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Reviewed by Karen Painter

Frisch Contra Modernism

Long admired for judicious analysis steeped in history, from Schoenbergian Brahms to Brahmsian Schoenberg, Walter Frisch, in German Modernism: Music and the Arts, topples a historiography in place for at least sixty years. Chapters on "Ambivalent Modernism" (Parsifal) and "Regressive Modernism" (Pfitzner's Palestrina) serve as bookends. Reger receives twenty-three pages, Schoenberg four-and those four on the works in a performance that set Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc aglow. The book traverses a half-century of early modernism, as Frisch occasionally specifies, from 1870 to 1920. If the book's title overreaches, laying claim to the entire sweep of German modernism, one need only recall that at the time, the music of Wagner and Strauss, Mahler and Schreker, sparked debates over "modern" music, whereas Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg fell by the wayside, receiving scant notice in the annals of history and more scorn than recognition from critics. All this would change, but only after World War I, when musical life became politicized and polarized, each camp with its own advocates. Frisch has a different story, and one worth telling.

Periodization commands less attention in musicology than in history, except from Carl Dahlhaus, Frisch's exemplar. While historians dispute the events that most decisively changed the course of human life, periodization in music remains tied to style categories that have fallen into disrepute. Even without agreeing on a definition of modernism, we can recognize that more than nomenclature is at stake. Joseph Auner, quoted on the back cover, considers Frisch's subject to be the *transition* between romanticism and modernism. Many textbooks rely on this periodization. But if late romanticism extends to Strauss and Mahler, and modernism begins with atonality, then numerous innovations will be overlooked. Some of the compositions Frisch illuminates are absent from the standard music histories, still others subsumed into anachronistic style periods. He can be forgiven, therefore, if the canonic modernist composers from 1910 to 1960 appear, if at all, in a ritual listing of names. And however audacious the revisionism, Frisch is hardly alone.¹

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As is inevitable with any impassioned study covering a broad swath of history, there are blind spots, even on Frisch's terms. (Strauss's symphonic poems, which blazed the path of modernism in the eyes of contemporaries, are barely mentioned.) Yet far from a traditional survey, the book is de facto a study of influence—that of Bach, but especially of Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*. Here, too, Frisch is in good company. The leading book on contemporary German music before World War I, by Walter Niemann, was entitled *Die Musik seit Richard Wagner* (1913). Frisch is interested in composers "revisiting and drawing materials from the past," and his intimation that historical influence was the chief trait of modernism (253) must be taken seriously.

The importance of Frisch's book lies as much in its method as in its content, which is mainly given over to case studies. *German Modernism* evinces a commitment to sensible and sober analysis that is all too rare among interdisciplinary texts. Musicology becomes the most catholic of disciplines in Frisch's hands, faithful to the duties of analyst and aesthetician, yet calling upon other disciplines in good measure, especially the visual arts and literature, but also political and social history.

Frisch proceeds thematically, not chronologically, yet the historical logic is unassailable. After untangling the subject of Nietzsche and Wagner (chapter 1), Frisch turns to Naturalism, bearing down on works from 1903 to 1908 (chapter 2), then, in a tour de force, delves into music's influence on the visual arts (chapter 3). Taking a few steps back, Frisch then pursues a more conservative path, from Bach's influence, 1895–1910 (chapter 4), to irony in Thomas Mann and Mahler, 1901–06 (chapter 5), to conservative and "regressive" modernism in Strauss and Pfitzner, 1910–15 (chapter 6). The cancroid structure is emblematic of the undertaking, at once survey and tome, circling around the issues vital to our discipline.

Chapter 1 provides an excellent introduction to German modernism via Nietzsche, surpassing any other known to this author. Chapter 2, "German Naturalism," exemplifies the book's *modi operandi*. Frisch examines Wagnerian naturalism in its many diverse strands, eshewing any simple teleology. Wagner remains progenitor, but a literary figure, Arno Holz, instead supplies the context for experiments in naturalism. A Berlin realist of searing poignancy, Holz coined several phrases for realist technique, and Frisch's discussion of his writings has ramifications well beyond the operas discussed in this chapter. The choice of musical examples here is quirky, but nonetheless persuasive. Following several introductory sections, including a superb account of declamatory naturalism, "German Verismo" (section 4) is devoted to the Swiss Hans Merian's response to Italian *verismo*. Eugen d'Albert's *Tiefland* also receives ample treatment, but Frisch disassociates the work from German naturalism (section 5). Max von Schillings's *Mona Lisa* instantiates *verismo*, but only by way of its plot; its musical kinship is to Wagner and Strauss (section 6). The chapter culminates in a thoughtful discussion of Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* (section 7) and Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* (section 8); none of the three, Frisch concedes, was historically associated with naturalism, but each is nonetheless "a better reflection of the naturalist agenda" than *Tiefland* or *Mona Lisa* (76). If history and interpretation clash swords, the endeavor only becomes more genuine as a result, exposing the limits of interdisciplinary scholarship. Cultural context can *inform* interpretation—and Frisch exercises utmost prudence in this regard—but should not *determine* the analytic course or hermeneutic practice. The result, at best, is a subjective process, forsaking rigor but remaining true to the insights and intuitions of the analyst and listener.

