

JUST THEN A GEDANKEN POPPED INTO THE DOCTOR'S UPPER

GANGLIER; the granulars started churning. What if the piano had never been invented? He didn't mean any of the chordophone precursors or lateral zithers like the dulcimer, cimbalom, koto, guzheng, or santur. He meant all those ivories that had come through the European tradition. Christoforte, what were you thinking? Even the harpsichord is not blameless. Without the piano, there would be no tortured counterpoint (the only true invention in his view) and none of that Mozak modulation nonsense where you end up in a different key but with the same intervallic relationships. He was thinking into oblivion the entire Western canon. He imagined the big Plonkathons that had echoed through the castles and cathedrals of Christendom. He turned his gaze and rendered to dust all that religiosity (that easy eh?) All right - even if you allowed the music through the grinder, there were still those God-awful cantata texts - all that coming (ich komme), all that blood. Luckily, he had forgotten most of his German. Rosenberg warmed himself on the ashes of classicism and musicologists who had found yet another forgettable, second-rate 18th-century hack court composer. As he focused the sun's rays through his eyeglass and onto the romantics, he smelt the smoke of sonata form contentment - conveniently sidestepping Beethoven. Aber ich bin Beethoven! yells some deranged detainee from the other side of the quarry. Ach, they all think they are Beethoven. No more stodgy Brahms, no tortured Schoenberg, and none of that mediocre pop music.

YOU COULDN'T HAVE ENDED UP WITH ALL THAT MUSIC

without the piano; it had been the musicologist's dream instrument. Apart from it being blindingly obvious where all the notes are and hence a reductionist's hammer taken to the basic principles of 'other' in music, the keyboard (for that is what it had come down to) haunted Rosenberg, who had lived long enough to see that 84 keys were an extravagance in passing (he blinked). The piano was clearly responsible for the computer - and Steve Jobs had been tone deaf (he noted). One keyboard click was what it now took to play the entire works of any sonic event ever heard by anyone at any time in any place, including the quarry where he was now working, building his final contribution - a one-stop shopping marvel to confound: the irreducible computational device made of stone.

A CHASTENED, BARE-FOOTED

ROSENBERG CONTINUED his contemplative labour. Here a chip, there a chip, everywhere a chip chip. The keyboard was the super paradigm of the Enlightenment. The Cartesian balloon sent aloft in the unlimited fresh air released with the decapitation of the French nobility and its gastronomic cake. What could be more damning than the simple elegance of a pianoforte - duality in abundance at the table of the bourgeois? The black keys could be white, and the white keys could be black. It didn't matter as long as there were two sets clearly demarcated for all to see and hear, all in their places with bright shining faces, (Rosenberg pondered between movements, his stone axe raised in anticipation).

OCCASIONALLY, the quarry manager would call a production meeting with Rosenberg, for this was how it used to be. They would stare at each other, tacitly, each trying to remember the agenda. One time, the violinist thought he heard the sound of scribbling. Writing on stone tablets? Surely such a useful tool would have left a data trail as to its method and purpose? Every activity had left a trace, whether taking your dog for a walk, boiling an egg, or playing the violin. All begat data - data that had been generated, stored, sold, and then lost. But even the most effervescent of data with the lightest of footprints had needed a physical reality in which to exist. Electricity; the guilty conduit. Can you run me through that again? Coal, air (impossible to breath), power stations, rare earths... the manager of the quarry could not remember the rest. They continued to observe each other for many, many moments before mutually assuming (after an inadvertent movement of the head) that the meeting was over.