

THE ECONOMIC AND CREATIVE IMPACTS OF STREAMING ON THE MUSIC INDUSTRY:

*Does Spotify's attractiveness stifle or challenge the artists creativity,
in an era of musical overabundance and competition characterized by a
lack of economical transparency?*



Pablo Picasso, *Guitar and Violin* (1912)

Author: Félicien Carnoy 537937

First reader: Dr. H. Abbing

Second reader: Dr. C. Handke

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Abstract

Music has enormously changed in recent times. Compared to a hundred years ago, nothing is done in the same way. The recording techniques, the production, the distribution and the listening have continuously developed, and sometimes dramatically changed, from decade to decade until now. Naturally, these several shifts could and should be analyzed from multiple perspectives. In this thesis I will examine the relation between the economical and the creative evolution of the music industry with the advent of streaming services, more specifically with the arrival of Spotify. Many observers¹ have pointed out that the economics of music streaming lacks transparency. It is often criticized for its low artists compensation and for its distorting influence on the music market. In contrast, the democratic access to a huge catalog of music history combined with tailored suggestions of discoveries appears to be an exceptional incentive for artistic creativity. I will present these elements and ponder over their ambiguous coexistence by interviewing multiple professionals of the music industry. Two managers of the main collecting society for the French artists and performers² have shared with me their opinion on the health of jazz and classical music. Also, nine artists practicing different genres of music and belonging to different generations exposed to me their process of inspiration as it is influenced by Spotify. The diverse results allowed me to detect and discuss several types of responses to the inspiration process encounter when confronted with streaming services. This will lead to partly elucidate the economical and creative impact of music streaming and suggest further possibilities for improvement, as far as transparency (on the economic side) and creativity (on the artistic side) are concerned.

Keywords: Streaming, Music, Spotify, Creativity, Inequalities

¹ Seabrook 2015, Fanen 2018, Hann 2019.

² *Société civile pour l'Administration des Droits des Artistes et Musiciens Interprètes* called « ADAMI »

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Introduction

“A good composer does not imitate; he steals.” (Igor Stravinsky)

We can take for granted that Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) wanted to provoke his public with the above-mentioned pique. Great contemporary artists, the ones that many of us rightly admire, are in reality thieves. Or are they not?

Generally speaking, one can distinguish between two opposite perceptions of what we call “talent”. If one follows Plato or Kant (taking into account the important differences between those two authors separated by many centuries), some people might consider that great art is the product of a divine inspiration or an unexplainable talent. (Kant, 1929) (Plato). Other people, like Stravinsky, or like some of the artists that I interviewed, claim that pure creativity does not exist, as it is always inspired consciously or not by another artwork. If we follow the latter definition, artists aim to create a unique combination of existing elements and perform them with their own original voice, instrument or method of production.

1) The Impact of Technology on the Arts

Before attempting to indicate how streaming services like Spotify could influence the creative process among musical artists, it seems important to present how the creation and “consumption” of the Arts has already been impacted by technological revolutions. Thus, I will very broadly present some authors who studied the changing dimensions of aesthetics during the 20th century. Indeed, the music streaming services operates in the footsteps of large cultural trends which have developed considerably in the course of several centuries: the democratisation, globalisation and commoditization of arts. Among the many publications which described them along the 20th century, I consider that reviewing Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and a brief anecdote about André Malraux constitutes an appropriate resume of the subject.

a) *Walter Benjamin*

In 1936, Walter Benjamin wrote a short but fundamental article: *The Work of Art at the Time of its Mechanical Reproduction* (Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. New York: Schocken books. 1969). By observing the quarrel that arose in the 19th century between painting and photography, he drew fundamental conclusions about the major consequences produced by the mechanical reproducibility of art in the 20th century.

Benjamin observes that if a work of art is unique, its authenticity resides in the “*hic et nunc*” of its production (the fact that its production is unique in space and time). Its authenticity provides the work of art with an *aura*. But in the twentieth century, the technique of reproduction detaches the object from the framework of tradition. By multiplying reproductions, it replaces the authority of a single presence with mass existence. And by allowing the future reproduction to come into contact with the receiver in the place where it is, it updates the reproduced object. (Benjamin 1936, 22). Art itself came to change fundamentally thanks to the new means which were introduced after the Industrial Revolution to produce art.

Walter Benjamin thus describes a fundamental shift in the perception of art in the twentieth century: on the one hand, the work of art definitively loses its aura or its original meaning which can only be perceived in an actual face-to-face relation with the viewer/listener; on the other hand, the work of art definitively gains in ubiquity and perpetual accessibility when it is reproduced by the means of photography or recording techniques. Thanks to the cinema and the record, any film and/or symphony can be enjoyed in all four corners of the world, and the amateur/consumer can listen to the piece as many times as he wants, whilst they would have attended only once in his life if they had lived in the 19th century.

From my perspective, I will retain two important aspects of W. Benjamin's seminal article: on the one hand, Benjamin admits and even approves of the development of modern techniques that favour the massive diffusion of art. It is in particular the *record* and *film industries* that capture his attention. He applauds the communicative force of the cinema, and he goes as far as to believing that cinema can play a liberating and even revolutionary role. On the other hand, he regrets the loss of the aura of unique and original works of art. We will see how these two opposite aspects (which in Benjamin's view remain distinct: one being positive and the other

negative) will be fused together with a distinctly negative and even *pessimistic* colouring in Horkheimer and Adorno's opinion.

b) *Theodor Adorno & Horkheimer*

In their jointly written book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno note that today's culture is completely industrialized and produces mass consumer goods. In so doing they bring the definition of *culture industry* one step further than Benjamin did in the chapter of the book which has a deliberately pessimistic tone : *Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (edition Allia, 2019). They argue that culture industry in which all forms of culture (from literature, through films and all the way to entertainment music) becomes an integral part of the capitalist system of production. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that these cultural products not only lose their utility value (which is transformed in exchange value in view of profit), but also produce consumers that are adapted to the needs of the capitalist system.

While Benjamin considered that cinema and recorded music were still art (even if it had lost its aura) and retained their potential for the revolutionary emancipation of the masses, we see that Adorno and Horkheimer definitively condemn industrialized cultural productions. They are vulgar products that reduces the consumer to be an accomplice and prisoner of the capitalist system: in their eyes, industrial art is the new opium of the people.

Theodor Adorno, in his article *Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (édition Allia, 2016), notes that: a) the intrinsic value of mass music products is of inferior quality, close to *kitsch* b) the so-called enlightened amateur is constantly running after the best interpretation of a known work: in doing so, he forgets to enjoy the music itself and gets himself obsessed by the commercial reputation of the fashionable performer alone.

The listener of records or CDs will fetishize the name of *Von Karajan* for example (because he considers this orchestra director as better than a hundred others, essentially because he has sold more records than his "competitors"), and will therefore forget to and abstain from listening with the necessary attention to Beethoven's 9th symphony.

c) *Malraux and his Imaginary Paper Museum*

André Malraux had the great merit of highlighting the role of the Museum as a fundamental institution in the development of modern art, as far as visual arts are concerned. As Jacques Taminiaux puts it :

"Thanks to the Museum, art becomes aware of itself as art, correspondences appear between the most diversified productions in time and space, and artists begin to create less in relation to a world that they wish to express, magnify or denounce, than in relation to the paintings and sculptures of other artists, both past and present. The historical process of producing works of art acquires a kind of autonomy, it is a sequence that in a sense relates first to itself, a kind of chain whose links in their very individuality are linked to those that precede them. Impressionism is situated in relation to naturalism, fauvism in relation to impressionism, cubism in relation to Cézanne, expressionism in relation to impressionism, geometric abstraction in relation to all the above, pop'art in relation to the various abstractions, conceptual art in relation to pop'art and hyperrealism, and so on". (Jacques Taminiaux, Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment, p. 62)

It is known that in his youth André Malraux, accompanied by his wife Clara, attempted to steal Khmer statues from the temple in Banteay Srei, 20 km north-East of Angkor, Cambodia, in order to sell them to an art gallery in Paris. He was denounced and remained in prison in Phnom-Penh for one year before finally being released. It is with a certain irony that we can see that the artistic looting that Malraux failed to accomplish in his youth was carried out successfully in his late age. Thanks to *photography*, Malraux managed a gigantic embezzlement - perfectly legal, it must be said - in museums all over the world. In doing so, he made available to everyone and everywhere an anthology of the masterpieces that mankind has produced over many centuries on the 5 continents. In this imaginary museum of paper, the authenticity and *aura* of the works could have been reduced, but these works have gained maximum *ubiquity*, *accessibility*, and *manageability*: it is in a way the quintessence of the world's artistic beauty at your fingertips. Consciously or unconsciously Malraux had learned the lessons of Walter Benjamin in his article on *The Work of Art at the Time of its Mechanical Reproducibility* (Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. New York: Schocken books. 1969).

2) Research Questions

In the following pages, I will attempt to analyse more in detail the upheavals brought by the music streaming services in the practice of musical artists today. I decided to designate the music streaming services in general by the company Spotify because they are pioneer of the music streaming market. They are currently the most popular service in the world and their model has largely inspired their competitors. As I described, Spotify embodies the three important dimensions in the evolution of the listener's behaviour -and in the producer's behaviour as well- to music:

- a) **Extreme globalisation:** Spotify aims to deliver to the listener all the music from all over the world and from centuries past without distinction of genre;
- b) **Extreme democratisation:** the extremely wide range of music made available is presented without any hierarchy or distinction;
- d) **Extreme commodification:** music is now even more available to the listener than any supermarket commodity. It is no longer necessary to go to the supermarket to help oneself; one simply has to make one's consumer choice without asking oneself the question of the conditions of possibilities that allowed this choice to be made.

It is not difficult to see that Spotify, in its own way, realizes electronically what the Imaginary Museum of Malraux had only achieved on paper: a gigantic embezzlement carried out the most legally in the world.

In these conditions, Spotify potentially offers a revolutionary field of inspiration of more than 40 millions of songs. This is so vast that nobody can pretend to be familiar with even one percent of it. If one considers that in the recent history of Western humanity the museum has played a major educational role in both the reception and production of works of visual art, one could argue that Spotify plays *mutatis mutandis* the same educational role with regard to the reception and production of music. However, there is no reason to forget the critiques of Adorno and Horkheimer. As I will present, the most used discovery tools of streaming services strengthen the supremacy of the superstars and make music more functional than ever.

In order to balance these two perceptions, I will build a modern definition of creativity with the help of literature. This will help us to understand how the democratization of music through streaming can be related with the creativity of independent artists. Thus, I will first present a brief overview of the technological changes brought about to produce and distribute music since a few decades. This will offer a better understatement of the context in which Daniel Ek and Sean Parker decided to create Spotify. I will then explore the various impacts of streaming services on the music industry. I will see that, despite the democratic access to the whole catalog of the music history, the economics of music streaming lacks transparency. On one hand, streaming offers tailored suggestions of discoveries and appears as an exceptional incentive for artistic creativity. On the other hand, it is often criticized for its low artists compensation and for discriminating certain genres in the music market. I will then conclude with some suggestions which might improve the current economic model.

The main questions that will be explored are:

- 1) What is the impact of streaming services on the creative process of the artists?
- 2) What is the impact of streaming services on the economics on the music industry?

Leading to the subquestions:

- 1.a) Does the use of streaming stimulate artistic creativity?
- 1.b) Does the use of streaming change the creative process of the artist?
- 2.a) Is the remuneration system of Spotify transparent?
- 2.b) Does streaming generate market inequalities between music genres?

The ambiguous result led me to formulate the mixed question “Does Spotify’s attractiveness stifle or challenge the artists creativity, in an era of musical overabundance and competition characterized by a lack of economical transparency?”

In order to verify the ambiguous consequences of streaming in reality, I interviewed multiple professionals of the music industry. Firstly, Céline Leporrier and François Boncompain, artistic managers in the main collecting society for the French artists and performers (Adami), will share their opinion on the health of jazz and classical music. Then, nine artists of several genres and generations will explain their process of inspiration through Spotify. The diverse results allowed me to detect and discuss several types of attitude towards

the inspiration process with streaming services. This will lead to partly elucidate the economic and creative impact of music streaming and suggest further researches. Indeed, the technological evolution of the cultural industry keeps serving economic interest. My research contributes to make technology and culture more socially driven.

