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Dandelion futures: creative anxiety and making art in the digital age

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ABSTRACT

The Internet and other rapidly changing digital technologies have had a revolutionary effect on how we make and consume art. In this essay, I map how these changes have been translated into an increased level of creative anxiety in creative artists as they are forced to engage with the prospect of dwindling revenues and income streams, how it has led to debates around ‘dandelion futures’ for artists and how we can employ Bourdieusian concepts of consecration and hysteresis to conceptualise these profound changes for our culture.

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Introduction


In a 2018 interview in *The Guardian* newspaper, the novelist Will Self argues that the novel as a form is essentially dead. He says:

I think the novel is absolutely doomed to become a marginal cultural form, along with easel painting and the classical symphony. And that’s already happened. I’ve been publishing since 1990, so I’ve seen it happen in my writing lifetime. It’s impossible to think of a novel that’s been a water-cooler moment in England, or in Britain, since *Trainspotting*, probably. (Self 2018)

It is, of course, difficult to know just how to take the pronouncements of a commentator so well known for his ironic, usually cynical, and often mischief-making, sense of humour, especially since this is not his first visit to this particular theme.¹ However, assuming we take him at his word, Self does himself no favours with his closing remarks in the 2018 piece with his observation that for his next project he was:

drawing up a list of important women writers, because I’m teaching a course on the importance of literary influence and the books that influenced me as a writer, and one of my students pointed out they’re all by men. Ditto with literature in English from more diverse cultural backgrounds and heritage. (Self 2018)

It’s somewhat hard to take Self completely seriously as an authority on the relative well-being of the novel when he is self-confessedly ignorant of the contribution of female writers, or writers from other cultures, or indeed from ‘contemporary fiction’. Indeed, this is a statement of such boldness (if not crassness) that one is tempted to think that

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this is Self as ironic wind-up merchant tossing a hand grenade into the entire article. However, if we take his pronouncements at face value, really the only statement that we can infer from this interview that has any accuracy is that white, male, middle-class authors of midlist literary fiction are not optimistic for their future. (I certainly take exception with Self's assertion and argue that there have been many 'watercooler moments' in the fiction world since 1993s *Trainspotting* – the phenomenon of the *Harry Potter* novels and the long-running controversy over the true identity of Italian novelist Elena Ferranti being just two that spring immediately to mind.) It's also worth noting that Self's argument was the subject of strong rebuttals from writers like Roxanne Gay, Stephanie Merritt, Joanne Harris and Sarah Perry.² As Gay acerbically observes in a tweet: 'White men love to declare an end to things when they no longer succeed in that arena.'³

However, the general tenor of the argument is one which is very familiar to anyone interested in pretty much any aspect of creative discourse since the turn of the millennium, or at least from the 2008 global financial crisis onwards – that how we consume, and therefore create, art is changing dramatically, as are the ways in which artists can expect to be rewarded for their work, or if they can expect to be rewarded at all.

It's to be noted that in many ways there is nothing particularly new in this debate and that the established elder statesmen of pretty much any artform will reach a point where they'll pronounce its imminent demise (and that, coincidentally, their practice of said art represents the last, triumphant flowering before its inevitable final passing). However, there is enough statistical evidence to suggest that Self's fears have at least some grounding in reality. A report by Arts Council England highlighted a dramatic slump in sales of literary fiction between 2011 and 2017 (Arts Council England 2017). These findings are echoed by findings by BookNet Canada that also found print sales declining in 2017.⁴ However, it should be noted that these studies focus on 'literary' fiction rather than 'genre' fiction and these conclusions are by no means universal. For instance, a report by *Publishers Week* into data from NPD BookScan suggested that print sales had seen a 10.8% increase on 2013. And industry analyst Jane Friedman provided a more nuanced examination of 2017's sales trends – by no means good news and decrying the 'resurgence' of print as 'a myth' and highlighting factors such as the independent bookstore sector enjoying a period of stability and eBook sales declining in traditional publishers but increasing significantly with non-traditional publishers (perhaps pointing to an increased shift towards new strategies of production and distribution, the steady erosion of 'bricks and mortar' publishing by emerging digital paradigms).⁵

