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# **The role of joint dynamics in the evolution of alternative market categories. A sociohistorical approach to independent music**

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**Abstract:** This paper contributes to the understanding of market categorisation processes. More specifically, it analyses the evolution of the independent music category, characterised as a fuzzy category by its instability, and as an alternative category by its power relations with the dominant mainstream music category. Based on a sociohistorical approach, we show how external forces such as boundary reconfigurations on the one hand, and internal forces such as tension around category representations on the other, shape the definition and evolution of the independent music market category. Our findings show the joint action of these dynamics in

the emergence and evolution of alternative categories. They highlight the interest of simultaneously examining these multiple dynamics and their relationships in the study of market categories. Our paper also reveals the strategic and ideological issues associated with the alternative–mainstream dialectic, which constitutes a key factor in the structuring and evolution of many other industries.

**Keywords:** category dynamics; categorisation; alternative market category; independent music; sociohistorical approach

The great artist of tomorrow will go underground.<sup>1</sup>

Marcel Duchamp

## INTRODUCTION

There has been a significant increase in research on categories and categorisation in the humanities over the last twenty years (Vergne & Wry, 2014). Within this framework, the more specific study of market categories has seen growing interest in management and organisational sociology (see the special issue published in *Organization Studies*, 2020). The process of market categorisation refers to ‘the formation of categories that emerge from elements extraneous to an existing market [or] around a subset of elements within a preexisting category system’ (Durand & Khaire, 2017, p. 88), and which are informed by new systems of representations, new practices, and new products evaluation criteria (Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010). It involves a collective negotiation between various market actors around meanings, actions, and artefacts – and, in this sense, it is a social process (Durand et al., 2017). Market categories are thus an outcome of economic exchange structures that are subject to the interpretations of market actors who use them to evaluate and identify products and services (Navis & Glynn, 2010).

In a context of increasingly frequent and intense technological and societal change, the question of the emergence and evolution of these market categories is particularly acute. Among the various studies on categories, Delmestri et al. (2020, p. 910) recently highlighted the need to develop ‘a dynamic view of how categories emerge, change, dissolve, are combined or contested’. As Gollnhofer and Bhatnagar (2021, p. 247) explain, ‘category dynamics are internal and external forces that may work together or in opposition to induce or inhibit a change in the category’. While some prior work has adopted a dynamic reading of

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<sup>1</sup> From 'Where do we go from here?', a speech given at Philadelphia Museum College of Art, 20 March, 1961.

market categories, the way these internal and external forces act simultaneously on the categories still needs to be clarified.

Among the various market categories, some are particularly prone to such changes. These are *fuzzy categories*, with unstable and shifting boundaries that make them difficult to define (Vergne & Wry, 2014). Understanding such fuzzy categories is all the more important as they prefigure and imply new categorisation processes. It is these new categorisation processes that are the focus of this paper. We approach them from the study of alternative categories, namely, fuzzy categories whose boundary instability is characterised by a construction that is contrary to a dominant category (Blanchet, 2017; Dion & Tachet, 2020). Indeed, the members of these alternative market categories must regularly conduct identity work internally, while constructing external boundaries in contrast to a dominant category (Siltaoja et al., 2020).

Our paper thus aims to identify and better understand the mechanisms regarding the formation of and changes in alternative categories by exploring the joint action of internal and external dynamics. In other words, we seek to answer the following research question: *How do external and internal dynamics contribute to the evolution of alternative market categories?*

To address this question, we focus on the categorisation of the independent music market from the late 1970s to the present day. Independent music is an alternative category based on values, aesthetic taste and practices in opposition to mainstream commercial music (Fonarow, 2006). This artistic and sociocultural category is at the origin of a countercultural market (Choi & Burnes, 2022) whose evolution and transformation over time helps to shed light on the dynamics of alternative categories.

To account for such multiple changes, the sociohistorical approach adopted allows us, in the first part of our research, to identify four phases that structured the emergence and then the evolution of the independent category on the music market: (1) emergence, from 1977 to 1991; (2) mainstreamisation, from 1991 to 2001; (3) legitimisation, from 2001 to 2011; and (4) polarisation, from 2011 to the present. This sequential analysis offers a processual and

longitudinal reading (Musca, 2006) of the evolution of an alternative category and its relationship with a dominant category. In the second part of the findings, the analysis is completed by an examination of the different representations and interpretations (economic, aesthetic, and ideological) of independence within the music market. Finally, in synthesising the findings, we highlight and consider the joint action of internal and external dynamics on the evolution of the independent music category.

Our findings show that alternative market categories are shaped by both external dynamics, such as the reconfiguration of boundaries with the dominant category, and by the internal dynamics of reinterpretation of the category. They also reveal the strategic issues concerning the dialectical relationship between alternative and mainstream categories that structure many industries. These different aspects are discussed at the end of the paper.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review successively addresses three levels of interrelated theoretical questions: the issue of the definition of fuzzy categories, that of the alternative as a specific mode of categorisation of fuzzy categories and, finally, the question of the role of internal and external dynamics in the definition and evolution of alternative market categories.

### **Fuzzy categories**

The literature on market categorisation processes has often adopted a sequential approach, from understanding the phases of a category's emergence via a set of legitimisation and institutionalisation processes to its eventual demise (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Navis & Glynn, 2010; Schultz et al., 2014; Siltaoja et al., 2020). Durand and Khairé (2017) distinguish between the two processes of category emergence and category creation. According to these authors, the emergence of a category occurs from factors exogenous to a dominant categorical system, such as material and technological innovations, whereas the

creation process proceeds from the redefinition of cognitive boundaries within an existing category. In this sequential reading, Pedeliento et al. (2019) propose a model of the emergence and evolution of a category through the case of the renaissance of an alcoholic beverage, gin. It investigated the structural evolution of the gin category, identifying three successive phases: the emergence, settlement, and resettlement of the category. Like other research (e.g., Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016), the study offers a stable and homogeneous view of market categories, ignoring the fact that they are often subject to internal and external change, reinterpretation, and redefinition (Gollnhofer & Bhatnagar, 2021; Navis & Glynn, 2010).

As social constructs with more or less fuzzy boundaries (Rosa et al., 1999), market categories are the result of information classification, interpretation, and organisation activities designed to create a market representation (Blanchet, 2017; Negro et al., 2010). In this sense, they are ‘the symbolic and material attributes of products, firms and industries that are both shared among actors and that distinguish these entities from others’ (Durand & Thornton, 2018, p. 637). However, these classification criteria and attributes are frequently open to debate between members of the same category. This is what Vergne and Wry (2014) call fuzzy categories.

Fuzzy categories are subject to interpretive flexibility, and in this respect can be characterised as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989). The question of boundary transformation, boundary crossing, and disappearance is central to the study of these categories (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). For example, Rao et al. (2005) studied the erosion of boundaries between the rival categories of classical French cuisine and nouvelle cuisine from the 1970s onwards, based on the dynamics of appropriation and hybridisation between the two categories.