THEORY

1) A Look at Creativity

What is exactly creativity? Many definitions refer to the concept of originality or novelty to define creativity. However, as we will see, the importance of originality and novelty into the artistic creations has emerged relatively lately in Europe in the context of the Industrial Revolution and need of distinction of the bourgeoisie. The ability to imagine and create has been differently defined over the past years. If one that to choose among the most recent definitions, I would suggest the following one which has my preference: “*the presentation of pre-existing elements and ideas filtered through the perceptions and feelings of an individual.*” (Will Gompertz, 2015. p. 83). In order to better understand what creativity is and to identify the different artistic attitudes that I have collected during the interviews, I will have a look over this evolution of the concept of creativity in Europe.

a) *Ancient Approach: The Divine Artistic Genius*

Creativity used to be associated with originality and genius. The term *genius* is subject to various interpretations depending on the period and the social environment of its use. For example, around 370 BCN, in his dialogue “Phaedrus”, Plato described the poet Lysias as sacred men inhabited by gods:

“(...) there is in him a divine inspiration which will lead him to things higher still. For he has an element of philosophy in his nature. This is the message of the gods dwelling in this place (...)” (The Internet Classics Archive)

During the Greek and Roman Antiquity, two complementary ideas established the concept of genius: the innate nature of talent and the worship of important figures. For example, Sophocles, Homer and Epicurus were considered as living heroes by their contemporaries. (Brenot 1997, 13-22)

During the European Middle Ages, artists were mostly anonymous workers for their patrons. Later on, the adoration of living figures reappeared during the Italian Renaissance. For example, Giorgio Vasari collected the names of the greatest painters, sculptors and architects

of his time into a praising compendium. This practice became progressively common through centuries until the term *genius* lost its initial exceptional value. (Brenot 1997, 13-22)

Despite the aim for rationality and scientific explanations, the period of Enlightenment reinforced the supranatural status of genius. In his publication “The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle” Charles Batteux (1747) attempts a first clear definition, by reducing artistic genius to a perpetual imitation of nature. (Ferry 1990, 62). Nevertheless, this definition does not include the faculty to innovate as t geniuses generally break the rules of their art. Ten years later, Diderot and d’Alembert needed no less than six pages in order to define the term genius in their “Encyclopedia”:

“the expansiveness of the intellect, the force of imagination and the activity of the soul (...) Within the Arts as in the sciences or in business, genius seems to alter the nature of things, its character expands over all it touches, it bursts over the past and the present and lights the future; it precedes its century but cannot follow it; it leaves behind it the reasonable criticisms of others and with its even pace never leaves nature’s uniformity.”
(Diderot, *Encyclopedia*, Vol.7 p.584. 1757)

Let me at present briefly consider the way Kant determines the term “genius” in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Kant states that the artist cannot produce a beautiful work of art simply by applying commonly accepted rules which determine when something is beautiful. But on the other hand, Kant states that “every art presupposes rules”. Kant's solution to this apparent paradox is to postulate a capacity, which he calls “genius,” by which “nature gives the rule to art”. An artist endowed with genius has a natural capacity to produce objects which are appropriately judged as beautiful. As a matter of fact, the artist himself does not know, and therefore cannot explain, how he was able to create his painting or his piece of music.

In other words, Emmanuel Kant stresses the unexplainable dimension of the genius. In his *Critique of pure Judgement* (1781), the artwork of a genius is original and cannot be the product of a learning process. Thus, he insists on the innate character of the genius, whose attitude is to innovate without any imitation from the environment. Hence, Kant makes a strong distinction between two kinds of artists: the imitators, and the originals. (Dumouchel. 1993. p.80)

The industrial revolution intensifies even more this mystical aspect of artistic genius. During the 18th century, the need to differentiate the human skills to anything which can be produced by a machine strengthen the values of spontaneity and creativity into the arts. In addition, the emancipation of the bourgeoisie (and its need of distinction) and the development of the art market favor the originality of the artists. This reminds us that the importance of originality into arts has emerged culturally in Europe during this period.

Around 1880, a strong social symbolic boundary was established between serious and popular art. This sacralization of art during this period is well illustrated by a letter from Friedrich Nietzsche to Wagner in the book *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872): “*art is the highest task and the properly metaphysical activity of this life*” (p.20) And “*(...) existence and the world appear justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.*” (p. 183). Art for art’s sake became the purpose of the creations and a process of de-commercialization starts and remain until around 1980. This is clearly described by Hans Abbing in “The Changing Social Economic of Arts” (2019).

b) Modern Approach: Genius is a Social Fiction

During the 20th century, in parallel with the development of behavioral theories, psychologists focused on the different manners of learning. Precisely, in their book *Social Learning and Imitation*, Miller and Dollard stressed that “*imitation can greatly hasten the process of independent learning by enabling the subject to perform the first correct response sooner than he otherwise would*” (1941). Later, in order to criticize the behavioral theories, Bandura emphasized that “*the importance of social agents as a source of patterns of behavior continues to be essentially ignored.*” (1962). In this chapter, I will present how this rational approach has progressively driven the educational theories and can be applied to the concept of genius.

For example, a more recent definition of creativity is suggested by Plucker and Beghetto in 2004: “*Creativity is the interplay between ability and process by which an individual of group produces an outcome or product that is both novel and useful as defined within some social context.*” (Plucker & Beghetto 2004, 156). This definition refers to the role of the social context in determining the novelty and thus the creative aspect of a work. Nowadays, the artistic genius is no longer a question of divine call, nor of an unexplainable metaphysical phenomenon.

In “Sociologie de la Culture et des Pratiques Culturelles” Laurent Fleury resumes briefly the sociological context of the 20th century. In the 20th century, after the Second World War and the rising globalization, sociologists like Adorno, Marcuse, Simmel or Habermas express their critical concerns against the development of the mass culture. They lament that new technologies like radio, television and cinema are only driven by a logic of profit. This industry of entertainment would precisely work only to entertain, distract and make money out of business. Its influence was transforming culture into a common product of consumption. Considering that cultural diversity is important to enable each citizen to make his own choice in a democracy, Malraux created the French Ministry of Culture in order to curb its commoditization by the mass industry. The ministry aimed to protect culture against market’s law and to build a society where each citizen has the opportunity to emancipate and has access to art and culture. (Fleury 2016, 18-24)

If one wishes to obtain a reliable panorama of artistic practices and the evolution of taste in France in the 1960s across all strata of society, one can turn to Pierre Bourdieu's reference book, *La Distinction* (1979), which analyses the behavior of the spectator and the listener in relation to art in general. With this important book, Bourdieu played a major role in the de-sacralization of art. He argues that each action reflects the social status (*habitus*) of its holder. In short, the cultural behavior of the consumer -as his music tastes are concerned for example- is highly related to his socio-economic conditions. As a conclusion, the elite-class, will appreciate above all listening to Bach, whereas the lower middle class will prefer to go to a concert featuring Johnny Halliday.

c) *Everybody is an Artist*

It is worth asking whether this analysis of consumer behavior can be applied to the behavior of the artistically creative creator. In the book “Mozart: portrait of a genius” (1993), the sociologist Norbert Elias describes in what extraordinary socio-economic, and psychological context the “genius” of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart developed. Indeed, the father of the pianist was a violin professor who put all his hopes of success into the career of his children. Furthermore, Mozart was living during the transformation of music being considered as craftsmen’s art to artist’s art. “*Elias describes Mozart as striving to move from the position of a craftsman in a feudal system dependent on the patronage of the Salzburg court, to independence as a musician catering for a wider market.*” (Steptoe, 1994. P.278). In addition, Mozart was revolted against the social structure and patterns of tastes in the aristocracy. Finally,

one can also note that the love (or lack thereof) from his wife did influence deeply his self-esteem as a composer and “his desperate search for love was constantly frustrated”. (Elias 1994, 69)

If we leave aside the intellectual ability of the artists, which does not belong to our field of research, the previous historical evolution that I exposed allows to argue that genius is for a great part a social fiction. This result suggests a new modern definition of the term genius as “*A set of exceptional circumstances which coincide efficiently within an individual*” (Selrahc, 2015).

This statement would be supported by the BBC's arts editor Will Gompertz. In his book “Think Like an Artist” (Gompertz 2015, 78-98), he presents several major artists, writers or even physicists like Pablo Picasso, Emile Zola or Albert Einstein. What do they have in common? They would consider that originality in a completely pure form doesn't really exist. Indeed, taking his cue from Pablo Picasso's famous quote “*good artists copy, great artists steal*”, Will Gompertz (2015) describes the major difference between copying and stealing. Stealing a work means that one possess it and is therefore responsible of its future. This requires mastering the technical skills of its field and its sociocultural environment. Thus, Gompertz defines creativity as “*the presentation of pre-existing elements and ideas filtered through the perceptions and feelings of an individual.*” (p. 83). This definition is complementary to the one proposed by Plucker and Beghetto (2004) who insist that creativity should imply “*something novel and useful within some social context*” (Plucker & Beghetto 2004, 156).

The multiple perspectives that I presented so far allow me to suggest at present a new definition which will help to understand how the use of streaming impacts the creative process of artists:

“Artistic creativity is the interplay between ability and process by which an individual presents an original combination of pre-existing elements, with a manner that reflects the perceptions and feelings of its author and which meets the aesthetic criteria defined within some social context.”

It is not difficult to see that, to abide by this definition is not an easy business. It often requires years of work and experience to master the technical aspect of the art and the socio-cultural environment of its cluster to present it correctly. I deliberately did not touch upon the dimension of the “impulsive energy”, also described as “intrinsic motivation” whose

explanation differs for each individual and requires, for each case, a deep tailored multi-dimensional analysis.

In order to understand what creativity is, I described the historic evolution of the concept of artistic genius and related it to some of the most influent thinkers who wrote about the subject. Finally, I suggested a new definition of artistic creativity which could help us to determine how Spotify is conducive to modify the creative process of the artists as it is such an attractive tool for them. At this point, it is necessary to explain the context of the music industry in which Spotify has become the most popular device in order to discover and listen to music, let alone to create new music based on the influence exerted by Spotify.

2) Turbulence of the Music Industry

According to the definition that I suggested previously, the creativity of an artist depends largely on his access to existing works that he has. In this regard, Spotify, which provides an easy accessibility to the whole musical catalogue and to obscure tailored recommendations which meet the tastes of the users, would definitely be the best ally of the artists, who want to consider it so. However, the Swedish company is also accused to ruin the music industry (Hann, 2019). Before presenting the two sides of the medal, we need to understand in which particular economic and technological context Spotify came into existence.

a) Cost Optimization of the Music Production

In the beginning of the 80's, the music industry went through a radical transformation due to several major shifts: more than the CDs and the development of the video clips to promote the music, MIDI protocol, TCT/IP, revolutionary rhythm box and samplers triggered the idea that music could be reduced to a sum of binary numbers. (Prior, 2010). In *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the article "*La misère des musiciens*" (Goethals, 1989) described the spread of recorded commercial music in the public spaces at the expense of the local musicians. With the emergence of the *disco* period, the managers of the nightlife spaces understood quickly the economic loss that they would suffer by maintaining live music in their events. Wisely, they invested into big sound system intended for disc jockeys. *Disco* evolved to *House* until the live

musicians could absolutely not compete with the high degree of technique achieved by the studio recordings.

In the above-mentioned article, Goethals worried that the threat of electronic and sampled music would lead to the disappearance of the popular balls, parties where local artists played music in the villages. He considered that DJing was apparently a job of the future. He proved to be right: as I never had the chance to experience a popular ball, I actually do not even know what it is. The concept remains, but it is rare to find a public party with a live performance.

In 1999, the music industry reached its biggest commercial value as far as historically recorded. Around 25 billion dollars were generated every year (IFPI 2018). Considering the millions that could be generated by only one song, the supply chain of the chart music had become totally industrial. For the manager of record labels Clive Davis, the ultimate goal was to create a pop star who would remain popular as long as possible, something that Clive Davis defined as a “continuity of Hits”. Since 1992, two Swedish producers, Denniz PoP and Max Martin, became famous by producing artists as *The Backstreet Boys* or *Britney Spears*. (Seabrook, 2015). They favored a particular producing method which contributed to the standardization of a new organization of the production: the “track and hook” model. This approach consists of dividing each aspect of the production and entrusting them to different specialists. One producer is in charge of the percussion line, called the beat, another producer makes the chords instrumentation, another the bass, ... Once the main producer has obtained a beat that satisfies him, he could send it to ten different bassists by email and select the bassline that he has his preference. Then, the production team assembles a full instrumentation and they send it to tens of topliners. Toplining consists of singing melodies without lyrics so as to find a “hook” which make the song addictive. Finally, they find the lyrics in collaboration with several songwriters and the result is presented to a star who gets the whole attention from the public. In short, following John Seabrook (2015), Denniz Pop and Max Martin spread the idea to produce commercial music within a network of specialists.

b) Streaming Solved Music Piracy

At the same moment, the development of the internet allowed anybody to share the content of a CD anonymously and freely on peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms, also called piracy sites. In June 1999, the P2P platform “Napster” was founded by Shawn Fanning and Sean

Parker. Its popularity increased quickly, and Fanning and Parker invited the record labels to collaborate so as to build a new economic model for the music distribution. However, the two entrepreneurs were perceived themselves as modern pirates threatening the music industry. In December 1999, the Record Industry Association of America filled a lawsuit for copyright infringement against Napster. The mediatization of the lawsuit provided an important visibility to Napster whose number of users grew up to 80 million. In July 2001, Napster shut down, but the war of music piracy just started. Other similar piracy platforms emerged, and the CD sales began its steady decline.

