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GUNKEL'S DECONSTRUCTION: BETWEEN THE FETISH AND THE NEED FOR A DIALECTICAL RENEWAL

Abstract. The purpose of the essay is to critically analyze the influence of J. Derrida's deconstruction on David J. Gunkel's book *Deconstruction* (MIT Press 2021). Gunkel's handbook is aimed at making deconstruction a tool of critical thinking accessible to non-professionals. It turns out that accomplishing this task comes at the expense of precisely the critical potential of deconstruction itself. Gunkel is well aware that his arguments are sometimes superficial and overlook deeper problems that should be addressed. Such a failure takes the form of a fetishistic denial, which in psychoanalysis is summarized by the formula "I know well, but all the same." In turn, deconstruction itself, insofar as it is separated from Kant's transcendental philosophy and Hegel's dialectics, becomes an academic ideology. Restoring its proper subversive potential can only be done by returning to a philosophy of reflection, in which the thinker himself must ultimately consider his own position as an author and bring it under criticism. This is the path that Gunkel avoids, because he could then no longer be the author of a handbook on deconstruction, rather than someone who practices deconstruction.

Keywords: deconstruction; dialectics; fetish; subject; reflection

1. Introduction. 2. What should deconstruction not be confused with? 3. What is deconstruction, then? 4. Explaining Gunkel's failure. 5. Deconstruction as the repetition of dialectics. 6. *Deconstruction* as a fetishistic denial. 7. The tragedy of writing a handbook. 8. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

David J. Gunkel's undertaking to explain in a clear, systematic, and at the same time condensed form what deconstruction really is and how it should be understood is indeed a hard task. Gunkel is deeply aware of this difficulty, which he cleverly elevates to the rank of a philosophical problem in itself. By doing this he continues a unique – one could argue, the only proper – philosophical tradition in which the exposition of a philosophical theory becomes itself

a philosophical problem. In this tradition, philosophy acquires its autonomy by posing a fundamental question about the conditions of the possibility of the subject-object relation (Žižek 2011, 9), that is by asking what it means to write and speak about something. It remains to be seen whether Gunkel tries to give an answer to this question, and in general to what extent can philosophy succeed in this task at all even if confrontation with it is unavoidable for its own survival. I would like to propose here the idea that if a text about a philosophical theory, such as the Gunkel's, tries to capture its own conditions for being a proper philosophical text – for having a reflexive structure, in other words – it can do so either in the manner of a fetishistic denial or by developing its central problem to its extreme implications, when, unable to control the infinite movement of *différance*, inevitably fails. In the latter case, the failure is the evidence that the author's own position has been scrutinized and put to the test in a confrontation with the object. The reflexive nature of the author's own position in the text is then accomplished precisely through this peculiar failure. Gunkel's book proceeds in the former way. However, had he not rejected the dialectical method reformulated under the influence of deconstruction, he could have followed the latter path, which is much more critical and therefore more interesting.

Before turning to this central issue, it should be noted that it is undoubtedly an advantage of Gunkel's *Deconstruction* – even if he ultimately adopts a fetishistic approach – that the author doesn't avoid these fundamental problems in a book published in the Essential Knowledge Series of the MIT Press, which aims to “offer a point of access to complex ideas for nonspecialists.” The usual way to carry out such a task is to popularize a theory in such a way that it does not address the very problem of what a theory as such is, thereby sparing readers from getting involved in complicated and “unnecessary” problems in order to provide them with practical tools to understand and change the world. Deconstruction, Gunkel

notes, has been generally afflicted with this error (especially in the ideologically arranged American academy), which results in denying its entire essence. Despite being fully aware of the possibility of committing this error, even drawing the reader's attention to it, precisely because of that Gunkel does not overcome it. The question arises whether non-specialists should be overburdened with excessive inquisitiveness, which is likely to remain inconclusive. In other words, the question concerns the costs of engaging non-specialist readers at a deeper level. If this would amount to providing theoretical tools, it would be inconsistent with the tenets of deconstruction. In fact, it would confirm and strengthen the author's position, who supposedly has such tools at his disposal. The issue would only be whether he knows how to popularize them well.

