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Bush in Drag

Sarah Palin and endless war

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Sarah Palin's vice presidential candidacy raises formidable questions for feminism. Rather than dismiss Palin supporters as 'idiots,' this paper interrogates the desires and opportunities that have enabled her meteoric rise to power in the Republican Party. Using Žižek's fertile trio of concepts for analyzing ideology—jouissance, disidentification, and the sublime—I investigate Palin's relation to the women and men who support her and ask about other possible directions for those political desires.

I Introduction

The nomination of Sarah Palin as running mate for Republican presidential candidate John McCain initially energized a lackluster campaign. While Governor Palin's nomination cost the ticket substantial support in some quarters, it injected 'fresh enthusiasm' for the Republican ticket among voters who identify as evangelical Christians (Carnes, 2008: 34). Among those who were electrified by Palin's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, giving her three minutes of standing ovation, Palin clearly made them feel proud (R. Smith, 2008).

It is easy to show that Sarah Palin was a weak candidate, and many prominent people have done so. Mocking her 'frayed syntax, bungled grammar and run-on sentences,' Dick Cavett (2008) dubbed her 'The Wild Wordsmith of Wasilla.' The Columbia University *Teacher's College Record* saw Palin as the 'anti-merit candidate' (Zimmerman, 2008: 3). Longtime conservative George Will expressed his concern about McCain's 'visceral judgment' (2008) while conservative columnist Christopher Hitchens castigated Palin as a 'national disgrace,' 'a deceiving and unscrupulous woman utterly unversed in

any of the needful political discourses but easily trained to utter preposterous lies and to appeal to the basest element of her audience' (2008). Jonathan Raban noted in the *London Review of Books* that 'she seems perfectly untroubled by either curiosity or the usual processes of thought ... instead, she relies on a limited stock of facts, bright generalities and pokerwork maxims, all as familiar and well-worn as old pennies' (2008). Both the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* cited McCain's poor judgment in choosing Palin as a factor in their endorsements of the Obama/Biden ticket. With characteristic pith, Garrison Keillor observed of Palin's candidacy, 'The American people have an ear for B.S. They can tell when someone's mouth is moving and the clutch is not engaged' (2008).

Some accounts from people in Alaska who know Sarah Palin characterize her as smart, savvy, hardworking, energetic, ambitious, narrow, ruthless (Kilkenny, 2008; 'Letter', 2008). These are believable characterizations. It would be a mistake to underestimate Sarah Palin; her swift rise to prominence is perhaps the 2008 Republican campaign's most lasting effect. While some observers write Palin off as a temporary sideshow, Howard Fineman of *Newsweek* commented that Palin is 'the big winner in this campaign' and predicted that she has entered national politics to stay (2008). Frank Rich of the *New York Times* bluntly credits Palin with 'more testosterone than anyone else at the top of her party' (2008). Regardless of the motives behind Palin's surprise resignation from her position as governor of Alaska in July 2009, Palin is likely to continue to influence conservative politics in the U.S.

Even more to the point of this paper, it is a mistake to underestimate, or wrongly estimate, Palin's supporters. Casual dismissals of Palin enthusiasts as 'idiots' confuse intelligence with desire, generate a misplaced sense of superiority for her critics, and get in the way of more critical understandings. Unlike Spiro Agnew, Dan Quayle, and other fringe vice presidential nominees, Palin has a potent constituency with ideological clout and staying power.[1] CNN exit polls indicated that 73% of voters identifying as white Protestant/evangelical/born again Christians voted for McCain/Palin; 55% of non-born again Christians did so as well ('Exit Polls', 2008). A post-election Gallup poll found that 76% of Republicans would like to see Palin 'become a major national political figure in the years ahead' (Newport, 2008). This constituency is not going away, and, if Palin is sidelined as a national political figure, her supporters will nonetheless continue to influence U.S. politics. Some of the people drawn to her could, in a different political landscape, move in more progressive directions, but to imagine such shifts requires attention to how Palin 'works' for them. It is Palin's relationship with her constituency, not simply Palin herself, that requires our attention.

My task in this paper is not to show that she was a weak candidate, but to think about how she could be a candidate at all, and to reflect on the implications of her candidacy for feminism. There are many

seasoned Republican women who could have been selected for the ticket, had Senator McCain actually sought a qualified female running mate (see Appendix A). However, though Governor Palin's credentials to be vice president are minimal, her 'credentials' for this campaign, which was all about tapping sacred cultural icons and going for the gut, were impeccable. Like Ann Coulter, Nancy Grace, and other harsh female spokespersons for neoliberal and neoconservative politics, Palin is a somewhat more affable face of what Sam Chambers and Alan Finlayson have called 'a much more general and highly successful political style that has achieved national prominence thanks to channels such as Fox News, talk radio and, lately, internet conservative town-halls and blog fora' (2008: par 14). This style, William Connolly explains, mixes 'bellicose tone of voice, implacable facial expressions, sharp bodily demeanor, exclusionary doctrinal concepts and scandal mongering' (2008: 53). Palin's jabbing index finger, jutting jaw, relentless animation, and amiable smirk sculpt her embodied presentation as urgent, her message, alarming. Chambers' and Finlayson's gloss on Coulter's in-your-face polemics applies in a slightly softer and more folksy register to Palin: 'Coulter [Palin] engages in a distinct form of political-performance-action that exceeds the imagined rules of 'proper' public speech. When called on this transgression, Coulterism [Palinism] not only refuses to apologise but also positively celebrates its own transgression—turning it into a source of legitimacy, construing it as proof that the ideological power of the media really is a tool in the hands of liberalism' (par 19). Yet Chambers' and Finlayson's probing analysis of liberalism's relation to Coulterism, while noting Coulter's sexualized self-presentation as 'school mistress-cum-dominatrix,' neglects some of the larger gender contours of these performances by aggressive and sarcastic right-wing women (par 12). The sexual politics producing Sarah Palin's candidacy require further examination.

