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Introduction
Neoliberalism, Financialization, and the Contemporary Literary Marketplace

In August 2008, while financial markets were already dominating headlines around the world amid mounting chaos in the global credit system, a singular finance-themed news story appeared in arts pages and on cultural web sites in North America and Europe: the New York-based writer Tao Lin was selling shares in his in-progress second novel (eventually published in 2010 under the title *Richard Yates*) to the public. The quasi-stock prospectus for this offering that appeared on Lin's blog explained that he was selling six shares, each entitling the holder to 10 per cent of the US royalties of his novel, for $2,000 per share, as well as the right to "call yourself a 'producer' of [the] novel if you want to do that." Within six days, Lin announced that all shares had been sold.[1] Online commentators were quick to question the exact nature of the reported transactions, though it was evident that, for Lin, the idea of treating book production "like the stock market" was at least as appealing as the actuality: he was, he explained, drawn to "the experience of being [a] 'publicly-owned company'" – "in some way a corporation instead of a person." Dismissals of the affair as a "mere" publicity stunt (typical of accusations that had long surrounded Lin in New York media circles)[2] also seemed beside the point, since Lin's announcement made no secret of the fact that the sale was at least in part a "publicity thing": not only was his share issue "another thing people can talk about in terms of me and will 'in itself' 'increase sales' in the long term," but "if anyone buys shares they will have concrete motivation to promote me and that also will increase sales."[3]

Though his method was unorthodox, it's perhaps unsurprising that Lin felt the need to boost both his income and his profile. His publisher at the time, Brooklyn's Melville House, could offer only the modest advances typical of smaller independent presses; while already emerging as one of the key outlets for innovative fiction in the United States, its marketing clout was (and remains) only a fraction of that of a major New York house.[4] Lin's ongoing self-promotion campaign seems to have eventually paid dividends: as Frank Guan describes, "Lin's efforts at publicity . . . likely helped him secure a high-profile agent [Bill Clegg of William Morris Endeavor] and a book deal . . . from a major publisher," Vintage (an imprint of one of the world's largest publishing companies, Random House), which agreed a $50,000 advance for his third novel in 2011.[5] I return to the resulting novel, *Taipei*, which appeared in 2013, later in this book, but I highlight the various transactions that led to its publication here because they so starkly display the relationship that I trace in the following chapters between contemporary fiction and market logics modelled on those of contemporary finance.

* * *

Literature, and especially prose fiction, have long been shaped by their relations to the capitalist marketplace. But fiction published in Britain and the United States over recent decades has increasingly internalized the structures, dynamics, and demands of market systems. More specifically, contemporary authors are inclined to conceive of the literary marketplace in which they operate, and to which they are obliged to be acutely sensitive, as inextricable from the financial markets that exert ever-greater dominance over the global publishing industry and book retail business and the global economy at large. While stock, bond, foreign exchange, and other types of financial markets remain deeply embedded in networks of commodity production and consumption, the "financialization" of advanced capitalist economies since the 1970s has seen crowded trading floors, or, latterly, open plan offices arrayed with ranks of electronic trading terminals, come to define how writers understand the ontology of "the market" as such, and to embody the model of value against which contemporary authors are obliged to measure themselves and their work.

As a matter both of temperamental propensity and structural necessity, the ambitious contemporary novelist's relation to the market activities of Wall Street and the City of London is deeply conflicted. This is the case for two key reasons. Firstly, as the prime mover of social and economic change over recent decades, our present phase of intense financialization defines the horizons of the contemporary novel's political imagination, by turns inspiring utopian visions of a sublime new world of speed-of-light data transfer and value creation, and dystopian images of grotesque excess, inequality, and exploitation. And secondly, the heavily financialized restructuring of the global publishing industry since the 1970s has ratcheted up the commercial pressures on authors, obligating a submission to the literary marketplace that is sharply at odds with an equally strongly felt imperative – mandated by the legacy of modernism and the avant-garde – to maintain one's artistic and intellectual autonomy. While these processes are of course global in scale, they are unsurprisingly felt peculiarly acutely by writers situated in the vicinity of the world's pre-eminent financial and publishing centres – London and New York – and accordingly it is on these twin locations that this study is primarily focused.

