

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen - my name is Meik Puppe and I'm representing the internetlabel „Digital Kunstrasen“ - a german label, best translated by „Digital Astroturf“. Digital Kunstrasen was founded in 2005 by Thomas Kempka – who's accompanying me this evening – and two of his friends and now, in its fourth year, presents music of various genres, E-Books and visuals online under the Creative Commons Licence. Thereby, Digital Kunstrasen works uncommercially and represents a platform for unknown artists as well as for semi-professionals engaged in the cultural sector. Like me, who publishes books and audio books commercially, but also provides music and texts for free under the creative commons.

Even before the label was founded, it already became clear, that Creative Commons were a suitable, legitimated framework for a young and uncommercial label. The concept of publishing, propagating and performing music and texts for free as long as the copyright is revealed and no commercial use is intended, drew a line between the label's policy and the legal framework that prevailed in Germany then as now. To present yourself to the general public, start prolific cooperations with other artists and – at the same time – care for the marketing of your copyrights, you usually had to have the luck of being a member of a major label. Or to ensure the right's commercialisation by paying tremendous dues to the GEMA – the german organisation obtaining and managing copyrights and their adherence. Since their invention in Germany in 2004, the Creative Commons still clash with some terms of the GEMA, so that Digital Kunstrasen and other german netlabels operate, though legally protected, in a grey area, assuming the role of pioneers.

Over the years, the Creative Commons as a legal framework lived up to their promise. Easily to understand and implement, scarcely any of our 50 artists exercises the option of modifying or denying singular rights for free use – and when, it's usually related to points like decomposing or remixing songs. For us - in turn – it's a proof that an upcoming generation of artists is willing to publish under the Creative Commons Licence and accepts their basic idea. It enables a creative self-development, where all is fair that's good and of a certain quality. The decision on quality – like in commercial labels – is up to the management, which means Thomas and me – not as CEOs, but parts of a whole network where managing or programming has to be done.

But why should a free artist with commercial or non-commercial notions make a supposed detour by going to a netlabel in times of Web 2.0? Allowedly, the young generation of today follows the slogan „Broadcast yourself“ and – with a few worthy exceptions – has no dread to download even protected material from the net for all one's worth. But the provision of this apparently endless quantity of releases on YouTube or MySpace, comes at the expence of quality. Of course, everyone may point out that artistic freedom means also the freedom to make terrible music or to sing along to the greatest, legally protected hits of Britney Spears in the nursery while filming oneself. However, for a creative advancement that suffocates in this mass - not later than in times of web 2.0 – a filter is needed. A preselection, that doesn't exclude genres, but claims a certain standard of quality. We at Digital Kunstrasen perceive us as fulfilling the function of a filter, although the requirements concerning quality likewise depend on personal and subjective views and come up to be a balancing act here and there.

Apart from that, our label has become a playground for common works and artistic cooperations, elementary artistic needs, in our opinion. Those cooperations are often an exception at major

labels, as long as you wouldn't like to pay dues to the GEMA for every single track. Such a degree of freedom shows, that the Creative Commons rightly bear the name „creative“ and the image of digital „astroturf“ is well chosen. At it, it's possible to play around with source material from musicians and authors, wrapping it into an artistic garment of your own and presenting the result on the netlabel as well. By doing this, releases come up which one will hardly find in commercial business, like electronica-versions of texts from comedy and cabaret f.e. Releases, worldwide available and downloadable within a few minutes – but clearly distinguished from all these „Hit me baby one more time“-versions from several nurseries. And even compared with such a huge platform like MySpace, a netlabel like Digital Kunstrasen comes up to the term „network“, where single combs not just exist in parallel, but regularly band themselves together to new knots and formations.

Now that the principle of Creative Commons is so well working and artists are willing to present their intellectual property to the general public for free, the question is justifiable, whether a financial reward for intellectual property is still reasonable and maintainable. Wouldn't the artistic freedom – so praised by myself – get chained again to the disdainful, financial wishes of professional labels? For this purpose, I want to draw a historical comparison: The principle of „stealing“ intellectual property in the area of music and using it without any kind of consideration, already existed in the history of music, for instance in the Middle Ages with its players and ballad-mongers. Novel melodies were gladly put to the own repertoire and – instead of paying for it - it was regarded as a great honour, when a song of one's own was taken and spread by other musicians.

As we all know, this principle didn't last until today. But for what reasons? Musicians and other artists mostly haven't that comparable social function and the esteem like in those days as well – ok, let's take out Bono and U2 at this point... and a few more. The musician, messenger and newscaster in one person could be sure to survive by his own handicraft – a condition not effectual for lots of artists today, often taking the livelihood and even the possibilities of living out their plans. And I won't lie to you: Of course even I would be pleased to let my feet dangle in the caribbean ocean from tomorrow on because my audio books suddenly find a suprisingly ready market. One has to care not only for an artistic development but also for a well-financed way of life to assure one's own survival by one's own creativity. Not living at a time, where you'll be invited by the innkeeper of a taproom in the evening, you have to care for a meal, a guinness and a doss on your own every day. And this hope to survive on it is still a creative motor for many of our artists, although some of them admittedly don't plan to live on music.

Nevertheless, we at Digital Kunstrasen also exhibit the function of a springboard, to give first attention to debutants in the overflowing world of the internet. And it's not only easier coming up at a netlabel compared with a private website or sites like MySpace. In fact, our netlabel has become a first reference for continuing actions, like getting gigs or caring for a merge with other artists – two factors, that – by our opinion – may come to the fore for artists of the future and even may save jobs, f.e. in cultural centres. Factors, which will possibly make the work of uncommercial labels even more and more important. To be taken seriously is our aim and that of other netlabels of our kind. And that it's taken more and more seriously, is eventually proved by an invitation to the discussion at this very evening, where friendly people let us travel 600 air miles, charges included.

In short: Multitudinous people love to be active in music and arts, without the will of graduating in law just to know, what is allowed and what permitted. And except for those 12-year-old girls screaming „I want to be like Beyonce!“, there are many young artists aiming for their work's professionalisation and commercialisation. Applaus might be what artists live for, but still not live on. It's often hard for artists to live in an in-between state, called „talented, but to uncommercial to survive“. But right for this in-between state in the artistic sector, the Creative Commons are the suitable in-between state in the legal sector, coming up with everything musicians and artists could be longing for: An uncomplicated access to the public. A large freedom to cooperate with other artists without asking the major label for permission first. And foremost: The chance to survive one day on something people are joyfully working on throughout their lifetime. The Creative Commons have a wonderful, legal stake in this. Thank you very much!