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# **The maintenance of macro-vocabularies in an industry: The case of the France's recorded music industry**

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## **Abstract**

*Different studies have proved the importance of language and vocabularies in structuring shared perceptions among stakeholders within an industry. Little is known about the discursive work involved in the evolution of these vocabularies. The use of corpus linguistics provides insights in the process through which an industry stabilises itself and how incumbents engage in discursive work to maintain their interests. We explore the jolt the Internet provoked in the French recorded music industry between 1988 and 2008. We argue that one major explanation for the industry inertia is that the technology of the Internet and the new distribution channels it opened up were framed by discourses, characterized by a relatively stable vocabulary which repeated established words such as right and artistic work. The discursive work of incumbent actors supports the stabilization of this vocabulary. When new words appeared, they were incorporated into existing vocabulary. This dual process of repetition and incorporation was facilitated by the fact that many of the words central to the debate were relatively empty and ambiguous floating signifiers. This paper represents a promising avenue to better account for the place of words in the institutional work and more specifically institutional maintenance.*

**Keywords:** discursive work, corpus linguistics, vocabularies, words, new technologies, music industry.

## **1. Introduction**

Institutions are usually defined as relatively taken-for-granted and enduring sets of practices (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008). In recent years, researchers have begun to emphasize the fact that even deeply institutionalized practices and social relations require significant deliberative and conscious work to keep them running (Angus, 1993; Zilber, 2002, 2009). In that vein, there has been an emerging interest in the notion of institutional maintenance, referring to efforts 'supporting, repairing and recreating' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006 p230) existing institutions. This recognizes the agentic side of institutional stability.

One way researchers have tried to get grips with institutional maintenance is by considering the role of language. Zilber (2009), for example, analysed how narratives which establish fixed meanings, are key to maintaining institutions. Others have looked further at the component parts of stories, such as the very words they are made up of are an important aspect of maintaining institutions. For instance institutional vocabularies (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) and key words (Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008) in articulating and manipulating institutions. While we know language more generally and the words we use in particular are an important part of stabilizing institutions, we do not really understand exactly how words evolve in an institutional field and what is the relationship between discourses at a micro level and diffused words constituting institutional vocabularies. Therefore, in this paper we explore the dynamics of words associated with institutional maintenance. This implies two interrelated levels of discourse analysis: a micro level associated with discursive work and a macro level which refers to an institutionalized vocabulary (that is, words systematically repeated among industrial actors). The words are analysed through their association, their repetition, their resilience to jolts and the incorporation of new words in established institutional vocabularies. We therefore set out to ask: what role do vocabularies (and words) play in the inertia of an institution even after a jolt?

Specifically, we examine the case of the recorded music industry in France between 1988 and 2008. We explore the jolt the Internet provoked in the French recorded music industry between 1988 and 2008 based on a systematic analysis of French newspapers. The use of corpus linguistics provides insights in the process through which the intellectual property (IP) institution instils stability and how industrial marketers engage in discursive strategies in order to maintain their interest in the music

industry. This focus on discourse may appear provocative while several authors have emphasized the role of technologies and thus materiality to structure the music industry (e.g. Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2017; Sanjek, 1988). Without denying the pivotal role of technologies we also posit that meanings – and thus discourse – associated with this materiality are a central dimension to explore (Zilber, 2017). Many works show the social construction of technologies and the fact that meanings around these technologies are essential to consider (Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2014; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Munir & Phillips, 2005). More specifically, our paper focuses on words and vocabularies, based on the arguments mentioned above that they participate to the construction of reality (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) and in turn frame the way technologies are described, explained and perceived.

Finally, we find that despite significant opportunities associated with the rise of Internet-based music distribution, there was significant inertia in the music sector. We argue that one major explanation for this inertia is that the technology of the Internet and the new distribution channels it opened up were framed by discourses, characterized by a relatively stable vocabulary. These discourses repeated established words such as *artist* and *artistic work*. A specific vocabulary therefore supported and reproduced the existing institution of IP. This meant that new technologies and associated practices (such as Internet-based music file-sharing) were largely talked about using existing terms. We show that the discursive work of incumbent industrial actors has facilitated this association. Even when new words appeared, they were incorporated into existing vocabulary, i.e., the existing repertoire from which actors draw. This dual process of repetition and incorporation was facilitated by the fact that many of the words central to the debate were relatively “empty” and ambiguous “floating signifiers” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) that lacked in precision and could be linked with a wide range of potential meanings. Through this threefold process—repeating existing words, incorporating new words into an existing vocabulary, and the use of keywords that remained highly ambiguous—the entire vocabulary used in the industry remained relatively stable. In making this argument, we extend germinal accounts of mechanisms that slow down transition processes. In our case, incumbent actors have played a determining role by keeping using the same keywords associated with IP. This has in turn structured the debates among other industrial actors in the Press. This paper also illustrates the interest of discourse analysis for industrial marketing, an approach that is rarely chosen in spite of the valuable

methodological and epistemological direction for marketers (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015; Skålén, 2010). The description of the words employed to speak in an industry is useful to better understand the linguistic frames that structure the thoughts and the justifications of industrial agents. A linguistic approach facilitates the observation of patterns defining how to speak and what can or cannot legitimately be said, which is associated with a technical orientation of discourse analysis (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015). We also emphasize the role of words at a macro level: when constantly repeated by various types of agents, these words may participate to the constitution of what is perceived as real in an industry, which echoes the constitutive orientation of discourse analysis (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015).

The remainder of this paper is divided into four parts. First, we focus on the theoretical background related to the issue of the change and the stability of institutions and to the potential role of discourses in stabilizing institutions. The second section describes our research context and methodology. Then, we present our main findings, and in the fourth and final section, we highlight our contributions and discuss the main conclusions of our research.

## **1. Theoretical background**

### *Institutional Stability*

Classical statements considered processes of institutional maintenance to happen through processes of self-reproduction and taken-for-grantedness (Jepperson, 1991). That is, because institutions are so deeply assumed we often reproduce them through relatively un-reflexive and unconscious practices. In spite of these mechanisms of institutional self-reproduction, an emphasis has been made these last years on agentic processes to account for institutional reproduction (Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013; Royer & Daniel, 2017). In that way, the current cannon of neo-institutional theory recognizes that ‘continuous action to maintain existing order’ (Zucker, 1988 p26) is necessary. The catalyst for this interest was in many ways Lawrence and Suddaby’s (2006) call to study previously overlooked work involved in maintaining institutions. They point out that institutions

are not simply self-reproducing systems, but need to be maintained and recreated through purposeful and deliberative work.

While existing studies have gone some way to examining how the regulative and normative elements of institutions are maintained, there is a lacuna around the maintenance of cognitive elements of institutions. In particular, existing research does not identify the same range of mechanisms through which taken for granted cultural categories (Scott, 2008 p57-58) are maintained over time. There are some exceptions here. For example, Tamar Zilber's (2009) study of the discursive dynamics of symbolic institutional maintenance in an Israeli rape crisis center. She focuses on the role of narratives in fixing meanings around the broad categories of institutions inform how the institution operates. A second exception is a study of how the Germany Nuclear Energy Industry sought to maintain its sense of legitimacy following a potential nuclear accident (Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011). They show how the industry mobilized broad discourses and widely shared schemes of justification in order to shore up the legitimacy of the nuclear industry. While both these studies tackle very different topics, they seem to share the similar insight that an important way cognitive elements of institutions are maintained is through the skilled mobilization of language. In particular, they make the point that mobilization of broadly shared discourses is an important way widely shared institutions are bolstered.

### 1.1 Discourses and stability

The role of language and discourse in organisational dynamics has been widely explored in the existing academic literature (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putman, 2004; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Mumby & Clair, 1997; van Dijk, 1993). Discourses are typically understood to be a structured collection of texts, which constitute social reality (Grant et al., 2004). During the past decade a range of institutional scholars have sought to account for the role of discourse (Elsbach, 1994; Green & Li, 2011; Green, Li, & Nohria, 2009; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) and build on the assumption that discursive processes construct reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In particular, discourses are thought to constitute concepts, objects and subject positions (Hardy & Phillips, 2004) through the production of shared typifications and categories (Phillips et al., 2004). For example, Munir and Phillips (2005) focus on how discursive processes reconstructed the field surrounding photography and how some actors

manage strategically, through carefully planned and executed discursive practices to shape the industry in their favour. Discourses then lead to the evolution of institutions or their stabilisation.

Embedded in the notion of discourse is thus the potential for stabilisation (Phillips & Malhotra, 2008).

A discourse puts forward patterns of seeing, describing, and interpreting reality and defines the standard way of thinking in a particular situation. For example, Hirsch (1986) analyses various texts to investigate the linguistic framing of takeover activities. He asserts that “language provides the medium to common symbolic glue and vocabulary by which the experience is processed and ordered, comprehended and made explicable by both participants and observers” (1986, p. 814-824). His study shows how, without a shared way of speaking to describe and interpret new events, it is unlikely for them to become conceptualized as normal, routine and acceptable, i.e., become absorbed into the culture of collectivity (1986, p. 821).

