A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/95560

Copyright and reuse:

warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

STIMMUNG AND MODERNITY:

THE AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY OF MOOD IN

DOSTOEVSKY, BECKETT AND BERNHARD

by
Birgit Breidenbach

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick
Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies
April 2017

Contents

Acknowledgements

First off, I would like express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Prof Thomas Docherty, for his invaluable guidance, support and generosity of spirit throughout the course of this project, for which I could not have imagined a better advisor. I would also like to thank my mentor, Prof Emma Mason, for her much appreciated insight and advice over the last few years. I would, furthermore, like to extend my gratitude to all other senior colleagues, at Warwick and elsewhere, who have taken the time to engage with my work over the last few years and who have helped me to advance it, to name but a few, Prof Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Prof Daniel Katz, Dr Christina Britzolakis and Prof Ansgar Nünning, who has been very supportive throughout and beyond my undergraduate degree.

This project was generously funded by the University of Warwick as well as by the German National Academic Foundation (*Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*), for which I am immensely thankful.

My gratitude to my parents, Herbert Breidenbach and Delia Camacho-Breidenbach, is boundless. This work is dedicated to the memory of my father and to the courage, love and strength of my mother. My sister Carina Breidenbach and her fiancé Max Gilljohann have been an unrelenting source of support and kindness. Madelyn Rittner and Daniel Schneider have been the best friends I could have wished for. Daniel Tiemeyer has been a most erudite and kind musicology 'consultant' and friend. I also want to thank my 'sisters-in-arms' at Warwick, in particular Kristin Hübner, Karen Borg Cardona and Madeleine Scherer, for their friendship and generous help – especially over the last few months of completing this project – as well as Rochelle Sibley for taking the time to answer myriad big and small questions about submitting this work.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mark Wilson, who – along with his family – has given me a home away from home, for inspiring me, for believing in me more than I did at times and for graciously accommodating the many different *Stimmungen* (and *Verstimmungen*) the writing of this study has produced.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. A section of the background material of chapter one builds on work that was first carried out as part of a summative essay during my Master's degree in English and Comparative Literary Studies at Warwick.

Abstract

This study investigates how the aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* ['mood' or 'attunement'] informs the affective and experiential dimension of the reading process through the lens of modern philosophy and literature. It seeks to establish 'mood' as a key concept in literary theory and to outline the modes and articulations of this aesthetic phenomenon as an integral part of the modern discourse on existentialism and aesthetics. Modernity, I propose, fundamentally redefined *Stimmung* as an intersubjective phenomenon, and has sparked a sustained exploration of this concept in pivotal philosophical and literary texts of the modern age.

The study first examines the conceptual history of this term and its musical origin to then focus on Martin Heidegger's redefinition of attunement as a crucial aspect of his ontology. From these considerations, a phenomenological theory of *Stimmung* in literature is developed, in which the reading process is defined through the attunement between text and reader. I subsequently further refine this notion by analysing the central role of *Stimmung* in the narrative fiction of three key authors of modern literature: Fyodor Dostoevsky, Samuel Beckett and Thomas Bernhard. What these readings demonstrate is a significant shift towards an aesthetic of intensity and immediacy, in which the experience of the reading process takes centre stage. *Stimmung* as an attunement between text and reader uncovers the dynamic relationality of aesthetic reception, and is inextricably connected to dominant modes of conceptualising existence and experience in the modern age. Ultimately, I demonstrate how the specific modern configuration of *Stimmung* answers to a sense of crisis and vicissitude that aesthetic modernity has transformed into a mood in its own right.

Gestehn wir es, ich schreibe über Stimmungen, indem ich eben jetzt gestimmt bin; und es ist ein Glück, daß ich gerade zum Beschreibe[n] der Stimmungen gestimmt bin.

<div align="right">Nietzsche, 'Ueber Stimmungen'</div>

[*Let us admit that I am writing on moods because right now I am in a mood, and it is a good thing that I am just in the mood to give a description of moods.*

<div align="right">Nietzsche, 'On Mood']</div>

Preamble

In 1864, a young Friedrich Nietzsche ponders his struggle to decide on a theme for his writing:

> Man vergegenwärtige sich, wie ich am Abende des erste[n] Ostertages in einen Schlafrock eingehüllt zu Hause sitze; draußen regnet es fein; niemand ist sonst im Zimmer. Ich starre lang auf das vor mir liegende weiß[e] Papier, die Feder in der Hand, ärgerlich über die wirre Menge von Stoffen, Ereignissen und Gedanken, die alle niedergeschriebe[n] zu werden verlangen; und manche verlangen es sehr stürmisch, da sie noch jung und gährend wie Most sind; dagegen sträubt sich aber mancher alte, ausgereifte, geklärte Gedanke, wie ein alter Herr, der mit zweideutigem Blick die Bestrebungen der jungen Welt mißt. Sagen wir es offen, unsre Gemühtsverfassung ist durch den Streit jener alten und jungen Welt bestimmt, und wir nennen die jedesmalige Lage des Streites Stimmung oder auch, etwas verächtlich, Laune[1].

> [Imagine me on the evening of the first day of Easter, sitting at home wrapped in my dressing gown: outside a fine rain is falling; no one else is in the room. I stare for a long time at the white paper lying in front of me, pen in hand, angered by the confused crowd of themes, events, and thoughts all demanding to be written down; and a number of them demand it in a very stormy way, because they are still young and in ferment, like must [new wine], while a number of old, mature, settled thoughts resist, like an old gentleman gauging the efforts of the world of youth with an equivocal glance. Let us say this plainly: our frame of mind is determined by the struggle of the old with the young world; and we call the state of the struggle at each moment 'mood,' or else, somewhat contemptuously, 'whim'[2].]

This self-reflexive passage addresses the circumstances, and difficulties, of its own writing. Where is one to begin when myriad ideas are present in one's mind at the same time, asks Nietzsche. Old and new impressions, ideas and thoughts come to mind as he sits down to write, and where 'old' and 'new' collide something Nietzsche calls 'Stimmung' ['mood' or 'attunement'] emerges. The moods of one's daily existence, he suggests, grow out of the tension between that which is familiar and that which is new, but they are often discarded as being mere 'whim' [*Laune*] since they are considered as being rather mundane. Since Nietzsche cannot settle on either an 'old' or 'new' idea, he decides to address the mode of writing itself: the state of being in a mood that is, by his definition, indicative of the relationship and tension between various, temporally disparate impressions in his mind.

---

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ueber Stimmungen', in *Frühe Schriften*, Vol. 2, *Jugendschriften 1861-1864*, ed. by Hans Joachim Mette (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1994), pp. 406-8 (p. 406).
[2] Nietzsche qtd. in Stanley Corngold, 'Nietzsche's Moods', *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 29, No. 1, *Nietzsche and Romanticism* (1990), 67-90 (pp. 69f.).

In his short prose text 'Ueber Stimmungen', Nietzsche thus gives the term 'mood' a decidedly temporal dimension: it is the mutual consciousness of past, present and future in whose field of tension mood arises. That which has been, that which is and that which is to be all lay claim to and forge the 'Stimmung' arising in the mind of the writer. Mood becomes the locus of an encounter with a perpetual sense of novelty as Nietzsche further elucidates that moods never repeat themselves but are always new: 'keine einzige gleicht einer andern genau, sondern jede ist unergründlich jung und die Geburt des Augenblicks'[3] ['no single one is exactly like any other one, but each is unfathomably young and the offspring of the moment'[4]]. To Nietzsche, *Stimmung* thereby becomes the locus of a perpetual modernity of experience. Every mood he enters is unprecedented as it arises out of the tension between novelty and past.

As he describes the phenomenology of a moment-to-moment experience of affect, Nietzsche also tries to create an aesthetic mood in its own right in this short essay: opening the text by prompting the reader to imagine the physical circumstances he is writing in, the essay aims to envelop the reader in a similar mood. It attempts to make the author's mood accessible by evoking a material presence through the parameters of space, time of day and weather. Not only does mood thus become a pivotal aspect of everyday experience; it is also conceptualised as a central element of writing, which is made communicable to the reader through textual means.

This short text summarises a number of key components of how the concept of *Stimmung* manifests itself in the literature as well as in aesthetic and philosophical discourses of modernity, and it sets the scene for the work of this study. *Stimmung* has recently resurfaced in a number of scholarly explorations of aesthetic affect – which I will engage with in the pages to follow – putting the question of mood on the map of emerging research on ways of conceptualising art and modes of affective aesthetic reception. In this study, I aim to further investigate this phenomenon's far-reaching influence on modern aesthetics and its crucial relationship with the concepts of the self that are emblematic of modernity. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that the re-positing of the question of *Stimmung* and aesthetic modernity are inextricably

---

[3] Nietzsche, 'Ueber Stimmungen', p. 408.
[4] Nietzsche qtd. in Corngold, 'Nietzsche's Moods', p. 71.

connected and marked by an experiential 'comorbidity' that is constitutive for the notion of modernity itself as this phenomenon produces a pressing need to negotiate forms of attunement. I aim to show that *Stimmung* can make a principal contribution to the understanding of modern aesthetics and philosophy as it permeates the modern self-understanding of the subject as well as the dominant modes of receiving and understanding art that modernity has produced. The focus of this study will be directed at the philosophical discourse on *Stimmung* and at the ways in which three eminent authors of modern literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Samuel Beckett and Thomas Bernhard, negotiate the question of mood in their narrative fiction. By examining the intersection of individual consciousness and affect with the world and with others – as well as the modes of unison and dissonance that spring from this relationship – in the works of these three writers, I will outline the philosophical modes of *Stimmung* that have shaped our present-day understanding of literary fiction and aesthetic affect.

Chapter 1

Stimmung and Modernity: Theoretical Explorations

I.   Conceptual History

The German noun 'Stimmung' carries multiple connotations that inform its usage as an aesthetic concept: firstly, it describes psychological 'mood', both that of an individual and of a group; secondly, it refers to 'atmosphere' as an affectively charged sense of a place and situatedness; and, thirdly, it denotes the tuning of instruments through its etymological kinship with the verb 'stimmen' (which translates both as 'tuning' and as 'being correct') and the noun 'Stimme' ['voice']. Through the intersection of these semantic fields in one term, the word 'Stimmung' may well be 'untranslatable'[1], at least in the Anglophone context. 'Mood', 'humour' and 'attunement' are perhaps the closest English equivalents to it, although none of them encompass all three elements of meaning simultaneously present in the German, that is the affective, spatial and musical dimensions. As an aesthetic concept, *Stimmung* addresses the elusive 'sweet spot' between subject and other, between individual and group, that allows for a transmission of affect and for different people to have *similar* forms of experience, psychologically and aesthetically. As the short essay by Nietzsche which I have discussed above exemplifies, a pivotal notion silently underlying discourses on mood is that it makes aesthetic impressions communicable and liberates them from the confinement of subjectivism as it allows for readers, viewers and listeners to encounter pieces of art in a way that suggests a shared or related form of experience.

The musical dimension of *Stimmung* indicates this element of relationality: musical tuning aims to first bring elements together that are initially marked by difference. *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* defines tuning as the '[a]djustment of pitch in any instrument so that it corresponds to accepted norm'[2], thus suggesting a notion of

---

[1] Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word 'Stimmung'*, ed. by Anna Granville Hatcher (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 5.
[2] Michael Kennedy and Joyce Bourne Kennedy, 'tuning', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.

interdependence that is structured through an adherence to normativity. Initially, tuning applies to the elements constituting an instrument: the strings of a violin or guitar must be tuned to a given standard and *at*tuned to one another as a preparatory action for playing music. Then, different instruments playing together must be attuned to one another to establish a harmonious relationship. Through the process of musical attunement, difference is thus not erased but integrated into a connection of mutual dependence whereby the different elements are brought into a relationship marked by a preconfigured sense of consonance and harmony.

In his important study *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word 'Stimmung'* (1944/5), the Austrian philologist Leo Spitzer traces the concept of musical 'Stimmung' back to the ancient Greek idea of world harmony and, by extension, to the Christian tradition. Spitzer sees the conceptual origin of attunement in Pythagorean philosophy, where a natural 'world harmony', metaphorically derived from musical harmony, is pursued as an aesthetic and philosophical ideal that was later on carried forth into Christian theology. In this context, Augustine's writings shifted the focus from an all-encompassing transcendent harmony to an inner-worldly, phenomenologically significant form of attunement[3]. According to Spitzer, the pervasive idea of world harmony dominated European theological and philosophical discourses until it started to erode and was eventually repealed after the Renaissance period. Although Spitzer hints a connection with the process of secularisation and the development of modern European philosophy, his study closes by emphasising the need for further research on the ways in which the concept of *Stimmung* was adapted and transformed in the age of modernity:

> [T]he death of this concept cannot be attributed to Protestantism as such—as one might be tempted to assume from Novalis' *Christenheit oder Europa*—but only to the destructive process of 'demusicalization' and secularization, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [...]. How this process is connected, in turn, with Calvinism and Cartesianism, with the growth of analytical rationalism and the segmentary, fragmentary, materialistic, and positivistic view of the world—all this would have to be shown in another study. An inquiry into this era of disintegration would put into relief once more the ancient and Christian tradition of world harmony, that is, the spiritual and intellectual background on which alone a future linguistic and semantic interpretation of the word *Stimmung* itself can be built[4].

---

pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578 108-e-9315> [accessed 2 April 2017].

[3] Cf. Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony*, pp. 8; 19-33.

[4] Ibid., p. 138.

The crucial turn in the conceptual framework revolving around the term *Stimmung* which Spitzer hints at coincides temporally with the outset of modernity and its far-reaching impact on societal and political realities, ways of living and philosophical and aesthetic paradigms.

One of the most common, and at the same time most debated terms in recent scholarship, modernity has been used to designate a number of different phenomena: historically speaking, it addresses the consequential impact of secularisation, technological progress and the emergence of new forms of governance and capitalism in Europe from the Enlightenment period onwards, and the vicissitudes of the circumstances of social and private life resulting from these manifold transformations. From a philosophical point of view, modernity is very much associated with wide-ranging paradigm shifts affecting discourses on human existence, politics and aesthetics, and is often fashioned in an antithetical relationship to antiquity[5]. In his influential book *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), Marshall Berman defines modernity first and foremost as a mode of experience marked by transformation, change and the absence of stable points of reference and meaning. This 'maelstrom of modern life'[6] is engendered by the ongoing vicissitude of world-historical processes from the sixteenth century onwards, which generated a sense of disintegration that, according to Zygmunt Bauman, renders modernity an age marked by an increasing sense of fluidity[7].

However, the concept of modernity as defined through a single radical break with the past has become subject to criticism from prominent scholars such as Fredric Jameson and Arjun Appadurai, who argue against the notion of a singular historical moment that propelled the world into a state of modernity[8]. Jameson, conversely, argues that rather than a historical fact, modernity is a 'narrative category'[9] that has led to the creation of the trope of the modern as an epistemological and historiographic instrument. Taking these qualifications into account, for the purpose of this study I understand modernity as a dominant mode of

---

[5] Cf. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 17.
[6] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 16.
[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), p. 6.
[8] Cf. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 24-30; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 2f.
[9] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 40.

thinking about experience, existence and the notion of the 'present' that has shaped in particular European philosophical thinking and aesthetic production from the post-Renaissance age onwards.

Coining the term in his 1864 essay 'The Painter of Modern Life', Charles Baudelaire laid the foundation for disseminating this mode of experience. He therein states: 'La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable'[10] ['Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable'[11]]. Baudelaire's poetic response to the urban reality of nineteenth-century Paris constitutes one of the first instantiations of an aesthetic that would become constitutive for and emblematic of modernity and which places experience, space and contingency front and centre. Modernity thus becomes the self-defined birthplace of a new aesthetic that grows out of a mode of experience shaped by instantaneity and presence, one I argue is inextricably connected to *Stimmung*: where the notion of a world harmony has been declared as lost, the moment-to-moment attunement of experience becomes the new focal point of philosophy and aesthetics.

As Darío Gonzáles points out, mood's capacity to create a unity of affective experience that goes beyond the subject takes on a particularly significance in the context of modernity:

> As in earlier phases of the German aesthetic tradition, *Stimmung* seems to designate a non-reducible meaning that can become perceptible under the condition of a unifying vision. What seems to constitute a new turning point in the interpretation of the phenomenon, however, is the increasing awareness of the necessity of that kind of vision in the modern world[12].

The development of the modern subject that is commonly traced back to the philosophy of René Descartes[13] constitutes an 'obstacle' to existential and artistic attunement: if there is such a thing as a subjective, interior core of being that is separate from the world, attunement becomes a secondary process that connects a primary subject of cognition and experience, the locus of the Cartesian 'cogito', to a

---

[10] Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', in *Œvres Complètes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980), pp. 790-815 (p. 797).

[11] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P.E. Charvet (London et al.: Penguin, 1992), pp. 390-435 (p. 403).

[12] Darío Gonzáles, 'Mood/Attunement', in *German Aesthetics: Fundamental Concepts from Baumgarten to Adorno*, ed. by J. D. Mininger and Jason Michael Peck (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 188-95 (p. 193).

[13] Cf. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 42f.

contingent world. The emergence of modern individualism and subjectivity renders attunement not a given state of affairs, as it was for the Pythagoreans, but an unsolved problem. In line with Gonzáles's position, I thus suggest that the disjunctive, ever-changing experience of the modern world and its emphasis on the individual subject render the question of *Stimmung* even more pressing than it had previously been. In other words, through the advent of modernity – here understood as an epistemological category – the question of attunement becomes a pivotal problem in aesthetics as well as the philosophical discourse on affect and the subject.

David E. Wellbery's comprehensive article on the history and development of the aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* in the recently published encyclopaedia *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden* (2000-5) outlines the most prominent developments in response to this question of attunement within the modern context. Wellbery's summary of the evolution of the aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* departs from the sixteenth century, the historical point where Spitzer's study concludes. For the purpose of embedding my analysis of this phenomenon in its historical context, I will briefly summarise the most pertinent philosophical and aesthetic positions on mood Wellbery's essay comprises.

In the German-speaking context, the word *Stimmung*, according to Wellbery, had been in use in the musical sense of its meaning since the sixteenth century, while the aesthetic concept of the same name emerged in the late eighteenth century and derived from the musical meaning by metaphorically applying the musical usage of the term to aesthetic theory[14]. While the term was initially free of reference to subjective experience, it subsequently underwent a successive process of 'subjectivisation'. Immanuel Kant's use of the term in *Die Kritik der reinen Urteilskraft* (1790) first transferred it into the realm of aesthetic experience as Kant finds that aesthetic judgments can only be communicated between individuals through the attunement of their dispositions. In *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1794), Friedrich Schiller uses the concept of aesthetic *Stimmung* to describe an absence of 'Bestimmung' ['determination'] through the faculties of reason and feeling which results in a state of artistic freedom and potentiality[15].

---

[14] Cf. David E. Wellbery, 'Stimmung', in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, *Band 5: Postmoderne − Synästhesie*, ed. by Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2003), pp. 703-33 (pp. 706f.).
[15] Cf. ibid., pp. 708-10.

Throughout the nineteenth century, particularly within the context of German Idealism, the meaning of the term was shifted more and more towards the description of subjective and individual states of mind. In the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Schlegel and G.W.F. Hegel, *Stimmung* is interpreted as the innermost form of subjective experience[16]. According to Johann Gottlieb Fichte's aesthetic theory, then, the aesthetic process transfers the artist's subjective mood to the recipient. In Wellbery's words, this semantic shift renders mood as the main aspect of what is communicated in art: 'die Stimmung ist zum Inhalt der Mitteilung geworden, nur ist die Stimmung kein Inhalt, sondern die Bewegungsform der eigensten Subjektivität des Künstlers als Selbsttätigkeit'[17] ['mood itself has become the content of the message, except that mood is not a form of content, but an autonomous form of movement of the artist's innermost subjectivity' (my translation)]. In this account, literature thus needs to bridge the gap between subjectivity and language in order to make the moods experienced by the artist communicable.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the aesthetic discourse on mood gradually started to move beyond the notion of *Stimmung* as an expression of subjectivity: questioning the notion of the 'innermost' self, Hugo von Hoffmansthal emphasised the central role mood plays in aesthetics, describing the evocation thereof as art's main objective. Aesthetic attunement, Hoffmansthal further argues, is brought into being through the ways in which literature physically affects the body and language[18]. From here, Wellbery moves on the theory of *Stimmung* Martin Heidegger developed in the first half of the twentieth century, which is considered a pivotal turning point for the development of the concept in philosophy and aesthetics. Heidegger's philosophy eliminates the distinction between exteriority and interiority and conceptualises *Stimmung* not as expression of the innermost self, but as a way of embedding the subject position within a transsubjective structure of affect[19].

Wellbery concludes that the different inflections that have been applied to the term *Stimmung* and the diverging concepts of its role in the aesthetic process indicate that there is no such thing as an essential, trans-historic meaning of the term; instead,

---

[16] Cf. ibid., p. 713.
[17] Ibid., p. 715.
[18] Cf. ibid., p. 717.
[19] Cf. ibid., pp. 724-8.

he proposes that the development of the concept showcases to what extent its variations and inflections are historically and culturally contingent. In keeping with this notion, in the following chapters my analysis of the modes of *Stimmung* in the works under scrutiny will be framed through their historic contingency and situatedness. At the same time, my analysis of the modern configurations of *Stimmung* will be informed by the conviction that the question of attunement becomes particularly pressing in historical moments of fracture and crisis, which is exemplified by the development of Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung* in the inter-war years as well as Spitzer's reconsideration of the dimension of harmony at the end of the Second World War.

This study, then, aims to interrogate the aesthetic and philosophical role of *Stimmung* in the context of modernity, focusing on the conception of mood and its relationship to subjectivity, affect, space and the notion of harmony, both in a musical and in an existential sense. In this context, although they are not fully semantically congruent, I will use the terms *Stimmung*, 'attunement' and 'mood' synonymously. To deepen my analysis of the philosophical dimension of this phenomenon, I will now outline Heidegger's influential theory of *Stimmung* as developed in his landmark work *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Presenting the most fully-fledged ontological reflection on attunement, Heideggerian *Stimmung* is part and parcel of the first comprehensive attempt to structurally examine human existence as 'Being-in-the-world' and thereby locates mood within a field of tension between the subject and the world that is, as I will demonstrate, crucial to an understanding of mood in the context of modernity.

II.   Heidegger's Ontology of *Stimmung*

Heidegger's project of describing the nature of human existence in *Sein und Zeit* fundamentally redefines the subject through its relationship to the world. Self and world are therein not separate from each other; on the contrary, in Heideggerian theory *Dasein* is marked by its so-called 'Being-in-the-world'. And yet, to Heidegger, Being-in-the-world is marked by a sense of struggle and dislocation, of 'thrownness' [*Geworfenheit*] into the world rather than a purposeful placement. While we endeavour to find a home in the world, a space of 'dwelling', our sense of belonging to the world

and engaging with it is thus by definition always somehow disturbed. To explore this relationship and the role of attunement in this framework more closely, I will outline a number of significant points from the fifth chapter of division I in *Sein und Zeit*, which is titled 'Das In-Sein als solches' ['Being in as such'][20].

In attempting to define the existential constitution of *Dasein*, that is, the fundamental conditions and modes of human existence, Heidegger introduces the concepts of *Befindlichkeit* – in Macquarrie and Robinson's canonical translation rendered as 'state-of-mind'[21] – and *Stimmung*. As opposed to the commonplace understanding of states-of-mind and moods as psychological phenomena or emotions, Heidegger's initial definition locates them among the basic conditions of human existence, the so-called *existentials*:

> Was wir *ontologisch* mit dem Titel Befindlichkeit anzeigen, ist *ontisch* das Bekannteste und Alltäglichste: die Stimmung, das Gestimmtsein. Vor aller Psychologie der Stimmungen, die zudem noch völlig brach liegt, gilt es, dieses Phänomen als fundamentales Existenzial zu sehen und in seiner Struktur zu umreißen[22].

> [What we indicate *ontologically* by the term 'state-of-mind' is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing: our mood, our Being-attuned. Prior to all psychology of moods, a field which in any case still lies fallow, it is necessary to see this phenomenon as a fundamental *existential*, and to outline its structure[23].]

As *existentials*, states-of-mind are thus a basic ontological feature of Being-in-the-world, and moods are the respective ontic form they assume as everyday manifestations of these modes of 'affectedness'. In contrast to emotions and feelings as *interior* states-of-mind, mood as an *existential* is thus given a transsubjective dimension. Moods 'encompass our *total perspective*'[24], thus taking on a much more fundamental and comprehensive role than emotions. And yet, Heidegger's

---

[20] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 19th edn (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), pp. 130-80.

[21] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York et al.: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 172. However, Matthew Ratcliffe points out that this translation is inaccurate as mood circumvents the category of subjective experience; see Matthew Ratcliffe, 'Why Mood Matters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 157-76 (pp. 157f.). In *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's 'Being and Time', Division I* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1991), Hubert L. Dreyfus discusses the difficulty in translating the term *Befindlichkeit*, suggesting 'state-of-mind', 'disposition', 'situatedness', 'where-you're-at-ness' and 'affectedness' as possible translations. Dreyfus ultimately prefers the term 'affectedness' as it indicates the mode in which *Dasein* is affected by and relates to objects and other beings in the world (p. 169). Likewise, Bruce W. Ballard translates *Befindlichkeit* as 'affect' and 'situatedness' in *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology* (London and Lanham, NY: University of America Press, 1991), pp. 1; 7.

[22] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 134.

[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 172f.

[24] Ballard, *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology*, p. 1.

exploration of *Stimmung* indicates that this phenomenon is related to feelings and emotions and that, ontologically, they all belong to 'the different modes of state-of-mind'[25]. States-of-mind, Heidegger finds, disclose 'wie einem ist'[26], i.e. how one's own being appears or 'feels' to a person, thus being constitutive for establishing the initial relationship of a person to the world and to the way in which they conceptualise their own existence and place in the world. In this sense, they articulate the fundamental relationality between the subject and the world and shed a light on the nature of this connection, as well as on the nature of being itself: 'a mood does not "discover" entities but "discloses" something about the kind of being that I am'[27]. Heidegger further argues that the sensation of being in a bad mood or 'out of tune' [*verstimmt*] indicates that *Dasein* is always already (at)tuned[28]: only when we feel 'off-tune' do we realise that our existence is subject to an attunement that is always at the backdrop of our everyday activities. 'One mood can be replaced by another', contemporary philosopher Lars Svendsen thus summarises in reference to Heidegger, 'but it is impossible to leave attunement altogether'[29].

Abandoning the Cartesian notion of a primary, subjective core of being which then interacts with the objective world, Heidegger insists that we are always already contained in the world and in the circumstances of our existence, and that our being is thus, by implication, defined spatio-temporally. In this context, *Dasein*'s attunement is the prerequisite for the subject's ability to establish meanings, intentions and actions in relation to the world. However, the term 'world' therein designates not simply the ontic environment within which *Dasein* exists, but also, more importantly, the system of references through which it relates to those entities surrounding it[30]. Heideggerian mood is then not a subjective – and in the dualist notion of subjectivity vs. objectivity, 'less true' – way of experiencing the world; instead it describes the fundamental and inescapable mode of being in which we find ourselves 'attuned' to the world at any given moment in time.

---

[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178.

[26] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 134.

[27] Steven Crowell, 'Responsibility, Autonomy, Affectivity: A Heideggerian Approach', in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of 'Being and Time'*, ed. by Denis McManus (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 215-42 (p. 221).

[28] Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 136.

[29] Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. by John Irons (London: Reaction Books, 2005), p. 114.

[30] Paul Gorner, *Heidegger's 'Being and Time': An Introduction* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 43f.

The connection established here renders 'mood' an ambivalent phenomenon: on the one hand, it belongs to the self since it describes an individual's relationship to the world, but on the other hand, it transcends the realm of subjectivity. Heidegger radically foregrounds the intersubjective potential harboured in the term *Stimmung* – which, as mentioned above, can designate both the mood of an individual and of a group – thus elevating it from the bias of being a merely subjective phenomenon and thereby rendering a philosophical discourse on it possible in the first place. In response to this, Michel Haar's account of the twofold nature of mood highlights that '*Stimmung* is […] both a property and not a property, both relative to the I and relative to the world. But first of all it is relative to the world'[31]. It connects *Dasein* to the world in the sense that it, firstly, relates it to the social world it is situated in and, secondly, lays bare its existential possibilities in relation to this world. Haar hints towards a crucial element in the nature of *Stimmung* as he qualifies it as 'both a property and not a property', and yet this aspect has largely been neglected by previous studies of Heideggerian mood: *Stimmung*, like most German nouns ending in the suffix '-ung', implies a processual element. Due to this, it cannot be considered a property or a fixed trait that is attributed to *Dasein*; conversely, it signifies the continual process of tuning human existence, and of *at*tuning it to the world.

Rather than a static relationship, Heidegger's *Stimmung*, then, describes a relational process between the subject and the world which is marked by degrees of consonance and dissonance, to a great extent hinging on the musical metaphor which the the concept is derived from. As Heidegger points out, we tend not to be aware of our moods, and they only make their presence felt if we feel 'out of tune', just as one tends to pay more attention to the one instrument in the orchestra that is out of tune rather than to the remaining ones that are not. Haar's ontological study *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being* (1993) calls attention to the intimate relationship between music and mood as he defines *Stimmung* as

> a unity that precedes the subject-object division; a nonverbal dimension for which music is a more faithful analogy than is language. […] Heidegger thinks *Stimmung* as a music complete by itself, as *attunement*, the *accord* that defines the profound coherence of being-in-the-world[32].

---

[31] Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 37.
[32] Ibid., p. 40.

Stimmung, like music, is thus located at the stage of the pre-linguistic, and both *Stimmung* and music transcend individual emotion and 'assail' the individual, attuning it to them. In line with this notion, the German musicologist Heinrich Besseler seized the potential for reconceptualising music as a fundamentally mood-related phenomenon that is inherent in Heidegger's notion of *Stimmung* and traced its origin in human ontology, concluding that '[t]he musical originally comes to us as a *manner/melody of human existence*'[33]. In other words, the conceptual affinity between music and *Dasein*'s relationship to the world grounds attunement in a discourse that is, by definition, always simultaneously aesthetic and philosophical in nature.

It is crucial for this project to unravel the further implications of the concept of an existential 'affectedness' with various articulations of ontic mood in order to outline its ontological significance. Heidegger elaborates:

> [i]n der Befindlichkeit ist das Dasein immer schon vor es selbst gebracht, es hat sich immer schon gefunden, nicht als wahrnehmendes Sich-vorfinden, sondern als gestimmtes Sichbefinden[34].

> [[i]n a state-of-mind Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has[35].]

In Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit* thus designates how *Dasein finds* itself thrown into the world and how it negotiates that thrownness through the process of attunement: it describes the way in which we are, ontically, already attuned to the world rather than a conscious, ontological act of perceiving our existence in relation to it. Heidegger's 'gestimmtes Sichbefinden', i.e. attuned presence or state-of-being, as a way of finding and locating oneself, is thus implicitly and unconsciously comprised in every situation of life. It argues against a solipsistic idea of finding one's 'true' self as a spiritual essence, and instead proposes a relational and spatial definition of self-disclosure. To find yourself, then, means to locate the self in its directedness and positioning toward the world, an act that thus constitutes a form of *disposition*. This redefinition results in a peculiar tension between selfhood and worldliness: if the finding of the self is dependent on finding a place in and attunement to the world, is an individual core of being, independent from the 'outside' world, possible at all? Can my moods, in that

---

[33] Besseler qtd. in Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 294.
[34] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 135.
[35] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174.

sense, ever be my *own*? To identify of the locus of *Stimmung*, Heidegger's rejection of the distinction between interiority and exteriority must be taken into account.

To Heidegger, the source of moods lies neither inside nor outside individual consciousness since they are intertwined with the fundamental state of 'Being-in-the-world':

> Die Befindlichkeit ist so wenig reflektiert, daß sie das Dasein gerade im reflexionslosen Hin- und Ausgegebensein an die besorgte »Welt« überfällt. Die Stimmung überfällt. Sie kommt weder von »Außen« noch von »Innen«, sondern steigt als Weise des In-der-Welt-seins aus diesem selbst auf. Damit kommen wir über eine negative Abgrenzung der Befindlichkeit gegen das reflektierende Erfassen des »Innern« zu einer positiven Einsicht in ihren Erschließungscharakter. *Die Stimmung hat je schon das In-der-Welt-sein als Ganzes erschlossen und macht ein Sichrichten auf … allererst möglich.* Das Gestimmtsein bezieht sich nicht zunächst auf Seelisches, ist selbst kein Zustand drinnen, der dann auf rätselhafte Weise hinausgelangt und auf die Dinge und Personen abfärbt. Darin zeigt sich der *zweite* Wesenscharakter der Befindlichkeit. Sie ist eine existenziale Grundart der *gleichursprünglichen Erschlossenheit* von Welt, Mitdasein und Existenz, weil diese selbst wesenhaft In-der-Welt-sein ist[36].

> [States-of-mind are so far from being reflected upon, that precisely what they do is to assail Dasein in its unreflecting devotion to the 'world' with which it is concerned and on which it expends itself. A mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being. But with the negative distinction between state-of-mind and the reflective apprehending of something 'within', we have thus reached a positive insight into their character as disclosure. *The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something.* Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and it is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons. It is in this that the *second* existential characteristic of states-of-mind shows itself. We have seen that the world, Dasein-with, and existence are *equiprimordially disclosed*; and a state-of-mind is a basic existential species of their disclosedness, because this disclosedness itself is essentially Being-in-the-world[37].]

Moods, according to Heidegger, originate neither from within nor from without, but from a relationship between *Dasein* and world that precludes that very distinction. They emerge and 'assail' the subject out of its attunement to the world, and their continuous latency as an *existential* under normal circumstances prevents the human agent from consciously reflecting on their presence and origin. If the locus of mood is not within the self, *Stimmung* becomes the scene of an affective relationality with potentially far-reaching consequences for the ethics of attunement as it is, in Heidegger's ontology, decidedly not conceptualised as being 'owned' by the individual.

---

[36] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 136f.
[37] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 175f.

Further, the existential 'disclosure' enabled by moods as it is described in the section quoted above does not signify a conscious realisation of the nature of Being-in-the-world, but a disclosure in the sense of an opening up or making accessible. The German *erschließen* ['disclose'] refers to an exploration or opening up of something that enables practical usage: for instance, a piece of land may be 'erschlossen' to become a building site. Disclosure in the sense of such *development* indicates its more practical – as opposed to intellectual or ontological – orientation. Moods disclose Being-in-the-world by means of development; they develop the existential possibilities of *Dasein* at any given point in time and enable us to direct ourselves towards other entities by providing the framework of possible ways to relate to and interact with the world. Heidegger thus concludes: 'Die Gestimmtheit der Befindlichkeit konstituiert existenzial die Weltoffenheit des Daseins'[38] ['Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind'[39]]. In laying bare its existential possibilities, *Stimmung* as the attunement of a state-of-mind thereby enables *Dasein*'s openness to the world and its ability to engage with it. Matthew Ratcliffe summarises this by writing that

> for Heidegger, mood is primordial, meaning that it is presupposed by the intelligibility of all explicit forms of cognition and volition. It is a condition of sense for any encounter with beings, whether theoretical or practical. It is thus prior to the intelligibility of all such beings and not reducible to them. Hence moods are not subjective or psychic phenomena but are instead prior to the sense of a theoretical subject-object distinction[40].

As the constitutive element between subjectivity and worldliness, *Stimmung* thus illustrates the ways in which *Dasein*'s notion of identity, its actions, affectedness and interpretations are interdependent with the system of reference that establishes the world. This interdependence is articulated in the dimension of attunement, which at the same time discloses *Dasein*'s 'thrownness'. Since the notion of 'thrownness' indicates a relationship between *Dasein* and world that is marked by a sense of dislocation rather than being contained and finding a harmonious 'home' in the world, *Stimmung* becomes a critical requirement for human existence.

However, in everyday life, Heidegger finds, *Dasein* tends to evade this realisation, which is why he ascribes an exceptional function to anxiety as a *Grundstimmung* ['basic state-of-mind']. In anxiety, Heidegger states, echoing Søren

[38] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 137.
[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176
[40] Matthew Ratcliffe, 'Heidegger's Attunement and the Neuropsychology of Emotion', *Phenomenology and Cognitive Emotion* 1 (2002), 287-312 (p. 288).

Kierkegaard's existential philosophy[41], *Dasein* is forced to realise its otherwise implicit dependence upon the world, a process which then exhibits its ownmost, 'authentic' possibilities as isolated from the social world:

> Worum sich die Angst ängstet, ist das In-der-Welt-sein selbst. In der Angst versinkt das umweltlich Zuhandene, überhaupt das innerweltlich Seiende. Die »Welt« vermag nichts mehr zu bieten, ebensowenig das Mitdasein Anderer. Die Angst benimmt so dem Dasein die Möglichkeit, verfallend sich aus der »Welt« und der öffentlichen Angelegenheiten zu verstehen. Sie wirft das Dasein auf das zurück, worum es sich ängstet, sein eigentliches In-der-Welt-sein-können. Die Angst vereinzelt das Dasein auf sein eigenstes In-der-Welt-sein, das als verstehendes wesenhaft auf Möglichkeiten sich entwirft[42].

> [That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with others. Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in the terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities[43].]

While it is important to recognise that, for Heidegger, anxiety harbours the possibility of authentic and ontologically self-aware being, the notion of authentic *Dasein* must not be mistaken for the idea of a 'true' core of being that is independent from the world. As a way of rethinking one's self in relation to the world, anxiety is still indebted to and concerned with the world through which *Dasein* finds its place and its own existential constitution. Despite the ontologically accentuated nature of anxiety, it is therefore not necessarily more prevalent in human existence than the less conspicuous every-day moods that regulate *Dasein*'s continual attunement to the world.

Summarising the constitutive structures of *Dasein*, which he names facticity, being-ahead-of-oneself and being-with, Heidegger subsequently develops the term 'care' [*Sorge*] in order to describe the totality of being. In the existential structure of care, past, present and future are encompassed as the three aspects that define *Dasein* at any given moment:

> Das Sein des Daseins besagt: Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-in-(der-Welt-) als Sein-bei (innerweltlich begegnendem Seienden). Dieses Sein erfüllt die Bedeutung des Titels *Sorge* […]. Weil das In-der-Welt-sein wesenhaft Sorge ist, deshalb konnte in den voranstehenden Analysen das Sein bei dem Zuhandenen als *Besorgen*, das Sein mit dem innerweltlich begegnenden Mitdasein Anderer als *Fürsorge* gefaßt werden. Das Sein-bei… ist Besorgen, weil

---

[41] Gonzáles, 'Mood/Attunement', p. 194.
[42] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 187.
[43] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.

es als Weise des In-Seins durch dessen Grundstruktur, die Sorge, bestimmt wird. Die Sorge charakterisiert nicht etwa nur Existenzialität, abgelöst von Faktizität und Verfallen, sondern umgreift die Einheit dieser Seinsbestimmungen[44].

[[T]he Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term '*care*' [*Sorge*] […]. Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analyses as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as solicitude. Being-alongside something is concern, because it is defined as a way of Being-in by its basic structure—care. Care does not characterize just existentiality, let us say, as detached from facticity and falling; on the contrary, it embraces the unity of these ways in which Being might be characterized[45].]

Care thus implies the temporality of being, but also the temporal nature of affectedness. We develop a 'caring' relationship to things, others and ourselves in a way that brings together our past experience [*Faktizität*], intentions, wishes and desires for the future [*Existenzialität*] and our present situation [*Verfallen*]. For the concept of *Dasein*, this means that the sense of self is characterised by the simultaneity of past, present and future that is brought into being by the temporal nature of existence. Likewise, the attunement of *Dasein* and world – which is fundamentally temporal and processual in nature – is regulated by the structure of care as a form of concern that orients *Dasein* towards its being with others. This fundamental dimension of intersubjectivity, which Heidegger places at the core of human existence, will constitute a cornerstone for my analysis of literary attunement in section IV below.

To summarise, through Heidegger's influential framework of Being-in-the-world, *Stimmung* takes on a pivotal role in the formation of the self and its relationship to the world. To Heidegger, it articulates the ways in which *Dasein* finds itself by disclosing its existential possibilities with regard to the world and within the context of a temporal structure that underscores attunement's processual nature. The origin of the pressing need for this attunement is *Dasein*'s fundamental 'thrownness' into the world: in the absence of a harmonious home, in Heideggerian terms, 'dwelling', in the world – as it is fashioned in Pythagorean philosophy – *Dasein*'s dislocated existence necessitates the process of *Stimmung* to negotiate and establish its position within the world. While Heidegger de-subjectifies the concept of attunement against the Idealist notion of interior *Stimmung*, his philosophical framework therefore also

---

[44] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 192f.
[45] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 237.

solidifies the categorical impossibility of a Pythagorean notion of world harmony from a modern perspective. Importantly, from an ontological point of view, *Verstimmung*, the notion of 'out-of-tuneness', becomes the much more productive state-of-mind to Heidegger as it harbours forms of existential insight. Heidegger's modern take on attunement thus revolves around an intrinsic sense of dissonance and displacement, which counters the concept of existential harmony through a fundamental sense of fracture underlying philosophical and aesthetic modernity.

III.   Locating *Stimmung*: Subject, World and Attunement

In discussing the relationship between *Stimmung* and the self, I have previously raised the question of ownership and belonging: do our moods belong to us? Are they a phenomenon of the world or of the self? Dreyfus argues that in Heidegger's ontology 'affectedness is not a structure of the *world*, but rather a structure of the *there*'[46], an assertion that renders the question of ownership void. As a basic feature of our being-in-the-world, moods are the condition of our ability to define a self and a world in the first place. If we thus have no ownership of our moods, do we have any influence on or control of them at all? Or are they the masters of our affectedness, of the way we find ourselves in the world and engage with it? Heidegger's notion that mood 'assails' *Dasein* bestows a form of agency on mood that would suggest an affirmative answer to the latter question. To explore this issue further, the linguistic structures that are used to describe and define moods can be considered as being indicative of the implied cultural understanding of attunement.

Habitually, moods are referred to as something that we 'find' ourselves in, as a locus of experience into which the self enters. Charles Taylor elaborates on this spatial understanding of affect as he explains the Platonian notion of a unitary self:

> The temptation to place certain thoughts and feelings in a special locus comes from the special nature of those thoughts and feelings. They are different from, perhaps even incompatible with, what we ordinarily feel. What we experience in moments of heightened inspiration can have this character. And today, we are still tempted by talk of special localizations, but of another character: we speak as a person being 'carried away', or 'beside herself', swept off as it were to someplace outside. In a sense, what we feel when we are in a towering rage seems incommensurable with what we feel when we have calmed down; the people and events are quite transformed in aspect. And a similar change can occur when we

---

[46] Dreyfus, *Being in the World*, p. 170.

> fall in or out of love. The landscape of experience changes so much that we are easily tempted to use images of a change of locale to describe the transition[47].

As something that contains *Dasein*, *Stimmung* is thus traditionally conceptualised in accordance to the binary of interior self and exterior world. According to Taylor, strong moods are thought to affect the self in a way that endangers the idea of its unity, which is why we commonly speak of them as if they are places outside the self rather than an integral part of the self. While Heidegger's philosophy conceptualises *Stimmung* as being neither 'inside' nor 'outside' the subject, thus making this distinction obsolete, the affinity between mood and space is indicative of the ways in which attunement depends not only on the temporal dimension – as outlined above – but also on an inherent sense of spatiality. Although the idea of being 'in a mood' upholds the unitary idea of the Platonic self, the notion of moods as affective spaces gives them a transsubjective potential. A conception of *Stimmung* as a space of experience – rather than as a property belonging to the individual self – makes it possible for two people to be in the same affective locus, i.e. to be 'in the same mood'. However, this notion still implies that the subjects entering into a *Stimmung* are separate, self-sufficient individuals that then encounter an 'objective' attunement as a force from 'without'. If 'being in the same mood' is described as attuning oneself to the same experiential 'space', the subject upholds its primacy of existence, wherein *Stimmung* becomes a secondary existential phenomenon. The notion of individual experience thus prevails in this traditional account of conceptualising *Stimmung*. By developing the notion of attunement further through twentieth-century post-structuralism, the contingency of mood on subjectivity can, conversely, be inverted to outline the ontological primacy of this phenomenon.

Inverting Attunement

In a recent special edition of the *New Literary History* focusing on the phenomenon of mood, Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman emphasise the potential the concept harbours for reconceptualising modes of thinking about the categories underlying the notion of attunement itself:

---

[47] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 119.

> The concept of mood […] circumvents the clunky categories often imposed on experience: subjective versus objective, feeling versus thinking, latent versus manifest. The field of affect studies is sometimes taken to task for reinforcing such dichotomies, creating a picture of affect as a zone of ineffable and primordial experience that is subsequently squeezed into the rationalist straitjacket of language. The concept of mood, for the most part, avoids such difficulties. Definitions of mood often emphasize its role in modulating thought, acknowledging a dynamic and interactive relationship between reason and emotion. Mood is tied up with self-understanding and shapes thinking rather than being stifled by thinking. It makes intellectual work possible and inflects it in subtle and less subtle ways, informing the questions we ask, the puzzles that intrigue us, the styles and genres of argument we are drawn to. *Mood impinges on method[48]* (my emphasis).

Rethinking mood, then, means not only to rethink epistemological binaries that have long shaped modern thought but also to reconsider the method which we apply in order to define and describe the relationship between fundamental categories such as those of self and world. Applying this notion to the way in which attunement is conceptualised can thus aid in navigating around the 'clunky categories' that have been used to structure experience in modern thought. In the following section, I will use this approach to develop further the concept of attunement as outlined above. This will entail the embedding of Heidegger's notion of *Stimmung*, which was introduced in the previous section, more fully into the modern discourse on subjectivity. A more distinctive discussion of world, subject and *Stimmung* through the lens of twentieth-century existential philosophy is required, first to outline the pivotal significance of this philosophical concept, and secondly, to reconceptualise its position within the modern philosophy of the subject and recent theories of affect.

As one of the most fundamental problems in philosophy, the question of the subject has been explored from different angles, leading to a multiplicity of philosophical stances on how it can be defined and what implications these definitions have for ontological, epistemological and ethical frameworks. Even on the most basic level, speaking of the subject is terminologically difficult. Does it equal the 'self, the 'I', one's 'identity' or the 'body'? And if not, how does it relate to these ideas? These questions cannot be answered in any easy or definitive fashion, and by far exceed the scope of this introduction. Leaning on Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* and Gilles Deleuze's theory of the self, I shall, however, outline a working definition of subject and world that will be more immediately useful for the purpose of conceptualising the role of attunement in the modern context.

---

[48] Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman, 'Introduction', *New Literary History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2012), *In the Mood*, pp. v-xii (p. vi).

The Cartesian philosophy of the subject is often quoted as the origin of modern philosophy and has been, according to Dalia Judovitz, 'instrumental in fashioning the viewpoint that we identify today as modern'[49]. Laying the foundation of a philosophy of the self that pits subjective interiority against objective exteriority, Cartesianism has created a dominant narrative of the subject that defines it through its spatiality and inwardness. As Charles Taylor describes it in his important study *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), '[w]e think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being "within" us, while the objects of the world which these mental states bear on are "without"'[50]. This topography of the mind constitutes a dichotomy of self and world that is predicated upon physicality on the one hand and a transcendental idea of the self on the other hand. The Cartesian subject is characterised by such a notion of interiority as well as by its structural unity:

> First, dependent upon its identity to itself, the subject is defined by the *content* or essence—the intrinsic being—of this identity. Drawn around such content, the rational subject resides in a position of *stasis*, anchored as it is at the center of knowledge. Finally, the anchoring of the subject as such indicates a clearly defined zone of *interiority*: the thinking subject seeks only to apprehend and confirm its identity, thus rendering it immune to the difference at play outside of itself[51].

The still pervasive paradigm of the subject introduced by Descartes is thus grounded in the principles of essence, unity, stasis and interiority. The Cartesian subject is defined in opposition to the outside world, from which it is shut off by means of its static, individual essence. Although this dichotomy has largely influenced modern ways of conceptualising the subject and the world, Taylor points out to what degree this sense of the self, defined by its inwardness and in opposition to the exteriority of the world, has lately increasingly been viewed as a 'historically limited mode of self-interpretation'[52] and has been encountered with a number of philosophical interventions.

As outlined above, Heidegger, in turn, characterises the idea of *Dasein* as located in between what we commonly refer to as the internal and the external in the concept of Being-in, a phenomenon that 'is underivable from the phenomena of Worldhood and the Self', as Bruce W. Ballard states. 'If anything', Ballard proceeds,

---

[49] Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 186.
[50] Taylor, *Sources of the* Self, p. 111.
[51] Bradford Vivian, 'The Threshold of the Self', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2000), 303-18 (p. 305).
[52] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 111.

'the analysis of Being-in explicates human Being as the "between" of World and Self'[53]. *Dasein* as a 'between' of the Cartesian dualism of world and self is determined by its Being-in-the-world, but as it is defined by a twofold dependence on the world on the one hand and the idea of a subject on the other hand, an echo of Cartesianism still looms therein. The difficulty of overcoming the dualism of subject and world that is at the core of modern thought reflects particularly in the way in which critics have tried to consider more fully the theoretical implications of Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung*.

In his discussion of attunement and affectedness, Richard Dreyfus problematises the latent Cartesian idea of an independent subject he perceives as being present in Heidegger's philosophy of affect. The problem arises as Dreyfus considers the possibility of moods that are specific to the individual:

> Of the three aspects of being-in, affectedness, especially as manifested in individual moods, is the most dangerously close to Cartesianism. How can you and I be said to be open to the same situation if what each of us is in is threatening to me and exhilarating to you? At best our different moods seem to be subjective colorings projected onto a shared neutral scene. Worse, since the situation includes how it matters to me as one of its constitutive aspects, Heidegger runs the risk of making my personal situation, colored by my mood, into a private world cut off from and more fundamental than, the public world[54].

The primacy of subjectivity that Dreyfus describes in the Heideggerian notion of *Stimmung* leads to an irreconcilable multiplicity of experience, which renders a more general discourse on experience and affect insufficient. Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger demonstrates to what degree the notion of the Cartesian subject is pervasive in and through the way we habitually think about experience and affect. However, the notion of attunement can be rephrased more radically through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's take on the self in order to circumnavigate the affective solipsism Dreyfus warns of.

Dasein, as Heidegger defines it, initially finds itself 'thrown' in the world and through the process of attunement establishes its position therein, reflecting the musical metaphor that this notion of attunement derives from: when tuning an instrument, the first operation is to identify a steady point of reference that can be used as a measure for the tuning process. Attunement thus requires the setting of an arbitrary fixed-point, which then allows for other elements to be established around

---

[53] Ballard, *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology*, p. 10.
[54] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 169.

it. In the Cartesian model, the 'cogito' establishes such a fixed-point, while in Heideggerian philosophy, the attunement of *Dasein* and world itself constitutes the referential centre of existence and '*makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something*'[55]. The ideas of self and world are thus relative to our attunement, an attunement which determines the way in which we define our selves in relation to the 'other', to the 'outside' world. While Heidegger suggests that attunement is that which allows the subject to direct itself towards the world, a more radical reformulation already implied in Heidegger's theory thus emerges from the concept of *Stimmung*: rather than modulating the relationship between a pre-existing world and subject, the continuous attunement between these two is instead precisely what produces the categories of subjectivity and world in the first place.

Without explicitly relating this phenomenon to the Heideggerian concept of *Stimmung*, Deleuze's interpretation of Kant points towards a similar definition of the self through a perpetual process of attunement dependent on time. '[T]he Self is not an object,' Deleuze suggests, 'but that to which all objects are related as to the continuous variation of its own successive states, and to the infinite modulation of its degrees at each instant'[56]. The term 'modulation' as a reference to the realm of sound indicates the extent to which Heidegger and Deleuze here strike a very similar note, so to say, in underlining the relational nature of this concept of self. Deleuze's Self is thus a relative, ever evolving reference point giving meaning to the objects surrounding it, just as Heidegger's *Dasein* relates to the world through a continuously processual attunement that is constitutive for Being-in-the-world.

In this respect, time and development play a crucial role in what is defined as the self. Deleuze proceeds by stating that the grammatical 'I' is subject to a temporal structure of affectedness:

> [i]f the I determines our existence as a passive self changing in time, time is the formal relation through which the mind affects itself, or the way we are internally affected by ourselves. Time can thus be defined as the Affect of the self by itself, or at least the formal possibility of being affected by oneself[57].

Again, Deleuze's terminology points towards Heideggerian thought as he elaborates on the role of affect in generating a sense of subjectivity. In Kant's redefinition of

---

[55] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176.
[56] Gilles Deleuze, 'On Four Poetic Formulas That Might Summarize the Kantian Philosophy', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 27-35 (p. 30).
[57] Ibid., p. 31.

time, which Deleuze here glosses on, the term 'time' does, then, not refer to a pre-existing condition of the self but to the way in which the self relates to itself and affects itself, thereby constituting a structure of attunement. A similar concept of time is developed in Heidegger's previously mentioned notion of *Sorge* ['care'], which characterises the simultaneity of past, present and future in the way *Dasein* relates to itself, to the world and to others.

Deleuze's post-structuralist project of undermining the Cartesian notion of the unified subject in favour of a changeable, multi-faceted subject-position ultimately leads him to a renouncement of the concept of a subject in the first place. Together with Félix Guattari, he concludes that 'there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation'[58]. The unified, static subject is thus replaced by a collection, an assemblage, of subject-positions, which is over time bundled into the place of enunciation called 'I'. Emphasising the processual nature of this 'I', Deleuze states, in another context, that '[t]here's no subject, but a production of subjectivity'[59]. The Deleuzian 'Self' is thus as interdependent with the world as the Heideggerian *Dasein*, although it is decidedly less stable. Bradford Vivian rightly summarises Deleuze's manner of resolving the paradigm of the interior/exterior binary of subjectivity by echoing Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world:

> Vis-à-vis his interpretation of Foucault, Deleuze […] identifies a very different space and morphology of thought than the one embodied by the self-same subject of the cogito. The exercise of encountering the outside is therefore an exercise by which one simultaneously hollows out a space for self-knowledge, self-reflection, and self-mastery. This self-knowledge, however, is not founded upon the identity of the thinking subject. By Deleuze's account, the admonishment to 'know thyself' is actually a command to know one's self *in the world, as part of the multiplicity of the world*, since one's self cannot be separated from, but is indeed enfolded among, the world[60].

Throughout the twentieth century, the Cartesian distinction between the subject and the world was thus increasingly countered by a reconfiguration of the self that defines it through an originary sense of multiplicity and vicissitude. This redefinition of the relationship between self and world, which extends Heidegger's existential philosophy, shows world and subject to be intrinsically related and dependent on one

---

[58] Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 130.

[59] Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 113.

[60] Vivian, 'The Threshold of the Self', p. 310.

another through a process of attunement that generates the production of subjectivity and the notion of the 'world' as such.

The concept of the self emerging from this discourse thus fashions the subject position as the result of an attunement that takes place between the 'I', which is an acquired position rather than a unified, static locus of identity, and its surroundings. As this attunement is by definition an ongoing process, the twentieth-century discourse on the self thus redefines the subject as an ever evolving position within and in relation to the world that allows for meanings and intentions to develop, rather than as a fixed locus of subjectivity. Furthering the sense of fracture emblematic of the modern condition, this notion of the subject is relative to its spatio-temporal situational context and marked by a sense of directedness and affectedness as well as by a concern with itself which is constitutive not only for the possibility of any kind of directedness but also for the definition and identification of the subject position itself. In this sense, the attunement of the subject and its affectedness in time generate the concepts of self and world. *Stimmung*, in a sense derived from Heideggerian philosophy, is thus an ontically primary precondition for subjects to be able to identify a self in the first place and to then locate it within the world. Post-structuralism thus induces an inversion of the structure of attunement as it was previously defined in section I, transforming it from a product of the negotiation between world and subject into the process that produces those very categories.

IV.   Conceptualising *Stimmung* in Literature

The philosophical implications of *Stimmung* as they have been explored above are inextricably connected to its central role in aesthetics. Wellbery's historical overview compellingly illustrates that in modern German philosophy, *Stimmung* was first established as an aesthetic concept and then transferred into the realm of existential philosophy. Capitalising on this significant interrelationship, I will now turn to the role of attunement in literature to develop an approach for reading *Stimmung* in the following chapters.

The recent monograph *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (2012) by literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, which has played an essential role in putting *Stimmung* on the map of current-day aesthetics, opens by

critiquing a perceived sense of stagnation in contemporary literary criticism through the opposition of two predominant schools of thought that have emerged in the course of the twentieth century: Deconstruction on the one hand and Cultural Studies on the other hand. Gumbrecht suggests that, since these positions fundamentally refute one another, literary theory remains prone to the danger of being stuck between two opposing viewpoints until it produces alternative ways of approaching literature:

> To overcome such dangers—which have already materialized in part—we need 'third positions'. The German word *Stimmung* […] gives form to the 'third position' I would like to advocate. In analogy to the notion of 'reading for the plot' that Peter Brooks set forth some years ago, I would like to propose that interpreters and historians of literature read with *Stimmung* in mind[61].

