

The Time is Out of Joint

At the first reckoning, this was proposed to be a text about disappointment - the complexities and nature of the various disappointments that I have felt in working with and displaying a few aspects of the Savoy Books back catalogue, and the publishing work of Michael Butterworth. Disappointment is a term that has been evoked repeatedly throughout this project, directly in relation to the material that Savoy have published, as well as in regard to the criticisms that we have invited. However, in conducting research into the epistemic and psychological attributes of disappointment it has become evident that situation; historically, geographically and socially is integral to understanding how disappointment has functioned as part of this project. As such, working collaboratively and attempting to communicate intergenerationally and internationally is a point of interest along with the ways in which place and time are integral to an understanding of the material in question, of the agents and actors, and of what took place.

Conducting research into Butterworth's publishing and writing back catalog, which in turn initiated further tenacious strands of enquiry, has involved recurring instances of stepping forward¹; in initiating contact, forging ahead with research in spite - or possibly because - of repeated, half-joking warnings about the law, deciding to display and commission new work in response to provocative material, and in exhibiting our work and research here. By stepping towards an unknown outcome, we have necessarily engaged with the prospect of disappointment, and have gone ahead anyway. In epistemological and psychological terms, the instance and feeling of disappointment is tied to hope and despair, within the definition of disappointment as a result of an unmet expectation or desire. In considering the action of stepping forward - used here to mean moving forward inwardly, rather than the action of taking a step - hope and despair are powerful motivators, and the expectations or desires which trigger such feelings can function on different levels simultaneously, be they pragmatic or moral.

Whilst disappointment is generally characterised as a negative occurrence and an unpleasant feeling, it is necessary to define the catalysts for and results of this troublesome instance. In considering its aftermath, disappointment is situated in time, and we are shifted by it, whether forwards or in other directions. In *Disappointment*, Anthony LaBranche explores the personal responsibility inherent in disappointment, and contradicts the idea that it is purely negative. He testifies against the attitude that disappointment is related to bad luck, a miscalculation or "morbidly of mind", and contemplates it as a voluntary, rather than an instinctual reaction, suggesting that we can only discover and examine our disappointment on freely-undertaken reflection after the fact. This characterisation of disappointment as voluntary, and to some degree conscious, posits that stepping forward, toward possible disappointment, is an important part of acquiring new knowledge or perspectives. In this formulation, disappointment is a stage of soul searching, described by LaBranche as a "revelation"... "an enterprise which illuminates and indeed "discovers" our selves to ourselves" leading to "not a curtailment of our freedom, but as a deepening sense of its obligations". Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that mindless positivity and the dogged avoidance unpleasantness would be a successful or realistic way to approach life in the long run. As Miranda Fricker argues in *Epistemic Injustice: The Power and Ethics of Knowing*, "Human beings are obviously subject to all sorts of powerful motivations and indeed reasons for shielding themselves from painful truths through mechanisms of denial or repression. On the whole, however, one must see such mechanisms against a backdrop of a more general motivation to truth."²

In *The Glass Bead Game*, published in 1943, Hermann Hesse's hero Joseph Knecht is disabused of the notion that gaining knowledge and power leads to greater freedom within a hierarchy, and is advised that increasing responsibility is all that there is to look forward to. This parable of Hesse's, telling the tale of a natural leader who rises to meet each new responsibility and revelation with sincerity and humility, is helpful in considering LaBranche's contestations on the subject of disappointment. This formulation could also be applied to Savoy's approach, although sincerity is a more appropriate word, here, than humility. The highly provocative, purposefully offensive, and intellectually layered material that Savoy published could be seen as the product of this kind of revelatory disappointment, stemming from both hope and despair. In an interview with David Mitchell and John Coulthart in 1995, Michael Butterworth speaks about the first meetings between himself and Savoy co-founder David Britton, referring to their motivations as a product of their upbringing, and class; "Dave [Britton] had really straight conservative working-class values at core but had rebelled against the call of the foundry, whereas I was from a conservative middle-class background, though with a working-class mother...From the outset Dave had a definite publishing agenda, which was to preserve and extend the culture of his youth - the seminal movers of the 1950s who had provided him with his means

