

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WAVES
Excerpts from the field diaries of John
Cousins, 1987-1999

The University of the Waves (ME18)

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Massey University Composer Address

This Address was delivered by John Cousins in the Humanities Auditorium at Massey University, Palmerston North, on 12 September 2001.

JOHN COUSINS was born in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1943. He received training as a musician, graduating with an honours degree in music from the University of Canterbury in 1965. In 1967 he was appointed to the staff of the university's School of Music, subsequently working there as a teacher and creative artist until 2004 when he left to concentrate fully on making and promulgating his work.

Over the years Cousins' work has evolved from conventional musical composition to sculptural performance, mixed-media and sonic art. It has been performed, broadcast and exhibited in Australia, Britain, Europe, Russia and the USA. Although the composer's early works were for conventional resources, much of his more recent work deals in some way with the experience of personal history within his immediate family (particularly the male line from his Irish grandfather through his father to his children and grandchildren). Here the 'acousmatic' genre of Sonic Art (sometimes accompanied by visual images) has been honed to form an aesthetic language which points, via the composer's own intimate family connections, towards more general human concerns.

In contrast to the abstract medium of *String Quartet*, for instance, the central element of his electro-acoustic work, for example *Sleep Exposure*, *On Listening In*, *The Quarter*, and *Say*, is the sonic sign: recordings of recognisable aural objects of all kinds are re-contextualised within surreal, sometimes super-real, sonic environments, generating works with a documentary flavour. This address is a notable expression of Cousins' elemental imagination. Alone with sand, stones and the sea, he speaks in a voice calm with knowledge.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WAVES

Excerpts from the field diaries of John Cousins, 1987-1999

*I need the sea because it teaches me,
I don't know if I learn music or awareness,
if it's a single wave or its vast existence,
or only its harsh voice or its shining one,
a suggestion of fishes and ships.
The fact is that until I fall asleep,
in some magnetic way I move in
the university of the waves.*

Pablo Neruda, translated by Alastair Reid
in *Absence and Presence* (New York, 1990)

On Coogee beach there was this glass-clear twenty-five-foot-high walking wave of green sea. Twenty-five-foot!

Alive and swimming straight along its curling middle was this huge shark.

Tell it to the old man of the sea. Let him smoke that with those tawny lion-cubs his mind's eye saw gamboling on some African shore.

What's the frantic magic? Simply feeling, hey, that's a mighty rising mass of energy forever gathering, never stopping, preserving a fish in amber, gone greeny forever.

That big slow curling wave never comes down.

Len Lye in Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks (eds).
Figures in Motion: Len Lye, selected writings (Auckland, 1984)

Preface

In 1978, Colleen Anstey and I visited an area on the North West coast of the South Island. We discovered it by chance during a summer holiday drive to the coast west of Collingwood. In 1981 we returned for a longer stay, and from then on our migratory need has seen us return at least once almost every year. Gradually our 'holidays' turned into creative expeditions, as we both began to make work in, of, and from the location, and it became more and more apparent that we were gaining and sharing fundamental understandings. We began keeping detailed notes and diaries, and after a while audio, photographic, and videotape recordings of our activities.

Our connection to the place has evolved, and continues to develop in many dimensions, now including relationships with the people, as well as the landscape. Initially though, it was the power of this relatively isolated coastal environment which captured us.

On looking back over two decades of our experiences there, I am only now beginning to realise how central it has been in forming my aesthetic and philosophical stance, and in my development as a person, an art maker, and a facilitator of creative action in others. I would therefore like to share some of this material with you, both the sublime and the mundane, in the hope that it may be of more than anecdotal interest.

The central element in this talk revolves around diary notes and video recordings from our stay over the summer of 1995. I begin, however, with a sample of material from 1987, and end with a few notes from the late 90s. I have deliberately left the text more or less in its initial form – contradictions, repetitions and all, as I want to retain its casual, but also personal, sometimes intimate quality.

Prelude

January 1987

Looking for 'matching' stones. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' shape for a stone. However some possess more 'integrity' of form than others. What I mean is, my aesthetic sense of formal completeness (stemming from my personal idea of beauty) alights upon some stones as 'stronger' than others. The stones represent an infinitely variable set of formal identities. They seem to fall into categories:

- Nearly circular, flat or disc-shaped
- Nearly circular and spherical
- Cylindrical
- Kidney-shaped
- Heart-shaped
- Totally asymmetrical

I seem to prefer those whose shape is relatively symmetrical, smooth and without structural flaws. I prefer shape and weight, to colour, pattern or patina. No matter how 'interesting' the lines and patterns are on a stone, those parameters do not speak to me beyond the merely ornamental. Each stone is in a process of slow transformation into sand.

