

On the Singular Status of the Human Voice

Tomorrow's Eve and the Cultural Series of Talking Machines¹

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The cinema was far from being the first 'talking machine' used for putting on shows. The talking component is part and parcel of a long line of technical inventions and discourses about the audiovisual representation of man. The term itself underlines the preponderant role given to the word – the true 'subject' of talkies being located in the *talking Subject*² her/himself, as Jean-Louis Comolli has noted. The talking element has fostered an anthropomorphic mimetism, which is comparable in its principles to the mimetism underlying both the manufacturing of automata with human faces and some of the ways phonographic techniques are used. Rick Altman has written about the phase in which talking was generalised: 'nearly every important technological innovation can be traced to the desire to produce persuasive illusion of real people speaking real words'.³ James Lastra has noted that when analysing the writings of Hollywood technicians at that time, 'all sounds were ultimately recognized to be functionally subordinate to the *voice*'.⁴ Even if in science, as Jonathan Sterne underlines, a movement of subordination of the voice to the more general category of 'sounds' can be observed from the 19th century onwards,⁵ the primacy of the talking element has been perpetuated in audiovisual representations, implying all the phases of sound manufacturing in the cinema, from their recording to their projection in halls. It is against this background that I shall address the conditions that have contributed to the emergence of a conception of the relations between sound and visual representations, where the dominant parameter is voice-lip synchronism. When one examines the possible combinations (exemplified in the 'installations' of contemporary artists), it becomes clear that institutionalised talking cinema can profit from being set within a wider technological spectrum belonging to the *cultural series of talking machines*.⁶ From a methodological point of view, this conception allows us to free historical study from the requirements of periodisation, for if one series may be derived from another series, it may also echo it at a distance or develop in parallel to neighbouring series. Reciprocal influence may occur as a result of a spatial contiguity (when, for example, two techniques are presented at the same exhibition)⁷ that is itself subject to considerable diachronic variations and various contingencies, as it results from practices that have not been laid down and fixed. To take an example that is specifi-

cally linked to the human voice, one may suppose that the enthusiasm that the painter Léopold Robert evinced on discovering the interactivity instigated by the acousmatic voice⁸ of the 'Invisible Girl'⁹ – a show staged in 1815 by the famous phantasmagorist Robertson – can be explained by the fact that this curiosity was presented in the vicinity of an exhibition of talking automata.¹⁰ It is this kind of convergence between series that allows one better to comprehend the specific nature of each dispositive used.

When the phonograph, patented by Edison in 1877, was first used in public, it was usually called the 'talking machine',¹¹ a name which highlights the spoken component of its 'performance' (the performance being not just a technological one, but also a spectacular one when exhibited in public), but not its capacity as a recording apparatus. This designation thus played the role of superordinate, inscribing very different dispositives within the same cultural series. The use of a term that already existed clearly shows the filiation that people at that time established between the phonograph and certain older machines. When developing an epistemological approach to the main reception paradigms of the 'talking cinema' that were prevalent three or four decades before the latter became standardised, it is helpful to compare certain fields of activity that were particularly permeable at the end of the 19th century. The border between a show intended to amuse and scientific demonstration (particularly in the field of physiology), or exact sciences and spiritism, was a tenuous one. I shall limit my study to one particularly discursive category: literary fiction based on technological speculation. As Charles Grivel has shown,¹² the imaginary world of mechanical voice reproduction – which had already been evoked in 1748 in the works of the philosopher Julien Offroy de La Mettrie¹³ – was revived in literature with the spreading of Edison's and Berliner's inventions during the last quarter of the 19th century.

One of the fictional works discussed by Grivel that best illustrates the transformations that took place in the 1880s is *Tomorrow's Eve*, a novel published in 1886 by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.¹⁴ He was a close friend of Charles Cros, an inventor and French poet who, eight months before Edison received his patent, had sent a sealed letter to the French Academy of Sciences in which he set out the phonographic process in plausible detail. Although often referred to in relation to the cinema, *Tomorrow's Eve* is a very rich work whose hermeneutic potential is far from exhausted. It is the story in which a fictive Edison, given mythical status as the 'father of the phonograph', exploits his invention to reproduce a talking being mechanically – a project similar to the talking doll that the real Edison completed in 1889.¹⁵ The book fosters a discussion of the status of the voice within the audiovisual dispositive, and in particular the recorded voice, as the author emphasises the indexical nature of the phonographic recording. This question has often been raised, but generally not explored in

depth by those who have studied Villiers's work. Research has concentrated on the technological dimension of the world that is represented, either because it is the image that is foregrounded, or because the various spoken manifestations in the book are not considered with regard to their particular characteristics. A symptomatic illustration is when André Bazin, who succinctly refers to Villiers's novel to illustrate the 'myth of total cinema', does not refer to the android itself, but simply mentions the fictitious Edison's projection of animated scenes using a lampascope.¹⁶ Even though the passage he quotes ends with the dancer singing, Bazin does not address the question of the coupling of the image and the voice. In an article on anthropomorphous simulacra created via audiovisual technology, Tom Gunning discusses Bazin (albeit with little critical distance) and cites the work of Villiers, but without going into detail, claiming that numerous analyses have already been published.¹⁷ Despite recurring references to *Tomorrow's Eve* in studies investigating the representation of science in futuristic novels and stories, I believe that this particular novel merits greater attention from the point of view of the voice and the implications of phonographic technology, for – as many scholars have underlined – it is a work where the representation of the voice is a fundamental concern.

The voices in the novel

One can see how important voices are in *Tomorrow's Eve* from the very beginning, when Edison, in his inaugural monologue, laments that he has not been able to record all the voices from the past, particularly God's voice – which, one might say, would have enabled him to provide *phonographic* proof for *ontological* proof. Here Villiers is expressing the dream of acceding to the divine by means of telecommunications – a dream shared later by Guglielmo Marconi, who hoped to develop radiophony to the point of being able to capture Jesus's last words on the cross.¹⁸ The desire to conjure up a past shrouded in mystery shows to what extent the recreated voice is marked by the absence or disappearance of beings – a situation that also concerns God himself, who in this novel has, as it were, been supplanted by the man of science and his sacrilegious challenge. The function of compensating for an 'absence' is not confined to uses of the voice, since the photographic image was also destined to replace the painted portrait in its capacity to conserve a trace of those who have died.¹⁹ However, the example of the divine voice in Villiers's work reveals an almost mystical conception of voice phenomena that are deprived of physical incarnation, associated both with the origins of the world ('In the beginning was the Word') and with manifestations of a source that eludes representation.

