

# Edwin Fischer's Bach-Pianism in Context\*

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## Introduction

In this article I will report briefly upon a particular epistemology of Bach performance that Edwin Fischer (1886–1960) formed in Berlin during the period of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933). I will describe the elements of his approach, reconstruct his circle, and the ideas that circulated within it. Fischer's aims, attitudes, and development can, to some extent, be discerned by looking at his editions and recordings. However, they emerge more clearly when his intellectual and artistic environment is taken into account, and so I will also compare epistemology to environment. To analyse his approach I will use Fischer's descriptions of Bach-pianism, the very existence of which suggests just how integral it was to him as a performer, and validates its study. To make it clear that I am studying a single, consistent epistemology, I have limited the number of artefacts in this essay to the *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* (henceforth *T-A*) editions of Bach's clavier works, produced by Fischer from 1924 to 1933 for Ullstein Verlag (U-V), and to Fischer's recording of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (*WTC*) for His Master's Voice. *WTC I* was recorded from 1933–1934, and *WTC II* from 1936–1937; the latter was the first complete recording of the cycle. Fischer's worldwide reputation largely rests on this widely distributed and iconic recording. I will also document and describe Fischer's affiliations and compare the ideas most closely associated with them to his output.

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## History and Context of Fischer's Relationships with Alfred Bertholet, Ferruccio Busoni, Ernst Kurth, Franz von Mendelssohn, Rudolf Steiner, and *neues Bauen* leaders

### Fischer and Bertholet

The Swiss *Religionswissenschaftler* Alfred Bertholet<sup>1</sup> (1868–1951) introduced the young Edwin Fischer to a number of important figures to whom he remained connected throughout his life, including Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), Karl Straube (1873–1950), Max Reger (1873–1916), the theologian Carl Albrecht Bernoulli (1868–1937), and the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1935).<sup>2</sup> Bertholet's principal occupations were Jewish hermeneutics, Bach performance (as organist and arranger) and music pedagogy. Some principles of Jewish hermeneutics may have been transferred to Fischer as a result of his close relationship with Bertholet.

### Fischer and Ferruccio Busoni

Fischer's close association with Busoni is well documented. He was a younger colleague, although not a student. Busoni's influence can be traced through paraphrases in Fischer's prose publications, many of which began life as lectures to students at his Potsdam summer masterclasses, and as prefaces to his editions of Bach's clavier works.

As Dent and Stuckenschmidt have observed, Busoni's pianism developed substantially over time. This is certainly true of the two volumes of his *WTC* edition, which (as even Busoni acknowledges in his preface to *WTC II*) bear little resemblance to one another. In the period 1917–1920 Busoni had an epiphany regarding Bach-pianism, which substantially affected his approach to the

<sup>1</sup> Bertholet was also an organist, a Bach editor and arranger, and a major figure in the revival of Baroque music in Germany. His most significant work was *A History of Hebrew Culture (Die Kulturgeschichte Israels)*. Alfred Bertholet, *A History of Hebrew Civilization* [sic], English translation by Rev. A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap, 1926). (N.B. Dallas' translation of the German title is a misnomer. Germans take care to treat *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* as discrete phenomena.)

<sup>2</sup> 'Bertholet directed the *Musikschule* as well as the recently founded Conservatory. At the latter, he met Ferruccio Busoni, who led a master-class there, as well as Edwin Fischer, who was a student. He remained closely connected with Fischer into his last years. Bertholet was the Housing Director (*Quartiermeister*) of the German *Tonkünstlerfest*, which took place in Basel in 1903. Via his own guest Karl Straube, who would later be the Thomaskantor of Leipzig, Bertholet came to know Max Reger. Among his friends in Basel were the theologian Carl Albrecht Bernoulli and the art-historian Heinrich Wölfflin'. '[Bertholet war] Administrator der Musikschule und des neugegründeten Konservatoriums, wo er Ferruccio Busoni als Leiter eines Meisterkurses zu begrüßen hatte und unter den Schülern dem Pianisten Edwin Fischer kennenlernte, mit dem er bis ins Alter eng verbunden blieb. Beim Deutschen Tonkünstlerfest, das 1903 in Basel stattfand, war er der Quartiermeister; durch seinen eigenen Gast, den späteren Thomaskantor Karl Straube, kam er mit Max Reger in Beziehung. Von den Basler Freunden seien der Theologe Carl Albrecht Bernoulli und der Kunsthistoriker Heinrich Wölfflin genannt'. (All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.) Rudolf Schmend, 'Ein Göttinger Deuteronomiumkommentator Alfred Bertholet (1868–1951)', in Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (eds.), *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 173–89.

notation of pianistic nuances until his death in 1924. As Stuckenschmidt recalls, 'A short article written [by Busoni] on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasia* introduces fresh ideas on piano playing and piano transcriptions', in which Busoni 'advises a musician to strive for the lucidity and lightness of Mozart's language'.<sup>3</sup> Stuckenschmidt also reveals a possible motive for Busoni's new aesthetic of restraint: '[Busoni's] correspondence with his friend Hans Huber [who was also a close friend of Fischer's], particularly during the years 1917 and 1918, shows how distressed he was by the frequently harsh criticism of his playing and his Bach editions'. By 1920 Busoni had transformed his pianistic approach. Fischer noted of Busoni's approach in these years that, 'In maturity, I scarcely heard a forte from [Busoni]; he found this sufficient, for it was for him a question of the balance of tone, no longer of strength in itself.'<sup>4</sup>

### Fischer and Ernst Kurth

Daphne Tan reports that Fischer was a student of the theorist Ernst Kurth (1886–1946).<sup>5</sup> Their association is known to have extended at least until 1931, when, together with Paul Dikenmann, another Kurth student, Fischer compiled the *index rerum* and *index nominum* of Kurth's last work, *Musikpsychologie*.<sup>6</sup> Kurth's views on performance are particularly clear in his *Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts* of 1917, a text emphasising the dynamic fluctuations of Bach's music and the performer's responsibility to realise and amplify them:

Instrumental performance must be guided by an understanding of the dynamics of motion and of the striving forces that lead to the formation and realisation of lines in developmental-transitional passages. Essentially, a performance should co-form—hence, always re-enact—[a work's] linear motions on the basis of the energy inherent in their shape, with the sole aim of bringing out the now-rising, now-falling, swaying of dynamic movement, as absolute shapes almost absolved of being tones. With regard to dynamics, a performance first and foremost has to reflect such fluctuations. Creating undulating [dynamic] gestures depends especially upon delicacy of instrumental tone-production and a feel for the discrete characters of variously constructed lines.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Ferruccio Busoni: Chronicle of a European* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Fischer, 'On Musical Interpretation', in *Reflections on Music* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1951), 21. The German original is *Musikalische Betrachtungen* (Munich: Insel, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> 'The index to *Musikpsychologie*, compiled by Kurth's students Edwin Fischer and Paul Dikenmann, cites two direct references to Kant on pages 25 and 59'. Daphne Tan, 'Ernst Kurth at the Boundary of Music Theory and Psychology', PhD dissertation, University of Rochester (2013), 26 n. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Kurth, Paul Dikenmann and Edwin Fischer, *Musikpsychologie* (Berlin: Hesse, 1931). On page xii, Kurth thanks 'Edwin Fischer, teacher in Berne (along with Dikemann) for the indices' 'painstaking preparation'.