It occurred to me that it seems unlikely that stones which at present have reached an 'integrated' shape, will pass through asymmetry again in their lifetime. If they are physically consistent, their symmetry will tend to encourage them to change more and more symmetrically. The opposite seems also true for those stones, which are at present asymmetrical, as their present shape will predispose them towards even greater distortion. Perhaps this process is analogous to life. As one grows older, one's life circumstances combined with one's innate personality, produce continual change. However, unlike the stones, the material of which can only be worn away, a person is being reconstituted as life progresses in a much more complex manner, more a re-arrangement, than a wearing away. Both stones and humans *seem* to be subject to 'random' change. But just as it seems feasible to predict certain formal eventualities for a stone, taking into account its material constitution, the context of forces acting upon it, and the tendencies already overt in its original shape, so it may also be possible to predict equivalent

eventualities for the human personality, existing as it does in its particular context of psychological forces. However, it is obvious that *precise* expectations of both types of situation are not possible.

March 1987

Am well into *The Matriarch*.¹ Uneven book but some wonderful passages. Lots of tears from yours truly. It sets me to thinking further about family and the land.

Rain all day. Have spent all day in the tent because of a very sore back. Almost completely immobilised. Can't escape the feeling that I have come on a wild goose chase, the same variety that wear bridles!² I have the sneaky feeling that I am due for some surprises in the next few days. I feel very open, continually close to tears, and struck by a sense (exciting but also frightening) of impending new revelations and directions. Perhaps this enforced inactivity is depressing me and once I start to walk, swim, fish, and work, things may settle into a more familiar pattern.

O how the river and beach are changed...like an entirely 'other' environment.

1 1986 novel by Witi Ihimaera.

2 This is a reference to the nonsense saying 'wigwam for a goose's bridle'.

Summer, 1995 *'I saw the coast'*

12 January 95

A thought today – something I tried to explain to Colleen this evening – not very successfully. Occurred to me while just sitting watching the sea during the heat of midday.

I saw the coast solely as it is, a natural entity, water, land and climate, all working as part of an environment which I take absolutely for granted, with no aesthetic or philosophical overlay, just as a 'thing'; and I felt a slight tremor at the back of my mind, a kind of shiver of recognition, saying that this was the real secret – that reality, what we perceive with our physical senses, is all there is, that there is nothing 'below' or 'beyond'.

I think it was a glimpse of what it must be like to truly let go of one's own personal point of view of the world, and see it and yourself objectively, as something from which you are apart but to which you simultaneously belong. It was like really getting outside of myself or else getting fully *inside* of what I was seeing. It was not an aesthetic appreciation, more a sort of relaxing into a state of neutrality concerning it and me. Somehow letting go of my feelings about it and just acknowledging it as being there. Just a hint, like a fragile odour or a mirage, or some kind of ghost sound which leaves you wondering if you have heard it at all.

Somehow this resonates in the area of the sonic work I am engaged with at the moment (*Songs for the Little Lady*) linked into the necessity of sensing the psycho-acoustic aura of the sounds I am using. Sounds of the environment act upon us in deep ways, mostly below our ability to recognise or describe. They exist in a pragmatic reality, exhibit ordered parameters, and are produced by and within a dispassionate context. If I am going to wield them successfully in a contrived sonic work, I must learn to recognise their authentic character and let them behave as they should, viz: as a self-defining, objective system, like the one described above, not merely as I would like.

15 January 95

Been here five full days, and no rain! Five perfect days, unheard of in these parts! Lots of excellent wave skiing, and one lovely underwater visit to the reef. Fishing

conditions perfect, but only one kahawai. Locals blame the seals.

My discovery of the week has been skin diving on the reef. It is a pretty uncompromising environment if you cling to the rocks and attempt to experience it from above the water. As soon as you submerge however, and allow the waves and current to take you over, the struggle ceases and is replaced by a sense of security and belonging. You feel just like a seal rolling amongst the kelp and diving into the watery chambers and passageways eroded into the limestone. Fish everywhere, and because of the very settled weather, good visibility. Shoals of yellow-eyed herring, large black, sulky rock cod (striped with yellow like Taranaki rugby players) and every now and then small groups of kahawai driving past, knowing exactly where they are going. So far no paua. The sand seems to have covered a lot of the inner reef. Shall try further south, hopefully today at low tide.

So far have seen some interesting rock faces, which I shall photograph. Need slide film though, and all I have brought is print stock! Also recorded ten minutes of high tide a couple of nights ago, mainly for the low background roar and the fact that the air was absolutely still. Have been forgetful of gear, no headphones, or tripod!

Usual momentary dropouts and panic attacks. But today, almost a week into our stay I feel the old anchor bedding in, and the atavistic undertow of the place doing its work. Don't know what it is I learn here, but it seems no matter how I change, the lessons continue.

PS: Nearly all the large stones in the area around the river mouth have been covered with sand.

18 January 95

Last night was a full moon, in a totally clear sky. I piled some stones into Goldsworthy's³ balanced spires in the river bed at low tide and waited for the incoming tide to put them back with their fellows. Turned out the rising moon coincided with the rising tide and produced exceptional silhouettes on the shining moon's pathway upon the river water. Tried to photograph these. Lets hope they

³ Andy Goldsworthy, a Scottish-based artist who creates sculptures using natural resources which he photographs before they decay.

say something unique and transcend being merely imitation Goldsworthy!

Got involved with placing stones in sand bays and photographing before and after the tide had done its work. The transformation from foreign object to totally integrated one, always strikes me.