Changes in market category boundaries have implications for their organisation and their functioning. As Vergne and Wry (2014, p. 73) explain, ‘fuzzier boundaries result in more difficulties to assess category membership’ and consequently, more tension about the people, organisations, and objects that can be categorised. For instance, the recent entry of many

secular institutions into the Islamic banking market has created tension between insiders (e.g., banks owned by Islamic institutions) and outsiders (e.g., banks owned by Western institutions) (Paolella & Syakhroza, 2021; Syakhroza et al., 2019).

It is in this vein that we investigate the definition and boundaries of fuzzy categories, focusing more specifically on alternative categories whose instability is largely explained by their relationship with a dominant category.

### **The alternative as a mode of categorisation**

The present study attempts to further our understanding of the relationship between mainstream and alternative market categories (Campana et al., 2017). According to the latter authors, alternative economies represent an essential part of ‘cultures of resistance’ (Williams, 2005). Internally, the alternative is built around a set of shared values and meanings that construct a certain social reality (Batat et al., 2016). These shared meanings are also subject to change in the light of dominant market categories. Verhaal et al. (2015) speak of oppositional markets to describe the new market categories that emerge in ideological opposition to existing industries.

This is the case for independence, which is now a central category in the cultural and creative industries (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2014; Noël & Pinto, 2018). As an alternative category, independence has often been associated with the idea that it could contribute to the development of different and preferable ways ‘of organi[s]ing cultural production and consumption, and society itself’ (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2014, p. 95). Among the authors that have studied this category, Khaire (2017) investigated how, as a market intermediary, the Sundance Institute has been involved in the creation of the independent film market category in the US. Focusing more on consumption practices associated with independent culture, Arsel and Thompson (2011) showed how indie music consumers develop strategies to distance themselves from the archetypal figure of the hipster that embodies the



commodification of independent culture. By addressing ‘the question of independence as a professionally, culturally and politically relevant category of analysis, but also as a concrete economic practice’ (Noël & Pinto, 2018, p. 6), our paper extends the study of this alternative category by focusing on both the internal and the external dynamics involved in its emergence and evolution.

### **Internal and external dynamics of category change**

Several studies have looked at changes in a category by focusing on its internal dynamics and the ideological confrontations between its members (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Granqvist & Laurila, 2011). Conflict and tension within an existing category can lead to its reinterpretation when new representations come into play (Negro et al., 2011). Other research has explored the external dynamics between two categories and the power relations between them (Blanchet, 2017; Dion & Tachet, 2020; Rao et al., 2005). Blanchet (2017), for instance, revealed the role of criticism in the emergence of new categories, showing that the emergence of the ethical fashion category is based on criticism of an existing categorical system (that of conventional fashion) and on the construction of a new system of representations. Dion and Tachet (2020), on the other hand, looked at the interactions between two market categories: the mainstream fashion market and the alternative plus-size market. These studies show, among other things, that the definition of category boundaries is not just linked to representations, but also to the material devices present in the two market categories.

By focusing either on internal dynamics (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Gollnhofer & Bhatnagar, 2021; Negro et al., 2011) or on external dynamics (Dion & Tachet, 2020; Pedeliento et al, 2019), these studies nonetheless fail to explore the joint action of the two types of dynamics that shape alternative market categories and determine their emergence and evolution, namely, external dynamics linked to boundary-work and power relations with the

dominant category and internal dynamics linked to interpretative and symbolic tensions within the alternative category.

A few studies mention the role of internal and external dynamics simultaneously in the formation of new market categories (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Siltaoja et al., 2020), but they only focus on certain dimensions of the categorisation processes: either symbolic in the case of the emergence of the organic farming market in Finland (Siltaoja et al., 2020), or identity-based in the case of satellite radio in the United States (Navis & Glynn, 2010). While they serve as interesting first steps, these studies do not propose a systematic analysis or theorisation of the joint dynamics that could provide insights into the complex process of changes in alternative categories.

Our research thus investigates how internal and external dynamics shape alternative market categories, based on an exploration of the music industry's independent music category.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Setting the scene: the independent music market category**

In 1977, the Buzzcocks released *Spiral Scratch* and became the first English band to create its own label to release a record. This event embodied the emergence of a new category in the music industry: independence. This founding act of the post-punk movement heralded both a symbolic and a structural transformation in the music market. Forty years on, the *Worldwide Independent Network* (WIN) noted in its third and latest report on the global music economy that independent producers now account for 39.9% of the revenue generated in the market (WIN, 2018). Today, the category encompasses a diverse set of music scenes with various motivations and political ends. Nevertheless, independence (indie) is an alternative category in its own right, present in the music industry as well as in other sectors of the culture industries (Alexandre et al., 2017).

The independent music movement emerged at the end of the 1970s thanks to a network of musicians, journalists, and managers whose aim was to create, produce, and distribute music independently from the six major labels of the time (EMI, MCA, RCA, PolyGram, Warner, and CBS). The genesis of this alternative category was also part of a symbolic renewal: artists and labels defended new genres – post-punk at first, then new wave, indie pop, shoegaze – in an attempt to impose new aesthetic standards and new evaluation criteria. These transformations of the musical landscape contributed to the formation of an independent culture and a specific ideology (Oakes, 2009).

Since the late 1980s, the indie music category has gradually emerged as a musical genre. In practice, this artistic categorisation based on the constitution of perceived similarities and founded on socially constructed systems of meaning (DiMaggio, 1987) can be found on record shop shelves and on music streaming applications. The term indie is thus used to characterise a specific pop and rock ‘sound’ (Fonarow, 2006, p. 40).

However, this conception of independent music has been widely challenged by the many aesthetic variations associated with the genre and the diversity of sub-genres that are now linked to it<sup>2</sup>. As we shall see later, this contributes to instability in the category’s definition, to the extent that we can relate it here to a fuzzy category.

At this point, we can present the independent music market category according to the five elements of a market category definition proposed by Blanchet (2017). This presentation (Table 1) allows us to highlight the instability of the definition and the boundaries of independence, making it a particularly interesting case for observing the external and internal dynamics of alternative categories.

**Table 1.** Elements for defining the independent music market category according to Blanchet (2017)

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<sup>2</sup> Today we talk about indie electronic, indie rap, and indie classical.

Elements of definition	Justifications
The label	The term ‘independent’ is used to describe productions, people, labels, and the essential characteristics of alternative artistic production and distribution.
The prototypes	Sonic Youth can be considered as the prototype band for the independent scene, 4AD and Rough Trade for the record labels, <i>Pitchfork</i> for the media, and Bandcamp for the music platform.
The stories	Independence narratives abound in the music sector. Many market actors tout the benefits of independent production by developing a narrative about the ethics of consumption and production and the specific approach that determines it.
The definition	The issue of how to define independence fuels debate between music market actors, making it a fuzzy category (Vergne & Wry, 2014). Its traditional definition as an alternative mode of production and distribution opposed to the mainstream encompasses many limitations.
Boundaries	The boundaries of independence are a constant focus of negotiation between the different actors and depend on the historical and cultural context that determines them. The instability of the independent category boundaries is part of its ontology. The boundaries are constructed in relation to a dominant category, while shaped by reinterpretation and internal instability.

