



**International Conference
Paris
26-27 November 2015**

Culture and (in)dependence Issues of Independence in the Cultural Industries

CALL FOR PAPERS

Claims to independence have been taking on increasing importance in areas as diverse as the audiovisual sector, publishing, the cinema, music and journalism. This position, albeit with important nuances according to the domain, is generally considered as being opposed to the "dominant" or "mainstream" model represented by the various large groups, "majors", circuits, etc., and their modes of operation. The specific character of independent production, in terms of content (produced or disseminated), working methods or relations with producers and consumers, is seen as being threatened by a certain number of "deviations", with (for the most vulnerable) problems concerning market access, shrinking profit cycles, oversupply, diminishing cultural diversity, the homogenisation of content, etc.

The objective of this conference is to examine the role and significance of claims to independence through an analysis of their social uses in the cultural industries, taking into account their economic, political and artistic dimensions. Far from establishing an unequivocal, stable definition, the theme of independence constitutes an area of controversy in different sectors of culture and the media.

The concept of independence is highly valued by the cultural industries and the media, with regard to the cinema, publishing, labels, festivals, journalism etc. But the conference will seek to go beyond indigenous, normative oppositions between the (indisputably virtuous!) "indies" and the "majors". It will look at the idea of "independence" through the different ways in which it is mobilised. It is to be seen, first and foremost, as a social construct that is highly sensitive to institutional and commercial environments in each sector, and as an important index of conflict in social spaces. In parallel with this definition, there will be an examination of independence as a "label", notably in terms of commercial competition, access to subsidies and compliance with more or less explicit values.

The aim is to establish comparisons between empirical work deriving from disciplines belonging to different cultural, artistic and media sectors, and thus between practices and representations in universes governed by similar constraints. It will be a case of probing the boundaries of independence, and what the various protagonists have to say about it, along with their ways of displaying, describing and deploying it on a daily basis.

In sum, the project consists of examining the ways in which the idea of independence characterises and structures cultural sectors which have generally been studied separately, with the result that individualised logics have taken precedence over transversal analyses, both in sociology, cultural economics and the sciences of information and communication, in line with the prevailing, and comprehensible, logics of specialisation.

The intention of the conference is to open up an international perspective, in that the idea of "independence" varies across different institutional and legal frameworks, but also different traditions, and particularly in relation to the State.

Contributions to the general problematic should focus on one of the following four themes.

1. THE GENEALOGY AND QUANTIFICATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Papers dealing with this theme will discuss the genesis of "independence" either in the cultural industries generally or in particular sectors. The historicisation of the concept will provide a perspective on the novelty of the current situation, showing how, over time, the principle of opposition between "indie" and "mainstream" gradually gained currency.

This theme also involves the many possible definitions of independence in economic, legal and geographical terms, according to the situation of independent structures in cultural production and consumption, or their organisational forms. Interdisciplinary comparisons may bring to light convergences and/or divergences.

Contributions aiming to quantify independence may apply these definitions in a sectorial or correlated way. The presentation of the methodological choice of the criteria for the validation of independent structures, as opposed to the dominant actors, will thus provide an opportunity to test the different definitions of independence.

2. THE VALUES, CONTENT AND AUDIENCES ASSOCIATED WITH INDEPENDENCE

This theme involves the values mobilised by independent protagonists. Displays of commitment, vocation, "passion" and disinterestedness, and, in certain cases, a celebration of artistic marginality and insecurity are no doubt central to the exercise of independence. Are there "intrinsic" values that can be identified with this phenomenon? Is disinterestedness everywhere advocated, whatever the sector of activity, or are there significant variations? Which models are given prominence? What are the interrelations between the different economic, editorial and political definitions of independence?

The choice of independence is inseparable from claims to produce and distribute "non-standard" content which could not be conceived of elsewhere, but which contributes to the kind of diversity that is indispensable to an open, democratic society. The implications of independence must be grasped in terms of content and aesthetics. And special attention should be paid to the diversity of the terms used to describe "independent" actors and content, according to sector and market: alternative, indie, artisanal, underground, avant-garde, specialised, niche, sustainable, creative, etc.

