

might change and our particular approach may transform the issues themselves, but we are still working through the same basic problems, in Jameson's case, for example, the basic separation of the realm of Freedom from the realm of Necessity.

The final chapter of this volume consists of an interview with Jameson. Here things unfold along the same lines as the rest of the book: Buchanan's questions reflect his concerns and his overall methodological approach. At the same time, in his answers, Jameson makes the important point of both historicising himself and our own critical present. Jameson holds a unique perspective: he was a young scholar before "theory" had infiltrated the North American academy, and at the same time being the most important figures in ushering theory into this context. Jameson thus outlines theory's present by way of his own formative role in importing its ideas and problems onto the North American scene.

The only thing that is perhaps left wanting of both the final interview and the volume as a whole is Buchanan's lack of attention to Jameson's most current work in globalisation—work, we might point out, that has been carried on for some time now. This omission is understandable, however, not only because this work is still ongoing, but also because its unfolding follows a certain exigency of the times and hasn't contributed to the interpretive polemics or theory wars of the '70s and '80s, which are now fading. In any event, we might interpret this lack of an adequate critical narrative about globalization as merely Buchanan's final dialectical move, illustrating that "There is no one—or final—form of the dialectic" (12), that it is still with us as we interrogate the present and construct the future.

Kiel Hume, University of Western Ontario

In Defense of Lost Causes

Slavoj Žižek

London: Verso, 2008; 504 pages.

In Defense of Lost Causes may strike those familiar with Slavoj Žižek's *oeuvre* as a somewhat cursory treatment of problems he has explored elsewhere in much greater depth. Nonetheless, it is Žižek's most lengthy

meditation on the relationship between today's ideological and political landscape and the so-called revolutionary 'catastrophes' of modern history to date. Across events as diverse as the French Revolution, Mao's Cultural Revolution, Stalinism, Heidegger's engagement with Nazism, and Foucault's enthusiasm about the Iranian Revolution, Žižek argues that "there is in each of them a redemptive moment which gets lost in the liberal-democratic rejection." (7)

The book is in many ways the latest chapter in Žižek's struggle against the levelling-down of political possibility performed by contemporary (liberal-democratic) ideology, which Žižek perceives as suppressing the articulation or imagining of something truly new. To this end, his primary goal is to open up the space for a real alternative to the present situation to be imagined. Rather than attempting to begin this re-imagining from a blank slate, however, Žižek sets out to identify and reactivate the emancipatory potential of the revolutionary 'Events' that have been bracketed off and neutralised by the liberal-democratic rejection of 'terror' and 'totalitarianism.'

Parts One and Two examine in detail not only what is commonly understood but also misunderstood about these catastrophes; Part Three contains an engagement with Deleuze and (especially) Badiou in an attempt to establish what authentic 'fidelity' to these events might mean today. If the first two parts of the book can be described as his identification of their 'kernel' of truth, then the third and final part 'What Is To Be Done?' comprises his effort to suggest how contemporary politics can be changed or altered out of fidelity to these truths.

Žižek's meditation on 'Radical Intellectuals' is one of the most controversial sections of the book. He insists that by dismissing Heidegger's commitment to Nazism and, to a lesser extent, Foucault's enthusiasm about the Iranian Revolution as 'mistakes,' or reducing them to simply abhorrent political blunders, we miss their moments of authentic political involvement. Žižek's claim is that where Heidegger took the 'right step' in the 'wrong direction,' Foucault took the wrong steps in the 'right direction.' "What Heidegger was looking for in Nazism," argues Žižek, "was a revolutionary Event." (142) The fact that Heidegger saw in the ontic political reality of Nazi Germany the fulfillment of an ontological destiny is not, for Žižek, in itself reprehensible. There "is nothing 'inherently fascist' in the notions of decision, repetition, assuming one's destiny, and so forth..." (136) Heidegger's mistake was not that he iden-

tified too strongly with the destinal role of a political movement, but that he misrecognised Nazism as an Event. Thus, “in his Nazi engagement, he was not ‘totally wrong’—the tragedy is that he was *almost right*, deploying the structure of a revolutionary act and then distorting it by giving it a fascist twist.” (139) Foucault, conversely, was right to interpret the Iranian revolution as an Event, as a genuine utopian opening of possibility, but was excited about the wrong aspects of it, namely, the sheer sublimity of a revolutionary upheaval.

The Deleuzian concept of repetition figures centrally in the text, since it is only by ‘repeating’ past events that we can (re)create something authentically and radically new. Drawing from Deleuze, Žižek takes it as axiomatic that “[o]nly repetition brings out pure difference.” (141) Thus, he argues, “it is not only that repetition is (one of the modes of) the emergence of the New—the *New can only emerge through repetition*.” (140) *In Defense of Lost Causes* treats the past as a kind of virtual reservoir of potentiality, and the possibilities it opens up are varied and not always immediately understood.

