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Are the Independent Labels
Really Independent?

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Are the Independent Labels Really Independent ?

Per Darmer

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Preface

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following Danish independent labels for making this paper possible: Crunchy Frog, Exlibris, Mega Records, and Record Music Denmark.

The four independent labels allowed me to interview them, and during those interviews they willingly shared with me their views on the Danish music industry, in general and their own role in it, in particular.

It should, however, be pointed out that the participating independent labels are not to blame for the conclusions and interpretations put forward in this paper. They are solely my responsibility, as it is I who interpreted the data from the independent labels.

Introduction

The idea for this paper emerged from a genuine interest in the music industry, in general, and the independent labels role in it, in particular. A previous article on the Danish music industry (Darmer & Freytag, 1998) focused on, how the independent labels were able to survive in a business dominated by the multinational corporations (the major labels). This former article briefly touched upon competition within the Danish music industry, which will be further developed in this paper.

The paper is focused on independent labels in Denmark. This focus, of course, has to do with convenience and prior knowledge. The author is Danish, has a certain knowledge about and the access to gather data from Danish independent labels. The accessibility to data is crucial, as the paper is empirically based. Empirical data is regarded as the most appropriate way to acquire knowledge on the subjects of this paper.

The paper being empirical based means that the conclusions and interpretations are grounded in data. However this does not imply that the paper acquires the method of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), as their criteria for validating grounded theory are considered far too restrictive and relying too much on the positivistic criteria for evaluation to fit the phenomenological approach of this paper. The paper agrees with grounded theory that the researcher needs to be creative and theoretically sensitive, when interpreting the data, but the

criteria for validating grounded theory research make the limits for creativity and theoretical sensitivity to tight.

The independent labels can provide the knowledge of the competition and cooperation in the music industry and its symbols, as they live it. The independent labels might even be considered the victims of the competition in the music industry. The British Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 stated that the major five labels in 1993 had a market share of 73 per cent, leaving only 27 per cent of the market to the 600 independent labels in the UK (p. 8), which made the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 conclude that "a complex monopoly situation in favour of the five major record company groups." (p. 15) exist in the British music industry. This, of course, is the UK, and the paper looks at the Danish music industry, but it is a fact that the five major labels are multinational and dominate the music industry worldwide. The dominance of the majors might differ in Denmark compared to the UK. Figures from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 show that the majors have app. 91 per cent of the Danish market, leaving only 9 per cent to the Danish independent labels (p. 87). Though, it should be stated that the Danish figures are estimated and not quite as reliable as those from the UK. The estimated figures for comparison show that the British independent labels have a greater market share than any other European country (the other estimated European countries are (besides Denmark): Germany, France and the Netherlands).

The paper looks at the Danish music industry from the point of view of the independent labels for another reason as well, which is that the paper besides focusing at competition and cooperation in the music industry, it also explores, what an independent label actually is, and in order to find that out it seems obvious to seek out the primary source - the independent labels themselves.

The idea to explore, what an independent label is, is inspired by Weick, 1979, who encourages always to question the obvious, and Argyris, 1990 who warns never to take the granted for granted, which in the case of the independent labels means not to take for granted that independent labels actually is independent, but instead to question it by discussing what an independent label is.

The purpose of the paper is twofold:

- To find out what an independent label is, and whether the independent labels really are independent.
- To find out how the independent labels view competition and cooperation in the Danish music industry, and if - and to what extent - the competition might be symbolic.

The purpose of the paper shows that it is important to get an understanding of the independent labels view on these matters, but that is not sufficient, it has to be transformed into a better understanding of the music industry, and this is done, when the realities of the independent labels are interpreted, discussed, and put into perspective.

To accomplish the purpose of the paper, the paper has been structured the following way. After this introduction, the paper will briefly describe the Danish music industry. It is dominated by the five major labels, besides the five majors a number of independent labels exist. The independent labels are different in many respects, and are, therefore, split into three categories.

The third part of the paper explains the constructivistic paradigm (Guba, 1990) and the empirical phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) of the paper, and how that is applied to the interviews and the data-analysis.

The next three parts are the main part of the paper, reporting the results of the data-analysis. Part four reports what the independent labels regard as an independent label. Part five concentrates on the independent labels view on competition and cooperation in the music business, including competition and cooperation among the independent labels as well as between the independent and the major labels. Part six goes beyond the views of the independent labels, meaning that their views will be interpreted, discussed and put into perspective related to the themes of this paper: dependency and competition / cooperation. The sixth part of the paper concludes by an interpretation stating that:

The independent labels are not independent.

The cooperation and the division of labour in the Danish music industry makes the competition partly - but not purely - symbolic.

The Danish Music Industry

The Danish music industry is dominated by the multinationals - also known as the five majors or the five sisters (see figure 1). The five sisters had a little sister, but the smallest member of the multinational family lost its virginity in 1992, when Virgin was bought by EMI (one of the five majors).

"One of the biggest events in the music industry history took place on 6 March 1992, with the sale of Virgin Records to its (British) compatriot company EMI. The sale price of BP510 plus BP50 million assumption of Virgin's debts (= a total of USdollars 1 billion) to Thorn-EMI, marked the end of the independents as a force in the music business, according to some." (Breen, 1995, p. 487).

Breen, 1995 notes that according to some Virgin was an independent label, and when this influential independent label sold its independency to EMI, it ended "the era of the independent entrepreneur as a key in the music industry." (Breen, 1995, p. 487). The fact that some see Virgin as 'the last of the independent', and others regard Virgin as the little sister of

the multinational family, makes it even more relevant to discuss and come to terms with, what an independent label is (one of the purposes of this paper).

Virgin is not the only label, where the line between major and independent label is blurred. Decca was seen the same way in the prewar years. "Jack Kapp retrieved full ownership of Decca by buying the remaining 25 percent owned by Warner Brothers, making his company the only true independent of all the prewar major firms." (Sanjek & Sanjek, 1991, p. 82). Here the ambiguity becomes obvious. Decca being the only independent major seems a contradiction in terms, but it does not have to be so, it is a matter of, how the term independent label is perceived and understood. In the case of Decca independent means that it is economically independent of the multinational corporations, which Decca became, as Warner Brothers was bought out, Decca then remained a major, as Decca then was big enough to play in the big league of the music industry.

Decca moved in the opposite direction of most other independent labels. Decca grew and became an independent label, at the same time as Decca was a major label. The independent labels usually follow one of the following paths:

- The independent label becomes successful and grows, and it might end up as a major label. Some labels have started out as independent, others emerged from an existing multinational corporation, expanding into the music industry.
- The independent label gets success and grows, but remains an independent label, as it never grows enough (or wants) to become a major label.
- The independent label remains a small independent label, that manages to survive and establish itself in the music industry.
- The independent label does not make it in the music industry, and it quickly disappears again. A lot of independent labels make a production or two, and then they are out of business again. Many of these independent labels are formed by artists, producing their own music, because none of the existing labels want to. When it turns out the production of their own music does not sell and make them rich and famous, they leave the business.
- The independent label is bought by one of the major labels. This might be very small independent labels, but usually it is independent labels with some success that the majors acquire.

