Skr

Vocals, live electronics and live visuals

2020

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The text for the vocal is taken from a rough translation of hieroglyphs on a late-period Egyptian coffin lid. I have had something of a recent fascination for Ancient Egyptian beliefs, particularly surrounding death. This in part because theirs is a religion, in my personal understanding, of betweenness. Their religious architecture inhabits a particular kind of doubleness vacillating between the actual and (spectral) virtual that is always collapsing (for a moment) in one direction or the other. For a given soul, successfully crossing the threshold is often more a matter of tenacity than anything else; not merely the variously outlined trials on pyramid walls and in the Book of the Dead, but also in their subversion if needs be. In the exquisite script decorating the walls of his tomb, a particular priest conveniently declared himself 'among the judges' who would have the final say in the weighing of his soul. I sincerely hope he pulled it off!

In this piece, if I might speak crassly for a moment, I am acting out in my own way some semblance of that tenacity and perhaps pushing through just a little. That is to say, the vocal actions to be undertaken as outlined in the score are forceful, intricate, multi-variant and exhausting to perform, but the resultant sound, the echo back, has its foot across the threshold of a dead space: positively nothing. This 'nothing' is in fact not 'nothing' just as being dead is in a manner of speaking simply another condition of being alive. The nothing I speak of is the nothing one finds in a vacuum; a space teaming with liveness as electrons and various exotic little particles pop in and out of existence. This nothing is an emergent, or positive, absence; not question of what is not there per se but what is not there by virtue of it having just been there; a statistical inscrutability.

It is this inscrutability, often also in the visuals as well as with the sound, that is in my opinion at the root of this piece's erotics. The disgusting and its erotic double come into play perhaps not just because the sounds are of an extremely bodily nature, and the imagery is often one of a moving indiscernible orifice, but also because of the imperviousness of any given moment of the piece to understanding. Perhaps I am tapping into the eroticized and gendered anxiety of the romantics that caused Keats to speak of his urn as 'a still unravished bride of quietness.'

Necessary equipment

Hardware:

- Video camera with optical zoom (I used a Canon camcorder).
- Video capture card.
- A recent computer capable of running Max/MSP and spectral processing on 4 channels independently.
- A condenser microphone (I used an AKG 414)
- An audio interface (I used a Lexicon).
- A control surface, ideally with faders.

Software:

- The Max Patch available from the composer.
- Izotope RX plugins (or similar).

Runtime: 5' – 7'

Stage Setup

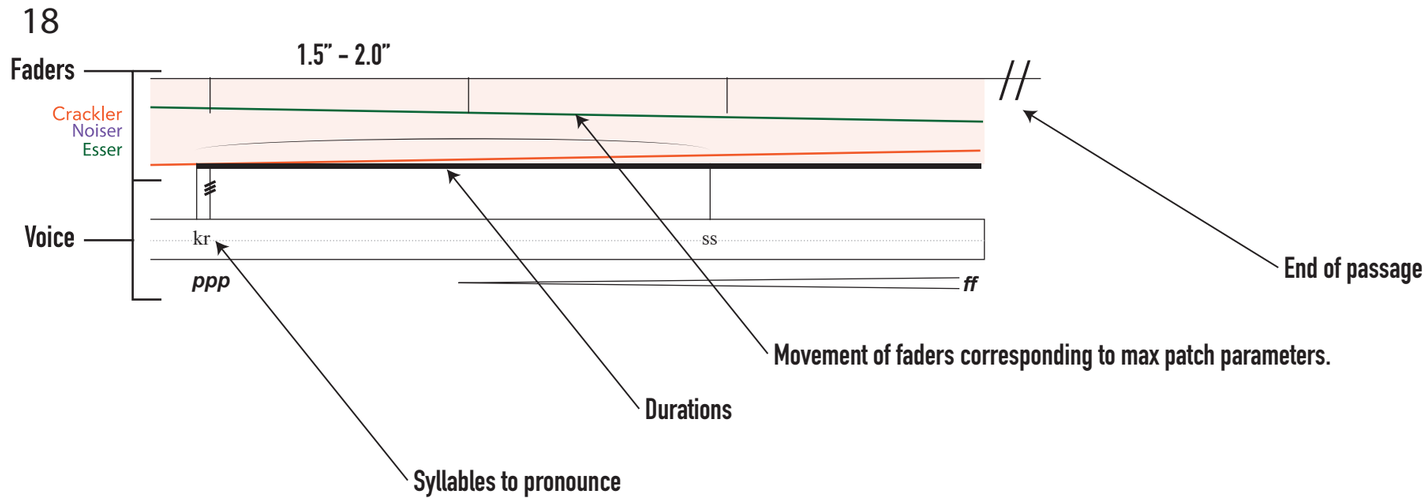
The performer should be in a separate room to the space in which the piece is nominally being performed, ideally where there is minimal sound bleed from one space to the other. The camera should be zoomed in to almost maximum, such that it tends to frame the mouth of the performer, and the video and audio output from the max patch should then be projected into the space. The performer should attempt to keep their mouth and lips in frame as much as possible, but the inevitable slippages in this regard are not be seen as failures but rather an integral part of the piece. On one side of them, the performer should have access to the control surface for the max patch. They will not be able to glance down at it except out of their periphery; For this reason, rehearsal with the control surface should take place in advance in order to embody the various changes that take place across the piece.