When Gumbrecht proposes a new approach to reading literature that is predicated upon the aesthetic notion of *Stimmung*, he simultaneously implies that critics and readers are always already reading 'with *Stimmung* in mind', that this phenomenon – which has remained in the background of literary theory for most of the past century – is thus a vital part of any form of aesthetic reception. He further argues that, as opposed to Deconstruction and Cultural Studies, both of which place the question of representation and representability at the centre of their analyses, an approach to literature that focuses on *Stimmung* can shift critical attention to the reading experience:

> [T]he dimension of *Stimmung* discloses a new perspective on—and possibility for—the 'ontology of literature.' […] [A]n ontology of literature that relies on concepts derived from the sphere of *Stimmung* does not place the paradigm of representation front-and-center. 'Reading for *Stimmung*' always means paying attention to the textual dimension of the forms that envelop us and our bodies as a physical reality—something that can catalyze inner feelings without matters of representation necessarily involved[62].

Addressing the fundamental ways in which literature operates, Gumbrecht's important contribution to the study of *Stimmung* puts mood at the core of the study of literature in order to account for an immediacy of the aesthetic experience that is often overlooked in current debates. His approach thus opens up important questions in relation to the school of reader-response criticism (or, in German, *Rezeptionsästhetik* and *Wirkungsästhetik*, respectively), theories of literary affect and cognitive poetics, which I shall explore further below.

---

[61] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 3.
[62] Ibid., p. 5.

Gumbrecht's proposition that *Stimmung* is always at work in our encounter with a work of art is corroborated by certain aesthetic reflections by nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers and critics. Among such thinkers is Fichte, whose aforementioned definition of *Stimmung* as the transmission of the author's affect to the reader by means of the literary text is a key example. The notion that art makes the dimension of *Stimmung* communicable and sets out to produce moods that envelop the recipient is pervasive in modern aesthetics, as exemplified in Gumbrecht's study. He therein defines mood as a 'universal category'[63] that is present in any work of art and allows for the recipient to encounter the moods of different times and ages through the aesthetic process. Forms of *Stimmung* in literature, Gumbrecht argues, allow readers to access these historical moods through 'an encounter—an immediacy, and an objectivity of the past-made-present'[64]. According to this position, literary texts thus evoke an objective material 'presence of the past' that enables readers to experience the specific moods of their times.

Works of art are thereby conceptualised as vehicles of *Stimmung* that preserve and contain moods, which then unfold in the aesthetic process and envelop the recipient. Michel Haar's study of *Stimmung* is in line with this notion and suggests that moods 'emanate' from works of art and other objects in the world rather than from a place of subjectivity:

> More exactly, it is *what* we occupy ourselves with, *what* we read or watch that interests us, stimulates us, bores us—in short, that always *produces* these often changing dispositions. Phenomenologically speaking, *Stimmung*, the atmosphere, emanates from the things themselves and not from our subjectivity or from our bodiliness[65].

Existing aesthetic theories on *Stimmung* thus suggest that works of art 'exude' the moods emerging in aesthetic experience and render the reader a rather passive recipient of these forms of affectedness. However, the dimension of aesthetic mood harbours far more interactive and experiential potential than all existing previous studies betray. If we are indeed to grasp the full extent of the literary power of *Stimmung*, we must extend the logic further, and attend more fully to the actual process of reading itself.

To this end, and by utilising Heidegger's existential definition of *Stimmung*, I will propose a different view on the modes of attunement in the reading process.

---

[63] Ibid., p. 10.
[64] Ibid., p. 13.
[65] Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 37.

Through reference to concepts from reader-response criticism, I will demonstrate to what extent the moods created through art correspond to the existential process of attunement derived from Heideggerian *Stimmung* in the previous section. In doing so, I define the reading process as being fundamentally structured through an attunement between the reader and textual forms of affect, which renders *Stimmung* a critical new paradigm in literary studies, one that illuminates the conditions of our encounter with literature and that will attend properly to its experiential, affective and existential functions.

Transferring *Stimmung* to the Aesthetic Process

Heidegger's concepts of affectedness and attunement can make a pivotal contribution to the establishment of *Stimmung* as a constitutive element in the process of reading literature. As an *existential* of Being-in-the-world, Heidegger suggests, forms of affectedness permeate our experience of the world and the perception of our own existence. This fundamental role is reflected and exhibited in literature which, firstly, re-enacts and establishes forms of attunement in the aesthetic process and, secondly, through its capacity for fictional 'worldmaking'[66], becomes an arena for ontological reflection and experimentation with the notion of *Stimmung*.

Fritz Kaufmann's study 'Die Bedeutung der künstlerischen Stimmung' (1929) is the first attempt that seeks to apply Heidegger's philosophy of *Stimmung* to aesthetic reception. Kaufmann therein proposes that concentrated, aesthetic forms of *Stimmung* enable ontological insights about the nature of existence and the originary attunement of *Dasein* that are otherwise occluded in everyday articulations of mood[67]. Furthermore, Kaufmann's study, importantly, moves away from the dominant notion of an artificially pre-configured mood that is 'transmitted' in the aesthetic process. Instead of this, he suggests that genuine forms of aesthetic *Stimmung* emerge out of the process of aesthetic reception and cannot be predicted or purposefully induced. Kaufmann thus states: 'Ich werde in die Stimmung versetzt, die mir das Werk mit-teilt'[68] ['I am put into the mood that the work of art con-veys to me' (my

---

[66] Cf. Nelson Goodman's discussion of practices of 'worldmaking' through semiotics in *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978).

[67] Cf. Fritz Kaufmann, 'Die Bedeutung der künstlerischen Stimmung', in *Das Reich des Schönen: Bausteine zu einer Philosophie der Kunst* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), pp. 96-125 (p. 113).

[68] Ibid., p. 114.

translation)]. Kaufmann's particular use of the word 'mitteilen' [convey, transmit] singles out the dimension of shared affect in separating the prefix 'mit' [with] from the verb 'teilen' [share], thus underscoring the *collaborative* act between the work of art and the recipient. Aesthetic mood is not transmitted from a work of art onto a passive recipient; rather the mood that emerges is of a dialectical nature.

Developing Kaufmann's line of thought further, my analysis of literary *Stimmung* will add a new dimension to the discourse on aesthetic affect by foregrounding the mutual dependence and relationality of the moods emerging in the reading process. The notion of a constant negotiation between the self and the world and the question of how mood, as a phenomenon that connects these two, can be perceived and transmitted intersubjectively as part and parcel of a 'literary ontology', will be at the centre of my discussion. More specifically, rethinking literary mood through Heidegger's ontology requires that we consider the act of reading as a process that, in some way, re-enacts the basic modes in which we find and conceptualise our Being-in-the-world. Our affectedness through a text and the sense of perceiving the 'atmosphere' of a fictional world predicate on the implied forms of ontic Being-in-the-world to which we are always already subject through the originary structure of existence. In that sense, *Stimmung* – as the condition for establishing a subject position and for orientating oneself in the world – is also the prerequisite for our ability to make sense of fiction in the first place; to use Ratcliffe's words, it is constitutive for the 'intelligibility' of a text[69].

Since *Stimmung* establishes the ground for meaning-production in literature, it is a crucial element for the development of an ontology of literature as Gumbrecht suggests it. On the first level of this ontology, the ways in which literature conceptualises characters in relationship to the fictional worlds they find themselves 'thrown into' frequently mirror forms of *Dasein*'s existential self-interpretation. Depicting characters as attuned to the world, literature therefore commonly addresses the interaction of consciousness and the 'outer world' and negotiates clashes emerging between these two. By re-enacting human subjectivity, agency and consciousness, literature thus oftentimes implicitly or explicitly portrays *Dasein*'s self-understanding in relation to its situatedness within the world, or a struggle thereof. What is more, in line with Kaufmann's argument, Stanley Corngold observes that

---

[69] Cf. page 15 and Ratcliffe, 'Heidegger's Attunement and the Neuropsychology of Emotion', p. 288.

the realm of the literary offers insights into ontological concerns that might be obscured in most contexts of ontic *Dasein*:

> The point is plausible, I think, if one grasps the literary work as a world. In an exemplary way the human beings 'in' it are delivered over to that world and none other. The interpreter of literature who shares the existence of its 'characters' has the exemplary experience of what it is to be enthralled by a world. At the same time he maintains an interpretative distance from his experience. This distance permits him to grasp the fact of his thralldom to his *own* world and at the same time to reorient himself toward it. Literature thus becomes the vehicle of a possible authenticity. […] Poetic discourse seeks to share that articulation of moods which would amount to a disclosure of existence. It thus aims at *Dasein's* most *authentic* disclosedness, for 'the most primordial, and indeed most authentic, disclosedness in which Dasein […] can be is the *truth of existence*'[70].

The attunement that is always implicitly regulating *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world can thus become more observable in literature, which then allows readers to venture into explorations their own thrownness (or, in Corngold, 'thralldom') into the world. Poetic discourse, which Corngold here – in reference to Heidegger's later works on poetry and language – names as the 'scene' of ontological disclosure, signifies not only poetry but any kind of speaking that stems from authentic language. To Kaufmann and Corngold, literature thereby gains an exceptional position for exploring the conditions of human existence.

While literary fiction thus displays an inherent affinity with ontological reflection, the study of *Stimmung* in literature cannot be based on a mere application of Heideggerian thought to the aesthetic process. Crucially, the specifics of an 'aesthetic ontology' must be taken into account and integrated into pre-existing discourses on aesthetic reception, the most crucial being the field of reader-response criticism and its inquiry into the dynamics of the reading process. The phenomenological study of *Stimmung* in literature, while inspired by the philosophical dimension of this concept, must develop its own modalities and analytical categories.

Articulations of *Stimmung*

In conceptualising the role of attunement in literature, the different articulations of this phenomenon in private and public contexts can shed a light on the ways in

---

[70] Stanley Corngold, '*Sein und Zeit*: Implications for Poetics', in *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature: Toward a Postmodern Literary Hermeneutics*, ed. by William V. Spanos (London and Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 99-114 (pp. 111f.).

which *Stimmung* manifests itself in fiction. According to Dreyfus, 'mood' as it is defined by Heidegger appears in at least five different forms:

> As Heidegger uses the term, mood can refer to the *sensibility* of an age (such as romantic), the *culture* of a company (such as aggressive), the *temper* of the times (such as revolutionary), as well as the *mood* in a current situation (such as the eager mood in the classroom) and, of course, the mood of an individual[71].

Stimmung thus articulates itself on various phenomenological levels, the most specific of which is the notion of individual mood, while the most extensive aspect attempts to grasp the sensibility of an entire historical period. Oscillating between the realm of the social and the private, this definition continues to render the phenomenon rather elusive. In another attempt to categorise the different types of *Befindlichkeit*, Dreyfus then identifies three domains:

> What Heidegger should have done, I suggest, is distinguish three types of affectedness: a world type (cultural sensibility); a situation or current world type (mood); and the specific directedness mood makes possible (affect)[72].

This distinction hinges on the degrees of pervasiveness of different forms of affectedness, locating *Stimmung* at the intersection of the levels of private and public experience. Cultural sensibility or the 'mood of an age' as a transsubjective phenomenon encompasses, amongst other things, the predominant opinions, sentiments, beliefs, social conventions and forms of artistic expression of a culture in a certain historical period. Mood as it is defined here, as 'a situation or current world type', constitutes a bridge between the subjective and the transsubjective. A situation can involve several people or only one person; regardless, the expression to be *in* a situation suggests that whoever is involved is spatially contained in a larger context, one that transcends individual experience. Thus becoming a spatial denominator for a context of meaning which contains a human being or human beings, a *situation* marks the juxtaposition of subjectivity and transsubjective affectedness. What Dreyfus defines as affect is then the smallest unit of *Befindlichkeit*, the notion of having a specific affective response in a given context. Dreyfus's discussion of the different types of mood is thus largely quantitative as it identifies different categories of attunement based on their duration on the one hand and on their preponderance on the other hand.

---

[71] Dreyfus, *Being in the World*, p. 169.
[72] Ibid., p. 170.

This significant move away from Heidegger's abstract discussion of *Stimmung* and towards a more applied study of its factual articulations makes a helpful contribution to describing and qualifying forms of attunement. Dreyfus further argues that the aforementioned levels of *Stimmung* are, by definition, intertwined and interdependent: '[m]y mood, while possibly at a given time mine alone, is not essentially private; another person in my culture could share the same mood', he proposes; and further, 'I can have only the sort of moods one can have in my culture; thus the public is the condition of the possibility of personal moods'[73]. Dreyfus's proposition of an interdependence between individual and cultural moods questions Heidegger's notion of the possibility of an 'authentic' being that is detached from society – in Heidegger's terms, the *Man* – since the attunement of the individual is described as being pre-configured through cultural means.

I consider Dreyfus's notion that different people can independently enter 'the same' mood questionable as I have previously outlined the spatio-temporal specificity and contingency of attunement; however, the cultural influence on forms of *Stimmung* that Dreyfus calls attention to rightly foregrounds attunement's dependence on the world and at the same time opens up the question of the relationship between attunement, culture and cultural production. In view of these considerations, aesthetic attunement is then, by definition dependent on cultural parameters – e.g. the shared semiotic system it is based upon, aesthetic modes and genre conventions and established art forms – that pre-configure the forms of *Stimmung* emerging in the aesthetic process. To be able to critically discuss the role of mood in literature further, I will now outline the different articulations of *Stimmung* in this medium in correspondence to Dreyfus's description of the types of attunement in private and public contexts.

Literature has the capacity to negotiate *Stimmung* on several levels: on the most elementary level, fiction can depict characters and their forms of attunement to the fictional world, to other characters and to specific narrative situations and events, thus formulating an implicit or explicit ontology of *Stimmung*. On the second level of aesthetic affect, literature also creates a plane of attunement in the narrative act, through the relationship it creates with the reader, a pivotal dimension I will explore more fully below. Thirdly, genre and other literary conventions, as essential forms of

---

[73] Ibid., p. 172.

literary meaning-making, are predicated upon specific forms of *Stimmung* that are constitutive for textual understanding. For instance, in a thriller, the conventional mode of *Stimmung* stipulates that murder and suspense would be 'in tune' with the fictional world, while slapstick comedy would not be. The juxtaposition of these two can be used to create a sense of comic incongruity, which then produces a mood in its own right. Finally, every text relates to the mood of its age − what Heidegger describes as epochal *Grundstimmung*[74] − by means of representation, rejection or negotiation. Satire, for instance, oftentimes imitates the epochal climate it is produced in for the sake of critiquing it, thus inverting and undermining its own epochal *Stimmung*. In addition to these aspects, literature can implicitly and explicitly reflect on the nature of mood, thus establishing a potential additional level of negotiating *Stimmung* in fiction.

In the following chapters of this study, each of these levels of mood-related negotiation will be taken into account in tracing modernity's concern with *Stimmung* as a foundational element of subjective, existential and aesthetic experience. Special attention will be paid to the depiction of modes of attunement in the medium of literature and to the *Stimmung* that is created between text and reader, while the question of epochal *Grundstimmung* will considerably inform my analysis of all three chosen authors since their works will be read against the backdrop of the epistemological category of modernity. In addition to this, the notion of genre as a form of convention predicated upon mood will be a recurrent aspect of enquiry. First, however, to clarify the conditions of literary attunement further, we should examine in more detail the dynamics between reader and text in the context of aesthetic *Stimmung*.

Self and World, Reader and Text

In order to bridge the gap between the philosophical theory of *Stimmung* outlined above and the study of literary forms of attunement, we can now turn to a proper understanding of the relationship between reader and text. Their rapport, I suggest, structurally corresponds to the relationship between the self and the world which I have already outlined above through refence to Heideggerian and Deleuzeian

---

[74] Cf. Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 44.

theory. The reader-text relationship has been subject to considerable attention in the context of twentieth-century poetics and criticism, most compellingly in the reader-response criticism of Stanley E. Fish and the Vienna or Konstanz schools, including the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, and more recently, in the critical analysis of affect by scholars such as Teresa Brennan. Iser's influential contribution to the field has redefined the role of the reader and elevated it from the position of a passive recipient to that of an active subject that is complicit in generating the meaning of a text. In *Der implizite Leser* (1972) and *Der Akt des Lesens* (1976), he introduced a new concept of textuality that shifted the critical focus from the written text to the process described in title of the latter, the act of reading, thus causing a paradigm shift that would eventually lead from New Criticism to the cognitive turn in literary criticism. Iser's significant work redefined the literary text through the process of interaction between the reader and the text[75], thus implying that the place of literature, which is a phenomenon generated by the convergence of reader and text, is outside the text and in the reader's mind.

Iser's 'participating' reader is constitutive for the meaning of the literary work since the reading experience is shaped by his participation:

> participation means that the reader is not simply called upon to 'internalize' the positions given in the text, but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge[76].

At the same time, the text produces an effect on the reader, thereby constituting a structure of affectedness [*Betroffenheit*], which is, according to Iser, impossible to express in theoretical terms:

> Sinn als Wirkung macht betroffen, und eine solche Betroffenheit ist durch Erklärung gar nicht aufhebbar, sondern läßt diese eher scheitern. Wirkung kommt über die Beteiligung des Lesers am Texte zustande[77].

> [Meaning as impact affects the reader, and such affectedness cannot be revoked through explanation, but instead causes the explanation itself to fail. The impact is brought into being through the reader's participation in creating the text (my translation).]

Textual meaning is thus generated through the reader's participation in creating the text, and at the same time, this participation is constitutive of an emotive affectedness

---

[75] Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, 2nd, revised edn (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984), pp. vi f.

[76] Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch et al., 2nd edn (London and New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2010), pp. 1524-32 (p. 1532).

[77] Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, pp. 22f.

that cannot be accounted for through reason. Iser here posits the literary work as something that *matters* to the reader and *affects* him due to his own complicity in generating its meaning in an event that is defined as the coming-to-being of the text. In Heideggerian terms, one could speak of a structure of 'care' being generated through the reader's participation in the actualisation of the text. By participating in the process of meaning-construction, the reader is drawn into a temporal structure of affectedness which is marked by 'caring' about the text.

An even more radical position was developed by Stanley Fish, who introduced the concept of 'affective stylistics' as a way of describing the readerly contribution to textual meaning. To Fish, there is no such thing as an objective text, although this notion has continued to exist in the cultural consciousness as a 'dangerous illusion'[78]. Freed from the idea of being a fixed entity consisting of historically invariable, written signs, the literary text is thus re-conceptualised as a process, as an '*event*'[79] only emerging and taking place when it is read. The important turn in the argument Fish makes is that the meaning of a text — which Iser still holds on to — is dismissed in favour of the dimension of experience: since semantic textual meaning is unstable, the experience of reading the text *itself* becomes its meaning[80]. The literary text is thus marked by a structural openness that allows readers to have different experiences of the same text as the semantic plane of meaning is replaced by the experiential dimension of the aesthetic process.

Taking Iser's and Fish's work as a stepping stone for a reconsideration of the reader-text relationship, I want to suggest a position which establishes the reader not as a participating subject but as the condition for the existence of any meaning while simultaneously dissolving the reader, as a stand in formula of the transcendental 'self', into the transsubjective worldliness of *Stimmung*. As outlined above, the process of negotiation taking place between reader and text is structurally similar to the attunement between the self and the world. What we call the 'reader' shall be redefined as a subject position corresponding to the self as inflected through Heidegger and Deleuze, i.e. as an ever-evolving negotiation between the locus of the self and the world. In this context, the (written) text represents the world, as a

---

[78] Stanley E. Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (London and Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100 (p. 82).
[79] Ibid., p. 72.
[80] Cf. ibid., p. 98.

linguistic structure of reference that draws on a historically and culturally defined semiotic system, and in relation to which the reader-position is established.

At the same time, however, literature – as a fictional way of 'worldmaking' – often problematises our implicit ontological notions of the self and of the world. Literature can thus be regarded as both a vehicle of (ontic) implicit cultural notions of the self and the world and as a 'playground' for ontological possibilities. This complicates the attunement that takes place between the reader and the text: on the one hand, this form of *Stimmung* draws on the attunement taking place between the self and the world as a reference point for worldmaking in the medium of fiction; it creates a world in accordance with the way in which we construct the physical world as opposed to our subjective selves. On the other hand, this very attunement can be explored, modified and manipulated by the literary text. I shall return to these possibilities and the ways in which they are implemented in the substantive engagements with the texts that constitute the body of my argument in the following three chapters of this study.

Despite certain similarities between what I have philosophically defined as the world and the fictional worlds created in literary texts, it is crucial to bear in mind the differences between the ways in which *Dasein* encounters them: the form of participation that the reader exerts in the text differs from her active participation in Being-in-the-world. She is, beyond the experiential process of meaning-making, not actively involved in the events depicted in the literary text, but, in most cases, remains an observer – although, once again, this position will be shown to be relative in some of the texts under discussion. Nevertheless, her relationship to the text is marked by the existential structure of 'care' as she becomes an accomplice to the process of generating the meaning of a text. To a certain extent, a 'suspension of disbelief', as it was famously defined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is required for the reader to become involved in what is depicted in a narrative text. Even though she remains an observer, she has to give herself up to the text in a certain way in order to engage with and 'attune to' it. The aim of this attunement is a form of convergence which, according to Iser, brings the literary work into being: 'The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence'[81]. The sense of convergence,

---

[81] Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (London and Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 275.

of literary meaning production, is, however, not a fixed product or a result of the interaction between reader and text, but an ongoing process taking place in the act of reading: the process of *Stimmung*. The sense of affectedness, of care, which Iser defines as – in Heidegger's words – equiprimordial to the interaction between reader and text, results from a negotiation between the reading self and the literary work as it is constructed by the reader in the process of aesthetic attunement.

In this context, the reader, as a specific function of the self, is defined in analogy to the concept of self in the previous section. She is the ever-evolving subject-position generated by the attunement between subjectivity and worldliness, a worldliness which, in the reader function of *Dasein*, is represented by the text. As Donald Hall explains, recent philosophical explorations of subjectivity have even conceptualised the self itself as a text:

> the textuality of the self as a system of representations has, itself, become a singularly important area of investigation and speculation. Thus in exploring subjectivity, we are in effect exploring the 'self' as a text, as a topic for critical analysis, both in and beyond its relationship to the traditional texts of literature and culture[82].

If we conceptualise the self as a text in Iser's sense of the literary work, we arrive at a definition that emphasises the processual nature of the self as something that emerges from the negotiation of forces as described in reference to Heidegger's attuned *Dasein* and Deleuze's concept of inconsistent subjectivity. While the self-text analogy might be heuristically helpful in terms of grasping the ways in which culture inscribes itself in the self, I shall, however, maintain a terminological and conceptual difference when speaking of the 'self' and the 'text' in the analyses that will follow this theoretical chapter.

V.   *Stimmung* and the Literature of Modernity

The historical view on the concept of *Stimmung* outlined at the beginning of this study underlines a pivotal caesura in the way attunement was conceptualised in aesthetics, which took place in the sixteenth century. Whereas the classic idea of world harmony dominated aesthetics from Pythagorean philosophy to the Renaissance age, the epoch that has been defined as modernity has established a much more unstable and

---

[82] Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

complicated relationship with the concept of *Stimmung*. However, the affinity between art and harmony is still very deeply ingrained in the European aesthetic tradition. Augustine's declaration that harmony is at the core of art and beauty still strikes a chord familiar to present-day notions of the purpose of art:

> The source of pleasure in any art is harmony, which alone is responsible for the beauty and wholesomeness of all things. At the same time, harmony aspires to equality and unity, either through the similarity of even parts or through a regular progression of uneven[83].

This idea of harmony as the ultimate purpose of art has continued to inform discourses on aesthetics beyond the outset of modernity. In his 1899 essay 'Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst', the art historian Alois Riegl suggests that the main aim of modern art – as opposed to previous historical eras – is to create moods. He therefore defines modern art as 'Stimmungskunst'[84] ['mood art'], which seeks to re-establish order and harmony where it is lacking in life, thus constituting an aesthetic corrective for the chaotic modern world[85]. According to Riegl, the desire for the lost harmonious form of *Stimmung* thus establishes the fundament of modern aesthetics[86]. Writing over a century later, Gumbrecht, conversely, proposes that in the modern age the concept of *Stimmung* is no longer associated with the dimension of harmony[87]. Resulting from this vacillating position of harmony in modern literature is a fundamental sense of instability, which reinforces my previously stated proposition: the question of attunement becomes ever more pressing in the age of modernity as this epoch fashions itself as one of radical disintegration and transformation, thus adding to the disorientating notion of thrownness that marks the human condition.

In her book *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture*, Rebecca Saunders suggests that aesthetic moods in literature and philosophy are not just representative of the dominant moods of modernity but also actively create and disseminate such moods[88]. Taking into account Jameson's notion of the discourse of

---

[83] Augustine, 'On True Religion', in *Greek and Roman Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. by Oleg V. Bychnov and Anne Sheppard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 219-26 (p. 221).

[84] Alois Riegl, 'Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl Maria Swoboda (Vienna: Dr. B. Filser, 1929), pp. 28-39 (p. 34).

[85] Cf. Wellbery, 'Stimmung', p. 719.

[86] Cf. Gonzáles, 'Mood/Attunement', p. 192.

[87] Cf. Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 10.

[88] Rebecca Saunders, *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 10.

modernity as a narrative rather than a representation of historical reality, my analysis of key works by Dostoevsky, Beckett and Bernhard is thus not based on the assumption that they mimetically represent the historical realities they were written in, but that those texts in themselves fashion a sense of modernity that is not merely descriptive; instead, they actively have contributed to the emergence of the notion of modernity and its cultural meaning.

The following chapters of this study shall focus on the different articulations of the concept of *Stimmung* in European works of narrative fiction spanning from 1864 to 1985. I have concentrated upon the genre of narrative fiction as my main corpus for examining the modes of *Stimmung* in literature since, in my view, it harbours the most sustained and intense relationship between the text and the reader. Forms of *Stimmung* are, beyond doubt, just as important in drama and poetry, but for the purpose of keeping the field of enquiry for this study as well-defined as possible, I will mainly confine my analysis to the narrative texts of the chosen authors.

My analysis starts with the novels of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, whose work temporally coincides with Baudelaire's inauguration of the self-aware epoch of modernity. Writing from the Russian 'outsider' perspective on the emergence of European modernity, his novels express a dialectical relationship with the notion of the modern: although they are to some degree arrested in the nostalgia of a Slavophile anti-modernity, they, at the same time, indicate of a strong sense of being propelled into the existential and aesthetic condition of the modern. From this relationship springs an emphasis on existential questions as well as the emergence of new, intense forms of aesthetic affect that would shape modern literature and which I will analyse through the lens of *Stimmung*.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus to the narrative works of Samuel Beckett. Continuing and enforcing the existential perspective that is introduced in Dostoevsky's works, Beckett's early novels in particular display an overt interest in the question of attunement, situating it within the discourse of musical and aesthetic harmony as well as within the question of the modern existential condition. This juxtaposition of aesthetic and existential concerns creates a potential for ontological reflection, which, on another level, also deeply affect the relationship between the text and the reader.

Finally, the last chapter in this overview of how *Stimmung* articulates itself within modern European fiction looks at the late narrative *œuvre* of Thomas Bernhard, an author whose works are deeply entrenched in an understanding of art that revolves around forms of *Stimmung* and affectedness. I will relate Bernhard's prose to an aesthetic notion of musicality in the medium of literature that is shaped by the idea of attunement and will outline to what extent Bernhard's later novels engender and exemplify an art theory that centres on *Stimmung* and significantly prioritises the aesthetic experience. In all my readings, what I call the experience of the reader will be constructed phenomenologically, on the basis of observable textual structures rather than based on empirical data regarding reader responses.

Although the dimension of *Stimmung* plays a role in all works of art, as Gumbrecht has pointed out, I have focused attention here on a number of texts that render the structures and modes creating forms of attunement more observable and, in doing so, either implicitly or explicitly reflect on this fundamental aesthetic category. All of the three canonical authors under discussion display a distinct preoccupation with the question of existence in relation to the notion of modernity, which they pose via the issue of attunement. At the same time, the existential dimension of this phenomenon significantly informs their approach to aesthetic form and to the reading process, thus offering new ways of thinking about the nature of *Stimmung* and its existential and aesthetic dimensions. I will therefore not simply attempt to apply the concept of literary attunement, as I have developed it in this chapter, to these texts. Instead, I aim to significantly develop this concept further and to shed a light on its role and articulations in the context of modern fiction through my reading of the chosen works. Not only will I thus critically discuss the manifestations of the aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* in the context of literary modernity; I will also make a contribution to the scholarship on Dostoevsky, Beckett and Bernhard by outlining a dimension in their work that has, thus far, been largely overlooked.

Chapter 2

Stimmung in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Poetics of Modernity

I.   Introduction: Modernity and Affect

In his excellent study *Petersburg Fin de Siècle* (2011), Mark D. Steinberg sheds light on the relationship between urban modernity and social mood in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, detecting 'a darkening, even despairing, public mood in the face of many troubling conditions'[1] in *fin-de-siècle* Saint Petersburg. Describing the crammed, intense urban modernity of Tsarist Petersburg, Steinberg argues that the public developed an awareness of the moods that shaped social reality and actively integrated them into a discourse on modern life:

> Anxious talk of emotion filled the urban public sphere in Russia during these years of disorder, drift, and uncertainty. Questions about mood, feeling, and affect—particularly what was called the 'public mood' or 'social mood' (*obshchestvennoe nastroenie*)—became literally the talk of the town, concerning not only particular problems like street life or death or debauchery, but the very nature of modern times. This emotion talk was intensely social: shared, circulated, and analyzed in the periodical press and other public spaces and interpreted as having social location, causes, and effects. And talk about public emotions was itself emotional: not simply a description of the feelings of others, but an anxious, obsessive, even panicked part of the public mood (indeed, it helped shape that mood)[2].

Mood in urban Petersburg thus became a crucial subject matter in its own right, and one that deeply informed the social imagination as well as artistic production and reception. In this chapter I will argue that, through its dependence on urban space and intersubjective experience, the notion of aesthetic modernity that developed in the nineteenth century is fundamentally intertwined with articulations of and reflections on the concept of *Stimmung*. Modernity's urbanity, its emphasis on the crowds and their coalescing, often colluding, forms of affect, were the backdrop against which the dominant current-day notions of mood as we know them – social, individual, aesthetic and existential – emerged.

I will exemplify this primarily through reference to the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), whose novels are as deeply embedded in this modernity as

---

[1] Mark D. Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siècle* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 199.
[2] Ibid., p. 234.

they are concerned with the influence it exerted on the individual in a psychological, social, political and spiritual sense. Dostoevsky was one of the first writers to recognise the fundamental interdependence of existentialist questions and forms of *Stimmung* and he thus became a key contributor to the development of a modern aesthetic of attunement, pioneering ways of enacting and negotiating moods that would shape the development of modern fiction through an emphasis on space and modes of affect.

As one of the most influential novelists of early modernity, Dostoevsky comprehensively examined the human condition and the nature of being in his works, to such an extent that he is commonly considered a founding father of aesthetic existentialism. Walter Kaufmann considers Dostoevsky's novella *Notes from Underground* («Записки из подполья», 1864) as 'the best overture for existentialism ever written'[3], while Jeff Malpas finds that '[f]rom a purely literary perspective, the key figure in the development of existentialism is not so much Kierkegaard or Nietzsche as Feodor Dostoevsky'[4]. By executing a pathological study of human existence on the edge of sanity and reason, Dostoevsky was simultaneously also intensely concerned with the effect of modernity on the human psyche. In *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman allots Dostoevsky an eminent position in the development of modern literature[5], describing him both as an heir and aesthetic antipole to Baudelaire's *modernité*. While Berman recognises the influence of the aesthetic fluidity and 'gaseousness'[6] of space and atmosphere championed by Baudelaire's writing in Dostoevsky's works, he considers the latter's late nineteenth-century Saint Petersburg as the underdeveloped, Eastern twin to the former's dazzling modern metropolis Paris. Modernity, Berman argues, divided Dostoevsky's Russia between the old capital Moscow and the superficially Westernised façade of Petersburg, which was founded as a new and modern capital, between the higher classes' desire for European progress and modernisation and the lower classes' bewilderment with their effect. According to Berman, modernity in nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia was hence 'something that was happening only in the most

---

[3] Walter Kaufmann, 'Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. by Kaufmann, revised and expanded ed. (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1975), pp. 11-51 (p. 14).

[4] Jeff Malpas, 'Existentialism as Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. by Steven Crowell (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 291-321 (p. 296).

[5] Cf. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, pp. 229-34.

[6] Ibid., p. 144.

jagged, halting, blatantly abortive or weirdly distorted ways'[7], a notion that permeates Dostoevsky's portrayals of Petersburg and of the 'modern condition'.

As a result, many Russian intellectuals developed anti-Western, Slavophile sentiments, emphasising the uniqueness of the Russian spirit in opposition to their Western European counterparts, as expressed in Dostoevsky's musings in *A Writer's Diary* («Дневник писателя», 1873-81). Nevertheless, according to Berman, the urban aesthetics of Dostoevsky's texts, like Baudelaire's, offer 'primal modern scenes' with 'everyday encounters in the city street that are raised to first intensity […], to the point where they express fundamental possibilities and pitfalls, allures and impasses of modern life'[8]. Despite Dostoevsky's own scepticism regarding Western modernisation, Berman therefore considers him part of the first wave of writers responding to the newly developed mode of experience that he calls modernity. The notion of intensity that Berman – and before him Alex de Jonge[9] – observes in relation to the Russian novelist's works will provide the point of departure for my analysis of Dostoevsky's aesthetics of *Stimmung* as part and parcel of a modern inquiry into human experience that is inextricably tied up with existential concerns. The 'comorbidity' of a budding existentialism and an emergent modernity in Dostoevsky's *œuvre* points towards the ways in which the far-reaching epistemological paradigm shifts that modernity represents called for a re-evaluation of the conditions of existence and, by implication, of *Stimmung* that materialises in the novels. I will demonstrate that Dostoevsky's preoccupation with the human condition in the context of modernity stylistically results in literary actualisations and explorations of affect and attunement, and that these elements constitute one of the most central elements in his writing and in the aesthetic reception thereof, while simultaneously setting the scene for a modern aesthetic of *Stimmung* that would considerably influence twentieth-century literature.

After his life-changing near-death experience and imprisonment in a labour camp in Siberia – which were the consequences of his involvement with the progressive Petrashevsky Circle – Dostoevsky entered the most prolific phase of his writing career in the 1860s, a decade which 'brought to the fore nearly all the

---

[7] Ibid., p. 175.
[8] Ibid., p. 229.
[9] Cf. Alex de Jonge, *Dostoevsky and The Age of Intensity* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975).

problems with which modern man has grappled ever since'[10]. During this middle period of his artistic career, which was informed by extensive travels through Europe, the loss of his first wife and his brother Mikhail, gambling addiction and constant financial anxiety, he composed a number of what would become his most influential works: *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment* («Преступление и наказание», 1866), *The Gambler* («Игрок», 1867) and *The Idiot* («Идиот», 1868-9). The aesthetics developed in these texts, and their portrayal of the human psyche in particular, demonstrate to what extent Dostoevsky 'both anticipates and, through his enormous influence on twentieth-century art and thought, helps to shape modern consciousness'[11]. My analysis of forms of attunement as, firstly, an integral element of existentialist concerns and, secondly, a crucial defining element of aesthetic modernity in Dostoevsky's works structurally aligns itself with a division suggested by Sarah J. Young, who proposes that up until *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky's aesthetic focus lies with the minds of solipsistic individuals, whereas from *The Idiot* onwards, the psychological dynamics of social interaction take centre stage in his texts[12]. I will therefore start by examining the subjective psychology and spatial poetics displayed in earlier works, with a focus on *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*, and will then proceed to analysing forms of intersubjective affect in *The Idiot* to conclude with an outline of the distinctly modern aesthetics of transsubjectivity in Dostoevsky's narrative fiction.

---

[10] Richard Freeborn, 'The Nineteenth Century: The Age of Realism, 1855–80', in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. by Charles A. Moser, revised ed. (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 248-332 (p. 249).

[11] Robert Russell, 'The Modernist Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 210-29 (p. 214).

[12] Sarah J. Young, 'Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881): Fantastic Realism' in *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, ed. by Michael Bell (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 259-76 (p. 266).

Alienation and the Modern Experience: *Notes from Underground* and

Crime and Punishment

A 'song of songs on individuality'

Both the novella *Notes from Underground* and the accomplished novel *Crime and Punishment* instigate a perspective on the intensity and immediacy of a single mind: that of the 'underground man', as he has been named by readers and critics, a spiteful former government clerk and self-declared 'sick man'[13] [*человек больной*[14]], and that of Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, an ex-student who commits double murder to prove a philosophical theory, respectively. Considered two of the greatest characters Dostoevsky created[15], both men are isolated, discontented and nihilistic outsiders living in urban Petersburg. The texts take us into their idiosyncratic, obsessive minds, representing consciousness in new and innovative ways through forms of 'intensely internalised discourse'[16] that considerably influenced the development of forms of portraying subjective experience in twentieth-century aesthetic modernism.

The first-person narrative of the *Notes* gives readers the sense of having direct insight into the thought processes of the underground man, while the third-person narrator of *Crime and Punishment*, though also intermittently depicting the perspectives of other characters such as Raskolnikov's friend Razumikhin, his sister Dunya and the virtuous prostitute Sonya Marmeladova, very much revolves around Raskolnikov's delirious, solipsistic point of view. The fact that the novel was initially also intended as a first-person narrative[17] articulates itself in its intense focus on

---

[13] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground,* trans. and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2006), p. 3.

[14] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья» (Санкт-Петербург: Издательский Дом Азбука-классика, 2008), p. 43.

[15] Cf. Bernard J. Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters: A New Approach to 'Notes from the Underground', 'Crime and Punishment', and 'The Brothers Karamazov'* (New York and Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. xi.

[16] Young, 'Fyodor Dostoevsky', p. 266.

[17] In his edition of Dostoevsky's *Notebooks for 'Crime and Punishment'* (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), Edward Wasiolek describes the difficulty Dostoevsky encountered in settling on a narrative perspective for the novel:

> [In the *Notebooks*, Dostoevsky] experiments with three forms, the first-person as diary and as memory, and the third-person, which in a kind of limited omniscience constitutes the narrative manner of the finished version. He also briefly considers two other forms: the first-person as 'confession' and a mixed form of drama and diary. He left the 'I-form' with reluctance, taking it through several variations and leaving us with two large fragments in the

Raskolnikov, encompassing stream-of-consciousness techniques and surreal, dream-like sequences. At the same time, the radical subjectivity of both texts and their concern with fundamental questions of existence are intimately connected with the poetics of space they display: both in the *Notes* and in *Crime and Punishment*, Petersburg takes on a major role that permeates the characters' thoughts and actions. In the following, I will explore the motif of existential solipsism and individual psychology in relation to the significance of space in both texts, aiming to outline the nature of spatial affectivity in Dostoevsky's depiction of the modern condition.

The underground man speaks to us from the underbelly of society. As becomes apparent in the course of the novella, his 'underground' is not an actual subterranean space but the metaphor the narrator uses for his antisocial, disillusioned mode of existence and the failure of revolutionary and utopian idealism. While the first part of the novella introduces the underground man and his views on various philosophical and societal issues, in the second part the narrator relates a series of events he experienced as a younger man, most notably his encounter with the prostitute Liza, whom he first opens up to but then humiliates and drives away. Walter Kaufmann considers the *Notes* as 'an unheard-of song of songs on individuality: not classical, not Biblical, and not at all romantic'[18]. He goes on to argue that, unlike the Romantic concept of the individual genius, the notion of the individual construed in the text is not at all a positive or attractive one: 'No, individuality is not re-touched, idealized, or holy; it is wretched and revolting, and yet, for all its misery, the highest good'[19]. Indeed, the unnamed underground man seems to revel in his own squalor and dissects himself in the harshest manner; and yet, he celebrates his individuality, even indulges himself as he notes at the end of the first chapter: 'А впрочем: о чем может говорить порядочный человек с наибольшим удовольствием? Ответ: о себе. Ну так и я буду говорить о себе'[20] ['But anyhow: what can a decent man speak about with the most pleasure? Answer:

---

notebooks. […] Dostoevsky, I hazard, thought of the 'I-form' as a way of gaining immediacy, of dramatizing the self in touch with its own crisis, but the long extended passage in the second notebook shows us that the 'I-form' took him away from the immediacy he sought, turning what was meant to be immediate into something analyzed, self-conscious, and schematic (Wasiolek in Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for 'Crime and Punishment'*, p. 9).

[18] Kaufmann, 'Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', p. 12.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», p. 47.

about himself. So then I, too, will speak about myself'[21]]. His distinctive narrative voice and musings about his life thus dominate the narrative, which is infested by an uncompromising, obsessive solipsism only relativised through the preface and afterword signed by the author, indicating that the underground man and his notes are merely fictional. In this excessive rendition of the Cartesian 'cogito', the self becomes the axis of any form of reflection but also of its own destruction.

Similarly, the opening sequence of *Crime and Punishment* portrays Raskolnikov's intense isolation, equalling that of the underground man: 'Он до того углубился в себя и уединился от всех, что боялся даже всякой встречи, не только встречи с хозяйкой'[22] ['He had become so completely absorbed in himself and isolated from his fellows that he dreaded meeting not only his landlady, but anyone at all'[23]]. The verbs *углубиться* ['to become engrossed'] and *уединиться* ['to isolate oneself'] both contain the prefix '*у*,' which express a move away from something, while the reflexive suffix '*ся*' describes Raskolnikov's turn away from everything and everyone and in onto himself. More specifically, the noun '*глубь*' contained in the first verb signifies 'depth' and interiority, echoing the notion of the 'underground', whereas *уединиться* derives from *единый*, which means 'single' or 'one', and thus underlines the sense of singularity. From this isolation, which is an integral part of Raskolnikov's conviction of his existential singularity, setting him apart from the 'normal' people, he develops the idea that extraordinary figures, like Napoleon Bonaparte, are above the law and are therefore allowed to commit any action they deem necessary. To prove his point, Raskolnikov, whose telling names echoes *раскол*, 'split' or 'schism'[24], murders an old pawnbroker named Alyona Ivanovna, and in the heat of the moment also kills her innocent simple-minded sister Lizaveta when she walks in on the crime. Following his deed, Raskolnikov undergoes an intense, feverish delirium. Once recovered, he finds himself confronted with the alcoholic Marmeladov and his innocent daughter Sonya, who became a prostitute to support her impoverished family, his mother and sister, who have come to see him in Petersburg, and the detective Porfiry Petrovich, whose investigation soon begins to close in on Raskolnikov. Plagued by his conscience and pressured by the amoral Svidrigaylov, his sister's former employer,

---

[21] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 6.
[22] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание» (Кишинев: Издательство Лумина, 1969), p. 3.
[23] Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by Constance Garnett (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p. 3.
[24] Cf. Charles E. Passage, *Character Names in Dostoevsky's Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982), p. 58.

Raskolnikov first confesses to Sonya and then to the authorities, and is ultimately sent to Siberia to serve his sentence, where Sonya aids him in atoning for his crime.

Both the *Notes* and *Crime and Punishment* thus examine the dark, twisted and ugly side of the human condition, its metaphorical underground, exploring the existentialist notion that human beings create themselves from their freedom, as is shown in Raskolnikov's attempt to prove his individuality and freedom through the murder of the old pawnbroker[25]. Though both protagonists isolate themselves from society and encounter it only with reluctance and disgust – thus anticipating Jean-Paul Sartre's exploration of existential and physical nausea – their states of mind are inextricably connected to the social and physical environment modern Petersburg produces. My argument aims to counteract the common notion that Dostoevsky's writing is best interpreted on a metaphysical plane, which was first and most succinctly expressed in Dmitry Merezhkovsky's essay 'L. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky' (1900/1901). Merezhkovsky therein argues that Tolstoy's materially grounded realism and representations of consciousness render him a 'seer of the flesh', whereas Dostoevsky's concern with the human psyche makes him a 'seer of the mind'[26] with a limited interest in the level of physical existence. As opposed to this dichotomy, in my view Dostoevsky's intense spatial poetics strongly ground the metaphysical aspect of his work in physically concrete environments and the materiality of a pervasive modern form of *Stimmung*.

A closer look at the role of space in the two texts reveals the significance and physicality of Petersburg as their setting: as the lawyer Luzhin, who intends to marry Raskolnikov's sister, suggests, Petersburg is the Russian centre of the new, modern way of life, the breeding ground for modern ideas and reforms: 'Я, видите ли, уже десять лет не посещал Петербурга. Все эти наши новости, реформы, идеи – все это и до нас прикоснулось в провинции; но чтобы видеть яснее и видеть все, надобно быть в Петербурге'[27] ['You see, it's ten years since I visited Petersburg. All the novelties, reforms, ideas have reached us in the provinces, but to see it all more clearly one must be in Petersburg'[28]]. As both the *Notes* and *Crime and Punishment*

---

[25] Cf. Patrick Lyall Bourgeois, 'Dostoevsky and Existentialism: An Experiment in Hermeneutics', *Journal of Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1980), 29-37 (p. 34).

[26] Merezhkovsky qtd. in Kenneth Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 437.

[27] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание», p. 127.

[28] Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 128.

portray, Petersburg's modernity – which manifests itself, on the one hand, materially in the concrete spatial environment of the city, influenced by modern technology, architecture and capitalism, and, on the other hand, immaterially through the dissemination of Western ideas – severely impacts the psychological and spiritual condition of the individual, producing a sense of alienation and disintegration that would become an existential and aesthetic *Grundstimmung* emblematic of the modern experience.

The Abstract Concreteness of Dostoevsky's Petersburg

> Мне говорят, что климат петербургский мне становится вреден и что с моими ничтожными средствами очень дорого в Петербурге жить. Я все это знаю, лучше всех этих опытных и премудрых советчиков и покивателей знаю. Но я остаюсь в Петербурге; я не выеду из Петербурга! Я потому не выеду… Эх! да ведь это совершенно все равно - выеду я иль не выеду[29].

> [I'm told that the Petersburg climate is beginning to do me harm, and that with my negligible means life in Petersburg is very expensive. I know all that, I know it better than all these experienced and most wise counsellors and waggers of heads. But I am staying in Petersburg; I will not leave Petersburg! I will not leave because… Eh! but it's all completely the same whether I leave or not[30].]

Thus describes the underground man his relationship to Petersburg: although the city is detrimental to his health and despite his claim that it makes no difference to him, he cannot – and will not – live anywhere else. It is the 'climate' [климат], in Dostoevsky's works a recurrent term signifying a spatialised transsubjective mood, of the capital in particular that puts him on edge, its meteorological characteristics being symbolic of the urban and social atmosphere that conditions the underground man's mode of existence. His disgust with himself and society emerges as a response to the social disparities of urban life, the experience of an anonymous modern society in the busy Petersburg streets, especially on Nevsky Prospect, and his crammed, unsightly quarters. Physical concreteness of space and metaphysical meaning converge as the underground man describes Petersburg as the 'most abstract' [*самом отвлеченном*] and 'intentional' [*умышленном*] city in the world:

> Для человеческого обихода слишком было бы достаточно обыкновенного человеческого сознания, то есть в половину, в четверть меньше той порции, которая достается на долю развитого человека нашего несчастного девятнадцатого столетия

---

29 Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», p. 46.

30 Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 6.

и, сверх того, имеющего сугубое несчастье обитать в Петербурге, самом отвлеченном и умышленном городе на всем земном шаре[31].

[For a man's everyday use, ordinary human consciousness would be more than enough; that is, a half, a quarter of the portion that falls to the lot of a developed man in our unfortunate nineteenth century, who, on top of that, has the added misfortune of residing in Petersburg, the most abstract and intentional city on the entire globe[32].]

In Dostoevsky's texts, the urban geography of nineteenth-century Petersburg juxtaposes allegorical meaning with lived actuality. After he seized the territory it was built on from the Swedish, Peter the Great intended the city as a symbolic new capital opening Russia to Europe and had it minutely planned by architects such as Domenico Trezzini. Its intended symbolic value and geometric design suggest the way in which the city of Petersburg materialises an idea – one of progress, modernity and grandeur – that is, however, contrasted with a manifest reality dominated by bleakness, squalor, poverty and illness, creating a modern 'inferno'[33] in the shape of a metropolis. Perceiving life in Petersburg as a curse to his consciousness, the underground man's existential condition, simultaneously, emerges as a product of Petersburg's urban modernity. As Abraham Akkerman points out in his discussion of the relationship between urban space and mood disorders, nineteenth-century Petersburg became the epitome of the 'winter-city' that was associated with urban alienation and depersonalisation, a circumstance that resulted from its specific geography and climate as well as its societal configuration[34].

A similar depiction of the city can be found in *Crime and Punishment*, which represents Raskolnikov's 'sick, hallucinatory apprehension of reality' in a 'crowded, fetid, urban ant-heap of a world, packed with "voices" and given to a baroquely detailed authenticity'[35]. Critics have meticulously identified the locations described in the novel as actual historical places in Petersburg[36], discovering the ways in which Dostoevsky used the space of his own lived experience as a setting for Raskolnikov's narrative. Underlining the gloom, misery and poverty of the lower classes living off the illustrious Nevsky Prospect, the novel suggests that Raskolnikov's aberrant

---

[31] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», p. 47.
[32] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 7.
[33] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. 93.
[34] Abraham Akkerman, *Phenomenology of the Winter-City: Myth in the Rise and Decline of Built Environments* (Heidelberg et al.: Springer, 2016), p. 186.
[35] Freeborn, 'The Classic Russian Novel', in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-10 (p. 106).
[36] Cf. Robert Belknap, 'St. Petersburg', in *Dostoevsky in Context*, ed. by Deborah A. Martinsen and Olga Maiorova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 168-75 (pp. 173f.).

philosophical considerations and feverish delinquency may result from his living in the Petersburg of the 'unfortunate nineteenth century'. The morally depraved Svidrigaylov, who is suspected of having murdered his wife and who then blackmails Raskolnikov's sister, describes the city as a breeding ground for different kinds of maladies and pathological behaviour:

> [Я] убежден, что в Петербурге много народу, ходя, говорят сами с собой. Это город полусумасшедших. Если б у нас были науки, то медики, юристы и философы могли бы сделать над Петербургом драгоценнейшие исследования, каждый по своей специальности. Редко где найдется столько мрачных, резких и странных влияний на душу человека, как в Петербурге. *Чего стоят одни климатические влияния!* Между тем это административный центр всей России, и характер его должен отражаться на всем[37] (my emphasis).

> [I'm convinced there are lots of people in Petersburg who talk to themselves as they walk. This is a town of crazy people. If only we had scientific men – doctors, lawyers and philosophers – they might make most valuable investigations in Petersburg each in his own line. There are few places where there are so many gloomy, strong and queer influences on the soul of man as in Petersburg. *The mere influences of climate mean so much.* And it's the administrative centre of all Russia and its character must be reflected on the whole country[38] (my emphasis).]

The 'gloomy' [*мрачный*] influence that Petersburg and its 'climate' exert on the human mind is reflected in particular in Rakolnikov's destitute, oppressive lodgings, which he alternately describes as a 'den' [*каморка*] or 'kennel' [*конура*]. When he eventually confesses his crime to Sonya, he depicts the time leading up to the murders as one during which he completely isolated himself in his room, exacerbating his agitated mental state, although he was very much aware of the effect his isolation had on him:

> Я тогда, как паук, к себе в угол забился. Ты ведь была в моей конуре, видела… А знаешь ли, Соня, что низкие потолки и тесные комнаты душу и ум теснят! О, как ненавидел я эту конуру! А все-таки выходить из нее не хотел. Нарочно не хотел! По суткам не выходил, и работать не хотел, и даже есть не хотел, все лежал. Принесет Настасья – поем, не принесет – так и день пройдет; нарочно со зла не спрашивал! Ночью огня нет, лежу в темноте, а на свечи не хочу заработать. Надо было учиться, я книги распродал; а на столе у меня, на записках да на тетрадях, на палец и теперь пыли лежит. Я лучше любил лежать и думать. И все думал… И все такие у меня были сны, странные, разные сны, нечего говорить какие! Но только тогда начало мне тоже мерещиться, что…[39]

> [I sat in my room like a spider. You've been in my den, you've seen it… And do you know, Sonia, that low ceilings and tiny rooms cramp the soul and the mind? Ah, how I hated that garret! And yet I wouldn't go out of it! I wouldn't on purpose! I didn't go out for days

---

[37] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание», pp. 403f.
[38] Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 392f.
[39] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание», p. 361.

together, and I wouldn't work, I wouldn't even eat, I just lay there doing nothing. If Nastasya brought me anything, I ate it, if she didn't, I went all day without; I wouldn't ask, on purpose, from sulkiness! At night I had no light, I lay in the dark and I wouldn't earn money for candles. I ought to have studied, but I sold my books; and the dust lies an inch thick on the notebooks on my table. I preferred lying still and thinking. And I kept thinking… And I had dreams all the time, strange dreams of all sorts, no need to describe! Only then I began to fancy that…[40]]

The room is portrayed as the root of Raskolnikov's mental state being aggravated to the extent that makes him commit the murders; only as his isolation and the oppressiveness of his surroundings start to throng [*теснят*] his mind, Raskolnikov's obsession with his theory that he stands above the law 'normal' people must follow, begins to flourish.

At the same time, however, Raskolnikov's plan to murder the old pawnbroker is fuelled by economic necessity and the dehumanising experience of urban poverty. The connection between urban modernity and material need pervades the entire novel, in which only characters travelling to Petersburg from other parts of Russia – Luzhin and Svidrigaylov – are not afflicted by financial troubles. The city thus generates a structure of existential deficiency and lack in the context of civic life that is associated with modern capitalism and the development of a dehumanising, radically uneven modernity, adding a financial level of concrete materialism to the spiritual erosion depicted in the text. In his poverty-stricken Petersburg existence, Raskolnikov describes himself as a spider, an image that is part of a recurrent trope of dehumanisation through modern life in Dostoevsky's writing: elsewhere, he calls himself – and the old pawnbroker – a 'louse', and likewise, the underground man repeatedly refers to being an 'insect,' while the surreal 1865 short story 'The Crocodile' («Крокодил») describes a man being swallowed alive by a crocodile and continuing to live inside of it (and, naturally, the image of the alienated, dehumanised modern individual would later prominently resurface in Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* in 1915).

Bizarrely, both Raskolnikov and the underground man display an awareness of the effect the urban environment takes on them; but nevertheless, they both remain in Petersburg and in their claustrophobic lodgings, as if to intentionally intensify their existential crises. In this 'suffocating psychological enclosure from

---

[40] Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 351.

which escape seems impossible'[41], the characters' violent individuality and solipsism, as well as their intensity of experience and affect, are supplied by the materiality of urban modernity, a modernity which thus becomes both an affliction and an addiction. Consequently, Raskolnikov eventually only experiences true atonement and a spiritual 'resurrection' away from Petersburg, in the Siberian labour camp, as he overlooks the landscape from a river bank. This critical mode of existence thus seems contingent on the urban experience and on being in the condition of modern alienation [*Entfremdung*], defined as an estrangement from one's own self as originally described by Hegel and then adapted by Karl Marx in his critique of modern capitalism[42]. Indeed, both Raskolnikov and the underground man are estranged from their own identities, the former being marked by his eponymous schism of the self, while the latter is not even identified by name and takes on several identities and voices in the course of his narrative. The loss of a sense of self, as it is repeatedly portrayed in Raskolnikov's feverish state, and an anonymity that borders on non-identity thus become symptomatic of a distinctive new mode of experience.

Robert Alter, in *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*, suggests that

> the filth, disorder, and oppressiveness of the city are repeatedly seen from Raskolnikov's fevered point of view, but there is also an implicit overview of the modern city as something that objectively has become a site of social and moral pathology[43].

Alter relates this notion to the aesthetics of urban space in the novels of Charles Dickens, whose work exerted an important influence on Dostoevsky's writing[44]. Indeed, Dickens pioneered an aesthetic of the urban environment in his portrayal of nineteenth-century London, which foregrounded a sense of alienation and uncertainty as well as the experience of the urban squalor and of the crowds[45], and which strongly resonates in Dostoevsky's depiction of Petersburg. The city as a space of uncertainty and possibility, of contingency and transience, thus takes on a crucial role in Dostoevsky's existential study of the modern condition: the characters do not

---

[41] Robert A. Maguire, 'The City', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 21-40 (p. 28).
[42] Cf. Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3-5.
[43] Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 54.
[44] Cf. ibid., p. 81.
[45] Cf. F.S. Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1979), pp. 213; 218-23.

exist independently from their urban milieu and are inextricably entangled in the modern space of their lived experience, which defines their existential mode of being, rendering them 'symptoms' of the modern city. In Heideggerian terms, Dostoevsky's depiction of Petersburg replaces essential being with necessarily contingent Being-in-the-World. However, the spatial poetics in the texts exceed a straightforward materialist determinism: the underground man and Raskolnikov are not mere products of Petersburg's 'distorted' modernity. Instead, they engage quite literally with the spatial dynamics of the city through the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein*, through presence and projection into their concrete physical environment as a mode of 'being-there'.

