Ben Johansen

Extemporizations No. 1
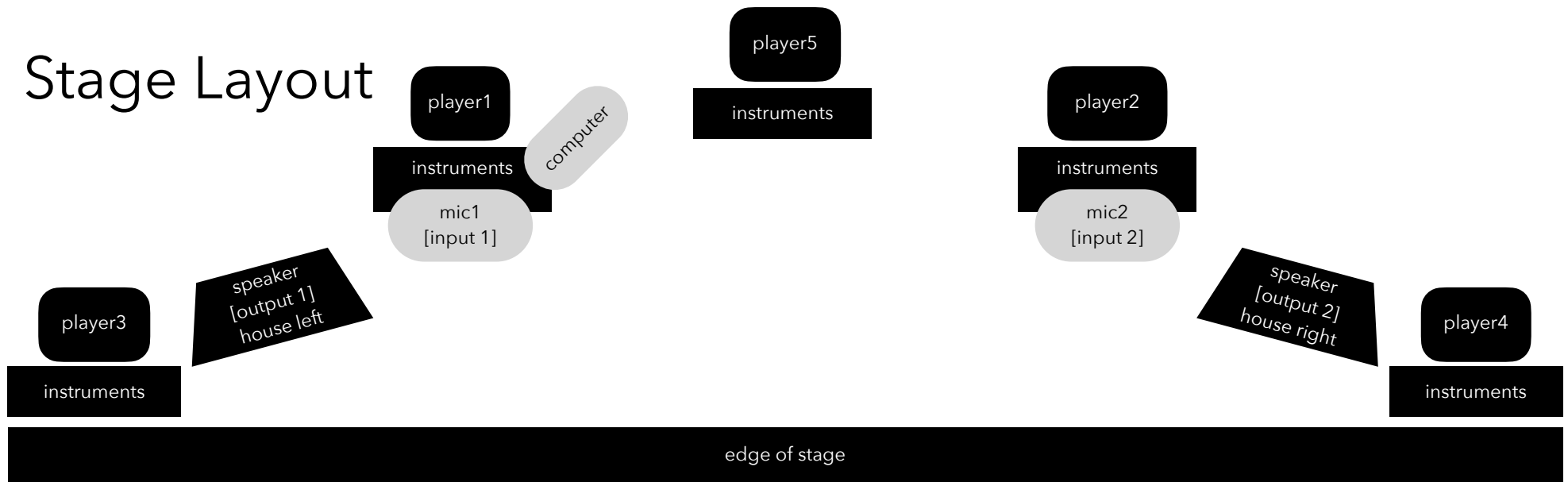
for

2 - 5 Percussionists + Computer

Performance Notes

This work requires a great deal of musical improvisation by all performers. While the score and computer interaction provides a framework, performers have to be confident in experimenting with what the instruments can do and how to best feed data to the computer to create desired soundscapes.

This work may be performed successfully with anywhere from 2 to 5 performers. Players 3 - 5's task is to blur the line between the acoustic world of Players 1 & 2 and the digital world the computer creates. This task requires careful listening to both what Players 1 & 2 perform *and* to that which is created by the computer. Create a dialogue. Only say something musically when you have something to say. Most of what is written in the score for Players 3, 4, & 5 are when *not* to play … almost everything else is left up to the tactful real time composition of the performers.

Ideally, the score will be memorized so performers will not have to look at the score during the performance. It is better to reserve as much space in your senses as possible to actively listen in order to compose in real time within the confines of the score provides.