## Data collection

Comprehensive and longitudinal approaches are frequently used to study the emergence and dynamics of categories (e.g., Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Gollnhofer & Bhatnagar, 2021; Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010). Historical and historiographical methods (Delacour & Leca, 2011; Suddaby, 2016) are therefore well suited to the study of category dynamics since ‘historical contextuali[s]ation reinforces the explanatory power of category systems’ (Durand & Thornton, 2018, p. 643).

In this vein, we adopted a sociohistorical approach based on the analysis method proposed by Smith and Lux (1993), articulated around three main sources of data: a media corpus comprised of articles from press titles, a set of books and documentaries dealing with independent music from a historiographical perspective, and interviews for their biographic character.

Between 2015 and 2019, fifteen comprehensive individual and collective interviews were conducted with twenty-one participants from the music industry and from the independent scene: artists, label managers, press officers, artistic directors, publishers, and consumers.

Each interview lasted an average of 1 hours 30 minutes – from 45 minutes for the shortest to 2 hours 45 minutes for the longest – and was transcribed in full. The participants were from three cities – Paris, Montreal, and Caen – and consequently from different independent music scenes. We interviewed people with a variety of profiles, both in terms of their relationship with independent music (professionals, amateurs, consumers, etc.) and in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, nationality) in order to understand the different representations of independence and their evolution over time.

Interviews were conducted in conjunction with the collection and analysis of data from primary and secondary sources. The first consisted of biographical documents, books, and documentaries dealing with independent music at different times, and were collected using the historiographical method based on an in-depth bibliographical search (see Appendix 1). The second involved a corpus consisting of 606 articles from French and Anglo-Saxon media from 1970 to 2022, which are of particular interest as it has been shown that media coverage influences the formation of market categories through legitimacy effects (Schultz et al., 2014). All the articles were selected according to criteria of relevance depending on whether they deal with independent music or not, and whether they directly address the category, its definition, and its boundaries. They take the form of posts, interviews, reviews, and columns, and come from both the specialised music press (e.g., *Les Inrocks*, *Pitchfork*, *Gonzaï*) and the general press. The diversity of sources allowed us to observe different forms of independence representation according to the position occupied by the media in the musical and media space.

A systematic approach to data collection was first deployed with the general newspapers *Le Monde* and then *The New York Times*. We conducted searches in the archives of these newspapers using key words such as ‘independent music’, ‘independent scene’, ‘independent label’, etc., to build the iterative construction of a press corpus. The approach is limited to the extent that this subculture is not disseminated through the traditional media but rather through

new emerging actors. It is interesting to measure the level of institutionalisation and diffusion of the independent culture within the dominant culture, but this method does not allow us to take the discourse of the independent scene participants into account. Consequently, analysis of a media corpus solely made up of articles from the general press offers only a partial view of the evolution of the independent music category. For this reason, other media sources from the specialised press and alternative media have also been included in the corpus.

Consulting primary sources from the archives of press titles and secondary sources from biographical documents, books, and documentaries enabled us to analyse the genesis of independent music and to develop a periodisation in order to better understand its internal and external dynamics, while interviews with participants of the independent scene contributed to the construction of a common narrative and a history ‘in the making’.

Finally, the sociohistorical analysis of independent music and its market led us to investigate the aesthetic evolution of the related musical sub-genres as a force for internal change within the category, given that symbolic dimensions are indicative of the transformations of the artistic and cultural market categories and their boundaries (DiMaggio, 1987; Rao et al., 2005).

With this in mind, we conducted a statistical analysis based on the lists of the best albums per decade published by the online magazine *Pitchfork*. From the 2000s onwards, *Pitchfork* established itself as the international reference media for independent music (Sinkovich et al., 2013). It periodically draws up lists of the best albums by decade: the *100 Best Albums of the 1980s* (21 November 2002), the *100 Best Albums of the 1990s* (17 November 2003), the *200 Best Albums of the 2000s* (2 October 2009), and finally, the *200 Best Albums of the 2010s* (8 October 2019). Each of these lists is republished by the *Album of the Year* website<sup>3</sup> which aggregates album reviews by year of release, label, and genre. We were thus able to identify the sub-genres most frequently cited in each decade, and to identify the aesthetic and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.albumoftheyear.org>

symbolic changes at play in the internal dynamics of the independent music category. The list of genres identified by decade is presented in Appendix 2.

**Table 2.** Overview of all data collected and their analytical purposes

Source	Data set	Analytical objectives	Analytical focus
Comprehensive interviews	22 hours of audio recording; 672 pages of transcripts 21 participants: 10 individual interviews, 5 group interviews	Build a story in the making Identify representations of independence Identify internal interpretative tensions	Internal dynamics (representations, interpretations, and definitions of the category)
Primary sources	606 press articles from the music and general press published between 1970 and 2022	Gain a longitudinal understanding of the phenomenon Observe category relations and legitimisation effects Identify internal interpretative tensions	External and internal dynamics
Secondary sources	21 historical and bibliographic works, and academic books and articles	Identify the periods of evolution of the category Gain a longitudinal understanding of the phenomenon	External dynamics (boundary processes) Process and sequence analysis
<i>Pitchfork</i> magazine lists	4 decade lists with 600 record and artist references	Analyse the evolution of the musical genre Integrate symbolic and aesthetic dimensions	Internal dynamics (aesthetic representations)

## Data analysis

Analysis of the data was carried out in several phases, designed to meet ‘the three goals of identifying, explaining, and interpreting change’ (Smith & Lux, 1993, p. 599). An initial sequential and chronological analysis of data from historiographic and media sources was conducted in order to determine the chronological boundaries of the different phases of the independent music category’s evolution. The years 1977, 1991, 2001 and 2011 each, in their own way, mark pivotal moments in the history of independent music, illustrated through the identification of key events (Appendix 3). This initial analysis highlighted the external

dynamics linked to the shifting boundaries of the independent music category and the dominant category.

In a second step, we sought to explain these various changes that underlie the evolution of the independent music category, informed by a sociohistorical analysis. The sociohistorical approach focuses more on the actors involved in the changes, their roles, and their mutual relations. The first two stages of analysis allowed us to trace the history of independent music according to its actors, and the evolution of its boundaries with the mainstream.

Finally, the third stage of analysis consisted of interpreting the forces of change within the category. Here we focused on a cross-analysis of the data from the interviews<sup>4</sup> and media corpus, which revealed different representations of independence and interpretative tensions within the category. Interpretation of the changes taking place within and at the boundaries of the category exposed the joint impact of internal and external dynamics in the emergence and evolution of the independent music category, enabling us to answer our research question.

