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SPECTERS OF LOST CAUSES: CAPUTO'S THEOLOGY THROUGH THE ŽIŽEKIAN LENS OF FIDELITY AND
HAUNTING

Author Biography

Yiu Ming Cheung is a PhD researcher at GCAS College, Dublin, where his doctoral research is supervised by John D. Caputo. His work sits at the intersection of continental philosophy, biblical hermeneutics, and theology, with particular attention to John D. Caputo and Jacques Derrida on the derivation of an eventual hermeneutics for the Bible. His research interests include radical and weak theology, deconstruction, and biblical hermeneutics.

Abstract

This article argues that Slavoj Žižek's notion of the "lost cause" and John D. Caputo's theology of the event can be brought into a mutually illuminating dialogue that yields a distinctive "theology of insistence and interruption." I reconstruct Žižek's account of the lost cause as fidelity to a traumatic Real that exceeds empirical success or failure and propose three criteria, namely rupture, universality-claim, and spectral persistence, for identifying such causes. I then illustrate these criteria through brief readings of the Umbrella Movement and 2019 Hong Kong protests, Occupy Wall Street, and the 2011 mobilizations in Cairo's Tahrir Square, showing how each functions as a "lost cause" whose truth remains unfinished. In the second part, I read Caputo's event-theology as a hauntological thinking of divine insistence, in which "God" names an undeconstructible call that never becomes a metaphysical presence yet demands concrete, non-sovereign responses. Bringing Žižek and Caputo together, I argue that Žižek's emphasis on trauma and fidelity sharpens the political edge of Caputo's spectral hermeneutics, while Caputo's insistence on weakness and hospitality constrains Žižek's militant negativity. The result is a postsecular, theopolitical framework for thinking how faithfulness to "lost causes" can animate emancipatory projects without collapsing into nostalgic myth or quietist resignation.

Keywords: Slavoj Žižek; John D. Caputo; lost causes; the event; weak theology; hauntology; fidelity; the Real; political theology; spectral hermeneutics; postsecularism; radical theology

1. Introduction

In contemporary critical thought, Slavoj Žižek's concept of the "lost cause" and John D. Caputo's "undeconstructible event" are subjects of considerable fascination and debate. Although these concepts appear to originate from different intellectual traditions, i.e., Žižek's from Lacanian psychoanalysis and political theory, and Caputo's from Derridean deconstruction and theology,¹ they provide a potent framework for examining the endurance of

1. John D. Caputo, *Specters of God: An Anatomy of the Apophatic Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 19, 44.

belief and hope in our contemporary climate of disillusionment. This paper seeks to initiate a critical conversation between Žižek's idea of the lost cause and Caputo's spectral hermeneutics. By investigating their areas of agreement and disagreement, especially in their treatment of failure, fidelity, and the elusive nature of truth, I propose that their combined perspectives establish an innovative "theopolitical" framework.² This article advances three claims: (1) Žižek's "lost cause" can be specified through three criteria – rupture, universality-claim, and spectral persistence; (2) Caputo's event reframes fidelity as ethical "insistence"; (3) taken together they yield a theopolitical framework with distinctive diagnostic and ethical purchase. This framework, I contend, not only counters prevalent postmodern skepticism but also reveals how radical potential persists in the present, even without unequivocal victory. More specifically, I develop a "theology of insistence and interruption" in which Žižek's fidelity to lost causes supplies the analytic register of rupture, while Caputo's eventual insistence provides the ethical register of non-sovereign response.

In what follows I develop these claims in three steps. First, in sections 2–4 I reconstruct Žižek's account of the "lost cause," emphasizing its Lacanian grounding in the traumatic Real and specifying three criteria, namely rupture, universality-claim, and spectral persistence, that distinguish a lost cause from mere failure or nostalgic fantasy. Second, in section 5 I read Caputo's "weak theology" and spectral hermeneutics through this Žižekian lens, arguing that the event can be understood as a kind of theological "lost cause" that never arrives as presence but insists as a demand for justice. Third, in section 6 I stage a theopolitical comparison that both politicizes Caputo's event and softens Žižek's militant negativity, before concluding in section 7 with indications for how this Caputo-Žižek constellation might inform postsecular forms of faith and political commitment today.

2. Lost Causes According to Žižek: Trauma, Fidelity, and the Political Real

Slavoj Žižek's concept of the "lost cause" is not merely a political setback or a wistful glance back at the past.³ Instead, it points to a project or an event that never quite achieved its full potential,⁴ something whose inherent capacity to disrupt the status quo still lingers, a persistent ghost in the present.⁵ Grounded in a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the lost cause appears to align with the **Real**: that stubborn dimension of existence that resists complete symbolization or neat integration into our conceptual schemes.⁶ The Real, as Žižek understands it, breaks into our ordered world not by conforming, but precisely by refusing to. Institutional failure is here a precondition rather than a criterion: a lost cause is, by definition, a cause that has been defeated. What distinguishes a genuine lost cause from mere failure or nostalgic fantasy are three criteria. A defeated movement or claim counts as a Žižekian "lost cause" when it (i) indexes a structural antagonism that the existing order cannot absorb (rupture), (ii) articulates a universal demand irreducible to identitarian closure (universality-claim), and (iii) recurs as a symptomatic

2. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 8; Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 1.

3. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 1–4.

4. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 4, 6.

5. *Ibid.*, 1–3, 13; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989; repr., London: Verso, 2009), 182–84.

6. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 8.

“return” that refuses to disappear (spectral persistence). A lost cause is not simply a cause that failed but a cause that remains unfinished in its very truth.⁷

2.1. The Lacanian Core: Beyond Simple Failure

To grasp the implications of Žižek's concept, one must look into its Lacanian underpinnings, particularly the notion of the Real. The Real, in Lacanian thought, is not just objective reality; it is more akin to the irreducible kernel that resists being fully articulated in language or absorbed into social structures. It functions as a traumatic core, a persistent residue that constantly disrupts the smooth surface of our perceived reality. The lost cause, in this light, is precisely such a phenomenon: a political or social aspiration that, despite its empirical defeat, embodies a truth so radical, or a potential so disruptive, that the dominant symbolic order cannot entirely assimilate or dismiss it. It persists as a nagging inconsistency, a “symptom” demanding recognition.⁸ This very “stubbornness” of the Real, its refusal to be fully integrated, suggests that every social edifice is built upon a fundamental antagonism that it constantly attempts to disavow or paper over. The lost cause, then, is not merely a historical failure, but an *exposure* of this inherent incompleteness within the social fabric itself.

