WTC II/1 in C major – Prelude

This C-major prelude presents itself as a tightly woven texture of four complementary voices. There are no distinct motifs; recurring melodic features appear more like formulas marking the beginning or end of a structural unit. The prelude's design is determined by its harmonic progressions, together with secondary features like peak-note lines.

The first harmonic progression concludes at m. 3_1. This is the only phrase in the prelude in which all motion is provided by the soprano alone: the alto has not set in, and tenor and bass are locked in a tonic pedal in double octave. As the three other voices have not yet entered the musical development, this cadential close cannot be regarded as structurally relevant. The conclusion of a section occurs only after the reiteration—extended and with four active voices—of the C-major cadential progression. This second cadence reaches the tonic in m. 5. When reading through the piece for the first time, we might assume that this is a strong-beat ending in which the close falls on the middle beat. As we compare this ending with similar ones in mm. 8, 20, and 22, however, it becomes evident that all these cadential closes end in weak-beat extensions of four 16th-notes. The first section of the prelude thus concludes on the fourth beat of m. 5.

The pattern established in this first progression, i.e., a not-quite conclusive cadence followed by a stronger confirmation, is repeated twice in the course of the composition. In mm. 14 and 28, a modulation to a new key area is harmonically complete but somewhat unconvincing owing to a rest in the bass. The target key is subsequently corrected and the section firmly closed a few measures later. There are altogether eight sections:

Section	mm.	step	tonality
Ia, b	$1\text{-}3_1\text{-}5_4$	I	C major
II	$5_4\text{-}8_2$	I - ii	C major/D minor
III	$8_2\text{-}11_1$	ii confirmed	D minor
IVa, b, c	$11\text{-}14_2\text{-}16_3\text{-}20_2$	ii - vi - IV	D minor/A minor/F major
V	$20_2\text{-}22_4$	IV - V	F major/G major
VI	$22_4\text{-}25_3$	V	G major
VIIa, b	$25_3\text{-}28_4\text{-}30_2$	V - ii - I	G major/D minor/C major
VIIIa, b	$30_2\text{-}32_2\text{-}34$	I	C major

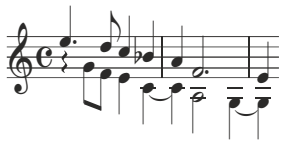
These eight sections thus represent, on a large scale, the steps of the simple progression: tonic (mm. 1-5), subdominant (mm. 6-20), dominant (mm. 20-25) and return to the tonic.

The prelude comprises two extended passages that are built in strict correspondence to one another: mm. 5_4-14_2 ≈ 20_2-28_4. Another analogy established through the use of pedal notes rather than melodic resemblance exists between the opening measures and the closing measures: compare mm. 1-3_1 with mm. 32-34. We can thus condense the structural overview into the following schema:

opening section	mm. 1-3/3-5
main section	mm. 5-14
middle section	mm. 14-20
main-section recapitulation	mm. 20-28
closing section	mm. 28-32/32-34

In this texture of voices complementing one another in a seemingly endless stream of sound, no articulation or obvious phrasing is desirable. Instead, the sound flow should meander from one voice to the other in an unbroken legato. An appropriate tempo has to take into consideration both the details of the surface pattern and the underlying metric pulse. It must be calm enough to allow for clarity in the 16th-notes and occasional 32nd-notes in the weaving lines, but not so slow as to render the quarter-note beats imperceptible.

When describing details of tension growth and decrease, we must keep in mind that these appear only as shadings before the backdrop of the predominant harmonic developments. The first phrase (mm. 1-3_1) displays an ornamental line falling over an entire octave. The dynamic development follows the shape, creating a single diminuendo. The line reads like a hidden two-part structure in double sixths. It anticipates what later frequently materializes as a complementary pattern of two adjacent voices.