Feminist theorist Elizabeth Janeway, as columnist Ellen Goodman (2008) recalled, once predicted that the first woman to make it to the White House would be a vice president 'picked for balance' who also was 'a Conservative Republican who believes in the status quo.'^[2] Janeway was right. While feminists have argued over whether Palin is or is not a feminist (Kelly, 2009; Friedman and Perez, 2008), warned of the dangers of her policies for women (Boris, 2009), and assessed her treatment in the media (Streimlau, 2008), these are not, I argue, the most significant questions Palin poses for feminism. Far more crucial is what we might call the Palin effect, the process by which Palin 'spreads or distends [her]self over a surface' (Deleuze, 1990: 70), in this case, the surface of U.S. conservative evangelical politics. Palin serves as a potent relay point in a conservative ideological apparatus. Traits that appear to be specific to Palin—her speech, her sexuality, her smile—are able to rise to prominence due to their imbrication in a network of elements whose interactions *produce*, not merely record, her appeal. Feminist attention to the Palin effect may help us to intervene in ideological practices connecting her to her supporters in order to nudge their enthusiasms in more critical directions.

I am driven to wrestle with these questions because I recognize Sarah Palin. Watching her feisty RNC acceptance speech, I was pushed to recall many women like her, women I grew up with, women I went to church with, women I homeschooled my children with. My first response to her plucky defiance of 'liberal elitists' and 'east coast politicians' was...embarrassment. One of my own, someone from my tribe, came out onto the political stage and flaunted the worst aspects of the community that I had left, but never fully left behind. Embarrassment was followed quickly by pity, imagining this ignorant woman trying to hold her own with world leaders or in debate with Democratic vice presidential nominee Joe Biden. Palin's subsequent perky performance in that debate, while less embarrassing than the bumbling cuteness to which she retreated in the famous interview with CBS news anchor Katie Couric, heightened my curiosity about the process through which an attractive young woman maneuvers a meteoric rise to national prominence by substituting platitudes and poise for substantive knowledge. While I shared my progressive friends' dismay at her candidacy, those responses in me were modified by the inescapable twinge of familiarity, a needling demand to recognize something like an unwelcome family resemblance.

While Sarah Palin is something like my worst nightmare, in a no-longer-so-distant past, she could easily have been my best friend. Consequently, this paper is compelled to take an autobiographical turn, looking toward the prevailing lifeworlds in small-town, evangelical Christian America, seeking to map their political dynamics and explore possibilities of crafting different arrangements from their flawed and poignant grounds.

II Loving Sarah

When my parents died, my siblings and I took up the gargantuan task of cleaning and sorting through decades of personal belongings held fast by people who never threw anything away. The refrain, 'You might need that sometime,' echoed through our heads as we excavated drawer after drawer, closet after closet, room after room. In this process I found no fewer than 20 Christian bibles: bibles given to me at birth, first communion, birthdays, graduation, Christmas, marriage, childbirth; giant bibles acquired by my grandfather at his Oddfellows Lodge, my father at his Masonic Temple, my brother in Demolay, myself in Job's Daughters; pocket bibles from annual church camp, summer vacation bible school, weekly youth fellowship meetings, and Sunday school classes.

Along with other religious paraphernalia, including an extensive collection of angels and a \$250 porcelain eagle my mother had ordered from her favorite televangelist, I found two letters I had written at church camp to my future self, no doubt at the prompting of counselors, recounting my own 'coming to Jesus.' 'I did not plan to go down to the altar,' I had written in a round, childish hand. But something came over me and I 'went down' and took the pledge. Prior

to finding those letters, my primary recollection of church camp was the comradery of friends and the heavy-handed fundraising practices of the staff, who were skilled in building up emotional intensity in young campers, then turning that feeling toward the desire to donate money to the church. Those letters provoked different memories: I was startled to recall how enthusiastically I had found my place within that conservative, anti-urban, implicitly white, thoroughly patriarchal milieu.

I spent the first 17 years of my life on a family farm in a comfortable, closed rural community in the Midwest; to steal a line from Woody Allen, I grew up in a Norman Rockwell painting. While college provoked major life changes, I nevertheless have returned to that community many times each year for 40 years, spending large chunks of summers, sabbaticals, and holidays there. The day after Palin accepted the Republican nomination for vice president, National Public Radio interviewed women delegates at the Republican National Convention (RNC). I recognized their excited laughter, the rush of joy in their voices: 'I love it when she says...' The same delight was evident on their faces as they gazed at their standard bearer on stage. In Sarah Palin these women saw a likeable, no-nonsense mom, a small town girl with kitchen table common sense, a model mother and wife, a devout Christian, a can-do girl. Comparing herself to Harry Truman, Palin (2008) assured her supporters at the RNC that 'We grow good people in our small towns, with honesty and sincerity and dignity,' and she 'grew up with those people.' Well, so did I, and Harry Truman aside, there are some questions to be asked about Palin's legitimating strategy that she declines to pursue.

While Palin's success among conservative Christian women is significant, it is her success among men that is most important to her rise to power. A different sort of delight showed on their faces: panning the audience during her animated, smiling, nasty attacks on Barack Obama in her RNC acceptance speech, the TV cameras picked up white men in suits, elbowing each other and snickering like naughty school boys, gleeful that Palin could deliver frontal assaults on Obama that they themselves could not say in public without appearing racist. Palin can attack women's interests because she is a woman; a man refusing abortions to victims of rape and incest would seem heartless, but Palin can do it with a soulful plea for valuing life from the moment of conception. She could attack her black opponent because she is a woman; marginalized groups can publicly tear each other up in ways that white men must abjure. She can misrepresent events, lie about her record and her opponents, reveal stunning ignorance about national and international politics because she is a woman; her handlers can scream 'sexism' at critics who dare to point out her flaws.

Palin's was an iconic candidacy, a feminine repetition of President George W. Bush's success in insinuating himself into a 'good ole' boy' narrative, just an ordinary guy, someone you want to have a beer

with. Of course Bush had to work at that story, since he's actually from a wealthy Connecticut family and a graduate of Yale. But Palin really is from that venerated American space, the sacred small town, which novelist William Gass calls 'the heart of the heart of the country' (Gass, 1968). It would have been difficult for a male candidate to reproduce the campaign successes of President Bush without reminding voters of, well, President Bush. But a woman could tap the same gut narratives while retaining the distance that Republicans sought from their failed president. A sign held by a man at the pre-election 'Alaskan Women Reject Palin' rally in Anchorage read, 'Bush in a skirt' (2008). Palin is Bush in drag.

Palin, like McCain and Bush, is another true believer in American Empire. Arianna Huffington (2008) noted Palin's willingness during the campaign to link the 9/11 attacks with the war in Iraq, when even President Bush had ceased to allege such a connection. In her debate with Senator Biden, Palin heralded eminent U.S. 'victory' in Iraq, associating it with the claim that McCain knows how to 'win wars.' In her acceptance speech, Palin correctly noted that it is the sons and sometimes daughters of the rural working class who fight America's wars (along with the sons and daughters of minority communities, but that is a kinship Palin declines to explore). Like no male candidate could do, Palin parlayed her small town patriotism into ignorant cheerleading for America's failed war in Iraq, recruiting enduring national loyalties to justify sending still more young men and women to the brutal mayhem of an unnecessary war.

