The event, the messianic and the affirmation of life:

A postcritical perspective on education with Agamben and Badiou

Joris Vlieghe
Liverpool Hope University
vlieghj@hope.ac.uk

Piotr Zamojski
University of Gdańsk
pedpz@ug.edu.pl

Introduction

In this contribution we read together the work of two philosophers, Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben. There might be many reasons for doing this, e.g. because both are influential present-day political philosophers who have criticized the current political situation and who have advocated without compromise a radical alternative to the biocapitalist and postdemocratic societies we live in. In that sense a conversation between Agamben and Badiou might be a fruitful one. At the same time, the alternative which Badiou defends and which consists of a newly invented universalism has been heavily criticized by Agamben as a mere continuation of the order both disapprove of, and as a fundamentally anti-political line of thought.

Although the political inspiration of both Badiou’s and Agamben’s ideas is important, as is there point of discussion, we believe that there is another and perhaps more important reason to engage in a discussion between both: according to us, they are also profound educational thinkers, at least in the sense that their philosophical approaches help us to articulate what is at stake in education today. It appears that much is to be gained by reading their work together and by developing a discussion about education between both these two thinkers. In that sense, what we present in this paper is a philosophical exercise in translation. First, because it takes the work of Badiou and Agamben as addressing a topic they haven’t explicitly written about, but which – according to our reading – is actually at the core of their philosophies. As such, we translate their ideas for the world of (philosophy of) education. Second, because we set up a discussion between two authors who haven’t been read together by philosophers of education, translating thus between two diverse theoretical frameworks, and therefore crossing philosophical divides.
As a starting point for this discussion we take their work on Saint Paul. Indeed, both Agamben (2005) and Badiou (2003) have devoted a detailed study to the writings of the Apostle. However, being self-proclaimed atheists themselves, the nature of these books isn’t theological. It seems, both are fascinated by the figure of Paul for another reason. More specifically, throughout his Letters, Paul has found the appropriate words to think and speak about the fate of our world and about new ways of beginning with this world. For Badiou and Agamben alike, Paul is ‘our contemporary’ (Badiou 2003: 4-15; Cf. Agamben 2005: 135-136). And, we would like to add, with their reading of Paul, Badiou and Agamben can be said to develop fresh ideas about the contemporary challenges of education. As a common denominator of this joint educational reading of their work, we argue that it opens a postcritical view on education which is about fidelity to an event which has the force to install a particular attitude towards life and which installs a messianic interruption of time. We see this more specifically as a most precise description of the work any genuinely impassioned teacher engages in and of the constitution of particular conditions called ‘school’, respectively.

We first have a closer look at their readings of the Apostle separately. We show that both thinkers grant the possibility of reconceiving what is at stake in education –something which is markedly different from main stream views on education. At the same time, the alternative account we suggest is not just a criticism of the existing system, but an entirely affirmative, and hence a post-critical, approach. We argue furthermore that on the basis of our common reading of Badiou’s and Agamben’s work an ontology of teaching can be fleshed out. We use these different accounts of education and teaching to draw attention to the possibilities we have at our disposal to begin anew with our world.

**Event, fidelity and truth**

For Badiou the resurrection of Christ wouldn’t have been the founding event of Christianity (and the Church) if not for St. Paul. It was he, who has recognized this happening (which for Badiou is a fiction) as the event. ‘Event’ is the key concept of Badiou’s philosophy and it signifies the possibility of the coming into being of something utterly new in a self-reproducing, solidified status quo. Given that this solidity of the order of things is a construct, from time to time something happens that doesn’t fit. Although there are always many witnesses, i.e. people who are aware that something important and unexpected has happened, there must always be someone who understands that after this thing took place nothing remains the same - that what has happened is the event. Badiou calls such an act of recognizing the event and naming it the intervention(Badiou 2005: 202-203). This act is necessary since the event is something not taken into account by the status quo. It is supernumerary, as Badiou calls it, and hence not-representable (Badiou 2005: 178): “…it doesn’t belong to the language of the situation” (329). This is exactly why St. Paul has to invent a new discourse to express the event (cf. Badiou 2003:

