



HAL
open science

Roy Harris and Writing Without Speech

John Pier

► **To cite this version:**

| John Pier. Roy Harris and Writing Without Speech. *Style*, 1997, 31 (1), pp.134-147. hal-03944347

HAL Id: hal-03944347

<https://hal.science/hal-03944347>

Submitted on 3 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Pier, John. "Roy Harris and Writing Without Speech". *Style* 31.1 (1997): 134-147 (on Roy Harris, *Signs of Writing*, 1995).

Review Essay

John Pier

Université François-Rabelais

Roy Harris and Writing Without Speech

Roy Harris. *Signs of Writing*. New York: Routledge, 1995. viii + 185 pp. \$55.00, cloth.

"A language [*langue*] and its written form [*écriture*]," wrote Ferdinand de Saussure in chapter 6 of his *Cours de linguistique générale*, "constitute two separate systems of signs. The sole reason for the existence of the latter is to represent the former. The object of study in linguistics is not the combination of the written word and the spoken word; it is the latter alone which constitutes this object" (45). With this bold statement of doctrine in which writing is isolated from the object of linguistic study (*la langue*, modeled after speech), Saussure was emphatic in denouncing "the tyranny of the letter" and the "inconsequentialities of writing" found in such "irrational written forms" as, for example, *oiseau*, whose spelling fails to represent any of the sounds in the word as it is actually spoken (*wazo*) and which thus leave nothing of the image of *la langue*. Writing in fact serves to conceal *la langue* and, worse yet, is to be qualified not so much as a "garment" as a "travesty" whose effects can go so far as to place the image before the model, leaving us in the situation of someone who would hope to learn more about a person's appearance by scrutinizing his photograph than by looking at the person himself. Although Saussure does recognize, reluctantly, that written forms intermingle with and sometimes influence spoken forms (this is true particularly in societies which place a high value on written documents), it is thanks to phonology, he claims, that linguistics can free itself from the written word and "the illusions of writing." One logical consequence of this separation of language from writing is the classification of writing into two systems: ideographic, in which the sign relates to the word as a whole, independent of its sounds and devoid of any phonetic dimension; and "phonetic," further divided into syllabic and alphabetic systems based on the irreducible elements of the word. In a reversal of reasoning which is no less revealing than it is astonishing, Saussure cites ancient Greek as the prototype example of the alphabetic system, a nearly ideal system in which each simple sound is represented by one single graphic sign. Paradoxically, then, Saussure winds up appealing to the secondary role

of writing in order to buttress the primacy of the oral, so that what has been pushed out the front door—the alphabetic writing of modern European languages, fixed in archaic forms that fail to keep pace with, to represent, the successive synchronic states of oral language—can thus be seen to sneak in again through the back door: a phonology modeled after an alphabetic system purged of its phonetic impurities and capable of bringing us one step closer to a faithful image of *la langue*, that supra-individual system of linguistic rules deposited within the brain of each member of the speech community.

Like many of the principles spelled out in the *Cours de linguistique générale*, the separation of writing from language has undergone numerous metamorphoses and has continued to be the object of intense critical debate and revision. Roy Harris's *Signs of Writing*, in many ways the fruit of more than twenty years of research and publishing in the field of general linguistics, is notable for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in the following pages, for in placing itself at a critical distance from various dogmas and dead-ends that have plagued whole areas of linguistics since Saussure and, in particular, in refusing to make the phonetic alphabet the measuring stick for all writing systems, this study places writing at the critical juncture of linguistic phenomena by putting into question the deeply-ingrained idea that speech corresponds to the pronunciation of written forms, while writing, reduced to a mnemonic function, is merely a way of setting down speech in a visual form. What is at issue in Harris's work is not a form of Derridean grammarology (we shall return to this point), but rather, through a critical reconsideration of Saussure (see in particular Harris's *Reading Saussure*, but also his English translation of the *Cours*) and a sobering critique of the state of present-day linguistic theory against the background of the history of linguistic thought (see in particular *The Language Myth*, *The Language Makers*, *The Language Machine*, and *The Origin of Writing*), an ambitious and pathbreaking attempt to outline a semiology of writing aimed at the following: (1) to identify those factors that enable us to see writing, not as a pale derivative of speech, but as a distinct form of human communication; and (2) to account for the actual and possible forms of writing through an investigation of various configurations of the relevant linguistic and nonlinguistic features.