III How Does This Work?

For help in understanding how Palin's candidacy worked for those who find her compelling, I turn to Slavoj Žižek's analysis of ideology. Žižek points us to a triangulated relationship among three freighted ideas: the sublime, ideological disidentification, and *jouissance*. Because these vague yet powerful concepts host a potentially inexhaustible metaphorical surplus, they can be recruited in many directions and are capable of producing multiple possible meanings: 'Ideological space,' Žižek argues, 'is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, 'floating signifiers,' overdetermined by their articulation in the chain with other elements' (1989: 87) These proto-elements can be quilted together into chains of signifiers, brought to order by unifying relationships through which 'they become parts of the structured network of meaning' (87). I suggest that Sarah Palin works as a 'nodal point' which quilts the elements together, 'stops their sliding and fixes their meaning' (87). She has become an anchoring point in a set of practices that Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage. As explained by William Connolly, an assemblage is 'a temporal complex in which numerous coexisting elements are simultaneously interinvolved, externally related, and jostled by flows that exceed these two modes of connection' (2008: 12). Assemblages are made of specific practices that stretch or contract, interrupt or solidify the dense surrounding institutional and discursive arena.

Palin, like George W. Bush before her, is the central spindle around which the pleasures of self-recognition, the reassurance of distance from unclear commitments or scorned others, and the elevating confirmation of allegiance to the sacred are brought to order for millions of conservative Christian voters who imagine in Sarah Palin the America they long to see.

Drawing upon Kant, Žižek offers a useful analysis of the operations of the sublime. The sublime is that which inspires awe, veneration, a feeling of boundlessness that can issue in both delight and fear. The sublime, for Kant, goes beyond beauty to awesome greatness. Our empirical senses are inadequate to grasp the sublime, yet we are capable of feeling its expansive greatness, a capacity Kant called 'supersensible.' Examples include a powerful earthquake, a towering mountain range, a hurricane—superior forces that take us outside ourselves into a sense of exultation or horror.

In politics, according to Žižek, the sublime refers to those big ideas that function as 'master signifiers,' vague potencies—such as God, the Nation, or the People—that do not refer to clear concepts (signifieds) or objects (referents). The sublime's escape from our conceptual grasp is taken, then, as evidence for its greatness: we glimpse it, but are unable fully to grasp it; we see ourselves failing to grasp it, and we take that inability as evidence that it is Really Great. Unable to apprehend the sublime directly, we approach it intersubjectively, that is, through our identifications with 'others supposed to know,' who crystallize our reverence and symbolize our access to that which we take to be extraordinary. Žižek, utilizing Lacan, calls this 'belief through the Other.' Žižek's 'big Other' refers, as Tony Myers explains, to 'the Symbolic Order as it is experienced by individual subjects, or to another subject in so far as that subject represents the Symbolic' (23). The big Other includes the explicit and implicit practices that bring order to communities, and can be condensed in the figure of an individual whose relation to the community allows him or her to function as a placeholder or exemplar for that order. Thus, the priest mumbling Latin rituals, or for that matter Obama's election or Bill Gate's unconventional authority, are important because they are 'signs of something more' (Žižek, 2008: 1; see also Sharpe, 2004: 90-91). The big Other mediates our relations to the sacred; without this mediation, our speech and actions 'fall lifeless' (Sharpe, 2004: 62). Our very inability to give an account of our Big Thing works as indirect testimony to its ineffable greatness and to the value of relations we sustain with those who share our awe. Thus ideologies are not particularly vulnerable to being falsified through empirical evidence. Their role is not to generate correct statements, which can then be tested, but to tap 'an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself' (Žižek, 1989: 33). Political speech creates an elevated sense of community by connecting us with others who are similarly affected by the venerated object and in touch with the deep Truth the object allegedly allows us to access.

How does Sarah Palin help conservative Christians touch the sublime? She is their new big Other, the vehicle through which they touch America, their door to the iconic Heartland. An icon does its work through a vague but productive proximity: one of the definitions of icon provided by *Dictionary.com* is 'a sign or representation that stands for its object by virtue of a resemblance or analogy to it' ('Icon', 2009). Supporters can believe through her in that nostalgic national frame, even though the towns and cities they live in probably bear little resemblance to the 1950's image Palin invokes. But in the gut-level thought/feelings she stirs, they can touch that frozen image, imagine that she embodies it, and relish their nearness to it through their abiding cultural memories and loyalties: through Sarah Palin.

In the process of approaching the sublime, Sarah Palin is an icon in another sense as well: in the world of computer science, an icon is a dynamic generator of meaning, a productive image. About this sort of icon, *The Free On-Line Dictionary of Computing* tells us:

The central theme of Icon is the generator: when an expression is evaluated it may be suspended and later resumed, producing a result sequence of values until it fails. Resumption takes place implicitly in two contexts: iteration which is syntactically loop-like ('every-do'), and goal-directed evaluation in which a conditional expression automatically attempts to produce at least one result. (Howe (ed.), n.d.)

In computer language, an icon represents a command. Clicking on an icon initiates an associated program, opening a specific window or directory. In the lingo of computer interface design, Iconic 'uses a system of representation that depends on visual or other sensory organization and upon the use of summarising images. (Howe (ed.), n.d.)

The twist on the meaning of iconic that we can glean from the world of computing is useful in enhancing the more traditional connotation of veneration: icons are active; they do things. The people who make use of the icons are also being active, doing things; they are not simply manipulated or brainwashed. Rather, they are participating in a gut-level sensory process capable of endless reiteration, 'syntactically loop-like,' dipping over and over into a potent reservoir of national sacredness and redemption—not just manipulation, but skilful play upon pre-existing dispositions to nudge identity and desire in authority-sustaining directions. If Palin supporters were merely the passive recipients of ideological messages, then we could simply send new messages to compete with or overwrite the old. However, as Žižek (1989: 35) remarks, political beliefs are not internal mental states but 'practical, effective procedures of people.' Palin's 'every-do' suggests, not her hair style, but her potency as a 'summarizing image' to appear to tap into an identity already there, while actually helping to produce that identity through its active summoning of 'visual or other sensory organization' to represent the America that Palin enables her supporters to imagine.

