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Putain d'camion: Commercialism and the Chanson Genre in the Work of Renaud

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Putain d'camion : commercialism and the chanson genre in the work of Renaud

par

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Résumé. The singer-songwriter Renaud, whose work stretches from the mid-1970s to 2003, shows a constant awareness of the genre in which he is working and its place in popular cultural history. This article will concentrate on Renaud's struggle to come to terms with his own place and status as a *chanson* artist, and with the place of the *chanson* artist generally in a commercialised and globalised music industry.

Through an examination of his songs and interviews, it will briefly outline Renaud's relationship with the music industry, exploring how his almost arrogant defiance of the industry, and the mass media generally, changes over his career as he has to come to terms with commercial success. It will explore Renaud's reasons for the ongoing struggle with the industry and hypothesize that his distaste for commercialism is concomitant with his projection of himself as a *chanson* artist, which is equated as the binary other of the 'pop' or *variétés* singer. The second part of the article will focus on some of the ways in which Renaud distinguishes himself from more commercial pop singers and draws attention to himself as an *auteur*.

It will argue that although Renaud's own personal battles with the mass media have perhaps not been as victorious as he may have hoped, the fact that he has inspired a whole new generation of singer-songwriters working in the *chanson* tradition and looking to ways of mediating the genre's roots and traditions with today's more commercial industry, is a testament to Renaud's own place and importance in *chanson* history, and reason to view his work as a valid area of academic investigation.

Mots-clefs. *Renaud – Chanson – Commercialism – Authenticity*

Renaud has been a significant figure in French *chanson* from the mid-1970s to his latest, highly successful album, *Boucan d'enfer*, released in 2002. It is widely recognized that his songs explore contemporary French society by means of acute social observation, often concerning young people and youth culture; a fact which in the 1980s turned him into something of a youth icon and a superstar. Indeed, in one of the few serious academic essays devoted to Renaud, Peter Hawkins argues that his 'main importance' as an *auteur-compositeur-interprète* lies in 'his manipulation of the imagery of the mass media, popular culture and youth [which] is extremely perceptive and skilful' (Hawkins, 2000). This analysis is undoubtedly true. However, I would argue that Renaud is important as a *chanson* artist for another – albeit not unrelated – reason. Perhaps because of this complex professional position he occupies, midway between the time-honoured old world of French *chanson* and the brash new world of pop stardom, Renaud's songs also explore, in a variety of ways, the medium and the milieu in which he is working, in particular the pressures inflicted on that medium by the music industry and more broadly by capitalist society.

This article, then, will do two things. First, through an examination of his songs and interviews, it will briefly outline Renaud's relationship with the music industry, exploring how his almost arrogant defiance of the industry, and the mass media generally, changes over his career as he has to come to terms with commercial success. It will explore Renaud's reasons for the ongoing struggle with the industry and hypothesize that his distaste for commercialism is concomitant with his projection of himself as a *chanson* artist, which is equated as the binary other of the 'pop' or *variétés* singer. The second part of the article will focus on some of the ways in which Renaud distinguishes himself from more commercial pop singers and draws attention to himself as an *auteur*. This exploration will illuminate Renaud's views on the place and status of the *chanson* artist in contemporary society, which, of course, raises the question of the place and status in general of the *chanson* artist in today's society.

Société, tu m'auras pas!

From the beginning of his career, there has been an ongoing battle with the music industry and the mass media generally in Renaud's songs and his actions. When he started out, he projected a confident image of himself as a rebellious, independent singer-songwriter, aware of media pressures but positive about his ability to remain an authentic *chanson* artist. Two songs from the mid-1970s illustrate this attitude perfectly: 'Société tu m'auras pas' and 'Le blues de la Porte d'Orléans'. 'Société' (1974) was released on his first album (*Laisse béton*), before he had achieved commercial success or notoriety as an artist. Although the music industry is only one of the concerns in this song, it is evident that Renaud wants to see himself, and wants his listeners to see him, as a rebellious singer. Through an anarchist attack on the military ('cons en uniforme') and the government ('j'ai connu l'absurdité/ de ta morale et de tes lois') Renaud is simultaneously projecting an image of himself as a supporter of the under classes, and placing himself in a protest-song tradition (François Béranger, Léo Ferré). There is also a strong sense of autonomy in 'Société tu m'auras pas', as Renaud gives a defiant, almost arrogant view of the 'selling out' of singer-songwriters before him (Antoine, Dylan), delivered to an aggressive fast-paced guitar accompaniment, protesting 'société/ tu m'auras pas'. Although at times this may sound naïve and simplistic, the constant interplay of meaning and the evocation – and questioning – of the political role of the singer-songwriter raises the song above the level of the rather trite 'me against the world' pop song.

