

## PIERRE BOURDIEU (1930–2002)

With the death of Pierre Bourdieu, the world has lost its most famous sociologist, and the European Left its most passionate and authoritative voice of the past decade. Born in a remote corner of south-west France, Bourdieu was trained in his youth as a philosopher, but the experience of the Algerian War—he taught for a time in a *lycée* in Algiers—made of him a social scientist. His first book, published at the height of the War, in the year the Fourth Republic was overthrown, was a *Sociologie d'Algérie*. From the mid-sixties onwards, he produced a series of studies of French society whose hallmark, from the outset, was a remarkable combination of empirical research and theoretical ambition. The leitmotif of his work, throughout his life, was inequality—his writings can be read as one long investigation of its manifold forms and mechanisms in modern capitalist societies. Well before the upheaval of May–June 1968, Bourdieu had focused on the student body (*Les Héritiers*), in a critical enquiry which later extended to teaching (*La Reproduction*) and the professoriat (*Homo Academicus*). A set of major monographs on the cultural field of art developed alongside these texts on education: beginning with photography, and then moving to museums (*L'Amour de l'art*), taste (*La Distinction*) and the emergence of a new conception of literature in the nineteenth century (*Les Règles de l'art*).

Politically, Bourdieu was always on the Left. Sickened by the experience of the Socialist regime of the Mitterrand years, his writing took an increasingly radical turn in the nineties. In 1993 his massive indictment of the human consequences of the neoliberal order installed by French socialism, *La Misère du monde*, marked this change of stance. In 1995 he played a leading role in rallying intellectual support for the great strike movement against the Juppé government, and was thereafter a tireless spokesman and organizer of political opposition to the recycled PS regime of Jospin, about whom he was privately scathing. Creator of a network of sharp-shooter interventions, *Raisons d'Agir*, mobilizer of a ‘left of the left’, advocate of a European social movement, in his last years Bourdieu unleashed a volley of blistering attacks on the corruption of the French media and the conformism of the French intelligentsia—*les nouveaux chiens de garde* of the title of Serge Halimi’s book in the *Raisons d'Agir* series—earning their solid hatred. Readers of NLR will recall his exchange with Terry Eagleton in these pages, and Alex Callinicos’s juxtaposition of his ideas with those of Anthony Giddens. Below we commemorate him with a dialogue he held with Günter Grass in 1999, that gives some idea of his political intransigence. He had become a successor to Zola and Sartre, in a time when that was thought impossible.

## THE ‘PROGRESSIVE’ RESTORATION

*A Franco-German Dialogue*

**G**RASS: It’s unusual in Germany for a sociologist and a writer to sit down together. Here, the philosophers sit in one corner, the sociologists in another, while the writers squabble in the back room. The sort of exchange we’re having here rarely occurs. But when I think of your *The Weight of the World*, or of my most recent book, *My Century*, I see that our work has one thing in common: we tell stories from below. We don’t speak over people’s heads or from the position of the victor; we are notorious, within our profession, for being on the side of the losers, of those excluded or on the margins of society.

In *The Weight of the World*, you and your co-authors managed to suppress your own individuality and focus on the notion of understanding, rather than that of superior knowledge—a view of social conditions in France that can certainly be applied to other countries. As a writer, I’m tempted to use your stories as raw material—for example, the description of ‘Jonquil Street’, where often third-generation metalworkers are now unemployed and shut out of society. Or, to take another case, the story of the young woman who leaves the countryside for Paris and sorts letters on the night shift. All the other young women there were recruited on the promise that, after a couple of years, they could fulfil their dream and return to their villages to deliver the post. This will never come to pass: they’ll remain letter-sorters. In these descriptions of the workplace, social problems are clearly evoked without recourse to slogans. I liked that very much. I wish we had a book like this on social relationships in our country. In fact, every country should have one. Or perhaps a whole

*library, gathering detailed studies of the consequences of political failure—politics having now been entirely displaced by the economy. The only question in my mind perhaps relates to the discipline of sociology in general: there is no humour in such books. The comedy of failure, which plays such an important role in my stories, is missing—the absurdities arising from certain confrontations. Why is that?*

**Bourdieu:** Recording these experiences directly from those who have lived them can in itself be overwhelming; to keep one's distance would be unthinkable. For instance, we felt obliged to omit several accounts from the book because they were too poignant, too full of pathos or pain.