The ubiquitous 'Country First' signs decorating Republican presidential rallies took on a distinct visceral resonance with the addition of Sarah Palin to the ticket. McCain's war hero status spun those two words in a nationalist direction—the 'country' is the U.S.A., and McCain put it first by his bravery as a prisoner of war. Campaigning behind those signs, Palin's twangy tones and rustic cadence evoked a different notation: 'country' became America's farmlands, the place that is not the city, the place that can be imagined as innocent, Christian, and white.

Palin's folksy vocal performance cements those heartland loyalties: the dropped 'g's ('People are hurtin', they are 'cravin' somethin' new.'). the 'gosh darns,' the tortured syntax, the down-home sprinkling of extra words into speech: 'this one here' and 'that one there.' Alistair Cooke has labeled this homespun mishmash 'Frontier Baroque' (quoted in Dowd, 2008b). Linguist Geoff Nunberg points out that Palin retains the final 'g' when talking about policy—'cutting taxes, reducing spending'—but drops it when she is speaking 'on behalf of ordinary Americans' ('For Candidates', 2008). The point, Nunberg rightly emphasizes, is not that one is authentic and the other is not; most people's accents change as we grow up, travel, and speak with different people. Rather, the point is the symbolic importance of this particular accent: Palin's tones and cadence promote her claim to rural roots, Americana-ish local color. To the extent that, as Nunberg claims, listeners take accent to provide 'a window on character,' Palin's accent implicitly supports her claim to represent the old-time heart of the country, the authentic rural America, much as George Bush's Texas twang located him as a good ole boy. The 'moral slang' represented in Palin's folksy speech performs her claims to be one with the people who grow our food, work in our factories, and fight our wars. It implicitly, sensorily links her to an old-fashioned place, a safe and wise place, and subconsciously recruits listeners' visceral loyalties and longings for the America they can, through her, imagine as real.

The second concept in Žižek's trilogy is ideological disidentification, a process that enables people to maintain some needed psychological distance from ideals they espouse. The excess generated by any political formulation requires management: as Matthew Sharpe explains, 'ideology is always *self-distancing*, enabling subjects a (sense of) distance from the very symbolic illusions that its explicit idealistic surface articulates' (2004: 103, italics in original). That which doesn't fit, according to Žižek, can be brought back in by the second move of ideology: we see ourselves not fully taking in the Big Idea, and take that failure as indirect testimony to the big Other's ability to do so for us. Like parishioners listening uncomprehendingly to Latin Mass, Žižek explains, the subjects of ideology can accept their lack of full understanding because they have an intimate relation with 'the Other who is supposed to know.' The subject can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all those who are similarly affected, secure in their relationship to the Extraordinary Thing via their participation with the One Who Knows.

Palin's famous 'pro-America' comments at her North Carolina fundraiser on October 16, 2008, evoked the nostalgic political virtues of small-town America:

'We believe that the best of America is not all in Washington, D.C. We believe' – here the audience interrupted Palin with applause and cheers – 'We believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit, and in these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard working very patriotic, um, very, um, pro-America areas of this great nation. This is where we find the kindness and the goodness and the courage of everyday Americans. Those who are running our factories and teaching our kids and growing our food and are fighting our wars for us. Those who are protecting us in uniform. Those who are protecting the virtues of freedom'. (quoted in Stein, 2008b)

This reference is a clear example of the non-falsifiability of the Big Idea: Palin finds the Real America in the places that are properly pro-American, small town, and good. If this were an empirical statement, one could challenge it by showing people in cities and suburbs who are patriotic and hardworking, or people in small towns who are not. But it is not an empirical statement, it is a gut-level association. Palin supporters from, say, the largely Republican cities of Charlotte, NC, Indianapolis, IN, Fort Worth, TX, Anaheim, CA, or Phoenix, AZ (Frum, 2008) can feel warmed and confirmed in their connections to the iconic small town via Sarah Palin; their link to their big Other overcomes their own urban affiliations and resituates them symbolically with the alleged virtues of small towns where they may seldom visit and have no desire to actually reside. Palin supporters living in small towns and rural areas where, contrary to her summarizing image, factories are closed, farms are foreclosed, and urban sprawl has paved rich farm land, can nonetheless re-image their homes in the intensifying glow of Palin's nostalgic prism. As Chambers and Finlayson point out, 'the classic repertoire of populism' rests on an alleged chasm 'between a corrupt elite, responsible for all errors and evils, and an otherwise good and decent people truly born of the national and godly community' (2008: par 26). Palin's work as the big Other serves as the medium for reorganizing the imagined public so Republican voters from any demographic groups can reinvent themselves as the carriers of small-town virtues.

The third concept in Žižek's trilogy is *jouissance*, the excessive pleasure that goes beyond ordinary enjoyment, embodies rapture, and can lead to pain. *Jouissance*, Jodi Dean explains, names an erotic, transgressive passion, 'an excessive, irrational enjoyment that accounts for the hold of an ideological edifice on the subject' (2006: 8). The idea of an 'over-the-top' enjoyment can be both sexual and appropriative: 'it signifies an extreme or deep pleasure; it signifies sexual orgasm; and in law, it signifies having the right to use something, as in the phrase *avoir la jouissance de quelque chose*' (Clark, 2004). Commerce in political pleasures can readily become

inverted, so that supporters become 'instrument[s] of the *jouissance* of the big Other' (Žižek, 1993: 190).

Palin's campaign was a site for complex transactions of *jouissance*. Palin's appeal among 'dudes,' the men sporting 'Proud to vote for a hot chick' buttons or carrying 'Governors I'd like to f***' signs, was an obvious site for a mischievous kind of *jouissance* in which ogling an attractive woman in public is compatible with supporting her politically. Polls suggested that support for Palin's candidacy during the campaign was strongest among men, who predominated at her rallies (Leibovich, 2008).[3] While young white guys with 'maverick' painted on their bare, depilated chests provided an eye-catching performance of juvenile *jouissance*, more interesting were the relations Palin sustained with the male powerholders in Republican circles, relations mediated through a back-and-forth over that erotically charged commodity, The Approval of Powerful Men.[4]

