The Business of DIY. Characteristics, motives and ideologies of micro-independent record labels

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This paper examines micro-independent record companies, mostly set up by musicians according to the Do It Yourself (DIY) principle. They serve as distribution channels for counter-mainstream, often local, music. This paper discusses the characteristics of micro-(DIY) independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the context of persisting uncertainties in the music market. Earlier research (Hesmondhalgh 1998b, 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007) on micro-independents in the UK demonstrates their typical moral or political motivations, aiming to counter the hegemony of the capitalist mainstream music industry. The analysis is based on business information and open (qualitative) interviews with 14 companies in Netherlands. The paper shows that DIY-independents want to contribute to broadening the supply of contemporary music. By releasing indie genres and engaging in the associated social discourse, they differentiate themselves from the commercial majors. Commercial or financial success is not considered important and they adhere to collectivist ideologies. However, they do not aim to resist the dominance of the major music industry.

Keywords: DIY, micro-independents, music production, sociology of music

Introduction: Do-It-Yourself

The global market for recorded music is largely dominated by three major record labels. These majors' (Sony Music, Universal Music and Warner Music) market share is about 70 percent of the entire global music market (Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012). One common criticism of these global companies, is that they typically operate in the mainstream market

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consistent with a commercial, capitalist corporate ideology, with little attention paid to the creativity of the artist (Negus 1995, Hesmondhalgh 1999, Frith 2000, Strachan 2007). In addition to these majors, there are numerous small record labels, from larger independents to very small micro-independents.

This paper examines such micro-independents, often set up by artists following the Do It Yourself (DIY) principle, to serve as a distribution channel to issue their own countermainstream ("indie") music and that of other local bands and artists (McKay 1998, Moore 2004, Strachan 2007). By appropriating DIY and indie as emic concepts, micro-independents actively position themselves within broader classification processes in the music industry. Our research looks at the characteristics and business structure of micro-DIY independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the context of the current uncertainty of the music market. Previous research by Hesmondhalgh (1998b, 1999) on independents and Strachan (2003, 2007) on micro-independents in the United Kingdom shows that they are typically grounded in moral or political motives, aiming to counter the hegemony of the mainstream music industry. The question is whether such motivations also play a role in the Netherlands. Exploring the Dutch case will add to our understanding of micro-independent music companies, expecting that a smaller musical culture in a somewhat peripheral country as the Netherlands may offer a very different context than the sizeable and globally dominant British cultural industries.

Technological developments in recent years have opened many doors for DIY artists. They can be described as musicians who want control over the production, promotion and distribution processes of their music. Typically, these processes are kept separated from major professional record companies and the professional networks surrounding them. Such DIY-artists are characterized by the in-house production of their music. Recording is mostly done at home, in "home" or "bedroom" studio's (Hesmondhalgh 1997, Hibbett 2005), using relatively cheap, often digital recorders. Distribution and sometimes sales take place within very small business structures, with a minimum input of finance and human resources. Such companies are called micro-independents.

Usually, DIY musicians aim at forms of alternative expression, by idiosyncratic and autonomous production and distribution of their artistic products (Moore 2004, Choi 2009). Moore calls this the DIY-ethic, in which artists, musicians and participants attach great importance to the fact that music should be judged on creativity and authenticity. The DIY ethic opposes the mainstream music industry, with its emphasis on large production budgets, rich sounds, professional instruments and thoughtful "performing skills" of the artists (Moore 2004, Hibbett 2005, Choi 2009). In this context, the term mainstream refers to the mass or large scale production of popular music (Thornton 1995, Hibbett 2005).

For DIY musicians, the internet is an important medium for the distribution and promotion of their music, as it appears to offer substantial creative freedom and autonomy (Hibbett 2005, Choi 2009, Kruse 2010). Arguably, new technologies such as the internet can be used by musicians to secure creative control over their productions (Karasas 2002). Not only have they transformed traditional processes of music production and distribution, they have also contributed to the increase in the supply and consumption of different types of (popular) music (Leyshon et al. 2005, Handke 2010, Oliver 2010). Musicians today can promote and distribute their home-produced music virtually free of charge, as user-created content, separated from

professional spheres to wider regional, national or international audiences (Kruse 2010, Oliver 2010). The digital home recorder is considered a crucial link, as it allows relatively cheap professional-quality productions. Furthermore, Kruse (2010: 633) suggests that digital recorders have made important contributions to the rise of the indie pop and rock music in the 1980s, as well as the recognition of lo-fi productions, classifying such music as authentic (Hibbett 2005: 56). Alternative DIY approaches to music production, promotion and distribution, are therefore considered to have eroded traditional power structures within the music industry (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007, Kruse 2010). Our study aims to not only shed more light on the practices of (Dutch) micro-independents, but will also contribute to the academic debate about theoretical notions of augmented possibilities for counter-mainstream music in the internet era.

Theories on DIY independents

Most research on DIY music production and micro-independents is based on British or American cases. Strachan (2007) describes DIY micro-independents as very small record companies, established mostly by one person or a small group of friends. They release music albums on a small scale (sometimes only one or two a year) under a private label.

Small-scale, collectivism and networks

The characteristic small scale of all aspects of their business operations sets these micro-independents apart from mainstream music companies. British studies show that micro-independents are generally run by only one or two individuals, who take on all organizational tasks (Ibid.). Albums are usually released by simple agreements between the label and the artists, often based on mutual trust (Banks et al. 2000, Crossley 2009). Micro-independents in the UK are typically run from home (Strachan 2003). Characteristic of these record companies is that they often work with local artists. Bands or artists are often personal acquaintances, but many labels also issue releases by their owners or employees. DIY micro-independents rely heavily on working in cooperative networks with other small cultural organizations, such as venues, distributors, record stores, recording studios, bookers and agents. In his work on local music, Crossley (2009) similarly points at strong network ties between musicians, fanzines and distributors. These networks are characterized by mutual communications, support, exchanges and recommendations. Becker (1982) and Crane (1987) suggest that such social networks create close relationships between artists and their audiences and can thus can serve as independent distribution channels for cultural expressions. Crane (1987) claims that artists who participate in such networks also often support each other. A social network links them to other artists, stimulating aesthetic or artistic innovation. Networks can generate new artistic ideas and act as a source of information about works and activities of connected artists. British micro-independents are frequently affiliated with international DIY networks in which other small record companies participate (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007).