There is obviously an agentic dimension in the relationship between language and stability (Green & Li, 2011). In an industry, some actors are engaged in the maintenance of existing institutions, which may imply the use of discursive resources (Bjerregaard & Nielsen, 2014; Harmon, Green, & Goodnight, 2015; Taupin, 2012; Zilber, 2009). Powerful actors may aim at reinforcing an existing discourse that legitimizes their position (Taupin, 2012). This conveys a specific meaning for concepts and objects that are profitable to them. Words are central in this discursive work and some efforts may be related to the use of one word, rather than another, conveying specific ways of perceiving key elements of an industry. Thus, we consider that one vital aspect of discourses is the vocabularies of which they are comprised. These are the “structures of words, expressions, and meaning used to articulate a particular logic or means of interpreting reality” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p34). Many studies (e.g., Babb, 1996; Benford & Snow, 2000; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Hirsch & De Soucey, 2006; McLean, 1998) show that vocabularies are a central tool of persuasion, a means for talking about frames (Lowenstein et al., 2012, p. 10). Jones and Livne-Tarandach (2008, p. 1076) add to this conception that key terms and keywords define a field and act as a central point around which associated terms or words cohere. This study reminds us of the vital importance of the component parts of a vocabulary, namely, words. This point is underscored by McConnell-Ginet (2008, p. 524),

who indicates that “it is the relative emptiness of words (their strikingly formal character) that seems responsible for their great functional value (...). Words matter so much precisely because so little matter is firmly attached to them.”

We argue that actors draw on the vocabularies of their industry as a set of words and concepts that are understood and accepted as relevant. Their effects are to shape the meaning actors attribute to objects and activities (Geels, 2004). However, actors may also change and reshape vocabularies, in conjunction with evolving economic, strategic or technological jolts. In a nutshell, actors draw on existing discursive structures for action and structures are retroactively reproduced through discursive strategies. Few scholars have precisely analysed the role of vocabularies and the specific linguistic mechanisms that contribute to the stability of an institution, especially when this institution is under the pressure of a jolt. This paper raises the question: *what role do vocabularies (and words) play in the inertia of an institution even after a jolt?* There are two dimensions in that question. First, we need to determine the inertia facilitated by vocabularies, despite the emergence of new technologies and practices. Some efforts have been made to take into account the inertia created by language in general, for example by the bias of the Press (Fowler, 2013) or stories (Näslund & Perner, 2012). We need to extend these efforts in the case of vocabularies and words in particular. Since “institutions are built upon language” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p64), the way words and language may contribute to the inertia of an institution in a context of change is an interesting phenomenon to describe. Second, there is also an agentic dimension in the relationship between vocabularies and the inertia of an institution. Harmon et al. (2015) suggest that the defenders of an institution tend to deploy more intrafield rhetoric in order to maintain the status quo. Extended to the notion of vocabularies, it is relevant to observe whether the incumbent actors’ discourses draw on vocabularies associated with an institution.

## **2. Research context and methodology**

### **2.1 Empirical setting**

In this study, we focus on the recorded music industry in France between 1988 and 2008. This single case is particularly well adapted to account for the stability of an institution and the vocabularies that may have had an effect on this stability. First, it represents a specific period, during which the recorded music industry is under sustained pressure, conflagrating with the Internet industry. It takes place during an unstable period during which profound changes could have emerged. Second, a preliminary analysis of this case has showed that words such as “author,” “copyright” and “right” have been central and persistent despite radical technological and social changes. These words have proved to play a significant role, framing debates related to the evolution of the recorded music with the Internet. Third, the French case is a particularly revelatory example, which makes it fitted for a single-case research strategy (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007): in developed countries, only France voted for the legalization of peer to peer exchanges on the Internet. This proposed legislation created a big bang in the industry, pushing key incumbent actors to react and protect what they considered as a jeopardized industry. Many actors were delved into these controversies, opposing customers, politicians, journalists, professionals and artists all together. Obviously, this has led to the production of a considerable amount of texts, which represents a rich corpus of data to analyse vocabularies.

The emergence of the Internet has opened new avenues, facilitated exchange, offered alternative business models in various sectors, boosted new ways of consuming, and reinforced a trend toward dematerialization. Meanwhile, the recorded music industry has had to face tremendous challenges, absorbing new technologies and with them new ways of thinking and new practices. This led some earlier commentators (e.g., Hensmans, 2003) to forecast significant and profound changes for the music sector. However, most of these changes have been slow to come about: there is still uncertainty about adequate business models, and many potentialities of the Internet for recorded music have been impeded. This inertia is not purely a structural phenomenon but is also related to the struggles and resistance by incumbent industrial actors to radical change (Geels, 2014). We thus investigate in this paper the intertwining of structural pressures related to the recorded music industry and the efforts of certain actors to frame the evolution of the recorded music industry in conflict with the Internet. We are thus interested in two levels of analysis. At the macro level, we question the existence and the role of a relatively stable discourse diffused in the recorded music industry and how it is impacted by the

penetration of the Internet. We also examine, at a micro level, the active discursive efforts of incumbent industrial actors to frame this evolution, while new discourses and new words are promoted by the Internet.

We decided to focus on the period between 1988 and 2008 because it was during these years that the industry came under sustained pressure. During this period, the rise of music downloading led to a range of controversies in the music industry. Although the debates and changes taking place in the industry were global in scope, they were particularly pronounced in the French context. One reason for this was the proposition of alternative licensing arrangements (called a “global license”) based on a broadband tax that had not been tabled in many other developed economies. Despite new potentialities offered by the Internet, most of the alternative projects were marginalised, and many elements of the recorded music industry were reaffirmed. We stopped our observations in 2008—when a new debate about the “Hadopi<sup>1</sup> law” began—so as to exclude the controversies taking place at the time of writing.

First, we provide a narrative history (Langley, 1999). This involves tracing the major events that transformed the sector between 1988 and 2008, from the CD golden age to a more uncertain era when the recorded music industry was under the pressure of the Internet. In order to do this, we have used key historical studies of the French recorded music industry. These are backed up by accounts that identify the transformations of this industry in a global context. These sources allow us to identify changes in the industry’s structure and the logic underpinning it.

Second, we focus specifically on discourses related to different levels, both at the industry level (1) and the micro level (2). We examine (1) the recorded music industry and we capture discourses related to collective values and technological trajectories. For this level, our corpus is based on the systematic analysis of French newspapers and magazines. We then study (2) the micro level to analyse strategic discourses of two types of actors, those who try to defend the existing organization of the recorded music industry and those who attempt to change it. The conflagration between the recorded music

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<sup>1</sup> Hadopi is an acronym for an independent public authority (the English equivalent is High Authority for the Distribution of Works and the Protection of Rights on the Internet). It is mandated to monitor the Internet and to ensure compliance with copyright laws.

industry and the Internet produces a very particular context that stimulates the production of discourses and foregrounds the dynamics between macro and micro discourses.

## 2.2 Data collection

To capture discourses and thus representations at a macro level is particularly problematic. Scholars have mobilised different methods to capture these macro representations, for instance analysing cartoons (Hardy & Phillips, 1999), scholarly texts, Internet movie database (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004), or press articles (Patriotta et al., 2011; Selsky, Spicer, & Teicher, 2003). This research also relies on press articles to account for discourse at the industry level. In line with historical studies of institutional fields inspired by discourse analysis (Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire & Hardy, 2006; Munir & Phillips, 2005; Selsky et al., 2003), we sought to trace shifts in the words which appeared in a consistent body of texts which informed debate and discussion related to the recorded music industry. Newspaper articles are an excellent source of data because they capture many of the central voices in the sector ranging from activists and musician unions to record companies and artists. In the vein of Luhmann's approach (2000), we claim that the system of mass media (whose newspapers are a component) is regulated by an internal code related to the production of information, and go beyond specific social interests or political directives. Mass media becomes a key system by means of which society constructs its own reality (Luhmann, 2000). What we are interested in is not the way this reality is negotiated through press articles (micro discourses in the Press) but rather the shared ideas and elements convergently communicated as information. As suggested by Patriotta et al. (2011), a politically balanced range of media press journals was selected to avoid any systematic political bias. We used two press databases—Factiva and Europresse—to identify articles whose main topic relate to the music industry, using as keywords (in French) “music AND (industry OR sector).” After excluding articles deemed to be irrelevant—for example, duplicates, short news or commercial announcements—this gave us an archive of more than 800 articles (1,800 pages) drawn from a variety of French newspapers (appendix 1). The articles come from generalist newspapers (e.g., *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*), the economic press (e.g., *La Tribune*, *Les Echos*), monthly magazines (e.g., *Le Monde diplomatique*, *Courrier International*), and

web articles (e.g., Le Monde.fr, La Tribune.fr). These sources cross the political spectrum from the right (*Le Figaro*) to the left (*Libération*). As such, their content may present some variations depending on the ideological position of the editorial board. We do not deny these variations, but what we are interested in is the identification of common elements which determine common positions at a macro level. This is why we have chosen to aggregate these articles so as to observe the most repeated words, independent of the alleged position of each newspaper, that refer to common ways of expressing an idea and perceiving the recorded music industry. The results presented below are moderated according to the number of articles per newspaper to avoid the prevalence of certain newspapers, except during the two early periods during which *Le Monde* (political alignment: centre-left) published most of the articles in our corpus. We also decided not to integrate in this corpus expert music journals, meeting reports or whitepapers to avoid texts focused on a professional target audience, which are more appropriate to a niche-level analysis. Appendix 1 describes the evolution of the number of articles in our corpus between 1988 and 2008, including a period between 2004 and 2008 during which articles related to the music industry reached a peak.

Regarding the discourses produced at a micro level we have collected various types of texts, also identifying the context of this production and the purpose of actors in these discursive activities. Our central data here are constituted of texts produced by actors to influence collective perceptions (press releases, websites, conferences, etc.). We have focused our attention on the major labels, the most influential actors in the recorded music industry. They are engaged in an intensive campaign to adapt the Internet to the “traditional” business model of the recorded music industry. To collect their discourses, we have consulted the archives of IRMA, an information centre devoted to the music sector. Appendix 2 indicates all the sources we have collected. We have also interviewed several key individuals in the music industry to contextualize these discourses and understand the motives for their production (see appendix 3).

