The Ambiguity of Change: Slogans in a Commodified Democracy

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THE AMBIGUITY OF CHANGE

SLOGANS IN A COMMODIFIED DEMOCRACY

Ehren E. Stuff*

PRODUCTS HAVE SLOGANS. The ultimate success of any company is dependant on getting people to believe in the product, which is achieved through producing a brand-name. When a product becomes a brand-name we are no longer dealing with simple consumption, but an entire transformation of lifestyle. The potential of this transformation is of crucial concern in regards to Obama and his slogan of change. What is in this slogan or any other slogan? For example, in the case of consumerism, McDonalds’s “I’m loving it” - what is “it” I’m loving? Or, Obama’s “yes we can” - “What” can we do, thus “what” will be changed? Before people passively accept change, there needs to be an analysis of the ambiguity of change to determine whether the people are dealing with change or static (the situation as is within the present conditions of the State). This is to say that change is an unclear concept that should be clarified by the people before this transition of power historically structures this situation.

HOW SHOULD THE SLOGAN “CHANGE” BE UNDERSTOOD? This ambiguity of change has resulted from a few things; one in particular is the lack of critical analysis from U.S. citizens. The term has taken on different meanings for many people. This alone is not problematic; this can provide people with a sense of possibilities. The problem lies in the ambiguity of change for society;

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in how it can be interpreted both for progress and exploitation. Basically, if people fail to define what they want to change, this will be provided for them; voiding all change.

This article attempts to understand the slogan of change and transition from Bush to Obama through a critical analysis, primarily drawing upon philosophical concepts from Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou, as well as Noam Chomsky’s electoral political analysis: The first section distinguishes between substantial change and symbolic change. The second section, is a critical analysis of the 2008 election as a marketplace (“commodification of politics”). The third section notes some irregularities of the present conception of change and the importance of registering past events. The fourth section explains how a space for this presidential transition should be maintained. In the fifth section, I investigate the transition from Bush to Obama and the actions that the Obama administration has enacted thus far.

**Symbolic to Substantial**

To analyse change requires going beyond the feel-good mechanisms of this slogan. People have embraced the idea of change; it has signified a treatment for the symptom that they are experiencing. That is to say that change is a way to express their desires to treat their symptom. A symptom “appears as an outward positive cause whose elimination would enable us to restore order, stability and identity” (Zizek 1999: 128). It marks the place of a rupture within our daily social reality; that is to say, it indicates that something went wrong. The central liberal symptom has been George W. Bush (although other various symptoms were addressed during the campaign: war, environment, economy… but many were inevitably linked to Bush). The treatment for everyone’s symptoms lies in change. The word change is a point de capiton, “a word, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which ‘things’ themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity” (Zizek 1999: 95-96). The moment that people begin to identify with this signifier, they achieve their identity (Zizek 1999: 96). Thus, the word achieves its meaning retroactively. In the case of change, this inversion was apparent during the election: the inherent ambiguity of the word itself became a way
to alter the nature of the problems that people perceived. The inversion takes place when people identify with the word change. They no longer wanted something changed, but rather, change constituted those problems that needed to be changed. Change encompassed the problems that most people wanted addressed. In this case, it was the process of going from I want change, to I support change (identifying with this movement’s desire to change). Yet, what failed to manifest was what initiated their symptom to emerge. What does Obama need to change that will treat their symptom? This is the critical moment where people need to address their demands. Their symptom has appeared; it is a matter of diagnosing the cause.

**Obama is the ultimate culture jam**

**Does this historical event represent change?** If we are to analyse this event, we are dealing with a *symbolically historical event*. For example, a symbolically historical event can be understood as the televised unknown rebel in Tiananmen Square. This was an extremely courageous act that may have influenced other events around the world (perhaps this courage affected the events that happened later that year throughout Eastern Europe); yet, the historical relevance of this single event is not quantifiable or even verifiable. That is not to say that symbolic events cannot have measurability. Symbolism can create (re)actions. When analysing fashion, symbolism can be measured monetarily: after individuals are exposed to fashion, trends correlations can be drawn from exposure to purchase. Concerning Obama, a black man has become the President of the United States, and this is symbolically significant. However, when Obama defined change during his DNC acceptance speech, he did not declare that race was part of that change. He stated that it “has never been about me. It’s been about you” (Obama 2008). He went on to say, “change we need doesn’t come from Washington. Change comes to Washington” (2008). For change to happen by Obama’s standards, people should change themselves as a society and force the change upon Washington.