<sup>7</sup> 'Das Verständnis für die Dynamik der Bewegungen und strebenden Kräfte, welche in den Zwischenspielentwicklungen zur Liniengestaltung und -Ausspinnung führt, muss vor allem auch die Wiedergabe auf dem Instrument leiten; diese soll im Wesentlichen nichts anderes sein als ein Mitgestalten, daher stets wieder Neugestalten der Linienzüge nach ihrer Formenergie und nur unter Hervorkehrung der wechselnden steigenden, schwebenden oder

Lee Rothfarb groups Kurth with Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) and Oswald Jonas as the ‘energeticist’ theorists.<sup>8</sup> Their views strongly echo the form/function emphasis of the Bauhaus as well as the *neue Bauen* view that outer surfaces ought to reflect inner constructive elements. Fischer promoted Schenker’s editions to his piano students<sup>9</sup> and invited Jonas to lecture at his masterclasses.<sup>10</sup> Fischer was further connected to Schenker through his teacher Eugen d’Albert (1864–1932) and his two closest musical colleagues, Busoni and Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886–1954).<sup>11</sup>

Any knowledge of Jewish critical thought that Fischer gained from his association with Bertholet would have been reinforced in 1904, when his mother, Anna Fischer, moved the household to Berlin so that Edwin could study with Martin Krause at the *Stern’sches Konservatorium*. The Stern Conservatory was strongly identified with Judaism from its founding in 1850 by Julius Stern, Theodor Kullak, and A. B. Marx. When Fischer studied there its students and faculty were predominantly Jewish. His affiliation with the institution continued beyond graduation. He became a *Pädagog für Klavier* at the *Stern’sches Konservatorium* on 9 January 1905 and served in that capacity until 1918.<sup>12</sup>

abwärtssinkenden Bewegungskräfte; absolutestes, fast von den Tönen gelöstes Formen. Vornehmlich in der äusseren Dynamik muss die Wiedergabe von dieser Bewegungsentwicklung abhängig sein; insbesondere die Gestaltung der Schwebebewegungen erfordert auf dem Instrument-entsprechende Zartheit in der Tongebung und Einfühlung in den Charakter dieser Themenbildung’. Ernst Kurth, *Grundlagen des Linearen Kontrapunkts: Einführung in Stil und Technik von Bachs Melodischer Polyphonie* (Bern: Drechsel, 1917), 427.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Rothfarb, ‘Energetics’, in Thomas Christensen (ed.), *Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Jonas wrote to Schenker (1930) that Fischer actively promoted use of his editions. See the handwritten letter from Jonas to Schenker, December 5, 1930 at [www.columbia.edu/~maurice/schenker/jonas/from\\_jonas/oj\\_126\\_6\\_12530.html](http://www.columbia.edu/~maurice/schenker/jonas/from_jonas/oj_126_6_12530.html) (accessed 30 January 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Reporting on his reception by the pianists at that meeting to Schenker, Jonas wrote that, ‘the evening was very energetic...great interest was aroused in many, and that can have further repercussions’. (Translation by John Rothgeb, 2006.) ... Der Abend war sehr angeregt ... jedenfalls wurde doch bei vielen großes Interesse wachgerufen und das kann ja noch weiterwirken’. See [www.columbia.edu/~maurice/schenker/jonas/from\\_jonas/oj\\_126\\_33\\_62934.html](http://www.columbia.edu/~maurice/schenker/jonas/from_jonas/oj_126_33_62934.html) (accessed 30 January 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Schenker was acquainted with both d’Albert and Busoni as early as 1900, when he promoted his compositions to them. Schenker’s Op. 4 is dedicated to d’Albert, Op. 2 to Busoni. Both pianists expressed strong interest in performing Schenker’s compositions. See Helmut Federhofer, *Heinrich Schenker: Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen in der Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection, University of California, Riverside, Studien zur Musikwissenschaft, 3* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985), 15–16. Furtwängler was an unofficial student of Schenker’s. See Federhofer, *Nach Tagebüchern*, 38–9.

<sup>12</sup> ‘1905–Lehrer am Sternschen Konservatorium in Berlin (bis 1914)’. Lotte Boelger-Kling, ‘Edwin Fischer / biographische Daten’, appendix to Edwin Fischer, *Von den Aufgaben des Musikers* (Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum, 1997), 62. However, the PDF entitled ‘Liste der Lehrenden des Stern’schen Konservatoriums (1850–1936)’ at [www.udk-berlin.de/fileadmin/2\\_dezentral/FR\\_Musikwissenschaft/PDFs/LehrendeSternKons.pdf](http://www.udk-berlin.de/fileadmin/2_dezentral/FR_Musikwissenschaft/PDFs/LehrendeSternKons.pdf) suggests that Fischer was associated with the Stern Conservatory in some capacity until 1918 (accessed 31 January 2016).

### Fischer and Franz von Mendelssohn ('der Jüngere')

Through one of his students at the *Stern'sches Konservatorium* Fischer met and became a favourite of the great banker and philanthropist, Franz von Mendelssohn (1865–1935). This helped his rise to prominence:

Through this first student, 'H', as well as through his own wife Eleonora (*née* Mendelssohn) Edwin Fischer came into close contact with Berlin's leading social circles. In these Sunday 'Salons', much insightful music-making took place. Fischer often recalled that talent and hard work alone had not led to his success. Equal to those qualities was the power proffered his career by relationships with exclusive and influential personages. Such relationships raised him, on the often rocky path, to recognition and, finally, to fame.<sup>13</sup>

Franz and his brother Robert von Mendelssohn (1857–1917) – principals of the bank Mendelssohn & Co. – built large villas in Berlin-Grunewald, where they were important figures in its highly musical, predominantly Jewish culture. Europe's finest touring musicians routinely visited Franz von Mendelssohn's salon. The largely Jewish group of Berlin artists and intellectuals that frequented the Mendelssohn villa overlapped with the membership of the Berlin *Gesellschaft der Freunde*, for which Franz von Mendelssohn served periodically as deputy chairman throughout the 1920s and 30s.<sup>14</sup> One of Moses Mendelssohn's sons, Joseph, had co-founded this historically Jewish association, which was historically under Jewish leadership.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that Berlin Jews regarded Franz von Mendelssohn as a fully enfranchised representative of Judaism, despite his Christian baptism.

In 1919 Fischer married Robert's daughter, Eleonora von Mendelssohn (1900–1951). Fischer attributed great significance to Busoni's present to Eleonora of two rare books written by her great-great-grandfather Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786). She appears to have valued the memory of her illustrious forefather very highly:

<sup>13</sup> 'Durch diesen ersten Schüler, H., aber auch durch seine eigene Frau Eleonora, geborene Mendelssohn, kam Edwin Fischer in engere Berührung mit den gesellschaftlich führenden Kreisen Berlins. In den "Salons" wurde sonntags viel und mit großem Verständnis musiziert. Er bekannte immer wieder, daß Begabung und Fleiß allein ihn nicht zum Erfolg geführt hätten. In fast ebenso großem Ausmaß hätten ihn Begegnungen mit aufgeschlossenen und einflussreichen Menschen gefördert. Sie hätten ihm den oft sehr steinigen Weg zur Anerkennung und schließlich zum Ruhm geebnet'. Jörgen Schmidt-Voigt, 'Musikalische Begegnungen', in Hugo Haid (ed.), *Dank an Edwin Fischer* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1962), 30.

<sup>14</sup> '... Franz von Mendelssohn (1898–1935, zeitweise 2. [stellvertreder] Vorsitzender ...' Sebastian Panwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Freunde (1792–1935): Berliner Juden zwischen Aufklärung und Hochfinanz* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007), 124.

<sup>15</sup> 'The rule that leaders of the *Gesellschaft der Freunde* must be Jews was never stipulated as a regulation. However, it was from then on [i.e. 1856] followed as a kind of unspoken-but-acknowledged law until the club was dissolved in 1935'. 'Die Regelung, daß ein Jude die *Gesellschaft der Freunde* zu leiten habe, fand nie Eingang in die Statuten. Dennoch wurde sie – als eine Art stillschweigend anerkanntes Gesetz – von jetzt an bis zur Auflösung des Vereins 1935 stets befolgt'. Panwitz, *Gesellschaft der Freunde*, 147.

Busoni was then a demigod for us young pianists, and I gladly accepted the invitation to visit him. I arrived with my wife, Eleonora Mendelssohn, and Busoni received us with his two lovely lads [a reference to Busoni's sons]. He had a passion for ancient languages and possessed a large library. I will never forget the graciousness with which he took down two old volumes by Moses Mendelssohn and presented them to [Eleonora] with an Italian dedication.<sup>16</sup>

Fischer's prose style is extremely concise, and as a result the enormity of what he relates here—as elsewhere—emerges only on close scrutiny. Busoni was indeed an obsessive competitive bibliophile, so giving away a rare book would have been a significant sacrifice for him.<sup>17</sup> And the Italian dedication was a meaningful flourish: Eleonora von Mendelssohn's godmother was the legendary Italian actress Eleonora Duse (1858–1924). The identity of the two books may be of some significance. The designation *zwei alte Bände* implies that these books comprised a two-volume set (otherwise 'Bände' would probably have been replaced by 'Bücher') and that they were already quite old in 1920. The mention of Busoni's fascination with ancient languages ('*alte Sprachen*') implies that the set of books in question was at least partly printed in Greek, Latin, or Hebrew. The only set of books by Moses Mendelssohn that meets these three criteria is his two-volume parallel (German/Hebrew) translation of the *Psalms*.<sup>18</sup>

Busoni's gift reflected the continuing importance of Moses Mendelssohn in German culture as well as to Eleonora's immediate family. German publishers repeatedly reissued Moses Mendelssohn's works until the Nazi era. More than a century after his death, the association of Robert and Franz von Mendelssohn's families with this *pater familias* was still strong. They erected a large bas-relief of him in the lobby of the Mendelssohn Bank as a constant reminder of his influence.