The second phrase (mm. 3-5_3) appears as a more complex reiteration of the same process. The octave descent occurs within the first half measure in the form of a scale that falls through the alto and bass registers. Thereafter it is extended, first imitating the more elaborate ornamental pattern of the first phrase (see mm. 3_3-4) and then continuing in a cadential bass pattern (mm. 4-5_3). The falling line spans more than two octaves.

Only from m. 6 onward do listeners get the impression of true four-part texture. Secondary features emerge with timid tendencies to counteract the overwhelming impression of descent. The tenor emancipates itself in m. 4

with a four-note ascent (a little crescendo), the soprano, which had been motionless for more than a measure, follows with an ascending fourth (m. 4: D-G; a smaller crescendo), and the alto adds an even weaker ascending step (m. 4: B-C). After this, all voices blend once again into the overall relaxation. This is completed with the weak-beat ending in the bass. The four ascending 16th-notes are passive here, and the C at m. 5_4 is best played as a pianissimo note.

The first phrase of the main section introduces a figure that recurs several times as an active gesture: the zigzag broken-chord descent in 16th-notes that, after reaching an artificial leading-note (F♯), resolves indirectly onto G (B: mm. 5_4-6_2). This short figure will be referred to as M1. Its little tension-curve with the dynamically active beginning inspires two similar curves in the soprano (mm. 6-7) and bass (mm. 6-7). A last, softer curve in the soprano (mm. 7-8) leads to the final relaxation of this phrase with a weak-beat ending at m. 8_2. Here, too, the ascending notes in the tenor are passive and end in pianissimo.

The second phrase of the main section also begins with M1 in the bass, followed by a one-measure dynamic curve in the soprano (mm. 8-9). The end of this phrase corresponds with that of the previous phrase (compare S + A: m. 7 with B: m. 10, and the passive ascent in T: m. 8 with the passive descent in S + T: m. 11). The performers' shaping should be geared toward underscoring such resemblances.

The next phrase consists of two consecutive larger curves. One begins in m. 11 with three active gestures (S, B, A) followed by a protracted relaxation through m. 13_2. The other is launched primarily by the prominent bass line that builds up some tension in mm. 13-14. The phrase ends once more with passive gestures (here in A + T).

In the middle section, overriding large-scale pitch motions determine the tension design. The first peak line occurs in the bass. After two active gestures describing ascending fourths (see mm. 14-15: C to F and F to B♭), it descends gradually in an ornamented line that extends through the remainder of this middle section, i.e., through six full measures. This bass line is joined, in the second phrase within this section, by a similarly embellished descent in the soprano. The most appropriate interpretation, which admittedly asks for performers with a "long breath," is one that renders the entire descent as a single gradual diminuendo.

From m. 20 onward, the recapitulation of the main section follows, developing along the same lines as the motions described earlier. It is complemented in mm. 28-30 and 30-32 by two short phrases featuring fragments of M1 in the bass (see mm. 28-29 and m. 30). These are

integrated into another descending peak line, which ends in a do–si–do formula. Again, rendering these measures in a continuous and almost unbroken diminuendo would seem the best choice.

The final phrase, which begins after the passive gesture, i.e., at m. 32_2, can be said to bring forth the real surprise of this prelude. It is launched by yet another fragment of M1, this time in the alto, followed by an active gesture in the soprano (mm. 32-33). The prelude's penultimate measure—which, due to voice splitting, regains four-part texture despite the extended bass pedal—expresses such obvious reluctance to calm down and resolve that it is probably most appropriately interpreted as a final build-up to the seven-part climactic chord that concludes the piece.

To sum up, the prelude's main section contains fairly intricate patterns of small-scale tension curves, as does its recapitulation. The middle section and the two initial phrases of the closing section are characterized by large-scale descents. The opening section also represents descending motions, while the final phrase, structurally conceived as a coda, is the only one in the entire prelude to be dominated by clearly increasing tension, which ends this meditative prelude on a surprisingly assertive note.