In *Tomorrow's Eve*, Edison's soliloquy prefigures the way the voice is treated throughout the novel. Firstly, the monologue – an instance of *diegetized* enunciation – is direct discourse relying on indications of linguistic register and orality. Secondly, the voice is exploited as a narrative motif. One can join Gwenhaël Ponnau in affirming that 'not just thematically, but also poetically and structurally, *Tomorrow's Eve* may appear as the novel of the voice, or rather, of voices'.²⁰ However, Ponnau examines the polyphonic structure and various 'stage directions' without linking such stylistic characteristics with the technological element built into the heart of the story. It is, however, enlightening to draw a correlation between the representation of the voice and the problematic of talking machines imagined by Villiers. Not only does his novel often describe in detail the voices of feminine characters (referring to timbre, intensity, intonation, etc.), but he also brings in various voices heard in acousmatic situations, i.e., when the source of the voice cannot be seen. In the diegetic universe of the novel, such manifestations are motivated either by means of long-distance communication (telepathy or telephony) or by playing a sound that has already been produced (phonography). Sounds of the first type occur right from the very beginning of *Eve* – the employee and Edison's son are presented only as voices. In the tangled web of direct discourse, the expression 'a voice' often designates by synecdoche the various characters.²¹ The voice is thus associated with an absence that the phonograph is partially used to cover – just as the android is the idealised substitute for the real woman. Edison, who is isolated in his laboratory, is loath to speak directly to his interlocutors, but replies simply by setting off a phonograph linked to a telephone (p. 16). Thus, his relationship with others is strongly mediated by the techniques of voice reproduction and transmission. This somewhat asocial behaviour may well hark back to Villiers's initial intention, which was to portray Edison in a sarcastic manner. However, the novel often uses voice-off, the source of which is situated elsewhere (i.e., the sleeper Any Anderson), or even in a time and place different from that of the listener (when Hadaly repeats Alicia's words), thus stressing the dissociation and disembodiment brought about by activating Edison's dispositives.

Furthermore, the separation between the physical person and speech is explicitly thematized by Edison, who claims to be able to preserve Alicia's *body* while modifying her *soul*, and thus fulfil his friend's wish. As Franc Schuerewegen has written, Villiers's Edison manages to 'abduct the present of a being by capturing her voice, which is closest to the soul, and thus to the essence'.²² This fundamental dichotomy between (the) being and appearing allows a distinction to be made between the dimensions of the word and the voice when Lord Ewald says of his lover that '... her words seemed constrained and out of place in her mouth.' (p. 31). Moreover, the same oppositional rationale (body-soul, body-voice) governs the value judgements made regarding the attributes of the

voice. With the portrait that Villiers draws of Alicia, there is a contrast between the perfection of the innate and the mediocrity of what is acquired – everything not belonging to her ‘essence’ is tainted by the base aspirations of the philistine. For example, he notes that she speaks ‘after the fashion of a saleswomen in a department store, *but* in a voice of perfect clarity’ (p. 169, my italics). The capturing of the voice is thus presented as an undertaking to extract one part of the real which, when assembled with a new element, contributes to creating the feminine ideal. It is no coincidence that Alicia is a singer, like the prima donna La Stilla in Verne’s *Carpathian Castle*²³ – it is a profession that is associated with a vocal performance that is grounded in human expressivity.

Phonography and illusion

By making the phonograph the key invention from which one may derive various applications, Villiers inscribes his imaginary invention in what Rick Altman defines as a context of ‘intermediality’.²⁴ The making of the android – described with fetishist-like precision – requires several uses of the projected image. It is thus presented as the product of a visual representation that exceeds the automaton’s mere physical presence. When Villiers wrote that his Edison intended to surpass such makers of automata as Vaucanson or Maelzel (p. 61), he was underlining the filiation between his character and these automata-makers with whom his Edison – as opposed to the real Edison, who was always interested in the industrial prospects of his inventions – shared an artisanal conception of automata manufacturing, while surpassing them thanks to his mastery of phonographic techniques. Even if visual machinery does not intervene per se in the functioning of the mechanical being, it is necessary for the conception of its body and especially to set up synchronism between word and movement. Edison first uses a projection dispositive, whose ‘successive photographs’ allow him to show Lord Ewald the animated image of a dancer. It is not a silent projection, for the singer sings, and Villiers comments that the ‘lip movement’ is also reproduced, indicating synchronism. It is interesting to note that the illusory status of the audiovisual representation is never called into question by the characters present at the spectacle, even though the demonstration aims precisely to show the deceptive appearance (cf. the misleading outfit) of the filmed subject. The illusion of the representation produced by the dispositive is, as it were, transferred onto the nature of the represented object in accordance with a process that resembles the film spectator’s immersion in the filmic diegesis. Given Villiers’s scientific speculations, we note that he postulates total fidelity of the audiovisual reproduction to its source (in fact, its referent). In the descrip-

tive sections, Villiers does indeed describe the functioning of Edison's apparatuses, but he tends to conceal the representational dimension of the phonographed voices by repeatedly stressing their perfection. Thus, the speaker pays absolutely no attention to the recording situation when she speaks – Alicia's voice is fixed unbeknownst to Alicia, as if the optimisation of the reproduction qualities was independent of the 'prophonographic' conditions.²⁵ Moreover, the functioning of the apparatus seems to have no influence whatsoever on the restitution of the voice, whereas right up to at least the first years of the twentieth century, people constantly commented on the imperfection of the phonographic reproduction of the voice's characteristics.²⁶ This conception – which could also be detected in Jules Verne's writings²⁷ – whereby one does not perceive sound technology as such influenced the dominant thinking on matters audiovisual during the twentieth century (alongside the rare commentators who recommended exhibiting the mechanical side of the phonograph).²⁸ Given that the technology is inaudible, the representation passes for perfect restitution, as if the transmission did not require a transducer. This ideology reached its apogee with the appearance of the so-called *high fidelity* systems.²⁹

