

The Narcissism of Bipartisanship: Accessing Ann Coulter on the Internet

Among the many dramatic moments of the 2008 presidential campaign, one of the highlights was the “Celebrity Ad” released by the McCain campaign in which scenes of a smiling Obama, supporters chanting his name in the background, are juxtaposed with images of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, the sound of a flashing camera signaling each change in frame. “He’s the biggest celebrity in the world, but is he ready to lead?” draws a low, alluring female voice which ends the ad by proclaiming, “higher taxes, more foreign oil, that’s the real Obama.” The ad suggests that Obama’s appeal is more narcissistic than political and that image rather than substance was the key to his success. In their mockery, the McCain campaign acknowledged the power of image, a force which they also harnessed in their selection of Palin for VP, whose image was the focus of much media attention. Perhaps it is partly due to that image that Palin managed to breathe new life into the GOP, as party-line conservative rhetoric, to many, seemed somehow sexy coming from her. However, Palin is certainly not the first to show how seductive an attractive young woman pushing good old boy politics can be. In fact, it is likely that Adam Brickley, the 21-year-old college student whose blog is credited with ushering Palin into the top spot for VP pick, was taking cues from internet queen Ann Coulter.

In her new book about conservative women’s organizations entitled *Righting Feminism*, Ronnee Schreiber quotes a former lobbyist of Concerned Women for America, “who argued that because men feel that they will be attacked by feminists and perhaps by the ‘liberal’ media, women

make better spokespeople on conservative issues” (47). While Coulter is not beyond attack, and, in fact, seems to thrive on it, she was working the media to give conservatism a new, more feminine face well before most Americans had ever heard of Sarah Palin. In attempt to understand the avenue through which Coulter put lipstick on the conservative pig, this paper focuses on her extraordinary internet presence and its contribution to contemporary political discourse. Drawing primarily on Jean Baudrillard’s theory of seduction, I argue that Coulter’s political commentary initiates a game in which the American bipartisan signifiers are largely detached from the complex political system of policy decisions and relationships they are expected to signify, becoming meaningful only as appearances to be manipulated for sport. I argue further that Coulter’s simulacrum for political discourse serves two purposes. First, it opens up a space where participants can relieve lustful and hostile impulses and simulate intersubjective interaction, and second, it exposes both the seductiveness and hollowness of the terms “liberal” and “conservative,” calling to question their efficacy in the mainstream political discourse that Coulter mocks.

Coulter and Her Contemporaries

Although Coulter might seem to some an unlikely subject of scholarly analysis, contemporary political and social trends indicate that to ignore her would be irresponsible, since Coulter’s popularity as well as Palin’s appearance on the scene are not isolated occurrences. Rather, these two figures are highly publicized representatives of an increasingly prominent political identity: the conservative woman. This growing presence is evident in Shreiber’s study of conservative women’s organizations, in which she claims that “conservative women’s groups present a substantial threat to the feminist movement. They are well organized, politically active, and have access to government institutions, political parties, and national media” (4). While Coulter is not an official representative of any one conservative women’s organization, Schreiber notes that they do take her seriously, as one organization, the Clare Booth Luce Policy Institute, has promoted her appearances on college campuses and featured her in their “Great American Conservative Women” calendar (22-23). Coulter is arguably the most famous conservative woman today, with six *New York Times* bestsellers, countless

university speaking engagements, regular appearances on various news channels, a cover interview in *TIME*, and a host of blogs and websites both celebrating and bashing her. She has been called “the Paris Hilton of postmodern politics” (Cloud), and “a feminist success story” (Rivers). As she is an unofficial spokesperson of a growing movement, a careful examination of Coulter’s rhetoric should provide insight into the trajectory of popular political discourse in America.

A Feminine Success Story

As a cultural figure, Ann Coulter has followed in the footsteps of her predecessors in the tradition of conservative American political popular culture started in 1987 by Rush Limbaugh’s AM radio talk show (Anderson 36), but at the same time she is a unique embodiment of the conservative pop journalist tradition not only because the Internet is her primary medium, but because she is the only person in the tradition to achieve iconic status. While Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly deliver commentary quite as shocking as Coulter’s, they do not, for instance, have dolls made in their image as she does. In other words, Ann Coulter stands apart from the grandfathers of conservative talk because she seduces in ways that they never could. As Baudrillard would argue, she has harnessed the powers of the feminine.

