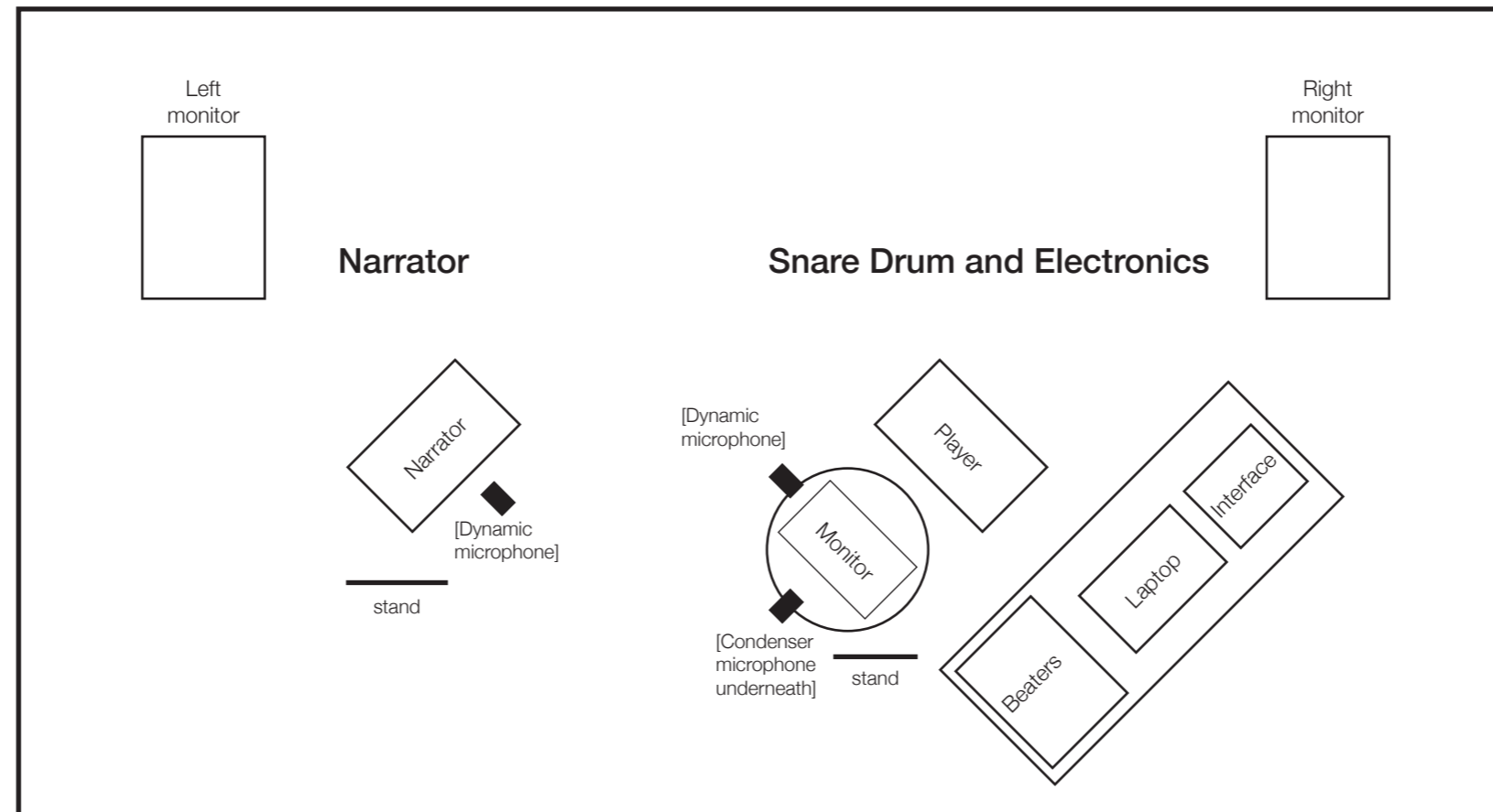# Ode to Pynchon

Alex De Little

Overview

This piece is an ode to the literary imagination of Thomas Pynchon. It aims to convey an essence of his writing style through a non-linear framework inspired by his fragmentary and often disorientating treatment of the narrative.

Recorded quotes taken from across Pynchon's eight novels are arranged in terms of themes and triggered at random by a max/msp patch, provoking particular responses from live snare drum and narrator. During the course of the piece, thematic consistency gives way to a lack of clarity, where Pynchon's voice is heard as a series of interconnected, obscured fragments. The musicians roles gradually lose structure, becoming increasingly interprative.

