



Journal *Hybrid*, n° 1
“Ephemeral Heritages”

Creating Heritage Collections from
Ephemeral Artifacts: the Case of Vinyl
Records

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Abstract: with the rise of a new medium linked to the emergence of new musical cultures, methods of music production changed and new practices were developed in the course of the second half of the twentieth century. The institutions involved in heritage collection had to review how they operated, particularly in the light of the legal deposit of sound recordings. Additionally, when popular song recordings increased exponentially, a whole set of broader questions emerged around the status of sound recordings, within these institutions and also in the public and political spheres. It was only when the Head of the National Sound Archives joined forces with the Recording Industry’s Trade Union in order to redefine the value of the vinyl record that these recordings became accepted as artistic and cultural works.

Keywords: formats, heritage-creation, legal deposit, popular song [*variétés*], rock ‘n’ roll, vinyl record.

Full text (PDF file)

In order to address the issue of what constitutes cultural heritage in the case of ephemeral digital devices, a historical detour *via* “pre-digitization” conservation logics is useful on several accounts. The case of vinyl records illustrates how the growth of a new medium,

along with new musical forms, revolutionized the music industry's strategies and everyday practices as from the mid-twentieth century. The massive increase in music production, particularly in the field of popular song (*les variétés*), gave rise to debates on the cultural value of sound recordings in connection with the issue of legal deposit. Since the legal deposit system was linked to the work's medium rather than the work itself, the idea of [classing records as heritage](#) created tensions and controversies within cultural institutions, and prompted the Head of the French National Sound Archives (*la Phonothèque nationale*) to rally to the cause of the SNEP, the French Recording Industry's Trade Union (*Syndicat des éditeurs phonographiques*). Jacques Guyot and Thierry Rolland have underlined the paradoxical status of mass-media artifacts which are produced "for immediate consumption, in vast numbers and are conceived from the start as ephemeral and also fragile," and yet they "constitute a precious heritage resource on several accounts."¹ Our historical detour can thus throw light on the changing norms and practices presiding over heritage-creation, and, more importantly, it can raise broader issues concerning the status of artistic works in contemporary societies.

Musical production in the age of the microgroove

Simon Frith argues that because music in the twentieth century is not "the starting-point of an industrial process —the raw material which everyone fights for— but in fact the end product," a number of convergent dynamics are required for the production of music.² He adds that one should take into account all the mediations involved in music's production and consumption. One should consider 1. the effects of technological progress (which situate the recording industry within the broader context of electrical goods production and the development of radio, cinema and television); 2. the different stages in the music market's organization, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century when "in all industrialized countries, disk production sky-rocketed;"³ 3. the emergence of new musical cultures: "the record industry's development on a large scale profoundly transformed the way music was experienced, brought about a decline in traditional

1 Jacques Guyot and Thierry Rolland, *Les Archives audiovisuelles. Histoire, culture, politique*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011, p. 2.

2 Simon Frith, "L'industrialisation de la musique" [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, 2012, p. 31.

3 Mario D'Angelo, *La Renaissance du disque*, Paris, La Documentation fran aise, 1989, p. 13.

amateur music-making, and produced new forms of musical consumption and new musical practices.”⁴

Adopting Frith’s approach, we can start by noting that disk manufacturing techniques changed in the first decades of the twentieth century from using wax-coated zinc to wax itself and later to lacquer-coated aluminum plate, and additionally electrical recording was invented (1925). These technological advances improved sound quality, increased storage capacity and diversified the ways recording media could be preserved. The 78 rpm record, which became standardized only in 1942,⁵ was still too limited in practice (five minutes of listening time per side). However, that did not prevent the recorded music market from developing in the inter-war period and overcoming a major crisis, as new musical trends emerged (particularly around jazz).

When, in the late 1940s, the US record companies CBS and RCA released 33 rpm LPs and 45 rpm short-playing records respectively, sound recording left behind live performance once and for all. Disk records would henceforth be conceived not simply as a way of reproducing the sounds of live music, but as a musical experience in themselves. Record production thereafter bowed to the constraints of technical formats and to the demands of radio audiences who had become indispensable partners in music’s promotion. When CBS assigned its patent to other record companies, it obliged RCA to do the same, and so imposed new recording strategies: the 33 rpm LP was used for classical music, because of its better sound quality and greater storage capacity,⁶ and the 45 rpm maxi-single was used as a popular song format,⁷ inspired by the same logic as 78 rpm, that is, it was composed of “3-minute segments, for today’s easy-listening popular music”.⁸ Other technological innovations improved the listener’s experience and changed the ways in which music was

4 Simon Frith, “L’industrialisation de la musique” [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, 2012, p. 32 sq.