¹ Anthony LaBranche "Disappointment" in *The Journal of Value Enquiry* 8 pp. 131-136 (1974)

² Miranda Fischer, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, (2007) p.103

of escape."³

Our wayward Library Curator was once a 'young blood' of the New Wave of Science Fiction, and describes the diminishment of time within this movement; "One of its concerns was with the near future rather than the far future - in a psychological sense - psychological fiction - psychic alteration. And that you could write about the future simply by writing about the present"⁴. To pause on Butterworth's final statement, that "you could write about the future simply by writing about the present", from our vantage point in the future of a past that has only relatively recently retreated from the present, this statement evokes the idea of 'out of joint time', as laid out by John Rajchman in *Diagram and Diagnosis - The Time of the Question*.

Commenting on Deleuze's apparent optimism towards a political diagram 'After Marx', when the trend seems to be toward melancholy and pessimism, Rajchman describes how in *Difference and Repetition* "Deleuze tries to sketch a synthesis...in which the past becomes indeterminate, the present untimely and experimental, and the future unknown, unforeseen and unthought. He finds a poetic formula for this synthesis in Hamlet's phrase *the time is out of joint*"⁵. The idea of an out of joint time is highly relevant to the theme of modern histories, as well as to the output of Savoy. Butterworth refers to how Britton was interested in 'preserving and extending the culture of his youth', bringing the cultural touchstones of the 1950s to bear on the 1980s and 90s. In *Diagram and Diagnosis: The Time of the Question*, Rajchman focusses specifically on this same era, this span of modernity wherein imagined futures mutated into sinister dystopias, under threat of totalitarianism and Nuclear disaster. Rajchman states that, "we see problems of poverty and racism that are no longer "rationalised" or "politicised" in relation to that form, giving rise to new kinds of violence within and without. They already match up with the depoliticization or desolidarization of the enthusiasms of the 1960s, captured in youth culture by the punk cry in Thatcherite Britain: "There is no future and we are living in it."⁶

Pragmatically, in examining a recent history that is well within living memory, it is important to parse the gap that yawns open in dealing with and responding to fragmentary and subjective accounts. The term 'account' used here refers to the documents, objects and personal anecdotes generously supplied by Butterworth, and the growing hoard of such items still being amassed from an ever deepening pool of sources. In *Genuine Conceptualism*, Lynda Morris states that "Although I enjoy the attention paid to my times by younger historians, they never get the focus, the complexity and simplicity of the period just right"⁷. The language chosen here by Morris belies the slipperiness of this investigation, referring to the era in question as *my times*, indicating a feeling of ownership, an idea that is also evident in Butterworth's responses. She then expresses a contradiction, referring to the simultaneous complexity and simplicity of a period, demonstrating that to understand a time you must be able to apprehend the coexistence of opposing concepts, narratives and perspectives, even opposing truths.

As laid out in the introduction, this text was intended to explore a personal experience of disappointment, and of its appropriateness and function when applied to actors at a recent historical remove. This could be seen as a disappointment engendered by the unpleasant experience of engaging with material that depicts morally reprehensible actions, tropes and stereotypes. However, in considering the subject in relation to Savoy's output, influences and their historical and cultural situation, it has become evident that as well as conferring disappointment, they can be seen to embody and perform a disappointment born of despair with their times and history, precluding hope in the future. In *A Serious Life*, which was published by Savoy in 2004, David Mitchell seeks to characterise these times; "Since the Second World War, the act of rebellion has become more and more violent and abrasive. This is in response to a society that seems to commit atrocities in its sleep, a society in which oppression and horror have become spectator sports."

