



JOMEK Journal
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Published by Cardiff University Press

Attempting to Teach the Event: An Experiment in Pedagogical Reflection

Clayton Crockett

University of Central Arkansas
Email: claytonc@uca.edu

Keywords

Event

Jacques Derrida

Jacques Lacan

John D. Caputo

Catherine Keller

Abstract

This article focuses on the impossible task of teaching the event, using some ideas from Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, John D. Caputo, and Catherine Keller. It also performs a pedagogical experiment by including some voices or testimonials from former students and others who have experienced this attempt to teach the event. There is a political and philosophical value to this form of education that works as a counter to the positivism of neo-liberal education.

Contributor Note

Clayton Crockett is Professor and Director of Religious Studies at the University of Central Arkansas. He is the author or co-author of a number of books, including *Deleuze Beyond Badiou* (2013), and most recently, *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for a Radical Politics* (2016, co-authored with Ward Blanton, Jeffrey W. Robbins, and Noëlle Vahanian).

Citation

Crockett, Clayton (2016), 'Attempting to Teach the Event: An Experiment in Pedagogical Reflection', *JOME C Journal* 10, 'Teaching and the Event', ed. Éamonn Dunne. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10083>

Introduction

How does anyone teach an event? According to Derrida, all the way back in 1966 in his article 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', 'perhaps something has occurred in the history of structure that could be called an "event"' (Derrida 1978: 278). The concept of the event, taken from Heidegger's *Ereignis* – usually translated as an appropriating event or an event of appropriation – became the sign of French poststructuralism. One way to read French poststructuralism is as a commentary on the ways in which philosophical thinking is both captured by structures of economy, politics and power, and how at the same time this thinking exceeds these structures by way of the event.

After World War II, the United States embarked on a project of wide-spread higher education of a majority of its population, using the GI Bill as a means of sending former soldiers to college. At the same time, the 'military industrial complex' used research universities as laboratories for scientific and technological development and therefore the hard sciences were heavily funded. In the wake of the protests and revolts of the 1960s, this liberal education was rolled back and increasingly privatized and corporatized. As Steven C. Ward writes in a recent issue of *Academe*, 'The attack on the liberal university and public education in general can be traced back to the variety of neoliberal reforms of higher education that have been promoted globally since the 1980s by think tanks in the United States and the United Kingdom and groups such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank' (Ward 2015: 14). The shift from liberalism with its government investment to neo-

liberalism with its defunding of public education has left institutions of higher education with two choices: defend liberal education and risk bankruptcy and irrelevance, or adopt these corporate practices of management, assessment and the transformation of ideas into data.

At my institution, which is a mid-level state university in the US, I teach classes in Religious Studies for students who may be personally religious, but are not invested in the value of the academic study of religion, if they even have a distinct idea of what that means. Most students take Religious Studies courses as an option in what used to be a General Education program that has been revised and renamed the Core and expanded to include offerings by the professional schools: Business, Education and Health Sciences. My job is to offer an increasingly limited number of students exposure to 'global' world religions and cultures in an effort to train them to be smarter, more tolerant and more malleable employees in a shrinking job market.

So what is an event, how would one attempt to teach it, and what difference does it make? According to Gilles Deleuze, 'the event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed' (Deleuze 1990: 149). An event is not simply what happens, but what goes on inside what happens. The best way I can explain this is to refer to how a feeling feels. We can talk about what happens in a situation, like listening to a song that generates a feeling, in purely descriptive terms, and we can also go about delineating the physiological happenings in the body and the brain, but we only know how a feeling feels by feeling it, as something purely expressed, from the inside. This is

not a totally closed off inside, because it is always open to the outside, but a person who hears a song and is moved can experience an event, whatever the song and whomever the person. One can play a song, but one cannot simply convey an event because you can never control how someone will hear and respond to it.

