutch station to start this institution when they were still illegal and immensely popular, broadcasting from a ship in the North Sea. Many of the tunes stressed, for instance, that the next song would be *new* (repeating, while fading the word 'nieuw'), was a hit in the US ('In New York it's number 1' – note that English was the language used in this jingle), or was rising rapidly ('Alarmschijf', which is a record that is the strongest riser of the week): winning appeals to many people.

Posters were a further important reason to buy magazines. Posters you could hang on the wall, not just to shock your parents, but as a visible and quasi-imaginary personality to identify with. Both boys and girls would do this. Many girls used to cut pictures and lyrics from the magazines to collect them in a notebook or school diary. Learning the lyrics enabled you to be able to sing along with music on the radio, often with a friend. Singing together on the way to school is something Cathy has clear memories of when she hears certain songs now.

Boys, too, created a world of fantasy around pop idols. Joop was shocked to find out that Buddy Holly was not the incredibly handsome man he had thought he would be. Ilja was particularly shocked by the fact that he was balding and Clemens by the fact he wore glasses, as if they wanted to say: How can you be young, sing so beautifully about such meaningful things, be so far away, unknown and unattainable and *not* be handsome, be so ordinary? Still, this was no reason not to read the

magazines. Their curiosity for news about pop music was stronger than the fear of shattering a dream.

Boys used magazines more as a means to inform themselves about new developments, it appears, than girls. To them 'pop music' (cultural capital) (Frith, 1996, referring to Bourdieu, 1984) seemed more important as a means of creating hierarchies between different groups and among themselves, within groups. Magazines from abroad, like *Melody Maker* from Britain or *Billboard* from America, were evidently better than the Dutch. Ilja still feels proud to have followed *Billboard* and *Cashbox* then and is admired by the others in the Nijmegen group for it now. The Dutch magazines like *Muziek Expres* 'were months behind . . . they were weeks, weeks behind.' He was, and still is to some extent, particularly troubled by the fact that the magazines did not acknowledge that the news they presented was weeks old, and often copied from American or English magazines; he could tell by comparing, for instance, the charts printed in the different magazines. He found that charts printed in Dutch music magazines that would purportedly give the present list of hits in the US turned out to be dated. Nevertheless, for many, these charts were another reason for buying the magazines. They kept you informed about what was new. New and authentic pop music originated, people thought, from the United States or the United Kingdom. Magazines were aware of these perceptions and would publish charts purportedly from these countries. What appeared in the *Billboard* chart would then take some time to be ranked in continental European charts.

Each year every Dutch music magazine published a popularity poll ('populariteispoll') – a list of the most popular songs, musicians, singers, programs and disc jockeys of the year according to the readers of the respective magazine (Dolfsma, 2004a, 2004b). Listeners were asked to send in their personal list of favorites. *Tuney Tunes* started doing this and soon the others followed suit. Among the magazines there was some competition on this point. Competition focused on the issue of credibility; one magazine even saw fit to mention that a notary authorized the polls. Still, according to Skip Voogd, who first compiled the polls for *Tuney Tunes* and later for *Muziek Expres*, they were rigged. Unless there was no way to get around it, his personal favorites would rank as number 1. Otherwise, they would be runner-up. Readers of the magazines, however, all seem to have believed the polls were genuine. I asked questions about it in all of the group interviews. In Delft, I asked participants if they knew these polls were tampered with.

Gerrit: Were those things made up?
Wilfred: You didn't know that?
Peter: I always sent in the forms. [Mary confirms.]
Wilfred: Did you all send in these forms? [General confirmation.]

Mary: I really don't want to hear this. . .
Gerrit: You take away an illusion.

New, fast and the unknown go together. Fans liked programs that played many new records, especially at a high speed that, as Clemens put it, 'took your breath away'. Disc jockeys would talk while the next record was starting to play which would increase the impression of speed. Talking through the introduction of a song was not customary on the official Dutch stations, not allowed even. This, and shortening a record by skipping parts, would also give the impression that there was something left to be discovered by the fans. As Ilja in Nijmegen suggests, it aroused their curiosity but did not entirely satisfy it, keeping the idea alive that there was so much more of that new record to hear.

Looking for news relates to the idea that pop music needed to express autonomy. New information is something other people do not have, do not know about. To possess news about pop music can make you an authentic person. It is something you can use to distinguish yourself from others, but also – and often at the same time – something that may connect you to different others who are also knowledgeable of something. Disc jockeys who did not make their audience feel as if they chose their own records without interference from others were not held in high esteem. If others would influence their choice of music, this would either mean these others were more knowledgeable or that the others had power over the disc jockeys. The audience would perceive either one of the two as an impeachment of the autonomy of the disc jockey, and hence their own. DJs who ostensibly wanted to teach their audience the *correct* taste for music were not popular; these disc jockeys interfered with the autonomy of their audience.