Syllables

th – as in thatch
hv – as in ‘have’ without the ‘a’
m – like an engine whine, or when interrupting a held sound, smacking the lips together.
kr – as in kraken
p – plosive sound, as in ‘pool’
sh – as in shock
t – tick, it, etc. Slightly over-pronounced even at the end of a phrase or ‘word’.
d – percussive ‘d’ – as in ‘door’
ss – as in hiss
ft – as in ‘foot’ without the ‘oo’.
ro – as in ‘rot’
ot – as in ‘rot’
so – as in ‘so’
a – as in ‘ah’

Notation

The piece consists of two staves. The upper stave is for motion of the faders on the control surface (labeled and colour-coded in the score according to the max patch parameters), The lower stave is for the vocal sounds to be made, which are always unpitched. The rhythmic notation is proportional, and beams specify both groups and durations of sound relative to the ‘ticks,’ which serve as a rough guideline. The music is split into passages of varying length marked by slashes, which can be interpreted as short pauses or else ignored.

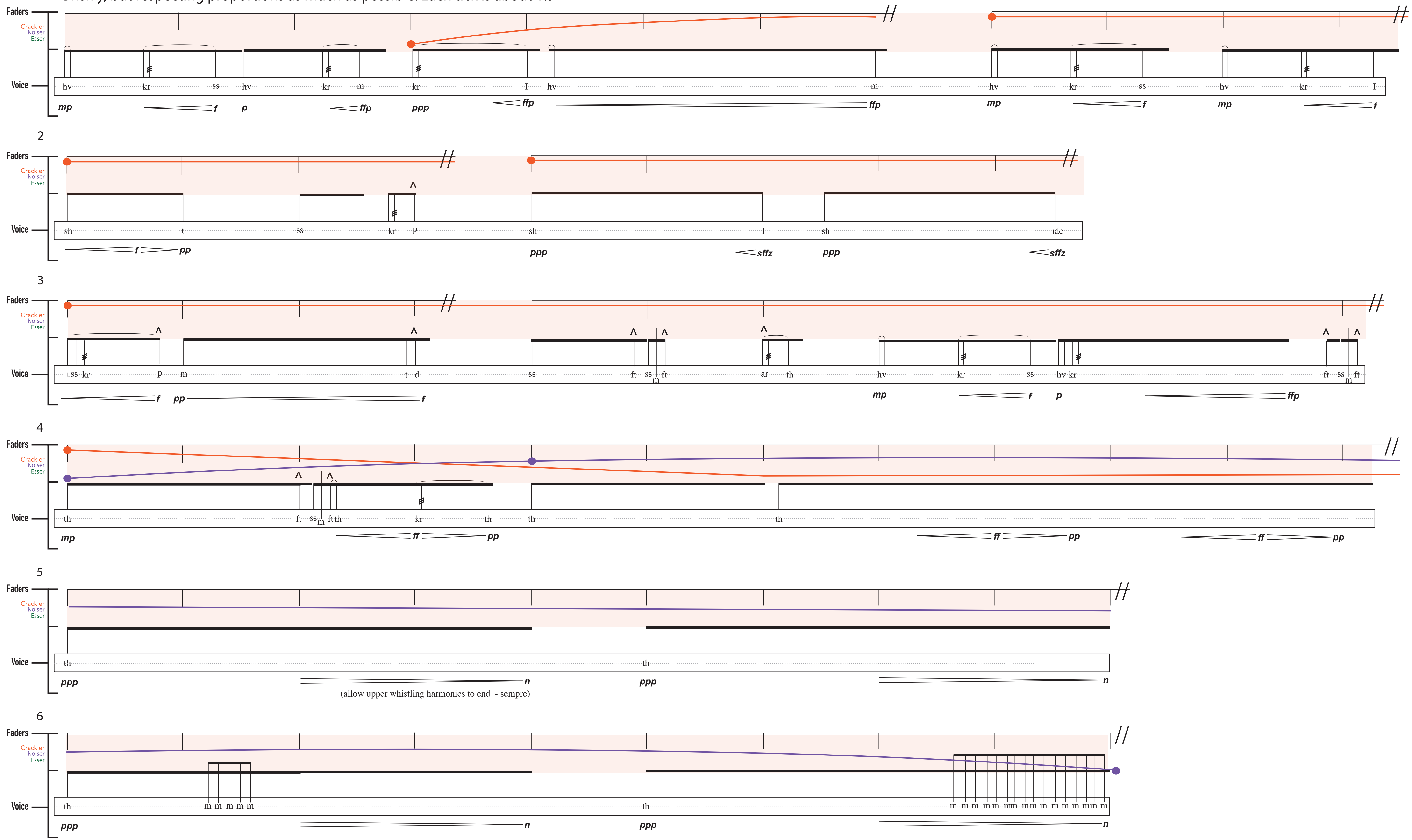


Additional symbols:

Gradual closing of the mouth over the course of a phrase.

Tongue rolls.
For ‘r’s as in rolled rs.
For ‘t’s as though imitating machine gun fire.

Briskly, but respecting proportions as much as possible. Each tick is about 1.5”



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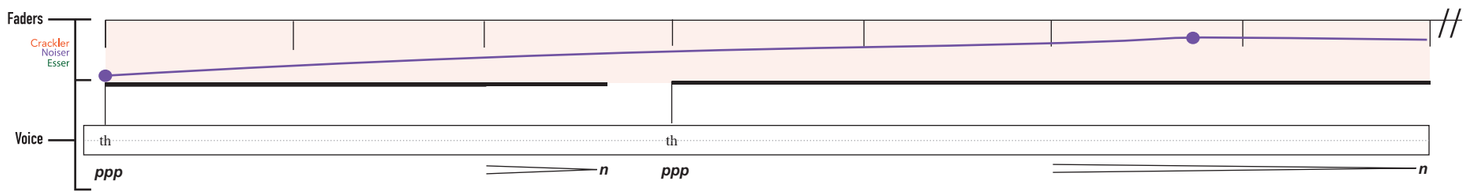
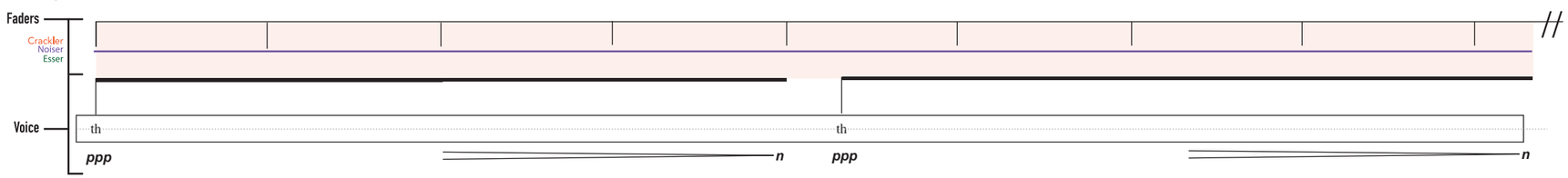
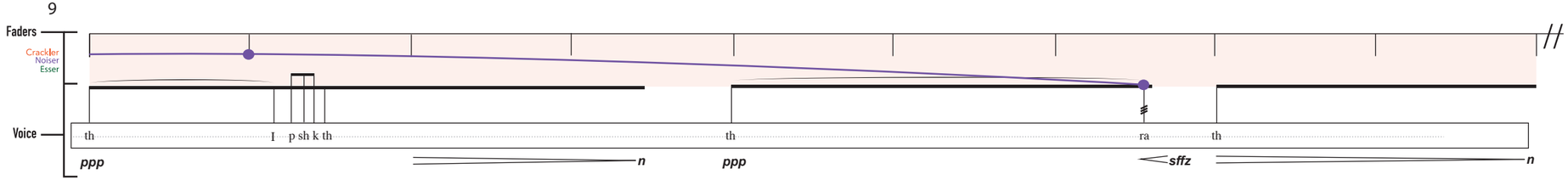