Stage Layout and Setup

Left monitor

Right monitor

Narrator

Snare Drum and Electronics

Narrator

[Dynamic microphone]

[Dynamic microphone]

Player

Interface

stand

Monitor

Laptop

[Condenser microphone underneath]

stand

Beaters

Notes on Setup

PA should be placed behind the players, allowing them to hear the output of the max-patch. A small monitor should be placed underneath the drum so that the cone is pointing directly at the snare. The laptop should be in a position where the the contents of the max patch can be clearly seen by both players. Either the snare drum player may create a live mix through the laptop, or the live output of the max patch can be sent to the in-house engineer. The snare drum should be carefully amplified underneath so as to capture as much of the sine-wave material as possible. Players should be positioned at a roughly 45 degree angle to maximise eye contact.

The snare drum should be tuned to a slightly different pitch at each tuning point: Not too much to comprimise the overall timbre of the drum, but enough to be detectable when the edges of the drum are played. The snare drum player should make sure they have the following beaters: Soft timpani mallets, bell mallets, brushes and regular sticks. The narrator may be seated or standing.

The audio interface used should have at least three audio outputs. The sine wave is routed to output three, whilst the triggered samples are routed to outputs one and two. The recording function inside the patch only captures channels one and two.

Notes

General Remarks

Recorded quotes generated by the patch are arranged by theme, and each theme is read by a different speaker. There are seven themes in total. In minutes 2-4 of the piece, the patch decreases the gaps between quotes. From this point onwards, the quantity of each quote played is progressivley reduced until it reaches zero and the piece ends. A sine wave of greadually increasing frequency, triggered by the patch resonates the snare drum.

Performers respond musically to this generated material in various ways throughout the piece. The manner in which they do so is directly influenced by which material is generated by the patch, and how much the patch has reduced the size of triggered samples. The patch is automated to trigger material, however the material that it produces is completely random and therefore performer's responses are always spontaneous.

The overall structure of the piece moves in totality from complete quotations with tangible musical responses to an abstracted dialogue between the seven speakers, accompanied by fragmentary musical gestures. Performers start by responding with a distinct musical or spoken reaction per theme. The snare enters with the patch, and reacts to the patch using the same material for six minutes. The narrator's part is more developmental, moving from spoken phrases, to perfomed phrases before imitating the drum's rhythms with words, and finally performing with phonemes. A timeline that plots the performers musical reactions can be found at the bottom of each page.

Information about the themes of triggered quote material, position within the material, and position within the piece are all visible in the max patch. Therefore, ensure that the laptop screen is visible at all times.

Narrator
(male or female)

Introduction
Read the passage aloud in an expressive manner at a relatively brisk pace.

Stage 1
Read the passages provided in the **silence between triggered quotes**. The passage read should relate to the theme of the quote that has just been heard. Repeat until the next quote is heard. Stop as soon as the next quote is heard. Move to stage 2 when there is no longer silence between quotes. Where there is a pause under a theme heading, the performer should remain silent.

Stage 2
Perform the passages as written **over** the triggered quote material. Each passage performed should relate to thethee of current quote material in the max patch. Material should be repeated until the next quote starts, at which time the performer should move to the next piece of material. Short pauses are permitted in between material. Where there is a pause under a theme heading, the performer should remain silent.

Stage 3
Use the words provided to imitate the rhythms of the snare. Only imitate the snare when it is performing a consistent rhythmic pattern. i.e. not when... Use the word that contains the quantity of syllables most appropriate for the current rhythm, i.e. three-syllables for a triplet rhythm. Follow the dynamics of the drum.

Stage 4
The page contains two types of material. The performer should alternate betweeen the two, spending roughly 10" on each. Material on the left hand side of the page consists of consonant phonemes. Each time this material is performed, the narrator should alternate constantly between any two of the six phonemes. A different tempo should be adopted each time.

Material on the right side of the page consists of vowel-based phonemes. The performer may start at any of the four points, and should hold the phoneme at the current pitch of the sine wave, gradually moving to an adjacent phoneme. The transition between phonemes can happen as slowly or quickly as the performer deems appropriate. It is imperative that the performer holds the firs pitch that they hear and doesn't move with the acsending sine frequency. Pay close attention to dynamics for both groups of material.

Electronics

Electronics should controlled by the snare drum player and set up as per page 3. Audio files are contained within the max patch folder and are routed directly to the patch.