Coulter is a feminist success story, according to Boston University professor Caryl Rivers, because she has staked out territory in “the ethereal planet of Infotainment, a realm where fact hardly exists, compassion is a yawn, civility is a bore, and the national anthem is ‘another opening, another show.’” In other words, regardless of her message, Coulter is a feminist success because she made sure that men would not be the only ones to get rich by capitalizing on the public’s desire for the outrageous. Although she is a successful, empowered woman, many would disagree with Rivers’s characterization of Coulter, as she has added nothing to political discourse but her own anti-feminist image. But the power of image should not be underestimated, according to Baudrillard’s theory, because the “strength of the feminine is that of seduction” (7), of which image is a tool. According to Baudrillard, the masculine discourses privileged in western society have a lesser-valued feminine counterpart which, though it is generally ignored or belittled, is no less important or powerful. In his explanation of seduction,

Baudrillard juxtaposes, but does not oppose it with sex and psychoanalysis. “Freud was right,” he claims, “there is but one sexuality, one libido, and it is masculine. Sexuality has a strong, discriminative structure centered on the phallus, castration, the Name-of-the-Father, and repression. There is no other” (6). Within this phallically ordered realm lies the whole field of psychoanalysis as well as political and sexual power. Seduction, the feminine realm, lies outside of the positive/negative value set that orders the masculine, and forms a universe which parallels but does not meet the universe of psychoanalysis. “The feminine,” Baudrillard explains, “is not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine” (7). While masculine discourses are preoccupied with depth and hidden meaning, seduction works through the play of appearances and, as Baudrillard indicates, in seduction the masculine discourses of sex and power are drawn from their depths and caught up in this play. He explains the distinction between seduction and psychoanalysis further, saying that “[i]nterpretation is what breaks the appearance and play of manifest discourse and, by taking up with the latent discourse, delivers the real meaning. In seduction, by contrast, it is the manifest discourse – discourse at its most superficial – that turns back on the deeper order (whether conscious or unconscious) in order to invalidate it, substituting the charm and illusion of appearances” (53).

It is not surprising that the women’s movement, as Baudrillard points out, rejects the power of seduction, because if it is a feminine power, it is only feminine in so far as it is constructed from a masculine perspective. While Baudrillard’s masculine and feminine are not directly linked to physical sex or even gender, neither are they arbitrary or unconnected to conventional western gender roles. As men occupy the positive, active position in the male/female binary, the male is the gazing, desiring subject who experiences scopophilia, or, as Laura Mulvey describes it, “pleasure in looking at another person as object” (177). The female, then, is objectified in the male gaze, and her greatest potential for agency lies in harnessing the power of her appearance that so attracts the male and manipulating that attraction. If the feminine lacks depth, it is only because her depth eludes the male gazing subject who has led each movement in the western tradition and determined the horizon of its discourse. Baudrillard’s seduction theory even seems to suggest that when a woman is known or becomes real she is no longer feminine. The height of femininity is the unknown, unreal scopophilic object

which Baudrillard praises. "In its unreality," he says, "in the unreal defiance of its prostitution of signs, the sexual object moves beyond sex and attains seduction" (92). In Baudrillard's model of seduction, then, to harness the power of seduction the feminine figure must, in a sense, uphold the phallogocentric order that Baudrillard claims is undermined by seduction, to understand thoroughly her position as object and exploit it. Needless to say, this is not the project of the feminist movement, which focuses on the subject position of the female and her ability to act, to occupy a space in what has traditionally been labeled the masculine sphere, a label that has now been reproduced in the realm of the symbolic by Baudrillard and other theorists.

Ann Coulter, however, is not often accused of being a feminist and adamantly denies it when she is. One could say that her gender performance is as conservative as her politics, as she is happy to occupy the position of object of the male gaze and to manipulate her image in order to seduce. One look at Coulter makes clear that her physical appearance "prostitutes the signs" of the conventional American sex object. Like the supermodels in whom American culture glorifies unrealistic and unhealthy body images, Coulter is strikingly thin, and based on commentary by David Brock, who writes that "Ann seemed to live on nothing but chardonnay and cigarettes" (qtd. in *Cloud* 9), this thinness is not for lack of trying. Like Barbie, Paris Hilton, and Marilyn Monroe, Coulter sports long blonde hair which, as Linda Kintz points out, not only seems to counter the "shorter professional, 'sensible' - and perhaps androgynous - haircuts that seemed to be coded as liberal, feminist, or lesbian" but also allows "women of privilege [to] exploit a misogynist social structure [. . .]" (347), presumably, by giving it what it wants in order to gain power. Also, instead of a sensible, perhaps androgynous business suit, Coulter prefers the typical sex-object costume of mini skirts and spiked heels.