Thus, if the significance of Obama being black is the historic change desired, one could posit that Obama is the ultimate culture jam. A culture jam can be understood as an alteration on a symbolically accepted structure of
our society. It draws into question an item, asking for a reinterpretation of what was previously taken for granted. For example, if someone draws a moustache on a woman’s face on a billboard, it intends to redirect our attention from the consumerist function of the image and thus, our desire to fit the image of that picture; in alleviating our consumerist desire, it allows a new perspective to relieve us from the intended function. A culture jam’s ultimate intention should be to symbolically destroy an element of our social reality. It achieves this with an alternative symbolic meaning that creates a rupture in our social reality that forms an action. Ultimately, the question is if it can alter how we reconceptualise our social reality. This is the wager for change, but the results are unclear.

For example, if we painted every dollar bill red, would we reduce consumption? Red equals stop. A culture jam’s effectiveness is limited until it is saturated into the recirculation of production. Initially, how does the culture jam interact with other elements to alter the social system being jammed? Did it become a new product to stimulate the system or have the opposite effect than what was desired? Through addressing these questions, we can analyse its impact on a system. Did the red dollar bill reduce, increase, or not affect consumption?

Regarding substantial change that directly affects our way of life; that event has not taken place. We need to analyse if this symbolic event can create a substantial event from this instance. If a black person becoming president comprised the desired change, then change has occurred. This can very well be an aspect of change. However, does it fulfil the definition of change and clarify what was ambiguous? No. symbolic change can lead to substantial change, but it does not structurally change our lives at this moment, so the results remain unclear.

The condition for true change (a true act) is to stop false activity; or, as Badiou puts it in a sentence I quote repeatedly: “It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent” (Zizek 2008: 309).

If this standard holds true, Obama’s election may not only be a failure
in regards to change, but it is also perhaps subversive. It brought about the disillusioned liberals into another false activity of legitimatising the present State. “The state is a sort of metastructure that exercises the power of counting over all the subsets of a situation” (Badiou 2006: 143). From a parliamentary perspective of analysing the notion of a state, it is concerned with governing: “the economy, the national question, and democracy” (Badiou 2006: 83).

For a true political change to take place there needs to be an intervention or event (Badiou 2007: 290)? An intervention consists in a fidelity to an “unpresented element” of the event (ibid. 513). An event is the place between the site and itself (self-belonging) (ibid. 506-507). For example, Badiou uses the example of the French Revolution and states:

“As event it must be said that it both presents the infinite multitude of the sequence facts situated between 1789 and 1794 [(site)], and moreover, that it presents itself as an immanent resume and one-mark of its own multiple [(itself)]” (2007: 180).

The event should be understood as that which tears apart the present situation. Without intervention or event, we are dealing within the situation (a structured presentation) (ibid. 25), which is to say a “deployment of its parts” (ibid. 290). This does not concern the event; it deviates from the site and concerns presentation within the State. Basically, the situation is that of the election; the State as usual deploys its parts (in this instance, individuals running for office). As Badiou so masterfully states:

*The thought of the situation evolves, because the exploration of the effects of the state brings to light previously unnoticed but linguistically controllable new connections. The support for the idea of change is in reality the infinity of language* (ibid. 290).

An alteration in society occurs. Nothing changed, but the deployment of
new parts, and so a continuation of language sustains presentation within the State. Change cannot simply be an alteration because then every election with new candidates elected would result in change. Ronald Reagan was a change; George Bush was a change; Bill Clinton was a change, etc. Even when Bill Clinton campaigned in 1992, he declared that his campaign was bringing “change to America.” However, the U.S. system was maintained: the military industrial complex continued, health care and the environment were not addressed, and corporate power increased. However, there are those that will claim that although these complaints are true, the Clinton years were economically prosperous times that will allow us to challenge these complexities, constituting a change. Yet, even by Nobel economist and former chairman of Bill Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers Joseph Stiglitz’s own admission in the article “The Roaring Nineties” (2002), much of the economic prosper was due to earlier investment in technologies and “lucky mistakes” in managing the deficit and interest rates (Stiglitz 2002). Many of the deregulations and the signing of NAFTA have added to the economic situation of today (Stiglitz 2002). Basically, the Clinton years were an extension on previous investments with a lucky twist. The next section will attempt to explain this process of how this tautological “change” within the electoral system is sustained.