David J. Gunkel is known mainly for developing a philosophical approach to issues in information and communication technology (ITC). Gunkel's work shows a thorough knowledge of the field of ICT, in addition to engaging with current philosophical debates, first and foremost as the editor of the *International Journal of Žižek Studies*. In his own words, applying deconstruction to ITC led him "to update, rework, and/or reiterate that basic explanation" (Gunkel 2021, 10) of deconstruction, since its common usage and understanding has now moved far away from its original meaning. As a result, the first issue addressed in *Deconstruction* is precisely the common misreading and misunderstanding of the title term.

In order to improve the original notion of deconstruction, Gunkel structures his book systematically. It begins with a "negative" part in which he states what deconstruction could be confused with, but should be differentiated from; then, in the next chapter he clarifies the essence of deconstruction by introducing its two-step logic. Thereafter the reader finds the most important examples of a proper applications of deconstruction made by Derrida's followers. The book's structure, which he calls at the very beginning "the standard operating procedure," should become itself, as Gunkel remarks,

a matter of a deconstruction since the opposition between the abstract scheme and the specific examples cannot remain unexamined within a deconstructionist framework (Gunkel 2021, 13). The last chapter of the book carries out a kind of a costs-benefit analysis. One should also note that at the end of the book the reader can find a useful glossary of the most important terms of philosophical deconstructionism, which is indisputably an advantage of this publication.

In my comments, I will faithfully adhere to the structure of Gunkel's book. After presenting what Gunkel thinks deconstruction is not, what it really is and some proper examples of deconstruction according to Gunkel, I will explore the relation between deconstruction and dialectics and highlight the fundamental problem where they meet each other. Gunkel tries to distinguish deconstruction from dialectics. However, in doing so he misrecognizes their common interest and the dilemma which is constitutive for philosophy itself. This is of the utmost importance because the Hegelian dialectic posed a particular challenge and was a crucial point of reference for Derrida's project. Furthermore, I will try to demonstrate that contemporary interpretations of the Hegelian dialectic owe a great deal to deconstruction, and that the latter, if detached from the former, becomes what it was not intended to be. It becomes a deconstructive method that does not speculatively address the question of the subject using that method and it is thus deprived of its proper reflexiveness – the only feature that could rescue its subversive potential. In his book, Gunkel advocates their separation and thus contributes to this misuse of deconstruction. At the same time, however, he repeatedly points out this danger and poses radical questions which, if taken seriously, could save him from this error. For this reason, his entire argument takes a form that I call here a form of fetishistic denial. Gunkel is fully aware of the pitfalls of his argument, but that doesn't change anything.

2. WHAT SHOULD DECONSTRUCTION NOT BE CONFUSED WITH?

Before Gunkel goes to explain what deconstruction is, he rejects a number of wrong explanations. He chooses this strategy because deconstruction – as it has been already mentioned – has a “rich social life” and lives in many false semblances from which its proper meaning should be extracted. This ‘extraction’ turns out to be itself a problem, for here one cannot refer to the authority of “deconstruction’s father,” Jacques Derrida. Such authority is, as Gunkel notes, itself something rejected by deconstruction. Derrida himself (as well as Michael Foucault) refuted such authority and merely resigned to play this role. Although Gunkel is aware of this problem, he suspends it like several others. This is the first signal of a fetishistic denial, the nature of which will be discussed further. Suspension is its defining feature. In connection to this, however, it is interesting to notice that Gunkel is the author of a particularly brilliant text on the conditions for the possibility of comparing alternative interpretations of Hegel’s thought, in which he defends the originality of Žižek’s interpretation of this philosopher (Gunkel 2008). Here Gunkel signals Derrida’s authorized “death of the author,” but must continue to refer to him in order to reconstruct deconstruction as faithfully as possible. The consequence of suspending Derrida’s problem as the father of deconstruction will be to suspend the problem of Gunkel as the author of *Deconstruction*. This deprives the book of proper reflexivity, which grounds the activity of deconstruction (Gunkel 2021, 85-86).

Gunkel lists five wrong meanings of deconstruction in the following order: destruction, analysis (also discourse analysis), critique in the ordinary sense, transcendental critique, method. I discuss them in a slightly different order, which will allow me to avoid the arbitrariness of his argument. Not only the order is here arbitrary, but the premises of Gunkel’s refutation are also not fully exposed by him. I have therefore divided Gunkel’s criticism into refutations

whose premises are clearly laid out and refutations in which the reader must – paradoxically – trust the author’s authority.