It is important to bear in mind that Harris speaks of a *semiology* of writing, and not of a *semiotics* of writing, for in one significant sense his project consists in reformulating Saussure's projected "science which studies the life of signs within social life" (*Cours* 33). While this position serves to mark Harris off from the Peircean "doctrine of signs," it is also articulated in such a way as to supersede the Aristotelian—and Saussurean—thesis of the written sign conceived as a visual metasign derived from the (already) spoken sign and thereby to reintegrate writing into a conceptually broader theory of the sign than that originally proposed by Saussure. "This new analysis," states Harris in *La sémiologie de l'écriture*, a useful volume complementary to the leaner and more theoretical *Signs of Writing*, "replaces Saussure's sign with a

sign which is much more pragmatic. . . . For writing, in our opinion, is not only a testing bench for the Saussurean sign. It is, rather, *the* testing bench for any semiological theory" (20). One major thrust of Harris's approach to the study of writing, then, is to recast the linguistic sign—both spoken and written—within a newly-delineated semiological framework.

The conceptual foundation of Harris's writings, essential to an understanding of his semiology of writing, is to be found in his theory of "integrational semiology." Developed out of the Oxford linguist's critical reading of Saussure and his critique of linguistics as it has developed since Saussure, integrational semiology is not overwhelmingly indebted to any particular precursor or school of thought, but seeks to reorient linguistic study by placing it firmly within the framework of human communication. Originally a proposal for an integrational linguistics with an emphasis on the contextuality, indeterminacy, creativity, and non-autonomy of language (i.e., the refusal to isolate language from nonlanguage; cf. *The Language Myth*), this integrational linguistics later came to be formulated in terms of two "axioms" with broader semiological implications: (1) a sign is not given independently of the situation in which it occurs, with the result that neither the sign nor language is the product of pre-established codes; (2) the value of the sign is a function of the integrational proficiency that its identification and its interpretation presuppose such that the sign is subject to constraints on human communication arising from various biomechanical, macrosocial, and circumstantial factors (cf. "Integrational Linguistics"; *Signs* 21-24). The consequences of these axioms are more far-reaching than might appear at first sight, for, on the one hand, they show integrational linguistics to be an alternative to "telementational" theories of human communication based on the encoding and decoding of messages (this includes not only Roman Jakobson's model of verbal communication, but also Saussure's "speech circuit"), while, on the other hand, they serve as a basis for replacing Saussure's concepts of the arbitrariness and the linearity of the sign and, ultimately, the underlying biplanarity of Saussure's linguistics together with the dualisms of signifier/signified, synchronic/diachronic and *langue/parole*. Ultimately, Harris proposes to distinguish the integrational model of signification both from surrogational models (a sign, whether in a fixed-code or in an open model, "stands-for" what it signifies and is necessarily atomistic, as in Peircean semiotics) and from structural models (which are necessarily closed, as in such models the sign is an abstraction, meaningful only in virtue of the similarities and differences it bears in relation to other signs belonging to the same system) ("Three Models"; *Signs* 50-55; cf. Love, "Transcending Saussure"). In contrast, integrational semiology is an open model based, not on pre-established categories of signs, but, rather, on the contextualized integration of human activities that then takes the form of signs, the sign thus being the product or result of that integration.

With these semiological principles as its theoretical basis, *Signs of Writing* proceeds to investigate how various biomechanical, macrosocial, and circumstantial (or contextual) parameters combine and interact so as to produce different forms of written communication. These parameters intersect in such ways as to englobe not only what is writable, but also what is readable, neither being possible without the other; and in order to map out a semiological theory of writing, Harris devotes the main body of his book to investigating how the three parameters contribute to such a theory by outlining its three "nuclear components":

- a theory of written communication;
- a theory of the written sign;
- a theory of writing systems.