In 2003, Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, launched the iTunes Store, a solution to substitute music piracy and at the same time save the endangered music industry. This software was the first music digital market dedicated for music which obtained contracts with the big majors. It usually sells any song individually for 0,99 cents and the albums for 9,99 euros. From that moment on, the music was available on an iPod, a little portable player also sold by Apple. The stakeholders of the music industry hoped that this would save their business. However, the iPods could not prevent reading the music which was downloaded illegally on P2P services. After 2003, Steve Jobs sold millions of iPods, while piracy kept decimating the revenues of the music industry.

In 2006, the Swedish entrepreneur Daniel Ek, ex-CEO of the P2P server µTorrent, launched Spotify. In a conference held in 2012 at the University of Stanford, he explained very clearly the intuition which triggered the company:

“Musicians were struggling, they can’t make money out of their music anymore so they keep doing it for touring (...) in 2006, iTunes still sold DRM tracks: They were copyright protected songs, you couldn’t play them anywhere. The quality was 160 kbits. And at the same time, I could go to PirateBay or Kazaa and download the same song pretty much as fast in lossless quality and with no protection whatsoever. So it was obvious to me that, for the first time in history, the pirated product was actually lot better than the one you could buy. So no wonder why people use pirated services. So what we tried to do with Spotify and the goal was to create a service that was actually better than piracy. It was simpler, it’s easier for people to discover and share music. It’s really all that. And we realized that if we could do that, maybe we could take a big chunk of the 500 million people that consume music illegally. And by doing that, getting the music industry back to growth again, where artists can keep making great music that we all can enjoy.” (Ek, 2012)

Considering that piracy and technology would always find a way to escape from laws, Daniel Ek aimed to create a service which offered better quality than piracy while at the same time compensating the music industry.

c) *Democratization of Music Production*

In 1926, the first recording machines were used in North America to record various popular music like blues, gospel, country, and more. Music bands were recorded with a single microphone in only one take. The studio performance was simultaneously pressed on a vinyl disc which was reproduced to be shared around the country. As one can imagine, it was all very exciting. Musicians came with their song ready to make a performance that would leave its trace in history. Studios were rare and the recording sessions were a particularly important moment for their career. As Jack White tells in the movie *The American Epic Session*:

“The musicians came to the room prepared for this moment. That is like going to the church, going on your best clothes for this moment to happen (...) You can’t fix this later. Any mistake that happen are going to be there, in the finished record (...) It’s a scary place to be for some people too.”

Nowadays, things present themselves a bit differently. The technological development of the music production tools was able to reduce professional studios to a single computer. As an illustration of this development, we can consider the album *The Fall* which was entirely produced on an iPad in 2010 by Gorillaz. In contrast to the trend of the 90’s, it is not necessary anymore to depend on a large network of experienced producers controlled by a major label to win Grammys. The singer Billie Eilish hit the superstardom with an album recorded with her brother in their parent’s house using no more than 5000 euros of gear. (Joe, 2020)

Nick Prior (2010) describes precisely the de-industrialization of the music production by what he calls the “*new amateurs*”. This community of active music consumers is seriously interested into the processes of music production and seek a professional quality without the traditional infrastructure nor the traditional qualifications of the professionals. These *new amateurs* come generally from the educated middle class and promote autonomous cultural projects. The knowledge which used to be owned exclusively by the professional sound engineers, producers and composers are now shared and watched for free by millions of new amateurs on YouTube. For example, free programs allow anyone to be initiated with music production techniques. Each Apple device is equipped with *GarageBand*, an intuitive program which offer high quality tools of production. Equivalent program like *Micro Zoom* are available on Microsoft computers. If one hears a song anywhere and needs to find its title, *Shazam* can recognize it and provides a link to find it on streaming platforms. For more experienced

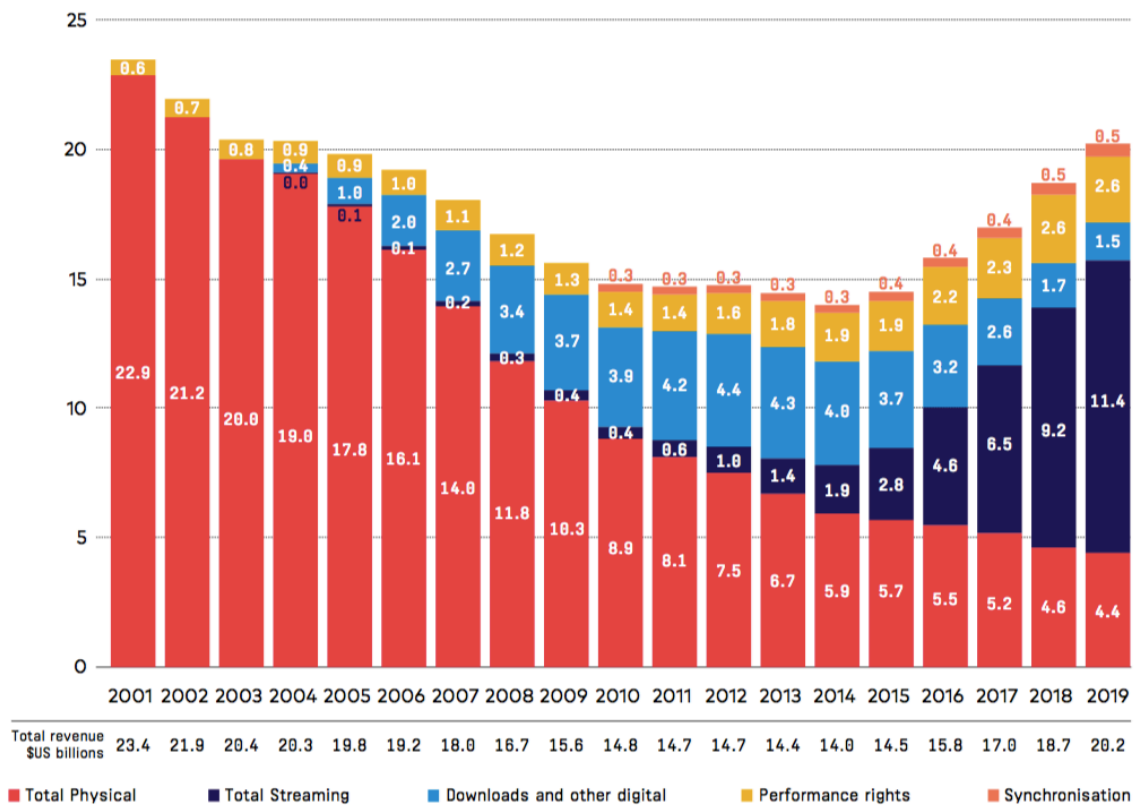
samplers or curious listeners, the website Whosampled.com democratize the knowledge on sampling by showing literally who sampled who. For example, you can find every listed artist who used the drum fill of “Funky Drummer” of James Brown or that superstars like Kanye West sampled around 700 songs along his career.

3) Economic Consequences of Spotify

“The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an *immense collection of commodities*” (Karl Marx, *The Capital I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Classics, 1990).

The following graph indicates how streaming significantly revived the growth of the music industry. Before the emergence of streaming services in 2006, 500 million people downloaded their music illegally on piracy websites (Daniel Ek, 2012). Despite the small amount of revenues that lesser-known artists get from Spotify, I will explore the positive economic impact that it has on the music industry.

Global Recorded Music Industry Revenues 2001-2019 (US\$ Billions)



(IFPI, 2019)

The above graph shows clearly that after having hit rock bottom in 2014, the revenues regained some traction from 2015 onwards. In 2020, it has almost achieved its maximum profitability of the late 90's. Currently, the value of the streaming companies keeps growing on the shares market, which might predict a bright future.

Spotify does not sell any music; it sells the access to it. For a monthly subscription of 9,99 euros, the clients have an unlimited access to the growing catalogue of the platform (around 40 million songs). This price is the same on every streaming service (Tidal, Apple Music, Amazon, Deezer, Pandora, Napster, Google play...). This low price has already allowed Spotify to convince 130 million people to subscribe to their premium service. Following Marc Bourreau and Benjamin Labarthe-Piol, in 2001, the average French family bought 2,1 albums per year. Which represents approximately 31,5 euros per house. With its premium option, the model of streaming services progressively leads subscribed family to spend 120 euros per year on music.

a) *The Obscure Remuneration System*

I should however be noted that the way Spotify distributes its revenue is not clear. On his previous website, Spotify explained that it distributes its revenue following this equation:

$$\text{Spotify monthly revenue} \times \frac{\text{Artist's spotify streams}}{\text{Total Spotify Streams}} \times 70\% \times \text{Artist's royalty rates} = \text{Artist payout}$$

The “70%” factor is due to the fact that 30% of Spotify’s revenues flows directly into the company’s pockets. Apple applied the same ratio with its iTunes platform. This amount goes to the master and publishing owner (distributors, editors and labels) which can close different kinds of contracts with their artists. The functioning of these obscure “Artist’s royalty rates” is precisely what Jeff Price, CEO of the American collection agency *Audiam*, recently tried to explain in March 2020. In a 50 pages guide, he showed the role of the multiple stakeholders who share the incomes distributed by Spotify among the various artists cases. He concludes with this:

“Due to the extreme complexity of how the royalties are calculated, and the pipelines these fractions of pennies flow through, very few know exactly what was earned from

streams of their music on Spotify in the first place. How can an artist have a conversation over how and why things need to change, if the complexity and opaqueness of the situation precludes an understanding of how things work? And that makes you wonder if perhaps this is part of the plan as well... ” (Jeff Price 2020, *The Definitive Guide to Spotify Royalties*)

This conspiracist critic appears in many publications when it comes to explain the functioning of the music industry. I believe that this cloud of obscurity is mostly due to the non-disclosure clause signed between the streaming platforms and the majors to give access to their catalog. (Seabrook, 2015, p. 356). However, in May 2015, the magazine *The Verge* revealed temporarily the article signed between Spotify and Sony. The article disclosed that Sony has negotiated important privileges to the tune of 42,5 million dollar in advances. Sony also got a “Most Favored Nation” clause to keep these advances rising. This clause means that if a competitor major earns more royalties than Sony, Sony will receive a compensation to get as much as its competitor. Another musky revelation of this leak is that Spotify can retain up to 15% of its revenues on advertising. This source of income is not accounted in the official 30% declared by Spotify, as presented in the previous equation (Singleton, 2015). These revelations show that the majors (Sony, Universal and Warner’s) overuse the value of their catalog to optimize their revenue, at the disadvantage of smaller actors of the industry.

b) Critiques on Streaming

Streaming services are accused not to remunerate enough and to offer a superficial visibility which does not support the loyalty of the listeners. (Boulevard du stream, p. 237) Indeed, the incomes are shared proportionally to their number of streams among the total of songs listened. Thus, if a subscriber listens exclusively to independent musicians of his town, the money of his subscription will not go to the account of the artists he listens to. Instead, 70% of his money will be payed to rightsholders, who negotiated different secret conditions. This system logically breaks the career of the artists who lived with an intimate loyal fanbase.

It is hard to estimate the revenues that an artist will earn compared to his popularity on the platform. It depends on each role that he played in the production of his music, and on his contract with its label and distributor. The average revenue for each listening is estimated at 0,004 euros and depends on the type of the stream (premium or from advertising), the country, and the famous (or infamous) artist royalty rates. This means that, on average, an artist needs

to reach more than 250.000 streams per month to earn a decent salary. Only a very small minority of famous artists can score enough to make a living from streaming. In addition, this is just an average approximation. In *The song machine* (Seabrook 2013), both artists Rosanne Cash and Marc Ribot confessed that they respectively earned 104\$ for 600.000 streams and 187\$ for 60.000 streams. (p.358). John Seabrook explains that this is the way music industry work. Artists trust their labels which decide how much they get paid without any transparency.