Collectivism distinguishes DIY independents from profit-oriented record labels on the hegemonic mainstream market (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007, Crossley 2009). They embrace an aesthetic of openness and accessibility, in which musical interests prevail over profit

motives or commercial success (Strachan 2007: 252). Collectivism is based on creating or expanding a support network, in which the participating labels see each other not as competitors, but support each other where necessary. In that way micro-independents attempt to gain access to the production and distribution processes of popular music. Crossley (2009) shows how such networks of independent music production generate an autonomous dynamism and structure. This dynamism may challenge the dominance of major record labels and the resource distribution and conventions of the music industry (2009: 30). Network connections between musicians, DIY micro-independents, their audiences and other participants can confirm collective participation, autonomy, creative freedom and close social or artistic relationships. This discourse of autonomy and independence is diametrically opposed to that of the dominant and commercially oriented majors (Hibbett 2005).

Symbolic resistance and art/commerce discourses

Professionals in the mainstream music industry are often criticized for their disinterest in the quality of music (Williams 1981, Hibbett 2005, Strachan 2007). Genres unknown or less popular, are deemed unsuitable for major record labels. As a result, majors nowadays hardly release music of unknown talent (Carvalho 2008). Major labels show no interest in musicians in small niche markets, selling at most 20,000 copies (Weissman 2003). The music industry is characterized by the super star phenomenon (Rosen 1981, Hamlen 1991) which leads to huge income differences between successful and unsuccessful musicians (Cox, Felton and Chung 1995). The practice of many independents can be regarded as an expression of symbolic resistance against the capitalist discourse within the mainstream music industry. The motives of musicians to be signed by a DIY independent often find their origin in aversion against the corrupt and capitalist system of the mainstream music industry. They define their own practices by differentiating them from the commercial mainstream (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Hibbett 2005). The conscious choice for small scale is the answer of DIY independents to the commercial operations of major record companies (Rosen 1997, Strachan 2007: 248)

In Strachan's (2007: 247) opinion, the differentiation from larger mainstream record companies is central to the micro-independents legitimation (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 104). Views or conventions about aesthetics and music as an art form are regarded very important by the employees of micro-independents. Additionally, they may be considered as justification for their behavior, contrasting it to the commercial, profit-oriented record companies in the mainstream music market. Both Rosen (1997) and Strachan (2007) stress that micro-independents oppose commercial gain or other profit goals. According to them employees are aware of the low monetary gains of their ventures. For them, the creative artist or the attention to access and the development of the artistry of musicians is central. Rosen calls this the "access aesthetic" (Rosen 1997: 3).

The contrasting ideologies about the access to and value of music as a cultural product, are referred to as art/commerce binaries (Strachan 2007). This dichotomy is central to the debate among musicians, fans and critics on how rock music's value should be assessed (Weinstein and Weinstein 1999). Those critical of the commercial production of mainstream music, often talk in terms of manufactured pop music. Manufactured here refers to artists who are "created" or "invented" by the commercial industry. Such "fabricated" acts therefore, lack any artistic value, according to the supporters of the art principle (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1999). It is believed

that the priority of commercial music production is making profits, rather than artistic innovation or creativity (Hibbett 2005, Saha 2011). However, Frith (1983) indicates that commercial rock musicians in reality are no different than other entertainers. They may likewise be blamed of being in the music business for the money. This is opposed to the innovation-oriented and music-based anti-commercial DIY ethic.

Similarly, Strachan's research shows that employees of DIY independents believe that artistic creativity suffers in commercial, large scale, profit-oriented mainstream music businesses (2007). The typical small scale production of micro-independent record companies, following Hesmondhalgh (1998b), O'Connor (2008), Rosen (1997) and Strachan (2007), can be characterized as a distinctive feature of pure art products (Bourdieu 1984). In keeping with his field theory, this way of producing ensures a high degree of autonomy. Oppositely he places mass cultural production, aimed at making commercial cultural products. Bourdieu (1996) perceives popular music as commercial culture, produced and distributed to provide financial (or economic) capital. Hibbett (2005), Hesmondhalgh (2006) and Strachan (2007) however, stress that alternative, independent music production may be conceived as examples of small scale restricted cultural production. Negus (1995) also nuances this contradiction by showing that for virtually all players on the market it is difficult to draw boundaries between making "creative" or "commercial" decisions, regarding the industrial production process of popular music. He argues that creativity and commerce are always very closely related.

DIY motives, genres and classifications

The motivations of DIY micro-independents to engage in music production may often be considered political or moral (Rosen 1997, Hesmondhalgh 1998b, Strachan 2007). Political and moral motivations can be seen as a way of resisting the dominant, capitalist-oriented discourse, used by the major record companies. For this reason, some independents try to transform or to democratize the system (Hesmondhalgh 1998b). They aim to promote counter-hegemonic or non-mainstream genres (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). These genres are also known as "indie" genres, including punk, post-punk, indie pop, space rock, psychedelic rock, post rock, krautrock, lo-fi and many electronics genres (Strachan 2003, Hibbett 2005). A genre can be considered as a class or type of art (DiMaggio 1987). Wright (1975) believes that genres can be regarded as artistic works characterized by certain shared conventions and contents.

As indicated by Hitters and Van de Kamp (2010), the use of different types of genres by recording companies can be considered a form of classification. By releasing indie genres and engaging in the associated social discourse, independents differentiate themselves from the commercial majors and labels. The distinction is reinforced by the fact that the latter companies hardly deal with the release of non-commercial an unprofitable music. By responding to genres outside the mainstream supply, small record companies create opportunities to enter into competition with the majors and to contribute to the diversity of contemporary music (Peterson and Berger 1975, Dowd and Roy 2010). Especially the interactive internet may play an important role, by the mostly free dissemination and promotion of music (Oliver 2010).

The previously discussed symbolic resistance, as well as alternative and collectivist business operations, can be interpreted as characteristic DIY practices to counter the commercial music industry. DIY micro independents thus oppose the power dominance of the majors. Strachan

(2007) suggests that by releasing indie genres, British micro-independents try to influence music consumption. Nevertheless, despite their small-scale limited production, micro-independents often aim to be part of the public debate on musical taste. Hibbett (2005) ironically calls them the "scholars and conservators of good music" (p. 60).