5 Some records might have one side which played at 74 rpm and the other at 80 rpm depending on the recording speed.

6 The average play-back time per side of a 12”, 33 rpm vinyl record was 22 minutes. In France, the first long-playing record was released by the label *L’Oiseau-Lyre* in 1949. It was a recording of Couperin’s *Apotheosis of Lully*.

7 We do not distinguish here between “popular song music” [*musique de vari t s*] and “pop music,” because by the end of the 1960s the French Sound Archives had classed “pop music” as a sub-category of “popular song music.” In our view, the separation introduced later in the French charts between “French popular songs” and “International popular songs” [*vari t s fran aises*] and “*vari t s internationales*”] was a restatement of the earlier “popular song music”/“pop music” distinction.

8 Simon Frith, “L’industrialisation de la musique” [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, Paris, 2012, p. 47.

consumed, through stereo recording,⁹ universal play-back¹⁰ and transistor components¹¹.

By the early 1960s, rock 'n' roll¹² was no longer solely a US product. French groups had formed and performed (particularly at the Golf Drouot and the Olympia concert halls), radio shows featured French rock (particularly on Europe 1 with Frank Ténot and Daniel Filipacchi's program *Salut les copains* [*Hi buddies*], songs were released on disk (Johnny Hallyday's *Laisse les filles* on the Vogue label in 1960, the Chaussettes Noires' and the Chats Sauvages' first 45 rpm disks on the Barclay and Pathé-Marconi labels respectively, in 1961), and francophone hits rivaled their US and British counterparts on the juke box. However, the esthetic norms of this music did not correspond to those of the "music-hall milieu",¹³ which was focused not on the band but rather on a central personality, as in the cabaret or song recital tradition. Rock 'n' roll came to be viewed as subversive, especially in the wake of the mass *yéyé* meeting at the Place de la Nation in Paris in June 1963 and after a few seats were torn out during the first French rock concerts. "Show-biz", "built around recorded music, which encompassed live recordings, but also, the third arm of this trio, radio and television",¹⁴ concentrated on the solo careers of singers, in line with the tried and tested methods which had been successful for popular singers. The first forms of rock 'n' roll nevertheless finally managed to dissociate themselves from the styles developed by Eddie Barclay, Lucien Morisse ("Musicorama" on Europe 1) and Bruno Coquatrix (the Olympia). In the world of the French media, the French rock 'n' roll of "the buddies [*les copains*]"¹⁵ was on an equal footing with British and American rock, which was governed by the much broader market of major labels, in which France was simply a local market among others.

9 The first "stereo" record was released in France by Erato in 1958.

10 Until then, "stereo" records could only be played back on "stereo" machines.

11 This technology lay behind the invention of cheap phonograph record players (like Teppaz's "Oscar"), and small radio receptors.

12 We use Simon Frith's distinction here between 1950s "rock 'n' roll" and 1960s "rock": cf. Simon Frith, "L'industrialisation de la musique" [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, 2012, p. 33. Later, the term "pop" was temporarily used in France to refer to rock, before this latter term was itself reintroduced: cf. Patrick Mignon et Antoine Hennion (ed.), *Rock. De l'histoire au mythe*, Paris, Anthropos, 1991.

13 G r me Guibert, *La Production de la culture. Le cas des musiques amplifi es en France*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/IRMA, 2006, p. 100.

14 Mario D'Angelo, *La Renaissance du disque*, Paris, La Documentation fran aise, 1989, p. 60.

15 In *y y * terminology.

It was precisely during this period that disk record sales really took off, especially after the 45 rpm single came onto the market. This format could accommodate only one or two songs per side and was ideal for “hits”: in 1967, almost 22 million 45 rpm records were sold, as opposed to 9.5 million 45 rpm singles; in 1970, there were only 14 million 45 rpm records sold against more than 35 million 45 rpm singles.¹⁶ A poll carried out for the French Recording Industry’s Trade Union by the French Institute for the study of Public Opinion (*Institut Études et Sondages de l’Opinion Publique*) in November 1968 showed that more than 80% of the 150 record outlets surveyed thought that a hit available as a single would generate higher sales than if it was available only as a 45 rpm disk.¹⁷ During the same period, sales of 33 rpm LPs shot up from 11.2 million to 26 million. Apart from the fact that the 1960s was a period of economic and demographic growth, with an exponential rise in electrical equipment purchases, and increasing purchasing-power for young people,¹⁸ these new practices can be attributed to two major changes: first, a substantial expansion of distribution networks (wholesalers, mail-order sales and increased numbers of sales points), which reduced the purchase price for short-playing formats; secondly, the appearance in that same year of 1968, of the first “concept albums”, which boosted sales of the LP format.¹⁹