The assimilation of Jews into the culture of the German Reich—largely a result of the work of Moses Mendelssohn and the *Haskala*—imposed (or implied) restrictions on traditionally Jewish behaviour, as the following brief examination

<sup>16</sup> 'Busoni war damals für uns junge Pianisten ein Halbgott; so folgte ich damals gern seiner Aufforderung, ihn zu besuchen. Ich war mit meiner Frau, Eleonora Mendelssohn, bei ihm, als er mit zwei bezaubernden Buben uns empfing. Eine Leidenschaft hatte er für alte Sprachen und besaß eine große Bibliothek. Nie werde ich die Grazie vergessen, mit der er zwei alte Bände von Moses Mendelssohn herunterholte und sie mit einer italienischen Widmung ihr überreichte'. Edwin Fischer, 'Schüler und Meister', in *Von den Aufgaben des Musikers* (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1960), 51.

<sup>17</sup> Wassermann went so far as to speculate that Busoni's library must have been 'one of costliest in existence'. 'Er war ein passionierter Sammler von Büchern, und seine Bibliothek ist wahrscheinlich eine der kostbarsten, die heute existieren'. Jakob Wassermann, *In memoriam Ferruccio Busoni* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1925), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Die Psalmen, mit 12 Holzschnitten von Joseph Budko* (Berlin: Maurer, first edition, 1783); Moses Mendelssohn, *Die Psalmen* (Frankfurt und Leipzig: [publisher unknown], 1787); *Die Psalmen; zweite, verbesserte Auflage* (Leipzig, 1791–2); Moses Mendelssohn, *Die Psalmen* (Budapest: Burian, 1819); Moses Mendelssohn *Die Psalmen* (Vienna: Anton Schmidt, 1823). The M.E. Löwy edition of 1864 is ruled out by the fact that in it the two volumes were bound together.

of *Geselligkeit*<sup>19</sup> and *Entjüdung*<sup>20</sup> shows. Prussian leaders exerted pressure on German Jews (as well as Catholics) to sublimate their respective religious confessions in order to facilitate national cohesiveness. This catalysed the progressive secularisation of German polite society, which was already well underway before the establishment of the German Empire in 1871. The move towards cultural adaptation was particularly pronounced among the Jewish middle classes in Germany. The arts, and particularly music, provided Jews with a forum in which to employ Jewish critical thought without invoking religious difference.

The social construction known as *Kunstreligion* played a significant role by establishing a clear path through which religious behaviours were transferred to the arts. Adherents to *Kunstreligion* grew steadily in number from the late eighteenth century into the twentieth. At the end of the nineteenth century, Joachim Konrad—a writer in Fischer's immediate circle—described religion and art as slightly disguised expressions of the same impulse. Konrad wrote:

Art holds the potential to serve as a vehicle of the highest, ultimate truth. Art that is truly religious—which hasn't yet absolutely given itself over to the straightforward depiction of religious themes—is creativity from the deepest fundamentals of religion, design stemming from an ultimate overflowing of exuberant faith. Art thereby itself becomes religion; it speaks the language of religion; aesthetic effect is simultaneously religious significance.<sup>21</sup>

By the time Fischer arrived in Berlin translation of Jewish values to a German-Christian context had become ingrained within the confines of artistic salon culture. *Entjüdete* Jewish attitudes, viewpoints, and critical thought flowed easily in salon culture. It follows that the close proximity to Fischer of *gesellige* Jews would lead almost inevitably to him adopting *entjüdete*—but nonetheless essentially Jewish—beliefs and practices.

<sup>19</sup> That is, the social integration of Jews into German polite society, particularly via artistic salon culture. See Arndt, Andreas, 'Geselligkeit und Gesellschaft. Die Geburt der Dialektik aus dem Geist der Konversation in Schleiermachers "Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens"', in Hartwig Schulz (ed.), *Salons der Romantik: Beiträge eines Wiepersdorfer Kolloquiums zu Theorie und Geschichte des Salons* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1997), 45–61. See also Dollinger, Petra, 'Die jüdische Salontradition in Berlin: Vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg', *Mitteldeutsches Jahrbuch für Kultur und Geschichte*, 8 (2001), 75–102.

<sup>20</sup> 'Entjüden' means 'to free from Jewish manners'. See George J. Adler, *A Dictionary of German and English Language* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848), 171.

<sup>21</sup> 'Kunst trägt die Möglichkeit in sich, höchstem und letztem Sinn als Vehikel zu dienen. Echte religiöse Kunst, die mit der bloßen Tatsache des religiösen Themas wahrhaftig noch nicht gegeben ist, ist Schöpfung aus dem religiösen Urgrund, ist Gestaltung aus letzter Glaubensfülle. Kunst wird damit selbst Religion und spricht die Sprache der Religion. Ihre ästhetische Wirkung ist zugleich religiös bedeutsam'. Joachim Konrad, *Religion und Kunst: Versuch einer Analyse ihrer prinzipiellen Analogien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1929), 141.

### Fischer and Rudolf Steiner

Fischer's diary entry of 20 February 1915 records that he had become a theosophist.<sup>22</sup> His next entry, on 24 February, offers an explicit phrase of theosophist doctrine.<sup>23</sup> In 1915 Steiner—leader of the theosophy movement in the German-speaking countries—was in Berlin giving a series of nine lectures. Fischer's writings towards the end of his life are full of Steiner's peculiar ideas: his division of living things into three related 'kingdoms'; his assertions of supernatural relations between them; his belief in physiognomy; and his persistent use of crystals as metaphors for elegant organisation.

Apart from the stylistic influence of Steiner upon his writings, becoming a theosophist had two important effects on Fischer. First, it seems to have heightened his understanding of musical performance as a sacred ritual act. This belief came naturally to Fischer, because he grew up when *Kunstreligion* was a strong cultural force. Second, Steiner's architectural bent, combined with the inclination of his wife (Marie von Sievers, 1867–1948) to link music and movement in eurhythmy, reinforced the notion that architecture, movement, and music are related expressions of the same spiritual ('supersensible') forces, an idea that also appears often in Fischer's writings.

### Fischer and new German architecture

Among Steiner's followers were a group of architects from the Bauhaus including Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1924) and Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Like Busoni before him, Fischer was a political supporter of the Bauhaus.<sup>24</sup> Fischer and Kandinsky were well acquainted: as followers of Rudolf Steiner, with whom Kandinsky was very closely associated; through Fischer's support of the Bauhaus as a Trustee (*Kurator*);<sup>25</sup> and via their mutual friend Busoni. Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* takes up Steiner's language, connecting abstraction to Steiner's kingdom-based cosmology.

<sup>22</sup> '... Theosoph geworden'. Edwin Fischer diaries, entry of 20 February 1915, *Nachlass Edwin Fischer an der Zentralbibliothek Luzern*.

<sup>23</sup> '... knüpfen sich reale Vorstellungen daran, kurzum: bete alleine eine Gottheit an: T.A.T.'. T.A.T. is the Anglicised version of a theosophist mantra, the Sanskrit phrase 'Tat Tvam Asi', rendered in English as 'Thou Art That'. Edwin Fischer diaries, entry of 20 February 1915, *Nachlass Edwin Fischer an der Zentralbibliothek Luzern*.

