



UCLA'S JOURNAL OF CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES

MEDIASCAPE

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PAST ISSUES

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5. One would surmise that humanities scholars in general, and media scholars in particular, occupy the more "liberal" end of the political spectrum. To what extent do you believe this is true? Is there "conservative" media scholarship?

[Intro](#) | [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#) | [Part 4](#) | [Part 5](#) | [Part 6](#) | [Part 7](#) | [Part 8](#) | [Part 9](#) | [Part 10](#) | [Part 11](#) | [Part 12](#)



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Nichols: Conservatism is rampant in the doxa-driven stuff that university presses and most film mags pump out. Follow the leader, regurgitate the paradigm. Radical shifts of perspective are more and more rare and the dominant paradigm of formalism continues to guide most film study: ignore form and you are just a sociologist; get political and you are not a real scholar. Most want to chug along, doing "normal" research in obeisance to the existing paradigms, collecting tenure chits and waiting for a future moment to write the great American novel.

Miller: Most people in Research-One US universities outside engineering and business faculties are in favor of expanding rather than restricting human rights/civil rights--the most significant proportions in psychology departments--and hence support the D-Word rather than the R-Word. This is also true of artists and creative people in general. They use knowledge more than superstition, a blend of the new and old through imagination and rationality--hence just 6 percent of scientists favoring the Bush Administration. Media studies is therefore a minuscule segment of a wider tendency. That said, there are segments of media scholarship that are intensely conservative in terms of my politics, in that they: deny their own conditions of existence; exclude issues of labor and the environment from their considerations of how the media industries work; deny the reality of massive cultural imbalances in global exchange; use neoclassical notions of competition in discussing ownership; fail to attach textual analysis to wider social formations; peddle cybertarian mythology without any sense of history or political economy about how technology works; draw on theories from Screen in the 1970s without acknowledging it as a socialist enterprise; and are often driven by a puerile academic careerism.

Tryon: It seems safe to assume that most humanities scholars would be classified as "liberal." However, such assumptions should not be taken for granted and to define political leanings merely along a left-right spectrum certainly obscures quite a bit. In fact, as Thomas Frank has argued, cultural studies approaches that identify subversive meanings in popular culture actually serve as unwitting support for free market capitalism.¹ In fact, many of the more celebratory treatments of participatory culture could be accused of supporting, if only tacitly, libertarian capitalism. Others, such as Toby Miller, point out that mass culture has opened up new modes of participation that must be carefully analyzed.²

There is conservative media scholarship both inside and outside academia. Although Mark Bauerlein is best known for his work in literary studies, his recent book The Dumbest Generation is the latest in a long tradition of

anti-media jeremiads, in this case focusing on what Bauerlein regards as the harmful effects of digital media on cultural literacy. While I am skeptical of many of Bauerlein's arguments, most notably his tendency to downplay different degrees of digital literacy among contemporary teenagers, his work raises important questions about contemporary educational practices.³

Notes:

- 1 O'Hehir, Andrew. "How the Democrats Lost the Heartland," [Salon.com](http://dir.salon.com/story/books/int/2004/06/28/tomfranks/print.html) 28 June 2004.
<http://dir.salon.com/story/books/int/2004/06/28/tomfranks/print.html>. See also Frank, Thomas. One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy. New York: Random, 2000.; and Bérubé, Michael. "More Old Business." [Michael Bérubé.com](http://Michael.Bérubé.com). 6 January 2007.
- 2 Miller, Toby. Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007. 3-4.
- 3 Bauerlein, Mark. The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Generation Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future. New York: Penguin, 2008

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