The model offered by Spotify is not only blamed for increasingly supporting inequalities between artists. In 2019, the journalist Michael Hann provided a clear overview of the recent critics with his article “*How Spotify’s algorithms are ruining music*” published in the *Financial Times*. This article reviewed three books which explained why music streaming affects negatively the way music is listened and created: 1) *The Final Days of EMI: Selling the Pig* (Forde. 2019), 2) *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music* (Eriksson, Fleischer, Johansson, Snickars and Vonderau. 2019) and 3) *Ways of Hearing* (Krukowski, 2019).

- 1) According to the journalist Eamonn Forde, the music industry changed its way of functioning after that the private equity firm *Terra Firma* bought the Major Label *EMI* for 4 billion £ in 2007. The new CEO, Guy Hands, who did not understand the music industry, came to restructure it. For example, he preached the need to use data to scout new artists and he wanted to launch a streaming service to promote *EMI*’s music. Nevertheless, he suffered from his lack of experience of the functioning of the industry and the progressive uselessness of the majors. He failed and the *EMI* label went broke in 2012. However, Daniel Ek and Sean Parker knew perfectly the needs of the music industry. After being respectively CEO of μ Torrent and Napster, the two entrepreneurs knew how to ally the advantage of piracy with the needs of the artists for years. In brief, Eamonn Forde regrets that the music industry has turned exclusively money driven.
- 2) The book *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music* (Eriksson. 2019) claims that Spotify’s main goal is not to help the listener to discover new music. Instead, its business would be to collect information about listeners in order

to sell its audiences to advertisers. The authors point how the company progressively shifted its search options from tracks, artists to “behaviors, feelings and moods”.

- 3) Finally, in *Ways of Hearing*, Krukowski (2019) claims that on Spotify’s users would be confused by the impossibly wide choice of the catalogue. This would reduce the incentive to discover new music as Spotify’s algorithms steer the listeners to remain conservative by suggesting them recommendations which fits their favorite tastes.

The article of Michael Hann concludes that the context of Spotify could not give birth to artists like The Beatles, Queen, The Beach Boys nor Pink Floyd, who signed to *EMI*. However, the sum of his arguments is quite unclear. On one hand, he laments that Spotify caused the failure of *EMI*, collects data about the behavior of their users and that its recommendation algorithm is not good enough. However, Spotify offered to the majors their first growth of revenue after 14 years of loss and the collection of data is precisely used to improve the algorithm of recommendations. In order to blame that the company collects data, the article appears to explain that Spotify advises artists within their distribution strategy... Can we conclude that streaming is ruining the way we create and listen to music, as Hann introduced his article?

c) Arguments in Favor of Spotify

Several studies argued that the use of Spotify brings a significant positive impact on the music industry.

In 2018, Datta, Know and Bronnenberg studied the impact of the use of streaming on the diversity of the music consumed. Their methodology consisted of observing the behaviors of 5000 users of Spotify for 2,5 years on the streaming platform. Their results indicate a consequential long-run shift in music consumption leading to more plays, variety, and new music discoveries. Hence “*the shift from ownership to streaming potentially levels the playing field to the benefit of smaller producers, indie artists or labels*”. (Datta, Knox and Bronnenberg, 2018, p.6)

Furthermore, Aly-Tovar published an article in 2018 where he asked to 1100 artists what their opinion on the emergence of streaming services was and examined their answer depending on various factors like the genre, the age and the popularity of the interviewees.

Among their several interesting discoveries, the authors identified that “*Free streaming stands as a discovery tool that helps consumers to explore the music catalogue beyond stars and already well-known artists (...) (and) generates a positive externality on the live music market*”. (Aly-Tovar, 2018, p.20)

Finally, an Australian study on the live performance economy also concludes that streaming services expanded considerably the consumption of music. Instead of focusing on how or why streaming would be good or not for musicians, Campbell analyses the new opportunities that it offers and suggest a new business model built on the *Economy of Experience*. Briefly, live performances. Despite, the loss of revenues from CD sales, Spotify offers visibility to a lot of independents, empowering the niches markets. (Campbell, 2013). The growing economy of live performances is also indicated by the graph from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, which clearly shows that the revenues from live performance has doubled in ten years.

d) The Advent of Alaylists: Are Market Inequalities Increased or Revealed?

Between 2014 and 2016, we discovered that the music industry has hidden a secret since decades. Thanks to their unique collection of listening data, platforms like Spotify were the first to notice it. People do not listen to albums, but pieces of albums. They gather their favorite songs into personal compilations called playlists. In their beginning, streaming services organized their suggestions by albums, a coherent collection of songs mixed organically by an artist to be listened in queue. This model of consumption has been leading the music industry since the sixties with the invention of the 33 rpm records. With these long formats, artists had the opportunity to tell a narration through the tracks and to mark the spirit of their fans. This format was also economically interesting. Producing and distributing a disc for two or twelve songs cost quite the same. The main difference was the rent of the recording studio. In these conditions, the labels favored to sell an album for thrice the price of a single. “*Thus, for fifty years, the long format was the commercial priority of the Majors as the artistic outcome for the musicians.*” (Free translation, P.240)

In the end of the nineties, the peer-to-peer platform Napster revealed that most of users did not download entire discographies nor albums. They picked their favorite songs to sculpt

their personal compilations. The same ascertainment was done on iTunes with the rise of legal downloading: 90% of the clients bought one or two songs from the albums, only 10% bought the album entirely. (p. 240). As a consequence, a market of playlist has been developed recently. Spotify hires specialist of different genres to update regularly the latest novelty on playlists like *Rap Caviar* or *Pop Champagne*. From his office in New-York, Tuma Basa managed the most popular hip-hop playlist of the world. His job consists of predicting what rap fans will love and listen on loop by curating a coherent combination of pleasures among the abundance that is suggested to him daily. (Menu, 2017). The same phenomenon happens on YouTube with independent channels like *Délicieuse Musique*, *The Sound You Need* or *Majestic Casual*. The curators of these playlists follow both their instinct and the data analysis of the behavior of the listeners. If a song is regularly skipped, it will be displaced or removed.

Because of this, the journalist James Masterton sees this trend with a very pessimistic look. Playlists curators would take less risk to promote songs which requires several listening to be fully appreciated. In his opinion, the charts have changed for the worse because exciting music could not emerge anymore from this system. (Lynskey, 2017). In contrast, Sophian Fanen, the author of *Boulevard du Stream*, which inspired most of this chapter, stresses the rise of diversity that hit the music industry recently. “There is no reason to worry for music”. (Free translation). After each technological innovation, some people worry for creativity. Young listeners consume more music than ever. Even if they do not know the historical context nor the career of what each artist they like, they still hear more music than any generation before.

However, the accepted rumor which says that when a song is skipped often, it is detected as a sign of dissatisfaction by the algorithms of the platform is widely spread. In this case, the song would become less likely to appear on the suggestions for the other users and to appeal to more listeners... In addition, we have seen that the remuneration system of the streaming services pays artists proportionally to the number of listens of their music, one listening being counted after the 30th second of the song. For these reasons, some artists are hesitating to shape their music to make it more algorithm friendly and to shorten their songs to optimize their revenue. As a consequence, the British Collective Society PRS for Music observed that “*Pop songs are one minute and 13 seconds shorter on average than they were 20 years ago.*” (Bemrose, 2019).

As an example of this development, the Electronic Dance Music producer Jon Sine uses to reveal his creative process on his YouTube channel. In the beginning of June 2019, he said that he would not approve to change his music so that it fits the code of the algorithm. However, he would hesitate to take into account some particularities of the recommendation system, as long as he likes what he does (Jon Sine 2019, *How Spotify Manipulation is Ruining the Future of Music*). However, in further videos, it looks like he stopped hesitating and gives plenty tips to shape music with the functioning of the algorithms. For example, in July of the same year, Jon advises to distribute music on as many platforms as possible and promote it on social media to increase the chances to be discovered by fans. (Jon Sine 2019, *Make 1 Mio. Plays on Spotify - 5 Fast and Easy Steps*). Then in October, he recommended to grab the attention of the listener in priority, to shorten the songs and to limit its music to one precise genre to be easily integrated into playlists by curators. (Jon Sine 2019, *How to produce Music to get more Streams*) This dilemma seems to worry him a lot because he presents his hesitations and solutions in plenty of videos (*How Algorithms Transform Music; Spotify Algorithm Explained - Get more Plays; Should You Change Your Sound for Success; How to Get your Music on BIG Spotify Playlists - This got Me 3 Million Streams!*). His career is not finished but it seems that he progressively becomes more cynical and successful with his EDM music.

This trend looks particularly true for mainstream music which are more likely to attract money driven producers. Also, the audiobooks now cut their chapters into plenty of 90 seconds parts. Indeed, the number of divisions of the audio book multiply proportionally their revenue. These optimizations are problematic because it competes with the majority of artists who do not consider such practices.

More recently, another phenomenon reveals even more that music is not purchased by album, nor by artist nor by genre, nor by decade. Streaming services grant a rising importance to playlists sorted by moods, atmospheres or moments. In 2015, only 17 of the 100 most influent playlists of Spotify represented a musical genre. Chill, party, sport, gym, kitchen, ... there are even playlist curated for sex depending on the age of the listener and sport playlists indicate the bpm of the music to fit with the heartbeat of the listener. This functional way of presenting music is obviously disapproved by the traditional audiophiles who aim to understand the history of the music that they hear and to feel connected with the artists.

Nonetheless, functional music is not something new. Religious songs in the middle-age, table music of Telemann (1681-1767) could already be considered so. In 1920, the composer Erik Satie claimed to have composed his “Musique d’Ameublement” to fill the awkward silences during the dinner (Gillmor, 1988. P.17). Since, the BBC launched the program *Music While You Work*, as the company Muzak offered the program *Stimulus Progression*, designed precisely to accompany the rhythm of the workers in the factories. (Lanza. 1995. P.48). Ambient music has developed into multiple forms like *Lounge*, *Buddha-Bar* compilations, into commercial galleries and plane boarding halls. (Fanen, p. 244).

Despite their will to share music with passion to stimulate the curiosity of the listeners, streaming services pushed functional music to the next level. Daniel Maherly, founder of Deezer, stresses the passivity of the general public. People are lazy and need recommendations of music which they already know. An anonymous employee of the French streaming service regrets that when they take the risk to make more adventurous playlists, the listening rate decreases... (Fanen, 2016). One statistic illustrates it perfectly: on Deezer, 90% of the listens concentrate on only 5% of the catalog. (Fanen, 2016). This proportion is probably the same on the other streaming services.

4) Possible Solutions to Improve Welfare of Artists and Listeners

I have presented several consequences of the development of the streaming services in the music industry. In a nutshell, it should be welcome as far as the creativity of the artists is concerned, but its remuneration system remains unclear and its malfunctioning would create market inequalities which weaken certain music genres which are less adaptable to fit the algorithms codes. Several examples illustrate that the economical functioning of Spotify alters the music creation and consumption. The market discriminations caused by Spotify push the music producers to adopt a competitive approach to be highlighted by the algorithms of recommendation and to optimize their revenue by altering the structure of their song to fit the remuneration system. This reduces the creative freedom and the cultural diversity in the music industry. Thus, it is necessary to look for improvements. In this chapter, I will present existing solutions of policies that could be adopted by the cultural institutions to protect and stimulate cultural diversity and creativity and increase the fairness of the music industry.

I strongly believe that the role of the cultural institutions is to protect culture against the commoditization and the rules of the industry and markets. The Federation of Brussels and Wallonia defends this goal because “*culture is the pillar of every society and constitutes a major vector of emancipation, social reinforcement, human and economic development*” (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, *Déclaration de Politique Communautaire 2014-2019*, Online, free translation).

In addition, Caves (2000) and Gill (2002) described that the workers of the creative industries are already experiencing several challenges. Employment is largely project-based and temporary, they face many costs and constraint, regarding that retirement, sick leave and insurance are transferred to their individual responsibility. Creative workers manage often unstable income and claim that there are several unpaid elements hidden from the public gaze when managing a creative practice, such as personnel practices, rehearsals and administrative. When they work in their creative field, they must make themselves available for extended and irregular working hours and must be geographically mobile.

Over the last years, the European Parliament has been working on solutions with the controversial “Article 13 of the European Copyright Directive”. This law planned to reinforce the control of the licenses of copyright-protected material on the content-sharing services. As many critics against this law, I argued in a previous essay that it favors the biggest industrial groups and the music majors at the expense of the independent publishers the public, the values of freedom of speech, democracy, creativity and the culture of remix.