This is a debate that's seldom out of the headlines for long and another recent instance was the spat that took place between the Society of Authors and the Publishers' Association on the back of a June 2018 report by the Authors' Licensing and Collection Society into authors' earnings that found a 15% drop in average income since 2013, with authors, including Philip Pullman and Amanda Craig claiming the publishing industry is exploiting authors with low, and decreasing, rates of remuneration, something which the Publishers' Association strongly refutes (Flood 2018).

The debate is clearly one that is going to go on and on (if it is indeed not just a new iteration of one that has been taking place ever since there have been writers and publishers) and it is not my intention to offer a detailed review of such debates – merely to identify that they are taking place and that they constitute the publishing version of a general creative anxiety affecting all creatives as they enter the digital age.

Bourdieu, cultural fields & artistic consecration

There has, however, probably never been a time when writers weren't worried about money, the need to make a living, or the vicissitudes of the publishing industry. But if we accept that there has indeed been a significant change in how things once were then we need some firm terms with which to conceptualise these changes and it with this in mind that we now turn to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of a 'field of cultural production' and its associated forces of *habitus*, *illusio* and *consecration*.

Bourdieu extends the concept of *capital* beyond the merely economic to incorporate the ideas of *cultural capital* and *symbolic capital* to accommodate the idea of artistic autonomy, of the separation of creative practice from commerce. Thus artists at the more 'avant garde' end of the field of cultural production might be low on economic capital and even cultural capital (recognition by established figures of 'taste', such as critics or Academies) but would score higher on theoretical and artistic symbolic capital (which is capable of being transformed into more directly rewarding cultural or economic forms with the passage of time and familiarity). Bourdieu, therefore, presents the entire field of cultural production as being placed within wider fields of power and social space which exert influence upon artists and their work (Bourdieu 1996, 124). This relies on what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, the unspoken set of 'rules of the game' to which all participants implicitly agree to adhere. Thus, rather than being a free and open space of unlimited experimentation and creative endeavour, the creative field is 'an ensemble of probable *constraints*' and '*possible uses*' (Bourdieu 1996 235). Closely related to this *habitus* and also of interest to us here is *illusio*, which Bourdieu defines as 'belief in the game' or the 'condition for the functioning of a game of which it is also, at least partially, the product' (Bourdieu 1996, 229–228). Thus *habitus* are the internalised rules of conduct within a field of creative activity while *illusio* is the similarly unarticulated agreement to adhere to those rules.

A key operating mechanism for these processes is *consecration*, the means by which artists and their work receive validation and recognition within the field at large:

One of the central stakes in literary (etc.) rivalries is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, that is, among other things, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who is authorised to call himself writer (etc.) or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer; or, if you prefer, the monopoly of the *power of consecration* of producers and products. (Bourdieu 1996, 224, italics in original)

This places the power of who enters and does not enter the field in the hands of a specific set of cultural arbiters:

The producer of the value of the work of art is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a fetish by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist. Given that the work of art does not exist as a symbolic object endowed with value unless it is known and recognised — that is to say, socially instituted as a work of art by spectators endowed with the aesthetic disposition and competence necessary to know it and recognise it as such. (Bourdieu 1996, 229)

These 'spectators' can take many forms, from fellow (established) artists, to review journalists to commercial and academic critics and publishing agents, gallery owners, booksellers and so on. The relationships and interdependencies between these often-competing

forces is complex and subject to change and even revolution but it cannot be ignored or bypassed by those wishing to enter the field. Or at least that is while the *illusio* remains unchallenged.