The Internet, the Unconscious, and Coulter's Cold Seduction

This image constitutes one archetype ordering the the "bioelectric mirror" of electronic media, specifically the internet, which, as Dolores E. Brien illustrates, resembles the human unconscious and functions as a quasi-cultural unconscious. In calling the Internet a metaphor for the psyche,

Brien echoes Baudrillard's characterization of digital technology as a feminine space which displaces the centrality of the phallus in favor of the mirror. In this realm Oedipus is replaced with Narcissus because, as Brien argues, it is not structured hierarchically like the government, the family and other social spheres, but horizontally, like the psyche which is fragmented, made up of not one but many selves and ordered by archetypes made up of "cluster[s] of images and ideas" around which "each of the complexes or many selves center" (283). Drawing on Kevin Kelly's assertion that "[b]eing 'on line' and having the subjective experience of depth, of existential coherence, are mutually exclusive situations," (qtd. in Brien 279), Brien situates the internet as the realm of seduction which is not concerned with depth but the light manipulation of appearances, and of narcissism because it displaces individual subjectivity and intersubjective exchange, instead herding the masses into clusters around predetermined, archetypal, cultural selves like, for instance, Yankees fan, reality TV addict, liberal, or conservative. Baudrillard reasons that "[t]wo terminals do not two interlocutors make," (165). In telepresence, spontaneous exchange between interlocutors is replaced by a stream of 0s and 1s which "provides us with a kind of strange bioelectronic mirror, in which each person, like some digital narcissus, is going to slide along the trajectory of a death drive and sink in his or her own image" (166).

Coulter is tailor-made by and for the internet, because, as Baudrillard points out, while with cinema idols "seduction is *hot*," with Coulter, as with all modern idols, seduction "is *cold*, being at the intersection of two cold mediums, that of the image and that of the masses" (95). While cinema idols function only as characters in a voyeuristic fantasy played before viewers' eyes, Coulter, existing on the internet, an interactive space where intersubjective communication is impossible or at least highly mediated, is both object and mirrored reflection of the subject. As Laura Mulvey explains in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the film viewer experiences two "pleasurable structures of looking" at once. "The first, scopophilic," she explains, "arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen" (179). According to Mulvey the second pleasure structure is a residual effect of Lacan's mirror stage, in which children recognize

themselves in the mirror and “imagine their mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than they experience their own body” (178). In Mulvey’s model the passive female character serves as the erotic object of the gaze while the male actor functions as the idealized self. With Coulter, however, the two roles are conflated, and she becomes both the sex object and the idealized self, allowing viewers to satisfy both lustful and hostile impulses through her. On one hand, Coulter is bold, witty, and powerful, striking interviewers dumb by saying, as Jonathan Freedland argues, what many on the American right want to say but can’t. On the other hand, as Cloud writes, she “might be shrink-wrapped in a black-leather mini as she says it” (4). This dual psychic function may go far in explaining what Camille Paglia calls Coulter’s “gender weirdness,” which she is not the first to notice, in addition to her uncanny allure both for those who agree with her and those who detest her. If these roles seem contradictory, that is part and parcel of Coulter’s seductive appeal.