The vinyl disk was not, however, the only “technological root of rock”²⁰ to have given rise to alternative uses (in particular “light music” bands using 33 rpm disks). Magnetic tape also enabled smaller record companies to develop, thanks to cheaper recording costs. Producers —those who invest in recording the musical contents— came to occupy an increasingly pivotal role in a market

16 We compiled this data from the following sources: Jacques Masson-Forestier, *L’Industrie phonographique française. Faits et chiffres*, Paris, CIDD, 1969; Jacques Masson-Forestier, *ABC du disque*, Paris, CIDD, undated; Jacques Masson-Forestier, *ABC du disque et des publications sonores et audiovisuelles*, Paris, CIDD, 1972; Jacques Masson-Forestier, *ABC du disque et des publications sonores et audiovisuelles*, Paris, CIDD, 1975; Unknown, “Dépôt légal 1970 à la Phonothèque Nationale,” *N. I.*, no. 184, 16 March 1971 (sources: CIDD Archives).

17 Jacques Masson-Forestier, *N. I.*, CIDD, no. 30, 31 March 1969 (source: CIDD Archives).

18 cf. Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les Baby-boomers. Une génération. 1945-1969*, Paris, Fayard, 2003.

19 Many specialists have classed The Beatles’ album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which was released in 1967, as the first “concept album,” composed not of a series of unrelated songs, but of songs linked by a common theme. This gave rise to new production possibilities for the 33 rpm format: cf. Iddir Zebboudj, “Le concept album : une vaste ‘escroquerie’ ?,” *Volume!*, n° 4.2, 2005, p. 107-117.

20 Simon Frith, “L’industrialisation de la musique” [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, 2012, p. 31.

which was initially driven by electrical equipment manufacturers. In September 1966, the Head of the National Sound Archives put together an inventory of all recording companies.²¹ Magnetic tape also altered the creative process (possibility of arrangements, vocal doubling, etc.) and, with the arrival of multi-track consoles, a new intermediary figure, the artistic director, emerged.²² The artistic director transformed the recording into “an art form, with the result that rock could become ‘serious’ music in all respects,”²³ particularly by challenging the ways manufacturers linked certain formats to certain established genres, which in turn affected the principles of conservation applied.

The legal deposit system and the popular music boom: the issue of heritage value

The legal deposit system, introduced by an ordinance of Francis I on 28 December 1537, obliged printers and publishers to deposit at the “Librairie” of the Château de Blois a copy of every printed book sold in the kingdom. The idea was both to create a heritage library and to introduce “an instrument of control over publishing activity”.²⁴ The scheme was done away with during the French Revolution and then reintroduced, along with reproduction rights, in 1793. Thereafter it developed in response to new media (engravings, prints, maps, plans, musical scores, photographs, films and audiovisual documents). Today, all publishers (including printers, producers, distributors and importers, associations, trade unions or even authors) are obliged to send to the French National Library two copies of their publication, at the latest on the day it is put into circulation, or one copy for a print-run below 300. The 2006 law concerning copyright and related rights in the information society provided the legal framework for the legal deposit of the web.²⁵

21 Roger Décollogne, “La phonthèque nationale,” *BBF*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1967, p. 35-60. [Online] <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1967-02-0035-001> [accessed 8 September 2013].

22 In the sense of record producer.

23 Simon Frith, “L’industrialisation de la musique” [1988], translation G r me Guibert and Marc Kaiser, in St phane Dorin (ed.), *Sound Factory*, Saffr /Paris, Seteun/Uqbar, p. 50.

24 Val rie Game and Cl ment Oury, “Le d p t l gal de l’Internet   la BnF : adapter une mission patrimoniale   l’ conomie de l’immat riel,” in Fran oise Benhamou and Marie Cornu (eds.), *Le Patrimoine culturel au risque de l’immat riel. Enjeux juridiques, culturels,  conomiques*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2010, p. 17.

