The Grammar of Deconstruction

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> Above all, this [compulsive demand for a purity of language] remains so inflexible that it sometimes goes beyond the grammatical view, it even neglects "style" in order to bow to a more hidden rule, to "listen" to the domineering murmur of an order which someone in me flatters himself to understand, even in situations where he would be the only one to do so, in a tête-à-tête with the idiom, the final target: a last will of the language, in sum, a law of the language that would entrust itself only to me.[1]

Introduction: Is a Grammar of Deconstruction Possible?

"The Grammar of Deconstruction": the title is promising, but runs counter to some of deconstruction's instincts. One of the reasons for this is deconstruction's suspicion of grammar's totality, apparent in Paul de Man's suggestion that "grammatical decoding of a text leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be,

resolved by grammatical means, however extensively conceived." De Man's reservations are further explained in the view that "no grammatical decoding, however refined, could claim to reach the figural dimensions of a text. There are elements in all texts that are by no means ungrammatical, but whose semantic function is not grammatically definable, neither in themselves nor in context."[2] The point is clear enough, even though it emerges from an essay where deconstruction is not mentioned as such, though it is not expressed by the arch-deconstructor himself, Jacques Derrida, and though the punctiliousness that is grammarians' forte might insist on an explanation of why de Man should be regarded as a deconstructionist. The suggestion, quite simply, is that deconstruction is sensitive to those aspects of texts that might remain opaque to grammar, and it hinges on acceptance that the protocols of grammar and the strategies of deconstruction might be irreconcilable. It highlights an incompatibility between grammar's intent on "definition" and deconstruction's propensity to draw attention to what eludes definition.

It is therefore interesting that in "The Supplement of Copula" (1971), where Derrida reflects on certain grammatical and philosophical questions surrounding the verb *to be*, he should choose to witness Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1947) articulating the opportunity cost of grammar's overweening capacity for control: "Metaphysics, which very early on in the form of Occidental 'logic' and 'grammar' seized control of the interpretation of language. We can today only begin to descry what is concealed in that occurrence. The liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation."[3] Consequently to invoke "the grammar of deconstruction" risks not only a contradiction in terms, imposing concerns of description and prescription on a

discourse that is minded more towards the fact that "Language … has within it an illogical element, metaphor" (SC 178), but potentially a cutting down to size of deconstruction's power.

There is another reason why the phrase "the grammar of deconstruction" might be incongruous. It has to do with the possessive case within grammar, with the relation of the *of*. The implied problematic of the proper is what is at issue there. Deconstruction takes the nature of the proper seriously but often does so, perhaps paradoxically, in texts where perceptions of singularity or of any singular appertaining to someone or something are problematized. There is, indeed, a very basic question to consider when thinking about the possessive case – about the issue of the *of* – in relation to deconstruction. It is the following: is there any aspect of the language of deconstruction – indeed, any aspect of anything about deconstruction – that could be viewed as being *peculiarly, singularly, uniquely deconstructionist*? And might such an aspect involve an aversion, within deconstruction, to grammar's procedures: even to its "spirit" and "genius"?

The question would of course not be a keen one were it not for the obvious and commonsensical objection that, excepting the procedures of *fous littéraires* and arguably not even then,[4] no discourse could possibly configure itself without grammar (an issue considered further below). There are, however, two further considerations which ought to be mentioned here. Firstly, *of* is a preposition which at an uncomplicated and commonsensical level signals co-implicated belonging and possession; secondly, familiarity with Derrida's thinking through of the question of the proper in the texts which we invoke below prompts acknowledgement that any *singular* "belonging and possession" becomes particularly thinkable in contexts

informed by deconstructionist-inclined perspectives, or at any rate deconstructionist-tolerant outlooks. So to focus on the *of* relation in the context of a consideration of grammar, which is what articulates the relation of the proper in the first place, and to be doing that while pondering a grammar specific to deconstruction – this discourse which famously constructs its sense of the proper (including what is proper to itself) only in respect of and with respect to the other[5] – becomes a very fraught enterprise indeed.

Consequently "The Grammar of Deconstruction," as a title, appears to promise more than could be delivered. It cues a discussion that must find itself uncomfortably positioned between two contrary styles or procedures. Deconstructive argumentation is typically marked by nuance, reflexivity, and self-awareness. These are key to an understanding of what deconstruction might be, what could pertain to it, what might "belong" to its "possession." Yet grammar, on its part, is hardly nuanced. It names, classifies, structures, describes, and prescribes. Additionally, and unlike deconstruction, it tends to articulate rather than undo, so that in this glib sense it is not radical. Rather, it tends to respect the value of the "correct" over the ethic of the "counter." For these reasons, as well as others we shall consider below, to speak of a grammar of deconstruction is to be already in the quandaries of contra-diction.