This persistence often feels like **trauma**. For Žižek, a traumatic event is not merely a past misfortune we recall; it is an unassimilated kernel that actively shapes our present desires and anxieties. It returns symptomatically,⁹ not out of a nostalgic yearning for the past, but because its underlying truth was never “worked through” or integrated into the symbolic order. This can be understood as a “missed encounter” with the Real, a moment of truth that was either unregistered or misrecognized by the symbolic order at the time, hence its persistent return. Fidelity to a lost cause, therefore, is not about wallowing in sentimentality or romanticizing failure. Instead, it bears a resemblance to psychoanalytic transference: a dynamic engagement with something in the present that resists resolution.¹⁰ It represents a commitment to the truth embodied in the original rupture, even if that rupture ultimately failed to succeed on its own terms. This stubborn, unassimilable core of the lost cause might be understood as Lacan's *objet a*, i.e., that elusive, impossible object-cause of desire, the leftover that cannot be fully symbolized, yet which continues to exert a powerful, sometimes irrational, pull.¹¹ It functions as the *objet a* of a political project, a spectral presence that, precisely by *not* quite becoming fully real, retains its radical potential. This *objet a* is, in a sense, a symptom of the system, revealing the inherent contradictions or disavowed truths that the dominant order struggles to contain. Alain Badiou, a philosopher Žižek frequently engages with, might describe this as a loyalty to an event that never fully arrived, but whose possibility continues to insist.¹²

It is worth pausing on Badiou here, since his vocabulary of event and fidelity shadows this entire argument. For Badiou, an event is a rare, unpredictable rupture that exceeds the existing “state of the situation”; fidelity is the disciplined, militant labour of drawing out the event's consequences through a truth-procedure, and the subject is precisely whoever sustains that fidelity.¹³ Žižek's lost cause clearly borrows this grammar. But notice the divergence. Badiou's event is subtractive, formalizable, and resolutely atheist: it founds a positive truth and a militant

7. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 1, 4, 141.

8. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 3, 13; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 16–17, 22.

9. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 21.

10. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 57–59, 62–65.

11. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 21.

12. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 3, 277.

subject. What it has little place for is haunting – the spectral persistence of a cause that *failed to arrive* and yet will not depart. Badiou gives us the *that* of fidelity, its formal structure; what he does not give us is the mournful, non-sovereign *how* that Caputo's spectral theology will supply. The synthesis I pursue here lives in precisely that gap, which is why it cannot be folded back into a Badiouian event theory.

2.2. Contemporary Examples: Hong Kong and Beyond

This logic seems to play out quite clearly in recent political movements, especially those that, despite being suppressed, continue to resonate in our collective memory.

A note on the cases. I treat Hong Kong, Occupy Wall Street, and Tahrir Square as exemplary sites rather than as data for empirical generalization. They are selected not for statistical representativeness but because they vividly exhibit the three features of a Žižekian “lost cause”: (i) an evental rupture that interrupts the existing order, (ii) a universality-claim that exceeds particular interests, and (iii) a spectral recurrence that refuses to disappear even after apparent defeat. My brief readings draw on publicly available documentation and existing scholarship in order to clarify how the lost cause functions conceptually in each case, rather than to offer a full-scale sociological analysis.

Consider the **Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014, and subsequently the anti-extradition protests in 2019**. Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 anti-extradition protests serve here as paradigmatic *candidates* for a lost cause, not because their political trajectories are identical, but because they throw into relief the tension between spectacular defeat and the stubborn survival of an emancipatory demand. These movements were curtailed by legal-administrative measures framed by authorities as stability and national-security protections; external observers assess these as reconfiguring key features of “One Country, Two Systems.”¹⁴ Yet, their symbolic power undeniably persists. The “Be Water” philosophy, the iconic images of protestors facing riot police with umbrellas, the defiant chants in the streets – these are not simply historical footnotes.¹⁵ They function as symptomatic returns of a demand for autonomy and freedom that simply cannot be fully absorbed into the current authoritarian system. The very act of suppressing these movements, and the subsequent imposition of national security laws, has, in a paradoxical turn, cemented their status as a “lost cause.” They have become a potent symbol of an unfulfilled promise, something that continues to stir resistance and shape the identity of a generation. That powerful sense of impossible solidarity, however brief, remains a haunting reminder of what *could have been*, and for many, what *still insists* as a future possibility.

Beyond Hong Kong, other movements, even if they appear to have vanished, may still function as lost causes due to their untapped radical potential. Occupy Wall Street (2011), for instance, did not achieve concrete legislative changes or dismantle the financial institutions it targeted. Its encampments were cleared, and its direct action model largely dissipated. However, its core

13. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005); and Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

14. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, “The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Gazetted and Takes Immediate Effect,” press release, June 30, 2020. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202006/30/P2020063001015.htm>; Amnesty International, *Hong Kong: In the Name of National Security: Human Rights Violations Related to the Implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law* (London: Amnesty International, 2021); Edmund W. Cheng and Samson Yuen, “Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Movement (2019),” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), 1–6.

15. Antony Dapiran, *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2020).

critique of systemic economic inequality, encapsulated in the “1% vs. 99%” idea, and its imagery of grassroots defiance continue to echo in political discourse. It arguably laid bare a fundamental tension within neoliberal capitalism that remains unresolved. Occupy’s “failure” was perhaps not a refutation of its truth, but rather an indication of how deeply entrenched the problems it highlighted are, leaving behind a kind of spectral demand for economic fairness that periodically resurfaces in various forms of social and political unrest.

