

# OTHERNESS AND DECONSTRUCTION IN JACQUES DERRIDA

INNOCENZO SERGIO GENOVESI

Innocenzo Sergio Genovesi, PhD Student, University of Bonn

## Abstract

Otherness, together with difference, plays a crucial role in Derrida's thinking. Although many critics have interpreted deconstruction as a negative philosophical movement aiming to dismantle old metaphysical dogma and to give alternative readings of philosophical and literary texts, I show that the reflection about the relationship with otherness and the impossibility of getting a complete understanding and availability of it leads deconstructive thinking to fundamental positive results. Indeed, our aiming toward the absolute Other corresponds for Derrida to a basic human aptitude to openness, which he calls *messianism*. Accordingly, deconstruction is not to be seen as the mere destruction of a tradition, but rather as the strive for the opening to the Other who is yet to come.

This paper will focus on Derrida's works that refer to the Jewish conception of Otherness. After having defined the notions of otherness and difference that he develops in such writings, I will attempt to establish to what extent the Jewish conception of *messianism* influenced Derrida's ideas. Does the Other, that is the Messiah, in the end arrive, or should we rather think about "Him" as never coming, like Judaism does? Translated in philosophical terms: is the coming of the Other something we can expect as a result of deconstructive praxis or is it an unreachable and regulative idea? I will argue that Derrida's position is nearer to the latter.

In the end of the paper I will raise the question whether the other's unreachability is a necessary condition for deconstruction to realize its aim at openness. Derrida's work shows that in order to understand our reality we should consider difference as a (quasi-)fundamental notion. However, I will suggest that difference does not have to be absolutely unbridgeable to make us receptive toward Otherness and that the Other may in the end come.

## 1. Ethical and Theoretical Difference

Jacques Derrida is universally known as the thinker of difference. With the word "*différance*", which is already to be found in his first writings, he intends to show the impossibility of any simple and full origin, that is an ultimate ground from which sense can spring: «*Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name "origin" no longer suits it» (Derrida 1982, p. 11). Derrida showed that meaning and being present - in the form that we normally use to think about them - cannot be auto-referential and self-grounded: they always refer to some absent element in order to make sense and be available for us (Derrida 1967). Since *différance* is the differentiating element which differs the presence itself, it is impossible for it to appear in the form of a present being. Nevertheless, we may have a trace of it, for it lays on the ground of all the other concrete differences we experience in our everyday life. Thus, *différance* is «what makes possible the presentation of the being-present», even if «it is never presented as such» (Derrida 1982, p. 6).

All in all, Derrida's notion of *différance* avoids introducing a new metaphysical element with a strong ontological consistency and, instead, shows that the ground of every phenomenological manifestation of things and meanings does not take the form of full presence but rather the opening of a space which allows present beings to articulate and structure itself. The word Derrida uses for such an opening is "spacing" (*éspacement*).

While Derrida first introduces the word *différance* to the discussion about our operation of meaning-attribution, in writings such as *Speech and Phenomena* he attributes to this term a mere theoretical sense. However, already in his early works it becomes clear that *différance* has also a fundamental ethical relevance which cannot be considered apart from its theoretical function. In the essay on Emmanuel Levinas, *Violence and Metaphysics*, Derrida discusses extensively the issue concerning the connection between the theoretical comprehension of the world, that is the operation of classifying beings in a totalizing ontological structure, and the ethical relationship with it, that is how we behave in front of the appearance of otherness.

