DERRIDA’S DECONSTRUCTION AS A METHOD OF ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE

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Chapter IV

'Deconstruction is violence'

- Derrida

THE LOGIC OF DECONSTRUCTION
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4.1 The Structure of Norris’ Approach

We owe to Christopher Norris for the distinction between the rigorous (philosophical) form of deconstruction and the non-rigorous (literary-wild) form of deconstruction. The reason for the animus against the wild variety is that they cannot provide a model for literary criticism. They are hostages to misfortune in the way postmodernists are. Both are counter-theorists. His attack on post-modernism is aimed to prove ‘what is wrong with it’ (Norris, 1999). The raison d’etre of the alternative rigorous form vindicates that the logic of deconstruction is deeply embedded in the logic of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but has its own characteristic features. While the wild variety presupposes no interface of philosophy and literature, or the lack of it, the Derridean variety is a candidate for such an interface, as much as the early analytic philosophy. The last two chapters were devoted respectively to understand Wittgenstein’s overtures to deconstructivist mode (textual affinity thesis) and Quine and Davidson’s deconstructivist logic (logic of indeterminacy). In a sense, this proposes collectively that Derrida can be approached from the side of analysis. But it does not follow that Derrida is an analytic philosopher. What on the other hand needs to be examined is
whether Derrida can saunter towards the school of analytical thought. This is the prime motif of Norris to demonstrate: deconstruction is logical and analytical enough to sustain a rigour in philosophy.

Norris’s basic intention is to vindicate a view according to which there is an ‘analytical divide’, between deconstruction on the one hand and hermeneutics on the other. Such an analytic divide suggests a contrast which carries far-reaching implications for the interface between philosophy and literature. One chief implication is that while deconstruction can sustain such an interface, post-modernism undermines and wrecks it. This is the reason behind the critical theorists’ response as seen in their leveling of the genre distinction by offering transcendental types of a meta-narrative. The thesis about the analytical divide is sustained by holding that while deconstruction has the conceptual sources to sustain an interface, post-modernist lacks them. This ultimately leads to the conclusion that deconstruction belongs to the same range of discourse which Habermas terms as the philosophical discourse of modernity, but it strains one’s credulity to thing so. Thus Norris is forced to take a stand on these developments but invariably he makes a failed attempt to fit everything into his scheme.

In this context, he advances a ‘mitigating’ argument, but fails. The argument is stated as follows:
1. Counter-postmodernist premise: Deconstruction is not a philosophical offshoot of the wider post-modernist or counter-enlightenment drift; (169)

2. Protagonist Habermasian premise: Deconstruction belongs to the same genre of philosophical discourse on modernity (modernism is regarded as unfinished project); (170)

3. Conservative premise: Philosophy is still a discipline with its non-distinct mode of conceptual or analytical rigour (to which Derrida can conform);

4. The analytic premise: Kant is the basis for the ‘rigour’ in analytic outlook.

Norris proceeds to repair (1); catapults Derrida to the Habermasian mode of discourse. So Derrida is a minimalist Habermasian who can reflect on the myriad domains of rational discourse that includes deconstruction as well as postmodernism. He wants to push back Derrida to the analytical fold in (3) and pushes analytical philosophy also into the fold of philosophical discourse of modernity so as to draw the conclusion that Derrida is a Kantian analytical philosopher as any other; so it transpires that Derrida is a ersatz Kantian whereas Habermas is a superficial one. But he conveniently overlooks that postmodernism itself is an offshoot of analytic temper.
What transpires from the above is that all these domains of discourse are on par with each other such as the one represented in the following triangle.

Norris misses what lies enclosed within the vortices, namely, language. While the mainstream (or early) analytic philosophy takes it in the direction of language-world interface, deconstructionists take it in the direction of ‘technics’ (the interface of writing (écriture)/speaking or logocentric/phonocentric) (we take the later binary relation as the immediate consequent of the former binary relation). The former sense of analysis requires certain deep structure (logical forms) while the latter sense of ‘analysis’ requires certain ‘depth’ forms (binary proposition). As such they are to be located on the outskirts of different vortices. But then postmodernists as well as critical theorists can be said to be engaged in similar ventures of binary opposition without succumbing to any Kantian ideals of conditions of possibility of language, communication, or rule-following. If we stretch further, the game of binary opposition, we find that the conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility provide a slot for
a binary opposition (at the ‘quasi-transcendental level’) and thus the underlying Kantianism goes by default. What Norris fails to notice here is that the binary opposition between normal (serious) / deviant (non serious) or rule-following and rule-violating (Kripke) is acceptable across a spectrum of devices including the architecture of human cognition.

This is equally true of the ‘conflict’ or ‘contest’ between faculties or ‘phrase-regimes’ (pure, practical, judgemental form of reason). Dr. A. Kanthamany has yet to earn the credit for introducing agon (Pace R. Bernstin) in this context, which means ‘controversy’. It transpires therefore the deconstructive logic in its binary form, inevitably leads to the agon. As Kanthamani has shown that this is not missed by Lyotard but the same is missed by Norris both in his readings of Derrida as well as his readings of Lyotard. Thus, Derrida is undoubtedly Euro-centric, but incredibly Kantian. Now the way Norris valorizes deconstruction at the expense of the other two varieties such as post-modernism and critical theory demonstrates that a cultivated understanding of the relation between is still far-off. Given the fact that he casts the vote in favour of Kant for the ancestry he cannot reinstate Kant whose paradigm is decisively rejected by all. Nor his credentials for realism are not in doubt. But in recent times, Norris has developed a certain ‘amnesia’ about Kantianism but not about realism.
Anyhow now we can see deconstruction can never overweigh the other two mainly because it has the rigour. This has been amply demonstrated by Kanthamani in his critical review by looking at the many of the arguments which Norris advances. No doubt that this line of enquiry in this regard will lead us to the logic of binary oppositions, that is called the ‘double gesture’ calling it as the very peculiarity of deconstruction, but its logic is impeccable. This is what Norris fails to decipher. No doubt Norris is an exemplar in tracing out the rigour of deconstruction. However, it does not mean that deconstruction should not be content simply to invert certain cardinal oppositions (speech/writing, philosophy/literature) so as to leave the ‘inferior’ term henceforth firmly established on top. For this is nothing more than a notional gesture, a reversal that leaves the opposition still very much in place without beginning to shift the conceptual ground wherein its foundations are securely laid.¹

Let us first recount the exposition with all its nuances as Norris gives for the logic before we pass judgment on them. The effective counter to Norris is that whereas analysis and critical theory (hermeneutics) can be naturalized, deconstruction cannot aspire to this position. Derrida is as much willing to admit this and is ready to exorcise the very word deconstruction which is not clearly definable as such. But one can agree that postmodernism and deconstruction share similar platforms against enlightenment ideals so much so that we can agree with Habermas’s observation in the first premise.
A powerful case against Norris can be built on his own premises. The ‘late’ Derrida is thoroughly Euro-centric in his approach to philosophy, sharing a similar ‘public sphere’ with Habermas (9/11) where he talks about the ‘metaphysical hangover’ of the past including the Kantian ‘inheritance’. So also he counter-poses Davidson to Quine in his recent writings, especially his scepticism of translation. What Davidson probably needs according this reading is referential semantics which will ultimately bring Davidson in approximation to the ethics of literary criticism. Even here, Norris’ premises can be countered by holding that Davidson’s ‘malapropism’, that involves violation or ‘circumvention’ of linguistic conventions can equally serve as a prototype of linguistic creativity. So Norris is defeated on his homegrounds. So we can concede that Norris’s logic is right in moving deconstruction towards the top vortex but not at the expense of the others unless he wants to endorse more the analytic rather than the post-analytic reversal. So what boils down from all this is that deconstruction is analytic both in the analytic and post-analytic mode, as shown in this dissertation.