<sup>24</sup> In 1932, when the Nazis moved to remove Mies van der Rohe from his position at the Bauhaus, Fischer signed a declaration of confidence that was presented to the Mayor of Dessau. See Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus: 1919–1933* (Köln: Taschen, 2002), 228–30.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Board of Trustees of the "Friends of the Bauhaus" are: Peter Behrens, Marc Chagall, Herbert Eulenberg, Josef Josef Hoffmann, Adolf Sommerfeld, H. P. Berlage, Hans Driesch, Edwin Fischer, Hans Poelzig, Josef Strzygowski, Adolf Busch, Albert Einstein, Gerhard Hauptmann, Arnold Schönberg, Franz Werfel. They lend to the tempest-tossed Bauhaus their considerable support'. 'Im Kuratorium der "Freunde des Bauhauses" sind: Peter Behrens, Marc Chagall, Herbert Eulenberg, Josef Hoffmann, Adolf Sommerfeld, H. P. Berlage, Hans Driesch, Edwin Fischer, Hans Poelzig, Josef Strzygowski, Adolf Busch, Albert Einstein, Gerhard Hauptmann, Arnold Schönberg, Franz Werfel. Sie verschaffen dem umstrittenen Bauhaus erhebliche Unterstützung', in Walter Gropius and Ladislaus Moholy-Nagy (eds.), *Bauhaus: Zeitschrift für Gestaltung* (Dessau, 1926).



The more one uses these abstract forms, the deeper and more confidently will he advance into the kingdom of the abstract. And after him will follow the viewer...who will also have gradually acquired a greater familiarity with the language of that kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

Although Fischer's interest in the Bauhaus is clear enough from his documented support,<sup>27</sup> there are other reasons that Fischer might have brought *neue Bauen* concepts to bear on his Bach-pianism. The frequent association of Gothic architecture with the music of J. S. Bach in German throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth<sup>28</sup> gave rise to the popular notion that Bach's music somehow conveyed, or was the product of, Gothic architectural design principles. This typical passage from the classic 1856 *History of Architecture* by Franz Kugler (1806–1858) offers an elegant summary of design concepts that others attached to Bach's music via the Bach-Gothic association. It describes the mission of German architects to...

... bring the [French] system back to basics, removing some of the obscuring elements that the French passion for decoration had covered it over with, thereby updating it by reshaping it in severe, chaste simplicity. They penetrate to its inner, life-giving substance, to the depths of its fundamental ideals, and give the organism more lifelike fluidity than French masters had been able to attain. They relay fundamentals to higher structural levels, and likewise convey the structure of the inner parts to the shape taken by the outer walls. In a stupendous triumph of the Gothic mind, they allow the implications of systematic logic to express themselves at every level, until the last hurdle is overcome: namely, the exterior pinnacles, where a denouement is reached that figures as the greatest, most stupendous achievement of the Gothic era.<sup>29</sup>

This remarkable manifesto is essentially a blueprint of fundamental precepts of *das neue Bauen* that the Bach-Gothic association brought to bear upon German Bach conceptualisation: its admiration of 'strict, chaste simplicity' and the 'life

<sup>26</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, English trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 32.

<sup>27</sup> See note 24, above.

<sup>28</sup> The trend stretches back as far as E.T.A. Hoffman and extends well into the career of Heinrich Bessler. See Heinrich Bessler, 'Bach und das Mittelalter', *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Bachtagung, Leipzig 23. bis 26. Juli 1950* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1951), 108–30 at 114–18. English translation in *The Score* 9 (1954), 31–42.

<sup>29</sup> 'Sie führen das System auf seine Grundzüge zurück, entkleiden es mancher verhüllenden Zuthat, welche die dekorative Lust der französischen Architekten darüber gebreitet hatte, gestalten es aufs Neue in strenger, keuscher Schlichtheit. Sie versenken sich in sein innerliches Lebenselement, in die Tiefe seines idealen Gehaltes und geben seinem Organismus eine flüssigere Belebung, als die französischen Meister zu erreichen vermochten; sie führen das Prinzip hiermit in der That auf eine höhere Stufe der Entwicklung, sowohl was die Gliederung der inneren Theile als was die Gestaltung des Aussenbaues betrifft; sie lassen die in dem Systeme gegebenen Konsequenzen sich fort und fort weiter entwickeln, bis die letzten Probleme erledigt sind und namentlich auch in den Gipfeltheilen des Aeusseren jene wundersame Auflösung erreicht ist, die den höchsten staunenerregenden Triumph der Gothik ausmacht'. Franz Kugler, *Geschichte der Baukunst* (Stuttgart: Ebener, 1856), 204.

giving' capacity of the ideal substrate, revealed by reducing ornamentation and systematising and integrating the whole; the fluid movement resulting from the total integration that couples interior construction and outer shape; and, overall, treating the artwork as a functional, living organism whose parts are inseparable. Fischer's diction is loaded with identical terms of organic integration: e.g. 'If a work has *grown*, as a tree grows...with its own constant character...it is good'. And this bears implications for performers, who must strive 'to understand this profound logic, to follow it in essentials' as 'the first task of the interpreter.'<sup>30</sup>

### Fischer and the Mendelssohnian Dialectic

Moses Mendelssohn's religious works codified principles for editing canonical texts with the aim of maintaining their purity as written texts while interpretively adapting them to suit local and current circumstances. He expressed these views in several publications, including his *Sefer Megillat Kohelet* (1770),<sup>31</sup> the *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* (1783)<sup>32</sup>—colloquially referred to as the *Bi'ur*—and his translation of the *Psalms* (1783).<sup>33</sup> The *Bi'ur* was an epochal publication that achieved widespread recognition even outside of Jewish circles.<sup>34</sup>

Midrash is an exegetical process on the basis of which one may understand the instructions and prohibitions of Jewish canonical texts within one's current context; it also served as the foundation for Mendelssohn's translation of sacred Jewish texts into modern German. Shifts in the immanent can block access to the transcendent: the new circumstances in which Jews found themselves in the diaspora entailed reading of sacred texts in their new local and historical contexts. In his *Dictionary of Religions* Alfred Bertholet (Fischer's mentor) offers that, '...the scientific quest for knowledge is not the driving force behind Midrash, rather instead the search for the guidance regarding making acceptable adjustments to the Law and to devotional practice. Midrash makes use of imagination and speculation...[it] is not just interpretative work in general, but stands for the concrete sense of the particular tasks that comprise such work'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Fischer, 'On Musical Interpretation', 23.

<sup>31</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Sefer Megillat Kohelet* (Berlin, 1770); reprinted in Ismar Elbogen, J. Gutmann and E. Mittwoch (eds.), *Gesammelte Schriften / Moses Mendelssohn*, vol. 14: Hebräische Schriften, I (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1972; facsimile of 1938 Breslau edition), 145–207.

<sup>32</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *ספר נתיבות השלום* (*Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom; The Book of the Paths of Peace*) (Berlin: George Friedrich Starcke, 1783).

<sup>33</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Die Psalmen, mit 12 Holzschnitten von Joseph Budko* (Berlin: Maurer, first edition, 1783). Documents show that Busoni gave Fischer a copy of this publication.

<sup>34</sup> As Eliyahu Stern notes, 'One might mistakenly assume that Mendelssohn wrote the *Bi'ur* strictly for Jews and therefore addressed strictly Jewish communal concerns. Mendelssohn's views in the *Bi'ur* vis-a-vis rabbinic authority, however, were consistent with exegetical and philosophical positions he expressed throughout his life in multiple venues and before primarily German Protestant audiences'. Eliyahu Stern, 'Genius and Demographics in Modern Jewish History', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 101/3 (2011), 347–82.

<sup>35</sup> 'Midrasch. Hebr. 'Forschung', bezeichnet diese aber meist in ihrer speziellen Bezogenheit auf die Beschäftigung mit dem Bibeltext, sei es dem gesetzl. ('halachischen M.'→Halacha) sei es dem erzählenden u. poetischen ('haggadischen M.'→Haggada). Nicht wissenschaftl. Erkenntnisstreben ist Triebfeder des M., sondern das Verlangen, die Richtlinien zu untadeligem Wandel im Gesetz und Frömmigkeit zu gewinnen. M. bedient sich der Phantasie und Spekulation, der alles möglich ist, weil auch bei Gott kein Ding unmöglich ist. M. heißt

### Editorial Transparency and Sanctity of Primary Text<sup>36</sup>

In the *Bi'ur* Moses Mendelssohn removed Haggadic interpolations, accretions that had infiltrated the main text and which the reader could not distinguish from it. Moses Mendelssohn considered the primary text's purity to be the foundation upon which all interpretation rested. His devotion to textual purity and clarity was threefold, entailing editorial transparency, removal from the text of any accretions (traditional, halachic interpolations), and rejection of anti-rationalist obscurantism and scholasticism (*pilpul*).

