RIVERS AND TIDES
Andy Goldsworthy Working With Time

Transcript

Art for me is a form of nourishment.
I need the land, I need it.
I want to understand that energy that I feel and that I also have in me and that I also feel in the plants and in the land.
That energy that is running through, that is flowing through the landscape.
It is that intangible thing that is here and then gone.
Growth, time, change, and the idea of flow in nature.

The two big influences in my work, the sea and the river, both water.
You would think that time would be more compatible with the tide.
Time and tide, this daily up and down, but somehow I think there is a lot to be learned on time by the river.
There are always these obsessive thoughts, that you cannot get rid off.
I don't like that sensation of travelling, I feel dislocated, uprooted, and it takes me time to establish roots again. And when I arrive at a new place, I have to begin work almost immediately. There is no period of research or resting, I go strait to work.

The tide is quite extraordinary, to have that liquid movement backwards and forwards.
The cold and its relationship to stone and fluidity. But I am a stranger here.
I am a stranger. I am so out of touch with it.
I have shook hands with the place and begun.

When the work is going well, I feel warm, but when there is a collapse, that this coldness goes right through me. Good art keeps you warm!
I got up early this morning, you know, four o'clock, and I could not see anything. The moon was out, but it cast a shadow down here. Once you lose it, it's gone. And I have to work with my bare hands, because my gloves stick and I don't have the sensitivity to do it with gloves. I lose feel of it. I always like to touch. You never shake someone's hands with a glove on!

It is hard, hard going, and it is cold sometimes on the hands, and I do get up very early, and all that effort is ultimately going into trying to make something that is effortless.

I wish I'd reached this point about an hour ago, before the sun had risen.
What is extraordinary, what I did not expect but what I could only have dreamt off happening is that the sun, coming from there, shines completely on both sides of the rock! So all the icicles is illuminated against that cliff and I never had any idea that that would happen.
But the potential, the potential here, is fantastic.
No, it is water: the river and the see made solid.



And it is so many works that I made that the thing that the very thing that brings the work to life is the thing that will cause its death.

…

My first view of the beach was a river and a pool that was being turned by the river. So I am trying to touch and understand that motion, that flow and the meeting of the river with the sea: these two waters meeting.

Man: When I was a boy, we used to stand on those rocks and dive in. The water was a little deeper then, I think.
Do you have a name for this?
Man: This is a salmon hole.
- Did you catch salmon here?
Man: Many times, many times. They were touching each other, they were so thick.

- Such a strong connection to Scotland. We have salmon holes too. I like that. I like that feeling of the fish underneath, that energy.
Man: It has that sense of a whirlpool.
- That is exactly what I wanted. I fed of that motion in this piece.
Man: So what's going to happen when that tide hits that, is it going to float?
- O, it's going to float away, it will move into the pool. It won't stay intact, absolutely not! It feels like it has been taken off into another plane, taken off into another world.
It does not feel at all like destruction. That moment is really part of that cycle of turning. You feel as if you have touched the heart of the place. That's a way of understanding for me. Seeing something you never saw before, that was always there, but that you were blind to. There are moments when it is extraordinarily beautiful, when a piece of work happens that is… that are those moments that I just live for!

…

Well, it is quarter to eight, and I think the tide is doing it around three. That is not a lot of time. I think you should stop filming and collect stones instead. Do something useful.
A stone is not so bad but having to walk quite distance to get it. All the time we are loosing time. So that makes for an interesting work. I really quite like that tension. And there is a risk: I may be only this half way up and the tide is here. And that's like a marker to that time that is coming up behind me.

I began working on the beach, that's where I began. It's a great teacher about time.
I think the relentlessness of it, there is no getting away from the fact that that sea is going to be here.



I was at Art College at Lancaster and all the students were in their cubicles as they are and in that cramped space and every day I'd catch a train to Molcomb where I was staying and you get of the train and you see this big expanse, this space in such stark contrast to the art college. And one day I went of and worked on the beach. What struck me was that sense of energy when you were outside of the art college. It was very secure in the art college. As soon as you made something outside there was this almost breathlessness and uncertainty. Total control can be the death of a work.
Oops. The stone speaking. I never had one do this before, and I think it is either the sand settling in its… or the weakness of the stone, or even a combination of the two. I'll make this the widest point, and then get some weight back in the middle to start securing it.
This is my work you know! Too many unknowns.
I think its chances of survival are a bit slim!
Shittt..
I need a very heavy stone right here. Can you bring me a very heavy stone, a squarish, lumpy one?
That's the fourth collapse. And the tide is coming in. I think it would be better to wait.
The moment something collapses, it is intensely disappointing, and this is the fourth time it has fallen, and each time I got to know the stone a little bit more, I got higher each time, so it grew in proportion to my understanding of the stone. And that is really one of the things my art is trying to do: is trying to understand the stone. I obviously don't understand it well enough yet.