Symbolic rewards

Artists (such as musicians engaged in micro-independents) who distribute their own work themselves or through small networks, must have self-supporting abilities (Becker, 1982). Crane (1987) explains how autonomous artists know that they will never get rich by selling their art, because in the end the sales are just not enough. Therefore, in addition to their artistic work, they have normal day jobs, mostly art related.

It is considered an advantage that the autonomous self-supported artist is free to do whatever he or she wishes with the art created. Assuming an independent reward-system (Crane 1976), these artists retain control over the symbolic and financial rewards. Symbolic rewards refer to the benefits of respect or prestige and recognition of beauty or authenticity of the art product within the restricted field of art (Bourdieu 1996). Authenticity here, is considered a social construct, attaching cultural status to restricted field cultural products by setting them apart from large scale mass products (Peterson 1997).

Hesmondhalgh (2006) underscores that symbolic rewards, typical for small scale restricted cultural production, also characterize independent music production. Also Strachan (2007) suggests that the practices of DIY independents shows the relation between production on a small scale and acquiring symbolic capital. Here, personal recognition and satisfaction are generally considered as rewards or success. Bourdieu (1996), however, also sees a link between autonomous art production on a small scale and a disinterest to the economic value of art or cultural products. He emphasizes that participants in small, autonomous art fields adhere to the art-for-art's-sake principle. Bourdieu (1996) assumes that participants in autonomous art fields are rich in cultural capital, but lack economic capital, and moreover, deem that to be unimportant.

DIY artists managing a micro-independent are often fans or enthusiasts with a passion for music. Strachan (2007) maintains that their main motivation is to personally (and financially) invest in artists or bands. Commercial or financial success is regarded as unimportant. A key motivation is to be involved in the recording and release process, as it is considered "being worthwhile in itself" (2007: 255). Among micro-independents, success equals satisfaction or a certain degree of personal recognition within the network sphere. An example of recognition is positive coverage in the music press. Also airplay on a radio station, which may then serve as promotion for the release of an album, is considered as a form of recognition (Strachan 2003).

Research methods

In this research we map the characteristics and business structure of micro-DIY independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the light of the persistent uncertainty of the music market. As research method, we have chosen the open or qualita-

tive (semi-structured) interview, with a focus on social behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and experiences of the respondent (Boeije 2005). Besides mapping the characteristics of these small organizations, the aim was to understand the motives and beliefs of their owners and managers. Furthermore, this research also intends to chart working practices and attitudes towards majors and the mainstream music market. It is therefore of great importance that during the interview the respondent gets ample opportunity to put forward his or her opinions and points of view (Hijmans and Wester 2006). The more elaborately the respondent can talk about a particular theme, the clearer and more complete the potential result becomes for the interviewer to interpret. This can be considered a dialogue with an informal character or a conversation with a purpose (Hijmans and Wester 2006).

Substantive and theoretical considerations, derived from preliminary or previous findings informed the selection of these micro-independents (Hijmans and Wester 2006). We thus applied theoretical or purposive sampling, assuming a consciously reflected choice of respondents. The selection of Dutch micro-independents was based on characteristics (size, music genre, release numbers etc.) derived from findings of other researchers, most prominently the work of Strachan (2003, 2007). For this research fifteen employees from a total of fourteen micro-independents were interviewed. A topic list was used in the interviews, based on the literature review, thus giving the qualitative semi-structured interview a solid foundation in theory (Braun and Clarke 2006). The interviews took place between April 22nd and May 31st of 2011. The interviews were transcribed into documents with an average size of 16 pages. The contents of these documents was subsequently arranged by themes through a process of systematic thematic coding and content analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Dutch DIY micro-independents: characteristics and ideologies

The examined micro-independents in the Netherlands are small organizations, in most cases established by one or two people. During the interviews it was found that these record labels often started to release the musical productions of the founders or those of friends. The largest part (10) of the examined Dutch micro-independents is still managed by one or two staff members. A small number (4) consists of a group of three or four friends. All have indicated during the interviews that their work is driven from a love or passion for music. Most of the Dutch micro-independents are also run from home. In addition to their work for the label, most staff members also have another, often artistic, job. In Table 1 an overview of the examined micro-independents is given. It is described which employees were interviewed and what their functions are at the record label. Furthermore, the tables provide the number of employees in the examined micro-independents, as well as the founding year and place, the genres released and the average number of releases per year.

Label name:	*Employee(s) interviewed and function(s):*	*Total # of employees*	*Founded in:*	*Genres:*	*Avg. # releases (annually)*
Subroutine Records	Koen and Niek, owners and management	2	Groningen, 2005	Indie pop, singer-songwriter	5
Betoontoon	Lasse, co-owner	3	Rotterdam, 2008	Experimental and electronic computer-controlled music	2
Laterax Recordings	Jorg, label owner	2	Rotterdam, 2001	Electro, indie pop, singer-songwriter	4
Snowstar Records	Cedric, owner and management	2 and 1 intern	Utrecht, 2003	Folk, indie pop and singer songwriter	4
Dying Giraffe Recordings	Ingmar, owner and distributor	1	Rotterdam, 2001	Indie pop, singer-songwriter	4
Knife Slits Water	Maarten, co-owner	2	Amsterdam, 2006	Experimental, krautrock, (Neo) psychedelic	4
Eat Concrete	Teun, owner	1	Den Bosch, 2006	Electro (mostly), indie pop, shoegaze, psychedelic rock	4
Freebird Records	Marcel, co-owner	2	Leiden, 1998	Garage, stoner rock	2
Narro Minded	Gabry, co-owner	4	The Hague, 2000	Electro, noise, post rock	6
Beep, Beep, Back Up The Truck!	Nicolai, co-owner and management	2 and 1 intern	Utrecht, 2008	Indie pop, post rock, singer-songwriter	4
Stardumb Records	Stefan, owner	1	Rotterdam, 2000	Indie pop, punk	5
WOT NXT	Marcel, co-owner	4	Leiden, 1996	Indie pop, punk, singer-songwriter (mostly)	3
Bunker Records	Guy, owner	1	The Hague, 1992	Dark techno, electro, electro funk	12
Sally Forth Records	Minco, co-owner	3	Amsterdam, 2007	Hardcore, indie pop, noise	4

Table 1: Overview of the 14 Dutch micro-independents, the employees interviewed and their functions, total number of employees, year and place of foundation, genres released and the average number of releases per year.