Central to my argument in what follows is the twenty-first-century efflorescence of what I call "market metafiction": a mode, evident across a varied array of narratives, which is concerned less with the fictionality of the text as such, and more with the ways in which that fictionality solicits or spurns the approval of the literary marketplace. Time and again in such narratives, this self-consciousness about the text's market positioning is articulated via a profoundly ambivalent reckoning with the power of stock markets, currency exchanges, hedge funds, and trading algorithms – the most spectacular manifestations today of the market mechanisms that contemporary authors must learn to navigate.

This book thus returns in a genealogical vein to the history of literary postmodernism in order to explore how we arrived at the "moment" of market metafiction so vividly exemplified by a figure like Tao Lin. Alongside Lin, the book examines key texts by a wide range of authors, including Iain Sinclair, Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Kathy Acker, Bret Easton Ellis, Anne Billson, David Foster Wallace, Percival Everett, Chris Kraus, Colson Whitehead, Hari Kunzru, Barbara Browning, Teju Cole, Ben Lerner, Nell Zink, Joshua Cohen, Sheila Heti, and Garth Risk Hallberg. Engaging closely with the work of these and other writers, the book reveals contemporary fiction's signature tensions – between complicity and critique; co-option and autonomy; transparency and self-reflexivity; scepticism and belief – to be inextricable from a preoccupation with the intertwined logics of literary and financial markets and the monetary forms and credit instruments that circulate within them.

This book takes a nuanced approach to the question of literary periodization. In the case of the phenomenon that, in Part II, I call "fiduciary exchangeability" – that is, the capacity of fictional texts and monetary and financial instruments to circulate in the market by virtue of their solicitation of trust or belief – I argue that the mass "engineering" of synthetic new financial instruments over recent decades has heightened the importance of fiduciarity to economic life, and found literary expression in a proliferation of outlandish speculative genre modes. At the same time, however, it is a key premise of that part of the book that these recent developments

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represent mutations and intensifications of dynamics that extend over a much longer historical arc – one reaching back to the co-emergence of modern finance and the Anglophone novel in eighteenth-century Britain.

In a similar way (albeit on a considerably shorter timescale), I argue that while "market metafiction" – fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own marketability – has coalesced into a fully constituted and highly visible mode over the past decade, instances of similar practices have been evident in British and American fiction since at least the 1970s. This book is thus founded in the belief that attempting to trace lines of continuity is as important a task for literary history as identifying moments of break or rupture. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that work in contemporary literary studies is sometimes hampered by its determination to insist on the stark novelty of the practices it identifies, whereas deeper literary-historical research is always liable to yield evidence of, at the very least, anticipations of the latest forms and styles, thereby necessitating more nuanced and less strident – but, I would argue, richer and more accurate – accounts of literary change. This is one of the ways in which this book aims to make an intervention in the methodological practices of its primary field.

* * *

In 1998, as the economic, political, and literary landscape over which this book will range was still emerging into view, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu published an essay that perceptively sketched many of that landscape's key features. "The Essence of Neoliberalism" sets out to identify the core elements of a concept then becoming increasingly prevalent as a means of defining the global drift of social and economic life over the previous two decades. Neoliberalism, Bourdieu argued, was best understood as nothing less than a programme aimed at the destruction of "*any and all collective structures*" that "may impede the pure market logic" – a logic, that is, whereby the value of anything is determined solely in economic terms, by the transactions of buyers and sellers in their shifting relations of demand and supply.[6] Under capitalism, of course, where the means of production of goods and services are in private hands, the more that the allocation of resources falls simply to the market's individualized mechanisms of exchange (rather than being subject to some form of provision, arbitration, or control orientated towards collective needs), the more the capitalist class itself stands to benefit.