In my courses, I try to disorient my students in subtle ways, to help soften the edges of what they think they know, and open them up to other ways of thinking and knowing. I let the materials be the blunt instrument, to shock or intensely affect them in their cognitive incapacity, while I work to lighten the effects of these ideas. I want them to understand that I am not the master, that it's not what I know but what we are able to engage and question, that is important in any class. In my lower-level courses, I have to be stronger and more authoritative while the readings and class materials have to be lighter, while the reverse happens in my upper-level courses. There is a significant break between the lower-level and upper-level courses, and I end up lecturing more and functioning more as a stereotypical instructor in these lower-level courses. My upper-level classes are composed of majors and minors (and often also majors and minors in philosophy), however, who are much more open to thinking about and experiencing an event.

Many students are diminished by standardized testing, debt, work, crippling anxiety and depression. These conditions lead to a loss of any joy of learning, and we sacrifice our students' creative imagination, which is the most essential aspect of any vitality for a reflective human being. Under our present crushing neo-liberalism, how can we

build up rather than tear down without this upbuilding being a shallow and empty affirmation that accords with our consumerist ideologies?

The Question of Transference

Rather than describe in any detail the pedagogy I use in my classes, I thought it would be more interesting to try an experiment. I invited about a dozen former and current students to contribute a paragraph about teaching and the event, based on their experience with my classes. Most of the students have taken my Postmodern Theology course, that focuses most explicitly on the conception of the event, and usually reads either Derrida or John D. Caputo. I also included a couple of non-students, as people who nevertheless have had exposure in some ways with my teaching.

To invite such reflections raises some dangers, the most obvious of which is the problem of transference. Obviously there are important differences, but I do think there is an analogy between the situation of teaching and the situation of psychoanalysis. Certainly most professors represent what Jacques Lacan calls the discourse of the university, rather than the discourse of the analyst. But the question becomes the proper place, if there is one, of love in a pedagogical situation, with all the dangers that inhere. Any influential teacher risks becoming a love object, of having a certain kind of attachment transferred to oneself. This is necessary in the situation of psychoanalysis, although it is not necessary in teaching. However, to make an impact on a student's life is to engage the transference mechanism, and then

transference leads to counter-transference.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is no avoiding this situation, but the question is how to handle it. The danger of course, is for the analyst to identify with the transference, rather than to work with and through it. If a student transfers love onto a teacher, how does she respond, especially if that is part of her pedagogical intention? To remain at the level of persons is to miss the point. It's not about the person of the teacher, how great or popular or masterful he is. And it's not about the personality of the student, however smart or passionate or wonderful she may be, but the pedagogical work that's being accomplished.

The other mistake is to think that transference is simply therapeutic or restorative of a lost capacity. We are not trying to make up for something that is lacking, as obvious as that may seem. It is tempting to think that pedagogy restores something to the student that society has removed, but that is precisely not the case, because there is no natural state of harmony or wholeness on the part of the subject. The teacher is not a master, and the student is not an aspiring master who tries to measure up to the teacher. Neither one can possibly measure up to the subject matter, and teaching works by way of mistakes or misrecognitions.

Transference is love, according to Lacan, but this love is never simple or straightforward. Transference is one of the 'four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis', for Lacan, and it is that which engages the unconscious directly. I am not an analyst, and the classroom is not a couch. At the same time, I do think situations of transference develop, or can

be allowed to develop, but these must be attended to extremely carefully. If I identify with the transference placed upon me, as attested to by some of my students below, I limit myself as a teacher because I then delimit and crush the event. To love one's students is not to identify with the transference and then feed it back to them in a counter-transference, it is to allow what Lacan calls their *jouissance* to emerge as a question and hopefully also as an opportunity, *even if they don't know it*.

There is something of the unconscious at work in teaching, and the connection of the teacher's unconscious with the students' unconscious in an asymmetrical synthesis allows for the chance of an event. This is extremely difficult to pull off, and I usually feel like I fail but in the rare cases where I feel like I succeed I am either fooling myself or giving myself a chance to experience an event, which is never just mine alone because it is always shared. In his seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan argues that the goal is to bring subjects to an awareness of their splitting. Insofar as we are subjects, we are not whole, but already split, divided, and analysis is the attempt to speak to that splitting.