**COMMODIFICATION OF POLITICS**

Could pressure be applied to the U.S. electoral system? Perhaps the first step is to identify the cause for the symptom. The risk with bypassing this step would be non-properly addressed statements that appear as hysterical demands: “End the war; protect the environment; return the Constitution; fix the economy; prosecute Bush.” These are all reasonable claims, but the fractioning of these claims is impossible to address at once (Zizek 2008: 350). A clear cause needs to be identified. Without specific and clear demands from a collective group, this allows for an agenda not of the people, but for the powerful select few that clearly present their issues via the mass media. This is crucial in a televised society; we cannot underestimate the role of the corporate dominated media in this election, nor their ability to transform a voter into a consumer.

The media’s influence upon voters is extraordinary. This accounts for the
massive amount of money spent on television ads, the reluctance of the corporate media to allow third parties/independents fair coverage,\(^3\) the majority of corporate controlled surveys only including McCain and Obama (providing people with an either-or scenario), and the Democrats’ and Republicans’ control of the presidential debates through the Commission on Presidential Debates (by their own admission the goal is to “strengthen the two-party system”), excluding all other parties and individuals (Cohen and Ackerman 2000).\(^4\) Another extremely important aspect to analyse is the amount of money the two-party system received from donations, which was over one billion dollars (Obama: $745 million and McCain: $368 million (Opensecrets 2008). For some, this was noted as a grassroots indicator because so much of Obama’s money was from individuals; however, they missed the point that money raised is not an indicator of grassroots, but instead becomes the very disablement of grassroots. Problematically, the time and money spent on this election siphons true grassroots movements. To correlate money and grassroots is to say that Wal-Mart or Amazon is the pivotal of grassroots movements. Rather, was Obama the most purchased candidate in American history?

**Elections themselves are conceived along the lines of buying a commodity**

**The U.S. elections** have a noticeable fallacy in regards to change; one that many simply proclaimed was Obama seizing the moment. However, nothing deviated from the standard electoral formula, so that basically, the initial process that established change was static. If this is true, Obama’s election may be a matter of inclusion, not change. The electoral process for many countries lasts a few months at most. The U.S. process becomes a four-year ordeal for some, but for most is a two-year stretch.

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\(^3\) Some will claim this is simply a matter of numbers; it is impossible to allow all third parties and independents fair time. However, if the media based their criteria upon possibility, four other candidates were able to gain enough electoral votes to win the election: Chuck Baldwin (Constitution Party), Bob Barr (Libertarian Party), Cynthia McKinney (Green Party), and Ralph Nader (Independent).

\(^4\) The last time a third party candidate was allowed was the billionaire Ross Perot in 1992; however even with his wealth he could not gain access in 1996.
For a general review of the U.S. elections: it begins for most potential candidates with an exploratory committee that determines whether they should campaign for office. This process involves collecting information, but more importantly building support and collecting monetary donations. Once this process concludes, the candidate officially announces. Now a lesser discussed component of this process surfaces, as those involved in the two-party system (democrats and republicans) and everybody else (independents and third-party) diverges. The two-party candidates vie for the nomination of their party, with the guarantee of having access to all 51 state ballots. The non-included spend the primaries attempting to gain access to those 51 ballots through a different standard for each state. The two-party system begins their nationally televised primary debates, during which no coverage is provided for independents or third parties. As the primaries unfold, two-party candidates receiving few primary votes begin to exit the process until the last two or three candidates proceed. After receiving a certain number of electorates, one of the candidates receives the nomination. In 2008, Barack Obama (democrats) and John McCain (republicans) secured the two-party system’s nominations. After the primaries are concluded, all parties have their conventions with only the two-party system’s conventions being nationally televised. Candidates for president accept the nomination in late summer with their acceptance speech, and they proceed to campaigning, then a series of two-party debates, and finally the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts until November.

This entire campaign, as many others, amounted to what Zizek calls the “commodification of politics.” This is not merely about how politicians are packaged and sold to us, rather “that elections themselves are conceived along the lines of buying a commodity” (2008: 283). As Noam Chomsky insightfully pointed out, the advertisement industry’s prize for the best marketing campaign in 2008 went to Obama; the campaign was essentially a marketing campaign (2008). The best-marketed product won the most votes (product Obama). Chomsky explains that “the point of the advertising is to delude people with the imagery [, …] keep[ing] them uninformed” (2008). He then states that those that are creating the advertisements want “uninformed consumers, […] uninformed voters to make irrational choices” (Chomsky 2008). What we are dealing with is no longer the political sphere,
but a virtual political marketplace.