Chapter 3, "Convergences," examines an extension of the Wagnerian legacy in which music transcends the rules of its craft. The term "convergence" is borrowed from Adorno, but without the philosophical baggage. For Adorno, the arts converge when their aesthetic conditions resemble one another without any material influence (coloristic timbre or rhythmic brushstrokes) or thematic influence (visual representations of listening). Nor can the convergence be intentional. Impugning Wagner's ambition to unify the arts, Adorno cites Kandinsky and Schoenberg's mutual discovery of parallels in their respective paths to abstraction, though he remains leery of the metaphors each forged from the other's art. An art form must be true to its "immanent principle" is Adorno's dictum. Frisch, untroubled by the ambiguity in Adorno's thinking, declares that Austrian and German artists "strove towards convergence" in the period 1885 to 1915 (91). The ideal of convergence of the arts can be traced to 1800 or earlier; its early utopian strain, which Frisch lays bare, provides a useful genealogy for Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk and deserves more scrutiny in the period of high modernism.² This chapter will enlighten art historians and musicologists alike, never mind that its tenacious study of music's influence on the visual arts inverts the book's charge of understanding music in the context of the other arts.3 The rich detail and purview allow the chapter to stand firm, largely independent of an otherwise solidly musicological study. Copious analyses of Klinger and Kandinsky on either end enclose a far-ranging discussion of symbolism, Jugendstil, and much else. The perspicacious reading of Klinger's Brahms Fantasy supports Frisch's credo that modernism drew from tradition more than scholars have acknowledged. Among the chapter's gems is a discussion of Kandinsky's visual sketch of a four-movement symphony, which, oddly, is more precise than his Impressions of a concert from the same year, 1911.

In an about-face, chapter 4, on Bach, is musical through and through. Is there no parallel in the other arts to the historicism in music around 1900? The fascination with ancient Greek art, including a renewed interest in Winkelmann, during the very same time that composers and critics turned to Bach, may be one cultural and aesthetic correlate.⁴ The popularity of Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy ([1907] 1997), part of which he expanded into Formprobleme der Gotik ([1911] 1920), bears witness to a profound rethinking of earlier styles in the visual arts. Abstraction in Gothic, Byzantine, and Egyptian art resulted not from technical limitations or a primitive mindset, Worringer maintained, but from Weltanschauung-a "spiritual dread of space" (geistige Raumscheu) and a desire for spiritual transcendence.⁵ The archaicism and rigor of Bach's music, as Frisch shows, empowered some composers to rise above the focus on "sensation" in modern life and art. The rhetoric of the day recalls the Mozart revival that promised an escape from *fin-de-siècle* decadence; a comparison of the two movements might reveal a single cultural phenomenon behind the marketing of the respective composers.⁶ Frisch's discerning observations on Bach reception in the inaugural issues of *Die Musik* will serve a range of scholars, particularly as background for the journal's later missteps into reactionary and fascist ideologies. Yet the abrupt shift from reception history and aesthetics to biography and musical analysis begs the question: if Reger had a "neurotic obsession" with Bach (173), then how do the musical politics of the Bach revival shed light on his compositional practice?