In the Danish music industry an independent label yet has to become a major label, and it is more than doubtful that it will ever happen. Some independent labels have had success and have grown, although they have not grown enough to become major labels, these labels are called The National Danish Labels in figure 1. The national labels have often been bought up by the major labels, during the 90s several national labels experienced that (e.g. Medley, Genlyd, Pladekompagniet, Replay). Today there are about a handful national labels in Denmark.

A certain amount of Danish independent labels have managed to survive and established themselves as independent labels in the Danish music industry. The success of these Established Independent Labels (figure 1) varies, but none of them seem able to really prosper from the production of records, in fact they make their living from something else than the label. Some of the established independent labels specialises in a certain type of music (find their own niche, e.g. Cloudland and Crunchy Frog), but it is not a general feature of the established independent labels, as some of them do not (e.g. AGM and Record Music Denmark). Established independent labels have been purchased by the majors as well in the 90s (e.g. Start Records and Instant Records). Right now there exists app. 15 established independent labels in Denmark.

The Non-established Independent labels in figure 1 are the independent labels that comes and goes in the business, they make a production or two and then dissappaer without ever really establishing themselves in the business. It is impossible to estimate the amount of non-established independent labels with any certainty, as it fluctates almost from day to day, as these label go in and out of business. But it can be stated that there are a lot of these small labels.

The paper is focused on the independent labels, but not all the three categories are represented in the sample. Only independent labels with four or more productions are included in the data sample. The reason for excluding the non-established independent labels is that these labels have to prove themselves as independent labels, before they can be considered as such, and that means making more than one or two productions, so that they become part of the music industry, instead of just making their own music.

Darmer & Freytag, 1997 distinguish between the national Danish labels and the established independent labels foremost geographically. The national Danish labels has the whole country as its turf. The established independent labels are locally based in the big cities, where a club and underground stage exists. This distinction can be critized as well as supplemented by an empirical explanation of the differences between the two categories. The geographic distinction does not quite hold. The national Danish labels are not necessary limited to Denmark, but has the whole of Scandinavia as their local market. The established independent labels does not confine themselves to the local stage, they might sign artists from all over the country, and even from abroad on rare occassions. The national Danish labels are established independent labels too, the most obvious difference between a national Danish label and an established independent label is that a national Danish label actually is a business, while an established independent label is not a business. The national Danish labels are more business-like and are able to make profits from their business. This is not the case for the established independent labels, they do not make any profits worth mentioning, and they have to earn their living from something else than the business of the label. The established independent labels seem more idealistic than business-oriented. This does not imply that the established independent labels do not strive to be successful and breake their artists, they do. It does, however, indicate that they rarely do that.

The distinction between the national Danish labels and the established independent labels goes deeper than explained above, as it also reflects their perception of what an independent label is, which will be further examined in part four of the paper.

Figure 1. The Structure of the Danish Music Industry.

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<p>1. The Multinational Labels</p> <p>(Sony, PolyGram, Warner, BGM, and EMI)</p>
<p>2. The National Danish Labels</p> <p>(e.g. Mega Records, Iceberg Records)</p>
<p>3. The established Independent Labels</p> <p>(e.g. Cloudland, AGM, Kick Music, Crunchy Frog, Record Music Demark)</p>
<p>4. The Non-established Independent Labels</p>

Source: Up-dated version of Darmer & Freytag, 1998.

Method

The scientific paradigm of this paper corresponds with, what Guba, 1990 calls the constructivistic paradigm. Constructivism is one of four paradigms, the other three are: The positivistic paradigm, the neo-positivistic paradigm, and the critical theory paradigm (Guba, 1990). The paper will not dwell at these paradigms, but very briefly present the paradigm which is applied. The constructivistic paradigm is opposing the positivistic paradigm. Positivism is looking for the eternal truth, constructivism denies that such the eternal truth exist. Instead constructivists are looking for a better understanding of, whatever it is that they are reseaching. Constructivism primarily sees human reality as the central aspect, when a better understanding has to be accomplished. As human reality varies from individual to individual and for the same individual over time, the ontology of constructivism becomes relativistic.

The epistemology of constructivism is subjective, as the better understanding is created through an insight in the realities of the informants. This means that interpretation is both a central and an on-going process in constructivistic research. The constructivists find that values, feelings, and science are inseperable (again directly opposing positivism, where science is detached from values, feelings, and emotions, as they disturb the quest for the definite truth). The methodology of constructivism becomes complex, as the constructivists interpret the reality in all its splendor and complexity in order to get a better understanding of this reality, and why individuals act, the way they do.

Constructivism holds different scientific approaches, the most well-known being hermeneutic and phenomenology. The differences between these to constructivistic approaches are not to be explored further here. It is considered sufficient to declare that a phenomenological path is followed in this paper, as "any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for phenomenological reflection." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). The paper reflects on two phenomenons: Independent labels and what that mean, and what competition / cooperation means in the music business. Both these phenomenons are researched from the independent labels point of view (the reality of the independent labels).

Researching the music industry from the independent labels point of view is certainly not a familar way to research the music industry (except for Darmer & Freytag, 1997 it has not yet been applied). The research on the music industry has almost exclusively been done from overall point of view, where the researcher stands outside the industry and describes how it functions using different kind of approaches or perspectives. The wide variety of approaches includes: The institutional approach of Breen, 1995, the stuctural approach of Hirsch, 1970, the organizing perspective applied by Darmer, 1994, the historical description made by Sanjek & Sanjek, 1991, the descriptive perspective of Shuker, 1994, Frith's 1979 sociological approach, the youth culture perspective that Thornton, 1996 represents, Björkegren, 1992 sees the music industry as a way of exploiting artistic knowledge, while Eliot, 1993 becomes the economic detective that 'follows the money' of the music industry.

The phenomenological approach applied here is, what Moustakas, 1994 terms: the empirical phenomenological approach. An appropriate choice for an empirically based paper.

Moustakas, 1994 mentions two descriptive levels of the empirical phenomenological approach. "Level I, the original data is comprised of naive descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. On level II, the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's account of the story." (p. 13).

The research done on the independent labels in this paper applies to Moustakas', 1994 two levels of empirical phenomenological research. Level I is the interviews, where the researcher obtains an insight in the reality of the independent labels, which leads to a description of the reality of the independent labels concerning the themes of the paper: Independency and competition / cooperation (this is done in part four and five of this paper). Calling the descriptions naive, as Moustakas, 1994 does, appears naive to me, as the descriptions most of the time are very complex, filled with insight and knowledge, an insight and knowledge that the researcher needs to acquire and capture to describe the reality of the participants.