A large majority of texts belong to the period between 2005 and 2006, during the vote on the DADVSI<sup>2</sup> proposal in the House of Parliament. The first text that refers to the Internet and to the recorded music industry appeared in 1998 in *L'économie du disque*, but few producers expressed their position publically: during this early period, the Internet was not considered a threat and the Major labels did not attempt to influence the recorded music industry. It is only from 2004 that the Major labels began to actively participate in public debates, producing numerous texts, at the same time that the number of articles in newspapers reached their peak (appendix 1).

To account for the singularity of these discourses, we have also collected texts produced by alternative groups, positioned in niches that promoted the deeper integration of the Internet for the recorded music industry. Among these subversive groups, we have selected those who received the most media coverage: “the Alliance” and the “*Quadrature du Net*.” We have gathered press releases, manifestos, petitions, whitepapers and interviews. The “Alliance,” also called *Alliance Public-Artistes*, is a coalition of a variety of associations (consumers, artists, collecting right agencies, etc.) that promotes an alternative remuneration system based on a “global license” which would allow Internet users to use peer-to-peer platforms in exchange for a tax paid by all Internet users. The “Quadrature du Net” is a group that promotes digital rights and freedoms of citizens. They have been very active in the struggle against DRM<sup>3</sup>, considering it a threat against fundamental liberties

### 2.3 Data analysis

In order to highlight the stabilization of discursive repertoires at the industrial level, we employed the lexicometric software program *Prospéro*, with a corpus linguistics approach (Perren & Sapsed, 2013; Pollach, 2012). This software is similar to WordStat in the way that it determines frequency lists, keywords and collocated words, and allows researchers to draw on collective dictionaries. We chose Prospéro for several reasons. First, it was initially designed by sociologists to explore texts in the context of conflict and change. One very useful feature is that it relies on the dynamic analysis of texts. It is possible to divide a corpus into different periods and compare them with a view to

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<sup>2</sup> DADVSI (in English: "law on authors' rights and related rights in the information society") is a proposed legislation reforming French copyright law.

<sup>3</sup> DRM : Digital Right Management

identifying stable arrangements or changes. Second, Prospéro relies on dictionaries in French which have been progressively refined by an active community of scholars in linguistics, sociology and psychology. Words are classified according to their nature: nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives and common expressions are recognized. According to the specificities of the study, these dictionaries can be modified by researchers. Third, this program has been used to study large corpuses of texts (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Chateauraynaud & Torny, 1999) and has proved to be a very flexible and powerful tool (Chateauraynaud, 2003).

To explore the long period between 1988 and 2008, we divided our corpus into six time periods, each one relating to somewhat different contexts. This breakdown is a means of achieving a form of temporal bracketing in order to structure our data (Langley 1999). This division is based on an iteration to define turning points, taking into account both the significant events in the music industry and some inflexions in the use of words as emphasized by the lexicometric approach. The six periods are structured as follows. First, 1988 to 1998 represents a period considered as a golden era for the recorded music industry due to the success of CDs, which became the dominant medium for music distribution with a steady increase from 20 million albums in 1988 to 100 million in 1998. The second period begins in 1998. It is from that year that there are references to the Internet in our corpus. 1998 to 2000 is the time when, while CDs were still dominant, the Internet arrived in French households (1,250,000 homes were connected by early 1998, compared to just 480,000 one year earlier) and digital pirates began to appear. Third, in 2000, there is a turning point with the development of illegal downloading platforms like Napster. Also, from 2000 to 2002, the Internet became of central importance, with a shift from 5 million Internet users in 2000 to 16 million in early 2002, and illegal downloading platforms contributed, to a certain extent, to the attractiveness of the Internet. The fourth period begins in 2002, when a coalition of producers decided to react against piracy in the music industry. 2002 to 2005 is thus the period characterized by the beginning of an organized crackdown on pirates with several trials initiated against them. The fifth period is short but intense, as illustrated by the number of articles published (appendix 1). It begins in December 2005 when a draft law concerning the recorded music (Dadvisi) was deliberated by parliament, leading to a massive debate

among politicians, producers, consumers, etc. Finally, in April 2006, the discussions came to an end, and it marked the beginning of a new period. The Dadvsi law was partially implemented and actors in the industry considered new measures for improving control of the Internet, leading later to the Hadopi project. What is important in this breakdown is whether or not texts produced during a specific period share certain common elements with texts produced during another period.

For each period, using Prospéro to automatically count all words, we established the most frequent nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. This generated a list of the most frequently occurring words in each time period (see Table 1). We assumed that this list of frequently repeated words constituted the repertoire to account for the dominant discourse of the recorded music industry. We chose not to use Prospéro's overall word count but instead moderated according to the number of articles produced by each newspaper during a given period.

Next, we sought to identify which words remained stable during the time period examined. We did this by establishing the number of periods in which a word was dominant, the number of times it was used in the entire corpus and the stability of collocated words (See Table 2). The analysis of collocations is important in indicating the semantic preference for certain linguistic constructs and can uncover meaning imbued in words through collocation (Pollach, 2012). Signs do not have an "essential" meaning in and of themselves, but only take on meaning in relation to their position relative to other signs (Saussure, 1998). Collocation is calculated according to a specific algorithm (Chateauraynaud, 2003) that accounts both for the proximity and presence in the same sentence of two words.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for each keyword in our corpus, we identified their linguistic network, that is, their most frequent collocations.

Finally, we examined how these networks of words had changed over time and their degree of stability. This provided an account concerning how keywords in a vocabulary and their association

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<sup>4</sup> When two words are in the same sentence (sequence separated between two words) this is considered as a collocation. If, among words between these collocated words, there is only one verb, the value of the collocation is 2; if there are at least two verbs, the value of the collocation is 1. The strength of the collocation in the entire corpus (or sub-corpus for each period) is measured by adding the value of collocation for all sentences of the corpus.

with other keywords had changed (or not) over time. This is important in understanding the evolution of specific ways of thinking and understanding through the discursive resources available to individuals.

To analyse the content of the texts at the micro-level, we employed a traditional method of content analysis, describing the topics which were the most frequent in texts and identifying the most repeated words associated with these topics. For the corpus of incumbents, six main categories were identified: the essential role of the major labels in the recorded industry, a legal offer as an alternative to piracy, the precarious position of artists and their need to be protected, artists' rights and authors' rights, criticism of alternative models, the importance of intellectual property. For the corpus produced by alternative groups, three main categories were identified: criticism of intellectual protection, the cultural industry needing to give a central place to artists and the public, the necessary remuneration for artists. For each category, we have indicated their frequency in our corpus among coded sentences. There are only few texts produced before 2004. For that reason, we did not use a lexicometric approach for each period, observing the evolution of repertoires. Instead, we focused on the period between 2005 and 2008 during which the controversies reached a peak. Following this, we discuss whether these discursive efforts of the major labels and anti-majors have produced effects at an industrial level.

### **3. Findings**

#### **3.1 The vocabulary of the recorded music industry**

##### **3.1.1 Changes in vocabulary**

Table 1 details the broad changes in the core vocabulary used in our corpus from 1988 to 2008. It reveals two asymmetrical dimensions: the strong stability of particular words, and the occasional dominance of new words. Figure 1 represents the evolution of the main words in the recorded music industry.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

For example, the word “Internet” appears in the Top 5 during the second period and remains among the dominant words up until 2008. The Internet, as an exogenous technological and social jolt in the industry had tremendous consequences and offered a significant potential for change. In the same vein, “Napster” is the most frequent word during the third period, which shows the importance of this new platform that threatened the music industry’s main revenue model. However, Napster has become a distant echo since 2002, becoming less important in the vocabulary. The words “global license” experienced the same fate as “Napster.” They were central during the debates about DADVSI in 2005, but disappeared entirely in the following period. The word “piracy” appeared in 2002 among the dominant words and followed a strange trajectory thereafter. It was not dominant in 2000, although Napster was a celebration of copyright violation. After the Napster crisis, the term “piracy” was very often employed. It is also worth noting that “piracy” is an aggressive term used against many Internet users. Those who illegally download files are accused of pillaging artists’ work, but this does not take into account the fact that they may be supporters of a particular artist and may buy her CDs or go to her concerts. “Piracy” was also a dominant word during the last period. This word is all the more powerful as it is frequently used. The behaviour of Internet users who download copyrighted files on the Internet is commonly referred to as “piracy,” even by Internet users. This effectively frames this topic in a way that reinforces the intellectual property rights in the recorded music industry: Internet users who download on P2P networks are defined as “pirates” and thus are supposed to feel guilty.

In the section below, we analyse the two main characteristics of this vocabulary. First, which words were constantly used from 1988 to 2008? Were they associated with the same words throughout this period, or was their linguistic network more contingent? Second, which new words became dominant? And what about changes in their association with other words?