A similarly enthusiastic, defiant stance is to be found in 'Le blues de la Porte d'Orléans', written two years later in 1976. In this blues pastiche Renaud declares himself 'l'autonome de la porte d'Orléans' arguing that 'le quatorzième arrondissement/ possède sa langue et sa culture' and that if other regions and peoples of France – les Alsaciens, les Occitans, Les Corses – can claim independence then so can he for his region. The only drawback with the area, he argues, is that the River Seine does not pass through it, but he claims, 'ça peut toujours s'arranger [...] on pourrait p't'être la détourner'. Despite the obviously tongue-in-cheek subject matter, this hyperbolic claim is in keeping with his overall attitude of infallibility. He sees himself as an independent artist who can achieve anything he wants. He is attached to his immediate locality and not to outside influences.

The choice of music also echoes the sentiments expressed in the lyrics, as the blues is traditionally associated with local settings and music which is 'performed in social contexts for the local market' (Longhurst, 1999). Renaud's lyrical claims for regional independence and his musical reference to the blues have the combined effect of positing him as a confidently independent, autonomous and local singer-songwriter.

His success started to grow in the immediate years after these songs and by 1980 he played a sell-out tour at Bobino for one month. At this stage in his career certain ambiguities concerning his relationship with the mass media become evident: while on the one hand he is still clinging to his independent, local aspirations, on the other a sense of impotence is starting to creep into work, and the realization that it is more difficult than he first assumed to be free of industry pressures. In an article in *Le Monde* in 1980 Claude Fléouter describes Renaud as being one of the 'nouvelle génération' singer-songwriters who 'n'a pas envie de faire une carrière dans la chanson, d'aller chanter pour la nième fois à Bobino, l'Olympia ou dans les salles de cinéma' and quotes Renaud as saying, 'je veux m'arrêter avant qu'on me le fasse sentir. J'aurai toujours envie, je crois, d'écrire des chansons mais pas celle de les défendre sur une scène ou à la télévision' (Fléouter, 1980). Fléouter's assertion compounds the sentiments expressed by Renaud in the above songs and Renaud's own claim suggests that he is willing to sacrifice his career as a singer-songwriter in order to stay true to his beliefs in the autonomous nature of the *chanson* artist.

Indeed, finding the balance between staying true to one's art and making a career from music is one of the most prescient dilemmas in music today. Many critics cite free jazz as the only music which managed to transcend this dilemma by the musicians collecting and sharing out all the profits equally between them, thus cutting out the music industry altogether (see Longhurst, 1999 for more on this dilemma). However, this Marxist approach was not a viable option for Renaud, who was already beginning to feel morphed into a pop star and commercial 'product' by the public. 'Où c'est qu')'ai mis mon flingue' (1980), which questions the power of song and Renaud's place in the *chanson* tradition, illustrates this attitude. There is a dual metaphor at work here: his 'flingue' is a metaphor of song, which is in turn seen as a metaphorical weapon. Throughout the song, the title line is repeated, referring to Renaud continually searching for a weapon with which

to react against passivity. This apparent celebration or threat of violence which is fairly common in his work (the pathetically violent Gérard Lambert for example) seems always to be metaphorical rather than real, allowing Renaud to distance himself from the violence and to, at times, explore the power of song as a peaceful means of social change. In the opening verse he declares that:

*J'veux qu'imes chansons soient des caresses
Ou bien des poings dans la gueule
À qui qu'ce soit que je m'agresse
J'veux vous remuer dans vos fauteuils*

This double-edged assertion is a crisp description of his work generally, especially his earlier songs ('Hexagone', 'Société tu m'auras pas') where he did actively explore song as a means of social protest and fought passivity through his aggressive (note the 'je m'agresse' rather than the expected 'je m'adresse') lyrics and musical accompaniments. Equally, in this song he maintains that for him being a singer is not about achieving high sales or securing a solo performance at the Olympia. It is not for the fame or publicity but to say something, to produce a reaction through his songs: 'rien à foutre de la lutte des crasses/ tous les systèmes sont dégueulasses!'. In this song, however, one also sees the reasons for his renewed attack on social structures and the public generally as there is an overriding sense of despair at the realization that song is not as powerful a medium as he had hoped, and clear signs also of his personal frustration and despair (his future, he says in the song, is with his head on the bar, totally drunk). The public, he suggests, are drawn to the image and fame of an artist rather than paying attention to the content of his/her songs. He comments that it is not only kids who want his autograph when he is out:

*Y'a même des flics qui me saluent
Qui veulent que j'signe dans leurs calots*

In earlier songs, Renaud has attacked the police, violently at times. Therefore, it is a bitter irony for him that policemen are now asking for his autograph. They too see only the star, which ultimately indicates that his songs have done little to change the world. Even though the following lines in

the song suggest that he is still willing to uphold his protest-singer beliefs, 'moi j'crache dedans [dans leurs calots], et j'crie bien haut/ qu'le bleu marine me fait gerber/ qu'j'aime pas l'travail, la justice et l'armée', the fact that he is having to re-assert his anti-establishment stance so aggressively is evidence in itself of the despair he feels at the impotence of his songs to change the world.

In spite of his frustrations Renaud continued to write and perform songs in public, and in so doing became one of the most commercially successful French artists of the decade. Changes in Renaud's private life in the mid-1980s also marked a change in the tone of his songs and the focus of the narration. He got married and had a daughter, Lolita, to whom, the album, *Morgane de toi* (1983) is dedicated. *Morgane de toi* sold 1,300,000 copies in a few months and, as Marc Robine (1995) comments, this is a figure which no album by a French-speaking singer had achieved since Jacques Brel's *Les Marquises* (1977). When his subsequent album, *Mistral gagnant* (1985) was released Renaud was at the peak of his career, and was chosen to inaugurate the Zénith in January 1984. He was also voted, by 31% of young people at the time of the student protests, the personality who most embodied their hopes and aspirations (Robine, 1995).

However, after this period of personal and professional success, the anti-commercial sentiments and questioning of his own status as a *chanson* artist first expressed in 'Société tu m'auras pas', resurfaced from 1985 onwards. The song 'Fatigué' (1985) clearly indicates Renaud's weariness at fighting societal ills and the kinds of injustices he has taken as his subject matter in previous songs. Once more despair, fatigue and bitterness are omnipresent, rather than the aggressive nihilism of his earlier songs:

*Fatigué, fatigué
Fatigué de parler, fatigué de me taire
Quand on blesse un enfant, quand on viole sa mère*

The sentiments of tiredness expressed in the lyrics are juxtaposed with a bitter irony by the use of an eighties celebratory MOR genre of instrumentation ('middle of the road', radio-friendly music) – drums, bass, guitar, electronic keyboard and the obligatory saxophone solo – and upbeat melodies so prevalent in that decade. This ironic juxtaposition on an album where the title

track, 'Mistral gagnant', takes a stance against the inauthentic musical styles and globalization of the 1980s, hints at Renaud's despair with the state of the music industry and his own status as a *chanson* artist working in that industry. The despair becomes magnified in 1988 with his choice to engage in no publicity for the release of the album *Putain de camion*.

The album is a homage to the comedian Coluche, a close friend and Renaud's daughter Lolita's godfather, who was killed in a motorbike accident in 1986. Renaud wrote the following message on a whiteboard at his record company: 'pour son prochain LP (avril 88) Renaud ne fera AUCUNE promo. Ni presse pourrie, ni radios nulles, ni télé craignos'. However, this no-publicity ploy failed, as Renaud explained in a later interview with Claude Fléouter: « *partagé entre le ras-le-bol de devoir me justifier dans cent émissions de radio et trente de télévision, et l'envie viscérale de m'exprimer en dehors même de mes plaintes, j'ai eu finalement une trop grande confiance en la capacité de mes chansons à se défendre toutes seules. J'ai refusé les médias. Je me suis fait piéger. Je me suis autobailonné. D'autant plus que je n'ai pas fait de prouesses au Top 50. Résultat: je me suis aperçu que, dans les régions, des gens qui m'aimaient bien ignoraient la sortie de l'album. Je me suis planté. Je reprends un peu du collier pour dire: voilà, j'ai un spectacle au Zénith. J'ai envie de m'éclater sur scène et de donner du bonheur à ceux qui m'aiment* » (Fléouter, 1988).