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1 What we usually call the status quo, could be rendered in Badiou’s terms as the situation and the State of the situation (see Badiou 2005: 24-28, 93-103; idem, 2003: 76)
and to introduce its effects on the *status quo*. This is what Badiou calls *fidelity to the event*. The event – in St. Paul’s case: the resurrection of Christ – is not understandable within the *status quo* (the situation and its state). It is impossible, irrational, beyond reach. So it first needs to be expressed in a conceivable way, and then it has to be related to the present *status quo*. Fidelity is, therefore, a process of giving the event its meaning by reinterpreting the elements of our *status quo* in the context of the event, which – on the other hand – means reconfiguring this *status quo*: recognising and introducing the consequences of the event into the particularities of our life. This procedure is productive as it brings forth the truth about the event. The truth consists of the effects of an infinite process of faithful connections of particularities to the event (Badiou 2005: 335). Hence, the event and its truth ‘need’ not only an intervening subject (recognizing it and giving it a name), but also the militant of this truth. Someone who will make us understand the event, who shows to the others what the meaning is of the event for their world, for their life, for everything that counts. Or even better: someone who would introduce the new way of counting (i.e. differentiating what counts and what doesn’t). As Badiou comments, such a militant fidelity is named *agape* (love) by Paul – a point to which we shall return later on in this text.

For Badiou the most important quality of the event, as indicated by Paul or any other militant of truth, is its universal equality. Fidelity is a procedure of connection. It shows that there are some elements of our world that – in the face of the event – are not important any more, as there are some that have become more crucial (Ibidem: 232-234). Christ’s resurrection, for example, made the difference between the circumcised and not-circumcised redundant, but it had put in the centre the commandment of love. So by reconfiguring the situation and the state, Paul invalidates all the differences (circumcised/not-circumcised, Greek/Jew, man/woman, etc.) that were used to group people, to enumerate them, to assign to them their predicates, duties, ranks, and rights. These differences have become ‘out of order’. They are useless and no longer operational (as they are not-connected to the event). In Badiou’s terms, Paul subtracts these differences, as the resurrection of Christ wasn’t the act of negation or overcoming of death, but rather of its subtraction (Badiou 2003: 73). This means that death simply doesn’t count any more (that is: after the event of Christ resurrection) – what counts is Life.

**The Messianic and the affirmation of life**

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2 Hence – as Badiou notices – “the subject cannot make a language out of anything except combinations of the supernumerary name of the event and the language of the situation” (Badiou 2005: 396, emphasis in original).

3 This regards is an endless process because the flux of being brings about an infinite number of terms that can be found as connected or not-connected to the event.

4 This is exactly the way of counting that forms and runs the State of the situation. Hence, for Badiou fidelity creates a kind of counter-state: “…what it does is organize, within the situation, another legitimacy of inclusions. It builds […] a kind of other situation…” (Badiou 2005: 238, emphasis in original)
Agamben’s main concern, in his reading of St Paul, is not so much the event of the Resurrection, as it is the messianic community (cf. Agamben 2005: 18). This is a way of living, as individual human beings and as a collective of people, which is – as in Badiou’s reading - solely structured by the enactment of agape (love). Or at least, what is needed according to Paul’s teachings is that we come to relate in a different way to the ‘normal’ way of structuring our communal life – which is according to nomos (the Law). As Paul claims, love will come and fulfill the (ancient Jewish) Law.