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

### 3.1.2 Stable vocabulary

While Table 1 shows the changes that took place between 1988 and 2008, there is also strong stability and a kernel of words that was constantly employed during this period (Table 2). From one period to another, more than half of the vocabulary was reproduced. These stable words refer to artists, rights in the recorded music industry, as well as its central actors. Among these words, some were persistently associated with the same vocabulary and others were employed in different contexts. In order to look at these stable terms in more depth and to understand the most structuring words—and so the most significant for stability—we decided to focus on the five most repeated words with stable networks of associations (figure 2): author, artistic work, copyright, artist and music. We will now consider each of these networks of association in more detail.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

The fate of the word “author” and its linguistic network is striking due to the high level of similarity between the different periods. From 1988 to 2008, 88% of the words associated with “author” are repeated across at least three different periods, which shows the stability of its network. “Authors” is persistently linked with “producers,” “rights,” “Sacem,”<sup>5</sup> “society” (referring to the society for the protection of musicians), “record labels,” “composers,” “artistic work” and “music.” The development of the Internet has had little impact on the word “authors,” and no words associated with new technologies are persistently incorporated into its network. It is also puzzling that the word “artist” is not part of this network, as if an “author” could be disconnected from her artistic activity. The stronger proximity of “producers,” “Sacem” and “rights” tends to create a linguistic universe in which authors are described and contained within a legal and productive dimension.

It is interesting to compare the linguistic network of “artists,” which is also fairly stable, with that of “author.” In particular, it is all the more meaningful as the words “artist” and “author” may refer to the same person. The main difference is the word “remuneration” which is persistently associated with “artists.” The idea of protection for artists is therefore particularly salient in this area. There is also a

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<sup>5</sup> Sacem is the leading professional association for the collection of royalties in France.

notable absence of “artistic work” in the stable linguistic network of “artist,” which indicates that their output is not the central concern.

This construction of the word “artist,” as opposed to “author,” in the recorded music industry is quite similar to that given by the *Trésor de la Langue Française* (French dictionary): an author is “a person who writes a book or produces an artwork,” while artists are “those who cultivate an art, who practice an art.” These definitions suggest that “author” denotes a productive, creative and material dimension. The word “artist” is instead associated with a practice and a lifestyle: artists are not defined as producers. The use of “author” connotes an idea of production and ownership. As for the word “artist,” it refers more to the person who constitutes the artist, with all of her passions and personality.

“Copyright” is also a central word in our corpus, and represents a pillar of the recorded music industry. Its linguistic network is also fairly stable. In particular, quite naturally, it is persistently linked with a legal vocabulary (right, law, related rights). This vocabulary is often associated with coercion and control. “Artistic work” is also persistently associated with “copyright,” which corroborates the idea that language itself reflects and reproduces the association between the production of artists and its control through copyright. This idea of prohibition is extended to a more general idea of protection. The word “protection” is important and is presented as the *raison d’être* of copyright.

In this vein, it is interesting to explore the stable linguistic network of “artistic work.” It is persistently associated with “authors” and “distribution” but not with “exchange” or “downloads.” In the vocabulary, artistic work is distributed and protected by copyright while files are exchanged and downloaded. “Artistic work” is also strongly incorporated in a stable network of words referring to the legislative sphere. The term “artistic work” is all the more interesting as it is generic and represents any kind of artistic production, regardless of its content. It constructs global statements about artists’ productions.

“Music” is naturally a central word in our empirical study. Its linguistic framework is fairly stable and it is strongly linked with “authors,” “Internet,” “market,” “online” and “downloads.” It is interesting to note that “music” both incorporates traditional features of recorded music (Sacem, major labels, authors, producer) and socio-technological change (downloads, Internet, online, files).

### 3.2 Unstable and repeated words

Contrary to the previous five words, other words are used during the entire period between 1998 and 2008 but with changing associations. This is the case for “right” as is illustrated by Table 3.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

While there are persisting associations (with the words “authors”, “law”, “artistic work” and “copyright”), there are other strong temporal associations during different periods, for example, with “private copy,” “European directives,” “remuneration” and “protection.” As such, the word “right,” albeit central, circulates between different contexts according to the successive periods in the music industry. The same observation can be made about “law,” which, although central, has a changing linguistic network. According to the period, it is associated with varying concerns: “Napster,” “Dadvisi” or “related rights,”

In comparison to/with “author,” for example, whose linguistic network is fairly stable, we question the distinctive role of words whose linguistic network is changing. We argue that these changing associations allow more space for change and contradictions. The word “right” may refer to “intellectual property” as well as “private copy.” These words are not only central in the recorded music industry but also reflect conflicting elements since “right” or “law” can reflect different perspectives.

#### 3.2.1 New words in the vocabulary and incorporation of change

In a context of the conflagration between the recorded music industry and the Internet, it is interesting to look more closely at the emergence of new words in our corpus. As is illustrated in Table 1, several

words have emerged and become dominant in the field, such as “Internet,” “Internet users” and “files.” As new words, they may undermine the stability of the recorded music industry. In the section below, we describe their evolution and aim to understand its underlying process.

The network of “Internet” changes somewhat except for four words that are persistently and frequently associated with it: “artistic work,” “downloading,” “music” and “piracy.” This manner of speaking about the Internet constructs an image that is restrictive and expresses a common view emphasized by the frequency of “piracy.” The Internet is restrictively shaped as a source of uncertainty due to downloads and piracy. One finds many expressions such as “online piracy” or “piracy on the Internet.”

However, the word “Internet” does not rely on fixed meanings, and the variability in its associations denotes its ambiguity. It is striking to notice that words like “share,” “exchange” and “free” seldom appear. It reflects the slow incorporation of values moving from the Internet to the recorded music industry. During the period when the global license proposed legislation was being debated in parliament, “piracy” was less often associated with the word “Internet”; on the contrary, when the global license proposal failed, “Internet” once again became strongly associated with “piracy.”

As for the term “Internet users,” its network is also extremely unstable. Its evolution is interesting and shows a high flexibility with regard to events in the industry. The early periods are symptomatic of an Internet ideology based on free exchange. Between 2000 and 2002, “Internet users” were mostly associated with “Napster” and “exchange.” Between 2002 and 2005, “Internet users” was more generally associated with “peer-to-peer” and finally with “freedom” with the climax of the global license proposal in 2005/2006. There was a shift in 2006-2008. During this last period, “Internet users” was incorporated into a network that referred to a traditional market system. The frequency of associations with “artistic work,” whose network refers to intellectual rights, tends to export “Internet user” to a different linguistic universe.

In the same vein, the associations with the words “law,” “penalties” and “warning” reflect the shift of “Internet users” to a more controlled space. Furthermore, the network of the word “download” in

2006-2008 (music, Internet, illicit, artistic work, market, euros, DRM, platform, website) evolved to reflect both legal and illegal downloads, as is clear from the analysis of the adjectives used with “downloads.”

The word “files” is strongly associated with words that refer to free exchange such as “Napster,” or “P2P” during the first periods. They represent the most frequent associations and are at the top of the table. Most often, they are not associated in an ideological way, but rather objectively describe the possibilities available through peer-to-peer and the Internet. There was a shift in 2006-2008. Although the word “copyright” was present from 2000 to 2005 in the linguistic network of “files,” it was not repeated as often as “exchange.” “Files” came to be dominantly associated with “protection” and “DRM” (Digital Rights Management) from 2006, after the DADVSI vote. Finally, there was a significant change for the word “files,” moving from belonging to the sphere of the Internet and free exchange to belonging to the sphere of market and property. Even though files are not material—and so can be disseminated without limitation—they are cognitively turned into artefacts that fall under intellectual property.

From these observations about the “Internet,” “Internet users” and “files,” we can see that words belonging to the core and stable repertoire of the recorded music industry are used to speak about these new words in the music industry, regardless of whether their linguistic proximity can be established more or less quickly. The fact that some words are systematically used to speak about a phenomenon in a given field establishes a link between different linguistic universes and ensures the incorporation of new words in a stable, coherent and constraining vocabulary. The conflagration between the recorded music industry and the Internet shows an asymmetrical incorporation. Typical words from the Internet are incorporated into the repertoire of the recorded music industry and positioned in stable linguistic networks.

The appearance of new words, due to the conflagration with the Internet, creates gaps in the existing vocabulary. These gaps, as we have observed, tend to be filled in by the use of pivotal key words (such as “author” or “artistic work”) that progressively incorporate these new words into existing

stable linguistic networks, and structure their meaning in accordance with the repertoire of the recorded music industry.

### 3.2 Discursive efforts to influence the evolution of the recorded music industry

The stability of repertoires is obviously not the result of a pure linguistic and structural process. The music sector is the arena of strong struggles, opposing incumbent actors (such as major labels, collecting rights agencies) and other groups defending alternative models (such as associations of Internet users, artists, cultural institutions, etc.). Our results show that incumbent actors have done intensive discursive work to provide *pedagogical* resources to the public, politicians, and artists in order to define the stakes of the music industry with the emergence of the Internet. Their texts mostly draw on the repertoire of the recorded music industry, with an effort to use new words and expressions to frame new possibilities with the Internet. We observe that alternative groups do not necessarily employ similar linguistic structures; they provide other associations, even if the effects of their discourse appear much more marginal.

#### 3.2.1 The discursive efforts of the major labels

Few texts were produced before 2004 and the texts produced after 2004 emphasize six main issues, as summarized in table 4. An interesting element is that “Internet” is not associated with words related to opportunities. It is rather discussed as a potential threat that needs to be controlled.

One common topic expressed in the corpus exploits the notion of “risk” for artists, whose revenues would be jeopardized by the Internet. Here, the Internet is expressed as a threat that needs to be controlled to preserve the music industry.

In this context, the music industry is presented as necessary and protective. The following claim illustrates this:

*Artists need producers that take risks, artistic managers, disc recorders, professionals around them. Professionals are here to help artists have the means to make their choice.* (Christophe Lameignère, Sony BMG France, CEO)

The analysis of this corpus also shows the pivotal role given by the major labels to “intellectual property.” The discussion is often quite technical about different types of rights for artists. Thus, the rights and revenues of artists and performers are opposed to those of authors. The polysemy of the word “*droit*” (right and law) may also create ambiguity. The word refers to fees that can be demanded by artists, but it also contains an idea of justice that provides more legitimacy to the existing system of “author’s rights.”