Indeed, against the copyright enforcement Cochrane, Fantini and Scherer (2013) argue that “*music is an important component in human identity construction and development, both on an individual and collective level*” and “*these identity functions become severely restricted by today’s copyright laws*”. Considering the influence of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights on the national copyright laws, they add that “*music becomes subject to the private rights of multinational corporations and media-conglomerates, whereby music loses its independence as a dynamic cultural expression and individual self-object.*”

In 2016, Christian Handke, Bodo Balazs and Joan-Josep Vallbé proved that it is possible to improve the global welfare between the online consumers and music producers by

implementing a well-designed Copyright Compensation System (CCS). Their research aims to suggest a viable option to improve the widespread dissatisfaction of the online copyright system in the last 20 years. Their article studies the impact that would have a tax on the Dutch internet subscription to stimulate the investments in the creative industries, which would also bring substantial benefits to the users. They estimated that the average willingness to pay for a mandatory CCS is 9,25 euros per month and would generate a surplus of 600 million euros yearly. This result counts for the Netherlands, where the internet penetration rate is one of the bigger in the world. However, they stress that “*increases rights holder profits would foster the supply of new creative works in way that was not foreseen by participants in the choice experiment, making a CCS even more beneficial in the long run.*”

Another solution to improve the fairness of the remuneration system of the streaming services is the User Centric Based System (UCPS). As I explained previously, the current remuneration system of Spotify distributes the total of the revenues of the company compared to the proportion of streams that each artist has generated. This means that artists who are listened on loop by a little proportion of intense listeners might receive the majority of the distributions. Furthermore, some musical genres have the possibility to adapt their music by shortening their song or making more catchy introductions to be favored on popular playlists. This system creates market inequalities between the different musical genres and pushes artists to produce music that fits particular characteristic favored by the algorithms, instead of supporting quality and novelty. Recently, the French streaming service Deezer, promised to adopt the User Centric Based System. In this model, the money of the subscribers goes directly to the artists whom they listen to. According to the Deezer website, the users aged between 18 and 25 years old represent 19% of their clients but generate 24% of the royalties. The French company argues that this measure will reduce unfair revenue gaps and support local creators and niche genres. By adopting this policy, Deezer insists on its mission to help all artists to reach more fans and to “*promote a diverse and vibrant music landscape.*”

However, no study has yet proved the efficiency of UCPS yet to reduce unfair revenue gaps. Even if it does have a positive impact, it does not mean that the other streaming platforms will change their remuneration system. This reform has been adopted by Deezer in March 2020 and results should soon be available.

5) Expectations

In the theoretical considerations, I discussed two opposite impacts of the music streaming service for the artists. Firstly, I defined artistic creativity as “the interplay between ability and process by which an individual presents an original combination of pre-existing elements, with a manner that reflects the perceptions and feelings of its author and which meets the aesthetic criteria defined within some social context.” This definition suggests that Spotify can stimulate the artists creativity by providing them an infinite access to the entire historical music catalog, letting them stream through the time, and suggesting them tailored obscurer artists. Thus, artists could easier sculpt their originality through what they listen to and influence their creativity. I want to explore how does the artists apprehend this possibility for their music. Logically, the democratization of the access to Culture should stimulate the emancipation of the public and facilitate the emergence of the artists. If this is hardly measurable, I expect to reveal how certain uses of streaming can stimulate the artistic creativity.

However, I presented several structural issues and critiques whereby companies like Spotify would have brought a negative impact on the cultural diversity and on the artistic creativity. Indeed, the current system of remuneration lacks transparency and favors non-innovative musical genres for a passive audience. Despite their will to encourage the curiosity of the listeners, streaming services noticed that they prefer to remain in their comfort zone and listen to music for its functional dimension.

Thus, Spotify would impose ambiguous consequences on the diversity and the creativity of the music industry. I therefore want my research to verify, interpreting and balancing these two opposite aspects of Spotify by interviewing artists and experts.

Empirical Research

1) Methodology

In the introduction, I presented the research question as:

- 1) What is the impact of streaming services on the creative process of the artists?
- 2) What is the impact of streaming services on the economics of the music industry?

Leading to the subquestions:

- 1.a) Does the use of streaming stimulate artistic creativity?
- 1.b) Does the use of streaming change the creative process of the artists?

- 2.a) Is the remuneration system of Spotify transparent?
- 2.b) Does streaming generate market inequalities between music genres?

a) Sampling

In order to answer the question and to collect a pertinent point of view of the evolution of the music industry since the advent of Spotify, I needed to interview experts of genres who are disadvantaged by the streaming services. In addition, they should provide a broad view of their sector by working on several projects, of various sizes, on a national scale. I opted for ADAMI, the French collecting management society, which gathers and distributes the royalties of the French performers. ADAMI collects 45 million euros each year from the diffusion of recorded music whose 25% is invested in 1300 artistic projects. Céline Leporrier and François Boncompain are respectively artistic directors in the jazz and classical music departments.

In order to measure the impact of Spotify in the artistic creative process, I needed to gather a sample of artists of different musical genres, different ages, different instruments and different levels of experience.

In the context of the music genres, many sociologists pointed out recently that the traditional music genre classification is not relevant anymore (Vlegens. and Lievens. 2016) because “*an*

artist like Eminem might be pop for one person and hip-hop for another” (Beer & Taylor, 2013; p. 3). In addition, as described by Hans Abbing in *The Changing Social Economic of Arts* (pp.117-157. 2019), a symbolic exclusion has been operated between serious and popular arts in the last century and this boundary is fading into multiples hybridizations since around 40 years. Still, the approach of producing hip-hop seems technically and sociologically opposite to the one of a classical composer. Parallely, we can differentiate the approaches between a jazz and a rock composer. Distinguishing the musical genres is getting more and more complex so I have to compromise. Thus, I consider the relevant category by the popularity and the music genres.

The sampling strategy is a mix of convenience and atypical cases. I managed to reach artists of various profiles and more or less famous in their genre. Considering the little amount of time that I had compared to the depth of the research, I have decided to select a pertinent sample of accessible artists with the objective to gather multiple artistic profiles that cover complementarily a wide sum of creative approaches in the music industry.

I selected the following participants:

Name	Age	Genre	Popularity	Instrument
Thomas (aka Bungalow)	29	Pop/Rock	National	Production, Bass, Vocals, Composition, Songwriting
Cecilia	53	Classical	International	Flute, Composition
Aude	21	Pop/Rock	Local	Vocals, Songwriting
Charlotte (aka Charles)	18	Pop/Rock	National	Piano, Vocals, Songwriting
Antoine (aka Glass Museum)	25	Jazz/Electronica	International	Piano, Production, Composition
Jules (aka Al'Tarba)	30	Hip-hop/trip-hop	International	Production, Composition, Mixing
François (Mowley)	27	Hip-hop	International	Production, Composition, Mixing
Emile	23	Classical	Local	Piano, Violin, Composition
Edouard	23	Folk/Rock	Local	Guitar, vocals, production, songwriting, composition

b) Method

I made the choice of a qualitative research with a thematic analysis for the following reasons:

The creative process of artists is something very individual that seems impossible to collect with a quantitative survey. Each interview required to establish a confidential relationship. Artists were invited to reveal their personal reflections about the controversial marriage between art and technology. A qualitative methodology allows the interviewees to bring new elements that could overpass the expectations and complete the research.

In theory, the thematic analysis consists of six phases (Blandford, 2016).

- 1) *Familiarization with data* which is my theory
- 2) *Assigning preliminary codes to the data to describe the content* which are the expectations and the questions of interviews.
- 3) *Searching for themes in the codes across the different interviews* will be done in the reports of each interviews
- 4) *Reviewing themes* is the results of the interviews
- 5) *Defining and naming themes* is the analysis of the results matched back with the theory
- 6) *Producing the final report* will be the conclusion

I consider the themes as “the impacts of Spotify on the music industry, on the creative and economic sides”. With the project managers of ADAMI, I explored the health of the independent music sector and how it changes with the advent of musical streaming. Here are the questions which conducted the interview:

- 1) *Is there an increasing number of artists who request your services?*
- 2) *What would be the reasons of the increase/reduction?*
- 3) *Then, is there an increasing level of competition between the independent artists?*
- 4) *Do you think that it affects their creativity?*
- 5) *Is there a shift of revenues into the independent art sector?*

- 6) *People who use streaming services like Spotify would adopt a more various musical consumption which favors the independent artists. Do you observe this enhancement of curiosity from the publics?*
- 7) *Do you think that digitalization contributes to the democratization of culture?*
- 8) *Do you think that musical niches are endangered?*

With the artists, the thematic analysis will describe how the use of Spotify influence their creative process and if they do, how do they consider the market discriminations generated by Spotify. In order to explore their attitudes among their use of Spotify to listen and discover music as to inspire their creations, I prepared the following questions. (NB: some questions seem repetitive and wide. My intention was to push the interviewees to look in depth at their creative process. It was efficient because sometimes, artists noticed new ways to describe how their method has evolve with the time.)

Listening part:

- 1) *Do you use Spotify or any other music streaming service?*
- 2) *Before the advent of streaming, did you use another tool to listen to music? (iPod, CD, ...)*
- 3) *What tool do you prefer? Why?*
- 4) *On average, how much time per day do you listen to music?*
- 5) *How do you discover new music? (automatic playlist? friend's or artist's playlists? friends' suggestion? Magazine? ...)*
- 6) *If you discover a song from an intriguing artist which make you be curious, how do you go further?*
- 7) *Do you have a « musical secret garden » like a playlist or anything with only the songs that you love?*
- 8) *To what extent is it representative of the music that you create?*

Creation part:

- 1) *How would you define the music genre that you make?*

- 2) *Do you have something like a notebook, or a playlist, made specifically to inspire your compositions? How do you manage it? How long have you been doing it?*
- 3) *Can you describe me the creative process of one of your composition? Which artists/songs inspired it musically? What about the arrangement? The lyrics?*
- 4) *Do you experience creativity blockage? How would you define it? How do you move out of it?*
- 5) *Nowadays we can observe two kind of creative process: The “traditional” one consists of following its compulsive authentic ideas. The “DJ” one consists of mixing ideas from different songs until achieving something original. Did you ever experience this boundary? What is your opinion on it?*
- 6) *How would you react if you find a song that you would have loved to make?*
- 7) *Does the popularity of a song influence the idea of drawing from it?*
- 8) *What is originality?*
- 9) *Do you grant importance to provide variety in an album? If yes, how would you define it and how do you manage to produce diversity?*
- 10) *Streaming services give us the opportunity to access an infinite content to stimulate our creativity. In your daily life, how do you deal with this abundance, between listening, silence and creation?*

Additional question: What do you know about the remuneration system of Spotify and what do you think about it?

c) Limitations

The impact of streaming on artistic creativity is hardly measurable. Each artist develops a unique relationship with his/her art and should not be aware of its particularity to be good at its profession. Paralelly, as a cultural economist, I can only pretend to ask questions and to collect their multiple answers to indicate the existence of trends, as far as my sample is representative of the reality. Collecting information about the creative process of an artist requires to build a relationship of trust. The Covid-19 crisis forced me to meet the participants by audio conference, which did not facilitate the task. In order to be able to explore these questions more precisely, I would have needed to interview much more artists of more genres like Metal, Rap, Techno/House, Afrobeat, Reggae/Dub, ... Also, except Cecilia who is born in Argentina, all of the participants are Belgian, Dutch or French natives. The study should include

artists from wider origins. I also regret not to have met a producer who obviously optimizes his revenue by producing cheap music that fits the “mood playlists” of the streaming platforms.

Finally, I think that the two managers of ADAMI suggest a wise approach on the changing economics of jazz and classical music for independent French musicians. I attempted to reach employees of streaming services as Google, Deezer or Spotify in vain. Further researches could include the views of labels, venues and festival managers.

2) Results

In the introduction, I explained that inspiration is the oil of creativity. Then, I presented the arrival of Spotify and I discussed its impact on the music industry. On the one hand, Spotify provides an unlimited access to the whole catalogue of the industry, since, millions of people can shape their musical culture easily. Before the advent of streaming, a very few music lovers collected hundreds of discs for this purpose.

Thus, considering my definition of creativity, I expected that the advent of musical streaming supported the creativity of the artists. However, streaming is also responsible of the build-up of competition and many artists are now struggling to make a living with their music. In addition, certain genres are discriminated by the use of streaming. Does this confusion affect the attitude of the artists? Does this change their creative process?

a) Interview With Two Project Managers of ADAMI

Before exploring these questions, I present a testimony of two professionals who represent the economic side of the music industry. In order to collect a pertinent look, showing the development of the independent musicians in France, I interviewed two project managers of ADAMI. This is a major collecting management society, which gathers and distributes the royalties of the French performers.