Recipe:

1. Take two disparate objects (stone and sand)
2. Place in close proximity to each other
3. Apply a third ingredient (sea), which causes changes to both of the objects and then disappears. *Viz:* a catalyst

The result will always be formally integrated provided that there is no external interference with the process.

Problem: How do you become an integrative catalyst when putting sounds together in the lab? In the case of the stone and sand and sea, the mechanics of their interaction combined with their physical properties, takes care of things, requiring no conscious thought processes. Indeed, if the stone, sand and sea *did* have to consciously ensure that they behaved appropriately, it is unlikely they would succeed. It is the physical/mechanical functionality of the context and the objects in it, which ensures a result, which I find aesthetically pleasing.

How can the sonic artist match this type of action when at any stage he/she must decide and then contrive the results? Trial and error, mediated by an innate sense of what constitutes integration, seems the only way. The sounds must be allowed to mix and then the correct additional sonic ingredients added to produce a plausible psycho-acoustic entity, one which convinces the human ear that it can only be the way it is, and no other way under those particular sonic conditions. In the world of sound many catalysts may be needed to arrive at a convincing integration of a number of distinct programs. Reverberation, equalisation, compression and expansion, spatial displacement and movement, all need to be wielded convincingly, in an interdependent continuum.

Negative catalyst: water on stone and sand (physical subtraction) – the water washes away the sand.

Positive catalyst: wind on stone and sand (physical addition) – the wind slowly builds up sand around the stone.

Problem:

1. The givens. What sounds do we start with which can function as prime and form the basic sound environment?
2. How to produce the secondary sounds, ones that are the result of interaction amongst the prime set?

Example: A coast is sea and rock. The rock is eroded by the sea to produce sand. The sea and rock are prime, the sand is secondary, a product of their interaction via a catalyst. The morphological changes capable of being exerted upon the shape and spectrum of whatever sounds are to be used, need to be wielded with this sort of example in mind.

Question:

Hierarchies. How does one construct a convincing hierarchy, which is plausible and does lead to certain controls and expectations –and is not merely a succession of sounds, which you have decided you like together?

When you go to a coast you expect sea and land.

When you go to a desert you expect dry and barren land.

When you go to the Arctic you expect ice and snow.

When you 'go to' a *Sonic Work*, you should also be able to perceive its limits and parameters. It should not be a bit of everything (a mess). It should on the contrary infer its own limits through the nature of its materials and the way they 'behave'.

19 January 95

Developed the stone piles further.

Task: In the area of a natural stone field, randomly place stones upon one another, usually just two stones high. Work quickly and without thought, or aesthetic anticipation. When finished, walk slowly through the area, looking constantly at the ground in front of you.

20 January 95

Worked in one of the south stone bays as the tide was coming in. Firstly tried working in a visually prescribed area of stones, slowly placing stones on top of

their adjacent neighbour. Looked interesting, but somehow too cosmetic. Then I tried following my shadow from the high tide area to the sea, marking the position of my head each time, by squatting down in the location of its shadow and making a rough cairn, using only the stones I could reach from that position. I did this quite fast and produced a line of about seven cairns running obliquely from a sandstone outcrop to the incoming sea. The Cairns worked better than the single upturned stones. They also were much more visible and because they were rearranged stones from that particular spot, made more sense to me. The tide then came in, and very quickly took the cairns back into their natural pattern of distribution. I now want to make an azimuth curve of cairns in a few days when dawn will occur at low tide. Document on slide film.

NB: This was a breakthrough because it is so obvious: a much clearer statement is made by rearranging a *number* of stones from a designated area chosen by the azimuth method. The single, up-ended stone or balanced cairn is aesthetically much more arresting, but does not speak as clearly about the process of rearrangement. The beauty of the up-ended stone leads one too much away from the significance of its altered position towards its aesthetic impact. It is the alteration of position, however, which is the whole point of the procedure. The roughness and blatant instability of these latest Cairns resonates with the random patterning produced by the sea, and hence works more successfully as a statement about relocation.

22 January 95

Discussed this morning with Colleen the need to clarify my family tree, and realised that all I need do is claim this knowledge. All I have to do is search, ask questions, name names, faces, and, in some cases, histories and personalities.

Low tide: Started by squatting and circling an area in the sand with my outstretched arm. Then gathered all visible stones on the surface of the circle into a central cairn. Then moved forward and made an adjacent circle, and repeated the process. Did this until I reached an impassable obstacle. Ideal way of finding direction should be by the azimuth method. Had a very strong intimation that all of the available stones were analogous to people, all the people of the world. I was using the rotation of the earth for direction, and my own physical anatomy

as a scale indicator to choose certain groups of stones to be rearranged under these parameters (azimuth and body) rather than by the parameters of tidal effect. The work represents repeated attempts to define a place and ground for viewing the world. Each circle with its central cairn of relocated stones set in a larger environment of seemingly randomly dispersed stones, articulates a desire for recognition.