Our students are split, but the object of pedagogy is not to overcome this split, but to open it up and allow them to experience this situation not as a negative condition but as an opportunity for transformation. According to Lacan:

To appeal to some healthy part of the subject thought to be there in the real, capable of judging with the analyst in the transference, is to misunderstand that it is precisely this part that is concerned in the transference, that



it is this part that closes the door, or the window, or the shutters, or whatever – and that the beauty with whom one wishes to speak is there, behind, only too willing to open the shutters again. That is why it is at this moment that interpretation becomes decisive, for it is to the beauty that one must speak. (Lacan 1977: 131)

How do I attempt to teach the event? I try to speak to the beauty of the students' 'unconscious', of which they are usually barely aware, and to awaken them to this beauty. This beauty is so fleeting and fragile that it is easily pushed aside, and that is why we need to be so careful to keep it present, even sometimes by distracting the consciousness of the students with jokes, stories and songs. Even if these testimonials to teaching and the event are testimonials to or about me, I have to resist identifying with them, or believing in them. Because it's not me that matters, it's the chance for teaching to precipitate an event.

Testimonials

Here is an expression of what I am trying to do, by a recent graduate who minored in Religious Studies, Savannah Moix, who was recognized as one of the top graduates of UCA in 2014. She gets at some of the disorientation necessary for an event to happen, and how my teaching tries to speak to the beauty just under the surface of the text and the person.

Never have I felt more unsure, more discombobulated, and more in awe at my own incomprehension than in Dr.

Clayton Crockett's Religious Studies courses at the University of Central Arkansas. In a teaching style I have never encountered before or since then, Dr. Crockett held his students' hands – trembling and with shared uncertainty – as we all attempted to make (non)sense of various theological, philosophical, religious, and psychological thoughts together. He posed inconclusive questions, invited interpretations as wild as the imagination could stretch, and communed with us in utter amazement (and oftentimes frustration) as the vastness and unpredictability of our budding deconstructive minds wrestled with the *event*, the theory that cannot be theorized, the notion that cannot be adequately envisioned, hammered down, or linguistically defined – only portrayed and described in an unlimited multitude of ways. Dr. Crockett inspired the ever-unfolding, consistently undulating events of my learning, of my self-growth, of my (mis)understanding of the system around and containing me, all giving way to future events I will never see coming and am thankful to not expect or fathom. I owe my ability to love and participate in, yet not fully grasp, my own becoming in a universe, in a space, in and out of several fluid moments to this *weak* teacher, a loving lifelong (un)learner, my friend, and the greatest proponent of the potential, Dr. Clayton Crockett. (Savannah Moix)

Before reproducing more reflections by students, I want to step back, and give space for a fellow teacher and colleague, Kelsey Wood, who came to UCA to see Slavoj Žižek give a presentation I hosted



in 2006. After the talk, Wood asked if he could visit my class the next morning, in which Žižek was guest-lecturing.

November 8, 2006

University of Central Arkansas

Conway, Arkansas

At 7:02 PM, Žižek enters the lecture hall. He is dressed casually in corduroy slacks and a dark green long-sleeved dress shirt. No jacket. He slouches a little. He is round-shouldered, and he has a little 'spare tire' of belly fat hanging over his belt. He looks like a big, nervous bear.

But he is animated, and talking in a friendly way with Clayton Crockett, who steps up to the microphone and introduces Žižek to us, the professors and students who make up the audience. Žižek smiles a lot while he speaks, but they are not big smiles: he smiles a lot of quick, half-smiles. While he speaks, he makes constant gestures with his hands.

His talk is called 'Why Only an Atheist Can Believe: Politics between Fear and Trembling'. I wonder if Žižek knows what he is in for. After all, this is Arkansas, where even the Democrats are anti-progressive. I hope he won't be attacked by some ridiculous, conservative idiot...