As we have seen, from his very first album Renaud has been aware of the power of the music industry, the media, and commercialism and has tried to fight against it. However, he humbly admits now that the media, as well as the commercial side of the music industry, are an integral part of being an artist. The realization that to work as a *chanson* artist involves co-operation with the music industry – and therefore the impossibility of the totally autonomous singer-songwriter – may explain the attitude of frustration and despair seen in many of his songs after this album, and also his silence from 1994 to 2002. The rather burnt-out sadness of his 2002 album, *Boucan d'enfer*, as well as the unprecedented high level of publicity he engaged in for its release, is also an indication that he has reluctantly reconciled himself to the fact that to have a career as a *chanson* artist means taking on board the more commercial side of the industry. On his latest album, instead of portraying a defiant confrontational image, his narrator in 'Je vis caché' merely comments on the proliferation of manufactured pop stars seen on French television in shows such

as 'Star Academy', and although the tone of the song is as bitter towards the mass media as many of his earlier ones, instead of offering solutions or representing himself as being able to combat the inauthenticity and commercialism he simply claims that 'pour vivre heureux, je vis caché, au fond de mon bistrot peignard', thus preferring escapism to activism.

Docteur Renaud, Mister Renard

As the first part of this article demonstrates, Renaud has lost his more overt battles with the mass media, and has seemingly resigned himself to engage in the more commercial side of the music industry. However, there are also more covert battles in his work against commercialism and capitalist society on which we shall now focus. First, Renaud distinguishes himself from more commercial pop stars – and claims his creative independence – through drawing attention to himself as an *auteur*. Similarly, by invoking a *chanson* heritage, Renaud not only attempts to place himself within that genre but also set *chanson* apart from commercial pop music and *variétés*.

One of the ways in which he draws attention to his own creative input in his songwriting is through references to his own previous songs, fictional characters, or constructed image. We find, for example, a number of sequels in his work: 'Le Retour de la Pépette', 'Le Retour de Gérard Lambert', 'Ma chanson leur a pas plu (suite)' which suggest that Renaud is aware – and is making his audience aware – of the fictional world he has created. This, in turn, leads us to see him more as a creator, an *auteur* than a commercial pop singer. Similarly, he constructs his own image as a rebel (through album covers – the 'Gavroche' cap, the dungarees and accordion – and through his songs) and then continually parodies it over his career. In this way he implicitly represents himself as always having the upper hand over the industry: he has a well-crafted image like all major pop stars, but he also has the intelligence, wit and possibly, humility, to parody – and even subvert – that image. And this parody, be it visual, lyrical or musical, becomes a tool and a means of connotation.

Similarly, throughout his career Renaud makes reference to other singer-songwriters and *interprètes* in his songs, comparing and contrasting his style to theirs. The two versions of 'Ma chanson leur a pas plu', the first released in 1983 and the 'suite' in 1991, are good illustrations of this. They both

depict the protagonist engaged in imaginary conversations with singer-songwriters and performers concerning a song the former has written but which is not in his usual style. The main interest of the song lies in his trying to convince his 'imaginary' interlocutors that they would benefit from performing the song. In both versions the song the protagonist has written is comparable to the style of song usually associated with the singer he is approaching, thus producing a conscious awareness of the style of that singer. Renaud is also ironically distancing himself from the singers he is talking to, as ultimately he does not produce the song and we have the impression that he is (kindly, perhaps) mimicking them. For example, in the 1983 version, the narrator attempts to sell a song to Jean-Patrick Capdevielle called 'Le cataclysme' which 'raconte l'histoire d'un ange/qu'est marchand de certitudes'. The lyrics cited here are generally similar in content to songs by Capdevielle himself. This produces a humorous effect through audience complicity as the listener is more than likely aware of Capdevielle's repertoire and of Renaud's ironic references. Similarly, in the second version, the protagonist first asks Alain Souchon if he wants 'une chanson très mignonne'. As in the first version, elements of the protagonist's surplus song can be identified with the work of the artists in question. Renaud does not make overt value judgments about the style and content of the singers mentioned, but the intertextual element, the ironic distance and the slightly mocking mimicry allows him to suggest otherwise:

*J'ai écrit une autre chanson [...]
mais elle ne correspondait pas trop
à mon image, mon créneau
un peu comme si Dalida
chantait Be Bop a Lula*

Furthermore, in the final verse of the second version of the song, the protagonist sounds bitter at the state of the music industry and the fabrication of rock stars. He approaches a stranger with a pre-written song since none of his singer 'potes' were interested: 'on l'enregistre dès ce soir/ et demain t'es une rock-star'. This last comment suggests the importance of the singer-songwriter in *chanson* discourse, who is seen in opposition to *variétés* singers who do not write their own material and are therefore more false, and less 'authentic'. The intertextual references are, in this

way, being used to distance the singer-songwriter from the more commercial genre of *variétés*, and more broadly, to suggest a scale of values and discrimination applicable to *chanson*.

