Autophagia

Breath, Blood, & Brain

for three people

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Program Note

The term “autophagia” comes from the Greek roots “auto” and “phagia,” meaning “self” and “to eat.” In biology, autophagia refers to the natural process of cellular recycling—a life-sustaining mechanism where the body breaks down its own components to repair itself. In psychology, it takes a darker turn, describing the compulsion to consume parts of one’s own body.

Autophagia is a reflection of the creative process. As humans, we digest and repurpose elements of our lives, consuming our experiences, emotions, and influences. These are transformed and expelled as something entirely new—music, art, writing, etc. This cyclical process mirrors the decomposition and nutrient cycling within ecosystems, where decay becomes the foundation for new life.

Instrumentation

The piece consists of five kits made from collections of found and reconstructed objects.

1. "Nature"

Two gallon jugs, one filled partway with water
Dried Lunaria annua silicles (Annual Honesty)
Oak branch with dried leaves
Other foraged organic objects that produce nice sounds

2. "Death"

One quijada
Three turtle shells of varying size (largest filled with coyote knuckles)
Two deer jaws
Two deer femurs
Two deer scapula
One deer metatarsal/shell shaker
One goatskin shaker
Bone chimes

3. "Deconstruction"

Three drills
One jigsaw

4. "Reconstruction"

Three broken violins of varying timbre
One woodblock made from reclaimed piano wood
One goatskin drum made from reclaimed piano wood
Reconstructed chimes made from discarded metal piano parts
One medium sized terracotta pot

5. "Life"

Harp
One quijada

Stage Setup

Stage Right

Stage Left

Life

Reconstruction

Deconstruction

Death

Nature

Performance Notes

Breath, Blood, & Brain

Autophagia is performed by three people cycling through three roles over six continuous, overlapping movements traversing five stations. The roles are as follows:

Breath

The task of the ***Breath*** role is to create ambient texture. This is accomplished by rubbing, scraping, brushing, or lightly tapping materials. Encourage dynamic swells and temporal synchronization.

Blood

The task of the ***Blood*** role is to maintain a steady pulse. This is accomplished by performing the notated rhythms as seen on the following pages.

Brain

The task of the ***Brain*** role is to wander. This is done by straying from the pulse, phasing, and/or playing sporadically in one's own time.

Body

The piece begins as ***Person 1*** enters from stage left to play on the ***nature*** kit. After ~20 seconds, ***Person 2*** joins them. ~20 seconds later, ***Person 3*** joins. Once the minute is up, ***Person 1*** moves on to the next kit (***death***), and so on. In this way, each person spends 1 minute at each station, staggered by 20 seconds.

Time is approximate and will naturally breath throughout the performance. For reference, the 12-bar cycle of notated rhythms will last exactly 20 seconds when performed at 144 beats per minute.

When at the ***nature*** kit, all person's roles are always ***breath***. When at the ***life*** kit, all ***Persons 1 & 2*** assume the role of ***breath***, whereas ***Person 3*** assumes ***blood*** on the quijada. For all other kits, the first third of a minute is spent as ***breath***, the second third as ***blood*** and the final third as ***brain***.

After each person has finished their time at ***life***, they return to ***nature*** for a final minute. Once their minute is up, they exit the stage, staggered in the same way they entered.

Performance Notes

1. Nature

Breath

Everyone assumes the roll of ***breath*** here. ***Person 1*** enters from stage left and begins by pouring the water from one jug into another. Person 1 proceeds by swishing the water around the jug for the remainder of the minute. ***Person 2 & 3*** enter, staggered by 20 seconds to interact with the dried branches, leaves, and other organic materials.

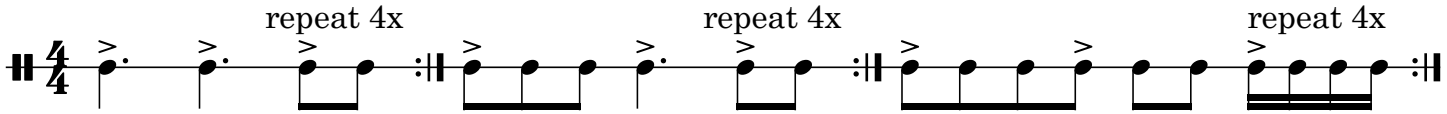
2. Death

Breath

Explore the timbral qualities of each of the items in the kit, priotizing sustained and continuous sounds. For example, Roll the shells of the ulna shaker around in your palm, scrape one bone against another in various places at varying speeds, or slowly move the coyote knuckles around inside the turtle shells.