Like other important analysts of neoliberalism, Bourdieu stresses that while neoliberals often overtly preach a doctrine of nineteenth-century-style laissez-faire, they are distinguished from their classical liberal antecedents by a more covert recognition that it is not sufficient merely to strip away a set of distorting "collective structures" (trade unions, nationalized industries, the welfare state, and so on) in order to allow the "logic of the pure market" to run its natural course. Instead, this logic must be actively constructed, cultivated, institutionalized, and policed through strong state and international institutions.[7] As he puts it: neoliberalism aims at "constructing, in reality, an economic system conforming to its description in pure theory, that is a sort of logical machine that presents itself as a chain of constraints regulating economic agents."

Bourdieu also points the way to current scholarly discussions of neoliberalism in locating the leading edge of neoliberal restructuring in the global financial sector: the domain of investment banks, hedge funds, treasury departments, and stock, bond, currency, commodity, and derivatives exchanges. "The movement toward the neoliberal utopia of a pure and perfect market," he writes, "is made possible by the politics of financial deregulation . . . The globalisation of financial markets, when joined with the progress of information technology, ensures an unprecedented mobility of capital." Under these conditions, investors fixated on their portfolios' short-term performance are liable to punish any dip in firms' growth or profitability, leading those firms to "adjust more and more rapidly to the exigencies of the markets, under penalty of 'losing the market's confidence.'"

A further claim of Bourdieu's essay is that one of the most crucial effects of the "implementation" of neoliberalism is "the progressive disappearance of autonomous universes of cultural production, such as film, publishing, etc. through the intrusive imposition of commercial values." Here, Bourdieu echoes the "Postscript" to the book for which he is best known by literary scholars, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992). In that study, as well as other influential texts such as *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Bourdieu shows how the Aestheticist, Decadent, Symbolist, and other modernist and avant-garde literary movements of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France operated within a "subfield of restricted production," leveraging the "cultural capital" endowed by education and social background to compete for the "symbolic capital" of recognition, notoriety, or academic consecration, while displaying indifference (or even outright hostility) towards the economic capital centrally at stake in the subfield of "large-scale production" – the domain of "commercial" literature "oriented towards the satisfaction of the demands of a wide audience" and "dedicated and devoted to the market and profit."[8]

Contemplating the late twentieth-century literary field at the end of *The Rules of Art*, however, Bourdieu suggests that the relative autonomy from market pressures enjoyed by earlier generations of cultural producers faces an unprecedented challenge in the form of "the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money," prompting him to ask "whether the division into two markets characteristic of the fields of cultural production since the middle of the nineteenth century . . . is not now threatening to disappear, since the logic of commercial production tends more and more to assert itself over avant-garde production (notably, in the case of literature, through the constraints of the book market)." For Bourdieu, while the "experimental work" always, necessarily, occupies a marginal position relative to the "bestseller," that position had, by the 1990s, become untenably precarious.[9]

Bourdieu's literary field can sometimes seem like a deeply cynical place, where the cynicism of producing literature purely for the market would be trumped only by the cynicism of those who affect a pose of indifference to the market merely in order to accrue reputation and prestige that will in time yield their own economic payoffs as the processes of consecration and canonization take their course. However, the unmistakable note of alarm that Bourdieu sounds at the end of *The Rules of Art* makes clear that for him there is something more at stake in the presence of a "subfield of restricted production" in the literary field than a mere opportunity for writers to execute a smart opening gambit while playing the "long game" of literary entrepreneurship. While Bourdieu questions whether modernist and avant-garde movements are "radical," "subversive," or "disinterested" in quite the ways or to quite the extents that they claim (and indeed believe themselves) to be, it is nonetheless clear that for him the disappearance of a literary sphere that, whatever its conscious or unconscious motivations, does not simply subordinate itself to the logic of the market would be a profound – in fact, an incalculable – loss.

In "The Essence of Neoliberalism" and the wider body of work from which it derives, Bourdieu charts a set of relations – between a logic of pure market exchange, the diffusion of neoliberalism, the reorientation of advanced capitalist economies towards financial trade, and the shrinkage of spaces of autonomy in the literary field – that have grown far stronger and more starkly visible over the past two decades, and which are crucial to the analysis I offer in this book. Where Bourdieu's late work sometimes seems to herald a state of total enclosure by the laws of supply and demand, however, I highlight the inventive and resourceful – if never pure or uncompromised – strategies via which formally ambitious contemporary writers seek to open up spaces of manoeuvre immanent to, but not simply determined by, the market.