The nature of that contra-diction is further complicated by the need not to lose sight of the fact that to identify attributes of deconstruction is not necessarily to discern characteristics unique to this eccentric and ex-centric discourse. Of course, however, "belonging and possession" are most interesting when most idiosyncratically proper, so that it ought then to be asked whether there is anything within deconstruction, and more specifically within the grammar of deconstruction,

that is so peculiar to it that it takes on the nature of a signature. Yet how can something grammatical – and hence something determined by the order of the rule – "sign," unless it is truly unique?

It is here that it becomes opportune to recall that when Derrida writes about the proper he tends to do so in the context of a consideration of language and its effects and/or on the basis of a reflection on the question of the signature. Certain obligatory references can be invoked here as self-evident indications of the issue of the "signing proper-ties" of deconstruction: that is, of the relation of the *of* articulated in a manner uniquely constitutive of a discourse which is, as it happens, attentive to the potential for "de-constitution" within texts, a discourse which tends to undo, to de-construct, to work from the inside to reveal what is other to the self-same, what disturbs "belonging and possession," and thereby what is most threatening to what might be defined by the *of* relation. Hence, for instance, "Signature Event Context" (1972), or *Signéponge* (1983), or "Schibboleth – pour Paul Celan" (1986), or "Counter-Signature" (2004), but also *The Other Heading* (1991), a work which thinks through the difficult relation between the example and the universal, a relation fundamental to grammar and its operations. If we move on from these texts, merely mentioning them rather than reading them, it is not on the basis of that safe appeal, "lack of space" (always a curious escape-clause where what is in question is grammar, which must aim towards an extreme comprehensiveness), but because some important preliminaries to any review of the grammar of deconstruction must be completed.

Accordingly, it bears repeating that deconstruction, which proceeds so often on the basis of the study of style(s) (as of Nietzsche, for instance[6]) or of attention to rhetoric or tone (as of philosophy, say[7]), might well be found to have been very

canny in its recalcitrance to linguists' (as distinct from tropologists') protocols, and to their attempts to find within it any patterns of usage that might be regarded as specific to deconstruction. There is an irony there, of course. For if one deconstructively takes language "literally," not in the form of "linguisticism" of the "prison-house-of-language"-kind, of which deconstruction has so often been accused, but as an ontological plane with a dynamic of its own, as always being "other" or "of the other," might it not mean that one is then first and foremost a "linguist"? Might we not even say a "philologist," in the literal sense of a "student" or admirer of language and of its inner workings, rules, and grammar(s)? Deconstruction would then be a specific "way of speaking," arguably a discourse about discourse. It would be unusually aware that every speaking "about" language must happen in (a) language. Deconstruction thereby becomes a speaking about language, about a language. On these grounds, the temptation for the analogy with grammar is almost irresistible. The analogy would suggest that there is no fundamental irreconcilability between grammar and deconstruction after all. Yet it is also a little *too* beguiling, not least if one remembers that in deconstruction as in translation, where the law of *plus d'un* intrudes, "there is no metalanguage."

That makes it all the more important to proceed in a manner aware that *the propensity to counter the proprieties of grammar is one of deconstruction's properties*. Indeed, it is one of deconstruction's signature-effects. That awareness is needed all the more badly if it is thought that it might be possible to individuate a grammar of deconstruction, one that somehow impossibly lies outside what is generally comprehended as grammar and/or within grammar, and hence that it might be possible to approach that grammar as a legitimate and discrete object of study. It is

an awareness that must also acknowledge the pertinence of an obvious move. This would involve initially considering what might be gained by speaking of a "deconstruction of grammar" rather than a "grammar of deconstruction." That move need not necessarily require extensive reconsideration of deconstruction's early phase and of the importance afforded to concepts of structure or, indeed, to grammatology, which is not feasible here. There are other ways of approaching the issue, as demonstrated below.

The Deconstruction of Grammar: Some Considerations Based on "Grammars"

In remarking more directly the (im)possibility of individuating a grammar of deconstruction, the encounter with one French example, or with *the* example from French – Grevisse's *Le bon usage* (1986) – becomes both instructive and intriguing. This, arguably the standard text on the grammar of French – the language, so to speak, of deconstruction – establishes in its introduction language (*langage*) as the outstanding means of human communication. It goes on, in true "phonocentric" fashion, to define language through sounds as "translatable" into letters, before elaborating on linguistics and grammar and their underlying systems. The study of the rules of distribution of linguistic elements leads to other approaches, notably Noam Chomsky's generative or transformational grammar. This is linked to two further approaches, one culturalist and socio-political, the other psychological and cognitive. Grevisse completes the definitional aspect of its introduction with further distinctions involving phonetics or spelling, lexicology/etymology or lexicography,

and morphology and syntax. Finally, it lists three descriptors of linguistic "reality": semantics, stylistics, and pragmatics (cf. 1-9).