The data set was analysed following a number of manipulation and processing operations characteristic of the interpretive approach (Dumez, 2013; Spiggle, 1994). It was processed using NVivo10 software to establish a periodic and thematic breakdown. More specifically, we conducted a thematic analysis using conceptualising categories for all the data (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2016), also known as coding with a theoretical aim (Point & Fourboul, 2006). During our investigation, for example, we rapidly identified issues related to the definitional problems surrounding the notion of independence and the tensions this implies. Several themes such as ‘indie is hard to define’ or ‘obsolete notion’ were first identified and then grouped under the category of ‘interpretative flexibility of independence’ from this conceptualising perspective. Similarly, the emerging themes of ‘decompartmentalisation’, ‘porosity’, and ‘boundaries of independence’ were grouped under the broader category of

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<sup>4</sup> The interviews with participants of the independent scene contribute to the construction of a common narrative and a history 'in the making', in contrast with the approach taken by Cuffolo and Brée (2021) in their study of music self-production. For this reason, our research does not establish an end point, allowing it to incorporate the recent and ongoing dynamics of the independent category.



‘category relations (indie-mainstream)’, allowing us to develop its generality and to relate it to theoretical dimensions.

## **FINDINGS**

Analysis of the different data collected enabled us to follow the evolution of the alternative category of independent music in the light of its relationship with the dominant category of mainstream music. Four distinct phases were identified and used to inform the historical narrative, drawing attention to the factors that led to a reconfiguration of the boundaries of the alternative market category with the dominant category (external dynamics). In the second part of our findings, we identify and discuss the three main representations of independence that make it a hard-to-define category (internal dynamics), describing the interpretative tensions that emanate from the coexistence and evolution of economic, aesthetic, and ideological representations of independence. Finally, we identify the links between internal and external dynamics together with their joint action on the evolution of the alternative market category.

### **The boundaries of independence: origins and evolution of the market category**

#### *Emergence (1977-1991)*

Independent music emerged from challenges to the record industry’s operating mode in the late 1970s, leading to the creation of an alternative market. In the UK, this new economic organisation was symbolised by a co-operative of British labels known as The Cartel, founded in 1977 and formalised in 1982 with the aim of establishing an extensive and alternative autonomous distribution network (Tranmer, 2021). While all of the labels were created in an entrepreneurial spirit, it was more ideological than commercial (Bannister, 2006). In other words, the economic positioning of the independents was backed by an ideological or even a

political positioning that took the form of a new economic organisation. Independence thus marked the desire to democratise the music market and to offer an alternative to the dominant mainstream market.

This revival involved the introduction of new devices, such as the music magazines *New Musical*, *Melody Maker*, and *Sounds* which devoted pages to singles released by independent labels from 1980 onwards. That same year, the first independent charts were published. The Indie Charts became the barometer of the independent scene. The independent character of a music production was determined by the distribution channel through which it was released. At the time, a single was categorised as independent when it was distributed outside the major record company networks.

All these devices responded to an alternative logic based on a 'spirit of independence', which gradually spread to the United States and France in the second half of the 1980s. These national markets were then reorganised through the emergence and work of new actors. In the United States, it was college radio stations that made it possible to discover many bands. The music played on the stations was known as college rock, a term that was gradually replaced by alternative rock, and then indie rock. In France, the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, launched in 1986, covered the new musical genre and new bands from England, marking a renewal of the French music press. The magazine clearly broke away from the traditional rock press in terms of aesthetics and editorial content, and helped to make the new scene known. It established its influence through a multi-media network built around the press title and then the gradual development of other forms of distribution: the festival in 1988; records, with compilations; a chart; radio, through collaboration with Bernard Lenoir on *France Inter* from 1990. These different activities contributed to the categorisation of the independent music market in France by establishing boundaries with the dominant category represented by the major record companies.

The year 1991 marked a turning point in the evolution of the independent music market as the mainstream music market actors began to take an interest in the independent movement. Several of our participants recall this period of development, internationalisation, and mainstreaming of alternative music, when underground groups were broadcast on mainstream channels and stations. This democratisation, which could be seen in the evolution of media channels, led to a reconfiguration of the relationship between the major labels and independents, and overlap between the two categories' boundaries.

The development of the independent scene and the popularisation of indie pop and rock led the major record companies to reflect on how to integrate the structural and ideological specificities of independents in order to penetrate this market segment. The growing success of artists from this scene – represented in particular by the international triumph of Nirvana – attracted the covetousness of the music industry's major record companies: 'The success of Nirvana changed, once and for all, the industry's perception about alternative or "indie" rock' (*The New York Times*, 6 June 1993). Numerous accounts highlight the tension caused by the rapprochement between the mainstream and alternative markets. For artists, this was expressed by the notion of 'selling out', which pit commercial success against artistic integrity (Bridson et al., 2017).

The rapprochement between independents and majors obscured the ideological and artistic dimensions of independence to make way for an essentially economic conception. As the boundaries between these two organisational forms became increasingly blurred, a set of 'crypto-indie' labels was created that were fully funded by the major record companies but used an independent distribution network (Fonarow, 2006, pp. 37-38). The emergence of these 'middling members' (Paolella & Syakhroza, 2021) and the ensuing reconfiguration of category boundaries threatened the legitimacy of independent categorisation.

*Legitimation (2001-2011)*

These pressures from outside the category were partly mitigated at the turn of the millennium when the record industry underwent profound changes. In this respect, 2001 was a pivotal year in the genealogy of independent music, with a revival of the scene led by bands such as *The Strokes* and *The Libertines*. This new wave of artists enjoyed international success, ushering in a new era in the independent music market. Indie culture became international thanks to the internet, establishing itself as a global consumer culture. After a phase of mainstreaming, the sector began a process of both commodification and legitimisation. In a context of instability in the record industry, the new digital technologies were seen as a commercial opportunity for independent producers. The advent of the internet and digital technologies changed the way consumers accessed information and navigated through the myriad choices available to them, leading to the emergence of new actors such as *Pitchfork*, which became one of the most influential media outlets in the music industry (Sinkovich et al., 2013). This period of legitimisation for the independence movement, marked by a reconfiguration of the record industry, globalisation, and commodification of independent culture, was characterised by the indeterminate nature of the category's boundaries with the mainstream.

#### *Polarisation (2011-)*

Since 2011, it seems as if the independent music sector has reached a turning point, determined by the gradual commodification of the principle of independence and the development of associated marketing strategies. The separation between the alternative category and the dominant category is again becoming more pronounced in the wake of successive periods of rapprochement. In reality, rather than fragmentation, we are witnessing the polarisation of independent music. This polarisation implies the completion of a process of delegitimisation of the traditional actors in the independent sector within which new categorisations are taking shape. Several magazines with an illustrious past, such as *NME*, *Les*

*Inrocks*, and *Magic*, ceased their activities or suffered heavy financial losses during this period.