It is therefore crucially important to the work, that the methods of choosing:

1. Site and beginning time
2. Starting and ending points
3. Direction of travel
4. Rate of travel
5. Size of circle
6. Which stones to move

These are all integrated as much as possible by obeying laws or givens *outside of the subjective aesthetic preferences of the person performing the task.*

1. Site: Tabula Rasa – an area of ground as unmarked as possible by previous human activity
 2. Start and End points: Natural features of the site, which make axiomatic sense e.g. river, seashore, cliff face etc. Essentially an impassable topographical obstacle of some kind.
 3. Direction: Following the shadow (azimuth method)
 4. Rate of travel: Controlled entirely by the task – in this case how long it takes for me to gather all of the available stones in the prescribed area
 5. Size of circle: Established using my physical proportions, a *given* belonging to me
 6. Which stones: Only those visible on the surface and inside the circle.
- Size of search area: Body proportion only. Location of search area: Shadow and body combined

The beginning time for the task is very important. Should begin as soon as shadow is available on the site. All other time parameters should be decided by this (tide), i.e. undertake the task when the chosen site is cleared by the tide at dawn, or at earliest time of available shadow. The circle is the prescribed search area.

The stones are the individuals available, findable within the area. Of course they are just the surface stones and one knows that underneath them lie all of the other individuals which, although destined to be unrecognised at this time, provide the foundation for those above.

The establishing of these kinds of empirical parameters within which the work can function, gives a sense of inevitability and a kind of destined certainty to the task. Hence the finding and recognising of the individual stones which is at one level random, is ordered and given credibility by the rationale of how, why and when the task is undertaken. At another level, it gives the entire work a sense of unstoppable inevitability, similar to the momentum of tidal and terrestrial movement.

Watching a stone moved by the tide

It may be displaced a great deal, or only very slightly, but whenever the tide recedes the stone seems to be in an inevitable position, one that it has long inhabited. Every time it is dislodged it always reintegrates with its environment. This is brought about by the integrative power of the dislodging medium (the sea), and by the ability of the material around the stone (the sand) to reflect the fluid dynamics produced by the seawater inundating the stone. The sand is an ideal physical environment for formal integration of the stone's many and varied positions during a tidal cycle.

23 January 95

Wet! Out to Takaka to buy film stock and treat ourselves to a cooked breakfast. Back in afternoon to a very wet camp, and ripped outrigger roof (due to weight of accumulated water). Temporary repairs and then to a very damp bed – not much sleep.

24 January 95

Up before dawn (not sleeping) to a moon in a misty sky and dawn just beginning to arrive. Very still. Recorded ten minutes of high tide surf from low down on the ground. Cuts out the highs and seems to highlight the slowly altering lower frequencies. Then down to the river mouth – and what a find. Residual tidal surges in a totally still and otherwise quiet ambience. Rushed back to get gear, and set up

on a convenient log very close to the river. Took three complete takes of the next three surges. Hope they are O.K. as the detail was magical. The usual surprises, like a curious vocal seagull and, in the last take, the beginnings of the dawn chorus. Then wandered on the beach as the tide receded and photographed my usual heaps of light and dark markings left by the water and watched the rising sun struggle to dissolve the sea mist. Still a very heavy surf, but better behaved than yesterday's killer. Might try to wave ski when the tide is lower. While recording realised there are time windows for making recordings as well as for doing visual stuff. This morning the high tide happened just before dawn and so there were no bird sounds and the air was still, a perfect time to record, and a perfect subject available (tidal surges). Such a complete event, a tidal surge. Begins with the low drone of the surf (no detail) and hardly any other sounds – no aural cues of the river. Then the surge enters and generates an extraordinarily complex image of growing, energetic movement – very dynamic and with the sound events ever closer and more detailed, panning L-R all the time. It peaks with a full spectral and spatial spread, and then releases quite quickly back into distant drone. Displays the usual exponential curve, which seems to accompany most natural sonic gestures. Marvellous thing is that although the sound is instantly recognisable as water and probably as seawater, the entire event retains a wonderfully abstract quality, being at the same time a recognisable source (water), *and* pure sound. Form and function in perfect complementation.

NB: The psycho-acoustic effect on the listener is one of an inevitable event, something emerging, reaching fullness, and then lapsing back. Implies a strong sense of cyclic, organic power, quite menacing but also resonating with achieved fullness. Very Lawrencian to me!⁴

Can't forgive myself for leaving the phones behind, and not bringing more batteries. Chances for recordings like these are so rare. When will I learn! Shows just how tired I was at the end of last year. O how I hope these recordings are OK. Occurred to me the strong link between the completeness of the aural effect of the tidal surges and the visual integration achieved when the tide reclaims a stone. Both are intensely integrated events.

⁴ This is a reference to the novelist and poet D.H. Lawrence, in whose work sexuality and creativity are deeply and intricately connected.

More and more it seems that merely recording them (aurally and visually) is all that is necessary to create a powerful expressive image for the senses of a human being.

Lunchtime Tuesday: Off to Takaka to get some more batteries, headphones, webbing for wave ski belt (old one is coming apart), and more leucoplast to fix the outrigger properly. Back at around 5.00pm to a lovely evening. Wave skied very large but friendly waves in a glassy sea. Absolutely no wind. Listened to the tidal surge takes, only the last one is free from microphone bump, or very slight wind noise. Shall now attempt a further set of recordings tomorrow before dawn, so to bed!