The number of artists who requests support from ADAMI for their project has increased by a third since a few years. This rise is partly due to the fact that some big artists, who did not need support from the public institution, recently face difficulties to cover their costs. François

Boncompain also explains that this rise is a consequence of the multiplication of the schools of jazz. This led to an increasing number of talented musicians, but the demand did not follow this trend. In jazz, fees have diminished, and the artists have no more revenues from CD sales nor from streaming.

The situation is quite similar in classical music. It has become extremely difficult to find a contract in an orchestra. But the technical level of the musicians has never been so high. They are now more likely to manage their own career in self production. The young musicians apprehend better the new communication techniques of the online social networks, which help the classical music to survive. Nowadays, musicians are expected to prove entrepreneurial abilities to survive in the industry. However, the audience is ageing, and the current crisis will probably push many struggling musicians out. ADAMI does its best to sustain these niches, nevertheless, the future of jazz and classical remain uncertain.

Further to their newly required entrepreneurial skills, conservatoria musicians are also expected to contribute to the artistic education of the public with multiple actions driven by cultural institutions. They are generally proud of this mission. Nevertheless, albeit they are trained to be professional musicians, one can only come to the conclusion that they are paid more as educators than as performers.

Finally, François Boncompain indicated the emergence of a new hybridization of Hip-hop and Jazz which is getting extremely popular and proves that the sector might find a new audience in the future. (To illustrate this rebirth of Jazz in the US, I invite the readers to listen to the album “To pimp a butterfly” by *Kendrick Lamar*, to *Flying Lotus* or *Kamasi Washington*. Also in the UK, various artists like Jacob Collier, Kokoroko, Tom Misch or Alfa Mist are giving a new life to jazz.)

b) Interviews With the Artists

In this part, I will explore the behavior of different artists and examine how their use of Spotify to listen and discover music as to inspire their creations. The interviews consisted of a semi-directive discussion with the artists. I started by asking open questions about their use of Spotify as music lovers. Therefore, I asked them to describe their creative process with multiple

questions. The following reports are summaries of the most pertinent information of each interview.

Thomas (aka Bungalow)

Thomas is a producer and songwriter graduated in bass guitar at the conservatory of Amsterdam. Since 2015, he released one EP and three singles with his band Bungalow and he occasionally produces music for commercials. His next EP contains six tracks and is going to be published around June 2020.

After having downloaded music illegally for years, he currently uses Spotify daily. He likes it for its convenience and the discovery tools. The recommended playlists offer him similarities of what he likes and sometimes “gritty, weird things”. He follows artists that reflect his music. They create playlist that he can follow, and he also make his own playlists and share his discoveries with his friends. However, he sometimes misses “the hunt” of new music that he experienced before the era of streaming. With “hunt”, Thomas meant that there is less excitement when he discovers new artists and share it with his friends.

Most of the time, he listens to the recent recommendations that Spotify offers to him. He never listens to entire albums. He agrees that there is a relationship between the music that he listens and the music that he produces. He might be “obsessed” with a certain guitar sound on one song and try to recreate it in his own way. In that sense, *“it does trigger (his) creativity and the way (he) makes music”*

However, his creative process remains personal and spontaneous. He composes his vocal melodies with the toplining technique. That means that he sings whatever comes to his mind on the instrumental until finding something he likes. Then, he would improve the lyrics to finalize the song.

His creative blockages come from overthinking and the pressure he sets to himself. He likes his music when it come from spontaneous moments when he does not think about what he is doing.

He does never take direct inspiration from an existing song. His work might only be indirectly or unconsciously influenced by what he likes. During his creative process, he wants his music to take a life of its own, changing direction from his initial idea. It leads to new things and exciting ideas. However, he defines originality “*more as a combination of existing sounds and methods*” than as “*inventing something new*”. “*I don't want to say it like everything's been done. But everything has been done.*” He finally says that his view of originality is a bit unclear. “*I want stuff to be original, but I don't mind if stuff is, is inspired on other stuff*”.

His creative process is different if he works on a commercial. In this case, he can take a more direct inspiration from an existing work.

Thomas used to hate cover songs. “*Why would I create a song that's already been being done? (...) and which would sound worse than the original...*”. Now, he regrets this attitude because artists can learn a lot from this process.

We conclude the interview on the possibility of altering strategically the input of inspiration in order to influence the output. This idea seems feasible for him.

Cecilia Arditto

Cecilia is a classical music composer from Argentina. She studied classical composition at the conservatorium of Amsterdam in the 80's. Her experimental compositions are played by different performers worldwide. She does not use Spotify nor Youtube because these platforms use to cut the content with advertising. For that reason, she still prefers to surf on Soundcloud and Vimeo. She is satisfied with these platforms which suggest composers that she likes and that she could find herself. She knows personally the composers who influence her art. When she discovers an artist that she likes, she uses to send him a private message on Facebook, to meet him, and say that she loves what he does.

Her creative process consists of writing down different ideas and concepts on a notebook, organizing them until creating a structure. It might be a complex process for just a one-minute trumpet solo.

She does not experience any creativity blockage. In opposite, she has generally too many ideas. The work consists of simplifying it. Everything in the score should have its importance and be at the right place.

About the different approaches that modern composers can adopt, Cecilia compares our period with the Baroque era. There are plenty of different influences and each composer can makes its unique path by quoting materials from anywhere. She often finds pieces that inspire her and that she does not achieve to copy. It still inspires her work a lot. Cecillia aims to find her own sincere voice, whatever if it is good or bad or original.

As a yoga teacher, she aims to find a physical dimension into her music. She considers herself as very productive, but she considers that it would be capitalist to use this term about the act of producing music. The society pushes us to be productive and the goal of music is precisely to suggest another dimension for our existence.

She thinks that the wide quantity of music available on the internet is fascinating. Despite the overwhelming quantity of music which is available, she seeks continuously for the same music and she thinks that she could open her perspective a bit more.

She does not worry for the future of classical music. In her opinion, the fear raised by every technological change is not relevant. When the television appeared, people predicted the end of the radio. When the internet appeared, people predicted the end of the television. She does not think that the development of electronic music will pose a threat for the orchestras.

Emile Daems

Emile entered the conservatorium of Brussels in 2012 as a violinist. He follows with a bachelor's in musical writing and he still studies composition while earning money with concerts as a violinist. His compositions are occasionally played but he is in the very beginning of his career as a classical composer.

He uses Spotify daily, and he also recently started a collection of vinyl discs. He favors Spotify for discovering obscure composers that he would not find otherwise. In addition, in

classical music, the CDs are often sold by compilations. It appears difficult to buy a contemporary work without other mainstream classical compositions. He stresses that the economy of classical music is traditionally more built on the live performances than on the physical sales. Indeed, a little minority of famous works are recorded every year by plenty of performers. The business is more based on the promotion of new interpretations than on the discovery of new compositions. Emile regrets that the status of performers dominates the composers in the current classical music hierarchy.

Nowadays, each composer can be inspired by influences from all around the world. One century ago, it was exceptional for a composer to use the elements of another culture into his music. He stresses the example of Debussy who was fascinated by the Gamelan's music at the universal exhibition of Paris in 1889.

In his opinion, it is essential to find an own style, which is original, and also reach an audience. He spends a lot of time to analyze the works that he listens to.

He discovers new music on YouTube and Spotify but not on the recommended playlists. He favors the "radio" option which suggest similar songs to the one he listens. Since he has access to Spotify, he discovered plenty of new artists compared to the past. Emile does not create his own playlist. He thinks that he would get bored of listening to the same songs over and over again. Instead, he feeds his inspiration in the perpetual discovery.

He can hardly explain his creative process. Each piece of work is different from the other. He generally selects the elements that he likes the best and shift its shape subtly. He can take inspiration from existing works like the form, the structure, when the surprises come, ...

In his opinion, young composers are strongly influenced by their predecessors. They achieve the status of master once they are themselves able to other artists. For example, the first period of Beethoven was really similar to Hayden or Mozart. He needed years of practice before finding his path and building his historical reputation.

Emile faces creativity blockage if he has no deadline or no desire to compose. His schedule as an performer, music teacher and composer is quite hard to sustain.

Inspiration is a really small part of the creative process. It is only useful to find the melodies, the material and the harmony. What matters is the work accumulated behind every end product: the context, the structure, the effects, ... These are aspects that the composer learns with experience.

Edouard

Edouard started to play the piano when he was around 14 years old. Two years later, he decided to play music more seriously and launched his first band *Tissue* with a friend. They both played the guitar and sang. They found good musicians to play along on stages and made tens of concerts for 3 years. Two years ago, *Tissue* separated for musical and human reasons. Both started their own solo project. Edouard recruited new musicians and alternated between full band and solo concerts. Recently, he started to record his music, which he produces as a self-made artist at home, with the best quality as possible. An EP will be released soon.

Edouard used to buy physical CD's or online music on iTunes. He was extremely attached to the fact of materially owning the music. Two years ago, his family decided to subscribe to the family plan of Spotify... He now listens to music on Spotify around three hours a day. He does not follow the automatic playlists, nor even the tailored lists because he does not want to fall into a consumption model of listening, where he would not know the artists that he listens to. Thus, he discovers new music via his friends, movies, YouTube suggestions and going to live concerts. When Edouard listens to music, he is insisting on listening to the albums entirely. This allow him to create a proximity with the artist, his creative process and his music. In order to keep the feeling of owning his favorite music, Edouard still buy CDs or download music to put in on his iPod.

About his creative process, Edouard used to be obsessed with particular songs for weeks. Thus, he incorporates a dimension of these songs in his music. It is often a mix of different influences. One song will inspire the melody, another will inspire the lyrics, some songs can inspire the arrangement, ... He gathers a few songs that he collects and try to figure the direction that bring him there, consciously or not. For example, in his composition *Doors*, the vocals are

inspired from *Damian Rice*, the phonetic and the grammar of the lyrics comes from *Flyte*, and the arrangement was inspired from *The Beatles*, *Lou Reed* and *Grizzly Bear*.

Edouard says to be inspired by the fact that other artists are better than him. He will privilege a contemplative, admirative attitude and he will try to reach the excellence he finds in the artists he loves. It is necessary to be able to listen, understand and appreciate to write and compose. There are other periods when Edouard cannot appreciate music anymore and he would not create anything.

“You should avoid plagiarism by multiplying your sources to go unnoticed. (laughing)”

However, Edouard always keep a large part of the creative process for his own ideas. Inspiration from existing work could limit his own creativity and he risks making an imitation of a genre that is not his own. He composes, plays the song with a guitar and let spontaneity carry him away.

Despite the fact that artists are not paid anymore, Edouard likes how easy it is to share and to discover new artists with Spotify. It had made him be more curious. Now, he can “take the risk” to discover new genres without paying and he is often surprised to love what he discovers.

Aude

Aude performs regularly with her cover band and with her friends in various open stages. She recently started a new project with compositions inspired by various artists like *London Grammar*, *Radiohead* or *Palace*. She uses Spotify every day and watch live concerts on Youtube. After having used an Mp3 player, she favors Spotify for its practical aspect. She uses it between five and six hours per day. It allows her to easily collect her favorite music into playlist and listen to it on loop. The “radio” tool allows her to discover plenty of songs associated with what she likes. In addition, she regularly shares it with friends during little parties.

When Aude discovers a new artist that she likes, she makes plenty of researches on YouTube and Google to find interviews, concerts, the biography, the themes of the lyrics. She sorts her favorite songs out, depending on their mood and genre, into several playlists. At the moment, she takes inspiration from particular artists: Billie Eilish, Ale Reinhardt for the vocals, Radiohead and Palace for the structures. Spontaneously, she defines originality as achieving to transform something existing into something that does not exist yet.

If inspiration does not come, she takes a musical break during a few days. Inspirational blockage comes often from the pressure that she puts on herself. She would be glad if her music sounded like what she likes, as long as it's not a copy-paste. She aims to apprehend what inspires her to create her own identity.

In her opinion, the internet pushes the public to make more researches to “*know what is inside their head.*”³ The communication between the artists and the fans is more relaxed, everyone can comment and there is less taboo.

Charlotte (aka Charles)

Charlotte won the television contest TheVoice Belgium in 2019 and signed with Universal Music for releasing an EP this year. Her first single “Wasted Time” was released a few weeks after the interview.

She used to download music illegally until the advent of Spotify. She discovers music by discussing with friends or with the recommendations associated with the artists that she likes on Spotify. If a song gives her a rare feeling, she puts it in her secret playlist, which appears to constitute her main source of inspiration.

Her creative process is controlled but disorganized. She uses to write any idea and she manage to find it when it is necessary. She mixes several inspirations to inspire her songs. For

³ Free translation.

example, the composition of her single was inspired by “This World” of *Selah Sue* and the arrangement is influenced from the Arctic Monkeys.