Blood

After your first third of a minute as ***breath***, perform the following rhythms on whichever objects you feel called to at the station. The 12-bar phrase is then passed to the next person.



Brain

Once you've fulfilled your roll as ***blood***, wander from the pulse, switching between different materials if you like. Unlike the ***breath*** roll, prioritize impulsive noises rather than sustained or continuous sounds. Ornament the gaps between the ***blood*** pulse and play with different groupings of tuplets.

Performance Notes

3. Deconstruction

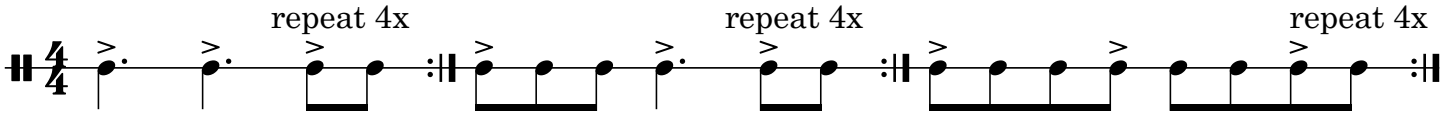
The three drills are to be set at the lowest torque with the clutch in its tightest position, rotating clockwise. Whichever drill you pick is the one you use for the entirety of the section.

Breath

Press down the trigger of the drill lightly and slowly increase to its highest speed. Then play with gradually increasing and decreasing the speed.

Blood

Hold the trigger all the way down, bringing the drill to its highest speed. Grip and release the clutch collar to elicit the following rhythms.



Ossia: grip the clutch collar without releasing, twisting against the rotation of the drill to rhythmically increase the frequency of the clicking of the collar.

Brain

Stray from the pulse, playing with distinct impulsive rhythms by pressing the trigger multiple times in succession or by gripping and releasing the clutch collar with the trigger held down, resulting in a quick clicking sound. As each person completes their roll as ***brain***, put your drills to the side. As ***Person 1 & 2*** are moving through ***breath*** and ***brain*** at ***4. Reconstruction***, ***Person 3*** is to saw the table in half with the jigsaw. ***Person 1 & 2*** remain in the roll of ***brain*** until ***Person 3*** joins them and fulfills their part as ***brain***.

4. Reconstruction

At this station, only ***Person 1 & 2*** cycle through all three rolls, remaining as ***brain*** until ***Person 3*** joins as ***brain*** and fulfills their roll.

Performance Notes

4. Reconstruction cont.

Breath

Pay special attention to the chimes, assuming the role as previously outlined.

Blood

Same as ***2. Death - Blood***. One person should use the goatskin drum with violin neck drumsticks.

Brain

Move from the goatskin drum to the violin bodies, wood blocks, and terracotta pot. Once everyone is here, build in intensity to climax, ending the movement with ***Person 3*** leading four distinct blows on the broken table.

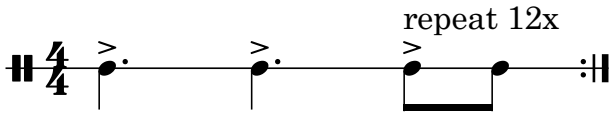
5. Life

Breath

Person 1 and ***Person 2*** assume the role of ***breath*** at the harp for the entirety of this movement. ***Person 1*** begins by bowing the lower wire strings of the harp with a hank of rosined horse hair. ***Person 2*** then joins by dragging friction mallets along the soundboard.