Elections are the marketplace for this commodification of politics, reducing political analysts to tabloid reporters. Production, distribution, commercialisation, and the market all functionally transform politics into a reified democracy, commercialised through the mass media. During the election cycle, citizens are bombarded by two-party political advertisements via the media’s constant kneading of their plastic candidates from politician (object) to their personalisation (commodity): how many dogs they own, their favourite food, anything that personalises them and relates them back to the general public, and avoids all issues, reified. The distribution process that is now incorrectly identified as a “grassroots” movement (with a noticeable fallacy, it was a top down approach) follows the production process. (Note: Obama and McCain began on the television networks through a series of debates, not from the bottom up). The distribution process coincided with the commercialisation not only of Obama and McCain, not even only of the Democrats and Republicans, but of the United States democratic process, as a whole. The process of voting in the elections was marketed as the essential civic duty. The United States reduced voting to a menial decision between Coke and Pepsi. Every alternative was dealt with in advance through cynical\(^5\) bigotry reducing alternatives to inevitable losses: “I agree with their positions, and I would like to vote for them, but they cannot win.” The distribution went from plastic to material only during the final months of the campaign with the GOTV efforts to fully legitimise the system’s success. Consumption did not occur on November 4\(^{th}\) (Election Day), but gradually, with every T-shirt, sign, sticker, and song of the two main candidates in the marketplace of the U.S. political market. In total, the New York Times estimated that 200 million dollars worth of Obama merchandise was sold (Khaleej 2009). Election Day ended the consumption frenzy (everything must go) of merely reducing it to a hedonist orgy of taking out the trash; all excess election merchandise flooded the market.

\(^5\) “Cynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them.” (Zizek 1999: 33)
As far as reform or true representation is concerned, voting is becoming obsolete; its relevance is comparable to all other consumerist habits. Not only is it becoming obsolete in terms of providing true change, but, in itself, the process “has little to do with truth” (Badiou 2006: 15). Badiou explains, “If our knowledge of planetary motion relied solely on suffrage as its protocol of legitimation, we would still inhabit a geocentric universe” (Badiou 2006: 15). One could restate this sentence: if change relies solely upon suffrage, we will continue to inhabit a static society.

REMEMBERING TO REMEMBER

The change that the world and America cannot afford is what viewers witnessed as Obama finished his inaugural speech. His eyes averted from the teleprompter (like all of his speeches never directly addressing the crowd, always a separation from his audience), turning away from the millions of hopeful citizens that voted for him. He then moved toward former President George W. Bush (the man that the liberals had blamed for every disaster in the last eight years). With their arms extended, they embraced each other with Obama’s back turned away from the world, while the viewers passively watched the spectacle on television (like all the other spectacles of Bush’s presidency). The non-involved citizens were reduced to voyeuristic bystanders, as their candidate of change turned his back on them and embraced their symptom. Many will dismiss this as simply political grandstanding, however if symbolism is as important as the masses are led to believe, what does this symbolise?

We must begin by noting some irregularities in the present conception of change. First, when many people discussed their reasons for voting for Obama, they mentioned Bush as their reason, but Bush no longer occupies the White House. The U.S. system had already provided that change in advance. Second, it was the U.S. system that allowed these excesses and abuses of the Bush administration. At anytime the courts or the Democrats that controlled congress could have intervened (checks and balances). Even more shocking is the Senate that was controlled by the Democrats at the time permitted the Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan, and the Patriot Act. Third, Obama has clearly stated he is not interested in pursuing the past.
(actions of George W. Bush) and believes the nation should focus on the future (Obama 2009b). Is this change or a revisionist whitewash of the past?

Therefore, perhaps it is the U.S. system of government and the way it operates that needs to be changed. The first step may very well be the election of Obama if the wager of symbolism holds correct. However, what are the consequences of allowing Obama to define change, rather than change being defined by the people? The ultimate danger resides in a stagnation of substantial change because of a fixation on symbolic change. Not only is there a consequence of waiting for change, but perhaps more seriously, symbolic change could have the affect of appearing as substantial change to the point that any actions by Obama could appear to be change. This becomes visible when analysing brand-name products. This is the reason brands are so valuable, why companies consume other brands and incorporate them into conglomerates. Symbolism trumps substance; they buy the consumers of the brand, not the product. The consumer is no longer consuming the same substance, but the transitioned brand-name produced by a different producer.