Seduction and the Unification of Opposites

In seduction, Baudrillard explains, “the distance between the real and its double, and the distance between the Same and the Other, is abolished” (67). That is, of course, if there ever was a difference. After all, we already know from Saussure that the signifier takes meaning only in relation to other signifiers, from Freud that the Other is only ever a projection of the anxieties of the self, from Morrison that the meaning of white central to early American identity depended on its construction in opposition to the Africanistic other, and so forth. Coulter makes the unity of opposites absurdly apparent, entrancing America by functioning as a carnival mirror of its foundational contradictions, stretching perceived opposites to the point of hyperbole while simultaneously collapsing them into one. Many wonder whether she is a serious political commentator or, as John Cloud puts it “a right-wing Ali G, acting out a character who utters what the rest of us won’t” (5). She is a strong single woman who claims “[i]t would be a much better country if women did not vote” (qtd. in Freedland 7). A large percentage of her income comes from university engagements, yet she denounces universities as liberal cesspools that promote radical agendas. She’s a lawyer who vilifies lawyers, as per her dig at John Edwards in one weekly

column title, “Even by trial lawyer standards, Edwards a real sleazebag.” She engages in shameless Muslim-bashing, most famously saying of Muslims after 9-11, “[w]e should invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them to Christianity” (qtd. in Cloud 4), while the fact that she once dated a Muslim man is highly publicized. To say that Coulter is conservative is an understatement. She touts all of the conservative causes - she’s pro-war, pro-gun, pro-life, pro- Bible, pro-flag, anti-gay marriage, and thinks global warming is the biggest scam of the century. Yet, Coulter’s career depends entirely on liberals. All of her bestsellers, not to mention her weekly column, have liberal bashing as their main aim.

Not only does Coulter’s livelihood depend on liberals, but by some standards she actually *is* a liberal, since, as Immanuel Wallerstein shows, many of her political views were originally foundational liberal values. For instance, while Coulter and other conservatives celebrate patriotism and many claim to be the only true patriots, Wallerstein notes that initially, “[t]he nation was not a traditional conservative communal category,” like the church and the family; on the contrary, at first “only the liberals saw the nation as the appropriate summation of individual wills” and promoted the “national spirit” (101). Also, Wallerstein explains that the laissez- faire capitalism which neo-conservatives adamantly defend today was, for classical economists, the “optimal expression [of liberalism]” (84). It can be argued then, that at least regarding these matters, conservatives like Coulter are more liberal than liberals.

In addition, Coulter’s lifestyle more closely resembles that of a stereotypical liberal feminist than a Bible-beating conservative. Coulter was raised in Connecticut, went to Cornell University as an undergraduate and got a law degree from the University of Michigan. In fact, according to Cloud, apart from a few months she has never lived in a red state and in fact, charges up to \$50,000 (as opposed to her standard \$25,000) per speaking engagement “if she must cross the Mississippi River” (7). She lives in a New York City apartment and, as Cloud reports, “loves expensive Manhattan restaurants, chews Nicorette in church [. . .], hardly ever misses the drag queens’ Halloween parade in Greenwich Village,” and gets up at noon and writes in her underwear (10). She describes herself in an interview with Freedland as “[j]ust your typical, immodest-dressing, swarthy-male loving, friend-to-homosexuals, ultra-conservative” (9). Far from the stereo-

typical existence of an American conservative woman, living in a modest colonial in Georgia, staying at home, driving a minivan and participating in bake-sales for the church and PTA, Coulter's life is much more fit for a typical, privileged, east coast liberal. Thus, while at first glance Coulter's extremist one-liners distinguish her as a reactionary conservative, a closer look reveals her as a split subject, one half planted firmly to the far right of the spectrum with the other half chained to the far left. However, in Coulter's brand of discourse the signification of the bipartisan labels doesn't matter so much as their role in her game of seduction.

Check Mate: The Play of Bipartisanship

The difference between liberal and conservative in Coulter's discourse as opposed to their more common usage is similar to the difference between what Baudrillard describes as the Rule of the game of seduction and the Law that governs "real" life in society. "The Rule," he asserts, "plays on an immanent sequence of arbitrary signs, while the Law is based on a transcendent sequence of necessary signs" (131). In relation to the American government, the presidency, house, and senate, the terms liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican are necessary to keep the bipartisan system functioning. Though throughout American history these labels have turned in on themselves and traded meanings so many times that they are at this point contested signifiers at best, serious political analysis attempts to maintain the truth of these signs by keeping up with, for instance, specific policy decisions of liberal and conservative leaders and their implications. Coulter, however, is not known for this kind of analysis but for seducing the bipartisan signs, as seduction, according to Baudrillard, "takes from discourse its sense and turns it from its truth" (53).