One can reverse the priority by holding that philosophy is (postmodernism, deconstruction and critical theory) as much sensitive to the failure to distinguish between normative (pure) and deviant discourses but the way they come to grip with this may facilitate further differentiation. They all have family resemblance by virtue of their trait and can even exchange roles between them. Norris has as much to concede this in his revisionary outlook

Plato condemned writing and its effects, and upholds the authority of self-present (spoken) truth. Derrida finds that this is a pattern of thought prevalent in the history of western philosophy from Plato, Kant, Hegel, Husserl and other representative thinkers like Heidegger, Marx, Ricouer during the ‘late’ period. By doing this according to Derrida, philosophy refuses to acknowledge its own textual status and aspires to a pure contemplation of truth independent of mere written signs. It reduces writing to a form of mere repetition by means of dead mechanical notation devoid of the true form of knowledge. Rejecting these notions, Derrida states that all these never take us back to the origins and sources and there is no escaping from the ‘logic of supplementarity’.

The attempt to fix an origin for truth and knowledge in Phaedrus is therefore, get entangled in the textual complication beyond its power to predict or control. Deconstruction of Plato’s Phaedrus, therefore works on the failure of the text to achieve what its arguments expressly require. This failure is inscribed in a series of metaphors and figural substitutions that lacks a clear-cut logic of sense. Hence Derrida states that mere inversion of the received order of priorities will not solve the problem, instead ‘writing’ will
take precedence over ‘speech’ and its various associated values. Further, it involves the dismantling of all those binary distinctions by means of which Plato’s text is formed to the point where opposition itself provides the very ground of dialectical reason. ‘Derrida shows with remorseless regularity, this contrast must always undermine its own logic by opposing ‘good’ and ‘bad’ on the basis of a single term – that of writing itself – whose primary (literal) sense is undeniably that of textual inscription. So the ‘good writing, imprinted in the soul, can only be conceived as a metaphor derived from its supposedly derivative opposite term’: metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contaminations of logic.² He also calls the ‘trial of writing’ in the Phaedrus with the ‘trial of democracy’ that occupies Plato intermittently throughout the Republic. Derrida takes Freudian ‘kettle-logic’ as a model for the different logocentric moves. Freudian kettle-logic comes forward with the following contradictory claims that the subject may put for excuse. These are (1) I never borrowed your kettle; (2) It was in perfect condition, when I gave it back to you (3) It already had those holes in the bottom when I borrowed it. In parallel to this, Derrida finds the following logocentric moves. (1) Writing is ‘rigorously exterior and inferior’ to living speech, and cannot threaten speech (2) Writing is harmful to speech since it can put speech and reason ‘to sleep’ and (3) if anyone prefers writing, it is because not of its intrinsic value but because of the finite aspect of the living memory.
4.2 Exploring the Logic of Binary Opposition

Now let us discuss how ‘deconstruction as an event that does not avail deliberation, consciousness or organization of a subject or even of modernity,’\textsuperscript{3} takes place in some of its key terms such as \textit{Pharmakon}, \textit{differance}, \textit{supplement} etc. It is through these double-edged metaphors and the oddly reversible figures of thought that Derrida has traced out the covert textual logic of his enquiry. This what is illustrated by Norris in his handling of the binary opposition in many of the instances, a specimen of which are selected for discussion in the subsequent section. Norris has admirably shown how this leads to the \textit{aporia}.

The Greek word \textit{Pharmakon} is not a mere ‘ambiguous’ term. The ramifications of its sense are everywhere explicit in the dialogue. One could list several meanings and appreciate its richness, subtlety or scope that it imparts to Plato’s text. Literally, \textit{Pharmakon}, in Greek language is a \textit{drug}, either healing or harmful; a medicine; a poison; an enchanted potion, hence a charm or spell; and also a dye or paint. In \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato presents writing as remedial poison, a pseudo-remedy against forgetting, because it distances us from the idea of the thing itself. King Thomus criticizes it as a \textit{Pharmakon} of forgetfulness, saying, ‘you have found a Pharmakon not for memory (\textit{mnēmē}), but rather for recollection (hypomnēsis).’ The \textit{Pharmakon “writing” therefore does not provide a good and real memory. The two chief
senses of the word *Pharmakon* thus becomes ‘poison’ on the one hand and ‘remedy’ or ‘cure’ on the other. Norris cites, this is an exemplar of inimitable logic of deconstruction and tells us,

‘that these two antithetical senses of the word are everywhere co-present in Plato’s text, defeating all attempts (on the part of tidy-minded scholars and translators) to choose one or other according to context. And it is not by chance, he argues that the *Pharmakon* inserts this strange double logic into Plato’s text at the point where writing is explicity on trial, along with all its manifold associated terms. Writing is both poison and cure on the hand, a threat to the living presence of authentic (spoken) language, on the other, an indispensable means for anyone who wants to record, transmit or somehow commemorate that presense.’

Quite contrary to the above context, scholars interpreted the meaning of the word that gives ‘best sense in a given passage.’ They took *Pharmakon*, an effect of analysis that violently destroys it and reduce *Pharmakon* to one of its simple elements by means of paradoxical interpretation with the aim of some ulterior developments that itself has made possible. All these commentators, according to Derrida tries to reduce the *Pharmakon* to one or other of its violently disjunctive senses. They have not done justice to this
word. The word *Pharmakon* thus disrupts the very logic of identity, that opens up a play of semantic substitutions beyond the hope of all conceptual grasp.

There cannot be a Greek word that captures the entire range of meanings connected with the scapegoat-figure as well as a connection with the *Pharmakon* of writing. Here the Greek word in question is *Pharmakos* for which scholars have given different meanings such as ‘magician’, ‘wizard’, ‘poisoner’ and the ‘one sacrificed in expiation for the sins of a city.’ At the same time, for the word *Pharmakon*, the meaning comes as ‘charm’, *philter*, drug, remedy, poison etc. According to Norris, Derrida would seem to have good philological warrant for his thesis that writing is in some sense a *scapegoat*, a necessary evil that society tolerates only in the hope of presenting worse ills. Both terms belong to the same paradoxical system that can take a single word (whether *Pharmakos* or *pharmakon*) and invest it with meanings so sharply opposed as to render its senses undecidable in any given context.\(^5\)

The word ‘*Pharmakos*’, never appears in the course of Plato’s dialogue. However, according to Derrida, its effects can be traced through the logic of displacement or ‘supplementarity’ that governs the text. But the word *Pharmakon* is dealing with a word, which, ‘for all its hiddennes, for all that it might escape Plato’s notice, is nevertheless something that passes
through certain discoverable points of presence. Such a reading is not free from the bounds of lexical self-evidence. Although the word *Pharmakos* is absent in *Phaedrus*, it says that there is no last appeal to the ‘words on the page’ as support for one’s various conjectures. Such a view, according to Derrida, suspends those structured oppositions (inside/outside, present/absent) and serve to delimit the operations of textual commentary. In brief ‘according to Norris, the word ‘*Pharmakos*’ is demonstrably *there* among the lexical resources of the Greek language, and would moreover seem to have played a vital role in Greek thought and culture. So how can we account for its absence in a text where everything points to the *Pharmakos* as key to that the text’s most essential and intricate logic of sense’? To quote Derrida,

> The bad *Pharmakon* can always parasitize the good *Pharmakon*, bad repetition can always parasitize good repetition……… Deconstruction is always attentive to this indestructible logic of parasitism. As a discourse, deconstruction is always a discourse about the parasite, itself a device parasitic on the subject of the parasite, a discourse “on parasite” and in the logic of the “Super-parasite”.