We shall look more closely at these component theories, but before doing so, it is useful to highlight what is surely one of the most original and innovative features of this theory of writing: namely, the fact that, as Harris takes his distance from the idea that the written sign is the visual equivalent of the spoken sign, and as he does not adopt any of the typologies based on the widely-held evolutionary view of writing with their phoneticist bias (i.e., the development from pictograms through ideograms and then from phonetic scripts to alphabetic writing), he gives special prominence to the particularities of written communication in its graphic dimension—an aspect of writing all too readily assimilated to the "linearity" of speech and, in the case of Saussurean linguistics, revealing a confusion between the visual and the temporal resulting from the superimposition of the linear on the auditory (cf. *Reading Saussure* 70ff.). By setting forth criteria for a clearer apprehension of the graphic qualities of writing and by incorporating into his study a wealth of anthropological and historical information relative to writing practices in cultures other than our own, Harris has succeeded in opening the way to a broad view of writing that embraces the phenomenon, not only in its glottic forms, but also in its mathematical, musical, and other forms, while at the same time making possible the confrontation of writing with other forms of graphic expression.

In the chapters devoted to the theory of written communication, Harris identifies the key biomechanical features that distinguish written communication from spoken communication with such incisiveness as to lay bare many of the received ideas about writing and to recast the issue in a compellingly new light. It is widely considered, for example, that writing is the transposition of auditory signs into visual signs. Harris argues, however, that what distinguishes the two forms of communication from one another is not the auditory versus the visual, but the use, in writing, of tools and particularly of prepared surfaces—that is to say, of instruments from the macrosocial domain having biomechanical implications for both writer and reader: writing surfaces can be wax tablets, blocks of marble, papyrus scrolls, sheets of paper, or

If the conventions of horizontal and vertical alignment in the alphabetic writing of Western languages enable us to read (ii) following the same order of words as (i), these conventions are subtly subverted in (iii), where the graphic distribution of the letters cannot be accommodated to the patterns of speech without a considerable degree of equivocation. Harris discusses this case together with a number of others of a related nature, including examples drawn from advertising and nonalphabetic writing as well as from graphic objects such as maps and charts and even the three-dimensional system of Braille writing, the aim being to identify the graphically-determined fundamentals of the syntagmatics of writing. Such a syntagmatics would include, first, both an external and an internal syntagmatics of graphic space. Hence, a road sign with an arrow pointing in the direction of the destination named is an example of external syntagmatics, while the relation between a picture and its caption is an example of internal syntagmatics. Within internal syntagmatics, the author further distinguishes between the horizontal and the vertical *alignment* of characters (i.e., their position relative to one another within a grid of squares on the graphic space) and the *direction* of writing: where on the writing surface does the writer (and reader) begin (center, top left, bottom right, etc.), and in which direction is he or she to proceed (to the left, to the right, upwards, downwards, diagonally)? Curiously, the only "linear" writing is in the form of a spiral starting from the center (a possibility exploited by some forms of poetry, but with examples going back as far as the Phaistos disc in ancient Crete). Most writing systems, however, follow a straight line between two points, so that in order fully to exploit the space available, the writer (and reader) begins in one corner of the graphic space with the possibility of moving to the left or to the right along the rows and, independently of that, upwards or downwards along the columns in such a manner that a line can be drawn from the initial character to the last (top left to bottom right for European languages; top right to bottom left for Chinese). Furthermore, due to geometrical constraints involving biomechanical factors that are totally dissociated from the syntagmatics of speech (barring the significant exception of traditional verse forms), the line is necessarily broken at certain points and continued in the adjacent row or column.

By granting a primordial role to the surface in the theory of writing, Harris has provided a basis of considerable interest for rethinking the nature of written communication. The features of graphic space that condition the biomechanics of writing represent a powerful and necessary corrective of the supposed linearity of the signifier, a pervading theme in linguistic thought that has tended to conflate the signifier of writing with that of speech and one that has contributed (notably in literary circles) to a proliferation of ill-founded conceptualizations of both the signifier and the text. Few will come away from the experience of reading *Signs of Writing* indifferent to Harris's insights into the divergent forms of temporality in the spoken and in the written sign,

or to the graphic configurations of the written text, which are not merely a corrupt imitation of spoken discourse, but an integral part of written communication itself.