Similarly, specific moments within the Arab Spring, such as the initial burst of revolutionary energy in Tahrir Square (2011), can be viewed through this lens. The widespread call for genuine democracy, social justice, and an end to authoritarian rule, while initially successful in toppling some regimes, was largely stifled, co-opted, or, in many cases, led to new instability and authoritarianism. Yet, the image of millions united in that demand, that initial break from fear and silence, remains a powerful “lost cause.” It embodies a truth about the desire for self-determination that continues to trouble the restored authoritarian governments and the international powers that supported them. The memory of that collective will, however fleeting, persists as a potential for future change, a ghostly reminder of a promise made but not entirely kept.

Žižek, in his characteristic provocative style, suggests that our loyalty should be to these disruptions, these moments of seemingly impossible unity. For Žižek, lost causes are not lost because they were wrong, but because they were right in a way the world was not ready to accept. This implies that genuine truth might not be found in the winning ideologies, but rather in those that are silenced or suppressed, precisely because they lay bare the fundamental antagonisms of the Real.¹⁶

Yet the very power of these cases also exposes a danger: the language of “lost causes” can be co-opted to sacralize projects that are anything but emancipatory.

3. What Lost Causes Are Not: The Trap of Reactionary Nostalgia

It is crucial to clarify that not every failed project qualifies as a “lost cause” in Žižek’s specific sense. A common misstep involves conflating the lost cause with simple reactionary nostalgia.¹⁷ Žižek is quite explicit: we should not romanticize the past or attempt to resurrect old, failed ideologies merely because they appear tragically heroic.¹⁸ The key distinction lies in the fundamental nature and aim of the cause itself: does it genuinely disrupt the established order, or does it merely reinforce it? Does it open up new possibilities for collective action, or does it seek to restore an old, perhaps oppressive, way of life?

3.1. Distinguishing from Reactionary Nostalgia and Ideological Restoration

The Confederate “Lost Cause” narrative in the United States serves as a compelling illustration of what Žižek’s concept explicitly *excludes*. This narrative, which emerged in the aftermath of the American Civil War, romanticized the Confederacy’s defeat, portraying it as a noble, tragic struggle against overwhelming odds, often minimizing or outright denying the central role of slavery. This is not a Žižekian lost cause because its fundamental aim is to *restore*

16. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 6.

17. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 239.

18. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 9.

a past social order built on white supremacy and hierarchy. It functions as a form of *myth-making* designed to solidify existing power structures and legitimize racial discrimination, rather than creating a rupture or opening up new, universal possibilities. Its objective is to re-suture the symbolic order, not expose its inherent cracks. The “truth” it insists upon is a manufactured one, serving to maintain ideological control. A necessary condition for a Žižekian lost cause is a universalizable demand that subtracts from identitarian closure. Projects oriented to restorative ethnonational dominance fail this test. It is crucial to stress that Žižek’s “lost cause” emphatically does not rehabilitate the U.S. Confederate “Lost Cause” mythology or similar reactionary projects; on the contrary, the very criteria of rupture, universality-claim, and spectral persistence function here as negative tests that expose nationalist nostalgia and white-supremacist myth-making as pseudo-causes whose “truth” consists precisely in ideological disavowal.

Similarly, the push for Han cultural supremacy under Xi Jinping’s China, or the embrace of civilizational rhetoric in Indian Hindutva politics, are often presented as efforts to reclaim a lost cultural pride or historical grandeur. Yet, these are, at their core, ideological *restorations*, not Žižekian lost causes. They aim to re-establish a perceived glorious past, often through exclusionary nationalism, the suppression of minorities, and the centralization of state power. Their function is to forge a single, unified national identity by *erasing* internal differences and *re-imposing* a rigid symbolic order, rather than challenging prevailing hegemonies or opening up universal possibilities. These movements are about closure, not rupture.

3.2. *The Ambiguity of Counter-Cultural Movements: Commodification and Compensation*

Other phenomena occupy a more ambiguous space, particularly within the realm of counter-cultural or spiritual movements. Consider the trend of spirit-channeling and occult revivalism among disillusioned young people in places like Taiwan or Hong Kong. In certain instances, these acts might genuinely represent a resistance to the perceived emptiness of neoliberal life or the decline of traditional religious institutions, a search for meaning outside conventional channels. However, Žižek would likely argue that such practices frequently become *ideological* when they are absorbed into consumer culture: one might think of divination apps, algorithmic horoscopes, or online “witches” monetizing their spiritual authority. When these activities offer a *compensatory satisfaction*, a kind of spiritual quick fix, instead of catalyzing genuine social or political change, they paradoxically become part of the very problem they ostensibly oppose. They provide an outlet for discontent that, in a subtle way, *stabilizes* the existing system by channeling potentially subversive energy into individualized, commodified forms of pseudo-resistance. The “symptom” here is not one that demands radical transformation, but rather one that allows the system to persist by subtly absorbing and neutralizing potential threats.

A true lost cause, then, must retain a core of universal demand. It cannot simply serve as a substitute for institutional religion or a fleeting cultural trend. To be “lost” in Žižek’s sense, the cause must appear absurd within the dominant logic of its time, and yet, it must still command loyalty, not merely because of its outward appearance, but because of what it fundamentally represents. It must embody a truth that cannot be easily integrated or commodified.¹⁹

19. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 2, 6, 116.

4. The Significance of the Lost Cause in the Postmodern Condition

Why, one might ask, is it worthwhile to revisit the “lost cause” today? This concept holds particular resonance in our contemporary postmodern condition, challenging its foundational assumptions and offering a surprising lens through which to understand the persistence of hope and belief, even in apparent defeat.

Throughout this section I use “postmodern” primarily to name the now familiar climate of incredulity toward metanarratives and suspicion of strong truth-claims; by contrast, when I later speak of the “postsecular” (in connection with Caputo and with debates around Habermas and Taylor), I mean not a simple reversal of secularization but a situation in which religious and secular discourses continue to contest and reconfigure each other within a shared, fragile public space.