(2) The second deconstructive key term is *differance*, which appears in Derrida’s essay ‘*Difference*’ in *Margins of philosophy* (1982). Derrida coins the term, exchanging “ence” ending for “ance”, with the aim of bringing
together contrary senses of the French verb ‘differer’. This “neographism”, differance stands for the differing and differentiation as well as deferral, detour and delay. These senses are combined so as to discuss the constitution of presence, and thus all that depends on presence within the simultaneous constitution of difference and its deferral. In other words, as stated by Derrida, differance inhabits structures of meaning as both conditions of possibility and impossibility.

In French, the anomalous a of difference registers only in the written form of the word, since when spoken it cannot be distinguished from the common place, received spelling. And this is precisely what Derrida intends: that differance should function not as a concept, not as a word, whose meaning could be finally ‘booked into the present’, but as one set of marks in a signifying chain which exceeds and disturbs the classical economy of language and representation’.\(^9\) Differance or the trace does not present itself, this almost nothing of the unpresentable is what philosophers always try to eraze. It is this trace, however, that marks and relaunches all systems\(^10\).

Differance is the systematic play of differances, of the traces, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the a of differance) indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition, production of the
intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function. It is also the becoming space of the spoken chain - which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing and every passage from one to the other.¹¹

The key point to be noted in the term *differance* is that it does not merely mean the two words differ but it also points out that each word differs from itself. As Derrida says in *Positions*, “Nothing – no present and in – *different* being – thus precedes *differance* and spacing. The two words “cat” and “dog” are alternatively present and absent in the two sentences “the cat on the mat” and “the dog is on the mat”, but while the word “cat” is present in the first sentence and not the second (in which the word ‘dog’ is present), the “cat” nevertheless remains absent. This absence of the referent is what makes a word *differ* from itself and opens discourse to the play of consciousness, a play that deconstruction tries to understand.¹²

Freudian influence can also be traced out in the word *differance*. Derrida’s increasing interest in psychoanalysis was very explicit since his first essay on Freud in 1966 *Freud et la de l’écriture*. After that the *Glas* (1974) comes out, using certain psycho-analytic notions (such as the fetish) in its account of Genet and Hegel. The essay *La Differance* of 1968 (collected in *Margins*) and *La Dissemination* (1972), also immensely reveals. Derrida’s
reflections on the relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction on the basis of the rejection of values of presence, origin and ultimate meaning. Derrida treats the Freudian notion of ‘trace’ (*Spur*) as an inscription of ‘differance’, and finds a way for an analysis, the fulfledged form of which comes out a few years later in the pleasure principle and its deferral through the Reality Principle. Unlike Freud, Derrida argues that the unconscious is not a reservoir of what was once present, but rather a ‘past which was never present and never will be’. Further, it is deconstruction which helps clarify Freud’s notions of the trace and the unconscious, not *vice versa*. Dissemination is another concept which resists what Derrida calls, ‘the effect of subjectivity…… and appropriation’, as it points out the internal self-division of ‘presence’ and disorganizes the unity of symbolic meaning and truth.\(^\text{13}\)

(3) The third deconstructive key term, I intend to explain is *supplement*. According to Norris, there are two senses of the word ‘supplement’, but only one of the senses is squares with this traditional idea of the relation between speech and writing, that is speech. This situation would exist so long as writing was the kind of *mere* supplement or optional feature. In that sense, firstly, the only self –sufficient entity speech could make use of writing despite its limitations as an aid to memory or mass-communication. Secondly a ‘supplement’ is also required to *complete* or fill up the existing lack, the gap in the present order of things. Here writing would have to be
treated as a precondition of language in general. It becomes a necessary supplement and in its absence speech itself could scarcely be conceived. Norris thus states that ‘what Derrida calls ‘the logic of supplementarity’ is precisely this strange reversal of values whereby an apparently derivative or secondary term takes on the crucial role in determining an entire structure of assumptions.’

Thus an enquiry into the logic of supplement together with its history bring us back to the question of genesis that marked the beginning of Derrida’s thinking in 1953. It lead us to the Roussean concept according to which ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are terms which exist in some fixed order of priority and conforms to the logic of identity which in turn is the classical notion of ontology. But the logic of supplement says that the outside be inside ……. that what adds itself to something takes place of a default in the thing, that the default, as the outside of the inside, should be already within the inside etc. In the words of Bernard Stiegler, the ‘logic of supplement’, as a logic of pro- thesis that shows the “truth” of the “inside” to be (in) the outside in which it exteriorizes itself makes the opposition inside/outside redundant. Thus we get the fourth illustration, which makes its appearance once again in ‘late’ Derrida, there he explains how impossibility is lodged in possibility. Let us discuss some of them.
Firstly, the word confession: a confession does not simply involve saying what happened. Here Derrida says that if an individual committed a crime and go to the police and saying “I have committed a crime”, does not itself constitute a confession. It becomes a confession only when, beyond the act of imparting information, I confess that I am guilty. In other words, letting someone know what has happened is not simply confession. There is more to the confession than informing, more than the constative of cognitive saying of the event. It involves a transformation of the individual’s relationship to the other, there he present himself as guilty and say ‘I am guilty, and not only I am informing you of this, but I am declaring that I am guilty of this’. Hence Derrida says that in the confession, there is a saying of the event, of what happened, that produces a transformation. It produces another event and is not simply a saying of knowledge. Every time that saying the event exceeds this dimension of information, knowledge, and cognition, it enders the night – you spoke a great deal of night – “the night of a non-knowing”\(^{17}\). Therefore, saying the event that produces the event beyond the confines of knowledge. The possibility of such and such an event will happen appears impossible.

Secondly, we take how ‘Giving as an event’, discussed by Derrida. The very word close to giving is forgiving is also a form of giving. One cannot forgive a person who has committed immeasurable crime. Forgiving, if it is possible, can only come to be as impossible. But this impossibility is
not simply negative. This means that the impossible must be done. Therefore, it states that “giving or forgiving, if there is any, must appear impossible; they must defy all theoretical or cognitive statements, all “that is that” type of judgments, all judgments along the lines of “forgiving is”, I’ve a forgiving nature, or “the gift has been given”.  

Derrida concludes that the history of philosophy is the history of reflections on the meaning of the possible, on the meaning of being or being possible. The great tradition of the dynamis of potentiality, from Aristotle to Bergson, these reflections in transcendental philosophy on the conditions of possibility- are affected by the experience of the possible and the impossible, the opposition between the possible and the impossible. What we speak here is of im-possible event, an im-possible that is not merely impossible, that is not merely the opposite of possible, that is also the condition or chance of the possible. An im-possible that is the very experience, of the possible.

4.3 The Logic of Undecidability

Norris wants to prove that the conclusion that Derrida is not perversely collapsing or annulling the genre distinction between philosophy and literature as Searle and Habermas blamed, instead he is seeking a ‘leap beyond a certain logic within a logic which he tries to perform and which is so difficult to perform’. This leads him to open a counter to post-analytical logic. He says that unlike Davidson, to whom there is a priori possibility of
comparing or translating between different conceptual schemes, that is, ontological relativity must presuppose the very idea of conceptual scheme, contra Quine, Derridean deconstruction says that there is a priori condition of impossibility for the above according to which there is a world.

‘Deconstruction directly attacks not a thesis but only an argument for a thesis.’

This gets the support from Derrida’s own illumination of ‘logic’ that is stated as follows:

I am trying to elaborate a logic and I would call this a ‘logic’, in which the only possible x (and I mean here any rigorous concept of x) is ‘the impossible x’. And to do so without being caught in an absurd, hanzensical discourse. For instance, the statement according to which the only possible gift is one impossible gift, is meaningful. Where I can give only what I am able to give, what it is possible for me to give, I don’t give. So, for me to give something, I have to give something I don’t have, that is to make an impossible gift.