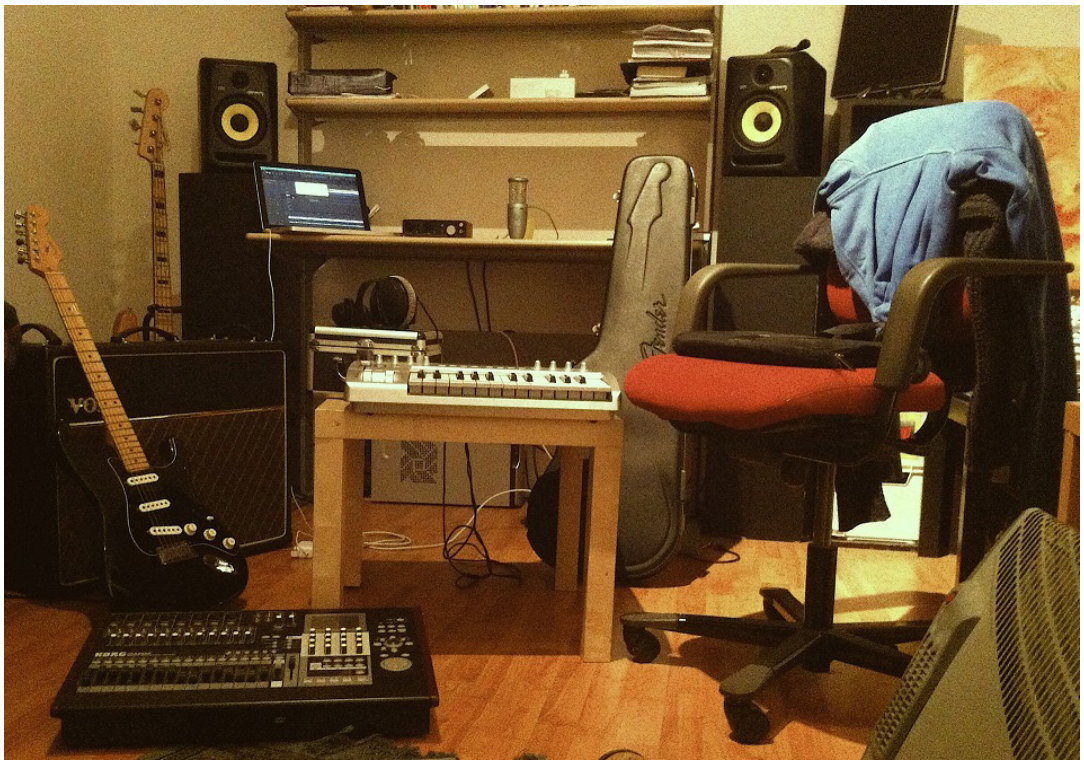
Small scale production, indie genres and classification

Dutch micro-independents produce on a small scale. In most cases they release about four productions a year. These productions are issued in editions of 150 to 500 pieces. As shown in Table 1 independents exclusively release indie genres. These can be considered as non-commercial, counter-hegemonic music styles (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007) beyond the mainstream supply by the major record companies. By categorizing their genres within the

indie discourse, these labels consciously present their music as distinctive within the realm of popular music (Hibbett 2005). Furthermore, the table also shows that the examined micro-independents are not limited to releasing one specific genre, while indie as a genre is not limited to these micro-independents. Gabry of Narro Minded describes why:

> The funny thing is that our audience, the people who feel challenged with what we're doing, mostly listen to all these different styles of music. It's not that we serve complete different markets. They're just people who love adventurous music. And that's just how we also see ourselves. It's not odd at all; there are just people out there with broad tastes and there's just a lot of music around. That's what I think. They're just music lovers, I guess. (Gabry, Narro Minded).

Nonetheless, with their focus on indie genres, it can be assumed that the micro-independents want to distinguish themselves from the majors (Hitters and Van de Kamp 2010). The interviewed staff members expect major record companies to mainly deal with the release of commercial and uniform mainstream music, in order to maximize financial gains. It is remarkable that most interviewees find the profit motive of the majors understandable. Generally they recognize that the majors have to produce commercially profitable music in order to keep their heads afloat. In so doing, they consider mainstream culture as a completely different industry or entertainment world. They accept that other conventions apply in this industry, that relationships between record companies and artists are not the same and that music is approached or assessed differently by majors. Clearly, they classify themselves as different from the major industry.



Picture 1: A typical bedroom studio. Picture taken by Robin den Drijver. Reproduced with permission.