PS: Hopefully will capture Colleen on video in the morning – she has her eye on a particular pool in the sandstone in the reef a couple of bays south. Hope the tide is low enough and the light conditions meet with her approval.

PPS: I even have a beer crate (MT) from the Collingwood pub to get me the correct height to operate the camera!

25 January 95

Murphy's Law applied this morning. When I tried to record tidal surges:

- 1) I was an hour too late
 - 2) Slight wind gave noise in mic!
- Try again tomorrow!

Late morning wave skied while tide was at half ebb. Some very well formed breaks, both sides. Glassy sea, low, soft cloud and sea mist, with sun broiling everything through it. Nobody here except us!

Dug a new latrine (seems we go through one hole per week).

Sand is building up on the beach below the camp with a nice random spattering of surface stones ideal for my projected stone cairn work. All I need now is a day of direct sunlight to show me direction.

Colleen has devoured three books already, including the quite long and arduous Tarkovsky diaries.⁵ Lots of discussion about Tarkovsky and things filmic. Now, about 2.00pm, she has gone off south to visit her proposed site for video work, and I sit on the little hill above the camp and write, and watch the tide get

ever nearer the black rocks.

Today, two and half weeks into our stay and I feel completely at home. Slept very well last night, and am just feeding on the sights and sounds of this constantly surprising environment.

I am, however, having great trouble with my reading. Amos Oz (Israeli commentator) essays, I find too pompous. Have tried to begin a book by Lisa thingamajig...South American setting...but don't like my chances of finishing it. However, *The Bird Artist* by Howard Norman I am enjoying a lot. Very terse, sparse but intense prose and a subject and narrative which takes my fancy. Newfoundland setting, with a strong pared-down to the essentials ambience. Wonderful when a writer is able to convey an image with just a few simple little words. I love short sentences!!

Can feel the sound work (concertina piece) working away. Look forward to closing combat with it again when I get back.

A pod of dolphin came into view while I was sitting reading on my hill. They were moving South West and very close inshore, just beyond the breakers. When they were directly opposite me, they seemed to pause and began surfing in on the waves, using the added momentum to leap clear out of the water. Then they continued south, but constantly leaping out of the water, standing on their tails, and then splashing back on their back or side. I thought of going out to them on the ski, but realised they would be gone before I got to their position. I have not seen dolphins do this (except on film). It was wonderfully moving and exhilarating.

And I remembered my dream of a couple of nights ago – in the sea and being completely surrounded by dolphins – all calmly swimming in one direction – they seemed to form a kind of supportive mattress for me and I realised I did not have to keep myself afloat, just let myself be carried along by their concerted mass.

I did go wave skiing later on. Very good, big, but well behaved surf.

My new belt works well, although I have noticed some hairline cracks around the belt mounts. Just shows what a hiding I have been taking from these seas. The board will need a few repairs when we get home.

⁵ *Time within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986* translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair

Tonight Colleen has lit a fire on the stone bank and we will sit and watch the light slowly evaporate. Probably have some hot sweet tea and then to bed.

31 January 95

O so much has transpired since my last entry! Out to Takaka again on Thursday for a variety of reasons – mainly to ensure our supply of batteries for the camera. Returned to a rainy evening and to bed. Friday, rose to a completely destroyed outrigger. The roof had totally shredded, I think from the weight of all night heavy rain. Thought of going to Takaka again to get more polythene to fashion a new roof aborted when the truck refused to start! I thought then it was just saturated by twenty-four hours of continuous rain. So, fashioned a new roof from the truck cover. Turns out to be much better than the previous roof, heavier and more waterproof. Left truck to dry out but by Sunday it was clearly more serious than just damp. To our rescue came Malcolm, a friend of Rod and Mandy, who we got to know a few years ago. He is a mechanic but only had access to his son's toy tool kit, as his gear was still at his previous address at Takaka! However, he agreed to help, and after much trial and tribulation got the bomb fired up!! Hooray! We had transport again, quite a necessity in this neck of the woods. Then on Tuesday morning, while in the process of setting up to video me wave skiing at high tide, Colleen reversed the terminals of the battery on the camera and blew the conversion box! So yet another trip to Takaka to get the fuse replaced (should have had one with me). I write this waiting outside Takaka Electrical for their repairman to return from a job. Hopefully he will decide to call into work before going home. Will J and C get their fuse? Will the ever-present damp affect the trusty truck again? Will the tides and weather allow the capture of yet more unique video material? Only time (and this journal) will tell!

PS: The world looks much more optimistic after a wonderful rib-eye steak at Millaways Restaurant (accompanied by two glasses of very good Riesling) plus access to Colleen's inevitable desert!

31 January 95 8.30pm

Drew a line of circles from low tide to the stone formations, just a straight line,

consecutive circles, no moving of circled stones, just their inclusion (recognition) if they fell within the circle. Went back later and watched the tide claim the last couple of circles closest to the shore.

IDEA: Set up camera on tripod at low tide and document various stages of the making of line of circles (with me in shot) and then a final shot of the finished line. Leave camera in position until tide begins to erase the circles. Take a number of shots of various stages and a final one of the completely erased line.