Machine representation as an audiovisual dispositive: the android and its spectator

The idea put forward by Villiers of linking the lampscope with the phonograph had probably been circulating since the time of the very first presentations of the phonograph, as can be seen in a review published in 1878:

It is already possible by ingenious optical contrivances to throw stereoscopic photographs of people on screens in full view of an audience. Add the talking phonograph to counterfeit their voices, and it would be difficult to carry the illusion of real presence much further.³⁰

In Villiers's novel, Edison's experiment puts Lord Ewald in the position of audio-spectator, thus creating a dispositive. The android's interactions with Lord Ewald that follow are, significantly, called 'scenes' on several occasions. But before he falls for the illusion, he is filled with indignation about Edison's vast ambition and exclaims: 'But I was forgetting; this is a theater, I'm watching a stage show! I'm bound to applaud. The last scene was really good – strange, indeed, but strong!' (p. 201). The relationship that develops between Edison and his guest is thus grounded in the context of the spectacle (a kind of scenic performance), which includes the object of the exhibition (the automaton) and the two poles of communication (the instigator and the spectator). It is significant

that Lord Ewald qualifies the contents of the phonographic inscriptions as 'paradoxes' (p. 201): he judges that when a machine is capable of conducting a conversation, there is a lack of verisimilitude, even within the fiction. This is a nodal point on the narrative level, given that Edison keeps putting off his explanation, and was a decisive stage in the genesis of the novel, as Villiers only hit upon the final outcome after several years. The android's functioning was only finally clarified when the work, which is presented as a rewriting of the Book of Genesis, was completed: phonography is the instrument repeating the founding act, with the gift of speech guaranteeing that the artefact is endowed with human qualities. This is why Edison, like the novel itself, makes this gift his ultimate purpose. If silence has the last word – it is literally the last word of the book – this is because the divine origin proves in the end to be unsurpassable.

If we turn our attention to the image, we see that it intervenes via the crafting of Hadaly, thanks to a series of marks made on the basis of 'photographic enlargements'³¹ (p. 151).³² The physical appearance of this artificial being is indeed the result of a series of images similar to those obtained by Etienne-Jules Marey by means of his chronophotographic technique.³³ This part of the novel suggests a possible link between automata and devices projecting animated films, despite the fact the role of the projected animated image is confined to creating the machine – there is no trace of the projection system used to conceive it once it is finished. Villiers's Edison justifies such up-front experiments by underlining the need for a correlation between the line representing the body movements inscribed on the cylinder – itself a tool related to the phonographic process – and the groove resulting from the recording of the voice. He calls this process 'expressive correspondences' and makes the following comment on it: 'It follows accordingly (does it not?) that the action of two phonographs, combined with that of the cylinder, must produce a perfect synchronizing of words and gestures as well as of the movement of the lips' (p. 132). This explanation shows the importance given to voice-lip synchronism – a principle which would later come to dominate talking cinema.

Despite the perfection of the fictitious Edison's creation, Villiers points to the fact that the word cannot be reduced to the level of the machine, which, fundamentally, has no soul. The movement that characterises chronophotographic projection does indeed animate *things*, but only the voice truly 'animates' the *beings* represented. For Villiers, the laws of mechanics and acoustics are not sufficient to attain this origin of the voice.

Where spiritism put the finishing touches on the technical invention

When in *Eve*, Edison communicates with Menlo Park, a disembodiment results both from the use of the phonograph (the manifestation of sound deferred in time) and that of the telephone (the spatial separation between the places of sending and receiving). This double dematerialization of the speaker is also played out on another level with the intervention of Any Sowana, as the inventor contacts this spirit both by means of his gift for telepathy but also, more concretely, using a telephone handset. Thus, as Edison explains to Lord Ewald, *his* transmission really is 'occult', while *her* reply comes 'by way of electricity'.³⁴ This principle is illustrated earlier in the book in a dialogue in which we discover Any Sowana's hearing perception, depicting the strangeness inherent in the sudden booming forth of a voice without a body. In this passage, we note that the telephone and phonograph intervene together to activate the talking automaton – an alliance that is symptomatic of the lack of a clear boundary between the paradigms of the inscription and transmission of sounds at the end of the 19th century. Patrice Carré, for example, has underlined that the applications of the telephone were at first both uncertain and varied, with Bell's invention sometimes being envisaged as 'complementary to the phonograph'.³⁵ Villiers lets the invisible Sowana explain precisely how this dispositive functions:

– It's a marvel of thought and ingenuity, but perfectly natural now that it's been brought to reality.

Look: for me to hear you, in the mixed and marvelous state where I now am ... there's no need of a telephone. But for you to hear me, you or any one of your visitors, isn't it true that the telephone whose mouthpiece I'm now holding must be linked to a sounding box, however concealed? (p. 12)

Sowana has to use prosthetic technology in order to materialise the sound of her voice in space and speak. Villiers underlines just how perfect the transmission apparatus is,³⁶ and thanks to the telephone, the speaker establishes proximity and intimacy with the listener, making the technical instrument similar to the telepathy that is used to ensure the reciprocal nature of the communication. Villiers's Edison provides his guest with a veritable *séance* where the beyond is reached thanks to the combined power of the spirit and electricity. The way in which Villiers thought out the story is indicative of the similarities – in the collective imagination at that time, and still today for those who believe in the phenomenon of 'channelling' – between technology and the 'para-scientific' field. This meeting between the occult dimension and a technology that allows instantaneous communication at a distance – a mixture of ingeniousness and

the ideal, as Any Sowana puts it – reveals the rapprochement between telegraphy and modern spiritualism that Jeffrey Sconce has examined in the discourses of the second half of the 19th century,³⁷ a paradigm that continued on into the 20th century via various mystical or religious uses of telephony.³⁸