As an example of Coulter's seduction of signs it is useful to look closely at the October 24th, 2007, entry of her weekly column, in which Coulter jokes that "Liberals believe in burning the American flag, urinating on crucifixes, and passing out birth control pills to 11-year-olds without telling their parents — but God forbid an infidel touch a Quran at Guantanamo" ("Have you Hugged"). In contrast, of course, conservatives believe in venerating the American flag and Christianity and in outlawing abortion. They promote abstinence-only training in schools and condone torture camps like

that in Guantanamo. Such a statement is deliberately misleading, though it may not be entirely baseless. Reading this sentence should raise many questions like who, specifically are the liberals to whom she is referring? How does one reference in this apparently random sequence relate to the next and, most importantly, what is its significance in relation to the stated topic? For many readers, however, this passage doesn't evoke questions but emotions. One pictures honest Christian Americans held captive by hysterical liberals, exposed to sleep deprivation and extreme heat and forced to watch while their captors defile and destroy symbols of American values and patriotism, and 11-year-old girls dressed in mini skirts and cropped tops, stuffing their heavily made up faces with birth control pills granted them by legislation passed by liberals through congress. Next to that, confining suspected terrorists, exposing *them* to sleep deprivation, dehydration and defilement of *their* religious symbols may not look so bad. These images, successfully manipulated by Coulter to evoke rage and disbelief from liberals and conservatives alike (though likely for different reasons), preclude any serious discussion of torture in Guantanamo or liberal versus conservative political platforms. But such discussion falls in the realm of the Law and is not within the Rules of Coulter's game.

Baudrillard explains the game of seduction by opposing its dictates, which he calls the "Rule," to the dictates of material reality, which he calls the "Law." He explains that , "[o]rdinarily we live within the realm of the Law, even when fantasizing its abolition. Beyond the law we see only its transgression or the lifting of a prohibition. For the discourse of law and interdiction determines the inverse discourse of transgression and liberation. *However, it is not the absence of law that is opposed to the law, but the Rule*" (131). Coulter's game of seduction is primarily concerned with two elements from the law of American politics: the bipartisan binary and political correctness. With the purpose of protecting historically subjugated groups, legislated and culturally mandated political correctness is targeted at hate speech directed toward these groups and has worked to curb the public expression of overt racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. Coulter's rhetoric does not seek to abolish the prohibitions instituted by this liberal brainchild but makes them central to her game of seduction, perverting political correctness for the purposes of her discursive game, which she challenges liberals and conservatives alike to play.

“Games, stakes, and challenges are the figures of passion and seduction,” says Baudrillard, “[. . .]and games are always a challenge” (139-141). In Coulter’s game, while the old targets of hate speech are still fair play, liberals and conservatives are the new central objects of hate speech. The rules dictate that everyone in the game choose a side, liberal or conservative, and aim to fling the cleverest, most ironic and piercing examples of hate speech possible at the other side. While Coulter is not above racist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic remarks, the new, uncanny, easily manipulable Other into which she has condensed all of these prejudices is, of course, the liberal. For self-identified liberals, who may be reluctant to join the game or make generalizations about conservatives for sport, Coulter offers herself as a target, challenging them to play the dozens and outwit her. In one clever move, Coulter subverts the assumptions of political correctness, charging that despite their efforts to eradicate racism, liberals are the more racist of the bipartisan ideologies. The October 27, 2004 entry of her internet column is dedicated to this charge. In it, she criticizes Kerry’s appeal to black voters, claiming, “[t]he Democrats’ inspired 11th-hour message to black voters is: Here are your crumbs, your scraps, your measly handouts. Too bad you’re so childish, incompetent and dependent, huh? Now run along and cast your vote for the guy with the ‘D’ next to his name and we’ll see you in four years, ‘K? Buh-bye, now” (“40 Excuses”). She further charges that democrats’ pro-choice stance is “identical to the Klan’s” because it leads to and, according to her, is motivated by the death of black babies.