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
th
th
ppp
n
ppp
n

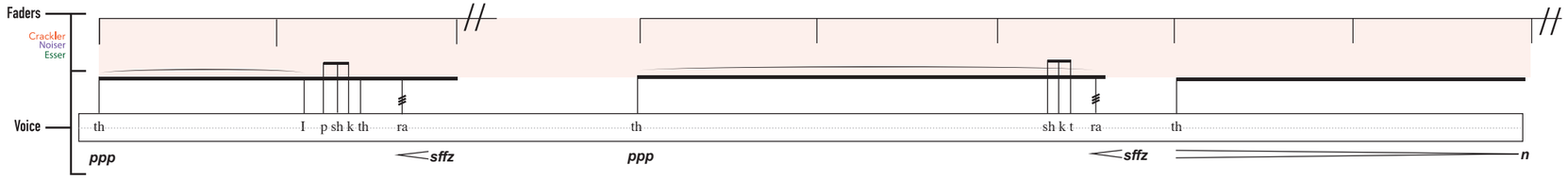
8


Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
th
th
ppp
n
ppp
n

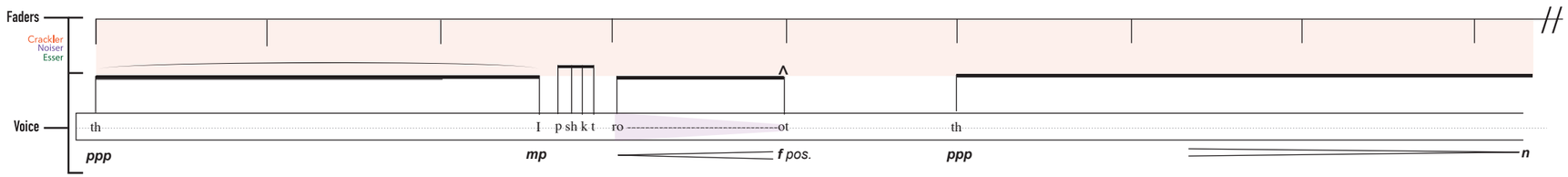
9


Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
th
I p sh k th
th
ra
th
ppp
n
ppp
sffz
n

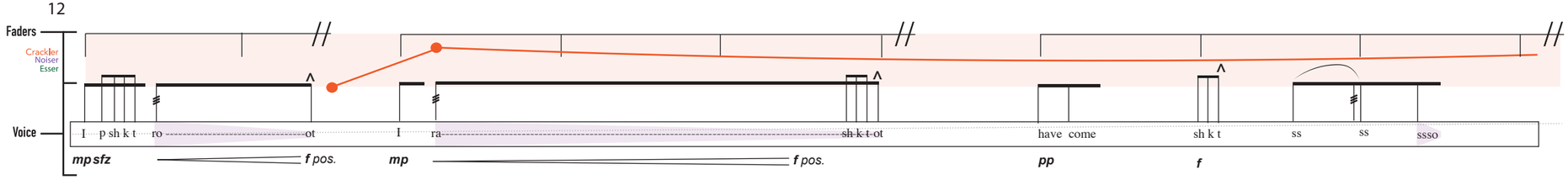
10


Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
th
I p sh k th
ra
th
sh k t
ra
th
ppp
sffz
ppp
sffz
n

11


Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
th
I p sh k t
ro
ot
th
ppp
mp
f pos.
ppp
n

12


Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice
I p sh k t
ro
ot
I
ra
sh k t ot
have come
sh k t
ss
ss
ssso
mp sfz
f pos.
mp
f pos.
pp
f

13

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

s f r a kr p s sh k t ot ide s f r a s f r s f

mp sffz f mp ff mp sffz n mp sffz

14

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

a a m m m m m m m m m m m m m m m s f r ss f r ss s f s f s f s f

mp ff mp sffz

15

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

ss ar th s f s f kr p s f a s f r ss a m m m m m m m m m m m m m m m f r ss s f s f s f s f f r s f s f s f s f

mp ff f mp ff mp sffz

16

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

ss ss ss ss kr ss

pp ff ppp ff ppp ff

17

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

ss ss sss ss

ff n ppp n

18

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

I have come so far th a t I have come so far that I might see sss sss sh k t s f kr p s f a s f r e s f r e

mp ppp n mp ppp mp f mp ff mp sffz mp ff

19

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

I have come so far that I might see Osiris th k r th s sh k t ot s f r e I have come so far that I might see Osiris that I might

mp *n* *mp* *ff* *mp* *sffz* *mp*

20

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

ll i hv kr i hv sh ide ll a ll a ll i hv I have come so far that I might see Osiris that I might live sssss s ssso

mp *mp* *f* *mp* *ppp* *sffz* *mp*

21

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

s f r ss ll e ll a ll i hv ll a ll i ll e sh ll e sh p sh k b s f r e

mp *sffz* *mp* *sffz* *sffz*

22

(sempre until end)

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

I have come so far that I might see Osiris that I might live by his side kr p ll e sh p sh k b sh k t s f s sh k t ot s f a s f r e s f r e b

mp *f* *mp* *ff* *mp* *ff* *mp* *sffz* *mp* *ff*

23

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

ra sh k t ot ll e sh I have come so far that I might see Osi ris that I might live by his side that I might rot kr a m m m m m m m m m m m m m m f r ss

f pos. *sffz* *ppp* *ff*

24

Faders
Crackler
Noiser
Esser
Voice

sh k t I have come so far that I might see Osi ris that I might live by his side that I might rot beside him

f

aulich, buffalo N.Y. April / May 2020.