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Does it Matter Where We Begin? Or, On the Art of Preparation and Preluding*

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"In all things success depends on previous preparation, and without such previous preparation there is sure to be failure."
(Confucian wisdom, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. James Legge)

[1] Does it matter where we begin? What could this question possibly be asking for? As an anxious question, it usually meets with a simple retort: we have to begin somewhere, so does it really matter where? Perhaps, however, I'm making a false start and should ask whether it matters not *where*, but *how, when,* or *with what* we begin—although, just by considering these alternatives, at least I've made a start. I already feel a bit like the white rabbit instructed by the King of Hearts to "begin at the beginning, and go on till the end is reached—and then stop." But Alice quickly enters my world to prevent me seeking too many adventures in Wonderland. Don't descend the path of puzzle and paradox, she warns me—just stick with the Confucian wisdom: that the most successful beginning presupposes a preparation from which it derives its sense as a beginning in the first place.

[2] My address today regards the idea of preparation, the idea of getting ready as when one says "ready, steady, go." As others write of the sense of an ending, I join those who write of the sense of a beginning. But whereas others say that the beginning makes sense given what follows as the middle and end, I ask what the preparation contributes to making a beginning the best beginning it can be. Many insist that a beginning must make sense, for if it doesn't, there's little inclination to pursue matters further. The beginning must grab us, put us in the right mood. Yet if getting in the mood presupposes a preparation, shouldn't the preparation count as a part of the beginning, or even be reckoned as the real beginning itself?

[3] My topic today is the preparation required of a public address, be it of a keynote address as here, or of a musical performance as delivered to an audience in a concert hall. If I may tease you straightaway with a real situation—consider what happens before we hear the first notes of Beethoven's *Eroica*, a third symphony whose own most decisive opening chords have been so much noted and revered that one might think it impossible that anything could come prior. Yet, before these opening chords, don't we hear a breath attending the gesture of the conductor's upbeat? Or the last coughs or rustles of candy papers from an audience that hasn't quite settled? Or the last beeps from the many electronic devices that are switched off, though always just a bit too late, giving rise to frustrated shushing sounds all around? And before the first chords, don't we hear a broad range of noises coming from a public finding their seats, flipping through their programs with small gasps of pleasure or fear when they're made fully aware of what they're about to hear? And aren't we offered what is sometimes quite a considerable din from the orchestra warming up, either by practicing their parts imminently to be performed or for a rehearsal the following day? And doesn't this noise become yet another noise when we hear the ensemble leader arriving to our applause to tune the instruments now in a more orderly way, so that when our last applause finally accompanies the conductor onto the podium, we are ready to hear the first chords in what suddenly becomes for us a perfect aesthetic silence?

[4] I tried by my description *not* to suggest that there is *too* much rhyme, reason, or etiquette observed either by the public that constitutes the audience or by the ensemble that constitutes the performing body. I described the situation to convey an atmosphere less of preparation and more of a near-meaningless social din. I did this to bring attention to what was once much more the case—before the nineteenth century and those decisive Beethoven chords—when a practice of explicit preparation justified if not every noise of the occasion, then more than seem to be justified today. This practice of preparation went by the name of preluding, though, in broader contexts, also of preambling, prefacing, prologuing, and even, if I may adapt a term, provisionalizing, when musicians improvised in a deliberately preparatory way. The practice of preparatory preluding once had a whole gamut of points, ranging from the most pragmatic tuning, pitching, and warming up of the performing ensemble to the most aesthetic, social, and political attuning of the assembled audience.

[5] My address explores what the practice of preparatory preluding once contributed to securing a key or pitch that signaled both that the speakers or performers were ready to perform and that the addressees or audience were ready to receive. The preparation was a ritualistic gathering of ensemble and assembly in which, by way of the preparation, all were attuned in body, mood, and mind to deliver the art or to accept the art that was delivered by way of the performance. But though I describe the gathering this way, I observe that the occasions did not always yield the proper result, prompting one to ask where things could go wrong or where failure could enter the picture. In this talk, I investigate two ideas, of preluding and of preparation, to show how their interaction produced a deep tension in the practices of speaking and music-making right from the very get go.