In this essay Derrida recalls the famous critique to metaphysics and phenomenology which Levinas articulates in his works, especially in *Totality and Infinity*. According to Levinas, authors such as Heidegger and Husserl failed in their attempt to provide a satisfying account of Being because their philosophy was not able to think about otherness in terms of its transcendence and absolute difference to the self. To think about otherness in the form of a modification of the self or as an element of its horizon of comprehension is for him a kind of violence and expression of «the Greek domination of the Same and the One», that is «an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world» (Derrida 2002, p. 102). As an alternative option to this way of thinking, Levinas proposes to ground ontology on ethics and to see the strive for the transcendent otherness as the first fundamental moment of our world acquaintance. Like the experience of *différance*, otherness too is not comprehensible through the category of presence and the logic of non-contradiction:

«Only the other, the totally other, can be manifested as what it is before the shared truth, within a certain non-manifestation and a certain absence. It can be said only of the other that its phenomenon is a certain nonphenomenon, its presence (is) a certain absence. Not pure and simple absence, for their logic could make its claim, but a certain absence. Such a formulation shows clearly that within this experience of the other the logic of non-contradiction, that is, everything which Levinas designates as "formal logic," is contested in its root. This root would be not only the root of our language, but the root of all of Western philosophy, particularly phenomenology and ontology» (Derrida 2002, p. 112-3).

The philosophy of Levinas had a great influence on Derrida's thinking. Nevertheless, Derrida did not share the Levinasian view of ethics. More specifically, Derrida did not agree that ethics is more fundamental than phenomenology and ontology. In his view, the relationship between ethics and phenomenology is not one-sided, in which phenomenology requires ethics in order to begin its investigation of reality, for ethics can be grounded independently. On the contrary, for Derrida there is a reciprocal dependence: «Without the phenomenon of other as other no respect would be possible. The phenomenon of respect supposes the respect of phenomenality. And ethics, phenomenology» (Derrida 2002, p. 151). Moreover, he did not consider the fact of having an intentional representation of the other as a form of violence. For having a representation is the only way to access otherness, even though it is impossible to have a full access to it, the attempt to meet or understand the other should not be seen as violence. This attempt becomes violence only if the subject sees the other merely as a function of herself: «Every reduction of the other to a real moment of my life, its reduction to the state of empirical alter-ego, is an empirical possibility, or rather eventuality, which is called violence; and violence presupposes the necessary eidetic relationships envisaged in Husserl's descriptions. For, on the contrary, to gain access to the egoity of the alter ego as if to its alterity itself is the most peaceful gesture possible. [...] In effect, the necessity of gaining access to the meaning of the other (in its irreducible alterity) on the basis of its "face", that is, its nonphenomenal phenomenon, [...] [is] violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence, supposing, as we said above, that it is somehow meaningful to speak of preethical violence. For this transcendental origin, as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is at the same time nonviolence, since it opens the relation to the other» (Derrida 2002, pp. 160-1).

As we see repeatedly in his work, here Derrida lines up against radical conceptual oppositions. He refuses to conceive otherness only in terms of a modification of the self, and yet he is aware of the impossibility of operating an absolute separation between the subject sphere (the Levinasian totality) and the transcendent other (Levinas' infinity). The theoretical problem I will explore in the remainder of this paper is precisely how these two fields can be kept together in a meaningful way.

## 2. Otherness and Event

The ethical connotation of *différance* becomes even clearer in Derrida's later writings with the development of the notion of "event". For Derrida an event is not a simple happening: «it may rain tonight, it may not rain. This will not be an absolute event» (Derrida, Stiegler 2002, p. 13). An event is rather «another name for that which, in the thing that happens, we can neither reduce nor deny (or simply deny). It is another name for experience itself, which is always experience of the other» (Derrida, Stiegler 2002, p. 11). Here we find the concrete expression of Derrida's thinking of difference: the event is the coming of the absolute otherness:

«Différance also relates, and for this very reason, to what comes, to what happens in a way that is at one and the same time inappropriable, unexpected, and therefore urgent, unanticipable: precipitation itself. The thinking of *différance* is therefore also a thinking of urgency, of what I can neither evade nor appropriate because it is other. The event, the singularity of the event, that's what *différance* is all about» (Derrida, Stiegler 2002, p. 10).