Many texts are also devoted to the criticism of alternative systems. The “global license” for example is described as an unrealistic measure, neither moral nor fair for artists:

*The absolute right for a worker to earn money from his work is jeopardized. Recently it is good to pretend that refusing to exploit artwork for free kills liberty.* (Claude Lemesle, author)

Furthermore, the use of the word “fair” is often employed and denotes a system of values. Speaking about the “fair remuneration of work,” some incumbent actors aim at naturalizing the existing order of value distribution. This order is based on a “star system” in which the artist’s success prevails.

Consequently, this discourse associates artists’ work with the success of their work. The idea of remuneration reduces the status of artist to a worker who produces successful artworks. Their discourse marginalizes “public-less,” “success-less,” work-less artists. Artists without success are anti-economic and, in that sense, are not really artists but apprentices bearing the hope of a brighter future.

A producer quoted by Sacem illustrates this contempt for *Ms Jane Doe*, an anonymous artist:

*The global cultural patrimony is worth more than 7 euros!* [Note: this is the amount of money that would be paid as a tax to legalize the exchange of files on the Internet.] *Besides, this wage will be distributed between Ms Smith who sings in the shower and an artist whose work requires a real production cost.*

“Intellectual property” is associated with positive terms, and is presented as the only system able to save the music industry threatened by the Internet. Some statements are pronounced with emphasis:

*Intellectual property is the guardian of one of our most precious goods: imagination. This ability of imagination causes ideas and feelings to emerge. Then they can be turned into paintings, novels,*

*music or songs... Intellectual property protects authors and the expression of ideas. It allows people to create.*

The goal of property protection establishes a relationship between creation, remuneration and artwork control. To this extent, intellectual property appears to be necessary:

*Among all properties that are the least contestable, the least contestable, one that can neither harm republican equality nor offend liberty, is the property of mind productions. (SNEP, quoting Lakanal)*

The tone of the discourse is often alarmist. It is interesting to note that, even if professional magazines advise considering the potentialities of the Internet for the industry, in most texts produced for the public, the Internet is expressed as a threat that should be legally controlled. The expression “legal offer” has become systematic to refer to the music distributed on official websites. It is illustrative of the difficulties of naming new ways of consuming music on the Internet. Two categories are thus repeated and opposed: “legal offer” versus “pirate websites.”

These discourses show that actors do not deterministically repeat a repertoire related to the recorded music industry. They achieve discursive efforts that intend to reinforce specific values in the music industry. These discourses may have an impact at a macro level, reinforcing the centrality of certain words that they often repeat (“authors,” “rights,” “intellectual property”) clarifying and adapting their meanings to social and technological changes. The discourse produced by incumbent actors is probably one element that explains that the Internet is associated with piracy between 2006 and 2008 and also the fact that “law,” “right,” “protection” and “DRM” are dominant words in the last period at an industrial level (cf. Table 1). We can observe a clear intent to focus the debates around artists’ rights and intellectual property to account for the future of the recorded music industry facing the emergence of the Internet. The numerous potentialities offered by new technologies are marginal in the major labels’ press releases and public documents.

### 3.2.3 Analysis of alternative discourses

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

A study of a few alternative discourses is interesting to understand the specificities of the incumbents' discourse. We focus here on discourses produced by the *Alliance* and the *Quadrature du Net* which are closer to customers' expectations and to certain artists' position (for example, in this corpus, the words "culture" and "public" are much more present). Moreover, these associations were central in the debates regarding successive draft laws which were discussed in the House of Parliament. Based on our corpus, we have identified three main topics, as they are detailed in table 5.

Among the most frequent topics, one important issue is to denounce the dangers of intellectual properties. While "intellectual property" is also a central keyword, it is instead associated with more negative words. Some pernicious effects of protection techniques are highlighted and accused of jeopardizing the freedom of Internet users.

As regards technical issues, the system of protection (in particular DRM—Digital Rights Management) is criticized and described as inefficient:

*Let's not be excessively optimistic concerning the efficiency of anti-copy protection systems. Computer scientists say that it is like snake oil. It is an expression used in computer security to refer to protection technologies that are easy to bypass. (Whitepaper, Alliance)*

Many words and expressions connect "intellectual protection" with the major labels, whose real motivations are questioned. Intellectual property is described as an unnecessary protection for artists that would lead to the development of locking mechanisms and the limitation of Internet users' "freedom."

Many statements reveal a suspicion concerning intellectual property that may be used as a pretext to exercise more efficient control:

*On behalf of intellectual property protection, Sony wants to control their customers' computers. The effects, regarding freedom and security, are incalculable. (Whitepaper, Alliance)*

Interestingly, the *Alliance* and the *Quadrature du Net* also frequently employ the words "pirate" and "piracy" to describe people who download from the Internet, even if words like "customer" or "individual" would be more neutral and consistent with their desire to defend the general public.

Some other statements severely denounce the behaviour of the major labels, and emphasize their power:

*Should the DADVSI be accepted, technology would replace law, according to the will of private companies. We can see to what extent they are ready to behave with a criminal irresponsibility. (Website, Alliance)*

As the second category emphasizes, music “diversity” and “artists” represent a constant concern in this corpus. The issue is to combine economic constraints with the artists’ and the public’s wishes. The use of the word “revolution” is remarkably frequent and is revealing of the difficulty in finding a consensus with the existing economic models. Perceiving difficulties in the music industry, some statements show concerns about the renovation of the existing model:

*The only possible solution to stop this phenomenon which relies on the reinforcement and the development of alternative sources to offer a free access to culture. (Website, Quadrature du Net)*

They also express suspicion concerning industrial manoeuvres against artists—especially “independent artists”—, denouncing a kind of subjugation of “artists” by the major labels and their alleged industrial vision:

*[Applying to the Internet and to peer-to-peer industrial models that are similar to those used by the traditional disc sale] consists in impoverishing the market with the elimination of independent artists or labels using free licenses. Then it consists in offering to the public a monolithic model with controlled content, which will benefit few individuals. (Whitepaper, Alliance)*

The above statements implicitly reveal a fear of a morganatic union between “culture” and “industry.”

The third prevailing category in our corpus refers to the remuneration for actors involved in the creation of artworks: performers, producers, and composers. The remuneration of artists is presented as imperious:

*I demand that remuneration should be guaranteed for artists for all kinds of music exploitation. (Petition, Alliance)*

An interesting point is the fact that remuneration is defended independently of any ideological position. The discourses here do not contain any expressions to defend culture for everybody, free music, or a radical new status for artists. The texts from the Alliance merely reflect pragmatic answers to a problem:

*Today, the increasing exchange of files between peer-to-peer users most often occurs without the permission of artists and without their receiving any remuneration. (Website, Alliance)*

The solutions suggested are supposed to bypass this problem and pay artists in compensation for peer-to-peer practices. The notion of “fair” remuneration is put to the fore.

Regarding the relationship between this corpus and the repertoire of the recorded music industry, we can observe that the words employed are fairly different, giving more space to “culture,” the “public” and “diversity.” The Internet is both perceived as a tremendous opportunity for culture and described as compatible with the remuneration of artists. While “intellectual property” is also a key word in this discourse, it is used to participate in the debates and propositions made by incumbent actors.

We observe however that this discourse does not appear very powerful in modifying the repertoire of the recorded music industry. For example, keywords such as “culture,” “freedom” and “diversity” are not dominant at the industrial level (table 1) even during the period 2005-2006 when the global license was being debated.

#### **4. Discussion**

What role do vocabularies and words play in the inertia of an institution? This question points to one aspect of complex transition processes that has been overlooked. Some studies have contributed to the question of language in relation to institutional stability (Zilber, 2008, 2009) and others have emphasized the role of keywords (e.g. Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008) or, more broadly, of “institutional vocabularies” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). However, a great deal of work remains to be done to understand how words can facilitate the inertia of an institution, especially following a jolt. In the case of the music industry, we underlined that the way most actors express their ideas reinforce the central institution of intellectual property (IP). In turn, this contributes to the inertia of the recorded

music industry despite the development of the Internet. We have analysed two levels, describing the evolution of vocabularies at an industrial level and the vocabularies employed at a micro level in discursive strategies. We would argue that one of the reasons for the inertia of the recorded music industry is that the vocabulary used in the debate concerning the recorded music is partially stable, with central terms being constantly employed. We have brought out the role of incumbent actors in repeating specific words, reinforcing their repetition at an industrial level. These words have contributed to the reproduction of the IP institution, central in the structuration of the music industry. During periods of transition, incumbent actors have persistently repeated certain words that have become so resonant that even iconoclast groups use them in their discourses. Furthermore, when new words appear, they are incorporated into the existing vocabulary. Our claim is that this process of incorporation is facilitated by incumbent actors engaged in discursive activities, who actively bridge the changes (and the words that describe them) with the vocabulary from the industry, and thus reinforce a central institution that structures an industry. We have also highlighted the role of keywords as “empty signifiers” that can be linked with lots of potential meanings. This threefold process—repeating existing words, incorporating new words into existing vocabulary, and the use of keywords that remain ambiguous—explains why the vocabulary used to talk about the recorded music remained relatively stable.

Based on our analysis of press articles about the recorded music industry during the two decades from 1988 to 2008 and on discourses produced by incumbent groups and their opponents, we would like to articulate three central claims: (1) stability occurs through the existence of a limited vocabulary and recurrent associations ; this vocabulary reflects and reinforces some central institutions that structure an industry; (2) when change does occur it is often described using existing vocabularies, associating change with existing institutions; and (3) when new words arise they are incorporated into existing vocabularies in a way which preserves established patterns of meaning. We will now expand on each of these points in more detail.