4.1. Challenging Postmodern Skepticism and the “Death of Grand Narratives”

Postmodernity, as Jean-François Lyotard famously described it, is often characterized by “incredulity toward metanarratives,”²⁰ a pervasive skepticism towards universal truth claims, grand emancipatory projects, and overarching historical narratives. This stance frequently leads to a celebration of fragmentation, local narratives, and “weak thought” (as championed by Gianni Vattimo), which advocates for a gentle, non-foundational approach to philosophy and politics. However, Žižek, in his typical fashion, inverts this perspective: what if the very “death of ideology” is itself a form of ideology? If incredulity toward metanarratives functions as disavowal, then fidelity to a rupture is neither a return to teleology nor a celebration of micro-narratives, but an attachment to antagonism itself. What if our widespread skepticism is, in fact, a mode of disavowal that conceals a deeper truth, a refusal to confront fundamental antagonisms?²¹

This is precisely where the lost cause becomes illuminating. It is not a naive call to return to grand universal ideas. Instead, it stands as a direct challenge to radical relativism and the comfortable resignation of “weak thought.” The fidelity Žižek discusses is not to some new master narrative, but to a *rupture within narrative itself*. It is an insistence that *something* happened, or failed to happen, that still demands reckoning. This idea that truth can persist even after empirical failure directly counters the postmodern tendency to dissolve all truth into subjective opinion or power dynamics. The lost cause, even as a spectral presence, points to a *strong truth* that resists domestication. It reminds us that genuine change remains possible, precisely because the current system is not as seamless or unassailable as it appears. It serves as a call to commitment in an era that often valorizes detached irony and a cynical outlook.²²

4.2. Impact on Contemporary Christianity: A Paradigm of Failure and Resurrection

From a theological standpoint, this makes Žižek an unexpected, yet a deeply insightful ally for a radical understanding of Christianity. In *The Fragile Absolute*, Žižek provocatively argues that

20. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv; John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 338–39.

21. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 1.

22. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 4.

Christianity becomes truly revolutionary at its point of ultimate failure: the crucifixion. What appears as absolute defeat and humiliation paradoxically becomes the very locus of universal address. Paul's insistence on the "foolishness of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV) rejects both rigid religious legalism and worldly triumphalism. His radical embrace of an absurd, scandalous event inaugurates a new form of subjectivity, liberated from particular identities and earthly power.²³ This, arguably, represents the ultimate "lost cause," a movement born from catastrophe, refusing to transform its trauma into worldly power or institutional success, yet, in a striking paradox, founding a universal faith.²⁴ Žižek contends that true fidelity to Christianity entails abandoning its institutional victories and returning to the scandal that initiated it, to its inherent negativity and self-subversion.²⁵

In contexts such as postcolonial Asia, this idea carries some unsettling, but potentially transformative, implications. Christianity's complex and often problematic history, with its ties to Western imperialism, its moralistic strictures, or its embrace of conservative bourgeois values, has, in many contexts, rendered it spiritually inert or complicit in oppressive systems. Its historical successes have, ironically, frequently obscured its radical origins. Yet, if Christianity's genuine power resides not in its institutions but in its absurd, foundational event, that is its "lost cause" status, then it may still offer a vital message to contemporary struggles. It encourages us to engage with Christianity not from the comfortable position of established power, but from the ruins of its historical failures, from the margins where its radical truth might still be heard. It suggests a pathway for Christianity to reclaim its prophetic voice by embracing its own vulnerability and its commitment to the unfulfilled promise of universal liberation, rather than pursuing worldly triumphs or cultural dominance. It is a call for a faith that finds its strength in the very absence of guarantees, in the persistent, ghostly demand for justice and hope. This framework finds a powerful, concrete expression in the Minjung theology of South Korea. Born from the **han** (한/恨), a collective sense of unresolved grief, suffering, and resentment, of an oppressed populace, Minjung theology located the divine not in institutional power or state-sanctioned success, but precisely in the "crucified people." This is a theology that is, at its core, a fidelity to a "lost cause": the unfulfilled promise of justice for those crushed by authoritarianism and rapid industrialization. It persists not as a triumphant dogma, but as an insistent, spectral demand from the margins, embodying the very "paradigm of failure" that gives Christianity its radical edge.

4.3. *Implications for Biblical Hermeneutics.*

A spectral-fidelity hermeneutic coordinates two complementary reading logics. First, a symptom-oriented reading (Žižek) attends to ruptures and remainders in the text, such as the scenes, voices, and tensions that resist seamless doctrinal closure, treating their recurrence as an index of unresolved antagonism. Second, an event-hospitality reading (Caputo) disciplines response by foregrounding non-sovereign openness to what "insists" without guarantee, especially from marginal or "absent" presences. Practically, this yields: (1) an inventory of textual ruptures (what cannot be smoothly integrated), (2) a mapping of how those ruptures recur across canon and reception, and (3) an ethical norm of non-dominating response in interpretation and application. Together these moves anchor a "theology of insistence and interruption" in concrete exegetical practice rather than in abstract thesis alone.

23. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 112.

24. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 147–48.

25. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 118.

Consider the Markan passion narrative (Mark 14–15) read through this double lens. A symptom-oriented reading (Žižek) attends to the *ruptures*: Peter's denial, the disciples' flight, the tearing of the temple veil, and especially Jesus' cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), which resists doctrinal closure and recurs across Christian memory as an index of unresolved antagonism between divine promise and historical abandonment. An event-hospitality reading (Caputo) foregrounds the non-sovereign openness to the "crucified God" who insists without existing, whose weakness calls for a response that cannot translate the call into triumphalist mastery. Together, these readings yield a hermeneutic that resists both dogmatic reconciliation (the suffering *must* mean something triumphant) and cynical dismissal (it is merely a failed messianic movement). Instead, fidelity to the Markan rupture entails sustaining the tension, i.e., the cross as both symptom of systemic violence and spectral call to solidarity with the abandoned.

5. Caputo's Spectral Hermeneutics: The Theology of Perhaps

While Žižek often speaks in terms of trauma and sharp breaks, John D. Caputo, I find, responds with a voice of mourning and a persistent, yet elusive, call. Drawing heavily on Jacques Derrida's ideas of deconstruction and hauntology, Caputo constructs a theology that isn't about fixed being or absolute certainty, but about the event, something that can't be fully taken apart, yet is never quite here.²⁶ Perhaps a quote from Caputo's 1997 work resonates this loudly: "Deconstruction is the relentless pursuit of the impossible, which means, of things whose possibility is sustained by their impossibility, of things which, instead of being wiped out by their impossibility, are actually nourished and fed by it."²⁷ For my purposes, what matters is that Caputo's "event" names not a hidden metaphysical fullness behind appearances, but the insistence of a call, such as justice, hospitality, and forgiveness, that comes to us only in and through fragile, historically situated events, and never as a stable presence we could finally possess.