The phrase "the grammar of deconstruction" – a phrase haunted by the shadow of a pointed inversion in its seeming double, "the deconstruction of grammar" – prompts a number of questionings in relation to each of these three aspects. Thus, and to generalize: would a grammar of deconstruction be normative? Would it benchmark how to speak-write "properly" as a deconstructionist (i.e. as a member of deconstruction's "linguistic community"), based on a genealogically historical or diachronic study of pure and original use, "filiation," and "inheritance" – everything that belongs to an "idiom"? Or would it be purely descriptive, working towards a "structure" of deconstructive speaking, laying bare characteristic and shaping elements (within the lexicon, morphology, syntax, stylistics etc.) in any given deconstructive text or utterance? Would it do this with a view to establishing the generative rules underlying acceptable sentences or statements by the community of deconstructionists? Would that be based on a shared idiom between deconstructionists, even a "culture," a "politics and ethics," a "frame of mind and behaviour," "cognitive processes," etc. – perhaps in view of arriving at underlying "universals" (so that the "grammar of deconstruction," as part of a "universal grammar," becomes perceivable – some fancifulness may be permitted here – as an innate, maybe even genetic "predisposition" within humans, maybe even across "*animots*")? Finally, would a grammar of deconstruction be predominantly interested in semantics, syntax, or stylistics?

We cannot be serious, it could well be objected at this point. Surely no-one would take deconstruction or the question of its grammar so literally. But a square approach

to the issue is not without its insights, and it is worth persisting a little longer with this. The equivalent of *Le bon usage* in and for English is probably Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik's *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985). In true "Anglo-Saxon" fashion the introduction is already less prescriptive than Grevisse and starts, pragmatically, from actual usage.[8] It adds a few interesting dimensions, namely the question of exclusion, identity, and the necessarily "unconscious" operation of grammar within the increasingly problematic category of "native" speakers. Grammar, in a sense, is for the "foreign learner": "the native speaker ... does not feel the rules of his own language – rules that he has acquired unconsciously – to be at all constraining; and if ever he happens to be called on to explain one such rule to a foreigner he has very great difficulty" (13). The second aspect of pragmatic awareness arises out of the question of the subject, "authority," and power (or the "cultural politics of grammar," its normativity and its "subjects-supposed-to-know"). Studying the grammar of a foreign language (or indeed one's own language as if it were "foreign") makes it clear that grammar is not (only) something that is "inherent" or "immanent" within a language, but (also) is something that is imposed by grammarians, by social institutions, codes and practices, or by "tastes" and mechanisms of social "distinction" and the production of "cultural capital," in Bourdieu's sense. This latter point is important, and will emerge more prominently below.

Meanwhile there is another intriguing point worth making here. The *OED* in its lemma on "grammar" recalls that the Latin etymon used to refer, via the Old French, simply to "letters, literature, letter, written mark." Only "post-classically" was grammar dissociated from philology (the methodological study of literature and

language) and reserved for the "linguistic portion" of philology, before finally acquiring its modern meaning: "That department of the study of language which deals with its inflexional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage; usually including also the department which deals with the phonetic system of the language and the principles of its representation in writing." Other historical remainders of the semantics of grammar are "the art of speaking and writing a language correctly," and "the fundamental principles or rules of an art or science." It also lists two now "rare" verbs: "to grammar" (used either intransitively to mean "to discuss grammar," or transitively to mean "to ground or classify"); and "to grammarize" ("to give a certain grammatical structure to").

What consequences, then, ought to be drawn from these grammars and from the lexicon's clarifications? We would like to draw attention to three considerations above all.

1. Firstly, a "grammar of deconstruction" would cut across many of the concerns envisaged above. Derrida's occasionally cold and superficial reception within his own "linguistic community", France and *la francophonie*, is arguably due to the "auto-immunity" effect of a language he describes so well in *The Monolingualism of the Other* (1996), and which seems to be all about a certain prescriptiveness in "national" grammars. Who has the right to claim ownership over a language, to exclude usage on the basis of social and/or linguistic "tastes" etc.? As was anticipated above, when the reference to Bourdieu was being made, there is a battle waging within every language about norms and normativity, fought out through grammar amongst grammarians who protect the apparent essence of any language

because of its problematic and unconscious relationship to culture and identity. Perhaps it is because deconstruction unsettles this appropriation process at work in any given language, because it makes grammar conscious or "foreign," that the idea of a "grammar of deconstruction" appears so implausible. Isn't deconstruction precisely what resists (any given) grammar? Deconstruction, in the rare senses excavated by the *OED*, is not easily "grammared" or "grammarized." It is not easily grounded or classified (indeed, it makes a point of its capacity to elude the attempt) and it is not easily given structure (this being one of the first notions it pitched as "deconstructible."). It can only be "grammared" in the most neutral sense contemplated by the OED: that designating a discussion of the grammar of, in this case, deconstruction (so that in that sense this essay would itself be "grammar-ing).