#### 4.1 Stability through repeated words and recurrent associations

In our study, we noticed that there was a rather limited vocabulary in the industry. There was a kernel of dominant words which were very often and systematically repeated during all the periods we examined. The words “author,” “copyright,” “artistic work,” “law” and “artists” were persistent throughout these periods, despite significant technical and social changes within the industry. These words represent the intellectual property institution and the repetition of these words reinforce the centrality of this institution for the recorded music industry. They provide a relatively stable set of linguistic resources which are used to speak and write about what recorded music means. This means that recorded music during the entire period was discussed using a set of terms which originated much earlier in the industry’s history. Therefore, actors had a fairly limited linguistic palette with which to discuss the meaning of recorded music.

In addition to having a relatively limited set of words to talk about recorded music, the way these words were used was based upon a set of fairly stable associations with other words. We can see that throughout the period studied there were highly stable networks of words around “author,” “artistic work,” “music” and “artist.” We observed that there were recurrent associations between these words insofar as they were typically used together and in relation to one another when talking about recorded music. These recurrent relationships are important because, as we have indicated, signs do not have an “essential” meaning in and of themselves, but only take on meaning in relation to their position relative to other signs (Saussure, 1998). What this means is that words like “author” only take on a particular meaning to the extent that they are related to other words such as “artistic work,” “music” and “artist.” Furthermore, while this set of relationships remains relatively stable over time, it follows that the meaning attributed to a particular word also remains stable. Thus, the relative rigidity of meaning is not associated with the repetition of signs only, but more specifically with the very stability of relational positions between words. These associations reinforce a central metaphor (Lakoff, 2010) that partially frames the recorded music industry in terms of work and property, maintaining the naturalized relationship between the IP institution and the recorded music industry.

Our first central claim, therefore, is that the relative stability of the words in our study and the relationships between them created a persistent vocabulary, and that this stable vocabulary was an important component in instilling some inertia in the industry considered. This is because a stable set of words with stable relationships between them makes for relatively restricted possibilities for actors involved in this industry to speak and write about it. Actors including record companies, artists, government regulators and various commentators all faced a relatively restricted set of words and a limited way of putting them together. This meant that when they discussed how the recorded music industry could work, or indeed should work, they typically fell back on this limited vocabulary. In addition, we defend the idea that some actors intended to repeat specific words, as long as these words supported the beliefs they wanted to protect. This was the case, for example, of the word “copyright,” frequently employed by incumbent actors and associated with “author” and “protection” to promote the traditional business model of the recorded music sector. To engage with them, even subversive groups needed to integrate the keywords they employed, thus reinforcing these words in public debate. Based on our case, we would also suggest that the use of specific words belonging to the industrial vocabulary by incumbent actors played a role in increasing their legitimacy: the fact that their discourse was anchored in the IP institution, which is so common in the recorded music industry, made it easier to share among other actors in the music industry, and made their discourse more familiar and legitimate.

But what is so striking about the kind of vocabulary examined herein is not just the fact that well-known clusters of words are systematically used together (“author,” “artist,” “artistic work”, “music”), but rather the fact that this vocabulary seems to underpin the core assumptions of the recorded music industry which are in turn underpinned by legal regulations. In other words, the relatively stable words and associations between them seem to continue to anchor the kinds of laws related to recorded music (and intellectual property in particular) that can be conceived. In this sense, a relatively limited vocabulary helps to bolster and continues to underpin the recorded music industry.

#### 4.2 Incorporating change in existing vocabulary

The repetition of specific words and the use of stable associations result in the reproduction of a rather stable vocabulary across several decades. However, what happens when significant changes or jolts occur within the environment? In the present study, we found that in spite of radical technological shifts and new ways of consuming music, a relatively stable vocabulary persisted throughout the period studied. We found that this happened because changes themselves were expressed through the existing vocabulary related to the IP institution, which is thus reproduced as the most central institution of the recorded music industry. For instance, despite the introduction of new technologies which easily enabled peer-to-peer distribution of music, notions of who owned the shared music were interpreted through notions of “copyright,” which maintained a relatively stable linguistic network. Similarly “music” was also associated with the same vocabulary despite the fact that it could be represented and expressed in radically new ways. We have found that one reason for this inertia in vocabulary is the active discourses used by incumbent groups to frame the debate around specific issues, such as “copyright” and “intellectual property,” translating new technologies and new business opportunities with the central words of the industry. The discourse of incumbents goes beyond the repetition of the industrial vocabulary, since new key words are also employed. In our results, this has been the case for “legal offer,” an expression widely employed by incumbent actors, which has probably contributed to the fact that the notions of “protection” or technologies like “DRM” have become dominant in the industrial vocabulary. Often, such environmental changes are described in terms of existing vocabularies by attaching them to “empty signifiers” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). These are concepts which are central to a vocabulary, but are attached to a whole range of conflicting and often contradictory discourses. They are linked to a wide range of discourses, making them both relatively devoid of precise meaning and potentially applicable to a wide range of situations. This wide applicability also makes these words relatively powerful. These empty signifiers constitute what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call *nodal points* insofar as they can act as a lynchpin for a broader discourse. For instance, “artistic work” is one such empty signifier that was particularly significant in the industry studied. Its significance lies in the fact that it has no specific meaning and could ultimately represent anything. It could potentially refer to an album or a music file downloaded using a peer-to-peer file sharing system. Furthermore, this term was strongly associated with rights, authors

and a set of signs, which together establish a rigid and durable relationship between the production of an artist and intellectual property.

By being relatively bereft of meaning, these floating signifiers can be applied to nearly any significant change in the macro environment. Yet even though the notion has apparently universal applicability, it also carries with it a fairly limited and circumscribed meaning. In the texts produced concerning the recorded music industry, “artistic work” seems to be naturally associated with “authors,” “rights” and “protection.” This set of relationships suggests a vision of music based on production and ownership, rather than any assumption of artistic content. It is used unthinkingly in many situations to speak about any production by an artist, even by individuals who do not themselves hold such a vision of art. The fact that incumbent actors have constantly repeated words such as “protection” and “rights” even when describing new technologies caused it to become more difficult to give room to notions drawn from the Internet, like “exchange” or “freedom.” This is the constant intersection between the vocabulary constitutive of the IP institution and the vocabulary diffused in the recorded music industry which makes it difficult to speak in the music industry without references to intellectual property, even to describe radically new opportunities in this industry. The emptiness of certain key words and the systematic intersection with the IP institution vocabulary infuse every new opportunity with meanings related to intellectual property.

The broader finding which we think is relevant beyond this case is that the presence of rather vague floating signifiers provides the potential for their being adapted to existing vocabularies. The more ambiguous a word, the easier it is to use it to speak about something new. These words have maintaining properties because they are able to apply traditional words to new phenomenon. This finding is echoed in research on social movements, which has found that existing movements often seek to incorporate new demands and political concerns into their existing vocabularies by attaching them to floating signifiers. For instance, the Slow Food movement was able to incorporate new demands associated with ecological sustainability as well as social justice by linking them with the

over-arching and rather vague concept of slowness (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Indeed, it was precisely the vagueness of the word “slow” which allowed the movement to enlist such a wide range of supporters with very different concerns. By doing so, it has been able to maintain its central and somewhat unique vocabulary while extending it to new concerns and issues.

#### 4.3 New words created by a jolt are incorporated into existing vocabulary

While novel practices and challenges which appear through environmental shocks are often spoken about using the existing vocabulary from an industry, there are often some new words that appear at a niche level and, according to the groups which promote them, may influence the vocabulary at an industrial level. In the case of a conflagration between two industries—in this research, the Internet and the recorded music industry—some words typical of one industry may circulate to the other one. When this happens, some of these words tend to become important in the vocabulary employed by actors in industry. This has been the case of “Internet” since 1998. Some of these words represent such an important evolution that they become central in the vocabulary and are repeated very often. However, because they are repeated in a particular linguistic context, they become entangled in existing linguistic networks. New elements are therefore associated with traditional words, and innovations are uttered with reference to an already existing linguistic structure. For instance, we found that the word “Internet” came to be used alongside a whole set of well-established and familiar terms which had been in the existent vocabulary for some time. This meant that instead of attributing a fundamental shift in the meaning and discussion of the recorded music industry, the Internet came to be largely incorporated into existing assumptions in the field. As a result, the recorded music sector came to be thought about largely according to already existing ideas, especially related to intellectual property. It meant that ways of thinking about the recorded music industry which were developed much earlier in the industry’s evolution (and under completely different conditions) were applied to this new technology which had a whole range of potentially novel and different affordances. Ultimately, the result was that existing practices associated with the way recorded music was thought about and sold came to be extended to the Internet. Novel suggestions (such as the global license or peer-to-peer platforms) were effectively marginalised in favour of established practices which placed a

few star musicians and large record companies at the centre of the industry. Here, discursive activities played a determining role. In our case, incumbent actors were familiar with one industrial order in particular and tended to translate new technologies and practices from the Internet in terms of “copyright,” “author” and “legal platform,” drawing on words and meanings typical of the recorded music industry and thus more familiar for most people involved in the music sector. Other groups, who have attempted to bring radically new ways of thinking to the recorded music industry, using words typical of the Internet, have been less successful. The example of the *Quadrature du Net*, positioned in a niche, is illustrative. It defended words such as “freedom” and “exchange,” typical of the Internet, but these words have been marginalised and not understood by many traditional actors of the recorded music industry. The expression “global license” was also considered as part of a technical jargon and remained poorly understood among most actors involved in the music sector.