WTC II/1 in C major – Fugue

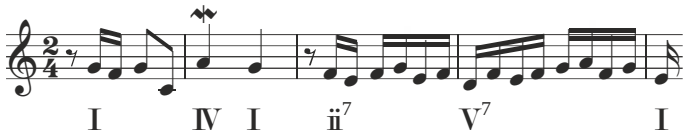
With its extension of four measures, divided by a rest exactly in its middle, the subject of the C-major fugue reveals a very regular phrase structure. The beginning on the second eighth-note converts the first measure into an upbeat to m. 2. Similarly the third measure, with its downbeat rest, also serves metrically as an upbeat to m. 4, after which the phrase concludes on the first 16th-note of m. 5. The question whether this phrase consists of two subphrases or one indivisible unit with a tension-sustaining rest in its middle allows for two answers. These have to be in keeping with the interpretation of several other subject features. Let us consider these first.

The pitch outline develops in a fairly restricted range, spanning a major sixth. The beginning on the fifth gives the subject a hint of "being already in the middle of things," while the conclusion on the third has a gently releasing quality. The pitch pattern features two accented inverted-mordent figures (in mm. 1 and 3) along with an unaccented one (in m. 4). These written-out ornaments suggest that the remaining 16th-notes, both within the subject and in the fugue as a whole, also invite to be interpreted as

ornamental rather than melodious. The two large intervals in mm. 1-2 form consecutive leaps, thus corroborating the assumption of a lively character. The target of these consecutive leaps, the A at m. 2_1, is supported in many ways: melodically the highest pitch, rhythmically the first of two longer notes, and harmonically the representative of the subdominant, it is further emphasized by an ornament proper (see the inverted-mordent symbol) before it relaxes slightly with the ensuing step downward.

If one regards mm. 3-5 as a varied sequence of mm. 1-2, seeing that (GF)G-C-A—G could become an ornamented (FE)F-(E)-D—E, the subject appears as consisting of two fairly balanced subphrases. The rest in m. 3 must then be played as an interruption before a new beginning, the written-out inverted mordent following it (m. 3: F-E-F) being more active than the fairly relaxed G in m. 2, and the D at m. 4_1 a second, softer climax. Another view is equally possible and perhaps more conducive to the transmission of overall unity. The entire string of 16th-notes in mm. 3-5 can be regarded as ornamental. One would then define the main melodic steps in the subject as (GF)G-(C)-A—G——F—E. In this case, the gradual descent from A to E requires an uninterrupted line. The rest in m. 3 is now perceived as tension-sustaining, after a G that sounds only minimally softer than the preceding climax. The step A-G and the tension-sustaining rest will thus allow for a further release through the following F and all its gradually retreating ornamental surroundings to the final E. This interpretation thus renders the subject as an uninterrupted unit.

The subject's harmonic background does not reveal anything that might decide the matter. The active step to the subdominant appears at m. 2_1—but then there never were any doubts about the overall climax anyway. The subdominant relative, another harmonically active chord, is represented by m. 4, followed by the dominant and the final tonic.



The C-major fugue comprises eight subject entries:

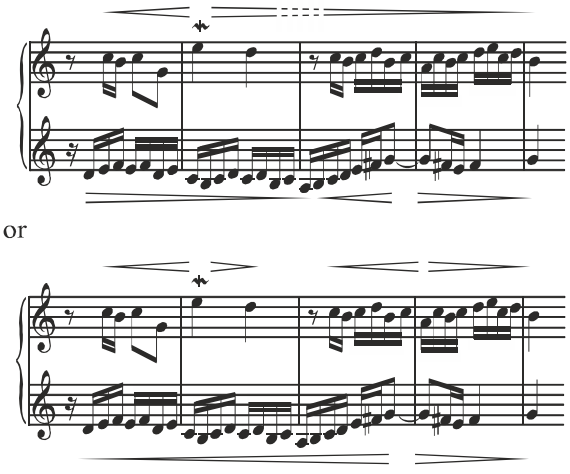
1.	mm.	1-5	M	4.	mm.	21-25	M	6. mm. 39-43 L
2.	mm.	5-9	U	5.	mm.	25-29	U	7. mm. 47-51 M
3.	mm.	9-13	L					8. mm. 51-55 U

Apart from the interval modification in the answer (where the falling fifth in the first measure becomes a fourth), the subject does not undergo any changes. Neither does it appear in any stretto or parallel setting.