In the case of the independent labels the researcher found the informants descriptions to be native not naive, as the independent labels through the interviews passed on their reality to the researcher, which is, what the researcher describes to the best of his ability at level I. Such a description will always be to the best ability of the researcher, as the researcher is not native, and never truly can become so during an interview. The researcher, therefore, only is able to describe the native-view of those interviewed, as the researcher perceives it. On the other hand, the fact that the researcher ground the native-view description in the data and tries to the best of his/her ability to reflect the reality of the independent labels, should make the native-view description as authentic as it can possible get.

The native-views presented by the independent labels during the interviews were full of insight and very informative, and provided the researcher with the understanding necessary to analyse and interpret the two themes researched. This was done at level II (part six of the paper), where the researcher based on the reality of the independent labels analyses, interpretes, and discusses the two themes of the paper. Level II in this paper is not concerned about describing structures, rather level II is an interpretation and discussion of the themes: Independency and competition / cooperation. The researcher finds that revealing structures in the empirical data is not the main effort on level II. The main effort is for the researcher to put forward his cognitive interpretation of these themes based on the reality of the independent labels. Meaning that the researcher is not given an account of underlying structures, but presenting his reality of the two themes researched, and the reality of the researcher, of course, is a result of his analysis, reflection, and interpretation of the reality of the independent labels.

The phenomenological researcher are to put away prejudgement regarding the phenomenon investigated, which implies that the researchers should be "free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies - to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

Being free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge must be considered an ideal impossible to fulfil in the real world. In this particular case the researcher had a preknowledge of both the music industry and the reality of the independent labels, as the researcher has former written about the organizing of the music industry (Darmer, 1994) and the independent labels (Darmer & Freytag, 1997). However, this preunderstanding should not make the music industry an off-limit subject for the researcher, especially not as the purpose of phenomenological research is a better understanding of the phenomenons researched. The understading might very well be extended, when the researcher emershe himself into the subject investigated.

The less fortunate consequence of accepting that the researcher can not have any preknowledge of the phenomenon investigated is that no one can ever do research on the same subject more than just once, and the researcher can do it only this one time, if he/she is 'clean' (have no preknowledge of the subject). Of course, this could be taking the argument to far, but sometimes that proves the point. The phenomenological researcher can not be completely stripped of preknowledge and experience with the phenomenon investigated, and need not be so. What is required from the phenomenological researcher, on the other hand, is that he/she gains an understanding of the reality of the participants. And as long as that is the true aim of the phenomenological researcher, he/she will not be directed by her/his own preknowledge or experience, but will be open and receptive to the reality of the participants.

The researcher of this paper has prior to the data-collection for this paper interviewed two Danish independent (Cloudland and AGM), these interviews concerned other themes than this investigation, but still it provided the researcher with a preknowledge of the view of the independent labels. These interviews have not been used as data in this investigation, as the reality of the two independent labels have developed (changed), since those interviews was conducted in 1996. In phenomenological research the data always becomes 'snap-shots' of the reality of the participants, as this reality is continuously changing. However this is only problematic, if the researcher strives for a definite truth, which is never the case in phenomenological research, where the researcher aim is to get a better understanding of the reality. A reality which is subjective and constantly changing.

The interviews from the prior investigation has not been re-used in this one, but they are part of this investigation in the sense that they are a part of the researcher's preknowledge of the Danish music industry and the role of the independent labels. The researcher, of course, has put aside this preknowledge to the extent of being open and perceptive enough to understand the reality of the independent labels interviewed in this investigation, which was not as hard as it might sound. But it is unrealistic to imagine that the researcher can totally put away his/her preknowledge and understanding of the phenomenon in an investigation, and as already mentioned, it would be inappropriate as well, as the aim of phenomenological research is a better understanding. A better understanding can be reached when the existing understanding is expanded. This is done when further data on the music industry and the independent labels is collected from another approach.

The researcher tried to interview Cloudland and AGM again during this investigation, but unfortunately it did not work out that way. Cloudland has been 'on hold' since 1996, meaning that this independent label has not made any records, since they were interviewed during the prior investigation (any connection between the two events are purely incidental). It was not possible to schedule an interview with AGM for various reasons.

On the other hand four interviews with independent labels were conducted as the empirical foundation for this investigation. The selection of independent labels covers the whole range of established independent labels (the two relevant categories in figure 1). Meaning that one of the independent labels is an economically successful national label. Another is an untraditional label, which is hard to categorise in figure 1 (and therefore it has not been done). The third is a one-man label, and the fourth is a label that started out by making its own music and have expanded from there to becoming an established independent label (all four of them are presented in more detail later on).

The interviews were unstructured and in-depth, in order for the researcher to capture and understand the reality of the independent labels. The duration of the interviews varied from app. one hour to two and a half hours. The interview-guide consisted of three themes:

1. Presentation of the independent labels (the story of the label)
2. Independency (what is an independent label?)
3. Competition and /or cooperation

The interviewer left it almost entirely to the interviewee to report his reality. The interviewer only interrupted to clarify, when in doubt what was said, and/or how it was to be understood. Apart from questions to clarify the reality of the interviewee, the interviewer only posed question to make sure that the three themes of the interview-guide was properly explored, and to encourage the interviewee to further develop interesting subjects. It is important that the interviewee is free to tell what is on his mind, as it is his reality which is under investigation.

The analysis of the data was done in the following way. The researcher listened to the taped interviews, and from them the reality of each of the four interviewed independent labels were found (level I of the empirical phenomenological approach). The reality of the independent labels concerning the two themes of the paper is reported in part four and five. Based on the reality of the independent labels, the researcher discusses and put forward his interpretation of the two themes of the paper (level II of the empirical phenomenological approach). The reality of the researcher concerning the two themes is reported in part six of the paper.

The independent labels and their view on what it means.

How the data was collected and analysed has been explained, now it is time to look at the results of the data-analysis at level I (the reality of the independent labels). In this part of the paper the four independent labels and their views on, what an independent label means, is presented. Meaning that the two first themes in the interview-guide are reported here. The third theme of the interview-guide - competition and/or cooperation in the Danish music industry - is reported in the next part of the paper.

This part of the paper is very logical structured, in the sense that each of the four independent labels is briefly presented together with its views on what an independent label is.

Mega Records

Mega Records was founded in 1983. At that time the founders of Mega Records were working as management for the Danish pop-band Laid Back, and when the opportunity to form a record company came, they decided to take it.

The first records that Mega released were imported to Scandinavia on license, and they became hits all over Europe (e.g. Modern Talking), which meant that Mega Records actually were making money right from the start, as they through the license received a percentage of the sales.

Later Mega Records began to produce records with Scandinavian bands, as Mega Records due to their license regards Scandinavia as their primary market. Mega has agreements with some of the majors to distribute and market their international artists outside of Scandinavia.