Starting with the former, according to Gunkel deconstruction shouldn’t be confused with a general method. This is because a method implies an opposition of the subject, the author of an action or a cognition and its object. An author has tools at his disposal that give him an advantage over the object, subjecting that object to his control. The objective of deconstruction is precisely to overcome this subject-object opposition. For Gunkel, methods “... are generally understood as roads (from *hodos*: ‘way,’ ‘road’) to knowledge. In the sciences – as well as in the philosophies that scientific thinking patronizes – method is an instrument for representing a given field, and it is applied to the field from the outside.” Conceptualized in this fashion, methods are both instrumental and subjective (Gunkel 2021, 24).

Overcoming the rigid subject-object opposition leads to the conclusion that the object of the deconstruction deconstructs itself, and the subject can only follow this process (Gunkel 2021, 26). In positive terms deconstruction is here characterized as a “strategy(ies).”

Secondly, deconstruction is not an analysis: it is neither the standard analysis nor just the simple discourse analysis, as analysis in general presupposes an opposition between complex and simple. This opposition is indeed the object of deconstruction, but not something that constitutes it. The purpose of analysis in its proper sense is to decompose the complex into its constituent simplest elements.

Rejecting these two misconceptions, we can already grasp something. Deconstruction has something in common with radical doubting or unveiling the oppositions which are constitutive of the usually way of thinking and are therefore taken as given and unquestionable.

It is noteworthy that both method and analysis are not strictly philosophical terms, as they are used in other domains as well. Subjected to deconstruction, they reveal their conceptual and

metaphysical assumptions. We can therefore point out, following Gunkel, that for the procedure of deconstruction every manifestation of life is based on similar metaphysical structures. This conviction underlies Derrida's famous passage that there is nothing outside the text: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (Gunkel 2021, 37).

Traditionally, two types of criticism can be raised when constitutive, taken-for-granted assumptions are unveiled. The first one, skeptical, rejects everything that is ungrounded, taken on faith. The second one, transcendental, examines the conditions under which something can be thought of. Both types of criticism, however, are what Gunkel wants to distinguish from deconstruction. However, the emphasized difference between deconstruction and transcendental criticism is not entirely clear, especially because Gunkel often emphasizes transcendental motifs in Derrida's thought, such as that there is nothing beyond the text, that the relationship with the world is always conditioned by language and its oppositions. Gunkel avoids confronting transcendentalism, and he also avoids the problem of the subject. That is, he avoids confronting with his own position.

Gunkel distinguishes deconstruction from the concept of destruction. He states that the aim of deconstruction is not to demolish anything, even if this term is derived from the German destruction that appears in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Gunkel 2021, 15). But it is also not meant to construct anything new. In fact, its aim is to think beyond the destruction-construction opposition.

The whole section of Gunkel's book devoted to distinguishing deconstruction from procedures and concepts that are usually confused with it is of rather questionable value. On the one hand, the author confronts the pressing issue that deconstruction has become such a widespread term that its meaning has moved far away from its original meaning and intentions. He tries to address this problem without resorting into purely academic and hermetic considerations. On the other hand, the reader has not yet been presented with

a “positive” version of deconstruction; hence, he is forced to trust the author without being able to scrutinize the premises of his argument.

In view of the prevalence of the false meanings of “deconstruction,” two strategies could be adopted. Gunkel faces here a dilemma. He could either faithfully explore how these false appearances deconstruct themselves and thus abandon the conventional handbook form, or he could rely on the author’s authority to reject such false interpretations in light of a positive and correct understanding of deconstruction. However, since Gunkel has not yet given a positive account of deconstruction this option would prevent him from remaining faithful to the deconstruction strategy.

3. WHAT IS DECONSTRUCTION, THEN?

The decision to approach deconstruction through a negative path is understandable insofar as the positive path is not easier. Traditionally, this would take the form of the sentence $x \text{ is } y$. However, it is precisely this sentence type that is the basic structure of the metaphysical thinking that is the object of deconstruction. The formula $x \text{ is } y$ expresses the law of identity since it establishes a relationship in which some entity acquires determinacy and unambiguity by assigning a predicate to it. The logical law of identity leads to the law of non-contradiction. The unambiguity of a term obtained by assigning a predicate to a subject follows from the exclusion of the opposite predicate being assigned to it. Deconstruction trying to overcome any kind of unambiguous identity shouldn’t be using the structure that serves to establish it.