Against the answer, i.e., at a point where one expects a counter-subject, the middle voice continues with a melodic line. Later in the piece, this line recurs twice in its unabridged version (M: mm. 25-29 and 51-55); in two other cases, only the initial measure reappears (U: mm. 9 and 39). While independent in structure, this counter-subject is not entirely independent in material. Its first two measures (see from D, the second 16th-note in m. 5) are closely related to the subject's final two measures. Only its second half contributes new components with an ascending scale, syncopation, and closing formula. Another shortcoming of this counter-subject is the fact that its unabridged version remains restricted to the middle voice, appearing exclusively in accompaniment to an upper-voice subject statement, and thus lacks true polyphonic versatility.

The internal structure of this phrase poses a question that is crucial for the fugue's contrapuntal setting. Following the pitch pattern of descending sequences in the first two measures, most performers will choose to interpret these as expressing gradually lessening tension. After the lowest note A, the ascending scale would then support an increase toward the syncopation, after which the closing formula provides a relaxation.

With this dynamic outline in mind, let us return to the two options for the interpretation of the subject's phrase structure. We shall find that the concept described above for the counter-subject is ideally suited to balance the concept of the subject as an indivisible phrase. In a reading of the subject assuming two dynamic curves, however, this interpretation of the counter-subject is unlikely as it would create simultaneous phrasing in both voices and thus undercut the polyphonic texture. Performers who prefer a divided rendering of the subject should thus play the counter-subject as an unbroken phrase, beginning with an extended crescendo.



The C-major fugue comprises only four subject-free passages.

E1	mm. 13-21	E3	mm. 43-47
E2	mm. 29-39	E4	mm. 55-83

The episodes make ample use of material from the subject. E1 features an imitative pattern based on the subject's first half, complemented by an eighth-note instead of the rest (see mm. 13-19, U and M; the final imitation in M is inverted and varied). This pattern recurs faithfully in mm. 55-61. In both instances, the lower voice adds a figure that is derived from the last measure of the subject and/or from the first measure of the counter-subject. The lower-voice 16th-notes then continue, with a little more liberty, up to the end of the episode (m. 21_1) and up to the final cadence of the earlier version (m. 67_1) respectively. The head of the subject further recurs in the coda, where its imitations move through all three voices (L: mm. 68-72, M: mm. 72-76, U: mm. 76-80). The first eight measures are once again accompanied by the 16th-note figures from the subject ending and/or the counter-subject beginning.

In E2, the first segment features a two-measure motif whose beginning is rhythmically related to the subject head (U: mm. 29-31, sequenced in mm. 31-33). The accompaniment, once again, is the string of thematic 16th-notes. The second segment of this episode brings an imitation built exclusively on the 16th-note pattern (see U: mm. $33\text{-}37_1$, M: mm. $34\text{-}39_1$). E3 displays a lower voice that is even more closely related to the end of the subject as it sequences the final measure (see L: mm. 43-46).