A theory of writing must ultimately come to grips with the theory of the sign. Harris has approached this issue by placing the written sign within the scope of the integrational theory of signification, as distinct from the surrogational and the structuralist theories mentioned earlier. He singles out two types of signs as being of particular relevance to the theory of the written sign:

the token, based on one-one correlations between single items and following a logic of cumulation, such that these items reflect recognition of "another (different) X" (example: notches in a stick to count the number of days; pebbles or any other countable objects can serve the same purpose);

emblems, based on one-many correlations making it possible to group items into classes and to follow a logic of replication, such that this type of sign reflects recognition of "the same X again" (example: proper names, and particularly the signature, which has no equivalent in speech, as it lies at the convergence between a specific individual, the act of signing and a specific form). (*Signs* 71-73)

These elementary types of sign, based on cognitive principles that clearly set integrational semiology off from the biplanar principle of the arbitrary versus motivated relation between signifier and signified in structuralist theory, frequently combine to form *duplex* signs, as is the case with money, for example, where each coin is a unit of currency that is both replicable and cumula-ble. Thanks to the resources of graphic space, writing, more than speech, makes systematic use of duplex signs, as briefly illustrated by the following two ways of presenting names in a telephone directory:

NELSON, Demetria
NELSON, Duane
NELSON, Gary

on the one hand, as opposed to:

NELSON, Demetria
Duane
Gary

In the first list, "NELSON" functions both as a token (each occurrence corresponds to a given individual) and as an emblem (it serves to distinguish this group of individuals from others having different surnames); in the second list, however, only the latter function comes into play.

Harris notes that the use of duplex signs in written communication is "a very general" point that the writing of languages shares with other forms of visual communication such as musical scores and mathematical equations, for

the duplex sign is a contributing factor in the organization and economy of semiological space and thus constitutes one of the fundamentals of the syntagmatics of writing.

Although these insights into the theory of the written sign clearly open up perspectives on the semiology of writing that merit further research and discussion, they also leave a number of vital issues unresolved. For instance, are we to suppose that, while signs are the product of the integration of human activities within the context of communication (rather than abstract entities), and while tokens and emblems occupy a fundamental place in integrational semiology, they constitute the basis for a full account of other types of signs? How are we to understand tokens and emblems as they appear in spoken communication? Would it be useful, as some authors have proposed, to consider spoken communication as "discourse" and written communication as "text"? And how are we to specify the relation of the token/emblem pair to the influential distinction between type and token, or to the Peircean type/token/tone (legisign/sinsign/qualisign) trichotomy—both of them concepts that partially overlap with the one put forward by Harris? It is on these and similar points that the theory of the written sign enters the least-explored territory of Harris's semiology of writing. It would seem, then, that much remains to be done in order to provide the fully developed integrational semiology Harris's theory of writing supposes, and that while the parameters of writing itself are staked out with exceptional clarity, pointing the way to the integration of writing into human communication in the broad sense, the general semiological framework upon which the theory is based requires further elaboration. It is clear, for example, that integrational semiology stands as an alternative to telementational models, and particularly those of the structuralist variety, postulated on the biplanarity and linearity of the sign, but this is less true in the case of surrogational models. Hence, the "stands-for" element of the sign is singled out as the feature in Peircean semiotics that places it in the surrogational camp, but no mention is made of the interpretant or of semiosis, both of them fundamental to Peirce's system and, together, fulfilling a role that is comparable to the integrational function of Harris's semiology. It would thus seem that, while integrational semiology can in no way be construed as a variety of Peircean semiotics, the possible convergence of the two systems on this point (among others) may well be worth investigating.