In the beginning of the 90s Mega Records produced the Swedish band Ace of Base, which actually is one of the best selling artists of the 90s. The two albums that Mega Records has produced with Ace of Base has sold more than 26 million copies worldwide. It is artists like Ace of Base that sells beyond the Scandinavian market, which makes it possible for Mega Records to make money, so that the label can survive and prosper, and so far Mega Records certainly has done that.

Mega Records signed Ace of Base from a demo-tape, and that is how the label operates. Mega gets app. 50 demo-tapes a week and tries to figure out which of these artists has the capacity to make hit records and become international stars. Mega Records by now has grown so big that the label needs a continuing stream of hits to survive, one hit now again is no longer sufficient to make it. Mega Records have 20 Employees in Denmark, and four employees at an office in Hamburg (Germany).

Mega Records has not specialised in any particular kind of music, even though pop-dance music with an international sound surely is the core competence of the label. Mega produces

records with different kinds of music. Some of the productions Mega make does not cover the production costs, but Mega makes them anyway and finances them with part of the surplus from the pop-dance hits. Although Mega Records produce smaller cultural production, the label's mission is not to reform the music, the mission of the label is to make sure that music of superior quality is available to those who like pop, rock, and dance music.

Mega makes between 7 - 12 albums and between 40-50 singles a year. Right now Mega Records has signed about 20 artists.

Mega records sees an independent label as a label that is privately owned and has one or a group of countries as its market. In the case of Mega Records the group of countries is Scandinavia, and the label is privately owned. The majors, on the other hand, have offices all over the world and are conglomerates with complex ownership relations.

Mega Records viewed the Independent labels as having their own attitude, and being good at finding niches and new tendencies in the music. The independent labels are seen as much more flexible than the major labels.

Mega Records see itself as an independent label. Even though Mega is successful and have had artists break and become international top-selling stars, Mega has no intentions of becoming a major label, as Mega is a creative label that is more focused on the music and the artists than on marketing (the domain of the majors). Mega has too many music-freaks to become as business-like as the majors. In Mega's view they work with the artists and not against them (as some of the majors do).

Exlibris

Exlibris is a 25 year old label, and until about four years ago Exlibris almost entirely made records with Danish artists on their native language. The artists played folk-oriented music that still had a relatively broad appeal on the Danish market (e.g. Erik Grip, Poul Dissing and Pia Raug). The last four years Exlibris has made records with both Danish and English lyrics, and the productions and the time is shared approx. fifty-fifty between the music on the two languages.

Exlibris is part of Gyldendal (a well-known and well-established Danish publisher). Exlibris has autonomy within Gyldendal, meaning that Exlibris is not subsidized by Gyldendal, the label is in charge of their own economy. The board of Exlibris is identical with the board of Gyldendal, and the board, of course, has the final word if it should come to that, but so far it has not.

Exlibris is an economically healthy business, which has to do with Exlibris being around for so long that the label has build-up an extensive backcatalogue, going all the way back to the 70s, where the label was founded.

Exlibris is not specialised in a certain type of music, the label has a very broad profile that goes from the folk-oriented Danish music, it used to concentrate on and still produces, to the alternative rock music that has been produced the last four years. Besides that Exlibris makes what they label "ordered work". This is not seen as something negative. It is a way of combining literature (Gyldendal) and music (Exlibris), in the sense that Exlibris finds a Danish artist to make a record based on some Danish literature (put music to poems). The last of these productions were a success. Exlibris made the Danish rock-artist Nicolaj Nørhlund record some of the poems of the late poet Michael Strunge (one of the 'wild young' poets of the early 80s).

Exlibris made three albums in 1996, seven albums in 1997, and expect to make at least seven albums in 1998. Exlibris does not sign new artists for the time being, as the label intends to grow with the four bands, it has already signed. Denmark is the primary market for Exlibris, but they are beginning to become more international with some of the artists that sings on English, some of them have even sold more abroad than in Denmark. This also have to do with these bands playing alternative rock music, which means that they can only get an audience of 5.000 - 8.000 in Denmark, but abroad the possibilities are much more lucrative, as the markets are far bigger than the small Danish market. If the artists make it big internationally, Exlibris eventually will have to make a deal with one of the majors to distribute and promote them worldwide. Exlibris is both aware of this and ready to do so.

Exlibris have the filosofy that an artist should only be signed to Exlibris for as long as they want to. The artists signed by Exlibris want to stay at the label. Exlibris, therefore, wants to grow with these artists. Exlibris has never signed an artist based on a demo-tape. All their artists are bands they have been out listening to live.

Exlibris being part of a publishing corporation (Gyldendal) indicates that Exlibris might not be an independent label, but in the reality of Exlibris the label is an independent one. Exlibris works like and has the sound of an independent label (at least with the alternative rock records). Exlibris regards itself as much more flexible and in touch with the underground scene than the majors. Exlibris is an economically healthy label that operates with budgets far below those of the major labels. Exlibris like most independent labels is idealists, in the sense that the label only produces the music that the two employees of Exlibris like.

Exlibris' understanding of an independent label is a label that is neither owned by a multinational corporation nor has some board with different interests that decides what the label has to do.

Exlibris, as mentioned above, regards itself as an independent label, which they also are according to their own definition of the term. Exlibris at the same time is aware that some might not see them as an independent label, as they are part of Gyldendal. This duality makes in the labels' own words Exlibris a "bastard label" that feels independent and acts as such. On the other hand, Exlibris still depends on Gyldendal and the board of the publishing company, although the label is yet to experience that.

Record Music Denmark

Record Music Denmark was founded in 1993, when the founder, owner, and sole employee left the independent label Intermusic and started on his own. Record Music Denmark has made 5 albums with four different bands (one with each band and a compilation-album). The four bands are still with Record Music Denmark, and the label has not signed any new bands since 1996. Record Music did not stop signing bands deliberately, on the contrary the label would like to sign more bands, but the bands that the label wanted to sign has all been signed by the majors.

Record Music Denmark is not specialised in any type of music. The label sign bands playing different kinds of music, what counts when Record Music signs a band is that the band has a following (an audience). When that is the case, the label does not have to start to build up the band from nothing (a certain amount of sale is ensured). The label, of course, have to extent the following, so that the records can sell and become profitable. The albums of Record Music Denmark have all sold the thousand copies, which make them balance economically. On the other hand, if the label is to become profitable, every record have to sell between 2.500 and 3.000 copies.

Record Music Denmark does not make money worth taking about by producing records, in order for the owner of the label to support himself, he has other forms of income: management, booking, and consultant-work .

Record Music Denmark has the policy that the label can only sell, what it believes in. Meaning that the label only produces artists that the owner of the label believes in and like.

The definition of an independent label used to be that it was privately owned, not owned by a multinational corporation, but that does not hold anymore. The reality of Record Music Denmark is that an independent label is a way of thinking and doing things. The way of thinking that characterise an independent label is not that it has to be good business but a genuine interest and love for the music. This does not mean that independent labels do not want to become good businesses, it means that becoming a good business is not the main thing. The main thing is that you can do, what you want to do.