These characterizations aim to seduce Coulter’s opponents into her game, accusing liberals of holding the same prejudices they stereotypically abhor yet rendering any measured response based on logic and reasoning, the stuff of the law, boring and beside the point. Coulter often claims that much of her vicious invective is meant to be funny. In reference to some of her more outrageous comments, Coulter tells Cloud, “What p___ me off is when they don’t get the punchline” (7). That Coulter’s brand of humor is so mean that most people do not see the humor makes her all the more seductive. After all, Baudrillard claims that “[t]he game of the seductress involves a certain mental cruelty, towards herself as well as others” (86). Indeed, much of the joy of the game, as Coulter makes clear, comes when a liberal meets Coulter’s level of malicious sarcasm, especially when it is directed at her. Cloud reports that after critic Bruce Barcott compared

Michael Crichton's new novel to "one of those Ann Coulter 'Liberals Are Stupid' jobs" Coulter emailed him ecstatically, "I AM THE GOLD STANDARD FOR LIBERAL BILE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (3). That her enemies meet Coulter on her chosen plane of discourse proves that they have been seduced by her challenge, and, likewise, makes the game more challenging and therefore more fun.

One of Coulter's most public and most successful opponents is Al Franken, who understands the subtle points of the game and plays it on Coulter's terms. Introducing a chapter in his book, *Lies (and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them)* which criticizes her methods of reporting, Franken calls Coulter "the reigning diva of the hysterical right. Or rather, the hysterical diva of the reigning right" (5). Coulter clearly appreciates the healthy competition, and takes Franken's contested bid for the Minnesota senate seat as an opportunity to fire back, saying "like a bad Al Franken sketch on 'Saturday Night Live,' I predict this recount will keep going on and on and on for no apparent reason" ("The Cleanest"). Franken gets the rules of the game in that he understands that bipartisan insults must have some ring of truth to be funny. His assertion that "[w]hat Coulter writes is political pornography. She aims directly at her readers' basest instincts" (19) rings true with reference to internet conversations regarding Coulter, as does Gerry Spence's assertion that Coulter has "punch[ed] into America's hate canker and let the feculence ooze out" (21).

Based on the multitude of blogs and forums dedicated to Coulter, plenty of Americans have been successfully seduced, though they don't play the game as skillfully as Franken. For instance, on thinkprogress.org, a series of posts responding to Coulter's suggestion that John Edwards is a "faggot" at a conservative political action conference, blogged responses include "Even rehab wouldn't help turn Coultergeist into a human being (let alone a female human being!)," "Dude looks like a lady..." "Another embarrassing moment for conservatives," and, in response to the previous comment, "Impossible - to be embarrassed would mean that they actually had emotions. These sociopaths don't care about anything." In addition, the images that pop up in response to querying "Ann Coulter" on *Google* are a photo-shopped picture of her with a swastika on her head and images of Hitler, Nixon, and war behind her, followed by a poster of her, for sale for \$4.87 whose advertisement proclaims "The Beauty of Conservatism," the former

leading to a blog archiving self-identified liberals and conservatives exchanging insults directed at Coulter and each other, the latter leading to more of the same, indicating that many people on either side of the debate are ready and willing to rise to the challenge to try and outdo Coulter's violent rhetoric and fallacious metaphors with their own.

Coulter's game, similar to other online games, gives participants an outlet for the death drive, or, as Freud defines it, the inherent "instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness" (78), and this opportunity is perhaps what is most alluring about Coulter's cold seduction. While her appearance is an object of lust, a desire dictated by the pleasure principle, with Coulter lust is bound up with aggression. Her game is uniquely suited for the internet where, as Baudrillard explains, "the need for 'contact' is most cruelly felt, for not only is there no dual relation [. . .], but there is no longer even the inter-individual logic of exchange found in classical language (that of Jakobson). Discursive duality and polarity have been succeeded by the digitality of data processing" (165). Also like other online games, Coulter's game simulates the duality of conventional intersubjective conversations by providing users with two predetermined subject positions, or teams, interpellating people as liberals and conservatives to participate in an endless agonistic exchange which approximates conversation between two individuals. While Coulter is the primary actor and serves as a vessel for the insult wars that take place in her name, bloggers not only become more powerful through seeing their ideal selves reflected in her, they also get a chance to really act like her, to use the violent rhetoric which is so seductive in Coulter with no personal risk, as it is done anonymously on the internet under cover of screen names which don't lead back to the person behind the computer terminal.