5.1. God as Event, Not Being: The Trembling Insistence

In *The Weakness of God*, Caputo imagines God not as some all-powerful, sovereign being, but as a "trembling," a "disturbance," a "call" that "insists" but never quite "exists." Caputo's distinction between insistence and existence does more than redescribe divine ontology; it functions as a normative constraint on power. The weakness lies in the call itself, which is unconditional without being sovereign, for it insists without the force of being. But this does not entail that the response must be weak or passive. On the contrary, Caputo, following Derrida's "Force of Law," insists that the third aporia of justice is urgency: in the midst of undecidability, justice does not wait.²⁸ The response to the unconditional call must be strong, firm, and immediate. "Weakness," accordingly, is not deficiency in the response but the structural character of the call: it prohibits the translation of the call into sovereign mastery while obliging robust practices of hospitality, care, and, when necessary, putting oneself in harm's way for the sake of justice.

26. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 15–18.

27. John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 32.

28. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 26.

"Weakness" functions as a normative constraint against sovereign closure; "insistence" obliges non-dominating responses. The ethical force derives from the very absence of guarantees. This represents a rather radical departure from traditional, metaphysical ideas of God as a solid, foundational entity. For Caputo, God isn't a "What" (a substance or a being) but a "How," i.e., the insistent, unconditional demand that arrives from the future, always as a "perhaps."²⁹ Yet the event is not solely futural. It is equally a recall of the immemorial, a memory of a past that was never fully present. The specter is at once *arrivant* and *revenant*: the call is also a recall. As Samir Haddad has argued, Derrida's "democracy to come" should not be read primarily as turned toward the future; it involves the injunction to inherit from the past in a very particular way.³⁰ A radicalization is always the radicalization of what has been inherited. The hope for democracy to come is simultaneously a memory of a democracy from time out of mind, a past that was never present, which is precisely why it is not nostalgia but a spectral insistence. This "weakness" is, paradoxically, its real strength: it opens us up completely to the utterly Other, to a divine presence that can't be named, controlled, or turned into a rigid religious doctrine. This echoes Derrida's concept of *différance*, where meaning is perpetually deferred and never fully present, always hinting at something beyond our grasp. The event, in this sense, is always *coming*, always *perhaps*, never fully pinned down or used up. It represents the unconditional call for justice that remains endlessly open.³¹ This approach has roots in negative theology, which emphasizes God's transcendence by asserting what God is *not*, rather than what God *is*. Caputo pushes this further, suggesting that God's "weakness" is not a deficiency but a deliberate refusal of absolute power, thereby creating space for human freedom and responsibility. This, one might argue, fundamentally deconstructs traditional theological power structures, allowing for a God who is not a dominating force but a vulnerable, insistent call.

5.2. Hauntology and the "Weakness of God": The Ethics of the Unconditional

Caputo's "spectral hermeneutics" suggests reading the Bible, and indeed all texts, not as stable sources of ultimate truth or fixed meaning, but as haunted archives. Voices from the margins, faint traces of divine interruptions, flicker in and out of the text. They never quite materialize, yet they keep insisting. His theology isn't about dogma or certainty, but about haunting. This connects well with Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, where haunting is understood as a sign of justice: a call that never stops bothering the present order, a reminder of promises broken and injustices unaddressed. Yet it would be a mistake to construe the specter as merely futural. For Derrida, the specter is as much a revenant coming back from the past as it is an *arrivant* coming from the future.³² The memory of past injustice, what Johann Baptist Metz called the "dangerous memory" of the suffering of the marginalized, is precisely what gives the messianic its disruptive force.³³ Benjamin's "weak messianic power," from which Derrida derived much of his messianic thinking, is a power entrusted to us by past generations whose promise remains unfulfilled.³⁴ Caputo's spectral hermeneutics thus operates on a double register: the event is

29. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 16, 18, 38, 48.

30. Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 3.

31. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 19, 38, 55, 232.

32. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10; Andrea Cassatella, "'Normativity without Telos': The Messianic in the Thought of Jacques Derrida," *Bamidbar: Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2012): 5.

33. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 66.

34. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 254.

both the promise of what is to come and the recall of what has never yet arrived, a legacy that insists across time.³⁵

For Caputo, the event is always a “perhaps.” God doesn’t command with absolute authority; God whispers, invites, or simply insists. Faith, then, becomes an openness to interruption, a radical hospitality towards the unexpected. It is less about confident belief in a predetermined outcome and more about a willingness to be surprised. This is not weak because it is indecisive; it is weak because it rejects sovereignty, control, and the violence that often comes with absolute certainty.³⁶ Caputo’s God is not the King, but the Ghost, a vulnerable, persistent presence that calls us to an ethics of deep responsibility and care, especially for those on the margins, even when we can’t quite name the source of that call. This “weakness” is an ethical demand to stay open to the Other,³⁷ to listen to the insistent call for justice without the comfort of easy answers or firm guarantees. Critics sometimes argue that this emphasis on “perhaps” risks ethical relativism or a lack of concrete action. However, Caputo would likely counter that the very *unconditionality* of the “perhaps” demands a more sustained ethical engagement than any dogmatic certainty could. It is precisely because there are no guarantees that the ethical imperative becomes absolute. This embrace of radical contingency is central to Caputo’s thought, contrasting sharply with any form of teleological certainty and underscoring the ethical demand for openness without predetermined outcomes.

Here, we can see some clear overlaps with Žižek. Both resist the neat, closed systems of traditional theology. Both find truth in the breaks, not in the established order. And both seem to view the human subject as someone who is called, not by certainty, but by something that disturbs.

6. Lost Cause and the Event: Toward a Theopolitical Comparison

What happens when we try to read Caputo through Žižek, or Žižek through Caputo?³⁸ At first glance, it might seem like an odd pairing. Žižek, after all, often pokes fun at theological liberalism and critiques violent materialism. Caputo, on the other hand, also critiques violent materialism and leans into a more poetic, non-foundational theology.³⁹ But when we look closer, both offer genuinely insightful and complementary ways to think about postsecular fidelity, hope, and how we engage in politics. Together, they yield a distinctive “theopolitical” framework that moves beyond the limitations of studying them separately.