[6] To prelude as a mode of preparation was once tied to occasions in which one either spoke-before (*prae-fatia*) or made-before (*prae-factum*). It was to set a precedent by way perhaps of a parable or to set up a scene or theme before the main event. It was variously to introduce, originate, foreshadow, anticipate, and even to justify what was to come, as when a foreplay (*Vorspiel*) prepared the main play, or the *Eingang* prepared the *Anfang*, or the *Vormesse* the *Hauptmesse*. To prelude as a mode of preparation was to exercise or improvise, to arpeggiate or to fugue to find one's bearings and to help others with whom one was communicating to find theirs. As a public mode of address, it was to prepare the way—the path—for others by intoning, exhorting, and processing, as when trumpets brought an occasion to order, be it of a marriage or funeral, an academic or sacred ceremony, a court or theatrical entertainment. One early writer spoke of preparatory preluding as the time for attaching the soul to the ear, for were this connection not made, the concerted music or prepared speech would be delivered to no one who was properly prepared to listen.

[7] To investigate preluding as a preparatory practice is to turn our thought back to the earliest affinities in antiquity between three sorts of preparation: that which paved the way for philosophical arguments to unfold; for laws or commandments to be delivered to peoples or to citizens of a *polis*; and for performances of the various performative arts to be delivered to their audiences. These affinities were demonstrated and explained in the dialogues and treatises of Plato and Aristotle, in the oratorical or rhetorical traditions of public and political speaking, and, biblically, in the delivery of the Mosaic law. Drawing on these core affinities, I will lay down *some* of the preparatory ground for the later practice of preparatory preluding in the musical domain.

[8] I say "some" here because there's obviously far too much ground to cover in a single address, and because other scholars have already prepared much of the ground (Valerie Woodring Goertzen, N. Jane Lohr, Warren Kirkendale, and many more, and then many of the great scholars of theology and philosophy). But mostly I say "some" because my interest in preparatory preluding is not only in its early workings, but also in its transformation around 1800. Here, I'm drawn back to where I began my own philosophical pursuits, to when the new regulation of the work-concept reshaped musical practice. For, as I see the matter, the work-concept either killed off or so revised the preparatory demand on preluding that the practice of preparatory preluding became the art of a Romantic prelude already prepared. What, I will ask, happened to preparation in the Romantic prelude and what did the Romantic prelude offer, beyond the symphony, to our understanding of the work-concept?

[9] To address the changes around 1800 is to press the question whether the practice of preparatory preluding is still with us today: in whole or part, in tatters or in threads. To be sure, we have pre-concert talks, trailers at the movies (though no longer the joy of a mock organ), and lengthy introductions offered in lectures—like mine—that seem never properly to begin. We also still have the tuning and pitching of orchestras and the gathering of audiences. But the question is whether we, as critics and thinkers, regard these activities now as merely distracting us as a basic and noisy irritation. And if we do, do we then think about the activities as having lost much of the aesthetic and political force that preparatory preluding once had, or was meant to have, in gathering all together to receive the beginning when the beginning finally came?

[10] It is quite typical today to contrast situations before and after 1800. Yet, the truth is that, in the matter of preluding, the 1800 thesis spins around a single tension that existed all along, right from the very start of the practice. This tension arose whenever, in any preparatory act, the preluding brought too much attention to itself. Either it brought attention because it failed to prepare or because it proved so good that it became impossible to regard it any longer as a mere preparation. When too good, it threatened to upstage the main event, becoming, without paradox, both a beginning and an end in itself. The practice of preparatory preluding, I am saying, was always at risk and took a risk either because it failed to prepare or because the preluding resulted in a self-standing prelude. As a self-standing art, the prelude could then enter as art-product into the

history books as written into stone, without leaving trace of its once having been a preparation. Consider the prelude numbered the first of Johann Sebastian Bach's. Does it still carry a sense of its being a preparation for an event greater than itself? And if not, what does it mean for preparation and for the work concept to treat it as self-standing?