Stage Layout

player5
instruments

player1
instruments
computer
mic1
[input 1]

player2
instruments
mic2
[input 2]

speaker
[output 1]
house left

speaker
[output 2]
house right

player3
instruments

player4
instruments

edge of stage

audience

Instrumentation

Players 1 & 2
- medium tom (~13") with cloth
- large heavy triangle (~8") with many overtones (& beater)
- snare drum
- handbell (simple consumer version)
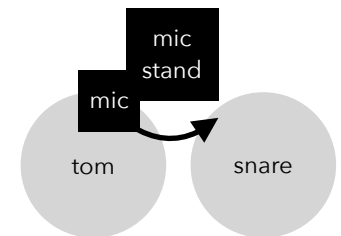
Players 3, 4, & 5
- various found materials (metal, wood, glass)
- triangle (different size than Players 1 & 2) with many overtones (& beater)
- wind chimes and a glass bottle

Acoustic Instrument Setup

- **Players 1 & 2** - place one layer of cloth over the top of the tom, hung along the side of the tom, and wrapped under the tom (between the tom and tom stand) to create an extremely dry, low tone
- **Players 3, 4, & 5** - wind chimes:
    - if only one set of wind chimes are available, give them to Player 5; otherwise, place wind chimes in front of each of Players 3, 4, & 5
    - place wind chimes flat on a cloth or carpet topped stand
    - play wind chimes with a glass bottle (carefully not to break the bottle) by striking and rolling the bottle over the wind chimes
    - the purpose is to achieve a sound that resembles breaking glass
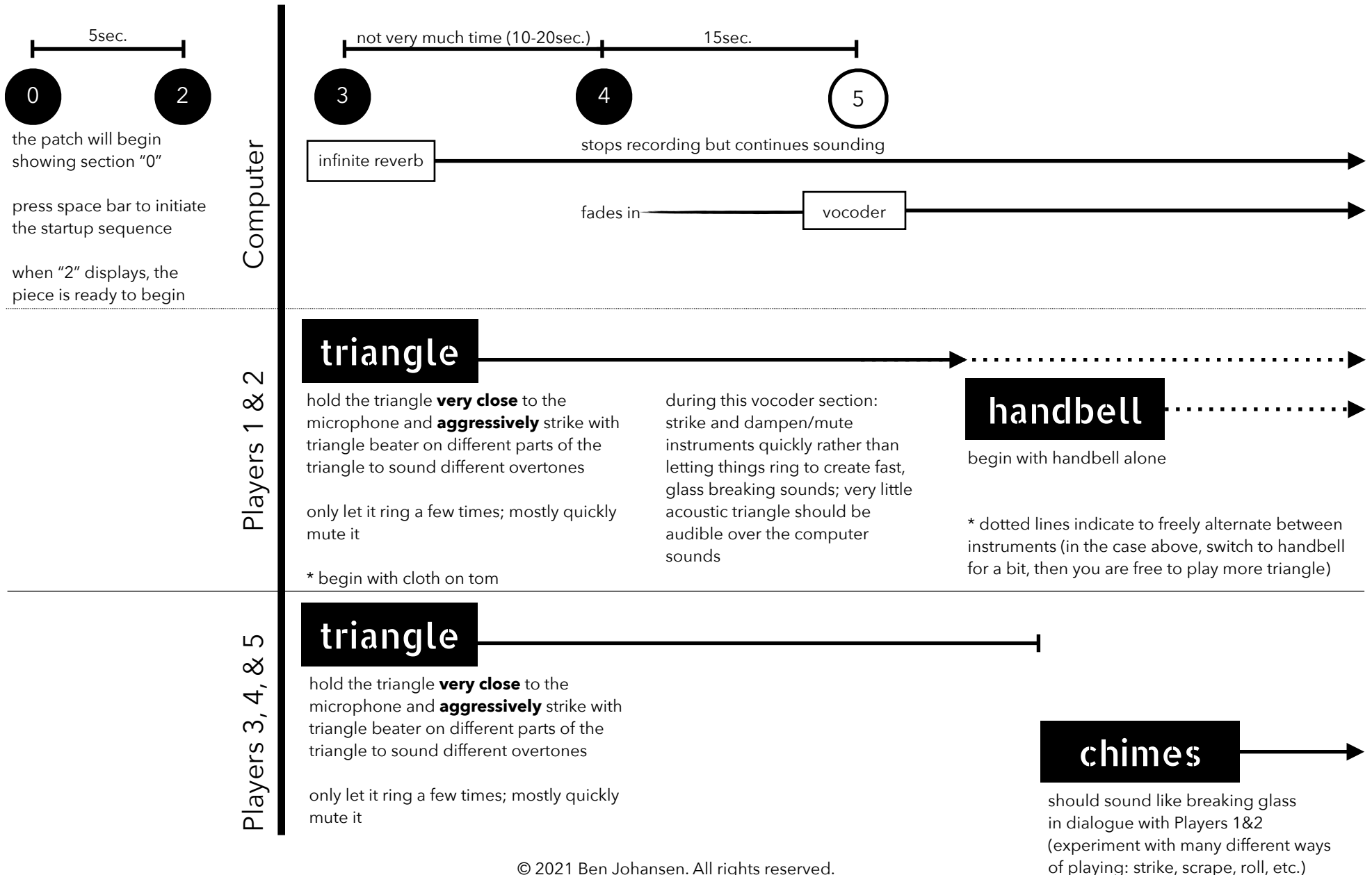
Electronics Setup