6.1. Points of Convergence and Divergence

The common ground between Žižek and Caputo lies in their shared conviction that **rupture** is where truth resides. Both thinkers fundamentally push back against any kind of philosophical or ideological closure that would make reality seem like a smooth, perfect whole. For Žižek, the Real is that inherent conflict that keeps things from ever being perfectly seamless. Žižek’s account of Pauline universality reframes fidelity as a subjective Act that severs identitarian predicates (“neither Jew nor Greek”) in order to name a truth that cuts across particularisms.

35. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 15, 17, 224. See also Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 161.

36. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 8, 235, 254.

37. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 16, 38, 232.

38. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 8–9.

39. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 15–18, 232–35.

Universality here is subtractively constituted: it emerges not by subsuming identities into a higher harmony but by traversing the enjoyment that anchors them, exposing the antagonism the social order disavows. Žižek reads Paul's universal not as a harmonious synthesis but as a cut enacted by the Act. As he puts it, "for Lacan, a true act does not only retroactively change the rules of the symbolic space; it also disturbs the underlying fantasy."⁴⁰ Read christologically, Žižek's point appears in his paradox of Fall/Resurrection: "We rise again from the Fall not by undoing its effects, but in recognizing the longed-for liberation in the Fall itself."⁴¹ These lines ground the use of fidelity as the disciplined maintenance of rupture: to be universal is to persist with the cut that traverses enjoyment and dis-identifies the subject from particularistic predicates. Fidelity, in this register, is the disciplined maintenance of that cut, i.e., refusing reconciliation with the existing symbolic coordinates while avoiding a relapse into identitarian closure.⁴²

For Caputo, the event is the interruption that cannot be undone, always destabilizing fixed meanings. But this interruption works in two temporal directions: it is not only the coming of the unforeseeable but the recall of the immemorial. A promise is always the promise of something inherited, a legacy that the present has failed to honor. Consider the "dangerous memory of the Cross" in Metz's political theology: the crucifixion is not merely an event that happened but a memory that continues to interrupt, to haunt, to insist upon the unfulfilled promise of justice for the victims of history.⁴³ Caputo's event thus shares more with Žižek's lost cause than a first reading might suggest: both are structured by fidelity to an inheritance whose promise remains outstanding. Both of them see the human subject as essentially summoned or called by something that disrupts the established order, rather than as a self-sufficient, independent agent. And they both, in their own ways, offer forms of postsecular fidelity, a commitment to a truth or a call that doesn't rely on the old guarantees of a benevolent God, a clear historical path, or a perfectly consistent social system. This "postsecular" space is not simply the absence of religion, but a complex re-negotiation where traditional religious forms might re-emerge in new, sometimes unsettling, public manifestations, or where the sacred is re-imagined outside established institutions.

However, their differences are just as important, and perhaps even more fruitful for our discussion. Žižek's Real often shows up as something violent, traumatic, even a bit obscene. He tends to focus on the radical negativity of fundamental conflicts, suggesting that a decisive, even forceful, act might be needed to expose and confront them. Žižek provokes; he wants to shatter illusions and lay bare the harsh realities of our social systems.⁴⁴ His loyalty is to the raw truth of the break, even if that truth is hard to stomach. Caputo's Ghost, by contrast, operates in a more poetic, vulnerable, and persistent way. For Caputo, the event is a call to radical hospitality and care, but this should not be confused with passivity or mere waiting. The haunting invites rather than violently imposing,⁴⁵ yet the response to this invitation demands urgency. Derrida's third aporia in "Force of Law" is decisive here: justice cannot wait for the calculation to be complete.⁴⁶ As the U.S. civil rights movement demonstrated, where activists like James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner put themselves in mortal

40. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 238.

41. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 86.

42. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 2, 127; Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 8; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 182–84.

43. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 90.

44. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 16, 152.

45. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 254.

46. Derrida, "Force of Law," 26.

danger for a justice they could not guarantee, fidelity to the unconditional call often requires putting oneself, not others, in harm's way. The weakness of God is not the weakness of the disciple; it is rather the non-sovereign character of the call that makes the disciple's strong response both possible and imperative.

Caputo mourns; he emphasizes the ethical need to stay open to the Other, especially when they're suffering, even if the source of that call or the way to resolve it isn't clear. His loyalty is to the unconditional demand for justice that remains forever a *perhaps*, without needing a definitive name or a forceful solution. So, their disagreement isn't about whether to critique power or reject old certainties, but more about their personal *style* and how they prefer to engage with the impossible.

6.1.1. *Two Concepts of the Real: Trauma versus Facticity*

This ontological divergence requires careful adjudication. For Žižek, the Real persists *from the past* as traumatic remainder, the unintegrated kernel that returns symptomatically to disrupt the symbolic order. Fidelity to the lost cause, therefore, is fidelity to an event that *failed to arrive* but whose structural antagonism continues to insist. The temporality is fundamentally one of repetition and return.⁴⁷

For Caputo, what occupies the structural place of the Real is something quite different. A caveat is in order, since the point is easily misread. Caputo does not himself use "the Real" in Lacan's technical sense, and I do not attribute the Lacanian register to him. I am coordinating Žižek's Real with what *functions* analogously in Caputo: the abyssal groundlessness that, in Schelling's idiom, can be called the *unprethinkable* (*das Unvordenkliche*), the dimension of being that precedes and exceeds thought. Caputo's sustained dialogue with Schelling, the organizing thread of *Specters of God*, foregrounds exactly these "nocturnal powers in being" that bring us up short. Read alongside Derrida's *khôra* and Heidegger's *Dass-sein* (thatness), this names not a traumatic remainder but the *excessive givenness* of existence itself, the sheer fact that there is something rather than nothing, the world as it would be if we were all dead or never born, expressible (if at all) only in the formal abstraction of mathematics, not in the lived horizons of human meaning.⁴⁸ Theologically, this corresponds to the ultimate mystery "in which we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), for we cannot comprehend it, but we experience being grasped by it.