Two hours later, no one wants Žižek to stop talking. What the hell did he do? He told jokes and made us laugh at ourselves. He talked about movies and made us wary of ideology. Is he trying to reinvent

Christianity? Or is he exposing its radical-emancipatory potential in such a way so that – retroactively – this potential was always already 'there'? Žižek did the impossible: he changed our reality. He told the truth.

In class the following morning, he did it again. Žižek talked about open ontology, how even the past is unfinished. He described something, and at the same time performed what he described. He gave the European tradition new life by re-inventing it, before our eyes. Žižek changed the past: he made the old new again. This was impossible, but so real it could not be ignored. Whatever it took, I would go to Europe, and hear him speak again. One way or another, I would turn my articles about him into a book. Everything's changed.
(Kelsey Wood)

Here the chance of an event of teaching – not mine but Žižek's – turned into a book, *Žižek: A User's Guide*, published by Wood in 2012.

Another student missed the structured event of my classes, but ended up being affected by it nonetheless, as he took classes with many of my colleagues as a philosophy minor before entering an M.Div. program at Fuller Theological Seminary. There he participated in a reading group that engaged one of my books, *Interstices of the Sublime*, and he contacted me and we have been friends ever since.

If we conceptualize an Event as a rupture of possibilities, or as an enigmatic in-breaking of the possible into the apparently impossible, then good pedagogy



should always sit on the edge of an Event. With a view of pedagogy merely prioritizing information-transfer, the student is handed the possible and expected to replicate the possible. The teachers I remember most are those who unexpectedly introduced the impossible. The expert teacher routinely triggers unexpected connections between seemingly unconnected knowledge sets. The student learns quickly that philosophical debates of the past are very much alive in the news stories of the day, that sense can be made out of that which seems impossible to understand. These small 'e' events model themselves on the Event.

Though never a formal student of Dr. Crockett's, I consider myself a student via his books, speeches, and friendship. While my theoretical interests are shaped by his work, my pedagogical ideals have been even more thoroughly influenced by watching the way he encourages students to pursue further studies, by the way he creates space for those with different expertise to shape his work, and by the humility and concern with which he engages his colleagues. If an Event makes the impossible possible, a pedagogy of the Event begins by taking every opportunity for triggering what the student (perhaps) already knows yet does not know that she knows. (Tad Delay)

Delay also produced a book, *God is Unconscious*, published in 2015. Some students like Delay, who is finishing a doctoral program at Claremont, go on to graduate study, and we often want them

to follow in our footsteps, to reproduce ourselves in some way. This is a difficult path, to pursue graduate study in theology, philosophy, or religious studies, due to the lack of resources or jobs. One of the best students I have ever encountered is Tim Snediker, a creative writer and poet who chanced into one of my classes in 2011. He wrote papers that took ideas that I had as well as ideas from Derrida and Deleuze and did things with them I did not think was possible. Don't tell him, because it's a secret, but I think that if he persists in his studies he will surpass me in what he is able to see and say, at least if he stays on the same track. Snediker is finishing an MA in Religious Studies at the University of Denver, and is applying to PhD programs.

Looking back, I can see that Clayton knew that knowledge cannot be transmitted: that one does not learn by mere imitation or mimesis, but in that profound repetition wherein student and master make the movements together – as equals. There is something of Jacotot in Clayton. Neither a strategic humility, nor an appeal to the universality of knowledge; rather a quiet *belief* in the possibilities that swarm in and out of his classroom every week. And the event, *s'ily en a*, is less an earth-shattering cataclysm, or a harmonious symphony, than a bolt of lightning that can be seen but not heard, as if a light without heat, testifying to an excess that can in no way be appropriated, but rather grips oneself in silence. In a word, teaching *is* learning – at the zero point of immanence, where thought arrives and one no longer knows who is master anymore. (Tim Snediker)



Here is another high-achieving student, Kirby Richardson, who studied and practiced Buddhism both at UCA and for a semester in India. In many forms of Buddhism the master-disciple relationship is central, and he reflects on this here in terms of teacher and student. Richardson is currently applying to graduate programs in more practical areas of social work and public policy.