25 Val rie Game and Cl ment Oury, “Le d p t l gal de l’Internet   la BnF : adapter une mission patrimoniale   l’ conomie de l’immat riel,” in Fran oise Benhamou and Marie Cornu (eds.), *Le Patrimoine culturel au risque de l’immat riel. Enjeux juridiques, culturels,  conomiques*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2010, p. 61 sq.

The deposit of sound recordings was made obligatory on 19 May 1925, but the law was not really respected initially. Producers of cylinder records, sapphire ball stylus disks and needle-cut disks were not always aware of the heritage value of their products, since these were accessories to talking machines, and gramophone players were often linked to the sale of bicycles, haberdashery and electricity.²⁶ It was not until the ordinance of 8 April 1938 and the founding of the National Sound Archives under the leadership of Roger Dévigne (who was also Head of the Museum of Speech [*le musée de la Parole*]), that the tide began to turn: after 1940, recording companies began systematically depositing their works, despite the temporary suspension of the scheme under the Occupation.

However, as microgroove technology developed and production costs increased, many record companies again failed to comply with the deposit legislation. When, in 1953, Roger Décollogne was nominated as Head of the National Sound Archives, the collection of recorded works amounted to only 17,586 records, after fifteen years of existence. He decided to introduce a policy of pursuing lax companies:

The appearance [in France] of microgroove technology in 1951 and its continued spread throughout 1952 generated serious problems. The new raw materials required, and the much longer time taken for a recording, which was cut onto a single base, caused the price of disk records to increase enormously. As a result, record companies tried to reduce their overheads by reducing their legal deposits. Appealing to the law on luxury books, they deposited only one copy. Many companies cheated by spacing out their submissions and claiming that they were almost out of stock for certain very popular recordings. The National Sound Archives went through difficult times, which coincided additionally with its separation from the Museum of Speech [...]. On being appointed to my post by Monsieur Julien Cain, my first concern was to ensure compliance with the law. Since then we have never stopped pursuing record publishers, because the universe of recording companies changes all the time, with an average of 50 new labels appearing yearly to replace the 50 which disappear, and additionally certain labels change company.²⁷

The activism of the Head of the Sound Archives certainly had a positive impact on the number of works deposited: more than

26 Sophie Maisonneuve, *L'Invention du disque. 1877-1949*, Paris, Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2009, p. 200.

27 Roger Décollogne, "La phonothèque nationale," *BBF*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1967, p. 35-60. [Online] <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1967-02-0035-001> [accessed 8 September 2013].

21,000 disk records between 1954 and 1958, and more than 31,000 in the five years thereafter. The annual average for the 1960s was around 7,500 records.²⁸ But it should not be overlooked that it was precisely at this time that microgroove technology began to edge out 78s, as new strategies on the part of record producers and manufacturers, and new modes of consumption, developed around rock 'n' roll. Roger Décollogne accordingly divided sound recordings, for the purposes of legal deposit, into two categories: “*variétés*” and “other documents”.

From 1962 onwards, the category of “*variétés*” encompassed “songs”, “dance music” and “light music”, whereas the category of “other documents” comprised “instrumental works”, “vocal” and “ethnic” works and “works of diction”.²⁹ A further distinction was introduced in 1964 following the establishment of the International Federation of Sound Archives [*Fédération Internationale des Phonothèques*]. Its French national committee considered that “jazz” and “sound documents for children” had specific characteristics which were not found in “*variétés*”. Thereafter there would be four categories: “*variétés*”, “classical/diction”, “jazz”, and “children’s records”. Further terminological changes occurred, and in 1968, 8 sub-categories were introduced for the *variétés* category: “songs”, “dance”, “light music”, “jazz”, “singer-songwriters” [*chansonniers*], “advertising”, “miscellaneous”, and “pop”.

The Head of the National Sound Archives hoped to show through these changes that the category of *variétés* accounted for only half of French annual production. This proved, in his words, that “sound recordings do not solely serve to entertain, as some of the National Sound Archives’ detractors have no qualms asserting”.³⁰ Since the legal deposit system was based around the medium of the work, and many songs, and particularly hits, were published both as singles and on albums, the category of *variétés* received an inflated number of legal deposits. At a time when cultural policy almost entirely neglected music, and when the cultural dimension of disk records was increasingly criticized, the Head of the National Sound Archives decided to support the recording companies in an attempt to transform how records were viewed:

I hope that from the points I am making you will
be able to develop arguments which are sufficiently
convincing to enable you to class disk records as

28 Roger Décollogne, “La phonothèque nationale,” *BBF*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1967, p. 35-60. [Online] <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1967-02-0035-001> [accessed 8 September 2013].