Which leads us on to one more Bourdieusian concept that could interest us here, that of *hysteresis*. In an essay on the concept, Cheryl Hardy defined it in general terms as ‘the mismatch between habitus and field and the time dimension associated with it’ (Hardy in Grenfell (2012, 144)). Hardy points out that this mismatch can take a number of forms, some of which can occur simultaneously – such as state intervention or international social change affecting local fields – but the one that perhaps interests us the most here is technological change. Hardy uses the example of photography as a discipline where habitus has constantly struggled to keep up with technological innovation but it could be equally applied to current developments in publishing (e-readers, self-publishing), TV/film (streaming services, digital piracy) and music (the same). She also reminds us that in these cases it is those already in a dominant and consecrated position within the field that are, at least initially, best positioned to take advantages of these changes (Hardy in Grenfell 2012, 141).

Indeed, there are a number of emergent – and converging – factors of the age of digital production that put the concept of consecration at risk. One is that new technologies have dramatically reduced the entry costs for new artists. A novel can be published on Lightning Source, Amazon or many other print-on-demand platforms for a very small outlay. An album can be produced and mixed in a bedroom and distributed online via services like SoundCloud. A film can be made with volunteer or amateur actors, shot and even edited on an iPhone and uploaded to YouTube. All these are clear examples of technological hysteresis, with what Bourdieu called the ‘avant-garde’ and what we’d probably today call the indie sector having become much more pliable and porous as a result.

So what? the argument might go, *there’s always been vanity publishing, this is just the same thing*. But this is not merely a matter of improved means of production. It’s that the means of distribution are changing, and essentially being taken out of the hands of consecrating authorities. No longer are artists dependent on gallery owners, booksellers, publishers or corporate media channels for the distribution of their art – obstacles that even the wealthiest or most connected of vanity publishers would have encountered before. And then there are those other consecrators, the opinion formers, the critics, the Academies, the journalists and the reviewers. As their old privileged structures break down under digital change – as newspapers and magazines contract and fold, it has been arts coverage that tended to be the first and worst hit – they find that their voices become marginalised in the wake of social media feeds and microblogs. This is a revolution in patterns of consecration as much as patterns of production.

However, despite this, we are still looking at a cultural field in the early stages of hysteresis. If we look at the key sites for self-published novels, such as Amazon KDP and SmashWords, as well as the Twitter feeds of self-published authors advertising their works suggest that rather than a creative renaissance of original texts, we are still seeing, with a few notable exceptions, works that still closely adhere to the commercial models of the previous paradigm. In other words, writers have still internalised the *illusio* associated with the established *habitus* of publishing and until the self-publishing field evolves its own, which will differentiate itself from, but still be able to engage in dialogue with, the established one then true creative progress is going to be slow (but, I’d argue, inevitable). It might even be possible that what remains of the traditional

consecrators find their authority strengthened as consumers seek to find their way through marketplaces that have suddenly become so much more crowded. What is significant is not (yet) the quality of the new work, but that its very existence constitutes a challenge to the fundamental *illusio* of cultural production.

If we were to now redraw Bourdieu's schematic of varying and sometimes antagonistic fields of power, we would find the social space expanding into the field of power with the erosion of the demarcation between consumers and producers (and the subsequent rise of the 'prosumer', which in turn leads to the loss of the fundamental distinction of the autonomous artist). Digital distribution and social media as forms of alternative consecration would mean a rise in symbolic and cultural capital for even the 'avant-garde' sub-field of cultural production, with an attendant drop in economic capital. At the heart of today's artistic digital anxiety is not merely an artistic revolution, a new '-ism' to challenge and then be subsumed into the pre-established field of power. Rather it is the anxiety of a growing awareness that the entire infrastructure, the unspoken complicity of the *illusio* itself, is at risk of collapse.