### Analytically Justified Interpretation

Although Mendelssohn was resolute in rejecting textual criticism as a means of adjusting the wording of the *Urtext*, in the *Sefer Megillat Kohelet*, he strongly advocated the midrashic framework known by acronym PRDS in its practice.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, this method had depended upon four manners of reading: *peshat*, the obvious, surface meaning; *remez*, the allegorical, symbolic meaning; *dershat*, the homiletic, rhetorical aspects of the text; and *sod*, the esoteric, mystical meaning, primarily as revealed to religious authorities. However, Mendelssohn rejected received revelation as idolatrous and dogmatic (primarily transmitted by *remez*- and *sod*-based commentaries). Instead, he placed emphasis on *peshat* (which focuses the reader's attention upon the primary sense of the text as a whole) and *derash* (insights springing from analysis of style, rhetorical devices, structures, and word choices). Mendelssohn bound them together: knowledge of the one is used to interrogate the other; in rare cases of irreconcilable conflict, *peshat* takes precedence. In other words, interpretation must be grounded in exoteric, hermeneutic/philological analysis of the sacred texts; the interpretative layer must never obscure or obfuscate the text's underlying sense. I style Moses Mendelssohn's apposition of these two antagonistic-complementary processes *the Mendelssohnian Dialectic*.

### Midrash as means of maintaining currency and relevance; its role in guiding translations

On the basis of this dialectic Moses Mendelssohn defended the Midrash as a means of codifying and interpreting the Masoretic texts so that they might continue to serve as a fount of revealed meaning in the context of Jewish life in Germany. This guided both the new commentaries of the *Bi'ur* and Mendelssohn's exemplary translations of the Pentateuch into refined, subtle

aber nicht nur im allgemeine solche Auslegungsarbeit, sondern bezeichnet im konkreten Sinne die Werke, die solcher Arbeit gewidmet sind: Jubiläen, Mechilta, Siphra, Siphre, Rabboth, Pesikta, Tanchuma, Jalkut'. Alfred Bertholet, *Wörterbuch der Religionen* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1952), 311.

<sup>36</sup> My overview of Moses Mendelssohn's exegetical and editorial practice is based on Edward Breuer's magisterial study, 'Jewish Study of the Bible Before and During the Jewish Enlightenment', in Magne Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: the History of its Interpretation, II (From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 1006-21, esp. 1012-17.

<sup>37</sup> See Wilhelm Bacher's watershed article 'Das Merkwort PRDS in der jüdischen Bibelexegese', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 13 (1893), 294-305.

*Hochdeutsch*. Translating inevitably entails interpretation, which opens the door to potential editorial tampering; Mendelssohn was revolutionary for advocating translation, which he believed would maintain the relevance of Jewish sacred Law and facilitate its deep understanding by a wide swath of the German-Jewish population. Situating translation within the *peshat-derash* dialectic eliminated the possibility that translating Hebrew texts would lead to editors' tampering with their contexts.

Adapting canonical texts to current circumstances through editing and interpretation also lies at the heart of Felix Mendelssohn and Edwin Fischer's basic precepts of Bach-pianism. Both of their approaches obey the structure, organisation, and tenets just outlined. Given the continual reprinting of his grandfather's books on Jewish religious practice, Felix Mendelssohn is likely to have applied their ideas and techniques to problems raised by Bach performance of his day, and this might help explain his significant role in forming the historical alliance of nineteenth-century Bach performance with *Kunstreligion*.<sup>38</sup>

Felix Mendelssohn's edition of Bach's organ music altered neither jot nor tittle of the text as represented in the autograph (which, in the case of the 44 *Short Preludes*, he owned). When invited by his publishers to add expression markings and other interpretive suggestions to Bach's text he declined, and stated that he chose to 'deviate as little from Bach's original writing' as possible.<sup>39</sup>

His preface to this edition does, however, invite the performer to exercise 'taste and fancy'. As a guide, he suggests colourful and imaginative registration,<sup>40</sup> a practice he followed in his public performances of Bach's organ music. Writing to his sister Fanny about his manner of interpreting Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy*, Mendelssohn reported permitting himself 'freedom to render the arpeggios with all sorts of crescendos and pianos and fortes, with pedal of course, and with the bass notes doubled' (at the lower octave), and to provide similar adaptations of the introductory flourishes leading into *arpeggiando* sections, as well as some melodic passages.<sup>41</sup> 'Specifically, I allow myself freedom to render the arpeggios with all sorts of crescendos, pianos, and fortissimos, with pedal of course, and with the bass notes doubled [at the octave], as well as to emphasise the little connecting notes that lead into *arpeggiando* passages ... as a result, the distinctive harmonic progressions make a good effect on the latest, hefty pianos'.

<sup>38</sup> On this subject, see Eva-Maria von Adam-Schmidmeier, 'Priester des Publikums: Felix Mendelssohn im Kontext einer neuen "Kunstreligion"', *Musik und Unterricht*, 17/85 (2006), 28–39. See also Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, 'Choralidiom und Kunstreligion: Fanny Hensels Bach', in Beatrix Borchard and Monika Schwarz-Danuser (eds.), *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Komponieren zwischen Gesellschaftsideal und romantischer Musikästhetik* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), 216–22.

<sup>39</sup> Russell Stinson, *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

<sup>40</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, preface to *John Sebastian Bach's Organ Compositions on Corales (Psalm Tunes)* (London: Coventry & Hollier, 1845).

<sup>41</sup> 'Ich erlaube mir nämlich die Freiheit, [die Arpeggien] mit allen möglichen crescendos und pianos und ff's zu machen, Pedal versteht sich, und dazu die Bassnoten zu verdoppeln, ferner die kleinen durchgehenden Noten...zu Anfang des Arpeggios zu markieren...und dann thun die einzigen Harmoniefolgen auf den dicken neueren Flügeln wohl'. Felix Mendelssohn to Fanny Hensel, letter of 14 November 1840 (*BDok* VI, E9).

The relationship between Felix Mendelssohn's discrete editorial and performance approaches to Bach's keyboard works was dialectical: Mendelssohn kept such additions and adaptations within bounds by choosing an approach that plays up the essential features of the genre of the movement or section he is performing. He advocates doubling at the lower octave and improvising freely only in the context of free musical idioms—e.g. *arpeggiando* sections and cadenzas—not in strict ones.

The process of adapting Bach's works from performance on baroque instruments to performance on later instruments is akin to literary translations. Mendelssohn's pianistic 'translations' reflect his understanding of newer instruments in the context of their predecessors (i.e., 'adapting to our current, hefty pianos'), just as his grandfather's German translations necessitated keeping the original Hebrew texts clearly in view. Moses Mendelssohn justified the radical act of translating Hebrew into modern German by arguing that it kept the text before the public, an argument that Felix Mendelssohn also made regarding adapting Bach's keyboard works to the instruments at hand.

The confluence of various sources of Jewish critical thought in Edwin Fischer's immediate circles is remarkable. Fischer's first mentor, Alfred Bertholet, was a scholar of the Masoretic texts and the author of a highly regarded Jewish cultural history. Fischer's first Berlin mentor, Franz von Mendelssohn, was a direct descendant of one of the greatest scholars of the Masoretic texts and a significant figure in Jewish cultural history in his own right. In the decades just before Hitler's ascent to power the *Jüdische Wissenschaft* movement was at its peak; it was an especially rich period of publication on *Midrash*. Berlin during Fischer's lifetime was also the home of the influential *Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1872–1942). If Felix Mendelssohn applied his grandfather's critical apparatus to musical editing and performance, then it is also possible that Fischer—another member of the family—might have operated under the terms of the Mendelssohn Dialectic.

In his 1929 essay 'On Musical Interpretation', Fischer touched on the principal concerns of Moses Mendelssohn's religious publications, rehearsing both sides of the Mendelssohnian Dialectic. First, Fischer articulates the exegetical justification.

