

This music should be called *musique concrète topologique*, a mode of hearing something again for the first time. *Typewriter Opera* is an audiovisual piece exploring an archetypal mechanical inscription technology known as the piano. Most obviously, the piece is a new musical composition, deploying an under-harmonized '*verso la capo*' of a keyboard theme from 1709 (the year the piano was invented) as a basis for a set of variations, expanded for four-hands. The variations pass through a kind of stylistic animism, as if visited upon by an apparition of western pianism in its high period (bookended more or less by Handel, on the one hand, and Brahms, on the other). The tension between the circling of Baroque variation form, on the one hand, and the directional transformational vectors of Romanticism, on the other, presents time as a dialectical to and fro (repetition as recurrence inflected by difference). In this way, the music simulates the *orthogenesis* of a characteristic Romantic *telos*, culminating, on the edge of irony, in an over-harmonized theme become triumphant. The music is familiar, but the sounds appearing from the piano are new, like a relic recursion of something already heard, appearing again as musical transvestism.

*Ceci n'est pas la moustache de Mona Lisa,  
mais la barbe de Brahms*



*Typewriter Opera* is an audiovisual project exploring an archetypal mechanical inscription technology commonly known as the piano. At stake in this work is the status of the piano as an ontological object. Despite the many updates during the past three hundred years, it is surprising to observe how similar Bartolomeo Cristofori's 1709 invention is to the modern piano of today. More surprising still is the capacious stability of its interface design in technologies no longer controlled by criteria oriented to the task of integrating equidistant mechanical components with the tactility range of *digiti* extending from human hands. No longer situated at the crossroads of technics and flesh – a once productive *mélange* of key, code, signal, hammer, hand, finger, and ear – musical time today is nonetheless still held in the arms of its code. Its presence is pervasive.

From the pitch lattices grounding current popular music to the sound designs of commercial ambience; from the programs underwriting MIDI audio beeps, alarms, recorded voices and ringtones to software applications for iPhones and iPads that enable users to create sound compositions, auditory experience today is increasingly marked by a subset of discrete tones that fit on a standardized modular grid. Today, the relation between code and sound is more like a dual setting than a double meaning. The piano's coded key template has become immortalized as the archetypal digital representation scheme for musical form in our times – a Platonic object.