Frisch's three Reger analyses contain bracing insights into thematic borrowing and development, as only a Brahmsian could deliver. Yet the underlying presumption of a "historicist modernism" becomes murky. The Organ Suite, op. 16 (1894), Frisch's starting point, is modern in its use of dissonance, estranging tone from technique. Frisch adduces no modernism in the Bach Variations (1904), but one is tempted to speak of a postmodern gloss on the Bach legacy, since all fourteen variations, excepting the theme and the concluding fugue, banish any hint of Bach or a baroque idiom. Once modernism became all the rage, Reger fancied his Piano Concerto a "new path" more likely to succeed than others (including Schoenberg's op. 11 piano pieces); he likened the work to Brahms's D Minor Piano Concerto "translated into modern terms." What makes this Brahmsian concerto modern is that the compositional materials are mere shards of Bach chorales-this during the very years that Charles Ives, across the Atlantic, quoted fragments of American tunes. But Frisch at once retreats, for Reger's deep thematic interrelations are alien to an Ivesian collage. (Here, the oftnoted similarity of Mahler to Ives would be more apt.) Do these disparate qualities amount to modernism, or was historicism perhaps instead a countermovement? The more fruitful comparison Frisch makes is between Reger and Busoni, as cohorts and competitors. To paraphrase: Reger absorbed Bach's techniques into his compositional voice, while Busoni juxtaposed "real' Bach and 'fantasy' Bach" (182). Some aesthetic questions fall by the wayside. How does this juxtaposition square with Busoni's insistence on the "unity of music?"⁷ Or, how does Busoni's *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, which his contemporaries took as a manifesto for the twentieth century (as Frisch mentions elsewhere), relate to his Bach reception?

Chapter 5, "Ironic Germans," rests solidly on Geistesgeschichte. Frisch probes Thomas Mann's use of irony as context for Mahler, with a literary excursus that takes on a life of its own. Buddenbrooks, but especially Tristan and Blood of the Walsungs, parody the early modernist cultural ideology of music. Mann's irony encompasses various literary devices. Most relevant to Mahler, it seems to me, are the narrator's shifting positions and detachment. The enterprise is admittedly heuristic, not biographical. Mahler had no appetite for contemporary literature, and, in any case, the three works by Mann postdate most of the compositions Frisch considers. The comparison is no less valuable for that, however, and Mahler scholars, with their tendency to deploy simple cultural paradigms of identity or gender, would do well to seek literary models for his artistry. In Frisch's magisterial treatment, Mahler's irony spans a range of aesthetic means and measures, from changes in dynamics to lurches in thematic syntax or tonal language. This line of interpretation, too, has an Adornian pedigree, but the musicologist Manfred Angerer supplies the characterization of Mahler's fragile connection to musical reality as an "as if" relationship. Hans Vaihinger's Die Philosophie des als ob (1911), which developed from his study of Nietzsche, would serve Frisch well in developing a historically informed analytic practice that extends beyond musicology.8

Mahler used irony, Frisch proposes, to establish distance from his musical past. The evidence is overwhelming in the Fourth Symphony, with the finale's sardonic text. If irony is also a determinant in the finale of the Seventh Symphony, which receives a briefer treatment, then it is only by virtue of the raw materials—thematic allusions to the *Meistersinger* Prelude and Franz Lehar's operetta *The Merry Widow*, with their blatant diatonicism. (Mahler always programmed the symphony with Wagner—except when it stood alone at the premiere in Prague—and in Amsterdam, to make the point clear, the *Meistersinger* prelude preceded the Seventh Symphony.)

But for Mahler as for Beethoven, as Paul Bekker stressed, symphonic *process* matters more than the actual themes (1918; [1921] 1969). I would interpret the intent and execution of this movement somewhat differently from Frisch. The formal process in the finale of the Seventh Symphony is

as gripping as in any Mahler symphony, and hardly lacks sincerity. While the tone is alternately bombastic and parodic, the symphonic architecture breeds strength and veracity. In the first part of the movement, the thematic and harmonic resplendence seems unsustainable, even illusory. The rondo form proceeds apace, one section interrupting the next. (The schematic form for the first part, ending at m. 219, is unexceptional: A B A C A B A B.) If ironic in effect, these disruptions also serve an earnest aesthetic purpose, recognized by Mahler's contemporary Paul Ehlers: the movement is immensely cohesive, despite its vast size and elaborate structure.9 The rondo form, a remnant of eighteenth-century wit more than nineteenth-century monumentalism, is gradually dismantled in the second part, as if the logic of enlightenment convention gives way to external forces. The form of the central section, ending at m. 433, might be sketched C D A B A D C. Section D (mm. 249-68 and 368-401) evokes the Turkish march in the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which is not without its own parodic tone: the lattice texture collapses, and the full energy of the orchestra with percussion is channeled into a single line. The rondo form all but disappears in the final part of the finale. Section D, with its carny momentum, takes the lead; schematically, the rondo proceeds as DADCA. The course of the movement gradually yields to a quotation from the first movement. A stock device in nineteenth-century symphonic literature, the brawny quotation resounds to great effect above a sinking chromatic line. No critic failed to notice the artistry and conviction of the thematic consummation, a beloved gesture of closure, be the symphony by Mahler or Bruckner.