**Grass:** *When I say humour, I mean that tragedy and comedy aren't mutually exclusive; the boundaries between the two are fluid.*

**Bourdieu:** What we wanted was for readers to see this absurdity in a raw, unvarnished form. One of the instructions we gave ourselves was to avoid being literary. You may find this shocking, but there is a temptation to write well when faced with dramas such as these. The brief was to try to be as brutally direct as possible, in order to return to these stories their extraordinary, almost unbearable violence. For two reasons: scientific and, I think, literary, since we wanted to be un-literary in order to be literary by other means. There were also political reasons: we believed that the violence wrought by neoliberal policies in Europe and Latin America, and many other countries, is so great that one cannot capture it with purely conceptual analyses. Critiques of neoliberal policy are not equal to its effects.

**Grass:** *This is reflected in your book—the interviewer is often struck dumb by the reply he receives, so much so that he repeats himself or loses his train of thought, because what is being related is expressed with the force of inner suffering. It's good that the interviewer doesn't then intervene to assert his authority or force through his opinion. But perhaps I should elaborate a little on my earlier question. Both of us—you as a sociologist and myself as a writer—are children of the Enlightenment, a tradition which today, at least in Germany and France, is being called into question, as if the process of the European Enlightenment had failed or been cut short, as if we could now continue without it. I don't agree. I see flaws, incomplete developments in the process of Enlightenment—for example, the reduction of reason to what is purely technically feasible. Many modes of its imagination which were present*

*at the beginning—here I’m thinking of Montaigne—have been lost over the centuries, humour among them. Voltaire’s Candide or Diderot’s Jacques le fataliste, for example, are books in which the circumstances of the time are also appalling, and yet the human ability to present a comic and, in this sense, victorious figure, even through pain and failure, perseveres. I believe that among the signs of a derailing of the Enlightenment is that it has forgotten how to laugh, to laugh in spite of pain. The triumphant laughter of the defeated has been lost in the process.*

**Bourdieu:** But there is a connexion between this sense of having lost the traditions of the Enlightenment and the global triumph of the neo-liberal vision. I see neoliberalism as a conservative revolution, as the term was used between the wars in Germany—a strange revolution that restores the past but presents itself as progressive, transforming regression itself into a form of progress. It does this so well that those who oppose it are made to appear regressive themselves. This is something we have both endured: we are readily treated as old-fashioned, ‘has-beens’, ‘throwbacks’ . . .

**Grass:** *Dinosaurs . . .*

**Bourdieu:** Exactly. This is the great strength of conservative revolutions, of ‘progressive’ restorations. Even some of what you’ve said today is influenced by the idea—we’re told we lack humour. But the times aren’t funny! There’s really nothing to laugh about.

**Grass:** *I wasn’t saying that we live in merry times. The infernal laughter that literature can prompt is another way of protesting against the conditions in which we live. You spoke of a conservative revolution; what’s being sold today as neoliberalism is simply a return to the methods of nineteenth-century Manchester liberalism, in the belief that history can be rewound. In the fifties, sixties, and even in the seventies, a relatively successful attempt to civilize capitalism was made across Europe. If one assumes that socialism and capitalism are both ingenious, wayward children of the Enlightenment, they can be regarded as having imposed certain checks on each other. Even capitalism was obliged to accept and take care of certain responsibilities. In Germany this was called the social market economy, and even among Christian Democrats there was an understanding that the conditions of the Weimar Republic should never be allowed to return. This consensus broke down in the early eighties. And since the collapse of the Communist hierarchies, capitalism—recast as*