In another context, Derrida says,

For me, the concept of possibility as something which has to be saved at the moment that it may ruin what we want to save, this ‘possibility as impossibility’, is the most unavoidable argument today. I use the word ‘argument’ in the sense of something
which can be used in a logical demonstration as something convincing, I want to convince.\textsuperscript{22}

But then he is willing to concede that like Godel, Derrida also has exploited the semantic slippage or undecidability. At several points, he has made reference to Godel’s undecidability proof which holds that from any logical system rich enough to generate the axioms of elementary arithmetic there will always result at least one in consistent or contradictory theorem and moreover that any charge introduced in order to remove the anomaly will render the system incapable of generating all axioms required. This is one of the most famous and deeply problematical results in twentieth century philosophy of logic and mathematics.\textsuperscript{23} Derrida’s early writings such as \textit{Writing and Differance}, \textit{Dissemination} and \textit{Margins of Philosophy} constantly makes reference to this “undecidability” and sometimes directly mentions Godel’s proof for its bearing on issues of truth meaning and textual interpretation.

Again in \textit{Dissemination}, Derrida writes specifically as Godel demonstrated in 1931 that “undecidable position”, is a proposition which, given a system of axioms governing a multiplicity; is neither an analytical nor a deductive consequence of those axioms nor in a contradiction with them, neither true nor false with respect to those axioms. \textit{Tertium datur} without synthesis.\textsuperscript{24}
This passage acts as a guiding principle for a writer like Arkady Plotinitsky who finds it as one indicator of the manifold associative links between (1) undecidability in its Godelian (mathematical or set-theoretic) sense (2) Derrida’s usage of the term in various (also highly specific) context of argument and (3) the whole range of scientific, literary and cultural phenomena which can also be described – albeit with some loss of analytical precision – as per taking of a generalized “undecidability”. This generalized “undecidability” explained in the third sentence, Norris says, brings Derrida closer to Bohr, Godel and other prophets of post-modernity who were engaged in undoing the values (like “classical” truth/falsehood distinction) that held sway in the discourse of the western natural and human sciences.

Derrida uses the term “undecidable”, to designate what he defines as unities of simulacrum…….. “false” verbal properties, nominal or semantic, which can no longer be understood in terms of (binary) philosophical opposition, and which nonetheless inhabit it, resist it, and disorganize it, but without ever constituting a third term, without ever giving rise to a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (POS. 58). ‘Undecidable’ stands for one thing and its opposite in one sense, and on the other it is neither one thing nor its opposite. Thus according to Derrida, undecidables are ‘in a rigorously Freudian sense, the unconscious of philosophical opposition’.
Derridean undecidables are not Hegelian *Aufhebung* or *Urteil* or *Meinen* or *Beispiel* which were necessary for Hegel in expressing the speculative dialectic, neither they are a matter of ‘enigmatic equivocation’ or ‘poetic mystery’, they do not stand for any lexical richness instead they stand for a syntactic practice which composes and decomposes them.

The term “undecidability” used by Derrida, is partly had its roof in the philosophy of mathematics. It does not stand for the vague idea used by some literary deconstructionist in connection with textual interpretation. As stated previously, it stands for the formal and synthetical *praxis* that composes and decomposes it. The various deconstructive key terms such as (1) *Pharmakon* in Plato, (2) Supplement in Rousseau, (3) *Parergon* in Kant (4) *Differance* (or differing – defferal) in Husserl etc. are worked on this principle of undecidability whose status is determined not by their ‘lexical richness’ or ‘semantic infiniteness’ nor by their open-ended textual ‘free play’. Instead it is the logical grammar of these words that makes them to function as internal points of leverage for a deconstructive reading. These revisionist proposals, according to Norris, result (like Godel’s undecidability proof) from a willingness to apply the principles of classical logic right up to the point where they encounter some obstacles to thought, some moment of textual *aporia*, which marks the limits of any such approach.\(^{27}\) Norris sustains the rigour of logic with the resources of realism. For he says that Derrida had valid
reasons for revising the axioms of classical (two-values) logic. This is very
evident when he says.

‘Taking into account the fact a name does not name the punctual
simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates
defining a concept, a conceptual structure centered on a given
predicate, we proceed: (1) to the extraction of a reduced
predictive trait that is held in reserve, limit in a given conceptual
structure (limited for motivations and the relations of force to be
analyzed) named x; (2) to the delimitation, the grafting and
regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name x being
maintained as a kind of lever of intervention. In order to
maintain a grasp on the previous organization which is to be
transformed effectively.’

He proceeds the canvas that we should reject Habermas’s attempt to
treat deconstruction as one offshoot a ‘philosophical offshoot of the wider
post-modernist or courier enlightenment drift.’ He also highlights Habermas’s
failure to recognize the extent to which the so-called ‘ordinary’ language shot
through with metaphors, nonce-usages, Freudian parapraxes etc. At the same
time, with proven evidences, Norris recognizes the post-analytic side by
quoting from Henry Staten when he describes ‘how Wittgenstein, like
Derrida, develops a style that is ‘radically errant’, one which effectively ‘un-
lids all the accidence concealed by “normal” uses of words in order to show how many different routes it would be possible to take from any given point in the discourse.’ There is no reason why he cannot agree with Habermas. There are examples for Norris to cite from Henry Staten from which he cannot draw the conclusion saying that Habermas has miserably failed. Norris comments:

‘Philosophy is indeed a ‘kind of writing’, but a kind which (contrary to Rorty’s understanding) cannot be collapsed into a generalized notion of rhetoric or intertextuality. It is unfortunate that Habermas takes his bearings in Post-modernism from a widespread but nonetheless fallacious idea of how deconstruction relates to other symptoms of the so-called post-modern condition. What Derrida gives us is not philosophy’s undoing at the hands of literature but a literature that meets the challenge of philosophy in every aspect of its argument, form and style.’

Further, Norris claims that this very argument, form and style of deconstruction is emanated from the Fregean tradition. Hence it does not reduce logic to rhetoric. It has its own logic and strong foundational proofs for its claims. It is a continuum that keeps the rigour and logic of analytic philosophy. But the context of deconstruction is “limitless”, which is also to
say interminable and indeterminable (or “indecidable”): one is left with *mise en abime* (abyss), or hall of mirrors of contexts. Derrida has claimed that a trait of “deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization.”  

4.4 Deconstruction as the Wider Practice in Analytic Philosophy

The rigour of logic found in deconstruction is very similar to the rigour found in analytic philosophy. It does not mean that deconstruction is analytic philosophy, instead, it can be said that the method of analysis of language found in deconstruction has close proximity to the method of analysis of language found both in analytic philosophy as well as in post-analytic philosophy. Thus a wider conclusion can be drawn in the event of identifying Derrida as an analytic philosopher of language. But Derrida makes it increasingly clear that he disown it however much he is willing to concede that he is a sort of analyst.

According to Frege, referents can only be identified if language and logic between them provide the salient criteria for picking out the object referred to. There is no direct relationship between word, concept and referent. However, naming depends upon a structure of predicative assumptions which point out the object in question with all its details. A similar argument can also be found in Russell’s ‘theory of descriptions’ and in
Wittgenstein’s pronouncement of ‘the limits of my language’, although with a different end in view.

These perspectives of the logico-linguistic traditions also squares with the structuralist emphasis on language as the omnipresent mediating element in all existing orders of knowledge and representation. According to Saussure, it is the linguistic structures that determines our grasp of the world and that the ‘reality’ can only be construed as a product of deep-laid linguistic conventions. The arbitrary nature of the sign, the Saussarean distinction between “signifier” and “signified” and “langue” and “parole” are some of the important structuralist notions that become important at this moment.