Frith (1987, 1996) argued forcefully that the value of pop music for its audience cannot be established by musicological research – even when pop music established 'modern rules for friendship, pair-bonding and the formation of identity', they study the lyrics of well-known songs of the time (Kleijer and Tillekens, 1994). From pop music young people acquired a new romantic code of how to interact with the other sex, providing an institutionalized means of communicating. By presenting socially accepted ways of behaving in specific circumstances, institutions provide a sense of certainty. Especially in the interactions with the other sex, uncertainty reigned. As shown by Rutten (1991), sexuality and love began to be more and more directly referred to in the pop music featuring in the charts, addressing this sense of uncertainty. For instance, in 1961 advertisements would appear in *Tuney Tunes* for lessons in kissing to be concluded by a 'kissing certificate'. In the group interviews, participants all said they were very aware of the sexual overtones in many of the songs, although their parents might have failed to understand it. Cathy, even though she knew it

would make her mother very angry, translated the lyrics of the song 'I Can't Get No Satisfaction' by the Rolling Stones, and it did make her mother angry, which is what she intended; it was 'nicely provocative. I liked it.'

The ambiguities surrounding pop music and the meaning it had for its fans were considerable. What to do when the presenter made a derisive remark about Elvis Presley when you are an Elvis fan? Clemens, who was a member of two Dutch Elvis fan clubs, would be deeply hurt if a presenter would said something 'bad' about Elvis, but would not switch the radio off. 'No, no, come on, no. . . . That was also because there were so few other programs; these were the times to listen to music. You didn't have money to buy records either.' You would, of course, boast of having heard the latest single by The Who. Admitting that you liked a song in Dutch by a Dutch female crooner you could not do, however much you liked it. Or could you?

The everyday practice of consuming music

How people consume pop music is telling. People went to great lengths in finding ways to consume pop music. Parents often did not approve of pop music, records and magazines were expensive, as were record players and radios, and the number of radio programs or stations that featured pop music was limited. Young people were inventive, however, in finding solutions for these problems. Many knew exactly when their favorite programs would be aired. They had memorized the days and times of these programs for the whole week, and still remember parts of the schedule now, as is apparent in Nijmegen:

Ilja: You built yourself some kind of scheme for the week, to know on which days to . . .
Wilfred: Did you write it down?
Ilja: We knew it completely by heart.
Olav: You knew it by heart . . .
Clemens: You didn't have to write it down.
Ilja: You knew exactly: on Sunday evening turn on this, so normally I can listen from 10 to half past 12 to that. Monday morning listen to this there.
Olav: And Sunday afternoon after 'No problems at all with your Volkswagen' there was 'Tienertoppertijd' by Guus Jansen Junior [on Radio Luxembourg].

Music magazines printed overviews of programs on radio that their audience would want to know about; competition between them was based in part on publishing such information. Programming of Radio Luxembourg and Radio Veronica were of special interest since these would not be

included in the magazines the official Dutch broadcasters published. Luxembourg and Veronica, in contrast to the Dutch broadcasters, would have a schedule for their programs that did not change for a month, or even months. The monthly music magazines printed these schedules. Frequencies for radio stations would also be given, sometimes also for stations that were less well-known or even obscure.

Getting a radio for oneself was an important step. Tensions in the family that arose over what to listen to because there would only be a single radio in a house, located in the living room where other members of the family gathered as well, would be avoided. Jon, for instance, got an old radio from his father. To hear his favorite program on Radio London, he had to hold the wire that was the antenna in the air in front of the window himself. Karel had also developed all kinds of tricks with the antenna and wires to improve sound quality. A build-it-yourself radio was another solution, which even people who described themselves as 'non-technical' could make.

Records, record players, tape recorders and regular radios were expensive and many would save money for a long time to be able to buy them for themselves. Once somebody had a record player at home, a group of friends would put together the money to buy a single in order to listen to it. Jon remembers that 'there were those who had a pick-up at home, so you would buy singles. Or you would put money together with a group of four to buy the latest Rolling Stones record.' In the Amsterdam and Nijmegen interviews, participants all recognized this situation. Borrowing records or magazines from each other was common practice. Money earned by doing odd jobs was spent on magazines and on records. Before buying a new record, fans would listen extensively to it in the record store in special small rooms, sometimes deciding after they had heard the record several times not to buy it. Everybody in the Nijmegen interview, for instance, clearly remembers having done this and how it upset shopkeepers, which was in part the fun of it.

The more docile fans would finish their homework as fast as they could and make sure they got good grades in school to be able to, or be allowed to, listen to the radio and to pop music. More rebellious types just listened to pop music as much as they could and did not bother about what parents or schoolteachers thought of it. They would rather listen to a new record 20 times, over and over again, until they had memorized the lyrics than study. Collecting lyrics, pictures and charts in a diary or exercise book, or posters to fill the walls in a bedroom, would take a lot of time.

Why pop music? Some concluding remarks

In every interview, everybody could tell of how certain songs or programs would remind them of certain events or times. Many of those recollections

were strong ones. Pop music seems to have brought structure and meaning into the lives of many young people then. According to Schouten (1991) and others, adolescence is known to be a 'liminal' period: a time in which people are very impressionable, when their experiences are likely to be formative. Important and persisting parts of a person's behavior related to (music) consumption behavior developed in adolescence: people's tastes for music do not tend to change dramatically afterwards (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989).