Open the patch in presentation-mode. Start the patch directly after the narrator reads the introductory passage (instructions can be found inside the patch). There should be little or no gap between the narrator finishing and the patch starting. The patch will run automatically for the duration of the piece. When the generated quote size has reached zero, the patch will revert to generating quotes at their full length. When a full length quote is heard (ca.10'), **both performers should stop**.
The snare drum player should at this point terminate the sine wave, and wait for the quote to end before fading it out and resetting the patch.

Patch adjustments -Sine wave frequencies may be adjusted as preferred by editing the message sent to the sine generator. Instructions for this are noted inside the sine sub-patcher.

Snare Drum

Stage 1
Respond to randomly generated quotes as per the designated material for each theme. Whilst dynamics should be adhered to, the overall dynamic should increase over the course of this section. Never mask the narrator or max patch. Where there is a pause under a theme heading, the performer should remain silent.

### Stage 2
Follow the given instructions.

Notation

Verbal Notation
All verbal notation should be interpreted in the same way as it would be applied to a musical note:

☙ Pause. Hold the phoneme over which it is placed. The length of a pause is discretionary.

● Staccato. Applies to the word over which it is placed.

> Attack. Attack the phoneme over which it is placed.

Snare Notation
Symbols are given for different playing positions on the drum:
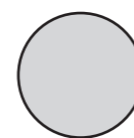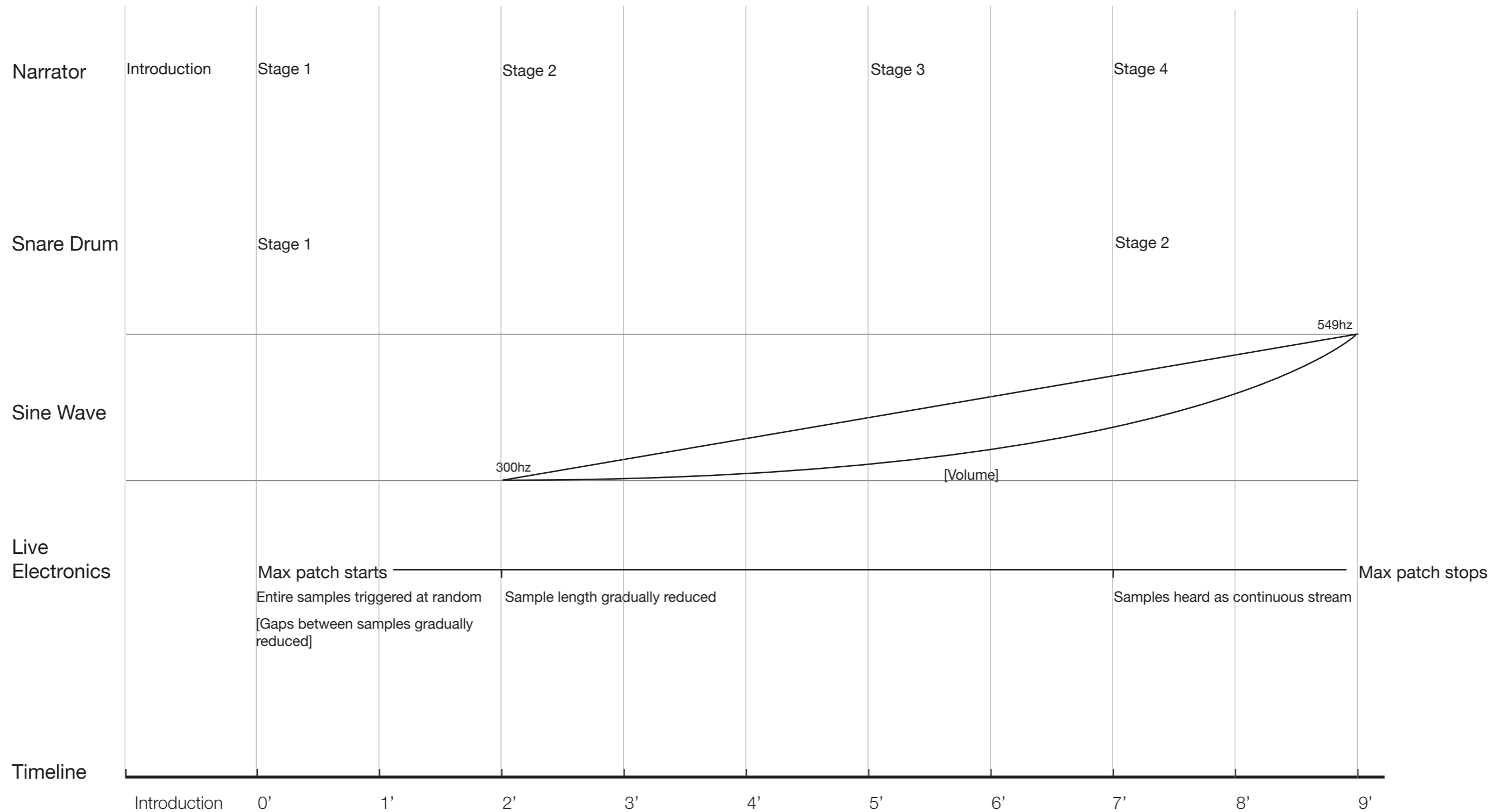
Use the entire face of the drum.