There are many common points at which structuralism and logico-linguistics converge and differ. Both Saussure and Frege agree that ‘meaning determines reference’ in the sense that outside language there exists no self-sufficient act of naming. When Fregean logical semantics speaks of a clear-cut referential implication, Saussure had no such objective in view. The linguistic ‘science’ that he had discussed consisted or different linguistic terms that have no absolute grounding in epistemological truth. According to Norris,

‘It follows from the structuralist argument that thought is necessarily constrained by certain regularities of language which semiological theory seeks to explain. To this extent,
perhaps, the Saussurain science of signs implies its own status as a meta-language equipped to interpret and ‘scientifically’ grasp all other forms of discourse. But this is quite distinct from the Fregean claim that semantics as ‘first philosophy’ is uniquely fitted to analyse the very terms of epistemological truth.\textsuperscript{31}

The point can be made explicit taking example from Frege. To him, it is the proper names like ‘Aristotle’, which create all manner of philosophic problem when the conditions that apply to their use as uniquely referring terms is asked. Frege’s answer is:

‘Opinions as regards their sense may diverge. As such may, e.g., be suggested ‘Plato’s disciple’ and ‘the teacher of Alexander the Great’. Whoever accepts this will interpret the meaning of the statement ‘Aristotle was born in Stagira’, differently from one who interpreted the sense of ‘Aristotle as the Stagirite teacher of Alexander the Great. As soon as the nominatum remains the same, these fluctuations in sense are tolerable. But they should be avoided in the system of a demonstrative science and should not appear in a perfect language.’\textsuperscript{32}
Here Frege points out the difficulty of assigning definitive attribute to names like ‘Aristotle’ based on the priorities. It also raises the logical kind of problems in deciding the status of factual propositions. Thus a ‘Fregean analysis is called for to prevent the collapse into logical undecidability which threatens as soon as one makes any statement about Aristotle’.33

In comparison to logico-semantics, structuralism takes a different path to the referential function of language. Its focus of attention mainly rests on the theories or philosophies of language bound up with linguistic convention. It is in this background, the emergence of deconstruction has to be viewed. Derrida sets out to deconstruct the ‘metaphysics of presence’ prevailed in the western philosophy. ‘What Derrida provides – most strikingly in his texts on Plato, Nietzsche and Saussure – is a discourse which combines an extreme sceptical rigour with a wayward, unsettling figurative play its aberrant (or self-deconstructing) moments.’34 By doing this, Derrida shows an unscrupulous fidelity to the letter of the texts to undo the ‘logocentric’ assumptions. The last and most acutely contradictory form of this play between blindness and insight, metaphysics and the textual ‘unconscious’ are expressed in structuralism. According to Derrida, the very idea of ‘structure’ is a metaphor that is handed over as concept and exist as the disseminating power of language. ‘Structuralism’, Derrida believes, ‘lives on the difference between its promise and its practice’. Quite contrary to this, deconstruction
sets out to demonstrate ‘the principled, essential and structural impossibility of closing a structural phenomenology, \(^{35}\) on the following points.

(1) that writing is systematically degraded in Saussurean linguistics;
(2) that this strategy runs up against suppressed but visible contradictions;
(3) that by following these contradictions through, one is led beyond linguistics to a ‘grammatology’ or science of writing and textuality in general.

From the above, Norris attempts to derive a conclusion about the differences between Frege and Saussure in a vain effort to align Frege with Derrida. He says that the Derridean critique of meaning and method was thus totally different from the Fregean attempt to search for epistemological clarity. However, it has a logic of its own.

The notion of ‘meaning determines reference’, acts as a large and potentially unlimited concession which in Derridean terminology is the ‘disseminating’ power of language. Such a perspective within the realm of epistemological reason necessitates a logical semantics which can clearly distinguish between necessary (analytic) structures of meaning and the senses which cannot or need not be thus construed. This is a trend that we can find in recent philosophy. For example, pragmatist Quine, discovered no grounds for preserving the notion of \(a \text{ priori}\) logical necessity. He considered the total field of knowledge at any given time as ‘a man-made fabric which impinges
on experience only along the edges.’ The conflict with experience finally make ‘readjustments in the interior of the field’. Here \textit{a priori} thus are themselves so linked to the total structure of knowledge that they may at any time be subject to revision, the field as a whole being ‘undetermined by its boundary conditions’.\textsuperscript{36} This is the main cause behind the collapse between synthetic and analytic judgements.

Structuralism, therefore, states that it is through language that we get access to the world of objects and experience. The ‘arbitrary’ nature of the sign, the absence of a bond between signifier and signified indicates the existence of a meaning dependent reference and that meaning itself is further bound with structured economy of signifying relationships and differences. Hence there is the general notion that ‘reality’ came into being by means of ‘discourse’ or by signifying practices that are used to explain it.

These activities cannot be considered as a textual free play. Instead deconstruction is the outcome of not mere structuralist thinking but analytic philosophy also has its role for basing its methods on the principle that ‘meaning [sense] determines [or precedes] reference.’ According to Norris, Derrida’s procedure’s are not the less compelling for the fact that they work to question or confound all normative concepts of logic and meaning. His conclusion that his arguments are the outcome of a Nietzschean principled
scepticism, allied to the means of linguistic analysis provided by Saussure, needs a corrective, along the lines indicated in the above.

It is by means of ignoring, suppressing the disruptive effects of language that philosophers have been able to impose their various systems of thought. The purpose of Derrida therefore is to draw out these effects by a critical reading to pick out the elements of metaphor and other figurative devices at work in the texts of philosophy. Here the role of deconstruction in its most rigorous form is to act as a constant remainder of the ways in which language deflects or complicates the philosophers’ project. Further, it works to undo the idea that reason can somehow dispense with language and arrive at a pure, self-authenticating truth or method, the prevailing illusion of western metaphysics. In other words, it is on the radical incommensurability of rhetoric and logic, meaning and structure, ‘naïve’ and critical interpretation deconstruction has taken shape. One wonders whether Norris can draws sustenance from such arguments to build up a narrow view of analysis. It does not, because it is the main plank on which it rests.

4.5 Deconstruction: Architectonics and Spectres

Next he must see how Norris exploits the Kantian motif to further his conclusion. Commentators on deconstruction fall into two groups. Firstly, writers like Rudolphe Gasche who reads Derrida’s work as a radical continuation of certain Kantian thesis. Secondly, thinkers like Richard Rorty
praises Derrida for having put such ‘deluded enlightenment’ notions behind him and arrived at a post-modern pragmatist stance relieved of all metaphysical baggage. These writers are of the opinion that we can’t make sense of Derrida without some knowledge of the relevant intellectual prehistory.