29 Roger Décollogne, Correspondence with Jacques Masson-Forestier, 27 March 1969 (CIDD Archives).

30 Décollogne, Roger, Correspondence with Jacques Masson-Forestier, 27 March 1969 (CIDD Archives).

cultural artifacts on the same level as books. This has long been close to my heart, and I authorize you to mention my views in the course of your negotiations. The number of teachers, students, scholars and researchers who request our help for the most varied projects are the living proof that the National Sound Archives possess precious documents which are used at the very highest educational level; what does it matter, then, that a proportion of our recordings are of *variétés*, since we have also helped a student research his doctoral thesis on the Songs of Montéhus. It was the sociologists themselves who insisted that the legal deposit of recorded works should apply to all types of recordings, claiming that in the future our old ditties —what we today call hit singles— will enable us to recreate the psychological climate of the nation at a particular historical moment.³¹

As a result, recordings of light music, especially hits —which arguably epitomize ephemeral material— could be assigned a heritage value: they are the traces which reveal the dominant cultural values of the period and the public, and the conditions under which the disk records themselves were produced and experienced. As Jacques Guyot and Thierry Rolland stress, the preservation of mass media enables one “to examine the past and set immediately topical events at a critical distance by envisaging facts and human experience in the perspective of the long time of political history”.³²

Roger Décollogne’s attitude was logical enough for his position, but difficult to reconcile with the orientations of the Ministry of Culture at the time. The Ministry privileged “serious” music and supported its teaching, broadcasting, composers and musical research centers.³³ Popular songs and “light” music in general were treated as not worth transmitting and not forming part of a common legacy. That is why the Head of the Sound Archives, in his defense of a policy of cultural recognition for the disk record as a medium in itself, turned for support to representatives of the record industry, rather than to state institutions.

31 Roger Décollogne, Correspondence with Jacques Masson-Forestier, 27 March 1969 (CIDD Archives).

32 Jacques Guyot and Thierry Rolland, *Les Archives audiovisuelles. Histoire, culture, politique*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011, p. 2.

33 Marc Kaiser, *Les Politiques publiques liées aux musiques populaires en France : la dimension culturelle en question*, doctoral thesis, University Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, viva 12 December 2012; Lucien Adès, “Spécial presse,” *N. I.*, no. 5.75, 10 February 1975 (CIDD Archives).

The disk record as an artistic and cultural work

Despite the fact that the democratization of culture in the second half of the twentieth century had given birth to a new “philosophy of government action”,³⁴ the record’s cultural value was far from established in the eyes of the general public and in the political sphere. Since recording companies were obliged by law to comply with the legal deposit system, records gained a certain heritage status, but they were not really recognized as artistic and cultural works as such.

Whereas in Great Britain discourses on music’s esthetic value came mainly from societies of enthusiasts, in France the source was generally the press and official institutions.³⁵ Awards for records were first instituted in France in 1931 by Maurassian journalists around the weekly paper *Candide*. When the *Candide* Prize disappeared at the Liberation, it was replaced by two associations which had organized themselves into Academies (L’Académie du Disque Français and l’Académie Charles Cros), which awarded prizes for the best French musical recordings. The President of the Recording Industry’s Trade Union was invited for the first time to make a speech at the prize-giving ceremony of the *Académie du Disque Français* in 1975. At the time, the sector’s prime battle was for disks to be recognized as artistic and cultural works and not simply as consumer products.

The artists we have chosen for their talents, the works we have recorded for their inherent worth and which we submit to the judgment of the Jury are our own crowning achievements. Our consecration is now official, and it does us honor. Yet as soon as we return to our offices and studios, we will be faced with the harsh reality: we are ostracized by the public authorities, who do not accept us as publishers; the Treasury, deaf to our explanations, refuses to hear us and taxes our productions at the highest rate in existence not only in the European Community, but in the whole world; our cultural role is denied, our problems and difficulties are ignored, and a veil of false modesty is thrown over the ‘trade’ we carry out, coupled with unpleasant noises about the scandals caused by one or other of our artists.³⁶

The key motive for attempting to change the profile of recorded music was certainly economic: if records were recognized as

34 Philippe Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1996, p. 10.

35 Sophie Maisonneuve, *L’Invention du disque. 1877-1949*, Paris, Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2009, p. 223.