Whilst an earlier period allowed the interpreter much freedom—left ornaments, cadenzas, and the general performance to his taste—the moderns are very exact in their notation... That is not to say that older music is simply to be played without interpretation... an interpretation which is based on purely stylistic and historical considerations and seeks to exclude the emotional element in the rendering of music of the pre-Bach period, is not correct. Music has always been a language of the heart, and subjectivity is modern only in so far as, today, players speak in their own name, whilst formerly, they were the servants of their period and as such anonymous.<sup>42</sup>

Turning to the textual fidelity/editorial transparency plank of the dialectic, Fischer laments editorial interference as having corrupted transmission:

<sup>42</sup> Fischer, 'On Musical Interpretation', 16.

If only the original conception of the composer had been handed on to us unadulterated—but then came the editors and competed with editions. A Beethoven, a Bach were strewn over with phrase marks, stops, fortes and pianos [i.e., interpolations are unjustifiable], and one might still allow these some validity if it were possible to recognize what comes from Beethoven and what from Mr. X [i.e., editorial additions must be transparent]. In recent times, much has been set to rights again, and the efforts of Breitkopf, Peters, Steingraber, and others to reconstruct the original text, cannot be welcomed enough [i.e., the sanctity and purity of the written text must be maintained].<sup>43</sup>

Like the Hebrew texts in Moses Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* and Bach's organ scores in Felix Mendelssohn's edition, Fischer offers Bach-*Urtexten* accompanied by editorially transparent interpretive commentaries. Fischer kept them typographically separate from the Bach score or identified his slight interpolations explicitly in his prefaces. In the following preface to a *WTC* edition that he had been slated to publish as part of the *T-A* Fischer reflects all the particulars of the Mendelssohnian Dialectic again, this time including a reference to the pedagogical aspect of interpretive training—a foundational element of Moses Mendelssohn's concept of Midrash as an individual practice that one learns by studying exemplars of high quality.

Various manuscripts exist of J. S. Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier'. The Staatsbibliothek in Berlin owns one of them [i.e. a Bach edition should be based upon an *Urtext*]. None of them bears tempo indications or expressive markings of any kind. The symbols for forte, piano, staccato, legato and the tempo markings are additions by the editor representing his personal taste [i.e. editorial additions must be transparent]. With as much justification, anyone can often read into Bach's notes alternative moods, tempi, and phrasings [i.e. exegesis is subjective]. And this kind of independent thinking, the interpretive task, cannot be recommended enough. With the passage of time, it develops into a true stylistic sense [i.e. one develops a capacity for Midrash with practice]. For this reason, it fell to me, as editor, to falsify Bach's original text as little as possible [this is a close translation of Felix Mendelssohn's wish to 'deviate as little from Bach's original writing as possible']. The advanced player will riddle out Bach's meaning for himself. For the instruction of beginning students, I have put my experiences and interpretive suggestions beneath the musical text [i.e. the editor should provide an interpretive exemplar for pedagogical purposes].<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> 'Von Johann Sebastian Bachs "Wohltemperiertem Klavier" existieren verschiedene Handschriften. Einige davon besitzt die Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; sie alle haben keinerlei Tempo- noch Vortragsbezeichnungen. Die in den heutigen Druck befindlichen forte-, piano-, staccato-, legato-Zeichen und Tempo-Vorschriften sind Zutat der Herausgeber und stellen deren persönliche Auffassung dar. Es können oft mit demselben Recht andere Charaktere, Tempi, Phrasierungen aus den Noten Bachs herausgelesen werden. Und diese selbständige Arbeit des Interpretierens kann nicht genug empfohlen werden. Mit der Zeit entwickelt sich dadurch ein echtes Stilgefühl. Mir lag als Herausgeber aus diesem Grunde daran, das Bachsche Original möglichst unverfälscht zu reproduzieren. Der Fortgeschrittene wird selbst den Bachschen Sinn erraten. Für die das Studium Beginnenden habe ich meine Erfahrungen in Interpretationsvorschlägen und Anmerkungen niedergelegt'. Edwin Fischer, 'Entwurf eines

This makes his commitment to added nuances clear, and suggests that he was prescient for having identified (at a very early date) a potential danger of the historical performance practice movement that was emerging around him: i.e. the perceived danger that performers might mechanically re-enact old conventions in a later, altered context. Returning to the problem in 1939, when the New Objectivity (*neue Sachlichkeit*) fashion was in full swing, Fischer entreated his Potsdam students to dismiss routine reproduction of formulas in favour of maintaining fidelity to higher-order creative effects, which entailed adjustment to the context at hand.

Be personal, be subjective, recognise your own nature, your own rhythm, to fill and fulfil yourselves. In a performance that is merely objective, the work of art fails to speak to human beings; you will fail to awaken any latent capacities in yourselves or in others with such objective performances. Objectivity is pure nonsense; that which has not passed through one's sensory and perceptive capacities cannot exist; it *is* not! [Both emphases are original.] The same holds for any so-called objective performance, which is actually subjective. One employs the term 'objective', as well, to signify fidelity to the musical work. Now, that is truly a beautiful expression. But this should not be understood as fidelity to superficial markings, as fidelity to the printed page, rather as fidelity to the effects that they elicit. Has anyone alive heard Beethoven play, so as to justify pronouncing, 'This way, and only this way, is correct?' When Brahms was asked for metronome markings for his works, he declined, saying, 'Do you believe that I am such a nincompoop as to play the same way every day?' Beheld through the mists of time, the objective and the subjective become indistinguishable.<sup>45</sup>

Fischer bridges *Urtext* and Midrash in a manner that echoes Moses Mendelssohn's use of hermeneutics and philology to stabilise interpretation; it also resonates with Felix Mendelssohn's linkage of performance liberties to their most appropriate and characteristic genres. Fischer clearly derived his interpretive ideas analytically: they correspond closely to the underlying text, elucidating and amplifying its compositional features via the principles that Ernst Kurth laid out in his *Grundlagen*.

Vorwortes für die *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* des "Wohltemperierten Klaviers" [circa 1929]', reproduced in *Dank an Edwin Fischer*, 104–110, esp. 105.

<sup>45</sup> 'Also seid persönlich, seid subjektiv, erkennt Eure eigene Natur, Euren Rhythmus, erföhlt und erfüllt Euch selbst. In einer nur objektiven Darstellung spricht das Kunstwerk nicht zu den Menschen, und Ihr weckt mit einer solchen keine auch in anderen schlummernden Talente. Eigentlich ist Objektivität ein Nonsens, denn was nicht durch meine Sinne, durch meinen Geist gegangen ist, existiert nicht, *ist* [emphasis original] nicht! Also ist auch eine sogenannte objektive Darstellung im Grunde eine subjektive. Objektiv nennt man auch werktreu, und dies ist eigentlich ein schönes Wort. Es darf aber nicht verstanden werden als treu den äußeren Zeichen, der Druckerschwärze treu, sondern treu den darüber wirkenden Kräften. Hat jemand von unseren Zeitgenossen Beethoven spielen gehört, um zu sagen, nur so ist es richtig? Als von Brahms Metronomzahlen für seine Werke verlangt wurden, hat er erwidert: "Glaubt Ihr, ich sei ein solcher Trottel, daß ich jeden Tag gleich spiele?" Objektiv ist subjektiv, gesehen aus der Entfernung der Zeit'. Ursula Wildgrube, 'Auszüge aus einem Stenogramm des Meisterkursus Potsdam 1936', in Haid (ed.), *Dank an Edwin Fischer*, 60–61.

## Analysis of principles embedded in Fischer's editions and WTC recording

### Prefaces to Fischer's *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* Bach-editions

Almost immediately after Busoni's death Fischer began editing Bach's clavier works for the media giant Ullstein Verlag, under the *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* imprint, general editor.<sup>46</sup> Of all of Fischer's *T-A* editions, those published in the period 1924–26<sup>47</sup> resemble Busoni's 1916 edition most strongly. Given this similarity and Fischer's general penchant for paraphrasing Busoni's prose, it is likely that Fischer worked directly from Busoni's editions, adapting it to conform with his performance principles and his aesthetics of notation and typography. However, Fischer has streamlined the dynamic profiles and reduced the complexity of articulations shown in Busoni's edition substantially. Fischer retains most of Busoni's fingerings, but replaces his phrasing slurs with his *Atemzeichen* (*Interpunktionszeichen zum Atmen*, or *Atemzugzeichen*), which are vertical dashes representing the breath-like manner of phrasing, the precise execution of which is left to the performer. Fischer's use of these marks in place of phrasing slurs may reflect Heinrich Schenker's campaign against the *Phrasierungsbogen*.<sup>48</sup>

Comments in the prefaces Fischer wrote for his *T-A* editions, together with his comments on editing in his essays, provide a useful overview Fischer's movement away from Busoni's principles.

