

**Thomas Schmitt:**  
**French Genealogy of Videoclips. Phonoscènes, Cinéphonies, Scopitones and Vidéomusiques**

The Culture Industry has produced its own history as a positive, affirmative and linear progression. The Jazz singer leads to MTV as if technical evolution was a concerted plan. But what about the Culture Industry before 1927, before 1918, or before 1914? With “French Genealogy of Videoclips etc.”, we consider the constitution of a discourse (in France and/or in French) about “visual songs” since 1900 – but starting in the late 1970s when French TV speakers hesitated to present Video killed the Radio Stars, or We don’t need no education, because they were considered as “a melting of comic strip and film tapes”.

In February 1983 the French minister of communication, Georges Fillioud, declared that the official name should be “promotional video tape” (Bande vidéo promotionnelle). The daily paper Libération, however, did promote, against Fillioud’s recommendation, the word “clip”. From this point on, “video” was used mainly to describe video art, video games and the VHS phenomenon. “Vidéomusique” is today’s official appellation, given by the Ministry of Culture in the early 1990s.

In October 1985, a special issue of Libération was published. Paysage du clip (“Landscape of the clip”), a 16 pages supplement linked to a forty days exhibit at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Here, Italian and German “clip situations” are mentioned. The last page presents a “Genealogy (a possible allusion to Michel Foucault’s theory, who had died the year before?) of the video clip from the caves until today”. According to this document, the clip is supposed to be ten years old by then: Bohemian Rhapsodie (1975) is considered as a “first step” and Video killed the Radio Star (1979) as a “starting point”. Not mentioned, however, are the prehistoric times (1930-1960) as represented by Mama Soundy (supposed to be playing in jazz clubs) and Daddy Scopitone (associated exclusively to the Yéyé – French rock variety – phenomenon). Nor any mention of two others ancestors: Cinéphonies (six productions by Emile Vuillermoz [1878-1960] during the years 1935-1939) and Phonoscènes (600 productions by Gaumont in the years 1905-1912). Already Serge Daney, however, in his article Critic Question, expressed the wish: “We should try to understand how clip culture, because it is essentially musical, brings us way back in past to a time we do not know, when films – even if they were qualified ‘mute’ – were shot and seen with a musical background.”

An archaeology of these (works/products/œuvres) including Audrey Orillard’s researches on Scopitone, Emile Vuillermoz’ Cinéphonies archives and Gaumont’s archives will be presented.