- Use an **audio interface with two mic inputs** (with preamps) and two outputs
    - connect two large loudspeakers of the best quality and largest frequency response available to audio interface (outputs 1 & 2)
    - connect two microphones to the audio interface (inputs 1 & 2); using dynamic mics such as SM57's will reduce feedback issues
    - place each microphone on the audience side of the tom + snare setup played by Players 1 & 2 at a slight angle downward (~45°) positioned over the drum head; make sure the mics are positioned further from the audience than the speakers to ensure they don't pick up sound from the speakers; position mic stand in such a way that the mic can easily be swiveled to be over the snare drum during the performance if necessary
- Use a **powerful computer** with as much processing and RAM as possible (this patch uses over 2GB of RAM)
    - the computer can be controlled by Player 1 on stage **or** by someone else from off stage (in the audience)
    - install Max [software application] = https://cycling74.com/downloads (currently Max 8.2)
    - download the Max patch created for this work (link provided upon purchase of the work) and keep the file structure intact
    - when you open the main patch entitled "_extemporization-no1.maxpat," it will show a large "0" - press the space bar to begin the startup sequence for the piece which will advance to section "2." - at any time, press "PANIC / RESTART" to get back to "0"
    - solid circles with numbers indicate sections advanced manually with space bar; circle 5 & 7 are automatically advanced by computer

Extemporizations No. 1

for 2 - 5 Percussionists + Computer   By Ben Johansen

Computer

5sec.

0   **2**

not very much time (10-20sec.)   15sec.

3   **4**   5

stops recording but continues sounding

infinite reverb

fades in   vocoder

the patch will begin showing section "0"

press space bar to initiate the startup sequence

when "2" displays, the piece is ready to begin

Players 1 & 2

triangle   **handbell**

hold the triangle **very close** to the microphone and **aggressively** strike with triangle beater on different parts of the triangle to sound different overtones

only let it ring a few times; mostly quickly mute it

* begin with cloth on tom

during this vocoder section: strike and dampen/mute instruments quickly rather than letting things ring to create fast, glass breaking sounds; very little acoustic triangle should be audible over the computer sounds

begin with handbell alone

* dotted lines indicate to freely alternate between instruments (in the case above, switch to handbell for a bit, then you are free to play more triangle)

Players 3, 4, & 5

triangle

hold the triangle **very close** to the microphone and **aggressively** strike with triangle beater on different parts of the triangle to sound different overtones

only let it ring a few times; mostly quickly mute it

chimes

should sound like breaking glass in dialogue with Players 1&2 (experiment with many different ways of playing: strike, scrape, roll, etc.)