Throughout his work Renaud is searching for his own specific niche in the *chanson* tradition and calculating exactly where he belongs. He does this through frequent references to other singer-songwriters with whom he seems to have an affinity, or whom he evokes in order to project his own style in a certain way. In a similar way to his confident, overt anti-commercial sentiments expressed towards the beginning of his career, Renaud's references to other singer-songwriters from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s suggest a confidence in his ability to remain an independent, rebellious *chanson* artist. He evokes – and places himself within – the international protest song tradition in 'Société, tu m'auras pas!' through lyrical references to Antoine and Bob Dylan, as seen above. Similarly, as Peter Hawkins notes, Renaud's early persona as well as his choice of material allude to the rebellious late-nineteenth century singer-songwriter and cabaret owner, Aristide Bruant (Hawkins, 2000). Before his recording career started, Renaud busked on the streets of Paris singing Bruant songs, and his early material in the realist vein equally evokes the style of Bruant, with the use of Parisian slang, an anti-bourgeois stance and a narrative focus on the 'petites gens' of the Montmartre area. Bruant himself, as Michael Wilson contends in an essay on the 'Portrait of the Artist as a Louis XIII Chair', 'built a reputation at the Chat Noir with his eccentric costume of corduroy suit, high boots, broad-brimmed black hat, and red scarf, and with his songs about the Parisian underworld. These songs narrated the lives of the poor, of criminals, pimps, and prostitutes, and they were usually cast in the first person and made liberal use of Parisian argot'. And just as Bruant cast himself as 'a poet-outlaw, following in the tradition of Villon in speaking the truth about the lives of ordinary people' (Wilson, 2001) Renaud too constructs his own image as a rebellious outlaw through his references to Bruant and other anti-establishment figures.

As Renaud's confidence in his own abilities to stay independent of the music industry decreases so too do his positive references to other singer-songwriters in his work. In 'Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue', for example, he makes reference to Gainsbourg's reworking of the 'Marseillaise': 'La Marseillaise, même en reggae/ Ça m'a toujours fait dégueuler'. He is making reference to a singer-songwriter known for his non-conformist attitude, and to one of the songs that most evokes

Gainsbourg's provocative tendencies. However, even Gainsbourg's scandalous reggae version of the Marseillaise is not shocking enough for this rebellious, anarchistic (and *despairing*) Renaud, who uses Gainsbourg's version as a benchmark of anarchy to surpass in his own songs.

In the 1988 song 'Jonathan', Renaud again compares himself to a singer-songwriter seen as a rebel, an outsider within the music industry, Johnny Clegg, and overtly asserts that he too is a *chanson* rebel:

*Jonathan, je suis comme toi un peu fou
Un peu kanak, un peu zoulou
Un peu beur, un peu basque, un peu tout
Rebelle, vivant et debout*

However, the sense here is that Renaud is having to declare or re-affirm his status as a rebel, and that the affirmation in the chorus is more a reminder to himself and a self-motivating statement than a true reflection of the way he sees himself. Indeed, this song is the last in which he directly compares himself to another singer-songwriter in such a positive way.

In his latest album, a now older and wiser Renaud again alludes to other singer-songwriters. There is an implicit reference to Gainsbourg, and more specifically his constructed alter-ego 'Gainsbarre' in 'Docteur Renaud, Mister Renard' which evokes the Gainsbourg song 'Docteur Jeckyll et Monsieur Hyde' in its style and structure. It also references the two personae of Gainsbourg at a more general level, with Renaud comparing himself to Gainsbourg's 'other':

*Comme y'a eu Gainsbourg et Gainsbarre
Y'a le Renaud et le Renard
Le Renaud ne boit que de l'eau
Le Renard carbure au Ricard*

