

My Pebble

a sound piece by Sam Auinger, Berlin Spring 2020.

My Pebble is a sound piece in three parts. In the form of a short story, the work gives suggestions and instructions for exploring the personal sound space. It was composed at the beginning of May 2020 for quarantine situations in hard lockdown. It is a series of small exercises with an experimental character, which, when practiced, can make a room or an entire apartment speak / sound. Slowly the living room becomes a sound space, and 'thinking with the ears' develops in the player.

For this piece, we need some time, personal attention, and an instrument. This instrument should be as hard as stone, small and light, and shaped to hold it like a chalk piece to play little impulses/beats on different objects. I use a river pebble.

My Pebble

- a) Pebble meets object
- b) Pebble meets object in changing situations
- c) Pebble falls to the ground

Imagine a friend (our Pebble) visits us for the first time, and we show him our room/apartment in detail. He is interested in everything and wants to get to know every detail, try everything, and contact everything.



Pebble meets object

We start with doors and windows. With a light knock, we explore the glass surfaces of the windows. We notice that it sounds different in the middle of the glass surface than near the window frame. From the glass itself, we go to the window frame and from there to the fittings. Then it goes on to the doors. We try to detect and make the different voices audible in the same object with gentle pulses/beats. We play as long as our instrument has come into contact with every item in our apartment.

We perceive the sound changes in different materials and forms, and the same object, played at various spots, sounds different. We also notice that items made of the same materials, e.g., wood, have a characteristic sound, but that this sound can be very different again depending on the object's size and shape. After a while and some practice, we begin to imagine how an item sounds before we make it speak with our instrument.

Pebble meets object in changing situations.

So far, we have found that surface, shape, and material are essential factors in how an object sounds when played. To further investigate this, we will experiment with combinations of materials and items in this part. We compare the same situation twice, each time with a change in the conditions. An arrangement could be: We take an empty cooking pot and place it on a table and play and explore it with our Pebble. We will notice that it sounds different when struck on various spots, much shorter at its edges than in the pot's middle. Then we put a towel under the cooking pot and play with it again. What has changed, and why?

This part of the piece is about us creating our own experiments with our existing resources. Again, our curiosity and imagination must guide us, and we try to predict the sound and its changes, to listen ahead.

Pebble falls to the ground.

In this part of the piece, we shift and expand our sound perception from material to space. We let our Pebble fall to the floor from always the same height in various rooms. We begin to pay attention to how other rooms speak and sound differently due to their form and materiality. Does a room dampen, amplify, or color the sound of the impact? Again, there is a multitude of different sounds to discover. Besides the materiality of floors and the various room architectures and their volumes, we are beginning to develop a feeling for room atmospheres. Does a room sound cold or warm? Is it transparent or dampened? We are also interested in how we feel in these rooms and how their atmospheres influence our moods.

My Pebble is composed as an introduction to the process of consciously exploring our living environments and personal sound spaces with our own ears and having a good and inspired time by doing so. Suppose we repeat this piece/these exercises and experiments more often. In that case, we will develop an „inner ear“ with the ability to anticipate sound characteristics of objects, spaces, and situations - ‚thinking with our ears‘ - and to sense their inherent atmospheres in advance. Both allow us to act more according to our needs and create different understandings of our living environments.



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