Small town, evangelical communities are largely patriarchal, endorsing, or at least longing for, the family formula of strong, responsible fathers, cheerful, supportive mothers, and wholesome children (see Snyder, 2007). Following the teachings of the Apostle Paul to the effect that women 'should submit to their husbands as to the Lord,' the dominant family paradigm in conservative Christian communities is 'a benign patriarchy set within a broader vision of a hierarchically ordered universe' (Gallagher, 2004: 218). While women do a great deal of the work, and can find leadership opportunities in women-dominated areas such as women's church groups, school activities, and youth groups, political and economic power is largely in the hands of men. Ambitious, able women who aspire to leadership positions in such communities need The Approval of Powerful Men; it is an irreplaceable seal of approval, a charged currency circulating through daily transactions as well as formal public arenas. The Approval of Powerful Men can itself be a powerful erotic stimulus, a self-perpetuating high for the girl-next-door who would otherwise be stuck running PTA meetings and baking cookies for Cub Scouts. The young women seeking The Approval of Powerful Men, and the men seeking the young women who seek their approval, are each operating as instruments of the *jouissance* of the other. Winning The Approval of Powerful Men generally requires a deft combination of aggressiveness toward enemies and deference toward the men in charge. It helps to be a bit of a tomboy, perhaps an athlete, maybe a cheerleader or an adventurer of sorts. It helps to be young, pretty, and charming, to be sexually attractive without creating the messy conflicts that ensue should one actually be sexually available, and to be willing to be a pet or mascot when needed (see Kanter, 1977). It helps even more to be willing to lead attacks on feminism, distancing oneself from other women, delivering patriarchal messages in mezzo soprano tones. And it is absolutely crucial to smile.

The heady circulation of *jouissance* is not limited to Palin's relations with her 'dudes' and her Powerful Men. *Jouissance* also does some of

its work with her women supporters, who admire Palin's 'girly' qualities and her ability to 'present herself well'—i.e., to both be good and look good—despite being a mother of five children (Block, 2008). It doesn't matter that Palin's teenage daughter is pregnant outside of marriage, or that Palin herself was pregnant when she married hastily in 1988 (Johnson, 2008: 39). In fact, those all-too-human frailties make her story of triumph that much more appealing. Perhaps these women see the same sleek, daring, virtuous Sarah Palin lionized by Lakota Industries, an archery manufacturing company which recently hit the market with their new pink bow, the 'Sarah-Cuda': 'This [product] is a tribute to women like Sarah Palin who bear the responsibility of family and work while strengthening the moral fabric of society' (Lakota Industries, n.d.). While dudes and Powerful Men want to *have* Palin, in both the biblical and the propertied sense, Palin's women want to *be* her, to imagine that, as one of her campaign buttons promised, they are also 'Sarah-licious.' Since 'having' the desirable one and 'being' the desirable one are readily mixable, *jouissance*, both possessive and narcissistic, can tap many flows of desire to do its potent political work.

IV Maintaining Boundaries

The approval of the big Other is critical to the identity of loyal constituents, making her disapproval a key aspect of the group's boundary maintenance. During the year I homeschooled my two children, we spent some weeks with a conservative Christian homeschooling group in the Midwest. Led by an articulate, effective woman named Pam, this group created an educational community cleansed of the disruptions of unregulated sexualities or secular humanism. The group's newsletter urged readers to boycott Disneyworld for allegedly pro-gay personnel policies while sharing material for homeschooling curricula such as the popular Narnia series. Motivated primarily by the search for playmates for my sons, we participated in homeschool reading groups, swim classes, and play activities. I was invited, and happily agreed, to serve as judge in a spelling bee and to make a presentation about Israel. One day, however, the dynamic changed: several moms were discussing reading, and Pam stated, 'there is no such thing as dyslexia.' Before I could stop myself, I blurted out, 'Of course there is. There is a great deal of scientific evidence about how dyslexic brains work' (see Ferguson, 2008a and 2008b). Pam's stern, appraising gaze took me in, and I felt a barrier come crashing down. After that day, things changed. My phone calls to group members went unreturned, play dates with their children became unavailable, and the previous invitation to speak about Israel was withdrawn. Earlier efforts I had made to help a homeschool mother address her children's learning difficulties faded, and could not be revived. I knew right away that I had made the mistake of appealing to scientific expertise (presumably at the expense of faith), but only later did I realize that an equally serious gaffe was to cross Pam at all.

Those who oppose the One Who Knows become, in Žižek's formulation, the needed outlet upon whom lurking political disunity can be blamed. The persecuting opponent is 'the Other of the Other,' the obstacle to the full realization of one's goals, the necessary outside against which the inside can reiteratively position itself. While I cannot know the nature of the conversations that resulted in our exclusion from the homeschooling community, I strongly suspect that we were identified as a difference that was a danger. In one of my last efforts to maintain our participation, I took my sons to a large event in a local gymnasium, where we met another family who recently joined the group. After speaking together for several minutes about homeschooling curricula and pedagogy, the other mother asked me, 'Are you Pam?' Assured that I was not Pam, she looked thoughtfully at me and said, 'You are a lot like her.' That shocking remark provoked me to imagine that, in this mother's eyes, self-confident women who speak readily in public command authority upon which I had unwittingly trod.

While I was a minor 'Other of the Other' in this local arena, Barack Obama was the perfect candidate to be 'the Other of the Other' on a national scale because he is sophisticated, he is well-educated, he is urban, and he is not white. Chambers and Finlayson point out that the rhetorical strategy of paradistole, making a virtue into a vice, or a vice into a virtue, allows right wing polemicists to turn the strengths of 'the Other of the Other' into weaknesses (2008: par 26). This turning is often a gendered process in which adjectives such as effete, soft, unsteady, or 'flip flopping' implicitly feminize and thus ridicule a man who might otherwise be praised for his willingness to hold a complex, nuanced view or even to change his mind (Connolly, 2008: 29, 55-6). There is a frisson of menace, a sudden delicious shiver of fear, available in the feeling/thought that 'the Other of the Other' endangers 'our way of life,' our vague national 'Real Thing' that 'they' cannot grasp but 'they' nonetheless menace. Žižek suggests that 'they' threaten 'our way of life' by threatening how we 'organize our enjoyments' (1993: 201). Belief in our 'way of life,' he argues, is rooted in the pleasure of believing with others, embracing the daily practices, historical legends, and national myths that materialize and organize our enjoyments. When Palin, sighing piously, told a cheering Florida audience that she was 'just so fearful that [Senator Obama] is not a man who sees America the way you and I see America, as the greatest force for good in the world,' she was forthrightly calling on voters to embrace and enjoy their fear of 'the Other of the Other' (in Milbank, 2008). When, in response to such allegations, a man shouted 'kill him' and received no rebuke from the candidate, the crowd was further encouraged to imagine 'the Other of the Other' as dangerous and themselves as in need of protection. Minnesota Republican Congresswoman Michele Bachman's subsequent call for the media to investigate members of Congress 'to find out if they are pro-America or anti-America' was the next logical step in cultivating the erotic charge offered by campaigns against 'the Other of the Other' (Stein, 2008a).