*neoliberalism—has felt it could run riot, as if out of control. There is no longer a counterweight to it. Today even the few remaining responsible capitalists are raising a warning finger, as they watch their instruments slip from their grasp, and see neoliberalism repeating the mistakes of Communism—issuing articles of faith that deny there is any alternative to the free market and claiming infallibility. Catholics proceed in the same way with some of their dogmas, just as the bureaucrats of the Central Committees did earlier.*

**Bourdieu:** Yes, but the strength of neoliberalism lies in the fact that it has been implemented, at least in Europe, by people who label themselves socialists. Schroeder, Blair, Jospin all invoke socialism in order to carry out neoliberal policies. This makes critical analysis extremely difficult because, once again, all the terms of the debate have been reversed.

**Grass:** *A capitulation to the economy is taking place.*

**Bourdieu:** At the same time, it has become difficult to take up a critical stance to the left of social-democratic governments. In France, the strikes of 1995 mobilized broad sectors of the working population, employees and also intellectuals. Since then there have been a whole series of movements—of the unemployed, who organized a Europe-wide march, the *sans-papiers*, etc. There has been a sort of permanent unrest, which has obliged the social democrats in power to adopt at least the pretence of a socialist discourse. But in practice, this critical movement is still very weak—in large part because it is still confined to the national level. One of the major political questions confronting us, it seems to me, is how to create on an international scale a position to the left of social-democratic governments, from which it would be possible to exert real influence on them. Attempts to create a European social movement have so far been no more than tentative. What I would ask is what we as intellectuals can contribute to this movement: one which is absolutely essential, since—contrary to the neoliberal perspective—all social gains have historically come from active struggles. So, if we wish to have a ‘social Europe’, as is often said, we need to have a European social movement. I believe intellectuals have an important responsibility in helping to bring such a movement into being, since the power of the dominant order is not just economic, but intellectual—lying in the realm of beliefs. That’s why one must speak out: to restore a sense of utopian possibility, which it is one of neoliberalism’s key victories to have killed off, or made to look antiquated.

**Grass:** Maybe this is also due to the fact that socialistic or social-democratic parties have themselves in part believed the thesis that the demise of Communism means socialism has vanished too. They have lost their faith in the European labour movements, which have existed for far longer than Communism. Parting with one's own tradition is a form of surrender, that leads to accommodation with such self-announced laws of nature as neoliberalism. You mentioned the strikes of 1995 in France. In Germany there were minor attempts to organize the workers, which were subsequently forgotten. For years I've tried to tell the unions: you can't only attend to the workers while they're working; as soon as they lose their jobs they fall into a bottomless pit. You must set up a Europe-wide union for the unemployed. We complain that European unification is taking place only on the economic plane, but what's lacking is an attempt on the part of the unions to break out of the national framework into a form of organization and mobilization that would transcend frontiers. The slogan of globalization lacks the needed riposte. We remain confined to the national sphere, and even in the case of countries bordering each other such as France and Germany, we are not in a position to take up successful French experiments, nor can we find equivalents in Germany and elsewhere, with which to make a stand against global neoliberalism.

In the meantime many intellectuals swallow everything. But all you get from such swallowing is indigestion, nothing more. You have to speak out. This is why I doubt one can rely on intellectuals alone. While in France people still talk constantly of 'intellectuals'—at least, this is how it seems to me—my German experience tells me that it would be a mistake automatically to link being an intellectual with being on the Left. The history of the twentieth century offers several counterexamples: Goebbels was an intellectual. For me, being an intellectual is no guarantee of quality. I can only offer guesses as to the situation in France, but in Germany, there are people who in 1968 believed themselves far to the left of me, and who I now have to wrench my head to the right even to see—to the radical right, to be precise; Bernd Rabehl, a former student leader, moves in those kind of circles now. That's yet another reason to treat the term 'intellectual' critically. In fact, *The Weight of the World* demonstrates that working people who have been unionized their whole lives have far greater experience in the social sphere than intellectuals. Today, they're either unemployed or retired; no one seems to need them any more. Their strength remains entirely unused.