Blood

Person 3 assumes the roll of ***blood*** on the quijada for the entirety of this movement, playing the following rhythm:

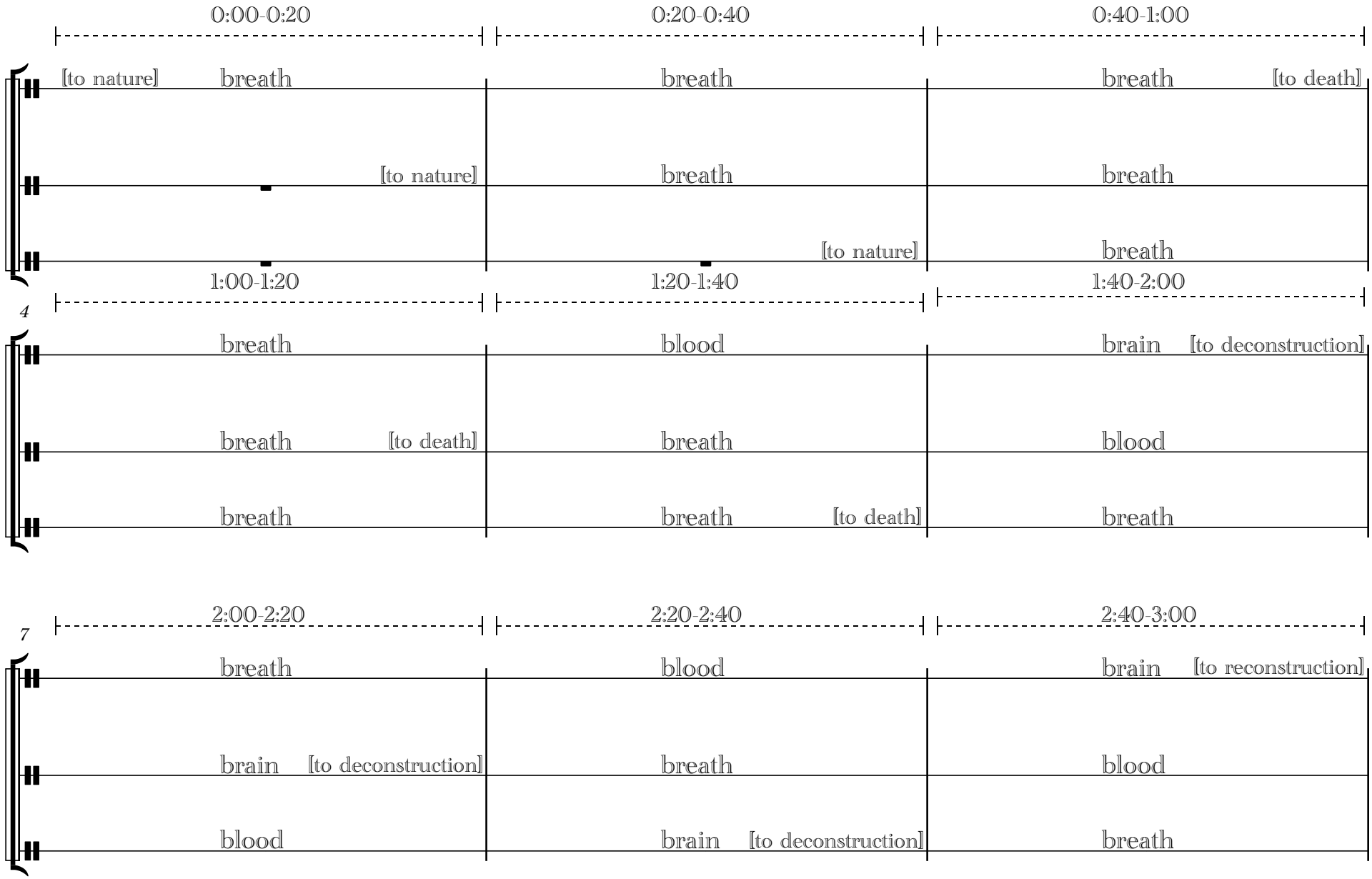


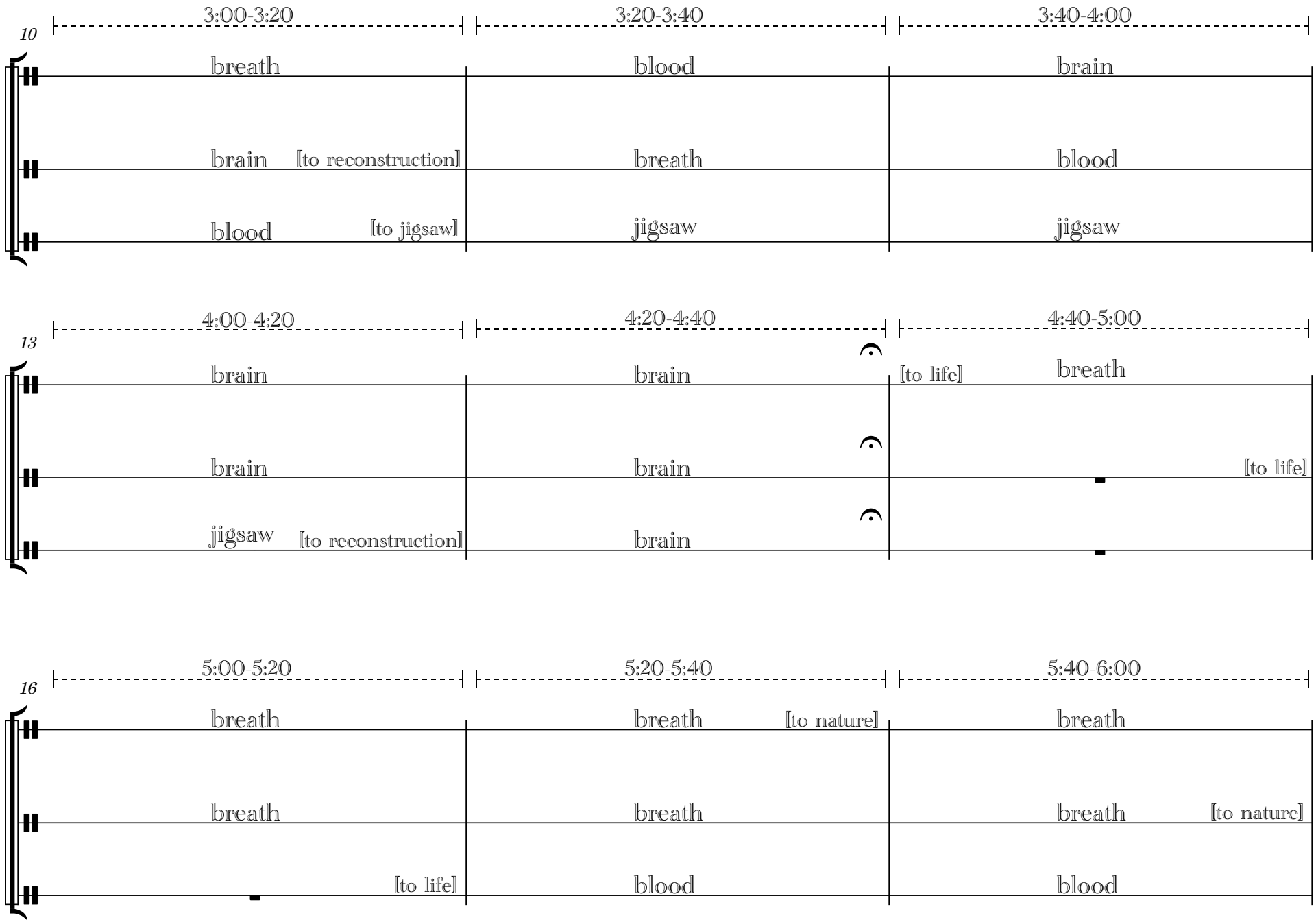
6. Nature (second time)