However, when she makes a new composition, Charlotte uses to starts from nothing. She sits at a piano, seek chords that she likes and sings spontaneously on it. This process does spare her from creativity blockage. She experiences it often when she composes by herself. Buy in the studio, the collaboration with other musicians is generally more efficient.

She prefers not taking inspiration from what she likes the most. She would risk sounding not original enough. Nevertheless, she makes some exceptions when an influence is really close to her heart...

“Even if it looks like everything has been done before, we are all so different that music is inexhaustible. Each artist has its own way to sing, to perceive, to tell a story...”

Charlotte would like to compose a wide array of different styles and her label helps her to find a coherent direction. Music allows her to express the secret emotions that she keeps with herself.

Antoine (aka Glass Museum)

Antoine started to play the piano at the age of six. He quickly learned the trombone and the accordion and played with some festive bands until 2017. He then launched the project *Glass Museum* with a drummer. The duo won a band contest and met a national success. They released their second album this year and already toured all around Europe.

Antoine disapproves the way of consuming music on Spotify. He used to listen to music deeper on his iPod, taking the time to apprehend the construction of the albums. Now, he regrets that Spotify pushes many people to listen to music more passively, by making playlists without paying attention to the artist’s intention. He discovers new releases with recommendations that Spotify offers to him and the online social networks. Instead of gathering with favorite tracks, Antoine prefers to listening to his ephemeral desires. During the interview, he was focusing on *Nicolas Jaar* and *Radiohead*. He tries not to be influenced by the algorithms used by Spotify.

He already tried to organize his influences into different playlists, but this method just does not fit for him. He prefers following his instinct and trusting his memories when it comes to find influences for a new composition.

For his track *Abyss*, the synthesizer was inspired from Rival Consols and some texture ideas came from Leifur James. About his song IOTA, the composition was inspired by Ibrahim Maalouf, and some arrangement ideas were inspired by instruments of Four Tet.

He experiences inspiration blockage due to personal pressure and stress. It happened during the last months. It happens irregularly. The quarantine and the cancellation of the tour allowed him to have a rest and find inspiration again.

Nevertheless, Antoine does not want to be too much influenced by existing music. If he does, it would be a subtle aspect of an idea, never an entire element. He wants the music to come from him. *“Too much inspiration risks to be a barrier to creativity”*.

If he likes an artist, he would analyze his music and trying to figure out the human and technological context of the music. As far as variety is concerned, he would rather talk about coherence and bounces along the album. For example, during the composition and the recording of the last album, he noticed that their music changed a lot with the places where they worked. Thus, they took the time to rearrange it in order to make it more coherent.

To deal with the abundance of music everywhere, Antoine actually listens to less music. He prefers listening to a small number of artists that he loves than streaming plenty of artists that he just mildly appreciates.

François (aka Mowley)

Eight years ago, François decided to use his musical knowledge in order to produce entire songs with on the digital audio workstation *Fruity Loops*. After 4 years of experimentations, he sent his demos to some rappers from Brussels. He progressively

collaborated with some of the biggest French rappers like *Romeo Elvis*, *Caballero & JeanJass*, *Lorenzo*, *L'Or du Commun*, *La Smala*, *Senamo*, *Moka Boka*...

Despite millions of streams, he does not make a living with his music. François is graduated in Geography and Environment Science and he is working on an additional diploma in order to become a teacher. In his opinion, keeping music as a serious hobby makes him be more creative because he does not have any constraint, he really makes what he wants.

When he listens to music, he is focusing mainly on the instrumental aspect. There are two different but complementary creative processes when he starts a new song. He might have precise ideas of what he is going to do; or he can start from scratch and experiment compulsive ideas with chords, rhythms and samples. However, he has no particular career plan. He produces by instinct for himself and if he likes what he does, he invites artists to collaborate. If his works does not fit with any artist of his network, he sells it on the beat market (traktrain.com). Indeed, hip-hop is so popular that the producers can sell their work online. This would be unthinkable in most of other genres. When he feels an inspirational blockage, he just stops to make music. It is not his main profession, so he does not have to suffer from any pressure.

In his opinion, the democratization of music production technology increased drastically the competition between the producers. To expand his knowledges, François uses the discovery tools of Spotify, *Shazam* and *whosampled* if he hears something interesting somewhere else like in an advertising. If a song contains an intriguing element, François would explore how it has been made. The internet is full of tutorials and production forums, like *Reddit*, to answer any question.

He takes the time to collect and to sort out his inspirations into different coherent playlists: “*Everything I listen to is influencing what I produce*”.

Any element of a song can be inspiring. For his song “*Bonnes fréquentations*”, Mowley was interested in Bossa Nova since a long time. He heard the piano of “*Kami Ga Yureteiru*” in a American hip-hop song. He managed to find the original song and adapted it for the rap duo from Brussels.

In general, Mowley aims to produce something unpublished. He wants to present surprising combinations of influences and to swim against the trends of most of the producers.

Jules (aka Al'tarba)

After having used mainly CDs, and vinyl discs for sampling, he now uses Spotify daily, between one and six hours a day. He discovers endlessly new sources of inspiration and go often deeper into their discography. His creative process mixes composition and sampling. His song "Dusty signal" illustrates this way of working well. He mixes film music, hip-hop, soul and breakcore.

When he faces inspirational blockage, Al'Tarba abandons his machines for a period of time. He watches movies and discovers new music. In addition, he might replaces his music software (VST) in order to experiment with fresh ideas.

For him, originality is the ability to develop a universe that is authentic and sincere, while being the sum of his influences. He totally agrees that Spotify can stimulate the creative process of artists by offering original recommendations.

"Each album is like a puzzle, I have an image of the whole and each piece comes to its place until achieving the final image. But the rule is that there is no rule."

d) Attempt to Contact Spotify

Finally, In order to elucidate how Spotify deals with its responsibility concerning its multiple stakeholders and the critiques that I presented in the theoretical considerations, I sent the following e-mail to Spotify.

Dear madam, dear sir,

As part of my master in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, I write a thesis which aims to describe how streaming services

impact the creation process of the artists. In this perspective, the strategy of Spotify plays naturally a major role and I would be extremely thankful if you would accept to be interviewed.

Several studies proved the positive effect that Spotify brings on the diversity of consumption of their users. Other studies describe the positive effect of musical tastes for the social mobility. Thus, it is possible to argue that the use of Spotify plays a key role in the social mix, improves significantly the cultural democratization, after 50 years of political failure.

If you accept my request, I would like to ask you the following questions:

- How do you deal with the multiple interests of your stakeholders (clients, majors, and artists)?*
- How is your relationship with your rivals (Amazon, Apple, Google, Deezer)?*
- Do you consider adopting the User Centric Payment System promoted by Deezer?*
- Could you provide me with some information about the functioning of your algorithm of recommendation?*
- Do you make any analysis with the data that you collect about the listening behavior of your users? If yes, for what purpose?*

I hope that my research will meet your interest and I will make myself available at your best convenience for a virtual interview.

Sincerely,

Félicien Carnoy

Spotify answered that it was not prepared to address those questions for me.

Analysis

1) ADAMI

Data from the French ministry of culture (Donnat, 2018) and my interview with the two managers of ADAMI confirms the growing number of artists on the music market. It is hard to prove that this rise is partly due to the new model of consumption offered by Spotify which inspires more its audience and increases the number of artists. This shift is mostly due to the following elements that I could not measure: Some artists did not need any support from ADAMI in the past and are now facing economic issues. The increasing number of independent records can also be due to the democratization of the production tools and the improvement of the SEO techniques⁴. In addition, considering the growing competition on the music market, plenty of artists remain in their private sphere without releasing their work in public.

The interview with Céline Leporrier and François Boncompain confirmed that the music industry is currently in a crisis. The jazz and the classical sectors need to refresh their audience and to compete against some genres which are fostered by streaming services. When streaming services emerged, ADAMI agreed to collaborate with the French streaming company Deezer. However, the economic model appeared to disadvantage the artists supported by the collecting agency... Deezer is currently experimenting a draft of solution, the User Centric Based Approached (that I presented in the last chapter of the theory). Results will come soon and will hopefully inspire the other streaming services.

By the time, the future of jazz and classical music is uncertain as artists are requested to combine multiple additional tasks... Considering the increasing competition, they need to acquire entrepreneurial skills to manage their production, their communication and their distribution. The public actions also demand them to deal with educational skills to transmit musical values to disadvantaged audience. Long term contracts are more and more rare, and many graduated musicians live from teaching music.

In addition, among the large public, the model of Spotify supports compulsive listening and zapping which creates market inequalities between the genres. For example, these

⁴ Search Engine Optimization

distortions would favor Hip-hop and Electro Dance Music at the disadvantage of jazz and classical music. Indeed, streaming services are mostly used by young audiences and some tend to listen to the same songs in loop. On its website, Deezer reveals that the users aged between 18 and 25 years represent 19% of all subscribers, but generate 24% of total royalties. As I explained in the previous chapter, Spotify distributes its revenue proportionally to the number of listens of each track divided by the total consumption.

2) The Artists

Among my sample of nine various artists, Spotify is definitely the most common tool used in order to listen and to discover music. Only Cecilia favored another online service like Soundcloud. Even if they sometimes keep a nostalgic use of vinyl discs and CDs, each artist uses streaming service every day, between 30 minutes and 6 hours on a daily basis. Each artist has a view on originality that fits with the definition that I presented in the first chapter:

“Artistic creativity is the interplay between ability and process by which an individual presents an original combination of pre-existing elements, with a manner that reflects the perceptions and feelings of its author and which meets the aesthetic criteria defined within some social context.”

If each artist, of different genres, ages and experience agrees on the definition of originality, they all have a different manner to apprehend the existing elements to inspire their own creations. They clearly claim their desire to differentiate their music from their influences. Nevertheless, they present different levels of awareness of the role of their influences in their creative process. In addition, it is hard to distinguish precisely how they define the action of taking inspiration from an existing song.

For example, Thomas says that he would not consciously take inspiration from a consistent element of what he listens to. At the same time, he sometimes consciously tries to imitate a particular guitar sound that he likes. In that sense, he probably considers that the mixing elements like the sound design and the timbre of the instruments cannot be considered as plagiarism. For another composer, “taking inspiration from an existing song” might be something like the theoretical concept of doubling a melody with the sixth harmony or writing a similar symmetry in the structure. On another degree, composers like Emile or Cecilia could also consider that “*taking inspiration from an element*” is to write a similar melody, with the

same rhythm, and altering the harmony, in order to appropriate the work. Finally, beatmakers like François and Jules would just use a sample of an existing song to enrich their production. I could multiply these possibilities with the richness of songwriting, mixing, rhythms, harmony, structure, textures, performance techniques, ... In the end, it is tempting to conclude that nothing really matters and that the originality will exist in the ears of the listeners.

However, music plagiarism courts are taking it more seriously. In 2018, the singer *Lana Del Rey* was publicly accused by *Radiohead* for plagiarizing “Creep” (1992) in her song “Get Free”. Ironically, the band *The Hollies* sued *Radiohead* for having stolen their melody of “The Air that I Breath” (1974) in “Creep”. The similarity between these three songs is limited to the chord progression and the mode of the melody. With this kind of accusation, we could theoretically sue the whole music history. The bassist and youtuber Adam Neely explained clearly to what extent modern lawsuits for music plagiarism make no sense. With the example of the court opposing Katy Perry and Flame, he argues that the issue depends on the ability of the plaintiff to use the ignorance of the judge to their advantage (Neely, 2019). Recently, in order to avoid these absurdities in the future, Damian Riehl used a computer to automatically program and copyright the 68,7 billion of possible melodies (Riehl, 2019). Thus, he claims that he will register them in the public domain so that any future lawsuit for musical plagiarism will need better arguments than melodic similarities.

In brief, each artist could have its own freedom to more or less consciously take inspiration from an existing work. The originality will be more or less appreciated by the audience and, eventually, if the inspired work meets a commercial success, the profits would be shared among the external contributors of the ideas. In order to let the readers, make their own opinion on the degree of inspiration that the artist use, I systematically asked them to describe the influences which help them in the creative process of one of their song.

Several artists distinguish two types of listening: active and passive. In my interpretation, the passive listening sessions happen when the audiophile is busy on another activity. It can be cooking, playing sports, having a break, walking, reading, discussing, ... In these cases, music generally serves as a functional entertaining. In the other hand, the active listening sessions serve specifically the inspiration. Each artist is free to organize his active listening when he wants. Listener pay a deep attention on the music and analyze it considering its knowledge in composition, songwriting, arrangement, mixing, ... This activity often brings

inspirational ideas which can be used for another work. Of course, the border between the two types of listening is often vague. Ideas might emerge whenever.