[11] With my own preparatory preambling now well on its way, I'd like to express the hope that you're all settled comfortably in your seats, if not well prepared by myself, then by the elegant introduction that you were offered of myself as your speaker, and for which I am most grateful. I am indeed honored to be speaking here today, though I have to admit to fearing the wrath of the more traditional music theorists of the SMT who might be expecting me to address what I rarely do in my writings: the matter of notes. In fear, I recall what Toscanini reportedly once said about the opening of Beethoven's Third Symphony, surely uttered against all of its hermeneutical devotees: "To some it is Napoleon, to some . . . philosophical struggle; to me it is Allegro con brio."(1) With shame, I confess to being no scholar of the Allegro, though I like to think that, with a certain *con brio*, I've prepared myself to meet those who might be sitting here with hostile expectations. For precisely these sort of expectations were what preparatory preluding was once supposed to temper and calm, and even to alter, so that listeners' minds already made up would become receptive to the speaker's offering. Though the comparison is entirely inappropriate, it has its point: if Moses and Socrates didn't have it easy delivering the law, why should anyone much lesser in wisdom expect to ease their thoughts into the minds and hearts of those whom they address? That the task of delivery was antagonistic or difficult, and that the task really mattered, was what made the practice of preparatory preluding necessary in the first place.

[12] On a lighter note, recall the old joke about the young man who asks an elderly man how he might find his way to Carnegie Hall. "Practice," the old man replies, "practice, practice, practice." The threefold repetition has its rationale. For there's one practice that gets you to the front door, another through the occasion, and a last that allows a quick exit when the audience has had its say.

[13] When Moses was chosen to deliver the laws of the Promised Land to a people also chosen, it was to his preparation that all were made to attend. Moses was prepared, somewhat against his will, to be a leader, but a leader who would not then assume the authority of a tyrant. His reluctance was what protected him from this hubris, a reluctance associated with his being not the first-born son, but the second-born. To be the first born perhaps carried an arrogance linked to the letter A, which is why the first word of Genesis began with B—*beth*—to make sense of a beginning—*bereshit*—that was a blessing but also a warning not to set the divine hand aside with one merely human. The idea of the beginning coming from something before, as second to the first, as order out of chaos, but also as ruin out of perfection, was already evidenced in the Genesis tale of the red thread, when a midwife spun the thread around the wrist of the son who appeared first, but who then withdrew into the womb, leaving his twin to be the first born. The red thread teaches about the pregnant tensions of beginnings: it tells us that, although in the beginning there was the deed or the word, in the beginning, too, was a midwife's preparation.

[14] To prepare for the delivery of the law, Moses was made to communicate what he was allowed to witness of the divine presence and word to a people denied this access. He was made to lay down the ground first for a safe passage across the Red Sea, a deliverance of the people from servitude, after which he was made to prepare to respond to every conceivable trial and tribulation as the people wandered mostly wildly and disbelievingly through the wilderness. He was instructed to so detailed a degree that no stone was left unturned. Every detail regarding the where, when, and how was covered so that, overall, it was the term "matter"—*DAVAR*—that was made to matter the most. Repeated ten times in a single biblical passage, the repetitive "matter" was made into what scholars have described as a "coded prelude" to the deliverance of the Ten Commandments, or what otherwise are called the Ten Words.

[15] When, to begin my address, I asked whether it matters where we begin, I already suspected that the word "matter" would come to capture something deep in the very idea of preparation: that one has to learn what it means to be ready to begin, especially when, from the start, one is confronted with all manner of unforeseen obstacles. Preparation doesn't simply guarantee in advance a complete success, or even any success at all. This I had to learn myself, when, once having reached Carnegie Hall in my youth, I played the first note, sadly a loud note, a magnificent fraction before everyone else in the orchestra. Although I claimed thereafter that this moment marked my solo debut in New York, I knew from then on that I'd always be insufficiently prepared as a practicing musician. And this is the point: that preparation is meant to give one a readiness to deal with every matter, but sometimes there are just too many matters to deal with: matters of fact, of course, of chance, choice, and decision, with matters hard and easy, with matters most abstract and most concrete, with matter in the air or on the ground, buried deep in the rocks and the stones. And precisely all these matters were with what Moses was made to preoccupy himself before the delivery of his main event, the most difficult matter of all: the setting down of the ten prohibitions—"thou shalt nots"—on all that the people were most inclined to do by nature, habit, and desire. So many matters to prepare, and so many opportunities for miscarriages, literally, of the law that would sustain justice in a state.