2. Secondly, it is true to say that the issue of foreignness, understood in the key of the "unnatural," bears heavily upon the grammar of deconstruction. As is well known, deconstruction's articulations often work contrarily to what is "natural" to language and grammar, and to what follows the rules. This cannot, of course be the place to discuss the whole question of Derrida's notion of writing as developed since *Of Grammatology*, but any "grammar of deconstruction" would have to position itself within the question of the "rule" (i.e. not only the problematic of "sovereignty" of any given language, as outlined above, but also its virtuality and iterability, the mark, the trace, the spectre etc.) and of "identity" (i.e. the idiom, the untranslatable, the "genius", the "proper" of any given language). Maybe, first and foremost, it would need to ask in which language to talk about (the grammar of) deconstruction? All that almost suggests that deconstruction not only contrives a language of its own, but in some respects becomes a language of its own – certainly a discourse apart –

with its own protocols and practices. By a rich irony deconstruction would thereby render itself amenable to becoming "grammarized" as well as "grammared." In other words, deconstruction's resistance to aspects of its language being comprehended within grammar's protocols, its singularity as a form of discourse, its readiness to work through and against grammar (abidingly and subversively, concurrently): all this is actually, and paradoxically, what makes analysis of the grammar of deconstruction, in all its counters to grammar's "correctness," both possible and worthwhile. Perhaps then there is no escaping grammar, even for deconstruction.

3. Thirdly, the question asked earlier about whether deconstruction's language would be approached in terms of its semantics, syntax, or stylistics can be revisited to indicate that scrutiny of the work of Derrida (we are bracketing here the issue of how coextensive that can be seen to be with the work of deconstruction more generally) has predominantly been levelled not through attention to the grammatical (and sometimes agrammatical) underpinnings of the locutions of deconstruction, but on the basis of an engagement with its key "concepts" or "figures." This point was made as early as 1981 by Barbara Johnson in her "Translator's Introduction" to *Dissemination* (1972), where she explained that with "Derrida's writing, … it is all too tempting to focus on certain 'key' terms and to compile them into a static lexicon." More relevantly for any study of deconstruction's grammar, she then goes on to mention Derrida's "syntax," "allusions," "fading in and out," "multiple coherences," and "non-binary logic" as the main aspect of "Derrida's Styles."[9] This is in keeping with the fact that it probably remains true that introductions to deconstruction proceed through a collection of key words ("lexemes") flagging concepts and figures like *différance*, supplement, *hymen*, phonocentrism,

pharmakon, (phal)logocentrism, event, *destinerrance*, *arrivant*, hauntology, spectropoetics, monolingualism, *mondialatinisation*, and many others. There is of course a lot of merit in that approach, as in recent attempts by Charles Ramond or Niall Lucy to establish a Derridean "vocabulary," a conceptual "semantics of deconstruction," so to speak.[10] However the deconstructive angel's ways of doing things with texts and words might well reward enhanced attention to idiosyncrasies of, say, syntax or morphology. And it certainly would not do to forget Rodolphe Gasché's remark that the letter of Derridean deconstruction has always set out to "prove the irreducible excess of syntax over semantics," or his view that Derrida's is a "*complex* continuation of Husserl's project in *Logical Investigations* of a universal and a priori, in short, 'pure logical grammar.'"

Towards a Grammar of Deconstruction

Gasché's remark is intriguing. However, this essay's concern is not with Husserlian perspectives or any universal, aprioristic, transhuman-yet-all-too-human dimensions to a grammar that might be shown to be amenable to Derridean revisitation. The issue of a pure, logical grammar is relevant, of course, but we are working here at a more exploratory level. We must also warn, in what is the midpoint of this essay, that we do not address other very cogent models of grammar, for instance Wittgenstein's or Chomsky's. This essay offers instead some prefatory considerations assisting in moves towards a grammar of deconstruction. It concerns itself with what an attention to the grammar of deconstruction might reveal about:

   (1) the possibility of identifying a grammar proper to deconstruction at all;

(2) the coextensiveness of such a grammar with Derridean strategies involving style, rhetoric, tone, etc.

(3) the manner in which a grammar of deconstruction could be seen to run *counter* to any "straightforward understanding of grammar," and hence,

(4) the extent to which it might then almost as a consequence force through a rethinking of what needs to be encompassed and reconceived within grammar, and the inevitability of grammar being re-conceptualized as a consequence of the encounter with deconstruction.

The first of the four points above has already been broached in the above section; we therefore move on to the second point.