This 'autoportrait féroce' as Anne-Marie Paquette (2002) describes it, does seemingly take an autobiographical stance confessing alcohol and relationship problems, but 'le Renaud' here refers as much to the constructed persona of the singer as 'le Renard' does, and the song is ultimately a

detached, rather world-weary comment on the construction – and deconstruction – of the public image of the *chanson* artist Renaud:

*Renaud a choisi la guitare
Et la poésie et les mots
Comme des armes un peu dérisoires
Pour fustiger tous les blaireaux
Renard, c'est son côté anar
Crache sur tous les idéaux*

Similarly, in 'Mon bistrot préféré', from the same 2002 album, Renaud, as songwriter, alludes to his creative influences and to favourite singers and literary figures who 'peuplent ma mémoire'. The first influences he refers to are, unsurprisingly, three of the major *chanson* artists of the twentieth century: Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Léo Ferré. Renaud's allusion to them, however, focuses on their mythical status in *chanson* history:

*Tirant sur sa bouffarde, l'ami Georges Brassens
Il y a Brel aussi et Léo l'anarchiste
Je revis, avec eux une célèbre affiche*

The 'célèbre affiche' is, of course, the still image from their only interview together in 1968 with François-Roger Cristianini on RTL and later published in the magazine *Rock et Folk* (see Tinker, 1999 for more on this). This image helped forge the notion of the three as a golden 'trinity' of *chanson* greats, which, as David Looseley comments, 'today functions as a national signifier, a benchmark not only of aesthetic excellence but also of authenticity and truth, against which other French artists must be measured and measure themselves' (Looseley, 2003). Renaud's allusions to the Brel-Brassens-Ferré trinity, and to a total of twenty-eight figures from the worlds of poetry, *chanson*, literature and politics in this song are a testament, in much the same way as Trenet's 'L'âme des poètes', to the creative inspiration of the figures cited and also to their place in his creative mind, and in *chanson*'s history. The figures cited – Verlaine, Rimbaud, Villon, Boris Vian, Maupassant, Bruant, Coluche, Bobby Lapointe – come as no surprise to those familiar with

Renaud's work as they have either appeared in some of his songs to date in an overt manner (Robert Doisneau and Aristide Bruant in 'Rouge-gorge'; Coluche in 'Putain de camion') or have influenced his work in some way (Gainsbourg who helped produce videos for Renaud, especially 'Morgane de toi'; Bobby Lapointe for his word play).

While on the one hand this song is a way of enabling Renaud to acknowledge and pay tribute to his predecessors, on the other it is a means of allowing him to invoke a (mythical) *chanson* heritage. Renaud, who has been described by Claude Fléouter amongst others, as an 'amoureux fou de la chanson' is here making clear his *chanson* roots and inspirational forbearers and, in so doing, is tracing a genre-specific path for *chanson*, which posits the art form as separate from *variétés* or pop music. In this way, although he has perhaps lost many of his battles with the music industry over the course of his career, he continues to project himself as a *chanson* artist working in a complex and multi-layered art form.

Pour vivre heureux, je vis caché

What conclusions can be drawn from Renaud's ongoing battles with the music industry and his continuous allusions to *chanson* artists? It seems clear that Renaud believes *chanson* should be more than a commercial enterprise, even if his belief in the power of song as a medium for social change has dwindled over the years. He continues to compare himself to other singer-songwriters which suggests that he still sees *chanson* as a genre in its own right, with its own set of exponents, and different from *variétés* or pop music. But what about the power of *chanson* to change the world? While admitting that he is no longer the same rebellious, anarchistic singer-songwriter as at the start of his career, he does suggest that *chanson* can still bring about social change. In a recent article in *Le Parisien* (May 2002) he declares: 'j'ai moins envie qu'avant de changer le monde avec des chansonnettes. Plus qu'autrefois, je pense que c'est vain, inutile, même si des idéaux comme le combat antiraciste me tiennent toujours à cœur. J'ai aussi moins envie d'être un porte-parole', but, he adds, with a more positive nod to the future of *chanson*: 'D'autant que la relève est assurée avec des groupes comme Zebda ou Noir Désir' (Catroux, 2002). Although Renaud's own personal battles with the mass media have perhaps not been as victorious as he may have hoped, the fact

that he has inspired a whole new generation of singer-songwriters working in the *chanson* tradition and looking to ways of mediating the genre's roots and traditions with today's more commercial industry, is a testament to Renaud's own place and importance in *chanson* history, and reason to view his work as a valid area of academic investigation.

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