Play only in the center of the drum.

Use only the outside edges of the drum.

Meta-Score

	Introduction	Stage 1		Stage 2			Stage 3		Stage 4	

Narrator — Introduction, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4

Snare Drum — Stage 1, Stage 2

Sine Wave

549hz

300hz

[Volume]

Live Electronics

Max patch starts   Max patch stops

Entire samples triggered at random   Sample length gradually reduced   Samples heard as continuous stream

[Gaps between samples gradually reduced]

Timeline

Introduction   0'   1'   2'   3'   4'   5'   6'   7'   8'   9'

Narrator, Introduction

We are safely past days of the Eis-Heiligen-St. Pancratius, St. Servatius, St. Bonifacius, die kalte Sophie...they hover in clouds above the vineyards, holy beings of ice, ready with a breath, an intention, to ruin the year with frost and cold. In certain years, especially War years, they are short on charity, peevish, smug in their power: not quite saintly or even Christian. The prayers of growers, pickers and wine enthusiasts must reach them, but there's no telling how the ice-saints feel – coarse laughter, pagan annoyance, who understands this rear-guard who preserve winter against the revolutionaries of May?

They found the countryside, this year, at peace by a scant few days. Already vines are beginning to grow back over the dragon's teeth, fallen Stukas, burned tanks. The sun warms the hillsides, the rivers fall bright as wine. The saints have refrained. Nights have been mild. The frost didn't come. It is the spring of peace. The vintage, God granting at least a hundred days of sun, will be fine.
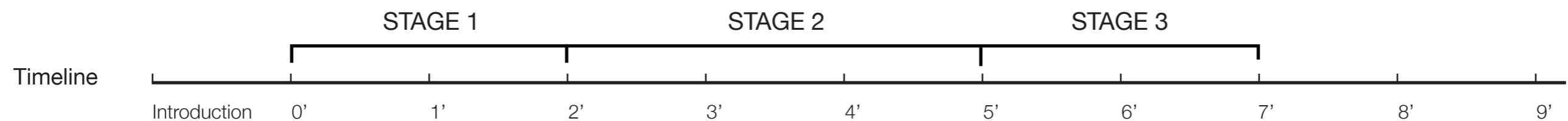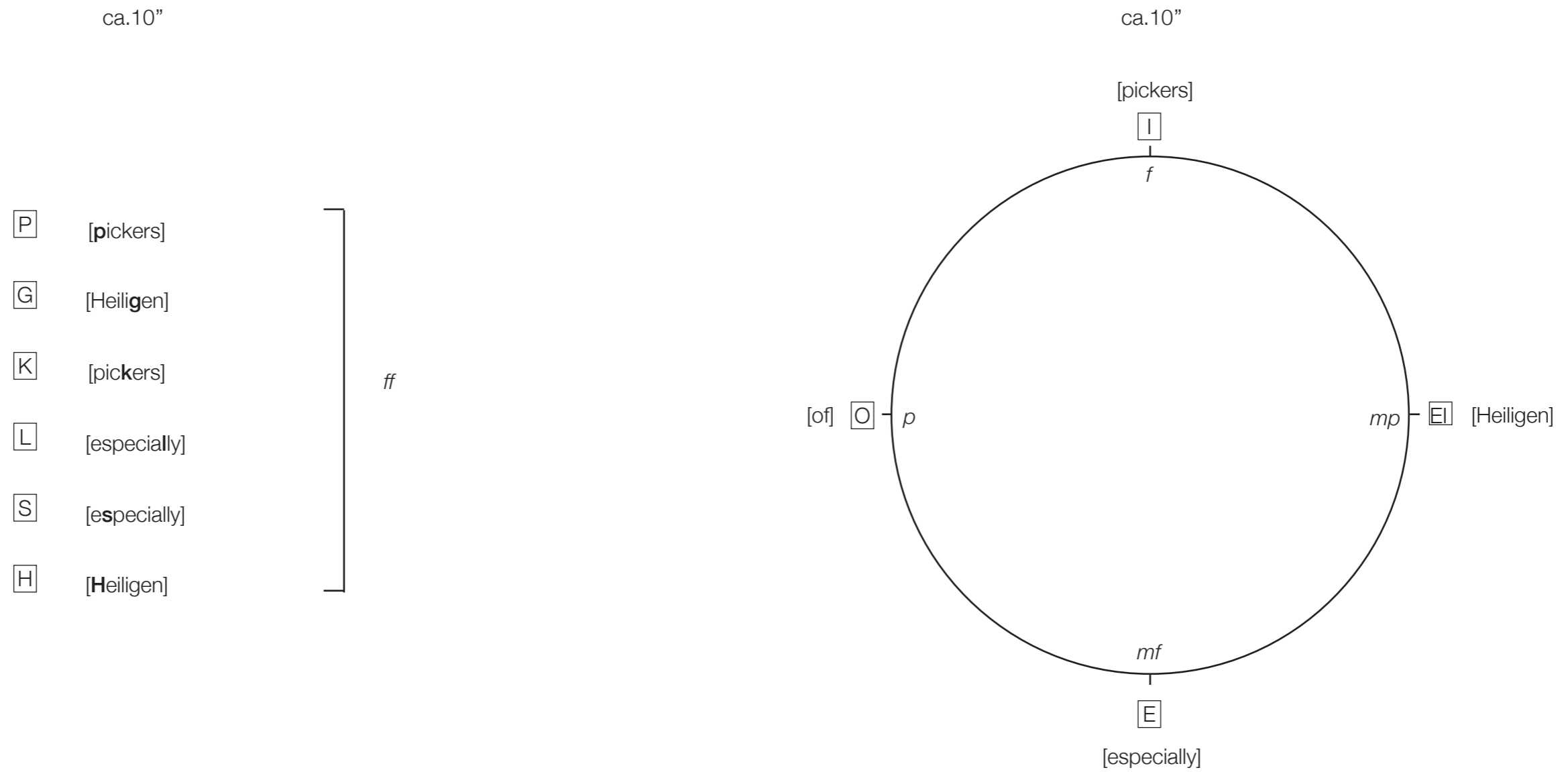
Timeline