The correspondences of a putative grammar of deconstruction with questions of style, rhetoric, tone, etc. References to grammar in guides to deconstruction and studies of Derrida's work are relatively uncommon, and unsustained where they exist. This is the case even in a number of otherwise excellent studies on Derrida's style and rhetoric, which all more or less try to capture and analyse Derrida's "tone" and "voice" – if not "syntax." For Rudy Steinmetz, for instance, Derrida's work is a "rewriting of metaphysics" which exploits "the neglected resources of language."[11] The plurality of "styles" in Derrida's writings constitutes a "composite ensemble of playful writing" (8). As a self-professed "geneticist," Steinmetz brings together the individual's "style" (his "genetic" – not to be misunderstood in a purely biological, evolutionary or deterministic sense – biography of a particular "subject") as it "intervenes" in the language system, all the while being defined in turn by the space language opens up to this intervention (11).[12] Steinmetz's notion of "styles" is thus to be understood as dynamic in the sense of linguistic and discursive

"transformations" within the metaphysical tradition of writing which problematize the traditional primacy of thought over language. Instead Derrida's stylistics is based on a "plurality" that oscillates "at the very heart of the subject and the always unstable relation it has with its 'own' experience of language" (13). However, according to Steinmetz a diachronic dimension also comes into play. He argues for the existence of three different stylistic phases in Derrida's writing, which nevertheless remain true to the same founding principle: "the originary *différance* under whose guidance writing obeys the double principle of repetition and transformation" (13). These three phases are an early "programmatic" period dominated by a "neutral" style governed by an "ethics of decision" (14); a second more "ludic" phase dominated by an "aesthetics of dissemination"; and a third, "nostalgic" phase, whose style is governed by a "poetics of invocation" (14). As powerful as this description and classification of Derrida's writings may be, Steinmetz's study remains pitched at a relatively conceptual and philosophical level of analysis. This is quite extraordinary for a work on "style" or even "styles," for any overt concern with stylistics and indeed grammar is underplayed. This reproach also applies to the otherwise impressive study by Marcos Siscar, which is a lot more technical and rhetorical in its vocabulary but which still privileges description of how Derrida's and deconstruction's conceptual content corresponds to formal actualization through the trope of "necessity" (i.e., the argument that holds that what Derrida has to say could only have been "expressed" through a specific style…).[13]

The other exception to the conceptual-semantic focus on Derrida's work can be found in Marian Hobson's *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (1998), which analyses "the relation of argument to mode of writing" (2). Hobson's claim is that a pure

lexical approach – the focus on Derrida's "lexemes" – needs to be supplemented with a syntactical study. The meaning of Derrida's philosophical argument is not just lexically expressed but depends on syntactical choices and patterns. Two tests can be used to prove this, namely "translatability" (i.e., To what extent is Derrida's peculiar and often subversive use of French an intrinsic aspect of his argument, thereby becoming, strictly speaking, untranslatable as such?) and "summarizability" (i.e., To what extent do Derrida's arguments lend themselves to summarizing? Or does their complexity necessitate almost repetitive commenting, as for example is usually the case in explanations of *différance*?). Hobson calls these "articulating patterns" in Derrida's writings his "syntax." It is these patterns that constitute the network-like coherence in Derrida's work. It is a coherence she also locates in "a repeated form of one element of Derrida's discourse, one philosophical problem, with another" (3)). In her syntactical analysis of some of Derrida's key texts Hobson then focuses on what she calls "the relation between the empirical and the transcendental" (or genesis – matters of event and act – as opposed to structures, which form our mode of knowing what we know (7)); "duplicating strategies of writing," such as "irony and quotation" (or "replications" which account for the high degree of reflexivity and spectrality in Derrida's writing); "singularities" (which arise out of the question of repetition, identity and iterability); and the use of "negatives" (usually combined with a double bind, aporia or "stricture" around the "possible-impossible"). It would be impossible here to engage in great detail with Hobson's notion of "syntax," something already begun by Geoffrey Bennington. We would however like to point out, with Bennington, that a clear distinction between "lexemes" and "syntax" as Hobson claims does not necessarily apply, and particularly so in Derrida's writing.[14]

A Derridean "lexeme" like *différance*, for example, is not confinable to any semantics but also immediately puts to work a pragmatics, i.e., it "says" something at the same time as it "does" something (and in its particular case the relation between saying and doing, differing and deferring, maybe constitutes its "singularity" but also undermines the distinction between lexical and syntactical meaning).

It could be contended, therefore, that specific instances of conceptual undecidability and aporia in Derrida's writings might be approached through an enhanced focus on grammar. The relation between the tropology of deconstruction and its syntax would then become a central concern. The scope for that arises from the fact that underlying and modulating deconstruction are subtle syntactical elements that undermine any easy conceptual "packaging," e.g. *contre*, *plus d'un*, *or*, *entre*, *comme si* and many others. These others include conjunctions, adverbial phrases, pronouns, affixes, etc., sometimes referred to as "syncategoremata."[15] They also include punceptuality, portmanteau words, and word formation through morphemic aggregation. What is curious, of course, is that many of these strategies are practically "untranslatable." In fact, they contribute to the core problem of translation in general and of any translation of Derrida's writings and thought in particular. They contribute also to the cliché, not without its pertinence, that the grammar and language of deconstruction deliberately stand outside the commonplace. The "grammar of deconstruction," it can therefore be argued, is what makes the genius of Derrida's texts fundamentally true to the problem of articulating what is only singularly communicable. In that respect, Siscar's concern with the "necessity" for deconstruction's language, and hence its grammar, being what it is

takes on increased relevance. The suspicion arises that the grammar of deconstruction *has* to be different, *différance*-aware, and counter to grammar "straightforwardly understood." That recalls the third point flagged earlier, to which we now turn.

