WTC II/6 in D minor – Prelude

This prelude is in two-part texture. The material includes components usually indicative of homophonic style (the broken-chord accompaniment patterns in mm. 2-4) as well as a number of motifs that are developed evenly in both parts. Counterpoint and imitation are amply used.

The first harmonic progression closes at m. 5_1 . The first structurally relevant harmonic close is not reached until m. 26_1 , where it affirms the modulation to the dominant. The prelude then continues uninterrupted as motifs not only follow each other but also develop from one another in such a way that distinguishing sections seems futile. The subdominant field within the large-scale harmonic development is established in m. 42, but it immediately gives way to a dominant pedal. This launches a liquidation process that proceeds through various steps up to a final tonic pedal. The prelude's layout can thus be presented as follows:

I a	mm. $1-9_1$	tonic confirmed
Ib	mm. 9-26 ₁	modulation to the dominant
II	mm. 26-42 ₁	modulation to the subdominant
III	mm. 42-61	return to the tonic

The character is determined above all by the uniquely homogeneous rhythmic pattern. The only interruptions of the continuous 16th-note motion occur not because of longer note values that would allow breathing space but in favor of brief ornamental runs in 32nd-notes (see mm. 22, 24). The rhythmic simplicity is matched by a pitch pattern consisting predominantly of broken-chord figures, scale passages, and ornamental figures. The prelude's basic character is thus rather lively. The tempo may be swift, not hurried but in a pace that discourages listeners from focusing on single 16th-notes but that conveys patterns like those in mm. 2 and 3 as units. Articulation is crisp. The non legato in the eighth-notes should rebound without appearing weighty. Apart from the few groups that Bach marks legato (U: mm. 22 and 24; L: mm. 43-45), all faster note values should be played quasi legato, resembling the tone quality that in Viennese Classical style was to be called leggiero.

The only ornaments indicated are inverted mordents. They use for their lower neighbor the pitch belonging to the tonality of the measure: in mm. 1-3, 44, and 50 where the key is D minor, the ornaments touch the leading-note $C_{\#}^{*}$, whereas in mm. 27-28 where the secondary key A minor is

reached, G_{\sharp}^{\sharp} and not G_{\natural} is the proper auxiliary. In mm. 43 and 45, however, the inverted mordents use the whole-tone step.

The falling octave in the lower voice at the beginning of the prelude never recurs and should therefore be regarded as apart from the thematic material. Moreover, on two strategic occasions (see mm. 5 and 26) the descending scale is conceived as an upbeat feature beginning in a metrically weak position on the second 16th-note of a measure. One might thus contend that the prelude begins with a kind of assertive "signal"—the triple D—and only launches its motivic material from the next weak beat. This material encompasses four distinct motifs. One of them appears with a specific accompaniment that it retains, a second is escorted by varying non-motivic note-groups, and the other two are introduced in stretto imitation, thus not leaving room for any contrapuntal figure.

M1 consists of a melodic strand in eighth-notes (L: mm. 2-5₁) and an accompaniment (M1a) in which a descending scale triggers a broken-chord motion. While M1a is harmonically determined and reaches its climax on the subdominant chord (m. 2) followed by a diminuendo until the end of the motif, the leading part of M1 follows melodic features. The rests together with the sequential layout at the beginning indicate sub-phrasing. The climax of the entire motif falls on the B_b in m. 4, a note that is preceded and followed by high-tension intervals (a minor sixth and a diminished fifth respectively). In this motif m. 3, a kind of harmonic variation of m. 2, takes part in the gradual buildup to the climax and should therefore increase in intensity.



Both voices come to a relaxed ending on the downbeat of m. 5. The repetition in inverted voices begins with a renewed secondary buildup of M1a, followed by a reiteration of the processes described above. Later in the prelude, M1a recurs in L: mm. $26-30_1$ and U: mm. $30-34_1$, while M1 in its original melodic shape is heard again only once, in U: mm. $27-30_1$. Fragments of the motif's melodic material can also be recognized in L: m. 42, U: m. 43, and L: m. 50.