There is a form of symbiosis that exists between a teacher and a pupil, a relationship that openly defies understood social mores in ways that other relationships tend only to threaten to. While typical relationships are expected to observe certain roles for all parties involved with minimal overlap, the very foundation of the teacher-student relationship is the deconstruction of the Other, evident in the teacher seeking to expand the horizons of the student and the student seeking to remain stalwart in confident defense of that which they believe to be indisputable. Teaching and learning are co-dependent acts of deconstruction, one being the targeted destabilization of one's assumptions as to the inner workings of the universe (teaching), and the other being the internal struggle between known and unknown (learning). The event as it pertains to the teacher-student relationship is the exact moment when the teacher is willing to break down all forms of separation between himself/herself and his/her students and when the student willingly takes the journey of self-other discovery along with his/her teacher. It is an experiential phenomenon, one that defies curriculum and data, one that is

rooted purely in the theoretical sphere where ideas and possibilities can be freely played with without fear of ridicule or shame.

Furthermore, the event requires teacher and student alike to forfeit those labels, teacher and student, and begin to interact with one another as if teacher is student and student is teacher. The event opens the mind to the true marvel of education, which is not the process by which we learn new facts, new knowledge, but the process by which we realize how much we do not know, the process by which we become comfortable existing in the grey area between fact and fiction. I believe the event to be the essence of deconstruction, and by extension the essence of postmodern theology as a discipline, and the event as a concept is something that I was forced to grapple with on a daily basis in many of Dr. Clayton Crockett's classes, which often functioned as a forum wherein a group of friends could discuss multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and perhaps even taboo ideas. From a general course on the big names and concepts in postmodern theology to a course on the intersectional nature of science and religion, Dr. Crockett routinely treated his classes as an exercise in deconstruction, one in which all that I once believed indisputable was put to the test, and one from which I emerged a more dedicated, conscientious, and, I believe, a far more effective scholar. (Kirby Richardson)

Many students, of course, do not go on to attend graduate school. One of the

most brilliant students who took classes with me in the years shortly after I started teaching at UCA, Sara Harvey, is currently a bookseller in Colorado.

One day after class, Clayton asked me to visit his office to talk about a paper. We'd been offered the chance to use non-standard forms of response if we felt it was appropriate – artwork, poetry, prose that went outside the usual essay. I don't remember to whom or what we had to respond, but I'd written a short story in large part because I just couldn't get my brain to move through the material in a way that I could recognize. And I was really short on time. In talking about the story – why I'd chosen it, how I thought it was an appropriate response – I realized how my story really did respond, not just to the prompt, but to the danger I felt at not *knowing* what to do with it. I had taken a chance on the assignment that, it turns out, really was the assignment, in a way it couldn't have been without the available alternate. Throughout the many classes I took, the conversations, the mentoring even after graduation, the freedom of Clayton's classroom is still a dangerous place where the world could upend itself; I was deconstructing while encountering these extraordinary ideas because there was no one trying to guide me through in a way *they* could recognize. Instead it was Clayton, who couldn't be possessive about ideas or thoughts and just wanted us to show up and talk every day. (Sara Harvey)

And here is another woman, Jess Porter Thames, who strongly impressed

everyone she worked with in the areas of Philosophy and Religious Studies. The best part about Thames is that no matter where I went or what I did in class she was right there with me intellectually, even when she didn't always agree with me or with the authors we were studying. She is now working to raise her two beautiful children, and she still grapples with the ideas she was exposed to in our department.

On my first day as a student of Dr. Crockett's, and in all the classes I took with him thereafter, I found myself repeatedly questioning, 'What is it that this guy is getting at, exactly?' I now know, as I (un)learn more and more, that *das ist die frage*. Sensitively improving upon the Socratic method, Crockett's subtly insistent approach never fails to yield (to) a powerful transformation in both the learner and the learned. Quite (un)precisely because he never 'gets to the point' of it all, Crockett artfully beckons and facilitates the Event with his every (un)utterance, both as teacher and himself an eternal student. (Jess Porter Thames)

Another student, Keith Witty, wandered into my Theories of Religion class in 2012. He was frustrated with his previous experience at a conservative seminary, and he was struggling to find his voice. His papers were mediocre, and he did something that not many students here do: he came to me and asked not how he could get a better grade, but how he could become a better thinker and writer. So we worked together for the next couple of years and he has flourished in his thinking and writing. He is currently pursuing a Masters in Education so that he can teach secondary school, and he is working on

fiction stories and novels. I told him I would like to become a character in one of his novels.