**Bourdieu:** *The Weight of the World* sought to assign a much more modest, but useful function to intellectuals than they are accustomed to. The

public writer, as I have seen in North Africa, is someone who can write and lends his skills to others, to express things they understand better than him. Sociologists are in a very particular position. They are unlike other intellectuals, since most of them know in general how to listen and to interpret what is said to them, to transcribe and transmit it. Perhaps this makes them sound too much like a guild; but I think it would be good if intellectuals, indeed all those with the time to think and write, were to take part in this kind of work—which presupposes an ability, all too rare among intellectuals, to shed their usual egoism and narcissism.

**Grass:** *At the same time, however, you would have to appeal to intellectuals sympathetic to neoliberalism. I've noticed that there are one or two within this capitalist-neoliberal sphere who, either on account of their intellectual disposition or their training in the Enlightenment tradition, are beginning to doubt a little whether the untrammeled circulation of money around the globe, this madness that has broken out within neoliberalism, should go unopposed: for example, mergers without sense or purpose that result in two or three, or ten thousand people losing their jobs. Stock markets reflect only maximization of profits. We need a dialogue with these doubters.*

**Bourdieu:** Unfortunately, it's not simply a question of countering a dominant discourse that preens itself as unanimous wisdom. To fight it effectively, we need to be able to diffuse and publicize a critical discourse. For example, at this moment we are talking on and for television, in my case—and I imagine also in yours—with the aim of reaching a public outside the circle of intellectuals. I wanted to make some sort of breach in this wall of silence—for it is more than just a wall of money—but here television is very ambiguous: it is at once the instrument that allows us to speak, and the one that silences us. We are perpetually invaded and besieged by the dominant discourse. The great majority of journalists are often unknowing accomplices of this discourse; breaking out of its unanimity is very difficult. In France, anyone who is not a highly established name has virtually no access to the public realm. Only consecrated figures can break the circle, but alas they are typically consecrated just because they are satisfied and silent, and to ensure they remain so. Very few use the symbolic capital their reputation affords them to speak out, and to make heard the voices of those who cannot speak for themselves.

**Grass:** *My understanding of narrative fiction was always—or to be accurate, from The Tin Drum onwards—that it should tell a story from the point of view of people who do not make history, but to whom history happens: victims or culprits, opportunists, fellow-travellers, those who are hunted. This I derived from the German literary tradition—after all, what would we have known about daily life during the Thirty Years' War if it had not been for Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus? I am sure there are comparable cases for France. If we rely only on the documents of historians, we certainly learn a great deal about the victors; but the story of the losers is as a rule written inadequately, if at all. Literature functions here as a kind of stopgap, stepping in when necessary to give people without a voice the chance to speak. This is also the starting point for your book.*

*But you were referring to television, which—like all grand institutions—has developed its own superstitions: ratings, whose dictates must be obeyed. That's why conversations like this one are seldom if ever shown on the major channels, but rather appear on ARTE. Even this discussion was turned down at first by Norddeutscher Rundfunk, before Radio Bremen—sly, as the small tend to be: this is the comic aspect of such affairs—slipped in, and brought us together round a table in my studio.*

*The panel discussions of the fifties and sixties have given way to the talk-show. I never take part in talk-shows—the form is hopeless, it yields nothing. Amidst all the blathering, the person who wins out is the one who talks longest or most completely ignores the others. As a rule, nothing of note is said because the moment anything becomes interesting, or issues come to a head, the anchor changes the subject. Both of us come from a tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages, of disputation. Two people, two different opinions, two sets of experiences that complement each other. Then, if we really make an effort, something can come of it. Perhaps we could make a recommendation to this Moloch, television: to return to the proven form of critical dialogue on a particular theme, as in a disputation.*

