

# boundary 2

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## **Additional Information**

# Political Acoustics:

A Note on the Left Conservatism Debate

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Regis Debray once noted that the victors in political and cultural wars always possess the more powerful acoustics. In the case of the American “culture wars,” this is certainly true. Affirmative action, academic freedom, experimental writing, and new thinking—all of these and more have been driven to the margins of society and the academy by a powerful alliance of culturally and intellectually conservative professors and journalists that, for related but different reasons, assures its own interests by demonizing those who, for better or worse, try to think through the new and changing realities of American life and experience.

*boundary 2* has encouraged a number of academic intellectuals to state clearly and directly their position on an important element in the culture wars, the so-called debate over “Left Conservatism.” In what follows, Chris Connery details the contexts, persons, and issues involved in the “Left Con” workshop held at Santa Cruz in 1998. In the weeks following that meeting, those who chose to protest most strongly against both the seminar and its topic, as well as the putatively representative work of its participants, **[End Page 1]** had much greater access to media than those who felt, for various reasons, that left conservatism raised an important issue for debate. Fearful that culturally conservative critics and journalists would, once more, use their easy access to media to close down intellectual inquiry into a troublesome question, *boundary 2* decided to resist conservative efforts at censorship by providing pages for those who wished to state their thinking on the

topic of left conservatism. No attempt was made to provide “balance” or “equal access.” On the basis of the Debray topos, *boundary 2* felt that fairness demanded only that the media poor be given some small means to be heard against the din.

Although the writers here were given a chance to be as polemical as they liked, for the most part, strong as these essays and notes might be, they are careful and considered pieces, clearly written, that effectively weigh the issues of left conservatism and the culture wars, and put to rest the repeated conservative claim that new thinking is merely always only careerist and obscure. These essays show the intellectual seriousness and rigor of the opponents of the “left cons.” And they help us remember what we all know: The commonplaces of “clear writing” can hide the most egregious violence and intellectual emptiness. When the heirs of Lionel Trilling, for example, intone the words *sincerity* or *authenticity*, their sense is no more “clear” than when the worst of postcolonial critics confuse all thought in the name of “hybridity.” At times, as these small but strong pieces make clear, the abusiveness of the “left cons” merely hides an intellectual laziness and unwillingness to do the hard work required to reconsider their old knowledge and its cash value, and to think through the new they don’t want to hear. Which fact leads to the last reason for publishing these notes: As Gramsci helps us to remember, fascism’s emergence depends on the failures of the intellectual class to revise, review, and reconsider in light of what circumstances demand.

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## Additional Information

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