The independent labels are in touch with the underground rock scene, leaving the majors to care about the overall trends in music.

Crunchy Frog

Crunchy Frog was founded in 1994, when the four guys that formed the label made their first record. The first two records Crunchy Frog made was with the same band, and the members of that band are identical with the four founders of the label. In that way Crunchy Frog was started by a band to produce their own music (not an unfamiliar situation in the music industry). Since the start in 1994 Crunchy Frog has made nine records (number ten and eleven

will be out in the spring of 1998). Crunchy Frog works with five bands (including themselves). The term work with is used quite deliberately, as Crunchy Frog signs bands for only one record at the time. The owners of Crunchy Frog are musicians themselves and they do not want to tie anyone down, if a band 'breaks', it should not continue on a small label unable to make them big, as they do not have the economic resources required.

Crunchy Frog started out producing themselves and went on to produce their friends, which they had been playing, and who made music, Crunchy Frog liked. The latest development is that Crunchy Frog now makes the first album with a band that they did not know themselves. Crunchy Frog learned about this band through a mutual friend. Crunchy Frog has specialised in alternative rock music, which is why they do not produce more than a thousand copies of each record. If they are sold, Crunchy Frog makes some money, as the budgets they work with are very small. The new band they produce is more mainstream, than the bands Crunchy Frog usually produce, meaning that the new band has a greater potential to sell records.

Crunchy Frog makes a fifty-fifty deal with the bands they produce, which means that the label and the band split the expenses of the production fifty-fifty, and share the income the same way. The fifty-fifty deal means that the bands get higher royalties with Crunchy Frog than with any other label. Copyrights are the only thing that is not included in the fifty-fifty deal, they go to Crunchy Frog. Copyrights do not provide Crunchy Frog with a huge amount of money. The money earned from copyrights makes it possible to start the next production. Crunchy Frog survives economically, but that is all the label does. All the money (or rather the little money) the label makes is used for future productions. Crunchy Frog does not pay wages to themselves (they work for free), and the label has not yet an office, they would like to have one, when they can afford it (but for the moment they prefer to produce another record to getting an office).

Crunchy Frog regards the labels as an ultimate independent label, in the sense that they can do what they want, and in the view of Crunchy Frog the real independent labels are characterised by a certain way of thinking - as idealists that do it because they love the music not to make money (they would not mind making money, but they keep on doing it, whether they make money or not). Crunchy Frog are idealists producing the music they like. Crunchy Frog points out that their economical weakness is their strength regarding independency. The weak economy makes the label more free, as the label is not in the business to make money. Therefore, the label has the freedom not to be commercial and not to follow the trends of the markets and so forth. Crunchy Frog is more flexible and more in touch with the underground rock scene than the major labels.

The four independent labels both differ and agree in their view on what an independent label is. Here some of the most obvious similarities and differences will be put forward. The interpretation and discussion of this will follow in part 6 of this paper, as the paper moves from level I to level II in the empirical phenomenological approach. The boundaries between level I and II are a lot easier to draw from a theoretical point of view, than it is to uphold in practice. Theoretically level I only describes the reality of the independent labels, so the comparison made here, should perhaps be at level II. On the other hand, the comparison is a way of

concluding on the descriptions of the realities of the independent labels, and level II will concentrate on the researchers' interpretation and discussion. The problem is that it is a thin line between making comparisons and interpreting, or rather it is impossible to do one without the other. The researcher, though, finds it appropriate to make the comparison here, later follows the discussion and the researcher own interpretation regarding the independency of the independent labels. Afterall, this is phenomenological research with a subjective epistemology.

All four independent labels view themselves as an independent label, and their perception of what an independent label is, becomes a reflection of their own reality. This is no surprise as the independent labels tell about and reflect on their own reality during the interviews, but at the same time the subject of independent label is something that is part of their reality, as all of them were pretty much aware and proud to be independent labels.

The intersubjectivity between the four independent labels was that an independent label is in opposition to the major labels. The independent labels are more flexible than the majors, more in touch with the music scene than the majors. The independent have a different attitude and way of thinking than the majors, the independent work with their artists, where the majors often work against them, and the independent labels are privately owned, or at least economically independent of the major labels. The independent labels have a genuine love for the music, they produce. They are entrepreneurs, and autonomy to make their own decisions are crucial to them.

The independent labels very much create their own reality as a counter-picture of the major labels. This should come as no surprise, as most independent labels have been established more or less as a protest against the established music industry, and as a reflection of the entrepreneurial spirit possessed by the independent labels, which makes it impossible for them not to do what they are doing. Put another way: The independent labels do what they do, because they love it and can not stop doing it. Again countering the majors, which are only in it for the money.

The differences in perception between the four independent labels seem very much to reflect what kind of an independent label, they are. The difference between the national labels and the established independent labels were, as mentioned, empirically based not just a matter of geography. Mega defines an independent label in more operational terms than the established independent labels. Mega focuses on private ownership and a well-defined market (Scandinavia in the case of Mega). Record Music Denmark and Crunchy Frog focuses on the 'independent' way of thinking and doing things, which is obviously less operational. Exlibris is "the-in-between" (with the mind of an established independent label, and an economy of a national label) due to the labels perception of itself as more in accordance with Record Music Denmark and Crunchy Frog than with Mega Records. You could say that the reality of the independent labels and their perception of an independent label reflects their economical situation. Record Music Denmark and Crunchy Frog with their focusing on the way of thinking as the important thing for a independent label, makes it almost impossible to both make money and remain independent. Exlibris is caught in-between again, as Exlibris actually

makes money, and sees themselves as independent. In that way Exlibris becomes a contradiction in terms, which is also reflected in the labels' perception of itself as a "bastard-label". Mega, on the other hand, makes money and intent go on doing so, as Mega sees that as a mean to stay independent. Mega in that way goes contrary to the contradiction in terms of money and independency, because Mega finds that if the label does not make money, it will eventually lose its independency, and Mega certainly does not want that to happen.

It should be pointed out that the differences between the independent labels, mentioned above are differences, within the intersubjectivity of the four independent labels. Meaning that the internal differences in perception between the independent labels are nothing compared to the 'different worlds' of the independent labels and the majors.

Competition / cooperation in the Danish Music Industry

The second theme of the paper - competition / cooperation - will now be described in accordance with the reality of the four independent labels. It will not be done the same strict way, independency was described. Meaning that competition and cooperation will be described more generally than in the previous part, where each labels individual reality was described. The more general picture presented in this part is the intersubjectivity of the independent labels' realities, where the intersubjectivity is not apparent, the differences between the independent labels will be spelled out.