The event is not something that can be forced upon a person, for it requires an openness within an individual of which s/he is potentially not even aware. A professor's teachings do not end at the classroom entrance, nor the moment a student steps away from his/her office. In fact, a professor's instruction is included within the readings assigned to his/her students, and in the dialogue that s/he creates once the class has been dismissed. It is in this facet of teaching that Clayton perhaps exhibits the beauty of the Event. It is found in the lingering questions that roll over in a mind, changing his/her stance towards to the world. It is found in the concepts that he offers his students to take in, not as something to memorize to pass a test, but rather to take and ponder. The Event ends up being unforeseen, unknowingly planted as a seed and left to germinate, blooming into something that changes both the student's experience of the world, and the world itself. (Keith Witty)

Two of the last three students are current students and Religious Studies majors. One, Joe Love, is a senior who is applying to an M.Div. program at a progressive divinity school, where he wants to engage issues of gender and sexuality, including sexual education in church-related contexts.

Dr. Clayton Crockett's classrooms embody John Caputo's idea of the event. As any course would in the academy, it has a plan. We have

texts to read and a timeframe to do it in, so that structure must be held. However, Crockett creates a beautiful synthesis between organization and potentiality. At the beginning of the class, the students and the professor could be chatting about something distant from the subject, but he always has a way of bringing it back to the book. His classrooms allow space for the unknown to flourish, and then use that to make the course more interesting and relevant to the subject matter. The event can be seen in classroom votes to relocate the seminars to the student lounge or the university's chapel resulting, perhaps, in students sitting down at the piano bench, donning shades and singing a tune... (Joe Love)

Here Love is referring to a field trip outside of the class, where we visited the small chapel at UCA, and held class while one student, Keith Witty, included above, played piano as I 'preached' from the pulpit. Again the challenge is to allow the class an openness without this becoming simple anarchy or total loss of focus. How can the extracurricular activities help assist the engagement with the ideas and precipitate the chance of the event?

D.S. Lowe is a recent graduate of Religious Studies and African/African-American Studies, and she is currently working in Conway and performing as an artist and poet, while considering whether she wants to go on to graduate school. Lowe is one of the most amazing people I have ever encountered in terms of her presence, her ability to think and grasp and express what is significant and important in terms of knowledge, art, and human relationships. Here she reflects

on what the event means for her, which is a kind of invitation:

Until we enter a space designed for the unfathomable we generate the expected. Education for the most part has been tailor-made for the expected, the measureable. Anomalies are things to be feared instead of moments to be embraced. Making the idea of the event coercive at best. Caputo calls it 'uncontainability', the idea that there is no way to really give description to 'God' or 'the event'. Asserting that any description would be reductive in nature. God might be the word but the event cannot be reduced. Essentially giving name to something allows us to understand it but eventually all things outlive the names they are given. They evolve and change. Traditional education tends to reduce moments of creativity, therein reducing evolution and change. I think something like 'the event' happened pretty often in Dr. Crockett's class. Something unconventional and non-traditional. Moments of creativity and intellectual curiosity weren't anomalies but summonses. That's because he treated each lecture like its own event and our participation was necessary in order to truly gain understanding. Furthermore each lesson seemed to embody its own benediction, a sort of invitation to discovery and creativity. An invitation that over the years I've learned to take more seriously. I find myself looking at very ordinary, mundane tasks searching for the extraordinary moment of clarity. (D.S. Lowe)

The last student included here, Keith Dove, is another senior Religious Studies major who is also finishing up a degree in Music. He blew me away when as a seminar project for my Postmodern Theology course, he re-wrote and deconstructed the traditional Christian doxology. And when I say re-wrote, I mean he revised the musical notations not the words. And it made sense! What I appreciate here is that he attests to how my teaching has impacted his own student teaching.