The plan is to make a slide work by superimposing the images of the completed line (low tide) upon that of the erased line (high tide). This would show a line of circles leaving the shore and extending out into the sea towards the horizon i.e. the circles are now prescribing chosen areas of sea, not sand.

Could also try superimpositions of other stages of the line being made and the incoming tide. All fixed features would fit exactly in any of the superimpositions.

Yesterday afternoon (Monday) we captured a lot of videotape of Colleen's body immersed in pools formed in the low tide stone formations south of Pain's Bay. Some of the backlit images looked very powerful. Also other images of her submerged hands feet and legs.

Interesting how one cannot know at this stage what these images say, or mean, or how they might be used. Enough that one feels that they possess some kind of innate expressivity, and then leave their application in a work to later, more general creative motives. I am more convinced than ever that responding to these 'blind' initiatives is the only way to proceed.

Long may they occur!

Only four more working days left! Where has the time gone? And now a full raft of further ideas pushing up. Tonight, as I sit in the outrigger and write by a single candle, the sea slowly creeps closer and a light drizzle gently embraces the coast. Hope we get some more fine weather before we leave. Maybe I can try out the previously described slide work on the morning low tide.

1 February 95

Rain from the North all night, and still soaked in now at 11.00am. River in partial

flood, and a very high tide building up (peaks at 1.00pm). This will leave the beach a mess of mangled driftwood and uprooted kelp. Hope it clears enough for us to get some more work done before we leave on Sunday.

The new outrigger roof is performing very well under its first real test. Solid and waterproof. In between heavy showers we emerge and stride along the stone bank at high tide, buffeted by the wind and immersed in a mist and low cloud-enshrouded, foam-filled world. Exhilarating to shout and jump and run as the massive muddied surf pounds in, shifting enormous driftwood logs up and down the stone barrier, or sweeping them parallel to the shore towards the river mouth, where the incoming tidal surges generate tremendous energy as they force themselves upriver. This is the aspect of this place I love most. Not very pleasant, or comfortable, but raw with the energy of wind, rain and tide.

A flash from a few days ago crosses my mind, one of so many undocumented moments, and typical of the experiences which happen if one remains in a spot long enough.

Fine, sunny day, light Easterly wind – glassy sea, and long well-defined swells building to knife-edged walls, ideal for wave skiing. I sit beyond the surf line on my ski, resting between sets. The swells gather seaward as the first of a set rises up in front of me. The sea is bottle green, and the wave so peaked and taut that I can almost see right through it, and in the wave a shoal of Kahawai – suddenly finding themselves on view as if in a natural aquarium. Then just shoreward of me I sense movement, low down in the water. I turn to witness three gannets in V formation flying no more than a few metres away, and at what seemed to be a lower height than me! Their reflections joined to their bodies they were so close to the surface. No hint of wing movement – just a perfect glide in tight formation. They are large birds – much bigger than the average skua. Black pointed wings and tail, with a ring of yellow/orange feathers around the neck. Long, narrow heads, and eyes in an odd position to facilitate angle of sight to the water while in flight. Then the two formations, gannets and kahawai, came into extraordinary connection. The leading bird folded its wings into its body and hurtled directly into the wave face, which framed the shoal of fish. It entered the rising wall of water with hardly a ripple, and I presume emerged from the other side with its quarry. A few moments

later, after the wave had passed under me, I saw the trio of birds still at surface level continuing their flight northwards.

2 February 95 6.00am

What a night! All day rain yesterday turned around 6.00pm into a full-blown North West storm. Buckets of rain, and very strong gusts of wind. Did not help when we discovered the tent had allowed water in on the weather side, soaking foam under mattress. However, we plunged into the tent anyway and just before dark the direction of the weather turned to the South West, the wind lapsed, and some time during the night the rain eased and then stopped.

This morning dawn is breaking on a clear day, although there are still a few ominous black pillars on the horizon. The beach is remarkably clean considering the flooded river yesterday and the accompanying very high and boisterous tide. However, the stones have all been covered by piles of thick, chocolate coloured foam, yet another transformation. Perhaps, all being well, I might be able to undertake a line of circles from the river South East using the azimuth method. A lot could happen between now and the full appearance of the sun.

Truck soaked again – will it start?

Very low tide this morning. In the dark of pre-dawn, I thought the sea had disappeared over the horizon. What a thought! As happens every now and again, this morning, as I walked on the totally untrodden mid tide zone, my father's absence from this world struck me. I had the feeling that somehow he was present, almost as though I had encompassed him in my experiences and that aspect of him transferred to me genetically, somehow extended his life force. Even though he died over four years ago, my sense of him seems undiminished. I have often heard of parents sensing their immortality through their children. It is a strange inversion to feel it the other way round; strange, and yet comforting, and resulting in a very real sense that he is still with me.