M2 is also introduced in the lower voice. Beginning on the second 16th-note of m. 9, it describes a curve that culminates on D (m. 9_3), later backtracks, and is rounded off by a broken chord also in the shape of a curve (mm. 10_3 - 11_1). In an interpretation emphasizing pitch patterns, the tension peaks on this D. Conversely, an interpretation that supports metric features will place the climax on the B at m. 10_1 . In either case, the climax is followed by a gradual decrease of tension that approaches the motif's final note motif without passing through any further accent. M2 is set in stretto imitation: it recurs in U: mm. 10- 12_1 (ending varied, with tied note) and in L: mm. 11- 13_1 . Furthermore—unusual for an imitative process—we can recognize two halves that separately fill up the spaces left vacant at the beginning and end of this stretto (see the second half in U: mm. 9- 10_1 and the first half in U: mm. 12- 13_1).

M3 presents itself under structural conditions very similar to those found in M2. Introduced in the lower voice, it is imitated in stretto. Its first complete statement is heard in the lower voice of mm. $13-15_1$. Its initial measure consists of a 2/16 "upbeat" to a broken chord in zigzag (see mm. 13-14: D-F-B_b-D-G) complemented by a continuous 16th-note motion continuing the zigzag line. An interpretation aiming at revealing actual and hidden pitch shapes should place the dynamic climax on the note at the outset of the descending broken-chord pattern, the D at m. 13_2 , whereas performers who have chosen to focus on rhythmic and metric features will increase tension until m. 14_1 and decrease thereafter. M3 recurs in U: mm. $14-16_1$, in L: mm. $15-17_1$, and in U: mm. $16-18_1$. As in the case of M2, there are also half statements (see the second half in U: mm. $13-14_1$ and the first half in L: mm. $17-18_1$).

M4, the last thematic component in this prelude, is introduced much later and, to make it stand out even more, in the treble (U: mm. $35-37_1$). In its first measure, the continuous 16th-notes are conceived in hidden twopart structure, displaying a peak-note line ascending before the backdrop of a repeated Eb-D-C. The harmonic resolution of the thus described diminished seventh chord F#-A-C-Eb materializes on the subsequent downbeat (with Bb-G for G minor), followed by a descending G-minor scale that, after a bend, ends on C. For the dynamic representation of this process there are again two options. One can emphasize the harmonic play of tension and relaxation by taking m. 36_1 softly, as the beginning of a resolution. Or one can choose the metrically oriented version in which the climax falls on the strongest beat—which here, moreover, contains a melodic "surprise" as the central Bb deceives the listeners' expectations for a continuation of the ascending peak-note line. M4 differs from the

prelude's other motifs in that it does not come accompanied by a fixed figure in the second part. The imitation sets in after the original figure has ended, and the eighth-notes of mm. 35-36 never return in the same shape. M4 recurs, with slight variations at beginning and end, in L: mm. $37-39_1$. Thereafter, only its first half appears in U: mm. $39-40_1$. (The descending 16th-notes in L: mm. 40-41 tempt us to hear them as a continuation of the motif in octave displacement—which, strictly speaking, they are not.)

The structure of the D-minor prelude is determined by the appearance of the four motifs and their respective inherent impetus. Section I displays a lineup of the motivic material followed by an extended cadential figure. The main motif in its original setting and in inverted voices respectively is presented in mm. 1-51 and mm. 5-91. This repeated statement of M1 is balanced by the two strettos of M2 (mm. $9-13_1$) and M3 (mm. $13-18_1$) that effect the modulation to the dominant key. In the following pattern, which exposes a chordal progression in hidden two-part structure, four measures with an indirect pedal on A (see the peak notes in the upper voice) are matched by four measures with an indirect pedal on D. In m. 25, the treble D has turned into the seventh of an E-major chord and thus leads to the completion of the modulation to A minor at m. 26₁. With regard to the development of tension, M1 is clearly the strongest thematic component in this section, both because of its greater length (four measures versus only two each in M2 and M3) and because of the extended dynamic buildup within its melodic part. The two smaller motifs both feature descending sequences. While the tension may momentarily flare up at the outset, it soon subsides, reaching a level of quiet suspension at the beginning of the pedal-note passage. Throughout the eight cadential measures, the tension then rises, reinforced by the sudden 32nd-note flushes in mm. 22 and 24, until the dynamic level of the prelude's beginning is regained.