[16] That justice, judgment, and freedom were tied biblically to prohibition and obedience was what made Moses's preparation a matter of confronting hostility and rejection. To prepare himself, he had to become above all the possessor of speech—*mi ba'al devarim*—of exactly the right words—and he stuttered. He knew that delivering the ten words meant preparing not only the deliverer, but also the deliverees. Preparation was a two-way street between someone who had the

words of freedom and a people who preferred to stick with what they already had by way of custom and tradition. Though freed from slavery, they remained enslaved in mind. To change their minds, the right words proved insufficient on their own. Moses had first to move them, compel them, or prelude them into an acceptance, into a freedom that was not as they expected it to be: they expected a freedom *without* restriction or compliance. Here, the longstanding fraternal tension between Moses and Aaron arose: who, of the two brothers, better had the art of preluding at his fingertips and with what consequences for the preparation of those who were supposed to receive the law? The failure for the first generation or any thereafter to reach the Promised Land—the promise thus remaining a promise always for the next generation—was part of a story with incomplete and premature ends as a way to contain a claim always to begin again.

[17] It was Philo of Alexandra, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, who found in Moses's preparation an illuminating match with what he found written by Plato about Socrates in *The Republic* and the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* regarding the idealized or promised construction of a *polis*. In the typological linking of Moses and Socrates, the juridical dialectic of freedom and compliance, a dialectic that later defined the regulation of the musical work-concept, was unfolded through terms that were political and rhetorical. Would and should the laws take hold on a person's reason or emotion, or both, and should they take hold by rational explanation, sweet persuasion, or brute force? In these questions arose all the tensions of the content and form of the prelude.

[18] If preluding the law's delivery were regarded as a sweetener or melodic lulling, it should remain external to the law itself and not count as a proper part. This way, even if regarded as a necessary preparation, it would become dispensable once the law was received. If, contrarily, preluding were made into an exercise in reasoning, it could be written into the law as an indispensable limb of the law's body: as the law's justification and motivation. The two options left preluding in a difficult space: As songlike and soft, it could be set aside as mere preparation; as rational, the prelude ceased to be merely preparatory and became a proper part of the whole.

[19] To test the case for and against preluding, the Athenian Stranger of the *Laws* drew on musical and medicinal models. The bedside manner of doctors and midwives would vary according to whether the deliverer were addressing those who had the mentality or lives of slaves in contrast to the same of persons who were free. With free persons, one could prelude them with reason because they were capable of understanding why obeying the law or taking the medicine was in the interests both of themselves as individuals and of the *polis* as a healthy whole. But if their reason were lacking, one would prelude them with a song aimed at harmonizing their more vulnerable emotions with the law's harsh demand. And then there was a third choice, to treat all as slaves and deliver the laws without preluding at all, by simply pouring the medicine down the throat.

[20] To bring out the benefits and dangers of engaging preluding to work on the emotions, the Athenian Stranger described the preluding in terms of the perfect but deceptive, spellbinding Homeric art of myth, poetry, and song. Working with the double signification of the term *nomos,* referring to both law and song, he drew on the term for the "path" or "way" that was also the term for the "prelude"—*prooimion/prooeimium*—to reveal the risk in singing to soften the law's blow: that the people might prefer to stick with the song and refuse the law. But if one did not sing and merely reasoned persons into acceptance, wouldn't their desires remain in place to lead persons astray?