Cultural justice & 'internal' vs 'external' goods

Bourdieu's cultural field and its related concepts is not without its difficulties. Mark Banks points out that while it does help us understand the forces that inform cultural production, there is a danger that the value of the actual works produced risks being undermined by the very focus upon those forces:

by insisting on the arbitrary and power-laden foundations of aesthetic judgement, some writers (of which Bourdieu is exemplary) have undermined the possibility of evaluating cultural objects through anything other than currently dominant sociological criteria. (Banks 2017, 13)

This is important, Banks argues, for political purposes, if nothing else, because:

we need to hang on to the idea that there is more to cultural objects than the commercial values they can expediently generate — evidenced not least in their capacities to objectively shape peoples' efforts to understand and live their own lives, and to live with others. (Banks 2017, 15)

Using his own love of the music of David Bowie as an example, Banks points out that this ongoing and enduring love is 'not merely socially conditioned, not straightforwardly predictable, but also emergent in and through my own, and others', subjective engagement with the recordings' (Banks 2017, 21).

Banks' ultimate concern here is with formulating a theory of 'creative justice' that will require a more significant place for artistic endeavour within society rather than the mere interplay between symbolic and economic capital and which will insist that:

objects are not therefore regarded as inert or static or fixed in value, but as productive and mutable, which, as they move, tend to both mediate and become mediated — providing a focus for, and helping constitute new social relationships and different kinds of value. (Banks 2017, 27)

Banks then builds on the work of Russell Keat to suggest that this concept of 'value' could incorporate the idea of cultural goods as 'meta goods': 'goods that significantly (if not

exclusively) through their aesthetic means have the potential to provide us with the resources for helping to reflect on the value and necessity of *all* other kinds of goods' (Banks 2017, 33). In other words, Banks seems to be calling for a role for cultural objects in society that can allow them to act as commentary or reflectors of society and which can't be simply explained away by the complex interplay of commercial and economic forces and vested interests.

He then (helpfully) directly addresses the question that began our inquiry. Why create? Using the example of jazz musicians, Banks applies Alasdair MacIntyre's theory of *internal and external goods*, with regard to the quality of artistic practice. External goods play much the same role as Bourdieu's economic capital and represent the tangible benefits to artistic labour while internal goods are 'qualities which are practice specific':

These internal goods are, however, contrasted with and necessarily co-exist with external goods (such as money, prestige, esteem, praise and status), which are obtainable through engagement in any given practice, but exist in contingent rather than dependent relation to the practice in question — since they can be obtained elsewhere in any given practice. (Banks 2017, 45)

Which is just another way of saying they're not 'just in it for the money' and that there are compensations that are intrinsic to the artforms being practiced. However, Banks does note that this would be disputed in a strictly Bourdieusian view of culture:

We might surmise then, in contrast to MacIntyre, that the Bourdieusian moral universe suggests that the mode of ethical orientation to a practice is not one of subordination and observance, and valuing the 'higher' good, but one of competition in the 'interest of one's interests'. (Banks 2017, 59)

However, Banks sticks to his guns against this cynical approach and insists upon bringing to:

further prominence the idea that the ethical principle of living 'the good of a certain kind of life' and contributing to the collective practice is at least as significant a compulsion to cultural work as any as the kinds of instrumental or less 'virtuous' motives and interests. (Banks 2017, 61)

He is right to do so, I think, if for no other reason than it accounts for the continued existence of artforms that have long since waned in cultural relevance and prestige, such as jazz or poetry or oil painting, which are all still widely practiced but with only the slightest possibility of external reward.

However, these competing theories don't help account for the one question we have yet to broach, and that is the sense of accelerating crisis identified earlier. Why now? What has changed in the field of cultural production that is making artists so anxious? Digital technologies are a big part of it, as we've already discussed, as they converge in various areas of activity to change patterns of consumption, consecration and distribution but there are social and political transformations that we also have to address, and it is to these that we turn now.

'Slashies', the 'long bust' & 'dandelion futures'

Much of the conversation so far has been around authors, like Self, who have had successful careers within the existing cultural field and who are now expressing anxiety as they

encounter palpable changes within it. But what of the generation who are just entering that field? Where do they stand?