The Law, etymologically speaking, goes back the verb nemo, which means to divide. It sets up, for instance, exclusive divisions between Jews and the pagan Greeks, or it neatly organizes societal life according to clear divisions between identities, positions and roles. However, the Messianic community is not one in which this dividing mechanism is simply abolished. Rather, the mechanism is subtly deconstructed from within. More concretely, the messianic consists in a suspension of the division, viz. in dividing the division itself. In Paul’s letters, we see how traditional identifications get destabilized in that some Jews appear to be not Jews (they are circumcised, but are no Jews in their doings and their convictions) and some non-Jews appear to be not non-Jews (although they have a foreskin, they are Jews in their doings and convictions). As such, there is always the possibility of a remnant which prevents a closure of Jewish, or for that matter Greek or any other identity: we are all non-non-Jews. It is important to remark here that this doesn’t imply a universally shared identity, but the ever present possibility to destabilize any identity: there is always “a remnant between every people and itself, between every identity and itself” (Ibid.: 52).

Likewise, the messianic community is one in which professional and hierarchical positions – ‘callings’ – no longer make a difference. Again what is at stake is not an abolishment of all callings – as an eschatological interpretation of Paul might imply (i.e. an indifference towards our callings in view of the end of time which is forthcoming), but rather a calling of these callings: rendering these positions ‘inoperative’. This is what Paul means, according to Agamben, when he claims that in Messianic time there will still be Jews and Greeks, men and women, well-off and poor people, slaves and free citizens. But, these oppositions lose their dividing power in that they are experienced as ‘hos me’: as-not. We live the life of slaves as not slaves, and of free men as not free men, etc. Social positions are “nullif[ied] in the very gesture of maintaining and dwelling in it.” (Ibid.: 24). They are no longer experienced as having any meaning whatsoever.

It is of the greatest importance to understand – and here Agamben departs completely from any standard interpretation of the Scriptures – that this messianic community is not a future state-of-being we have to await. In Paul, messianic time is now-time. It regards a moment here and now, a moment fully within ordinary time, which has the power to change our whole experience of ordinary time. It is a slip-up to regard this blissful moment (kairos), as the tradition does, as something to be glued to the course of time (chronos), after its end. This has caused the paradoxes and confusions about the Messianic as a
time that still has to come, but in the end never comes. The Messianic is *Parousia*, a technical term which is often identified with Christ’s Second Coming, but which literally just means ‘next-to, nearby, close at hand’. In other words, we must come and realize that the possibility of the messianic has already always been with us. The only thing which is needed is that we come and recognize this. And this is related to taking a particular, *entirely affirmative attitude towards our lives*: “the messianic world is nothing other than the secular world” (Ibid.: 56).

It is taking this attitude which turns life into something which is no longer susceptible to any order and divisionary logic the law wants to impose. It is in that sense that Love – as the affirmation of life – truly fulfills he Law. It is important, however, to note that this doesn’t imply a plea for substituting the existing law for a new law. Also, it is not a calling for lawlessness (anarchy). The law needs to be deconstructed (not destructed) from the inside. This is, the Law (of love) which applies in the Messianic now-time is a “non-normative figure of the law” (Ibid.: 95). Or, as Agamben says, “the Messiah renders the law inoperative” (Ibid.: 98).

**Beyond dialectics / After critique**

On the basis of this short presentation of what according to Badiou and Agamben is at stake in Paul’s writings, we would argue that for both thinkers Paul presents the possibility of an interruption of the existing dominant order, the *status quo*, and therefore the possibility of a revolution - of a new beginning, of a renewal of the world. A possibility which, almost two thousand years after date, still speaks to us. For Agamben, messianic time is most literally now-time, and for Badiou, the militant of truth is the figure which ‘faithfully’ connects the present to the event past – otherwise the event is purely ‘past’ and therefore irrelevant.

In both Badiou and Agamben, this possibility of interruption and change which concerns us ‘now’, is thought of in a most uncommon way: it is beyond dialectics and beyond any traditional critical position. With this we mean that, more often than not, change is conceived by philosophers and educationalists alike in terms of a negative relation with the existing order. This is very clear in the Hegelian conception of *Aufhebung*, where the ultimate point of reference remains the thing which is being negated, since every sublation preserves what it had abolished (See Hegel 2010: 81-82). The positive outcome of change is the negation of a negation.