* * *

This book makes its primary interventions in a field – the study of contemporary literature and finance – which has emerged as a major site of interdisciplinary scholarship over the past decade, impelled by the explosion of novels, plays, poems, films, and other cultural productions concerned with the topic that followed the global financial crisis of 2007–8.[10] As the following pages will make clear, *The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction* intersects with and diverges from this existing body of scholarship in numerous ways. Rather than treating this area of study as an already defined and delimited field, however, I instead approach it as still emerging and in formation, and so aim to expand its boundaries and open it to new forms of critical inquiry. Most obviously, this book moves the field into new territory by offering a sustained engagement with the ways in which today's publishing industry and literary marketplace are themselves subject to processes of financialization, and with the effects of these very direct and urgent economic pressures on literary production, especially in the form of the narrative self-reflexivity I call "market metafiction." While recent critical studies of contemporary literature and finance are necessarily concerned in various ways with markets, they rarely address the market for literature itself. I aim to deepen our critical understanding of contemporary "fictions of finance" by examining in detail how the literary marketplace is both materially shaped and also (in many contemporary texts) metaphorically figured by the financial markets.

In ways that I discuss further at the end of this introduction, this book also aims to relocate the field's core focus of inquiry away from the problematics of literary realism and towards more "speculative" genres and experimental forms. Methodologically, too, this project seeks to broaden the horizons of economically orientated contemporary literary studies, by bringing the field's predominantly Marxist theoretical influences into closer contact with burgeoning work on money and finance in various overlapping fields of the social sciences, including economic sociology, economic anthropology, cultural economy, and the social studies of finance. *The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction* seeks, then, to advance its primary area of study on a range of fronts in the process of developing its overarching argument: that a central challenge for fiction today is

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negotiating equally compelling imperatives to embrace and resist an ideology of the market whose locus lies in the systems of contemporary finance.

This introduction highlights the main historical and conceptual components of the book by identifying two multiply intersecting sets of developments: the rise and consolidation of neoliberalism and financialization and the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century transformation of the publishing industry and book trade. The book's analysis of contemporary fiction and the market is situated at the nexus of these momentous economic, political, and cultural transitions.

The Extended Present: Neoliberalism and Financialization

The coalescence of market metafiction into a distinctive, clearly visible, and widespread narrative style is a development of roughly the past decade, but it is one that is only properly intelligible in relation to a longer literary (as well as economic) history. This book on contemporary fiction conceptualizes "the contemporary," therefore, not as a condition of pure immediacy, but as a "long," "thick," or "extended" present; and, on the basis that the contemporary is best defined in terms of the core socioeconomic conditions that shape the experience of the present and recent past, I understand the long contemporaneity that we inhabit to have been forged in the multiple, mutually reinforcing intersections between a neoliberal model of market optimality and efficiency and a shift in the regime of global capital accumulation towards a round of finance-led expansion over the past four decades. Central to my project, then, is the intimate relationship between neoliberalism (as both theory and practice) and late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century financialization. If, in Greta Krippner's influential definition, *finance* refers to "the provision (or transfer) of capital in expectation of future interest, dividends, or capital gains," then *financialization* is "the tendency for profit making in the economy to occur increasingly through financial channels rather than through . . . activities involved in the production or trade of commodities."[11]

As Cédric Durand suggests, financialization "is no epiphenomenon. It is a process that gets to the very heart of how contemporary capitalism is organised," affecting areas of the economy ostensibly far-removed from the bastions of "high finance" (not least, as we'll see, the publishing and retailing of books).[12] In Kevin R. Brine and Mary Poovey's words, "finance as we know it today [is] the combination of institutions, regulations, asset categories, theories, models, and infrastructure that manages, creates, and studies money, credit, claims, banking, assets, and liabilities." Finance is a perennial feature of economic life, but it assumes very particular characteristics in the present: "In one sense – as a credit or a hedge against the possibility that a crop might fail – finance seems as old as exchange itself. In another sense – as an algorithm that speeds high-volume trades around the world in a fraction of a second – finance seems like a creature of today."[13]

