

James Weeks

Shading/colouring

for a single player or singer

2025

In an open-air space, prepare by immersing yourself in the sound environment; with eyes closed, focusing on each sound in turn and gradually immersing yourself within their polyphony (see Polyphonic Listening). Continue until you feel calm, focused and attentive.

Take one element of the sound environment and add yourself to it.

An element could be traffic, the sea, wind, leaves rustling, birdsong, a human-generated noise, or anything else. It can be continuous (unchanging, or rising and falling) or intermittent (regular or irregular).

To add yourself to your chosen element, make a soft sound simultaneously (or as simultaneously as possible) with it, attempting to create a harmony with it. Do not attempt to mimic it, but shade it with your own tone or noise, as a different part of a chord, or a partial. If the element has several different pitches (such as a bird call), you can do likewise, either following the contour or not. Follow rises and falls in intensity and changes of sound quality as closely as possible.

Your sound need not have definite pitch but should be able to respond to variations in the chosen element in some way.

Play softly enough that you can hear your element at all times, and the overall sound environment too.

Merge with your chosen element, and become one with it.

If you want to swap to a different element after a while, do so.

Finish the piece when you want.

Note: this piece should only be played on instruments able to play very quietly (with mutes where available). Strings are particularly well suited; manually-controlled electronic instruments are also possible. Some wind instruments are suitable, as is singing/vocalising. (A similar approach to tracing environmental sound can be seen in The wind is its blowing for choir.)

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