A key concern is that America may have distanced itself so far from an ethical dimension that any deviation from Bush is considered change. The problem then is that what was once wrong will now be right. Obama could very well only direct the U.S. democracy to pre-Bush years. This is not change, but a retroactive event. The results would be voiding the last eight years in return for a state of normalcy (the people’s desire for wholeness). Basically, we would have the classic movie scenario of It’s a Wonderful Life: we discover that what we had was great, and we want to return. For many, this is fantastic, and any repair will be deemed a reform; however, the cause of our desire to “never be born” is still waiting for us when we return “home.”

A problem in affecting change is that there has yet to materialise a strong collective group to organise for change. Currently the people that have
voted for Obama have fractioned off into a wide range of post-election positions: change has occurred; they must force change; exhaustion; and the position that undermines the fabric of the democratic process that has negatively materialised is a lack of responsibility (“I voted, therefore change will happen”). However, responsibility is essential in a democracy in order to provide value to a vote. People cannot simply make excuses and blame Bush. Such an action would be what Zizek deems “enjoy your symptom!” (2001: 9-10). This is when an individual indulges in his or her symptom, rather than exploring the cause. He or she literally experiences pleasure from this symptom, caught in a cyclical action of repeating a negative action at the point where pain becomes pleasure. Thus it is imperative that people resist the temptation of receiving an adverse pleasure from George W. Bush. This has clearly manifested over the years, creating an almost cynical entertainment industry surrounding Bush (*Daily Show*, *Countdown* with Keith Olberman, *W.*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*). If change is to occur, people must traverse their tendencies to over indulge in their symptoms. The cause is not to be found in an individual; the U.S. system permitted these excesses. The cause will not be found in Bush (that should not be read as he lacks responsibility or justice should not be sought). By the same token, it is imperative that people resist racial outbursts if Obama fails, when Bush failed it was not his “whiteness,” it was a failure of the U.S. system and the administration’s actions.

A SPACE

When analysing the ambiguity of change, there appears stopgap that is holding the place for the disorganised group in mourning. The disorganised masses rallying upon this slogan are not necessarily optimists driving towards the future. There is an element of grievance in their slogan. Why do they want change? What happened that caused this symptom? What did the people lose that is creating their symptom that needs to be changed? It is the same as when encountering a stain: what created the stain? How will I erase this dark spot on my white sheet? When analysing a cause, symptoms need to be explored until people can obtain a satisfactory diagnosis. What this persistence amounts to is what Lacan defines as drive:

*The compulsion to encircle again and again the site of the lost Thing, to*
mark it in its very impossibility – as exemplified by the embodiment of the drive in its zero degree, in its most elementary, the tombstone which just marks the site of the dead. (Zizek 2001: 272)

Thus drive is the very sustaining of a space to analyse what needs to be changed. Space can be understood as the area in between East and West Germany. Between communism and capitalism, it provided an unrepresentable to the imposed decision of either/or. It was a blank area, undefinable, existent, but not counted by the State. This unrepresentable is a void enabling a space. A void is the unrepresentable within a structured presentation (Badiou 2007: 55); it was the “almost being” (ibid. 77).

There are not ‘several’ voids, there is only one void; rather than signifying the presentation of the one, this signifies the unicity of the unrepresentable such as marked within presentation. [...] it is because the one is not that the void is unique [...] the Ideas of the multiple only live on the basis of what is subtracted from them. (Badiou 2007: 69)

That is to say; what is presented by the State does not reflect the void or event, and what is presented is subtracted, it does not present the unrepresentable. If we were to observe an explosion (event), the State would count the parts of the situation, providing a signifier (presentation) to suture the void of the situation; it presents a multiple of subtractive parts, but not the void that was introduced into the situation. Once the State has counted, the event is recognised as a multiple in the situation in a mixture of power and opinions, not truth (Badiou 2006: 97). In order for us to affirm truth, “for every x, there is thought” (ibid. 141). Yet, “The State does not think” (ibid. 87), the State is concerned with structuring the structure, disenabling the inconsistency from the void, providing consistency to the situation, and not truth (Badiou 2007: 93). “A truth groups together all the terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event (Badiou 2007: 335) [...] what qualifies the name of the event is that it is drawn from the void” (Badiou 2007: 329). Therefore, space will be defined as: what is drawn from the void and sustained by drive to produce thought. With a clause for a true space, it must meet this criterion: it undermines the coordinates of the very system from which it subtracts itself, striking at the point of its “symptomal torsion” (Zizek
In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera (1996: 4) wrote, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”. As the Soviets invaded the former Czechoslovakia, it not only concerned the mere presence of power and ruthlessness of this action; the spectacle of this event was secondary to the more devastating consequences that could be unleashed. What was at risk was more fundamental: the loss of their identity and a roadblock to pursuing their true goals. With every occupation of a street sign or erecting of a statue, the people of Czechoslovakia were in danger of losing themselves for a new imposed reality that would annihilate all knowledge of these past atrocities. A simple dismissal of past events must be avoided when attempting true change; a position of maintaining a space of past actions is required to discover the cause of their symptoms and maintain their identity to define their own direction.