This process through which new words are incorporated into existing vocabularies is not a particular quirk of this context. Research in other settings has noted similar dynamics. For instance, a study of the development of digital technology in the camera industry found that the new language and practices which came with this new technology were rapidly incorporated into the existing lexicon and set of practices associated with photography (Munir, 2005). Words specific to digital photography were linked to a more common vocabulary associated with analogue photography. This meant the unfamiliar and potentially disturbing notions associated with digital photography were incorporated within a system more familiar to most consumers and others involved in photography. This suggests that incorporating and linking new words into an existing vocabulary allows for the domestication and familiarisation of these novel concepts. This process contributes to maintain the centrality of an institution in an evolving industry.

Overall this article emphasizes the issue of transition, based on the three components mentioned above. There is a structured vocabulary which is a vehicle for the industrial inertia. This vocabulary is multi-layered. First, there is a large number of words that are often repeated, representing the palette of words available to speak about a social field. This level of vocabulary is adaptive and reflects the

various changes in a sector. In particular, various actors, protected in niches, can spread new words and new ways of associating words together, and may also employ common words of an industry. We have emphasized that this level is an arena of discursive struggle where some actors attempt to promote certain keywords and meanings over others. The second layer is more restrictive and represents a limited number of words that are repeated very often. It delimits the limited linguistic resources with which one can intervene in an industry, or even use to express new ideas. To this extent, when important changes occur, such as technological innovations in a niche, this layer of vocabulary may integrate new dominant words, associated with existing ones. At this level, we have empathized the potential role of “empty” words which facilitate the bridge between new and existing words. Finally, the third layer is a more restricted kernel of words, constituting the intersection between an industry and central institutions. It acts as a vehicle for the basic understanding of the industry that is taken for granted. These words are at the heart of several linguistic networks and are persistently used with the same words. In this way, they serve to anchor specific forms of comprehension and maintain a system of understanding.

## **5. Conclusion**

We have examined the role that words played in the inertia of the recorded music industry in France and how, at a niche level, various groups have exploited these words in their discursive strategies. We found that despite significant environmental changes (associated with the conflagration between the recorded music industry and the Internet), intellectual property has been maintained as a central institution for the recorded music industry. We have argued that one important reason for this is that the vocabulary used to discuss, analyse and understand the recorded music changed little during this period. In particular, incumbent actors, through intensive discursive activity, repeated central words of the recorded music industry and used recurrent associations, in spite on the fact that the context in 2005-2008 was fairly different from the context in the 1980's. When environmental change did occur, it was described using the existing vocabulary. This was facilitated by the presence of “empty signifiers” in the vocabulary. Finally, because of the vagueness of these terms, when new words did appear, they were rapidly incorporated into existing vocabularies. This incorporation was facilitated by

the efforts of incumbent actors, who tended to translate new technologies and emerging practices with pre-existing terms from the recorded music industry. It was more difficult for actors defending ideas drawn on Internet technologies to articulate alternative ideas using less familiar words and meanings, which explains why there was low porosity between the vocabularies of the Internet and the recorded music industry.

Our work also points to future possibilities for research on words. For example, the challengers of an established industry have to cope not only with shared beliefs but also with a complex interaction of linguistic systems which can convey—surreptitiously—the very beliefs that tend to be denounced. This is why Zandee and Bilimoria (2007) suggest that “positive textual deviance” is needed to achieve transformation. In that vein, we can raise the question of the characteristics of new repertoires that could facilitate innovation and change.

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1988-1998	1998-2000	2000-2002	2002-2005	2005-2006	2006-2008
authors 87	music 86	Napster 279	music 584	Internet 386	music 773
music 63	authors 64	music 251	Internet 448	music 381	Internet 501
SACEM 57	rights 59	Internet 180	copyright 221	copyright 288	copyright 409
rights 46	Internet 56	copyright 158	right 219	global license 265	law 300
movies 45	Sacem 54	authors 136	internet users 211	MP 253	euros 266
television 44	copyright 49	rights 126	files 210	text 251	downloads 244
cinema 43	artists 35	Internet users 107	authors 197	bill 246	market 243
artistic work 41	right 34	right 105	private copy 193	downloads 245	artists 230
right 34	producers 31	website 104	CD 187	law 229	text 225
editors 35	artistic work 29	artistic work 96	rights 183	internet users 214	Internet users 225
copyright 31	industry 29	copyright 96	artistic work 181	artists 210	artistic work 222
market 31	societies 29	files 95	producers 179	euros 203	website 220
record label 28	culture 28	system 93	euros 175	government 195	DRM 216
law 27	law 27	artists 79	piracy 169	files 170	authors 192
producers 26	copyright 26	intellectual 77	movies 167	artistic work 168	producers 189
disc 26	discs 23	property 71	law 166	right 144	files 186
programs 26	market 22	country 71	artists 159	debate 135	contents 180
agreement 22	world 21	society 67	major 149	authors 134	cinema 176
world 21	song 21	societies 65	cinema 143	UMP 133	piracy 159
Europe 21	distribution 21	major 63	Sacem 131	private copy 125	interoperability 156
musicians 21	disc 21	world 61	downloads 124	remuneration 117	protection 154
society 21	multimedia 21	creation 60	world 124	cinema 117	YouTube 152
industry 20		access 60	market 124	creation 109	Sacem 151

**Table 1: List of dominant words for each period from 1988 to 2008**

**Dominant words**

\*Music  
\*Authors  
\*Artistic work  
\*Copyright  
\*Law  
\*Producers  
\*Sacem  
\*Right  
\*Disc

**New dominant words**

\*Piracy  
\*Downloads  
\*Files

**Absent words**

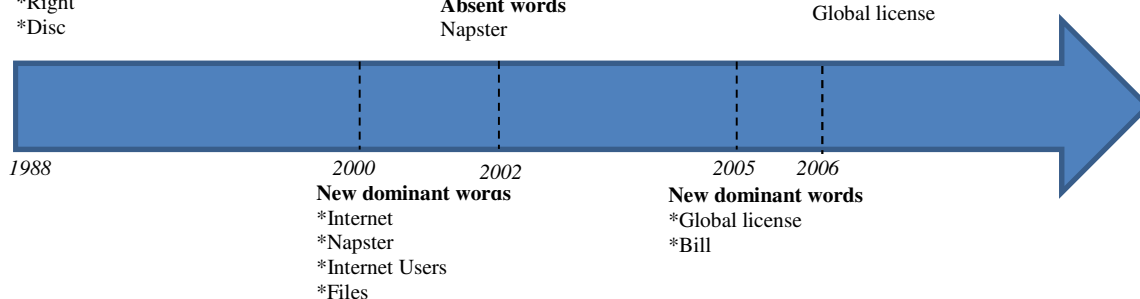
Napster

**New dominant words**

\*Market  
\*DRM

**Absent words**

Global license



**Figure 1 : Evolution of dominant words**

Words	No. of periods during which the word is dominant	Number of repetitions between 1988 and 2008	Stability of word associations*
music	6	2211	61%
authors	6	831	88%
artistic work	6	753	51%
copyright	6	694	52%
Internet	5	1658	33%
law	5	847	27%
artists	5	741	51%
right	5	689	39%
Internet Users	4	791	8%
files	4	679	72%

producers	4	574	55%
SACEM	4	461	82%

\*Percentage of the word network that is repeated for more than half of the number of periods during which the word is dominant

**Table 2: Kernel of stable and frequent words**

1998-2000	2000-2002	2002-2005	2005-2006	2006-2008
authors	producers	authors	private copy	private copy
cinema	authors	reproduction	authors	European directive
country	music	public	remuneration	artistic work
producer	copyright	property	Internet	intellectual property
law	artistic work	protection	use	Internet
record label	distribution	copyright	intellectual property	copyright
renting	interprets	Internet	copyright	debate
artistic work	artists	music	artistic work	downloading
protection	Spedidam	Napster	law	law
movies	record label	law	music	remuneration