(from circle 5 to 6 should be around 60sec.)

infinite reverb | continues →

vocoder | continues →

tom + cloth   **tom (no cloth)**

begin by hitting
tom with handbell
as the mallet

replace handbell
"mallet" with
felt mallet

remove the cloth, hit
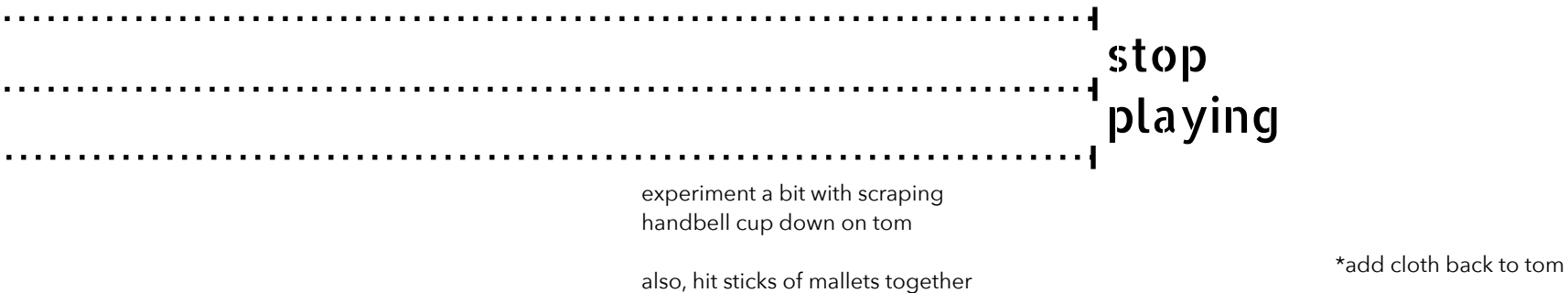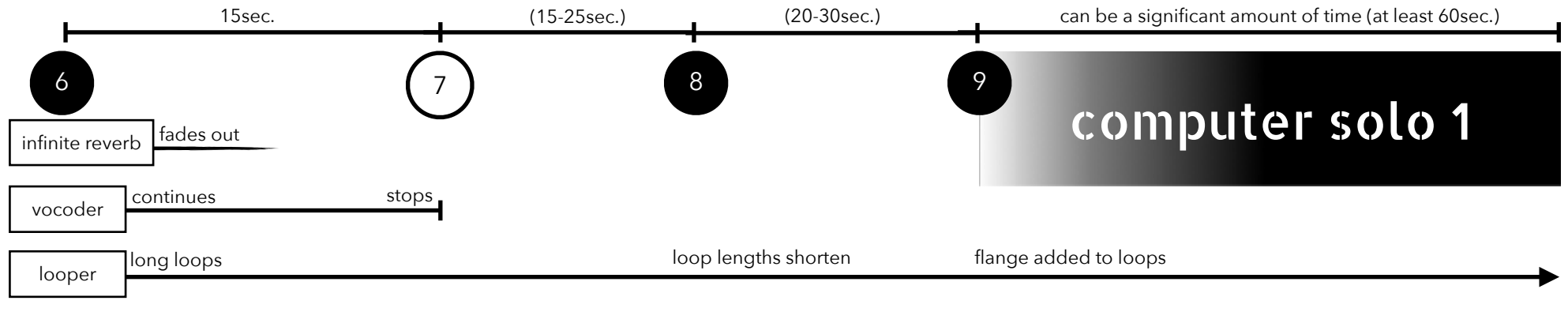the drum and let it ring

continue to improvise by intuitively
alternating between dampening the
drum with your hand and letting it ring

(continue chimes breaking glass sound in dialogue with Players 1&2) →

15sec.   (15-25sec.)   (20-30sec.)   can be a significant amount of time (at least 60sec.)