My other key term – neoliberalism – is often used without sufficient discrimination, but I'd argue that it remains a necessary concept for grasping the common logic and direction of travel of an otherwise diverse set of socio-economic ideas, events, and processes. It can only serve this purpose, however, insofar as that diversity is respected, and the various component elements of a larger neoliberal market logic are treated with due specificity and precision. As Simon Springer, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy suggest, while "most scholars tend to agree that neoliberalism is broadly defined as the extension of competitive markets into all areas of life," "the concept is in need of unpacking."[14]

On the one hand, neoliberalism can be conceived of as a more-or-less coherent body of ideas, theories, proposals, and polemics broadly united by a belief in the inherent desirability of installing market systems in preference to all other forms of resource allocation, and a conviction that the evaluation of "all institutions and spheres of conduct" is reducible "to a single economic concept of value."[15] As an intellectual movement (or "thought collective," as Philip Mirowski has described it)[16] neoliberalism springs from elite discussion forums like the Mont Pelerin Society, university departments (pre-eminently, the Economics Department and Business School at the University of Chicago), and think tanks including the Cato Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research in the United States and the Adam Smith Institute in the United Kingdom.[17] I engage in detail with core tenets of neoliberal doctrine (relating to ideas of market efficiency, methodological individualism, rational decision-making, and utility maximization) in Part III of this study.

Throughout the book, I also address a second conception of neoliberalism: as a set of practical processes whereby governments, regulators, central banks, international financial institutions, business leaders, and other elites exert their power in order to restructure global flows of capital, systems of welfare provision, corporations' organizational arrangements, the relations between public and private sectors of the economy, and, ultimately, the subjectivities and rationalities of ordinary citizens. These measures, initiatives, and reforms have invariably been informed to some

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degree by neoliberal theory, but they are just as likely to have been enacted by pragmatists working in a piecemeal, ad hoc manner under the contingent pressures of particular circumstances as by ideologically driven true believers intent on the thoroughgoing rollout of neoliberal orthodoxy; and what is sometimes referred to as "actually existing neoliberalism" has often strayed from the letter of neoliberal commandment, and shown marked regional variation, even as it has consistently adhered to its spirit of expanding the role of market dynamics in economic and social spheres.[18]

As I've already suggested, neoliberalism has an intimate connection to finance. In Chapter 4, I discuss in detail the especially direct relay evident in the financial sector between neoliberal intellectuals and academics and economic actors engaged in the practicalities of constructing and embedding new markets. Much of the ground for the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy, moreover, was cleared by transformations in the international monetary system in the early 1970s, while the privatization, deregulation, and market expansion that we associate with the processes of "neoliberalization" have been nowhere more pronounced than in the financial sphere. In the following chapters, I consider a series of key inflection points that have helped to make ours an intensely, arguably unprecedentedly, financialized age – one of what Arjun Appadurai calls "deep financialization."[19] These include the cascading economic "shocks" (to the gold convertibility of the dollar; to oil prices; and to interest rates) that punctuated the 1970s; the rise of currency futures and other forms of derivatives trading stemming from the shift to floating exchange rates following the 1971 closure of the Bretton Woods "gold window"; the crisis of industrial profitability that increasingly beset the advanced capitalist economies during the 1970s; the Third World debt crisis of the 1980s, and the resulting imposition of jarring "structural adjustment" programmes; the "Big Bang" reforms of 1986 that turned the City of London into arguably the world's leading financial centre; the emergence of High-Frequency Trading technologies; and a series of devastating financial crises – most obviously, of course, the global "credit crunch" of 2007–8.

It's not difficult to see why the period since the credit crisis has seemed to many commentators to have something of the quality of an interregnum. While the near-collapse of the financial system has led to loud questioning of the idea of the self-correcting market so central to neoliberal theory (as I discuss in Part III), the fallout of the crisis in practical and policy terms has been "neoliberalism recharged," as Martijn Konings puts it: "far from a political turning point, the crisis has been the occasion for an entrenchment of neoliberal principles and an extension of its operative