Section II begins in an intensity similar to that of section I. Yet while the immediate recurrence of M1 sounds as triumphant as before, its repetition in inverted voices is so strongly varied that the same character cannot be maintained. An inserted extra measure, reminiscent of the initial run of M1a, seems to launch a new attempt but leads instead into M4. The section concludes after two measures serving both as a complement to the aborted M4 sequence and as a transition, at m. 42₁. The decline of dynamic intensity is much more drastic in this section than in the previous one. It begins with the variation of M1 in which the lack of the characteristic melody creates a thematic void. The impression of reduced polyphonic density continues throughout the measures dominated by M4 where only one voice seems relevant—as supported by the switch to parallel texture in

mm. 38-39. In the transitional measures, the lower voice continues the decreasing tendency while the upper voice opposes this with a stringent increase in (mostly chromatically) rising eighth-notes.

Section III differs from the two preceding sections in almost every respect. No motif is quoted in its entirety. Instead, the initial measure with fragments of M1 is immediately followed by a development that combines faint remembrances of M1 with the extended pedal concluding section I (see A in L: mm. 43-46 and in U: mm. 47-49). Two measures of hidden two-part structure with parallels recall the end of section II (mm. 51-52 \approx 38-39) and lead to four measures in toccata-style (mm. 53-56). After the home key is reestablished in its major mode (Picardy third from m. 57 onward), the prelude ends with four cadential measures on a bass pedal D and a final chord that, with its four voices, confirms the four-part structure indirectly evoked in all the prelude's non-polyphonic passages. Dynamically, the third section describes a prolonged decrease of tension. Caused primarily by the absence of thematic substance, this decrease is further supported by a descending peak-note line (see treble E: m. 43, D: m. 44, C: m. 45, B_b: m. 46, A: mm. 47-49, G: m. 50, F-E_b-D: m. 51, E_b-D-C: m. 52, B_b: m. 53). While the toccata-like measures describe superficial waves rather than a consequential increase in tension, the final development over the tonic pedal musters the force to counteract the decreasing tendency and conclude the prelude on an assertive note.

WTC II/6 in D minor – Fugue

The subject begins on the downbeat and ends at m. 3_1 , thus extending over a little more than two measures. The two extra eighth-notes following the final note before the rest have neither harmonic function nor do they ever recur. They should therefore not be regarded as part of the subject. The F on the downbeat, on the other hand, is indispensable to complete the D minor cadence.

A description of the pitch and rhythmic patterns in this fugue depends very much on the interpreter's personal preference. There are two possible interpretations that will influence how the basic character is determined. Both can be supported by sound reasons: One can describe the rhythmic pattern as consisting of a variety of note values (eighth-notes, 16th-notes, triplet 16th-notes, and syncopations), and the pitch pattern as containing predominantly stepwise motion. Or one can argue that while there are three

regularly occurring note values, the rhythmic pattern can nevertheless be regarded as simple in its overall impression, particularly since the triplets conceived in stepwise motion display ornamental character.

The subject's phrase structure also allows for alternative interpretations (plus some variation in one of them). As each of these interpretations is linked to a particular view of the prelude's character, it is vital not only to recognize the various possibilities but to be aware of the ground on which each of them stands, and the consequences each of them demands.

- The subject may be regarded as an indivisible unit. This view can be convincing in a very lively character.
- The subject may also be interpreted as consisting of two subphrases, with the first subphrase ending on the first of the eighth-notes, the A at m. 1₃, which is the natural target note of the winding ascent in the 16th-notes. The second subphrase then comprises the descent from the octave D to the final F. In a rendering in lively character this concept is possible, in rather calm character it is probably the only meaningful interpretation.
- On basically the same grounds, the subject can be described as encompassing three segments: a first subphrase from the beginning to the A at m. 1_3 (as described above), a second subphrase whose main body ends on the F after the tied G, and a cadential tail. The argument runs as follows. The syncopated G acts as a harmonic embodiment of both the subdominant and the dominant chord, after which the subsequent eighth-note F brings the return to the tonic. So we have a point for regarding the subject's main body as ending here. Yet metrically this is unsatisfactory. Moreover, it would seem somewhat arbitrary as the remaining three notes with their cadential skips, which present a reassuring orientation after so much chromatic mystery, provide a convincing conclusion. To regard these notes as a "tail" might therefore not be such a bad idea: it shows that they are not essential although they belong, that they are somehow self-contained (owing to their harmonic background) but not weighty enough to constitute a subphrase of their own, and that they can occasionally be omitted without damage to the main body (as happens, e.g., in mm. 10-12, 14-15, and 17-18).