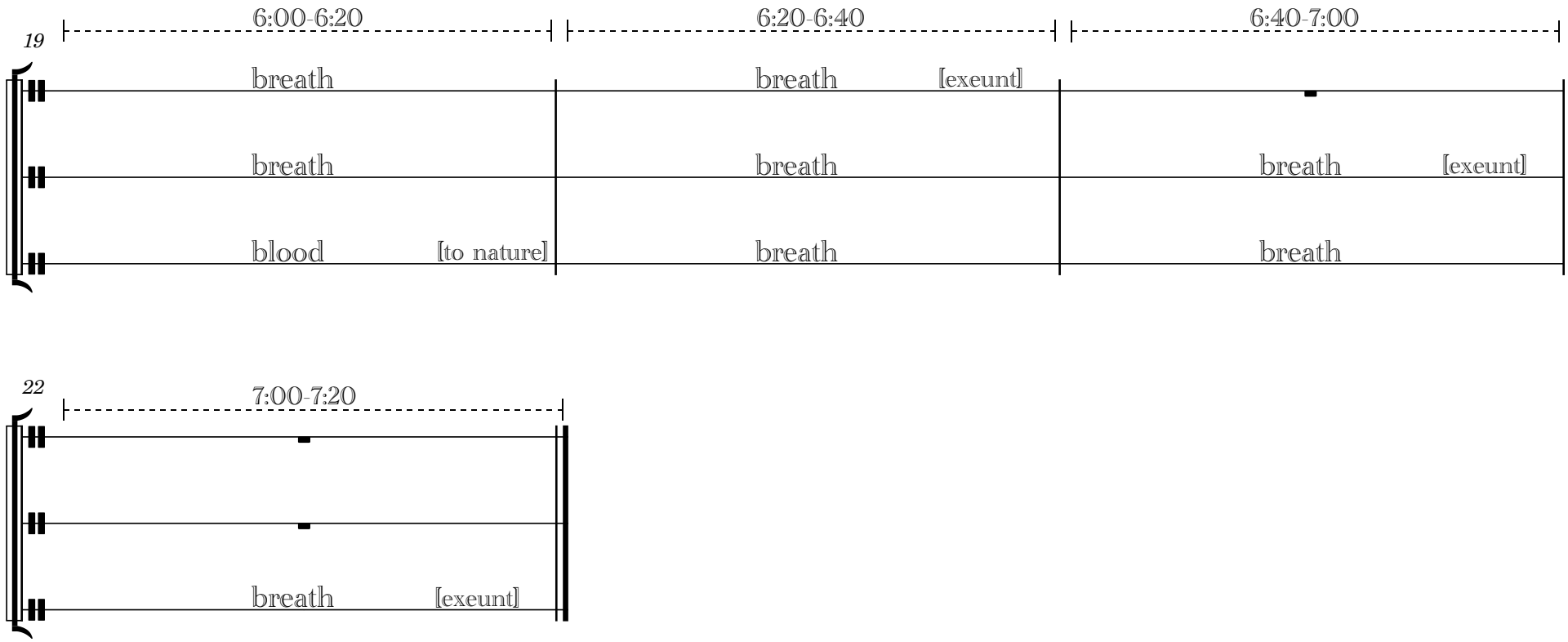
Breath

Everyone assumes the role of ***breath***. ***Person 1*** returns the water to its original jug, proceeding to swish the water around the container. ***Person 2 & 3*** arrive, staggered by a third of a minute, interacting with the natural materials. ***Person 1*** leaves ~20 seconds after ***Person 3*** has finished their time at ***life***, followed by ***Person 2 & 3***, in the same staggered fashion.

Autophagia


0:00-0:20
0:20-0:40
0:40-1:00
[to nature]
breath
breath
breath
[to death]
[to nature]
breath
breath
[to nature]
breath
1:00-1:20
1:20-1:40
1:40-2:00
4
breath
blood
brain
[to deconstruction]
breath
[to death]
breath
blood
breath
breath
[to death]
breath
2:00-2:20
2:20-2:40
2:40-3:00
7
breath
blood
brain
[to reconstruction]
brain
[to deconstruction]
breath
blood
blood
brain
[to deconstruction]
breath


10
3:00-3:20
3:20-3:40
3:40-4:00
breath
blood
brain
brain
[to reconstruction]
breath
blood
blood
[to jigsaw]
jigsaw
jigsaw
13
4:00-4:20
4:20-4:40
4:40-5:00
brain
brain
[to life]
breath
brain
brain
[to life]
jigsaw
[to reconstruction]
brain
16
5:00-5:20
5:20-5:40
5:40-6:00
breath
breath
[to nature]
breath
breath
breath
breath
[to nature]
[to life]
blood
blood


19
6:00-6:20
6:20-6:40
6:40-7:00
breath
breath
[exeunt]
breath
breath
breath
[exeunt]
blood
[to nature]
breath
breath
22
7:00-7:20
breath
[exeunt]