Over and against this, what Paul conceives as the change instigated by Christ is a *purely affirmative possibility of transformation*. The event of Christ’s Resurrection, according to Badiou’s reading of Paul, is a pure event: life is not the negative side of death. Christ’s Resurrection *just* happened and that is what makes it into a *real* event. There is thus a possibility of affirming life which is not dependent upon the overcoming of death. That is why the event is so sudden and unexpected, and why it constitutes a really radical breach in time and in the existing order. That is also why the event remains to be, time
and again, something which doesn’t fit and which will never fit. Something which therefore requires a reconnection of elements of the status quo to the event. Now, in order to do so, we need to see death and life not as two moments of a dialectical relation, but as ‘subjective paths’, i.e. attitudes or ways of being in the world (Badiou 2003: 68).

Likewise, in Agamben’s reading of Paul, the Messianic relates to the willingness to live our lives in a messianic mode. It is this which creates an interruption of the status quo which is beyond any reference to the existing order. Slaves live as not-slaves. The order is not replaced by another one, nor is it completely abolished: in both cases change would be negatively connected to the order we should transcend. The true new beginning is precisely expressive of an experience of life which is entirely affirmative and which doesn’t need the negative reference to the criticized order to be able to wholeheartedly say yes to life as it is. That is also why Agamen, following Benjamin here, defines the messianic not as a spectacular event, but as an almost insignificant happening: the messianic world is only slightly different, up to the extent that the Messiah comes almost without noticing (Agamen 2005: 69). The messianic is not some completely new existence which suddenly happens to us. Rather, what is demanded is the willingness to relate affirmatively to the existing world, and this requires an attitude of love – an attitude which is the opposite of the destructive passion to negate the present in name of a lost past or a better future still to come.

It is clear now that both Agamen and Badiou find the work of the Apostle as articulating the possibility of a renewal of our world which is not based on critique and overcoming of the negated status quo. What Badiou calls being faithful to the event is very close to what Agamen describes as the recapitulation which comes with kairos, i.e. the summing up of what we knew or/and believed in before the Messiah was present-near-by (See Agamen 2005: 75-77). Both, fidelity to the event as well as recapitulation in the Messianic time are creating something new (a counter state, an exception) within the dominant order - not in opposition to it. They create a gap or a slot that doesn’t fit, that can’t be taken into account. This happens in such a way that fidelity and recapitulation are not involved in the dialectical move characteristic of every negation and every critique.

Neither Agamen nor Badiou set forth a critical or a dialectical relation to the world. What they propose is also not a simple inversion of its structure, as it is not some kind of utopian dream of a brave new world. On the contrary, what is at stake is the possibility of introducing the impossible into the status quo. This is brought about by the series of small alterations that may seem to be irrelevant or irrational, but that in fact are reconstituting the operative order of things. As such, a sphere is created in which such an order is not operational any more. This order is present, but as if not itself. It is being reconfigured, it is put out of order.
Therefore, what is at stake here is not critique. It is not about distancing oneself from and overcoming the oppressive order of the present *status quo*. Instead the work of the Apostle creates a breach that makes possible a new beginning with life for all. It is not a work of a critic, it is a work of an amateur, who makes it possible for everyone else to fall in love, and therefore to live a fallen in love life: a life that happens within the conditions of the *status quo*, but that is not overwhelmed by them, and that therefore has the power to reconfigure these conditions.

**The ontology of teaching**

We argue that, we are dealing here with allowing for a possibility of renewing our world by virtue of love to a thing belonging to the world, that is, we are dealing here with an implicit attempt to formulate the ontology of teaching. With this we mean that teaching is more than a profession which consists of the possession of a set of technical skills, but a way of being which consists of being passionately in love with a subject matter (Cf. Arendt 1958).