The otherness which is coming in the event is not understandable in what we call expectation horizon. To this extent, Derrida's conception of otherness is very similar to the Levinasian ones. In the essay *Psyché. Inventions of the Other* he defines deconstruction as the invention of the other, wherein the invention has the same singular

structure of the event «insofar as it is singular» and «inasmuch as its very singularity will produce the coming or the coming about of something new» (Derrida 2007a, p. 5). However, the otherness he is referring to is not one an inventor could think about, such as innovative technological devices, new medical treatments or even avant-garde artistic movements. These kinds of inventions are called "inventions of the same" and represent almost all inventions. They are inventions of the same because they do not introduce an absolute novelty, since they could have been somehow expected and they are not completely surprising:

«The aleatory margin that they seek to integrate remains homogeneous with calculation, within the order of the calculable; it devolves from a probabilistic quantification and still resides, we might say, in the same order and in the order of the same. An order where there is no absolute surprise» (Derrida 2007a, p. 39).

Invention of the other is a totally different concept which cannot be opposed to the invention of the same, for the opposition still belongs to the regimen of the same. The invention of the other is not even an invention in the sense of the active introduction of a novelty in the world. Indeed, if it was a positive act of the inventor, it could be reduced to the sphere of sameness. With the expression "invention of the other" Derrida actually means the coming - or better the letting come - of the absolute other which cannot be programmed, decided or calculated. It is an invention «that allows the coming of a still unanticipatable alterity, and for which no horizon of expectation as yet seems ready, in place, available» (*ibidem*).

Although the other is not actively posed by the subject, the operation of leaving space for the coming of otherness has not to be seen as a merely passive attitude. It has rather to be associated with the spacing operation (*éspacement*) of deconstruction and corresponds in general to our fundamental need of an originary difference. This difference would enable us to acquaint ourselves with the things appearing in our experience or in our thought, so that they can make sense to us. Accordingly, the openness toward otherness that *différance* and event imply assumes for our knowledge and experience what Derrida calls a *quasi-transcendental* role, that is, it represents their condition of possibility without having the non-empirical and universal connotation of the Kantian transcendental.

The main difficulty in understanding Derrida's notion of the *quasi-transcendental* is due to its paradoxical formulation. As we have just seen, being open toward the event is a condition of possibility of our experience. At the same time we also remarked that the event should be incomprehensible and unanticipable and that is not be comprehended in our expectation horizon. In short, an event is what we cannot possibly imagine and be prepared for, it is the impossible itself. Derrida is well aware of this contradiction and underlines the contradictory structure of the *quasi-transcendental* as much as possible in order to let us rethink the meaning of the notion of impossibility:

«The history of philosophy is the history of reflections on the meaning of the *possible*, on the meaning of *being* or *being possible*. [...] These reflections in transcendental philosophy on the conditions of possibility, are affected by the experience of the event insofar as it upsets the distinction between the possible and the impossible, the opposition between the possible and the impossible. We should speak here of the 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 impossible that is the very experience of the possible. This means transforming the conception, or the experience, or the saying of the experience of the possible and the impossible» (Derrida 2007, p. 454).

The impossible is not counterposed to the possible. Since Derrida shows that the structure itself of our possible experience is paradoxical - demonstrating for instance that the presence is grounded in the absence - the impossible is rather thought as the margin or limit of our experience in which the possible can be introduced: «The *im-* of the im-possible is surely radical, implacable, undeniable. But it is not only negative or simply dialectical: it *introduces* into the possible, it is *its usher today*» (Derrida 2005, p. 90). Accordingly, an event has to be impossible in order to bear true novelties in its happening:

«An event would not be worthy of its name, it would not make anything happen, if all it did was to deploy, explicate, or actualize what was already possible: which is to say, in short, if it came back down to unfolding a program or applying a general rule to a case. For there to be event, it has to be possible, of course, but also there has to be an interruption that is exceptional, absolutely singular, in the regime of possibility; it must not be reducible to explication, unfolding, or the putting into action of a possibility. [...] Thus *it must be* that the event is also introduced as impossible or that its possibility be threatened» (Derrida 2005, pp. 91-2).