In addition, more and more actors and organisations are being categorised as independent, even though they adopted the behaviours and operating methods of the majors. French labels such as Naïve, Because, Wagram, or Tôt ou Tard symbolise these ‘big’ independents. The distinction between ‘big’ and ‘small’ independents was solidified with the creation of the *Fédération Nationale des Labels Indépendants* (FELIN) in 2009, a newcomer in the institutional landscape compared to the two other employers’ unions representing the music market in France: the *Syndicat national de l’édition phonographique* (SNEP), created in 1922 and composed of the three majors among others; and *UPFI*, created in 1986<sup>5</sup>, which encompasses the biggest independent labels we just mentioned. The creation of FELIN symbolises this fragmentation of the independent sector and the schism taking place within the category. The polarisation of independence adds to the fuzziness of the category by heightening its instability. It is a sign of the ‘boundary struggles’ with the mainstream, but also of the internal reinterpretations of the category, as we will now show in the second part of the findings.

## **The evolution of independence representations and interpretations**

### *Interpretative flexibility of independence as internal dynamic*

The definition of independent music is one of the most widely discussed and recurring themes in independent culture. The independent category is thus an element that is subject to the interpretative flexibility of actors. In other words, picking up on Blanchet’s (2017) five key elements of a category, the definition of the independent music market category varies according to the use and interpretation of the ‘independent’ label by the different market

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<sup>5</sup> UPFI was first created under the name of *Association Professionnelle des Producteurs Phonographiques Indépendants* (APPI) in 1986 before becoming the *Union des Producteurs Français Indépendants* (UPFI) in 1993.

actors. Moreover, the difficulty of attaching a stable and ecumenical definition to the independent category is expressed by the participants themselves. When interviewing actors in the field, the first observation is that it is a ‘catch-all’ term, i.e. its meaning is vague, polysemous, ambiguous, and a source of tension and negotiation:

I think everyone has their own way of representing it, or interpreting it, or challenging it. I think success, commercial and mainstream success, doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re not indie anymore or that you don’t have an independent ethos. (Festival artistic director, 41 years old)

Independent is just a word that has so many meanings. Depending of the context, it can mean something totally different. (Musician and founder of an independent label, 25 years old)

The term no longer makes sense. We work with artists who’re not indie either in genre, ideology, or legally. Many of them are signed to labels. (Booker and manager, 30 years old)

The above verbatim extracts illustrate the three major representations of independence that we have historically identified: the economic representation, the aesthetic representation, and the ideological representation (Table 3). This analysis overlaps with the literature on the topic. Lebrun (2006, p. 33) points to the polysemic nature of the notion of independence, and differentiates between ‘structural independent labels that are relatively prosaic in their approach [...] and independents with an independent vocation, seeking to avoid the liberal logic of the majors.’ Fonarow (2006) attributes several meanings to it: a mode of production and distribution assimilated with independent labels, a musical genre with its own aesthetic conventions, and music that disseminates a characteristic ethos and music style in contrast to other genres considered mainstream. Our findings thus allow us to distinguish the three main representations of independence that constitute the category’s internal forces of change.

**Table 3.** Representations of independence in the music market

Economic	Aesthetic	Ideological
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Objects of definition	Organisational model	Music genre and aesthetic conventions	Music scenes
	Type of economic structure	Artistic influences	Networks of social relationships
	Mode of production and distribution	Aesthetic and stylistic criteria	Norms and values
			Ethical principles
Dominant perspective	Commercial and industrial perspective	Artistic perspective	Community and political perspective

### *Economic representation*

Historically, independence is primarily defined by a set of economic criteria such as the mode of production and distribution of music, the type of financing, and the size or business model of the organisations that make up the music industry. This economic definition of independence, which dominated representations in the emergence, structuring, and legitimisation phases, has its limits, leading to debate over the interpretation of the alternative category. Indeed, it only allows a distinction to be made between actors affiliated with the record majors, on the one hand, and all the other market actors who are then considered as independent, on the other.

However, as we saw, this distinction was called into question in the phase of mainstreamisation and recuperation by the majors. It was then accentuated during the polarisation phase, when new media, new labels, and other market actors appeared in opposition or reaction not only to the mainstream, but also to the most strongly developed actors in the independent sector. This polarisation phase is thus characterised by a process of internal recategorisation of independent music.

By considering that all music produced outside the majors should be classified as independent, as do most independent label federations and associations such as FELIN and AIM (*Association of Independent Music*), the artistic and cultural history of the movement is obscured, explaining why other representations of independence have participated in the changes and reinterpretations of the category over time.

### *Ideological representation*

The independent music culture has a global history and ideology rooted in the punk, protest, and anarchist movement of the 1970s. The pioneers of the post-punk movement and founders of the first independent labels inherited punk's situationist lineage, while also drawing on post-structuralist (Hesmondhalgh, 1997) and neo-Marxist (Lebrun, 2006) thinking.

While the political anchorage of this cultural movement is no longer in question, we previously noted the gradual depoliticisation of the independent music category as it grew closer to the dominant category. The external dynamics of boundary reconfiguration thus affected internal interpretations of the alternative category. In turn, the internal aesthetico-ideological tensions conditioned the evolution of the alternative category and its relations with the dominant category.

### *Aesthetic representation*

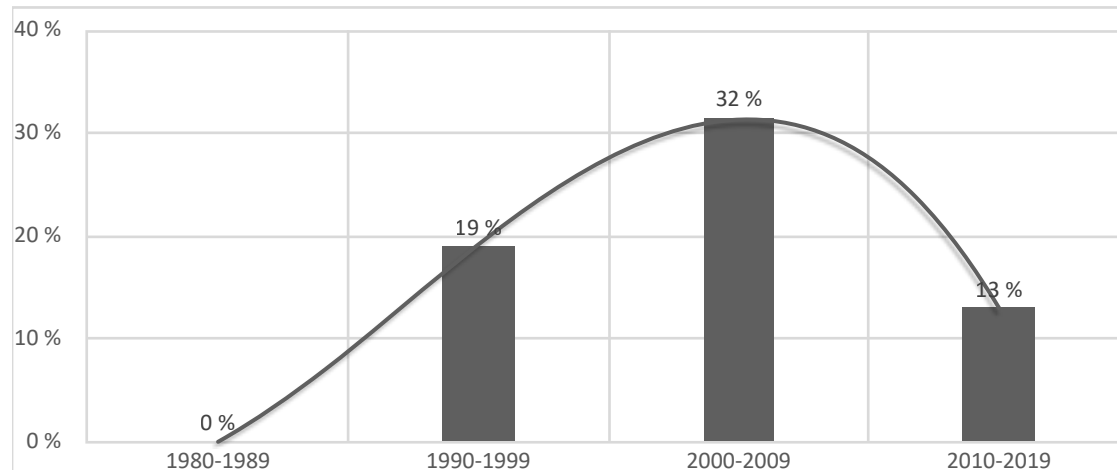
To explore the influence of aesthetic representations of independence, we examined the evolution of the indie genre in the music sector from an analysis of *Pitchfork* magazine's decade lists. This revealed the importance of the aesthetic dimension and the way in which the category evolved by gradually detaching itself from its economic significance alone. In the 1980s, the term 'punk' was mentioned most often through the sub-genres of post-punk (17) and hardcore punk (3), accounting for 24% of the albums listed. 'Alternative' accounted for 19% of mentions, while the term 'indie' had not yet appeared. During the 1990s, 'alternative' became the most frequently mentioned genre at 21%, followed by 'indie' at 19% (see Appendix 2 for a detailed list).