Apart from the final measures of the coda, the only components of the episodes that are not related to the primary material appear in the upper and middle voices of mm. 43-47 and 61-67. They do, however, recall the other episodes insofar as they also feature an imitative pattern in sequences. The role each episode plays in the dynamic design of the fugue is easily determined in accordance with the sequential patterns. E1 builds up tension through mm. 13-19 but then brings a slight release in mm. 19-21. E2 keeps a very low profile in its constantly falling lines. E3, on the contrary, ascends continuously in all three voices and thus produces a considerable increase. E4, like E1, begins with rising lines and a crescendo (mm. 55-61) followed by a gradual descent (mm. 61-65) and a cadential release—which now, in its revised version as an interrupted cadence, expresses much more intensity than did the earlier perfect cadence. The coda begins in a fairly leveled softer shade, followed only in mm. 80-83 by a final strengthening (see the split voices).

The uniformity and simple relationship throughout both the primary and secondary material adds to the fugue's playful character. The impres-

sion is further enhanced by rhythmic continuity: prior to the final cadence, the 16th-note pulsation is almost constant, with only minimal interruptions on four occasions (after the downbeats in mm. 11, 21, 22, and 41). The simplicity of the rhythmic pattern, the ornamental structure of the pitch line, and the leaps that occur both in the subject and in the episode material join to express a rather lively character. The tempo, too, should be fairly swift. The articulation requires non legato for the eighth-notes and quarter-notes and legato for the 16th-notes.

Owing to the prevailing patterns of almost continuous 16th-notes in both pieces, which would sound dull if the respective pulses were directly related, the relative tempo had best be chosen in complex proportion. A good and feasible solution is to translate each of the four quarter-notes in the prelude's final measure into triplet eighth-notes (instead of the previously felt four 16th-notes), and then turn these imagined triplet eighth-notes into the eighth-notes of the fugue. In other words: an (assumed) triplet eighth-note in the prelude corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 72, fugue beats = 108).

The prominent ornament notated with a symbol is the inverted mordent in the subject. Its pitch does not pose a problem as it always uses the natural (white key) for its lower neighbor note. As is the case with all ornaments that form a characteristic feature of a subject, this inverted mordent must be played even where it is not marked (i.e., in mm. 22 and 26). Conversely, the episode motifs deriving from the subject head need not be ornamented as Bach does not indicate this in a single case. (The presence or absence of the ornament has the further advantage to tell listeners already after one measure whether what they are hearing is a subject entry or a subject-related motif—a distinction that, due to the uniformity of material in this fugue, would otherwise not be so easy to make.)

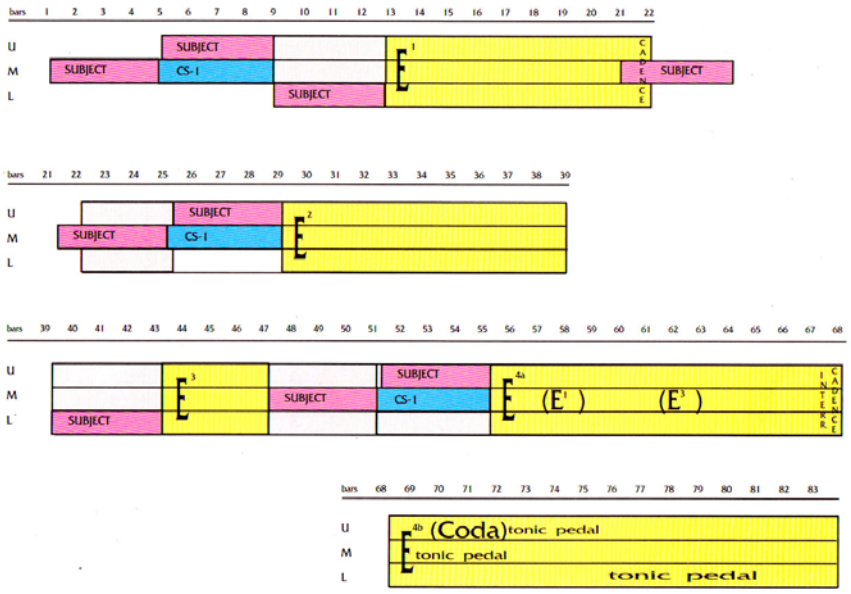
Another ornament appears in two of the three counter-subject entries. In m. 8 it is printed as an inverted mordent, while m. 28 features a mordent symbol without the slash indicating inversion. The first reading is unusual for a typical closing formula in which experienced performers might have added a full trill even without any invitation from the composer's hand. The second reading appears more convincing and can safely be chosen in both cases. As a leading-note trill approached stepwise it begins with a 16th-note on the main note, shakes in six 32nd-notes including the suffix, and resolves smoothly into the subsequent downbeat. In m. 54 the closing formula is varied and needs no ornament. Finally, the long trill with a tie-suspension in mm. 37-38 begins regularly, i.e., from the upper note; it then shakes in 32nd-notes until the very end of the measure where it ties