In order to make sense of exactly how this potentiality comes to be cultivated, however, it is necessary to abandon a common-sense understanding of what the past is; “the past is not simply ‘what there was,’ it contains hidden, non-realized potentials, and the authentic future is the repetition/retrieval of *this* past, not of the past as it was, but of those elements in the past which the past itself, in its reality, betrayed, stifled, failed to realize.” (141) Žižek’s argument, then, is that by bracketing the radical Events of the past out of discussion because of the ‘terror’ involved in them, today’s ideology has effectively suspended their radical potential.

It makes sense, then, that one of the most salient features of this book is its sense of urgency. Žižek observes that, because it has been barred from tapping into the latent potentiality of its past, today’s Left has reached an impasse; while it cannot just take up the (legitimately) discontinued leftist projects like Soviet communism and Maoism, it needs to be able to draw inspiration and ideas from them. This impasse has resulted in an inability to (re)define a leftist dream and, therefore, to offer a *real* alternative to the capitalist dream and its ‘political supplement,’ liberal-democratic multiculturalism. And as long as the Left keeps trying to define a new dream within the ideological constraints of the lib-

eral imaginary, that is, without authentically relating to the so called 'revolutionary terror' of the Jacobins or Stalinism, it will remain paralysed. For Žižek, the consequences of this failure are as evident today as they are dangerous, and are most visible in the rise of what he calls 'fundamentalist populism.' Across the globe, "fundamentalist populism is filling the void of the absence of a leftist dream." (275) In our 'post-political' era, where politics is increasingly being reduced to mere administration and management, populism, with its appeal to nationalism, race, and tradition, and its xenophobic promotion of fear, is the only force investing contemporary politics with passion. For Žižek, then, "the main task of contemporary politics, its life-and-death problem, is to find a form of political mobilisation that, while (like populism) critical of institutionalised politics, will avoid the populist temptation." (269) Žižek does little, however, by way of suggesting what this new form of political mobilisation might be.

One of the most interesting aspects of *In Defense of Lost Causes* is that in spite of its blatant antipathy for contemporary liberal-democratic politics, the message of the book is not anti-democratic. The very tension that structures it is that between what he takes to be the two sides of 'Democracy': the first is Democracy as the uprising of the excluded, the intervention of the "supernumerary" in a social configuration in which they have no place/are not registered, what Žižek calls, following Rancière, "the part of no part." The second is the subsequent institutionalisation of the new order that this revolutionary upheaval demands. To this end, "[w]hat truly matters is precisely the degree to which the democratic explosion succeeds in becoming institutionalised, translated into social order." (265)

In the final chapter of the book, entitled "*Unbehagen in der Natur*," Žižek points to the sites of struggle, the 'evental sites,' which have the potential to alter radically contemporary politics. Today, he claims, it is the inhabitants of the urban slums of the 'megalopolises,' those "excluded from the benefits of citizenship, the uprooted and dispossessed..." that are the "part of no part." (425) In typical Žižek fashion, he ends the book without offering any suggestion of how to mobilise this emerging group nor of what kind of changes to the global order they can or ought to achieve.

This is perhaps forgiveable, however, in view of the fact that Žižek's project in this book is above all an ideological one. It is not

meant to offer concrete political directions; rather, it opens up the space for these new, concrete directions to be *imagined*. And, with only a censored version of the past from which to draw, any attempt to imagine an alternative future is seriously hindered.

Owen Glyn-Williams, University of Western Ontario

Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics

Christina M. Gschwandtner

Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008; 344 pages.

Gschwandtner's book is the first comprehensive study of Jean-Luc Marion's thought. This is no small feat, at any rate, if one takes into consideration both the length and the complexity that Marion's work presents for the reader. Gschwandtner's study differs from other similar publications in another crucial aspect: where others see only fragmentation among Marion's various philosophical projects or, worse, the disingenuousness of a hidden (theological) agenda, Gschwandtner discovers in Marion's corpus a coherent vision and puts forward a strong argument in favour of continuity. Gschwandtner is right to have taken into account what has, for different reasons, been left largely unnoticed by other commentators, namely, Marion's early work on René Descartes. The difference is made not only by tracing the development of Marion's thought from the Cartesian trilogy to his later theological and phenomenological studies but also by arguing that many of Marion's later concerns and positions are already to be found, even if only *in nuce*, in his work on Descartes.

Reading Jean-Luc Marion follows a clear tripartite structure, a part being devoted to each of the following subjects: metaphysics, theology, and anthropology. Each part is prefaced by an introductory text that announces the Cartesian connection of the theme to be presented. Gschwandtner has ample opportunities throughout these conceptual itineraries to demonstrate that she is in command not only of Marion's work but of all the relevant secondary literature. This is a thoroughly documented study and one can expect that in time it will come to occupy its rightful place as a work of reference. Indeed, one could compare the scope and ambition of *Reading Jean-Luc Marion* to what William