Quite apart from the structural tension within the movement, which imparts an air of gravity, a purely ironic finale would be indecorous after the symphony's foreboding opening in a cold B Minor featuring an obsidian tenor horn. If the finale's diatonicism is mediated by *Meistersinger*, which is in turn mediated by Mozart, as Frisch proposes—what does it mean that Mozart is evoked so sensuously in the preceding Andante amoroso?¹⁰ The *Meistersinger* quotations are unmistakable, but the art and craft of the music lie elsewhere. The finale refashions the same structural principle at work in the preceding movement: a refrain or ritornello, highly charged in affect (virtuoso sensuality in the fourth movement and symphonic pomposity in the finale), recurs some seven or eight times, as if defying the passage of time—perhaps a hope against hope that tradition will prevail.

Is Mahler an ironic *German*, as the chapter's title declares? At times, art erased the borders between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Mahler composed German music, as did Brahms, because he self-consciously chose the genres of symphony and Lied, with their irrefutably German identity. Yet early advocates, including Zionists, also heard in Mahler's music

allusions and elements that they passionately held to be Jewish, Bohemian, or Viennese. If, to play off Frisch, Mann was born into a German lineage of irony going back to Nietzsche and Friedrich Schlegel, Mahler could only *adopt* it. Or, if Mann was at liberty to *introduce* ironic distance into his upper-bourgeois *Weltanschauung* (or perhaps nurture a sense of detachment related to his ambivalent sexual orientation), Mahler could not *escape* the disparities within his family background and career.

The final chapter takes its title from Nietzsche's image of "dancing in chains," whereby artists become freer by imposing limits upon their work. Frisch interrogates the "strongly retrospective forms and styles" of Strauss in his collaborations with Hofmannsthal and Pfitzner. His most spectacular contribution is to uncover a wholesale parody of the act II love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* at the opening of *Rosenkavalier*, in the love scene between Octavian and the Marschallin. True to Strauss's creative persona, in this ironic recasting, craft prevails over subtlety—from the "impatient" motif (Isolde's anticipation of Tristan's arrival) in the orchestral introduction to a Wagnerian intensification which, Strauss instructs, should be rendered "thoroughly parodically," to the notorious harmonic orgasm with horn outbursts.

Frisch's study concludes with an opera disavowed by many Germans of liberal persuasion, its manifest beauties notwithstanding. Quite apart from Pfitzner's efforts to collaborate with the Nazis or the political symbol that his music became in the Third Reich, or even his rabid anti-Semitism before 1933, Palestrina springs from an ideology of tradition. Pfitzner faced rebuke and parody for the politics of the plot itself (Schoenberg portrayed Pfitzner as a composer so inactive that he falls into snoring), but the score, too, often reflects an unmediated and unquestioning use of tradition and convention-whereas a composional ideal, from Mahler to Hindemith and beyond, has been to deploy tradition to one's own creative ends.¹¹ In an essay he would renounce soon thereafter, Mann admired the "psychologically modern" in Palestrina, particularly its "organic" connection to tradition or archaic styles. Does this warrant Frisch's classification of Palestrina as modern, albeit a "regressive modernism?" The austere opening of the work is deftly captured by Frisch's notion of a "second" or "as if" diatonicism, tinged with archaicism, but to my ears it is not modern. Far from dancing in chains to become freer, Pfitzner sought to tether Germans, both listeners and composers, to the rules of tradition.

It is not always evident what the analyst or historian gains by unifying such diverse idioms under the rubric of "modernism." But Frisch's point is well taken as a corrective to the linear historiography of modernism from

Schoenberg to Stockhausen. Any quibbles over the liberal use of the term "modern" finally remain just that, quibbles. Frisch's book is many things, the least important of which is a history of German modernism.

A survey of music and art over four decades that were fraught by polemics over "modernism" risks superficiality or incoherence, but Frisch avoids both. His array of case studies answers to the charges of history and criticism, placing representative and popular pieces alongside acknowledged masterpieces. As a group, these compositions resonate powerfully with the themes Frisch teases out of a rich historical fabric. His diversity in approach, woefully rare in musicology today, results in a few collisions between reception and analysis. If *Tiefland* is mediocre, by Frisch's verdict, why did it meet such public success? Were early reviewers entirely misguided when they enjoyed the brilliance and craft in the finale of Mahler's Seventh Symphony without noticing any irony?