Space and consciousness thus become the two elements negotiated in a process of disharmonious attunement emerging from Dostoevsky's Petersburg texts in particular. Perhaps it is this specific historical moment that consolidated the disturbed relationship between self and world that Heidegger would come to describe: not only did the infrastructural vicissitude of the modern world impact on individuals, but it is also the erosion of religion, philosophy and belief systems in general that is demonstrated in the figures of the underground man and Raskolnikov, who thinks of himself as a form of Nietzschean[46] *Übermensch*, that makes Dostoevsky's modernity collapse into an existential abyss. As the investigator Porfiry Petrovich observes, Raskolnikov's case is a specifically 'modern' one, the result of a 'climate of mind'[47]: 'Тут дело фантастическое, мрачное, дело современное, нашего времени случай-с, когда помутилось сердце человеческое; когда цитуется фраза, что кровь «освежает»; когда вся жизнь проповедуется в комфорте. Тут книжные мечты-с, тут теоретически раздраженное сердце'[48] ['This is a fantastic, gloomy business, a modern case, an incident of today when the heart of man is troubled, when the phrase is quoted that blood "renews", when comfort is preached as the aim of life. Here we have bookish dreams, a heart unhinged by theories'[49]]. Resulting from the nihilistic notion that to him, all is permitted, Raskolnikov's crime betrays a societal crisis in nineteenth-century thought and existence, in which Karl

---

[46] For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, cf. P. Travis Kroeker and Bruce K. Ward, *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity* (Oxford and Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), pp. 135-138; 169-173.

[47] Gary Saul Morson, 'Philosophy in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 150-68 (p. 161).

[48] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание», p. 394.

[49] Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 383.

Marx and Friedrich Engels's famous description of industrial modernity – which Berman uses as the theoretical backdrop for his definition of the modern – aptly portrays an ethic and existential dilemma:

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind[50].

Through this lack of existential stability, characters find themselves 'thrown' into a dizzying world of uncertainty and constant change that seems, at the same time, inescapable. The human subject is made to face the conditions of its own existence as well as its fundamental relationality with others. Here, in the absence of universally applicable norms or modes of existence, the notion of the individual and the concreteness of material presence become the axes around which experience revolves. Cultural *Stimmung*, or 'climate,' as it is denominated in the texts, thus becomes part and parcel of a new paradigm of presence, perception and contingency that structures experience, while presupposing a singularity of being that betrays a larger societal pathology[51].

Solipsism and Company

In Dostoevsky's works, spatiality and self are thus inextricably tied up in a structure of co-dependence that is, however, marked by disharmony. They neither posit a form of idealism nor of materialism: while his characters' minds are shown to be unreliable, distorted and contingent on their physical environment, the material dimension of existence can nevertheless only be accessed through forms of individual subjectivity and the relationship established between the mind and the spatial geography surrounding it. The term 'climate' therein comes to signify a concrete material and transsubjective affective impact on the subject: in his mood-oriented analysis of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), Gumbrecht notes that in Mann's novella, the weather and physical climate converge with the protagonist Aschenbach's consciousness, indicating a tangible form of material affect that

---

[50] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Isaac, trans. by Samuel Moors (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 77.
[51] Cf. Andrew Wachtel, 'Psychology and Society', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 130-49 (p. 130).

transcends the individual[52]. Likewise, the notion of an epochal climate or *Grundstimmung* that Dreyfus derives from Heidegger's ontology of mood is related to concrete physical actuality, and thus becomes a cornerstone of the material and affective structures in Dostoevsky's Petersburg texts. The particular climate, infrastructure and social dynamics of Petersburg exert a sense of gloom and sickness on their characters, which is internalised and given expression to via the pervasive images of illness and pathological behaviour: Raskolnikov's fever, the underground man's liver and tooth pain, Marmeladov's alcoholism, the consumption of his wife Katerina Ivanovna and Svidrigaylov's moral depravity and eventual suicide all constitute a physical attestation of the diseased surface of the process of modernisation.

The notion of solipsism in both the *Notes* and *Crime and Punishment* is thereby relativised by the fact that modernity is presented as a disease affecting the entire civic body of Petersburg as the diseased characters, in turn, reflect the pervasive cultural climate back onto the scenery, and in a second move, extend it to readers by taking them into the inner workings of their minds and mental geographies. Malcolm V. Jones therefore suggests – aptly enough, given this structure – that 'there are other places where the city also becomes an instrument for Dostoevsky to reproduce *in us* what his character is experiencing at the moment'[53] (my emphasis). Through the transsubjective materiality of the climate as well as the implied presence of a reader in the narrative act[54], particularly in the *Notes*, where the narrator frequently addresses the reader and anticipates her responses to his narrative, the possibility of breaking the spell of radical solipsism is thus put forward: since the underground man speaks to the reader and adjusts his discourse to her imagined presence, the text is given an implied dialogic structure[55], which undermines the apparent solipsism of the modern experience generated in Dostoevsky's texts.

A similar notion of encountering and attuning to an other can be discerned in *Crime and Punishment*. At the beginning of the narrative, just after he commits the murders, Raskolnikov feels as if violently cut off from all other human beings: 'Ему показалось, что он как будто ножницами отрезал себя сам от всех у всево в эту

---

[52] Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, pp. 74-81.
[53] Belknap, 'St. Petersburg', p. 175.
[54] Cf. Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism.* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 61.
[55] Cf. ibid., p. 113.

минуту'[56] ['It seemed to him, he had cut himself off from everyone and from everything at that moment'[57]]. The classic English translation by Constance Garnett here leaves out the word '*ножницами*', which translates as 'with a pair of scissors,' further underlining the violence implied in Raskolnikov's isolation and feeding into the novel's pervasive imagery of forms of violence implied in the notion of modernity[58]. While an intense sense of isolation thus dominates the novel, Porfiry Petrovich disrupts Raskolnikov's perceived detachment by, as it were, getting into his head: immediately after the murders, Raskolnikov gives the detective reason to suspect him as the murderer, and once the common ground – the knowledge that he is indeed the culprit – is established between the two characters, an attunement between them takes its course. As Raskolnikov consistently attempts to anticipate Porfiry's next move, Porfiry's 'mind games' eventually lead Raskolnikov to confess to the murders as the detective becomes the hermeneut to Raskolnikov's deeds, thus stepping into the position of a reader and interpreter to the murderer's psychology.

Raskolnikov's gradual attunement to others is extended through his relationship with Sonya, and towards the end of the novel, he eventually feels as if there may be a possibility of being with others: on his way to confess the crime, he takes in the world around him intently and, significantly, looks at a sign saying 'Товарищество'[59] ['company,' 'comradeship' or 'fellowship'] – an image that will, in the latter part of this study, be explored further with regard to the idea of company in Beckett. Following this symbolic encounter, ultimately, Raskolnikov succeeds in overcoming his isolation and alienation during his imprisonment in Siberia through his love for Sonya, which reintegrates him into a form of human company.

The mode of existential crisis associated with the emergence of modernity in Dostoevsky's fiction is thus intimately connected with a pathology of the cultural sensibility of this age that manifests itself physically and metaphysically. The air of uncertainty surrounding Raskolnikov is translated into a narrative in which the protagonist, for most of the plot, himself does not even know what he is going to do – one moment, his plan to murder Alyona Ivanovna seems like madness to him, the

---

[56] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание» ,p. 99.
[57] Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 101.
[58] Other examples in the novel, besides the axe murders committed by Raskolnikov, are Marmeladov being run over and killed by a carriage, Raskolnikov's dream of a horse being beaten to death and Svidrigaylov's assumed murder of his wife as well as his gruesome suicide.
[59] Dostoevsky, «Преступление и наказание», p. 455.

next moment he finds himself on the way to her house to commit the crime. The reader and Raskolnikov thus discover the events and, later on, their true motivation together as the reader becomes involved in Raskolnikov's feverish thoughts and general sense of uncertainty, which implicates her in his moral conundrum. Positioning herself ethically in relation to the murders turns into a challenge as Raskolnikov's inconsistency impedes the reader's ability to form a persistent moral stance based on consonance or dissonance towards his actions. The same holds true for the underground man: while he overtly anticipates that the reader will loathe him as much as he loathes himself, his shifting sense of identity and inconsistent behaviour render an attunement to him mutable and inherently processual. The experiential dimension of the narrative thus comes to the fore in both texts, wherein the process of negotiating the reader's attunement to the respective protagonist takes on a pivotal role and unsettles any fixed ethical and existential position.

The solipsism of Dostoevsky's antiheroes, which simultaneously indicates the notion of the 'unity of the modern self and the modern environment'[60], is thus countered with the presence of an other, either on a textual level or in the narrative communication with the reader, whose significance in the process of aesthetic interaction significantly increases in the texts to follow the two works discussed in this section. *The Idiot*, in the chronology of Dostoevsky's *œuvre* the second of the so-called 'great novels', replaces the notion of the individual dominant in its predecessors with a focus on group dynamics and shared forms of affect. As Sarah J. Young observes,

> [f]rom *The Idiot* onwards, attention shifts from the workings of a single consciousness to the dynamics of the crowd and the external interplay between characters. Internalised dialogue becomes much less frequent, and instead the characters' self-presentation dominates, in the form of inserted narratives and speeches directed towards the external other[61].

In this context, 'climate' and affect no longer remain phenomenona reflecting in the individual, as they largely do in Raskolnikov's delirium and the underground man's nausea: as I will demonstrate in the following section, in *The Idiot*, individual psychology is transcended by shared forms of mood and attunement, even more so than in the collective sense of disease already latent in its predecessors, which generates an intensely mood-driven relationship between reader and text.

---

[60] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 132.
[61] Young, 'Fyodor Dostoevsky', p. 266.

III.   The Intensity of Aesthetic Experience in *The Idiot*

<u>From Christology to Aesthetic Immediacy</u>

The Idiot has received a number of superlatives from critics, such as being the 'most challenging and obscure of Dostoevsky's novels'[62], 'perhaps the strangest and most problematic of [his] major fictional works'[63], his 'darkest and most tragic novel'[64] and even 'the strangest of the world's great novels'[65]. As such, although it is commonly included in the pentad of Dostoevsky's 'great novels,' it is generally lesser known than for example *Crime and Punishment* and his monumental last novel *The Brothers Karamazov* («Братья Карамазовы», 1879-80), the reason for which may lie in *The Idiot*'s frenzied, dream-like, disordered narrative. According to Konstantin Mochulsky, the novel constitutes a continuation, and even exacerbation, of the existential crisis depicted in Raskolnikov's struggle:

> in *Crime and Punishment* the crisis of consciousness is concentrated in one soul, which has plunged out of the old world-order. In *The Idiot* all the dramatis personae are drawn into this crisis, all belong to a perishing world. […] The world of the novel *The Idiot* is more terrible and more tragic than the world of *Crime and Punishment*. People rush in a fever, talk in delirium, groan, and gnash their teeth. The two novels are two stages of the same illness: in the first the illness is in germ; in the second, in full development[66].

Two aspects of Mochulsky's assessment of the two texts are particularly significant. Firstly, he considers the crisis portrayed in the two novels as being inextricably tied up with a change in the world order and in the 'perishing' of the old world the new paradigm of modernity had begun to replace during Dostoevsky's life-time. Secondly, the transition he observes between *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* moves from the isolated struggle of an individual to that of a whole group of characters: in between the texts, a contagion of the mood of modernity is brought about, feeding further into the notion of a pathology of the modern condition that Dostoevsky's works engender.

---

[62] Robert Lord, *Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 101.

[63] Young, *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot' and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), p. 1.

[64] George Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 64.

[65] Elizabeth Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot': A Study in Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 59.

[66] Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. by Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 352.

The novel depicts the events following the arrival of Prince Myshkin, a pure and saint-like character afflicted with epilepsy, in Saint Petersburg after having spent several years in a sanatorium in Switzerland. Myshkin, whose naivety and meekness render him the eponymous 'idiot' of the novel, is soon drawn into the affairs, scandals and interests of various figures of the Petersburg upper middle-class and, as the plot unfolds, makes the acquaintance of the Yepanchins, a wealthy family with three young daughters, Nastasya Filippovna, the beautiful former mistress of the socialite Totsky, and Parfyon Rogozhin, a merchant and heir of a multi-million ruble fortune. Myshkin feels instantly drawn to Nastasya Filippovna, whom he pities for regarding herself as a fallen woman, and offers to marry her, but she believes that she would only destroy the kind and innocent Prince and takes off with the violently passionate Rogozhin. Myshkin and the youngest Yepanchin daughter Aglaya fall in love and become engaged, but the betrothal is terminated as Myshkin fails to stay away from Nastasya Filippovna due to his urge to 'save' her. Torn between the Prince and her fear of ruining him on the one hand and Rogozhin and his destructive passion for her on the other hand, Nastasya Filippovna again elopes with Rogozhin, who then murders her. After Rogozhin and the Prince are found holding vigil by the side of her dead body, the former is sent to Siberia, while the latter, who has once again regressed into a state of stupor and 'idiocy,' is taken back to the Swiss sanatorium.

The Idiot was written during an especially dark phase in the author's life as the writing of the novel was frequently interrupted − and, as Dennis Patrick Slattery[67] argues, considerably influenced − by epileptic fits. Dostoevsky's letters to his friend Apollon N. Maikov indicate that he was afflicted by physical and emotional strains while he was working on the novel during his journey through Germany, Switzerland and Italy. In a letter dated December 31, 1867 / January 12, 1868 he states that he '[has] *been working and suffering*'[68], while a letter dated July 19 / August 2, 1868 displays his despair after the death of his infant daughter Sonya:

> I have been very unhappy all this time. Sonya's death has been torture to my wife and to me. My health is nothing to brag about—attacks, the climate of Vevey sets my nerves on edge. […] I am dissatisfied with my novel to the point of disgust. I have desperately tried to work

---

[67] Dennis Patrick Slattery, 'Seized by the Muse: Dostoevsky's Convulsive Poetics in *The Idiot*', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1999), 60-81.

[68] Dostoevsky in Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein, eds., *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, trans. by Andrew R. MacAndrew (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 260.

but I haven't been able to—my soul is sick. […] If I straighten out the novel, I will straighten out myself, if not—I am finished[69].

Thus *The Idiot* was conceived out of the author's 'sick soul,' and while it is neither particularly revealing nor reliable to reconstruct an author's mood and state of mind at the time of working on a novel, it is worth taking into account how this constitution is expressed in the densely affective narrative and how it may impact the transmission of mood in *The Idiot*.

I will argue that, perhaps inspired by Dostoevsky's own state of mind at the time as well as by his concern with aesthetic forms of responding to modernity and its effect on the human condition, *The Idiot* showcases an increased interest in and concern with emotional states and forms of *Stimmung*, and that these affective phenomena determine both the novel's plot and its effect on readers. One might even go so far as to say that the novel is driven by *Stimmung* as it is marked by particularly tangible intersubjective moods and atmospheres which govern the plot of the narrative and its particular reader-text dynamic. The novel therefore represents the epitome of a newly found aesthetic response to the modern condition and the affective structures resulting from this mode of experience. In *The Idiot*, *Stimmung* is presented as the main catalyst of human decisions, actions and desires, thus positing the principle of affect as an anti-Enlightenment paradigm of both human experience and aesthetic manifestations thereof. The novel's 'dreamlike' quality, which has puzzled and fascinated readers for more than a century now, can partly be accounted for by the employment of the volatile, by definition processual principle of *Stimmung* as a plot-developing device. Rather than making rational decisions, the main characters base their actions on their passions, inclinations and moods, therefore rendering *Stimmung* the main principle governing the narrative development of the novel and the reader's reception of it. The novel thus juxtaposes the first three planes of attunement in fiction that I have outlined in Chapter 1: that of the attunement of characters to their fictional worlds and to one another, that of the attunement between reader and text, and that of the literary conventions and modes shaped by forms of *Stimmung*, all three of which I will explore further below.

Jacques Catteau suggests that Dostoevsky's works are defined by the aesthetic totality they constitute and that the scholarship on his *œuvre* can be divided into three

---

[69] Ibid., p. 294.

major categories: criticism focusing on biographical elements, interpretations based on philosophical and theological ideas and text-centred readings examining deep structures in the works[70]. Traditionally, many of the interpretations of *The Idiot* in particular have focused on its allegorical Christian undercurrent, most prominently on the protagonist's role as a Christ-like figure or 'holy fool.' Such interpretation is mainly inspired by Dostoevsky's own comments on the subject matter of *The Idiot*, most notably by his much quoted letter to his niece Sonya A. Ivanova, dated January 1/13, 1868:

> The main idea of the novel is to portray a positively good man. There is nothing more difficult in the world, and this is especially true today. All writers—not only ours but Europeans as well—who have ever attempted to portray the *positively* good have always given up. Because the problem is a boundless one. The perfect is still an ideal, whether it is ours or that of civilized Europe, it is still far from having been worked out. There is only one positively good figure in the world—Christ—so that the phenomenon of that boundlessly, infinitely good figure is already in itself an infinite miracle[71].

In his study *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, Rowan Williams therefore construes the novel as part and parcel of 'Dostoevsky's implicit Christology'[72], discussing the role and nature of Christian faith in the author's major works and, importantly, emphasising the instability of the notion of a Godly form of harmony in the novel. Similarly, Robert Lord, Murray Krieger, Michael Holquist and Bruce A. French interpret the role of Prince Myshkin, the saint-like protagonist and self-declared 'idiot' of the novel's title, on an allegorical level as a failed Christ figure against the backdrop of Dostoevsky's own religious convictions[73]. Holquist in particular focuses on a cluster of interrelated symbols dominating the narrative, strongly relying on the figurative level of meaning in his reading. In line with this approach, Harriet Murav's book *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (1992) examines the figure of the 'holy fool' as a recurrent image in the Orthodox church and in Russian culture, the main feature of which is 'the assumption of madness or

---

[70] Jacques Catteau, *Dostoyevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. by Audrey Littlewood (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 1.

[71] Dostoevsky in *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky* by Frank and Goldstein, pp. 269f.

[72] Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 55; see also p. 56.

[73] Cf. Lord, *Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives*; Murray Krieger, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot:* The Curse of Saintliness', in *The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 209-27; Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Bruce A. French, *Dostoevsky's 'Idiot': Dialogue and the Spiritually Good Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

folly as an ascetic feat of self-humiliation'[74] for religious reasons. Liza Knapp further observes that the characteristics of the holy fool, who is 'associated with saintliness, a lack of worldliness (or otherworldliness) [and] marginality to society'[75], are transferred onto the figure of Myshkin. The notion of 'idiocy' applied to him thus reflects the way in which Myshkin, in his unmaterialistic and societally inacceptable behaviour, represents the traditional Orthodox ascetic model of 'foolishness for Christ' [«юродство во Христе»], a helpful insight illuminating the protagonist's position in relation to the other characters that will also become relevant to my reading.

In Dostoevsky, the motif of idiocy is thus associated with naivety and innocence, but also with being an outsider to society, as it is presented by Myshkin as well as Lizaveta, the pawnbroker's sister and Raskolnikov's second victim, in *Crime and Punishment*. According to Clément Rosset, the figure of the idiot, which etymologically relates to the notion of uniqueness and singularity through its root in the Ancient Greek *ἰδιώτης* [*idiôtēs*] and translates as 'private person' or 'individual', is connected to the idea of the 'real' as that which cannot be represented and exists merely for itself[76]. The figure of the idiot is thus marked by a lack of worldliness – as it is reflected in Myshkin's ignorance of societal conventions – as well as by a form of existential singularity that separates him from the other characters in the novel.

While the predominant interpretations of the novel offer valuable and fruitful insights into its symbolic dimension, they threaten to overlook a pivotal, equally important phenomenon at work in the text: its affective and reader-oriented structure. The first comprehensive examination of this aspect can be found in Elizabeth Dalton's excellent psychoanalytical reading of the novel in *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot': A Study in Literature and Psychoanalysis* (1979). While I do not fully subscribe to the psychoanalytical framework she uses in reading the novel's characters and plot as, in my view, the psychopathology of the fictional characters attests to a critique of modernity rather than to mimetic human experience and

---

[74] Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 2.
[75] Liza Knapp, 'Introduction to *The Idiot*. Part 1: When, Where, and How *The Idiot* Was Written', in *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot': A Critical Companion*, ed. by Knapp (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 3-26 (p.14).
[76] Cf. Clément Rosset, *Le réel: Traité de l'idiotie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 42f.; 51; see also Mario Perniola, *Art and Its Shadow*, trans. by Massimo Verdicchio (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 9f.

psychology, Dalton's observations regarding the intense affective involvement *The Idiot* stimulates in its readers are central to my interpretation. Grasping the intense nature of the novel very adequately, Dalton observes that

> the notion of the book as simply recording the fate of the Russian Christ does not account for what one actually feels when reading the novel. *The Idiot* presents itself first of all as an emotional experience of an extraordinarily concentrated kind; it arouses in many readers an almost unbearable excitement and intensity of feeling. Perhaps more consistently in *The Idiot* than anywhere else in Dostoevsky's work, our emotions are forced again and again to the breaking point. The action of the novel seems headed constantly toward hysteria and frenzy. The characters themselves lose control of their emotions frequently […]. To understand the novel, it is necessary to take account of these phenomena within the book itself and of their effects on the emotions of the reader[77].

Reading *The Idiot* is, then, first and foremost an aesthetic and an emotional rather than a religious or otherwise ideological experience, which is overlooked by many of the most canonical interpretations of the novel. In the same vein as Dalton's reader-oriented analysis, Robin Feuer Miller's seminal book *Dostoevsky and 'The Idiot': Author, Narrator, and Reader* (1981) analyses the stages of development in narrative structure in the novel, distinguishing between four different modes of narration used by the narrator[78]. In the course of the novel, Miller finds, the changes between these voices become more and more abrupt and confusing, rendering the reader increasingly bewildered[79], a notion that also features prominently in Malcolm V. Jones's *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism* (1990). Jones therein suggests that the ways in which the text draws the reader in and lets her partake in the affective commotion depicted in it through the use of stylistic and narrative devices results in forms of 'considerable emotional involvement in the text'[80]. The narrative structure of *The Idiot*, Jones argues, is then aimed at 'driving the reader crazy'[81] as it continuously augments the anxiety produced in readers throughout the aesthetic process. Due to these significant contributions to the criticism on the novel, a reading of *The Idiot* that foregrounds its affective immediacy for readers does not only suggest itself but, indeed, becomes indispensable for an interpretation revolving around the concept of modernity and its affinity to aesthetic modes of *Stimmung*.

---

[77] Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot'*, p. 66.
[78] Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 8.
[79] Cf. ibid., pp. 227-30.
[80] Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 144.
[81] Ibid., p. 113.

A Shared Illness: Modernity

The idea of a transsubjective form of experience, as suggested by Mochulsky in relation to the fictional characters of the novel and by Dalton, Miller and Jones in relation to the reader, is already hinted at in the opening paragraph of *The Idiot*, which sets the scene for Myshkin's arrival in Saint Petersburg:

> В конце ноября, в оттепель, часов в девять утра, поезд Петербургско-Варшавской железной дороги на всех парах подходил к Петербургу. Было так сыро и туманно, что насилу рассвело; в десяти шагах, вправо и влево от дороги, трудно было разглядеть хоть что-нибудь из окон вагона. Из пассажиров были и возвращавшиеся из-за границы; но более были наполнены отделения для третьего класса, и всё людом мелким и деловым, не из очень далека. Все, как водится, устали, у всех отяжелели за ночь глаза, все назяблись, все лица были бледножелтые, под цвет тумана[82].

> [At around nine in the morning toward the end of a thawing November, the Warsaw train was approaching Petersburg at full steam. The weather was so dank and misty that it was a long time getting light; anything beyond a dozen yards to left or right of the track could hardly be made out from the carriage windows at all. Among the passengers were some returning from abroad, but it was the third-class compartments which were really crowded— for the most part with ordinary folk and business-people, not travelling long distance. As usual, everyone was tired and heavy-eyed after the night, everybody was chilled through, their faces wan-yellow to match the fog[83].]

Describing a foggy November morning in Saint Petersburg after a cold, sleepless night spent on the train, the atmosphere of the paragraph is characterised by the external circumstances, the foggy and cold weather, as well as by a sense of a shared affective and spatially determined experience as the passengers have all spent the night on the train; all of them are tired and cold. The outer world and the passengers' *Befindlichkeit* are merged in that moment, constituting a single intersubjective mood of weariness and obscurity as the narrator states: 'у всех отяжелели за ночь глаза, все назяблись, все лица были бледножелтые, под цвет тумана' ['everyone was tired and heavy-eyed after the night, everybody was chilled through, their faces wan-yellow to match the fog']. As the opening reveals just as little to the reader about the scenery, people and surroundings as the fog betrays to the passengers, the reader is invited to enter into a similar state of mind, anticipating the unknown that Dostoevsky's texts associate with the state of modernity. Opening the plot of the novel on a train, a symbol of Western progress entering into Russian

[82] Dostoevsky, «Идиот» (N.p.: The Planet Books, 2013), p. 4.
[83] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. and ed. by Alan Myers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3.

culture[84], the author thus propels the narrative into the experience of a modernity whose impact on societal structures and individual states of mind would be irreversible (an image that would, not long after, famously resurface in the most accomplished work by Dostoevsky's great contemporary and aesthetic counterpart Lev Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, which was published between 1873 and 1877).

Thus is the scene for Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin's first, fateful encounter on the train, which is precipitated by a number of similarities in them and an attraction to one another:

> В одном из вагонов третьего класса, с рассвета, очутились друг против друга, у самого окна, два пассажира — оба люди молодые, оба почти налегке, оба не щегольски одетые, оба с довольно замечательными физиономиями, и оба пожелавшие, наконец, войти друг с другом в разговор[85].

> [In one of the third-class carriages, two passengers had found themselves opposite each other by the window since daybreak—both young men, both travelling light, both plainly dressed, both with rather striking features, and both at length desirous of engaging the other in conversation[86].]

Familiarities, shared mental states and a sense of common ground mark the entire opening section, which repeats the pronouns *все* ['all'] and *оба* ['both'] in an emphatic fashion that is diametrically opposed to Raskolnikov's isolation at the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*. However, despite the similarities between Rogozhin and the Prince, they are simultaneously designed as opposites to one another. While the Prince is gentle and kind, with fair hair and blue eyes, Rogozhin is fierce, passionate, dark-haired and grey-eyed. To Rogozhin's ridicule, Myshkin is dressed in Swiss winter clothing, a thin cloak and European-style shoes and gaiters – 'всё не по-русски'[87], 'all very un-Russian'[88]. Having lived in the isolation of a Swiss clinic for the past years, Myshkin is not in tune with the way of life in a rapidly evolving modernity; what is more, he is not at all attuned to the material realities of the Saint Petersburg society and, like the underground man, anticipates that the 'climate' of his native country may be to the detriment of his health: 'говорят,

---

[84] Cf. David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 58f. Bethea's thought-provoking monograph situates *The Idiot* within the cultural climate of modern Russia, which saw an emphasis on notions of the apocalypse brought about by the advent of modernity. In this context, railways are used as a 'symbol of doom' (p. 58), corresponding to the horsemen of the apocalypse, and as an instrument of Western capitalism threatening Russian traditions and belief systems.

[85] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 4.

[86] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 3.

[87] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 5.

[88] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 4.

здешний климат мне будет вреден'[89] ['they say the climate here won't be good for me'[90]]. Once again, the climate, i.e. the epochal *Grundstimmung* of the 1860s, thus materialises in the protagonist's modes of affect and experience, and, at the same time, is shown to be hostile and detrimental to his existential condition.

However, it is not just Myshkin who experiences forms of discord and discontent with the world he finds himself in. Almost all of the characters in the novel are, to some degree, out of tune with the narrative world, while those that are in tune with it (Totsky, Yepanchin, Ganya) are depicted as greedy, superficial or manipulative as the Petersburg of *The Idiot* itself is dominated by financial interests and social prestige. The Prince, through his saintly 'idiocy,' is not the only character who disrupts its social norms: a number of characters, including Nastasya Filippovna, Aglaya, Rogozhin, Madame Yepanchina and the consumptive youth Ippolit Terentyev, threaten the conventions of upper class society by acting out publicly and transgressing boundaries of societal decorum. The seemingly progressive world of mid-nineteenth century Russia is called into question as numerous characters clash with the social realities of capitalist modernity. As Terras argues, in *The Idiot* '[t]he irresoluble contradiction between two opposing principles is underlined by recurrent bursts of strident dissonance, scandal and violence that disturb the otherwise placid world of middle-class St. Petersburg'[91]. As in *Crime and Punishment* and the *Notes*, the clash of the 'new' and the 'old' world produces a state of tension and dislocation that results in a fundamental sense of dissonance at the heart of the modern condition portrayed in *The Idiot*.

In the past, the various intensely emotional, discrepant forms of attunement in Dostoevsky's novel have been identified by critics as forms of mental illness:

> A charge—one Dostoevsky had heard as early as at the appearance of *The Double* in 1846—was advanced time and again—that his characters were all psychopaths and hence irrelevant to the real world of normal people. Nikolai Leskov […] reviewed *The Idiot* anonymously and observed that 'all of the acting characters of the novel, as if even on purpose, are afflicted with mental illnesses'[92].

Dostoevsky's characters and their oftentimes pathological behaviour – from Golyadkin's paranoid psychosis in the early novella *The Double* («Двойник», 1846) to Smerdyakov's nihilistic murder-suicide in *The Brothers Karamazov* – can easily be

---

[89] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 40.
[90] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 57.
[91] Victor Terras, *The Idiot: An Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990), p. 82.
[92] Ibid., p. 10.

dismissed as instances of individual madness, but may indeed point to a larger issue within the existential condition of modernity: an 'illness,' as Mochulsky puts it, or in Heidegger's sense, as a form of existence that is shaped by having been thrown into an inhospitable modern world. Rather than making the (often futile) attempt to 'diagnose' fictional characters with mental illnesses, I therefore suggest that the ways in which Dostoevsky's characters, as previously discussed in the *Notes* and *Crime and Punishment*, and here evident in *The Idiot*, strike readers as insane or 'dissonant' disclose a relationship to the narrative world that is marked by a shared failure of attunement to the condition of modernity. As noted above, the notion of sickness, which permeates Dostoevsky's texts, conceptualises the modern condition as an affliction whose origin is so deeply anchored in existential concerns that it is no longer available to his modern characters. The underground man opens his narrative thus: 'Я человек больной… Я злой человек. Непривлекательный я человек. Я думаю, что у меня болит печень. Впрочем, я ни шиша не смыслю в моей болезни и не знаю наверно, что у меня болит'[93] ['I am a sick man… I am a wicked man. An unattractive man. I think my liver hurts. However, I don't know a fig about my sickness, and am not sure what it is that hurts me'[94]]. Likewise, the extreme mental states of the characters in *The Idiot* insinuate a modern condition in which an individual mood or state of mind (in Russian: *расположение духа*) becomes emblematic of a cultural climate. As I will argue, the novel's pronounced aesthetic significance lies in extending this state of mind to the experiential realm of the reader.

Nastasya Filippovna's Party

The most intense and rapidly changing affective episodes of the novel, as well as the greatest source of the general sense of disorder that the text creates, are the multiple scandal scenes, which stimulate an intense emotional involvement in the reader. The first scandal occurs in the Ivolgin household when Nastasya Filippovna visits the family of the young, aspiring Ganya Ivolgin, who wants to marry her in order to receive a large amount of money from Totsky. Nastasya Filippovna insults and mocks Ganya and his family, causing Ganya to lose his temper and slap the Prince in

---

[93] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», p. 43.
[94] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 3.

the face. The second incident, which has been described as 'a crescendo of scandalous grotesquerie'[95], occurs on the same day at Nastasya Filippovna's name-day party as Myshkin convinces the hostess not to marry Ganya and proposes to her instead. There are also two minor scandals, one taking place at the Prince's birthday party in the societal summer retreat of Pavlovsk, the other at the Prince's and Aglaya's engagement party at the Yepanchin's house, but the scandals featuring Nastasya Filippovna are by far the scenes with the highest density of emotional outbursts and changes in mood and the highest degree of excitation. Peter Conradi observes that

> [i]t is hard to convey, in any bald account of the plot, the feverish excitement of such scenes, and how convincingly Dostoevsky evokes the deep chaos inside the human mind. He shows how, in moments of high emotion, his characters act out roles that are incomprehensible even to themselves, and does all this with an art that is immediate, accidental in feeling, open-ended and absurd; and which yet convinces us that things could not easily have been otherwise. No other writer can so well convey the necessary, dizzy-making incompleteness of all moment-to-moment experience[96].

At Nastasya Filippovna's name-day party, a variety of strong emotions collude, creating a sense of immediacy and a tense and suspenseful atmosphere, in which the hostess's rapidly changing moods and her capriciousness stand out as affective extremes. This immediacy of the moment-to-moment experience in the context of a party as a stage for colluding and converging forms of transsubjective affect would become an important plot device in modern fiction that resurfaces, for instance, in the works of Virginia Woolf[97] as well as Thomas Bernhard, whose texts will be discussed in the fourth chapter of this study. As an initial step in establishing the structural condition of such texts, I will first of all, here, examine the party scene in *The Idiot*, which is perhaps the most intense affective moment in the novel, and its textual dynamics of *Stimmung* in more detail. In doing so I aim to uncover the plot-developing function of mood in *The Idiot* and to point out the mode of affective involvement the novel stimulates in its readers.

---

[95] Terras, *The Idiot: An Interpretation*, p. 90.

[96] Peter Conradi, *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Houndsmills and London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 66.

[97] Cf. Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism, 1900-1930* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 90-4, for a comparison between the plot device of the party in Virginia Woolf and Dostoevsky. Kaye therein suggests that as opposed to Dostoevsky's fictional parties, in which subjectivity and singular forms of experience are regularly dissolved, the parties in Woolf's works engender a mode of contemplative isolation in characters (pp. 90f.). I will revisit this important notion in my analysis of Thomas Bernhard's novel *Holzfällen* in Chapter 4.

Before the Prince arrives at the party, the atmosphere among the party guests is rather uneasy: Totsky and General Yepanchin are both intently awaiting Nastasya Filippovna's decision regarding Ganya's proposal of marriage. Ganya himself is sullen and unfriendly, while Nastasya Filippovna is silent and attentive. None of the attendees seem to be in the mood for a party, and they struggle to keep the conversation going. The only person who is in a festive mood is the Ivolgins' lodger Ferdischenko, who takes on the role of the jester: 'Один Фердыщенко состоял из всех гостей в развеселом и праздничном расположении духа и громко хохотал иногда неизвестно чему, да и то потому только, что сам навязал на себя роль шута'[98] ['Ferdischenko alone of all the guests was in high spirits and festive mood, laughing loudly on occasion for no particular reason, and then only because he had assumed the role of court jester'[99]]. Myshkin's unexpected arrival – he was not invited and resolved to come on his own account – causes a general commotion among the party guests. While most of them are amused, Nastasya Filippovna is pleased to see him and her mood instantly improves. The party gains momentum and soon a merry atmosphere emerges as Ferdischenko starts to make fun of the Prince. When the hostess invites her guests to drink champagne with her, the atmosphere changes from exuberance to unease as Nastasya Filippovna starts to deviate from her usual role:

> Предложение пить, и особенно в таких наивных выражениях, показалось очень странным от Настасьи Филипповны. Все знали необыкновенную чинность на ее прежних вечерах. Вообще вечер становился веселее, но не по-обычному. От вина, однако, не отказались, во-первых, сам генерал, во-вторых, бойкая барыня, старичок, Фердыщенко, за ними и все. Тоцкий взял тоже свой бокал, надеясь *угармонировать наступающий новый тон*, придав ему по возможности характер милой шутки. Один только Ганя ничего не пил. В странных же, иногда очень резких и быстрых выходках Настасьи Филипповны, которая тоже взяла вина и объявила, что сегодня вечером выпьет три бокала, в ее истерическом и беспредметном смехе, перемежающемся вдруг с молчаливою и даже угрюмою задумчивостью, трудно было и понять что-нибудь. Одни подозревали в ней лихорадку; стали наконец замечать, что и она как бы ждет чего-то сама, часто посматривает на часы, становится нетерпеливою, рассеянною[100] (my emphasis).

> [An invitation to drink, especially couched in such naïve terms, sounded queer coming from Nastasya Filippovna. Everyone recalled the high degree of formality which had prevailed at her previous parties. Indeed, the party did liven up, but in a rather unusual fashion. Nobody refused the wine, however: first came the general himself, then the sprightly lady, the old man, then Ferdischenko, followed by the rest. Totsky took his goblet too, hoping to *modulate*

---

[98] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 100.
[99] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, pp. 145f.
[100] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 103.

the new tone the evening was taking by giving it, as far as possible, the character of a pleasant joke. Ganya alone drank nothing. It was difficult to make sense of Nastasya Filippovna's oddly brusque, rapid outbursts, as she took her wine and announced that she would drink three glasses that evening, or her hysterical, pointless laughter, abruptly interspersed with silence and moody depression. Some guests supposed she was feverish; they began to notice at length that she too seemed to be expecting something, frequently consulting her watch and becoming irritable and preoccupied[101] (my emphasis).]

At this point in time, Nastasya Filippovna's drawing room develops a dynamic that suspends the usual social norms and conventions of the Petersburg society. Totsky, one of the characters that is usually in tune with the narrative world of the novel, becomes uneasy and needs to '*attune to the new tone*' of the evening [*угармонировать новый тон*] as Nastasya Filippovna's mood becomes more and more unpredictable. One moment she seems almost hysterical, the next moment she is thoughtful and silent, then she starts being impatient, insinuating that her decision regarding Ganya's proposal will soon be announced.

When one of the guests suggests playing a parlour-game, Ferdischenko comes up with the idea of playing a curious, socially almost 'impossible' game: Each of the attendees is meant to recount the single worst action they have ever performed to the other party guests. Although the party guests, especially Totsky, are alarmed, the hostess, in a near-delirious state, insists that the game be played: 'И теперь она была как в истерике, суетилась, смеялась судорожно, припадочно, особенно на возражения встревоженного Тоцкого'[102] ['Now she was in a state verging on hysteria, bustling about, convulsed by fits of laughter, especially at Totsky's nervous protestations'[103]]. After Ferdischenko tells the others about his worst action, stealing three rubles at a dinner party and having a maid take the blame for it, the guests are disgusted, but General Yepanchin and Totsky retain the company's good spirits by recounting stories of their chivalry.

When it is Nastasya Filippovna's turn, she demands that the Prince decide for her whether or not she should marry Ganya. Myshkin tells her not to marry him and she subsequently turns the proposal down, much to Totsky's and General Yepanchin's dismay. Shortly after this decision, Rogozhin and his drunk entourage arrive with 100,000 rubles in cash, which Rogozhin promised to bring to Nastasya Filippovna's party in exchange for her. Declaring herself as 'Rogozhin's woman', she

---

[101] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, pp. 149f.
[102] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 104.
[103] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, pp. 151f.

prepares to take off with the drunk party, but Myshkin proposes to her instead and reveals that he just inherited a fortune from a distant relative. From this moment onward Nastasya Filippovna seems to lose her mind: At first she accepts the Prince's proposal and starts to celebrate, then she declares that she changed her mind again and would never ruin an innocent 'infant' like the Prince by marrying him, prompting the General to call out: 'Это содом, содом!'[104] ['This is Sodom, Sodom!'[105]]. In a frenzy-like state, the hostess takes Rogozhin's parcel with the money and throws it into the fireplace, challenging Ganya to save the money with his own hands to make it his own. Ganya refuses to do so, provoking Nastasya Filippovna to rescue the money and give it to him. She then takes off with Rogozhin and his entourage, leaving her guests in profound consternation.

As Conradi states, it is almost impossible to express the excitement and immediacy of this forty-page long scene by merely summarising its events, but this description may at least suggest the frenzy, twists and turns and the high degree of agitation the sequence depicts and provokes in its readers. In regards to this scene, Holquist proposes that '[n]o essence can withstand the battering of the moments as they pass by. The structure of a single moment's promise broken under the onslaught of a series of other such moments following upon it, constitutes the novel's central pattern'[106]. The dramatic immediacy created by these scenes thus draws the reader into a notion of presence related to experience and affect that establishes a pivotal pattern in the text. In its intensity, the scene of the name-day party turns the conventions of the Petersburg society upside down, resulting in a form of disorder and frenzied carnival marked by the suspension of social conventions.

In his landmark study *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of the carnivalesque, which, derived from folklore, describes a ritualistic comedic and chaotic suspension of societal conventions and a temporary undermining of serious forms of representation; a tradition from which parody and satire have emerged[107]. In relation to *The Idiot*, Bakhtin further points out that Nastasya Filippovna and Prince Myshkin are the two centres of what he calls the 'carnivalistic play' of the novel:

---

[104] Dostoevsky, «Идиот», p. 124.
[105] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 180.
[106] Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, pp. 122f.
[107] Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 106f.; 122f.

> [A]round these two central figures of the novel—the 'idiot' and the 'madwoman'—all of life is carnivalized, turned into a 'world inside out:' traditional plot situations radically change their meaning, there develops a dynamic carnivalistic play of sharp contrasts, unexpected shifts and changes; secondary characters in the novel take on carnivalistic overtones, form carnival pairs. A carnivalistic-fantastic atmosphere permeates the entire novel. But around Myshkin this atmosphere is *bright*, almost *joyful*. Around Nastasya Filippovna it is *gloomy*, *infernal*[108].

The 'carnival heaven' surrounding Myshkin and the 'carnival hell'[109] surrounding Nastasya Filippovna thus constitute the area of tension out of which the trajectory of the novel develops. The structure of carnival that envelops the two protagonists of the novel affects the plot development of *The Idiot* considerably. Not only does the phenomenon of carnival subvert social norms, it also subverts the narrative conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel and the notion of realism in literature itself. Therefore, even though Dostoevsky's works are generally considered part of the canon of Russian nineteenth-century realism, Terras observes that despite some realist features, *The Idiot* cannot be considered as a realist novel in the strict sense[110].

After the novel was criticised for being too 'fantastic' when it was first published, Dostoevsky explained his views on reality in his correspondence, stating he had '[his] own peculiar view of reality (in art)'[111]. 'Reality above everything', Dostoevsky further remarked in the notebooks for the novel. 'It is true perhaps that we have a different conception of reality, a thousand thoughts, prophecy—a fantastic reality. It may be that in the Idiot man is visible in a truer light'[112], thus suggesting a notion of 'fantastic' and highly subjective realism that undermined conventions of mimetic representation. In line with this, Walter Koschmal, who observes that the aesthetic dimension of *The Idiot* has been neglected in favour of its themes, proposes that the novel is marked by a mode of writing in which the represented reality is less significant than its modes of representation[113].

In the context of 'fantastic' subjectivity, mood plays a crucial role in captivating the reader in the aesthetic process. The main characters, especially

---

[108] Ibid., p. 173.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Terras, *The Idiot: An Interpretation*, p. 46.
[111] Dostoevsky qtd. in Terras, *The Idiot: An Interpretation*, p. 30.
[112] Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for 'The Idiot'*, ed. by Edward Wasiolek, trans. by Katharine Strelsky (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 228.
[113] Walter Koschmal, 'Der exzentrische Roman: F. M. Dostoevskijs *Idiot*', *Poetica* Vol. 44, No. 1/2 (2012), 181-98 (p. 182).

Nastasya Filippovna, act on the spur of the moment, intuitive spontaneity rather than reason or intellectual calculation governing their actions. They are subject to their moods and, to some extent, they are fundamentally the vehicles of the moods that govern the novel's plot-development and that transcend the individual subject. In the scene of the name-day party, this implies that the reader's expectations and emotions are frustrated and turned upside down at every instant. As the narrator denies readers access to Nastasya Filippovna's inner life, they are exposed to her moody fits of hysteria, melancholy and frenzy without being able to anticipate or understand them. The main objective of this carnivalistic mood is, then, the immediacy of experiencing the moment in all its intensity.

Just like Totsky and the other party guests, readers are forced to attune to the moods of the hostess, modulating their expectations and emotions in every instant of the party scene. In one moment, it seems perfectly plausible for Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna to get married, which would be the somewhat romantic ending many readers might be hoping for. In the next moment, this idea is merely considered a sick joke worthy of Totsky, as the hostess decides that she would ruin a saintly man like Myshkin if they were to get married. The ontological status of the events at Nastasya Filippovna's party is as unclear to the reader as it is unpredictable: Is any of this meant seriously, or is it all just an impossible parlour-game? Is this realism, or is it carnival? Are we meant to care about these characters, or are they just playing (us)?

By attuning to the moods that govern the plot of the novel, the reader constantly needs to adjust her horizon of expectation concerning the development of the narrative and the ontological status of the events related, thus becoming the vehicle of an aesthetic attunement that is borne from the convergence of her aesthetic experience and the textual modes of negotiating affect. The very fact that readers can hardly decide if the scenes depicted in the novel are comic or tragic keeps them in constant limbo. Malcolm V. Jones fittingly observes that

> in *Notes from Underground* the narrator openly draws the reader into the dialogue. This experience, together with his exploitation of techniques for creating emotional and perceptual confusion, is put to new and original use in *The Idiot*. So much so that it is justifiable not only to speak of readers not knowing where they stand in relation to the text,

but also of the deployment of strategies for confusing the reader. These were present also in earlier texts, but nowhere so highly developed as in *The Idiot*[114].

Confusing the reader both intellectually and emotionally, the text presents a challenge and generates great emotional investment in the narrative. The novel thus forces us to attune ourselves, our emotions and our mood – in the Heideggerian sense – to the existential possibilities we see opening up for the characters and the development of the plot; and this happens in every moment while we are reading it. Hence the attunement taking place between the reader and the text is a continuous, intense and rapidly changing negotiation of emotion, expectation and involvement driven and orchestrated by the ambivalent, unpredictable and carnivalistic nature of affective structures in *The Idiot*.

Epileptic Narration

In his essay 'Seized by the Muse: Dostoevsky's Convulsive Poetics in *The Idiot*' (1999), Dennis Patrick Slattery argues that Dostoevsky's epilepsy was not only the inspiration but also the main aesthetic principle behind the structure of *The Idiot*[115], a notion that is corroborated by Robert Lord, who considers the novel 'primarily an exploration of the epileptic mode of being, which was also Dostoevsky's own'[116]. Indeed, in his correspondence, Dostoevsky describes that the process of writing the scene of the name-day party saw a heightened state of emotional arousal and two epileptic fits: 'I wrote this finale in a state of inspiration, and it cost me two fits in a row'[117]. Elizabeth Dalton considers the epileptic seizure the affective paradigm structuring the scenes of distress portrayed in the novel, finding that amongst the scandal scenes, the scene at Nastasya Filippovna's party in particular follows an 'epileptic pattern'[118]:

> One has the sense in reading *The Idiot* that the action of the novel is balanced quite perilously, that just beyond or beneath its precarious coherence is a kind of maelstrom or abyss in which emotion might lose its connection with intelligible form and manifest itself in some unimaginably direct, 'raw' state; here ordinary coherent speech and gesture might give way to frenzy or blankness. And indeed the novel does present us with the image of this extremity in the epileptic seizure. In fact, the seizure is a sort of paradigm of the emotional progression in the book's great scenes. In most of these scenes there is a pattern of rising excitement focused upon one central figure whose consciousness becomes more and more strained and

---

[114] Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 113.
[115] Slattery, 'Seized by the Muse', p. 62.
[116] Lord, *Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives*, p. 101.
[117] Dostoevsky qtd. in Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot'*, p. 125.
[118] Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot'*, p. 124.

exalted, until a moment of unbearable tension, when there is a loss of control, followed by physical and mental collapse[119].

The epileptic seizure thus becomes a symbol of an existential condition on the edge of reason and reality; it is indeed symptomatic for the 'maelstrom' of modernity Berman describes[120].

Turning to the effect this aesthetic has on readers, Dalton argues that

[i]n the great scenes of climactic emotion or violent confrontation, the reader is led to participate in a kind of loss of control: the ego of the protagonist, under the assault of repressed impulses, gives way to energies and fantasies usually inaccessible to it and undergoes an enormous expansion of its capacity for perception and feeling[121].

In this sense, the loss of control that is associated with actualisations of mood as the driving force behind the development of the plot heightens and intensifies the reader's immediate experience of the novel. Dalton goes on to point out that

[i]n these scenes the reader feels as if he is being forced to *know* more, as if the mind is being wrenched out of its limits and into those areas of experience of which no rational understanding is possible. The aim of these passages seems to be to push consciousness to and beyond the breaking point[122].

Pushing the reader further and further, the novel explores the forms of affective response that narrative immediacy can generate in its readers and thereby allows them to partake in the intense emotions the characters experience. As, in most cases, the reader will not have experienced the sensation of an epileptic fit, the novel approximates this particular mode of experiential intensity and mental collapse as an aesthetic reflection of the modern condition and as a means to implicate the reader in a circulation of intense transsubjective affect.

Dalton further argues that since his seizures give the epileptic Myshkin a feeling of oneness with the world, in which the boundaries between self and other are suspended, the notion of Sigmund Freud's oceanic feeling is evoked[123]. Myshkin's 'oceanic feeling,' which Freud defines as 'a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole'[124], metaphorically represents

---

[119] Ibid., p. 123.
[120] In connection to this, the notion of a 'raw' presence and existential state, in which all words and logic fail, will be explored further in my reading of Beckett's narrative texts in the following chapter of this study.
[121] Ibid., p. 138.
[122] Ibid., p. 139.
[123] Cf. ibid., p. 130.
[124] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. by Joan Riviere (New York: Johnathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 2011), p. 9.

the transmission of affect that the novel aims for and at the same time constitutes an affective counter-model to the radical solipsism that I discussed in the previous section above. As the experiential lines between self and other are blurred, transsubjective *Stimmung* thus becomes the paradigm of the aesthetic process in *The Idiot*. Transferring this notion to the psychoanalytical context, Dalton argues that the reader herself experiences the loss of ego controls that she finds in the characters:

> Nowhere else in Dostoevsky are we taken so far beyond intellectual speculation about and description of these states into the actual experience itself. The wild beauty and terror of the great scenes, the suffocating excitement that we feel through identification with the protagonists and through the dramatic rhythms of tension and abrupt release, are our own experience of the loosening of ego controls as we read[125].

For this aim to be fulfilled, mood – in the sense of an existential attunement to the narrative world and its characters – becomes the driving force behind the internal logic of the plot, and the creation of a processual, temporal structure of *Stimmung* between reader and text, which is continuously destabilised by affective intensity and volatility, becomes the most pivotal aspect of its aesthetic effect.

Polyphony and Transsubjective Affect

In addition to the concept of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin's interpretation of Dostoevsky's works in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* famously introduced the concept of polyphony to describe the multiplicity of independent voices and points of view that are combined and collude in the narrative texts, perhaps most prominently in *The Brothers Karamazov*[126]. Bakhtin considers Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel as a new genre, suggesting that prior to the publication of his works, the European novel was 'fundamentally *monologic*'[127] with an emphasis on single minds rather than collective forms of consciousness. As opposed to this, polyphony, as well as Bakhtin's related notion of the 'dialogic' nature of Dostoevsky's narrative fiction, by definition postulate plurality against singularity, both in an ontological and in an aesthetic sense: 'A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find fullness in himself alone'[128].

---

[125] Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot'*, p. 140.
[126] Cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 6.
[127] Ibid., p. 8.
[128] Ibid., p. 177.

This is what Bakhtin finds with regard to Dostoevsky's aesthetics in the *Problems*, suggesting that this mode of existence even applies to the most solipsistic of Dostoevsky's alienated characters. As mentioned previously, every word written in the *Notes* is by definition dialogic in nature as the underground man directs his entire speech to an imagined audience, anticipating their responses and adjusting his discourse accordingly. The presence of an imagined other thus renders the text by definition intersubjective, postulating a primacy of '*coexistence* and *interaction*'[129].

The 'dialogic' nature of affective structures, as described above, uncovers a fundamental relatedness between the notions of polyphony and dialogism on the one hand and *Stimmung* on the other hand: as Dostoevsky's characters, narrators and readers are always, by definition, oriented towards another consciousness – be it that of another character, the author, implied author etc. – individual states of mind and affect are never, as it were, singular in nature. Bakhtin further explains that

> the orientation of one person to another person's discourse and consciousness is, in essence, the basic theme of all of Dostoevsky's works. The hero's attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward another, and with the attitude of another toward him[130].

The characters in Dostoevsky's works are thus always contingent on another, and relate to that other through notions of harmony and dissonance (an idea that will, later in this study, be revisited in relation to Beckett's aesthetic search for harmony). In this sense, the fundamental category of personality only comes into being through its relationship with others, John Bayley suggests in *The Characters of Love*[131]. Literary characters thus emerge out of a constitutive relationality to others, in Bayley's analysis through the structure of his specific and particular construction of 'love'.

In *The Idiot*, a less straight-forward polyphonic layering of voices than in other works by Dostoevsky comes into play, leading Jones to conclude that due to the disorganised design of the text and the sudden changes in voice and generic patterns, particularly in the second half of the novel, 'polyphony becomes cacophony'[132]. Young, however, offers a new interpretation of *The Idiot* in *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot' and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (2004), in which she introduces the concept of 'scripting' in analysing the characters and the multi-layered

---

[129] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 28.
[130] Ibid., p. 207.
[131] John Bayley, *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality* (London: Constable, 1960), pp. 265f.; 272.
[132] Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 115.

structure of voices in the text. She suggests that the novel is marked by frequent collaborative and interactive scenes of storytelling, in which stories are related in social situations that define their very trajectory. Young defines these acts as 'scripting'. As individual characters orient their narratives toward others, the narrative process in itself becomes intersubjective and dialogic in nature:

> The interactive aspect of scripting is fundamental; the success of a particular script depends on the characters' ability to persuade another to give it a concrete reality through participating in its realization. Protagonists thus invite or coerce others into accepting supporting roles in their own dramas, thereby elevating the status of their own stories within the text and taking over the function of guiding the plot, as characters move in accordance with the demands of each others' scripts, not the author/narrator's design[133].

Since each character becomes contingent on the fellow inhabitants of the narrative world, the self is shown to be, by definition, dependent on the attunement to others: 'At the same time, the self only comes into being, and the idea is only realized, through dialogic activity with the other, through a "communion of consciousnesses"'[134]. Although Young's analysis focuses on the characters within the text rather than reader-text-interaction, this phenomenon affects not only the fictional characters of *The Idiot* but also the text's readers, who are dialogically attuned to the novel's frenzied affective intensity.

Stimmung thereby becomes constitutive not only for the relationships between characters and the narrative world, becoming the driving force behind the novel's plot-development, but also for the relationship between the reader and the text. The fundamental category of affective and existential intersubjectivity, which underlies the aesthetic composition of the novel, thus stimulates a process of attunement between the text and its readers, not only by approximating their affective states to that of the characters, but also by actively 'scripting' the presence of the reader into the narrative trajectory of the text. Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's implied understanding of lived experience therefore also dictates the way in which his texts engage readers in the aesthetic process, and it holds true for *The Idiot* in particular: 'For [Dostoevsky], to get one's bearings on the world meant to conceive all its contents as simultaneous, and *to guess at their interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment*'[135], a description reminiscent of Heidegger's definition of the continuous

---

[133] Young, *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot' and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative*, p. 18.
[134] Ibid., p. 137.
[135] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 28.

spatio-temporal attunement of existence. Dalton's analysis of *The Idiot* underlines the destabilising existential potential of this reading experience as she speaks of 'the loosening of ego controls' in the process of aesthetic reception. The reader's subject position is thus replaced by an ever-evolving subject-position, to relate this to the theory of aesthetic *Stimmung* developed in the previous chapter, whose development is contingent on an attunement to the textual modes of affectedness and possibility.

IV.   Conclusion: Dostoevsky's Aesthetic Intensity and the Modern Condition

The considerations in this chapter have outlined Dostoevsky's preoccupation with modernity, both experiential and aesthetic, and the poetic response to the cultural climate of industrial and epistemological modernisation he found himself in. By focusing on the works from his middle period throughout the 1860s, I aimed to unearth the relationship between the 'modern condition' and the emergence of the notions of *Stimmung* discussed in the previous section. As the *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* demonstrate, the transformation of experience, lived space and other fundamental existential conditions resulted in a pervasive cultural *Grundstimmung* of alienation and crisis, one that was strongly associated with questions of material space and urban modernity. Both texts, and the modes of existence presented in them, are inextricably linked to their setting Saint Petersburg and its particular, material climate, shaped by the ethos of modernisation, the concreteness of space and the actuality of urban misery, violence and disillusionment. Dostoevsky thereby 'emphasized, with exceptional complexity and pathos, this city's modernity—its tangible modernization, […], as well as the philosophical significance of this modernity'[136]. The solipsism of the characters portrayed in these texts betrays a consistent struggle with the notion of the other and with its own isolation in a structure of fundamental dislocation and dissonance with the modern world – ultimately, Raskolnikov finds human company again, while the underground man is submerged in his existential squalor – while at the same time dialogically reaching out to a reader implicated in a relationship that relativises his perceived solitude.