Distribution, promotion and business models

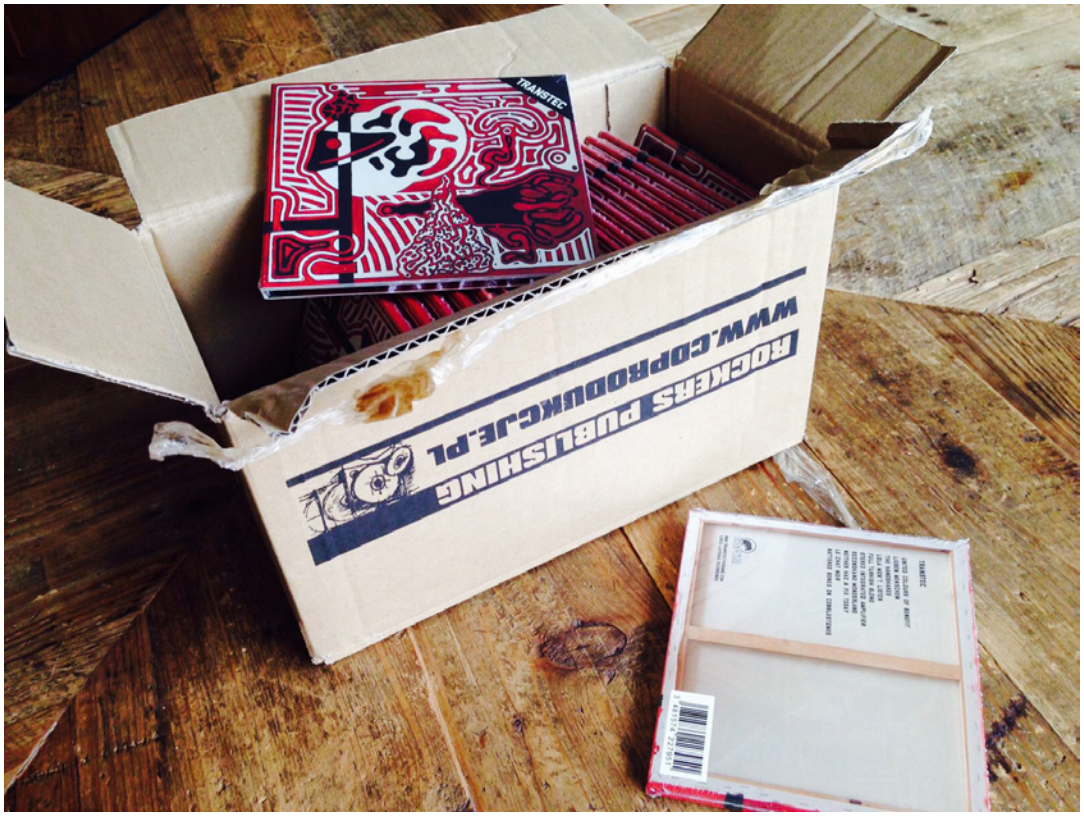
Dutch micro-independents are usually actively involved in the distribution and promotion of their releases, in which they often also invest financially. Most see promotion as a very important part of the launch of a release, because they feel that the music should be heard by as many as possible. Also artwork and design of the album is often part of the label's job. It is common to initially seek a break even. That means that the label first needs to recoup the investments. Potential profits can be equally divided between label and band, the so-called 50/50 deals (Strachan 2003). Despite the fact that a number of Dutch micro-independents have outsourced distribution to specialized companies, most of them prefer self-established independent channels for distribution. However, at least one company also had a distribution deal with major Sony, a practice quite common among independents in general (WIN 2016)

Remarkably, most micro-independents do not financially support the recording of an album. Thus, they distinguish themselves from the majors, who on the contrary invest substantially in the professional recording process. DIY artists usually provide a readymade album, which they themselves have recorded at home in what Hesmondhalgh (1997) calls bedroom studios, separate from the intervention of the professional (major) studio sphere (see pictures 1 and 2). According to Hesmondhalgh (1998a) this is an important characteristic of DIY musicians. Artistic freedom and the possibility for bands or artists to work autonomously, is considered important by all micro-independents. Koen of Subroutine Records comments:

> Anyway, it's important to realize that the musician's freedom has been a core principle to us from the first moment we've established. Our bands possess complete creative freedom and the rights of their music will stay theirs forever. In our opinion, this also applies to other cases like the album design. (Koen, Subroutine Records)

Similar to the British labels, these companies almost never work with official contracts. Agreements between the label and bands are often only verbally discussed and more than one release per artist is never expected. The increasingly common 360 degree deals among majors, whereby income from performances and merchandising are shared with the label (Carvalho 2008), in order to reap maximum returns from a release, are unthinkable among micro-independents. The bands arrange their own performances and obviously, their revenues remain their own. Similarly, Dutch micro-independent labels are not concerned with income from band merchandising.

The internet is widely used as a promotional tool for spreading free (or paid) mp3's, streams or albums. Compatible to Pfahl's (2001) findings, the primary objectives are enhancing awareness for certain bands or musics. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram are widely used. In addition, the free distribution of music files is used to reach out to larger audiences within niche markets. Most Dutch micro-independents also work with internet services like You-Tube, SoundCloud, Spotify and iTunes, in order to generate additional revenue, but as yet returns are minimal. Inevitably, as such services are owned by global media conglomerates, these worldwide distribution networks also tie the micro-independents to the wider mainstream music industry.



Picture 2: A box of DIY CD's, manufactured in Poland, by Dutch band Transtec on Laterax Records. This CD was issued in an edition of 500. Picture taken by Robin den Drijver. Reproduced with permission.

Local and international networks and collectivism

The interviews demonstrate that the record companies engage in partnerships with both domestic and foreign labels in various ways. These network relationships often have the purpose to distribute each other's releases. In this way micro-independents support each other in distribution and sales. Such alternative distribution structures were also visible among post-punk and indie genres investigated in the 1990s by Hesmondhalgh (1997, 1999).

In general Dutch micro-independents are embedded in local as well as international DIY networks. Characteristic of these organizations is that they assume cooperation with other small companies without aiming at commercial or financial gains. Maarten of the Knife Slits Water label explains:

> Together with other small European record labels, we participate in some kind of network. With these labels we exchange a lot of releases, like a trade market. It's like: 'I send you ten of our records and you send me ten of yours'. That's why we have this small shop and a mail order of all these European labels, but also some American. We just support each other in the distribution of our releases. After some time, you get quite a few contacts in Sweden or Germany. It's really like a network, a little scene. (Maarten, Knife Slits Water)