**Bourdieu:** I think I agree with your aim. Unfortunately, however, there would have to be a very special set of circumstances for the producers of discourse—writers, artists, researchers—to be able once again to appropriate their means of production. I use these slightly old-fashioned, Marxist terms deliberately. For paradoxically, writers and thinkers today have been entirely dispossessed of the means of production and transmission; they no longer have any control over them, and must make

their point in short programmes, by all manner of tricks and subterfuges. Our conversation can only be shown at 11pm on a restricted-access channel aimed at intellectuals. If we tried to say what we are saying now on a large public channel, we would—as you point out—be immediately interrupted by the presenter: in effect, censored.

**Grass:** *We should avoid falling into a posture of complaint, however. We have always been in the minority, and what is astounding when you look at the course of history is how great an effect a minority can have. Of course, it has had to develop certain tactics, particular ruses, to make itself heard. I see myself, for example, forced as a citizen to break a fundamental rule of literature: ‘don’t repeat yourself!’ In politics you have to repeat and repeat, like a parrot, ideas you know to be correct and proven as such, which is exhausting—you constantly hear the echo of your own voice, and end up sounding like a parrot even to yourself. But this is evidently part of the job, if one is to find any listeners at all in a world so full of different voices.*

**Bourdieu:** What I admire in your work—for instance in *My Century*—is your search for means of expression to convey a critical, subversive message to a very large audience. But today the situation is very different from that of the time of the Enlightenment. The Encyclopædia was a weapon that mobilized new means of communication against obscurantism. Today we have to struggle against completely new forms of obscurantism—

**Grass:** *But still as a minority.*

**Bourdieu:** —that are incomparably stronger than those ranged against the Enlightenment. We are faced with massively powerful multinational media corporations, which control all but a few enclaves. Even in the world of publishing, it’s becoming increasingly difficult to produce demanding, critical books. That’s why I wonder if one shouldn’t try to set up a sort of International of writers—be they scientific or literary, or any other kind—who are engaged in different forms of research. You may say that everyone should fight their own battles, but I don’t believe this will be effective in present conditions. If I felt it was very important to hold this dialogue with you, it’s because I think we should be trying to invent new ways of producing and conveying a message. Instead of being tools of television, for example, we should make of it a means to get across what we want to say.

**Grass:** Well yes, the room for manœuvre is limited. Something else now occurs to me which I find surprising: I never thought the day would come when I would have to demand a greater role for the State. In Germany we always had too much state, that stood above all for order. There were good reasons to bring the influence of the State under more democratic control. But now we find ourselves swinging to the other extreme. Neoliberalism has adopted the deepest aspiration of anarchism—naturally without the slightest ideological resemblance to it—namely, to do away with the State altogether. Its message is: away with it, we'll take over from here. In France or in Germany, if a necessary reform is to be carried out at all—and I'm speaking of reforms rather than revolutionary measures—nothing can happen until private industry's demand for lower taxes is met, and the economy approves. This is a disempowerment of the State of which anarchists could only dream, and yet it is taking place—and so I find myself, as probably do you, in the curious position of trying to ensure that the State once again assumes responsibility, regulates society once more.

**Bourdieu:** This is just the reversal of terms I spoke about earlier. We are paradoxically led to defend what is not entirely defensible. But is it enough to demand a return to ‘more State’? In order to avoid falling into the trap laid by the conservative revolution, I think we have to invent another kind of State.

**Grass:** Just to make sure we don't misunderstand each other: neoliberalism, naturally, only wants to do away with those activities of the State that impinge on the economy. The State ought to muster the police, to enforce public order—these are not the business of neoliberalism. But if the State is deprived of its power to regulate the social sphere, and of responsibility for those—not only the disabled, children or the elderly—who are excluded from the process of production or not yet involved in it, if a form of economy spreads that can escape any sort of accountability by flight forward into globalization, then society must intervene to restore welfare and social provision via the State. Irresponsibility is the organizing principle of the neoliberal vision.

