

# *Firing Back*

Against the Tyranny of the Market 2

**PIERRE BOURDIEU**

**Translated by Loïc Wacquant**



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## *Letter to the American Reader*

I would like my readers on the other side of the Atlantic to know that there are very many of us in Europe and throughout the world, in the countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, who are hoping for and awaiting their support in the struggles against what is misleadingly called "globalization" and is merely, as American researchers were the first to demonstrate, the imposition on the entire world of the neo-liberal tyranny of the market and the undisputed rule of the economy and of economic powers, within which the United States occupies a dominant position.

I would like them to understand that in the ruthless war being waged not only on the economic ground but also within the realms of culture and, particularly, law through all the agreements typified by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), through which the World Trade Organization (WTO) seeks to "commodify" education and medicine, and through the great concentration of the means of production and distribution of cultural goods those agreements tend to foster, we cannot carry on the fight without them, and we want to carry it on with them. I would like them to know also that we are ready to provide them with the channels of communication they sometimes lack to bring the re-

sults of their work to a world audience, and to grant them the collective support that some national traditions still offer today to nonconformist endeavors and to experiments that break with the dominant vision of the world.

If I stress this point here, it is because I am deeply convinced that the presence of American scholars and activists alongside us would not just make us stronger and more convincing by making us more universal. It would also strip our struggles of the appearance of particularism, even of nationalism, and it would strengthen the critique of and resistance to the neo-liberal doxa by showing that this critique can strike at, and radiate from, its very nerve center and global hub.

## Preface

I have brought together here in rough chronological order the texts of several public talks, most of them unpublished, with the intention of contributing to the European social movement that is currently forming. Though I have at times abridged them to avoid repetition, I have attempted to retain the circumstantial features that tie these pieces to a particular time and place.\* For reasons no doubt relating to my own person and to the state of the world, I have come to believe that those who have the good fortune to be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, from the struggles in which the future of that world is at stake. These struggles are, for an essential part, theoretical struggles in which the dominant can count on innumerable complicities (spontaneous or paid), such as the assistance they receive from the tens of thousands of professional lobbyists who, in Brussels, haunt the corridors of the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament. The neoliberal vulgate, an economic and political

\* I have not supplied references to all the works mentioned in these talks. They were aimed at a general audience of interested citizens in various countries. While that target audience has little use for bibliographical details, academics who want such information already know where to find them.

orthodoxy so universally imposed and unanimously accepted that it seems beyond the reach of discussion and contestation, is not a product of spontaneous generation. It is the result of a prolonged and continual work by an immense intellectual workforce, concentrated and organized in what are effectively enterprises of production, dissemination, and intervention. For example, in the course of 1998 alone, the Association of American Chambers of Commerce, to name but one such organization, published ten books and over sixty reports and took part in some 350 meetings with the European Commission and Parliament. And the list of bodies of this kind, public relations agencies and lobbies for industries or for independent companies, would fill several pages. Against such power, based on the concentration and mobilization of cultural capital, the only efficacious response is a critical force of contestation backed by a similar mobilization but directed toward entirely other ends.

Today we must renew the tradition that emerged in the nineteenth century in the scientific field, which refuses to leave the world to the blind forces of economics and seeks to extend to the entire social world the values of the scientific universe (no doubt idealized). I am aware that by calling on researchers to mobilize to defend their autonomy and to impose the values at the core of their profession, as I do here, I run the risk of shocking those among them who, opting for the cozy virtuousness of confinement within their ivory tower, see intervention outside the academic sphere as a dangerous failing of that famous "axiological neutrality" which is wrongly equated with scientific objectivity. I know I am in danger also of being misunderstood, if not indeed condemned without even a hearing, in the name of the very academic virtue that I

purport to defend against itself. But I am convinced that we must at all costs bring the achievements of science and scholarship into public debate, from which they are tragically absent—and, in passing, call to order the prattling and incompetent essayists who fill the newspaper columns and the airwaves of radio and television. In so doing, we will release the critical energy that remains confined within the walls of the Scientific City, partly as a result of a misconception of scholarly virtue, which forbids *homo academicus* to engage in the plebeian debates of the journalistic and political world, partly out of habits of thinking and writing such that specialists find it easier and more profitable (in terms of specifically academic gains) to reserve the products of their labors for scientific publications read only by their peers. Many economists who are privately contemptuous of the uses to which journalists or the governors of central banks put their theories would no doubt be scandalized if they were reminded that their silence is in no small measure responsible for the contribution that the science of economics makes to the justification of policies that are scientifically unjustifiable and politically unjustified.