The presence of the occult and the supernatural in *Eve* reminds us that the strictly technological context must not overshadow the symbolist side of Villiers's work. The use of spiritist means to allow the machine to speak shows how far he believed that speaking is totally incompatible with the mechanical aspect. The *singularity* of the voice comes from the indestructible link it has with an individual – for Villiers, the distinction between the human and the inhuman partly rested on the opposition between production and reproduction at the level of the voice. The simultaneously occult and technological origin of the reproduced voice reveals – like the oxymoron 'Tomorrow's Eve' of the title – the paradox of the symbolism that resides in the collusion of the *mythological* (the myth of Adam and the origin of humankind) and *scientism*. Although Villiers initially intended to combat positivism just as he had done in some of his tales, the final version of his novel bears witness to a clear attraction to scientism, despite the ending, where he underlines the vanity of man's attempts – like Prometheus – to become master of his own destiny.

The technological dimension that Villiers presented may be envisaged by comparing it with the talkie. *Delinking* between the spoken voice and the visualised body occurs when the voice seems momentarily to detach itself from its human origin, and while it does not exactly reveal its nature as a recording, it does unveil the trick of voice-lip synchronism.³⁹ In the novel, the character of Miss Alicia is associated with the idea of disparity between being and appearing. Her 'audiovisual' reproduction – the result of complex operations that ensure the synchronisation of the various mechanisms – produces a merging of Alicia's physical beauty and the interior perfection that her model does not have. The result is to repair any delinking effect. The work's technological Utopianism thus resides more deeply in a unitary conception of the android – the complete illusion of life.

In circa 1880, an advertisement for a spectacle involving automata emphasized how the invention being exhibited was both superior to and different from reproduction devices: 'Do not confuse this marvellous machine, unique in the world, with the phonograph, which is simply an ECHO effect'.⁴⁰ Thus, the fact that speech was produced without previous recording was used as a publicity argument, even though this process was by no means a new one, but belonged to the tradition of face-to-face communication. Similarly, Villiers highlighted the limits of phonographic reproduction, suggesting that they were outmatched by the 'techniques' of occultism: Sowana's spirit expresses itself through the android's mouth with the uncertainties that are characteristic of

everyday conversation, and interacts with the audio-spectator. Spiritism and phonography do, however, have one thing in common. Edison calls up Any Sowana's spirit thanks to his magnetising powers that he uses on Mistress Anderson, who lies in another room in a quasi-cataleptic state. In other words, Sowana's spirit can be freed thanks to the dissociation from the body of a third person who plays the part of intermediary, i.e., 'medium'. If one links this intervention of the supernatural with Edison's various inventions where voice and body are separated, one understands what it is about the phonograph that could be conceived of as an attractive, yet repulsive, demiurgic invention. In *Eve*, the meeting between a forsaken voice with an artificial body that is dedicated to the mechanicalness of the phonograph is presented as the guarantee of audiovisual completeness. It is instructive that the cornerstone of Villiers's scientific Utopia belongs to 'psychic magnetism'. He needs the help of the supernatural to cast out the anguish of absence provoked by the phonograph, to avoid the monstrosity that the phonographic *voix* represents when detached from any *soul* – a totally dehumanized voice, like that of Marcel Schwob's *La Machine à parler* (1892).⁴¹ This motif is part of the broader aspirations of the symbolist influence, which denounced the material foundations of *fin de siècle* society while it sought to find the lost soul, even if it meant availing oneself of the products (material) of industry, as is the case in the novel *Eve*, which is particularly ambivalent in this respect.

Technology not only affects the spectators in ways that are close to those of 'magic' phenomena, but can also be used for spiritist practices. James Lastra notes that the transformations brought about by the technologies of photography, phonography and telegraphy also affected the discourses and methods of spiritism.⁴² As early as 1673, Athanase Kircher recalled that many of those who mentioned 'talking heads' had interpreted the voices produced by these 'machines' as diabolical, because the devil was supposed to manifest itself in the shape of a voice spoken by statues.⁴³ Villiers's talking machines go hand in hand with a belief in the supernatural, and thanks to Edison, the 'modern' functioning of the android inherits a medium's ancestral powers. This contamination of the technological by the marvellous seems to be connected to the polysemy of the term 'medium': from *medial* to *medium* there is but one step, from the material presence of the mechanism to ... the beyond. It is interesting to recall that in the 1920s, the (real) Edison set out to improve the Ouija board that was used manually by mediums, although himself no adept of the Cause. To this end, he developed an electric recording apparatus, whose amplification system was particularly sensitive.⁴⁴ The focus of interest on both technological and parascientific subjects dealing with voice phenomena made up one of the main cultural contexts underlying the representation of the talking automaton in Villiers's work.

The presence-absence of the ‘imaginary signifier’

Following the example of Franc Schuerewegen,⁴⁵ one may draw a parallel between Villiers’s precise and powerful representation of technology and the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s comments about new technologies. When comparing aesthetics and the new means of communication, Lyotard notes an important upheaval, which stems from the spatio-temporal ‘liberation’ of data reception. The mutation discussed by Lyotard can thus be as much applied to the subject he addresses – the digitalisation of data⁴⁶ – as to the older technology of phonography. Lyotard’s questions (does not the ‘tele’ element necessarily blur the presence, the *hic et nunc* of ‘carnal’ forms and their reception?)⁴⁷ reflect a dialectic of presence and absence that is similar to that which is raised by Villiers’s novel, with the Android introducing the theme – albeit in an idealised mode – of the persistence of the carnal constituent. The automaton Hadaly speaks from another space, using words carried by a voice recorded *before* and *elsewhere*. However, when compared to the removal of the origin of the voice alone, today’s context to which Lyotard refers introduces a supplementary degree of non-realisation – that of the mathematical translation of sounds into information. Digitalization does, of course, place all audiovisual data on an equal footing, but Villiers gives a special status to voice and speech.