In some ways Palin's candidacy was not about women at all: not Hillary Clinton voters, but Nascar voters, were the likely target of Palin's electoral charms. Yet on another level it was about women—her rise to power offers a window into the stunted but potent opportunities that capable women can exercise within the narrow context of conservative, Christian, Republican orthodoxy. In the third presidential debate, Senator McCain proclaimed Palin to be 'a role model for women ... a reformer through and through.' Perhaps Palin's gender makes her claim to care for the lives of ordinary people more credible, since women are already associated with the domestic realm where such care usually takes place. Standing next to John McCain at rallies, Palin brought youthful energy into the picture: she looked like his adoring granddaughter, bringing him to life, showing that the old man had a fight yet left in him. McCain endorsed this endearing familial image in the third presidential debate when he proclaimed several times, 'I'm so proud of her.' While Barack Obama spoke of his vice presidential running mate Joe Biden as a respected equal, McCain beamed about Sarah Palin's alleged merits as if she had just won a blue ribbon in 4-H or first place at the science fair. Small wonder pundits quickly named her McCain's Viagra (Brogan, 2008).

V Endless War

Last summer I attended my 40th year high school reunion, mixing happily with a crowd whose political inclinations were largely frightening and therefore best left unexplored. One thing, though, was clear: over and over, my former classmates told me about their sons and daughters in Iraq. Sarah Palin was right about one thing: young people from small towns and rural communities do fight America's wars. Of course, minority communities do so even more, but that is not an alliance Palin courts.

To fully tease apart the link of ideology's sublime pleasure to war, we need to appreciate the two levels of ideological circuitry that Žižek charts. The first he calls 'the traditional ideological vicious circle' and the second he calls 'the loop of the perverse sacrifice' (1993: 194). Palin's promise that McCain would fight and win the war reflects the first level of the ideological circuit: McCain must continue the war so that American soldiers killed previously 'shall not have died in vain.' More young Americans must die to bring meaning to the deaths of those who have already died. Paralleling Nietzsche's argument in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Žižek argues: 'By dedicating ourselves to the task of successfully bringing to an end the work of those who sacrificed their lives, we will make sure that their sacrifice was not in vain, that they will continue to live in our memory; in this way, we will effectively commemorate them; if we do not accomplish this task of ours, they will be forgotten, they will have died in vain' (1993: 194).

The pain of the families and friends of dead soldiers, that brutal ripping of a beloved person out of one's self, is supposed to be

assuaged by the assurance that their deaths will find meaning through the production of more deaths, which require redemption through still more deaths... and on, and on, and on. In this grim sequence, the possibility that the war itself is in vain is very difficult to articulate, and voices striving to do so are easily dismissed as unpatriotic, disrespectful to the dead. Obama's plans to end the war in Iraq became synonymous, as Palin claimed in her acceptance speech, with wanting to 'reduce the strength of America.' At the same time, those who continue to conduct the war, sending more young people to die or be maimed, draw legitimacy from the prior deaths by continuing their work. As Žižek remarks, 'This gesture of self-legitimation through the other is ideology in its purest: the dead are our redeemers, and by dedicating ourselves to continuing their work we redeem the redeemers' (1993: 194). Whatever her personal feeling at the deployment of her son to Iraq, Palin's public front as patriotic mother resolutely sending her son to war fuels political support for continuing the war in Iraq while calibrating antiwar sentiment as disloyal both to the country and to the soldiers the country is willing to sacrifice.

The second level of ideology, which Žižek labels 'perverse,' adds another level of vicious imbrication into the mix. Žižek explains it thus: 'It is quite normal to say to the beloved woman, 'I would love you even if you were wrinkled and mutilated!'; a perverse person is the one who intentionally mutilates the woman, distorts her beautiful face, so that he can then continue to love her, thereby proving the sublime nature of his love' (1993: 194). He draws a powerful example from Patricia Highsmith's short story 'Heroine':

'Heroine' is about a young governess extremely eager to prove her devotion to the family whose child she is taking care of; since her every day acts pass unnoticed, she ends by setting the house on fire, so that she has the opportunity to save the child from the flames. This closed loop is what defines perversion. (1993: 195).

The perverse administration of President Bush and Vice President Cheney have 'set our house on fire,' taking the U.S. into an unnecessary war in Iraq so they can save the country from the war they created... by sending more troops to stoke the flames.[5] Patriotic Americans become caught in the picture they are looking at, an endless self-constituting feedback loop in which 'the true aim is no longer to hit the goal but to maintain the very circular movement of repeatedly missing it' (Žižek, 1993: 199). Efforts to intervene in the perverse circle, to stop producing the thing from which we must then be saved, then appear as a desire to surrender to the enemy. Palin enables the ideological vicious circle and the loop of perverse sacrifice to feed into each other to sustain America's endless war.

VI What Hath We Wrought?

Is this whole thing feminism's fault? When we identified and criticized the glass ceiling, did we set ourselves up for Palin's cocky claim in her acceptance speech that 'every woman can walk through every door of

opportunity'? When we chastised men for being sexist and patronizing to us, did we invite everywoman and her defenders to hide weak, self-serving arguments behind an accusatory veil? Most painfully, did we legitimize a kind of slave morality, in which licking our wounds becomes perversely enjoyable so we allow a morality of revenge to be created out of weakness?

Elizabeth Janeway was prescient in predicting feminism's role in enabling the success of antifeminist women. Movements for social change are typically vulnerable to being recruited for system-sustaining ends, and feminists cannot control the uses to which our ideas and practices are put. Nevertheless, seeing Palin's rise to power called 'feminist' by delighted right wing spokesmen who would normally neither know nor care anything about feminism at all, does give one pause. Feminism needs to be the source of a thorough critique of all forms of power and injustice, not a cover story for sending a white woman out to attack a black man, and in the process protecting the powerful, again.

What can we do? Žižek has explained that struggles against the sublime practices of ideology are not well served by appeals to the facts. 'An ideology really succeeds, he notes, 'when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour' (1989: 49). Our task, Žižek and I agree, is not just to find counter examples (e.g., 'Obama really is patriotic') but to ask how we are using the ideological figure we are trying to contest.