The short answer to that question is as part of the 'precariat', workers enmeshed in a 'gig economy' with no hope of progressing to something more secure. In a series of case studies, primarily in Sydney, Australia, George Morgan and Pariece Nelligan chart the hopes and fears of 'portfolio workers' like Amanda, 'a slashie, a "jack of all trades", prepared to improvise and to spend her days pitching for work' (Morgan and Nelligan 2018, 101). Angela McRobbie also notes a similar phenomenon in the UK, remarking 'being a specialist rather than a multi-skilled "creative" is becoming a thing of the past and a mark of being over thirty-five' (McRobbie 2016, 27). She observes that young workers (like Amanda) put up with this constant sense of insecurity because of the feeling of working in their 'dream job':

there is a tremendous appeal to work that involves putting on a show because of the adrenaline and the euphoria and excitement when it all goes right, and the emotional outpourings when it goes less well. This apparently obvious point may also be a key to the paradox of 'knowing self-exploitation'. (McRobbie 2016, 79)

But not everyone is as critical of this as McRobbie, seeing it as not only inevitable but also as something of an opportunity. Author Neil Gaiman in his keynote speech at Digital Minds Conference at the 2013 London Book Fair argued for this new sense of freedom for creative endeavour⁶ and in an interview given shortly after the speech, summarised his argument thus:

When the rules are gone you can make up your own rules. You can fail, you can fail more interestingly, you can try things, and you can succeed in ways nobody would have thought of, because you're pushing through a door marked no entrance, you're walking in through it. You can do all of that stuff but you just have to become a dandelion, be willing for things to fail, throw things out there, try things, and see what sticks. (Flood 2013)

Gaiman's 'dandelion' concept is by his own admission borrowed from Cory Doctorow, another author who has also been at the forefront of 'digital evangelism' for new publishing paradigms. Doctorow wrote:

Dandelions and artists have a lot in common in the age of the Internet. This is, of course, the age of unlimited, zero-marginal-cost copying. If you blow your works into the net like a dandelion clock on the breeze, the net itself will take care of the copying costs. (Doctorow 2008)

As the physical and technical limitations dwindle to near nothing, the power of the gatekeepers and arbiters of cultural production – publishers, record companies, film studios etc. – becomes reduced but taking with them their pre-established 'rulebook' which included the security of how artists previously expected to be paid. The two main reactions to this unavoidable challenge, as typified by Self on the one hand and Gaiman and Doctorow on the other, seems to be to either to don the sackcloth and ashes and 'the end of the world is nigh' sandwich board, or to seek out new strategies for artistic creation, albeit ones which don't yet have any kind of roadmap, let alone the promise of any kind of a living. These future strategies rely on flexibility and the idea of pursuing multiple creative projects, some along more 'traditional' lines than others, some capable of turning a profit, some probably not, but all veering the creative practitioner away from the idea of having some kind of sole career, of being 'a novelist', or 'a musician' or 'a film-

maker' and expecting to make a living from just that one avenue. Rather they will have to try different things, with varying success, possibly finding reward for their art from several different income streams.

However, McRobbie argues that this 'precaritisation' is part of a longer-term political project, starting in the Thatcher years and continuing with:

the expansion of higher and further education from the mid-1990s in the UK with particular reference to the arts, humanities and media fields, and with this the directing of young people so that they adjust themselves to the idea of enterprise culture. (McRobbie 2016, 11)

This, McRobbie argues, was part of an attempt to 'de-proletarianise' the workforce:

Neo-liberalism succeeds in its mission in this respect if a now very swollen youthful middle-class bypasses mainstream employment with its trade unions and its tranches of welfare and protection in favour of the challenge and excitement of being a creative entrepreneur. (McRobbie 2016, 11)

What is being attempted is nothing less than 'welfare reform by stealth' and a deliberate plan to end the class power of an organised workforce:

Being expected to work without workplace entitlements severs a connection with past generations who not only had such protection (in the form of sick pay, pensions, maternity leave etc.) but also fought hard to get them. And once these go, if indeed they do, it becomes difficult to imagine them being reinstated. (McRobbie 2016, 13)

McRobbie identifies the New Labour government of 1997 onwards in the UK, and its attempts to create a 'Cool Britannia' narrative in order to dissociate themselves from the party's industrial past, as a key part of this process:

New Labour shunned its historic connection with the trade unions, they were shunted aside, demonised and castigated for being old-fashioned or out of touch, or with being too closely connected with the so-called 'militancy' of the old left. (McRobbie 2016, 41)

The result is a 'major revision of the post-war social contract', with the Government pleasing 'the world of business without even having to use the words 'labour reform' (McRobbie 2016, 44–45). The effect, she argues, is a dramatic piece of social re-engineering:

These processes, when they are assembled and seen as a whole process, can be understood as an experimental remaking of the middle class at work where ideas of creativity and innovation compensate for and to an extent obscure the shrinking realm of protection along with welfare and various entitlements. (McRobbie 2016, 45)

Banks apparently largely agrees with this line of thought, observing the 'hollowing out of "good jobs", to be replaced by low-paid and precarious work, barely supported by corroding systems of social security' (Banks 2017, 109) and blaming the onset of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and noting that it is also:

underpinned by the migration from a socially democratic and welfare-conscious state capitalism to a more aggressive variant that tends to favour competitive individualism, toxic forms of self-sufficiency, and the creative exploitation of one's socially inherited advantages and assets. (Banks 2017, 115)

However, Banks does seem to go further than McRobbie's 'middle-classification' of society via the creative industries to observe that part of this process entails essentially purging working-class entrants from those industries in the first place:

what does remain shocking is the blind faith placed by governments, industry and employers in the cultural sector as a solution to problems of economic disadvantage amongst social minorities, since it's becoming abundantly clear, at least for the most part, that the arts and cultural industries don't just fail to alleviate inequalities, they actively exacerbate them. (Banks 2017, 115–116)

Banks maps out the 'long boom' in opportunity in the UK creative industries from the 1950s onwards that saw a perceived 'swinging meritocracy' take place with increased representation of working class, female and ethnic minority entrants within them. However, he argues against the reality of this and that despite a relative increase in the number of working-class voices within the industry, the senior and executive positions had always suffered from a 'class ceiling'. Nonetheless, as the 'long boom' turned to a 'long bust', the 'shared freedoms afforded by the long boom have come under more sustained (and possibly now terminal) attack' (Banks 2017, 107). He quotes music journalist and broadcaster Stuart Maconie on this 'long bust' from an article in the *New Statesman*:

The great cultural tide that surged through Harold Wilson's 1960s and beyond, the sea change that swept the McCartneys, Finneys, Bakewells, Courtenays, Baileys, Bennetts et al to positions of influence and eminence, if not actual power, has ebbed and turned. The children of the middle and upper classes are beginning to reassert a much older order. In the arts generally — music, theatre, literature, for sure — it is clear that cuts to benefits, the disappearance of the art school (where many a luminous layabout found room to bloom) and the harsh cost of further education are pricing the working class out of careers in the arts and making it increasingly a playground for the comfortably off. (quoted in Banks 2017, 107)

If there seems a disconnect between the largely UK-centric political arguments above and the US-based fiction being referenced, then it's worth emphasising that what we are talking about are largely global phenomenon. The 'Third Way' of New Labour of 1997 onward has its equivalent in 'Clintonomics' in the US and the liberalisation of markets under Paul Keating's Australian Labor Party of the 1990s. What we are largely discussing here are localised examples of global economic trends in the last decade of the twentieth century and carried over into the 21st, before being exacerbated by the GFC of 2008.