It is striking to note in a text describing the possibilities of his invention just how strongly the real Edison stresses the issue of the absence of the source. He notes that reproduction is realised ‘without the presence or consent of the original source’, and that the multiplication of sounds can be carried out ‘without regard for the existence or non-existence of the original source’.⁴⁸ He is, of course, referring to the legal and commercial advantages of the invention, but his text contains notions of presence and existence that reveal the new relation to the world instigated by the phonograph, which allows one to dispense with such notions. The move from ‘absence’ to ‘inexistence’ seems to me to echo the realisation that the ‘inhuman’ had indeed appeared, since the ‘source’ is associated with a person whose voice one records and reproduces (the expression ‘with or without the knowledge or consent of the source’ only makes sense when referring to a human source); inexistence is understood as a negation of the human, supplanted by a machine that guarantees mass dissemination. To go one step further: the voice’s origin is no longer a human being and has been reproduced by the apparatus itself. This material dimension of sound production – described as ‘writing without a subject’ by Friedrich Kittler⁴⁹ in his examination of Rilke’s text *Ur-Geräusch* (in which the physical inscription of a sound in the shape of grooves is compared to the fissures of the cranium)⁵⁰ – refers to a

situation of extreme autonomisation, where production and reproduction merge together.

Despite the hypothetical nature of his story, Villiers emphasises actual physical absence over the notion of inexistence. The scientist in the novel takes the trouble to explain how the sentences produced by the artificial being have been uttered. I believe it is significant that the novel's inventions never aim to *produce* a voice – he could have invented a more fantastic device to do just that – but always to *reproduce* a previous utterance whose author is *absent*. This observation is valid firstly for the artificial birds that keep the android company in its shelter – whereas one would have tended to associate these pretend animals with automata capable of mechanically producing noises or speech, in *Eve* they reproduce the comments of visitors to Menlo Park that have been recorded by its owner (p. 93). The same is true of the reproduction of Miss Alicia Clary's voice, since Edison, who planned to cut cylinders during one of the comedian's shows, invites her to his house on the pretext of a rehearsal to get her to say what the android will utter.

The importance of the sound '*that-has-been*' (*Ça-a-été*)⁵¹ arises when one examines the relations created between the representation, the machinery and the audio-spectator. One can postulate that the automaton Hadaly creates an impression of reality for Lord Ewald that, in some respects, is comparable to the one that the cinema dispositive creates for its spectator. The Faustian pact joining Lord Ewald and Edison can then be understood as a reading contract that recalls the necessary conditions for the 'impression of reality' that have been studied by Christian Metz.⁵² Indeed, Edison's description of the Android as a 'mixed presence'⁵³ seems to echo Metz's conception of the cinematographic signifier that 'makes itself present on the model of absence'.⁵⁴ One can argue that like the example of the 'imaginary signifier' in the cinema, the Android consists of a 'projection' in the psychological sense of the term, since it owes its existence purely to the credulous acceptance of the illusion on the part of the spectator – and the contract agreed upon by Edison and Ewald (who is in love with the singer and ready to put an end to his days) explicitly stipulates this. If one temporarily disregards the technological context (which dominates in *Carpathian Castle*, where an initial artifice reinforces Franz de Telek's belief),⁵⁵ one can see that the animation of the artificial being metaphorically expresses the power of the imagination unfurled by the sensitive man in his quest for the ideal. Moreover, a similar theme is found in Villiers's fantastic tale entitled *Véra* (1883), which makes no reference to the positive sciences of the time, however. In *Véra*, a 'distant voice' calls the man who has lost his wife, but like Orpheus, everything disappears the moment the husband commits the damnable deed of remembering his loved one's death. When Villiers affirms here that 'ideas are like living beings', he uses the supernatural to evoke a 'mixed-presence' similar to

that of the Android. Moreover, like in the cinema of fiction, which fosters the spectators' identification with the character on the screen, the ideal being is fulfilled in the Same: 'And they *then* realised that they were really *only one being*'.⁵⁶ In *Eve*, Edison states that the Other is created in the image of the I, that the words will appear in whatever form Lord Ewald wishes: 'Her words will never deceive your delicately nurtured hope! They will always be just as sublime ... as your own inspiration knows how to make them.' (p. 133). Hadaly thus resolves the paradox of the phonograph, which, according to Charles Grivel, resides in the association of the recognition of a particular identity (the objectified voice) with the expression of Rimbaud's 'I is another'.⁵⁷ By subjugating the voice of the machine to the voice of a spirit, Villiers maintains the fantastic power of 'total' mimesis while removing the anxiety produced by mechanization.

In *Eve*, the voice definitely allows one to create the *illusion of a presence*: beneath the perfection of her vocal abilities, the singer conceals all that she lacks in her 'soul'; Edison uses hypnotism when he talks to Alicia (p. 172); during the conversation in the park, Lord Ewald confuses his lover for an automaton because he is deceived by Hadaly's words. This power of illusion does not necessarily bring in the technological element, but rather – as a type of regression – introduces a psychic activity that is characteristic of the baby's earliest days, during which perception is focused on the voice of the mother and is basically acoustic in nature.⁵⁸ The phonograph thus appears as an instrument that objectifies a drive that Denis Vasse has observed in the young infant, consisting of exploiting 'mnesic traces' (rendered, as it were, in *Eve* by the grooves of the cylinder) to use its own voice to reproduce the absent mother in its imagination.⁵⁹ With the phonograph, subjects no longer need to become alienated to satisfy their fantasies, since at all times, the voice of the Other – captured on the phonograph's cylinder – can be heard. Vasse qualifies this activity, which belongs to *representation*, by using Freud's expression: 'the pleasure principle prevails over the reality principle'.⁶⁰

Eve belongs to the discourses from which a way of envisaging photographic technique arose that was to influence certain interpretative frameworks, which went on to structure the reception of the various ways sound was added to the 'cinema'. The voice's representation of audiovisual synchronisation and 'animation' in Villiers's novel advances a reflection on the gap produced by the coupling of a recorded voice to the depiction of a speaker, in particular from the viewpoint of the effect produced on the audio-spectator. This *delinking*, which sometimes threatens to manifest itself to the detriment of the dominant realist ideology in the cinema, brings the spectator face to face with the machinery, the pole of the dispositive that is generally held in check by a representation that aims to be anthropoid. In Villiers's novel, the detour via spiritism allows the anguish provoked by the perceptive experience, which was generalised by the

phonographic technique of an ostensibly acousmatic voice, to be forestalled. When all is said and done, *Eve* reasserts that inalienable characteristic of the voice – it is necessarily associated with a human being, even when it occurs within a dehumanizing machine-based dispositive.