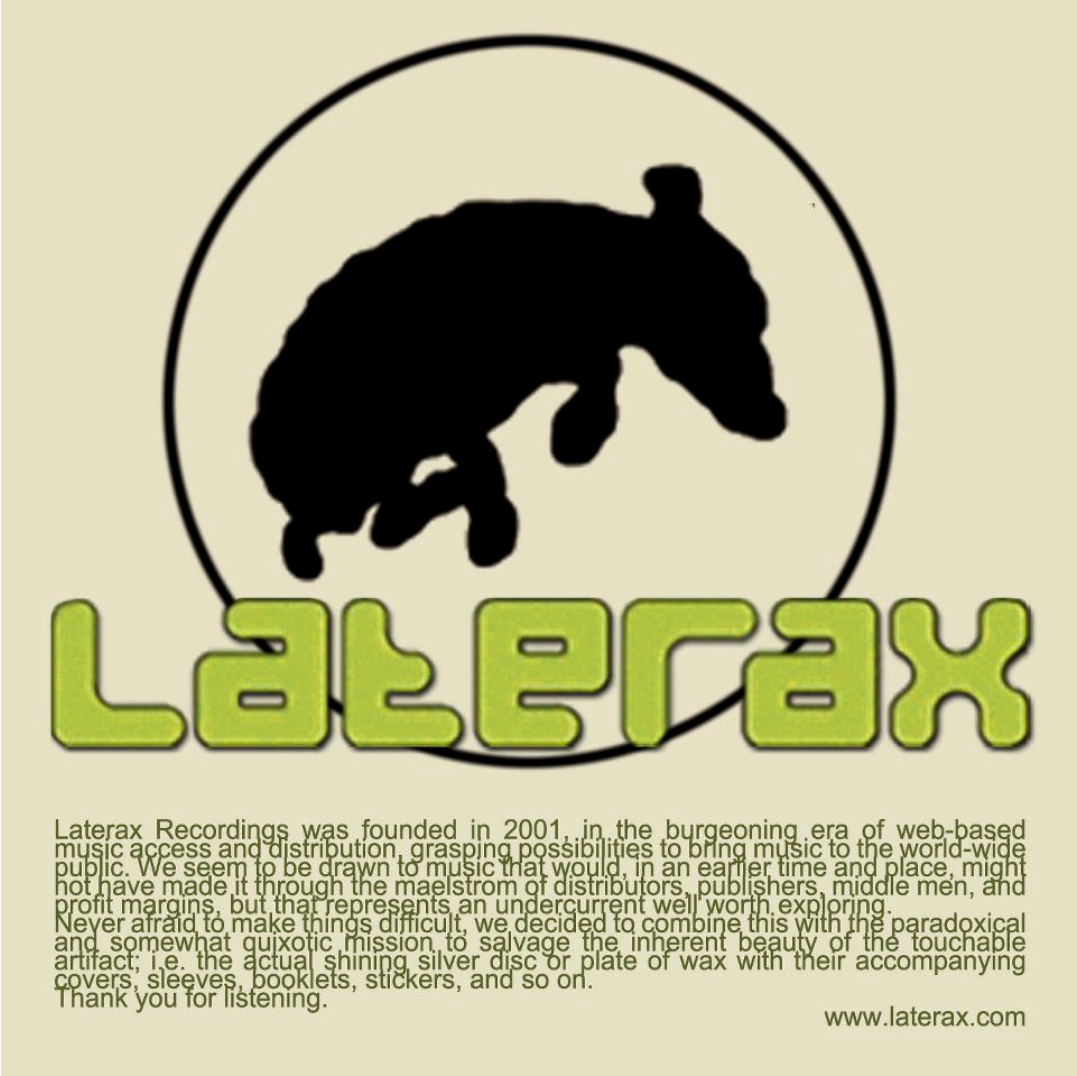
There are also forms of cooperation between micro-independents and local and independent record stores. In addition, staff members maintain close contacts with fanzines, distributors, bloggers and journalists. Other network connections were contacts with music venues, programmers and recording studios. Similar networks were also found among the independent

scenes studied by Kruse (2010), Hesmondhalgh (1997) and Crossley (2009). Characteristic of such network relationships is that they are based on mutual support, trust, advice and exchange. Collectivism then, may be considered an important ideological characteristic of micro-independents, both in the UK and USA as well as in the Netherlands (Strachan 2007). This collectivism places the importance of music above commercial or business interests. Nevertheless, as is the case with internet distribution, such networks are in many ways connected to the proliferated music industry as a whole. Venues, recording studios, festivals, agents, promotion companies and bookers, together with the micro-independents, need to connect to the wider music industry, in order for them to reach audiences and to get their music heard. In that way, micro- independents are as much tied to, and part of the mainstream music industry from which they often vehemently distantiate themselves.

Political motives

Dutch micro-independents show much less oppositional political dynamics than their British counterparts (Savage, 1991, Hesmondhalgh, 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). They do not aim to challenge the majors (Savage, 1991). Nor do they want to democratize or transform the music market (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). One reason for this is that they understand that they have little financial possibilities and thus can only release music on a very small scale. Subsequently, competition with the majors is regarded as unrealistic or even naive. In addition, label staff realizes that the music they release, only appeals to a small niche audience. Lasse of the Rotterdam Betontoon label argues: "It's not my mission to overthrow the majors. That would be absurd to think, because with our type of music you simply can't overthrow any major record company. Fans of Lady Gaga are definitely not going to listen to the music of Alien Drones" (Lasse, Betontoon). In addition, Dutch micro-independents release their productions often only on vinyl and cassettes, thus limiting themselves to a small niche market from the start. After all, such sound carriers only appeal to a very small and specific group of music enthusiasts.

Dutch micro-independents then, consciously operate on small-scale restricted niche markets, similar to Bourdieu's field of restricted cultural production (1996). In a way, this may be considered political as well. As Hibbett explains: "As an elite sect within a larger field, indie rock requires its own codes, i.e. cultural capital, and therefore can be used to generate and sustain myths of social or intellectual superiority" (2005: 57). Similarly, limited financial resources and an appeal to small audiences are regarded as typical for artists, organizations and participants in such autonomous art fields. Characteristic of cultural producers within autonomous art fields is that often they are rich in cultural capital, but lack economic capital (Bourdieu 1996).



Picture 3. Statement from Laterax Recordings, illustrating how internet distribution provides opportunities for reaching niche markets, that majors would ignore. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Laterax Recordings.