**Bourdieu:** In *My Century*, you evoke a series of historical events, among which there were several I found very moving. I'm thinking of the story of the little boy who goes to a rally where Liebknecht is speaking, and pees on his father's neck. I don't know if this is a personal recollection, but it is certainly a highly original way of discovering socialism . . . I also very much liked what you had to say about Jünger and Remarque:

between the lines, you imply a great deal about the role of intellectuals as accomplices to tragic events, even when they seem to be critical of them. So too your comments on Heidegger—something else we have in common, since I once wrote a critical analysis of Heidegger's rhetoric, which has been wreaking havoc in France until very recently.

**Grass:** *The fascination with Jünger and Heidegger among French intellectuals is an example of the kind of thing that amuses me, since it turns all the clichés France and Germany nourish about each other upside down. That the foggy thinking which had such fateful consequences in Germany should be so admired in France, is a rich absurdity.*

**Bourdieu:** Indeed—in my own case, since I went clean against the new cult of Heidegger, I was very isolated. It has been no pleasure to be a Frenchman attempting to keep faith with the Enlightenment in a country throwing itself headlong into a modernist obscurantism. In my eyes, for a President of the French Republic to decorate Jünger was an appalling event. But in Paris even today, to describe Jünger as a conservative revolutionary—I analysed his ‘theoretical’ works, his war diary in which he describes his daily life in occupied France—is to be suspect of archaism, of nationalism, etc. Besides, even a certain kind of internationalism can fall under suspicion now.

**Grass:** *I'd like to return to the story about Liebknecht. In the family of the story it was traditional for the son to be taken along. This was already the case in the years of Wilhelm Liebknecht, and continued in Karl Liebknecht's time: the son would sit on the father's shoulders listening to a mass orator. What mattered to me was that, on the one hand, Liebknecht was arousing youth for a progressive movement, in the name of socialism—and at the same time the father, in his enthusiasm, doesn't notice that the boy wants to get down from his shoulders. When the son pees on his neck, the father beats him, even while Liebknecht is still speaking. The authoritarian behaviour of this socialist father towards his son leads the latter to enlist when the First World War breaks out—and thus ends up doing exactly what Liebknecht warned against. This is not a twist I make explicitly, but rather one that becomes clear as the story unfolds—and which occurred to me during the process of writing the story.*

*To return to the esteem in which Jünger and Heidegger are evidently held in France: perhaps it would be more useful for French intellectuals to take note*

of thinkers of the German Enlightenment. If you had Diderot and Voltaire, we had Lessing and Lichtenberg, who was incidentally very witty, and whose boutades should appeal more to the French than anything in Jünger.

**Bourdieu:** To take an example nearer to hand, Ernst Cassirer was one of the great heirs to the Enlightenment tradition, but had at best a very modest reception in France; whereas his great adversary, Heidegger, was tremendously successful. This kind of switching in French and German positions has always troubled me: how can we make sure that our two countries don't simply combine their least attractive aspects? One often gets the impression that, by some historical irony, the French take the worst the Germans have to offer, and the Germans the worst from the French.

**Grass:** In *My Century* I portray a professor who, during his Wednesday seminars thirty years later, reflects on how he responded to events during 1966–68 as a student. Back then he came out of a philosophy of the sublime along Heideggerian lines, and this is where he ends up again. But in between, he's given to surges of radicalism and becomes one of those who publicly expose and attack Adorno. This is a very typical biography for this period, for which 1968 is now a shorthand.