Notes

1. This chapter is an augmented and rewritten version of the article entitled 'L'Ève future et la série culturelle des 'machines parlantes' Le statut singulier de la voix humaine au sein d'un dispositif audiovisuel' published in *Cinémas*, vol.17, no. 1, 'Cinélektta 6', 2006, pp. 12-34.
2. Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Technique et idéologie 6 (II). Caméra, perspective, profondeur de champ', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 241, 1972.
3. Rick Altman, 'Introduction', *Yale French Studies*, No. 60, 1980, p. 7.
4. James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema. Perception, Representation, Modernity*, New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 138.
5. 'Prior to the nineteenth century ... works of grammar and logic distinguished between significant and insignificant sounds by calling all significant sounds *vox* – voice ... As the notion of frequency took hold in nineteenth-century physics, acoustics, otology, and physiology, these fields broke with the older philosophy of sound. Where speech or music had been the general categories through which sound was understood, they were now special cases of the general phenomenon of sound' (Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past. Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 23).
6. We have borrowed the concept of the 'cultural series' from André Gaudreault (1997), who designates the practices used in shows and spectacles, which form the basis for the emergence of cinema ('*Les vues cinématographiques selon Georges Méliès, ou: comment Mitry et Sadoul avaient peut-être raison d'avoir tort (même si c'est surtout Deslandes qu'il faut lire et relire) ...*', in J. Malthête and M. Marie (eds.), *Georges Méliès, l'illusionniste fin de siècle?*, Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997).
7. As in the example given by Rick Altman of places where the phonograph, kinoscope and kinetophone were used either simultaneously or in succession (*Silent Film Sound*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 80).
8. This is Pierre Schaeffer's expression that was popularised in cinema studies by Michel Chion to qualify a sound whose (diegetic) source remains invisible.
9. 'You put any question very gently, then you place your ear on the tube and you hear a voice which comes out of the globe and which always replies in the most precise manner and (what is most extraordinary), draws up a portrait of your person, tells you what suit you are wearing and how old you are' (quoted in Jean Clair, *L'Âme au corps. Arts et sciences 1793-1993*, Paris and Milan: Réunion des Musées nationaux, Gallimard, Electa, 1994, p. 441).
10. 'Among other strange things we saw the wax model of a child which enunciated very clearly all the letters of the alphabet. The way in which it spoke several words in a row was very intelligible. It was most surprising' (letter from Léopold Robert to

- his brother, quoted in Chapuis and Droz, *Les Automates*, Neuchâtel: Editions du Griffon, 1949, p. 331).
11. According to James Lastra, op. cit., p. 24.
 12. Charles Grivel, 'The Phonograph's Horned Mouth' (1988), in D. Kahn and G. Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination. Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1992.
 13. La Mettrie, who admired the automata built by Vaucanson, spoke of a mechanical 'talker' as follows: it was a 'machine than can no longer be regarded as an impossibility, especially between the hands of a new Prometheus' (Julien Offroy de La Mettrie, *L'Homme machine*, Paris: Editions Frédéric Henry, 1865 (1748), p. 140).
 14. The first sketches of the novel date back to 1877 (with *L'Andréide paradoxale* as its working title), then appeared in serial form in an incomplete version called *L'Eve nouvelle*, and was finally published in its final version between 18 July 1885 and 27 March 1886 in the weekly *La Vie moderne*. The English translation used is the one published by Robert Martin Adams (*Tomorrow's Eve*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, [1982] 2001).
 15. Regarding the links between the contents of Villiers's novel and Edison's marketing of the talking doll, see Gaby Wood, *Edison's Eve*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, chapter 3.
 16. André Bazin, 'Le mythe du cinéma total' (1946), in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985, p. 23.
 17. Tom Gunning, 'Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear', in R. Abel and R. Altman (eds.), *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 22.
 18. See Roy Stemman, *Spirits and Spirit World*, London: Aldus Books, 1975, p. 97.
 19. Mention should also be made of the 'talking portraits' of such people as Hector Victor Marichelle, Georges Demenÿ, Ottomar Anschütz or William Friese-Greene, who linked the close-up animated image of the speaker with speech – whether virtual or real when coupled with a phonograph.
 20. Gwenhaël Ponnau, *L'Eve future ou l'œuvre en question*, Paris: PUF, 2000, p. 127.
 21. Examples include: 'The voice of the being called Sowana – laughing over its last word – seemed to come, always quietly and discreetly, from a pillar supporting the violet curtains' (Villiers 2001, p. 11); 'A vigorous voice replied, as from the center of the room, though not a soul was to be seen' (p. 16); 'What is it, father? said the voice' (p. 17); 'Huh? What? Where's the fire?' cried the voice, in frightened tones' (p. 55); 'I'm standing by for it, Mr. Edison, said the voice, more calmly now' (p. 55). But sometimes, references to the voice disappear in translation: 'A single spark and Hadaly will appear! ...' [*dit la voix*](p. 12); 'Right! I'll carry it myself, came the reply' (p. 55) [*répondit la voix*'].
 22. Franc Schuerewegen, 'Télétechnè fin de siècle: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Jules Verne', *Romantisme, Revue du dix-neuvième siècle*, no. 69, Paris: Editions CDU and SEDES, 1990, p. 80.
 23. Verne's novel focuses even more clearly on the interest of the singular voice of the person who is admired and recreated by means of an audiovisual dispositive. In this case, one of the novel's characters, Baron Gortz, is passionately attached to La Stilla's art as a singer, but as she is dead, she is reduced to a voice. While the voice in *Eve* is categorised among the physical attributes, in Verne's work it is fundamentally