Moral motives

Although there are no overt oppositional political motives among Dutch micro-independents, most labels do aim to enhance the diversity in the supply of music, since this music would otherwise not be heard. Like their British and American colleagues, they show moral motives. The drive or even obligation to promote "other music", can be interpreted as a motive to counter the power dominance of the majors. In addition, such a motive can also be considered as symbolic resistance (Strachan 2007). Despite their small-scale production orientation, they do aim to influence the taste dominance of the mainstream music industry. It is therefore a combination of aesthetic and moral motives, aimed against the dominance of the majors in the public sphere (Ibid.). Jorg of the Laterax label makes the following comment:

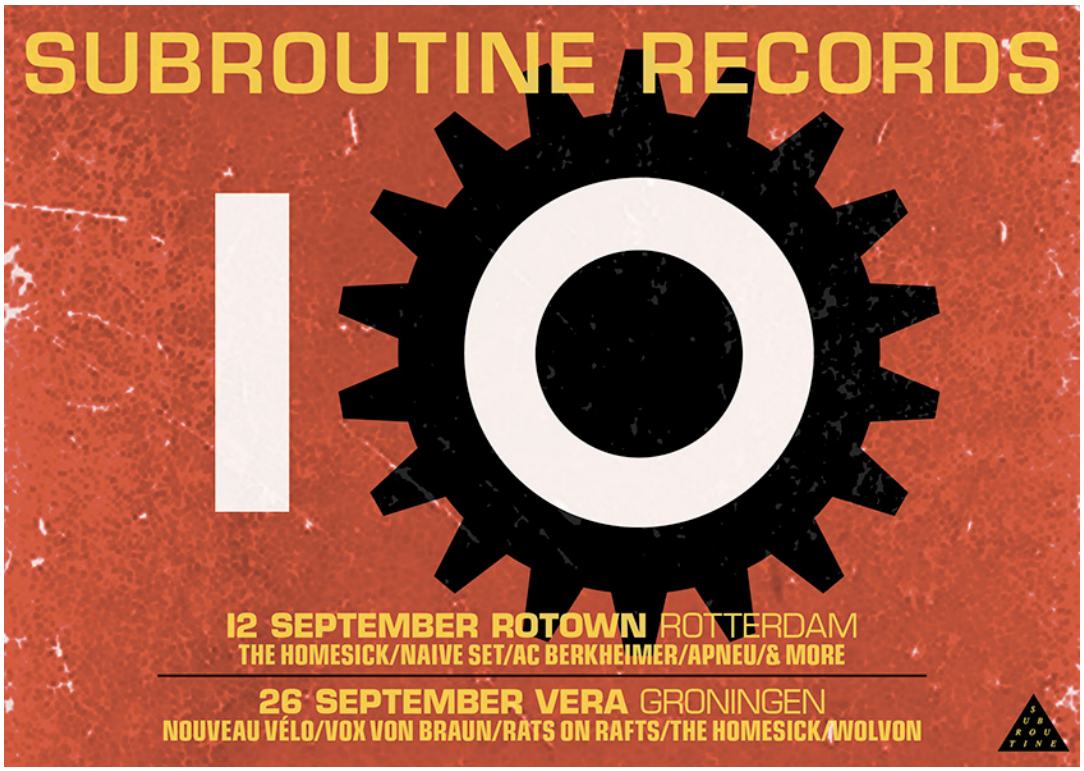
> Someone working for a major label simply just wants to find a band, or let's just say, make a band. And from then on everything is under control and ready to make as much money as possible. But we think the other way around. Our releases are meant to be very cool, authentic music. From that moment we try our best to find an audience, because we think our music should be heard by everyone. Our goal is to release music

that's really worth listening and where you should listen to with full attention, so that listening to that music becomes an experience itself. (Jorg, Laterax Recordings, see picture 3).

The examined micro-independents find it important to support the bands and artists as much as possible, in order to allow these musicians to grow artistically. Dutch label staff gives their bands the time and space to focus on artistic or creative development. Dutch micro-independents regularly organize label-related events, offering their bands opportunity to perform (see picture 4). These may be considered as local promotional fora, as pointed out by Hesmondhalgh (1998a).

Taste preferences, autonomy and symbolic rewards

The examined record companies only release music if the staff fully support the band's or artist's work. They explain they have to be fully dedicated, in order to promote a band, otherwise the collaboration has no chance of success. Staff will only invest time and effort in music that is very close to their personal preferences. In short, these micro-independents only release music they fully support, which refers to the autonomous nature of these record labels and the autonomous behaviour of their staff or owners. We can also observe a Bourdieusian link between restricted autonomous small-scale music production and a disinterest in the economic value of that cultural product (Bourdieu 1996). Almost all interviewees indicated that making money was never a consideration for starting their micro-independent.

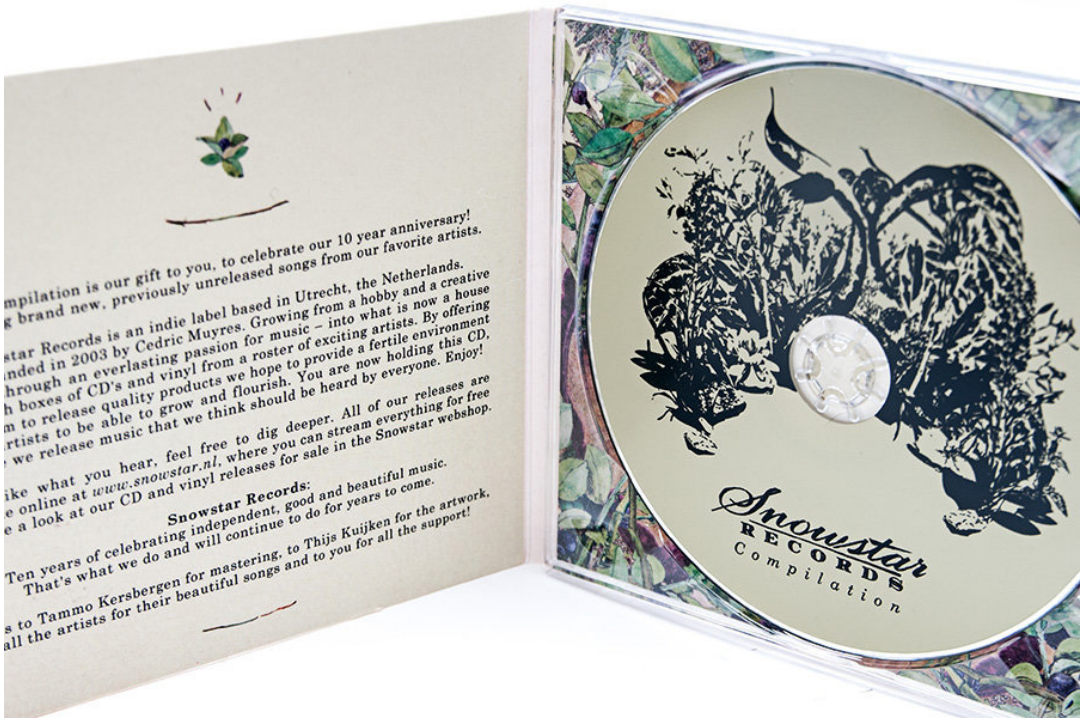


Picture 4: A label related event by Subroutine records. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Subroutine Records.