My first exposure to the concept of the event came through reading John Caputo's *The Insistence of God* in Dr. Crockett's Postmodern Theology class. Learning to embrace the event came from joking with fellow students about 'perhaps' and 'the event' both inside and outside of class. The shift from joking about the event to actually embracing it should probably be attributed to the event itself. It was by unguided chance that our jokes and playfulness led to understanding. This understanding led to a change in the lens through which I perceived the world. Specifically, I experienced the event alongside pedagogy as a music education major. As a student teacher, I taught middle school beginning band students. I quickly learned that following a strict lesson plan only led to failure by both me and my students. As a result, my lesson plans had to become 'weak'; they had to embrace the event. A weak lesson plan allowed for me to teach whatever the students needed the most on any given day, which was almost never what I actually intended to teach. Students unpredictably struggled



with some concepts and excelled with others. This was out of my control and was left purely up to chance. My job as an educator was to respond to the events that occurred in my classroom. As a result, this made education more enjoyable for both me and my students, fostering a positive and playful environment. The event, especially in education, allows for playfulness. I learned of the event through play and then used the idea of the event to allow play in my own classroom. This should serve as evidence that a weak pedagogy, which embraces the event, is able to yield strong results. (Keith Dove)

I want to finish these testimonials with some reflections by one of my colleagues, Taine Duncan, who teaches feminist philosophy at UCA. Duncan is an extraordinary teacher, and we have had many conversations about teaching during the years we have worked together. What she articulates is how my focus on the event and my attempts to teach the event constitute a form of resistance to the forces of neo-liberalism for myself and my students, as well as an effort of liberation.

The first two books I ever read, really read, by Derrida were *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* and *Without Alibi*. This has warped forever my understanding of the 'event' as I fundamentally see Derrida as a political philosopher of resistance. For Derrida the importance of resistance in the academy, as an impossible but necessary event, is not the duty of radical students. It is the duty of the academy itself. It is the duty of those of us who profess to teach in

the academy to always push to question, to always challenge, to always remain open to the enigmatic truth. Openness, questioning, and challenging are not easy. They are not the ways the 'truth' has been canonically defined, but they are the methods for the academic in resistance. Lecturing, for example, does not give this openness. It is a closing off of ideas, not a challenging of the truth. But there are so many in our profession who lecture to explain or to lead the students. Clayton does not do this; he does not stand in front of a classroom full of eager and open minds only to close them with self-assuredness and absolutes. Instead, as Clayton and I have discussed many times, he makes himself vulnerable to the class. He encourages the students to be vulnerable to the process of learning. He opens up, rather than closes, minds. I am lucky to count Clayton Crockett as both a friend and a colleague. Our students are lucky to count him as an academic in resistance. (Taine Duncan)

Conclusions

In her constructive work on theology, including *Face of the Deep* and *Cloud of the Impossible*, Catherine Keller insists on the radical relationality of existence. For Keller, this fundamental relationality applies not only to human interactions but also to non-human and inanimate beings. Being is relational all the way down to the level of quantum entanglement (2015: 127-167). To be is to be in relation, and this applies to teaching as well. There is not a discrete being who teaches and discrete beings



who learn, but a mutual interaction and learning. This situation is constant and dynamic, and then the question becomes what is the best form of relationality to accentuate in order to allow for an event?

The relation between teacher and students is not symmetrical, of course, but constitutes what Gilles Deleuze calls an 'asymmetrical synthesis' in *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 234). Pedagogy consists of an intensity that goes from high to low, 'making the lowest an object of affirmation'. The metaphors of high and low for Deleuze are not moral or aristocratic distinctions; they refer to the energetic flow of knowledge from a higher to a lower gradient, and this occurs both between and within a teacher and a student.