Through deconstruction Derrida brings to light an undeniable paradoxical structure of our reality and our way of conceiving of it. Furthermore, his innovative thinking of impossibility revolutionizes our way of conceiving of transcendentalism and possibility in general. However, there is still a crucial interpretative problem: can an event, in the Derridean sense, ever happen? Can the Other actually arrive? Or is the event solely a regulative idea that directs our knowledge?

To answer this question, I will refer to Derrida's writings about the otherness that is coming in the event, *l'arrivant*. However, it should be also taken into account that Derrida purposefully never answers the question: «To get ready for this coming of the other is what can be called deconstruction. It deconstructs precisely this double genitive and, as deconstructive invention, itself comes back in the step (*pas*) - and also as the step - of the other. To invent would then be to "know" how to say "come" and to answer the "come" of the other. Does that ever come about? Of this event one is never sure» (Derrida 2007a, p. 39).

### 3. The Greek and the Jew

Derrida's ideas of event and otherness are deeply influenced by the Jewish conception of messianism, even though he does not completely embrace this view. Coming back to *Violence and Metaphysics*, it is possible to trace a first thematization of messianism and an opposition between two main occidental ways of dealing with otherness, which are represented by the following figures: the Greek and the Jew.

Dealing with Hellenism, Derrida refers to the origin of all metaphysics of light and presence: the Greek *logos* which claims to include the whole being in itself and aims at reaching the absolute truth. Our occidental thought is pervaded by this Greek element and all our attempts to organize the world in a single ontological shape and to establish a formal hierarchy between things expresses a direct continuity with the Greeks. The concepts of "One" and "totality" are for Derrida the key concepts of Hellenism (Derrida 2002, p. 102). On the other hand, Derrida calls Judaism «the experience of the infinite other» (Derrida 2002, p. 191). Judaism differs from Hellenism to the extent that it is not striving to subordinate the whole being through conceptual means, which is how Levinas defined violence. Judaism is thus opposed to Hellenism in terms of its non-violent relation with being. In other words, Judaism does not attempt to dominate all the existent through *logos* but rather recognises the existence of something which cannot be reduced to the totality of the concept and of the knowing subject.

According to Derrida, this attitude towards openness and the recognition of transcendent otherness is perfectly expressed by the messianic eschatology, which is basic to Levinas' project. This eschatology refers to «experience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience: the passage and departure toward the other; the other itself as what is most irreducibly within it: Others» (Derrida 2002, p. 103). Derrida writes the following about messianic eschatology:

«It is but a question of designating a space or a hollow within naked experience where this eschatology can be understood and where it must resonate. This hollow space is not an opening among others. It is opening itself, the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme» (*ibidem*).

Messianism is counterposed to Hellenism because it assumes that *logos* alone is not enough to completely capture the truth. Messianism claims the need for revelation in order to achieve a full "phenomenology of spirit", that is to reach the ideal of totality in which the whole being is ordered and structured. God is the name of this totality and the Messiah is its delegate, who descends to the earth to reveal the truth. That is why Messianism implies the attitude towards openness: one should always be prepared for the coming of Messiah. However, the contrast between the Greek *logos* and messianism does not correspond precisely with the opposition between Hellenism and Judaism, but rather with a general distinction between a pagan *logos* and the religions of the Book. Within these religions Derrida highlights a further difference between Christianity, in which the Messiah *is come*, and Judaism, in which the Messiah *is yet to come*. Christian religion and philosophy are nearer to Greek thinking than Judaism does. Indeed, by revealing the truth about God and freeing humanity from sin, Christ enables Christians to achieve totality. Furthermore, the evangelists provided a logical notion of God (*en archè en o logos*, wrote John), and since *logos* originates from God, Christian classical theology uses *logos* - especially in the form of the Aristotelian thinking - in order to understand the divine revelation. On the other hand, Judaism is unconcerned with totality, for it is still waiting for the final revelation. According to Derrida, these two different perspectives about revelation correspond to different kinds of messianism and to divergent approaches to the otherness that is yet "to-come" (*à-venir*). Derrida calls *justice* the respect for such otherness:

«Justice - or justice as it promises to be, beyond what it actually is - always has an eschatological dimension. [...] Here, what I call the eschatological or the messianic is nothing other than a relation to the future so despoiled and indeterminate that it leaves being "to come" [à venir], i.e., undetermined. [...] There can be no future as such unless there is radical otherness, and respect for this radical otherness. It is here - in that which ties together as non-reappropriable the future and radical otherness - that justice, in a sense that is a little enigmatic, analytically participates in the future. [...] I do not want to take sides in a war of religions, but the religions for which the Messiah has arrived, where the messianic vocation has already been accomplished, always run the risk of lacking this transcendence of justice and the to-come with respect to totality» (Derrida 2001, pp. 20-2).

Derrida's deconstructive thinking also deals with the concept of messianism, but in a different way than Christianity and Judaism. Although the Derridean idea of deconstruction as opening towards the otherness that is yet to-come seems to be nearer to the Jewish conception of messianism, this latter does not show a complete openness, such as the one Derrida aims to reach. In fact, in a certain sense Jewish messianism prepares a horizon of expectation for the otherness to-come because it has a positive content of faith: the Messiah, God's delegate who is coming in the world to reveal the truth about it and to redeem humanity, *is coming*. On the contrary, Derrida's messianism, which designates our personal attitude as living beings towards otherness and the event to-come, aims to be a "desert messianism" or a "messianicity without messianism", that means without any positive faith or truth content: «As soon as a determinate outline is given to the future, to the promise, even to the Messiah, the messianic loses its purity [...]. We would find ourselves with a sort of messianic eschatology so desolate that no religion and no ontology could identify themselves with it» (Derrida 2001, p. 21). In *Marx and Sons* Derrida describes this messianism as following:

«Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe) [...] refers, in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is to the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness. Nothing is more "realistic" or "immediate" than this messianic apprehension, straining forward toward the event of him who/that which is coming. I say "apprehension" because this experience, strained forward toward the event, is at the same time a waiting without expectation. [...] Although there is a waiting here, an apparently passive limit to anticipation [...], this exposure to the event, which can either come to pass or not (condition of absolute otherness), is inseparable from a promise and an injunction that call for commitment without delay, and, in truth, rule out abstention. [...] *Anything but Utopian*, messianicity mandates that we interrupt the ordinary course of things, time and history *here-now*; it is inseparable from an affirmation of otherness and justice» (Derrida, pp. 248-9).

I return to my original question: does this concrete and real event ever happen, or should it always remain the goal of our messianic apprehension, which nevertheless allows our opening towards otherness?

#### 4. *L'autre à-venir*

Derrida states that Messianicity is «anything but Utopian». According to this position the presupposition for its practice and realization are not to be thought as part of an ideal world, but rather in our concrete reality, that is, in what comes (*arrive*) to us. However, the otherness which Derrida is referring to is so radical that he never gives an example of a contemporary event. Commenting the terror attacks of September 11, he states that even the "9.11" is not an event in proper sense, despite the fact that most people have the impression to be in front of a *major event*:

«There is no event worthy of its name except insofar as this appropriation falters at some border or frontier. A frontier, however, with neither front nor confrontation, one that incomprehension does not run into head on since it does not take the form of a solid front: it escapes, remains evasive, open, undecided, indeterminable. Whence the unappropriability, the unforeseeability, absolute surprise, incomprehension, the risk of misunderstanding, unanticipatable novelty, pure singularity, the absence of horizon. Were we to accept this minimal definition of the event, minimal but double and paradoxical, could we affirm that "September 11" constituted an event without precedent? An unforeseeable event? A singular event through and through?» (Boradori 2003, pp. 90-1). Translating Derrida's reasoning to our own times, not even the refugee crisis that we are now experiencing would be an event. The millions of people who are asking for asylum would not be a proper case of *arrivant* in Derridean sense. This phenomenon is rather an extension of the political and historical happenings of our times. Refugees are people who can be recognised as such and, given the established socio-political boundaries and policies governing the movement of peoples, expected: they come from a determinate place and they are directed to an other determinate place, to Europe for instance. They cross a determinate border, they traverse a threshold. According to Derrida, «those are all, of course, *arrivants*, but in a country that is already defined and in which the inhabitants know or think they are at home» (Derrida, p. 34), while the true *arrivant* «surprises the host» and is actually «not even a guest» (*ibidem*). The *arrivant par excellence* is someone who, in arriving, «does not cross a threshold separating two identifiable places, the proper and the foreign, the proper of the one and the proper of the other, as one would say that [...] of a traveller, an emigre or a political exile, a refugee» (*ibidem*).

If the most radical examples of coming of otherness that we can produce are not suitable enough for Derrida's idea of Other and event, how can then Messianism not be utopian? And how can we avoid thinking that "event" is for Derrida just a regulative idea? Concerning messianism, it is possible to explain its empirical meaning - and therefore its *quasi-transcendental* value - by returning to the Derridean concept of *trace*. Since his early writings, Derrida affirmed that we can never experience *différance* directly. However, it is possible to conceive of it because of the concrete and empirical trace of it that we can trace whenever we are in front of a singular determinate difference. On the one hand, *différance* refers to the infinite and preoriginary movement of

production of differences that makes up our reality. On the other hand, we can recognize its trace in our concrete knowledge and experience, that is what Derrida meant when he wrote in *La voix et le phénomène: la différence infinie est finie*. Messianism is not utopian because it is grounded on the concrete evidence of the traceability of otherness and *différance*. Yet for Derrida it is necessary that we never experience the absolute otherness and that the event of the Other remains *to-come*. The Other will never arrive: it will always be *arrivant* and never *arrivé*. These Derridean ideas have led several scholars to view Derrida's philosophy as a philosophy of transcendence and to consider *différance* as a constitutive element which transcends our reality and subjectivity, much in the same way as the god of negative theology (Smith 2003). Since Derrida constantly attempted to deconstruct the classical oppositions of metaphysics, including the opposition transcendence/immanence, the interpretation of *quasi-transcendentals* as transcendent elements misreads Derrida's will to put aside metaphysics of presence and to abandon the idea that there is a first principle of our reality which is either present in the world (immanence) or absent (transcendence). However, the fact that the Other should never arrive in order to achieve the deconstructive aim at openness can nevertheless be questioned.

Is it necessary for our messianic vocation that the Messiah never arrives? Does the fact that the Other at the end could possibly arrive prevent us to be truly open? If not, should we still consider the event as impossible? According to the Derridean conception of otherness as absolutely incomprehensible and unforeseeable, the unreachability of the event and the Other logically follows. Would a weaker definition of event, for which event is not only the happening of the unrepresentable otherness but rather the manifestation of a real difference, affect its *quasi-transcendental* value?

As I have explained, the Derridean event is concrete and real because its trace and its stage of happening is to be sought in our empirical reality. Nevertheless, no real example of such an event is available. However, countless examples of coming of radical otherness which prove our ethical and theoretical openness towards difference are available to us and happen concretely in our ordinary experience, such as 9.11 or the refugee crisis, but also less drastic cases of encounter with the Other. In these cases, the otherness which is contained in the real events is not completely understandable and not totally manageable, but we still call them event to the extent that they let appear a certain kind of otherness in a certain way. However, these concrete cases that we can mention would be events in the Derridean sense we have already examined only if the otherness that they enclose was fully manifest, which is impossible. But if - disagreeing with Derrida - we accept such happenings as true events in substitution for the Derridean event, do we have to renounce our deconstructive aim, that is, to leave an open space for otherness and to pursue justice, refraining from constructing any rooted dogma as definitive rather than dismantlable?