2 February 95 11.00am

1. Gathering stone Cairns emphasises the relocation of chosen stones from an area designated by the body (arms reach)
2. Gathering available stones from a circle inscribed by the arms and placing

them in a central cairn still emphasises the stones, but also makes the chosen area visually extant

3. Simply describing a circle and leaving anything inside it in place lifts the focus of the task to a more general level

The circle encloses a chosen area, the content of which is no longer relevant. The circle becomes just that – an enclosure of a particular shape. Not moving the objects found inside the circle allows it maximum abstraction and enigma. It focuses absolutely upon the circle itself, not what lies within it. This puts forward the circle as a boundary of no beginning or end, being placed upon a surface using an integrated system of interactive tasks.

3 February 95

Rained all night from the East. Today a good old South West howler, fine but not possible to stay upright on the beach. Have dried everything out, and unless tomorrow is absolutely perfect (as it could well be), we will leave a day early.

Colleen still has some material she wants to videotape, but only perfect (no wind) weather will be of use. Took advantage of the strength and direction of the wind to make a couple of audio recordings.

One in the Reardon's mailbox, situated at the road, and in the full blast of the wind. Lovely internal resonance and interesting implications of the box being opened and closed to the outside gale. I also climbed the lee side of the hill overlooking the river, and from a sheltered position, recorded the extraordinary sound made by the wind contacting the power lines stretched across the valley. The mix of intimate nearby sounds, with the spacious acoustic and ominous low moan of the power lines, was extraordinarily evocative.

Again it strikes me how, finally, things always seem to come back to simple, fundamental common sense. I realise I am only now beginning to hear and see in a way which allows me more useful access to my responses. This is particularly important in gaining a clearer idea of the complex web of feelings generated by an image.

The Reardon's mail box recording for example, gives a feeling of protected

enclosure, slightly tenuous and perhaps not totally secure, but somehow on the safe, internal, hibernating side of a harsh force. The opening and closing of the box (which also causes the papers inside to rustle or not) emphasises this. The harsh transients of the box opening/closing frame the sense of comfort, as they introduce/remove the upper frequencies which cause the ear to hear 'outside exposure' rather than 'inside protection'.

I think this stay has been one of the best, and yet also different from the others in that I have relaxed more (wave ski partly responsible?) and felt and seen in more 'ordinary' mode more often. However, now on the point of leaving, the spiritual value of our stay is strongly evident to me, like spending four weeks at a prime energy source.

Even when I have no specific plans for a day and just potter about, long periods of observation and contemplation inevitably materialise, and at days end I realise I have had a unique experience. I don't have to *do* anything, just being here and open to the sea, sand, wind, stones, reef, animal and bird life (and the odd person or two) is all that is necessary.

Postlude

6 January 97

As I write this, the south westerly howls along the beach, pushing the surf almost parallel to the shore, the surface of the sea a mass of white horses all stampeding northwards. And again, I sense the purpose of an individual life: to contribute energy to the complex processes of the Universe, each life force combining with all of the others at various stages in their curve of growth and decay, forming a 'sea' of life energy. As the wave of one life breaks upon the shore of oblivion, others continue on their individual trajectories. This sense of personal identification with universal factors becomes stronger in me all the time, gradually building at a subliminal level, a sustaining belief.

At moments like this I feel close to loving everything that exists. By this I mean I innately accept that I am simply one factor in a dispassionate scheme, no less or more important than a blade of grass. This realisation produces a visceral sensation of intense exhilaration, ecstasy and joy. It is not a vision disassociated from me, but more a state of being where I am fully me (with an intact ego and sense of self) and also fully everything else.

This morning after we awoke in the tent, Colleen and I made love. First she washed my body, my face, back, armpits, hands, feet and genitals. She worked carefully and expertly, while I lay in the sun. Then we spoke about what she would like me to do to encourage her to relax. The lovemaking was gentle, but very deep, and I felt us connect in a way we have not experienced for some time. The climax seemed to be in slow motion, all of the fear, pain, joy and eroticism being prolonged and amplified, producing not just a moment, but also a period, a prolonged durational plateau of intensified sensation and emotion.

That feeling and those pointed out in my previous description of the role of an individual life, are extraordinarily similar. Both involve the relaxation of the mind into an authentic state of grace, which empowers acceptance. If you fully accept, you no longer need answers. This security allows full entry to existence, and if you fully enter, you no longer need to differentiate amongst things. Boundaries dissolve, and all things become one.

I see that what I have often thought of as a sort of smug serenity in the faces of the so called 'fully enlightened' (monks, yogi, gurus etc.) is in fact a constant, eternally prolonged spiritual orgasm. These individuals really are in a state of 'bliss' because they have transformed their uncertain, questioning, polarised human nature into a receptacle for grace full acceptance.

13 January 97

Have been practising Qi Gong (the 18 movement form of Tai Chi) every morning. This morning on the way back from practice I noticed the lovely expanse of newly exposed low tide zone, strewn liberally with pebbles and larger stones, left by the retreating water. I decided to undertake an exercise from earlier visits.

Viz: While following shadow, walk the tabular rasa of the low tide zone. When a stone enters the shadow of the head, stop, contemplate the stone, set it upright and then proceed along the shadow path until it crosses another stone. This task leaves a trace of the azimuth curve through the random pattern of low tide remains. I called this 'individuating' the stones (those found by my travelling shadow). Today I began this task, but after a couple of stones, stopped and began to proceed in a seemingly related but essentially different manner. I started to execute position 17 of Qi Gong (bouncing a ball, while standing in one spot), but modified so that each new step took me a small distance forward along my shadow bearing.