Introduction   0'   1'   2'   3'   4'   5'   6'   7'   8'   9'

Narrator, Stages 1-3

	ALTERITY	COMEDY	DESCRIPTION	HISTORY	PARANOIA	POLITICS	SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY
STAGE 1	Eis-Heiligen- St. Pancratius, St. Servatius, St. Bonifacius.	The prayers of growers, pickers and wine enthusiasts	The sun warms the hill-sides, the rivers fall bright as wine.	In certain years, especially War years, they are short on charity, peevish, smug	Holy beings of ice, ready with a breath, an intention	Nights have been mild. The frost didn't come. It is the spring of peace.	
STAGE 2	Eis-Heiligen- St. Pancratius, St. Servatius, St. Bonifacius. [Start first line slow; speed up each line]	The prayers of growers, pickers and wine enthusiasts [medium tempo]	The sun warms the hill-sides... The rivers fall bright as wine.... [prosody: reflective light, syncopated feel.]	In certain years, especially War years, they are short on charity, peevish, smug	Holy beings of ice, ready with a breath, an intention [pause between lines ca. 2" prosody: light paranoia]	Nights have been mild. The frost didn't come. It is the spring of peace. [repeat metrically, as if each phrase is part of a 6/8 bar. prosody - insistent]	
	p ———— *ff*	*f*	*mp*	*f*	*pp*	*mf*	

STAGE 3

DIALOGUE WITH SNARE

1 OF   2 PICKERS   3 HEILIGEN   4 ESPECIALLY

| STAGE 1 | STAGE 2 | STAGE 3 |

Timeline

Introduction   0'   1'   2'   3'   4'   5'   6'   7'   8'   9'

Narrator, Stage 4

ca.10"

P   [**pi**ckers]

G   [Heili**g**en]

K   [pic**k**ers]

L   [especia**ll**y]

S   [e**s**pecially]

H   [**H**eiligen]

ff

ca.10"

[pickers]

I

f

[of] O — *p*

mp — EI   [Heiligen]

mf

E

[especially]