---

[136] Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siècle*, pp. 24f.

The Idiot, meanwhile, refocuses its existential concerns onto the notion of intersubjective experience. As discussed above, the novel engages *Stimmung* as a plot-developing element in order to facilitate a transsubjective experience of attunement that involves the reader in the intense immediacy of the narrative. Not only are Dostoevsky's characters out of tune with their narrative world; the narrative structure of the novel aims at getting the reader out of step with the plot by progressively frustrating her expectations and emotions in order to open up a mode of experience that approximates the modern experience of uncertainty, transience and immediacy. Malcolm Jones aptly summarises this by suggesting that 'Dostoevsky […] keeps his readers constantly on the verge of losing their balance, on the threshold of out-of-text normality'[137]. The novel generates an intensity of affect that is closely related to the notion of genre as a framework for meaning-production as the reader's experience of the mood of the novel becomes the breaking point for her ability to make sense of the plot. If she considers the mood of *The Idiot* as carnivalistic, the novel becomes a comedy; if she perceives the events as disturbing, it becomes horror or a tragedy, a notion that will be explored further in Chapter 4 of this study. Maintaining this ambivalence until the very end, until the tragic outcome of the narrative, the novel forces its readers to get invested on an intellectual as well as on an emotional level, and it also suspends their ontic attunement in aid of an aesthetic attunement to the text that revolves around a fundamental sense of 'out-of-tuneness'.

All of the above argues against a reading of Dostoevsky's works on a purely metaphysical plane. More than a 'seer of the mind', his novels showcase a strong affinity with materiality, embodied affect and modes of aesthetic response. In concurrence with this notion, Alex de Jonge, in his 1975 study *Dostoevsky and The Age of Intensity*, interprets the immediacy of experience employed in *The Idiot* as part and parcel of an aesthetic agenda that foregrounds the motif of intensity:

> Dostoevsky seeks to capture the spirit of his age through an aesthetic code built upon the need to provoke a reaction at all costs. Its aim is neither beauty nor harmony of form, but sensation and intensity. […] [F]rom Baudelaire and Dostoevsky onward, we see artists beginning to turn their backs on meaning, reducing their work to the cultivation of mere meaningless sensation, a sensation which is described by twentieth-century aesthetics as a 'pure aesthetic response'[138].

---

[137] Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 120.
[138] de Jonge, *Dostoevsky and The Age of Intensity*, p. 201.

In this sense, de Jonge proposes, Dostoevsky's novels thus address their readers more directly on an aesthetic and experiential level rather than on an intellectual level. Attunement, as an integral aspect of an aesthetic modernity that grew out of the poetics of urban space and transsubjective affect, becomes the key principle in the reader-text relationship and in Dostoevsky's texts narrative plot fosters this complex temporal relationship by foregrounding affect, mood and inclination instead of reason or aesthetic form as its main catalysts. The levels of attunement in the works I have discussed thus consistently intersect: the attunement between characters and their worlds is conditioned by a cultural climate, a fundamental *Grundstimmung* of the modern the texts project into their aesthetic design. At the same time, the attunement between the reader and the text, its modes of vicissitude and instability, aims to convey that very cultural climate into the experiential realm of the reader.

Both expressive and constitutive of an aesthetic pathology of this age, Dostoevsky's narrative fiction is decidedly embedded in the larger context of the modern condition; it is, paradoxically, as modern as it is distrustful of the notion of modernity. 'Dostoevsky's fiction undoubtedly makes a major contribution to the collapse of the enlightened "modern" subject', Rowan Williams proposes. And, further:

> through its suspicion of easy harmonics, [*The Idiot*] puts in question the simple narrative resolutions of an earlier age. But by doing so, it ranges that kind of narrative naivety alongside the 'truth' that threatens to turn into violence.[139]

In *The Idiot*, the 'maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'[140] that modernity propels individuals into reaches from the text into the aesthetic experience of the reader, aiming to turn an intellectual discomfort with the modern condition into an affective experience of it. Dostoevsky's works and their distinctly modern *Stimmung* indeed invite to think of him as a 'prophet' of modernity[141]; to say the least, his claim in a draft for a letter to M. N. Katkov, in which he pitched the idea that lead him to writing *Crime and Punishment*, rings very true: 'In short, I am convinced that my subject matter is in part justified by our times'[142].

---

[139] Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, p. 58.
[140] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 15.
[141] Cf. Kroeker and Ward, *Remembering the End*, p. 2.
[142] Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for 'Crime and Punishment'*, p. 173.

Chapter 3

Aesthetic Attunement in Samuel Beckett's Narrative Fiction

I.   Introduction: Modes of Modernity from Dostoevsky to Beckett

As we have come to see in the previous chapter, Dostoevsky's aesthetic articulations of attunement are very much defined through a reliance on the existential, affective and spatial aspects inherent in the concept of *Stimmung*. Therein, the musical origin of attunement, which I have discussed in the introductory section of this study, remains mostly covert; however, in a crucial section in *Notes from Underground*, the connection between existence and the realm of the musical surfaces. In discussing the ways in which scientific thinking has affected modes of existence in the modern world, the underground man comments on the idea that in light of modern-day rationalism human beings are depicted as mere 'piano keys' that are governed by the laws of nature. The underground man, however, suggests that this concept would not suffice for the establishment of the individual's sense of self and that if man was truly happy and prosperous as such a 'piano key' in the larger scheme of existence, he would destroy that happiness in order to prove his free will:

> Именно свои фантастические мечты, свою пошлейшую глупость пожелает удержать за собой единственно для того, чтоб самому себе подтвердить (точно это так уж очень необходимо), что люди все еще люди, а не фортепьянные клавиши, на которых хоть и играют сами законы природы собственноручно, но грозят до того доиграться, что уж мимо календаря и захотеть ничего нельзя будет[1].

> [It is precisely his fantastic dreams, his most banal stupidity, that he will wish to keep hold of, with the sole purpose of confirming to himself (as if it were so very necessary) that human beings are still human beings and not piano keys, which, though played upon with their own hands by the laws of nature themselves, are in danger of being played so much that outside the calendar it will be impossible to want anything[2].]

Threatened by the notion of being subject to the laws and mechanisms of nature, man would – according to the underground man – rather destroy a content existence than submit to being controlled from without. He further suggests that even if it was

---

[1] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», p. 74.
[2] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 30.

scientifically proven that man is a mere 'piano key' of nature, he would insist on his individuality and violently *demonstrate* his free will:

> Да ведь мало того: даже в том случае, если он действительно бы оказался фортепьянной клавишей, если б это доказать ему даже естественными науками и математически, так и тут не образумится, а нарочно напротив что-нибудь сделает, единственно из одной неблагодарности; [...]! Я верю в это, я отвечаю за это, потому что ведь все дело-то человеческое, кажется, и действительно в том только и состоит, чтоб человек поминутно доказывал себе, что он человек, а не штифтик![3]

> [And more than that: even if it should indeed turn out that he is a piano key, if it were even proved to him mathematically and by natural science, he would still not come to reason, but would do something contrary on purpose, solely out of ingratitude alone; essentially to have his own way. [...] I believe in this, I will answer for this, because the whole human enterprise seems indeed to consist in man's proving to himself every moment that he is a man and not a sprig![4]]

In this context, the image of the piano key marks an important choice: as opposed to other common metaphors implying a sense of machination – as for example those of the clockwork or puppet – the image of the piano key is fundamentally connected to the question of musical tuning and to the notion of an existential attunement to others. Human beings are thus depicted as piano keys that are attuned to one another and to the world from without, lacking control and self-determination. However, instead of submitting to an attunement that would grant a harmonious existence, the narrator reflects, modern man would rather shatter this harmony to prove his individual and free will. There is a notion of violence implied in the underground man's metaphor of the piano keys: musical attunement thereby becomes an imposition of a mechanical structure from without that obliterates individual subjectivity and free will. Since harmony is thus perceived as threatening and oppressive, dissonance becomes the fundamental stance the modern individual takes in order to posit its own subjectivity.

In his study *Stages of the Clown: Perspectives on Modern Fiction from Dostoevsky to Beckett* (1970), Richard Pearce chronicles a particular line of development in the literature of modernity that begins with Dostoevsky and leads up to Beckett's fiction. Pearce therein focuses on the mode of the comical in key works of aesthetic modernity, including those of Dickens, Kafka and William Faulkner, and traces its development as a particular articulation of the modern in these texts. In doing so, he describes Beckett as an heir to Dostoevsky's existential concerns, who, at the same

---

[3] Dostoevsky, «Записки из подполья», pp. 74f.
[4] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, pp. 30f.

time, developed this latent trajectory in Dostoevsky's works further. In describing this relationship, Pearce himself resorts to the musical metaphor: 'Beckett has taken Dostoyevsky's figure of man as a piano key and has explored the imaginative possibilities of man, not escaping his situation by capricious action, but capriciously playing the key himself'[5]. Beckett's engagement with the existential attunement between self and world thus continues Dostoevsky's enquiry into the modern condition, taking a playful approach to exploring the modes and possibilities of that attunement.

J.M. Coetzee, too, sees a connection between the aesthetic existentialism of Dostoevsky and Beckett as he describes the as latter 'echoing'[6] the former's mode of metafictional self-reflection and self-scrutiny in the *Notes*. Beckett indeed displayed a fascination with the Russian novelist and at one point proposed an essay on his works to his publisher Charles Prentice, which was, however, never written[7]. His lectures on the modern novel given in 1930 – which are only preserved in fragmentary form and were largely influenced by André Gide's work on Dostoevsky – underline that Beckett considered Dostoevsky as an eminent author in the development of modern literature. In his analysis of these lectures, John Bolin describes this perspective as follows:

> Dostoevsky is […] introduced in Beckett's lectures as a counter-paradigm—again, not simply to French literary tendencies, but to what is described as the 'European' novel. This otherness essentially consists in Dostoevsky's treatment of subjectivity. In contrast to the Naturalists, Dostoevsky posits the ultimate incomprehensibility of the actions and personalities of his characters[8].

Dostoevsky's brand of affectively charged, anti-rational poetics thus, in Beckett's view, marked an incision in the development of the novel form, and he located his own writing in this tradition. However, Beckett's aesthetics of the existential crisis at the heart of the modern experience would differ considerably from Dostoevsky's,

[5] Richard Pearce, *Stages of the Clown: Perspectives on Modern Fiction from Dostoevsky to Beckett* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 151.

[6] J.M. Coetzee, 'The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's *Murphy*', in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. by David Attwell (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 31-8 (p. 37).

[7] Cf. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London et al.: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 133f; see also Dimitri Tokarev, 'Samuel Beckett et la Russie', in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 17: *Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett*: *Colloque de Cerisy* (2006), 83-96 (p. 84).

[8] John Bolin, '"Preserving the Integrity of Incoherence?" Dostoevsky, Gide and the Novel in Beckett's 1930 Lectures and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*', in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 246 (2009), pp. 515-37 (p. 518).

and, in doing so, rephrase the fundamental dissonance in the conditions of human existence through close reference to the musical dimension of *Stimmung*.

It might appear counterintuitive to investigate the role of moods that are depicted in fiction in the writing of an author who is known for subverting the notion of aesthetic mimesis as radically as Samuel Beckett is. How is one to examine the role of affect in novels that deconstruct character, plot, setting and narrative as well as the very idea of the possibility of depicting the world authentically, if not the idea of authenticity itself? In fact, as I will show, the question of mood needs to be reframed even more radically than we have previously seen when reading Beckett's prose works, and my contention will be that his texts even consciously force readers to reframe this question and similar related categories that are often accepted as constitutive and integral parts of fiction as we know it. *Stimmung* in Beckett is not a representational matter, but a question of convergence, of whether the aesthetic process is capable of creating a shared state of mind in the deserted space of what I have above described as Heidegger's 'thrown' mode of being.

The idea of the modern subject plays a crucial role in Beckett's narrative works. From his early texts through to the 'trilogy', his protagonists and narrators first reflect the struggle to establish subjectivity and eventually represent the complete disintegration of the concept of the subject, as it is depicted in *The Unnamable* (*L'Innomable*, 1953; English version published in 1958). Their strained relationships to the world express a deep sense of dissonance and distress within the modern experience as the project of modernity creates an existential *Grundstimmung* of uncertainty, vicissitude and, as we have seen in Dostoevsky, illness. In a letter written in German in 1937, Beckett reflects on a sense of 'Dissonanz von Mitteln und Gebrauch'[9], a 'dissonance between means and their use', which he saw at the heart of modern literature and which aims to express that very condition. Following this line of thought, this chapter will examine the correlations between the existential and aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* and Beckett's narrative fiction, focusing on the question of how the notion of attunement can not only be applied to, but also developed further through a reading of Beckett's narrative fiction.

---

[9] Samuel Beckett qtd. in John Pilling, 'A Critique of Aesthetic Judgment: Beckett's "Dissonance of Ends and Means"', in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*., ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Chichester et al.: Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 63-72. (p.63).

My analysis will revolve around what critics often refer to as Beckett's pentalogy of novels, comprising *Murphy* (1938), his first published novel, *Watt* (1953) and the trilogy consisting of *Molloy* (1951; English version first published in 1955), *Malone Dies* (*Malone meurt*, 1951; English version published in 1956) and *The Unnamable.* As I will demonstrate, Beckett's narrative texts redefine and invert the relationship between their narrators and readers even more radically than Dostoevsky's, producing a dissolution of subjectivity that results in a circulation of mood between reader and text. In doing so, they undermine traditional ideas of fictional setting and character, challenging the concepts of self, world and attunement that I have sought to develop thus far. Tracing the notion of *Stimmung* and attunement through Beckett's major novels, I will show the extent to which they depict the modern human condition as being shaped by a sense of dissonance and unstable self-identity within the world that echoes Dostoevsky's conception of modernity and develops its aesthetic articulations further.

Strange Bedfellows: Beckett and Heidegger

Beckett himself claimed that he made no specific effort to engage with Heidegger's philosophy. In an interview with Tom Driver, he mentioned that Heidegger (and Sartre) 'may be right' about certain things, but that their language was 'too philosophical'[10] for him. In his article 'Beaufret, Beckett, and Heidegger: The Question(s) of Influence' (2010), Rodney Sharkey, however, indicates that Beckett was familiarised with Heidegger's philosophy through his friend and mentor Jean Beaufret, who had worked with Heidegger and played a major role in French Heidegger reception[11]. Beckett's affinities with Heidegger have been explored in more detail in Lance St John Butler's *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*[12] (1984) as well as Steve Barfield's 'Beckett and Heidegger: A Critical Survey'[13] (2002). St John

---

[10] Beckett qtd. in Tom Driver, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett in *Columbia University Forum*, Summer 1961', in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* ed. by Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London et al.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 217-23 (p. 219).

[11] Cf. Rodney Sharkey, 'Beaufret, Beckett, and Heidegger: The Question(s) of Influence', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* (2010), 409-22.

[12] Cf. Lance St John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

[13] Cf. Steve Barfield, 'Beckett and Heidegger: A Critical Survey', *Beckett and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Lane (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 154-65.

Butler considers Heidegger and Beckett to be 'linked by a common ontology'[14] and interprets Beckett's works as 'ontological parables'[15] for the problems of existence Heidegger puts forward. The human condition as one marked by 'thrownness' into the world is indeed a frequent motif in Beckett's works. His characters seem to be 'thrown' into their textual existence, with no sense of belonging or purpose: 'Where now? Who now? When now?'[16] is their originary state of being; many of them are homeless, wandering creatures that do not – in Heideggerian terms – occupy a space of dwelling in the world. Despite such overlaps, Barfield considers the relationship between Beckett and Heidegger 'uncanny and unsettling'[17]. He contends that Beckett's works cannot be considered to be mere literary applications of Heideggerian ontology; rather, Barfield finds, Beckett's engagement with existentialist ideas goes beyond Heidegger's ontology in its 'pulling down the trousers/skirts of being'[18].

The general mode of caution most critics display when connecting Heidegger and Beckett indicates that while there are clear affinities, a simple 'application' of Heidegger's philosophy in the form of 'ontological parable' is not the whole story behind Beckett's aesthetics. In an article in the recent collection *Beckett and Phenomenology* (2009) – the first comprehensive volume investigating Beckett's aesthetics alongside Heidegger as well as other central figures of phenomenology – Shane Weller describes Heidegger and Beckett as 'a strange literary-philosophical pseudocouple'[19], who share a number of pertinent existential concerns despite a lack of direct or obvious influence. As Weller points out, both writers address key questions of phenomenology, such as temporality, perception, the conditions of existence and, as an integral part of the latter, 'the "fundamental moods"'[20] of being. So far, however, the connection between Heidegger's *Stimmung* and Beckett's works has not been studied in more detail. In the following, I will test the notion of attunement that I have developed on the basis of Heidegger's philosophy against

---

[14] St John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 7.
[15] Ibid., p. 151.
[16] Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in The *Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Picador, 1979), pp. 265-382 (p. 267).
[17] Steve Barfield, 'Beckett and Heidegger', p. 156.
[18] Ibid., p. 163.
[19] Shane Weller, 'Phenomenologies of the Nothing: Democritus, Heidegger, Beckett', in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, ed. by Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman (London and New York, Continuum, 2009), pp. 39-55 (p. 45).
[20] Ibid., p. 45.

Beckett's narrative fiction to determine to what degree the concept of *Stimmung* upholds as an existential and aesthetic category, and to what extent it needs to be attuned to Beckett's poetics. Focusing on forms of attunement in Beckett's major novels and in his late story *Company* (1979), I will seek to not only explore the role of mood in Beckett's fiction, but – in turn – to develop the aesthetic concept of *Stimmung* further through Beckett's textual practice.

II.   Attunement and the (Pre- and Post-)Cartesian Subject in *Murphy* and *Watt*

<u>Murphy's Quest for Harmony</u>

The philosophical implications of attunement are first, and to a certain degree polemically, explored in *Murphy*, a novel written during the interwar years and influenced by Beckett's time in London. Just as the eponymous 'idiot' from Dostoevsky's novel, Murphy is a character who is deeply out of tune with his times and the world he lives in. Unemployed and solipsistic, he tries to escape from the physical world by tying himself to a chair and thereby silencing his body, which is meant to 'set him free in his mind'[21], thus parodying the Cartesian separation of body and mind. When his lover Celia urges him to find a job in order to make a living, he is disturbed by the capitalist ethos governing the world around him, but eventually finds work as an attendant at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (M.M.M.), a psychiatric hospital, where he can relate to the patients as kindred spirits. Murphy's inability to establish a harmonic relationship in the 'outside' world is countered by the sense of being kin to the rejects of society at the M.M.M. He feels respect for the patients and recognises his own desire to disengage from the world in their 'self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom'[22]. His 'kinship' with his patient Mr Endon, 'a schizophrenic of the most amiable variety'[23], exceeds any other human connection he forms in the course of the novel, and yet this relationship of familiarity ultimately fails in the process of the notorious chess game between

---

[21] Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. by J.C.C. Mays (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), pp. 3f.
[22] Ibid., p. 106.
[23] Ibid., p. 116.

Murphy and Mr Endon[24]. Eventually, while being searched for by a group of acquaintances he is romantically entangled with, Murphy's disturbed relationship to the world culminates in his bizarrely comical, accidental death caused by a gas leak.

As I will argue, the search for harmony or attunement is the central concern of the novel, and as such is introduced early on in *Murphy*. During the exposition of the novel, it is related that Murphy's former mentor Neary has developed the ability to control his heartbeat through his mind, which enables him to stop his heart. He also attempts to mediate the extremes of activity he has detected in Murphy's heart:

> For Murphy had such an irrational heart that no physician could get to the roof of it. Inspected, palpated, ausculated, percussed, radiographed and cardiographed, it was all that a heart should be. Buttoned up and left to perform, it was like Petrouchka in his box. One moment in such labour that it seemed on the point of seizing, the next in such ebullition that it seemed on the point of bursting[25].

The text here references the second tableau of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* («Петрушка», 1910-11), in which the eponymous hero, a puppet brought to life by his owner, the Charlatan, is locked away in his box and – torn between despair and anger fuelled by rejected love and the Charlatan's treatment of him – performs a dance alternating between agitation and silent desperation. The musical score of the scene is marked by frequent shifts, accelerations and decelerations in tempo, varying from *lento* to *furioso*. Being subject to sudden alterations, Murphy's physiological disposition lacks a constant rhythm and a middle ground between affective extremes, a reflection of Beckett's own heart condition, as a result of which his heart would intermittently start to race at night-time[26].

This search or desire for a steady rhythm is related to the novel's opening scene, in which Murphy is swaying back and forth on his rocking chair, having tied his naked body to it. The swaying of his body is translated into a swaying, back-and-forth rhythm in the syntax of the famous opening lines: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton'[27]. In this sequence, the punctuation marks create rhythmic

---

[24] For a detailed analysis of this chess game and its philosophical implications, see Richard Marshall's article 'The Illusory Nothing of Endon's Affence', in *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Arka Chattopadhyay and James Martell (London et al.: Roman Books 2013), pp. 271-89, and Angela Moorjani's *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 75-80.

[25] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 4.

[26] Cf. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 64; 214f.

[27] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 3.

segments of language that suggest a swaying movement, thereby establishing a connection between the motion of Murphy's body and the acoustic dimension of language. In Beckett's works, the image of the rocking chair, which reappears in his late play *Rockaby* (1980), connects the rhythm of language with a form of soothing, rhythmical motion in space, and particularly in a non-performative piece such as *Murphy*, this technique serves as a way of simulating motion through the acoustics of language. The material dimension of language is thus foregrounded in a way that anchors the novel in the materiality and movement of the narrative world, which is a world of sound and rhythm, despite Murphy's desire to escape it. This underlying structure and other aspects of materiality have recently prompted critics to re-evaluate Beckett's texts as 'a literature of the body'[28]. Furthermore, already in these opening lines, we can detect the reader-oriented trajectory of Beckett's aesthetics as the structure of these lines seeks to rhythmically attune the reader's breath to his prose.

Neary, 'at that time a Pythagorean'[29], makes it his objective to establish a balance between the extremes of agitation in Murphy's heart: 'It was the mediation between these extremes that Neary called the Apmonia. When he got tired of calling it the Apmonia he called it the Isonomy. When he got sick of the sound of Isonomy he called it the Attunement'[30]. 'Apmonia' is Beckett's misreading of ἁρμονία [*armonía*], a term from Pythagorean acoustics theory meaning 'harmony' or 'octave,' while 'isonomy,' again, derived from an ancient Greek term, ἰσονομία ['isonomia'], is now chiefly associated with equality before the law, but as coined by Alkmaion refers to a notion of medical harmony in the body[31] that influenced the Hippocratic theory of the four humours. According to this theory, the human body is governed by four humours – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – the balance of which determines the body's health[32]. This notion would later develop into the theory of the four temperaments or character types associated with the humours that, as the first psychosomatic theory of mood, remained influential until the modern age.

---

[28] Ulrika Maude, 'Beckett, Body and Mind', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 170-84 (p. 170).
[29] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 4.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Cf. C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 15.
[32] Jacques Jouanna, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, ed. by Philip van der Eijk, trans. by Neil Allies (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), p. 335.

Rather than an intentional error in transcribing ἁρμονία that may showcase Neary's inaptitude, it seems that Beckett unintentionally mistook the Greek letter ρ ['rho'] for a Latin 'p' as his 'Philosophy Notes' on Presocratic thinking also use the term 'Apmonia' instead of 'Armonia': 'Harmony (Apmonia) in classical Greek music refers not to chords but to melodic progressions, and means, first "tuning" and then "scale"'[33]. Against the grain of common interpretations of *Murphy* as a novel about Cartesianism, according to Eugene Webb, Matthew Feldman and Peter Fifield, Beckett's affinity to Pythagorean philosophy, which finds expression in the character of Neary, and other pre- and post-Cartesian thinkers shaped the ideas explored in *Murphy* as much as, or perhaps even more, than Cartesianism did[34]. Fifield thus suggests that

> the novel's broader philosophical debt is revealed as that owed to the early Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras and Democritus, and post-Cartesians such as Nicolas Malebranche and Arnold Geulincx, rather than to Descartes himself. Adequate knowledge of these more obscure sources allows us to see that Murphy's dualism is not a straightforward Cartesianism but something altogether more subtle and more strange[35].

Rather than simply emulating or parodying Cartesianism, Beckett's exploration of the division between mind and matter thus situates the Cartesian dualism among pre- and post-Cartesian approaches to the philosophy of the self, in doing so complicating the relationship between the physical world and the mind. As Michael E. Mooney argues, the connection to early Greek philosophy in particular complements the Cartesian thought commonly cited as a source that influenced Beckett's take on the human condition[36].

Beckett's indebtedness to Pythagoreanism gives the concepts of harmony and attunement a central role in his first published novel, in which they are used both as a structuring device and as a theme. Neary's attempted mediation between extremes in Murphy's physiology to reach a point of cardiac 'Apmonia' or Attunement follows the Pythagorean definition of harmony, which Leo Spitzer – as I have outlined in Chapter 1 – considers as the origin of the philosophical paradigm of harmony. In

---

[33] Beckett qtd. in Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), p. 69.
[34] Cf. Eugene Webb, *Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels* (London: Peter Owen, 1970), pp. 27f.; Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, p. 69; Peter Fifield, 'Samuel Beckett with, in, and around Philosophy', *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 145-57 (p. 150).
[35] Fifield, 'Samuel Beckett with, in, and around Philosophy', p. 150.
[36] Michael E. Mooney, 'Presocratic Scepticism: Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* Reconsidered', *English Literary History*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1982), 214-34 (pp. 214f.).

Pythagorean thinking, *armonía* is defined as the negotiating force between the two classes of entities the world consists of, unlimited entities like space and time, and their limiters, for instance measures of length and duration. Due to the lack of written records of Pythagoras's own thought, the surviving fragments authored by his follower Philolaus (ca. 470-385 BC) are often used as the first reference point for the Pythagorean theory of harmony[37].

According to Philolaus, the world is composed of three aspects, that is unlimiteds, limiters and the bond between them, harmony:

> Concerning nature and harmony the situation is this: the being of things, which is eternal, and nature herself admit of divine and not human knowledge—except that it was impossible for any of the things that are and are known by us to have come to be, if the being of the things from which the cosmos came together, both the limiters and the unlimiteds, did not preexist. But since these beginnings preexisted and were neither alike nor even related, it would have been impossible for them to be ordered, if a harmony had not come upon them, in whatever way it came to be. Well then, like things and related things did not require any harmony additionally, but things that are unlike, being neither related nor of equal speed—it is necessary that such things be bonded together by harmony, if they are going to be held in order[38].

Although Philolaus does not specify how (and when) harmony came to be established between the two categories of existence, he defines it as the mandatory bond that allows for a sense of order between them, as that which creates a relation between the unlimited elements of the world and its limiters and thereby introduces a connectedness between entities that would otherwise be disparate, random and chaotic. The initial ontological status of these elements is thus unclear, but the fragment under discussion implies that within the Pythagorean world picture, the concept of harmony is given a primacy of being. Horky further expounds this:

> [a]ccording to Philolaus, 'being,' which is prior to the two other primary forces (limiters and unlimiteds), is a necessary precondition for the existence of all things in the cosmos, which have been constituted through the 'harmonization' of limiters and unlimiteds. One might speculate that the 'being of things' and 'harmony,' for Philolaus, could be the same thing, or at least strongly related to one another; this would account for the surprising supervenience of 'harmony,' which is not described as ontologically prior, and seemingly appears out of nowhere in the fragment[39].

The strong relationship, perhaps even equivalence, between being and harmony Horky detects in this fragment is reminiscent of Heidegger's primacy of *Stimmung* in

---

[37] Leonid Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, trans. by Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 289.

[38] Philolaus qtd. in Phillip Sidney Horky, *Plato and Pythagoreanism* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 144 (translation after Carl A. Huffman).

[39] Horky, *Plato and Pythagoreanism*, pp. 145f.

human existence, but it renders harmony an even more fundamental phenomenon. While in Heidegger, attunement more specifically describes the relationship between *Dasein* and the world, in this interpretation of Philolaus, the idea of an orderly world can only emerge if any form of being is negotiated, and established, through harmony or a process of harmonisation. In this sense, harmony comes in the form of a relation, a negotiating force between disparate and epistemologically inaccessible elements that only become meaningful and identifiable through harmonisation.

A prime example of this structure is musical tuning as in musical theory '[a]n unlimited (the continuum of sound) is combined with limiters (points on that continuum)'[40]. Carl A. Huffmann further explains that in Pythagorean tuning

> this combination is governed by a fitting together according to whole number ratios 1:2, 2:3, 3:4 that define the central musical concords of the octave, fifth, and fourth respectively, so that the result is no chance set of notes but the diatonic scale[41].

In Pythagorean philosophy, the concept of harmony was thus strongly associated with both the realm of music and acoustics and with mathematics, establishing a strong link between the two as numerical ratios were used as the basis for musical intervals[42]. Through this relation, the Pythagorean tuning system, which relies on a diatonic scale constituted by 'pure' fifths, was created[43]. As opposed to equal temperament, which tempers the fifths constituting the octave slightly by narrowing them to allow for an evenly sounding octave – and which has been the universal musical tuning standard since the first half of the twentieth century – Pythagorean tuning uses untempered fifths and relies on natural acoustic proportions[44].

In accordance with this notion, Andrew Barker points out that in the original sense, the Pythagorean term for harmony refers to the structure of the octave: 'What Philolaus now calls *harmonia* is the interval of an octave, structurally integrated by relations between the notes inside it'[45]. Thus, in the musical sense, harmony is first and foremost a relationship of similarity or 'kinship' between notes that is defined by equivalent acoustic ratios. Beckett's aforementioned observation that Pythagorean

---

[40] Carl A. Huffmann, 'The Pythagorean Tradition', *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. by A.A. Long (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 66-87 (p. 81).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Cf. Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, p. 292.
[43] Cf. Ross W. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (And Why You Should Care)* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), pp. 23; 38.
[44] Cf. ibid., p. 27.
[45] Andrew Barker, 'Pythagorean Harmonics', in *A History of Pythagoreanism*, ed. by Carl A. Huffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 185-203 (p. 191).

harmony 'refers not to chords but to melodic progressions' documents the temporal, processual dimension of the concept: harmony first describes a progression of musical notes rather than their simultaneity. Consequently, it 'means, first "tuning" and then "scale"'; it designates first and foremost a process of harmonisation rather than a firmly established relationship between fixed musical elements.

In Philolaus's writings, the 'mathematical harmonics'[46] of the acoustic realm thus serve as an analogy for the relationship between elements of being, including the human body. Leonid Zhmud suggests that Philolaus considered the soul as the harmony or attunement of the elements of the body[47]. The soul thus designates the balance and equilibrium between the bodily functions and, as Zhmud suggests, the occurrence of illness could indicate a disturbance of this harmony[48] – as later on the cause of physical and mental afflictions would be seen in an imbalance of the four humours. Whereas reason and the mind were associated with the brain, some of the

---

[46] Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, p. 286.

[47] Cf. ibid.: 390f. The concept of the soul as a form of attunement reappears in Plato's *Phaedo* [in *Meno and Phaedo*, ed. by David Sedley and Alex Long, trans. by Long (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010)], as expressed by the character Simmias when he addresses Socrates. Simmias suggests that the body is analogous to a tuned lyre and, just as the attunement ceases when the lyre is destroyed, the soul comes to an end when the human body dies:

> 'In the following respect, I think,' he said. 'One might say the same thing about attunement too, and a lyre and strings: that the attunement is something invisible, incorporeal, and utterly beautiful and divine in the tuned lyre, whereas the lyre itself and its strings are bodies, corporeal, composite and earthy, and akin to the mortal. So when someone either smashes the lyre or cuts and snaps its strings, what if one were to insist, with the same argument as yours, that the attunement must still exist and not have perished? For there would be no way, when the lyre still exists with its strings snapped, and when the strings themselves, which are of a mortal kind, still exist, that the attunement, which is akin to and of the same nature as the divine and immortal, could have perished, and perished before the mortal did. No, he'd say, the attunement must still exist on its own somewhere, and the bits of wood and the strings must rot away before anything happens to the attunement. In actual fact, Socrates, I think that you yourself are well aware that we take the soul to be something of precisely this kind, since our body is made taut, so to speak, and held together by hot, cold, dry, wet and certain other such things, and our soul is a blend and attunement of those very things, when they are blended properly and proportionately with one another. Anyway, if the soul really is a sort of attunement, obviously when our body is loosened or tautened beyond proportion by illnesses or other evils, the soul must perish at once, however divine it may be, just like other sorts of attunement […]' (pp. 78f.).

The body and the lyre are physical entities, Simmias argues, that need to pre-exist in order to enable an attunement. Once the material aspects are destroyed, the attunement, an invisible and incorporeal element, is extinguished. In response to this, Socrates debunks Simmias's analogy by stating that the attunement is the last element to come into being once the parts of the instrument or the human body are already assembled, whereas the soul is the governing principle of the body, having primacy over it, which is why the soul cannot equal an attunement (cf. ibid.: 89). Both speakers portray attunement as a secondary, disembodied category, thus conflicting with the Pythagorean understanding of harmony as a quality of the material elements of the world.

[48] Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, p. 391.

early Pythagoreans considered the soul and the senses to be located in the heart[49], which plays further into the notion of Murphy's cardiac distress. There is also evidence for a strong link between the soul and movement in the context of Presocratic thinking as the soul was considered 'the source of motion'[50] by many Pythagorean philosophers. The soul, in turn, as the locus of an embodied form of affect, is touched by the senses – amongst others by the auditory sense and music – and its affectedness can thereby be generated by different musical forms. Zhmud thus summarises that '[i]n the late tradition, Pythagoras sometimes appears as the protagonist of stories which illustrate how music affects the soul by means of certain modes and metres'[51]. Thus, a strong link between music, the body and the concept of harmony is suggested; a relation that is transposed into *Murphy* and the question of harmonising the protagonist's body and mind in a fashion analogous to a form of musical harmony.

In the Pythagorean sense, Murphy's sense of a chasm between his body and mind as well as his irregular heart indicate the lack of a harmonisation between the different elements of his body. Not only is his body not in physiological equilibrium, but there is a striking imbalance between the world of the senses and the world of contemplation. To him, the mental realm and the physical world only seldom coincide. As described in the notorious sixth section of the novel,

> [t]he mental experience was cut off from the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the physical experience, the agreement of part of its content with physical fact did not confer worth on that part. It did not function and could not be disposed according to a principle of worth[52].

While in Murphy's mind, there is a degree of correlation between mental and physical elements, this connection is neither desirable nor subjectively of any avail to him.

The intersecting aspects of body and mind do not escape Murphy, but, echoing the philosophy of Arnold Geulincx[53] – a follower of Descartes – he has no

---

[49] Cf. ibid., p. 390.
[50] Ibid., p. 393.
[51] Ibid., pp. ibid: 286f.
[52] Beckett, *Murphy*, pp. 69f.
[53] Cf. Sylvie Debevec Henning, *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 50, and Shane Weller, 'Unwords', in *Beckett and Nothing*, ed. by Daniela Caselli (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 107-24.

understanding of how they might be related and prefers to keep them as separate as possible:

> Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other[54].

Due to this, Murphy's mind can only free itself from the material world when his body is resting and silenced, a notion that translates into the punctuation of Beckett's novel as commas and full stops are often used as rhythmically arranged moments of silence. Once Murphy has achieved this state of being, his mind is able to enter three zones representing successive states of disengagement from the physical world: light, half light and dark – a nod to Baruch Spinoza's concept of the mind[55]. The first zone is a parallel world to the physical world and contains its elements, ready to be arranged differently; the second zone is filled with forms that cannot be found in the physical world; and the last zone is filled with forms in constant flux, constantly coming into being and disintegrating. In the course of the narrative, Murphy spends increasingly more time in the last realm as the novel chronicles his gradual journey into 'darkness' and ultimately his death, the complete termination of his physical existence.

Murphy's self is not attuned to the world in the Heideggerian sense of *Stimmung*; it is not attuned to itself either. Matter and mind are conceived of as almost mutually exclusive, somewhat connected, but better kept separate. His body denies any kind of *armonía*, and an emulation of Neary's harmonised physical constitution would be 'fatal to a man of his *temper*'[56] (my emphasis). This phrase, again, points towards the notion of temperament, both in a psychological and musical sense. Neary, in tune with his body, is 'untempered', tuned to a natural harmony, while it seems that Murphy's constitution is altered, somewhat off key. In fact, he has never actually been in tune with the world, which is symbolised by his first cry as a newborn:

> His troubles had begun early. To go back no further than the vagitus, it had not been the proper A of international concert pitch, with 435 double vibrations per second, but the

---

[54] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 70.
[55] Cf. P.J. Murphy, 'Beckett and the Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222-40 (pp. 226f.).
[56] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 4.

> double flat of this. How he winced, the honest obstetrician, a devout member of the old Dublin Orchestral Society and an amateur flautist of some merit. With what sorrow he recorded that of all the millions of little larynges cursing in unison at that particular moment, the infant Murphy's alone was off the note[57].

This depiction parodies the idea that if it is Murphy alone who is not in tune with the rest of the world, then there must be a universal standard of harmony that everyone else conforms to, an issue Beckett would later further explore in *Watt*. Can it be so easy as to say that Murphy is different, that he is the only one who is 'off key'? In a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett expressed some concern about a tendency to see Murphy as an outsider of humanity: 'There seemed to me […] always the risk of taking [Murphy] too seriously and separating him too sharply from the others'[58] – the others presumably being Celia, Neary, Murphy's former fiancée Ms Counihan, Mr Endon, and so forth. The polemic description of Murphy's out-of-tuneness, down to the exact rate of vibrations per second in his infant cry, indicates that while, on the surface, Murphy can be described as a radically dissonant element in an otherwise largely harmonious world, the actual implication looming behind Beckett's irony is the absurdity of the idea of a universal harmony that keeps the world and human beings attuned to one another.

Far from being a coincidence, the cause of Murphy's absurd death, a faulty gas connection elicited by someone flushing the toilet, further points towards an inability to establish harmony in the world that is not limited to the main character. When Murphy takes up his position at the M.M.M., his predecessor at the asylum, the pot poet Ticklepenny, installs a gas radiator and connects it to a jet in the W.C. on the floor below Murphy's room, but the connection malfunctions due to an issue the pot poet is familiar with:

> The extremes [i.e. the gas radiator and the jet emitting gas] having thus been established, nothing remained but to make them meet. This was a difficulty whose fascinations were familiar to him from the days when as a pot poet he had laboured so long and so lovingly to join the ends of his pentameters[59].

Murphy's demise is notably generated by a failure to bring together two extremes – as with his heart – the actual cause being a fault in the connection, in the Pythagorean sense, a fault in the harmony. This comically mundane form of

---

[57] Ibid., p. 47.

[58] Beckett qtd. in John Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by Pilling (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 17-42 (p. 31).

[59] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 108.

disharmony is related to poetic form, rhythm and sound, through reference to Ticklepenny's poetic aspirations and his attempts to produce verse in pentameter. Again, Beckett presents us with a juxtaposition between metre and rhythm on the one hand and harmony and pitch on the other hand as timing is of a fundamental importance in the novel.

As the treatment of harmony in *Murphy* suggests, these two fundamental elements of music, while seemingly distinct, are inherently related through the acoustic quality of pitch, which is, from the point of view of acoustics, constituted by rhythmic vibrations. If the problem of pitch is qualitatively a problem of rhythm – as it is indicated by Murphy's infant cry being off the standard A with 435 double vibrations per second – harmony also becomes a problem of time and timing. The irregularity of Murphy's heartbeat illustrates his inability to coincide temporally with the rest of the world; likewise, the flushing of the toilet that kills him occurs at an inconvenient, fateful time; the party in search of Murphy only arrives at the M.M.M. after his accidental death; the lovers' entanglements are subject to a comically intertwined succession of encountering and missing each other. To Deleuze, this fundamental mode of discrepancy time becomes subject to, as it is declared in Hamlet's statement that '[t]he time is out of joint'[60], is a constitutive aspect of a new paradigm of time that emerges out of Kant's philosophy, where time is defined as a 'discordant accord'[61]. The structure of temporal 'out-of-jointness', of missing each other and of unfortunate coincidences that governs the plot of *Murphy*, is thus testament to a pervasive underlying mode of discordance and dissonance.

Through its reliance on the notions of rhythm, harmony and pitch, the composition of the novel is thus, to a certain degree, reminiscent of that of a piece of music. As Murphy realises that 'M.M.M. stood suddenly for music, MUSIC, MUSIC'[62], the trajectory of the novel becomes clear: it chronicles the search for harmony or an attunement, which is structurally expressed in the narrative of Murphy's quest and in which dualist relations establish a dialectic that needs to be harmonised. Far from being answered in a definitive way, the question of the possibility of harmony remains open; however, the novel does not seem to offer any

---

[60] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot et al. (London et al.: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), pp. 2422-619 (Act I, Scene 5, p. 2360).
[61] Deleuze, 'On Four Poetic Formulas That Might Summarize the Kantian Philosophy', p. 35.
[62] Ibid., p. 147.

stable forms of harmony and questions the very existence of its universality. The Pythagorean notion of harmony as an ontologically primary element that provides order between heterogeneous entities remains a central reference point to *Murphy*; however, since Pythagorean harmony is unfit for someone of Murphy's *temper*, the world depicted in the novel features a more complicated and disturbed relationship between the objects and subjects in it, in which the question of harmony is rephrased as its former presuppositions erode.

In conclusion, we can see that Pythagorean philosophy can thus fruitfully account for a number of the central themes of the novel: the question of harmony and attunement, the correlation between music and the self, motion and material presence and the relationship between the sensual body and the rational mind. However, the text does not seem to take these philosophical concepts at face value; instead they are playfully explored as potential, but not final answers or ways of framing Murphy's intellectual – and far from unique – dilemma. As one of Beckett's clear sources for his exploration of harmony, Pythagorean thought can be used to complement Heidegger's notion of *Stimmung* in a way that opens up a closer relationship to musical acoustics and the human body. However, as it is stated, Neary was 'at the time a Pythagorean', but has clearly moved on after he reached the limitations of usefulness of Pythagorean philosophy, exasperated by a person whose physical constitution overthrows the Pythagorean ideal of a universal harmony between entities in the world and within the human self through a *reductio ad absurdum*, and by a world whose fundamental conditions are now based on discordance rather than accordance.

The Pythagorean concept of harmony therefore ranks among a number of other philosophical influences and propositions the novel takes up and puts forward for the reader to test, consider and possibly dismiss:

> For if Beckett is, on the one hand, a novelist who employs philosophic ideas, he is also at times a grand debunker of philosophic notions. He is concerned, clearly, with metaphysics; he is also fond of philosophic puns and anecdotes; and the mixture of seriousness and levity is difficult to separate[63].

At this point in Beckett's *œuvre*, the question of attunement is posed, approached through the Presocratic understanding of harmony, and yet not answered in a satisfactory way. Nevertheless, the themes that would mark his works to follow, in

---

[63] Michael E. Mooney, 'Presocratic Scepticism: Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* Reconsidered', p. 216.

particular *Watt*, are put forward in an engaging, restless and urgent manner: the correlation between being and music, and the question of the possibility of an attunement in a seemingly hostile world.

Tuning and Listening in *Watt*

> *So I shall merely state, without enquiring how it came, or how it went, that in my opinion it was not an illusion, as long as it lasted, that presence of what did not exist, that presence without, that presence within, that presence between, though I'll be buggered if I can understand how it could have been anything else.*[64]

Written in occupied France during the early 1940s, while Beckett had gone into hiding from the Gestapo, but only published 15 years after *Murphy*, *Watt*, perhaps 'the oddest of all Beckett's works'[65], delves deeper into the realm of musical and ontological attunement. While *Murphy*'s semi-ironical treatment of Pythagorean harmony leaves the question of attunement open, *Watt* addresses the problem of *Stimmung* in a more direct manner. In four parts, *Watt* describes the journey of its eponymous hero to an unknown town, where he – without any explanation for this occurrence – takes up the position of being a servant to a Mr Knott. Upon his arrival, his predecessor Arsene introduces him to the household by means of a long-winded monologue before leaving him to enter Mr Knott's service alongside a senior servant called Erskine. When Erskine leaves, Watt becomes the senior servant and is joined by Arthur. During his confusing and alienating time in the Knott household, Watt gradually loses his ability to make sense of occurrences and develops a high degree of anxiety. In the third part of the novel, the narrator introduces himself as Sam and relates that Watt told him his story when they were spending time in an undefined institution at an unspecified moment in time, at which Watt also started to lose the ability to use language in the conventional sense. In the final part of the narrative, Watt departs from Mr Knott's house and returns to the train station, where he eventually disappears. The chronology of the novel is disordered, and the narrative often oscillates between being over-precise and fastidious in, for instance, meticulously listing all possible combinations of people and entities in a given

---

[64] Beckett, *Watt*, ed. by C.J. Ackerley (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 37.
[65] Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction', p. 35.

context, while at the same time being uncertain, obscure and chaotic by leaving out essential information about the plot and characters.

On the surface, *Murphy* and *Watt* may share a similar narrative structure in that a wandering individual finds work in an obscure place and at the end leaves it – dead or alive –, but aesthetically there are worlds between *Murphy*'s relatively conventional narrative composition and *Watt*'s unsettling indeterminacy. The novel thus marks a large step towards Beckett's gradual movement towards a disintegration of the structure of the novel, which culminates in *The Unnamable*. I will show that this disintegration is accompanied by an implementation and exploration of the philosophical ideas the text engages with on a level that is more ostensibly aesthetic, as opposed to *Murphy*'s earlier predominantly intellectual and thematic treatment of philosophical concepts. Despite the noticeable shift in Beckett's aesthetics after *Murphy*, *Watt* also represents a continuation of the philosophical enquiry initiated in its predecessor; according to P.J. Murphy, the focus here lies on Beckett's understanding of Immanuel Kant's dialectic of determinism and freedom, rendering *Watt*, in Murphy's view, 'a Kantian novel'[66].

Like Beckett's Murphy, Watt is an alienated individual in an alienating world, on a quest that is very likely not of his own choosing. Once again, harmony is presented as an ideal state of being whose accomplishment is sought with a high degree of urgency, but which largely seems out of reach. Arsene's monologue in the first part of the novel expresses a desire for finding harmony through a place where one belongs, and to the lonesome wanderer this place seems to be Mr Knott's house:

> He is well pleased. For he knows he is in the right place, at last. And he knows he is the right man, at last. In another place he would be the wrong man still, and for another man, yes, for another man it would be the wrong place again. But he being what he has become, and the place being what it was made, the fit is perfect. And he knows this. No. Let us remain calm. He feels it. The sensations, the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable, of imminent harmony, when all outside him will be he, the flowers the flowers that he is among him, the sky the sky that he is above him, the earth trodden the earth treading, and all sound his echo. When in a word he will be in his midst at last, after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter[67].

This vision of finding an existential mode of harmony in a place of belonging – in Heideggerian terms, a space of dwelling – proposes a coalescence between the self and its chosen space. As the self finally becomes one with the material world in this

---

[66] Murphy, 'Beckett and the Philosophers', p. 229.
[67] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 33.

image, it overcomes its sense of thrownness and thereby reaches a balance within itself, establishing a harmonious relationship with its surroundings and breaking the spell of its alienated subjectivity as it merges with the place it has found for itself.

In the course of the novel, Watt seeks to find this sense of harmony, but his attempts are condemned to fail. The famous scene of the piano tuners' visit at the beginning of Watt's stay in the Knott household sets the scene for the question of musical tuning, which occupies a central position in Beckett's *œuvre*. As they come to 'choon the piano'[68], the Galls, a blind elderly father and his son, are the only people to enter the house during Watt's first period of employment, in what is 'perhaps the principal incident of Watt's early days in Mr Knott's house'[69]. As the younger Gall sets out to execute the task, it becomes clear that the piano has become as good as unusable:

> The mice have returned, [Mr Gall Junior] said.
> The elder said nothing. Watt wondered if he had heard.
> Nine dampers remain, said the younger, and an equal number of hammers.
> Not corresponding, I hope, said the elder.
> In one case, said the younger.
> The elder had nothing to say to this.
> The strings are in flitters, said the younger.
> The elder had nothing to say to this either.
> The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger.
> The piano-tuner also, said the elder.
> The pianist also, said the younger[70].

The 'doomed' piano is a broken machine: the strings are worn out and have no tension, and as only nine hammers remain, only nine notes can be struck. Out of the remaining nine dampers, only one corresponds to a hammer, so that only one note can actually be played – the remaining notes can only fade out. Any attempt to tune the instrument seems senseless, and yet the Galls return to Knott's house to do their work, although the piano has apparently been broken for a long time, as indicated by the younger Gall's implication that the mice have been there before. The older Gall appears content with this state of affairs, even hoping that the hammers and dampers do not correspond. Hence, the tuning of the piano in itself has become an impossible act as the components of the piano are broken; an attunement is unattainable, and

---

[68] Ibid., p. 57.
[69] Ibid., p. 59.
[70] Ibid.

the tuner himself wishes it to be that way. As a result of this, the pianist – or the artist – too is doomed to set out to do his work from a place of fundamental dissonance.

Needless to say, the mere idea of tuning has been replaced by the phonetically skewed 'chooning', which constitutes yet another nail in the coffin of the concept of harmony. The older and the younger Gall, too, are out of tune with each other as Watt observes that '[t]here was no family likeness between the two'[71], leading him to assume they might in fact merely be stepfather and stepson. In musical terms, the father-son relationship could be interpreted as representing the interval of an octave – with the older Gall being the starting note and the younger Gall being its equivalent at the higher end of the octave – but the lack of likeness between the two indicates that only a broken sense of correspondence is in place. The conversation between the two Galls and the way in which it is represented in isolated, verse-like lines evokes the notion of a rhythmic musical progression: 'The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger. / The piano-tuner also, said the elder. / The pianist also, said the younger'. However, the older man's silences as well as their apparent physical unlikeness limit the possibility of an actual harmonic relationship, demonstrating that, similar to the piano itself, only fragments of harmony and correspondence remain. Thereby, the human piano keys, which the underground man previously described, step out of their imposed attunement; not of their own accord, but since the condition of attunement itself breaks away.

In his outstanding article '*Watt*: Music, Tuning and Tonality' (1983), Heath Lees provides the first comprehensive analysis of the role of musical imagery in the novel, identifying the concepts of tuning and harmony as a pivotal element of the text. He therein relates the idea that tuning is impossible within the novel, not only musically – as it is demonstrated in the piano-tuning scene – but also ontologically, in reference to the aforementioned issue of temperament and more specifically to the use of twelve-tone equal temperament. According to Lees, the imposition of this universal standard that tempers the natural sounds of the octave is the source of an inherent element of disharmony within music itself:

> Musical 'order' demands a continuous tinkering with natural sound to make the tonal system repeatable and therefore amenable to the form of series – the triumph of ratio over musical matter. Western music relies for its effect of discord resolving into concord not on musical truth but on musical compromise, the kind of compromise which is to be found in a pre-

---

[71] Ibid., p. 58.

established, sleight-of-ear system that piano tuners, for example, are paid to create. Watt's ear for music fails him not just because sensibility is overwhelmed by sense, but because the Western musical system of tonality is based on a distortion in order to achieve that system. It is, so to speak, a trick. In Wattian terms, Art is Con; tuner, piano and pianist are all doomed[72].

Lees argues that the inability to find a musical attunement in Beckett's fiction is based on the modern system of tonality introduced by equal temperament, which limits and tempers natural sound in order to establish a universal standard. This claim is underlined by the ironic stance *Murphy* suggests regarding the notion of a universal harmony and norm – symbolised by the supposedly ubiquitous A of international concert pitch all infants but Murphy strike – that only the protagonist does not conform to. The piano in particular is symbolic of this method of tempering sound as equal temperament was specifically designed for instruments with immovable pitch like the organ and the piano, as opposed to string and wind instruments whose pitch is adjustable. This tuning method was popularised in France and Germany in the eighteenth century and in England in the nineteenth century, becoming a universal standard after 1917[73].

According to Ross W. Duffin, the popularisation of equal temperament throughout the modern age is closely connected to the prevalence of capitalism and the progressive commercialisation of music, particular in the course of the twentieth century[74]. Standardised tuning methods facilitated the more affordable mass production of musical instruments and made musical performances more repeatable due to the reliance on a homogenised acoustic system. The connection between standardised attunement and capital becomes apparent in Beckett's homeless, unemployed or vagrant characters, whose dysfunctional existence betrays their 'constitutive maladjustment to the world'[75] and to a normative mode of Being-in-the-*modern*-world. Celia is exasperated with Murphy's resistance to finding work and adjusting to modern economy; his refusal to do so sounds like 'difficult music'[76] to her, out of tune with the universal ethos of his time. As we have previously seen, this

---

[72] Heath Lees, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Nr. 9 (1983), ed. by John Pilling, n. pag. <http://www.english.fsu.edu/ jobs/num09/Num9 Lees.htm> [accessed 20 April 2017].
[73] Cf. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony*, pp. 48; 108; 138.
[74] Ibid., p. 141.
[75] Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 177.
[76] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 28.

political dimension is also latent in Dostoevsky's Petersburg texts, in which an attunement to the modern world is by definition shaped by financial interests.

Duffin further argues that the introduction of a standard musical pitch has compromised the concept of harmony as, firstly, it has limited the variety of tuning methods that were previously in use and, secondly, the intervals constituting the octave in twelve-tone equal temperament are modulated, generating acoustical impurity in the structure of the octave[77]. In this sense, a fundamental aspect of disharmony is an integral part of this tuning method, a systemic issue of modern acoustics Beckett uncovers in both *Murphy* and *Watt*. To once again echo *Hamlet*, something is rotten in the universal structures that govern the modern world, which Beckett's characters experience as there is a cacophony underlying the seemingly ordered and functional industriousness of modernity.

The symbols present in Mr Knott's music room, a bust of the Danish-German Baroque composer Dieterich Buxtehude and a ravanastron, an ancient Indian string instrument, reinforce this notion of a forced concept of modern harmony. In this context, Buxtehude, who had a strong influence on Bach and his idea of the 'well-tempered clavier', represents the development of tuning methods that temper natural sound, particularly the practice of well-tempered tuning which emerged in the seventeenth century. The ravanastron, in turn, is a relic of a 'much older non-Western musical tradition'[78], epitomising – in line with the concept of Pythagorean tuning discussed earlier – an alternative to the established modern forms of tuning, and modes of existence, the novel critiques. The attempt at establishing equal temperament in the piano is thus symbolically countered by the ravanastron's movable, less confined pitch. The discordance between equal temperament and Pythagorean tuning is further expressed in rhythmic terms as the Pythagorean comma, a term delineating the small intervals that constitute the differences in pitch between Pythagorean tuning and tempered tuning, appears as an image in Beckett's manuscript for *Watt*, where this divisive element is then articulated in the punctuation and rhythmic use of commas in Beckett's prose[79].

---

[77] Cf. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony*, pp. 18; 29.

[78] Lees, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', n.p.

[79] Cf. Connor, '"Was That a Point?": Beckett's Punctuation', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 269-81 (p. 275).

What alternatives to the standardised notion of 'equally tempered existence' do Beckett's works suggest? According to Daniel Albright, *Watt* also parodies Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, debunking it as a too restrictive system of tonality:

> Twelve-tone procedures, as well as diatonic procedures, fail where there is no clear definition of pitch. A Beckett character, especially in the early novels, tends to be a creature of a continuous glissando of being, less appropriate to the music of Schoenberg than to the music that John Cage would be writing some years later[80].

The metaphor of a 'glissando of being' captures the vicissitudes of self that are displayed in *Murphy* to a certain degree and even more so in *Watt*. The latter in particular cannot be determined to any certain pitch, structure or form: the first view we get of Watt describes him as 'a solitary figure', which could be 'a man or a woman' or even just 'a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin'[81], and the only constant element of his self is his name, in itself a pun on the question of 'what' that may signify. Watt's inharmonicity to the world, to language and to his fellow beings uncovers a larger structural problem of modernity, one that is reminiscent of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's unearthing of the forms of oppression and violence inherent in the modern world in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

Some critics have suggested that the main difference between *Murphy*'s and *Watt*'s approach to this set of existential and political problems lies in the subjective space of the events related in the narratives: John Calder, for instance, proposes that '[w]hereas Murphy is largely about the outer world of appearances, Watt is mainly concerned with an inner world'[82]. While I cannot fully agree with this proposition, Calder, quite aptly, foregrounds the significant degree of subjective experience *Watt* is concerned with. Murphy, a creature split between the inner and the outer world, can only perceive them as two largely separate spheres, where the inner sphere is preferred to the outer world, which becomes merely a necessary evil. In *Watt*, however, the boundaries of inner and outer world gradually break down, but as opposed to Arsene's vision of a harmonic unity of inner and outer world, Watt's sense of self and meaning are obliterated during his stay at Mr Knott's house.

