

Welcome Address at the Festival of Speaking Machines in the Year 2000 (1908)

Abstract

This recording was made as a promotional item for the phonograph manufacturer and record label Deutsche Grammophon's tenth anniversary in 1908. Deutsche Grammophon had been founded in 1898 by Emile Berliner, the inventor of the gramophone record. Berliner, who had migrated to the United States from Germany in 1870, had previously founded gramophone companies in the U.S. and Great Britain. The recording is set in "the year 2000," when the audience at a "speaking machine festival" are welcomed by the voice of one such "speaking machine." Humorously foreshadowing the development of computers and artificial intelligence, the voice reflects back on the days before all human activity was taken over by machines and reminds listeners how lucky they were to no longer have to walk, write, speak, or even think for themselves anymore. The voice on this recording is that of comedic actor Gustav Schönwald, who was among the first German actors to lend his voice to phonograph recordings. While this futuristic scenario seemed comically unlikely to its author in 1908, the rapid advances in mechanization and technology at the time did have many Germans worried about their impact on human life and work and drew some to reform movements seeking a return to a less technologically driven way of life.

Source

Dear fellow citizens and fellow celebrants, when we think back today, in the year 2000, to those long-gone times when people were forced to do everything themselves that is now done by ingeniously designed machines, we are overcome by a quiet horror. In the most primitive way, people were forced to walk, write, eat, speak, and sometimes even think for themselves. How fortunate we are that we no longer have to do this today. As proof of this, you see no living speaker before you today, but rather I, the speaking machine, have the pleasure of welcoming you all on behalf of the organizers of this celebration. Free from all the worries that responsible work used to burden us with, I urge you to indulge yourselves today in pleasure, all the more so as this laudable endeavor is made easier for you by all the achievements of the year 2000. And therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I call out to you as loud as my construction allows: Enjoy yourselves!

Source: Gustav Schönwald, *Festrede zum Sprechmaschinenfest im Jahre 2000*, 1908. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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