Badiou argues that the truth is a process that takes place after the event is being recognized and named (intervention), a process that takes place by the virtue of the procedure of fidelity, that is by the decision of a militant to connect, or not-connect particular elements of the *status quo* to the event. And, this means reconfiguring (recounting) the existing order of things (the state and the situation). What is striking in his commentary of St. Paul is that Badiou, referring to the notion of *agape*, claims that “*Love is precisely what faith is capable of.* [...] In Paul’s thought, love is precisely fidelity to the Christ-event” (Badiou 2003: 90, emphasis in original).

Love is therefore the work of a militant of truth, the work of a subject introducing the event and its consequences into the *status quo*. Badiou recalls here the Letter to the Galatians: “faith works only through love” (Galatians 5: 6). Love is therefore labour: an infinite, consequent and relentless work of recounting and reconfiguring that is renewing our world in the face of the event. It means making the event that has happened present again, by installing it in our *status quo*, by reorganizing the situation and its state because of the event. However, such an identification of fidelity with love changes the whole of Badiou’s ontological argument, since before love there is a moment of falling in love – which corresponds to what Badiou calls the intervention, but which couldn’t be rendered as such.

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5 Badiou (2003) speaks in this context about the two forms of revolutionary thought: one conceives revolution in terms of an instrument, a means appropriated by the eschatological narrative of the shift from the now time of oppression to the future time of freedom; the other understands revolution as “a self-sufficient sequence of political truth” (48), as a break in the existing order that is not originated in the *status quo*, a purely new beginning that operates – however – on the body of the existing order.

6 This could be regarded as a shift in conceiving of love in Badiou’s writings. In Being and event he introduced love as one of the generic procedures of fidelity that operates in the situational sphere of the individual (Badiou 2005: 339). As such it is different from love in the sense disclosed by Badiou in his book on St. Paul, since the latter concerns the collective not the individual, and leads to the 6-th theorem on the universality of truth (the theorem of the militant) (Badiou 2003: 90).
Love is something that is not a matter of choice. It comes (from “the outside”) and presses itself upon us. We fall into it. That is, we submit to its powers, we are taken away by it: love leads us thereafter. For Badiou the event also is a coming [une venue] (Badiou 2003: 48). Now, the intervention is also a decision that establishes the subject. And so is love. But, love is a particular sort of intervention: it is close to the decision to recognize and name the event. However, love is also an encounter which completely demands our attention and takes over our lives. Indeed, falling in love is not a matter of a decision that brings forth a subject (a militant of truth) into the status quo. Rather, it is about letting oneself go, being ‘under the spell’ and beyond any decision. It is a kind of slacking the deciding and controlling subject, dispersing it into the particular efforts of responding to the call of love. We believe that exactly at the point of the identification of love and fidelity to the event, Badiou develops, in his reading of St. Paul, another way of viewing the relations between his fundamental ontological concepts (i.e. event, intervention, fidelity, subject...). More importantly, this way of viewing opens up a possibility to conceptualise in a new way the idea of teaching.

What Badiou says could be connected to insights recently developed by Gert Biesta when he argues that teaching is about the possibility of an introduction of a transformative experience of an encounter with the unknown, the unexpected, the other. It is not about equipping students with some cognitive schemes or packages of data, but about making a difference in the way they live (Biesta 2014 and 2015).

Following Badiou’s reading of St. Paul, we could add to this that teaching also originates in the experience of transformative affirmation, the experience of falling in love with a thing belonging to the world, i.e. a subject matter, and therefore, the very act of teaching consists of being faithful to this event. Teaching is an attempt to make this event of falling in love being present in the work with students. It is an attempt to ‘confirm’ this love, to make it true. The teacher is the militant of this truth, since the theorem of the militant means that: “No truth is ever solitary, or particular” (Badiou 2003: 90). The truth is never a private matter. Teaching therefore means: turning one’s private experience of falling in love with a particular subject matter into an event, a shared or common experience. Teaching can touch and transform students’ way of life only because it is an attempt to make the students fall in love with a subject matter, as it is a public testimony of a teacher’s love towards a thing belonging to the world.