My thesis is that such a substitution is not only possible, but should be operated in order to let deconstruction continue to have productive effects on contemporary thought. The notions of difference, otherness and event play a fundamental role in structuring our ethical and theoretical relations with the world. During the 20th century both continental and analytic philosophy have shown that an ontology and in general a *Weltanschauung* based on the pure concepts of substance and identity is not pursuable. Furthermore, the complexity and the relationality of being should be interpreted through different key concepts. Derrida's philosophy of event and difference gives us the possibility to make sense of our world by renouncing an ontologically closed conception of it while retaining its meaningfulness and ontological consistency. However, the radical and paradoxical conception of event and otherness which Derrida proposes, even if they are completely justified and understandable in the context of his philosophy, runs the risk of not fully satisfying the claim of realism that philosophy is continues to advance.

In order to further develop the positive contribution of deconstruction within contemporary ontology, my proposal is to replace the radical notion of event as the coming of absolute otherness (full manifestation of *différance*) with a weaker version that views the event as the happening of difference (manifestation of *différence*). By this proposal I am not excluding that behind the singular manifestations of concrete differences there is a more general notion of difference which is at the base of the production and recognition of any possible specific difference. Concrete differences are showing up in events we can experience. Through the differential relationships between the givens which appear in the events we can operate our positive recognition and understanding of being, which is not based on the fact that things are identical to themselves, but is allowed by a general principle of difference and differenciability. Derrida chose to name *différance* this fundamental (or better pre-fundamental) principle, warning in any case that *différance* is just a name he introduced for didactic reason and it should not be taken for a metaphysical entity (Derrida 1982).

Moreover, I am not advancing a positivist vision according to which we totally understand the concrete otherness that shows itself in the particular events we experience. Concrete events always have a margin of incomprehension, which is necessary to let what Derrida calls *éspacing* take place and start the play that leads to the positive constitution of our world. Even in the case of the weak notion of event Derrida's notion of the

event as the impossible coming of absolute otherness it is in a certain sense true: «the event is first of all *that* I do not comprehend. It consists in *that*, *that* I do not comprehend: *that which* I do not comprehend and first of all *that* I do not comprehend, the fact that I do not comprehend: my incomprehension» (Borradori 2003, p. 90). In other words, the Other may come, even if the Other is the one who, for definition, cannot totally be comprehended. Otherwise, it would not be the Other, but rather the Self, and the event would not show a difference, but rather an identity.

All in all, I cannot see how this weaker conception of event could stop us from going on with a philosophy of difference and, in general, to lack respect or be closed towards the otherness to-come. The fact that an event happens or that the Other comes does not prevent us from being open and therefore missing the aim of deconstruction. To miss the aim of deconstruction means rather to believe that a certain given is the last and definitive one and that we cannot further deconstruct it. This is why Derrida in his late writings defines justice and messianism as indeconstructible, since they are the very striving for openness itself.

## REFERENCES

- Borradori, G., 2003. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J., 1967. *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: PUF.
- Derrida, J., 1982. *Margins of Philosophy*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.
- Derrida, J., 1993. *Aporias*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J., 1999. *Marx and Sons*. In Sprinker, M. (ed.). *Gothly Demarcation*. London: Verso.
- Derrida, J., 2001. *A taste for the secret*. Malden: Polity.
- Derrida, J., 2002. *Writing and Difference*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J., 2005. *Paper Machine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J., 2007. A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event. *Critical Inquiry* 33, pp. 441-462.
- Derrida, J., 2007a. *Psyché. Inventions of the Other*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J., Stiegler, B., 2002. *Echographies of television*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Smith, D. W., 2003. Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought. In Patton, P., Protevi, J. (ed). *Between Deleuze and Derrida*. New York: Continuum.