To Watt, the significance of the piano-'chooning' incident lies in his inability to make sense of the occurrence as he repeats it in his mind over and over again until

---

[80] Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 144.
[81] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 11.
[82] John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder Publications/New Jersey: Riverrun Press, 2001), p. 28

it loses 'in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal'[83]. By breaking down the elements of sensual experience into their basic material categories, Watt loses his grip on abstract thinking, a development that later culminates in his dissection of language into phonemes distinct from their semantics or pragmatics. He becomes a being of pure sensual experience without the ability to use the higher cognitive functions allowing him to perform abstractions, and as the semiotic dimension of language thus supplants its semantics in Watt's mind, the realm of sensuousness, associated with the musical, comes to the fore. In Pythagorean terms, Watt loses any harmonising bond between unlimited and their limiters, finding himself in an unordered world he cannot comprehend. Successively, outer reality and inner processes become entangled to a degree where Watt can no longer 'distinguish between what had happened and what did not happen, between what was and what was not, in Mr Knott's house'[84]. Jonathan Boulter argues that Watt's confusion about the meaning of this specific occurrence mirrors the hermeneutic act of reading, rendering Watt himself a confused reader and the Galls incident 'the initiatory act of reading in *Watt* for Watt and the reader'[85]. Boulter's point concerning Watt's position as a recipient and interpreter rather than an active agent in his own narrative is very valuable; however, in my view the emphasis of Watt's receptiveness should be placed on his function as a *listener* rather than a reader.

In the course of the novel, we find Watt listening to music, voices and sounds on countless occasions; each section features at least one significant listening incident. In section one, he first listens to a threne sung by a choir, lying in a ditch on his way to Knott's house, and then to Arsene's monologue for an extended period of time; in section two, we find him listening to the rhythmic croaking of three frogs; in section three, he listens to Arthur's long-winded story in the garden and Mr Knott's monotonous singing; and in section four, Watt listens to his successor Mr Micks, whose voice 'was far from unmelodious'[86], and upon reaching the train station and having been knocked out by a door in the waiting room, becomes a receptacle of the conversation and events around him rather than an active agent.

---

[83] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 60.
[84] Ibid., p. 107.
[85] Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Gainesville, FL, et al.: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 27.
[86] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 187.

The novel invites the reader to join Watt in his listening experience, providing, for instance, the musical notation of the threne; however, the notation is incomplete as only the length of the notes without their pitch, key, tempo or definite rhythm is given. A footnote in this scene poses the question: 'What, it may be enquired, was the music of this threne? What at least, it may be demanded, did the soprano sing?'[87]. The Addenda at the end of the novel, a number of sections not incorporated into the novel due to '[o]nly fatigue and disgust'[88], provides the complete notation for the soprano voice, but the notation for the remaining voices is absent, thus obscuring the harmonic relationship between the voices. To Watt, they are ambiguously 'indifferent in quality'[89]; he can either not distinguish them qualitatively, or he has no interest in or understanding of their harmonic relationship. The novel withholds the song's harmonicity, and the locus of harmony, or rather of its lack, becomes Watt: as the focaliser of the narrative and the person who related the incident to the narrator Sam, he would have to fill in the gap, but he is unable to do so as the voices seem 'indifferent' to him. Rather than asking 'What […] was the music of this threne?', we thus discover that 'Watt was the [inharmonic, incomplete] music of this threne'.

In Beckett's handwritten draft of *Watt* it says of the threne that 'Watt heard the music in D-flat minor but it was probably in C-sharp minor for Watt was inclined to hear a with a flat'[90]. Watt's inclination is to hear the note a – again, this A of international concert pitch – as a flat renders his attunement to sound somewhat off the established norm, a tendency that becomes progressively more pronounced in his acts of listening and understanding in the course of the novel. Lees, then, interprets the Galls incident as a symbolic occurrence representing Watt's attempted and failed endeavour to attune to the meaning of what is happening around him:

> The tuners represent the ability to impose an acoustic system upon natural sound, yet the state of the piano renders this impossible, and the incident itself throws out an insuperable challenge to Watt's systematically-grounded powers of reasoning. Watt is as defeated in trying to tune the Galls into his concept of meaning as the Galls themselves are in trying to tune the piano into the tempered acoustic system[91].

---

[87] Ibid., p. 26.
[88] Ibid., p. 215.
[89] Ibid., p. 26.
[90] Beckett qtd. in Lees, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', n.p.
[91] Lees, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', n.p.

The breakdown in interpreting sound and meaning due to the lack of a solid system of signification – since the established systems of signification have been uncovered as a form of tempering the materiality of sound – goes hand in hand with a breakdown of the limits of Watt's subjectivity and the outer world. In the scene of the threne, it is suggested that the voices of the choir might be inside Watt's mind before he asserts that 'really [the music] *seemed* from without'[92] (my emphasis). A similar tendency is expressed in Arsene's monologue in the first section of the novel, which describes a slip, a shift in perception affecting his inner and outer world in equal measures:

> It was a slip that I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one nearby, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. And I have little doubt that I was the only person living to discover them. To conclude from this that the incident was internal would, I think, be rash. For my – how shall I say? – my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it[93].

The self thus finds itself in a process of distension which seems to obliterate the barrier between subject and world and which enables a free circulation of affect and moods. *Stimmung*, as a fundamentally spatial phenomenon, dwells in a space that transcends subjectivity and the material world, a concept Arsene finds a perfect expression for:

> So I shall merely state, without enquiring how it came, or how it went, that in my opinion it was not an illusion, as long as it lasted, that presence of what did not exist, that presence without, that presence within, that presence between, though I'll be buggered if I can understand how it could have been anything else[94].

Watt thus executes an important shift in Beckett's narrative fiction by reframing the question of harmony away from the strict dualism portrayed in *Murphy* and into a world in which the subject becomes a permeable locus of experience; in other words, from a theoretical exploration of philosophical attunement to an affective, experiential account of *Stimmung*, which then becomes the point of departure in the trilogy. Watt's feeling of anxiety, which grows over the course of the narrative, opens a door to what I will describe as *Molloy*'s 'anxious disposition' in relation to Being-in-the-world in the next chapter.

---

[92] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 26.
[93] Ibid., p. 35.
[94] Ibid., p. 37.

In *Watt*, the unsuccessful search for harmony initiated in *Murphy* thus leads to a subversion of harmony based on the modern practice of musical temperament, which the novel exposes as a corrupted form of harmony. There is a fundamental disharmony underlying Beckett's modernity, which translates into his characters' imprecision, fluidity and thrownness into the world. Lees quite aptly summarises the stages of deconstructing the Western musical system in the course of the novel:

> Throughout Watt's music, the quest begun in *Murphy* for Apmonia or Attunement is thwarted. The notion of true pitch is thrown into confusion; the coherence of an underlying key-system is denied and the patterns of scales themselves are revealed as a manipulation of acoustic fact – a mere expedience wrought at the hands and ears of Western musicians in league with the tuners[95].

In *Watt*, even the tuners, the blind elder and his son, have given up on establishing harmony and only leave rudimentary, incomplete aspects of attunement behind. Beckett's critique of aesthetic modernity can be viewed as an important part of a larger discourse on a sense of discontent about the modern world, which also includes Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the modern culture industry.

While *Murphy* preserves a largely traditional narrative structure, *Watt* opens up the cracks of narration and trapdoors of cohesion that would mark Beckett's later narrative works, thus mirroring the loss of Pythagorean harmony as a 'natural' system of reference and meaning in their aesthetic composition. At the same time, the acoustic quality of the text becomes ever more prominent, featuring sound experiments like the incorporation of rhythm through the song of the frogs and musical notation. These rhythmic elements are, again, connected the question of pitch through the notion of the Pythagorean comma, which manifests itself in a peculiar rhythmic prose. Just as Watt becomes a listener in his own narrative, so the reader, too, is made to listen to the voices, sounds and music of a novel that is perhaps as anti-mimetic as most pieces of instrumental music in its foregrounding of the material and semiotic dimension of its own language. As Mary Bryden points out, the musicality of these works thereby invites the reader to *hear* rather than read them: 'When we read or hear Beckett's texts, we are being drawn into their musicality, exhibiting as they do an extraordinarily acute attunement to sound'[96]. The alienating experience of reading *Watt*, with all its vagueness and chaos, and the

---

[95] Lees, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', n.p.

[96] Mary Bryden, 'Sounds and Silence: Beckett's Music', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 6, *Samuel Beckett: Crossroads and Borderlines / L'œuvre carrefour/ l' œuvre limite* (1997), 279-88 (p. 279).

act of listening to the material rawness of its sound and rhythm thus approximates the ontological struggle the novel portrays, throwing readers into a pandemonium of acoustic discordance and thwarted meaning, leaving them flapping to attune, somehow, to the sound of Beckett's out-of-tune writing.

III. 'All I am is feeling': The Textual Dynamics of *Molloy*

The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense,
it thinks itself, and even gives itself meaning within me.[97]

Readers, Narrators and Authors

After the intellectual exploration of attunement in *Murphy* and a turn towards its aestheticisation in *Watt*, *Molloy* – Beckett's first novel originally published in French – places ontological forms of mood at the centre of its study of the human condition. Unfolding against the backdrop of an existential notion of anxiety that draws on Heidegger's notion of *Angst* as a unique form of *Stimmung* enabling ontological self-awareness, *Molloy* develops some of the major themes Beckett introduced in the previous novels further: a profound sense of alienation from the world, a 'thrownness' that defines human existence, an undermining of paradigms of representation and, concurrently, a foregrounding of the questions of materiality, sound and subjectivity entailing a search for musical, and existential, attunement. At the same time, *Molloy* foreshadows the radical deconstruction of narrative conventions executed in the two later parts of the trilogy, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable.*

The transition from the third-person narration used in *Murphy* to the first-person narrative of *Molloy* marks Beckett's farewell to the idea of an omniscient narrator, which is already questioned and parodied in his first published novel and then successively dismantled in *Watt*. In a transitional state between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration[98], *Watt* presents its narrative voice Sam as

---

[97] Georges Poulet, 'Criticism and the Experience of Interiority', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (London and Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 47.
[98] The categories of homo- and heterodiegetic narration are introduced in Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 84.

predominantly a third-person narrator, who is, however, to some degree involved in the plot of the novel, relating his personal encounter and experiences with Watt, who has, in turn, narrated his experiences in the Knott household to Sam. In the chronology of Beckett's works, Molloy is the first title character to represent a radically subjective account of his story within the novel genre, a tendency that makes the trilogy 'microscopically concerned with the hermeneutics of the individual subject'[99]. Along with this turn towards a more subjective approach to narrative comes a reorientation towards a more nuanced engagement with affect and emotion. Of all of Beckett's novels, *Molloy* is certainly the most openly melancholic as the lonesome wanderings of Molloy and Moran, ostensibly his mirror image and alter ego, through the desolate landscape of the fictional county of Ballybaba are permeated by an elegiac atmosphere of isolation and an underlying sense of grief. This tangible 'moodiness' of the novel, and of the trilogy in general, can be extrapolated through reference to Beckett's self-reflexive comments on his decreasing engagement with philosophical thought.

In a frequently cited interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède, Beckett purports that he has little interest in the philosophy of his contemporaries, explaining that his writing from *Molloy* onwards is more closely related to *feeling* rather than philosophical thought:

> 'Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?'
> 'I never read philosophers.'
> 'Why not?'
> 'I never understand anything they write.'
> 'All the same, people have wondered if the existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works.'
> 'There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms.'
> 'What was your reason then?'
> 'I haven't the slightest idea. I'm no intellectual. All I am is feeling. "Molloy" and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel'[100].

Although in this statement Beckett significantly downplays his engagement with philosophy – whose biographical and aesthetic influence has been well

---

[99] Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 58.
[100] Beckett and D'Aubarède in Gabriel D'Aubarède, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett in *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 16 February 1961', trans. by Christopher Waters, in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* by Graver and Federman, pp. 215-17 (p. 217).

documented[101] – the shift alluded to in his aesthetic approach to the novel makes itself felt in *Molloy*'s affectively charged narrative, in which subjectivism and feeling take the place formerly occupied by a more distanced, ironic and philosophically charged tone. As Fifield notes, '[a]cross the range of Beckett's corpus, philosophical reference appears to become increasingly subtle'[102]. Beckett insinuates that his 'folly' in the earlier works may have been the exclusion of feeling, but the trilogy marks the beginning of a turn towards such forms of affect that may have been largely missing in the early novels and where life is equated with feeling: as Molloy phrases it, '[i]t is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life'[103]. In line with this notion, my analysis of the trilogy will focus on the aesthetic evocation of *Stimmung* as a central aspect of this affective reconfiguration in Beckett's works, and the way it complements the critical insights gained from the interpretation of attunement in *Murphy* and *Watt.*

Molloy, an heir of Murphy's and Watt's alienation and lack of belonging, narrates his story from his mother's room. We learn that he is supposed to write his story down, for whom or for what purpose we do not know. The majority of his narrative depicts a journey he took with his bicycle through Ballybaba – which may or may not be based on Beckett's native Ireland – during which he had a number of random and bizarre encounters, while his physical constitution gradually decayed. The second part of the novel is narrated by Moran, a detective who is instructed to find Molloy. Taking his son Jacques on his quest, Moran's health, too, deteriorates in the course of his journey. After his son leaves him behind, Moran murders a stranger and eventually finds his way home, where he begins to write down his report on the journey.

In the opening scene of the novel, the eponymous anti-hero observes an encounter between two unknown men on a country road, their approach describing an attempted form of attunement: 'At first a wide space lay between them', but as they walk towards each other, the distance is gradually diminished until they are

---

[101] Cf. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 111f.; 175; 218f.; 295; 358f.; Debevec Henning, *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition*; Fifield, 'Samuel Beckett with, in, and around Philosophy'; Feldman, *Beckett's Books*.

[102] Fifield, 'Samuel Beckett with, in, and around Philosophy', p. 153.

[103] Beckett, *Molloy*, in *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Picador, 1979), pp. 7-162 (p. 25).

standing 'breast to breast'[104] in a trough. Molloy speculates that the two men, who '[look] alike, but no more than others do'[105], may know each other as they departed from the same town, but he believes that now 'they will know each other, greet each other, even in the depths of the town'[106] when they meet again. After looking at the nearby sea and exchanging a few words, the two men – whom Molloy calls A and C – continue to walk their separate ways. The allegorical nature of this encounter as a form of approach or attunement foreshadows the novel's preoccupation with questioning whether a state of attunement between two subjects is possible at all, and if so, how it can be achieved. This peculiar scene intimates that an exchange has taken place and that the two men will henceforth 'know' each other, but to what extent this 'knowledge' indicates a shared state of mind, is unclear, though the scene suggests that attunement is a form of encounter with a certain epistemological value.

As they part, Molloy imagines the inner life of C, who continues to move away from the town:

> The treacherous hills where fearfully he ventured were no doubt only known to him from afar, seen perhaps from his bedroom window or from the summit of a monument which, one black day, having nothing in particular to do and turning to height for solace, he had paid his few coppers to climb, slower and slower, up the winding stones. From there he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these selfsame hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of colour and then from other signs for which there are no words, nor even thoughts. But all are not divined, even from that height, and often where only one escarpment is discerned, and one crest, in reality there are two, two escarpments, two crests, riven by a valley. But now he knows these hills, that is to say he knows them better, and if ever again he sees them from afar it will be I think with other eyes, and not only that but the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath, all that too quite *differently disposed*[107]. (my emphasis)

This lyrical depiction of a landscape reminiscent of Romantic and Gothic imagery sets the tone for a narrative that explores the connection between outer landscapes and 'that inner space', a relationship that is shown to be subject to a constant exchange of mood, moods that are changeable, fleeting, and – in their changeability – constitutive for the forms of fractured subjectivity that the novel sketches. Representing the shift in tone and focus from the theoretical considerations of attunement that dominates the early novels to the affective exploration of

---

[104] Ibid., p. 11.
[105] Ibid., p. 10.
[106] Ibid., p. 11.
[107] Ibid.

subjectivity, or even intersubjectivity, the passage describes a subject, Molloy, imagining the subject position and feelings of another, the man he calls C. Molloy's empathetic interpretation of the situation is predicated upon the notion that experiencing the landscape of the 'treacherous hills' enables him to enter a state of mind he and C have in common, a mood, generated by the atmosphere of this specific space. From the opening of the novel, *Stimmung* thus appears as, first, by definition spatially determined and, second, a potential door into the (imagined) subjectivity of another.

Due to the mirror structure of the two narratives constituting *Molloy*, critics have suggested that Moran and Molloy may actually represent the same 'character' and that the chronology of their stories has been inverted[108]. According to this interpretation, Moran is the earlier version of their self, which leaves home and descends into mental and physical decay in his search for 'Molloy' (who might be himself, or another whose name he may have adopted), while Molloy is the later vagrant version of the character, who writes his account anticipating his impending death. If Molloy and Moran are to be considered the same character, the novel obliterates the concept of self-identity, presenting its characters as unstable entities that elude any linguistic coherence: Moran, whose son goes by the same name as himself, as well as 'Molloy, or Mollose'[109] are unstable signifiers, mirroring their bearers' instability of being. Moran describes '[t]he fact was there were three, no, four Molloys'. He then elaborates that these Molloys are constituted by '[h]e that inhabited me, my caricature of same, Gaber's and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me'[110]. In his analysis of 'dispossessed' subjectivity in *Molloy*, Thomas Trezise foregrounds the relationship between temporality and self-identity in Beckett's novel:

> 'I am in my mother's room' – the inaugural sentence of *Molloy* and thus of the trilogy as a whole – describes an anonymous subject who is no longer Molloy and not yet his mother, and whose very anonymity testifies both to the temporal non-self identity and to the fundamental intersubjectivity of the Beckettian subject[111].

---

[108] Cf. Hugh Kenner, 'The Trilogy', in *Samuel Beckett's 'Molloy,' 'Malone Dies,' 'The Unnamable.'*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York et al.: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), pp. 31-49 (p. 35); Thomas Trezise, 'Dispossession', in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince (London and New York: Longman, 2000), pp. 134-54; Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 72f.
[109] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 103.
[110] Ibid., p. 106.
[111] Trezise, 'Dispossession', p. 151.

The fragmented selves of Beckett's novel lack a sense of coherent subjectivity and self-sufficiency and are, as such, dependent on temporality and on other subjects. In the following, I will demonstrate that it is this intersubjective nature and temporal mutability of Beckett's characters that gives *Stimmung* a central position in his texts as the fragmented self becomes contingent on a circulation of mood between subjects and within time and space that becomes constitutive for the existential structure of the self.

At the same time, the passage imagining C's thoughts and feelings illustrates the basic plot of both parts of the novel in a nutshell: both Molloy and Moran set out into the landscape of Ballybaba in search of another person, in Molloy's case this person being his mother, in Moran's case it being Molloy; both of them travel through the 'treacherous' and lonely hills and encounter them first-hand, even become one with them, and then return to civilisation with a changed perspective that does not only affect the exterior world but also their *disposition*. Although both parts reference the genre of the quest narrative, the quest structure is deconstructed in the course of the novel[112] as the story becomes 'a circling and recircling of quests, of attempts to identify oneself through identification with another'[113]. While the quest genre is commonly associated with the idea that the hero acquires a form of – mostly immaterial – gain from his or her journey (experience, self-knowledge, etc.), both Molloy and Moran become destitute in the course of their quests. The quest for meaning or identity through finding another or one's own alienated self results instead here in a loss of meaning and self-identity as well as in physical decay. Both characters are 'quite differently disposed' at the end of their quests, but their experiences bereave them of the fragments of coherence and identity they previously still possessed.

Julie Campbell's article 'Bunyan and Beckett: The Legacy of *Pilgrim's Progress* in *Mercier and Camier*' (2010) sheds more light on the use of the quest narrative in Beckett's fiction. Campbell suggests that the quest structure in Beckett's *Mercier and Camier* (1970), the novel whose writing immediately preceded that of the trilogy, undermines the traditional format of the spiritual quest as it leads to a form of physical and metaphysical impoverishment, thus establishing a notion of spiritual

---

[112] Cf. Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 64.
[113] Frederick R. Karl, 'Waiting for Beckett: Quest and Re-Quest', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 69, Nr. 4 (1961), 661-76 (p. 669).

regress that is opposed to the idea of making 'progress' through a quest in Bunyan's allegorical text[114]. Campbell points out that

> it is important to stress that although [Beckett's] version of a quest undermines the validity of the quest in the contemporary world, it is simultaneously a quest in its own right: a journey through the maze of conflicting pressures, apathies, escape routes, and blind alleys of contemporary thought[115].

As the quest genre has lost its transcendental meaning in the modern world, Beckett's anti-quests locate themselves within a discourse of modernity that discloses the absurdity and futility of a quest for meaning, identity or belonging and is present in texts by other central figures of modern literature, amongst others, Kafka − and Thomas Bernhard, whose works will be discussed in the following chapter.

Furthermore, on a self-reflexive level, Molloy's depiction of C's journey is evocative of the reading process: the reader first sees the landscape, inner and outer, from afar, 'perhaps from [her] bedroom window', as it is described in the section cited above. From this private locus of the reading experience she is unable to discern all of its details and abysses. She then ventures into the narrative and gets to know it intimately, realising that like the escarpment, the novel might initially appear to be one but then it turns out that 'in reality there are two, two escarpments, two crests, riven by a valley': Molloy's story and Moran's narrative. When she resumes the detached point of view from which she departed, the journey, in other words, the act of reading, will not only have changed her view of the novel but it will also have transformed her inner self. *Molloy* thus continues the hermeneutic project of approximating the content and structure of the narrative to the reading experience of the text that is set in motion in *Watt*.

As Boulter puts it,

> [a]s readers move through Beckett's corpus they finds [sic.] themselves in increasingly close relation to the experience of the characters in the novel: their hermeneutic bafflement mirrors or is mirrored by the character's own; their experience of what Heidegger calls 'thrownness' is identical to that of the character[116].

Boulter here draws on Iser's reader-response theory and the notion that the reader of any kind of fiction is complicit in the realisation of the text, which was explored in the introductory chapter of this study. As explained above, the literary work thus

---

[114] Julie Campbell, 'Bunyan and Beckett: The Legacy of Pilgrim's Progress in *Mercier and Camier*', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* (2010), 209-21 (p. 212).
[115] Ibid., p. 220.
[116] Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 19.

comes into being through a process of 'convergence of text and reader'[117], which takes the form of a dynamic process between the two. Iser thereby sketches a 'phenomenology of reading' that defines the act of reading as interactive rather than a one-way street where meaning is transmitted from the text to the reader. In Iser's words,

> participation means that the reader is not simply called upon to 'internalize' the positions given in the text, but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge[118].

The degree to which the reader is involved in the production of textual meaning is dependent on the level of determinacy the individual text provides. Following Iser's concept of reader-text interaction, Boulter goes on to argue that in *Molloy*, the reader is inscribed in the text in the character of Moran: the character Molloy thereby becomes the 'text' Moran is reading and attempting to comprehend, rendering Moran the 'reader-as-detective'[119]. Due to the fragmented concept of subjectivity that the novel revolves around, Molloy thus becomes both the subject and the object of his narrative, both 'I/you, narrator/narrated'[120]. Molloy, the 'author' of the first part of the novel, is, then, '*narrated* by someone else, […] dispossessed of his own story'[121]. As Molloy/Moran becomes both his own author and reader, attempting to make sense of a voice telling him things throughout the course of the narrative, the reader is made to become an active part of the mechanics of the narrative.

In his book *Re-Forming the Narrative: Towards a Mechanics of Modernist Fiction* (1987), David Hayman categorises Beckett's texts as a type of modernist fiction he defines as 'self-generating'[122], meaning that the absence of authorial authority allows the text to come into being 'out of its own matter' as a form of 'verbal perpetual motion'[123]. In a mode reminiscent of Iser's reader-response model, Hayman argues that in Beckett's narrative fiction, particularly in the trilogy, the reader is thus made a crucial part of the process of textual genesis, placing Beckett's fiction at the higher end of the reader-participation spectrum where the authorial position is virtually

---

[117] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 275.
[118] Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', p. 1532.
[119] Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 64.
[120] Ibid., p. 69.
[121] Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 99.
[122] Cf. David Hayman, *Re-Forming the Narrative: Towards a Mechanics of Modernist Fiction* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 107-122.
[123] Ibid., p. 107.

obliterated. Although Hayman's reading of *Molloy* does not elaborate on the reader's constitutive role in the novel, closer inspection of the passage quoted above reveals the significance of readerly interaction in the text as the man called C, a place holder for the reader figure, is observed by the narrator Molloy, not the other way around. The narrator thereby becomes an observer, a surrogate for the reader, and the reader briefly becomes the subject of the surface narrative. Molloy reports that C is walking 'on by ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all, for he went with uncertain step and often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind'[124]. As C portrays the Beckettian reader, in search of clues for some form of 'fixed,' stable meaning in the alienating text that is *Molloy*, the reader finds herself narrated by the text, that is by Molloy/*Molloy* (as both character/text).

The passage hints at the dimension of embodied, imaginative space generated by the fictional text, a space that exists only 'in [the reader's] mind' but takes the shape of a physical territory where 'landmarks' may indicate the possibility of determining stable signification. Molloy, however, does not consider himself a suitable landmark: 'But a man, a fortiori myself, isn't exactly a landmark', he muses, but an 'unstable fugitive thing'[125]. Molloy's existence is *a fortiori*, only by inference – and not of its own right – probable, throwing the reader into 'an oscillating zone of indecision'[126]. The inverted reader-narrated character constellation introduced in this section is then, however, relativised as it seems that C and Molloy share a number of distinguishing features: like Molloy, C 'looks old' and is a 'sorry sight' on his solitary journey; like Molloy, he walks with a stick 'to thrust himself onward'[127]. To a certain degree, this description suggests, the reader, Molloy and Moran are the same being: they share the same role in the hermeneutic design of the text that renders them all authors, fragmented readers and narrated objects of the novel at the same time. However, due to the fragmented and unstable model of subjectivity underlying the novel, Boulter suggests that reading the text leads to a negation of the reader's subject position: 'if […] the reader assumes the role of specular reader, his readerly subject position becomes tenuous as it too is decomposed'[128]. The aesthetic

---

[124] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 11.
[125] Ibid., p. 12.
[126] Paul Stewart, 'Living the Unnamable: Towards a Phenomenology of Reading', in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, ed. by Maude and Feldman, pp. 177-93 (p. 183).
[127] Ibid., p. 11.
[128] Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 73.

process of *Molloy* thus subjects the reader to the fragmentation of subjectivity depicted in the character(s) of Molloy and Moran, A and C, making her, too, an existential 'vagrant' in the reading experience.

The novel thereby introduces a central theme of self-reflexion that runs through the entire trilogy in the form of the perspective and experience of the reader, which is successively approximated to that of the narrator and – to some degree – even equated with and mirrored in it. Introducing a counter-concept to Erich Auerbach's notion of mimesis, the mechanics of Beckett's fiction thereby establish an alternative concept of literary 'realism'. While Auerbach acknowledges that modernist realism requires a high degree of reader-text interaction, he still finds that the modernism of Woolf and Joyce is 'a mirror' of their times[129]. As we have seen in *Murphy*, Beckett's anti-realism is far from attempting to simulate reality, but – through the individual reader – the texts of the trilogy actively absorb significant elements of reality into their aesthetic realisation, which turns literature from a fixed representative entity into a *real* changeable process. As opposed to the widespread concept of readerly engagement based on the idea that literature detaches the reader from reality[130], Beckett's narrative fiction engages the reader in the reality of her own subjectivity. As the narrator's and the reader's subjectivity are thus made to converge in the process of reading *Molloy*, the question of *Stimmung*, or disposition, arises. Iser points out that the realisation of the fictional text through the reader is by definition not fixed or determined and 'by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader'[131]. Molloy then suggests that the reader's disposition will be subject to change in the course of reading the novel, that at the end of it she, too, will be 'quite differently disposed'. Arguing that this change of disposition, of temper and mood, is the focal point of *Molloy*, I will, in the following, demonstrate the way in which a dynamic process of *Stimmung* between reader and text is constitutive for a reading of the trilogy.

---

[129] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 547.
[130] Cf. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, p. 227.
[131] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 274.

<u>Molloy's Anxious Disposition</u>

In line with the reorientation towards a more visceral focus in Beckett's *œuvre* from the trilogy onwards as discussed above, both Jonathan Boulter and Russell Smith[132] have called for a new way of interpreting the trilogy, and in particular *Molloy*, through the lens of affect or feeling, specifically in view of its impact on readers. Likewise, in her article '*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*: The Novel Reshaped' (2015), Angela Moorjani provides an overview of the dominant theoretical frameworks critics have used to interpret the trilogy, noting that most recently studies on affect and the body have taken centre stage in the critical discourse[133]. At the heart of *Molloy*'s affective core lies Heidegger's *Grundstimmung* anxiety. As Molloy watches A and C approach and then turn away from each other from a distance, an anxiety emerges that is situated in the space between him, the observer, and the observed: 'I watched him recede, overtaken (myself) by his anxiety, at least by an anxiety which was not necessarily his, but of which as it were he partook. Who knows if it wasn't my own anxiety overtaking him'[134]. Both C – the specular reader – and Molloy are thus overcome by an anxiety that might originate from either of them and has been transferred onto the other. Is it C, the reader, who infuses the narrator with his own anxiety, or is it the other way around? Does the text create a mood that is then transmitted to the reader or does the reader's disposition colour the text with its forms of affect? The novel's ambiguous answer to these questions anticipates a crucial problem of Beckett's writing: is meaning created by the reader or by the text? Or does it, instead, emerge in the production of *Stimmung* through the negotiation between reader and text? The textual dynamics of anxiety in *Molloy* allow for a more careful consideration of these issues.

As pointed out above, the novel's plot unfolds against the backdrop of an existential form of anxiety closely related to Heidegger's concept of anxiety as a unique form of *Stimmung* enabling ontological self-awareness. In the introductory chapter of this study, I have specified that Heidegger's analysis of this fundamental mood draws on Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*, where anxiety is defined as 'a

---

[132] Cf. Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 63, and Russell Smith, 'It's Nothing: Beckett and Anxiety', in *Beckett and Nothing*, ed. by Caselli, pp. 192-212.

[133] Angela Moorjani, '*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*: The Novel Reshaped', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 19-32 (pp. 30f.).

[134] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 12.

fear of "nothing"'[135], a notion Heidegger takes up in his ontology as he distinguishes between fear [*Furcht*] of a concrete thing within the world [*innerweltlich Seiendes*] and anxiety [*Angst*] of nothing and nowhere in particular[136]. An entry in Beckett's German notebook from August 1936 reveals that he engaged with a very similar train of thought, stating that it is 'better to be afraid of <u>something</u> than of <u>nothing</u>'[137]. To further outline a notion mentioned in my previous discussion of Heidegger's philosophy, the 'nothingness' of this anxiety is caused by a loss of identity and meaning as provided by the world: 'Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in the terms of the "world" and the way things have been publicly interpreted'[138]. Adopting this notion, Jean-Paul Sartre finds that anguish – his preferred term for anxiety – emerges in the face of realising one's individual freedom from the framework of meaning provided by Heidegger's *Man* ['They'][139]. Béatrice Han-Pile summarises this position:

> What anxiety discloses is not the burden of existing but human freedom. When I am anxious, I become aware of two things: (a) that nothing in the world can determine my choices because I am radically separated from the in-itself by my nihilating activity (therefore nothing can act as a 'cause' on me unless I construe it as such, thematically or non thematically); and (b) that nothing *in myself* can determine my choices either. Anxiety forces me to adopt the standpoint of pure reflection and thus to abandon bad faith in order to realize that what I see as myself (the ego) is a construct to which I can't be identified[140].

Anxiety thus leads to a disintegration of the subject's self-identity as it realises that the latter is a mere construct provided by the world. Molloy's – and/or C's – anxiety testifies to this loss of self-identity, which reveals the dissolution of self into an intersubjective notion of mood that then dissolves the division between reader and text. However, Beckett's self-erasing anxiety goes beyond Sartre's notion of the subject, which still considerably relies on the idea of a stable self. C's anxiety is not part and parcel of his individual freedom and subjective affect – it is not even *his*

---

[135] Brian Söderquist, 'Kierkegaard and Existentialism: From Anxiety to Autonomy', in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 83-95 (p. 88).

[136] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 186f.

[137] Beckett qtd. in Smith, 'It's Nothing: Beckett and Anxiety', p. 192.

[138] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.

[139] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 53.

[140] Béatrice Han-Pile, 'Affectivity', in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 240-52 (p. 247).

anxiety 'but [one] of which as it were he partook'. Molloy's anxiety thus evidences the self's ultimate dependence on an intersubjective notion of affective selfhood[141].

Later in the novel, Molloy's *Doppelgänger* Moran only perceives his own anxiety after noticing a change in his surroundings when his superior Gaber sends him after Molloy, thereby – in a fashion reminiscent of *Watt* – breaking down the barrier between internal and external atmospheres: 'The colour and weight of the world were changing already, soon I would have to admit I was anxious'[142]. Moran's anxiety is self-aware to the extent that he knows of the effect it has on the outside world, changing both its colour – his way of perceiving it – as well as its 'weight' – the impact it has on him. As an all-encompassing form of affect, this anxiety impacts not only the way Moran perceives the world around him; it also changes his relationship to it, which Moran is acutely aware of. In Heidegger's words, 'Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind'[143]; Moran's openness to the world is thus altered and transformed by the anxiety shaping this scene.

It is remarkable that Moran's realisation of his anxiety originates from his 'outer' perception rather than his 'internal' self-awareness. Once again, as seen in *Watt* above, 'the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw'[144]. Drawing on Sianne Ngai's analysis in *Ugly Feelings* (2007), Russell Smith underlines this ontological shift generated by Beckett's concept of anxiety as it blurs the lines between subject and object[145]. The conventional idea of a separation between an internal and external world collapses in this depiction of *Stimmung* as Beckett engages with the Heideggerian notion that *Stimmung* is not merely an internal phenomenon but rather a form of affect that emerges through an interaction and a negotiation between the self and the world. As pointed out in the introduction to this study, Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* as contingent on its Being-in-the-world can be extended through Deleuze's notion of the subject, according to

---

[141] It should be noted that the historical foregrounding of anxiety as a key mood in Western modernity can be described as problematic. In *Ugly Feelings* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Sianne Ngai politicises the cultural history of anxiety and its relatedness to the notion of masculinity, which posits anxiety as a distinctly 'masculine' mood of existential contemplation, as part and parcel of '"philosophically stylized" quests for truth, knowledge and masculine agency' (p. 246).

[142] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 89.

[143] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176.

[144] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 35.

[145] Cf. Smith, 'It's Nothing: Beckett and Anxiety', p. 204.

which '[t]here's no subject, but a production of subjectivity'[146]. We can now observe that Beckett's anxiously dissolved subjects, in turn, suggest that there is no fixed or individual subject, only a production of intersubjectivity.

Conversely, however, as Beckett's characters are not in tune with the world and the fellow beings surrounding them, incapable of achieving a sense of *Stimmung*, their anxiety singles them out. Molloy suffers from a successive isolation and dissociation from the world, as demonstrated in the following pastoral scene, which depicts his encounter with a shepherd and his flock of sheep:

> I heard the shepherd whistle, and I saw him flourishing his crook, and the dog bustling about the flock, which but for him would no doubt have fallen into the canal. All that through a glittering dust, and soon through that mist too which rises in me every day and *veils the world from me and veils me from myself*. The bleating grew faint, because the sheep were less anxious, or because they were further away, or because my hearing was worse than a moment before, which would surprise me, for my hearing is still very good, scarcely blunted coming up to dawn, and if I sometimes hear nothing for hours on end it is for reasons of which I know nothing, or because about *me all goes really silent*, from time to time, *whereas for the righteous the tumult of the world never stops*[147] (my emphases).

Alluding to T.S. Eliot's concept of the 'dissociation of sensibility', according to which in seventeenth-century literature a separation of intellect and feeling developed that has dominated literature ever since[148], Molloy describes himself as being dissociated from the world of experience of this pastoral sequence. Molloy's dissociation from the narrative world and the 'glittering dust' veiling both the world and himself from Molloy further illustrate the unique ontological function Heidegger assigns to anxiety: 'In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The "world" can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with others'[149]. Generating a hiatus between the world and Dasein, anxiety – as a mode of dissociated contemplation – separates and isolates the individual from other beings, a notion reflected in Beckett's solipsistic characters. It thereby creates a form of ontological detachment that, according to Heidegger, reveals the most authentic forms of being: 'Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about – its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that

---

[146] Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, p. 113.

[147] Beckett, *Molloy*, pp. 28f.

[148] Cf. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, Vol. II: *The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (London and Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press/Faber & Faber, 2014), pp. 380f.

[149] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.

understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities'[150]. As the 'tumult of the world never stops', ontological self-understanding is only possible in this detached state of mind, one we encounter in Beckett's writing in the form of 'silence'.

The idea of silence, which is a central motif in the trilogy and culminates in the play of voices and silence in *The Unnamable*, reappears in the second half of the novel in Moran's narrative: 'Yet only then can you detect, beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made'[151]. Beckett's existentialist notion of a profound stillness and silence beneath the frenzy of the world permeates the trilogy as well as his later short story *Company* (1979). It opens up an ontological enquiry into language and its relationship to being as well as the notion of a voice speaking through the void of existence, which is reminiscent of Blaise Pascal's often quoted observation from *Pensées* about the silence beyond birth and death as a fundamental source of anxiety: 'The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me'[152]. This silence, which I will explore further in the following section, is beyond the search for *Stimmung*: it admits a defeat and renouncement of the possibility of achieving an attunement, a sense of harmony, the idea of connectedness.

Two conflicting views on the existential condition thus take centre stage in *Molloy*: the first is constituted on a plot level, through the Heideggerian − and by extension, Sartrean − notion of a singularising form of anxiety that allows for ontological self-understanding and an authentic kind of being removed from the notions of identity and meaning provided by the world. The promise of authenticity which Heidegger's concept of anxiety harbours is, however, shown to fail since the anxious Molloy and Moran undergo a disintegration of self rather than a realisation thereof. The second plane is located on the reader-response level and generated by a gradual dissolution of self-identity into an intersubjective circulation of affect, which is subject to temporal change and is set in motion through the reading process. As noted above, the dissolution of selfhood in the fragmented, non-identical 'characters' of Molloy/Moran showcases the self's relationality to other beings and to other versions of the non-identical self as it/they evolve over time (whether to speak of a singular or plural of selfhood here becomes truly unclear). The hermeneutic process

---

[150] Ibid.

[151] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 112.

[152] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by F.W. Trotter (South Bend, US: Infomotions, Inc., 2000), retrieved from http://www.ebrary.com [accessed 5 October 2016], p. 42.

of *Molloy* renders the reader an integral part, both subject and object, of this dispossession, of the 'insurmountable deferral of any ultimate subject position'[153]. A closer look at the textual economy of *Stimmung* provides a way of resolving the conflict between these two existential models.

As Iser points out, the literary text requires its reader to distance herself from her own subjectivity to embark on the narrative process[154]. This self-effacing process – reminiscent of Eliot's proposition that the poet must erase her subjectivity in the act of writing as it is developed in 'Traditional and the Individual Talent'[155] – influences the circulation of mood: the *Stimmung* the reader may initially 'bring' to the text needs to be curbed, in line with their subjectivity partly effaced, to allow for textual engagement. This subdued form of *Stimmung* is, however, still present or – in view that this analysis is built upon a notion of mood as a continuous process of attunement – rather continues to evolve throughout the reading process. *Molloy* is, naturally, not only a text *about* anxiety, but in itself highly anxiety-inducing.

Norman N. Holland's method of conceptualising affect in the reading process in *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, which is largely based on Freud's psychoanalysis, relates forms of textual affect to two fundamental aspects: the anxiety-arousing and the drive-gratifying element of reader engagement[156]. If the narrative manages the anxiety-arousing elements and at the same time provides satisfaction to the stimulated drive, the reading process results in a gratifying affective resolution. Looking at Beckett's narrative texts, a low or even negative degree of 'traditional' reader-gratification can be assumed: notorious aspects such as failed quests, the lack of narrative resolutions, anti-heroes, infinite circularity, the withholding of stable and defined meaning and linguistic oddities are more likely to frustrate readers than to gratify them. The novel displays an ironic meta-awareness of its refusal for such gratification as Moran comments after he kills a wayfaring stranger: 'I am sorry I cannot indicate more clearly how this result was obtained, it would have been something worth reading. But it is not at this late stage of my relation that I intend to

---

[153] Katz, *Saying I No More*, p. 77.

[154] Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, p. 254.

[155] In Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, Vol. II: *The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, pp. 105-14.

[156] Cf. Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York et al.: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 307.

give way to literature'[157]. In addition to the refusal of conventional forms of reader-gratification, the dissolution of readerly subjectivity *Molloy* performs acts not just on the implicit level Iser postulates for any type of fictional text, but on a more aggressive, more alienating scale through the inversion and merging of the reader, narrator and author positions.

Naturally, a general statement such as 'Beckett's novels induce anxiety in their readers' would be questionable as many readers seek out and enjoy his trademark disintegration of traditional literary structures[158]. However, the textual (de)composition of the novels constituting the trilogy generate a hermeneutic structure that can evoke anxiety if readers embark on the existential anti-quests of these novels. But, if it is realised, what would be the locus of this anxiety? *Molloy*'s refusal to provide mimetic character models prevents one from describing Molloy or Moran as 'anxious characters' in themselves. They cannot *be* anxious because they *are* not (in the sense of existing in a narrative universe). Likewise, we cannot claim that the potential for anxiety structurally inherent in the novel realises itself in the reader and *only* within the reader since the self-effacing mechanism of the reading process suspends her subjectivity in the act of reading.

The convergence of readerly and textual affect can only lie within the reader's being in the *textual* world. As I have outlined in Chapter 1, by 'world', I refer to a system of meaning and signification rather than a physical space; in this sense, the textual world fulfils similar ontological functions as that which Heidegger designates by the term world. In his approach to a phenomenology of reading *The Unnamable*, Paul Stewart locates the experience of the reader both in and outside the text as he states that 'the reader's consciousness, which is both inside and outside the text, is caught between the felt reality of his or her mundane world and the quasi-felt, quasi-judgemental world created through living in the text'[159]. The act of reading thus places the reader in a space outside her individual subjectivity but not within the common, public world; it forces her into the continuous negotiation of an intersubjectivity that relies partly on aspects of her subject position – which, as part of this process, is dissolved through its attunement to the text – and partly on the

---

[157] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 139.
[158] See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of Roland Barthes's notion of bliss in relation to such texts.
[159] Stewart, 'Living the Unnamable', p. 192.

dynamics of textual affect. As observed earlier in *Murphy* and *Watt*, the possibility of a harmonic attunement of this kind has been obliterated in Beckett's branch of fiction; hence, a structural dissonance between the readerly subject and the text becomes the constitutive element of such intersubjectivity. A new, discordant system of signification – or 'world' – thus takes shape.

As Molloy and Moran become the readers of their own stories, they are cast into an affective attunement with their own past selves. Upon writing his report, Moran, for instance, relives his anxiety while recounting the events depicting his departure to Ballybaba with his son:

> Since in this way I shirked the issue, have I to appologize [sic.] for saying so? I let fall this suggestion for what it is worth. And perfunctorily. For in describing this day I am once more he who suffered it, who crammed it full of futile anxious life, with no other purpose than his own stultification and the means of not doing what he had to do. And as then my thoughts would have none of Molloy, so tonight my pen. This confession has been preying on my mind for some time past. To have made it gives me no relief[160].

The crippling anxiety Moran suffers estranges him from 'doing what he had to do', that is, from finding Molloy. And while the act of confession offers no relief to him, the act of narration subjects him to his past mood, rendering him not only the teller but simultaneously a recipient and reader of his own story who converges with the *Stimmung* of his past self. *Molloy*'s specular reader, in all his indeterminacy, allows even Molloy only conjectures about his textual experience:

> From there he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these selfsame hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of colour and then from other signs for which there are no words, nor even thoughts[161].

As we have seen through a reading of the hermeneutics of *Molloy*, the aesthetic process between text and reader is a continuous negotiation of affect which is subject to changes in attunement that are beyond the grasp of intellectual consideration; all they are is feeling.

---

[160] Ibid., p. 112.
[161] Ibid., p. 11.

IV.   Decomposed Selves, Voices in the Dark

<u>Finality without End:</u> *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*

The mood that characterises not only *Molloy* but most of Beckett's *œuvre* – an anxious exploration of the void underlying the 'fatuous clamour' of being in the world – is captured succinctly in Moran's realisation that 'it was only by transferring it to this atmosphere, how shall I say, of *finality without end*, why not, that I could venture to consider the work I had on hand'[162] (my emphasis). The paradoxical idea of a 'finality without end' echoes Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death, according to which Dasein is always oriented towards its own end but can never actually experience it. In this sense, Beckett's characters are always anxiously and asymptotically leaning towards their own finality, nothingness and silence without ever being able to actually reach it. The anxiety underlying these texts generates a structural mood of anxiety that always in itself contains a sense of insufficiency.

While it seems that to Beckett human existence itself bars the possibility of ever being that nothingness, his fictional 'characters', including Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* (1957), the nameless narrator of *How It Is* (1961), Molloy and Moran, are, through their own fictional being, forever trapped inside this state of a 'finality without end'. At the end of his report, Moran walks past a graveyard and ironically states that '[i]t is a great thing to own a plot in perpetuity, a very great thing indeed'[163], a metafictional comment showcasing the fate Beckett's weary characters suffer in the fictional 'existence' they are trapped in. His narrators are not in control of their stories, but are rather the victims of their own narratives, which trap them in a state of an anxious anticipation of the impending void. The most overt articulation of such finality, of perpetual dying, can be found in the second novel of the trilogy.

Malone Dies, originally published the same year as *Molloy*, takes the main themes of its predecessor further, depicting more radically the successive disintegration of the self and the act of narration I have previously discussed. In the same vein as Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* («Смерть Ивана Ильича», 1886), this short novel thematises the process of dying; but as opposed to Tolstoy's

---

[162] Ibid., p. 102.
[163] Ibid., p. 160.

psychological depiction of this experience, *Malone Dies* tests the existential concept of always already living towards death. Malone exclusively exists in the human condition of being trapped in a 'finality without end', in the perpetual process of dying, embodying Augustine's notion of the state of dying portrayed in *The City of God*. Augustine therein finds that one can never be dying, or 'in death', as one is always either before or after death[164]. There is no duration between those two, as there is no duration between past and future. However, he suggests that there is a hypothetical mode of eternal dying as a mode of punishment:

> For the death that is effected, not by the separation of soul and body, but rather by the union of both for eternal punishment is more serious and the worst of all evils. There, conversely, men will not be in a state before death or after death but always in death, and for this reason never living, never dead, but endlessly dying. Indeed, man will never be worse off in death than where death itself will be deathless[165].

Where Augustine proposes the state of dying, of a 'deathless' death, as a hypothetical idea, Heidegger integrates it into his ontology as an integral part of human existence through the concept of Being-towards-death. He suggests that the projection towards death, towards one's own finality, defines one's understanding of self and allows for a realisation of one's ownmost authentic being[166]. Lance St John Butler finds that 'Malone's entire narrative […] illustrates Being-towards-death'[167], a structure of existence defined by finality and oriented towards it.

While Molloy and Moran are, or become, ill and handicapped, but are still capable of interacting with the world to a certain extent, Malone is confined to his death bed in a body that he describes himself as 'impotent'. He further laments that '[t]here is virtually nothing it can do'[168]. While awaiting his death, his only pastime is storytelling, and although he might initially appear to be a posterior 'version' of Molloy, he later intimates that he could instead be the 'creator' of Molloy's narratives and the others:

> But let us leave these morbid matters and get on with that of my demise, in two or three days if I remember rightly. Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes beyond the grave[169].

---

[164] Cf. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans. Vol. IV: Books 12-15*, trans. by Philip Levine (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 169.

[165] Ibid., p. 175.

[166] Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 263.

[167] St John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 52.

[168] Beckett, *Malone Dies*, in *The Beckett Trilogy* by Beckett, pp. 163-264 (p. 171).

[169] Ibid., pp. 216f.

Once again, the narrative voice thus becomes an unstable entity as the boundaries between Malone and his characters, as well as himself as his own character, are blurred[170], leading to a fragmentation of the writing self that is even more intense than in *Molloy*: 'Of all of Beckett's works, the one that is most illustrative of this process of splintering and self-estrangement of the writing subject is probably *Malone Dies*'[171]. As the self disintegrates, it becomes apparent that this Being-towards-death is far removed from Heidegger's optimistic concept of self-realisation through death. Instead, Malone's state of Augustinian 'endlessly dying' leaves him forever deathless and forever entangled in a state of being that is not marked by 'authentic' selfhood but by its contingency on the world: 'The search for myself is ended. I am buried in the world'[172].

The disintegration of the body and the narrating voice finds its climax in *The Unnamable*, a text narrated by a nameless and motionless entity. Boulter rightly points out that '[i]n *The Unnamable* […] the subject is in radical crisis, unable to fix himself *as* a subject'[173]. All the eponymous creature really consists of is a voice, and like Malone, this voice is a teller of stories. Again, it is suggested that this narrator is the one who created the other narrators in the trilogy and thus assumes the position of an absent implied author:

> All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. […] Let them be gone now, them and all the others, those I have used and those I have not used, give me back the pains I lent them and vanish, from my life, my memory, my terrors and shames. There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been. And the sounds? No, all is silent[174].

As the Unnamable discloses that his – or, perhaps more aptly, its – predecessors are mere figments of his imagination, his 'puppets'[175], he declares that the only one who is there, wherever his 'here' is, is himself. Without their voices, he finds himself in complete silence and a black void. There is no encounter with the world in *The*

---

[170] Cf. Lawrence Miller, *Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 117.

[171] Sarah Gendron, '"A Cogito for the Dissolved Self:" Writing, Presence, and the Subject in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze', *Journal of Modern Literature* Vol. 28, No. 1, *Autobiography and Memoir* (2004), 47-64 (p. 52).

[172] Beckett, *Malone Dies*, p. 182.

[173] Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 59.

[174] Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy* by Beckett, pp. 265-382 (p. 278).

[175] Ibid., p. 267.

Unnamable as there is no tangible 'world' in the nothingness where the narrator – who is not anthropomorphic, who not only has no name but *cannot* be named – resides. The use of the deictic 'here' implies a presence without an identifiable space as the speaker provides no answers to the initial questions of 'Where now? Who now? When now?'; hence it must be the presence of the narrative itself he is speaking of. Beckett's later short story *Company* is reminiscent of the narrative setup of *The Unnamable* as it is opened by the words 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine'[176]. The text thus posits a narrative structure in which the solitude of the reader is a presupposition for an aesthetic encounter, and then explores whether that solitude is, at all, possible. As I will outline in the following, the Unnamable is both the voice coming to the reader in the dark and a listener of such a voice himself, in a black space of nothingness, a mere presence. This presence is Heidegger's *Dasein* stripped to its basic semantics: as a mere 'being there'[177] with no actual mode of being or definition of the 'there'.

The novel's emphasis on the idea of the voice, of hearing and listening, foregrounds the auditory dimension of the narrative as I have previously observed in *Watt*. The only identifiable trait of the Unnamable is his voice, a voice that establishes a subject position through its narrative discourse alone. As the Unnamable observes at one point in the novel, 'it's entirely a matter of voices'[178]. Like Moran, the Unnamable becomes a recipient, a listener of his own narrative as suggested in Jacques Derrida's concept of *s'entendre-parler*, of hearing oneself speak[179]. Returning to Deleuze's definition of the self from the introductory chapter of this study, the Unnamable instantiates his selfhood by means of the successive modulation of his voice over the course of the novel as 'the Self is not an object, but that to which all objects are related as to the continuous variation of its own successive states, and to the infinite modulation of its degrees at each instant'[180]. However, although his position as a self is established through the presence of his voice and as a supposed author figure – the creator of Murphy, Molloy and Malone – the Unnamable himself does not appear to be the one in charge of his own

---

[176] Beckett, *Company* (London: John Calder, 1980), p. 7.
[177] Cf. St John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 11.
[178] Ibid., p. 298.
[179] Cf. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 71.
[180] Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, p. 30.

narrative when he indicates that he is 'obliged to speak'[181]. At the same time, he is at times taken over by the voices of his own creations, in this example of a character he first calls Basil and then renames Mahood:

> It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head. I don't know how it was done. I always liked not knowing, but Mahood said it wasn't right. He didn't know either, but it worried him. It is his voice which has often, always, mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely[182].

Taken over by the voices of others, the Unnamable is the one who is being spoken through. As opposed to Malone, who suggests that he impersonates others, the Unnamable is impersonated by his creations and other voices, whose stories he listens to, rendering him both 'the teller and the told'[183] of the novel. It is against the backdrop of Malone and Moran's 'finality without end' that the Unnamable famously realises that he is forever trapped within his own narrative:

> perhaps it's done already, […] perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my own story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on[184].

His narrative is therefore both his product and his own origin: Hayman suggests that '[i]t follows that the details of these narrative accounts, aborted fragments though they may be, are overtly self-generated'. And, further, '[t]he speaker itself is transparently the creature of its prose, generated as much as generating'[185]. In this loss of the stable subject-object relation lies the foundation of the Unnamable's radical intersubjectivity: only by abandoning the concept of self-contained subjectivity can he enter the realm of speech; 'in order to speak at all, he must speak as if he were an other, one of the community that shares language and reason'[186]. The contingency of speech on a sense of community and on a form of company – constituted by the reader – propels the Unnamable's being into a form of intersubjectivity that becomes the precondition for any kind of speaking.

---

181 Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 267.
182 Ibid., p. 283.
183 Ibid., p. 284.
184 Ibid., p. 382.
185 Hayman, *Re-Forming the Narrative*, p. 121.
186 Miller, *Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma*, p. 143.

Conclusion: The Modern Self in Search of Company

In Beckett's texts, which 'are marked not so much by harmony as by disjunction, dissonance and fragmentation'[187], *Stimmung* is a quest for attunement, at first a thematic exploration and then an aesthetic reflection of whether a sense of harmony can be achieved or not. Therein, the question of attunement is found to be inextricably tied up with that of the subject. Theodor Adorno's discussion of the individual in *Endgame* reveals the complexity behind this concept in Beckett's works and its dialectic relationship to Heidegger's ontology:

> The individual himself is revealed to be a historical category, both the outcome of the capitalist process of alienation and a defiant protest against it, something transient himself. The individualistic position constitutes the opposite pole to the ontological approach of every kind of existentialism, including that of *Being and Time*, and as such belongs with it. Beckett's drama abandons that position like an outmoded bunker. If individual experience in its narrowness and contingency has interpreted itself as a figure of Being, it has received the authority to do so only by asserting itself to be the fundamental characteristic of Being. But that is precisely what is false. The immediacy of individuation was deceptive; the carrier of individual experience is mediated, conditioned. *Endgame* assumes that the individual's claim to autonomy and being has lost its credibility. But although the prison of individuation is seen to be both prison and illusion − the stage set is the *imago* of this kind of insight − art cannot break the spell of a detached subjectivity; it can only give concrete form to solipsism[188].

As Adorno observes, the existential, or non-existential, condition of Beckett's characters defeats the ontological structures proposed by Heidegger as the self is found to be, by definition, historically determined and transient rather than transcendental. Further, Adorno suggests that individuation and solipsism are at the core of this understanding of the modern condition, but that the aesthetic process can never actually achieve this individuation itself. A closer analysis of integral structures of reader response in the trilogy has shown that the artistic process is, in itself, predicated upon an intersubjective notion of community, or company.

Beckett's late short story *Company* elucidates this principle and becomes a locus of such intersubjectivity. As it revisits the idea of a bodiless voice in the dark, it is intimated that the 'Unnamable' is not a speaker but a hearer of the narrative: 'Let the hearer be named H. […] Then let him not be named H. Let him be again as he was. The Hearer. Unnamable. You'[189]. In the same mode we have observed in *Molloy*, if the reader is the Unnamable, she becomes the narrator and the listener of

---

[187] Stewart, 'Living the Unnamable', p. 180.

[188] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson, in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Birkett and Ince, pp. 39-49 (p. 47).