Rortian reading explains how the thinkers from Descartes to Kant on down to have misconceived the philosophical enterprise under the guise that they were giving solutions to the real philosophical problems. On the contrary, Gasche finds Derrida as a philosopher who not only had a critical perception on the previous thinkers especially with Kant, Hegel and Husserl but is centrally concerned with the issues in the realm of truth, knowledge and representation. However, it can be said that Derrida’s thinking is poised against the categorical basis of Kantian argument and also tries to demonstrate what Gasche calls ‘the conditions of impossibility’, which marks the limits of all philosophical enquiry. A close look at the arguments raised by these philosophers will make us understand that these philosophers (Rorty and Gasche) take Kant as cardinal point where their histories diverge. On the one side, there is the line that leads from Kant, via Hegel to the various other speculative systems and projects that make up the ‘continental side’. On the other, there is the Kantian base which inaugurates an era about the debates about language, logic and truth mainly found in the analytical school of
thought. Deconstruction belongs to the latter, or else it can be said that deconstruction is a firm of Kantianism. To quote Derrida,

Deconstruction is not simply the decomposition of an architectural structure. It is also a question about the foundation, about the relation between foundation and what is founded; it is also a question about the closure of the structure, about a whole architecture of philosophy. Not only as concerns this or that construction, but on the architectonic motif of the system. Architectonic: here I refer to Kant’s definition, which does not exhaust all the senses of “architectonic”, but Kant’s definition interests me particularly.38

In this context, Norris discusses how Derridean affinity to Kant have taken shape in two of his major texts namely the chapter “The Parergon”, in ‘The Truth in Painting’ and the essay, ‘Economimesis’. Both of these texts treat the analytic of aesthetic judgement as set out in Kant’s Critique of Judgement. Such an understanding though warranted does not go beyond a limit. In fact one can hold that any anti-Kantian reading will also be compatible with it.

Kant thought to liberate philosophy from the abysmal shares of sceptical doubt raised by empiricists and idealists by declaring that the proper concern of philosophy was not to prove that the mind could ‘know’ the
reality. Its purpose according to Kant is to show how experience was always and inevitably structured by the innate constitution of human intelligence.

Kant’s categories of understanding thus becomes a proof against this sceptical attack signally something inevitably epistemic in its core. Thus what Kant bequeathed to later philosophers was a new and more refined set of problems such that Moore’s attempted ‘solution’ could only seem willfully comprehending. This, says Norris, is some of the background history that needs to be borne in mind, when interpreting Derrida’s own various statements on the question of referentiality.39

In the chapter on the parergon in *The Truth In Painting*, Derrida explains how the domain of aesthetic enquiry emerges in Kant’s philosophy. According to Kant, *Parerga* include all those things “attached” to the work of art get they are not part of its intrinsic form or meaning, the frame of a pointing, the colonnades of palaces, or drapery on statues. *Parera* becomes an ornament, an adjunct or supplement to the intrinsic beauty of the artwork. To be more precise, to quote Kant, as he has stated in *Transcendental Aesthetic* of the first critique – ‘art concealed in the depths of the soul’, a synthesizing power that alone can accomplish the required link between intuitions and concepts, yet whose nature inherently eludes conceptual definition. Passages like these, for Heidegger, Foucault and Lyotard stand as promissory notes whose value can be redeemed only through Kant’s treatment
of the aesthetic (in his third critique) as a sui generis modality or judgement. But the paradox is that Kant’s analysis to the specificity of aesthetic judgement creates the dilemma it was designed to resolve ‘the insistence on enframing – defining on the one name, the self-identity of art and, on the other, the specificity of aesthetic judgements – is what in fact produces the divisions between object and subject, inside and outside, mind and nature, that the third critique claims to resolve in completing Kant’s transcendental system. The purpose of the third critique, according to Derrida, is to identify art as a middle term bridging an opposition between mind and nature, internal and external phenomena, the inside and the outside, and so on. Instead, Kant introduced two separate worlds that are absolutely divided through the concepts such as object/subject, nature/mind, external/internal, outside/inside, sensible/supersensible etc. These divisions cannot be bridged by pure reason as this would render aesthetic and scientific judgements as equivalent. Instead, the aesthetic judgement should be able to bridge these discontinuous worlds through the discursive structure of the example and throw a logic of semblance without identity originating in analogies referring to the model speech. In short, the parergon is a metaphysical logic of “controlled indeterminacy” or of a ceaseless vibration between inside and outside, the intrinsic and extrinsic, subject and object, the reflective and the determinant, the singular and the universal, the conceptual and the non-
conceptual, mind and nature. This indeterminacy is the ontological uncertainty of the very idea of the aesthetic.

Derrida coined the term *economimesis* while discussing the value of analytic judgements. It stands for the value produced in the self-identity of art as formulated by the logic of the Parergon, and in the hierarchies that adjudicate the relative value of different media and practices in relation to an identification of freedom and reason with speech. Economimesis secures the figure of Genius as the example of a divine agency in art where the artist creates without concepts as a pure and free productivity of the imagination – in a fashion analogous to the way God produces works in nature. So Derrida argues that Kantian aesthetic which deals with the interrelated questions of *mimesis*, of artistic disinterest and the ‘framing’ of aesthetic experience are involved in a play of figural substitutions which resists any form of *de jure* conceptual closure. So Norris, says, representation in general – which includes that most of classical of ‘philosophemes’, the notion of linguistic reference – becomes caught up in this functioning of a text that must perforce remain strategically bind to its own most crucial turns of argument. What transpires from the above is that the analytic motif of deconstruction can be subjected to varying readings. It must however be pointed out that it is an open question whether this makes Derrida to become a Kantian philosopher of analysis. This is no better shown in his account of spectrality of Marx to which we now turn.
Now let us turn our discussion to one of Derrida’s another major work, *Spectres of Marx* published in French in the year 1993. This book deals with the thoughts of Marxism and its future. The very title of the book is an allusion to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s statement at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto that a “spectre [is] haunting Europe”. For Derrida the spirit of Marx is even more relevant now since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the demise of communism. With its death the spectre of communism begins to make visits on the earth. Derrida seeks to do the work of inheriting from Marx, that is, not communism but of the philosophy of responsibility, and of Marx’s spirit of radical critique.

Derrida discusses Marxism of today and of the past with multiple meditations of various aspects of Marx and considers that Marxism is specifically inspired by the religion of messianism – a messianic politics it is. The most fundamental element of experience which has aligned to the coming of the Other, as stated by Derrida in *Spectres* is not the present moment but the future for which communication always hurries for, but missing it. He forewarns the coming of the bad from the future, ‘the bad Other, and also the bad from the past, for it is possible and essential to choose, not by conservatism and nationalism, or by approaching stasis and death, but by understanding the unforeseen quality of the future, and the spectral feature of events, because if we are not careful, they haunt us, and return. In the same way, one must avoid certain things from the past and cultivate others.’

46 How
can the coming of the worst can be avoided without recourse to conservatism, asks Derrida. ‘We always have to choose what to accept from time, and what to reject. We have to have courage and responsibility to do this. “The democracy to come” means always renew your promise to democracy and justice, your belief in the better future, so as to remain changeable events.’

In other words, the absent presence of the spectre features the self-identity of the present, installs, an anachronic, differential temporality, which is not divorced from, but renders both possible and impossible, the unfolding of time understood as a succession of self-present moments. Any modality of temporal presence is disadjusted, out of joint.

Examining Marx’s book *German Ideology*, in the second half of *Spectres*, Derrida dealing with the question of whether Marx believed the communist event would arise and become present and whether we were justified in ever believing incomplete social revolution. It creates an economy of hauntology in which expectations of the present and future are remained unfilled. ‘However if Marx was unaware of this, his text becomes subtly but dangerously involved in the lack of presence, a lack which also hides a power of ghostliness which Marx sough to erase. The lack and the ghost now come forth: ‘hauntology’ is possible because the spirit, or mind, continually calls the past in its aid, without alternative, and cannot settle and become steady, grounding.’
The final chapter of *Spectres* witness the presence of Marx reading a christian and ghostly writer, St. Max or Max Stirner who in turn makes the world into a ghost or insubstantial thing with ‘Jesus’ ghostly body at its centre. Here Derrida finds parallelism between Marx’s own life with Max Stirner’s crime against life and politics according to which the material fact of the world has been reduced to a mere insubstantial and unreal ghost. Marx’s own life was also directed with the intention of reducing the dialectic of Hegal to materialism. However, Derrida points out that Marx is obsessed by ‘St. Max’ because he is his double, his other, a ghost of himself whom he would like to oppose.\(^{50}\) To quote Jason Powell, it is sufficient to point out that the text *spectres* of Marx, was not only to discussion of Marxism, but an experiment in whether a working hypothesis of Marxism and religion could be formulated, a problem which Derrida, in his texts of broken questions and answers, of various voices solved his own satisfaction to some extent, although he kept searching. That is, such a deconstruction has never been Marxist, no more than it has ever been non-Marxist, although it has remained faithful to certain spirit of Marxism, to at least one of its sprits for, and this can never be repeated too often, there is *more than one of them* and they are heterogeneous. Having revealed the hope for a just revolution deconstructing it, Derrida says that this hope is the aspect of Marx’s writing which he has always thought to be valuable.\(^{51}\) According to Derrida, unlike any other philosophical tradition, the Marxism dialectic makes an allowances for
restructuring and reinventing the view of the unpredictability of knowledge and the ever-changing politics of globalization. Thus reading and re-reading, revisions and re-revisions of Marx always becomes indispensable.