For Gunkel, as it was already mentioned, deconstruction is a general strategy “by which to engage with and respond to the binary oppositions of metaphysics” (Gunkel 2021, 34). Oppositions, lets us repeat that, structure metaphysics (as well as any kind of thinking and practice) in such a way that the predicates mutually exclude each other: being/nothing, inside/outside, mind/body, male/female, self/

other, light/darkness, natural/artificial, and so on. Gunkel claims that the aim of Derrida's deconstruction is to overcome these oppositions for two reasons. Firstly, binary oppositions seem to be inadequate in view of the richness of our experience. They reduce every phenomenon to *x* or not-*x*. "For this reason, binary opposites often seem to be unable to represent accurately or to capture the rich experiences of empirical reality, which always seems to complicate simple division into one of two options" (Gunkel 2021, 38).

This first objection seems completely inadequate, especially because in the preceding section the author introduced a structuralist concept from which Derrida extracts the conclusion that there is nothing beyond the text. In other words, if we accept this conclusion, we can't just say that there are structures limiting our thinking and that there remains an experienced reality which is outside such structures.

Secondly, opposite terms, being always hierarchically arranged, exercise power. As Derrida argued: "We are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (Gunkel 2021, 38).

The consequence of such a power, for which Derrida forged the term "phallogocentrism," is exclusion, marginalization, and oppression. Unfortunately, to pin down the nature of this mechanism Gunkel relies on a simplification that removes him from the tenets of deconstruction. Namely, he says that the one who controls the oppositions that organize the debate, thereby controls social life. However, the problem here is that no one is able to control them, to treat them as adequate means of achieving pre-selected goals. Oppositions control both those who are subject to power and those we think exercise power. The aim that, according to Gunkel, Derrida has in mind seeking a way to overcome binary oppositions that are essential to the ubiquitous structures of metaphysical thinking, certainly fit the expectations of the book's presumed audience, but contradict the critical disposition of deconstruction itself. One could even say that

deconstruction arose as a reaction to this kind of prevailing type of criticism in the 1960s. Discussing the context in which Derrida's philosophy emerged, Descombes writes: "Derrida has no objections to a reductive formula such as 'philosophy is the ideology of western ethnos,' except for the fact that to say it is impossible. The formula is essentially meaningless, and also, therefore incapable of producing the critical effects attributed do it" (Descombes 1979, 137).

Nevertheless, it is still worth summarizing Gunkel's two-stage deconstruction strategy. It is primarily adopted to avoid two dangers associated with the metaphysical system of thinking:

1. "To attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language. Here, one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, relifting (*relever*), at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs."
2. Difference – "To decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference ... thereby inhabiting more naively and more strictly than ever the inside one declares to have deserted, the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground" (Gunkel 2021, 42).

The ethical aim of deconstruction, then, is to undermine Western metaphysics in a truly effective way, to open it up to radical otherness. Getting caught up in its internal problems and measuring it by its own standards, i.e. showing inconsistencies and internal contradictions will only strengthen this metaphysics. It can be treated as an ideology only by finding a ground that will sooner or later turn out to be metaphysical itself.

The first step to undermine the power of binary oppositions is to reverse, overturn their hierarchy. In Derrida's words this means "to bring low what was high." However, this gesture, although

revolutionary is not sufficient, for after it, things still “resides within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it” (Gunkel 2021, 43). It is therefore required a second step called “displacement.” Its result is the emergence of a new concept “that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime” (Gunkel 3021, 44). This new concept is a consequence of the fact that a text in the broad sense, as the object deconstruction is dealing with, is itself ambiguous, which in the first place means that there is no such absolute point (cognitively attainable or not) from which it could derive its meaningfulness. For Gunkel, an example of this third concept is “deconstruction” itself, which operates beyond the opposition destruction-construction. After a first phase which inverts the hierarchy construction-destruction into destruction-construction, follows a second phase marked by “... the emergence of a brand new and exorbitant concept. The novelty of this concept is marked, quite literally, in the material of the word itself. ‘Deconstruction,’ which is fabricated by combining the de- of ‘destruction’ and attaching it to the opposite term ‘construction,’ produces a strange and disorienting neologism that does not fit in the existing order of things” (Gunkel 2021, 44).