This first finding reflects the shift from indie as an economic and cultural principle carried by post-punk in the 1980s to its establishment as a musical genre in the 1990s. In the 2000s, 'indie' became the most widely cited genre at 31.5%, with indie rock, indie folk, and indie pop. This increase corresponded to the 'indie revival' and its constitution as a genre associated with consumer culture (see Appendix 3 for details). In the 2000s, the indie genre



became more popular, moving away from its sole economic representation, and the notion then penetrated several genres (rock, pop, but also, more recently, electronic music, rap, classical music, and jazz), helping to qualify and rank work and artists.

**Figure 1:** Percentage of indie genre among albums in *Pitchfork* magazine's decade lists



### **Summary: the joint action of internal and external dynamics**

Analysis of the evolution of representations of independent music reveals that the very notion of independence is subject to reinterpretation, which acts as an internal force of change. Various economic, aesthetic, and ideological representations influence the definition of independence internally, while at the same time being part of the historical evolution of this alternative market category. The latter has passed through several phases in which the dominant representations evolved under the influence of internal dynamics (interpretation and definitional problems), as well as external dynamics such as boundary-work with regard to the dominant category (see Table 4).

The influence of the different representations has evolved over time, thus diachronically shaping the interpretative flexibility of independence. Our findings highlight the role of artistic and symbolic classifications in the category's evolution and show how internal aesthetic and ideological tensions can be linked to the external dynamics of boundary shifting and boundary crossing between categories. Indeed, internal dynamics related to

representations do not act independently of the alternative category's relationship with the dominant category, as this extract from a 2019 *Pitchfork* article indicates:

Of all the upheavals in music over the last 10 years, perhaps none was broader or more permanent than the complete erasure of the borders around 'indie music.' The twin financial and ideological barriers separating those two words [mainstream pop and indie] began to collapse, brick by brick. (Pitchfork, October 17, 2019)

The vagueness of the independent music definition is a force for internal change that is accompanied externally by a transformation of the category boundaries with respect to the dominant category. These two dynamics act in concert on the evolution of the alternative category, while simultaneously influencing one another. Indeed, the rapprochement between independent music and the mainstream has led to tension between the economic representation of independence and the aesthetico-ideological representations, and vice versa. Our findings thus show how independence is indeed a fuzzy category with undefined boundaries (Vergne & Wry, 2014), while highlighting the joint action of the internal dynamics of interpretations and representations of the alternative category and the external dynamics of shifting boundaries with the dominant category. To this end, we need to move away from static definitions, and recognise the historical contingency of independence (Mall, 2018).



**Table 4.** Dynamics of the independent music category

Phases	Internal dynamics: representations of	External dynamics:	Key actors and devices	Examples of verbatims
Emergence 1977-1991	Balance between an economic, ideological, and aesthetic perspective	Rupture and boundary construction	Magazines, charts and rankings, fanzine, compilations	For innovations, and for much of pop's continuing vitality, one is going to have to look increasingly to the small labels and new bands, and it is going to be up to them and their supporters to create a viable alternative distribution network to get their disks into stores and, if possible, on the radio. (The New York Times, 6 September 1981)  It was a political thing. [...] When the thing to do is
Mainstreamisation 1991-2001	Economic and de-ideologised perspective  Gentrification of indie	Crossing boundaries : appropriation of indie by the mainstream	Specialised press, university radio stations, TV	It's indie music that's becoming accessible in fact. But you really have the impression that it's a media job that's done in relation to that. (Musician, 37 years old)  A reflection on the conditions of production, distribution and promotion has led to restructuring that attempts to recreate the specificity of independents within the large record companies. (Le Monde, 23 April 1992)
Legitimation 2001-2011	Market perspective and the emergence of a consumer culture	Blurred boundaries between indie and mainstream	MP3 blogs, <i>Pitchfork</i> , Myspace, peer to peer platforms	To cater to consumers who, like himself, want to dress with the accoutrements of indie rock: young people who wear tight jeans and Vans (The New York Times, 28 January 2007)  For a long time, the written press was the main source of information for those seeking new pop sensations. Today, it is the websites and blogs on
Polarisation 2011-	Opposition between a market perspective and an aesthetico-ideological perspective	Reconfiguring the boundaries of independence  Recategorisation	Webzines, alternative platforms (Bandcamp and Soundcloud), year-end lists	I'm 31 years old and people of our generation experienced the first emulation of the internet, the democratisation of the internet [...], the discovery of social networks. The internet was seen more as a positive thing. (Musician, 31 years old).  In the 90s you could see that there were bridges

## DISCUSSION

In this paper, we crossed sequential approaches to category dynamics with a more complex reading of the changes that operate at the boundaries of and within alternative categories. Our findings, based on a sociohistorical investigation of independent music, further our knowledge of category dynamics by introducing new elements of analysis. We now discuss these findings with regard to the joint dynamics of market categories, the alternative/mainstream dialectic at the origin of boundary-work, and the strategic and ideological issues involved.

### **The joint dynamics of alternative market categories**

The different phases identified in the sequential analysis of the independent music category offer a processual reading of the evolution of an alternative category. However, as summarised in Table 4, we highlight the instability of the independent category across its evolution. In the course of its evolution, the category is constantly reinterpreted according to the predominance of certain representations and the reconfiguration of boundaries. We thus showed that the emergence and evolution processes of alternative categories are based on complex mechanisms involving interactions between internal dynamics (the dynamics of reinterpretation and the problems of defining independence) and external dynamics with the dominant category (the dynamics of the ever-shifting and challenged boundaries of independence). These dynamics are considered as joint in that they act simultaneously on the evolution of alternative market categories. Compared to the existing literature, our paper thus highlights the interest of studying the internal and external forces of change concurrently in order to improve our understanding of category dynamics, as well as the way they influence one another.