I was in the middle all of these events. The student protests were justified and necessary, and have achieved more than the spokespeople of the pseudo-revolution of 1968 would have liked to admit. The revolution did not take place, there was no basis for it, but society did change. In *From the Diary of a Snail*, I describe how I was jeered when I said that progress is a snail. It is of course possible verbally to make a great leap forward—they were more or less Maoists—but the phase you have leapt over, namely the society lying underneath you, is in no hurry to catch up. You make the leap over society and are then surprised when its conditions strike back, and call it counter-revolution—in the inveterate lexicon of a Communism that even then was teetering. There was little understanding of all this.

**Bourdieu:** At the time, I wrote a book called *Les Héritiers*, in which I described the various political stances of students from working-class, petty-bourgeois and bourgeois backgrounds. The bourgeois students were the most radical, whereas the petty-bourgeois students were more reformist, seemingly more ‘conservative’.

**Grass:** *Usually it was sons from well-off families that projected onto society conflicts with their fathers which they had never been able, or never dared to play out, because then the money would run out.*

**Bourdieu:** This duality was very apparent in the movement of 68, in which—as in all such upheavals—there were actually several revolutions. There was a highly visible and flamboyant revolution, rather symbolic and artistic in character, which was outwardly very radical, and led by people who subsequently became very conservative. Then, at a lower level, there were others whose demands were considered reformist—and ridiculous—at the time, people who wanted to change teaching methods, widen access to higher education, who had very modest but realistic aims, that were held in contempt by the very people who have become conservatives today.

**Grass:** *In Germany and Scandinavia, during the seventies there was a growing awareness that if the economy were allowed to continue exploiting natural resources as it was doing, the environment would eventually be destroyed; the ecological movement came into being. But socialist and social-democratic parties concentrated, as before, solely on traditional social questions and bypassed ecology altogether, or else viewed it as antagonistic to their demands. Left trade unionists, who were otherwise progressive in every respect, believed jobs were at risk as soon as ecological issues were raised—an outlook that persists to this day. If we expect the Right, the neoliberal side to use their intellect and come to their senses, then the same should apply to the Left. It must be understood that ecological issues cannot be separated from issues of work and employment, and that all decisions have to be environmentally sustainable.*

**Bourdieu:** Yes, but what you say about ecologists is also true of social democrats. Social liberalism, Blairism, the Third Way—these pseudo-inventions are all ways of internalizing the dominant outlook of the dominant powers within the dominated themselves. Europeans are, deep down, ashamed of their civilization, and no longer dare to uphold their traditions. The process begins in the economic sphere, but gradually extends to the realm of culture. They are ashamed of their cultural traditions, they experience a continual guilt at defending traditions that are perceived and condemned as archaic—in the cinema, in literature, and elsewhere.

**Grass:** In our country, Schroeder's wing of the SPD see themselves as modernizers, dismissing everyone else as traditionalists—which is, of course, crazily reductive. Neoliberals can only gloat when they see social democrats and socialists in Germany and other countries running aground on such meaningless definitions.

**Bourdieu:** To take the problem of culture: I was delighted when you were awarded the Nobel Prize, not only because it honoured a very good writer, but also a European writer who is prepared to speak out, and to defend artistic procedures others might regard as old-fashioned. The campaign against your novel, *Too Far Afield*, was mounted on the pretext that it was out of date as literature. In much the same way that, by a now standard inversion, the formal experiments of the avant-garde—whether in literature, cinema or art—are increasingly dismissed as archaic. It is becoming increasingly difficult to resist a kind of superficial modernism, typically coming from the Anglo-Saxon countries, which represents itself as transcending older forms, while regressing well behind any of the artistic revolutions of the twentieth century.

**Grass:** So far as the Nobel Prize goes: I managed to live quite well without it, and I hope I'll be able to live with it. Some said 'Finally!', others 'Too late', but I'm very glad it reached me at an advanced age, well beyond seventy. If a younger writer, let's say around thirty-five, were to get the Nobel, I imagine it would be quite a burden, because expectations would then be so high. Today I can relate to it ironically and nonetheless be happy about it. But that exhausts the theme as far as I'm concerned.