[21] Some have said that preluding fell into paradox given an overly positivistic view of the laws as abstract articulations, set in stone, each requiring their specific prelude. If, however, one reconceived persons, as Philo did, as perpetually struggling between freedom and enslavement, reason and passion, then preluding, too, could be rethought—again, as scholars have shown—as drawing on song and reason both, and, hence, as counting both as preparation and as proper part. Seen as an art of thought and song, preluding could contribute to a life of perpetual preparation, to a life in which everyday activities of eating, fishing, singing, and merry-making were engaged with an eye to cultivating virtues associated with wisdom, humanity, and moderation. Beyond the preparation for the delivery of abstract laws, there could be a preparation and preluding toward a harmony—*sumphonia*—that rendered forms of life more law-like (observant) than law-bound or rule-following. Some take this to be what Moses and Plato were really after: preluding as a preparation not for a delivery associated with punishment and fear, but for a joyful though difficult contrapuntal living and striving toward the harmonic ends associated with the divine mean.

[22] To pave the way forward now toward matters more musical, let me note one thing the Athenian Stranger mentioned in passing when introducing the matter of preluding. He remarked that it had been generally overlooked, as though preparation had never counted as much as what was delivered. Making the topic explicit was what then encouraged Aristotle in his *Rhetoric,* and later the orators of late antiquity, constantly to return to the subject, in part never to let deliverers of speech and song forget that, before beginning, their voices should be pitched in the right place, according to a *tonarion* or pitch pipe. The matter of eurythmics, they insisted, should not be overlooked: tuning was part of a preparatory prelude that had the purpose to tune listeners in to their forms of life.

[23] In 1996, the philosopher, Myles Burnyeat, delivered a valedictory address to Cambridge University. He titled his address "First Words," because these were the words that Plato scholars, little inclined toward rhetoric, eros, and eurythmics, had tended to overlook. Drawing from a complaint of Leo Strauss, he described the tendency of philosophers to begin reading Plato's dialogues only when the "real business" of the argument began, and hence to treat the opening words as merely

preludic, or as "literary embellishments." To counter this tendency, Burnyeat read the many intriguing openings of the dialogues as scene settings modeled on the Homeric epic, or as exemplary sketches, or as condensed ekphrastic or reflective images, revealing where and when Socrates had met his interlocutors—*in medias res*—on the path up to town, down to a seaport, on the way to a fight, a feast, a conversation, even to his death, and at what time of the day. Most often starting out on a path of descent, Socrates prepared a discussion that was but a preparation for an eventual ascent. To read the first words as serving a preparatory and preludic function was for Burnyeat explicitly to employ a literary or musical model, as when a work begins with a prologue or an overture. But this meant that first words *qua* preludes were proper parts of the whole, and not to be overlooked. Even if, he granted, that we only fully understand the themes of an overture or philosophical prologue when the end has been reached, the beginning is as a pregnant womb that gives birth to all the rest. Preluding as preparation was nothing *mere*: it situated the serious business of philosophy in a theater of birth and playful delivery. It more than set the mood; it clued recipients into how the reasoned argument was to be received and assessed: perhaps as offered but perhaps then withdrawn, as serious but maybe with an ironic or skeptical inflection. Overlooking the prelude, readers would fail to get the point of the thought: the real pitch of the philosophy.

[24] In making his case, Burnyeat compared the overlooking of Platonic preludes to the overlooking of openings of operas, and he named Mozart's *Magic Flute* and Verdi's *Otello.* Who, he seemed to ask, would ever think to ignore them? But here, Burnyeat did not take full advantage of opera's offerings. For consider the preludic beginning that is said to both mark and define the birth of the very genre, when, in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo, La Musica* descends to prepare everyone for an eventual ascent. "I am music"—who with sweet melody and accent calms the heart and kindles the minds most frozen. Are these not exemplary preludic lines, licensing every future opera to begin with a preparatory significance, as when, in Mozart's opera, someone calls for help—"*zu Hülfe! zu Hülfe! Sonst bin ich verloren!"*—or when, in Verdi's opera, arriving at a port, the first thing noted is a sail—*"una vela! Una vela!"* and a standard—*"Un vessillo! Un vessillo!"*—twice repeated to mark an authority in place, but soon to be undone?