**Table 3: Evolution of the network for the word "right"**

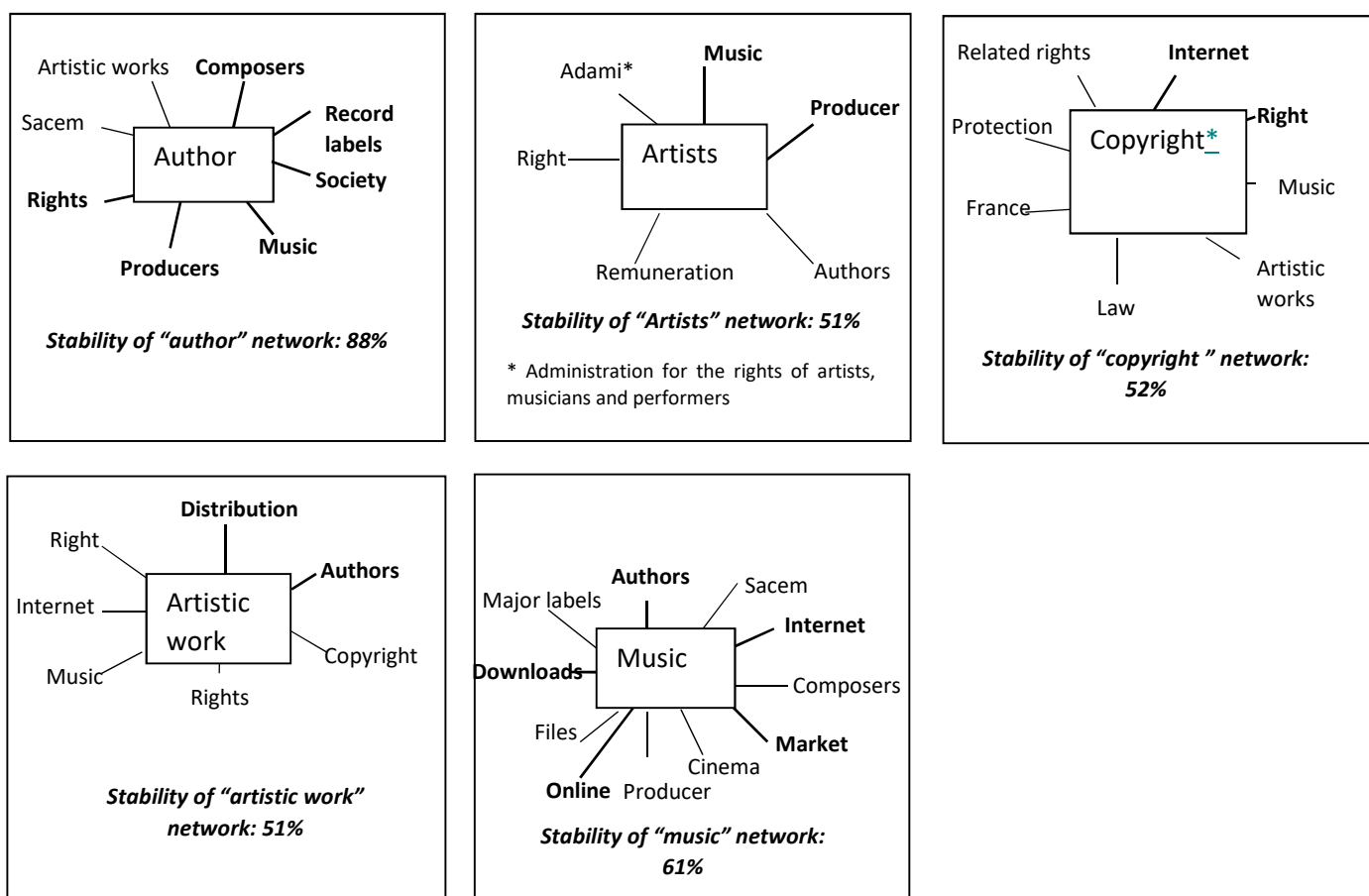
Main ideas in the corpus	Frequency	Frequent key words	Example of verbatim statements
<b>The major labels are essential in the recorded industry</b>	14%	Production Market Legalize Majors Industry	<i>"These modalities to finance the French artworks would be immediately impacted, with drastic consequences for musical production and diversity in France." (Sacem)</i>
<b>Legal offer as an alternative to piracy</b>	19%	Legal offer Website Internet Piracy Market	<i>"A win-win logic can be initiated: today, there is a legal, rich and attractive music supply on the Internet. Almost one million titles and 95% of new titles are available on 15 legal websites, while 600,000 or 700,000 are available in the biggest retailing stores." (FNAC and Virgin)</i>
<b>The precarious position of artists and their need to be protected</b>	15%	Artist Carrier Risk Remuneration Fair	<i>"The entire music industry is jeopardized. The music industry needs to constantly invest in order to develop artists' carriers over the long term and to allow new talent to find their audience." (promomusicfrance.com)</i>
<b>Artists' rights and authors' rights</b>	15%	Author Performer Composer Protection Right	<i>"Authors' rights are different from related rights, recognized in 1985 for producers and performers. In the music field, authors' rights, strictly speaking, deal with lyrics and music and ensure the remuneration of authors and their natural partners the editors for the broadcasting of their artworks." (Sacem)</i>
<b>Criticism of alternative models</b>	21%	Economy Global license Remuneration Artwork Moral	<i>"This remuneration would be abstract, without any relationship to the real exploitation of artworks, incompatible with the fair remuneration of individuals' work, disconnected from economic constraints and from specificities of each work and investment: an anti-economic, confrontational and arbitrary mechanism." (Sacem)</i>
<b>Importance of intellectual property</b>	16%	Intellectual property Protection Copyright Right Creation	<i>"These intellectual property rights have only one goal: allow beneficiaries to control the use of their creation and to be remunerated for the use of their work." (promomusicfrance.com)</i>

**Table 4: The main topics in the incumbent's discourse and their associated keywords.**

Main ideas in the corpus	Frequency	Frequent key words	Example of verbatim statements
<b>Criticism of intellectual protection</b>	39%	Intellectual Protection Software Property Freedom Piracy	<i>"If the DADVSI law is accepted, it means that technique is beyond law and it is only for the sake of private companies." (Whitepaper, Alliance)</i>
<b>The cultural industry should give a central place to artists and</b>	34%	Culture Industry Diversity	<i>"This solution [the global license] should provide access to culture for everybody and preserve cultural diversity." (Petition, Alliance)</i>

the public		Public Independent	
A necessary remuneration for artists	27%	Remuneration Artist Equitable Producer Having-rights	<i>"I support the development of a remuneration collected by Internet providers for artists-performers. In return, files will be freely exchanged between Internet users." (Petition, Alliance)</i>

**Table 5: The main topics in the discourse of the Alliance and Quadrature du Net and their associated keywords**



Words in bold are in the network of a word for at least five out of six periods, words not in bold for at least three out of six periods

**Figure 2: Collocated words of the five most repeated words with stable associations**

## Appendix

Period	1988- 1998	1998- 2000	2000- 2002	2002- 2005	2005 ; 2006	2006- 2008	First issue available
<b>Generalist newspapers</b>							
Le Monde	27	15	33	40	30	23	01/1987
Libération	2	11	29	40	22	34	01/1995
Le Figaro	2	2	7	50	27	67	10/1996
Le Point				2		4	01/1995
Sud Ouest				6	1	15	05/1994
Ouest France				3	5	8	12/2003
Le Progrès				4	5	8	01/1997
La Croix					2	6	09/1995
Charente Libre					2	7	01/2005
L'Humanité						4	11/1999
<b>Economic Press</b>							
La Tribune	1	6	8	9	22	24	01/1995
Les Échos	3	3	11	17	23	55	01/1991
<b>Monthly magazines</b>							
Enjeux les Échos			2				03/2002
Le Monde diplomatique		2					01/1980
Alternatives économiques		1	3	1	3		11/1996
Libération Suppléments			3	8	2		01/1995
Le Monde Economie				3			01/2001
L'Expansion				1		3	11/2001
L'Express				1	2	5	01/1993
Courrier International					1		01/2004
<b>Web articles</b>							
La Tribune.fr				6	5	18	03/2000
Le Monde.fr				4	7	12	08/2004
Les Echos.fr				4	13	6	08/2002
							01/1987
TOTAL	35	37	93	196	175	305	841

Appendix 1: Number of articles per period and sources

Sources	Producer	Audience	Years
Interviews in professional journals	- <i>Music Info Hebdo</i> (published weekly)	-Professionals	-1997-2008
Interviews in journals and magazines	Cultural magazines ( <i>Les Inrockuptibles</i> , published weekly)	-Public and professionals	1988-2008
	Generalist journals ( <i>Le Monde</i> , <i>Le Figaro</i> , <i>Libération</i> )	-Public and professionals	1988-2008
	Web journals ( <i>Journal du Net</i> )	-Internet users and professionals	2000-2008
Press releases	-SNEP (the leading Union of music producers)	-various stakeholders (Internet users, politicians, professionals, etc.)	2002 - 2008
Websites	-SNEP (interviews of producers)	-Internet users	Pages consulted in 2006-2007-2008
	-promomusicfrance.com (website created by the SNEP to “educate” Internet users, many interviews of producers)	-Internet users	Created in 2005, pages consulted in 2006, 2007, 2008)
	-Sacem (copyright collecting agency, many interviews of producers)	-Internet users, professionals	Pages consulted in 2006-2007-2008
White papers / reports	- <i>L'économie du disque</i> (The Disk Economy, official information about the music industry, editorial and trends in the sector)	-Professionals	1998-2008

**Appendix 2: Sources for the discourse of incumbent actors**

Name	Occupation	Maintenance vs. change	Date	Length
Jean Luc Bernard	General secretary of SNM FO (Artists' Union)	Change	March 2007	73'
Jean-Paul Bazin	Performer and FNS representative	Change	March 2007	70'
Lionel Thoumyre	Legal director of Spedidam	Change	March 2007	78'
Anonymous	Legal director of an independent label		April 2007	55'
Frédéric Goldsmith	Financial director of SNEP	Stability	April 2007	75'
Bernard Miyet	President of Sacem	Stability	April 2007	61'
Catherine Boissière	Adami Representative		May 2007	50'
Pascal Nègre	CEO of Universal Music, France	Stability	May 2008	81'
Florent Latrive	Journalist at <i>Libération</i> , book writer		February 2009	73'
Brunon Lion	Editor (Peer Music and SEMI), member of the board of the Sacem, vice-president of the Chambre Syndicale de l'Edition Musicale	Stability	April 2009	69'
Stéphane Gille	CEO of the label Sober & Gentle		August 2009	52'
Yvan Taïeb	Co-founder of the label Roy Music		August 2009	67'
Gabriel Ibos	CEO of the label Spalax		August 2009	81'
Laurent Cabrillat	Artist, cofounder of a cooperative label MilkMusic		September 2009	65'
Michaël Goldman	CEO of MyMajorCompany		September 2009	61'
Philippe Aigrain	Specialist in intellectual property rights and new technologies, Author of "Author's Right and Creation"	Change	November 2009	50'

#### Appendix 3: List of interviewees