Gunkel does neither consider nor even approximate the exact logic of this third term. The whole operation looks like a magic trick. This would be difficult to do otherwise as the motives for practicing deconstruction, as mentioned above, have been presented unfaithfully with respect to its own assumptions. It should also be mentioned that the fourth chapter of the book is entirely devoted to discussing other examples of deconstruction in action. There, we find deconstructive triads in which arche-writing as the third term emerges from deconstructing the voice-writing opposition; virtual emerges from the real-illusory opposition; remix emerges from the original-copy opposition; and cyborg from the organic-technology opposition.

These examples certainly give some idea of what the deconstruction strategy looks like in practice, but this pragmatic goal is achieved at a significant cost. This cost consists in renouncing to address the problems signaled by Gunkel in this publication and developed in his other works. One might suspect that since Gunkel has hinted at these problems, even naïve readers can feel treated protectively by being deprived of serious consideration of the issues.

4. EXPLAINING GUNKEL'S FAILURE

One may ask to what extent the deficiencies of Gunkel's book are the direct consequence of the very idea of producing a handbook on deconstruction. The answer to this question concerns the relevance of such a philosophical statement, taking into account its conditions. This is therefore a speculative question, as suggested at the outset. This is because it alludes to the conditions of what can be said and what cannot be said, as Gunkel states while commenting on Žižek's philosophy: "this means explicitly recognizing the way what comes to be enunciated is always and already conditioned by the situation or place of enunciation" (Gunkel 2008, 18). This takes us back to Descombes' comment about how Derrida reacted to the statement that philosophy is an ideology of the European ethnic community – how it is possible to express this conviction? Moving on to this, we necessarily return to considering things in a transcendental way, although transcendentalism has been distinguished from deconstruction by Gunkel. Transcendentalism, by asking about the conditions of possibility of the subject's reference to the object, paves the way for dialectics, which, as Gunkel also knows, radicalizes it and draws extreme consequences from it. In the first case, the question of the conditions of possibility of the subject's reference to the object is successfully answered through the concept of "the other side," which guarantees the coherence of the world – the effect of the projection of transcendental subjectivity onto the structure of the thing itself. In

the second case, the subject is entangled by the contradictory nature of phenomena and is divided between the positive and the inherent remnant of negativity that is the subject itself. This negativity is always represented in the text or argument as its ultimate failure, a sign of the fact that the text is reflexive to the point that it indicates the impossibility of mediating the subject's position in positive terms, through the category of cohesive identity.

It seems that it is precisely the framing of deconstruction in this context – rather than a subversive strategy for dealing with the text – that allows it to rescue its philosophical radicalism, nullified by the form in which it is presented in Gunkel's book.

The relationship between deconstruction and dialectics, which are both derived from the assumptions of Kant's transcendental philosophy, can be conceived in the following way: it is deconstruction that allows dialectics to be freed from the traditional teleological interpretation. In turn, dialectics, by raising the question of the subject caught up in the conditions of the possibility of an articulation, prevents deconstruction from being reduced to a mere toolbox for social criticism and activism. This is a popular interpretation, as in Gunkel's book, due not to the author's reputation or arguments, but to the form in which deconstruction is presented.

To discuss the latter point, it will be useful to consider how Gunkel defines dialectics and distinguishes it from deconstruction.

5. DECONSTRUCTION AS THE REPETITION OF DIALECTICS

I shall now consider in detail the relation between deconstruction and dialectics in *Deconstruction*. It is significant that Gunkel discuss dialectics only after presenting the general principle of deconstruction with its reversal of the hierarchy of binary oppositions and introducing the third term. He does not consider dialectics in the *Going Negative* section, where he says what deconstruction is not and what it should not be confused with. This is intended to emphasize that dialectics

has a special place. This is not surprising, because its close relationship with deconstruction is already indicated by the fact that in both cases there are oppositions and a third term. Moreover, it is worth recalling that Derrida himself admitted that his deconstruction is perhaps indistinguishable from Hegel's dialectics; he even claimed that Hegel can be considered as the first deconstructionist provided his philosophy is interpreted differently than mainstream accounts (Kowalska 2000, 376).