The book's limitations are also its strengths. Frisch steers clear of fashionable currents in Austrian and German studies. His scrupulous attention to artistic and musical traditions at the expense of developments in ideology is welcome and largely justified. Yet is it not relevant that the original version of "Blood of the Walsungs" parodied Yiddish dialogue-which Mann's father-in-law persuaded him to suppress? Anti-Semitism, the most prevalent strain of modernist critique during the period under discussion, goes unmentioned.¹² The ironic distance in Mahler's music (if not identified as such) led to aspersions of a cold and emotionless intellect. There are, however, many places to turn for literature on ideology in music, and Frisch's study is none the poorer as a result. Although reception sources are deployed to fine effect, the book is more a study of music than of responses thereto. Frisch also proceeds without recourse to critical theory. The few exceptions may confound the generalist reader, who can otherwise easily follow Frisch's lucid prose and argumentation. For instance, Gérard Genette, potentially a central figure in a book concerned with musical influence, appears first as a fleeting reference (the mere term "second degree" [185]), and later in a digression on hypertext and hypotext (201).

As Frisch moves nimbly through an awesome range of artistic movements and creative artists, historical vignettes and musical works, the reader is guided at every turn, if occasionally the signposts are at cross-purposes. Frisch introduces *Tiefland* as "the greatest success of any German dramatic opera since Wagner" and reports that, following the 1903 premiere, "it became one of the most frequently performed operas in the repertoires of Hamburg, Vienna, and Berlin." Yet pages later, to segue into a discussion of *Salome*, he speculates that "the German public by 1903 was ready for something more sophisticated and colorful" than *Tiefland*. These moments,

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however, are the natural by-product of a book that courageously unites the methodologies of history and aesthetics. Half tutor and half provocateur, Frisch sets clear objectives in the repertoire under survey, instructing the novice and equipping the scholar to pose new questions. Students and scholars alike will turn to this book in their exploration of modernism, and, on some subjects, it will remain the definitive and final voice. But more than that, Frisch cultivates a methodology and exemplifies a practice for a field crippled by an enthusiasm for cultural studies and ideology to the exclusion of musical analysis. Unlike some histories of twentieth-century music, there is nothing extraneous in Frisch's narrative. The writing is sometimes dramatic and powerful, other times eminently serviceable, but always without a shred of pretension or ornament. If academics are taken aback by some of the sharply-profiled prose (the finale of Mahler's Seventh Symphony sounds like "Wagner-on-steroids," 212), then far more non-academics will be drawn into a world from which humanities professors, regrettably, have often barred them.

Notes

1. The most sustained attack on modernism can be found in Taruskin (2005). Alex Ross's forthcoming book seeks to undo the antimonies embedded in historiography since the late nineteenth century, arguing instead for a continuum from traditionalists to modernists.

2. Rousseau (2000) links artistic convergence with the discourses surrounding evolution and degeneration. I am grateful to Anne Leonard for this citation.

3. In this regard, see also Leonard (2003).

4. See Sünderhauf (2004).

5. *Abstraction and Empathy* became a manifesto for German Expressionists and Surrealists, and it is in this context that Frisch mentions Worringer (108).

6. Frisch does not address Mozart, nor does Leon Botstein, in his parallel examination of Mozart, address Bach. See Botstein (1991).

7. Frisch allows Anthony Beaumont to pose and answer the question, but the curt response does little to allay one's curiosity. Aesthetic inquiry dissolves into musicological biography. See Beaumont (1985:161–63).

8. Hans Vaihinger has been all but ignored in the musicological literature, an exception being Grund (1997). Vaihinger has been the subject of several recent studies in German. The only adaptation in English is Wolf (1951).

9. Ehlers (1908) was one of the few early critics to come out against Mahler's Seventh Symphony. His review resorted to anti-Semitic rhetoric, and as Michael Kater has shown, Ehlers became active in the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur during the Third Reich and contributed to the National Socialist ideological literature on music (Kater 1997:16).

10. Elsa Bienenfeld, in her 1909 review of Mahler's Seventh Symphony for the *Neues Wiener Journal*, wrote, "this F-Major piece is the spitting image of Mahler's reverence for Mozart. In hardly any of today's compositions is the style of a past era revived so vividly and peculiarly as in this delicate piece. Even Mahler can make music speak of the sweetest bliss." Translation in Painter and Varwig (2002:326).

11. Schoenberg's "Pfitzner (Three Acts of "The Revenge of Palestrina")" was sketched for the Society for Private Musical Performances. A copy is located in the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna.

12. Neither does Frisch address the Nazi collaborations or reception of various figures who figure into his discussions. Felix Draeseke, for example, would be celebrated by the Third Reich in Roeder (1935).

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