[25] I have to admit that the overlooking of opera openings is at present my favorite topic. How operas begin and sometimes keep beginning is as exciting a topic as it is for literature, poetry, and plays. Beginnings as preparatory preludes may be oblique, indirect, and discrete, loud and attention-seeking, low-key or high-pitched, sweet, tempered, or self-denying, worldly or otherworldly, of the past, present, or future, gossipy or earnest, forgiving or murderous. They may last for but a moment or, as with Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for a lifetime, so that the prelude as preparation begins to feel like a lifetime lived in preparation for death. Or the prelude may be a period less embraced than feared as when writers describe it as a time of waste, delay, or procrastination given what finally the beginning of the main event reveals. Everything is possible with a beginning, even to have a work made entirely from beginnings—which is what Daniel Handler recently illustrated in a novel by reference to what he claimed to find in Beethoven's *Fidelio*: an opera with four possible beginnings. Titling his book *Watch Your Mouth*, he warned of a poison poured down a throat when someone opens his mouth to sing about a freedom desired, but a freedom denied.

[26] For a long time, I have worked on an opera which, with a touch of irony, might have brought me here today. For writing about it won me my first prize, in musicology. The opera itself has its eyes set on the prize, and as such makes its drama a matter of who is best prepared to sing in a winning way. One of the mastersingers preludes on a lute but fails to find the right pitch; the other refuses a preparation grounded in abstract rules, claiming that all the preparation he needs is that which nature has freely endowed him. Neither wins the prize because they fail adequately to grasp the lesson hammered out by the mastersinger who alone understands what true preparation means. By the end, however, it is unclear that anyone has met, or can meet, all its demands. But this is why, in my view, the opera opens with an almost endless string of false promises or false starts. Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* thus begins with an institutional fanfare that invites the audience into the auditorium, first to listen to a lengthy overture that gives all away, but yet only the keynote to the first chorus that sings of a new savior crossing the River Jordan. This savior is then evoked in Eva's mind as a David flaying Goliath *wie ihn uns Meister Dürer gemalt*—as Meister Dürer painted him for us—who then appears as a lover who reluctantly submits to a trial as a singer. But here, he finds himself subjected first to a list of rules, after which the judges enter, introduced by name, to turn down in the majority the song that is delivered to them, leaving only one master clued in to what the end must now be. Some interpreters have read the trial song, and even the entire first act, as an extended preparation for what really gets going in the second act. But in doing this, they have sometimes overlooked what I take to be of most significance: the biblical allusion to a promise not delivered associated with the Old Testament. Overlooking the pregnant (Dürer) image, or passing over it with a mere mention, something theological is missed about the promise of the opera as a whole.

[27] There is another opera, too, that has recently taken more than my fancy. It has led me to write a new book, which I am currently completing. This is Puccini's *La Bohème*, an opera without overture, which opens with a painter painting the passage of the Red Sea, and at the point at which it is most necessary to have the Pharaoh drown. My book opens by asking what the Red Sea passage has to do with the opera, and with the very idea of bohème. Tracing the question back to Henry Murger's *Scenes de la vie de bohème*, the answer turns out to be literally a murderous "nothing." Murger's first lines, matched by the opera, stage a drowning. Murger insists that his bohemians, the new artists of the future, have "nothing to do" with the bohemians of old, by which he means the filthy wanderers of the earth: the bohemian-Egyptians, the bohemian-Gypsies, and even the bohemian-Jews. The bohemians were long named Egyptians when the crimes of humanity were traced back biblically (in *Ezekiel*) to the first episode of deliverance at the Red Sea. As *Meistersinger*, so *Bohème*: the beginning of the opera is pregnant

with a promise, in this case, the promise of a painting that will never be finished, but which ends up as a commercial signboard standing for the inevitable death of the ideal—figured as Mimi—of the new bohème. Killing off the old idea of bohème, Murger revealed the new ideal of an artistic bohème to be impossible too. For five years, I have asked nearly everyone I have met how Puccini's opera begins. If they do not immediately note the meeting of the lovers, they recall the spat between the bohemians and the landlord. A few recall Marcello complaining about his painting. But almost no one recalls the painting's subject matter. This forgetfulness is what has inspired me to write my book, on the overlooking of Exodus images that have been used as preparatory preludes in works of philosophy, opera, and the arts.

[28] Following Burnyeat's lead, I just briefly discussed the oversight of preparatory preludes even when they are written into the main event—the works themselves. The matter becomes yet more pressing when the preparatory prelude, performed prior to the main event, is meant not to be noticed in the first place.