Gunkel points out that the dialectical triad cannot be treated as if three distinct substantive components were involved in it. He rejects this misinterpretation and states that dialectics is about a process, a movement, which, moreover, has no definite end, being an ongoing circular process. This is where the work of deconstruction begins, attempting to break out of this closed circle. Its third term in is not meant to be a third term that resolves and reconciles the contradiction between the first two terms, but one that shows that from the opposition of "a" and "not a" something still remains. Contrary to what the law of the excluded middle proclaims ("if not-a, then necessarily a"), deconstruction shows that any construction of such mutually exclusive oppositions breaks down, since the condition for its possibility is something third that constitutes the breach. While the simple thinking in terms of binary oppositions obeys the law of identity, deconstruction shows that the condition for the possibility of any identity is its intrinsic non-identity, its infinite differentiation from itself, the *différance*.

However, it is precisely the differentiation of something from itself, the attribution of the foreignness, otherness to a self-referential identity that is already a principle of the dialectics. Many contemporary interpretations of dialectics, including those of Žižek, Malabou (a disciple of Derrida), and Ruda accentuate precisely the presence of an unbearable remainder. For Žižek, such remainder is the figure of the king in Hegel's *Philosophy of right* (Žižek 2008, 83ff), for Ruda it is the rabble (Ruda 2011) from the same source,

for Malabou it is nature (Malabou 2005, 67) that is freed from the absolute at the end of Hegel's *Logic*.

These interpretations depend on Derrida's critical work. The advantage of deconstruction's "repetition of dialectics" is that it frees the latter from teleological interpretations prevalent in French philosophy of the postwar years. Deconstructing by struggling not simply against Hegel, but, in Derrida's words, against "a certain Hegel" (Kowalska 2000, 75) allows his philosophy to be given a critical motivation that goes beyond supporting a narrowly understood communist project, as usually assumed in secondary literature. Without Derrida and other thinkers rejecting the idea of a closed dialectical circle and a gradual, albeit necessary progress, such contemporary interpretations of Hegel would probably have never appeared.

6. DECONSTRUCTION AS A FETISHISTIC DENIAL

What is the advantage of showing that deconstruction falls into the tracks of dialectics? Let's start with the fact that Gunkel devotes a distinguished place in his book to the comparison of dialectics and deconstruction. To articulate the principle of deconstruction, Gunkel introduces the reader to its widespread false appearances and to such key trends as structuralism and post-structuralism. Dialectics is introduced only after deconstruction itself has been described. This is a traditionally philosophical strategy that gives deconstruction more than just a philosophical context for better understanding it (as in the case of structuralism and post-structuralism). In this regard, it is significant that, although Gunkel is familiar with Žižek's interpretation, he does not mention it in the book. The reason is that Gunkel wants to emphasize more the difference between dialectics and deconstruction, thus giving the latter a more essential overview. This is a strategic distinction. Not only it doesn't allow the reader to get an insight into new interpretations of dialectics (which is not the task of this book), but above all it impoverishes deconstruction

itself, depriving it of the opportunity to confront the problem of philosophical utterance as such, to confront the possibility and impossibility of speaking, that is, the subject's position as the one who speaks. Ultimately, the question of *différance*, the infinite self-differentiation of identity, is linked to the concept of reflection. For Derrida, this term enables one to think about the difference in a way other than as the negative moment of positivity (as it is usually ascribed to Hegel). However, this kind of *différance* treated as a distortion of identity can also be found in Hegel's idea that the cognition of the object finds itself within the object as the object's distortion, its nonidentity (Žižek 2006, 246). This in turn leads again to the concept of the subject, rejected by Gunkel. The identity of an object is, therefore, distorted by the subjective perspective, included and transformed within the object. One cannot measure in any objective way the scale of this distortion.

Had Gunkel chosen to follow this path, all the extraordinarily important problems he posed in his book about the conditions for the possibility of defining deconstruction, using the positive formula "*s is p*", the problem of distinguishing true deconstruction from its incorrect interpretations, the problem of the author's authority, etc., would have been solved. But he has not: one gets the impression that in *Deconstruction* Gunkel adopts a fetishistic strategy toward these problems, which can be summarized by the formula "I know well, but all the same ..." (Mannoni 2003, 68-92). Fetishism in the psychoanalytic interpretation means that the subject denies the existence of a problem in order to maintain control over himself and his world. Gunkel is aware of the importance of these problems and that addressing them would change the entire structure of the book, but he does not allow himself to be guided by the internal dynamics generated by these problems. Such an approach is precisely the one required by dialectics. However, in order to proceed in this way one endangers the position of the author as the one who has a full control over the argument of the text and must allow himself to be surprised.