- associated with the soul – the artist's death corresponds exactly to the end of the aria, and when La Stilla dies for the second time, the Baron cries out as her phonographic simulacrum is destroyed: "Her voice – her voice!" he repeats. "Her soul – La Stilla's soul – it is gone – gone – gone!" (Jules Verne, *Le Château des Carpathes*, Paris: Hachette, 1978 (1892); Jules Verne, *Carpathian Castle*, edited by I.O. Evans, London: Granada, 1979 (originally published: London: Arco, 1963)); the quotation is on page 182.
24. Rick Altman, 'Technologie et représentation: l'espace sonore', in J. Aumont, A. Gaudreault and M. Marie (eds.), *L'Histoire du cinéma. Nouvelles approches*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1989. According to Altman's definition, the linking of different media is necessarily temporary, as intermediality is grasped as a 'crisis of mediality', which is then resorbed in media autonomization.
 25. Here I use the equivalent of film specialists' 'profilmic', as proposed by James Lastra for the domain of sound – op. cit., p. 88. In the present context, this term has the advantage of stressing the question of the inscription (the 'graphy') and to refer explicitly to Edison's invention.
 26. A 'history of listening' remains to be written from this point of view. It is interesting to note the letters to the editor published in the *Fascinateur*, where the user of the *Ideal Phonograph* that was sold to 'lecturer-projectionists' by the *Bonne Presse* underlined just how far this device was an exception compared to what was on offer at the time. Thus, a priest named Marty claimed that 'since 1900 [he] had had the possibility of hearing many phonographs, but ... all had ... the same defect ... that brassy, tinny sound'; a certain Richer, opting for a veritable terminological topos when welcoming the improvements in sound technology, said of the *Ideal phonograph* that it 'was no longer toned down and deformed reproduction of the human's voice', but that it was 'the voice itself', whereas another reader wrote: 'A considerable number of people, who were prejudiced against phonographs in general because they had only heard those seen everywhere today with their tinny sound and faulty cylinders, had recognised that this model was in a different league' (*Le Fascinateur*, no. 1, 'Extraits de quelques lettres du courrier', 1 November 1903, p. 18, taken from 'Fonds de recherche de Monsieur Pierre Veronneau', Cinémathèque québécoise, winter 2004, document compiled by Marlène Landry). Over and above the praise for the *Ideal*, one can see in these remarks how the phonograph was perceived 25 years after Edison perfected it.
 27. In *Carpathian Castle*, an apparatus brought to 'such a pitch of perfection that it reproduced the human voice without the slightest loss of its purity and charm' is mentioned (Jules Verne, op. cit., p. 182).
 28. The example of Cœuroy and Clarence is a notable one: far removed from 'avant-garde' practices and using terms that were close to those of Rudolph Arnheim for the cinema (*Film as Art*, London: Faber and Faber, 1933), they called for the specificity of the phonograph to be exploited (i.e., 'photogeny') based on the apparatus's 'flaws', and on their refusal of a relation of analogy between phonic 'reality' and its reproduction: 'By always trying to get closer and closer to the real, to get close to the model of which it should be the transposition and not the copy, the phonograph loses its style' (André Cœuroy and G. Clarence, *Le Phonographe*, Paris: Editions Kra, 1929, p. 54; my italics).

29. For a criticism of the presupposition regarding the inaudibility of sound technology, see Alan Williams, 'Is Sound Recording Like a Language?', *Yale French Studies* 60, 1980, pp. 51-66, and my own contribution, *Du bonimenteur à la voix-over*, Lausanne: Antipodes, pp. 391-448.
30. 'The Talking Phonograph', *Engineering*, 18 January 1878.
31. Translator's note: the original text speaks of 'photographic proofs' ('épreuves').
32. Jacques Noiray has put forward the hypothesis that Villiers used an account that appeared in the opusculé by Pierre Giffard – the friend of Albert Robida – entitled *Le Phonographe expliqué à Tout le Monde* (1878), where he mentions a device combining a phonograph and a kinoscope (Jacques Noiray, *Le Romancier et la machine: l'image de la machine dans le roman français (1850-1900)*, vol. 2, Paris: J. Corti, 1982, p. 287, note 55).
33. Marey – author of *La machine animale* – did not hold the 'automaton' model in contempt. If one is to believe Laurent Mannoni, the young Marey had already set out to make a 'magnificent mechanical Punch whose arms and legs move by themselves'; later, when at the International Exhibition of Photography in Paris (20 April 1892) he presented the results of his research on fixing the phases of a movement, his celluloid films were next to 'statues illustrating human movement, strange and abstract working drawings in biomechanics' (Laurent Mannoni, Marc de Ferrière and Paul Demenÿ *George Demenÿ: Pionnier du cinéma*, Douai: Editions Pagine 1997, p. 5 and pp. 15-16). The 'working drawing', however, was poles apart from the perfection of pretence that was the android, which shows how far the analytical approach of the scientist is different from the intentions of the showman – which is how we may characterise Villiers's Edison.
34. Translator's note: the published translation is not clear on this point. It reads: 'She could be holding the speaker of a remote telephone, and would answer instantly questions which I sent her by means of thought transmission' (p. 210), where the author speaks of 'par voie d'électricité'.
35. Patrice Carré, *Le Téléphone. Le Monde à portée de voix*, Paris: Gallimard, 1993, p. 33. For more on the links between phonography and telephone during the two final decades of the 19th century, and in particular, with regard to how they appear in the fiction of Albert Robida, see my paper entitled 'Les technologies de la télécommunication en tant que dispositifs. Croisements entre la téléphonie et la série des machines à représentation audiovisuelle', at the international *Dispositifs de vision et d'audition* symposium (Lausanne, 29-31 May 2008, proceedings edited by F. Albera & M. Tortajada, forthcoming, recording of the papers available on <<http://www.unil.ch/cin/page56362.html>>).
36. Translator's note: the original text speaks of 'perfectionnement' ('je tiendrai secret, jusqu'à nouvel ordre, le surprenant, l'absolu perfectionnement que j'ai découvert', p. 46), but this does not come across clearly in the translation, which reads: '... I'll just have to keep secret the amazing, the ultimate development of my research ...', p. 11).
37. Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media. Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 21-28.
38. See James E. Katz, *Magic in the Air. Mobile Communication and the Transformation of Social Life*, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2006.
39. A distinction can be made between *fundamental delinking*, which is constitutive of the medium (as, from the point of view of the reception of the film in the hall, every