Mitchell seems to be suggesting that over the past eighty years society has become less humane, which could be countered in myriad ways. However, this statement could also be viewed as accurate, if we consider Miranda Fricker's arguments on the nature of moral judgements at a historical remove, and the distinction between routine and exceptional moral judgements. According to Fricker, whilst it is true that actors at a cultural-historical remove may have contingent access to ideas and intellectual skills that would

³ "Interview One: David Mitchell, Michael Butterworth, John Coulthart, 1995" in D M Mitchell, *A Serious Life*, Savoy Books (2004) p.50

⁴ "Interview One: David Mitchell, Michael Butterworth, John Coulthart, 1995" in D M Mitchell, *A Serious Life*, Savoy Books (2004) p.53

⁵ John Rajchman, "Diagram and Diagnosis - the time of the question" in Elizabeth Grosz ed. *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, Cornell University Press (1999) p.44

⁶ John Rajchman, "Diagram and Diagnosis - the time of the question" in Elizabeth Grosz ed. *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, Cornell University Press (1999)

⁷ Lynda Morris, *Genuine Conceptualism*, p.89

aid them in practicing testimonial⁸ and hermeneutical⁹ justice, there must be a possibility of such actors making an intellectual leap, as Fricker explains, "the distinction between routine and exceptional moral judgements helps explain how a piece of moral progress is possible". The likelihood of somebody making such a leap would be affected by their level of access to progressive ideas, and ability to apply existing concepts to new situations. Accepting Fricker's formulation, we can reasonably and rationally expect decent behaviour from actors at a recent historical and close cultural remove, where they are highly likely to have had access to ideas which should preclude them from behaving with prejudice as we understand it. As such, we can reasonably be disappointed when they do behave unjustly; "to judge historical others in this way is not hubris, for we can acknowledge that 'could do better' will be our ethical epitaph too."¹⁰

In *Disappointment*, an essay criticising Miranda Fricker's claims, Michael Brady counters that it is equally reasonable to despair as it is to hope that actors at a cultural-historical remove will behave justly, and it would be unreasonable to be disappointed as a result of despair. Brady states "it seems that hoping that someone at a cultural-historical distance does the right thing is a rationally optional attitude...since this pattern of attitudes is equally present in despair". However, this is incompatible with the conception of disappointment expounded by LaBranche and outlined above, whereby it is a transformative undertaking that involves a fundamental reevaluation of the self, "a violent updating, through reflection and revision, of the narrative which embodies me."¹¹ Such an internal change is not incongruous with despair instead of hope, just as you don't have to necessarily believe in an outcome to act. As Elizabeth Grosz argues; "the politics of the hopeless cause...introduces another time, another dimension, into the concept of what politics and struggle are"¹²..."to struggle not to win so much as to make a mark, to mark a time and a place as particular, is to imbue time (and space) with a hope that is beyond the hope of actual outcomes"¹³

If the times and places we are concerned with here, eg. modernity in the West, late capitalism, and the decades following the Second World War can reasonably be considered to embody exceptional depravity on the part of those with power, then the work of Savoy, and the accounts of Butterworth and Britton can be seen as hopeless mark making, as defined by Grosz, and as a response to disappointment, as defined by LaBranche. In finding expression through paperbacks, records, comic books and the methods of the SF New Wave, Savoy were seeking out and exposing the rancid underbelly of Western Culture, inducing revulsion by depicting the devastation wrought by abuses of and obsessions with power. As an expression of disappointment based upon despair such forms of expression will never *work*, and are done not to *win*, as Grosz argues, the mark of the hopeless cause - or no 'cause' in the political sense at all - can have unforeseen outcomes. The diagram of their times, and the future (our current times) drawn by Savoy is one of horrifying exaggeration and mocking cruelty, and is consistent with their apocalyptic and despairing impetus. In the present we still seem to be, in Mitchell's words, committing atrocities in our sleep, even while we ought to know and do better, and in attempting to puncture the barrier between routine cruelty and exceptionally just behaviour, marks will continually be made in despair and disappointment.

⁸ Testimonial injustice is defined by Fricker as occurring when a speaker is subject to prejudice based on their capacity as a subject of knowledge.

⁹ Hermeneutical injustice is defined as occurring at an earlier stage than testimonial injustice, when a speaker "a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at a disadvantage."

¹⁰ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, (2007) p.103

¹¹ Anthony LaBranche "Disappointment" in *The Journal of Value Enquiry* 8 pp. 131-136 (1974)

¹² Introduction in Elizabeth Grosz ed. *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, Cornell University Press (1999) p.10

¹³ Introduction in Elizabeth Grosz ed. *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, Cornell University Press (1999) p.10

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