The lightness of the 'cloud' of teaching I attempt to generate functions in contrast to the heaviness of our educational institutions. It offers a space for students to get caught up and hopefully opens them up to experiencing an event. This space is a kind of chaos, but not in an oppositional or absolute way. It's more like what Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a 'chaosmos', or composed chaos, following James Joyce (1994: 204). This affirmation of chaos in a certain specific way is a kind of love, a love of teaching, or learning, of students in their generality and singularity, and for the event. As Keller claims in her study of the Deep, or *Tehom*, in Genesis chapter 1, 'to love is to bear with the chaos'. Not to like it or to foster it [as literal chaos] but to recognize there the unformed future' (2003: 29). To love to teach is to bear with the chaos, to risk the mess, and to attempt to offer a possibility for an event, that might or might not happen.

Contributors

Tad DeLay holds a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate University and he is the author of *God Is Unconscious: Psychoanalysis & Theology*.

Keith Dove is a graduate of the University of Central Arkansas, majoring in religious studies and music education. He is currently pursuing an M.Div. at Duke Divinity School.

Taine Duncan is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Director of Gender Studies at the University of Central Arkansas where she happily engages in academic resistance.

Sara Harvey lives in Louisville, KY, where, as a bookseller, she often recommends people read books she knows will make them uncomfortable.

Joe Love earned his Bachelors of Science in Religious Studies from the University of Central Arkansas in 2016, and is now pursuing a Master of Divinity at Brite Divinity School.

D.S. Lowe holds a B.A. in Religious Studies with an African and African Studies concentration. She is a Slam Poet Artist, Youth Advocate, and is dedicated to youth in women empowerment. She is currently working on a Masters in Counseling at the University of Arkansas.

Savannah Moix is a resident of Virginia, and a graduate student at the University of Maryland, pursuing an MA in English Literature. She graduated from the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) in 2014, where she double-majored in English and Writing and minored in Religious Studies.

Kirby Richardson is a graduate from the

UCA Departments of Religious Studies and History and he is pursuing graduate work in Public Service and Social Welfare.

Timothy Snediker is holds an M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of Denver. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Jess Porter Thames graduated in 2013 from the University of Central Arkansas with a degree in Philosophy and minor in Religious Studies. She now resides in

Dallas with her husband and their two young *dasein*.

Keith Witty is completing a Masters in Education at the University of Central Arkansas, and he teaches English at Guy Perkins High School in Arkansas.

Kelsey Wood has taught at Penn State, Boston University, and Holy Cross. He is the author of *Žižek: A Reader's Guide* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), and *Troubling Play: Meaning and Entity in Plato's Parmenides* (SUNY, 2005).

References

- Deleuze, G. (1990), *The Logic of Sense*, translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1994), *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Félix Guattari (1994), *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978), 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Keller, C. (2003), *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, London: Routledge.
- Keller, C. (2015), *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1977), *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: W. W. Norton.
- Ward, S. C. (2015), 'No Child Left Behind Goes to College', *Academe* 101:5, Sept-Oct. Available at: <https://www.aaup.org/article/no-child-left-behind-goes-college#.WCxGANWLSUK>. [Accessed November 16 2016]



Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

www.cardiffuniversitypress.org

This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal*

JOMEC Journal is an online, open-access and peer reviewed journal dedicated to publishing the highest quality innovative academic work in Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. It is published by Cardiff University Press and run by an editorial collective based in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, committed both to open-access publication and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and academic integrity. *JOMEC Journal* is peer reviewed with an international, multi-disciplinary Editorial Board and Advisory Panel. It welcomes work that is located in any one of these disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary work that approaches Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies as overlapping and interlocking fields. It is particularly interested in work that addresses the political and ethical dimensions, stakes, problematics and possibilities of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies.

To submit a paper or to discuss publication, please contact jomecjournal@cardiff.ac.uk

Editors: Evelina Kazakeviciute and Alida Payson

Executive Editor: Professor Paul Bowman

www.cf.ac.uk/jomecjournal

Twitter: @JOMECjournal

ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Based on a work at www.cf.ac.uk/jomecjournal.