The independent labels are preoccupied with the market. The problem for the independent labels is that they do not have the economic resources to influence and change the market. They have to work real hard to make their products known and sold on the market. The majors, on the other hand, have the economical power to influence the market and sell their artists. The majors can market their products at a quite higher level than the independent labels. In that way the independent labels see the markets as very competitive, and the competition is in favor of the majors, as they have the resources to buy themselves competitive advantages. It is especially the major labels marketing possibilities that are superior to those of the independent labels. The majors can afford TV-aids, aids in newspapers and magazines, displays at the retailers, etc. While the independent labels due to their lack of economical resources can not match the majors on the marketing side of the business. Therefore, the independent labels have to be creative and work really hard to get their productions to the publics' attention. Still despite their hard work, the independent labels lack way behind the majors, when it comes to make the public aware of their new productions and sell them.

It should be pointed out that the majors despite their economical resources can not control the market. The market is seen as turbulent and almost unpredictable. In that way the independent

and the majors are both seen as victims of a turbulent market. It is to the advantage of the majors that they now and again can create hits through their marketing effort, but the number of hits compared to the total number of artists and cd's are very limited, indeed. Meaning that the probability of failure is always present and high. The reality of the independent labels is that music industry is a risky business. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 shares their view by stating that "The record industry is a high-risk business. The great majority of recordings do not sell enough copies to recoup their initial investment." (p. 4).

The majors can afford losses, as long as they get some hits as well, and they do. The independent can not afford to miss, if they really market an artists, because in that case they will not have the resources to try again. It could said that the major labels all have some star artists, which sell and covers the money spendt on those records never making it. The majors have to find future stars all the time, in order to continue to have the star artists to cover the costs of the endless number of records that never make it. The independent labels do not have the star artists that cover the costs of those that did not make it, as most of the artists of the independent labels do not make it big. This of course, is more the reality of Record Music Denmark and Crunchy Frog than of Mega Records, as Mega Records has star artists (Ace of Base) and needs hit records on a regular basis to survive (and prosper). The other three labels do not have the star artists, and operates with very limited budgets compared to the budgets with which star artists are familiar. Exlibris is included among the established independent labels, as Exlibris' reality closer matches those of Record Music Denmark and Chunchy Frog than that of Mega Records. The reason for this is properly also related to the fact that so far Exlibris has not had any international stars. Some of Exlibris' artists sell well in Denmark, but Denmark is a very small market compared to the international market. On the other hand, Exlibris so far has been focused on the Danish market, it is only recently that Exlibris have applied a more international strategy that might pay off.

The majors are major on marketing. The independent labels have the competitive advantages of being more in touch with the underground music scene and being more flexible than the major labels. Thereby, the independent labels can better forecast the new trends, and it is easier for them to adapt to them (and the market changes in general) due to their flexibility. The independent labels are small entrepreneurial enterprises that are able to make quick decisions and change in no-time. The problem with the competitive advantages is that some of the independent labels (especially Crunchy Frog) can not really use them, as the label is specialised in nicheproduction (alternative rock), and such nicheproduction (except for on very rare occassions) never becomes trendy and mainstream. Therefore, the advantages never will result in competitive advantages, because the label will not follow the trends anyway, but keep to their niche as that is the music they love and want to produce. Exlibris has obvious similarities with Crunchy Frog, but find that their rock bands have a international potential for becoming successful, and Exlibris are working to realise that potential. Record Music Denmark is not specialised in any type of music, and, therefore, competes more openly with the majors. Record Music Denmark has not signed any new bands since 1996, because the artists the label wanted to sign, signed with the major labels instead. Record Music Denmark has actually felt an competitive disadvantage, as the majors with their greater economical strenght has gone in on the nicheproductions that used to belong to the independent labels.

Mega Records has pop-dance music with an international sound as their core competence, and in that way they are up against the majors. Mega has produced star artists like Ace of Base, and the label has to be one step ahead of the majors in spotting trends and so forth, if Mega still wants to be able to make a string of pop-hits.

The independent labels all mentioned that they get a lot of press, when they have new productions, and they get airplay on the public radio as well. All new productions are reviewed in the press, and if good press sold records, they would be rich. Unfortunately for the independent labels the good reviews do not sell their records, but the good reviews and the airplay on the public radio (not so much on local radio, where hit music is played to please and attract the sponsors) helps make the public aware of these productions. The independent labels use posters, live performances, and rely on mouth-to-mouth of the fans to make the public aware of their new productions as well.

The independent labels are well aware, what their competitive advantages compared to the majors are, but Mega Records seems the only label, which is able to use these competitive advantages. Mega, on the other hand, is the independent label with both most relations and the most ambiguous ones to the major labels. Mega competes with the major labels on the Skandinavian market, which Mega consider their market. In the rest of the world Mega cooperates with the major labels, as the majors distribute and market Mega's productions worldwide. Mega has license agreements with the majors, acknowledging that Mega is too small to market their artists on a worldwide scale. The alliance with the majors is a necessity, as Mega does not have the resources to market the artists worldwide, but the majors do. The alliance have the advantage for Mega that the potential of the artist is fulfilled. The advantage of the majors is that they get a 'piece of the action'. Mega is the only of the four independent labels that works this close with the major labels. Exlibris has a distribution agreement with one of the majors on the Danish market, and that is all the cooperation Exlibris has with the majors. Crunchy Frog and Record Music Denmark do not cooperate with the major labels. These three independent labels work with other independent label in an international network of independent labels to get their productions distributed and sold abroad. The networks of independent labels make it possible to distribute and sell the independent productions in numbers so small that the established distributors and retailers would not find them relevant.

Networks are not only an entirely international phenomenon, it is of great importance in the Danish music industry as well. Denmark is a small country, where everybody in the business knows one another. Networks and maintaining them are important to the independent labels. The independent labels cooperate, making the competition amongst them very limited, indeed. Some have different niches in the music industry, and even among those independent labels that specialise in the same type of music, cooperation blocks out competition. The independent labels that produce the same kind of music have the same spirit (e.g. Exlibris and Crunchy Frog). A network exists between the labels that produce alternative rock. Cloudland is (or at least was) at the center of this network, in the sense that the current employees in Exlibris were previously at Cloudland. The director of AGM worked with Cloudland, before he started on his own. Cloudland introduced Crunchy Frog to the business, when Crunchy

Frog was to make their first production. Record Music Denmark is connected to the "Cloudland network".

The "Cloudland network" shows a characteristic feature of the independent networks, it is the same bunch of people that circles in different independent labels. In that way the independent labels may come and go, but the networks stay, because the people remains the same to a very high degree. Although the name of the label, they represent may change now and again, when the former label goes out of business, are bought by the majors, or whatever the reason may be.

Mega Records does not participate in the "Cloudland-network", but still cooperates with the other independent labels on different occasions. Mega cooperates with the majors as well, in order to get their artists out worldwide. As mentioned, Mega sees the cooperation with the majors as necessary, if their artists are to realise their potential. Exlibris and Crunchy Frog are both willing to cooperate with the majors, if need be, so it is not a totally unfamiliar thought for the independent to cooperate with the majors, as long as the independent and their artists profit from it.