I believe we should be making offers that cannot be easily ignored. Large television companies are also at a loss in their misguided cult of ratings. We should help a bit to put them in the right direction. The same is naturally true of the relationship between Germany and France, who have fought and spilled each other's blood almost to the last drop, whose wounds from world wars and wars going back to the nineteenth century can still be seen, and who have made all sorts of rhetorical attempts at reconciliation. There one suddenly realizes that it is not just the language barrier that divides us, but other dimensions that are less acknowledged. I have already referred to one of them: the fact that we are not even in a position to recognize the shared European process of the Enlightenment. Matters were different before nation-states became so

*dominant. The French took notice of what happened in Germany, and vice versa; Goethe translated Diderot, for instance, and there was a degree of communication between groups in the two countries, both minorities struggling to spread Enlightenment, against their respective censorships.*

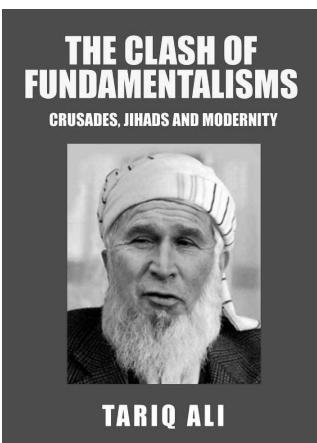
*It's time to re-establish these connexions. All we have to hand are the ideas bequeathed to us by the European Enlightenment—and by the failure of its subsequent developments. There is no alternative but to reform the Enlightenment with the methods of the Enlightenment, revising it wherever that proves necessary. Although we are right to decry neoliberal dominance and the areas of its irresponsibility, we should also consider what we have got wrong in the process of European Enlightenment. As I have already said, capitalism in its late form and socialism in its rudimentary form are both children of the Enlightenment, and somehow they need to come together at a single table again.*

**Bourdieu:** I feel you are a little too optimistic. I'm not sure, unfortunately, that the problem can be posed in these terms, since I think the economic and political forces that currently weigh down on Europe are such that the legacy of the Enlightenment is in real danger. The French historian Daniel Roche has just written a book in which he demonstrates that the Enlightenment tradition has very different meanings in France and Germany: that *Aufklärung* doesn't mean the same as *Lumières*, even though this would seem to have been one thing the two countries shared to the full. But the difference is there, and it's a significant obstacle which we must overcome if we are to resist the destruction of what we associate more generally with the Enlightenment—scientific and technological progress, and control over that progress. We need to invent a new utopianism, rooted in contemporary social forces, for which—at the risk of seeming to encourage a return to antiquated political visions—it will be necessary to create new kinds of movement. Unions, as they exist today, are archaic organizational forms; they must reform, transform, redefine themselves, internationalize and rationalize themselves, base themselves on the findings of the social sciences, if they are to fulfil their purposes.

**Grass:** *What you are proposing is a utopia. It would amount to a fundamental reform of the union movement, and we know how difficult it is to shift that apparatus.*

**Bourdieu:** But a utopia in which we have a part to play. For example, social movements in France are a good deal less potent now than they were a few years ago. Traditionally, our movements have had a strongly *ouvrière* outlook, very hostile to intellectuals, in part with good reason. Today, since it is in crisis, the social movement as a whole is more open, more responsive to criticism, and becoming much more thoughtful. Suddenly, it is much readier to welcome new kinds of critique of our society that encompass it as well. These critical, reflective social movements are, in my opinion, the future.

**Grass:** *I view this more skeptically. We are both now at an age where we can promise to go on speaking out as long as our health permits, but this is a limited amount of time. I don't know what the situation is like in France—I assume not much better—but among the younger generation of German writers I see little inclination or interest in continuing the Enlightenment tradition of speaking out, of getting involved. If there is no-one to relieve us, in the best sense of that word, then this part of a good European tradition will be lost.*



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