The subject's harmonic layout is very complex, particularly in the second half where the high degree of chromaticism creates altered chords and chords of secondary order. Bach's own realization displays harmonic shifts on every eighth-note—with only one exception, to which we shall return). While this constant change makes the search for what could be

determined as the main harmonic functions difficult, it contains a message of its own that is worth taking into consideration. On the one hand, such dense harmonic action requires time to be appreciated—and thus rules out the fast tempo that the 16th-note runs might otherwise tempt us to adopt. On the other hand, the only exception from the constant harmonic changes occurs on the third beat of m. 1 where both the A and the D stand for the tonic. This supports the view of the subject consisting of two subphrases, both of which display a roughly similar harmonic design:

•	3	_3						
X b G					10 10	i to bo		
$\odot' \cup$			000		1 1			
		-	6	1			6	6 -
	i	V'i	iv ⁵	i i	\mathbf{V}'		i iv ^š V	′ i i⁵V′i

As to the dynamic outline, any suggestion would obviously have to be in keeping with decisions made in other respects. The following options seem open:

- For performers who, despite the dangers for an adequate appreciation of the rich harmonic fabric, opt for a fast tempo with no subphrasing, a consistent dynamic design places the climax on the highest note D, with a crescendo in the ascending runs and a diminuendo in the gradual descent. This interpretation is based on the view of the subject—and, to a degree, of the entire fugue—as a virtuoso display in which pitch curves dominate. (Harmonic details, however, are overrun in this interpretation.)
- For interpreters who opt for a moderately fast tempo and a divided subject, the first subphrase also exhibits a crescendo in the ascent. The second subphrase can then give credit to the syncopation and its harmonic background, by having the tension increase in the chromatic descent up to G and decrease gradually thereafter.¹
- For those who pledge that in addition to two subphrases there is a cadential tail, the final decrease after the syncopated G must be fairly abrupt, so as to allow for the subsequent F to sound fully relaxed. The three final eighth-notes E-A-F then sound in a neutral, dispassionate tone color.

¹One occasionally hears the very subtle version that increases tension in the first subphrase only up to the B_b before resolving into the tonic on A. This is beautiful—as long as it does not lead to a similar up-down on the first beat, which would with one stroke ruin the subphrase by making it reminiscent of the "emotional waves" of 19th-century music.

The D minor fugue comprises nine complete subject statements.								
1	mm. 1-3	Μ	5	mm. 14-15	Μ			
2	mm. 3-5	U	6	mm. 14-17	U			
3	mm. 6-8	L	7	mm. 17-18	Μ			
4	mm. 10-13	U	8	mm. 17-18	L			
			9	mm. 25-27	U			

None of the further statements sounds exactly like the initial one. The second and third entries set out without major modifications, but the final note concludes the melodic cadence even more definitely than at the beginning of the fugue by falling back to the keynote. The fourth subject statement breaks off immediately before the expected syncopation and, after an octave displacement, sequences the eighth-note descent but alters the ending and breaks off unresolved. Statements 5 and 6, as well as 7 and 8, are positioned in stretto, with the latter pair using the subject inversion. None of these entries is complete. The fifth entry anticipates the syncopation (M, m. 15: on A instead of G) and then breaks off suddenly. Its partner corrects the position of the syncopation (U: m. 15) but, instead of resolving afterward and thus bringing the subject to a close, continues and expands the chromatic descent in sequences of the rhythmic figure. In the following stretto with inverted entries, the leader behaves like the leader of the preceding stretto: it anticipates the syncopation, lengthens it and then breaks off (M: m. 18). Its partner is even less complete, as it does not reach any syncopation but gives way to another motif halfway through the second segment. Only the statement that concludes the fugue recaptures the original version. Yet while the syncopation is in place, the cadential tail is substituted by a melodic closing formula.