6   **7**   **8**   **9**

computer solo 1

infinite reverb — fades out

vocoder — continues — stops

looper — long loops   loop lengths shorten   flange added to loops

stop playing

experiment a bit with scraping
handbell cup down on tom

also, hit sticks of mallets together

*add cloth back to tom

(continue chimes breaking glass sound in dialogue with Players 1&2)   fade out

stop playing

(60$^+$sec.)

10

trigger

looper — stops

tom + cloth

when the computer is set to section 10, the first tom hit (by either Player 1 or Player 2) will stop the looper from sounding … so dramatically let the first hit go for a while (less than 20sec.) before triggering another sample

Note: there must be no more than 20 seconds between strikes … alternate between sparse and crowded

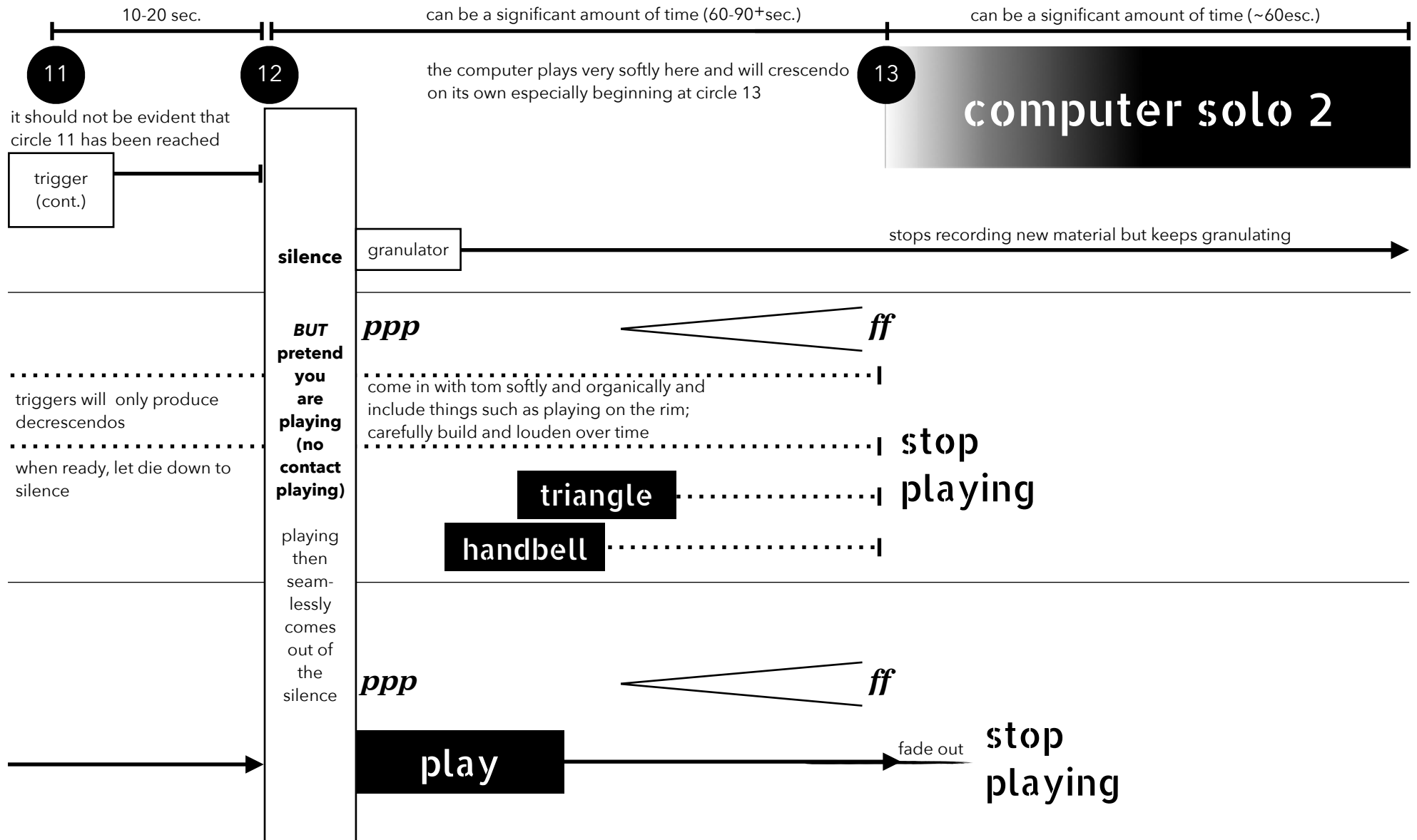**snare with snare on**

add in infrequently

no playing

play any instrument

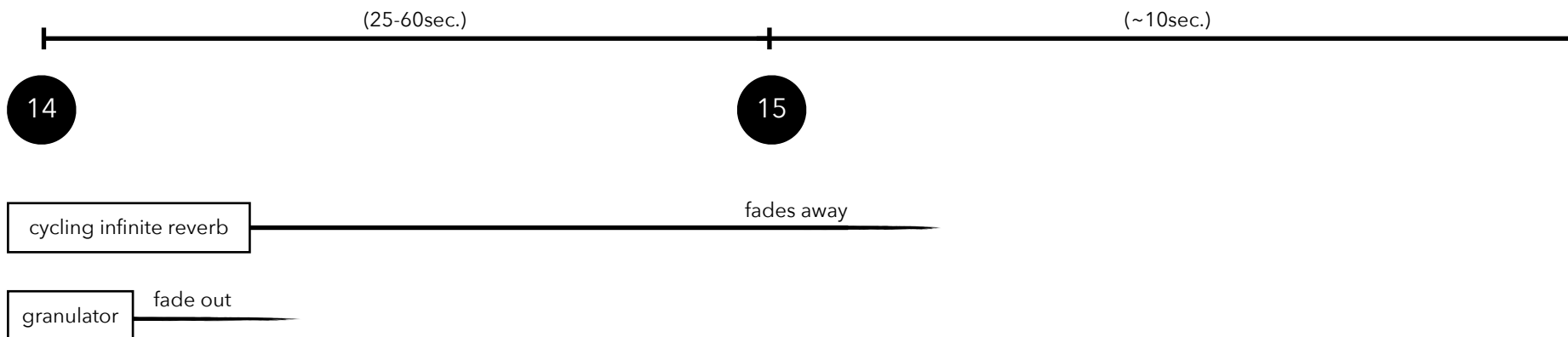sensitively fill silence when Players 1 & 2 allow a decrescendo. of a sample to create complete silence

10-20 sec.

can be a significant amount of time (60-90+sec.)

can be a significant amount of time (~60esc.)

11

12

the computer plays very softly here and will crescendo
on its own especially beginning at circle 13

13

computer solo 2

it should not be evident that
circle 11 has been reached

trigger
(cont.)

silence

granulator

stops recording new material but keeps granulating

**BUT
pretend
you
are
playing
(no
contact
playing)**

ppp

ff

triggers will only produce
decrescendos

come in with tom softly and organically and
include things such as playing on the rim;
carefully build and louden over time

**stop
playing**

when ready, let die down to
silence

triangle

handbell

playing
then
seam-
lessly
comes
out of
the
silence

ppp

ff

play

fade out

**stop
playing**

(25-60sec.)   (~10sec.)

14   **15**

cycling infinite reverb   fades away

granulator   fade out

triangle

this is a different kind of infinite reverb that turns on and off every few seconds, so play around with creating different timbres that evolve

slowly begin to back away from the mic while still playing

Player 1 = transition to playing the triangle as it was traditionally intended to be played striking eighth notes at quarter note = 120 … decrescendo and end on a quarter note that is allowed to ring

Player 2 = fade out quickly at circle 15 ……… then play last quarter note with Player 1

triangle

fade out …………………………….. then play last quarter note with Player 1

total time = ~10min