[189] Beckett, *Company*, p. 43.

the text, both the speaker and the one who is being spoken to. The text then intimates that this relationship between the narrative and the reader as a narrator-narratee is negotiated through a form of musical, acoustic attunement:

> But for the other say for some time past some improvement. Same flat tone as initially imagined and same repetitiousness. No improving those. But less mobility. Less variety of faintness. As if seeking optimum position. From which to discharge with greatest effect. The ideal amplitude for effortless audition. Neither offending the ear with loudness nor through converse excess constraining it to strain. How far more companionable such an organ than it initially in haste imagined. How far more likely to achieve its object. To have the hearer have a past and acknowledge it[190].

This section revisits the question of musical attunement and pitch proposed in *Murphy* and *Watt* and extends it by describing the narrative process as a form of musical performance, thus effectively bringing together the questions of musical attunement and of the interaction between reader (or hearer) and text (or voice). '[F]lat tone' and 'repetitiousness' are recurrent components in Beckett's narrative inventory, but *Company* now looks for the ideal setup to achieve 'greatest effect', a milder form of the anxiety-inducing aesthetics of previous texts that attempts to not '[offend] the ear' or to constrain it. Although the voice becomes its own audience, Beckett's texts are never in themselves sufficient without their readers and the company they provide: 'The voice alone is company but not enough. Its effect on the hearer is a necessary complement'[191]. The second person narrative of the story utterly abandons the mimetic paradigm of fiction as the text denies any form of representation and reverts its focus on the dynamics of the reader-text interaction. *Company* thus provokes a *Stimmung*, one that acknowledges the negotiating character of such attunement in that the reader's subjectivity as a temporal category is integrated: rather than abandoning her subjective experience in favour of not only a 'suspense of disbelief' but also of self, the story urges its recipient 'to have a past and acknowledge it'.

A dialectical structure hence arises out of an all-encompassing sense of solipsism that is, however, relativised by the urgent, self-effacing need for company. The closing paragraph of the text mirrors the different levels of narrative framing and re-framing and the contradictory condition of being alone *in the company* they create:

---

190 Ibid., p. 46.
191 Ibid., p. 11.

> You now on your back in the dark shall not rise again […]. But with face upturned for good labour in vain at your fable. Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.
>
> Alone[192].

Silence is the end of attunement. And yet, paradoxically, as long as Beckett's narrators speak to their readers, there is a search for attunement, a process of an attempted harmonisation. Their incompleteness of self invites the reader into the aesthetic experience of this existential condition, making her their company.

The modern condition in in Beckett's fiction is marked by an underlying sense of a being and 'making aware' of the situatedness and attunement I have previously described. In Beckett's earlier novels we have observed that the *Stimmung* of the modern is a quest for attunement, a thematical exploration and aesthetic reflection of whether a sense of harmony can be achieved or not – harmony between characters and their worlds, characters amongst each other, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, between the reader and the text, through texts that speak to their readers in search for an attunement that may counteract the silence underlying Beckett's dissolved modern subjects. The relationship between Beckett's take on human existence and Heideggerian ontology has been found to be based on a number of common themes and concerns; however, as Barfield rightly points out, Beckett's aesthetics go beyond Heidegger's framework, which relies on a notion of consistent self-identity. Beckett's focus on 'presence' as a stripped-down version of *Dasein* lacks any and all coherence, identity and authenticity; it has by definition no real existential condition in the Heideggerian sense:

> whereas Heidegger can affirm that temporality as the being of *Dasein* should replace Kant's 'pure reason', Beckett cannot make such an essentially straightforward declaration. His fictional world is at least one stage removed from an existential situation; therefore, Beckett must seek the language which could *mediate* this distantiation between would-be self and would-be world[193].

At the core of Beckett's treatment of the self lies a profound discomfort with modernity and with the idea of self-contained art that Adorno here encapsulates:

> For Beckett, culture swarms and crawls, the way the intestinal convolutions of *Jugendstil* ornamentation swarmed and crawled for the avant-garde before him: modernism as what is

---

[192] Ibid., p. 89.
[193] Murphy, 'Beckett and the Philosophers', p. 236.

obsolete in modernity. Language, regressing, demolishes that obsolete material. In Beckett, this kind of objectivity annihilates the meaning that culture once was, along with its rudiments. And so culture begins to fluoresce. In this Beckett is carrying to its conclusion a tendency present in the modern novel. Reflection, which the cultural criterion of aesthetic immanence proscribed as abstract, is juxtaposed with pure presentation; the Flaubertian principle of a completely self-contained subject matter is undermined. The less events can be presumed to be inherently meaningful, the more the idea of aesthetic substance as the unity of what appears and what was intended becomes an illusion. Beckett rids himself of this illusion by coupling the two moments in their disparity[194].

Aesthetic and existential substance dissolve into mutable, unstable and always contingent possibilities, leading Beckett's characters – and readers – to find an insufficiency in the proposed models of human existence such as Heideggerian ontology and other modern concepts of human existence. Richard Begam has therefore proposed that Beckett's works are part and parcel of what he coins the 'end of modernity'[195]: a dissolved intersubjective self located between the fatuous clamour of the world and the eternal silence of nothingness. As we will see when turning to Bernhard in the following chapter, this dissolution of subjectivity would encounter a new mode of intensity in the modern construction of aesthetic and existential *Stimmung*.

---

[194] Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', p. 41.
[195] Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 3.

Chapter 4

‘Das ist, glaube ich, eine Stimmungssache’:

Thomas Bernhard’s ‘Trilogy of the Arts’

I.   Introduction: Dostoevsky, Beckett and the Scandal Maker

In the previous sections of this study, two pivotal configurations of aesthetic mood in modern fiction have emerged: in Dostoevsky, the intensity of highly spatialised forms of collective affect, and in Beckett, an enquiry into the existential and musical dimension of *Stimmung*. We have seen that, as a consequence of these modes of interrogating affect within the modern condition, the works of both authors combine the levels of textual attunement outlined at the outset of this study: Dostoevsky’s analysis of *Stimmung* begins with a depiction of modes of existence in the modern city, his native Saint Petersburg, thus merging a perceived epochal *Grundstimmung* with representations of solitary characters who seem fundamentally out-of-tune with their times and through that very dissonance become all the more emblematic of the modern. *The Idiot*, then, marks a step towards an aesthetic practice that foregrounds the reading experience and the attunement at work within it. Beckett’s narrative fiction first resorts to a philosophical exploration of the human condition and successively delves deeper into an exploration of the aesthetics of intersubjective *Stimmung* in the reading process via the notion of musical attunement and the dissolution of self.

In the following, I will study the prose works of Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard (1931-89) as a means to synthesise these two manifestations of *Stimmung* and its aesthetic philosophy in the fiction of modernity. Combining the affective immediacy of Dostoevsky’s works with the philosophical exploration of human existence and notions of musical harmony which marks Beckett’s novels, Bernhard’s works self-reflexively investigate the nature of art and scrutinise even more openly how mood informs and shapes the reader’s experience in the aesthetic process. Bernhard, who was considered the *enfant terrible* of Austrian post-war fiction for much

of his career, has now become 'a thoroughly canonic figure in modern literature'[1]
and his works have frequently been compared to those of his Irish contemporary[2], to
such an extent that the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* called the Austrian writer
an 'Alpen-Beckett'[3], an Alpine version of Beckett, in 1972.

The affinities between the works of the two authors, who were both prolific
writers of drama, prose and poetry and passed away in the same year, are manifold.
Both Beckett and Bernhard are pessimistic commentators on the human condition,
both have a propensity for absurd and black humour in the face of existential
despair, and both display a fascination with language, music and the human voice
which informs their notion of literature. The position of the solitary, alienated
individual dominates their *œuvres* time and again, as Martin Esslin describes it:

> Bernhard's world, like much of Beckett's, whether in his poetry, prose or drama, is an
> essentially *monologic* universe, a universe of characters caught up in the prison house of their
> own consciousness, compulsive solipsistic talkers, experiencing their own selves, or rather, the
> hopeless quest for their true identities, as an endless stream of language erupting from their
> brains in the form of stories, stories made up of voices[4].

Although I consider an understanding of Beckett's works as being purely monologic
to be questionable since – as discussed in the previous chapter – they always imply a
search and desire for company, one that is fulfilled by the reader, Esslin raises a valid
point about the solipsistic nature and narrative programme of both Beckett's and
Bernhard's characters: as well as their signature self-scrutiny, Bernhard's narrators
are marked by a tendency for monomania[5] and, even more so than Beckett's

---

[1] Matthias Konzett, 'Introduction. National Iconoclasm: Thomas Bernhard and the Austrian Avant-garde', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett (Woodbridge and Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2002), pp. 1-21 (p. 1).
[2] Cf. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, *Der Übertreibungskünstler: Studien zu Thomas Bernhard* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1986), p. 108. The most important comparative studies of Beckett and Bernhard can be found in Martin Esslin, 'Beckett and Bernhard: A Comparison', *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1985), 67-78; Mark Byron, 'Scharfsinnige Sturzfluten bei Beckett und Bernhard', in *Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Literatur*, ed. by Jan Wilm and Mark Nixon (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), pp. 139-55; Catharina Wulf, *The Imperative of Narration: Beckett, Bernhard, Schopenhauer, Lacan* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997); Alfred Hornung, 'Reading One/Self: Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, John Barth, Alain Robbe-Grillet', in *Exploring Postmodernism: Selected Papers Presented at a Workshop on Postmodernism at the XIth International Comparative Literature Congress*, ed. by Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 175-98, and Jürgen Siess, 'La mise en scène des tensions institutionnelles: Thomas Bernhard face à Samuel Beckett', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 17, *Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett: Colloque de Cerisy* (2006), 501-18.
[3] Esslin, 'Beckett and Bernhard', p. 67.
[4] Ibid., p. 68.
[5] Cf. Oliver Jahraus, *Die Wiederholung als werkkonstitutives Prinzip im Œuvre Thomas Bernhards* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 18.

storytellers, by the obsessive, repetitive circling of pivotal questions they lack a final answer to.

Dostoevsky, on the other hand, constitutes a crucial influence and reference point for Bernhard's writing[6]. In his autobiographical text *Die Kälte: Eine Isolation* (1981), Bernhard describes how he discovered the novel *Demons* («Бесы», 1871-2) while afflicted with pulmonary disease during the early post-war period:

> Ich vertiefte mich in Verlaine und Trakl, und ich las *Die Dämonen* von Dostojewski, ein Buch von dieser Unersättlichkeit und Radikalität und überhaupt ein so dickes Buch hatte ich vorher in meinem Leben nie gelesen, ich betäubte mich, ich löste mich für einige Zeit in den Dämonen auf. […] Ich war von einer wilden *und* großen Dichtung getroffen, um selbst als ein Held daraus hervorzugehen. Nicht oft in meinem späteren Leben hat Dichtung eine so ungeheure Wirkung gehabt[7].

> [I immersed myself in Verlaine and Trakl, and I also read Dostoyevsky's novel *The Demons*. Never in my whole life have I read a more engrossing and elemental work, and at the time I had never read such a long one. It had the effect of a powerful drug, and for a time I was totally absorbed by it. […] I had felt the impact of a work that was both wild and great, and I emerged from the experience like a hero. Seldom has literature produced such an overwhelming effect on me[8].]

Bernhard's account of his influential, perhaps even life-changing, reading experience of Dostoevsky at a young age underlines the intense affective nature and 'overwhelming' immersive potential of the Russian novelist's works, which I have discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. Both aspects – intensity and immersion – would shape Bernhard's own writing considerably insofar as many of his works create a similar degree of affective intensity in the aesthetic process. In the following, I will outline the ways in which Bernhard's ferocious poetics of immediacy juxtapose Beckettian musical attunement with the concept of *Stimmung* as affectively laden atmosphere, as a matter of space and presence – such as we find it in Dostoevsky's novels – engendering an aesthetics of *Stimmung* that places the reading process front and centre. 'Bernhard ist nicht einer von jenen, die man «mit Abstand» liest'[9], Erika Tunner finds: Bernhard is not an author one reads from a distance. Quite the opposite is the case. The intense, intimate quality of his narrative fiction will

---

[6] Cf. Manfred Mittermayer, *Thomas Bernhard: Eine Biografie* (Vienna and Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2015), p. 364.

[7] Thomas Bernhard, *Die Kälte: Eine Isolation* (Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1981), pp. 140f.

[8] Bernhard, *Gathering Evidence: A Memoir*, trans. by David McLintock (London et al.: Vintage, 1994), pp. 335f.

[9] Erika Tunner, 'Scheitern mit Vorbedacht', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Manfred Jurgensen (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1981), pp. 231-41 (p. 238).

constitute my point of departure for a reconsideration of the relationship between mood and the reading process in the context of modern aesthetics.

From Erzählung to Erregung

If grumpiness were an art form, Thomas Bernhard would be its uncontested master. His works are notorious for the highly idiosyncratic style of his narrators, who are an epitome of spite, hatred and disgust, as well as for the many public scandals surrounding their publication[10]. As Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler points out:

> Um fast jedes Werk – wie auch fast um jeden Auftritt Bernhards – rankt sich eine Blumenkette von Skandalen, die den Blick auf das Werk oder auf den jeweils in Rede stehenden Anlaß der Aktion auf sich und weg vom Text zieht[11].
>
> [Every work of art – as well as almost all of Bernhard's public appearances – is tendriled with a girdle of flowers formed by scandals, which draw attention to themselves and away from the text or the respective occasion of his campaigns (my translation).]

Bernhard's novel *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung* (1984; translated into English by Ewald Osers as *Cutting Timber: An Irritation* in 1985 and by David McLintock as *Woodcutters* in 1987) is a prime example of this phenomenon as its German subtitle *Eine Erregung* – a commotion, irritation or uproar – is both programmatic for the content of the novel and for its reception.

One of Bernhard's former friends, the composer Gerhard Lampersberg, filed a libel suit since he recognised himself in the unfavourable portrait of the composer Auersberger. Consequently, all copies of the novel were temporarily confiscated in Bernhard's native Austria[12]. Lampersberg later abandoned the lawsuit, but the public scandal promoted the novel's publication considerably and initially almost overshadowed its status as a work of art. By the time the novel was published, Bernhard had already caused a number of public scandals, for instance through an opprobrious speech offering a damning assessment of his home country when being

---

[10] For a more detailed discussion of Bernhard's public scandals, see Christine Kiebuzinska, 'The Scandal Maker: Thomas Bernhard and the Reception of *Heldenplatz'*, *Modern Drama*, Vol. 38, Nr. 3 (1995), 378-88, and Matthias Konzett, 'Publikumsbeschimpfung: Thomas Bernhard's Provocations of the Austrian Public', *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (1995), pp. 251-70.

[11] Schmidt-Dengler, *Der Übertreibungskünstler*, p. 94.

[12] Cf. Mittermayer, *Eine Biografie*, pp. 120f.; 373f. For a detailed chronology of the public scandal and legal procedures resulting from it, see Eva Schindlecker, 'Thomas Bernhard: *Holzfällen. Eine Erregung.* Dokumentation eines österreichischen Literaturskandals', in *Statt Bernhard: Über Misanthropie im Werk Thomas Bernhards*, ed. by Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler and Martin Huber (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1987), pp. 13-39.

awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literature in 1968[13]. In this sense, the notion of *Erregung* can be interpreted as a self-reflexive comment on Bernhard's own artistic reputation as well as a provocative prediction of how *Holzfällen* would be received in the public eye.

In addition to causing *eine Erregung*, the novel introduced a new literary 'genre' of the same name that is emblematic of many of Bernhard's works[14]. The novel, I will demonstrate, comments on the role of genre as a meaning-producing aspect of works of art which in many ways hinges on mood, thus exemplifying the third manner of articulating *Stimmung* in literature outlined in Chapter 1: that of how literary forms are shaped by forms of mood as modes of meaning-production. Bernhard shows in his works that, whether we pity or ridicule a character, whether we laugh or cry at the same narrative event, depends largely on the mood given to a text, which shapes our understanding by making us apply the schemata of comedy, tragedy, satire, romance and so forth in the course of the reading process [15]. In this sense, genres are interdependent with moods defining the tone of works of art; one could even go so far as to say that, on an aesthetic level, genres are moods and modes of reading, watching and listening.

It is an important research desideratum to identify and describe the moods that shape specific genres, but as this task goes well beyond the scope of this project, I will confine my analysis to the use of the dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy in Bernhard's writing as well as the literary form of the *Erregung* which he created to circumvent and expose these preconfigured frames of understanding. The term 'Erregung' is evocative of the narrative genre of the 'Erzählung' in German-speaking literature, which is comparable with the narrative forms of story, novella and tale, and simultaneously underlines Bernhard's concern with mood as a driving force of writing: while the emphasis of *Erzählung* – which, in the literal sense, translates as narrative or story – lies in the mode of storytelling, the *Erregung* is more overtly concerned with stirring up emotions and exciting its readers, hence foregrounding

---

[13] Ibid., pp. 184-8.

[14] Cf. Hans Höller, *Thomas Bernhard* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993), p. 131.

[15] John Frow's *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) provides a concise introduction to the concept of genre as related to schemata (pp. 90-94) and frames (pp. 112-9). Moreover, in her book *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), Monika Fludernik further comments on the relationship between cognitive frames of understanding and genre classifications (pp. 312f.).

the active transmission of forms of affect, which we will further explore in this chapter.

Bernhard scholarship has commonly subsumed *Holzfällen* and two other novels under the umbrella term of the 'trilogy of the arts'[16], which comprises *Der Untergeher* (*The Loser*, 1983)*, Holzfällen* and *Alte Meister* (*Old Masters*, 1985), published within three years during the writer's late artistic phase. The three texts constitute a thematic and aesthetic unity as each of them explores a different art form from a similar aesthetic angle. *Der Untergeher* deals with the sphere of music in depicting the fictional relationship between three musicians: a nameless narrator, the world-famous Canadian pianist Glenn Gould and their friend Wertheimer. In *Holzfällen*, a disgruntled author muses about the performing arts, especially theatre and dance, while attending an 'artistic dinner' in the Vienna of the 1980s. In *Alte Meister*, the narrator Atzbacher describes his meeting with the aging art critic Reger at the Viennese Museum of Art History, during which they converse about the fine arts, the state of philosophy and art as well as the impossibility of artistic perfection.

Through consistent reference to an example from the respective artistic tradition, the novels not only engage with those art forms on a thematic but also on a structural level, which reflects in narratives which are considerably influenced by the three intertexts they revolve around: in *Der Untergeher*, Glenn Gould's performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (1741); in *Holzfällen*, Henrik Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck* (1884); and in *Alte Meister*, Tintoretto's *Portrait of a White-Bearded Man* (c. 1570). Gregor Hens proposes that these intermedial references do not merely play out in the theme and narrative of the texts, but are instead constitutive for their narrative structure: 'Es geht im Kern bei diesen Arbeiten darum, in erzählerischer Form die Strukturen der Musik, des Dramas und der bildenden Kunst zu verarbeiten'[17] ['At the core of these works lies the narrative configuration of the structures of music, drama and visual art' (my translation).]. These narrative actualisations of other art forms in the trilogy display Bernhard's intense preoccupation with art and artifice, the dichotomy between art and nature and, finally, with the relationship between affect and art as the process of aesthetic experience is examined in minute detail.

---

[16] Cf. Gregor Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste: Der Untergeher, Holzfällen, Alte Meister* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999), p. 15.

[17] Ibid. p. 18.

Although they are all themselves creative minds, the narrators of the three novels – only one of whom, Atzbacher in *Alte Meister*, is actually named – do not, primarily, act as the artistic creators in their narratives, but predominantly take on the positions of observers, listeners and spectators of the music, theatre and portraiture which the respective protagonists of the novels produce, thus mirroring Molloy's and Watt's position as readers or listeners in their own stories. Moreover, all novels of the trilogy feature similar monomaniac homodiegetic narrators who analyse the world and people around them with an extraordinary degree of ruthlessness and spite and who consider the potential and the limits of creativity and representation through various art forms as they are acting as the recipients of their respective artistic objects: Gould's piano playing, the spectacle and theatre constituted by the 'artistic dinner' and the portrait of an old man that Reger represents for Atzbacher, in the same way as the *White-Bearded Man* is, in turn, to Reger. The trilogy thus investigates the arts first and foremost from the point of view of aesthetic reception and experience, a position which gives the moods emerging in aesthetic reception and the process of affective attunement a prominent position and crucial role. As will become evident in the individual readings of the three novels, the trilogy acts as a means to summarise Bernhard's reflections on aesthetics and focus on the role of the listener and spectator in the encounter with works of art, a process in which forms of attunement take centre stage. In this context, the reader or spectator becomes the locus of a relationship established with the work of art which is marked by conflicting forms of affect generated by artistic form and experimentations with literary conventions and boundaries.

In the novels of the trilogy, as well as in his other works, Bernhard challenges and undermines genre conventions, blurring the boundaries between comedy and tragedy in particular. As are most of his works, all three novels of the trilogy are strongly concerned with death: the plot of *Der Untergeher* revolves around Glenn Gould's death and the suicide of his fictional friend and competitor Wertheimer. In *Holzfällen*, the 'artistic dinner' depicted by the narrator is overshadowed by the suicide and funeral of his friend Joana. Despite its subtitle being *A Comedy*, *Alte Meister* broaches the issue of how to deal with a loved one's death in describing Reger's struggle to live on after the death of his wife, a motif which has been connected to Bernhard's loss of his 'Lebensmensch', his life-long companion, and patron Hedwig

Stavianicek in 1984[18]. And yet, all three novels – *Holzfällen* and *Alte Meister* in particular – are marked by a sense of humour which is generated through the use of incessant hyperboles and bizarre details and character traits in the people who are portrayed.

In this sense, the title of Bernhard's ambiguous short story 'Ist es eine Komödie? Ist es eine Tragödie?' ('Is it a comedy? Is it a tragedy?', 1967) is programmatic for the trilogy of the arts as well as for Bernhard's other prose works and their indebtedness to theatrical conventions[19]. Therein, a medical student who is attempting to write a theatre study, meets an odd stranger outside a theatre, who urges the student to accompany him on a walk in the park. The stranger, dressed in women's clothes, behaves in a curious and threatening manner, persistently asking whether the play being performed in the theatre that evening is a comedy or a tragedy, but keeping the student from answering. Ultimately, he claims to have killed the woman whose clothes he is wearing and tells the student that the play which is under way as they are speaking is '[*t*]*atsächlich* eine Komödie'[20] ['*actually* a comedy' (my translation)].

In *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*, J.L. Styan suggests that modern theatre is marked by an ambiguity of affect that calls the traditional distinction of comedy and tragedy into question, creating a brand of comic tragedy which becomes emblematic of the age of modernity[21]. Bernhard transfers this phenomenon into his prose, thus continuing the line of aesthetic undecidedness and uncertainty that, as we have seen in Chapter 1, has marked the aesthetics of modern fiction since Dickens and Dostoevsky. In Bernhard's novels and plays, events that are essentially tragic in nature are thus perpetually depicted in a light which renders them comic and vice versa. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler therefore argues that in

---

[18] Cf. Mittermayer, *Eine Biografie*, p. 380.

[19] Cf. Mark M. Anderson, 'Fragments of a Deluge: The Theater of Thomas Bernhard's Prose', in *A Companion to the Works*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 119-35 (p. 130); Andrew Webber, 'Costume Drama: Performance and Identity in Bernhard's Works', in *A Companion to the Works*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 149-65 (p. 152).

[20] Bernhard, 'Ist es eine Komödie? Ist es eine Tragödie?', in *Prosa* by Bernhard (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), pp. 38-48 (p. 48).

[21] Cf. J.L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 296f. Styan also dedicates a chapter of his study to an aesthetic form he describes as the 'play of mood', a type of drama which imprints a specific atmosphere on its audience (pp. 106-12), thus outlining the central role *Stimmung* plays not only in narrative fiction but also, importantly, in drama. Since Bernhard's prose was very much influenced by his background in theatre, this aspect constitutes a significant reference point for the way in which Bernhard's narrative fiction engenders aesthetic moods.

Bernhard's writing '[c]omedies and tragedies are posited as identical'[22]. By wreaking comic effects from tragic events and tragic undertones from comic situations, Bernhard's style blurs the boundaries between the two traditionally dramatic genres, thus eliminating the tragic-comic dichotomy in favour of a mode of writing which destabilises generically preconfigured, 'safe' forms of affect and enables ambiguity and more nuanced forms of affectedness. The prominent conjunction of death and humour in this writing is grounded in Bernhard's dictum 'es ist alles lächerlich, wenn man an den Tod denkt'[23], 'everything is ridiculous when one thinks about death', from his speech at the award ceremony for the Austrian state prize. Indeed, the notion of 'ridiculousness' [*Lächerlichkeit*] is crucial for an understanding of the poetics of affect in Bernhard's works as it represents the in-between of the tragic and the comic mode: the ridiculous is associated with tragic failure and a comic understanding and representation thereof; with the gravity of existential distress and the simultaneous levity of comic relief.

This philosophical outlook on life significantly informs the genre conventions present in Bernhard's aesthetics. According to Matthias Löwe, the constant presence of death in Bernhard's *œuvre* is at the same time the source of its often humorous tone:

> Wer dem 'memento mori' eine Dauerpräsenz im eigenen Denken einräumt, für den gibt es keinen Normalzustand, für den gibt es kein routiniertes Rollenhandeln, denn wer das Leben nur von seinem tödlichen Ende her denkt, der kann nichts ernst nehmen, weil alles abstirbt[24].

> [For someone who grants the 'memento mori' a permanent presence in his thinking, there is no normal state, there is no routine in playing one's role, because someone who can only think about life from its fatal end cannot take anything seriously because everything dies off (my translation).]

Bernhard's comedy, which is intertwined with a constant awareness of an ontological *Being-towards-death*, is thus reminiscent of Beckett's laughter in the face of existential despair: 'Both Beckett and Bernhard look at the world and at themselves in a mood of savage black humor, gallows humor in the true sense of the word'[25]. This brand of laughter is the last resort against what Josef König describes as 'die allgemeine

---

[22] Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, 'Thomas Bernhard's Poetics of Comedy', in *A Companion to the Works*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 105-15 (p. 113).
[23] Bernhard, 'Verehrter Herr Minister, verehrte Anwesende', in *Thomas Bernhard − Der Wahrheit auf der Spur: Die öffentlichen Auftritte*, ed. by Wolfram Bayer, Raimund Fellinger and Martin Huber (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011), pp. 69-70 (p. 69).
[24] Matthias Löwe, 'Erregtes Ich und dezisionistische Ästhetik: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der offenen Gesellschaft im Werk Thomas Bernhards', in *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. by Johann Georg Lughofer (Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 2012), pp. 55-68 (p. 60).
[25] Esslin, 'Beckett and Bernhard', p. 76.

Krisensituation des modernen Geistes'[26] ['the general mode of crisis of the modern spirit' (my translation)], though like any form of affect in his works, I consider Bernhard's laughter and tendency for hyperbole as more bold and aggressive than Beckett's fatalistic humour of existential hopelessness.

In Bernhard's texts, laughter takes on the role of an intersubjective gesture: as Henri Bergson outlines in his famous study of the comic, laughter is a social phenomenon which always presupposes the presence of another, '[o]ur laughter is always the laughter of a group'[27]. The supposed solipsism of Bernhard's characters is called into question by this comic programme, which includes the reader in a circulation of transsubjective affect. For Schmidt-Dengler, then, in Bernhard's works

> [t]he opposites of comedy and tragedy exist alongside rather than in mutually exclusive terms. Bernhard's virtuosity reveals itself in that he gives the reader the opportunity to re-enact this constant crossing of borders between the two genres[28].

He goes on to observe that

> [Bernhard's] brand of poetics is determined by the dynamic change between tragedy and comedy. Both occupy the same territory and the difference between them only becomes glaringly evident at the moment when it is negated[29].

As Bernhard's texts circumvent genre conventions, readers are invited into the characters' tragicomic existential conditions, and the very mode of attunement between reader and text becomes constitutive for poetic meaning. Through this open generic structure, the reader's own affectedness by the text is creatively integrated in the aesthetic process. The genres of Bernhard's works are hence not inscribed in the texts as fixed entities; instead, constituting a central aspect of my reading of *Stimmung* in modern literature, they become subject to an act of negotiation, an attunement, between text and reader.

What is more, much of Bernhard's understanding of art, narrative and life depends on *Stimmung*. The following exchange in an interview with Peter Hamm from 1977 suggests, in typical nonchalant Bernhard-fashion, the importance of these modes of affect in Bernhard's self-understanding and views on art:

> P.H. Warum unterhalten Sie sich eigentlich mit mir?

---

[26] Josef König, '*Nichts als ein Totenmaskenball.' Studien zum Verständnis der ästhetischen Intentionen im Werk Thomas Bernhards* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1983), p. 195; cf. also p. 201.
[27] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications), p. 3.
[28] Schmidt-Dengler, 'Thomas Bernhard's Poetics of Comedy', p. 107.
[29] Ibid, p. 113.

T.B. Das ist, glaube ich, eine Stimmungssache, spielt vielerlei mit, glaube ich. Erstens eine –
das fällt alles in das Hauptwort »Stimmung« – Sentimentalität, weil das halt Sie sind und weil
ich Sie jetzt, wie direkt oder indirekt auch immer, fast zwanzig Jahre lang kenne. Und dann,
weil mir auch völlig egal ist, was ich sage, nicht? Ich kontrollier das ja auch gar nicht. Hat gar
keinen Sinn. Mehr kann ich nicht sagen[30].

[P.H. Why are you even talking to me?

T.B. I think it's a mood thing, it plays into many things, I think. First off, due to a sense of –
and all of this falls into the noun 'mood' – sentimentality, just because it's you and because
I've known you, whether directly or indirectly, for almost twenty years now. And also,
because I really don't care what I say, do I? I don't even control it in any case. There's no
point. I can't say any more (my translation).]

To Bernhard, his interview with Hamm is in itself 'a mood thing', motivated by a
sentimentality associated with his long acquaintance with the interviewer. But more
importantly, as Bernhard provocatively states that it does not actually matter to him
what he says, the extent of this 'mood thing' becomes apparent: in the interview, as
well as in Bernhard's works, what is said is often less important than how an
exchange between two parties unfolds and how forms of affect and attunement play
into these kinds of interactions.

This notion extends to Bernhard's view on literature: in the same interview,
Bernhard claims that as a reader, here more specifically of Dostoevsky, form and
technique are immeasurably more important to him than content:

T.B. […] Wie es gemacht ist, hat mich immer am meisten interessiert und komischerweise
kaum, was gesagt wird.

P.H. Und wenn Sie etwa Dostojewskijs »Idiot« oder »Die Brüder Karamasow« gelesen
haben, dann hat Sie wirklich nur das Gemachte daran interessiert?

T.B. Ja, das hat mich fasziniert, das Gemachte.[31]

[T.B. […] I've always been the most interested in how it is made, and funnily enough, hardly
in what is being said.

P.H. And when you, for instance, read Dostoevky's *The Idiot* or *The Brothers Karamasov*, you
were really only interested in the way it was made into art?

T.B. Yes, that's what fascinated me, the way it was made into art (my translation).]

Hamm's phrase 'das Gemachte' ['that which is made' or 'fabricated'], which
Bernhard then takes up, connects art to the notion of artifice and the Greek *poiēsis*
[ποίησις], which conceptualises literature as something that is fashioned from reality.
What Bernhard thus values in works of art is not the semantic or referential level of

---

[30] Bernhard and Peter Hamm, *»Sind Sie gerne böse?« Ein Nachtgespräch zwischen Thomas Bernhard und Peter
Hamm im Hause Bernhard in Ohlsdorf 1977* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011), p. 61.
[31] Ibid., p. 44.

meaning, but their 'fabricatedness' and the aesthetic techniques underlying them. Bernhard, famously, declared himself to be a *Geschichtenzerstörer*, a destroyer of stories:

> Andererseits bin ich natürlich auch kein heiterer Autor, kein Geschichtenerzähler, Geschichten hasse ich im Grund. Ich bin ein *Geschichtenzerstörer, ich bin der typische Geschichtenzerstörer*. In meiner Arbeit, wenn sich irgendwo Anzeichen einer Geschichte bilden, oder wenn ich nur in der Ferne irgendwo hinter einem Prosahügel die Andeutung einer Geschichte auftauchen sehe, schieße ich sie ab[32].

> [On the other hand I am, of course, not a cheerful author, no storyteller, I essentially hate stories. I am a *destroyer of stories, I am a typical destroyer of stories*. Whenever a hint of a story emerges in my work, or when I can, somewhere from afar, even see an inkling of a story beyond a prose hill, I shoot it down (my translation).]

Bernhard's polemic refusal to provide stories in his works corroborates his claim to have no interest in *what* is narrated [*mimesis*] as opposed to *how* it is narrated [*poiēsis*]. Once again, the semantics of modern literature are supplanted by its semiotics, rendering the semiotic dimension its new semantic subject matter. However, although Bernhard describes himself as an anti-storyteller, his works are decidedly not anti-narrative: on the contrary, as Rüdiger Görner points out, '[t]he art of narration was Bernhard's connection with the world in a decidedly existential meaning of the word'[33]. The act of narration thus comes to the fore as the subject of narration is discarded – through a crucial development engendered by Bernhard's works, the narrative process, the attunement between reader and text and the techniques underlying it, become the crucial driving force behind this prose.

As my reading of Dostoevsky's and Beckett's texts has already indicated, an important move away from representation and towards the modes and moods thereof within the medium of fiction can be observed in the narrative works of these influential modern writers, constituting part and parcel of their inquiry into the existential conditions of the post-Enlightenment subject. The works examined showcase a dialectical structure between moods which are represented in them and the modes of *Stimmung* generated by the interactive process between text and reader. As the aesthetic process itself increasingly becomes the subject of the literary text, the question of the attunement between text and reader is put forward and is always, as it were, related to the ontological structure of the modern individual and its own

---

[32] Bernhard qtd. in Barbara Diederichs, 'Musik als Generationsprinzip von Literatur. Eine Analyse am Beispiel von Thomas Bernhards *Untergeher*' (doctoral thesis, Justus Liebig University Gießen, 1998), p. 19.
[33] Rüdiger Görner, 'The Broken Window Handle: Thomas Bernhard's Notion of Weltbezug', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 89-103 (p. 94).

subject position. As a transsubjective form of affect, *Stimmung* reaches beyond the singular being and creates a space for an aesthetic encounter that destabilises the demarcations between subject and other. Within this context, Bernhard's works will represent a brand of fiction which, through a number of textual and paratextual elements, fictionalises its own attunement and thereby engages the reader in an intense and inescapable process of *Stimmung*.

In the following section, I will closely look at the role of mood and attunement in the three novels constituting the trilogy of arts in order to trace Bernhard's inquiry into the transmission of aesthetic affect. Of all of Bernhard's manifold, moody narrative, dramatic and poetic works, the trilogy stands out as the author's most explicit self-referential commentary on aesthetics and, at the same time, the most open exploration of aesthetic *Stimmung*. This is not a coincidence: the two, as will become more transparent in the analysis of the three texts, are absolutely inseparable to him. Art, in other words, becomes 'a mood thing' which is deeply embedded in Bernhard's critique of modernity and his post-war aesthetics.

II.   Music and Artistic Ideal in *Der Untergeher*

The 'Musicality' of Bernhard's Prose

Bernhard's entire *œuvre* is shaped by the author's affinity to the musical arts and his understanding of literature as an art form that is, inherently, musical in nature. Bernhard even goes so far as to describe the literary text itself as a multi-layered musical score:

> [I]ch sehe die Prosastücke wie die Stücke als Partituren. Die Kritiker aber sehen nur die Singstimme oder den Klavierauszug, und dadurch geht bei ihnen immer alles daneben, weil sie das Ganze nicht sehen. Sie sehen nur den Auszug und die Oberstimme. Und das ist für mich immer der Ruin […]. Der Literaturkritiker müßte eigentlich auch um drei Jahre in die Musikhochschule gehen, finde ich. Literatur hat ja sehr viel damit zu tun[34].

> [I consider the prose works as well as the plays as scores. However, the critics only see the descant or the piano reduction, and that is the reason why they always get everything wrong, because they do not see the whole thing. They only see the reduction and the descant. And to me that is always their downfall […]. Any literary critic should in fact attend a conservatoire for three years, in my opinion. Literature has a lot to do with that (my translation).]

---

[34] Bernhard qtd. in Bernhard and Hamm, *Nachtgespräch*, pp. 34f.

Applying musical metaphors to the elements of fiction, Bernhard suggests an affinity between literature and music which is reminiscent of Beckett's musical references and emphasis on the voice as an *instrument* of narrative. The failure in literary criticism's ability to understand his works, Bernhard opines, lies in the fact that critics – whom Bernhard was chronically wary of, as for example his spat with the feminist critic Ria Endres indicated[35] – have read his texts in a too one-dimensional way, often conflating the voices of his narrators with his own and focusing on the scandalous and vicious elements observable on the surface-level of the works.

Although Bernhard had previously experimented with musical elements and literary form – for instance in his play *Die Macht der Gewohnheit* (1974), which revolves around Franz Schubert's *Trout Quintet*, and in the 1982 novel *Beton*, whose narrator is attempting to write a piece on the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy – the first novel in the trilogy of the arts, *Der Untergeher*, is his most far-reaching experiment in combining musical and literary elements in the medium of narrative fiction. It is the closest Bernhard's writing would come to engendering the notion of a 'musical score' in the medium of narrative prose, which the author references in his remarks about his aesthetic self-understanding.

The novel describes the relationship between three friends and piano players: a fictional version of the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, the eponymous 'Untergeher' Wertheimer and the nameless narrator, who meet during their training with the distinguished master pianist Vladimir Horowitz at the Mozarteum in Salzburg in the 1950s. With the narrative being set 28 years after their first encounter, shortly after Gould's death from a stroke and Wertheimer's subsequent suicide, the narrator is the only surviving member of the group and reminisces about their relationship during their studies and its impact on their individual lives. While Gould, a natural prodigy, rises to international fame through his famous recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, both the narrator and Wertheimer end their careers as professional pianists – as the narrator suggests, because the experience of Gould's unachievable genius rendered their ambitions void.

---

[35] Cf. Ria Endres, 'Das Dunkel ist nicht finster genug', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 9-14. Following the publication of Endres's doctoral thesis *Am Ende angekommen: Dargestellt am wahnhaften Dunkel des Männerportraits des Thomas Bernhard* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1980), Bernhard showed himself dismissive about her – very justified – feminist critique of patriarchal dominance in his works.

While the narrator dedicates himself to philosophy instead and moves to Madrid, Wertheimer takes up a position in the humanities and begins to live in a quasi-incestuous relationship with his sister. They maintain their friendship with Gould, who lives an increasingly secluded life and eventually retires from giving public performances. After Gould dies of a stroke while playing the piano and Wertheimer's sister, having married a rich entrepreneur, moves to Switzerland, Wertheimer follows her and hangs himself outside her house as a form of 'revenge'. The narrator, too, travels to Switzerland to attend Wertheimer's funeral and consequently returns to Austria to visit Wertheimer's house. While reflecting on Wertheimer's reasons for committing suicide, the narrator's thoughts revolve around their encounter with Gould, concluding that it was the fateful experience of seeing a perfection that Wertheimer never could have achieved in Gould: 'Wenn wir dem Ersten begegnen, müssen wir aufgeben'[36] ['When we meet the very best, we have to give up'[37]].

Even though Bernhard references some biographical aspects, the historical figures appearing in the novel only bear partial resemblance to the actual Gould and Horowitz, and the Gould portrayed in the novel in particular in many ways 'has much more to do with the real-life Thomas Bernhard than with the real-life Gould'[38]. Indeed, Bernhard himself studied singing and later theatre at the Mozarteum in the 1950s[39] (an experience that considerably influenced the writing of *Der Untergeher*), and he continued to consider music a vital part of his life[40]. He further equipped his version of Gould with properties which clearly indicate the fictional nature of the character, as for instance the Gould in the novel dies aged 51, while the real-life Gould famously died shortly after his fiftieth birthday. Autobiography, biographical elements from Gould's career and fiction thus merge into a piece of writing which, in interrogating the relationship between between reality and fiction, addresses the production of attunement through the tension between the two.

---

[36] Bernhard, *Der Untergeher*, 16th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), p. 15.

[37] Bernhard, *The Loser*, trans. by Jack Dawson (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 9.

[38] Jason Blake, 'A Canadian Icon in a "Cretinous Provincial Dump": Glenn Gould and Thomas Bernhard's Novel *The Loser*', *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 71-87 (p. 77). Cf. also Mittermayer, p. 361.

[39] Mittmeyer, pp. 109f.; 361.

[40] Cf. Andrea Reiter, 'Thomas Bernhard's "Musical Prose"', in *Literature on the Threshold: The German Novel in the 1980s*, ed. by Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Roland Smith (New York et al.: Berg Publishers, 1990), pp. 187-207 (pp. 187-9).

The 'musicality' of Bernhard's prose is one of the most commonly studied phenomena in recent criticism on his works and has been addressed by numerous critics[41]. That Bernhard's literary texts possess a musical quality has now become critical consensus, though scholars have disagreed about, firstly, the specific ways in which this impression is generated and, secondly, to what degree the prose works actually engender musical structures or merely use them as reference points. Andreas Herzog and Liesbeth Bloemsaat-Voerknecht represent the widespread position that while Bernhard's writing is partly inspired by musical structures, attempts to substantiate one-to-one analogies between, for instance, the form of the sonata or rondo and Bernhard's prose texts[42], or more specifically, between *Der Untergeher* and the *Goldberg Variations*[43], are too far fetched. Instead, they consider his writing style as one that is informed by musical elements, but creates an artistic form in its own right. Herzog, in reference to Arnold Schoenberg's notion of musical prose[44], describes this form as 'prosaic music'[45]. He further argues that the employment of musical concepts in Bernhard's writing is fundamentally connected to a search for harmony in the author's life: 'Die im Werk immer wiederkehrende Thematisierung von Musik, Musizieren bzw. Musikvirtuosität […] offenbart, über sich selbst hinausweisend, eine Sehnsucht nach Harmonie und rettendem Aufgehobensein, deren Erfüllung dem Autor versagt blieb'[46] ['Beyond self-referentiality, the recurring form of addressing music, making music or musical virtuosity, respectively, discloses a yearning for harmony and for feeling safe and sheltered, whose fulfilment the author was denied' (my translation)].

---

[41] The most extensive studies of musicality in Bernhard's works can be found in Manfred Jurgensen, 'Die Sprachpartituren Thomas Bernhards', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 99-122; Reiter, 'Musical Prose'; Andreas Herzog, 'Thomas Bernhards Poetik der prosaischen Musik', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, Neue Folge, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1994), 35-44; Beate Sorg, 'Alle Sätze sind Partituren: «Musikalisches» Erzählen bei Thomas Bernhard', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 157, No. 2, *Literatur und Musik* (1996), 18-22, and Liesbeth Bloemsaat-Voerknecht, *Thomas Bernhard und die Musik: Themenkomplex mit drei Fallstudien und einem musikthematischen Register* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006). More specific analyses of musicality in *Der Untergeher* can be found in Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste*, pp. 27-82; Diederichs, 'Musik als Generationsprinzip', and Michael P. Olson, 'Thomas Bernhard, Glenn Gould, and the Art of the Fugue: Contrapuntal Variations in *Der Untergeher*', *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 3/4, *Special Issue: Form and Style in Contemporary Austrian Literature* (1991), 73-83.
[42] Herzog, 'Poetik der prosaischen Musik', p. 35.
[43] Bloemsaat-Voerknecht, *Bernhard und die Musik*, p. 226.
[44] Cf. Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg 1908-1923* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 49.
[45] Herzog, 'Poetik der prosaischen Musik', p. 35.
[46] Ibid., p. 36.

Through this description an elementary connection between ontology, attunement and harmony – in the musical sense – is established. Herzog interprets Bernhard's own sense of alienation and 'thrownness' as the origin of a desire for harmony, which is conceptualised as a mode of belonging and feeling at home in the world. The pursuit of musical harmony thus becomes a countermeasure for a failed ontological attunement. Although biographical interpretations of these aesthetic structures can be problematic, I consider Herzog's point as a valid one insofar as the ubiquitous sense of alienation and sickness in Bernhard's works points towards a fundamentally disturbed existential condition, one that, if not connected to Bernhard's own life, manifests unease about the modern human condition.

According to Robert Menasse, Bernhard's works, as well as those of his fellow countryman and contemporary Peter Handke, respond to a sense of 'forced' harmonisation which pervaded the Austrian political climate in the post-war era and in particular from the 1970s onwards[47]. After the height of crisis that European modernity would encounter through the Second World War, Menasse's account portrays harmony as an even more pressing aspiration – in the same vein as Riegl's position which was described in Chapter 1. However, this harmony was enforced through a politically charged climate that manifests itself in the anti-harmonic literature of that time. Like Beckett, Bernhard turns to music to determine the aesthetic conditions of harmony and to establish whether an attunement of self and world is achievable, and in doing this, he further extends Beckett's perspective. In the following, a closer look at the musical elements and notion of harmony in *Der Untergeher* will be used as the first step towards outlining the workings of the aesthetic process as a form of attunement in Bernhard's *œuvre*.

Musical Structures and the Defiance of Attunement

Since critics have pointed out that one-to-one applications of musical structures to Bernhard's prose are often not only a futile exercise but may also occlude the idiosyncrasies of his narrative texts, my interpretation of harmonic relationships in *Der Untergeher* will draw on musical patterns while at the same time emphasising the creative liberties with which the texts metaphorically engender a sense of 'musicality'

---

[47] Cf. Robert Menasse, *Überbau und Unterground: Die sozialpartnerschaftliche Ästhetik. Essays zum österreichischen Geist* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997), pp. 58f., 84f.

in the medium of literary fiction. In the following, I will provide an overview of the musical or quasi-musical structures the text displays and will subsequently discuss the implications these forms have for the concept of existential and aesthetic attunement in Bernhard's works.

The mark-up in the following extract from an extended section on Wertheimer's view on his own aphorisms, as summarised by the narrator, provides an example of the notion of literature as a musical score described by Bernhard and of the highly 'musicalised' forms of narration *Der Untergeher* creates:

> Da ich zum **Philosophen** nicht geboren bin, habe ich mich, nicht ganz unbewußt, muß ich sagen, zum **Aphoristiker** gemacht, zu einem dieser widerwärtigen **Philosophie**partizipanten, die es zu Tausenden gibt, <u>sagte er, dachte ich</u>. Mit ganz kleinen Einfällen auf die ganz große Wirkung abzielen und die Menschheit betrügen, <u>sagte er, dachte ich</u>. Im Grunde bin ich nichts anderes, als einer dieser gemeingefährlichen **Aphoristiker**, die sich mit ihrer grenzen**los**en Skrupel**los**igkeit und mit ihrer heil**los**en Frechheit unter die **Phi**_los_**ophen** mischen wie die Hirschkäfer unter die Hirsche, <u>sagte er, dachte ich</u>. Wenn wir nichts mehr **trinken**, ver**dursten** wir, wenn wir nichts mehr **essen**, ver**hungern** wir, <u>sagte er</u>, auf diese Weisheiten laufen alle diese **Aphorismen** hinaus, es sei denn, sie sind von Novalis, aber auch Novalis hat viel Unsinn geredet, <u>so er, dachte ich</u>. In der Wüste **lechzen** wir nach Wasser, so etwa lautet die Pascalsche Maxime, <u>so er, dachte ich</u>. Wenn wir es genau nehmen, bleibt uns von den größten **philosophischen** Entwürfen nur ein erbärmlicher **aphoristischer** Nach**geschmack**, <u>sagte er</u>, gleich um was für eine **Philosophie**, gleich um welchen **Philosophen** es sich handelt, alles zerbröselt, wenn wir mit allen unseren Fähigkeiten und das heißt mit allen unseren Geistesinstrumenten daran gehen, <u>sagte er, dachte ich</u>[48] (my emphases).

> [Since I wasn't born to be a **philosopher** I turned myself into an **aphorist**, not entirely unconsciously I must say, turned myself into one of those disgusting tagalongs of **philosophy** who exist by the thousands, <u>he said, I thought</u>. To produce a huge effect with tiny ideas and deceive mankind, <u>he said, I thought</u>. In reality I'm nothing other than one of those **aphorizing** public menaces who, in their bound**less un**scrupulousness and impudence, tag along behind a horse, <u>he said, I thought</u>. If we stop **drinking** we die of **thirst**, if we stop **eating** we **starve** to death, <u>he said</u>, such pearls of wisdom are what all these **aphorisms** amount to in the end, that is unless they're by Novalis, but even Novalis talked a lot of nonsense, <u>so Wertheimer, I thought</u>. In the desert we **thirst** for water, that's about what Pascal's maxim says, <u>he said, I thought</u>. If we look at things squarely the only thing left from the greatest **philosophical** enterprises is a pitiful **aphoristic** after**taste**, <u>he said</u>, no matter what the **philosophy**, no matter what the **philosopher**, everything falls to bits when we set to work with all our faculties and that means with all our mental instruments, <u>he said, I thought</u>.[49] (my emphases).]

This dense section contains a number of signature elements of Bernhard's prose, and the translation by Dawson demonstrates the difficulty in doing his style justice in

---

[48] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, pp. 94f.
[49] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 65.

English[50] as many of Bernhard's techniques depend on grammatical structures, morphemes and compound words that inhere in the German language. The notion of 'musicality' in Bernhard thus largely depends on an approach to language which conceptualises it from its material and acoustic dimension. Bernhard's language upends semantics in favour of the semiotic level of signification; to use the terms introduced by Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, everyday language is defamiliarised as Bernhard commits a form of 'organized violence'[51] upon it in a quasi-poetic fashion. The most prominent elements of this style are the (underlined) frequent, rhythmic repetitions of the *inquit*-phrase 'sagte er, dachte ich' ['he said, I thought'], which demarcate rhythmic units and thereby aid in structuring the reading flow of a text almost entirely free of chapters and paragraphs[52]. Once the motivic structure has been established through several repetitions, variations of the phrase – 'sagte er' and 'so er, dachte ich' – appear, only to then return to the original format, thus mimicking the musical structures of canon and fugue.

The theme of the section is constituted by the initially opposing phrases 'Philosoph' and 'Aphoristiker' (highlighted by different font) as Wertheimer contrasts the two as being antithetical at the outset of the section. In the following, they undergo several grammatical variations – 'Philosophiepartizipanten', 'philosophisch' and 'Philosophie' and 'Aphorismen' and 'aphoristisch', respectively – while another motif, the semantic cluster constituted by 'essen', 'hungern', 'trinken' and 'dursten' ['eat', 'starve', 'drink' and 'thirst'] is introduced. Furthermore, another theme is developed through the repetition of the morpheme '-los-' (highlighted in bold), which translates as '-less' or 'free from' and is first associated with the term 'Aphoristiker', but then initiates a semantic inversion as the three letters 'los' are, it is insinuated, contained in the antithetical term 'Philosoph'. Wertheimer thus unwittingly synthesises the two elements as he shows that *both* philosophers and aphorists are lacking in effectiveness and permanent significance. Throughout the section, the antithetical relationship of the two terms is thus inverted as the resolution of the

---

[50] For a more extensive discussion on the problems involved in translating Bernhard into English, see Gitta Honegger, 'Language Speaks. Anglo-Bernhard: Thomas Bernhard in Translation', in *A Companion to the Works*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 169-85.

[51] Roman Jakobson qtd. in Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 231.

[52] Cf. Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste*, p. 15.

section shows that they eventually fall prey to the same fate: that of being destroyed by the workings of the 'instrument' that is the human mind.

As it becomes observable in this example, Bernhard's signature repetitions – of single words, phrases, sentences, ideas, syntactical structures and so forth – are one of the main components generating a sense of 'musicality' in his prose. Andrea Reiter suggests that the frequent repetitions of individual words or phrases in these works resemble the development of motifs, in musicological terms the 'shortest intelligible and self-existent melodic or rhythmic figure[s]'[53], in classical music: 'Thomas Bernhard's prose works can be broken down into individual motifs, which are developed in a musical sense, logically put together and "quoted" later in the work'[54]. Through the prominent use of neologisms in *Der Untergeher*, such as the typically Bernhardian compound words '*Klavierradikalismus*'[55], '*Geistesmensch*'[56] or '*Weltverblüffung*'[57] or the *leitmotif*[58] of the '*Untergeher*'[59], these 'prose motifs' gain recognisability and mnemonic value, thus mimicking the function of musical motifs and allowing for the narrator to reference them throughout the novel.

In addition to the musically inspired elements on the micro-level, Hens identifies a number of musical elements affecting the macro-structure of the novel, most importantly contrapuntal elements engendered by the character constellation of Gould, Wertheimer and the narrator. According to Hens, the three characters constitute three individual voices – leading voice, middle voice or melodic counterpart and bass – wherein Gould represents the leading voice by setting the theme, Wertheimer the middle voice following the theme and the narrator the bass[60]. Hens thereby corroborates an observation by Manfred Jurgensen, which draws attention to the use of the voice as a musical instrument in Bernhard's *œuvre*:

---

[53] Kennedy and Bourne Kennedy, 'motif', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.pugwash.lib. warwick.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-6246> [accessed 24 March 2017].
[54] Reiter, 'Musical Prose', p. 93.
[55] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 10; translated as '*piano radicalism*' in Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 5.
[56] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 27; translated as 'thinking person' in Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 17, this term constitutes a recurrent theme in Bernhard's writing, in which the 'Geistesmensch', a 'mind person', is frequently contrasted with material reality and nature.
[57] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 83; translated as '*world flabbergaster*' in Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 57.
[58] For a detailed discussion of the recurrent *leitmotifs* pervading Bernhard's earlier works, such as landscape, forest, darkness, the body and the notion of the native country, see Manfred Jurgensen, *Thomas Bernhard: Der Kegel im Wald oder die Geometrie der Verneinung* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1981), pp. 91-138.
[59] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 26.
[60] Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste*, p. 53.

'Bernhard begreift die menschliche Stimme als Instrument. Er spielt es in seiner Prosa, indem er sich eines konsequenten Zitationsstils bedient. Nicht Bernhard spricht, sondern er spielt mit dem Geist auf menschlichen Stimmeninstrumenten'[61] ['Bernhard conceives of the human voice as an instrument. In his prose, he plays it by using a consistent style of citation. It is not Bernhard who is speaking; in his mind he plays on human vocal instruments' (my translation).] The voices of Gould, Wertheimer and the narrator are thus combined into a polyphonic narrative which is very likely inspired by classical musical structures and uses the voice in ways that are reminiscent of such patterns.

Counterpoint, which is marked by the use of different, harmonically interdependent voices, is a cornerstone of musical polyphony and plays a major role in Bach's compositions, for instance in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Art of the Fugue*, two pieces the narrator of *Der Untergeher* overtly references alongside the *Goldberg Variations* in discussing the relationship between the three protagonists towards the end of the novel:

> Wenn ich meine Beschreibung von Glenn Gould wirklich nocheinmal versuche, dachte ich, dann werde ich in dieser auch *seine* Beschreibung Wertheimers vorzunehmen haben und es ist fraglich, wer der Mittelpunkt dieser Beschreibung sein wird, Glenn Gould oder Wertheimer, dachte ich. Von Glenn Gould werde ich ausgehen, von den *Goldbergvariationen* und vom *Wohltemperierten Klavier*, aber Wertheimer wird in dieser Beschreibung eine entscheidende Rolle spielen, was mich betrifft, denn für mich war Glenn Gould immer mit Wertheimer verbunden gewesen, gleich in was für einer Beziehung und umgekehrt Wertheimer mit Glenn Gould und vielleicht alles in allem spielt doch Glenn Gould in Beziehung auf Wertheimer die größere Rolle, als umgekehrt. […] Wertheimers Bösendorfer gegen Glenn Goulds Steinway, dachte ich, *Glenn Goulds Goldbergvariationen gegen Wertheimers Kunst der Fuge*, dachte ich[62].

> [If I really have another go at my description of Glenn Gould, I thought, I will have to incorporate *his* description of Wertheimer in it and it's questionable who will be the focus of this account, Glenn Gould or Wertheimer, I thought, I'll start with Glenn Gould, with the *Goldberg Variations* and with the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, but Wertheimer will play a crucial role in this account as far as I'm concerned, since from my point of view Glenn Gould was always linked to Wertheimer, no matter in what respect, and vice versa Wertheimer with Glenn Gould and perhaps all in all Glenn Gould does play a greater role in Wertheimer's life than the other way around. […] Wertheimer's Bösendorfer against Glenn Gould's Steinway, I thought, *Glenn Gould's Goldberg Variations against Wertheimer's Art of the Fugue*, I thought[63].]