**AFTER 100 DAYS**

Critical analysis is essential; hope is sublime, but the persistence towards a true change should be the desired goal to treat the cause. If people displace their belief onto an object such as Obama, they will have accepted their subjectification. However, the persistence of encircling the event will enable them to discover the cause of their symptom. Throughout the election, people held to the pre-presented opinion of “wasting votes” on independents or third parties. The important thing for those that voted for Obama is to not let the inauguration become a funeral for their votes and ideas.

Within days after the election, Obama began to show the direction of his current administration. From a 2009 interview, Chomsky explains that financial institutes in the election preferred Obama to McCain (2009). In every election, the financial investors “coalesce and invest to control the state” (Chomsky 2009). To most this may seem irrelevant, and a factor that Obama cannot control. However, Chomsky explains that when we use Thomas Ferguson’s investment theory of politics, the best predictor of policy is campaign contribution investment (2009). What Obama can control are the individuals within his administration. When analysing his selections, it becomes apparent that his cabinet does not reflect change, and this adds
more weight to Ferguson’s theory. For instance, Larry Summers who is now part of Obama’s economic team was one of the people substantially responsible for this current economic recession (Chomsky 2008).

One leading economist, one of the few economists who has been right all along in predicting what’s happening, Dean Baker, pointed out that selecting [him] is like selecting Osama Bin Laden to run the war on terror.

His questionable selections do not stop there. The key position in the white house is Rahm Emanuel, the Chief of Staff (the senior aide to the President): well known for raising money for special interests, strong supporter of the military-industry-complex, and a hard line supporter of Israel suppression of the Palestinian people (Nader 2008). Emanuel was asked (even after the fact of Iraq not having weapons of mass destruction) if the U.S. should have invaded Iraq, and he answered affirmatively, explaining, “I still believe that getting rid of Saddam Hussein was the right thing to do” (Easton 2006). An indicator of change is whether Obama breaks free of this investment control.

When analysing change after the 100 day point of the Obama administration, what appears? The major networks are already proclaiming a change from Bush, as an ABC producer writes, “Obama flips Bush admin’s policies” (Khan 2009). For example, on some of these issues according to ABC, Obama has changed from the Bush administration: labour laws, greenhouse gases, harsh integration, stopping the use of the terms “war on terror and enemy combatant,” closing Guantanamo, and troops drawdown in Iraq (Khan 2009). Upon substantial examination, has there been change? For example, first, the Obama administration claimed to open up the Freedom of Information act; however, the administration is upholding Bush’s decisions on state secrets in the Justice Department (AP 2009).

Second, many claimed Obama had reversed the Bush administration’s policies on torture, and yet, upon closer inspection, stories that controvert the widely held position emerge. In February 2009, Obama thanked the U.K. for protecting evidence of “torture and rendition” at Guantanamo on a British resident (ACLU 2009). Later in April, memos were released, linking
the CIA to torture, but Obama proclaimed he would not prosecute (Fein 2009). In addition to the failure to prosecute CIA officers linked to torture, Obama will not prosecute individuals from the Bush administration involved in “warrantless NSA spying on American citizens” (Fein 2009). Even when Obama proclaimed to the world that waterboarding is torture, he reiterated he does not intend to prosecute Bush administration officials (Fein 2009). Then, in May 2009, Obama announced that the U.S. will continue the Bush military tribunal system for suspected terrorists, contrary to his campaign promises. However, he is claiming to reform the system and “bringing them in line with the rule of law” (Runningen and Chipman 2009). Yet is this possible, considering a recent interview, from reporter Jeremy Scahill (2009), informing viewers on Democracy Now of the Immediate Reaction Force (also known as the Extreme Repression Force) at Guantanamo Bay? Currently under the Obama administration heinous acts of torture are being committed? This group of individuals is called in by the guards, and they literally gang-beat prisoners. There are five men, generally that are sent in. Each of them is assigned to one body part of the prisoner: the head, the left arm, the right arm, the left leg, the right leg. They go in, and they hogtie the prisoner, sometimes leaving them hogtied for hours on end. They douse them with chemical agents. They have put their heads in toilets and flushed the toilets repeatedly. They have urinated on the heads of prisoners. They’ve squeezed their testicles in the course of restraining them. They’ve taken the feces from one prisoner and smeared it in the face of another prisoner. In regards to torture, he says what the world wants to hear, but his actions pardon and continue the abuses of the Bush administration (Scahill 2009). These actions that occurred under the Bush administration are now occurring under the Obama administration.  