When do icons fail? Perhaps when they become transparently kitschy, when they begin to look and feel like unpalatable simplifications, intolerable reductions in meaning. To help an icon fail, critics must intervene in the process of being affected, to alter people's lived relation to politics and history so that the extrapolitical Truth the icon appears to represent is reframed within a different, or differently interpreted, set of relationships. When ideological gestures lead people to roll their eyes rather than touch their hearts, they are in a position to contest iconic practices.

I speculate that feminism's interventions may productively lie in insisting on both the constitutive diversity of the Heartland, and in continually pointing to the bloody reality, for those very communities, of their icon's endless war. Remembering Žižek's warning that 'the key factor is not that people are duped – there's an active will not to know' (2003), feminism needs to intervene in that active willing, perhaps by showing those willing communities to themselves and to ourselves in a light that troubles prior certitudes. Murray Edelman has argued that, while kitsch can mobilize people by tapping 'vanity, prejudices, or unjustified fears and dubious successes,' it asks for a largely passive response: 'it does not postulate an observer with an active mind, with the imagination and creativity' to read the landscape otherwise (1995: 29, 33; see also Goldberg-Hiller, 2009). By

cultivating a more active engagement with Palin's sublime promise, feminists may contribute to the needed rethinking.

Žižek, along with Bergson, Mead, Deleuze, and others, encourages us with the possibilities of reinterpretation: 'As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier's network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way' (1989: 56). In George Herbert Mead's succinct phrase, 'with each new present, a new past' (2002). Articulating new presents, finding the trace of the alternative meaning-making practices, may 'sap the force of this underlying fantasy-frame' (Žižek, 1993: 213). Switching to a Deleuzian language, assemblages have 'nomadic possibilities,' especially in 'any period of heightened disequilibrium out of which a new idea, faith, state, or species might emerge' (Connolly, 2008: 23). New coalitions can be articulated from 'a period of accelerated disequilibrium from which a new assemblage occasionally emerges out of volatile exchanges between elements torn loose from previous constraints' (Connolly, 2008: 24).

Several emergent dimensions of evangelical Christian politics beckon for feminist attention.[6] The first is the recent turn to the environment. While Sarah Palin diminished the human causes of global warming, petitioned the federal government to take polar bears off the endangered species list, and built an energy policy on the mantra 'Drill, baby, drill,' other evangelicals have become activists in protection of the earth. The caring, unpretentious man who was my parents' minister, who comforted them and presided at their funerals, sometimes evoked *Genesis* 1: 26 to encourage his parishioners to cultivate an environmental ethic:

'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'

This particular political twist intrigued me, although it did not catch the attention of my parents, who attended the church primarily for the cheerful fellowship and the free donuts. However, our minister was not alone; Fred Van Dyke points out that 'Today there are more than 40 Christian organizations in the United States, many of them expressly evangelical, that state their missions in terms of environmental conservation' (2005: 1693). One third of evangelical colleges offer a major or concentration in environmental studies. Mass circulation magazines such as *Christianity Today*, the most widely read evangelical magazine in North America, bring a message of Christian environmental stewardship to a large Christian readership.

In 2004 a group of evangelical leaders organized by Jim Ball, director of the Evangelical Environmental Network, produced The Sandy Cove Covenant, 'a statement calling for evangelicals to take stewardship of the environment more seriously.' They affirmed that 'we covenant together to make creation-care a permanent dimension of our Christian discipleship and to deepen our theological and biblical understanding of the issues involved ... to motivate the evangelical community to fully engage environmental issues in a biblically faithful and humble manner, collaborating with those who share these concerns, that we might take our appropriate place in the healing of God's creation, and thus the advance of God's reign.' Rather than the fiery apocalypse anticipated in the 'end of days' scenario, these believers embrace 'a lasting reconciliation between God, humanity, and the nonhuman creation' (Van Dyke, 2005: 1694).

Another opening for progressive coalition building with conservative Christian communities has been investigated by Andrea Smith in *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances*. Smith argues that Native American activism and evangelical Christians can come together around issues of prison reform and sovereignty. Herself an evangelical Cherokee, Smith, in the words of one reviewer, 'explodes the myth of a monolithic Christian Right' (Chamberlain, 2008). Smith finds numerous people and organizations in evangelical communities willing to make coalitions based on partial agreements. Sarah Palin is not one of those ecumenical evangelicals. According to Evon Peter, former Chief of the Neetsaii Gwich'in tribe from Arctic Village, Alaska, and the current Executive Director of the organization Native Movement, Palin has joined other Alaskan Republicans in opposing native efforts to regain traditional subsistence hunting and fishing rights. She has also opposed Alaskan tribal efforts to avail themselves of the modest rights of sovereignty and self-government supposedly available to federally recognized tribes, and has brought legal challenge to Alaskan tribes' access to the Indian Child Welfare Act. Palin's promotion of off-shore drilling and increased mining threaten wilderness habitats upon which native peoples depend, while she minimizes the human role in global warming which is 'wreaking havoc on Alaska Native villages, forcing some to begin the process of relocation at a cost sure to reach into the hundreds of millions' (Peter, 2008).

Still other conservative Christians are exploring a partial convergence with secular feminism.[7] Sally Gallagher finds a 'poly-vocal discourse on gender and family within Christianity.' Evangelical feminism thrives, Gallagher tells us, as 'a subculture within a subculture,' supported by the theological impact of revisionist exegetical studies, the economic impact of dual-career households, and normative threads of egalitarianism within the larger culture as well as the evangelical communities (2004; see also Cochran, 2005). In sharp contrast, Sarah Palin's former Pentecostal church, the Wasilla Assembly of God, offers Lisa Bevere's book about embracing sexual purity, finding one's prince, and honoring one's earthly father as parallel to the one in heaven. Palin's current church, the Wasilla Bible Church, joined

with James Dobson's Focus on the Family 'to help gays and lesbians 'journey out' of same-sex attraction' (Dowd 2008a). While it is likely that abortion rights would mark a permanent dispute between secular and evangelical feminists, common cause might be made with 'the subculture within the subculture' around other issues of equality and opportunity.