The manner in which a grammar of deconstruction could be seen to run counter to any "straightforward understanding of grammar." In addressing this issue it is probably wise to follow the common, if problematic, distinction of the various aspects that linguistic grammar entails: among others, an abstract system of rules; a lexicon (or the paradigmatic axis of any language system); and syntax (the syntagmatic axis). To each of these aspects we shall connect an "example," as either discussed by Derrida or present as usage in Derrida's texts: idiom, homonymy, and what could be called "shifters" [*embrayeurs*]. This list is of course far from complete. Further obvious syntactical and grammatical peculiarities of Derridean deconstruction would include interlingual "puncepts" (the Joycean "he war", or "*oui* [we], *nous*", or the discussion of Hélène Cixous' "*or*"); word formation (compounds and affixes like "carno-/phallo-/logo-/centrism" or "archi-," etc.); portmanteau words (like "*destinerrance*" or "*animots*"), etc. All of these are linked by what we advance as the underlying "grammatical" principle of deconstruction, namely the "possible-impossible translation."

But let us proceed with consideration, in turn, of idiom, homonymy, *embrayeurs*. Hence, deconstruction's (grammatical) understanding of language is of course neither descriptive nor normative. It is "idiomatic." One of the best texts to clarify what Derrida means by "idiom" is probably a short interview with Évelyne Grossman. Starting from the idea that language cannot be appropriated, Derrida says:

"What I try to think is an idiom (and the idiom, precisely, means *the proper*, what is proper to) and a signature in the linguistic idiom that at the same time causes one to experience the fact that language can never be appropriated."[16] What is here said in relation to Celan's radically "idiomatic" use of the German language resonates with Derrida's analysis of his own problematic relation to his monolanguage in *Monolingualism of the Other*. It is a caringly deconstructive resistance to the appropriation of the idiomatic by cultural political forces and ideologies like institutions and nationalism. At the same time it is a kind of "grammar" that wishes to protect the singularity of what is most idiomatic of a language, not in a normative, but rather in the opposite sense: of linguistic "genius" and maybe the poetic "event." Derrida refers to Celan's "scarring" or "wounding" of the German language: "within the German language, he welcomed a different kind of German, or other languages, or other cultures ... an 'inhabiting a language' where one knows both that there is no home and that one cannot appropriate a language ..." (100). Ironically, what is most "proper" to a language, most idiomatic of a language, is its radically specific openness to other languages, or its "unappropriability": "what is most idiomatic, that is to say, what is most proper to a language, cannot be appropriated" (101). It is also what resists translation and hence constitutes the singularity, the (un)grammatical "essence," or "the signifying body" (102) of a language. What could be called the singular understanding of "grammar" within deconstruction refers to this "political difficulty": "how can one be in favor of the greatest idiomaticity ... while resisting nationalist ideology?" (102). Deconstruction could thus, in fact, be understood as a specific form of philology, namely one that advocates a "love" of what resists translation without "yielding to nationalist policies." It is, without a simple

understanding of loyalty or "fidelity," a cultivation of the singularity of the idiom and, because of that singularity, the impossibility of its appropriation or belongingness. The experience of a "grammar of deconstruction" then involves what Derrida calls the "spectrality" of language: "There is a sort of spectral virtualization in the being of the word, in the very being of grammar" (104). The focus thereby falls on how gain of identity through loss, singularity, and iterability is the inheritance, the condition of being born into a language or languages, which a grammar of deconstruction would "regulate" or rather "generate."

Within the parameter of this problematic idiomaticity, there is thus the question of an impossible "fidelity," undecidability, or aporia, both at the lexical and the syntactical level, as Derrida explains in a conversation between him and Hélène Cixous.[17] "Oui, au commencement il y a le mot. À la fois nomination et vocable ... Tout me revient, mais depuis la langue – qui se passe de moi en passant par moi." ["Yes, in the beginning there is the word. As a name as much as a term ... Everything is mine/comes back to me, but from language – which passes me by (does without me) by passing through me.]" Starting from a "trésor lexical et syntaxique …. Ce qui me guide, c'est toujours l'intraductibilité: que la phrase s'endette à jamais auprès de l'idiome. Le corps du mot doit être à ce point inséparable du sens que la traduction ne puisse que le perdre." ["a lexical and syntactical treasure .... What guides me is always untranslatability: let a sentence forever be indebted to the idiom. The body of the word must be so inseparable from meaning that translation cannot but lose it."] It is this that Derrida calls "homonymy" (which in Derrida's usage contains both homophony and polysemy, the plural relationship between one signifier and its many possible signifieds).