It is not out of the question that, finding himself in such a position an author would feel forced to abandon the handbook project expected by the publisher.

7. THE TRAGEDY OF WRITING A HANDBOOK

The publisher's expectation of a handbook on deconstruction for a wider audience has been satisfied by Gunkel, who has, indeed, written a book in which deconstruction is juxtaposed with a variety of important philosophical concepts, and includes a very clear and well laid out glossary. However, Gunkel lost the opportunity to reflexively elaborate the problem of trying to meet the publisher's requirements with a handbook on deconstruction that in a way does not possess the standard features of a handbook. Writing a handbook on deconstruction that presents it as an established topic, as one theory among other theories, as a tool and a method collides with the understanding of deconstruction as precisely the kind of writing that challenges this – it is a tragic situation. “I know well, but it changes nothing” seems to say Gunkel several times. Dialectics offers a non-fetishistic way out of this situation. According to dialectics, the tragedy of a speaking, writing and philosophizing subject is precisely what must be mirrored in the text itself, along with the conditions under which the subject speaks, writes, and philosophizes. However, such a mirroring of the tragic situation of the subject never creates a full, closed circuit and totality like a handbook. Instead, it points to a specific remainder, that is a remainder as the mark of the subject.

8. CONCLUSION

What might such a reminder be in the case of a philosophical text? It is perhaps just academic jargon that resists popularization. The purpose of the book is to question the conviction that deconstruction is exclusively an academic practice, cultivated in the “ivory tower”

(Gunkel 2021, 10). However, denying this is precisely a kind of fetishism – it amounts to denying that an academic practice truly is an academic practice that should not necessarily translate into the language of another practice in a controlled way. The idea of such a translation presupposes a subject who has control over the language and is able to construct equivalences between the terms of different jargons from a neutral standpoint. Such a control presupposes the juxtaposition of the subject and the object, operator and tool, and perpetuates itself in the American academic ideology which has absorbed deconstruction precisely as such a tool (Gunkel 2021, 19), contributing, as Gunkel diagnoses, to spreading incorrect ways of understanding it. Paradoxically, the most non-ideological way out of this situation is to treat deconstruction as an exclusively linguistic practice that does not need to be translated to non-academicians, although it may invite them to read a text that will be subversive and productive but not at the expense of a systematic argument. This, however, would entail that one would not be able to popularize deconstruction as a useful tool for achieving practical goals, which presupposes – to repeat – the existence of a subject that controls the intended goals and the means of achieving them effectively. A good dialectical lesson from Kant's primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason, which fails to achieve any satisfactory results, would be to show that the theoretical reason should not be subordinated to the practical reason, but rather that the latter constitutes the very failure of the theoretical reason to which the reader can be invited, with no promise of any practical profit. In this vein, Gunkel responds to the potential charge that deconstruction offers no definitive answers by claiming that deconstruction is about asking the right questions rather than reaching a conclusion (Gunkel 2021, 86). However, such questions should not be posed formally, but should engage the whole figure of the author. This will not be avoided by the concept of his death. Following death, after all, specters remain.

Derrida's dilemma of how to successfully overcome the terrain of metaphysical thinking could be adopted to Gunkel's situation. For Derrida the two strategies explored above are insufficient, for they both assume that the subject has control over meaning and its criteria. In particular, the strategy discussed in the previous section does not enable the subject to be decentralized together with his aims and tools, and thus perpetuates the metaphysical structures. In his essay on Bataille, *From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve* (Derrida 2001, 317-350), Derrida argues that looking for such a strategy yields surprising consequences that are not simply the expected profit from investment, in which there is always a reserve that marks the subject's foreignness to himself. Comparing the two inadequate strategies to the case of writing a handbook, one can either, as Gunkel does, accept that this book form can be used to popularize the tools of criticism, or recognize that this is in itself a corrupted task and reject such an enterprise by "abandoning the terrain." In both cases, however, we are dealing with an author who strictly sticks to the meaning of his action. Deconstruction proper, similarly to the endeavors of theoretical reason, can achieve something only through its failures. Fidelity to such a radical thinking is lacking in Gunkel's book, in which the controlled popularization of the critical tool wins out.

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