Third, millions protested the Iraq war; many of those same individuals placed their hope upon Obama reversing Bush administration’s global military strategy. However, as Obama authorised the redeployment of half the troops from Iraq, he later announced his surge strategy in Afghanistan  

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increasing U.S. troops by 21,000) and including military funding to Pakistan (1.5 billion dollars) (BBC 2009). Within Obama’s “new strategy” speech for Afghanistan and Pakistan, not only does one learn about the surge in Afghanistan, but the escalation towards a military presence in Pakistan and the linking of the two conflicts (2009a). Taking a lesson from Bush, Obama generously draws unsubstantiated conclusions that the terrorists that “planned and supported 9/11 [...] are in Pakistan” and even taking further liberties to claim the ultimate point de capiton of the Bush administration that Bin Laden is in Pakistan (2009a). He continues the Bush line of thinking to entice other countries into this conflict:

_Terrorist attacks in London and Bali were tied to al Qaeda and its allies in Pakistan, as were attacks in North Africa and the Middle East, in Islamabad and Kabul. If there is a major attack on an Asian, European, or African city, it – too – is likely to have ties to al Qaeda’s leadership in Pakistan._ (Obama 2009a)

As mentioned above, Obama’s administration is discontinuing the use of “war on terror and enemy combatant.” Yet, when analysing the speech some of Obama’s sentences, they seem as though they could have been directly spoken by Bush: “And to the terrorists who oppose us, my message is the same: we will defeat you” (2009a). His most telling statement for those that applauded the withdrawal efforts of Iraq: “America must no longer deny resources to Afghanistan because of the war in Iraq (Obama 2009a).” This leaves one wondering if the withdrawal was merely a tactic to replace the emphasis on Afghanistan. Near the end of his speech, he states the U.S. “did not choose to fight a war in Afghanistan,” and in the same paragraph once again links Afghanistan to 9/11 and then 9/11 to al Qaeda with the bizarre twist of linking al Qaeda to Afghanistan and Pakistan (Obama 2009a). Thus, he subtly continues the linking of 9/11 to Pakistan. This minute collection of material is the beginning of Obama’s administration; these are the type of actions that need to be marked to further understand whether there will be any substantial change from Bush.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis of Obama’s administration will be a continuous process.
The space between Bush and Obama will fade until consumed by the State and counted as a part of the historical U.S. process. As understood from observing the 2008 electoral process, Obama was elected through a static process, which was the same process that enabled the eight years of George Bush. What is undetermined is whether the same process can provide different results. This was perhaps a matter of inclusion rather than change. It appears as if Obama is suturing the void of the situation with the fallacy of change. It was during the 2008 election when the moment for an intervention could have been enacted to provide a space that was necessary for change. People demanded something that was unpresentable, yet the State through its structuring elections presented Obama.

Now it is a matter of analysing this presidency, as it unfolds, and diligently marking Obama’s actions and comparing them with the previous Bush administration. This requires traversing the symbolic and noting the substantial. As discussed earlier, for true change there needs to be an intervention or event. Therefore, until either of these two qualities occurs, the Obama administration is static.

Based upon monitoring the first 100 days, including his administration’s appointments, there have been few if any substantial deviations from the Bush administration. Thus, the idea that Obama was bringing change to Washington has yet to transpire. Unfortunately, it appears that the liberals have once again legitimatised false activities. However, if a space can be maintained, perhaps an intervention can evoke true change from the bottom up. Ultimately the discussion of what they want changed has to emerge to produce a true change.

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