- Bach's original scores do not include nuances regarding tempo, articulation, detailed dynamics, and the like.
- Fischer strives to maintain the original appearance of Bach's notation and to avoid making many editorial markings.
- Fischer generally recommends that players take a straightforward approach to tone-production and interpretation, taking special care with phrasing.
- By no means is this meant to exclude imaginative, expressive, or lifelike performance.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> U-V published scores under the *T-A* imprint from 1923 (also the year of the earliest identified surviving volumes) to 1933 (when the Nazis dissolved Ullstein Verlag).

<sup>47</sup> A catalogue showing the full extent of the Fischer-Bach editions as planned appears in the far-left ruled column on the rear paper-wrapper of *T-A* 287 (i.e., Fischer's edition of the English Suite in A Major). The numbering system is not chronological. A key appears between the four ruled columns of the catalogue, just above the publisher's colophon at the bottom of the page: 'Die mit Nr. bezeichneten Werke sind erschienen (Dezember, 1926), die übrigen folgen in kurzen Zwischenräumen'. This provides a *terminus ante quem* for publication of Fischer's U-V editions of the *Zwölf kleine Präludien und Fugen und Sechs kleine Präludien* [contents and ordering as in BGA 36/4] (*T-A* 1), the *Zweistimmige Inventionen* (*T-A* 3), the *Dreistimmige Inventionen* (*T-A* 4), the *Französische Suiten* (*T-A* 281–86) and the *Englische Suiten* (*T-A* 287–92).

<sup>48</sup> Schenker published a manifesto against the *Phrasierungsbogen* in 1925, i.e. just after the first of Fischer's U-V editions appeared. See Heinrich Schenker, 'Weg mit dem Phrasierungsbogen', *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, 1 (Munich, Vienna and Berlin: Drei Masken, 1925), 41–59.

<sup>49</sup> '... sie tragen weder Tempo- noch irgend welche Vortragsvorschriften von [Bach] selbst: also keine Fortes, keine Pianos, keine Phrasierungen. Der Herausgeber hat sich bemüht, das Bachsche Notenbild nach Möglichkeit zu erhalten, und an Stelle vieler Bezeichnungen empfiehlt er dem Spieler: Gesundheit, Klarheit und Einfachheit in Ton und Vortrag, sorgfältig



- Fingering is a matter for the individual to decide upon; however, it should be conceived such that it more or less compels the desired musical outcome.<sup>50</sup>

### Principles expressed in the 'Draft preface to an edition of the WTC'

Fischer's 'Draft (*Entwurf*) for a Preface of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*'<sup>51</sup> is undated, but was most likely prepared between 1927 and 1928. Its length (more than 500 words) makes it by far the longest of his prefaces, and its emphasis on details of interpretive procedures sets it apart from his other editorial prefaces. As in the prefaces to his other Bach editions, Fischer's *Entwurf* is written in characteristically economical prose, typical of the straightforward diction and aesthetic of economy surrounding him in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s.

Let clarity be the foremost principle. It is attained by attention to voice-leading and the structure of the composition, as well as by absolute precision in attack and release, by the most sparing use of the pedal, and finally by sustaining long notes for their full value. Such pedal points have to be struck strongly, so that the piano will sustain them sufficiently. One must balance the dynamics of the various voices well with one another.

In Bach's fugues, the intensifications—i.e. the internal [structural] dynamics [*das innere Geschehen*—make themselves evident by an accumulation of [fugal] entries and engagement of all the available voices. Thereby the form reveals itself. The longer one knows Bach the less one depends on external means such as dynamic extremes. Clear, simple phrasing; a nice, moderate tempo; and logical thinking are for the most part all that is needed.<sup>52</sup>

Phrasierung; dieses schließt Phantasie, Empfindung und Leben nicht aus'. Edwin Fischer, preface to *Englische Suite in A-Dur / J. S. Bach* (T-A 287; Berlin: Ullstein, 1926).

<sup>50</sup> '... Die Fingersätze sind natürlich individuell und manche ungewohnten sind durch den beabsichtigten musikalischen Ausdruck zu klären'. Edwin Fischer, preface to Bach's *Klavier-Konzert d-moll* (T-A 12; Berlin: Ullstein, 1932). '... Die Fingersätze sind nicht immer nur auf Bequemlichkeit bedacht, sondern sie sollen zu guter Phrasierung und musikalischem Ausdruck zwingen'. Edwin Fischer, preface to Bach's *Klavier-Konzert A-dur* (T-A 11; Berlin: Ullstein, 1930). Regarding the dating of this edition, an updated catalogue of printed T-A editions appears on the inside rear paper-wrapper of this volume (see note 47, above). The key at the bottom of the page now reads: 'Die mit Nr. bezeichneten Werke sind erschienen (Herbst, 1930), die übrigen folgen in kurzen Zwischenräumen'. This provides a *terminus ante quem* for publication of Fischer's edition of the *Klavier-Konzert A-dur* (T-A 11). Distribution delays may account for discrepant reports of publication dates provided by other sources. By the time that Fischer's edition of the Keyboard Concerto in D Minor (BWV 974) appeared in 1932, the Ullstein editorial staff had conspicuously altered the key so that it no longer referred to forthcoming publications. By that time Artur Schnabel—general editor of the T-A—had left Berlin permanently.

<sup>51</sup> Edwin Fischer, 'Draft Preface to the *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* Edition of [J.S. Bach] *The Well-Tempered Clavier*' [unpublished]; reproduced in *Dank an Edwin Fischer*, 105–6. Hugo Haid, the editor of *Dank an Edwin Fischer*, styled this a 'draft' (*Entwurf*) although it is obviously a polished document. This suggests that he knew that it never stood at the head of a published edition, which helps to confirm that Fischer's edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for the T-A either never made it into print or was never submitted to Ullstein Verlag.

<sup>52</sup> 'Das erste Gesetz sei Klarheit. Diese wird erreicht durch Kenntnis des Stimmenverlaufs und des Aufbaus der Komposition, ferner durch die gleiche Präzision beim Wegnehmen der Finger

Read analytically, and in tandem with Fischer's prefaces to his *T-A* Bach-editions, the *Entwurf* provides a foundation for assessing the core values of Fischer's Bach-pianism around the end of the Weimar-Republic era.

### Generic differentiation in Fischer's *WTC* recording

Bach scholar and record critic Alec Robertson<sup>53</sup> reviewed the first half of Fischer's H.M.V. recording in 1934 for *The Gramophone*. Robertson notes that, 'Fischer's greatness as an artist consists...in his power to see each work as a whole, and so to present it thought out from first note to last with all its parts resolved into unity.'<sup>54</sup> He amplified that sentiment in his 1937 *Gramophone* review of the whole set: 'following the Busoni edition on many points, Fischer retains a refreshing independence of view: and his power of seizing the inner spirit of each work results in showing us how wide is the range of Bach's thought.'<sup>55</sup> Here, Robertson makes the connection between Fischer's recording and the Busoni edition explicit. In both reviews, Robertson implies that the signal feature of Fischer's recording is the strong *intra*-movement differentiation that he achieves by enhancing *inter*-movement integration, a concept I take to be of significance in the history of Bach-pianism.