[29] Several scholars have described the demise or transformation of preparatory preluding as occurring somewhere between the 1790s and 1850s. Their descriptions fit the larger changes that brought the work-concept to its full regulative force. These changes allowed musical works to claim an autonomy and self-sufficiency, such that the pragmatic aspects of preparation were to be concealed as much as possible. Musical works ought in their first chords to begin as though from nowhere, or at most from a perfectly inspired musical idea (or seed) of which then the *work* in composition and performance was the unfolding—the generative labor. What came before the first chords was not all the hard graft, the rehearsals, the labor and practicalities of warming-up, tuning, and pitching. At most there was a metaphysical chaos or noise out of which came the true musical order and law of the work.

[30] For the musical work-concept to conceal the labor of preparation was for the work to assert its authority over the performance, to demand of the performance that it present itself as though always already prepared. A performance was not a try out, but a strict compliance to what was already established by way of sense and form. The work-performance relationship severed compositional and performance roles so that the composer's work could be presupposed by performers and audience alike as fully there—worked out—before the performers played the first chords. This severing of roles worked with changing attitudes toward what was to be put on display on the stage. By severing the aesthetic presentation from the mechanics and pragmatics of preparation, it was possible to see the work's preparation solely in the idealized or romanticized terms of a composer's lifetime of composition, or, even more purely, of the endowment from birth of a natural capacity called genius.

[31] Against this background, the practice of preparatory preluding was able also to set the preparation aside to attend to the production of a perfect prelude. What once came before the main event became the main event. The prelude ceased to be merely preparatory and even a mere part. It became something complete, condensed, and self-contained: an end in itself. But what did it contain and condense but everything that once went into preluding as a preparatory practice—virtuosity and improvisation, even exercise and study, all as aligned to the new romantic forms of the fantasia, arabesque, cadenza, and étude? Containing the idea of preparation transformed the preparation of the prelude into a guarantee of success, leaving the pragmatics of preparation—where mistakes could still be made—on the piano or music stand at home. Paganini demonstrated the change when, repeatedly staging the breaking of his violin strings, he showed that no breakage would or could ever lead to failure. The prelude became a capricious art, but also a perfect art whose preparation was presupposed.

[32] Everything that happened in the musical world happened also in philosophy and in the other arts. What, for example in the visual arts, were framing devices or visual *exhordia*—forecourts, pillars, and arches—ceased merely to pave the way to the main scene, and became, often in images of ruin, that to which the eye was made most to attend. And in philosophy and literature, too, writers increasingly offered and withdrew their beginnings, or reflected explicitly on whether the paratextual devices of title, dedication, preface, epigraph, and frontispiece were ways to render beginnings better pregnant and complex than absolute or pure. The greater the pregnancy, however, the more beginnings became ends, condensed often into self-standing aphorisms and fragments.

[33] Musicologists of the prelude have often focused on the changes in organ and clavier practice that led to the so-described golden age of the piano. They have written about Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Schumann, and especially Czerny to mark the difference between the public workhood of the prelude and its continued private use for pedagogical exercise and study. Though attending to the end of the practice, they have noticed the tensions extending back to the late Medieval and Renaissance periods, when preluding as mere preparation was already challenged by the production of so-termed "abstract" pieces, *morceaux*, or *Stücke,* even if these pieces were not yet fully invested with the public recognition that came with the later regulation of the work concept.

[34] Other scholars have investigated the matter more specifically of tuning and social attunement. John Spitzer and Neil Zaslaw's recent study defends an 1800 thesis for the birth specifically of the orchestra, though the pregnancy, they say, took two hundred years. In describing the etiquette of orchestral tuning, they turn to the only evidence possible, hence, not to a recorded history of abstract preludes, but to the pedagogical and theoretical treatises and to the public press that told what preluding as a preparatory practice was and should have been like. As preparation, the preluding before the main event tended neither to be announced nor regarded as part of the program proper. Yet it was necessary to get the program started

and, in this capacity, it was absorbed into a normative discourse of praise and censure.