The rise of pop music is a peculiar phenomenon. This article has tried to reconstruct the life world of people who listened to pop music in the late 1950s and early 1960s by analyzing 'texts' generated in a survey and group interviews. To understand why it was the amalgam of blues and folk that became known as pop music, which became so popular in many Western societies in the 1950s and 1960s, it is not sufficient to point to the associated meanings this music came to stand for. Analyzing the changes, the *why* question is related to the answer to the *how* question, while the first of these questions needs to be answered by looking at both *who* and *what* pop music represents to its audience. Analysis of the narratives of consumers brings out a more complex picture than is usually presented in everyday discussions of pop music or by students of pop music. Pop music is not merely a means for younger generations to rebel against the older ones, but it is also a means of creating distinctions within generations. Moreover, pop music is not just used as an instrument in a struggle between different groups, but it is consumed for the 'good life' it is thought to represent (Dolfsma, 2004). Pop music was and still is associated with modernist meanings of new, speed, different, full of emotions, a means of expressing that you were an autonomous and independent person. These related reasons for consuming pop music need to be acknowledged in order to explain its advent.

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Appendix: Further methodological remarks

Appropriate methods for doing qualitative research are discussed more extensively in other social sciences than economics (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Spradley, 1979; Thompson, 1998). Some explanation of the particulars of my methodology is warranted.

I looked for people to participate in the survey in three different ways. First, I placed a small announcement in five national, daily Dutch newspapers, reaching a broad audience in terms of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The previous day the fourth documentary in a series of five about pop music in the 1950s and 1960s had appeared on national television. In the ad, I asked people who had listened to pop music on the radio in the (late) 1950s and (early) 1960s to contact me. Second, I was interviewed on Dutch public radio about the research project, and was given the opportunity to ask the audience to cooperate by calling the studio. The particular program focuses on the target population. A third opportunity to call for participants took place at the national finals of a pop quiz in Delft, the culmination of preliminary contests which had been held across the country during earlier months. I was allowed time to tell the audience about the project and recruit people for the study. I asked people who responded to one of my calls for cooperation to fill in a questionnaire asking different questions about their consumption behavior at the time. What respondents answered to the questions in the questionnaires would provide

the first clues as to their life world and add topics to the list of issues I wanted addressed in the group interviews. I then selected people for group interviews. To my own surprise, the willingness to cooperate was very high.

Group interviews bring out the qualitative differences in the positions people take or the opinions people have, provided the group is carefully put together. The purpose is to reconstruct the life world(s) of young people who listened to pop music in the 1950s and (early) 1960s. To this end, as diverse groups as possible were formed (see Table 2).

In asking people to contact me in response to a general request, some self-selection was undoubtedly involved. The degree and nature of the bias is difficult to establish. Whatever the bias may be, the method used is appropriate because my primary objective was to gather qualitative material through the focus groups and not necessarily to arrive at a representative view. The request that the respondents fill in and return a questionnaire may have been a hurdle, but that was not too great, judging from the small number of non-respondents. It was clear that pop music played an important role in the lives of the respondents *now*, and that they had pleasant and vivid memories of the times and the music. This does not imply, however, that the participants were also more closely involved with pop music *then* in comparison to others, or that the music they liked or the way they experienced it was in any way biased. In fact, the sample appeared to be a mix of people from backgrounds that differed on these points. My two-step procedure for selecting respondents for the focus groups has an important advantage. By comparing what people wrote down on the forms to what they said during interviews, I could get some idea of the extent to which participants conformed to (emerging) group norms. Conforming to social group norms was minimal.

Table 2 Group interviews

	Delft	*Rotterdam*	*Nijmegen*	*Amsterdam*
Location	'Grand café'	'Grand café'/ restaurant	One participant's home (Ilja)	'Artistic café'
Participants (#)	6	6	4	3
First names	Peter, Kees, Mary, Gerrit, Jimmy, Jeanette	Meertem, Hans, Emmy, Charlie, Joshua, Cathy	Clemens, Ilja, Joop, Olav	Karel, Jon, Wil
From: newspaper	2	4	(–)	3
radio	2	2	4	(–)
pop quiz	2	(–)	(–)	(–)

WILFRED DOLFSMA, a philosopher and economist, is associated with Erasmus University Rotterdam and Maastricht University. Recent publications have appeared in *Media History, Journal of Evolutionary Economics, Review of Social Economy* and *Research Policy*. His monograph *Institutional Economics and the Formation of Preferences* has just appeared, and so has his co-edited volume (with Charlie Dannreuther), *Globalisation, Social Capital and Inequality* (2003, Erasmus Research Institute of Management). He is in the process of editing *Reading and Dynamics of the Knowledge Economy*. *Address*: Erasmus University Rotterdam – FBK, PO Box 1738, NL-3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands. [email: w.dolfsma@fbk.eur.nl]