Fischer achieves such differentiation by crafting articulations for various genres: preludes, as opposed to fugues; and preludes as judged relative to one another on a scale of melodic linearity. The preludes in C Major, C Minor, C-sharp Major, D Minor, E Minor, F Major, and B Major, for example, are primarily vertically oriented, repeatedly outlining decorated arpeggio figures over various harmonies in a consistent harmonic rhythm. The preludes in C-sharp Minor, F Minor, F-sharp Minor, G Major, G Minor, G-sharp Minor, A-flat Major, A Minor, and B-flat Major and B-flat Minor form a group that is somewhat more linear than the arpeggio-pattern preludes. The remaining preludes comprise a *vade mecum* of compositional models that feature fully wrought themes of longer scope. For the most vertically oriented, *arpeggiando* preludes Fischer's

von den Tasten wie beim Anschlagen, durch sparsamsten Pedalgebrauch und endlich durch gutes Aushalten der langen Werte. Solche liegenden Stimmen müssen auf dem Klavier stark angeschlagen werden, damit sie weiterklingen. Die Klangstärke der verschiedenen Stimmen muß gut gegeneinander abgewogen sein.

In den Bachschen Fugen zeigen sich die Steigerungen, das innere Geschehen, durch Häufung der Themeneintritte, Beschäftigung aller verfügbaren Stimmen an. Daraus ergibt sich die Gestaltung von selbst, und je länger man Bach kennt, um so weniger legt man Wert auf äußere Mittel, wie pianissimo und fortissimo; eine klare, einfache Phrasierung, ein schönes Mittelmaß im Tempo und ein klarer Kopf genügen meist'. Edwin Fischer, 'Draft Preface to the *Tonmeister-Ausgabe* Edition of [J.S. Bach] *The Well-Tempered Clavier*' [unpublished]; reproduced in *Dank an Edwin Fischer*, 105–6.

<sup>53</sup> Besides being associated with Gramophone, Robertson was an H.M.V. employee from the firm's earliest years. In the 1950s, he produced several recordings alongside Walter Legge (the producer of Fischer's *WTC* recording) for EMI, including Fischer's May, 1954 recording of Mozart and Beethoven piano concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

<sup>54</sup> Alec Robertson [A.R.], recording review of *WTC I* (H.M.V./Bach Society), Edwin Fischer (piano), in *The Gramophone* 11/139 (December, 1934), 263–4.

<sup>55</sup> Alec Robertson [A.R.], review of *WTC II* (H.M.V./Bach Society), Edwin Fischer (piano), in *The Gramophone* 14/165 (February, 1937), 379.

articulations are generally *detaché*. At the other end of the spectrum, in the '*vademecum* preludes' (which employ the longest lines of the three types), Fischer deploys unbroken legato for long stretches.

In fugal expositions Fischer voices the subject more loudly than the counterparts; indeed, Fischer consistently gives subject entries dynamic emphasis across the board, as Busoni does. In *stretti* Fischer plays each subject entry louder than the previous one, creating large, overall crescendi. The equation '*stretto* = dynamic intensification' is clear throughout Fischer's *WTC* recording.

Fischer plays fugal episodes at a lower overall dynamic than that of fugal expositions, corresponding to the absence of the fugal subject in its full form. Fischer and Busoni differ with respect to scope and duration of dynamic gestures in episodes. Busoni generally provides each sequential leg with a dynamic profile, which he replicates for each leg. Fischer, on the other hand, treats sequences as unities, usually applying a long crescendo to sequences that rise and a long decrescendo to those that fall. Although both of these approaches couple dynamics to a musical-structural element, Fischer's approach creates longer, less detailed gestures. As a result, Fischer's interpretations characteristically read as more streamlined than Busoni's.

### **Principles of Fischer's approach to editing and performing Bach**

Three practices are fundamental to Fischer's Bach editing and performance style: 1) he reduced the total number of superficial 'ornamental' details in expressive nuances, generalising and consequently streamlining them; 2) he adopted an editorial stance reflecting the techniques of criticism to which his Jewish network had exposed him, i.e. the Mendelssohnian Dialectic balancing textual purity with creative interpretation and translation; and 3) he used principles that Ernst Kurth espoused in *Grundlagen* to solve the problem of integrating the modern piano's expressive resources with Bach's music. Consistent with the work of Kurth and Schenker, Kandinsky and Gropius, Fischer's simplification and streamlining rendered his Bach-pianism elegant without compromising his fundamental commitment to contours and contrasts. Fischer's emendations to Busoni's dynamics in effect streamline the profile of Busoni's dynamics, in accord with the tendency of Weimar-era artists in all media to remove decoration at the surface level.

With Busoni's approach as a starting point, Fischer systematised editorial nuances (i.e. editorial dynamics, articulations, and the like) bringing them in line with concepts which Busoni developed late in his life, and with German architectural and design aesthetics of the 1920s and 30s. Fischer softened Busoni's dynamics by reducing their number and range. Thereby, he smoothed the relatively jagged dynamic profiles of musical lines in Busoni's editions of Bach prior to *WTC* II. From Fischer's written comments in his *T-A* prefaces and in his *Entwurf*, one can deduce the following guiding general principles of Bach-pianism.

- (1) *Clarity*: as 'the foremost principle'; this is achieved by enacting the remaining principles within a rational, rule-based epistemology of performance.<sup>56</sup>
- (2) *Interchange between the voices*: observing imitative relationships between the voices supports rendering the imitative counterpoint vivid and lucid via (7), below.
- (3) *Attention to compositional structure*: analytical understanding of the inner dynamics of the score is essential to structuring an integrated expressive amplification.
- (4) *Mastery of execution*: technical virtuosity – which is a function of precision, consistency and control – is subservient to amplifying the inner dynamics of the score.
- (5) *Sostenuto pedal*: to be used sparingly.
- (6) *Functionality of tied notes and 'liegende Töne'* (i.e. suspensions and pedal points): the tendency of the tones of the piano to decay undermines the harmonic function of tied notes in suspensions and pedal points, which provide a reference tone against which surrounding voices move in and out consonance; accentuating them in proportion to their length (which implies generally that longer pedal points will receive the strongest accentuation, briefer suspensions the least) mitigates this negative effect.
- (7) *Careful balancing of individual voices*: understood in the context of Fischer's editions, this implies that one determines a degree of dynamic emphasis by judging thematic/motivic importance hierarchically, i.e. the more central and cogent the theme or motive, the more it should predominate dynamically, either through a higher general dynamic, or by the periodic use of attention-gaining dynamic effects.
- (8) *'Exterior' expressivity should amplify 'Inner' structural lineaments*; expressive nuances in fugues should descend from 'the inner progressions of the piece' in such a way that 'the form reveals itself', i.e. sculpting expressive nuances to particular structural dynamics renders expositions, strettos, and episodes distinctive; 'intensifications' are composed into fugues, therefore only amplification of these intensifications is required; this implies that the addition of an independent layer of interpretive additions, typical of some earlier Bach pianists, is akin to patina, hence 'external' (i.e. at best superfluous, at worst occlusive).
- (9) *The Mendelssohnian Dialectic*: the editor should offer the reader an unadulterated view of the original score; on this basis, the performer should be free to pursue an imaginative, expressive, and lifelike performance style within the above confines of systematisation and integration. Fingering should be linked to expressive aims; although the editor may provide examples of fingering, this is ultimately an individual matter. Inflections applied by the performer applied must enhance structural lucidity; these consist of clear and simple phrasing (as opposed to detailed articulations), moderate tempo (as opposed to the tempo extremes more appropriate to

<sup>56</sup> In Busoni's two prefaces and in Fischer's 'Draft Preface', some terms appear with great frequency. In Busoni's case, Book Two shows a pronounced increase in use of the terms *Struktur*, *Form*, and *Symbolik*. Clarity (Ger., *Klarheit*) is an important touchstone for Fischer, mentioned in virtually every one of his speeches on pianism and in the prefaces to his editions. Alongside function (Ger., *Funktionalität*)—used almost obsessively by the artists of the Bauhaus to describe their design perspective.

WTC preludes), and rational structuring of linkages between nuances and the inner workings of the piece (a 'clear head').

(10) *Inter-movement integration in tension with intra-movement diversity*: individual pieces must be strongly integrated in all dimensions; at the same time, distinctiveness and contrast between pieces should be maximised.

If Fischer's synthesis now seems uncontroversial, and even banal, it is perhaps because Busoni and Fischer have become victims of their own success. They solved some essential problems of performing baroque music in a period that was, at least in stylistic terms, fundamentally at odds with elaborate contours of baroque music and they did so in a manner so convincing that—like so many of the Weimar Republic's other artistic innovations—it has come to be nearly ubiquitous.