36 Lucien Adès, “Spécial presse,” *N. I.*, no. 5.75, 10 February 1975 (CIDD Archives).

cultural products in the same way as books, their publishing companies could benefit from the same tax rate as other publishers. But the aim was also to recall the educational and heritage value of productions which had international renown. The different players in the record industry considered themselves to be fully engaged in cultural democratization, especially since there were no really satisfactory government policies on music at the time.

In 1973 record companies had already declared, through the intermediary of their trade union president, Jacques Souplet, that they were selling classical music at a loss out of a sense of duty, because the government, by keeping the VAT rate high, discouraged larger-scale media distribution. They hoped that France, inspired by the decisions of international authorities, would come to realize the true value of vinyl records, so that the latter could serve as genuine instruments of emancipation for the greatest number.

We publish records just like others publish books. We are not mass-producers, which would be incompatible with everything our activity contributes to our clients [...]. Many people hear only about our exceptional commercial successes, and so immediately conclude that record companies are money-minded merchants interested solely in the income from their best-sellers. I strongly deny this, for nothing could be further from the truth! [...]. We sell almost TEN THOUSAND different titles, ten thousand different record or tape titles every year. More than half of these have nothing to do with the genre of popular song: there is classical music (instrumental, vocal, religious), theater, educational recordings, etc. [...]. We put into circulation—and it is a principle of ours—a much higher percentage of classical music recordings than is merited by the present number of buyers [...]. Without going into the details, you should be aware that a book publisher pays 7% tax, whereas we are obliged to pay 33%, that is, five times as much [...]. The only possible explanation is that in the minds of those who decided on these rates there was a confusion between the equipment—by which I mean the gramophone player, which is subject to 33% tax—and the record itself. And this implies that the record's cultural value is left out of account [...]. In France, one would only have to follow the example of UNESCO: there, Disk Records are genuinely considered to be a means of cultural dissemination. We are represented in UNESCO as a member of an International Federation. It is our hope that one day soon this status may be acknowledged and granted to us in our own country.³⁷

37 Léon Zitronne, "Le nouvel environnement," *Jours de France*, no. 992, 1973, p. 122-125 (source: CIDD Archives).

The French Recording Industry's Trade Union had also set up an Information and Documentation Center on Disk Records [Centre d'Information et de Documentation du Disque, CIDD] to spearhead a campaign to showcase the value of records. It involved four major types of operation between 1968 and 1975: "the General Public" operation (the CIDD as a resource for the public and for industry); the "Sales points" operation (the CIDD as mediator between record companies and retail distributors); the operation "the Press and local authorities" (the CIDD as publisher of information about records); and the operation "Public, press and sales points" (the CIDD set up the French Charts, le Hit-Parade National du Disque).

These operations gave the record industry a certain visibility, which enabled it to gain the position of key representative of the music industry as a whole (as opposed to representatives of live shows, or music publishers). The industry was placed under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, which made some generous provisions for it (producers' rights in 1985, a lower VAT rate and television adverts authorized as from 1987, etc.). Record producers, unlike other figures in the music sector, were acknowledged by the public authorities and received substantial amounts of income and capital, especially between the 1980s and the early twenty-first century. This privilege was principally symbolic, and derived from their success in getting records recognized as artistic and cultural objects rather than as artificially inflated industrial products.

With the development of a new medium available in different formats, and the emergence of new musical cultures, production methods changed and practices evolved. The institutions involved in heritage conservation had to review how they operated, and to take on broader issues around sound recordings, especially when popular song music with rock 'n' roll inflections became widespread. Vinyl records, although by law deposited at the National Sound Archives, were not recognized as artistic works until the producers themselves campaigned to have them redefined. The issue was to get the music recording media to be accepted as heritage contents in their own right. The processes we have discussed developed at a time when, historically, ideas of democratization and cultural recognition were making themselves felt. Today, the digital turn in our contemporary societies transforms and challenges our ways of producing and disseminating knowledge, and the question of the heritage value of contents inevitably re-emerges. More specifically, producers of musical contents are attempting to find new ways of adding value to digital practices, while at the same time vinyl records seem to be enjoying a second lease of life. Should this be interpreted as a rejection of "digital culture"? Or is it a complementary trend, responding precisely to heritage problematics?

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