The homophonies within a language, one could say, are what constitute its idiomaticity, singularity, and untranslatability, but not in view of any "purity" but "always already" in translation (e.g. within "one" language). Again, there are countless examples in Derrida's texts where a homonymy is used as a kind of (lexical or syntactical) "shifter" [*embrayeur*, strictly speaking, "clutch," i.e. "the changing of gear"], to highlight a "necessary" undecidability, an impossible coincidence of meanings which calls for a "*fidélité à plus d'un*." "*Plus d'un*" – the irreducible "homonymy" of "no longer one" and "more than one," of impossible identity and uncountable plurality – is Derrida's non-sensical, counter-intuitive "definition" of deconstruction: "*plus d'une langue*."[18] In terms of grammar, which whether descriptive or normative is normally about the system of rules that "protects" the identity, correct usage, purity etc. of a language, this definition of "*plus d'une langue*" is impossible or non-sensical (a "*contresens*"). How to imagine a grammar that would do justice to the idiomaticity and singularity, the "genius" of one language while at the same time allowing for the resistance to appropriation, the being shot through with other languages, the more than one, the impossible identity of a language to itself and its community? Or, put differently, a "babelized" grammar which would nevertheless protect the most intimate "mark" of the idiom, a grammar as translation *and* idiom? A grammar of the "*plus d'un*," it would surely be "*plus d'une grammaire*" and would require the kind of impossible "double affirmation" at work in a "*fidélité à plus d'un*." The only fidelity in the face of a double bind of the kind of the "*plus d'un*" is the fidelity towards this infidelity, the double imperative, the double affirmation, the "yes, yes." On the other hand, this impossible grammar

would also be the most universal and the most politically "just" approach to the question of translation, whether linguistic, cultural, or otherwise:

> Je cherche toujours, dans le respect "sacré" de l'idiome, une chance politique universelle, une universalité qui ne soit pas l'écrasement de l'idiome. Est-ce possible? Cela ne pourrait être possible que si on accorde déjà à l'idiome ce que vous avez rappelé de l'être avec. L'idiome n'est jamais le propre ou l'identité à soi du propre, il est déjà différent de lui-même, il n'est qu'en différence.[19]

> I always seek, in the "sacred" respect of the idiom, a universal political chance, a universality that would not crush the idiom. Is this possible? This can only be possible if one already grants the idiom what you recalled about the being with. The idiom is never peculiarity/property or the selfsameness of the proper, it [the idiom] is already different to itself, it is only in difference.

Strictly speaking, shifters or *embrayeurs*, after Jespersen, Jakobson, and Benveniste, are elements within language whose meaning only arises out of the reference to a specific utterance, a specific context. Usually these linguistic elements are pronouns (like *I* and *you*), possessives (*my*, *your*, etc.), spatial and temporal adverbs (*here*, *now*), or the devices of modality (e.g. expressed through modal verbs or tenses or adverbs that reflect the speaker's or narrator's "attitude" to the utterance). What makes shifters such a fascinating and indispensable linguistic category is that they normally guarantee extralinguistic reference. They are anchoring points that are supposed to disambiguate statements by contextualizing them in some given identity or presence. Of course, they cannot guarantee this. The classical case is the pronoun *I*, whose singularity (it can only ever refer to the first person speaker of the statement) is nevertheless dependent on its necessary generalizability (in order to speak as a subject one has to be an "I"). The structure of an "I" is therefore a paradoxical "general-singular." All shifters are structured in this way because that is

their main function. In referring to a here-and-now, a present self-identity that is never fully actualized, their grammatical status is thus a kind of "spectrality." They momentarily allow subjects to link themselves into and phase themselves out of a linguistic context. It seems that Derridean usage of homonyms, the untranslatability of the idiom, is an attempt at accumulating and forcing this shifting process and its spectrality.

If that holds, a grammar of deconstruction cannot be about the universal applicability of some kind of method, or the sum of any deconstructive lexicon or syntax. Deconstruction is not predictable and not subject to rules or regulations. In that sense it advances by being first of all the deconstruction of any given grammar. Nevertheless, it also knows that the universal arrives through the singular. Justice, for example, as undeconstructible "universal,"[20] must pass through the singular and unappropriable idiom. The event, or change, happens both in and to (a) language, or, as Derrida says, "to make revolution, language, vocabulary and grammar must be changed."[21]

This connects with the fourth issue raised previously, i.e., *the extent to which deconstruction might almost force through a rethinking of what might need to be encompassed and reconceived within grammar, and the inevitability of grammar being re-conceptualized as a consequence of the encounter with deconstruction.* The point cues our conclusion. For after all the evidence above it is surely not too abrupt to say simply, in conclusion, that the grammar of deconstruction is the untranslatable but universal grammar of *plus d'une langue*: against grammar but all for it, an entirely other grammar, *a counter-grammar*.