As this self-reflexive section, which summarises the entire trajectory of the novel, indicates, the relationship between the three characters – at least in the narrator's

---

[61] Jurgensen, 'Sprachpartituren', p. 102.
[62] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 220f.
[63] Bernhard, *Loser*, pp. 154f.

view – is marked by mutual dependence and a concept of self which is designed in relation to the other two, particularly on Wertheimer's and the narrator's end. Without Gould, they may not have given up their careers as pianists, which shows that through the encounter with the Canadian, their self-understanding was fundamentally changed. Gould is the uncompromising genius who, in a quasi-contrapuntal fashion, renders – and names – Wertheimer the *Untergeher*, the 'loser', 'perisher' or 'sinker' to his simultaneous artistic rise, and as such, the narrator's conception of Wertheimer's role in the constellation is derived from Gould's description of the former. The narrator's view on this artistic triangle reinforces the notion of harmonic interdependence and of Gould's dominant position that is evoked by the character constellation:

> Indem ich über den einen (Glenn Gould) schreibe, werde ich mir über den anderen (Wertheimer) Klarheit verschaffen, dachte ich, indem ich die *Goldbergvariationen* (und die *Kunst der Fuge*) des einen (Glenn) immer wieder höre, um dann über sie schreiben zu können, werde ich über die Kunst (oder Nichtkunst!) des Andern (Wertheimer) immer mehr wissen und auch aufschreiben können, dachte ich[64].

> [By writing about the one (Glenn Gould), I will order my thoughts on the other (Wertheimer), I thought, by listening again and again to the *Goldberg Variations* (and the *Art of the Fugue*) of the one (Glenn), in order to write about them, I will know more and more about the art (or the nonart!) of the other (Wertheimer) and be able to write it down, I thought[65].]

Gould's voice, the narrator finds, provides the key for understanding Wertheimer's part in the novel as Gould, so to say, sets the theme of the text, thus establishing a quasi-contrapuntal pattern which Bernhard transposes into the realm of narrative fiction.

However, Hens's reference to the fugue structure, which he considers the musical model the novel's polyphony builds on[66], is not entirely conclusive as the polyphonic voices of a fugue usually act as equals, without the fixed hierarchical structure of a homophonic composition that Hens seems to draw on in describing Gould as the leading voice and the narrator as the 'bass' voice of the text. In my view, the imposition of such specific musical structures limits an understanding of the creative liberty with which Bernhard chose to generate musical effects in the medium of literary fiction, and ultimately threatens to distract from their aesthetic effects. More important than specific structures are the overarching musical concepts the

---

[64] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 225.
[65] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 157.
[66] Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste*, p. 44.

novel adopts and uses towards an inquiry into the existential constitution of the modern individual, a central one of which is the question of harmony.

Beyond the question of which – if any – specific musical structures are engendered in the novel, the notion of attunement in a musical and philosophical sense lies at the core of the existential crisis depicted in it. Wertheimer, the tragic centre of the narrative, has a fundamentally disturbed relationship with the world, one that can be found in many of Bernhard's works:

> Er habe nicht damit fertig werden können, in eine Welt hineingeboren worden zu sein, die ihm im Grunde in allem und jedem immer nur widerwärtig war von allem Anfang an. […] Existieren heißt doch nichts anderes, als: wir verzweifeln, so er. Stehe ich auf, denke ich mit Abscheu an mich und es graust mir vor allem, das mir bevorsteht[67].

> [He could never come to terms with being born into a world that basically repulsed him in every detail from the very beginning. […] To exist means nothing other than we despair, he said. When I get up I'm revolted by myself and everything I have to do.[68]]

Wertheimer's existential crisis is shown to be his primary mode of experiencing the world and himself, displaying a type repulsion with existence which is reminiscent of Emil Cioran's pessimistic philosophy[69] as well as Sartre's notion of nausea that Raskolnikov finds himself afflicted by. It is therefore not surprising that Dostoevsky is in fact named as one of Wertheimer's favourite authors:

> Er hat immer Bücher gelesen, in welchen von Selbstmördern die Rede ist, in welchen von Krankheiten und Todesfällen die Rede ist, dachte ich, im Gastzimmer stehend, in welchen das Menschenelend beschrieben ist, die Ausweglosigkeit, die Sinnlosigkeit, die Nutzlosigkeit, in welchen alles immer wieder verheerend und tödlich ist. Deshalb liebte er Dostojevskj und alle seine Nachfolger über alles, überhaupt die russische Literatur, weil sie die tatsächlich tödlichste ist, aber auch die deprimierenden französischen Philosophen[70].

> [He always read books that were obsessed with suicide, with disease and death, I thought while standing in the inn, books that described human misery, the hopeless, meaningless, senseless world in which everything is always devastating and deadly. That's why he especially loved Dostoevsky and all his disciples, Russian literature in general, because it actually is a deadly literature, but also the depressing French philosophers[71].]

The existential despair of Dostoevsky's texts and the French existentialists resonates with Wertheimer, whom the overarching motifs of sickness and alienation in the modern world drive into an early grave.

---

[67] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 69.
[68] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 47.
[69] Cf. E.M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 8f., 55f.
[70] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 91.
[71] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 62.

Ultimately, Wertheimer's perceived sense of 'thrownness' into the world, which does not seem to offer him any sense of belonging, reflects in his failure to achieve the musical greatness he aspired to:

> Kein *Musiktalent!* hat er ausgerufen, *kein Existenztalent!* Wir sind so hochmütig, daß wir glauben, Musikstudieren sei es, während wir nicht einmal fähig sind, zu leben, nicht einmal zu existieren im Stande sind, denn wir existieren ja nicht, es existiert uns![72]

> [No *musical ability!* he cried out, *no life ability!* We're so arrogant that we think we're studying music whereas we're not even capable of living, not even capable of existing, for we don't exist, we get existed[73].]

Wertheimer's self-understanding equates musical talent with 'existential' talent; his inability to become a virtuoso pianist conceptually coincides with his inability to live. Perceiving his existence as being too fundamentally flawed, disturbed and out of his control, he concludes that he essentially lacks the ability to achieve perfection in the realm of music. Existential *Stimmung* and musical *Stimmung* thus become synonymous to Wertheimer as an originary line of dissonance permeates his life.

The achievement of aesthetic attunement and harmony, in this sense, equals ontological attunement and finding a home and a purposeful mode of existence in the world. Since he lacks all of these, Wertheimer's sense of subjectivity and agency is obliterated as he considers himself not as living but as 'lived'. As outlined in the introductory section of this study, according to Heidegger, existential *Stimmung* is constitutive for *Dasein*'s subject position within the world. A relationship to the world which is marked by a universal sense of *Verstimmung* intercepts the establishment of such a subject position, and yet – as we have seen through the works of Dostoevsky and Beckett – *Verstimmung* emerges as the new fundamental mode of existence out of the modern condition. Wertheimer, however, in a Wertherian fashion eventually defies his gloom by taking his own life, and as the narrator suggests, '*das Wohltemperierte Klavier ist die Ursache*'[74] ['*the Well-Tempered Clavier is the cause*'[75]] for the existential 'catastrophe' that was his life. The knowledge that a 'well-tempered' harmonious relationship between musical elements is possible, the awareness of such a perceived perfect *Stimmung* within the musical sphere constitutes an antipole to Wertheimer's existential failure and becomes – at least as the narrator believes – the

---

[72] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 70.
[73] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 47.
[74] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, p. 217.
[75] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 152.

reason for his suicide as it becomes the benchmark for Wertheimer's understanding of life.

Revisiting the notion of musical temperament from my earlier reading of *Watt* shows that the practice of tempering sound to achieve standard tuning methods such as equal temperament was particularly popular in the Baroque age[76]. In *Der Untergeher*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Goldberg Variations* and the figure of Gould become metaphors for an aesthetic ideal Wertheimer finds to be unparalleled in his lived experience. It is the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the narrator opines, which 'kills' Wertheimer as the proof it provides of the possibility of harmony in the realm of music antithetically defines Wertheimer's lack thereof. Shortly before his death, Wertheimer attempts to defy this oppressive harmony by buying an old piano that is perversely out of tune, as described by his woodsman Franz:

> Wie die Zettel alle verbrannt waren, […] habe er, Wertheimer, nach Salzburg telefoniert und das Klavier bestellt und der Franz erinnerte sich noch genau, daß sein Herr während dieses Telefonats immer wieder betont habe, man solle ihm *einen völlig wertlosen, einen entsetzlich verstimmten Flügel* nach Traich schicken. *Ein völlig wertloses Instrument, ein entsetzlich verstimmtes Instrument*, soll Wertheimer immer wieder am Telefon gesagt haben, so der Franz. […] Die Klavierbringer waren noch nicht weggewesen, so der Franz, habe sich Wertheimer an das Klavier gesetzt und habe zu spielen angefangen. Es sei entsetzlich gewesen, so Franz. Da habe er, Franz, den Eindruck gehabt, sein Herr sei wahnsinnig geworden[77].

> [When the notes were all burned, […] he, Wertheimer, called up Salzburg and ordered the piano and Franz distinctly recalled that during this telephone call his master kept insisting that they send *a completely worthless, a horribly untuned grand piano* to Traich. *A completely worthless instrument, a horribly untuned instrument*, Wertheimer is supposed to have repeated over and over on the phone, said Franz. […] The deliverymen weren't out the door, said Franz, before Wertheimer sat down at the piano and began playing. It was awful, said Franz. He, Franz, had thought his master had lost his mind[78].]

By insisting on buying an instrument which is horribly out of tune[79] out of defiance for the notion of aesthetic harmony and attunement, Wertheimer expresses his *Weltanschauung* and self-understanding as the piano represents an antithesis to the idea

---

[76] Most musicologists had previously assumed that Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* was written for equal temperament, but a recent debate in musicology has uncovered contrary evidence, which has been subject to a critical debate that has resulted in various theories regarding which temperament was originally used by Bach. Cf. Bradley Lehman, 'Bach's Extraordinary Temperament: Our Rosetta Stone: 1', *Early Music*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2005), 3-23; Lehman, 'Bach's Extraordinary Temperament: Our Rosetta Stone: 2', *Early Music*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2005), 211-31; John O'Donnell, 'Bach's Temperament, Occam's Razor, and the Neidhardt Factor', *Early Music*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2006), 625-33.
[77] Bernhard, *Untergeher*, pp. 242f.
[78] Bernhard, *Loser*, p. 170.
[79] The word 'verstimmt' translates more accurately as 'out of tune' rather than the 'untuned' used by Dawson as the German translation of the latter would be 'ungestimmt'. 'Verstimmt' implies that the instrument is either wrongly tuned or used to be tuned correctly but is now out of tune, whereas 'ungestimmt' implies that the instrument has not been tuned at all.

of a well-tempered, attuned existence. Where all harmony and musical consonance have become impossible, Wertheimer embraces a radical dissonance and *Verstimmtheit* – from his woodman's point of view a sign of madness – and a narrative symbol of the *Untergeher* eventually embracing Gould's prediction: his *Untergang*, his demise and ruin. In this context, the *Well-Tempered Clavier* represents an aesthetic notion of perfection which is, however, fabricated and therefore, at heart, tempered. Wertheimer's tragedy lies in his inability to detect the artifice underlying art and the fundamentally *tempered* conditions of harmony. His death fulfills the musical pattern of counterpoint in 'echoing' Gould's passing but follows an intrinsically flawed one-to-one application of art to life. Hans Höller fittingly summarises Bernhard's aesthetic programme in defiance of harmony: 'An die Stelle der klassischen bürgerlichen Utopie der organischen Ganzheit und Harmonie des Menschen und seiner Welt setzt Thomas Bernhard deren Auflösung, Zerstörung und unwiderrufliche Todesverfallenheit'[80] ['Bernhard replaces the classic bourgeois utopia of the organic wholeness and harmony of the human being and its world with its disintegration, destruction and irrevocable 'fallenness' to death' (my translation)]. Where European post-war society enforces a notion of 'total harmony'[81] – as Adorno and Horkheimer phrase it in their critique of the culture industry, an idea Menasse's study of the literature of 1970s and 1980s Austria further corroborates – which becomes a standard for ways of living and notions of art, Bernhard radically undermines a constructed universal concept of *Stimmung*. Wertheimer's imitation of art in life within the medium of art represents the folly and indeed the 'deadliness' of such an imposition.

Listening to Bernhard

As we have observed, the 'musical' elements of *Der Untergeher* affect the microstructure as well as the narrative macrostructure of the text, creating a sense of musicality by using language as acoustic material which emulates elements of melodic development and counterpoint. On a symbolic level, the exploration of the lives of three musicians depicts an ontological struggle not limited to the realm of the

---

[80] Hans Höller, '«Es darf nichts Ganzes geben», und «In meinen Büchern ist alles künstlich»: Eine Rekonstruktion des Gesellschaftsbilds von Thomas Bernhard aus der Form seiner Sprache', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 45-63 (p. 49).

[81] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 106.

musical: Wertheimer represents an existential dissonance in the group that stands in sharp contrast to Gould's virtuosity, which Wertheimer, however, continues to aspire to. Gould, in turn, is not so much a fully-fledged character as he is a symbol of artistic perfection – which is underlined by the stark differences between the fictional and the historical Gould – and his virtuosity comes at the cost of self-renunciation: the narrator describes Gould's desire to become one with his instrument and with the music he is playing, once again conjuring up Dostoevsky's image of man as a 'piano key'. The fictional version of Gould in Bernhard's novel therefore symbolically dies while playing the *Goldberg Variations* on the piano as, to the artistic world, his name has become synonymous with 'Goldberg', which thus fully absorbs him into art and causes his physical death. Through explicit reference to Bach's works, of which the *Art of the Fugue* in particular relies on the notion of counterpoint, the theme of musical harmony is intertwined with the notion of existential attunement and brought to the fore of the text.

In conclusion, the aforementioned insights into the 'compositional structure' of *Der Untergeher* shall be used to shift the focus of my analysis to the novel's aesthetic impact in the reading process. Bernhard's awareness of the acoustic dimension of language gains a pivotal role as the semantic level of the text, the author's remarks suggest, takes on a subordinate position in relation to semiotics and aesthetic form – a technique reminiscent of James Joyce's overriding of meaning through semiotics in *Finnegans Wake*, which also considerably influenced Beckett. In view of this, Bernhard's prose is one that actively attunes the reader to the text in a very literal, musical sense as its rhythmic patterns and punctuation govern the reading flow while the use of motifs, recurrent themes and variations thereof direct the reader's attention and create semantic fields of meaning which the reader learns to navigate through. The semiotics of the text thus govern and drive its semantics; in other words, the semiotics *become* the semantics in Bernhard's prose. In doing so, the prose utilises musical structures and the predictability of musical progressions but at the same time retains the variability and creativity of classical pieces through the guiding principle of variation, an overarching structure borrowed from Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

Throughout the process of reading the novel, its reader thus becomes a listener of the 'score' constituted by the text, just as the narrator of *Der Untergeher* turns into the listener of Gould's playing, Wertheimer's demise and the innkeeper's and

woodman's narratives. The inverted structure of reader/listener has already been observed in Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy* and can be viewed as a continuation of Bernhard's discourse on hearing initiated in the early novel *Das Kalkwerk* (1970, translated into English as *The Lime Works*), in which the protagonist Konrad tortures his paralysed wife as part of an experiment on the nature of hearing. And yet, Bernhard's inquiry into modes of listening gains a new dimension in *Der Untergeher* as the entire novel is modelled around the concept of listening to music, polyphonic voices, harmonies and dissonances, and fittingly ends as the narrator once more listens to Gould's famous recording of the *Goldberg Variations*. However – as with Beckett's narrative fiction – the paradox of the text is that, technically, it is an affair completely free of material sound: unlike a theatre play, it is not written to be performed and thus consists of mere words on a page. To create the sense of a musical piece, the reader needs to actualise the text's latent musicality, its rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony and dissonances. This puts the reader and her attunement into the most crucial position we have seen in this study as yet: without the attunement between text and reader, the essential semiotic level of meaning loses its impact.

Der Untergeher thus needs to attune the reader through the rhythm of its prose, its semantic leitmotifs and formulaic expressions of perceived truths – as evidenced by the recurrent phrase 'das ist die Wahrheit' ['that is the truth'] – but cracks in the quasi-musical harmony open up, most importantly the repressed political subtext of the novel, which relates to Austria's Nazi history[82]. It is no coincidence that Gould, Wertheimer and the narrator end up renting the former villa of a Nazi sculptor during their studies, and neither is the fact that Wertheimer was Jewish, an aspect only mentioned in passing when the narrator discusses Wertheimer's funeral with the innkeeper. The narrator's concept of pure art, which is designed in opposition to 'nature' and material reality, is shown to be insufficient in uncovering the truth of the events, despite his repeated, insistent affirmations of the opposite. *Der Untergeher* therefore represents an aesthetic ideal doomed to fail; Manfred Jurgensen, likewise, views Bernhard's musical form of narration as a way of communicating that which no longer exists or is always, by definition, incomplete[83]. In the following, I will

---

[82] Cf. Mark M. Anderson, 'Afterword', in *The Loser* by Bernhard, pp. 171-90 (pp. 178f.).
[83] Jurgensen, 'Sprachpartituren', pp. 114f.

discuss the modes of aesthetic *Stimmung* in the second novel of the trilogy to further outline the aesthetic effects of Bernhard's works in relation to their philosophical and historical background and their motivation through a fundamental scepticism towards modernity.

III. *Holzfällen*: Irritation and the Creative Process

<u>The Life of the Party</u>

Closely following the publication of *Der Untergeher*, *Holzfällen* shifts the focus from the realm of music to that of theatre in depicting a state of irritation for the nameless narrator, an Austrian writer and intellectual in his sixties. He describes an *artistic dinner*, a term put in ironic italics throughout the novel, hosted by his former friends, the Auersbergers, in the Viennese Gentzgasse in the 1980s. Although he used to be one of their close friends and protégés, he now detests them as he felt exploited by them and consequently left their circle twenty years ago. The day he finds out that their mutual friend Joana, a choreographer, committed suicide, the narrator by chance meets the Auerbergers on the Graben boulevard in Vienna and is invited to the soirée they are hosting for an actor of the Austrian National Theatre, the Burgtheatre, which is scheduled to take place on the same day as Joana's funeral. Despite his inner resentment and hatred of the couple, the narrator accepts their invitation. At the dinner party he sits down at a distance, on his favourite wing chair, and begins to scrutinise and dissect the other attendees in the most relentless way possible. As he gets more and more agitated, he especially considers the Auersberger couple and the writer Jeannie Billroth – another attendee of the soirée as well as a self-declared Austrian Virginia Woolf and evidently the narrator's former lover – as pretentious, ridiculous and tasteless as he relates the years of their friendship as well as his acquaintance with Joana.

As with all three novels in the trilogy, the temporal structure of the text oscillates between the consonance and dissonance of events, timelines and rhythms. First, the narrator and the Auersbergers' paths intersect, a meeting that also coincides with Joana's death. Then, the funeral falls on the same days as the *artistic dinner*. Consequently, though, the famous actor keeps the entire party waiting, sending the narrator down a spiral of irritation and disgruntlement that results from

this temporal discrepancy. As in *Murphy* as well as in the works of Woolf – which are referenced through the character of Jeannie Billroth – timing thus takes on a significant role in the plot development, one that orchestrates modes of harmony as well as the narrator's eponymous irritation, which constitutes the affective fundament of the text.

When the famous actor, who keeps the company waiting until very late, finally arrives, the second part of the novel unfolds. The dinner and the actor's monologue about his theatre career and the play he is currently starring in, Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, are related from the narrator's point of view. Although he first depicts the actor with the same spite which he previously directed at the Auersberger couple, the narrator's perception of him changes when the actor, already drunk, openly attacks the company and Jeannie in particular. In a soliloquy filled with theatrical pathos, the actor declares that life in Vienna is just as fake and unnatural as the *artistic dinner*, and that real life quality lies in being one with nature, in '*Wald, Hochwald, Holzfällen*'[84], '[t]he *forest, the virgin forest, the life of a woodcutter*'[85]. As the dinner party ends, the narrator runs towards the city centre of Vienna, out of a desire to escape from the despised company of his acquaintances and overcome by an urge to write about the dinner party.

Due to its belligerent tone, Heinz Kuehn considers *Holzfällen* as an epitome of Bernhard's deeply pessimistic interpretation of modernity:

> Here is the real Bernhard, the outraged moralist at his most open and self-revealing, the man who uses all the tricks of the trade—irony, sarcasm, spite, cynicism, malediction, confrontation—to lay bare his utter, hopeless despair over the moral disintegration of modernity and the ruinous state of his city, his country, his world, the Western world[86].

As I have outlined above with reference to *Der Untergeher*, the view on art and modernity that is expressed in *Holzfällen* and the other novels of the trilogy is marked by a profound sense of dissonance between the self and the world, which is – as Kuehn further insinuates – also extended to the reader.

The narrator of *Holzfällen* thus relates the events due to and out of a state of irritation and the narrative portrays his growing agitation during the soirée. Throughout his spiteful rant, during which he does not shy away from dissecting

---

[84] Bernhard, *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung*, 15th edn (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), p. 302

[85] Bernhard, *Woodcutters*, trans. by David McLintock (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 170

[86] Heinz Kuehn, 'On Reading Thomas Bernhard', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (1997), 541-53 (p. 550).

himself as harshly as the other party guests, he makes frequent use of one of Bernhard's most prominent stylistic devices, the hyperbole. In the following section, for instance, his anger is directed at the interior design of the Auersberger flat in what may be described with a misplaced and exaggerated sense of revulsion:

> Wie ich an diesem Abend und in dieser Nacht von dieser ganzen, wie mir auch jetzt wieder schien, perversen Gentzgassenwohnung abgestoßen gewesen war. Diese überall einem gar zu aufdringlich in die Augen springende Perfektion ist ja auch nichts als abstoßend, habe ich gedacht, wie überhaupt Wohnungen, in welchen, wie gesagt wird, *alles stimmt*, nichts und rein gar nichts aus dem Rahmen fällt und auch niemals aus dem Rahmen fallen darf, widerwärtige Wohnungen sind[87].

> [How sickened I was by this whole apartment in the Gentzgasse, which once more struck me as perversely ostentatious! Such perfection, which hits you in the eye and crowds in upon you from all sides, is simply repellent, I thought, just as all apartments are repellent in which everything is *just so*, as they say, in which nothing is ever out of place or ever permitted to be out of place[88].]

The tirades of Bernhard's narrators are marked by such hyperbolic statements, which distort the people and events he depicts in such a deeply grotesque way that they can often only have a comic effect. According to Josef König, these hyperbolic tirades are closely related to the creating of aesthetic *Stimmung*:

> [S]ie sind Zitate aus und auf einem düsteren Hintergrund, die in dem Zusammenhang, in welchem sie stehen, zwar den Leser *in der vorher vorbereiteten Stimmung gefangen halten*, ihn zuletzt aber doch erkennen lassen müssen, wenn er sich zur notwendigen Distanz durchgearbeitet hat, daß es sich um künstlich aufgebaute Übertreibungen handeln muss[89] (my emphasis).

> [They are quotes from and against a gloomy backdrop, which in their context *captivate the reader in the previously prepared mood*, but eventually, once he has reached the necessary distance, they must make him realise that they are artificially constructed hyperboles (my translation and emphasis).]

Although the reader eventually realises that Bernhard's narrator only presents a grotesque, distorted image of reality, these obsessive, venomous rants intend to captivate her in the mood generated by the narrative. At the same time, however, the reader herself gradually enters a state of irritation[90] about the narrative voice as the plot of the novel is likely to frustrate her expectations. Although the narrator complains about the *artistic dinner* throughout the novel, his behaviour at the party does not live up to his fierce critique. Instead of confronting the Auerbergers with

---

[87] Bernhard, *Holzfällen*, pp. 244f.
[88] Bernhard, *Woodcutters*, p. 139.
[89] König, *Nichts als ein Totenmaskenball*, pp. 200f.
[90] Cf. Willi Huntemann, *Artistik und Rollenspiel: Das System Thomas Bernhards* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990), p. 227.

their hypocrisy, he eventually thanks his hosts profusely when he leaves the party and thus frustrates any hopes the reader may have built up for a final cathartic scene. Hence there is a dialectic at work between the narrator and the reader and between two of the levels of textual *Stimmung* I have previously outlined: on the one hand, the narrator urges the reader to enter in and share his mood of irritation, but on the other hand, the narrator himself becomes a source of irritation for the reader, which establishes two parallel temporalities and trajectories of textual affect. This second, self-reflexive level of narrative affect is also indicative of Bernhard's affinity with elements of late twentieth-century meta-fiction that we have previously seen in Beckett. Since the novel is thus not only concerned with a specific mood – irritation – on a content level but also addresses the general phenomenon on an aesthetic level, I will show that *Stimmung* is the both the main theme and governing principle of *Holzfällen.*

Irritating the Reader

Holzfällen thus employs conflicting modes of *Stimmung* as its main plot-developing device. The initial act of accepting the Auersbergers' invitation to the *artistic dinner* results from the mood that follows the news of Joana's suicide:

> In meinem schwarzen, viel zu eng gewordenen sogenannten *Begräbnisanzug* […] saß ich da und dachte, daß ich wieder einmal im Begriff bin, mich gegen meine Überzeugung gemein und niederträchtig zu machen, indem ich die auersbergerische Einladung zu ihrem Nachtmahl angenommen und nicht abgelehnt habe, indem ich auf dem Graben für einen Moment weich und schwach geworden bin und alles in mir verleugnet habe, daß ich an diesem Abend und in dieser Nacht nicht allein meinen Charakter, sondern gleich alles in mir auf den Kopf gestellt habe. Nur in Anbetracht des Selbstmordes der Joana hat es zu diesem für mich verheerenden Kurzschluß kommen können, selbstverständlich hätte ich die Einladung der Auersberger abgelehnt, wäre ich nicht durch den Selbstmord der Joana auf geradezu vernichtende Weise konsterniert gewesen[91].

> [I was wearing my so-called *funeral suit* […]. As I sat there I reflected that once more, contrary to my better judgment, I was making myself cheap and contemptible, having accepted the Auersbergers' supper invitation instead of declining it. That day in the Graben I had momentarily become soft and weak and so acted contrary to my nature, and tonight I was standing not only my character, but my whole nature, on its head. Only Joana's suicide could have prompted such an irrational reaction. Had I not been so devastated by her suicide, I would naturally have declined the invitation[92].]

---

[91] Bernhard, *Holzfällen*, pp. 31f.
[92] Bernhard, *Woodcutters*, pp. 17f.

If he had not found out about Joanna's suicide that morning, the narrator claims, he would not have accepted the Auersbergers' invitation, but the news left him in a mood of consternation and 'weakness'. The plot of the novel is thus initiated by an originary sense of being '*aus dem Gleichgewicht*'[93] – of being off balance – and it is another notion of disharmony – the narrator's profound irritation – which then facilitates the acts of writing and narrating. If the narrator had not been so tremendously irritated by the *artistic dinner*, there would be nothing to write about, there would be no work of art. The origin of writing is, then, a sense of *Verstimmung*, of being out of tune.

It is noteworthy that like Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, which was extensively discussed in Chapter 2, *Holzfällen* thematises *Stimmung* in the context of a party, that is, in a microcosm of society. Such social gatherings make forms of mood collude by bringing together the private and the public, the solitary and the social. The attunement taking place between the individual and her social surroundings becomes pressing in such situations, and in both novels it leads to notions of profound dissonance. However, whereas the *Stimmung* of the party scene in *The Idiot* is intersubjective and contagious within the narrative world, the irritation felt by the narrator of *Holzfällen* is subject to his pondering isolation[94], limiting the circulation of affect to the interaction between reader and narrator. I have previously discussed the inverted structure of *Stimmung* I am proposing on a philosophical level: I define *Stimmung* as the attunement between individual and world that brings these two categories into being in the first place. The party trope demonstrates that by defining itself and others in opposition to one other, the subject postulates itself through *Stimmung* and cannot exist or define itself without the structure of attunement.

Transferring this idea to the context of the dinner party in *The Idiot* and *Holzfällen*, we observe that the protagonists of these novels are defined through their dissonant and strained relationships with the world that surrounds them. As much as the nameless narrator of *Holzfällen* detests the Auersbergers, Jeannie and the famous actor, he still needs them to be able to postulate his subject position as the focaliser and narrator of the novel. In this sense then there is no subject without the

---

[93] Bernhard, *Holzfällen*, p. 58.
[94] This, again, constitutes a parallel to Virginia Woolf's texts and the party scenes in them, which are marked by internalised forms of affect rather than collective affect; cf. footnote no. 97 in Chapter 2.

postulation of that position in relation to the world. Without this constitutive *Stimmung*, there is no subject, and in the case of the novel, no subject of enunciation.

In *Der Übertreibungskünstler: Studien zu Thomas Bernhard*, Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler importantly observes that the notion of dissonance created by the mood of irritation in Bernhard's works is not merely an act of negation but at the same time one of creation: 'Wenn (prätendierte) Harmonie durch Irritation […] aufgehoben wird, so geht diese Irritation auf Wegen, die durch eben diese Harmonisierung versperrt waren'[95] ['when (pretended) harmony is revoked […] through irritation, this irritation takes ways that were previously blocked by the selfsame harmonisation' (my translation)]. In this sense, *Verstimmung* becomes a constructive phenomenon and the basis for writing since the obliteration of the pretended harmony that governs the narrative world enables new, creative modes of experience. The previously mentioned section, which describes the narrator's disgust at the Auersbergers' all too perfect apartment, illustrates this idea in its phrasing 'wie überhaupt Wohnungen, in welchen, wie gesagt wird, *alles stimmt*, nichts und rein gar nichts aus dem Rahmen fällt und auch niemals aus dem Rahmen fallen darf, widerwärtige Wohnungen sind'. McLintock translates the italicised '*alles stimmt*' as '*just so*', but it really should be '*everything is right*' or '*everything is in tune*'. In his trademark hyperbolic fashion, the narrator thus postulates that which is well attuned as something that is revolting and disgusting. For him the lifestyle of the Auersbergers, which is seemingly perfectly attuned to the artistic society of post-war Vienna, is destructive and nauseating, whereas the mode of *Verstimmung* becomes the actual locus of creativity.

In an interview with Krista Fleischmann in 1984, which was conducted shortly after the release of *Holzfällen*, Bernhard commented extensively on the role of *Stimmung* in the creative process:

> FLEISCHMANN Brauchen Sie nicht auch manchmal das Unangenehme zum Schreiben? Das, was Sie ärgert?
>
> BERNHARD Um das braucht man sich ja nicht zu sorgen, weil das verfolgt einen ja auch nach Spanien. Und im Grund schreib' ich ja eh nur, weil's halt unangenehm ist, weil's sehr viel unangenehme Sachen gibt. […] Und das ist notwendig. Im Grund schreib' ich ja nur aus dem Grund, weil vieles unangenehm ist. Wenn alles angenehm wär', könnt' ich ja wahrscheinlich überhaupt nichts schreiben. Da würde niemand schreiben. Aus einem angenehmen Zustand heraus kann man ja gar nicht schreiben, außerdem wär' man blöd, wenn man schreiben würde, wenn's angenehm wär, weil man sich ja dem Angenehmen hingeben soll, nicht. Das muss man ja ausnützen. Und wenn Sie in angenehmer Stimmung

---

[95] Schmidt-Dengler, *Der Übertreibungskünstler*, p. 110.

sind und sich an den Schreibtisch setzen, zerstören Sie ja die angenehme Stimmung. Und warum soll ich mir die zerstören? Ich könnt' mir auch vorstellen, daß ich mein ganzes Leben nur in angenehmer Stimmung leb' und überhaupt nichts schreib'. Aber da es eben, wie gesagt, eine angenehme Stimmung nur stundenweise oder nur kurze Zeit gibt, kommt man immer wieder zum Schreiben[96].

[FLEISCHMANN Don't you sometimes need something unpleasant to write? Something that irritates you?

BERNHARD You don't have to worry about that, because that will follow you all the way to Spain. Essentially I only write 'cause it's unpleasant, 'cause there's a lot of unpleasant things. […] And that's a necessity. Essentially I only write 'cause many things are unpleasant. If everything was pleasant, I probably wouldn't be able to write anything at all. Nobody would write then. You can't really write from a pleasant state of mind, on top of that, one would be stupid to write in a pleasant state of mind, 'cause you're supposed to devote yourself to the pleasant things, aren't you. You have to make the most of that. And if you're in a pleasant mood and sit down at your writing desk, you destroy the pleasant mood. And why would I destroy it? I could also imagine living my whole life in a pleasant mood and not writing anything at all. But, as I said, as a pleasant mood only exists for a few hours or a short period of time, you get to write again and again (my translation).]

According to Bernhard, being in a bad mood, being out of tune is thus the origin of writing. Without a sense of *Verstimmung*, one would always be immersed in the positive mood of a moment and never find an incentive to write, while writing becomes a corrective mode of responding to a sense of being 'out of tune' with the world. However, as the positive moods only last for a limited period of time, one finds a reason to write time and again. Being in a bad mood and feeling out of tune with the world thus becomes the driving force for any artistic endeavour as the sense of *Verstimmung* discloses the tensions in the relationship between self and world, an out-of-jointness that is reminiscent of Hamlet's existential dilemma.

What is more, in Bernhard's *œuvre*, the disharmonious attunement between characters and narrative world is fundamentally constitutive for the concept of character as Bernhard's characters indeed emerge out of their strained relationship with the world they live in. Bernhard's idiosyncratic narrators are thus an epitome of the structure of *Stimmung* which I inially described as the result of an originary attunement taking place between the 'I' and the world. The self, according to this view, only exists insofar as it defines itself in relation to the world through the process of an ever-evolving negotiation and attunement. Although Bernhard's characters despise the world they find themselves 'thrown' into, they simultaneously depend on it in order to define their own subjectivity. In the trilogy, the negotiation between the

---

[96] Krista Fleischmann, *Thomas Bernhard – Eine Begegnung. Gespräche mit Krista Fleischmann* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), pp. 23f.

self and world, which is depicted in many of Bernhard's works, is thus integrated as a fundamental aspect of his aesthetic theory.

Not only is the concept of *Stimmung* the origin and central theme in Bernhard's creative process; in his poetology, the mood of irritation plays a crucial role:

> FLEISCHMANN „Holzfällen" - das Buch hat den Untertitel „Eine Erregung".
>
> BERNHARD Ja, weil der Stil auch ein etwas erregter ist in dem Buch, musikalisch gesehen, vom Inhalt her schreibt man so was nicht ruhig, sondern in gewisser erregter Stimmung. Das kann man nicht ganz ruhig so wie eine klassische Prosa schreiben, sondern da setzt man sich hin und ist ja schon einmal von der *Idee* her erregt, und wenn man zu *schreiben* anfangt, erregt einen schon der Stil. Es ist in einem *erregten* Stil geschrieben.
>
> FLEISCHMANN Das heißt, es steigert sich zum Schluß?
>
> BERNHARD Eine Erregung steigert sich bis zum Ende immer mehr. Endet ja auch in einer totalen Erregung[97].
>
> [FLEISCHMANN 'Woodcutters' - the novel has the caption 'An Irritation'.
>
> BERNHARD Yes, because the style in the book is also an irritated one, from a musical point of view, and content-wise, you don't write something like that in a calm state of mind, but in a certain irritated mood. You can't write something like this like classical prose, you sit down and are already agitated about the *idea*, and once you start *writing*, the style agitates you. It was written in an *irritated* style.
>
> FLEISCHMANN That means it continually increases until the end?
>
> BERNHARD An irritation increases more and more until the end. [The novel] also ends in a total state of irritation (my translation).]

The German word *Erregung* can be translated as agitation, irritation and (sexual) arousal, a polysemy Bernhard also relates to the musical dimension and employs to various ends in *Holzfällen.* As Erika Tunner[98] argues,

> Erregung ist eine Quelle für Neugier, Inspiration und kreatives Schaffen, Erregung kann Ärger, Empörung und Zorn erzeugen oder erotische und sexuelle Wunschvorstellungen hervorrufen, eine reiche Skala, über die Thomas Bernhard virtuos verfügt. Erregung kann sich im Erleben oder in der Niederschrift äußern, oder in einer Mischung von beiden[99].
>
> [Agitation is a source of curiosity, inspiration and creative production, agitation can create anger, indignation and wrath or erotic and sexual desires, a rich spectrum, which Thomas Bernhard commands with virtuosity. Agitation can be felt in experience or in writing, or in a mixture of both (my translation).]

---

[98] Erika Tunner, 'Inwiefern ist und erzeugt Thomas Bernhards Text *Holzfällen* eine Erregung?', in *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. by Johann Georg Lughofer (Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 2012), pp. 69-75 (p. 69).
[99] Fleischmann, *Thomas Bernhard – Eine Begegnung,* pp. 96f.
[99] Tunner, 'Inwiefern ist…', p. 69.

At the same time, Bernhard qualifies *Erregung* not only as a mood one can experience or be in, but also as a state of mind with a sense of an agency in its own right that can draw one in and then, in turn, stimulate creativity as he describes having been aroused by the agitated style of the writing. In this sense, *Erregung* is not something one 'has' but a condition that envelops one, a state of mind – and body – that takes one in and thereby creates a certain relationship between the experiencing self and the world. From a Heideggerian point of view, it discloses the world in a certain light and opens up existential possibilities, but Bernhard's notion of *Erregung* goes even beyond Heidegger's notion of *Stimmung* as an *existential* of *Dasein* that structures its 'Being-in-the-world'. In *Holzfällen*, there would be no plot, no narration and no characters without the mood of irritation, which envelops the narrator and which renders his account of the *artistic dinner* possible in the first place. *Verstimmung* thus becomes the birthplace of the experiencing subject position as well as of the aesthetic impetus itself.

Bernhard's theory of irritation as the origin of writing is diametrically opposed to Wordsworth's famous description of the role of mood in relation to poetry, in which poetry is defined as

> the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment[100].

As opposed to Wordsworth, for whom the original emotion is transformed through the act of recollection in tranquillity, Bernhard describes the creative process as being based on memories that strongly agitate the writer. Wordsworth's mode of contemplation is thus countered by a mode of visceral and physical affective agitation. While Wordsworth's recollection is framed through a mode of distancing, Bernhard claims that the memories of people and events and, even more importantly, material encounters with people and places from the past, bring back previous states of affectedness and that the idea of a calm recollection of past events is a mere 'cliché':

---

[100] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: With Pastoral and Other Poems*, Volume 1 (London: T.N. Longman, 1802), pp. Lf.

BERNHARD Das ist das Klischee von der Vergangenheitsbetrachtung, das ist natürlich völlig falsch. Alte Leute können solche Bücher schreiben […], ich bin noch erregt, wenn ich schreib', auch wenn ich etwas Ruhiges schreib', bin ich letzten Endes auch erregt. Erregung ist ja ein angenehmer Zustand, bringt das lahme Blut in Gang, pulsiert, macht lebendig und macht dann Bücher. Ohne Erregung is' gar nix, da können S' gleich im Bett liegen bleiben. Im Bett *(lacht)* is' ja auch nur ein Spaß, wenn Sie sich erregen, nicht, und im Buch is' genauso. Ist ja auch eine Art Geschlechtsverkehr, ein Buch schreiben, viel bequemer als früher, wo man das wirklich natürlich ausg'führt hat, ist ja viel angenehmer, ein Buch zu schreiben, als mit jemandem in's Bett zu gehen[101].

[BERNHARD That's the cliché about contemplating the past, of course that's completely wrong. Old people can write books like that, […] but I'm still agitated when I'm writing, even if I'm writing something tranquil, I'm still agitated in the end. Agitation is actually a pleasant state, it gets the lifeless blood into motion, pulsates, makes you feel alive and then makes books. Without agitation there wouldn't be anything at all; without agitation you could as well stay in bed. In bed *(laughs)* it's also only fun when you become agitated, isn't it, and in a book it's the exact the same thing. It's also a form of sexual intercourse, writing a book, much more comfortable than it used to be when you really had to execute it naturally, it's much more pleasant, writing a book, than having sex with someone, isn't it (my translation).]

Bernhard thus revokes the notion of tranquillity as a prerequisite for writing as he posits irritation and agitation as the driving force behind the creative process. Both Wordsworth and Bernhard, however, depict the act of writing as a pleasant, enjoyable state of mind, and in Bernhard, it affects the writer in a very physical, almost erotic fashion.

As Bernhard compares the act of writing to sexual intercourse, he provocatively echoes the interactive dimension of the aesthetic process that we have previously encountered in Iser's reader-response theory, underlining the importance of the reader's immersion in and engagement with the text. This notion echoes Roland Barthes's concept of literature as a source of quasi-erotic pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text*[102], which distinguishes between 'texts of pleasure' and 'texts of bliss': while, according to Barthes, the text of pleasure 'comes from culture and does not break with it', the text of bliss 'discomforts' and 'unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions'[103]. *Holzfällen* – as well as all other texts discussed in this study – clearly falls into the latter category, engendering a loss of selfhood in the reader which harbours an aesthetic sense of bliss.

---

[101] Fleischmann, pp. 97f.
[102] Cf. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 17-21.
[103] Ibid., p. 14.

Erika Tunner comments on the affinity of the two aforementioned planes of irritation in the processes of creation and reception in *Holzfällen*:

> *Holzfällen* ist nicht ohne extreme Reaktionen geblieben, die jedoch allmählich zum Kuriosum werden. Was die eigentliche Erregung des Textes ausmacht, ist das ständige Schwanken zwischen Künstlichkeit und Authentizität, ist die Inferenz von Gesellschaftsablehnung und Gesellschaftsabhängigkeit, ist die Dialektik zwischen der Wahrnehmungsart des Erzählers und seinem ambivalenten kommunikativen Verhältnis zum Leser[104].

> [*Woodcutters* has caused extreme reactions, but they are gradually becoming curiosities. The actual irritation in the text is the constant fluctuation between artificiality and authenticity, the inference of rejecting society and depending on society, the dialectic between the narrator's mode of perception and his ambivalent communicative relationship with the reader (my translation).]

Tunner sees the source of irritation in the novel not in the scandalous public effect and libel suit it caused, but in a variety of stylistic features, amongst other things in the agitated and agitating style and in the dialectical relationship between the narrator and the reader that results from it. The novel thus generates a *Stimmung* of irritation that envelops the reader, causing her, firstly, to leave her attunement with the world she is in by showcasing an overstated, absurd and hypocritical mirror image of this world, and secondly, by bringing her into a relationship with the narrator that is marked by an affective ambiguity. On the one hand, his incessant rants are the source of an amusement that attunes the reader through the social dimension of Bernhard's brand of laughter, but on the other hand, she may consider the narrator himself as repulsive, hypocritical and frustrating. Even if she becomes agitated by the narrative, her agitation will not equal that of the narrator who eventually enters a state of full-blown mania that is conveyed through the syntax and punctuation as well as Bernhard's use of italics as a means to emphasise central phrases:

> und ich lief und lief und dachte, daß ich, wie allem Fürchterlichen, auch diesem fürchterlichen sogenannten *künstlerischen Abendessen* in der Gentzgasse entkommen bin und daß ich über dieses sogenannte *künstlerische Abendessen* in der Gentzgasse schreiben werde, ohne zu wissen, was, ganz einfach *etwas* darüber schreiben werde und ich lief und lief und dachte, ich werde *sofort* über dieses sogenannte *künstlerische Abendessen* in der Gentzgasse schreiben, egal was, nur *gleich* und *sofort* über dieses *künstlerische Abendessen* in der Gentzgasse schreiben, *sofort*, dachte ich, *gleich* immer wieder, durch die Innere Stadt laufend, *gleich* und *sofort* und *gleich* und *gleich*, bevor es zu spät ist[105].

---

[104] Löwe, pp. 64f.
[105] Tunner, 'Inwiefern ist…', p. 74.
[105] Bernhard, *Holzfällen*, p. 321

[and as I went on running, I thought: I've survived this dreadful *artistic dinner*, just as I've survived all the other horrors. I'll write about this *artistic dinner* in the Gentzgasse, I thought, without knowing what I would write—simply that I would write *something* about it. As I went on running I thought: I'll write something *at once*, no matter what—I'll write about this *artistic dinner* in the Gentzgasse *at once, now. Now*, I thought—*at once*, I told myself over and over again as I ran through the Inner City—*at once*, I told myself, *now*—*at once*, before it's too late[106].]

In this sense, the novel first brings the reader in tune with the narrator, but then leads her to revoke this harmony, ultimately ending on a note of discord as Bernhard employs 'a prose that mercilessly hammers away at the reader's nerves with endless repetition and elaboration of a few basic themes'[107] – a claim that is substantiated by the extremely repetitive closing section of the novel, which is quoted above. The style of the novel becomes unnerving and irritating to the reader, ultimately creating a sense of discord with the text and creating a dialectic between narrator and reader that is contingent on an attunement between the two, and which also entails a dialectical simultaneity of harmony and dissonance. The novel thereby fictionalises the continuous process of attunement between the reader and the world in a manner that pursues the suspension of what is considered as an oppressive and flawed mode of existential harmony.

All of the aspects mentioned above play into Bernhard's creation of the genre of the *Erregung* as irritation becomes the origin of the artistic process. Fictionalising the act of artistic creation itself, the novel fittingly ends as the writing process begins. By foregrounding the affective plane of the text, the genre of the *Erregung* prioritises *erregen* – arousing or exciting in a very visceral sense – over *erzählen* – narrating. At the same time, the creation of this mock-genre is an ironic comment on Bernhard's public image and a foreshadowing of the reaction the novel was going to provoke in its readers through textual and paratextual means. Furthermore, it calls attention to the difficult question of genre posed by the affective structure of *Holzfällen*: like Bernhard's other works, the novel may well be considered an elegiac work of art as death and suicide are one of its central themes; and yet, it is also hysterically funny in its grotesque portrayal of artistic hypocrisy.

This ambivalence is not resolved by the novel itself and the genre she assigns to it is a question of the reader's own sense of attunement, which opens the text to a structural undecidedness that can only be settled in the aesthetic process. As Willi

---

[106] Bernhard, *Woodcutters*, p. 181.
[107] Kuehn, 'On Reading Thomas Bernhard', p. 551.

Huntemann points out, Bernhard's prose is one that challenges the reader, requires her active participation and extends the relationships between the characters within the text to the reader[108]. However, if the novel's affective potential fully unfolds, the reader is attuned to, and then, in turn, brought out of tune with a mood of deep excitement and irritation. If genres are defined by their most dominant form of affectedness, then *Holzfällen* can be nothing but an 'irritation'. Through the structure of attunement between text and reader that I have outlined the subject position of the reader is fundamentally posited and created by means of an originary discordance which is created by the mood of irritation and which facilitates the negotiation between reader, narrator and text.

IV.   Conclusion: Bernhard's Aesthetics of *Stimmung* and the Failure of

Art in *Alte Meister*

Over two decades after Bernhard's passing, the stir caused by the scandalous nature of his public persona has settled enough for his works to actually have taken centre stage through discussions of his aesthetics and philosophy. Nowhere else in Bernhard's œuvre are his musically inspired narrative style and enquiry into the nature of art as condensed and explicit as they are in the trilogy, the last part of which, *Alte Meister: Komödie*, was the last novel Bernhard wrote before his death – as *Auslöschung* (*Extinction*, 1986), sometimes wrongly referenced as his last novel as it was published one year after *Alte Meister*, was actually written in the early 1980s and only published later on[109].

Like the majority of his other prose works from the 1980s – including the autobiographical narrative *Wittgensteins Neffe* (1982, *Wittgenstein's Nephew*), the novel *Beton* (1982, *Concrete*) and Bernhard's longest prose work, the aforementioned *Auslöschung* – the novels of the trilogy feature narrators looking back on those they have survived: in *Der Untergeher*, the narrator contemplates his friendship with the late Gould and Wertheimer, the narrator of *Holzfällen* muses about the recent death of his friend Joana and in *Alte Meister*, the narrator Atzbacher converses with the critic

---

108 Huntemann, *Artistik und Rollenspiel*, pp. 182f.
109 Cf. Hens, *Trilogie der Künste*, p. 22.

Reger, who reflects on the loss of his wife. This pervasive motif of loss creates a structure of elegiac belatedness that interrogates art's capacity to capture and preserve that which has been lost and is, by implication, intimately connected with Bernhard's politics and aesthetics of post-war trauma and his critique of modernity, which he depicts as an age marked by a structure of a fundamental loss. In her excellent book *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture* (2007), Rebecca Saunders demonstrates that this notion is pervasive in aesthetic and philosophical discourses on modernity[110]. Saunders further argues that the dominant mood of lamentation in the culture of modernity has considerably shaped our understanding of the notion of the modern by both expressing and constructing a sense of loss that has become constitutive for the very idea of modernity. Her argument is particularly helpful to my analysis of *Stimmung* and modernity as it locates the work of art within a circulation of affect that renders it both an expression of and a response to a perceived notion of loss, as well as an instrumental part in creating and perpetuating this pervasive mood.

In Bernhard's trilogy, then, the permanent mode of lamentation gives rise to an enquiry into art's capacity to recoup loss as '[t]he poet, as the only survivor, represents the dead as they had been in life and in the past so that they can be dead and buried in the present'[111]. However, art is always somehow insufficient in preserving the past and in carrying it forth into the present, as is shown in *Alte Meister*, which brings this issue to the fore by exploring the concepts of artistic mimesis, imitation and counterfeiting. At the same time, the inability to write is a recurrent theme since virtually all of Bernhard's protagonists speak of a desire but fundamental inability to write, almost as if literature's failure to supplant their experience is already anticipated and inherent in art. Ultimately, *Alte Meister* – perhaps not his definitive, but nevertheless Bernhard's last comprehensive statement on the nature of art in the medium of prose – thus discusses the failure of art to meaningfully connect to life due to their fundamental structural incompatibility.

The novel, which is subtitled *Komödie* [*A Comedy*], describes a meeting between the private intellectual Atzbacher, the narrator of the text, and his long-term acquaintance, the 82-year-old music critic and philosopher Reger, at the Viennese

---

[110] Saunders, *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture*, pp. 1-18.
[111] Bianca Theise, 'The Art of Erasing Art', *MLN*, Vol. 121, Nr. 3 (2006), 551-62 (p. 559).

Museum of Art History. Atzbacher is intrigued as Reger – who, like clockwork, visits the museum every other day – has, rather unusually, asked him to meet at the museum, although they had met there the previous day. He arrives an hour before the appointed time and watches Reger sit on the bench from which he inspects the same painting every other day, the *Portrait of a White-Bearded Man* by Tintoretto, while reflecting on Reger, his views on art and philosophy and their relationship. Atzbacher then approaches Reger and engages in a conversation with him, at the end of which Reger reveals that the reason he asked to see him was that he had planned on inviting him to a performance of Heinrich von Kleist's play *Der zerbrochene Krug* (1808/11). The novel ends with Atzbacher's verdict '[d]ie Vorstellung war entsetzlich'[112] ['[t]he performance was terrible'[113]].

As I previously observed with regards to *Der Untergeher*, *Alte Meister* merges the voices of its protagonists since the better part of Atzbacher's narrative is constituted by Reger's words which Atzbacher reproduces. In a sense, Reger thus speaks through Atzbacher, while Atzbacher, at the same time, speaks through Reger's words, creating a polyphonic structure of narration. Atzbacher, the more passive of the two, lets Reger take charge of the conversation and thus becomes his listener and observer, Reger's recipient – a notion that becomes particularly prominent when Atzbacher observes Reger in the same fashion in which Reger observes the *White-Bearded Man*. The text renders the structure of Atzbacher as 'reader' and Reger as 'text' more explicit when Reger admits, 'ich brauche einen Zuhörer, ein Opfer sozusagen für meinen musikwissenschaftlichen Redezwang'[114] ['I need a listener, a victim as it were, for my compulsive musicological talking'[115]], a requirement Atzbacher fulfils: '*Sie sind mir gerade recht gekommen, was täte ich nur ohne Sie!*'[116][('*you have come at just the right moment, what would I do without you*'[117]].

The aesthetic process as it is allegorically portrayed in *Alte Meister* is defined by a process of attunement between Reger and Atzbacher, in which timing plays an important role: they both value punctuality and when Atzbacher emerges from his

---

[112] Bernhard, *Alte Meister: Komödie*, 15th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013), p. 311.
[113] Bernhard, *Old Masters: A Comedy*, trans. by Ewald Osers (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1989), p. 156.
[114] *Alte Meister*, p. 186.
[115] *Old Masters*, p. 92.
[116] *Alte Meister*, p. 186.
[117] *Old Masters*, p. 92.

hidden viewpoint the second the appointed time arrives, Reger expresses his approval:

> Ich dachte, Sie werden pünktlich sein und Sie sind pünktlich, sagte er, von Ihnen erwarte ich ja nichts anderes, als Pünktlichkeit und die Pünktlichkeit, das wissen Sie ja, schätze ich über alles, da wo Menschen sind, muß die Pünktlichkeit und die mit der Pünktlichkeit gemeinsame Sache machende Verläßlichkeit herrschen, sagte er[118].

> [I thought you would be punctual and you are punctual, he said, I do not expect you to be anything but punctual, and punctuality, as you know, is what I appreciate above all else, wherever there are human beings there must be punctuality and, making common cause with punctuality, reliability, he said[119].]

In a social – and in an artistic – context, an attunement between individuals, as Reger's obsession with punctuality demonstrates, is indispensable as it enables a common ground for both social and aesthetic forms of encounter. Art, no matter how solipsistic or monologic it may appear, is thus inherently 'rooted in the social'[120] to Bernhard. Reger, when discussing Atzbacher's unwillingness to publish his texts, further observes that every text is written for an audience: 'niemand schreibt eine Schreibarbeit für sich selbst, das ist gelogen, wenn einer sagt, er schreibt sein Geschriebenes nur für sich selbst'[121] ['no one writes a work for himself, is someone says he is writing only for himself then that is a lie'[122]]. Quite contrarily, the presence of the reader is always implied in the text and her engagement in the aesthetic process becomes constitutive for the artwork as Reger tells Atzbacher that talking to his acquaintance has become an absolute, even existential, necessity for him:

> Sie *hören aufmerksam zu und widersprechen nicht*, sagte er, Sie lassen mein Reden in Ruhe, das brauche ich, gleich was es wert ist, was ich sage, es ebnet mir nur den Weg durch diese fürchterliche, glauben Sie mir, doch tatsächlich sehr selten glücklich machende musikalische Existenz. [...] Ich habe *keinen nützlicheren Menschen außer Ihnen,* sagte er. Wahrscheinlich ist mir das Überleben nur durch Sie möglich[123].

> [You *listen attentively and do not contradict*, he said, you leave me to talk, that is what I need, never mind what it is worth, it smoothes my path through this dreadful musical existence, believe me, one that in fact very rarely provides happiness. [...] I have *no other person more useful than you*, he said. Probably survival has been possible for me only thanks to you[124].]

---

[118] *Alte Meister*, p. 189.
[119] *Old Masters*, p. 94.
[120] Byron Spring, 'Art and Sociality in Thomas Bernhard's *Minetti, Der Theatermacher*, and *Alte Meister*', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (2010), 171-90 (p. 180).
[121] *Alte Meister*, p. 179.
[122] *Old Masters*, p. 89.
[123] *Alte Meister*, p. 188f.
[124] *Old Masters*, p. 94.

Reger can only survive with his 'recipient' Atzbacher, just as the text can only survive with the reader, which is why art is by definition always incomplete and therefore imperfect, an idea Reger follows through in his deposition of the 'old masters'.

By referencing the German composer Max Reger, who was strongly influenced by Bach and, in turn, exerted a considerable influence on Schoenberg, Reger's name establishes a clear connection to composers whose works interrogated the nature of musical temperament and harmony, relating – as in Beckett's early novels – the question of attunement in the reading process to that of musical *Stimmung*. *Alte Meister* thereby constitutes Bernhard's most open form of addressing aesthetic attunement in prose through the pivotal role given to the reader and, to some degree, represents a more positive view on the possibility of achieving *Stimmung* than Beckett's works or even its own predecessors within the trilogy. While *Company*, Beckett's most overt integration of the reader in the text, pursues an attunement to then arrive at the final conclusion, '[a]nd you as you always were. Alone', *Alte Meister*, although vigorously attacking the monolithic status that artworks have been given in Western culture, suggests that an attunement is not only possible but a necessity for survival.

Bernhard's often misanthropic and solipsistic characters solidify a continuous biographical problem of the author's: that of distance. In a letter to his brother, he stated: 'Meine Krankheit ist die Distanz'[125], 'my illness is distance', which referred in particular to his relationships with other people. In his works, however, this solipsistic and monologic existence gradually turns into the polyphonic symbiosis of multiple voices, relating *Stimmung* to its etymological relative *Stimme* in order to stimulate a quasi-musical attunement in the reader:

> Bernhard is in many ways an 'expressionist' writer who, although he uses the material of life to create his own universe, experiences a great need to communicate with individuals by means of writing, partly, like some of his characters, to escape from himself, but partly also to create a 'presence' through language, and achieving understanding even while denying its possibility. Bernhard's monologues provide 'existence' through their inner dynamic, and when the monologue stops, not only the speaker, but also the listener has advanced a small step[126].