Timeline

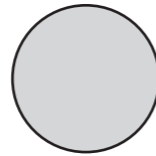Introduction   0'   1'   2'   3'   4'   5'   6'   7'   8'   9'
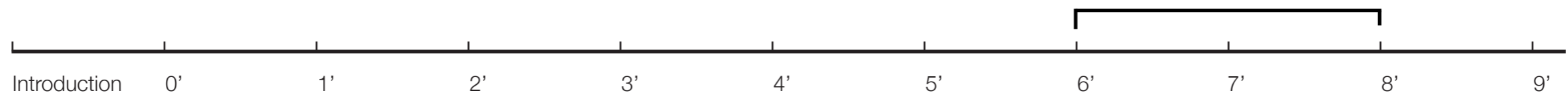
Snare Drum, Stage 1

ALTERITY

COMEDY

BRUSHES

Move brushes around the skin of the drum in a frantic quaver manner.
Shape each phrase with a dynamic swell.
Dynamics should be relative to the overall texture.
Pause for c.1" between swells.

 Stop playing when next sample starts

DESCRIPTION

TIMPANI MALLETS

Place ball of left hand stick on skin of drum. Strike with ball of right hand stick to bring out resonances of the drum. Repeat in a quaver manner, creating a palindrominc increase-decrease in tempo and dynamic in each phrase. Pause between phrases. Vary the pressure of the left hand on the skin of the drum.
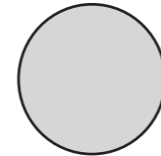
 Stop playing when sample stops

HISTORY

NORMAL STICKS

Repeat the rhythm of the first spoken phrase of the sample. Ths should be more the length of a spoken clause or phrase than a sentence; stay as true to the rhythm of the speech as possible.

 Stop playing when sample stops

PARANOIA

NORMAL STICKS

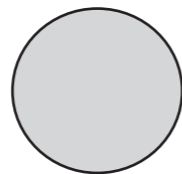Play a crotchet motion of any tempo, accenting every third or fourth beat. Crescendo towards each accented beat.

 Stop playing when next sample starts

POLITICS

BELL MALLETS

Hold sticks by the fingertips and allow each stick to bounce on the drum in turn, creating an overlapping texture. Vary the amount of overlap. The dynamic will be defined by the action.

 Stop playing when next sample starts

SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

BRUSHES

Imitate the rhythms of speech fragments as they are heard. They needn't be exact. Strive to capture the dynamic and rhythmic charecteristics of the voice. After imitating one phrase, the player may pause to hear the next before recommencing.

 Stop playing when sample stops

Move onto next section either after the samples become too short to play, or after 7 minutes.

Turn on snare

Timeline

Introduction 0' 1' 2' 3' 4' 5' 6' 7' 8' 9'
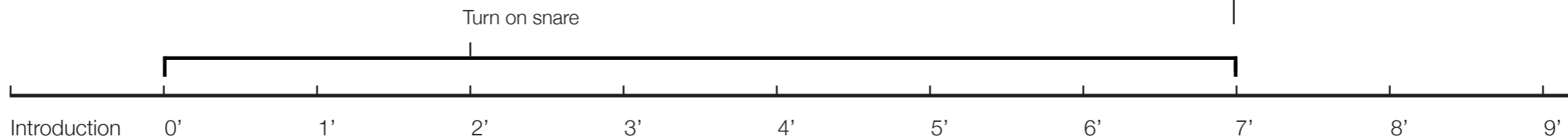
Snare Drum, Stage 2

TIMPANI MALLETS

If the sine-wave is creating a beating with the snare drum that is at a playable tempo, the player should pick out this rhythm, either playing the rhythm itself or triplets in relation to it.

If the sine wave is not beating, or is beating at an unplayable tempo, the player should imitate fragments of speech, in the same way as the 'Science and Technology' material on the previous page.

If at any time the beating becomes playable, the player should move back to playing in time with it. The player is, therefore, moving backwards and forwards between two different states.

ff
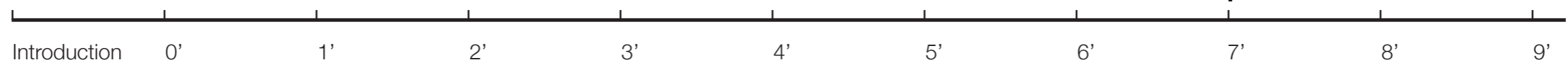
When patch finishes, terminate sine and fade out vocal

Timeline

Introduction	0'	1'	2'	3'	4'	5'	6'	7'	8'	9'