As we approach the jubilee anniversary of Jacques Derrida’s *De la Grammatologie* next year, we should consider his claims: voice means presence and that implies post-Platonic metaphysics and the imperial violence of the west. But if we shift our gaze from the voice in general to the vowels in particular, we will be able to see the precise reason for his worries. The history of the voice is the history of vowels. The history of vowels is also the history of efforts to record the voice, and it is a history that raises all kinds of questions about language, what humans are, and the geopolitical divide of east and west.

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