Moreover, artists presented different types of organization to structure their listening. For example, Emile, Jules, Thomas and François explained that they use most of their time to stream through new discoveries, even if they built their tastes on a solid foundation. In contrast, Edouard, Antoine and Cecilia seemed more loyal to their heaven of musical references.

Artists presented also different attachments to sculpt playlist with several tastes of coherences. François and Aude attest that they care to gather their influences into clean playlists, depending on their mood, genres, of other subjective aspects. However, Antoine and Emile prefer not mixing works. Instead, they are more likely to appreciate a song in its album, in the context wished by the artist.

Furthermore, the will to let spontaneous ideas surprise the creative process is ubiquitous. Considering the multiple discourses that I collected, it seems that listening to music serves to provide them the energy and the feeling that they aim to achieve in their music. Once they absorb this vitality, they are attached to let their own energy flow once their desire to create is fed by their environment. Edouard tells that he is sometimes glad not to have too much inspirational ideas. The limits that appear can stimulate his own creativity and bring authentic and original surprises, which seems extremely valuable. To generate these surprises, Aude, Charlotte, Edouard and Thomas told me that they consciously decide not to learn too much from their favorite artists.

Finally, most of the artists that I interviewed had almost no idea about the functioning of the remuneration system of Spotify. They still assumed that this model does not remunerate the average artists enough. Antoine and Edouard joins Adorno and Horkheimer idea by regretting that Spotify presents music as a trite entertaining noise to animate the background compared to how it was offered in CDs stores. Among my sample, no artist makes a living entirely with its music. Even François, whose work generate millions of streams, considers music as a hobby and is currently working to become a teacher in parallel of his artistic career.

Regarding the theory, this common disinterest and lack of knowledge about the functioning of the economic side of Spotify is due to the deep opacity of the whole industry. Contracts between the majors and Spotify are secret and it is impossible to have a transparent

look on the distribution of the money generated from Spotify to the labels. Streaming services do not answer question considering their awareness of the market inequalities that they generate between the genres neither their use of personal data that they collect. I did not develop this aspect to focus on the main subject.

The multiple interview reveals the existence of a fear of not being original enough. This was observable with a certain discouragement to learn or cover existing songs and with the avoidance of taking too much inspiration from existing works. This behavior is generally argued with the intention to stand out of what they know. However, every artist seems to agree that this fear is a mistake and that playing existing works will always be positive, or at least neutral. The artist will always play experimentations until finding a way to appropriate its influences with its own spirit. Considering this, the more influences they have apprehended, the richer the result could be.

This contradiction is probably related to the fast evolution of music during the last generations. In the past, the access to music was narrower and it required much more investment to find obscure and inspiring influences. Nowadays, any audiophile can easily build and appreciate its unique combination of tastes to feed its inspiration. In addition, it appears that the participants still share a lot of discoveries with their friends by word-of-mouth.

The theory started by exploring the historical evolution of the definition of creativity. The definition that I built suggests that Spotify can stimulate the artists' creativity by providing them an infinite access to the whole historic music catalog, letting them stream through time, and suggesting them tailored obscurer artists. Then, I presented several structural issues and critiques whereby Spotify would bring a negative impact on the cultural diversity and on the artistic creativity. The turbulences that the industry has faced with the changing production and distribution of music, and multiples economic consequences of streaming. This research revealed that the current system of remuneration lacks of transparency and, despite their will of doing the opposite, the automatic recommendations favors the musical genres which target an audience which listen to the same recommended music on loop, without encouraging the users to make their own researches and build their own tastes.

Thus, I wanted to verify the ambiguous consequences driven by services like Spotify on the diversity and the creativity of the music industry.

Conclusion and Discussion

1) Resume

The introduction presented the considerations of several authors on the technological advancements of the reproduction of Arts. Benjamin regrets that the *aura* of the artworks disappears as it is infinitely reproducible, while Adorno and Horkheimer severely critique that the mass production of culture serves economic interest, reduces the quality of arts and imprisons the consumers in a capitalist system. Parallely, I presented that Spotify offers an extreme democratization, globalization and commodification of music which could benefits the cultural diversity. Indeed, as a kind of electronic museum of music, such companies could play a major educational role in both reception and production of music.

By reviewing the historical development of the concept of genius, my theoretical considerations have permitted to define artistic creativity as “the interplay between ability and process by which an individual presents an original combination of pre-existing elements, with a manner that reflects the perceptions and feelings of its author and which meets the aesthetic criteria defined within some social context.” Such a definition allows to predict that the extreme democratization of music would stimulate artistic creativity by facilitating the access to unique combinations of influences.

Then I have presented how commercial music became more and more profitable along the 20th century and how the production processes were optimized. It brought me to the economic context in which Spotify has relaunched the growth of the music industry endangered by piracy. Furthermore, I explained how the music production has never been so democratic as today (Prior, 2010). Then, I indicated several economic consequences of the advent of streaming. The remuneration system of the music industry lacks transparency and contradictory critiques have been published about the role of Spotify on the industry. In addition, I stressed that music inequalities are more revealed than increased by streaming services

Finally, I presented several path of solutions which might improve the equity of the music industry and the wellbeing of the public.

2) Conclusion

a) *What is the impact of streaming services on the economics on the music industry?*

- *Is the remuneration system of Spotify transparent?*

I cannot know precisely how the revenue generated by streaming services are distributed. The contracts between the big majors and the streaming services remain secret and hide unequal treatments. (Seabrook, 2015, p. 356-358). It appears that at least one of the main majors (Sony music) overuses the value of their catalog to optimize their revenue (Singleton, 2015), at the disadvantage of smaller actors of the industry.

In addition, considering that some users are more active than others, the current remuneration system could strengthen inequalities by distributing the revenues proportionally to the number of streams. Solutions like the User Centric Based System is currently tested by Deezer and new public policies are negotiated on the European level.

Thus, the lack of transparency of the remuneration system is the fault of certain majors who defend their interest and overuse the weight of their catalog to negotiate privileged contracts with the streaming companies. The market inequalities between the genres are the consequences of the general passivity of the listeners. As private companies, they serve their clients, and it appears that the vast majority of the streaming users are passive. As an anonymous employee of Deezer said in *Boulevard du stream*: “as we increase the discovery ratio in playlists, the listening rate decreases” (Free translation, Fanen 2018, p. 248). In these conditions, I understand that streaming companies have to compromise to keep growing their number of subscribers and relaunching the economy of music.

- *Does streaming generate market inequalities between music genres?*

The interview with Céline Leporrier and François Boncompain, artistic managers at ADAMI, illustrated the crisis faced by classical and jazz music. The quality of the music education is higher than ever but the demand for jazz and classical is ageing, there is more competition between the artists, and it is almost impossible to live exclusively from its music. One observes an important rise of artists in financial assistance. Obviously, Jazz and Classical

are disadvantaged by the remuneration system of streaming services because their audience is not the most active on the platforms. Indeed, on Deezer, the users aged between 18 and 25 year old represent 19% of all subscribers, but generate 24% of total royalties. Unless jazz and classical music achieve to refresh their audience or that structural changes improve drastically the equity of the music market, there is no sign that this crisis will end.

b) *What is the impact of streaming services on the creative process of the artists?*

- *Does the use of streaming stimulate artistic creativity?*

The use of streaming services impacts only partly artists productions because the will to let spontaneous ideas surprise the creative process remains ubiquitous. The interview with different artists showed that music streaming services like Spotify is a powerful tool to stimulate artistic creativity. In addition, artists have different perceptions of “taking inspiration from existing works”. They present different manners of listening, different degrees of being inspired and different method of organizing their creative process through listening. Further studies could be interesting to verify how these multiple paths of creative process impact the artistic output.

- *Does the use of streaming change the creative process of the artist?*

As Sophian Fanen said, “*there is no reason to worry for music*” (free translation, p. 242). The interviews that I made proved that artists do not wonder if their creative process makes sense with the technological or economic environment. They need to create. Thus, I can conclude that creativity is not endangered. In contrary, artists might be stimulated by the increasing variety that they can access. However, it is still problematic that playlists curators have a growing influence on the music industry and cannot take the risk to promote songs that do not instantly seduce the listeners. As Tuma Basa, the curator of the Spotify’s playlist *Rap Caviar* says: “*this system is young and deserved to be improved*”. (Menu, 2017).

The possible changing creative process of artists is very hard to measure. I would have loved to interview artists, who, in my opinion, optimize their revenue by producing cheap music that fits with the popular “mood playlists” of the streaming platforms. An accurate description

of their attitude and way of thinking their music could allow to detect if this behavior is spreading at the detriment of other artists.

3) Discussion and future researches

I detected a contradiction within the creative process of some artists. They fear of not being original enough and avoid taking inspiration from what they love. This trend makes them suffer from pressure which block their creativity. It is contradictory because nowadays, it should be easier than ever to sculpt an original frame of inspirations. In the past, channels to discover new music were limited and it required a big investment to sculpt its own personal music taste with a unique combination of influence. This obstacle does not exist anymore as Spotify helps to sculpt a tailored music library and provides unique recommendations of obscure artists. In addition, the artists presented different level of awareness that what they listen influences what they create.

Thus, in the analysis, I developed the idea that some artists suffer from the fear of not being original enough. This angst is likely to strongly reduce the artistic creativity, especially in the context of abundance of access offered by streaming services. Further researches could explore if the use of streaming cures or stresses this phenomenon. Indeed, I make the assumption that, considering the advent of streaming services characterized by an abundance of offer and a rise of competition, the importance of producing original music is less important for modern artists compared to the past. Indeed, I think that an artist could never be satisfied of its work if s/he compares itself to the catalogue of existing music. Then, modern artists would accept their singularity and their limits in order to enjoy the immense perspective of creativity offered by the present times. Precisely, further studies could explore if the “fear of not being original enough” is increasing or disappearing among modern artists.

The different attitudes that I observed are possibly partly due to the fast changes that the music industry knew in the last century. The recording of music has developed since only one century and it keeps changing the way one can considers, contemplates, (consumes) and creates Arts. The streaming services are likely to alter our relationship with music as museums alters our relationship with Art. Visitors are free to employ museums as a distractive activity, or to apprehend the past and the future of human history and Art. In the same way, modern artists have the choice to control what they listen to in order to sculpt an original frame of inspiration.

I presented that it is hard to accuse the streaming companies of being responsible of the existing inequalities between the music genres. Firstly, they are private companies which have no social nor cultural responsibility. Secondly, they argue that they serve the artists interests but are also subject to economic goals which reduce their possible will to serve the artists and to cultivate the curiosity of their users. However, since their beginning, they fought successfully music piracy, relaunched the economy of music and convince more and more subscribers to slowly increase the profit of the artists.

Considering that “*music is an important component in human identity construction and development, both on an individual and collective level*” (Cochrane, 2013) and that the role of cultural institutions is to protect culture against the commoditization and the market laws (Fédération Wallonnie-Bruxelles), policy measures should be taken to reduce the opacity of the industry and to regulate the recent inequalities generated by streaming services. The competition among Amazon, Google, Spotify and Apple is unreachable by public institutions and control the subscription prices, the remuneration and the suggested discoveries for the listeners. In addition, the main majors (Sony, Universal and Warner’s) overuse the value of their catalog to negotiate privileged treatments from these tech companies. In order to optimize the welfare of the music industry, no major would have any secret privilege from the revenues of streaming and their runoff to the artists would be transparent. The prices of the subscription and the remuneration system of the streaming platforms would be homogenous and calculated to optimize the global welfare. For example, I am waiting to see the impact of the new remuneration system adopted by the French streaming company Deezer (UCPS). The European Union has proved its interest for these issues by working on the article 13. In addition, cultural economists suggest structural solutions to adapt the economy of the cultural industries to the digitalization of their consumption (Handke, 2016).

As mentioned in the methodology, I can only pretend to ask questions and to collect multiple answers from literature and data to indicate the existence of trends, as far as my sample is representative of the reality. The Covid-19 crisis forced me to meet the participants by audio conference, which did not help me to build a relationship with the participant. Also, I could have included other genres like Metal, Rap, Techno/House, Afrobeat, Reggae/Dub and

participants of wider nationalities. My attempts to reach employees of streaming services as Google, Deezer or Spotify did not succeed. Further researches could include the views of labels, venues and festival managers. In addition, I regret not to have met a producer who obviously optimizes his revenue by producing cheap music that fits the popular “mood playlists” of the streaming platforms.

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