the last F over to the next downbeat. No suffix is possible in this case since the ornamented note lacks a resolution.

At this point it may be interesting to learn that Bach's first version of this fugue (according to the Kellner manuscript) ended on m. 68_1. The composer later rewrote the perfect cadence in mm. 67-68 as an interrupted cadence and added 16 measures on a pedal note C. This extended coda concludes the piece much more convincingly. At the same time, the fact that it was not intended at the time of the earlier version is of great help for a true understanding of the fugue's architectonic design. This is determined by cadential formulas together with the key sequence of the subject entries and the dynamic buildup in some of the episodes. Only the end of the initial section may cause some doubt. In mm. 21-22, Bach presents the first closing formula with typical features in both the upper and the lower voices, thus creating a strong feeling of closure. The beginning of a subject statement in the middle voice overlaps with this closing formula for an entire measure. In this manner Bach strings the first and second sections closely together.

Given that the ensemble is reduced to two voices after the cadence in mm. 24-25, which would normally advocate the beginning of the second section, one needs good grounds for a differing view. Four reasons support the assumption that section I ends already in m. 22: As all three voices have already presented the subject, the first section can only close here or after an additional (redundant) entry. Yet the overlapping subject statement in the middle voice ends with a cadential close that is not quite satisfactory owing to a sudden break-off in the upper voice (m. 25_1), which creates a strong link between the upper-voice line in m. 24 and the new beginning in m. 25. The overlapping subject statement in mm. 21-25, while beginning in the harmonic surroundings of G major, soon reveals its loyalty to the key of D minor (see the C♯s and B♭s from m. 22 onward), thus forming a pair with the following upper-voice in A minor—the minor dominant of the preceding statement. A closer look at the beginning of both statements further strengthens this reading as they display the interval structure of subject + answer. (Compare mm. 21/25 with mm. 1/5.) If the subject entry in mm. 25-29 were the first of a new section, then the episode that follows would have to be regarded as linking two consecutive statements. The long and definite tension decrease in E2, however, makes such an interpretation very unlikely. Lastly, the dynamic design of E1 is distinctly related to that of the original E4 (until m. 68): both describe a full curve, using similar material.

Having said all this, a conclusion for the remaining sections follows without problems. The harmonically related entries in mm. 21-25 and 25-29 constitute, together with the decreasing E2, the second section. The return to C major and to three-part texture in m. 39 marks the beginning of the third section, which comprises three statements and a closing episode (like the first section, the only difference being the inserted E3). The exceptionally long coda must be regarded in the light of its relative in the Classical period: it rounds off the entire piece, not just the final section.



In the first and the third sections, the tension rises from one entry to the next. In the first section, this is bolstered by the gradual increase in texture; in the third section, Bach uses for the same effect an ascent from the very low keyboard register (mm. 39-43) and a mid-section episode with a strongly increasing tendency. The tension diminishes in the second section owing to the reduced number of voices in all but the first four measures, the minor mode, and the strongly decreasing direction of the episode.

The coda begins softly but then builds up strength as the pedal moves to the lower C and the lower-voice figures suggest hidden two-part structure. When the other voices also split, the fugue ends in full resonance.