Indeed, it is tempting to precisely there, and leave it at that. There would be a certain appropriateness in such a close, especially in a collection like this one where the title *Contre Derrida* sets up such a neat fit in terms of deconstruction's "counter-grammar" corresponding to generalized patterns of countering in Derrida's work. However, it is worth specifying a little more precisely – almost as a grammarian might, *pour ainsi dire* – what the intellectual gains of considering the grammar of deconstruction might be. At its most straightforward, such consideration creates an evident opportunity to analyse certain aspects of deconstruction's discourse which, as indicated above, have remained relatively under-commented. In a moment like the present, where after Derrida's death there is a poignant timeliness to seeking to understand more deeply those devices and aspects of his writing most directly responsible for making his work so momentously challenging to discourses like philosophy or literary theory, that opportunity is all the more welcome. It is worth noting that in the end deconstruction's challenge to "disciplinarity" depends on a *disciplined* taking of liberties with the most *disciplining* dimensions of language, grammar. For that reason, to work towards a grammar of deconstruction is to build up highly developed regimens of awareness of deconstruction's embeddedness within philosophies and codifications of language it occasionally recognizes and occasionally counters: "[I]f we consider the history of philosophy as one great discourse, a powerful discursive chain, is not that history immersed in a reserve of language, the systematic reserve of a lexicology, a grammar, a set of signs and values? And once this is so, is not the history of philosophy limited by the resources and organization of that reserve?" ("SC," 177). More crucially still, such a grammar would foreground the inevitability of coming up against deconstruction's

engagement with, *and deployment of*, language's capacity to subvert the understanding of the proper understood in the twin and potentially conflicting senses of correctness and singularity – for there can be no understanding of the logic of *plus d'une langue*, or indeed of *plus d'une grammaire*, without the appreciation that deconstructions of grammar proceed, always already and *de facto*, according to a grammar of deconstruction. It is to understand better the manner of that "according," and in order to gauge whether a *de jure* dimension to that might counter-intuitively be glimpsed, that it makes sense to work towards a grammar of deconstruction.

That cannot be attempted without losing sight of what is most proper in all this not to deconstruction but, it could be said, to Derrida himself, to his person. The epigraph to the essay cues the insight. It is an insight that has something to do with the idea that "Transcendental means transcategorial." ("SC," 195). The epigraph suggests that the way to the proper lies through going beyond "the grammatical view." It involves responding to "the domineering murmur of an order" proceeding from language. Countering sense, that murmur is in the nature of a call to what is most singular within the self-same. In that respect, to read the record of the response – the response which can sometimes coincide with deconstruction at its most searching – is to be haunted and exiled by our own engagement.[22] This idea of a "law," the proper, entrusting itself "only to me," interpellating what is most individuatingly proper in the self-same, is in the end the most economic and poignant formulation that the grammar of deconstruction, properly speaking, articulates the linguistic space for the paradox of being beyond any "grammatical view": the countering view, beyond generality or rule, where what offers itself to Derrida's rarest, most singular discernment is the possibility of a "he" who "flatters himself" to

understand the other, the idiom of language's "last" and most uniquely summoning

"will."

Notes

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 47.

[2] Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 15-16.

[3] Jacques Derrida, "The Supplement of Copula: Philosophy before Linguistics," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1972), 179. Page references to this essay will henceforth be prefaced by "SC" within the text.

[4] On this issue, see Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), and André Blavier, *Les fous littéraires* (Paris: Cendres, 2004).

[5] On this point see, for instance, *Monolingualism of the Other*, or "Shibboleth,"   -- but the issue resurfaces frequently in Derrida's work, not least in the context of his commentaries on Levinas, and referencing it comprehensively is impracticable here.

[6] See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[7] See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P. Leavey Jr., *Oxford Literary Review* 6. 2 (1984): 3-37.

[8] See Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London : Longman, 1985), 12ff.

[9] Barbara Johnson, Translator's Introduction to *Dissemination*, by Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xv-xviii.

[10] See Charles Ramond, *Le Vocabulaire de Derrida* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001), and Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

[11] Rudy Steinmetz, *Les Styles de Derrida* (Brussels: De Boeck-Wesmael, 1994), 7.

[12] For an introduction to genetic criticism, see Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden, eds., *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[13] See Marcos Siscar, *Jacques Derrida – Rhétorique et philosophie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

[14] See Geoffrey Bennington, in *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 180-96.

[15] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 244.

[16] Jacques Derrida "Language Is Never Owned: An Interview", in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 99.

[17] Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, "Du Mot à la vie : un dialogue entre Jacques Derrida et Hélène Cixous", ed. Aliette Armel, *Magazine littéraire* 430 (April 2004): 22-29; see particularly 26-27.

[18] See Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un – mériter d'hériter où la généalogie fait défaut," *Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (Autumn 1998): 224.
[20] See Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3-67.
[21] Jacques Derrida, "Countersignature," trans. Mairéad Hanrahan, *Paragraph* 27.2 (2004): 24.
[22] We are grateful to Simon Morgan-Wortham for his ideas on this point.

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