The crucial question is whether these two registers are compatible within a single framework. I argue that they are, provided we treat them as *complementary registers* rather than competing ontologies. Žižek's Real addresses the *structure of antagonism*, why social reality is never a seamless whole, why every symbolic order carries a symptomatic remainder. The Caputian register addresses the *groundlessness of existence*, i.e., the unforeseeable, uncontrollable facticity that makes both promise and risk constitutive of human existence. The lost cause, then, emerges at the intersection: it is the symptomatic insistence of an unfulfilled demand (Žižek) that draws its ethical force from the radical contingency of existence itself (Caputo). Fidelity is neither

47. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 21.

48. Caputo, *Specters of God*, 15–18, 164–71, 196. Caputo's engagement with Schelling, including Schelling's *das Unvordenkliche*, the "unprethinkable" ground that precedes thought, runs throughout the volume and is its organizing thread. Its fullest philosophical development appears in the chapters on Schelling's positive philosophy (esp. pp. 164–71, 196). I invoke "the Real" here only as a structural analogy; Caputo does not employ the Lacanian concept.

mastery of the Real nor dissolution into it, but a disciplined responsiveness to its double insistence – as symptom *and* as call.

The following table sets out this two-register reconciliation across core dimensions, making the points of convergence, tension, and the corrective role of “insistence and interruption” inspectable.

Dimension	Žižek: Real / Act / Fidelity	Caputo: Event / Insistence / Hospitality	Implication for “theology of insistence”
Ontology	Traumatic remainder that resists symbolization	Unprethinkable facticity of being (Schelling’s <i>das Unvordenkliche</i>), i.e., the world as it would be without us; the mystery “in which we live and move” (Acts 17:28)	Two-register account (rupture vs. unprethinkable facticity)
Temporality	Past persistence / return of the repressed	Messianic <i>à venir</i> (future-coming)	Bridge by treating fidelity as response to an insisting call
Subject formation	Subject of the Act; cut in the symbolic	Subject summoned by the event; openness to the Other	Militancy tempered by vulnerability
Normativity	Truth-procedure via fidelity to rupture	Ethical obligation of hospitality; non-sovereign response	Prevents fidelity from becoming acting out
Political modality	Confrontation; symptom reading; ideology critique	Non-sovereign politics; patience; care	Specifies when to act vs. wait
Failure/success	Failure indexes truth	Weakness conditions justice	Theology of failure without quietism
Universality	Subtraction from identity/enjoyment	Non-identitarian openness (“perhaps”)	Criterion for excluding reactionary “lost causes”
Principal risk	Escalation into voluntarism/violence	Drift into quietism/relativism	Mutual correction via “insistence and interruption”

Table 1. Two Registers of Fidelity: Trauma and Facticity.

6.2. The Benefits of the Comparison: A Theopolitical Framework

Putting Caputo and Žižek in conversation yields a distinctive theopolitical framework.

First, **Žižek helps us politicize Caputo’s ghost**. While Caputo’s spectral hermeneutics rooted in Derrida’s “democracy to come” is already intensely political, its messianic and aporetic nature operates in a different register than Žižek’s psychoanalytic-Hegelian critique. Žižek’s

framework, therefore, does not politicize an apolitical Caputo, but rather reframes his politics. Žižek's psycho-political lens allows us to see this spectral presence not just as a poetic haunting or a personal grief, but as the return of the repressed, a symptom that actively demands change.⁴⁹ The spectral isn't just a faint trace of the past; it is the insistent presence of *unfulfilled promises* and *unresolved injustices* that demand a political reckoning right now.⁵⁰ In this way, Caputo's theology of the undeconstructible event becomes much more urgent when we read it as a commitment to the *unfulfilled promise* of a radical social transformation. The haunting, then, turns into a political call to act, a reminder that the way things are is often built on hidden conflicts and delayed justice. This reading pushes Caputo's "weakness" into a politically charged insistence, transforming passive witnessing into a call for active engagement with systemic failures.

Second, **Caputo softens Žižek's militancy.** Caputo's framework stages a critical debate with Žižek's ethic of fidelity to the Real. The issue is not that Žižek's militancy lacks an ethical dimension—for him, fidelity to the radical Act is the supreme ethical gesture. Caputo's emphasis on vulnerability, radical hospitality, and the "perhaps" introduces a crucial ethical counterpoint to this militancy, but not in the direction of passivity. Caputo does not counsel waiting; he counsels urgency without sovereignty. The difference from Žižek lies not in the strength of the response but in the source of obligation: for Caputo, we respond to an unconditional call that cannot be translated into a program of mastery, yet the response itself must be firm, immediate, and willing to accept risk. Some hauntings arrive gently, but they demand a response that does not defer. Žižek, one might fairly say, is not far from violence; Caputo's theology of weakness demands that we put ourselves, not others, in harm's way, a distinction with significant ethical consequences.

This is not to dilute Žižek's radicality but to suggest that the *mode* of fidelity to the Real can be informed by an ethical imperative of vulnerability, preventing the Act from devolving into mere *acting out*. Žižek's insistence on the Real presses Caputo's "perhaps" to confront its political urgency; Caputo's hospitality, in turn, refines Žižek's fidelity, so that genuine commitment involves openness to the Other's suffering and not only militant confrontation.

Together, what they seem to suggest is a theology not of certainty but of insistence. Not of being, but of interruption. This comparative reading, in my view, offers a powerful way to understand how belief and hope manage to survive today. It is not about grand victories or solid foundations, but about what keeps haunting us after things fall apart. It is a kind of faith that sticks with the impossible, not because it is guaranteed to win, but because it is what still speaks, what still demands our attention, and what keeps us loyal in a world that often tries to pretend its own deep conflicts do not exist. It is a faith that finds its strength in the very lack of guarantees, in the persistent, spectral demand for justice and hope.⁵¹

6.3. Positioning This Comparison within Current Debates

The proposal to read Caputo through Žižek, and Žižek through Caputo, intervenes in at least three ongoing conversations. First, it complements recent reassessments of Caputo's "religious reading" of Derrida and of the status of the undeconstructible in deconstruction. Neal DeRoo's analysis of the Caputo-Häggglund debate,⁵² for example, worries that Caputo's appeal to an

49. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 13.

50. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 141.

51. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 100, 151.

52. Martin Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

undeconstructible event risks re-inscribing a quasi-theological normativity into Derrida's thought.⁵³ By construing the event as structurally akin to Žižek's "lost cause," my reading underscores both its non-teleological, non-presentist character and its insistently political, this-worldly orientation. The undeconstructible here is not a hidden metaphysical fullness but the spectral remainder of emancipatory struggles that cannot be domesticated by any existing order.

Second, this comparison speaks to efforts to articulate what Andrea Cassatella calls a "normativity without telos" in Derrida's messianic thinking.⁵⁴ Žižek's emphasis on fidelity to the traumatic Real supplies a way of thinking normativity as an unconditional demand that nevertheless lacks a predetermined end-state, while Caputo's language of insistence and "perhaps" highlights the vulnerability and openness of any response to this demand. Thinking the event as a kind of theological lost cause thus provides a concrete instantiation of a non-teleological, yet ethically charged, normativity.

Third, situating Caputo's and Žižek's respective projects against the backdrop of postsecular debates clarifies the scope of their claims. In contrast to accounts that treat postsecularity primarily in terms of the re-entry of religion into a once-secular public sphere, as in Habermas,⁵⁵ and to large-scale narratives of secularization such as Taylor's,⁵⁶ the Caputo-Žižek constellation developed here attends to the micro-politics of faithfulness to lost causes. It suggests that what is "postsecular" is less the institutional return of religion than the persistence of spectral claims to justice that traverse both religious and secular imaginaries.

In this way, the comparison does more than simply add another pairing to the extensive literature on Derrida, Caputo, and political theology. It sketches a theopolitical framework in which decisions of fidelity, whether named as "faith," "commitment," or "solidarity," are understood as responses to events whose truth remains structurally unfinished, yet whose specters continue to haunt our political present.

7. Conclusion and Future Directions

This paper has established a critical dialogue between Slavoj Žižek's theory of the lost cause and John D. Caputo's spectral hermeneutics, demonstrating that their synthesis yields a distinctive "theology of insistence and interruption." Three contributions merit emphasis.

Contributions. First, I have specified Žižek's "lost cause" through three criteria (rupture, universality-claim, spectral persistence) that distinguish a genuine lost cause from mere failure or reactionary nostalgia, and that can guide future interpretive work. Second, I have addressed the apparent incompatibility between Žižek's traumatic Real and Caputo's unprethinkable facticity by treating them as complementary registers, i.e., structure of antagonism and groundlessness of existence, that converge in the figure of the lost cause. Third, I have specified how this synthesis corrects the respective weaknesses of each thinker: Žižek's militancy is tempered by Caputo's ethics of vulnerability, while Caputo's "perhaps" gains political urgency

53. Neal DeRoo, "The Dangers of Dealing with Derrida: Revisiting the Caputo-Häggglund Debate on the 'Religious' Reading of Deconstruction," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 18, no. 2 (2019): 362–381.

54. Cassatella, "'Normativity without Telos.'"

55. Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29.

56. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

through Žižek's symptomal reading. The result is a postsecular framework for political theology that avoids both triumphalist certainty and quietist resignation.

Limitations. This argument is not without limitations. It has remained a single-author, interpretive construction of a Žižek–Caputo constellation, drawing selectively on major texts rather than offering exhaustive exegesis. My readings of Hong Kong, Occupy, and Tahrir are purposely schematic: they aim to illuminate how the three criteria of rupture, universality-claim, and spectral persistence can function as a diagnostic for “lost causes,” not to provide a full account of the complex socio-historical dynamics at work in each context. A further limitation is that the analysis has focused on relatively progressive movements; a more complete picture would require sustained engagement with ambiguous, compromised, or even reactionary causes that nonetheless mobilize powerful affects of fidelity.

These limitations, however, already suggest directions for further work. One obvious path is more detailed case studies that combine close textual readings of speeches, manifestos, and visual iconography with attention to how discourses of failure, betrayal, and haunting circulate across media ecologies in places like Hong Kong, Cairo, and beyond. Another is a more systematic comparison between Žižek's traumatic Real and Caputo's undeconstructible event in dialogue with Derrida's messianic “normativity without telos,” as well as with postsecular accounts of religion in the public sphere. Finally, the framework developed here could be tested against movements that do not fit our intuitive picture of emancipatory politics, in order to refine the criteria by which “lost causes” are differentiated from nostalgic mythologies. If fidelity to lost causes is indeed a way of naming how truth persists through failure, then probing where this fidelity illuminates and where it misleads will remain an urgent task for both political theology and critical theory.

Future directions. These considerations open several further avenues for investigation. Four seem to me especially promising.

- *Tracing spectral recurrence.* A close reading of how the signifiers of a lost cause – rupture, universality-claim, spectral persistence – are reinscribed and transformed across the afterlives of movements such as Hong Kong, Occupy, and Tahrir, in memoir, manifesto, iconography, and commemorative practice.
- *Resilience versus rupture.* A conceptual and historical examination of the tension between frames of resilience and adaptation, on the one hand, and fidelity to rupture, on the other – asking what each makes visible, and what each forecloses, in the self-understanding of an emancipatory movement.
- *Extending the theology of insistence.* A development of the two reading logics, symptom-reading and event-hospitality, through sustained exegetical case studies, showing how each reshapes interpretation and practical uptake.
- *Deepening the engagement with Badiou.* A fuller reckoning with Badiou's formal theory of the event and fidelity – begun here (§2.1) – tracing in detail where the spectral, non-sovereign synthesis of “insistence and interruption” diverges from a militant, subtractive, and avowedly atheist event theory.

Ultimately, by embracing the ghosts of lost causes and listening to the insistent call of the event, this framework cultivates a form of loyalty that stays open to the impossible. It is a recognition

that true hope often is not found in what has clearly triumphed,⁵⁷ but in what continues to haunt us after everything falls apart, always pushing us toward a future that is still waiting to arrive.⁵⁸

Author Information

57. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 4.

58. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 6, 141, 207; Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 150. See also Caputo, *Specters of God*, 16–18.