In this way I was able to incorporate my breath into my progress across the sand. I did not touch any stones and by varying the length of step, avoided disturbing any. When a cloud covered the sun, I reverted to the 'on the spot' version until my shadow again appeared. I concentrated upon executing the breathing and physical action as accurately and deeply as possible. Finally I reached the impassable obstacle of the reef, and I stopped. I then immediately looked behind me to observe the azimuth curve of my progress left by my footprints (the task had taken well over an hour). I was amazed to discover no trace. No footprints or any other sign of my passage. It was as if I had floated over the surface of the sand. The careful and gradual transfer of weight at the core of position 17 had allowed me to walk on the low tide surface without leaving a mark. I realised I was wearing

sand shoes, and so then tried the same process in bare feet. This was a lot more difficult but when I was achieving full integration of breath and weight transfer, it was almost impossible to discern where I had stepped.

I sense this exercise takes me to another level. Travelling without trace over a tabular rasa directed by the fixed sun and rotating earth. By comparison the practice of upending stones seems coarse and unnecessary. I now realise that in the former task I am not 'individuating' the stones, but rather using them to leave *my mark* on a naturally formed composition.

The above task seems so much more to reflect my present state of mind.

NB: In position 17 of Qi Gong (as in all positions) the breath is integrated with the movement. As the weight is transferred from one foot to the other, the expired breath is fully expelled and inhalation begins. The objective is to allow fully expanded diaphragmatic breathing.

Hence in the context of the above task, I am moving over the surface with my body and breath integrated. In a sense, my breath is controlling the rate of progress. This links positively with wave, tide and solar cycles, all of which display similar, breath-like periodicities.

January 99

Reading the surface – I became aware of how the behaviour of the swells as they approach the shore reflects not only their innate character (their wave length, amplitude and frequency), but also the influence of the topography of the sea floor at that particular spot. I realised that the way the wave builds and finally breaks constitutes an indirect, but readable map of the sea floor. This made sense of a great deal of human behaviour! People say and do things not only as a result of their inner constitution, but also in response to their psychological environment. Events and experiences from long ago, can surface in a comment or deed, and, like the impact of the sea floor on the wave, can affect the behaviour of the person. The same is true for an authentic creative process. In fact, ensuring that the results *are* a genuine reflection of the complex realities of the creative personality, is paramount, and, unlike in non-volitional systems, can be very difficult to achieve.

Stars – Last night I spent a prolonged moment observing the extremely bright

Milky Way before going to bed. When I was lying in the tent, I was overcome with a huge sense of guilt, assaulted with all of the things I had done in my life, which I regretted. The palpable brightness, scale and grandeur of the night sky had sparked in me a sense of insignificance, which had turned downwards, into shame. It was not until days later that I had a complementary thought, that what was required of me was not shame, but self-forgiveness: that all of my mistakes were as inevitable as the stars, and that taking responsibility for them was not shaming. That I needed to accept my mistakes, understand them, acknowledge them, and carry them with me, not as baggage, but simply as facts, as straight forward as the shape of my nose, or the colour of my eyes. So often, more frequently all the time, I seem to sense this universal pragmatism, and receive release.

It seems the more I do this, the more intact I become, and the less likely I am to behave in ways which are directed by 'wants and desires' rather than by understandings springing from a sense of being part of all things. Some people see this as being 'staunch', or 'strong', or 'lacking in the milk of human kindness', a kind of puritanical aloofness from human weakness. But in fact it is not a 'strength' at all, merely a relaxing into those larger laws which propel the universe. It is easy then, to understand how certain human beings become capable of seemingly superhuman detachment. Acceptance gives rise to a detached understanding, providing a certainty of thought and action which transcends personal considerations. This should not be seen as a 'sacrifice' but more, a movement towards fullness of life.

PS: Dream – A large sailing boat is upside down in a landlocked area of sea. Its stern is grounded on a rocky shore, while its bow floats free. There is a person trying to re-float the boat. It is me, but it does not look like me...a short dark person.

The 'real me' is also there as an active participant/observer, but I am invisible. The dark me says not to worry, as he has installed a special computer-controlled system in the boat to cope with these kinds of situations. The computer pushes water from the stern to the bow, so that the weight is redistributed, allowing the boat to be freed. He demonstrates this, and by putting his weight on the bow of the boat and pushing up and down, the boat slowly comes away from the rocky shore.

It then seems to drift under its own momentum towards the other side of the enclosed body of water. On the way, I warn the dark me to be careful as there are other rocks around, and it would not be good to ground the boat again accidentally. Soon we reach a building with a boat ramp. It is some kind of living quarters-cum-factory. The dark me goes in and talks to someone on the phone. Around about this point in the dream, I become the dark me, and the other presence evaporates. Then I go out, and coming up the ramp is a crowd of people, all of whom I recognise but they are not actual people in my real life. They are slightly agitated about the boat being capsized, but I say not to worry as I am negotiating to buy a new boat.