[35] Everyone knew that instruments were, and had to be, tuned to unmoveable instruments, the keyboard instruments on site. This meant that tuning could not occur out of sight in the green room, named after the green that once lay beyond the Shakespearean stage. Given climatic conditions, instruments had also to be tuned at the very last moment and even after the beginning: between movements and acts. Still, the pragmatic rationale did not excuse what some persons heard by way of a preluding that was also a tuning when, with so "perpetuall variety of fancy," no player seemed to regard what any other was doing. This led critics of preparatory preluding to encourage a discipline, and preferably to "abstain from all noise before the beginning of a piece." Spitzer and Zaslaw record one critic complaining of the "confused preludes" as causing more displeasure before the concert than any following pleasure [could] compensate for," and another critic, in Darmstadt, urging the protection of well-bred persons from the sort of noise to which they had cultivated a "natural aversion," a noise likened to what one heard in a synagogue or place of Talmudic study—a *Juden Schule*.

[36] Many wrote, from the fifteenth century on, of preparatory preluding as an extemporized trial and error, an experimentalism and risk-taking, a seeking, but not necessarily a finding, of the right pitch, and, hence, of a practice that allowed mistakes and false starts. But it was also a time to put the most extraordinary virtuosity of hand and mind on display. Under these descriptions, the preparatory preluding was a composing, as it was said, "without erasure" or without paradox *sans preparation*—and, hence, a *free improvising*. But as such, the act would at most yield a "premature fruit." The more through- and pre-composed the prelude became, the riper the result.

[37] Whatever the praise and censure, the preparatory demand on preluding meant still that it had to prepare, and not upstage, the main event: it had to attune strings and winds to the coming mood, key, and tempo and attune the audience to an appropriate receptivity. To meet the preparatory demand, the normative language accorded perfectly with what Aristotle described as the doctrine of the mean: that preluding should be neither too long nor too short, too fast or too slow, loud or soft, high or low pitched, gentle or harsh, impressive or dull, brilliant or boring, inebriated or sober, and finally, too over prepared or merely dashed off. Between the extremes of error, preluding would find what Aristotle termed *the right place*: the *focus* and *locus* in Latin and the *topos* in Greek. Hence, after all, it really did matter where we begin.

[38] I am now well placed myself to note a final potential in the Romantic prelude. It contained within it a potential not to succumb after all to the work-concept entirely, but to soften up the work-concept's authority, and, hence, to bring a freedom into play that allowed performances less to comply than experimentally to engage with the compositional act. Ask for *Werktreue* performances not simply to be obedient, but to be experimental acts of perpetual musical preparation. For, if philosophy and law can shed their narratives of fear-filled delivery, so can music too, by making the joys of preludic preparation matter much more to how we produce and receive the very first chords of a symphony.

[39] There is much more to say about everything I have said. But there is no better ending than a suggestive postlude that leaves all matters ready now for a discussion to begin. It was long said that one main purpose of preparatory preluding was to cover up the inevitably nasty noise of instruments seeking the right pitch for a sound more musical. To prelude on the organ would often be to disguise the noise of tuning strings. Much later, and noticeably in the 1940s, the relation between preluding as music and noise became the very subject matter of musical composition, when tuning up and preparation was returned to audible and sometimes also visible display. Karl Weigl's apocalyptic Fifth Symphony opened with a tuning of the orchestra in 1945, and Varèse's *Tuning Up* should have opened with the same had it been included, which it was not, in the 1947 film *Carnegie Hall*. Apparently Varèse was meant to take the commission with humor to open the film, but he took it seriously to compete with the other works on the stage. And then of course, on full display, were the preparations that brought nearly all of John Cage's works to their beginnings and to their ends, from his 4'33" to his *Prelude for Meditation* of 1944.

[40] Let me end with an example that proves that I know where I am and know where I am going next: to Milwaukee's Museum of Art, to watch a public that never settles down even though they are asked to witness the preparation for a perfect musical event—leading one to ask whether, despite the tempered preparation, they will miss the melody when it finally begins, or whether, in this new space, their ears are made more open than they are used to being in the concert hall.

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Footnotes

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1. Quoted in Horowitz 1994, 102.
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