Furthermore, studies of category emergence and evolution have largely viewed changes as moving from one stable state to another in a sequential process. Category changes are frequently associated with an influx of new entrants that lead to the departure of many category members and the evolution of the evaluation criteria, as in the case of grappa (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016) or gin (Pedeliento et al., 2019). Yet, in similar vein to Gollnhofer and Bhatnagar (2021) who explain that the new evaluation criteria of the German food market have not replaced the old ones, we use the divergent forms of the main representations of independence (economic, aesthetic, and ideological) to argue that different definitional and thus evaluation criteria can coexist, at the same time showing that some representations dominate more than others at various stages of the category's evolution.

### **Internal and external dynamics around the alternative-mainstream dialectic**

While our study confirms that alternative categories emerge and evolve according to a critique of a dominant category (Blanchet 2017; Dion & Tachet, 2020), it also reveals that these alternative categories are subject to internal reinterpretations. They act as spaces of constant symbolic, discursive, and material renegotiation and tension, within which different representations coexist and sometimes clash.

We also show that independence is a vague and ambiguous notion as it is subject to the interpretations and representations of the different actors. The mainstream is, likewise, an equally vague notion and a category with ill-defined contours. The independent music market category is conditioned by the instability of its boundaries with the mainstream market that is a feature of fuzzy categories (Vergne & Wry, 2014). It is also characterised by the erosion of these boundaries due to the appropriation of categorical attributes by the mainstream (Rao et al., 2005). Indeed, the categorisation of certain actors, products, or modes of consumption is itself subject to continuous redefinitions, able to move from mainstream to independent status, and vice versa.

The boundaries between alternative and mainstream are fundamentally unstable (Crewe et al., 2003). Our study shows that this instability and the tensions between these categories constitute the underlying principle of independence. The mainstream can thus be analysed as an imagined and homogenised construct against which the alternative positions itself through processes of boundary-work, boundary shifting and politicisation of boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). For example, retailers of retro objects construct an oppositional discourse in relation to an ‘imagined mainstream’ market from which they seek to differentiate (Crewe et al., 2003). In particular, we show how independent music entered a phase of polarisation in the 2010s. Tension and disagreement over the definition of independence emerged within the category itself, reproducing the opposition and differentiation mechanisms that exist between alternative and mainstream.

### **The instability of boundaries at the heart of alternative categories**

We can thus ask what these categories and their boundaries still mean. Studying independence implies ‘accounting for the lability of its boundaries in time and space’ (Noël & Pinto, 2018, p. 7). This is what we attempted to do through our sociohistorical investigation of independent music, taking its periodic evolution into account. The independent category boundaries shift and evolve depending on the historical and cultural context. According to Mall (2018, p. 447), for instance, the economic and organisational definitions of independent and major labels ‘are not invalid but historically contingent, tied to a particular place and time’. However, although the boundaries between independent and mainstream are contextual and evolving, our research helps to show that the dynamics between alternative and dominant categories can sustainably structure an industry such as music, even though, as Pontikes and Barnett (2015) argue, most existing research assumes that only well-defined market categories become relevant. In other words, the instability of an alternative category’s boundaries does not exclude its institutionalisation and durability.

Our paper thus contributes to the research on category dynamics by showing that fuzzy categories with undefined boundaries that are subject to reinterpretation can play a decisive role in the organisation of certain markets such as the music market. Alternative categories are manifestations of tension between different representations and conceptions of the world, which explains the difficulty in characterising and defining them as a stable category. On the contrary, our research recognises the instability of the boundaries of alternative categories as a central aspect of their definition. These tensions, which constitute the essence of alternative categories, are displayed through the different market devices, including material ones, and their appropriation within these categories. This is the case, for example, of the resurgence of certain audio supports, such as vinyl or, more recently, cassettes, which were supported by the independent sector and then recuperated by the mainstream (Collet & Rémy, 2022).

Thus, while our findings highlight the importance of representations and discourses in the construction and evolution of categories, they also help to confirm that a market categorisation process is not only determined by interpretations and meanings, but also by the socio-material devices present in the markets (Dion & Tachet, 2020).

### **The strategic and ideological issues of the recuperation of alternative categories**

This paper also furthers our knowledge of the evolution of alternative categories. It confirms that their construction and evolution arise from the antagonism of certain actors towards a dominant category and, consequently, of boundary-work and new interpretations of the category. In their study of Italian wines, Negro et al. (2011) explored the disputes between two groups of actors over the same category and the changes in its interpretation, showing that the reinterpretation of a category leads to internal opposition issues. Our study highlights such interpretation issues that are both internal and external to the alternative category. It shows that independence constitutes an important symbolic resource for certain actors in the



music industry. The ‘independent’ label thus becomes an issue of a struggle in the face of attempts at appropriation and reinterpretation of the alternative category by the dominant one. We stress the strategic and ideological issues related to the emergence of alternative categories. From this perspective, the use of categories is not a cognitive process but a matter of actors’ interests and ideologies: it is a strategic and/or political act (Pontikes & Kim, 2017; Quinn & Munir, 2017). Some market actors resort to alternative categories to differentiate and distance themselves from a dominant system within which they can neither develop nor succeed without compromising their values. This is the case of the alternative platforms Bandcamp and Soundcloud, for instance, which established themselves in the competitive music streaming market by adopting a positioning that corresponds to the values of independent music producers and consumers (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019).

These strategic and ideological positions can nonetheless be appropriated and recovered by the mainstream. Research on consumption helps us to address the dynamics between alternative and mainstream categories, and the appropriation and incorporation logic that is established between the two. Goulding and Saren (2007), for example, describe how the Goth consumer subculture participated in the creation of a new market in opposition to the mainstream, and how this market evolved. They identify three distinct stages of development, the rebellion stage, the fragmentation stage, and the appropriation and commodification stage, i.e., recuperation by the mainstream.

Our research presents comparable results across the different periodic phases we identified. It nevertheless questions the order and continuity of the phases described by Goulding and Saren (2007) by showing that the fragmentation phase (or polarisation phase in our case) may be partially consecutive to an appropriation process that has already begun. Indeed, the rapprochement between an alternative category and a dominant category incites some members of the alternative category to radicalise their positions as the category is reinterpreted.

## CONCLUSION

While there is a growing focus on category dynamics in the management literature, to our knowledge, no study has explored these complex mechanisms of change through the lens of the joint action of internal and external dynamics in the emergence and evolution of categories. Our research fills this theoretical gap by apprehending the exogenous and endogenous factors informing the definition and delimitation of an alternative market category from a sociohistorical approach. It also highlights the way in which multiple actors and market devices embody the different representations and logics at work in the evolution of a category.

Our study thus contributes to the literature on market categories in several ways, notably by highlighting the influence of non-market categories in the formation of market categories. As socially constructed classifications, categories transcend artistic and economic fields. However, the same category can be perceived and defined differently, depending on the field and environment to which it is attached. This is the interplay of representations which, as we show, call into question the definition and interpretation of a category.