As virtually all music is readily available through free downloads, the market for recorded music is generally perceived as very insecure (De Meyer and Trappeniers 2007). Owners and

staff of micro-independents acknowledge that releasing indie-genres will not generate big returns. For this reason, personal fulfillment is mostly regarded as success (see picture 5). On the other hand, they don't want to lose money doing this, as they are also very committed to their company's continued existence. Also, Dutch micro-independents get symbolic rewards by way of recognition for their artists or releases (Crane 1976, Bourdieu 1996). For them it is particularly rewarding when their artists or bands get positive reviews and that the public responds positively to these artists, as Cedric of the Snowstar label explains:

> To me it's more important that reviewers consider the Lost Bear record as an amazing album, than that they write that I released an amazing record. I'd rather stay behind the scenes, but I do feel very related to a band that is positively reviewed because we've released that particular record together. So when a band receives good reviews I'm just as happy as the band is, for the simple reason that Snowstar was responsible for releasing that record. (Cedric, Snowstar Records)



Picture 5: Snowstar Records compilation CD, a promotional tool, illustrating motives of personal passion and broadening the diversity of music. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Snowstar Records.

Conclusion and discussion

Dutch DIY micro-independents have many common characteristics, which makes them clearly stand out from the major record companies that operate on the mainstream market. The research shows that micro-independents primarily release music in order contribute to broadening the provision of contemporary music. Their releases can be specified as indie-genres, or non-mainstream music styles. Releasing precisely these indie genres may be conceived as a way of classifying, of distinguishing themselves from the major record companies or the mainstream music market (DiMaggio 1987). Commercial or financial success is not considered important

by micro-independents, however most of our respondents do want to break even in order to keep their companies going.

With their releases, most micro-independents have the aesthetic objective to enrich the everyday supply of music. This may be interpreted as a moral motive to oppose the dominance of the majors, a form of symbolic resistance (Strachan 2007). The drive to influence the music industry's mainstream taste is to be conceived as an interplay of aesthetic and moral motives. In that way, the examined Dutch micro-independents share many properties with similar small DIY labels in the United Kingdom and the United States. There are many similarities between the business operations, the structure and working practice of these organizations. Furthermore, the motives to start up or take part in a record label are in many ways similar. The examined independents are all embedded in both local and international network structures, often genre-specific. Also, they value forms of collectivism and profit sharing, which again distinguishes them from the majors.

However, the interviews showed that for the Dutch, political motives are less important than for their counterparts in the United Kingdom. Overt political oppositional motives were virtually not found. Dutch DIY-independents do not have a mission to combat the dominant hegemonic system of the major music industry or to democratize the music market. A key difference is that British DIY-independents more often explicitly aim to compete with, or even overthrow the majors. The size and global dominance of the British cultural industries, in contrast to the Dutch, can play a part in this. Also Hesmondhalgh (1999) described the strong aesthetic and political fervor of British indies in the punk and post-punk era, which has its roots in the – perhaps more strongly politicized - British society. This may have to do with the fact that the United Kingdom has profounder political and social divisions than the Netherlands (Russell 2010). In the British situation there may be a stronger urge to compete against dominant cultural, political and economic elites. Both Strachan (2007) as Hesmondhalgh (1997) register the mission among staff of British micro-independents to compete with the major recording industry. Dissatisfied with the capitalist and corrupt mainstream industry, they have the determination to transform and democratize the music market. A salient difference with our research results is that such goals are completely absent among the Dutch DIY-independents. On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent the political motivations are still present today among staff of British micro-independents. Both Hesmondhalgh's (1997, 1999) and Strachan's (2003, 2007) research findings are somewhat dated, making it difficult to predict whether such political motivations have decreased or maybe increased.

In terms of market shares, independents slowly but gradually gain ground in the market for recorded music, even up to 38% according to the Worldwide Independent Network (Statista 2016, WIN 2016). In the contemporary music marketplace they are well positioned to capitalize on their lean organizations, their network structures and their digital as well as non-digital distribution networks. Such an observation suggests direct competition between majors and independents. Micro-independents, however, appear to operate not so much on that shared marketplace, but on a parallel market. This parallel market logic is underscored by both the usage of distinctive non-mainstream genre classifications as well as their denial of the economy (Bourdieu 1996) as displayed by the respondents in our research. Their primary motivation is the love of music and their contribution to the diversity of taste. Rewards are mainly symbolic, voiced in terms of pride and recognition. Nevertheless, as Hesmondhalgh (2006) rightly points out we cannot fully explain alternative independent music production as a

Bourdieusian subfield of restricted small-scale production. As we have shown in this contribution, micro independents are inextricably bound to the field of mass cultural production. Only due to the overall growth of musical supply, technological innovations, audiences and the access to music, have micro-independents been able to establish themselves as a viable subset of the recording industry.

Theoretically, we have contributed to a deeper understanding of practices of cultural production in a non-dominant music industry as the Netherlands. Previous research into independents is virtually all from the United Kingdom or the United States. Because these studies are done from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, there is little comparison with DIY cultures in other countries. Subsequently, the establishment of micro-independents in other countries may well be grounded in different motives. Despite the fact that there seem to be many similarities between Dutch and British micro-independents and their staff, we hope to have shown for instance the absence of political motives among Dutch micro-independents. Moreover, we can expect the dominance of Anglo-Saxon music in the global music market to influence the position of local DIY-micro-independents in most countries. Future research may shed light on those uncharted territories. Furthermore, we may expect that differences in different countries might vary consistent with the size and influence of creative or cultural industries, its relation to politics and cultural policy, local art worlds as well as linguistic, socio-economic and cultural-economic factors.

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Date received: 2016-05-31
Date accepted: 2016-10-25