Mega and Exlibris are members of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), which represent the world-wide record industry. In 1994 IFPI had 1.055 members in 72 countries (The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994, p. 64). IFPI does lobby-work to further the interest of the record companies, IFPI also supports small independent labels to go to messes, where the industry displays its products. IFPI is primarily seen as the major labels' organization. IFPI supports the independent labels, even though only a small fraction of them are members of IFPI. The reason for this might be that the independent labels are considered a part (and a necessary part) of the music industry, so in order to keep the music industry in business, the more well-established part of the business supports its 'grassroots'.

"One of IFPI's responsibilities is to promote an effective world-wide regime of copyright protection for the recording industry." (The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994, p. 64). The independent labels perceive copyrights as a central activity of their business, for the small labels (Crunchy Frog and Record Music Denmark) copyrights are essential to the economic survival of the label, and they are an integrated part of being a label for all labels. The independent labels are well aware that the importance of copyright may become even more essential in the future, when music probably will be on the internet and bought on a 'per listen' basis. Copyrights is not really a matter of competition within the industry. It is established as part of signing a band. The copyrights can be bought and sold between labels, but that is part of a trade like with any other commodity. It is an established practice within the industry that the labels have the copyrights for the productions, they made, and part of IFPI's job is to secure these copyrights for the labels. The whole industry is united to hold on to the copyrights. "Copyright lies at the heart of the music industry... The protection of copyright is therefore crucial both to the creative side of the music industry and to the business of the record companies." (The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994, p. 9).

The independent labels are cooperating with the artists, while the majors are telling the artists what to do. The independent labels works with the artists, the majors work against them. In

this way it could be said that the independent labels cooperate with the artists, the majors compete with them.

This view to a certain degree is a symbol of cooperation, as the independent labels and the artists still have to agree on the productions and so forth. It seems that the bigger independent label (Mega Records) has far more competition with the artists than the smaller ones, which might be due to the fact that Mega needs its artists to hit on a regular basis. Something which is not expected from the artists of the smaller independent labels, although they, of course, would not mind that they did. In other terms the degree of cooperation and competition is in accordance with the business orientation of the label. The more business oriented the label is the more competitive is the relation between label and artist. This is a generalisation, as a lot of artists are themselves just as eager to hit as the label is to make them hit. Mega Records is more business-oriented in the sense that the label needs hits on a regular basis to survive and stay independent. Exlibris need their business to get a surplus, or at least balance, to make sure that they can keep their autonomy and run the label without interference from the board of Gyldendal. Record Music Denmark and Crunchy Frog do not need hits to survive, and they do not really expect that either (but they can not help dreaming about it). All The two labels need is a steady sale of their records, and they will survive and prosper, and the sales they need, are nothing compared to the majors.

Competition and cooperation between the labels and the artists could be seen as a continuum. At the one end the small independent labels are found, they have the greatest cooperation with the artists, and in the end leave it to the artists to decide. At the other end the majors are found, they decide for the artists, if need be. In between these two is the bigger independent labels, where the label and the artists work out some kind of agreement regarding the competition there might be between the artist and the label about the production, image, styling, and all that stuff. It could be said that the competition between artists and label always exists, the question is how and to what extent, the competition manifest itself at the single production, and how it is resolved

Now like in the previous part of the paper, the distinction, between describing the reality of the independent labels and discussing and interpreting it, becomes blurred. However this part and the previous has focused on describing the reality of the independent labels (level I). In the next and last part of the paper the stage is set for discussing and interpreting the realities of the independent labels, meaning that the reality of the researcher will now be described. The reality of the researcher, on the other hand, is very much 'formed' by the realities of the independent labels, as they are the empirical basis, the researcher has to ground his reality in and at the same time put into perspective.

Discussion and interpretation

The discussion and interpretation of this paper's two themes will start with competition / cooperation in the music industry, and end discussing what an independent label is. The discussion and interpretation is deliberately made into a provocative journey, trying to find new or hidden aspects of how the two themes can be understood and perceived in the music industry. "Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The first part of the quote about refraining from judgement is not quite as relevant here as the second part. It is the different and provocative way of perceiving things, which lies at the heart of this part of the paper. Meaning that the music industry is perceived as cooperative, and the independent labels are perceived as being dependent, which goes counter to everyday perception of the music industry being competitive, and the independent labels actually matching their name.

Epoche is used here to apply to the purpose of this paper (and phenomenological research in general), which is to get a better understanding of the phenomenons researched, and very often a better understanding arises, when the ordinary way of perceiving phenomenons are challenged. It might very well be that some find this to be 'to far out', but if the seeds are planted in their minds that everything is no quite, what it seems to be, then these seeds in the future might grow out as a better understanding of the music industry.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 stated. "We have found that there is a strong competition both among record companies and retailers." (p. 37). The conclusions of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1994 is about the British music industry, and can, therefore, not be transformed to the Danish music industry. As pretty obvious differences exist between the Danish and the British music industry: There are far more independent labels in the UK than in Denmark, and they have a larger share of the market. The British music industry is far bigger than the Danish, and have a much larger share of internationally recognised artists, etc. This is irrelevant, though, as the paper has no intentions whatsoever to adopt the British conclusion to the Danish music industry, on the contrary, the paper argues that the Danish music industry is more cooperative than competitive. The argument is that competition is more symbolic than real. It should be pointed out at this point that the paper does not argue that competition does not exist in the Danish music industry, it does, and it can be fierce sometimes. The argument is that the competition is not quite as fierce, as most of us may think or are supposed to think.

The labels are not competing so much against one another as against the market. All the labels would like the market to buy more music, in general, and the music that the individual label produces, in particular. The labels all want to break their artists, but it is very hard to do so, as the market is turbulent and unpredictable. The labels more or less obviously cooperate to make as many artists break as possible, because the labels have a unified interest in making the market grow. If the market grows, everybody can get a bigger piece of the action. In that way the labels have a common enemy: The market (which at the same time is what keeps them alive). The competition in the music industry is concerned with, how to make the market buy the productions of the single label. The competition becomes symbolic, in the sense that the music industry already has a well-established division of labour between the labels. The

division of labour means that the independent labels make niche productions, and sell to other parts of the market than the majors. The majors have the mainstream productions, and the stars that really sells, and due to the marketing competence of the major labels, they will take over the artists that the independent labels breaks.

This underlines that the competition is symbolic, because no matter how you look at it, the majors control the industry and get their share of the profits. Everytime an artist breaks, the independent labels have to either sign the artist to the majors or cooperate with the majors to sell the artist worldwide. Perceived this way the majors are bound to win, and the independent labels are the part of the music business, which provide the majors with what they are not very good at themselves. The majors concentrate their work where the money is, and leave it to the independent labels to be in touch with the rock-scene and develop the new talent there, and when the talent is developed, the majors enter the stage and take over either the artist or the international marketing of the artist. No matter what the majors become involved and profit. The independent labels, on the other hand, are not reluctant to cooperate with the majors, since the majors have the economic and marketing power to realise the potential of the artist, which the independent labels lack. The division of labour between the majors and the independent labels benefits both parties, when the artist realises its potential and becomes an international star.