There are people who believe that Derrida can be reconciled to Marx pace his spectres of Marx. There are also Derrideans who believe that deconstruction is at one with Marxism. A mixture of both of these readings are traced out by Dr. Kanthamani in his critical essay on ‘On Spectres of Marx’ (‘Man’ is printers devil), where he response to the writings of the Indian neo-Marxist Aijaz Ahamad and states that ‘there is indeed a Benjaminite warrant for the above engagement of the text, but it may not be true at all. Thus Aijaz claims that the spectres include a spectre of Benjamin, which warrants a messianic affirmation (376) with its kind of emancipation and in order to achieve a ‘religious surrender’. (392).52 The purpose of Kanthamani is to contest the argument whether Derrida’s text of spectres of Marx is much more a text of filiation than a text of affiliation. It is this which in turn throws light to a Marxist descent and heritage, a very idea that inspired Aijaz from Fukuyama’s which Derrida utilized for a deconstructive reading of end of history/ideology. The very idea of warrant a revanant by a spectre is counterintuitive to Kanthamani. Because ‘Derrida can never agree that a de-totalized horizon can ever sponsor a totalizing vision. Aijaz’s reading collapses therefore on its own homeground, as there is not a shred of evidence.’53
The very idea of Aijaz that there is a certain affinity between the spirit of deconstruction and the spirit of Marxism is repudiated by Kanthamani since it lacks textual evidence and taken it as the failure of Aijaz to understand the spirit of deconstruction. He explains the context where Derrida discusses this, as follows. Firstly, Derrida contrasts the type of critique Fukuyama advances with the spirit of Marxist critique with all its loose Hegelian core. It is only a façade. Further, he contrasts it with the deconstruction as the practices it. This is very contrary to Marxism as an ideology. From this, it is deduced that both Fukuyama and Derrida share a certain motif. Fukuyama can also be credited with the use of the canons of Marxist critique to criticize Marxism. In that sense, Kanthamani states that ‘no conclusion could ever follow from the above steps about the compatibility of the spirit of deconstruction and the spirit of Marxism. Unless the two steps are said to collapse into each other since there is no textual evidence for this, the two contrasting gestures will not collapse into each other. In fact, they are opposed to each other.’\(^{54}\) It also proclaims that deconstruction is a possible exercise on the text, but an impossible one. If its impossibility is excluded by fiat, it will be reduced to a meta-narrative like others. But the spectrality of Marxism does not exclude its impossibility as it speaks of many disparate spectres in place of the single spectre in the *Manifesto*. Kanthamani states that ‘we can deconstruct what cannot be object of deconstruction. If so, deconstruction becomes both the conditions of possibility as well as the
condition of impossibility,’ 55 ‘what distinguishes Derrida’s text is however it has a strong deconstructionist motif. That is, it refuses to valorise any dogmatics either neoliberalism or neomarxism.’ 56 This is what is largely attested to in ‘late’ Derrida, to we move.

4.6 Deconstruction: Postmodernism and Critical Theory

The earliest use of the term postmodernism dates back to the 1930’s by defining it as a “conservative reflux within modernism”, by the Spanish literary critic, Federico de Onis then agreeing with the unfinished project of Habermas. Despite the differences among these usage of ‘post-modern’, there is an underlying pattern of agreement in some areas of post-modernism. These are: (1) recognition of pluralism and indeterminacy in the world that modernist thought had evidently sought to disavow. It caused for a renunciation of intellectual hopes for simplicity, completeness and certainty (2) A new focus on representation of images of cultural signs as occupying a dominant position in social life. This has resulted in the acceptance of play and fictionalization in cultural fields that had earlier sought a serious, realist truth. Although the very idea of a summary may be antithetical to postmodernism, the points of agreements may be discussed as follows.

Firstly, it has often been said that postmodernists are concerned only with signs and never with things or objectivity or truth. Completeness and consistency of a system of phenomena are impossible to postmodernists. To
them analysis never ends. If anything is fundamental for the postmodernist, it could only be *difference* or *differance* in Derridean terminology.

*Secondly, the denial of presence,* is a characteristic feature of postmodernism. Traditionally, philosophers have often distinguished perception or sense-data, as immediate conduits for reality, thought, interpretation and hence symbolization. Postmodernism rejects any such distinction. Presentation presupposes representation. It makes Derrida even to say that there is no such a thing as “perception”. This denial throws light into the arguments about interpretation. Thus the saying ‘Every author is a dead author, denies that the meaning of a text can be authoritatively revealed through reference to authorial intentions’.\(^{57}\) Instead it states that author’s intentions are not immediately available, nor are relevant for the understanding of the text. They are not the origin of the text and have no *privilege* over other factors. In that sense, post-modernists are more radically *antifoundationalist* than others. They are also sceptic of God, Nature and Reason.

*Thirdly,* postmodernist are *constructivists* about knowledge. They state that *meaning is repression.* The denial of the myth of self-presence and the acceptance of constructivism occasionally leads them to substitute the analysis of *representation* of a thing for discussion of the *thing.* Derridean claim of “There is nothing outside the text”, is a best global expression of this
approach. By the famous statement Derrida does not mean that there is no real world, instead he states that we only encounter real referents through texts, representations, meditation. The world we know is constructed by representation.

*Fourthly,* the denial of dualism both metaphysical and methodological is another characteristic feature of post-modernism. They denied the traditional notion of norms, including reason itself. It has been considered that norms we use to judge processes are *themselves products of the processes* they judge. In other words, when most philosophers use an idea of justice independently derived from a philosophical argument to judge a social order, in post-modernism, the idea itself as the product of social relations that serves to judge.

The last and that which is equally applicable to all those four themes of post-modernism is the analytic strategy of post-modernism. It has been considered that a phenomenon maintains its identity in semiotic systems only if other units are represented as foreign or “other” by means of a hierarchical dualism in which first is privileged and the other deprivileged. Quite contrary to this, post-modernist concentrates on the marginalized elements of any system or text since it is here lies the key to its structure. From such a position, they will take linguistic tropes, such as metaphors, to the meaning of the text. To them, metaphors are crucial to the constitution of the texts theme.
“Pulling on these threads *deconstructs* the text, in Derrida’s famous term. Such deconstruction is the making explicit of the way the text undermines its own meaning”.$^{58}$

What all this indicates that deconstruction can be seen as is one offshoot – a ‘philosophical’ offshoot – of this wider post-modernist or counter-enlightenment drift as claimed by Habermas. Norris gives us in the service in which it was argued for in the light of consideration of post-analytical angle in the two chapters above what can now be examined.