Bernhard's characters, as well as his texts and readers, thus oscillate between the polar opposites of solipsistic distancing and intersubjective convergence. By creating

---

[125] Bernhard qtd. in Mittermayer, *Eine Biografie*, p. 257.
[126] Augustinus P. Dierick, 'The Teller from the Tale: Monologues, Dialogues and Protocols in Thomas Bernhard's Major Novels', *Oxford German Studies*, Vol. 44, Nr. 4 (2015), 416-27 (p. 427).

a 'presence' in his writing, a voice that ropes the reader in, so to say, the texts pursue an attunement through the aesthetic process, as a result of which both the speaker and the listener evolve.

Although *Alte Meister* contains what is perhaps the most comprehensive and scathing condemnation of Heidegger in all of world literature – in which the philosopher is dismissed as, amongst other things, a 'lächerliche[r] nationalsozialistische[r] Pumphosenspießer' ['ridiculous Nazi philistine in plus-fours'], a 'Voralpenschwachdenker' ['a feeble thinker from the Alpine foothills'] and 'eine unablässig trächtige Philosophiekuh, […] die auf der deutschen Philosophie geweidet und darauf jahrzehntelang ihre koketten Fladen fallen gelassen hat'[127] ['a ceaselessly gravid German philosophical cow […], which grazed upon German philosophy and thereupon for decades let its smart little cow-pats drop on it'[128]] – Bernhard's interpretation of the human condition in the age of modernity nonetheless (and perhaps despite Bernhard himself) showcases a number of similarities with Heidegger's. Towards the end of the novel, Reger describes the world he lives in as an uncanny one – one that can no longer provide shelter or a home:

> Sie können sich nicht mehr verstecken, es gibt kein Versteck mehr, das ist das Furchtbare, so Reger, alles ist total durchschaubar und damit total schutzlos geworden; das heißt, daß es heute gar keine Fluchtmöglichkeiten mehr gibt, die Menschen werden heute überall, gleich, wo sie sind, gehetzt und aufgehetzt und flüchten und fliehen und finden kein Loch mehr, in das sie entkommen könnten, es sei den, sie gehen in den Tod, das ist die Tatsache, so Reger, das ist das Unheimliche, denn die Welt ist keine heimliche mehr, nurmehr noch eine unheimliche. Mit dieser unheimlichen Welt müssen Sie sich abfinden, Atzbacher, ob Sie wollen oder nicht, *Sie sind mit Haut und Haaren dieser unheimlichen Welt ausgeliefert* und wenn Ihnen eingeredet wird, das ist nicht so, dann wird Ihnen eine Lüge eingeredet, diese heutige ununterbrochen in Ihre Ohren hineingetrommelte Lüge, auf die sich vor allem die Politiker und die politischen Schwätzer spezialisiert haben, so Reger. Die Welt ist eine einzige Unheimlichkeit, in welcher kein Mensch mehr Schutz findet, kein einziger, so Reger im Ambassador[129].

> [They can no longer hide, there is no hiding place left, that is what is so terrible, Reger said, everything has become transparent and thereby unprotected; in other words there is no hope of escape left today, people, no matter where they are, are everywhere hustled and incited and flee and escape and no longer find a refuge to escape to, unless of course they choose death, that is a fact, Reger said, that is the sinister aspect, because the world today is no longer mysterious but only sinister. With this sinister world you have to come to terms, Atzbacher, whether you like it or not, *you are completely and totally at the mercy of this sinister world* and if someone tries to tell you otherwise then he is trying to tell you a lie, today's lie which is

---

[127] *Alte Meister*, pp. 87f.
[128] *Old Masters*, pp. 41f.
[129] *Alte Meister*, pp. 299f.

> ceaselessly drummed into your ears, the lie on which the politicians and the political twaddlers have specialized, Reger said. The world is one big sinister place where no one can find shelter any more, no one, Reger said at the Ambassador[130].]

Although translated as 'sinister' by Osers, the term 'unheimlich' would be rendered more accurately as 'uncanny' or 'unhomely' and was promulgated through Sigmund Freud's essay 'Das Unheimliche', where it is defined as that which is at the same time strange and familiar[131]. The uncanny is a central aspect of Heidegger's concept of thrownness, which suggests that the relationship between *Dasein* and the world is fundamentally disturbed. *Dasein* is, from its outset, not at home in the world and is defined by this mode of *Un-zuhause* ['not at home'][132].

To Reger, the uncanniness of human existence is a novel phenomenon, one that is associated with the condition of modernity and, more specifically, with the state of Europe after the Second World War. As in Dostoevsky's and Beckett's works, the omnipresence of illness in Bernhard's texts[133] – which critics have often connected to his own lifelong health issues[134] – is symptomatic of a modern world which does not provide a home or any form of harmony for its inhabitants: more strongly phrased, '[k]ein anderer Autor der Moderne stellt die Welt als ein so häßliches, abgründiges, chaotisches und ekelerregendes Jammertal dar wie Thomas Bernhard'[135] ['[n]o other author of modernity depicts the world as as much of an ugly, abysmal, chaotic and nauseating vale of tears as Bernhard does' (my translation)]. Art, in its pursuit of perfection and harmony, is fundamentally incompatible with the chaotic world and nature of existence, but Bernhard's trilogy also reveals the cracks inside its aesthetic fundaments, its inability to substitute life and nature, and its underlying incompleteness without a human recipient.

Through a close reading of this trilogy, I have explored the dialectical structure of genre in Bernhard's work, which is generated through a harmonisation between the text on the one hand and through the reader's disposition and

---

[130] *Old Masters*, p. 150.

[131] Cf. Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 75.

[132] Cf. *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 188-90.

[133] Cf. Alfred Pfabigan, *Thomas Bernhard: Ein österreichisches Weltexperiment* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1999), p.106.

[134] Ibid. p. 207.

[135] Jürgen H. Petersen, 'Beschreibung einer sinnentleerten Welt: Erzählthematik und Erzählverfahren in Thomas Bernhards Romanen', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Manfred Jurgensen (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1981), pp. 143-76 (p. 143).

attunement on the other hand. In these texts, comedy and tragedy are merged, becoming virtually indistinguishable, and since traditional frames of meaning-making are absent, the reader is drawn – or, perhaps, even forced – into an attunement with the texts that is dynamic, unstable and open-ended. Through a dialectical relationship between the *Stimmung* of the reader and the moods created and stimulated by the text, a new attunement is created – one that is original, destabilising and uncertain; in other words, one that is 'modern'. The generic openness of the texts resides in their structural incompleteness prior to this process of attunement; and the intensity of affect that Bernhard's works engender – on a textual and paratextual level, through provocation, irritation and scandal – considerably plays into the forcefulness of their aesthetic effect on an almost physical affective level. Through the notion of the ridiculous – which describes the tragicomic coexistence of tragedy and comedy – the texts create a locus for an intersubjective encounter: *lächerlich* and its English counterpart 'ridiculous' etymologically point towards laughter, a phenomenon that is, according to Bergson, fundamentally social and intersubjective. At the same time, Bernhard's brand of the ridiculous contains an element of *sym*pathy towards those affected by it; it indicates a sense of – in Heideggerian terms – *Mitsein* or Being-with that is the originary structure of art.

As part and parcel of this existential and aesthetic Being-with, Bernhard's works engender a mode of *Stimmung* in the in-between of reader and text by creating a 'musical' prose that uses rhythm, the development of motifs and phonetic clusters as well as the human voice in order to overwrite the semantic level of the text with its semiotic quality. By doing so, language is employed in its most material form, and through this materiality a physical encounter between the narrative and the reader is stimulated, where the text engenders a 'presence' which, in the narrative process, aims to attune the reader to its 'pitch' and 'rhythm'. Bernhard is not an author one reads from a distance, Tunner suggests; his texts actively eliminate the distance between text and reader and thereby create an aesthetic mood marked by its intensity and unpredictability.

Eliminating the genre question, Bernhard's mock-genre of the *Erregung* radically foregrounds this attunement by underlining the significance of irritation and agitation for the processes of artistic creation and reception. Not only does the *Erregung* depict a state of agitation and discord with the narrative world; it also seeks to create a mood of irritation in the reader and unsettles her by, firstly, creating

discord between her and the world she is in and, secondly, by causing a complex dialectic between the narrator and the reader, which is marked by harmony and sympathy and by repulsion and aversion at the same time. To Bernhard, since modernity is 'understood as a break with harmony and perfection'[136], being out of tune with the world is the originary precondition for writing or any art form at all as there would be no incentive to write and, in that sense, no subject position to speak from without this sense of dissonance. *Holzfällen* in particular thus fictionalises the attunement which brings the notions of subject and world into being and allows the reader to affectively experience this attunement in relationship to the text.

The intimate connection between the three realms in whose intersection the phenomenon of *Stimmung* resides constitutes a continuous backdrop for Bernhard's aesthetics: 'Es ist ja klar, daß Literatur ohne Philosophie und umgekehrt und Philosophie ohne Musik und Literatur ohne Musik und umgekehrt nicht denkbar sind'[137] ['It is obvious, surely, that literature is not conceivable without philosophy or the other way round, or philosophy without music or literature without music or the other way round'[138]], Reger states in *Alte Meister*, intimating the fundamental connection between these spheres, which all are shown to be, essentially, 'eine Stimmungssache'.

---

[136] Paola Bozzi, 'Homeland, Death, and Otherness in Thomas Bernhard's Early Lyrical Works', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 71-87 (p. 81).
[137] *Alte Meister*, p. 257.
[138] *Old Masters*, p. 129.

Conclusion

Thus literature *necessarily gnaws away at existence and the world, reducing to* nothing *(but this* nothing *is horror) these steps by which we go along confidently from one result to another, from one success to another*[1].

A historical overview of the aesthetic category of *Stimmung* has unearthed the most significant inflections this concept has developed in the context of European thought. From the Pythagorean notion of a universal harmony to its redefinition in the modern age, *Stimmung* has remained intimately connected to its origin in the musical context where it designates, first and foremost, a relationship and a process. After its successive subjectivisation throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the emergence of urban modernity has, once again, uncovered that relationality inherent in the notion of attunement. Heidegger's ontology and subsequent enquiries into the nature of the subject and the conditions of human existence underline the ontological primacy of *Stimmung* and the subject's contingency on its attunement to the world and to other subjects. At the same time, literary articulations of a novel mode of experience that are related to the modern have given prominence to the key role this phenomenon plays within modern aesthetics.

The readings in this study, though by no means exhaustive, have given us an overview of pivotal modes and manifestations of the aesthetic category of *Stimmung* in modern literature. Since the scope of my analysis has been confined to – in the broadest sense – European works of narrative fiction ranging from the mid-nineteenth to the late-twentieth century, it covers only a very specific and historically limited view on the aesthetics and philosophy of mood in the context of modernity; and yet, the authors chosen represent a movement central to the reflection on and literary articulation of aesthetic and existential forms of attunement within the paradigm of modernity. In this context, I have conceptualised modernity as an epistemological category that has established a new way of thinking about experience and existence specific to the European post-Renaissance age.

---

[1] Georges Bataille, 'Molloy's Silence', trans. by Jean M. Sommermeyer, in *Samuel Beckett* by Birkett and Ince, pp. 85-92 (p. 92).

Through an interpretation of three principal works by Dostoevsky, we have first encountered a concept of *Stimmung* that embeds this phenomenon deep within the urban space of nineteenth-century Petersburg. Echoing Baudelaire's originary definition of modernity as a sense of fleetingness and contingency engendered by the novel urban environment as well as Dickens's depiction of the city as a space of uncertainty and alienation, Dostoevsky's works were complicit in heralding a new response to the material and epistemological vicissitudes of modernisation and in shaping literary modes and themes that would influence principal writers of literary modernism, such as Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka and William Faulkner. According to André Gide, Dostoevsky's works open up an aesthetic discourse on 'the individual and his self'[2] that had previously been absent in European literature. Both *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* depict protagonists that are symptomatic of a modern pathology uncovering fundamentally disturbed grounds of existence and thus initiated a literary existentialism that is intimately connected to the emergence of the modern age. Raskolnikov and the underground man equally represent the curse of modern subjectivity and of radical individualism; at the same time, their subject positions are fundamentally contingent on material space and affective 'climate' as a mode of transsubjective historical attunement.

In *The Idiot*, then, a shift towards intersubjectivity takes place: the intensity of affect both depicted and created by the novel posits the paradigm of mood as its organising principle, thus establishing a poetics of anti-rationalism, volatility and affectedness which radically foregrounds the dimension of aesthetic immediacy. Dostoevsky's notion of 'fantastic' realism portrays a narrative world in which dislocation and dissonance – generated by the modern condition and a detrimental capitalist ethos – become part and parcel of a new existential status quo. As a result of this perception, *The Idiot* develops an aesthetic structure in which the reader is thrown into this very dislocation since she consistently needs to attune to the rapidly changing atmosphere, tone and genre of the text. Due to the intense affective involvement the novel causes in its readers, de Jonge views Dostoevsky's *œuvre* as a significant element of a new literary movement in which the intensity of experience

---

[2] André Gide, *Dostoevsky* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952), p. 15.

194

provokes a 'pure aesthetic response'[3], thereby marking a move away from pure semantics and towards the experiential dimension of art.

Beckett's narrative fiction continues Dostoevsky's enquiry into the nature of affect and attunement. The notion of harmony – which, according to Leo Spitzer, has dominated Western philosophy from the Pythagoreans to the Renaissance age and which had long been fashioned as the main objective of art – lies at the heart of Beckett's early reflections on *Stimmung* in *Murphy* and *Watt*. In these works, attunement is approached through its etymological origin: the musical. Both Murphy and Watt represent an existential form of being that is defined by its fundamental dissonance with the world. The search for harmony – both existential and aesthetic – results in a futile pursuit of 'Apmonia' as Murphy's inability to fruitfully integrate the Pythagorean concept of harmony into his skewed sense of being is, from the start, doomed to fail since the world around him is marked by an element of discordance and dissonance. Subsequently, in *Watt* the metaphor of attunement manifests itself through a literal tuning incident: the piano tuners' visit early in the novel proves that the establishment of an attunement has, by definition, become impossible. No material basis remains that would allow for the creation of harmony, both in a musical and in a transcendental sense; any attempt to induce a harmonious form of *Stimmung* – such as equal temperament – is fundamentally flawed, basing a perceived sense of attunement upon a corrupted system.

These reflections on the conditions of attunement are, then, complemented by a more affect-driven understanding of *Stimmung* in the trilogy. In *Molloy*, Beckett's dictum '[a]ll I am is feeling' translates into a hermeneutics of reading in which the reader's central role in generating textual meaning through affective experience supplants the paradigm of representation. As the characters in the novel see, first, a degradation of their subject position and then the loss thereof, the reader's position is progressively approximated to a form of existence that is predicated upon the notions of displacement and transsubjectivity. This dispossession of self continues in *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, in which the dispossessed subject makes way for a mode of intersubjective affectedness that becomes the new status quo of human existence. In these texts, and in *Company*, Beckett poses the fundamental question of whether we can ever be truly alone, unattuned to others, and whether art is capable of producing

---

[3] de Jonge, *Dostoevsky and The Age of Intensity*, p. 201.

such a state. No definitive answers are given: on the one hand, virtually all of Beckett's narrators speak from a place of all-encompassing solipsism; but on the other hand, their need for company governs the fact that they are forever seeking to speak to, entice and attune their readers.

Bernhard, the third author in this compendium of modes of *Stimmung* in modern literature, invigorates the aesthetic reflection on the preconditions of existence and aesthetics through the affective extremes his texts generate. The mock genre of the *Erregung* is emblematic of his poetics of intensity, rendering it impossible for the reader to encounter his texts with indifference and, further, overriding traditional genre conventions and preconceived notions of aesthetic reception. Constituting Bernhard's most overt comment on the nature of art, his 1980s trilogy juxtaposes the author's trademark narrative devices – obsessive narrators displaying a propensity for monomania, spiteful rants about the Austrian state, its Nazi past and Catholicism, incessant repetitions, narrative circularity, minimalistic plot development – with a reflection on art that is framed through an analysis of three art forms: music, theatre and visual art. Bernhard's own understanding of *Stimmung* as a crucial element of artistic production and reception deeply informs all three novels as they interrogate the nature of existence and the modes of being with others as fundamentals of aesthetic theory.

In line with Beckett's exploration of musical attunement, *Der Untergeher* revolves around the realm of the musical and the parallels between musical and existential structures. Bernhard's musical prose here avails itself of structures borrowed from Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and other classical pieces to depict the relationship between its three protagonists as a quasi-contrapuntal attunement, creating a semiotic plane of meaning that emancipates itself from the semantic. Creating an opposition between the perceived form of perfection in art and a sense of failure, contingency and insufficiency in life, the eponymous 'Untergeher' ends his life to fulfil his contrapuntal 'role'; however, fractures in the tapestry of musical and artistic harmony expose the very insufficiency of art in relation to life.

As we have also seen, subsequently, *Holzfällen* shifts its focus to the performing arts and creates a forcefully immediate spectacle that is reminiscent of the dramatic genre. The nameless narrator's irritation steadily increases in the course of the odious *artistic dinner*, and while his rage is overwhelmingly internal, the reader is included in this intense affective state through a dialectical relationship with the narrator.

Nowhere else in Bernhard do we encounter a more intense form of *Stimmung*, one that echoes the tempestuous scandal scenes of Dostoevsky's novels and affects the reader in an unusual and forceful way. Irritation as a form of embodied affectedness becomes the locus of a dissonance and dislocation that spawns a creative impetus, thus becoming the precondition for any artistic activity.

Finally, *Alte Meister* completes the trilogy by foregrounding a sense of loss and mourning which is inherent in all three texts: the pivotal question at the heart of the novel is that of art's capacity to preserve or supplant that which has been lost. Reger ultimately answers this question in the negative: art, he finds, is always inherently imperfect and flawed as long as it lacks a human recipient. The narrator Atzbacher fills this void for Reger; and then the reader, in turn, fills it for the text, giving both meaning through their presence. Once again, a mode of company or 'being with' is evoked, while the central role of the recipient in the aesthetic process is underlined as she provides one half of the 'mood affair' that art constitutes in Bernhard's view.

While the three authors who have been discussed in this study do not exactly represent a homogeneous aesthetic philosophy of *Stimmung* and modernity, their works are indicative of a number of aspects that are constitutive for the role and articulation of attunement within modern literature. In his study on Beckett's philosophical aesthetics, Andrea Oppo suggests that 'as with Dostoevsky previously, [Beckett] turns literature into philosophy'[4], an observation that extends to Bernhard. Indeed, all three authors are influential contributors to an aesthetic existentialism that dissects the modern condition from its dysfunctional and corroded end and which also manifests in the works of Kafka as well as those of the French existentialist writers. The ubiquity of illness in Dostoevsky's Petersburg, the physical and mental dissolution of the self in Beckett, and Bernhard's signature perspective of elegiac retrospection in the face of death compose a pathology of modernity that points towards a notion of sickness at the heart of the conditions of existence.

This view is intimately connected to art's relationship to modernity. While Alois Riegl suggests that modern art aims to provide a corrective for the chaotic present, the texts we have read have quite the opposite effect: they unsettle their readers, throw them out of their existential attunement and into a realm of uncertainty, vicissitude and possibility – a realm that we can, in reference to

---

[4] Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 79.

Baudelaire, describe as that of the modern. From an ontological point of view, they thus destabilise the experiencing self and disturb its existential attunement, allowing for the possibility that we can gain insight into the nature and very conditions of this attunement. The Cartesian idea of the coherent, internal subject position is thus counteracted by a disintegration of the self into a mode of transsubjective affectedness, in which the reader is invited – or, at times, violently made – to partake in a dissolution of subjectivity as her position in relation to the text becomes, in Deleuze's words, 'that to which all objects are related as to the continuous variation of its own successive states, and to the infinite modulation of its degrees at each instant'[5]. The decentered self is thus 'turned into an experience'[6] made accessible to the reader.

According to Barthes, the unsettling, destabilising quality of the texts that have been discussed above is a source of what he referred to as 'bliss' in the aesthetic experience; a point that may be subject to disagreement. The works of all three authors to some degree fall into the category of what Eileen John describes as 'tormenting fiction'[7], a brand of narrative fiction in which the reader is entrapped in the experience of a miserable or spiteful consciousness or frustrating narrative situation. John uses *Notes from the Underground* as a paradigmatic example of this fiction; Dostoevsky's other texts – in which intense modes of volatile affect impinge on the reader and which have earned the author the epithet of being a 'shameless manipulator of his readers'[8] – may also, to some extent, fall into this category, as would Beckett's often unnerving narrative texts and Bernhard's characteristic 'prose that mercilessly hammers away at the reader's nerves'[9]. Whether this generates a sense of cruelty or bliss, the striking intensity of aesthetic effect is central to the vehement articulation of *Stimmung* as a driving force behind the aesthetic process.

It has also become clear that the five forms in which *Stimmung* manifests itself within the medium of literature – which I initially outlined – continually intersect and overlap: as modern fiction moves away from the paradigm of representation and

---

[5] Deleuze, 'On Four Poetic Formulas That Might Summarize the Kantian Philosophy', p. 30.

[6] Wolfgang Iser, 'The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laugh in Beckett's Theater', in *Samuel Beckett* by Birkett and Ince, pp. 201-29 (p. 226).

[7] This concept is taken from a forthcoming article by John under the working title '"Get me out of this novel!": Works of Paranoia, Revulsion and Despair'.

[8] Miller, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 223.

[9] Kuehn, 'On Reading Thomas Bernhard', p. 551.

towards an 'aesthetic of antirepresentation'[10] that foregrounds the experience of the reading process, aesthetic form and narrative structure orient themselves more openly towards the ways in which the reader is affected by the text, thus projecting modes of attunement depicted in fiction into the reader's experience thereof. The texts also comment on the role of genre and aesthetic form as preconceived frames of affect and affectedness that create meaning as part and parcel of the aesthetic process and, by overstepping existing genre boundaries and carnevalising preconfigured genres, open up a structure in which these preconceptions become tangible and make way for novel forms of aesthetic encounters.

At the same time, the texts negotiate forms of an epochal *Grundstimmung* that are emblematic of modernity and are simultaneously complicit in generating this overarching historical mood. By absorbing the materiality of lived experience – a notion that becomes particularly prominent in Dostoevsky's depiction of Petersburg and Bernhard's treatment of Vienna – the texts dialectically spawn modes of attunement shaped by the moods surrounding their creation that then, also, actively contribute to the creation and dissemination of a modern mood through art. As a result of these modes of engagement, we have observed an increasingly overt reflection on the nature of attunement and its aesthetic function. *Stimmung* thus becomes a discursive tool in modern fiction, which operates both at the level of textual communication and within the field of tension between art and reality where it forms a critical aspect of literary ontologies.

By expelling the reader from her existential attunement, the works – particularly those by Beckett and Bernhard – also bring to light the oppressiveness of an imposed notion of harmony in the modern world, which politicises the dimension of *Stimmung.* Since modern literature departs from a position of fundamental dissonance, available concepts of harmony are shown to be intertwined with a universalising ethos that is connected to modern capitalism. Twelve-tone equal temperament, the homogenised acoustic system that is scrutinised in *Watt* in particular, was established as a universal standard to facilitate the mass production of instruments and repeatability of musical performances, establishing a universal standard that – as the reflections on attunement in Beckett and Bernhard

---

[10] Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 151.

demonstrate – is predicated upon the practice of tempering sound which, by definition, entails the covering up of a fundamental dissonance.

Likewise, the post-war totalisation of political harmony which Bernhard overtly rejected – both in his poetics and in his public performances – is interpreted as a means to cover up the discontents of modernity – in this specific case, Austria's Nazi past – and the fundamental sense of discord and 'out-of-jointness' underlying it, which is most poignantly expressed in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This goes hand in hand with a politicisation of affect, through which otherness is fashioned as a mode of 'out-of-tuneness'. The patients from Beckett's asylums and his vagrant characters satirically depict the popular opposition between those that are attuned to the world and those that are dysfunctional as they are 'unattuned'. Modern civilisation's impetus to answer to the discontents of the modern mood through a harmonising effort becomes the source of an imposition and oppressiveness – an aspect whose political dimension will need to be uncovered more thoroughly in subsequent work.

Ultimately, what may be at stake in the way modern literature engages *Stimmung* is thus an ethics of mood and attunement that contradicts the idea of a 'pure aesthetics' I have previously spoken of. As the structural openness of modern fiction implicates the reader in the aesthetic process, it also hands over the responsibility for the way she positions herself in relation to the text to the reader. Alexander Spektor points out this dimension in the textual hermeneutics of *The Idiot*:

> as the primary means of forging intersubjective relationships between the characters, discourse in *The Idiot* acquires an ambiguous moral status. By bringing this realization to his reader, Dostoevskii forces him to face the responsibility he must carry for his own dialogue with the text[11].

Iser – whose reader-response theory has been a crucial reference point for this study – saw the question of ethics as a fundamental element of his concept of readerly participation through its democratic empowerment of the reader[12]. In the same vein, Wayne C. Booth frames the relationships readers form with literary characters through the notion of 'ethos' [ἦθος], which in Ancient Greek referred to 'character' or

---

[11] Alexander Spektor, 'From Violence to Silence: Vicissitudes of Reading (in) *The Idiot*', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (2013), 552-72 (p. 556).

[12] Cf. John Paul Riquelme, 'Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Fieldwork', *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, *On the Writings of Wolfgang Iser* (2000), 7-12 (p. 10); Paul B. Armstrong, 'The Politics of Play: The Social Implications of Iser's Aesthetic Theory', *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, *On the Writings of Wolfgang Iser* (2000), 211-23 (pp. 218f.).

a collection of customary habits[13]. To Booth, fictional characters are a form of company we keep, allowing for an ethically informed encounter with others that is mediated through literature. This notion is evocative of Beckett's short story of the same name as well as Bernhard's *Alte Meister*, which are both intimately concerned with the questions of companionship, presence and solitude in aesthetic reception. Literary *Stimmung*, then, becomes the locus of an ethical relationship and of the responsibility for forming such a relationship by attuning oneself to the text. Our *Stimmung* in relation to literature, to the world and to others is thus inherently an ethical phenomenon as it, first, predicates upon an instantiation of selfhood in relation to the world and, second, subsequently determines the ways in which we orient ourselves towards alterity.

Many other stones have had to remain unturned: how the aesthetic process I have termed *Stimmung* is engendered by other authors of the modern age, and the ways in which it manifests in poetry and drama, are central questions that future research will, hopefully, address. Much of what has been said about *Stimmung* in narrative fiction is transferrable to the articulation of attunement in other art forms and other literary genres. Due to its affinity with musical structures, poetry in particular constitutes an important area of inquiry for future work. More specifically, the 'mood poetry' of Romanticism and modern renderings of poetic attunement and dissonance in Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Paul Celan and others offer a rich corpus for the study of the role of *Stimmung* in the poetry of modernity. Moreover, the inflection of *Stimmung* that I have developed must be tested against its own historical and geographical limitations: what concept, or concepts, of *Stimmung* has recent history developed, and what modes of attunement exist outside the narrowly limited scope of European modernity?

While the limited scope of this study has not allowed me to address these questions (though it has served the purpose of producing and revealing the questions), they constitute important research desiderata along the lines of an emergent form of phenomenological enquiry that prioritises the experiential and affective dimensions of human existence. As Michel Haar points out, *Stimmung*, by

---

[13] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, CA, et al.: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 8f.

definition entails a reframing of experience through a reconsideration of fundamental categories such as interiority and intentionality:

> To 'listen to' *Stimmung*, it is necessary not only to eschew the definitions given by the rational faculty of understanding but to take one's distance from the egocentric *interiority* of feeling and its *intentionality*. Our epoch is without doubt too thoroughly molded by the reign of subjectivity to open itself to such a phenomenon[14].

Haar's verdict, originally written in 1987, that present-day notions of existence are still too firmly grounded in the concept of subjectivity, may finally have started to become invalid thirty years on. The resurgence of *Stimmung* as an aesthetic and philosophical category in the last fifteen years – as it has been manifest in studies by Gumbrecht, Fraiman and Felski, Thomas Pfau, Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber[15] and others[16] – may indicate that the preconditions for reflecting on affect have changed in favour of this 'alternative approach in which absorption in, and captivation with, the world ground the possibility of thinking and the constitution of meaning'[17]. From this experiential mode a new paradigm for conceptualising historical and aesthetic actualities through a fundamental sense of spatio-temporal situatedness emerges. Thomas Pfau summarises this alternative view, which I have called *Stimmung*, and its role in epochal cultures:

> When approached as a latent principle bestowing enigmatic coherence on all social and discursive practice at a given moment, 'mood' opens up a new type of historical understanding: no longer referential, thematic, or accumulatively contextual. Rather, in its rhetorical and formal-aesthetic sedimentation, mood speaks—if only circumstantially—to the deep-structural situatedness of individuals within history as something never actually intelligible to them in fully coherent, timely, and definite form[18].

The recent revival of the aesthetic and philosophical discourse on *Stimmung*, to which I have sought to make a contribution through this investigation, will beyond doubt

---

[14] Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 41.

[15] Cf. Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), and Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber, 'Moods and Philosophy', in *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, ed. by Kenaan and Ferber (Dordrecht et al.: Springer, 2011), pp. 3-10.

[16] Within the last decade, mood has recently also become an important new subject of enquiry in other disciplines. Cf. in sociology Jaap van Ginneken, *Mood Contagion: Mass Psychology and Collective Behaviour Sociology in the Internet Age* (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2013); in psychology, Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); in political science John L. Casti, *Mood Matters: From Rising Skirt Lengths to the Collapse of World Powers* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2010); in creative non-fiction Mary Cappello, *Life Breaks In: A Mood Almanack* (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016) and in the musicology Erik Wallrup, *Being Musically Attuned: The Act of Listening to Music* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

[17] Kenaan and Ferber, 'Moods and Philosophy', p. 5.

[18] Pfau, *Romantic Moods*, p. 7.

not fail to document how this pivotal concept develops further in the course of the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, we have come to see that what distinguishes the particular configuration of *Stimmung* reflected in modern fiction is the way in which dissonance and 'out-of-tuneness' become the originary – and also more productive – states of existence and of art. While in Heidegger 'thrownness' as the fundamental precondition of being structurally presupposes a form of existential dislocation, Bernhard's description of the creative potential of irritation becomes emblematic of a mode of writing about modernity that stems from an underlying sense of discomfort with that very concept as well as with the modes of existence associated with it. Through this 'emancipation of dissonance', one that mirrors Schoenberg's articulation of the same principle in the context of music[19], an aesthetic *Grundstimmung* marked by anxiety, displacement and uncertainty emerges: it is this very mood that we call modernity.

---

[19] Cf. Christopher Hailey, 'Introduction', in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. by Hailey and Juliane Brand (Berkeley, CA, et al.: University of California Press, 1997), pp. xi-xvi (p. xv).

Bibliography

Ackerley, C.J. and S.E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

Adorno, Theodor W., 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson, in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Birkett and Ince, pp. 39-49.

Akkerman, Abraham, *Phenomenology of the Winter-City: Myth in the Rise and Decline of Built Environments* (Heidelberg et al.: Springer, 2016).

Albright, Daniel, *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Alter, Robert, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

Anderson, Mark M., 'Fragments of a Deluge: The Theater of Thomas Bernhard's Prose', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 119-35.

—, 'Afterword', in *The Loser* by Bernhard, pp. 171-90.

Appadurai, Arjun, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Armstrong, Paul B., 'The Politics of Play: The Social Implications of Iser's Aesthetic Theory', *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, *On the Writings of Wolfgang Iser* (2000), 211-23.

Auerbach, Erich, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans. Vol. IV: Books 12-15*, trans. by Philip Levine (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

—, 'On True Religion', in *Greek and Roman Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. by Oleg V. Bychnov and Anne Sheppard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 219-26.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Ballard, Bruce W., *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology* (London and Lanham, NY: University of America Press, 1991).

Barfield, Steve, 'Beckett and Heidegger: A Critical Survey', *Beckett and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Lane (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 154-65.

Barker, Andrew, 'Pythagorean Harmonics', in *A History of Pythagoreanism*, ed. by Carl

A. Huffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 185-203.

Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

Bataille, Georges, 'Molloy's Silence', trans. by Jean M. Sommermeyer, in *Samuel Beckett* by Birkett and Ince, pp. 85-92.

Baudelaire, Charles, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', in *Œvres Complètes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980), pp. 790-815.

—, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P.E. Charvet (London et al.: Penguin, 1992), pp. 390-435.

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000).

Bayley, John, *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality* (London: Constable, 1960).

Beckett, Samuel, *How It Is* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1964).

—, *Malone Dies*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, pp. 163-264.

—, *Molloy*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, pp. 7-162.

—, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Picador, 1979).

—, *The Unnamable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, pp. 265-382.

—, *Company* (London: John Calder, 1980).

—, 'Rockaby', in *Collected Shorter Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), pp. 271-82.

—, *Endgame* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).

—, *Murphy*, ed. by J.C.C. Mays (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).

—, *Watt*, ed. by C.J. Ackerley (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).

—, *Mercier and Camier* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

—, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

Begam, Richard, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Belknap, Robert, 'St. Petersburg', in *Dostoevsky in Context*, ed. by Deborah A. Martinsen and Olga Maiorova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 168-75.

Bergson, Henri, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).

Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 2010).

Bernhard, Thomas, 'Ist es eine Komödie? Ist es eine Tragödie?', in *Prosa* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), pp. 38-48.

—, *Die Kälte: Eine Isolation* (Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1981).

—, *Die Macht der Gewohnheit* in *Die Stücke 1969-1981* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), pp. 251-349.

—, *Woodcutters*, trans. by David McLintock (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

—, *Old Masters: A Comedy*, trans. by Ewald Osers (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1989).

—, *Gathering Evidence: A Memoir*, trans. by David McLintock (London et al.: Vintage, 1994).

—, 'Verehrter Herr Minister, verehrte Anwesende', in *Thomas Bernhard – Der Wahrheit auf der Spur: Die öffentlichen Auftritte*, ed. by Wolfram Bayer, Raimund Fellinger and Martin Huber (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011), pp. 69-70.

—, *Alte Meister: Komödie*, 15th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013).

—, *The Loser*, trans. by Jack Dawson (London: Faber and Faber, 2013).

—, *Der Untergeher*, 16th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014).

—, *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung*, 15th edn (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014).

—, *Beton*, 13th edn (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015).

—, *Das Kalkwerk: Roman*, 21st edn (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015).

Bernhard, Thomas and Peter Hamm, *»Sind Sie gerne böse?« Ein Nachtgespräch zwischen Thomas Bernhard und Peter Hamm im Hause Bernhard in Ohlsdorf 1977* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011).

Bethea, David M., *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Birkett, Jennifer and Kate Ince, eds., *Samuel Beckett* (London and New York: Longman, 2000).

Blake, Jason, 'A Canadian Icon in a "Cretinous Provincial Dump": Glenn Gould and Thomas Bernhard's Novel *The Loser*', *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2015), 71-87.

Bloemsaat-Voerknecht, Liesbeth, *Thomas Bernhard und die Musik: Themenkomplex mit drei Fallstudien und einem musikthematischen Register* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).

Bolin, John, '"Preserving the Integrity of Incoherence?" Dostoevsky, Gide and the Novel in Beckett's 1930 Lectures and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*', in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 246 (2009), pp. 515-37.

Booth, Wayne C., *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, CA, et al.: University of California Press, 1988).

Boulter, Jonathan, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Gainesville, FL, et al.: University Press of Florida, 2001).

Bourgeois, Patrick Lyall, 'Dostoevsky and Existentialism: An Experiment in Hermeneutics', *Journal of Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1980), 29-37.

Bowie, Andrew, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Bozzi, Paola, 'Homeland, Death, and Otherness in Thomas Bernhard's Early Lyrical Works', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 71-87.

Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Bryden, Mary, 'Sounds and Silence: Beckett's Music', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 6, *Samuel Beckett: Crossroads and Borderlines / L'œuvre carrefour/ l' œuvre limite* (1997), 279-88.

Byron, Mark, 'Scharfsinnige Sturzfluten bei Beckett und Bernhard', in *Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Literatur*, ed. by Jan Wilm and Mark Nixon (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), pp. 139-55.

Calder, John, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder Publications/New Jersey: Riverrun Press, 2001).

Campbell, Julie, 'Bunyan and Beckett: The Legacy of Pilgrim's Progress in *Mercier and Camier*', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* (2010), 209-21.

Cappello, Mary, *Life Breaks In: A Mood Almanack* (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Caselli, Daniela, ed., *Beckett and Nothing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

Casti, John L., *Mood Matters: From Rising Skirt Lengths to the Collapse of World Powers* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2010).

Catteau, Jacques, *Dostoyevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. by Audrey Littlewood (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Cioran, E.M., *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Coetzee, J.M., 'The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's *Murphy*', in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. by David Attwell (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 31-8.

Connor, Steven, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

—, '"Was That a Point?": Beckett's Punctuation', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 269-81.

Conradi, Peter, *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Houndsmills and London: Macmillan, 1988).

Corngold, Stanley, '*Sein und Zeit*: Implications for Poetics', in *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature: Toward a Postmodern Literary Hermeneutics*, ed. by William V. Spanos (London and Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 99-114.

—, 'Nietzsche's Moods', *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 29, No. 1, *Nietzsche and Romanticism* (1990), 67-90.

Crowell, Steven, 'Responsibility, Autonomy, Affectivity: A Heideggerian Approach', in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of 'Being and Time'*, ed. by Denis McManus (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 215-42.

D'Aubarède, Gabriel, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett in *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 16 February 1961', trans. by Christopher Waters, in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Graver and Federman, pp. 215-17.

Dalton, Elizabeth, *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot': A Study in Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

de Jonge, Alex, *Dostoevsky and The Age of Intensity* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975).

Debevec Henning, Sylvie, *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

Deleuze, Gilles, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

—, 'On Four Poetic Formulas That Might Summarize the Kantian Philosophy', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 27-35.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Diederichs, Barbara 'Musik als Generationsprinzip von Literatur. Eine Analyse am Beispiel von Thomas Bernhards *Untergeher*' (doctoral thesis, Justus Liebig University Gießen, 1998).

Dierick, Augustinus P., 'The Teller from the Tale: Monologues, Dialogues and

Protocols in Thomas Bernhard's Major Novels', *Oxford German Studies*, Vol. 44, Nr. 4 (2015), 416-27.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 'The Crocodile', in *The Short Stories of Dostoevsky*, ed. by William Phillips, trans. by Constance Garnett (New York: The Dial Press, 1946), pp. 463-504.

—, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. by Boris Brasol (London et al.: Cassell and Company Limited, 1949).

—, *The Gambler, Bobok, A Nasty Story*, trans. by Jessie Coulson (Harmondsworth et al.: Penguin, 1966).

—, *The Notebooks for 'Crime and Punishment'*, ed. and trans. by Edward Wasiolek (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

—, *The Notebooks for 'The Idiot'*, ed. by Edward Wasiolek, trans. by Katharine Strelsky (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

—, «Преступление и наказание» (Кишинев: Издательство Лумина, 1969).

—, *The Idiot*, trans. and ed. by Alan Myers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

—, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue*, trans. by David McDuff (London et al.: Penguin, 1993).

—, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by Constance Garnett (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000).

—, *The Double and The Gambler*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2005).

—, *Notes from Underground*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2006).

—, *Demons*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2006).

—, «Записки из подполья» (Санкт-Петербург: Издательский Дом Азбука-классика, 2008).

—, «Идиот» (N.p.: The Planet Books, 2013).

Dreyfus, Hubert L., *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's 'Being and Time', Division I* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

Driver, Tom, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett in *Columbia University Forum*, Summer 1961', in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Graver and Federman, pp. 217-23.

Duffin, Ross W., *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (And Why You Should Care)* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

Eliot, T.S., *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, Vol. II: *The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (London and Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press/Faber & Faber, 2014).

Endres, Ria, *Am Ende angekommen: Dargestellt am wahnhaften Dunkel des Männerportraits des Thomas Bernhard* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1980).

—, 'Das Dunkel ist nicht finster genug', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Manfred Jurgensen (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1981), pp. 9-14.

Esslin, Martin, 'Beckett and Bernhard: A Comparison', *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1985), 67-78.

Feldman, Matthew, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2006).

Felski, Rita and Susan Fraiman, 'Introduction', *New Literary History,* Vol. 43, No. 3 (2012), *In the Mood*, pp. v-xii.

Fifield, Peter, 'Samuel Beckett with, in, and around Philosophy', *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 145-57.

Fish, Stanley E., 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (London and Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100.

Fleischmann, Krista, *Thomas Bernhard − Eine Begegnung. Gespräche mit Krista Fleischmann* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006).

Fludernik, Monika, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

Frank, Joseph and David I. Goldstein, eds., *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, trans. by Andrew R. MacAndrew (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

Freeborn, Richard, 'The Nineteenth Century: The Age of Realism, 1855–80', in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. by Charles A. Moser, revised ed. (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 248-332.

—, 'The Classic Russian Novel', in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-10.

French, Bruce A., *Dostoevsky's 'Idiot': Dialogue and the Spiritually Good Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. by Joan Riviere (New York: Johnathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 2011).

Frow, John, *Genre*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

Gendron, Sarah, '"A Cogito for the Dissolved Self:" Writing, Presence, and the Subject in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze', *Journal of Modern Literature* Vol. 28, No. 1, *Autobiography and Memoir* (2004), 47-64.

Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

Gide, André, *Dostoevsky* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952).

Ginneken, Jaap van, *Mood Contagion: Mass Psychology and Collective Behaviour Sociology in the Internet Age* (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2013).

Gonzáles, Darío, 'Mood/Attunement', in *German Aesthetics: Fundamental Concepts from Baumgarten to Adorno*, ed. by J. D. Mininger and Jason Michael Peck (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 188-95.

Goodman, Nelson, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978).

Gorner, Paul, *Heidegger's 'Being and Time': An Introduction* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Görner, Rüdiger, 'The Broken Window Handle: Thomas Bernhard's Notion of Weltbezug', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 89-103.

Graver, Lawrence and Raymond Federman, eds., *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London et al.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Haar, Michel, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

Hailey, Christopher, 'Introduction', in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. by Hailey and Juliane Brand (Berkeley, CA, et al.: University of California Press, 1997), pp. xi-xvi

Hall, Donald E., *Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

Han-Pile, Béatrice, 'Affectivity', in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 240-52.

Hayman, David, *Re-Forming the Narrative: Towards a Mechanics of Modernist Fiction* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

Heidegger, Martin, *Sein und Zeit*, 19th edn (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006).

—, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York et

al.: Harper Perennial, 2008).

Hens, Gregor, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste: Der Untergeher, Holzfällen, Alte Meister* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999).

Herzog, Andreas, 'Thomas Bernhards Poetik der prosaischen Musik', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, Neue Folge, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1994), 35-44.

Holland, Norman N., *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York et al.: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Höller, Hans, '«Es darf nichts Ganzes geben», und «In meinen Büchern ist alles künstlich»: Eine Rekonstruktion des Gesellschaftsbilds von Thomas Bernhard aus der Form seiner Sprache', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 45-63.

—, *Thomas Bernhard* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993).

Holquist, Michael, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

Honegger, Gitta, 'Language Speaks. Anglo-Bernhard: Thomas Bernhard in Translation', in *A Companion to the Works*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 169-85.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Horky, Phillip Sidney, *Plato and Pythagoreanism* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Hornung, Alfred, 'Reading One/Self: Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, John Barth, Alain Robbe-Grillet', in *Exploring Postmodernism: Selected Papers Presented at a Workshop on Postmodernism at the XIth International Comparative Literature Congress*, ed. by Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 175-98.

Huffmann, Carl A., 'The Pythagorean Tradition', *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. by A.A. Long (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 66-87.

Huntemann, Willi, *Artistik und Rollenspiel: Das System Thomas Bernhards* (Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann, 1990).

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (London and Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

—, *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, 2nd, revised edn (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984).

—, 'The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laugh in Beckett's Theater', in *Samuel Beckett* by Birkett and Ince, pp. 201-29.

—, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch et al., 2nd edn (London and New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2010), pp. 1524-32.

Jahraus, Oliver, *Die Wiederholung als werkkonstitutives Prinzip im Œuvre Thomas Bernhards* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1991).

Jameson, Fredric, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

Jones, Malcolm V., *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism.* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Jones, Malcolm V. and Robin Feuer Miller, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Jouanna, Jacques, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, ed. by Philip van der Eijk, trans. by Neil Allies (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012).

Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake* (London et al.: Penguin, 1992).

Judovitz, Dalia, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Jurgensen, Manfred, ed., *Bernhard: Annäherungen* (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1981).

—, 'Die Sprachpartituren Thomas Bernhards', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 99-122.

—, *Thomas Bernhard: Der Kegel im Wald oder die Geometrie der Verneinung* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1981).

Kafka, Franz, *Die Verwandlung*, ed. by Marjorie L. Hoover (London: Methuen & Company Limited, 1962).

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith, revised and ed. by Nicholas Walker (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Karl, Frederick R., 'Waiting for Beckett: Quest and Re-Quest', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 69, Nr. 4 (1961), 661-76.

Katz, Daniel, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

Kaufmann, Fritz, 'Die Bedeutung der künstlerischen Stimmung', in *Das Reich des Schönen: Bausteine zu einer Philosophie der Kunst* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), pp. 96-125.

Kaufmann, Walter, 'Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. by Kaufmann, revised and expanded ed. (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1975), pp. 11-51.

Kaye, Peter, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism, 1900-1930* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Kenaan, Hagi and Ilit Ferber, 'Moods and Philosophy', in *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, ed. by Kenaan and Ferber (Dordrecht et al.: Springer, 2011), pp. 3-10.

Kennedy, Michael, and Joyce Bourne Kennedy, 'motif', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac. uk/view/10.1093/ acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-624 6> [accessed 24 March 2017].

—, 'tuning', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://0www.oxfordreference.com.pugwash.lib.warwick .ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-9315> [accessed 2 April 2017].

Kenner, Hugh, 'The Trilogy', in *Samuel Beckett's 'Molloy,' 'Malone Dies,' 'The Unnamable.'*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York et al.: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), pp. 31-49.

Kiebuzinska, Christine, 'The Scandal Maker: Thomas Bernhard and the Reception of *Heldenplatz'*, *Modern Drama*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (1995), 378-88.

Knapp, Liza, 'Introduction to *The Idiot*. Part 1: When, Where, and How *The Idiot* Was Written', in *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot': A Critical Companion*, ed. by Knapp (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 3-26.

Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London et al.: Bloomsbury, 1997).

König, Josef, '*Nichts als ein Totenmaskenball.' Studien zum Verständnis der ästhetischen Intentionen im Werk Thomas Bernhards* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1983).

Konzett, Matthias, 'Publikumsbeschimpfung: Thomas Bernhard's Provocations of the Austrian Public', *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (1995), pp. 251-70.

—, ed., *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002).

—, 'Introduction. National Iconoclasm: Thomas Bernhard and the Austrian Avant-garde', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 1-21.

Koschmal, Walter, 'Der exzentrische Roman: F. M. Dostoevskijs *Idiot'*, *Poetica*, Vol. 44, No. 1/2 (2012), 181-98.

Krieger, Murray, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot:* The Curse of Saintliness', in *The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 209-27.

Kroeker, P. Travis and Bruce K. Ward, *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to*

Modernity (Oxford and Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001).

Kuehn, Heinz, 'On Reading Thomas Bernhard', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (1997), 541-53.

Lantz, Kenneth, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

Lees, Heath, 'Watt: Music, Tuning and Tonality', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Nr. 9 (1983), ed. by John Pilling, n. pag. <http://www.english.fsu.edu/ jobs/num09/Num9 Lees.htm> [accessed 20 April 2017].

Lehman, Bradley, 'Bach's Extraordinary Temperament: Our Rosetta Stone: 1', *Early Music*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2005), 3-23.

—, 'Bach's Extraordinary Temperament: Our Rosetta Stone: 2', *Early Music*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2005), 211-31.

Lord, Robert, *Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).

Löwe, Matthias, 'Erregtes Ich und dezisionistische Ästhetik: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der offenen Gesellschaft im Werk Thomas Bernhards', in *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. by Johann Georg Lughofer (Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 2012), pp. 55-68.

Maguire, Robert A., 'The City', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 21-40.

Malpas, Jeff, 'Existentialism as Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. by Steven Crowell (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 291-321.

Mann, Thomas, *Der Tod in Venedig: Novelle*, 24th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2013).

Marshall, Richard, 'The Illusory Nothing of Endon's Affence', in *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Arka Chattopadhyay and James Martell (London et al.: Roman Books 2013), pp. 271-89.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Isaac, trans. by Samuel Moors (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

Maude, Ulrika and Matthew Feldman, *Beckett and Phenomenology* (London and New York, Continuum, 2009).

Maude, Ulrika, 'Beckett, Body and Mind', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 170-84.

Menasse, Robert, *Überbau und Untergrund: Die sozialpartnerschaftliche Ästhetik. Essays zum österreichischen Geist* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997).

Miller, Lawrence, *Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

Miller, Robin Feuer, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Mittermayer, Manfred, *Thomas Bernhard: Eine Biografie* (Vienna and Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2015).

Mochulsky, Konstantin, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. by Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).

Mooney, Michael E., 'Presocratic Scepticism: Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* Reconsidered', *English Literary History*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1982), 214-34.

Moorjani, Angela, *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

—, '*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*: The Novel Reshaped', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 19-32.

Morson, Gary Saul, 'Philosophy in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 150-68.

Murav, Harriet, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Murphy, P.J., 'Beckett and the Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222-40.

Ngai, Sianne, *Ugly Feelings* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, 'Ueber Stimmungen', in *Frühe Schriften*, Vol. 2, *Jugendschriften 1861-1864*, ed. by Hans Joachim Mette (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1994), pp. 406-8.

Norris, Christopher, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

O'Donnell, John, 'Bach's Temperament, Occam's Razor, and the Neidhardt Factor', *Early Music*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2006), 625-33.

Olson, Michael P., 'Thomas Bernhard, Glenn Gould, and the Art of the Fugue: Contrapuntal Variations in *Der Untergeher*', *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 3/4, *Special Issue: Form and Style in Contemporary Austrian Literature* (1991), 73-83.

Oppo, Andrea, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2008).

Paris, Bernard J., *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters: A New Approach to 'Notes from the Underground', 'Crime and Punishment', and 'The Brothers Karamazov'* (New York and Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées*, trans. by F.W. Trotter (South Bend, US: Infomotions, Inc., 2000), <http://www.ebrary.com> [accessed 29 April 2017].

Passage, Charles E., *Character Names in Dostoevsky's Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982).

Pattison, George, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

Pearce, Richard, *Stages of the Clown: Perspectives on Modern Fiction from Dostoevsky to Beckett* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970).

Perniola, Mario, *Art and Its Shadow*, trans. by Massimo Verdicchio (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

Petersen, Jürgen H., 'Beschreibung einer sinnentleerten Welt: Erzählthematik und Erzählverfahren in Thomas Bernhards Romanen', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 143-76.

Pfabigan, Alfred, *Thomas Bernhard: Ein österreichisches Weltexperiment* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1999).

Pfau, Thomas, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Pilling, John, 'Beckett's English Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by Pilling (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 17-42.

—, 'A Critique of Aesthetic Judgment: Beckett's "Dissonance of Ends and Means"', in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett.*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Chichester et al.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 63-72.

Plato, *Meno and Phaedo*, ed. by David Sedley and Alex Long, trans. by Long (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Poulet, Georges, 'Criticism and the Experience of Interiority', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (London and Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Rabaté, Jean-Michel, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Ratcliffe, Matthew, 'Heidegger's Attunement and the Neuropsychology of Emotion', *Phenomenology and Cognitive Emotion* 1 (2002), 287-312.

—, 'Why Mood Matters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 157-76.

Reiter, Andrea, 'Thomas Bernhard's "Musical Prose"', in *Literature on the Threshold: The German Novel in the 1980s*, ed. by Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Roland Smith (New York, Oxford and Munich: Berg Publishers, 1990), pp. 187-207.

Riegl, Alois, 'Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl Maria Swoboda (Vienna: Dr. B. Filser, 1929), pp. 28-39.

Riquelme, John Paul, 'Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Fieldwork', *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, *On the Writings of Wolfgang Iser* (2000), 7-12.

Rosset, Clément, *Le réel: Traité de l'idiotie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

Russell, Robert, 'The Modernist Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 210-29.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

Saunders, Rebecca, *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Sayers, Sean, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Schiller, Friedrich, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, ed. by Klaus L. Berghahn (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010).

Schindlecker, Eva, 'Thomas Bernhard: *Holzfällen. Eine Erregung.* Dokumentation eines österreichischen Literaturskandals', in *Statt Bernhard: Über Misanthropie im Werk Thomas Bernhards*, ed. by Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler and Martin Huber (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1987), pp. 13-39.

Schmidt-Dengler, Wendelin, *Der Übertreibungskünstler: Studien zu Thomas Bernhard* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1986).

——, 'Thomas Bernhard's Poetics of Comedy', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 105-15.

Schwarzbach, F.S., *Dickens and the City* (London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1979).

Shakespeare, William, 'Hamlet', in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot et al. (London et al.: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), pp. 2422-619.

Sharkey, Rodney, 'Beaufret, Beckett, and Heidegger: The Question(s) of Influence', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* (2010), 409-22.

Siess, Jürgen, 'La mise en scène des tensions institutionnelles: Thomas Bernhard face à Samuel Beckett', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 17, *Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett: Colloque de Cerisy* (2006), 501-18.

Simms, Bryan R., *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg 1908-1923* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Slattery, Dennis Patrick, 'Seized by the Muse: Dostoevsky's Convulsive Poetics in *The Idiot*', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1999), 60-81.

Smith, Russell. 'It's Nothing: Beckett and Anxiety', in *Beckett and Nothing*, ed. by Caselli, pp. 192-212.

Söderquist, Brian, 'Kierkegaard and Existentialism: From Anxiety to Autonomy', in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 83-95.

Sorg, Beate, 'Alle Sätze sind Partituren: «Musikalisches» Erzählen bei Thomas Bernhard', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 157, No. 2, *Literatur und Musik* (1996), 18-22.

Spektor, Alexander, 'From Violence to Silence: Vicissitudes of Reading (in) *The Idiot*', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (2013), 552-72.

Spitzer, Leo, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word 'Stimmung'*, ed. by Anna Granville Hatcher (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963).

Spring, Byron, 'Art and Sociality in Thomas Bernhard's *Minetti*, *Der Theatermacher*, and *Alte Meister*', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (2010), 171-90.

St John Butler, Lance, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Steinberg, Mark D., *Petersburg Fin de Siècle* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Steiner, George, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980).

Steiner, Peter, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Stewart, Paul, 'Living the Unnamable: Towards a Phenomenology of Reading', in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, ed. by Maude and Feldman, pp. 177-93.

Styan, J.L., *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

Svendsen, Lars, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. by John Irons (London: Reaction Books, 2005).

Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Terras, Victor, *The Idiot: An Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

Theise, Bianca, 'The Art of Erasing Art', *MLN*, Vol. 121, Nr. 3 (2006), 551-62.

Tokarev, Dimitri, 'Samuel Beckett et la Russie', in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 17: *Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett: Colloque de Cerisy* (2006), 83-96.

Tolstoy, Leo, *Anna Karenina*, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 1995).

—, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, trans. by Nicholas Pasternak Slater (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 155-210.

Trezise, Thomas, 'Dispossession', in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Birkett and Ince, pp. 134-54.

Tunner, Erika, 'Scheitern mit Vorbedacht', in *Bernhard: Annäherungen*, ed. by Jurgensen, pp. 231-41.

—, 'Inwiefern ist und erzeugt Thomas Bernhards Text *Holzfällen* eine Erregung?', in *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. by Johann Georg Lughofer (Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 2012), pp. 69-75.

Vivian, Bradford, 'The Threshold of the Self', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2000), 303-18.

Wachtel, Andrew, 'Psychology and Society', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Jones and Miller, pp. 130-49.

Wallrup, Erik, *Being Musically Attuned: The Act of Listening to Music* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

Webb, Eugene, *Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels* (London: Peter Owen, 1970).

Webber, Andrew, 'Costume Drama: Performance and Identity in Bernhard's Works', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Konzett, pp. 149-65.

Wellbery, David E., 'Stimmung', in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden, Band 5: Postmoderne − Synästhesie*, ed. by Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2003), pp. 703-33.

Weller, Shane, 'Phenomenologies of the Nothing: Democritus, Heidegger, Beckett', in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, ed. by Maude and Feldman, pp. 39-55.

—, 'Unwords', in *Beckett and Nothing*, ed. by Caselli, pp. 107-24.

Williams, Rowan, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008).

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads: With Pastoral and Other Poems*, Volume 1 (London: T.N. Longman, 1802).

Wulf, Catharina, *The Imperative of Narration: Beckett, Bernhard, Schopenhauer, Lacan* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997).

Young, Sarah J., *Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot' and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

—, 'Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881): Fantastic Realism', in *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, ed. by Michael Bell (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 259-76.

Zhmud, Leonid, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, trans. by Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).