This fugue features only one proper counter-subject. It is introduced from m. 3 onward where it begins immediately after the middle beat. Its end is unclear. One feels that the counter-subject was meant to end with a closing formula A–G#-A. But Bach obviously decided to deviate from this expected ending, to write G \natural instead of G \sharp and delay the final note, which now resolves late and into another key. (In M: m. 5, the resolution comes after a suspension on the second 16th-note and suggests not a chord on the dominant A but one on the tonic D. The ending on the 16th-note F is thus the logical conclusion, although it is quite impossible to convey this in performance as suspension and resolution overlap with the beginning of the next motif.)

In terms of phrasing, this counter-subject can be interpreted either as indivisible or as consisting of two subphrases, with the second beginning in the form of a varied sequence after the downbeat A. The dynamic layout allows for a host of possibilities—several within each of the different options for the phrase structure. If the counter-subject is interpreted as an indivisible phrase, the climax can be chosen on the basis of melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic criteria and thus fall on the high-tension interval (the tritone C-F# in m. 4, F-B \models in m. 7), on the syncopation, or on the subdominant harmony, each time preceded by an unbroken crescendo and followed by a diminuendo. Conversely, if the counter-subject is interpreted as consisting of two subphrases and interrupted by a gentle caesura after the first downbeat, a first climax falls on the downbeat and its subdominant harmony can be combined with a second climax on the syncopation.

The following example gives the counter-subject as it sounds against the tonic version of the subject in mm. 6-8. Listed here are only two of the manifold contrapuntal patterns that result from the different options for phrase-structure and dynamic outline in subject and counter-subject.



There are five subject-free passages in this fugue.

- E1 m. 5
- E2 mm. $8-10_3$ (M overlaps, beginning already in m. 7_3)
- E3 mm. $13-14_1$ (M overlaps, beginning already in m. 12_3)
- E4 m. 16
- E5 m. 18₃-25₃

All the material that appears in these episodes either derives from the subject and the counter-subject or is introduced against it (as a "fake" counter-subject). E1 quotes (M) and imitates (U) the inversion of the subject's first phrase segment, with the second half of the subject's initial measure in retrograde serving as counterpoint. E4 takes up an excerpt of the counter-subject, juxtaposing it to descending lines reminiscent of the subject's second segment. E2 uses an independent motif introduced just before in the context of the last half measure of the subject/counter-subject juxtaposition (see M: mm. 7_3 - 8_1). The motif consists of a 7/16 upbeat leading to a target note that is complemented in various ways in the course

of the fugue. The second half of E2 recalls the subject's head. E5 is a complex variant of E2: before Bach quotes M1 toward the end of the episode he builds from the subject head a motif in which six triplet 16thnotes lead toward an ascending third, then places this motif into a chain of strettos and finally develops strettos of the entire inverted subject head. Only E3, the shortest of the episodes, is without analogy, consisting solely of M1 statements.

The role played by each of the four episodes in the dynamic development of the fugue follows directly from the analysis of the material. E1 and E4 bridge two consecutive subject statements. E3, despite its short range, effects a relaxation with independent material. The same is true for the first half of E2 and for the M1-determined segment of E5. In both cases, the episode's final half measure turns around and prepares for what appears like (and is intended to appear like) an unexpected additional entry.

As expounded above, contour and rhythm in this composition allow for two conclusions regarding the basic character. Given the specifics of the material in this fugue, the ultimate choice will have only limited influence on the articulation. In a lively character, the triplet 16th-notes are (quasi) legato including the link to the A on beat 3, while the eighth-notes are non legato. In rather calm character, all melodic notes should sound legato. Different options are, however, open for the three final notes depending on whether or not they are taken as cadential, in which case they had best be played non legato. (In this option, the subject would appear as follows: m. 1_{1-3} : legato, phrasing, from upper D to F: legato, after that: non legato). The articulation in the counter-subject and in M1 is overall legato in whichever character a performer chooses. Similarly, the articulation in the broken-chord extension of mm. 19-20 is non legato in any case.