Habermas ‘attacked post-modernism as a new form of conservatism, which has prematurely abandoned the uncompleted project of the Enlightenment’. $^{59}$ Habermas also held the view that deconstruction is a matter of collapsing all genre – distinctions, especially those between philosophy and literature, reason and rhetoric, language in its constative and performative aspects.

Norris states that Habermas’ has misread Derrida’s work, and done so moreover in a way that fits in too readily with commonplace ideas about deconstruction as a species of latter-day Nietzschean irrationalism, one that rejects the whole legacy of post-Kantian enlightened thought. $^{60}$ Norris agrees that deconstruction properly understood, belongs within the same philosophical discourse of modernity. However, there are certain blind-spots in Habermas’s critique which Norris tries to explore. According to Norris, the
major thrust of Habermas’s criticism is not emanated from what Derrida has written, but it springs up from what has been written about him by various (mostly American) commentators.

Norris states that one major premise in The Margins of Philosophy that often makes commentators especially Habermas confuse to classify Derrida in the post-modernist camp is this:

Philosophy is indeed a certain ‘kind of writing’, a discourse which nonetheless strives to cover its own rhetorical tracks by aspiring to an order of pure, unmediated self-present truth. Thus a deconstructive reading will typically fasten upon those moments in the philosophic text where some cardinal concept turns out to rest on a latent or sublimated metaphor, or where the logic of an argument is subtly undone by its reliance on covert rhetorical devices or again it will show how some seemingly marginal detail of the text some aspect ignored (not without reason) by the mainstream exponents – in fact - plays a crucial but problematic role in the entire structure of argument.61

According to Norris, what Derrida has achieved – on this view at least – is a striking reversal of age-old prejudice that elevates philosophy over rhetoric, or right reason over the dissimulating arts of language.62 But Habermas says that by doing this, Derrida marks a full scale programme of
ignoring those different kinds of language – use that have separated out the modern (post-Kantian) discourse of enlightened reason and overgeneralized poetic (rhetorical) aspect of language to a point where it commands the whole field of communicative action.

It has been the object of Derrida’s text to show how philosophers from Plato to Husserl, have striven and failed to suppress the signs of rhetorical disruption in the discourse of philosophical reason. But it does not issue the passport of reducing it to “all concepts are metaphors” or that philosophic truth claims are really metaphorical through and through: as literary critics do. These critics ignore a very crucial problem raised by Derrida in “White Mythology”, that all our working definitions of metaphor – from Aristotle down – have been couched in terms that ultimately derive from the language and conceptual resources of philosophy. Thus Norris says that, ‘it is impossible to break with that tradition simply by reversing one’s priorities, declaring the omnipresence of metaphor and hence the bankruptcy of philosophic reason. Such moves represent only the first stage in a deconstructive strategy which must then go on to re-think the whole structure of opposing valuations attached to the ideas of ‘metaphor’ and ‘concept’. So according to Norris, ‘we err more grievously in assimilating Derrida to a strain of post-modern irrationalism whose effects he has done nothing to endorse.’ When Derrida says that ‘philosophy is indeed a ‘kind of writing’, it does not mean philosophy’s undoing at the hands of literature but a
literature that meets the challenge of philosophy in every aspect of its argument, form and style.’\textsuperscript{65}

Now let us have a brief account of the term ‘critical theory’ in relation to deconstruction. The first meaning of the term ‘critical theory’ was defined by Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Social Sciences in his essay on ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’. Since then, critical theory is often thought as referring to Frankfurt School that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno and stretches to Marcuse and Habermas. Nowadays any philosophical approach with similar practical aims could be called a “critical theory”, including feminism, critical race theory and some forms of post-colonial criticism. This theory is originated in contrast to the traditional theory with the aim of critiquing and changing the society as a whole. These theorists believed that a “critical theory” may be distinguished from a “traditional theory” according to a specific practical purpose – that is the theory is critical to the extent as it seeks human emancipation, ‘to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.’ (Horkheimer 1982, 244). Its distinctive as a philosophical approach extends to ethics, political philosophy and to the philosophy of history. These philosophers not only try to preserve the values of enlightened critique but also attempts to diagnose the specific distortions of that principle brought about by modern (repressive or instrumental) reason. In this context, the relevance of deconstruction to that of critical theory may be asked.
Norris also asks the relevance of deconstruction in the context of critical theory especially in the reasoned debate of nuclear issue. A fitting answer – one answer – says Norris, ‘I would cite Derrida’s statement that ‘if there are wars, and a nuclear threat, it is because “deterrence” has neither “original meaning” nor measure. Its “logic” is the logic of deviation and transgression, it is rhetorical-strategic escalation or it is nothing at all’ (‘No Apocalypse’, p. 29). Although this Derridean statement may be taken as a ‘continental’ way of making the familiar point in the sense that deterrence is founded upon premises and principles that won’t stand up to logical analysis, here ‘Derrida wants to argue a much closer, more vital and productive link between ‘nuclear criticism’ and the strategies of deconstruction.’

If deconstruction has any special competence in the form of analysis developed to a unique degree – ‘then this has to do with precisely that absence of ‘original meaning’, the ‘logic’ of alogical transgression and the effects of ‘rhetorical escalation’ as against the ‘measure’ of enlightened reason.”

Norris states that these Derridean pronouncements cannot be negligible describing it as Derrida’s well-known solipsistic tendencies, instead it has to be viewed not only in the context of Derrida’s statements but also the entire post-Kantian history of epistemological critique has to be considered. Never before Derrida has more insistently engaged with that history than his reflections on the nuclear issue. “Nuclear Criticism”, like Kantian criticism, is thought about the limits of experience as a thought of finitude …… As for
the history of humanity, that example of finite rationality, it presupposes the possibility of an infinite progress governed according to an Idea of Reason, In Kant’s sense, and through a treatise on Perpetual Peace (‘No Apocalypse’ p. 30). This Derridean statement according to Norris, ‘pronounces the necessity of re-thinking those Kantian ideas with the utmost rigour, since nowadays crucial decisions are being made as if in compliance with the principle of reason, but actually in accordance with an escalating logic of rhetorical overskill which possesses neither ‘measure’ nor reason’. It also states the necessity of doing more than confrontation on these issues with a passionate moral conviction and a rhetoric as powerful as that brought to bear by the advocates of peace through nuclear strength. Hence the Derridean statement that ‘deterrence is a notion whose ‘logic’, as Derrida writes, is ‘either rhetorical –strategic escalation or nothing at all’, involves not only a patient and detailed rebuttal of opposing claims but also an appeal to critical reason by way of bringing out the contradictions and aporias present in the discourse of nuclear power-politics.
4.7 Conclusion

From the above sections it is explicit that deconstruction has a logic of its own and the rigour of this logic is very similar to the rigour of logic in analytic philosophy. It does not mean deconstruction is analytic philosophy. Instead as described by Norris, deconstruction can be seen in the wider practice of analytic philosophy. This moves us forward to conclude the perspective with an exposition of ‘late’ Derrida, which forms the final chapter.
Notes

3. LTRG p. 287.
6. Dsmn. p. 129
18. Ibid. p. 450.
19. AD. P. 56.
20. DAP p. 37.
25. Ibid. p. 115.
27. Psn. p. 60.
34. W & D p. 60.
36. O G. p. 43-44.
37. D.T. P. p. 157
42. Ibid. p. 16.
44. Ibid. p. 148.
46. JDB p. 194
47. Ibid. p. 194.
49. JDB. p. 194.
50. Ibid. p. 195-96.
51. Ibid. p. 196.
53. Ibid. p.29.
54. Ibid. p.31.
55. Ibid. p.34.
56. Ibid. p.35.
58. Ibid. p. 12.
60. DCR. p. 167.
61. MP p. 117.
64. Dda. p. 169.
65. DCR. P. 191.