Semantic considerations vary with the activity and the context, each term revealing, by an effect of contrast, an antonym specific to the sector in question. Attentiveness to vocabulary will facilitate the problematisation of indigenous oppositions and established boundaries. Consequently, the question arises as to whether there exists a "typical" aesthetic of independence, with forms and genres that are characteristic of particular areas, or transversal with regard to the cultural industries.

Work on reception and the effects of independent labels on the demand side of the equation is also important. How is "independence" viewed? What image of itself does it want to put across? Through what types of experience? What types of distinctive practice? How is it to be understood, or taken into account, by "cultural consumers"?

3. PRACTICES OF INDEPENDENCE

What does it actually mean to be an independent actor in the field of culture or the media? What constraints, and margins of manoeuvre, does this form of organisation entail? In practical terms, how are claims to independence put into practice? What alternative strategies may be developed?

Schematically, two strategies stand out: on the one hand, that of professionalisation, and on the other, that of size ("Stay small, stay free"). Expansion (assimilated to a betrayal of values and a loss of control) is rejected by many small producers. And this type of relation to the economy is akin to that espoused by artisans, with the ideal of "a job well done", limits of scale, and the fact of being "answerable to no one". In some cases, however, professionalisation is seen as a prerequisite to the perpetuation of an activity and the exercise of "genuine" independence, equidistant from the dominant actors and the State.

The permeability of the boundary between amateurism and professionalism in this domain has to be taken into account, and movement between them occurs quite frequently. A high level of technical professionalism can be compatible with organisational amateurism, e.g. an absence of remuneration, or the fact of holding down a regular job in parallel with an "independent" activity, just to pay the rent. In fact the need to break with amateur practices is becoming crucial at a time when they are gaining importance in the digital world, where, more than ever, cultural intermediaries must justify themselves.

It is also useful to examine the ways in which independent structures age, and to look at the persistence over time of their founding principles, in the light of the reconfigurations that are taking place in the cultural industries.

4. POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

This theme treats the political aspect of claims to independence, politics being seen, on the one hand, as a form of engagement, and, on the other, as a strategy of "finding one's place" in a given sector. Structures defined as "independent" often have a political dimension, with recurrent topics such as the idea of "working differently", the emphasis on relations with producers and the public, and the long-term commitments that contrast with the one-off commercial "coups" of the large groups or majors. Independents are often associated with a strategy of distinction between the artisanal and the industrial, "the big and the small"; which has concrete consequences for practices considered in the vocational register. The articulation between different types of organisation, modes of "presentation of self" and the assertion of independence on the political level is central.

The concept of independence is also linked to the different forms of post-war "cultural politics", which, to a certain degree, have consisted of supporting a sector "aside from", or "on the margins of", the market, e.g. in the name of a "cultural exception". In this respect it can be said that public policy has broadly defined the frameworks that make it possible for independents to exist. But at the same time, independents have created support structures and professional organisations that have given them greater leverage. To what extent is the concept of independence utilised as a "label" to establish oneself in a particular market? What type of rhetoric is targeted at bodies that carry out assessments or confer recognition? And how do the authorities or the support groups contribute to defining the contours of independence?

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals (≤ 2,500 characters) should be sent to the organising committee by 15 May 2015, at: colloque.independance2015@gmail.com

Proposals should set out a problematic, a field of enquiry and a heuristic. They should include:

- The author'(s)' name(s)
- The institution(s) to which they belong
- Their discipline(s)
- An email address
- The title of the paper
- The theme(s) to be treated
- A summary

Submissions may be either in French or in English.

SCHEDULE

- 15 May 2015: deadline for the reception of proposals
- 30 June 2015: selection of the proposals to feature in the conference, by two members of the scientific committee
- 20 October 2015: deadline for the reception of the texts (delivery time: 20 minutes), for transmission to the moderators

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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