We are speaking, then, of taking scholarly knowledge beyond the walls of the Scientific City or—and this is more difficult—of goading researchers to intervene in the world of politics. But for what kind of action, what politics? To fall back on one of the tried and tested models of intellectual "engagement," that of the intellectual who expresses solidarity and signs petitions, a mere symbolic warrant more or less cynically exploited by the parties; or that of the expert or pedagogical intellectual, sharing his knowledge or providing tailor-made research on demand? We must break out of this inherited

alternative to invent a new relationship between researchers and social movements, based on a double rejection of separateness (though without concession to the idea of "fusion") and of a merely instrumental relation (though without yielding to anti-institutional mood and myth). And we must work to design *new forms of organization* capable of bringing together researchers and activists in a collective work of critique and proposition, leading to novel forms of mobilization and action.

But what form are we to give to this political action, and on what scale is it to be conducted—national, European, or global? Have not the traditional targets of struggles and demands become decoys, well designed to deflect attention from the places where the invisible government of the powerful is wielded? Paradoxically, it is *states* that have initiated the economic measures (of deregulation) that have led to their economic disempowerment. And contrary to the claims of both the advocates and the critics of the policy of "globalization," *states* continue to play a central role by endorsing the very policies that tend to consign them to the sidelines. They fulfill the function of a screen which prevents citizens—if not political leaders themselves—from perceiving their disempowerment and from discovering the loci and stakes of a genuine politics. More precisely, national states operate as *masks*, which, by attracting and attaching attention to straw men, empty figureheads—those names that clamor and clash on the front pages of the national political dailies and in the electoral battles—deflect mobilization, indignation, and protest from their true target.

Politics has been continually moving further and further away from the citizenry. But one has reason to believe that

some of the aims of effective political action are located at the European level, insofar as European companies and organizations retain a decisive influence on the evolution of the world. And we may take as a goal to restore politics to Europe or Europe to politics by fighting for the democratic transformation of the profoundly antidemocratic institutions with which it is presently endowed: a central bank freed of any democratic oversight; committees of unelected functionaries working in secrecy and deciding everything under pressure from international business lobbies, outside of any democratic or even bureaucratic control; a Commission that, though it concentrates immense powers, is answerable neither to a sham executive, the Council of Ministers, nor to a sham legislative body, the Parliament, itself almost entirely helpless in the face of lobbies and devoid of the legitimacy that only election by universal suffrage by the whole population of Europe could give it. These institutions are increasingly subjected to the dictates of international bodies whose aim is to strip the entire world of all obstacles to the exercise of an increasingly concentrated economic power. If they are genuinely to be transformed, it can only be by a vast European social movement, capable of elaborating and imposing an open and coherent vision of a political Europe, rich with all its past cultural and social achievements and armed with a generous and lucid project of social renewal, resolutely open to the entire world.

It seems to me that the most urgent task is to find and mobilize the material, economic, and, above all, *organizational* means to encourage all competent researchers to unite their efforts with those of the responsible activists in order to collectively discuss and elaborate a set of analyses and proposals for progress that today exist only in the virtual state of private

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and isolated thoughts or circulate in fringe publications, confidential reports, or esoteric journals. It is clear indeed that no compilation made by an archivist, no matter how detailed and exhaustive; no discussion within parties, associations, or trade unions; no synthesis by a theorist can substitute for the product of a confrontation between all those researchers oriented toward action and all the thoughtful and experienced activists of all the European countries. Only the ideal assembly of all those who, be they researchers or activists, have something to contribute to the joint enterprise will be able to build the formidable collective edifice worthy, for once, of the overworked concept of *societal project*.

*Paris, November 2000*

## *For a Scholarship with Commitment\**

I would like, first, to thank Edward Said for his invitation to participate in this debate and for his kind words of introduction. I regret that I could not be with you in Chicago on this day due to ill health. Nonetheless, I hope that, thanks to techniques of remote communication, I can be among you in voice and spirit and that we will be able to open a dialogue.

Given that I do not have much time and that I would like my speech to be as effective as possible, I will come directly to the question that I wish to raise before you: Must intellectuals—more precisely, research scholars, or to be more accurate still, social scientists—intervene in the political world, and if so, under what conditions can they interject themselves efficiently? What role can they play in the various social movements active today, at the national level and especially at the international level—that is, at the level where the fate of individuals and societies is increasingly being decided? Can they contribute to inventing a new manner of doing politics fit for the novel dilemmas and threats of our age?

\* Keynote address delivered by videoconference to the Modern Language Association Meetings, Chicago, December 1999, and introduced by MLA President Edward Said.