In Agamben’s reading of Paul’s faith to the Messiah, we are also presented with a figure of the faithful that comes close to what we have just analyzed as the teacher which is passionately devoted to a subject matter. In order to understand what faith (pistis) is all about, we need to take into account that there is always an ambiguity between the propositional content faith pertains to and the act faith consists of (Agamben 2005: 89). On the one hand, faith is obviously about something (when someone says ‘I believe’, we want to know what it is she believes). On the other hand, faith requires that we actually do something which makes a difference (it is actually important that we do confess to something and are
willing to bear the consequences). Our words of faith are performatives: they make something happen almost like magical words or curse words do.

As such, we are close to the origins of both language and law, a sphere to which Agamben also refers as ‘prelaw’ (Ibid.: 114): the experience of naming things, which gives us a glimpse of the power which is present in language. We have, in other words, an exceptional experience of what it means to be able to speak, i.e. that our words can refer to things and can convey messages. This is the most profound meaning of the word *evaggelion* – which only later became the name of a canonical text, i.e. the gospels (Ibid.). In origin, however, the evangelical refers to ‘an experience of language in which the text of the letter is at every point indistinguishable from the announcement and the announcement from the good announced’ (Ibid.: 90). The messianic faith happens precisely at the moment when the distinction between the content of the message and the magic-performative deed can no longer be drawn (Ibid.: 90). As Agamben says, faith “enacts its meaning through its utterance” (Ibid.: 131). It is an act of pure affirmation.

That is also why Paul’s ‘message’ cannot be adequately defined in any standard epistemological way. Significantly, Paul never says that he knows that Jesus is the Messiah (Ibid.: 127). This is to say that, apart from the historical fact that Paul never knew Jesus and thus cannot make that truth claim, “he only knows Jesus Messiah” (Ibid.). In the end, Paul’s faith is not a belief in a propositional content (Jesus truly is the Messiah). Rather, the ‘knowledge’ involved here is close to the relation we have with our beloved ones. When we say we love someone, e.g. ‘beautiful-brunette-tender Mary’ (Ibid.: 128), we do not mean that we love her because she is called Mary, she is beautiful, tender and brown of hair, etc. : “Love has no reason, and this is why, in Paul, it is tightly interwoven with faith” (Ibid.). Both love and faith come down to being taken by something which entirely determines our own being, in such a way that we cannot separate lover and her object, confessor and the object of confession.

In a sense, this is a very precise ontological account of what teaching might all be about. The teacher has not the choice not to profess the event that has made her a teacher, i.e. her passionate attachment to a subject matter. Her subject matter is her gospel, her *evaggelion* - her way of saying yes to life, to affirm life beyond negativity and dialectics. She is so fully taken by it, that it would be utterly senseless to ask why it is important, why we need to take care for it and why we need to pass it on to the next generations. It is also in that sense that we can understand Paul’s dictum that love fulfils the whole Law – which he identifies, as we said earlier on, with recapitalulation: what we love is experienced as unconditionally good (i.e. worth of affirmation). And, it is so good that we must pass it on. The good of fulfilment is beyond ‘good works’, i.e. the things that are good in view of the Law. As such, the ‘good’ teacher is someone who performatively embodies a subject matter and who shows to others why it is important. Therefore she has the capacity to turn something into an object of attention and care.
This figure has to be opposed, most firmly, to someone who is merely concerned about outcomes that can be judged from the standpoint of the Law. This last figure would be the accountable and entrepreneurial teacher whose teaching must be judged according to the measurable outcomes she realizes, i.e. according to the benefits she brings to students and to the whole of society. Over and against this, the ‘faithful’ teacher, in a Pauline sense, is entirely gripped by something she ‘knows’, i.e. something she knows to be intrinsically good. Her teaching is therefore a pure gift: “a pure and common potentiality of saying, open to a free and gratuitous use of time and the world” (Ibid.: 136). Her gift is literally for everyone, so that they can begin anew with the world.