Similarly, in taking his distance from communication models such as that of Jakobson, Harris rejects the idea of the encoding/decoding of pre-established information by neutral and homogenous interlocutors; in doing so, however, and in introducing into his semiology the cognitively-based functions of token versus emblem, he would in effect seem to be rejecting communication models derived from information theory so as to renew with Karl Bühler's organon model, based on the poles of representation, expression, and appeal, although Harris himself nowhere mentions this connection (see, however, *La sémiologie de l'écriture* 209ff., devoted to writing and index, which

takes a few steps in this direction). In sum, while it is true that Harris deals with a variety of semiological (and semiotic) questions in his various writings prior to *Signs of Writing*, and while these publications do provide a number of principles that reappear in the present work, contributing to its theoretical background, it seems that Harris's theory of writing can be characterized as the most systematically-developed branch of an integrational semiology still in the process of elaboration—that the theory as it presently stands is less the “testing bench for any semiological theory” (see above) than it is the “launching pad” for such a theory.

Having outlined the biomechanical factors that characterize written communication and the elements for a theory of the written sign, Harris then goes on to take up the theory of writing systems. According to him, “[a] writing system, from an integrational point of view, exists as a set of (typically macrosocial) practices associated with an inventory of written forms” (*Signs* 56). Stated more fully, this means that, due to the importance of contextualization in integrational semiology and to the refusal to see writing as the representation of speech, Harris considers that writing systems are the product neither of conventionalization nor of the fixing of codes. What is required for a theory of writing systems does not consist in an account of how graphic units are correlated with nongraphic media (such correlations result in the codification process of standard spelling, for instance), but, rather, in a typology of the different sorts of writing that includes both the various ways in which writing is deployed within the graphic space available and the scanning procedures required of the reader for processing and interpretation. Harris cites George Herbert's seventeenth-century poem “Easter Wings,” presented on the page in the form of a dove, as an example of how writing is not restricted to representing the sounds of speech; and in a similar connection (in *La sémiologie de l'écriture*), the author concludes a brief discussion of Apollinaire's calligrams by stating: “written communication can create its own means of expression” (136). This point is further developed by the second feature of written communication: the distinction between graphic communication that makes use of script and graphic communication that does not. Hence, whereas charts are based on the distribution in graphic space of marks that need not be differentiated from one another (i.e., tokens), script relies on a repertory of characters distinguishable from one another through their form, a hybrid of the two types of communication occurring in the bar code, composed of alternating dark and light stripes under which are located a series of numbers. And finally, in referring to the simple but easily overlooked fact that, for instance, the sequence of letters *c-h-a-i-r* do not form the same word in English as they do in French, Harris observes that the alphabet, used for writing different languages with differing phonetic features, is not a writing system at all or even a script, but a notation that is adapted to the particular writing system for which it is used. It even occurs that letters can be employed

independently of any phonetic value, as is the case with the seven letters of the Roman alphabet that constitute the Roman numerical system (I, V, X, L, C, D, M).

To a large degree, Harris's theory of writing systems—as indeed his entire theory of writing—results from a careful examination of the graphic dimension that comes into play with the forming and processing of the written word. The role of the surface in writing, together with the syntagmatics of graphic space that set written communication off from spoken communication, as well as the configurations of tokens and emblems peculiar to the written text and the notational character of the marks employed in writing (marks whose functions are not limited to the visual representation of speech)—all of this constitutes a significant reformulation of the “linearity” that, under the influence of Saussurean linguistics, has come to be taken as common to both speech and writing (for further commentary on this latter point, see *Reading Saussure* 78).

A related point to be considered is that Harris's nonphoneticist approach partly explains his insistence that the theory of writing is necessarily a semiology of writing, and not a linguistics of writing—quite possibly an implicit rebuttal of the disparate and inconclusive collection of articles included in a volume entitled *Linguistics and Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*. The divergence between Harris's research and work such as that contained in this volume is explained by the particular linguistic and semiological framework within which Harris is working, for since the overall orientation of the above volume is post-structuralist, it seeks to extend the bipolarity of structural linguistics from the spoken sign to the written sign in an attempt to bridge the gap between the two, as can be seen in the Introduction: “Texts in any medium, transmitted or recorded in any form, are signifying entities or practices which operate through a system of differential relations between sounds or letters” (Fabb 8). Integrational semiology, with its more radical critique of structuralist models and principles, seeks to provide a basis for a theory of writing that takes full account of the semiological implications of those graphic properties that are peculiar to the written sign and are not derivatives, however camouflaged they may be, of the spoken sign.