Unlike other online gamers, Coulter's teams maintain at least a superficial connection to the world outside the Internet, as they correspond to the ruling political parties. Because of this connection, players in Coulter's game, unlike gamers who prefer *Halo* and *World of Warcraft*, can log on with the sense that they are engaging in meaningful public discourse which carries weight in the "real world." As a result, Coulter's game of seduction functions as a simulacrum for political discourse in a society dominated by what Baudrillard calls the "soft seduction" characteristic of life after mass media in which "[t]he masses will be psychologized in order to be seduced; they

will be rigged up with desires in order to be distracted” (175). That so many people answer when they are called upon as liberals and conservatives and respond, at least when playing Coulter’s game, in ways that often seem to have little to do with government policy indicates that perhaps the public hasn’t been rigged up with desires but rather that basic human instincts, as well as desires, like the desire to belong to a community, the desire to exercise aggression, the desire to be one’s ideal self, the desire to be a good citizen, etc., have been herded into two camps - liberal and conservative, and that people expect these desires to be realized through identification with liberal and conservative figureheads. If this is the case, then there is little difference between Coulter’s game and bipartisan discourse outside of the game. Certainly the personal insults and accusations of the 2008 presidential election indicate that the two have much in common. If this is the case, then McCain’s celebrity ad that made Obama out to be little more than the object of a mass narcissistic gaze is not a joke, as it was made out to be upon its release, but an astute analysis of bipartisan politics in contemporary America.

Lindsey Ives

University of New Mexico

Works Cited

- Anderson, Brian C. *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias*. Washington DC: Regnery, 2005. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. Trans. Brian Singer. New York: St. Martin’s, 1990. Print.
- Brien, Dolores E. “A Psychology for the Age of the Internet.” *The Soul of Popular Culture: Looking at Contemporary Heroes, Myths and Monsters*. Ed. Mary Lynn Kittelson. Chicago: Open Court, 1998. Print.
- Cloud, John. “Ms. Right.” *Time*. 17 Apr. 2005. Time Inc. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- Coulter, Ann. “40 Excuses and a Mule.” *AnnCoulter.com*. Universal Press Syndicate, 27 Oct. 2004. Web. 12 Dec. 2007.
- . “The Cleanest State Meets the Pushiest Person.” *AnnCoulter.com*. Universal Press Syndicate, 3 Dec. 2008. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- . “Even by Trial Lawyer Standards, Edwards a Real Sleazebag.” *AnnCoulter.com*. Universal Press Syndicate, 13 Aug. 2008. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.

- - -. "Have you Hugged an Islamo-Fascist Today?" *AnnCoulter.com*. Universal Press Syndicate, 24 Oct. 2007. Web. 12 Dec. 2007.
- Franken, Al. *Lies (And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them): A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. New York: Dutton, 2003. Print.
- Freedland, Jonathan. "An Appalling Magic." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 17 May 2003. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1989. Print.
- "John McCain Celebrity Ad- Feat. Paris Hilton." *YouTube*. YouTube, LLC, 7 Aug. 2008. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- Kintz, Linda. "Performing Virtual Whiteness: The Psychic Fantasy of Globalization." *Comparative Literature* 53.4 (2001): 333-353. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Aug. 2009.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Richter 1791-1801.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *The Narrative Reader*. Ed. Martin McQuillan. New York: Routledge, 2000. 177-181. Print.
- Noah, Timothy. "Sarah Palin, Web Invention." *Slate*. Washington Post Newsweek InteractiveCo. LLC, 29 Aug. 2008. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- Paglia, Camille. "Hillary vs. Obama: It's a Drawl!" *Salon*. Salon Media Group Inc., 14 March 2007. Web. 15 Dec. 2008.
- Pitney, Nico. "Coulter: I Would Talk About Edwards But 'You Have to Go into Rehab if You Use the Word Faggot'." *ThinkProgress.org*. Center for American Progress Action Fund, 2 March 2007. Web. 4 Aug. 2009.
- Richter, David H., ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2007. Print.
- Rivers, Caryl. "A Feminist Success Story." *The Boston Globe*. Globe Newspaper Company, 16 June 2006. Web. 14 Dec. 2008.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. "[Binary Oppositions]." Richter 845-851.
- Schreiber, Ronnee. *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Spence, Gerry. *Bloodthirsty Bitches and Pious Pimps of Power: The Rise and Risk of the New Conservative Hate Culture*. New York: St. Martin's, 2006. Print.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press, 1995. Print.