- occurrence of sound is necessarily 'over', since the movements that are visible on the screen do not actually produce the vibrations in the air that are the source of the sounds) and a one-off and exhibited use of delinking. In the second case, it can often be observed that the anti-illusionist consequences of the *delinked* voice are reversed for the benefit of the diegetic universe thanks to various types of motivations, thus strengthening the immersion of the spectator (for example, in William Friedkin's *Exorcist*, where the effect of strangeness brought about by delinking has the function of boosting the horrific effect). See Alain Boillat, *Du bonimenteur à la voix-over*, op. cit., pp. 23-30 and pp. 414-420.
40. Poster by C. Deaves, reproduced in Jean Clair, op. cit., pp. 430-431.
 41. Unlike Lord Ewald, who perceives nothing of the machinery when he converses with the Android, the narrator-spectator of Schwob's text only has access to the 'wings' where the sounds are produced mechanically (here there is no imitation of the human face, the 'giant throat' being the exaggerated expression of a phobia of the feminine sex). The appearance of the voice is, significantly, preceded by 'wheels squeaking' and 'metal wires grating' – parasitic noises that exhibit the mechanical origin of the voice. Schwob's creator ('La Machine à parler', in *Le Roi au masque d'or*, Paris: Editions G. Crès et Cie, 1920 [1892], p. 151) moreover affirms that he became dehumanized through contact with his invention: 'I have lived so much with my machine that, like it, I speak *without nuances*; for nuance belongs to the soul and I have removed it'. It should also be noted that the little woman presented by the demiurge as being 'the soul who moves the keyboard' (p. 149) disappears when the machine explodes, i.e., when the man loses his voice. This finale bears witness to the same association between soul and voice as that suggested by Villiers, but in Schwob's work it operates on the mode of dysphoria/dysphonia.
 42. James Lastra, op. cit., p. 224, note 3.
 43. Athanasius Kircher, *Phonurgia Nova*, New York: Broude Brothers, 1966 (1673), p. 161.
 44. See the announcement made by Edison in *Scientific American*, 30 October 1920, quoted by René Ladoux, *Le Spiritisme*, Paris: Cerf, 1989, p. 64.
 45. Franc Schuerewegen, op. cit., and *A distance de voix*, Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1994, pp. 33-34.
 46. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Logos et tekhnè, ou la télégraphie', in *L'Inhumain, causeries sur le temps*, Paris: Galilée, 1988, p. 60.
 47. J.-F. Lyotard, 'Quelque chose comme: communication ... sans communication' in *L'Inhumain*, op. cit., p. 129.
 48. 'The Phonograph and his Future', *North American Review*, No. 126, May-June 1878, quoted in James Lastra, op. cit., p. 19.
 49. Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*, Berlin: Brinkmann and Böse, 1986, pp. 63-69.
 50. It should be noted that, in this example, the human subject certainly exists, but is not an active instance – it is the very subject of the writing. A similar concept is found in a recent story by Jean-Claude Bologne, *Le Chanteur d'âme* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1997, p. 10), where the hero imagines that the fingerprints of a criminal can be read like a phonograph's cut cylinder. In these types of cases, the subject is absent, since the nature of the sounds of which s/he is the source are in no

- way dependent on her/his willpower (considered by Edison to be a definite economic advantage).
51. I have borrowed here the notion used by Roland Barthes (in chapter 32 of his *Camera Lucida*, translated by Richard Howard, New York: Hill & Wang, 1981) when he speaks of photography as being the result of a co-presence between the real photographed thing and the lens of the camera – which is no longer valid in the digital age. The image (or, in this instance, the sound) is the trace (the index in Peirce's terminology) of the actual existence of what has been recorded. The conception needs to be relativized in that it conceals the representational nature of the reproduced images (and sounds).
 52. Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1977, chapter 3.
 53. The term can be found on p. 61 and p. 68. As Jacques Noiray (op. cit., pp. 341-342) has noted, this designation refers to the 'mixed-fluid' notion previously used by Villiers, and defined as the mixture of an electric fluid (the technical aspect) and a nervous fluid (an imaginary addition). Noiray also alludes to the possibility of an occult interpretation.
 54. Christian Metz, op. cit., p. 64.
 55. Franz de Télék's adherence to the audiovisual representation is so strong because it is accompanied by a voice that he has recognised and heard previously in the castle without being able to identify its source. Jules Verne previously described how Franz, when imprisoned in the crypt of the *burg*, kept hearing La Stilla's invitations to follow him coming from outside, without the door opening. This key passage stages a song that is condemned to be repeated forever and is detached from any spatial setting. The sentence has been forcibly removed from its prime *deixis* and is nothing more than a vain injunction. What is tragic about the door refusing to open is the loss of a loved one who is simply recreated in the shape of a dream by phonographic reproduction.
 56. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, 'Véra' (1883), in *Contes cruels*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, pp. 66-67.
 57. Charles Grivel, op. cit.
 58. According to Didier Anzieu, who claims: 'At five weeks, the baby makes out its mother's voice from other voices, whereas it does not yet make a difference between its mother's face and other faces' ('L'enveloppe sonore du moi', *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse*, no. 13, 1976, p. 168).
 59. Denis Vasse, *L'Ombilic et la voix*, Paris: Seuil, 1974, p. 77.
 60. *Ibid.*, p. 78.