Frith, 1979 has called the evolution of the rock artist "The Rock". The Rock has four stages that the successful artist goes through. It should be pointed out that only the successful rock artists reaches stage three and four. Most rock artists never even make it into The Rock, and for those who do, most of them get no further than stage one or two.

The four stages of "The Rock"

Stage one: The rock artist plays in the small local clubs to build up an reputation.

Stage two: The rock artist gets regional reputation and builds a following. The following and the local 'fame' lead the artist to record at small independent labels.

Stage three: The rock artists gets nation wide recognition, leading to a major label contract with national exposure, hits, and touring.

Stage four: The last step to fame and stardom is international recognition with the record and tour contracts that this bring along.

Source: Based on Frith, 1979.

The Rock does not apply to all artist. The Rock can be criticized for being too simple related to the Danish independent labels. Mega Records demonstrates that the band can become an international success and stay at an independent label (Ace of Base). The modification is that the independent label (Mega Records) cooperates with the major labels, when their artists break and get international recognition. The majors do not take control over the artist, the control over the artist stays at the independent label, where the artist is signed. The majors only have the right to promote and sell the artist at the markets covered by the license agreement between the independent label and the majors.

The way Mega Records cooperates with the majors is one way of doing it. Most independent labels do not have the same resources (economic and otherwise) as Mega. Meaning that most of the small independent labels act in accordance with The Rock, and let the majors take over the artists that break. The small independent labels then negotiate some kind of agreement with the major label, giving the independent label some kind of economical 'compensation' for handing over the artist to the major label.

The competition in the Danish music industry in many respects are more symbolic than real. The symbolic competition covers a "web of meaning" (Geertz, 1973), where relations between the independent labels are much more a matter of cooperation than one of competition. There seem to be a network of independent labels, where everybody knows one another and help each other out (e.g. the "Cloudland-network"). Denmark being a small country where everybody in the business knows everybody (or at least almost everybody) else, also characterises the relations between the major labels and the independent labels, although the cooperation and networks here are not quite as close and widespread as among the independent labels themselves. The cooperation between the majors and the independent labels is business agreements (while among the independent labels themselves they are often friendship relations). Even though the cooperation between major and independent labels are more business-like, the cooperation is still there, being covered up by the independent labels perception of themselves as very different from (counter to) the majors, and therefore, competing with the majors in an uneven competition, due to the economic strength of the major labels. The competition between the independent labels and the majors, of course, are not only symbolic, sometimes the majors and the independent labels compete, and the independent labels certainly has to work hard to survive this competition. On the other hand, it is not all competition, the division of labour in the industry makes cooperation necessary and beneficial, when the independent labels break an artist and want to make that artist an international (or national) star.

The conclusion of the discussion and interpretation of competition in the Danish music industry is that Denmark is a small country, where everybody in the industry is familiar with one another, and the competition is more symbolic than real. Networks is essential in the music industry (as everybody knows each other), and the division of labour between the majors and the independent labels does that competition is not fierce except for certain areas - mostly the mainstream rock (the alternative rock is left to the independent labels). The division of labour leads to cooperation, also where mainstream rock is concerned, as the majors, due to their economical resources, marketing skills, and international distribution,

controls the market to such an extent that they eventually will get involved with all the successful artists one way or the other. The controversial conclusion of the paper on the theme of competition and cooperation is that the competition is symbolic and helps hide the complex monopoly of the major labels.

This was the conclusion on - or rather the interpretation of - competition / cooperation. Now focus will be turned to the discussion and interpretation, whether the independent labels actually are independent.

The established independent labels are economically independent of the major labels, but they are not economically independent, as they are not able to make a living from the label alone. The established independent labels can not live on idealism alone, they have to get bread on the table as well. In order to get that the established independent labels have to earn their living from other sources than the label (Crunchy Frog has ordinary jobs besides running the label, AGM and Record Music Denmark have booking and management, and Cloudland has distribution).

The national labels are successful enough to make a living from the label, but the national labels are not independent of the the major labels. The national labels depend upon the majors to get their successful artists sold worldwide. The national labels make a profit, but they still are economically dependent on the majors, because it is the majors that handle the major part of the lucrative business of the national labels. Mega Records are doing well, but still the label is depending upon some of its artists to break internationally, in order to continue to do well. In this quibbling way Mega Records depends upon the majors to keep its economical independency.

It was mentioned above (part 4) that the independent labels perceive independency in a way that makes the label itself independent, which means that what an independent label is, depends on the eyes of the beholder. If independency is a matter of being independent of the major labels, the established independent labels (including Exlibris, as Gyldendal is not a major label) are independent. However, the established independent labels remain independent only as long, as they are not successful, as soon as they get successful, they will have to cooperate with the major labels one way or the other. In other words: The established independent label will become (like) a national label and be dependent on the majors economically. If dependency is a matter of economic independency, in the sence that the label is a way of making a living, the national labels are independent, while the established independent labels are not, as they need other sources of income, than those provided by the label, to make a living. If independency is a matter of real economic independency, neither the national nor the established independent labels are independent. The national labels are economically dependent on the majors labels, and the established independent labels depends on other sources of income, than those provided by the label.

The discussion of independency concludes with the interpretation that the independent labels are not really independent, as none of them are able to survive on their own, but dependent on either other forms of income or the majors to survive and make it on their own. In that way the conclusion is based on the interpretation that 'real' independence is economical

independence. When these are the premises, none of the independent labels are independent, although they perceive themselves as such and act, as though they were. Actually it can be argued that Exlibris is the only truly economic independent label, but the fact that the label is part of Gyldendal, makes this argument somewhat odd. Although Exlibris is (or at least so far has been) an autonom profitcenter of Gyldendal.

The established independent labels are close to the traditional perception of an independent label and in a way keeps this tradition alive. The national labels are those that somehow managed to realise the dream of the independent labels (making it in the business) and in the process, they became more business-oriented and less independent in the traditional perception of the term.

The conclusion reflects the interpretation of independency, if the conclusions have been based on the perceptions of the independent labels themselves, they would all have been independent (see part 4). But the purpose of level II of the analysis is to interpret the realities of the participants and put them into perspective, which is what has been put forward here. In order to further the understanding of what an independent label is, the interpretation has epoched (an unfamiliar way of perceiving things).

It seems appropriate to end this paper with a quote from a rock song fitting the interpretation of the independency of the independent labels. Although the lyrics is not about independent labels (and are actually released on a major label).

I don't wanna be forgiven

I just wanna be free

I know I never will be forgiven

I know I never will be free

(from the song "Forgiven" by Echo & the Bunnymen)

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