The consequences and potential effects of Harris's semiological theory of writing are multiple and far-reaching, extending into disciplines and theories too diverse to be discussed in any detail in the present pages. One comparison to be made, however, is clearly that between *Signs of Writing* and Jacques Derrida's grammatology. While both authors refer, with reservations, to I. J. Gelb's *A Theory of Writing*, in which the term “grammatology” (“a new science of writing”) was coined, Derrida sets up a “general grammatology” in place of Saussurean semiology, too closely modeled after the linguistic sign to provide a theory of writing; Harris, also critical of Saussurean principles, opts for an integrational semiology that is more consequent in taking into consideration the contextual features of communication than the fixed-code

models of structural semiologies and that also provides the general framework for his theory of writing—a theory that lies at a critical juncture for all reflection on the sign. Moreover, both authors take exception to the phoneticist bias of traditional linguistic thought up to, including, and beyond Saussure; but whereas Derrida, who maintains that “writing exceeds and comprehends language” and that writing is foreign to voice, and for whom “there is no sign before writing,” sets out to “deconstruct” the metaphysical presuppositions inherent in phonocentrism, or the “absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning” (*Of Grammatology* 8ff.), Harris, who opposes integrational semiology to telementational models of communication, considering a sign to be the product of a situation rather than of pre-established codes, seeks to identify those graphic qualities of the written sign that distinguish it from the spoken sign. To a significant extent, then, although the two authors cover the same terrain, they do so with different objectives and with the use of epistemological tools that are not wholly commensurate with one another.

I shall not attempt here to do justice to the complex issues at stake, but it appears that one of the ultimate and most consequent points of divergence may well spring from the authors' contrasting critiques of Saussure, particularly as concerns the arbitrariness of the sign and the principle of linearity. In order rigorously to dissociate signifier and signified from one another and thereby refute the phonic basis of language, Derrida incorporates into his theory the glossematics of Louis Hjelmslev wherein expression versus content, each with its form and its substance, is substituted for the Saussurean dichotomy. He further advances the notion of “*differance*” to designate the (nonlinear) articulation of signs among themselves in a given order (e.g., phonic or graphic) or between different orders of expression. And in place of the acoustic and graphic image of Saussure's signifier, he adopts “trace”—trace not in a spatial or temporal sense, but as a mark of the “deconstruction of presence” that lies at the origin of all sense. Texts—both spoken and written—would then correspond to chains and systems of traces.

More concerned with the specificity of writing in all of its forms viewed within the framework of the contextual integration of human activities, Harris ultimately rejects the biplanarity and binary oppositions that characterize Saussurean semiology in favor of such cognitively-determined principles as are to be found in tokens and emblems, neither of which can be adequately conceptualized in terms of signifiers and signifieds or of their linear distribution along the signifying chain. In place of the distinctive features of structuralist linguistics (a form of dualism that underlies the correspondence between written forms and sounds), he refers to *analogy* as a category that is fundamental to writing: “The foundation of all writing is the human capacity to recognize and exploit analogies” (*Signs* 194). The implications of this affirmation, however, are not explored in any extensive way, as the matter is taken up explicitly in a short appendix at the very end of the book with only a few observa-

tions as to how analogy intervenes in the biomechanical, macrosocial, and circumstantial constraints that operate on writing. Nevertheless, the evidence does seem to suggest that analogy is a feature of writing that is also anchored in the integrational semiology of human communication (see, for example, *La sémiologie de l'écriture* 115ff., where Harris discusses analogy in connection with Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" and Michel Foucault's resemblances and similarities).