The gift of teaching. Or: making a difference to our contemporary world

Of course, there is no guarantee that this gift will be accepted. Students can easily reject it or remain utterly indifferent. Nonetheless, her free gift has made something happen. It has made a difference. The gift of the passionate teacher produces the conditions for the emergence of a sphere which is out of the ordinary: a sphere of suspension or subtraction, where everything except for the subject matter (the object of love) is temporarily bracketed out.

With Agamben and Badiou, we have analysed this possibility of a rupture within the normal course of things as a ‘counter-state’ and as an ‘exception’. When a militant is faithful to the event and when the believer affirms in life what she confesses, the possibility of gap in the dominant order of things is granted. This is not the result of criticizing or negating the given order of things, nor of dialectically overcoming it, but – as Badiou argues – of a reconfiguration of the status quo: the revolution consists of a re-description – i.e. a recounting and recapitulation of the world we live in. This, Agamben would add, goes together with the creation of a specific kind of time. What we need to reconfigure is not an ideological narrative, a discourse, a political strategy, social institution or a rule of law. Instead, we need to build the conditions for this other experience of time to emerge. This time is kairos, now-time, which Paul opposes to chronos – the ordinary three dimensional time of past-present-future, i.e. the time of the dominant order. Drawing from Masschelein and Simon’s account (2013), it could be said that this particular time which allows for a recounting and recapitulation of our common world is school time – following the original ancient Greek meaning of this word: skholè, free time. The time during which the existing order of things is suspended, so that we can begin anew with the world.

However, Agamben and Badiou also stress that this slot in the order of day-to-day business is not a matter of supernatural causes. Neither is it an accident. It is made by humans, and it requires their effort and discipline, their faith (pistis) and love (agape): “grace itself is no more than the indication of a possibility” (Badiou 2003: 91). This is, skholè is an exceptional condition. It is both a condition (i.e. something given), but it also requires an uncommon effort and work – not unlike love which is an emotion which affects us involuntarily (falling in love) and which is also something to sustain and develop (labour of love). Of course, this is to say that school cannot happen everywhere and anytime,
which seems to be the creed of the current educational policies (geared at life-long learning and turning education into a matter of securing total employability). We must grant the possibility for a passionate encounter between the generations, between someone who is taken by a devotion to a subject matter and those who might, inspired by this passion, transform our world.

When teaching passionately, i.e. when being faithful to the event of falling in love with a subject matter, true educational time comes about. However, this pure gift of teaching runs counter to the current ordering of educational space and time. This order is, on the one hand, a productive regime which doesn’t tolerate that we lose ourselves, that we truly follow a passion. Everything we do must be accounted for of in view of what it contributes to individual and collective development and success. What happens in a learning context must be useful and beneficial for something else. On the other hand, it concerns also an order which aims at safeguarding the status quo. The only change that is permitted is a change which increases productivity and which guarantees success, and therefore a true new beginning with our world is ruled out (Cf. Simons and Masschelein 2006).

As such we argue, with Agamben and Badiou, that Paul is indeed our contemporary. He offers the vocabulary and the philosophical tools to address an issue which has become ever more pressing in today’s educational world: how to conceive of the possibility of truly educating, i.e. offering the possibility to the new generation to radically transform a given order of things by introducing them into our common world. Therefore, the figure of the teacher, passionately devoted to a subject matter, is a messianic believer and a life-affirmative militant: she has a major political relevance for our times which are at risk of reducing the educational to a matter of maximizing productive forces and sustaining a given state of affairs.

References