There is substantial danger here, in that a superficial alliance between feminism and evangelicalism may well be what produced Sarah Palin in the first place. The face of feminism that insists primarily on upward mobility for women within existing institutions can, not surprisingly, readily be paired with any institution, including the Republican Party. Ironically, McCain has proclaimed that Palin is 'a direct counterpoint to the liberal feminist agenda for America,' when it is precisely the thinnest aspect of liberal feminism that Palin has tapped (Romano 2008: A23; see also Ferguson and Marso, 2007). But there is much more work for feminism to do: supporters of Sarah Palin can pride themselves on their open-mindedness in 'giving a woman a chance to lead' because, I suggest, they have not yet thought much about the direction this leadership would likely take for non-elite women and men. Just as many African Americans and Latino Americans struggling against racism were appalled at the political successes of conservatives Clarence Thomas and Alberto Gonzales, many more women, including evangelical women, may come to see that Palin's economic, environmental, and military policies, which reproduce those of the Bush administration in nearly all regards, are disastrous for them.[8]

Feminists and other progressives could seek to build a new political assemblage, to develop a resonance between religious sensibilities and critical political practices. There is already a pluralization within conservative Christianity, offering environmental, indigenous, and feminist openings for possible alliances and the invention of new political opportunities. As Chambers and Finlayson remark, 'politics is always the site of a certain kind of excess, a destabilisation that reorders its own spaces' (2008: par 24). Feminists can intervene in these restless spaces, working for a reordering that could erode the appeal of candidates such as Sarah Palin.

The work of cleaning my parents' home, after their deaths, went on for several months. One day my brother struggled into the house with a large, cracked wooden crate he had discovered in one of the outbuildings. In it we found, wrapped carefully in old newspapers, a dainty set of dishes that we remembered from our grandparents' home. They were the dishes that Grandma always kept in the glass-doored cabinet in the living room, dishes we never used in our lives, dishes always saved for the company who evidently never arrived. I felt a bolt of shock at the sight of those delicate white china plates and cups decorated with a tiny pattern of pink roses. While I had not

recalled them before, seeing them jolted remembrance not just of that particular set of dishes, but the many articles, fabrics, and surfaces in the homes of my mother and my grandmother, recurrently decorated with delicate, precise flowers. For years I have joked about my somewhat childish taste in cloth and dishes, saying 'I'm a sucker for little flowers,' not remembering the repetition of that pattern in the homes I loved as a child. Now that I can see the pattern, I still love it. Yet love may not need to be grounded in unreflective allegiance. Perhaps there is a more self-aware affection available for a past that one can acknowledge without desiring to repeat.

Appendix A: Nationally Prominent Republican Women

5 Republican women senators:

1. Kay Bailey Hutchinson, TX
2. Olympia Snowe, ME
3. Susan Collins, ME
4. Elizabeth Dole, NC (defeated in 2008)
5. Lisa Murkowski, AL

22 Republican women in the House of Representatives:

1. Michelle Bachman, MN
2. Judy Biggert, IL
3. Marsha Blackburn, TN
4. Mary Bono Mack, CA
5. Ginny Brown-Waite, FL
6. Shelley Moore Capitol, W VA
7. Barbara Cubin, WY (retired in 2008)
8. Thelma Drake, VA (defeated in 2008)
9. Joann Emerson, MO
10. Mary Fallin, OK
11. Virginia Foxx, NC
12. Kay Granger, TX
13. Lynn Jenkins, KS (elected in 2008)
14. Cynthia Lummis, WY (elected in 2008 to Cubin's seat)
15. Cathy McMorris Rogers, WA
16. Candice Miller, MI
17. Marilyn Musgrave, CO (defeated in 2008)
18. Sue Myrick, NC
19. Deborah Price, OH (retired in 2008)
20. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
21. Jean Schmidt, OH
22. Heather Wilson, NM (defeated in 2008)

(Source: National Federation of Republican Women <http://www.nfrw.org/republicans/women/21.htm> and Center for American Women and Politics, 'Women in the U.S. Congress 2008' <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts/Officeholders/cong.pdf>) (accessed 30 August 2009).

3 Republican women governors:

1. Sarah Palin, AK
2. Linda Lingle, HI
3. M. Jodi Rell, CN

(Source: 'Statewide Executive Women,' <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts/Officeholders/stwide.pdf>) (accessed 17 November 2008).

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Notes

1. For those inattentive to U.S. vice presidential scuffles, Spiro Agnew was Richard Nixon's colorful first vice president, prior to his forced resignation from that office for tax evasion. Dan Quayle was the first George Bush's vice president, widely mocked as unqualified for the office.
2. Judith Walzer (2009) also asks whether American voters 'can *only* make an exception for a female candidate who stands on the reactionary edge of our politics.'
3. In a Washington Post-ABC poll taken after Palin resigned from the governorship of Alaska, well before completing her term, it seems that Palin had lost some ground with evangelical white voters, with more GOP women than men seeing Palin as a 'strong leader' (Cohen and Rucker, 2009).
4. My inspiration for *The Approval of Powerful Men* is Virginia Woolf's line 'daughters of educated men' in *Three Guineas*. Woolf uses adroit

repetition to group the words into a singular concept, to rhetorically intervene in the grammatical arrangement of two nouns, an adjective, and a preposition to make a new noun. Lacking her skill, I turn to capitalization to supplement the labor of repetition.

5. I am eliding some subtleties in Žižek's Lacanian argument here: he takes pains to distinguish the process of looking at oneself through the eyes of the big Other (what he calls desire) from the more perverse process of 'making oneself seen to the object of one's seeing' (what he calls drive) (1993: 196-8).

6. Another political possibility lies in strengthening coalitions between progressive groups and military families. While not explicitly evangelical, Military Families Speak out and Gold Star Families for Peace give voice to opposition from within the demographics that are disproportionately conservative, Republican, and Christian. See *Military Families Speak Out*, accessed 2 November 2009, <http://www.mfso.org/index.php>.

7. William Connolly points out the potential link of evangelical sexuality to feminism in his reading of the popular *Left Behind* series of Christian novels about post apocalyptic America. These best selling stories 'bind the future of the nation, Christian sanctity, the joy of sexuality, and the nuclear, heterosexual family' (2008: 30). Men take the lead; women defer to them and are subsequently secure within marriage while receiving 'the promise of a sexual fulfillment that draws secret sustenance from feminism while locking its space of propriety inside the nuclear family' (2008: 31).

8. Thomas is the second African American to serve on the Supreme Court. He was appointed to the court by the first President Bush and is one of its most conservative members. Gonzales was Attorney General under the second President Bush, and the first Latino appointed to that office; he resigned amidst accusations of perjury before Congress.

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