Another contribution addresses the links between alternative categories and cultural and organisational innovations. By examining how the category of independent music emerged and evolved in relation to a dominant category, this paper sheds light on the origins of innovation in the creative industries. Indeed, ‘many of the most important cultural innovations have come from small firms and independent producers’ (DiMaggio, 1977, p. 440). In organisational terms, our research shows that the mainstream tends to be based on *exploitation*, while independence is based on *exploration* whose essence ‘is experimentation with new alternatives’ (March, 1991, p. 85). As such, it opens up further perspectives in our understanding of how new products, categories, and modes of consumption emerge, and thus the nature and origin of innovation in the creative industries (Jones et al., 2011).

More broadly, this article sheds light on independence in the music market and invites scholars to extend the study of this alternative category to other contexts, such as cinema (Khaire, 2017; Newman, 2011, 2017), comics (Hatfield, 2005), video games (Parker et al., 2018), or the more recent independent brewing sector (Murray & O'Neill, 2012), so as to assess its transferability from one sector to another. The conceptualisation of a regime of independence would allow us to address other important issues in contemporary society, such as the question of self-employment and media independence.

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## Appendix 1. List of secondary data

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**Appendix 2.** Inventory of musical genres and sub-genres in *Pitchfork* magazine's top albums per decade by number of occurrences

1980s (Base 100)	1990s (Base 100)	2000s (Base 200)	2010s (Base 200)
Punk 24 <i>Post-punk</i> 17 <i>Hardcore punk</i> 3 <i>Punk rock</i> 3 <i>Folk punk</i> 1 Alternative 19 <i>Alternative rock</i> 19 Hip Hop 8 New Wave 7 Rock 4  + <i>dream pop</i> (2), <i>pop rock</i> (2), <i>synthpop</i> (1), <i>jangle pop</i> (1), <i>psychedelic pop</i> (2), <i>electronic</i> (2), <i>shoegaze</i> (1), <i>art rock</i> (2), etc.	Alternative 21 <i>Alternative rock</i> 20 <i>Alternative dance</i> 1 Indie 19 <i>Indie rock</i> 18 <i>Indie pop</i> 1 Hip Hop 19 Electronic 8 Post-rock 5  + <i>trip hop</i> (4), <i>folk</i> (3), <i>noise rock</i> (3), <i>shoegaze</i> (2), <i>grunge</i> (2), <i>art pop</i> (2), <i>post-hardcore</i> (2), <i>ambient</i> (2), <i>experimental</i> (1), etc.	Indie 63 <i>Indie rock</i> 44 <i>Indie folk</i> 11 <i>Indie pop</i> 8 Electro 31 <i>electronic</i> 24 <i>electropop</i> 7 Hip Hop 28 Pop <i>indie pop</i> , <i>electropop</i> , <i>dream pop</i> , <i>pop</i> , <i>art pop</i> , <i>chamber pop</i> 20 Experimental 16 Alternative 14 <i>Alternative rock</i> 13 <i>Alternative dance</i> 1  + <i>ambient</i> (5), <i>dance</i> (4), <i>folk</i> (4), <i>garage rock</i> (3), <i>post-rock</i> (3), <i>rock</i> (3), <i>noise rock</i> (3), <i>minimal</i> (2), <i>post-punk</i> (1), <i>post-hardcore</i> (1), etc.	Hip Hop 35 <i>Hip hop</i> 32 <i>Experimental hip hop</i> 3 Indie 26 <i>Indie rock</i> 17 <i>Indie folk</i> 5 Pop/rock art 21 <i>Pop art</i> 19 <i>Art rock</i> 3 R&B 17 Electro 11 Singer-Songwriter 11 Alternative 9 <i>Alternative R&amp;B</i> 8 <i>Alternative rock</i> 1  + <i>ambient</i> (7), <i>country</i> (5), <i>soul</i> (5), <i>psychedelic pop</i> (3), <i>post-punk</i> (2), <i>idm</i> (2), <i>rap trap</i> (2), <i>lo fi</i> (2), <i>hardcore punk</i> (2), etc

### Appendix 3. Justification of the historical periodisation by key events

Year	Key events	Examples of verbatim extracts
1977	<p>Release of the Buzzcocks' <i>Spiral Scratch</i> EP, their first self-produced record</p> <p>The apogee of punk and the birth of post-punk</p> <p>Richard Scott joins Rough Trade</p>	<p>The Spiral Scratch EP ended up selling 16,000 copies and reaching the top 40 – there was no problem with the loans. More importantly, though, it proved that it was possible for artists to be in complete control of their music, from production to distribution, and in the process invented indie. (The Guardian, 12 January 2017)</p>
1991	<p>Nirvana's album <i>Nevermind</i> is released on 24 September to international acclaim.</p> <p>Rough Trade declares bankruptcy</p> <p>Creation of La Route du Rock festival and <i>Magic</i> magazine in France</p> <p>First mention of the term 'independent' in relation to music in <i>Le Monde</i> newspaper</p>	<p>The sharpest blow to the world of the indies occurred last May, when the record company Rough Trade, a leading distributor of independent labels in America and Great Britain, filed for bankruptcy. (The New York Times, 27 October 1991)</p> <p>The conversations changed after '91. Before, people talked about ideas and music. And then after that, people talked about money and deals. (Guy Picciotto, musician and member of the American band Fugazi, in Azerrad, 2002, p. 495).</p> <p>Here, in full view of mainstream America, was the band outselling U2 and Michael Jackson; the unknowns whose album 'Nevermind' (DGC) had graced dozens of music critics' top 10 polls; the misfits who seemingly overnight had become one of the most popular bands in America. (The New York Times, January 26, 1992)</p>
2001	<p>'Indie revival': the rise of the New York independent scene with bands like The Strokes, Interpol; and the return of indie guitar rock in the UK represented by The Libertines.</p> <p>Peak popularity of <i>Pitchfork</i> magazine and the Napster download site</p>	<p>'For me personally, 2002 was the end of an era. (Sylvia Patterson, NME, 27 November 2017)</p>

2011	<p>End of the 'indie revival'</p> <p>Creation of the first Independent Label Market in London</p> <p>Arcade Fire wins a Grammy Award</p> <p>Takeover of Napster</p>	<p>The last gasp of indie rock (Slate, 17 January 2012).</p> <p>'Indie rock's slow and painful death' (The Guardian, 16 January 2012)</p> <p>Of the five albums in Pitchfork's list that sold more than 100,000 copies in the US in 2011 only two (Bon Iver and Fleet Foxes) are indie artists. (The Guardian, 16 January 2012)</p> <p>The stage for indie's move toward the mainstream was set by the industry collapse of the '00s, spurred by a disastrous transition to digital. At the beginning of the new decade, that collapse had started to resemble freefall, and by 2011, sales were so dismal that albums were routinely breaking records for hitting the top of the charts with the lowest number of units sold. [...] In 2011, Arcade Fire won a Grammy for Album of the Year, leading to a 'Who the hell is Arcade Fire?' meme. (Pitchfork, 27 October 2019)</p>
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