For neither Derrida nor Harris, then, is writing a visual representation or metasign of speech. The consequences drawn from this common position and the theoretical constructs to which it gives rise are both overlapping and divergent in a number of regards, and it appears likely that further discussion would bring the issues at stake more clearly into focus. While Harris has been exemplary in disentangling the written from the spoken, there is nonetheless one point some readers of *Signs of Writing* may find to be a stumbling-block: if it is true that writing (particularly in its nonglottic forms, but also in languages that do not use phonetic writing) has at its disposal an array of means with no exact equivalent in speech, making it largely independent of the spoken word, then how does integrational semiology account for the culturally-induced idea, shared by readers of virtually every description, from young learners of reading to the most inventive of print-oriented bastards, that reading in some way and in spite of whatever evidence can be mustered to the contrary, invests the written text with a voice? The influence of Aristotle and Saussure in this matter notwithstanding, one would be at pains to deny that certain classes of cultural texts—most notably literature—could exist were writing totally devoid of something that, in the ears (or imagination) of the reader, *sounds* like a voice. What is at issue here is not how the text serves as a vehicle for authorial voice (an inflation of the thesis that writing is the visual record of speech), but how, between text and reader, there occurs a dialogue generated within the reader's ear, how reading is a "reading back" to oneself in the reader's own "voice." Although Harris insists on the indissociable link between writing and reading and prefers to speak of the forming, processing, and interpretation of written messages in place of the various sender/receiver models of communication, which he finds unacceptable (cf. *Signs* 64ff.), nowhere does he seem to allow for the possibility that some forms of writing encourage and even depend on the projection of a reading voice into the text, and he in fact insists that reading cannot be characterized as the transformation of a text into the oral mode, be the text read out loud or mentally (*La sémiologie* 158).

The case for aural, in contrast with oral, reading has been aptly argued by Garrett Stewart in *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*. The "phonophobia" that has come in the wake of the Derridean attack on Logos has led Stewart to study the "dyslocutionary" tension that occurs between the phonemic and the graphic signification of such sequences as Tennyson's "silent-speaking words"—sequences that cannot fail to activate the reader's

voice (in this connection, note the presence in the title of Stewart's book of the strategically ambiguous word: "voices"). Play of this kind between phonetic and graphic articulation does in fact occupy a chapter in the history of writing: Augustine, for example, noted that St. Ambrose had the curious habit of reading silently, and it was in the ninth century that the practice of dividing words in written texts first appeared in order to accommodate the spread of silent reading, returning the text to orality, but to an orality removed from that of public oratory. Stewart does not consider writing to be encoded speech or the transcription of an authorial voice, but he maintains that, within the textual circuit of "so-called phonetic writing," letters are "acoustic (though not vocal) signifiers" and that, at the interchanges between words, these letters can prove lexically relevant in the construction of morphemes—whence the practice of phonemic (aural) reading as opposed to phonetic (oral) reading. Accordingly, the phonotext—unlike the nonkinetic graphotext—is "that articulatory stream which the interruption of script at lexical borders never quite renders silent, at least within a single syntactic period broken by no full pauses" (*Reading Voices* 28).

Seen in this perspective, *Signs of Writing* can be said to present a theory of the graphotext, a semiology that, indeed, releases writing from dependency on the spoken sign, but at the same time points towards the signs of reading.

Other Works Cited

- Derrida, Jacques. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit, 1967. Trans. Gayatri C. Spivak. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974.
- Fabb, Nigel, et al., eds. *Linguistics and Writing: Arguments Between Language and Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Gelb, I. J. *A Study of Writing*. 1952. Rev. ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1963.
- Harris, Roy. "Integrational Linguistics." *Proceedings of the XVth International Congress of Linguists, Québec, Université Laval, 9-14 August 1992*. Ed. André Crochetière et al. Vol. 1. Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, 1993. 2 vols. 321-33.
- _____. *The Language Machine*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987.
- _____. *The Language Makers*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.
- _____. *The Language Myth*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981.
- _____. *The Origin of Writing*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1986.
- _____. *Reading Saussure*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987.
- _____. *La sémiologie de l'écriture*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 1993.
- _____. "Three models of signification." *Structures of Signification*. Ed. H. S. Gill. Vol. 3. New Delhi: Wiley East, 1993. 3 vols. 665-77.

- Love, Nigel. "Transcending Saussure." *Poetics Today* 10 (1989): 793-818.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Cours de linguistique générale* [1915]. Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechahaye. Rpt. Paris: Payot, 1972. Trans. Roy Harris. F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1983.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.