The tempo is limited on both sides by certain features: it must be fast enough to ensure that quarter-notes, and not eighth-notes, are perceived as the beats, and it must be slow enough to allow listeners to fully appreciate the chromaticism and its harmonization as well as the syncopations and complementary rhythmic patterns. The most convincing proportion between prelude and fugue is one that translates the main pulse: a quarter-note in the prelude corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue. If, however, a considerably faster tempo is desired for the fugue, a more complex proportion is preferable: one measure in the prelude then corresponds with half a measure in the fugue. Approximate metronome settings: (a) prelude beats = 108, fugue beats = 54 / eighth-notes = 108; (b) prelude beats = 108 / measures = 36, fugue beats = 72 / half-notes = 36.

The fugue features two ornaments. The trill in m. 16 represents a long, note-filling ornament since it resolves duly—in harmonic, melodic, and metric respects. As it is approached stepwise, it begins on the main note, which is prolonged to triplet-16th-note duration. The following four notes are the upper/main/lower/main notes and lead smoothly into the E at m. 17_1 . The cadential trill in the fugue's final measure, by contrast, is a point d'arrêt trill rather than a note-filling ornament since its resolution is anticipated before the strong beat. After a regular beginning on the upper neighbor note, the shake includes four or, preferably, six notes and then stops short before the next eighth-note in the middle and lower voices.

The layout of the D-minor fugue is conveyed mainly by three features: the introduction of the subject stretto in the second section, correspondences between subject entries (and, particularly, between episodes), and the dynamic function of the episodes. The most prominent correspondence occurs between mm. 10 and 25. In both cases, the head of the subject appears in stretto with its inversion, at a distance of one quarter-note, thus preparing the next subject entry. While the voices are inverted and the subject statement begins earlier in m. 25 than in m. 10, the basic analogy is unmistakable. Furthermore, mm. 10 and 25 both appear at the end of an episode in which, after an overall relaxation of tension, they build up new tension in a last-minute preparation for another subject statement. (This is even more obvious in m. 10, which is reached in a cadential formula, than in m. 25.) These two measures thus determine that the following entries are perceived as part of the ongoing section. Another structural correspondence exists between the main body of E2 and the latter half of E5: compare the four statements of M1 in mm. 7-9 with those in mm. 21-23. E1 and E4 fulfill an analogous function as both consist exclusively of primary material and both bridge consecutive subject entries. Finally, the two subject statements that form the stretto in mm. 14-15 are identical, both in notes and with regard to the voices presenting them, with the two initial entries in mm. 1-3 and 3-5 respectively. The counter-subject of mm. 3-4 also recurs here in octave transposition.

As far as the thinning of the ensemble is concerned, no subject statement returns to two-part texture. The prominent lower-voice rests in m. 14, however, convey this impression although the three-part texture is regained halfway through the stretto with the entry of the counter-subject. The fugue thus presents itself as consisting of two structurally corresponding and equally long halves. The abridgment achieved in the second section by means of the stretto is made up by the additional measures in the first half of E5.



While the harmonization is complex in its details, the overall design is simple: all statements remain in the key of D minor. The dominant is not reached in cadential confirmation and the subdominant appears only transitorily at the end of the second stretto.

In its overall design, the fugue is built in one large dynamic curve: the first half represents an overall increase and the second half an overall decrease of tension. Within the first section, the tension rises, both owing to the growing ensemble and the increase in polyphonic density. While E2 brings forth a certain decline, its final half measure with the intense preparation of the subject entry makes up for the loss by propelling the dynamic level up again. The second section is governed predominantly by the opposite tendency. It begins with the subject in stretto, accompanied by the counter-subject—a combination that represents the highest degree of polyphonic complexity achieved in this fugue. The extension produces a protracted diminuendo, followed by the more subdued character of the inverted-entry stretto. E5 continues this tendency with a prevalence of falling lines and descending sequences. The dynamic decrease ends at m. 25_1 where the preparation for the final subject statement achieves a last short rise of tension.