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## In Search of the Perfect Pebble

### Auf der Suche nach dem perfekten Kieselstein

#### Gabriele Schmid

The pursuit of perfection or virtuosity can be regarded as a myth that sometimes also determines the search for the definitive artistic formulation in the artistic research process. With the theme of repetition and return in mind, I recalled the pre-history of artistic research, when the painter Giotto di Bondone was famous for his perfect frescoes. Therefore, as handed down by Vasari, Pope Benedict sent an envoy to Tuscany to assess Giotto's skill for a project in St. Peter's. The envoy asked Giotto for a drawing to send to the Pope. Giotto, with a steady hand, drew a perfect freehand circle and said, "This is enough." When the Pope saw Giotto's circle, he recognized the artist's unmatched skill. This story gave rise to the Tuscan proverb, "You are rounder than the O of Giotto".

Roundness as a result of endless repetition is not only to be found in human made artefacts but also in nature - making the sea, the wind and the coast into a possible accomplice of artistic creation. In consequence, my research led to a collection of round shaped pebbles which I found on the shores of the Isle of Barra. In the course of the search, I wondered what consciousness pebbles might have and soon came across the philosophical concepts of *Panpsychism* (Strawson 2024) and *Vibrant Matter* (Bennett 2010).

Such entanglement of artistic research and theory-led reflection serves as an example to illustrate the relevance of *a/r/tography* in the training of arts therapists. In the presentation it will be developed further from a post-humanist and maybe also panpsychist perspective in adding a second "a": The artistic research process is understood as the entanglement of artwork, artist, researcher and therapist. *A/a/r/tography* as a reflective process then may serve for the further development of arts-therapeutic interventions.



## Biography

**Gabriele Schmid**, PhD, is Professor of Aesthetic Education at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Ottersberg. Her research interests lie in artistic and arts-based research and artistic autoethnography, with particular regard to arts-therapeutic and arts-educational fields of practice. She was a board member of the Society for Artistic Research from 2015 to 2022. Being part of the academic university administration, Gabriele is currently responsible for studies, research and teaching at HKS Ottersberg.

## Recent Publications

Schmid, G. (2025/ In Press.): **Artistic and Arts-Based Research in the Arts Therapies.**

In: D.E. Waller, C.L. Vaculik, U. Herrmann, and M. Hills de Zárata (eds.): *Routledge International Handbook of Art Therapy*. London: Routledge.

Schmid, G. (2024): **Never Past: Embodied Memory in Human and Other Animals.** In: M. Cao, R. Hougham and S. Scoble (eds). *Memory. Shaping Connections in the Arts Therapies*. London: Routledge.

Schmid, G. (2024): **Künstlerische Forschung und ihre Relevanz für die künstlerischen Therapien / Artistic Research and its Relevance to Arts Therapies.** In: *PiD – Psychotherapie im Dialog 2024*; 25: 89–92. Stuttgart: Thieme Verlag.