Conclusion

It can't be emphasised too often that financial insecurity and the difficulty of balancing the requirements of Art with economic survival are hardly new phenomena and that many of the debates outlined above could be described as old arguments presented in new contexts. However, there is also a significant body of evidence to suggest that the advent of the internet and other digital technologies have led to an ongoing process of cultural hysteresis that is changing the fundamental structures of how we make and consume art and placing creative practitioners into a state of 'digital anxiety', the effects of which are still unfolding.

The worst-case scenario, as outlined by the likes of Banks, McRobbie and others is that talented artists of the future will find them priced out of the ability to follow their craft, that creative production will become either a rich man's hobby or only possible with the aid of wealthy sponsors. The suggestion here seems to be that artistic labour will regress towards a pre-twentieth century model of artistic patronage. I find this unlikely, primarily for the same reason that has brought about this shift in creative dynamics in

the first place – that the channels of media distribution can no longer be controlled with the same centrality and granularity as they could before. Self-publishing a novel, recording an album, even making a movie are a lot easier than they were before. As is distributing them. In an era of competing media, and the erosion of traditional Bourdieusian avenues of consecration, it is attention and trust that are the truly scarce resources.

I'd argue that what we could see in the future is a hybrid model of distribution. As what we consider today as the mainstream distribution channels find themselves under increasing economic and cultural pressure, they will become less and less inclined to artistic risk-taking and more and more conservative. The decline in sales of literary novels discussed above can perhaps be put down to this increased conservatism, as well as the reduction in marketing budgets for those kinds of novels, save for already established names. In his diagram of the cultural field, Bourdieu pointed out that avant garde artists tended to go to smaller distributors, publishers and galleries, who offered lower economic capital but a greater degree of artistic control and potential symbolic capital. Self-publishing (which I'm taking to mean not just novels but any 'DIY' cultural production) could be seen as the modern equivalent. Experimental or avant garde novels will either continue to find specialist publishers or their authors will resort to self-publishing. However, this model does not merely include experimental or avant garde projects. In terms of emerging, more mainstream artists, I would argue that they will increasingly resort to a hybrid form, with earlier (and less obvious commercial works by more successful names) resorting to self-publishing, until they establish a business case for bigger publishers to take on their work. This process will be slow and gradual as both the new and old paradigms jockey for position in the overall cultural field and self-published authors gain confidence from new sources of consecration to reject the internalised *habitus* of traditional publishing models.

But doesn't this leave us with the same unlevel playing field that Maconie and others fear? It does. Wealthier or sponsored writers will have the leisure to hone their craft and pay for the increasingly necessary marketing and publicity in a now-crowded cultural field – and often vital for self-published authors who will have no or limited access to traditional sources of consecration. There are, of course, emerging models of funding that will to an extent counteract this, such as crowd-funding websites like Patreon and Kickstarter but these are by no means guaranteed to completely level the cultural field.

As Banks and McRobbie pointed out, the 'long boom' in cultural production (at least in the UK) was at least partly due to strong welfare provision that allowed emerging artists the financial base with which to perfect their art. As that provision has been eroded, first by the New Labour government, and then greatly accelerated by that austerity-era Coalition and Conservative ones, it is surely inevitable that creative production would be adversely affected (and thus increasing the levels of creator anxiety discussed above). The solution is obviously some form of welfare reinstatement and the real debate is what form this should take, with much of the current discussion centring around some form of universal basic income. It's worth noting, however, that a society that offers a subsistence wage to all working-age adults would constitute a profound shift in the *illusio* of the cultural field as the very 'rules of the game' alter and would erode the very concept of the 'creative industries' as formalised by the 'Third Way' political movements in the 1990s, and leading to significant changes in everything from consumption patterns, to cultural practice, to higher education.

Notes

1. Self also declared the death knell of the novel in this Guardian article in 2014: 'The Novel is Dead – And This Time It's For Real.' *The Guardian*, May 2, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction> (accessed 6 April 2018).
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