People make small piles of stones to mark pathways in the hills, mountains, in Scotland and I think all over the world. All the cones are related in some way and they have become markers to my journeys and to places that I feel a special attachment towards.
And then it has a quality of a guardian, the way it stands, as if it is protecting something.
I like the connection the form has with the seed, very full and ripe.
I think to look at stone and find growth, as expressed in the seed, within stone is a very powerful image for me.
The sea came in and the cone just disappeared and then was gone, but it was still there. A work that I had only just finished making, so my contact with the stone was still very, very strong, so I was with it down there, but I still could not see it.
What I have touched on this time is that I haven't simply made the piece to be destroyed by the sea. The work has been given to the sea as a gift. And the sea has taken the work and made more of it than I could have ever hoped for. And I think that if I can see in that, ways of understanding, those things that happen in life that changes our lives, that causes upheavals and shock.
I can't explain that.

…

That deeper rhythm of change I can't see other than in my home. This is why my home place is becoming more and more important to me. Bracket is a material that I have always enjoyed working with, but it is a very hard, tough plant to work with; it's very aggressive on your hands when you're pulling it, it's like razors. I always associate the material the material with bleeding hands. It's one of the few plants I use a knife on. And it is a very toxic plant too. When it's pouring, you shouldn't really inhale at that time. And I think we misread the landscape when we think of it as being pastoral and pretty. There is a darker side to that. Where they have been in the ground they've gone black, and I really like that idea that the contact between the plant and… The flame of a fire makes the energy of the fire visible. It is the same with this black: it is a result of the exchange of energy that has taken place between the plant and the earth, and through that process there is an exchange of heat that gives it this… when it looks charred it looks painted but it's not, it's just the root as I find it. And I think at this time, when spring is beginning, it doesn't begin on the surface, it begins below. This idea of finding evidence of that heat within the ground is something that in a way is my way of understanding what is going on at the moment and even though these are stalks from last year's plants and will not grow again this year, they are still connected to that root system underneath the ground, and the idea of what happened last year is being repeated this year and is going to come through this.

…

I began taking photographs when I was a student at art college. When I was working outside and I had to explain to the teachers what I was making. (…) Photography has become the way I talk about my sculpture. Brancusi once said about sculpture: why talk about sculpture when I can photograph it? It's the language through which I describe what I made, it is also become the way through which I understand what I have done. When I have worked all day in the rain and I am tired, I get visually and physically numb to what I have made. And I need that time between the making and the return of the images to be able to see afresh what I have really done. (…)
…
Somehow the river is that line that I follow. The river has an unpredictability about it. It really is unpredictable. That line running through - yet having its own cycles, related to the weather and the sea. (…)

The river is a river of stone, a river of animals, a river of the wind, a river of water, a river of many things. The river is not dependent on water. We are talking about the flow.
And a river of growth that flows through the trees and the land.

…

The reason this landscape looks as it is with no trees is because of the sheep. So the sheep have had this very deep impact on the land, so I do feel this need to work with the sheep. And yet our perception of the sheep is so different to the reality of the sheep. That makes it an incredibly difficult thing to work with, because we perceive it as being a woolly animal, and to get through that wooliness to the essence of the sheep is very, very hard. Because sheep are incredibly powerful animals in their own way. They have been responsible for social and political upheavals. The highland clearances when people were put off the land. The landlords put sheep on the land and moved the people away. And they have left their story behind them, it is written in the place, in the landscape. There is an absence in the landscape because of the effects of sheep. People lived and worked and died here and I can feel their presence in the places that I work. And I am the next layer upon those things that have happened already.

…



I am so amazed, at times, that I am actually alive.
Well, it happened, on occasion, when someone very close to me died. It was my younger brother's wife, very young. And the image of somebody dying, of Julia dying, is very burned in your mind. And the day after Julia's death, I worked to the tree, it seemed the right place to go, and made a work with a hole on the tree. I have come to see it as a kind of entrance, a visual entrance into the earth, into the tree,

into the stone, an entrance between which life both ebbs and flows. Looking into a black hole I have often described is like looking over the cliff's edge, a sense of being drawn into the black as you're drawn into the depth, the distance. But the other side of that is that out of that comes grows also. It's my way of trying to understand not just the death, not just the absence, because black is the absence, the intangible, but it's in the context of a tree that I know will come back to life. And there is nothing more potent to me than a black hole that I've made and returning to that a little later and seeing a little finger, a little blade of growth, growing out of that black. That is such a potent image!

...

The reason why the stone is red is because of its iron content, and that's also the reason why our blood is red, too. I do feel there is a special energy about the red. It is probably its relationship to blood. But probably something that I can't really explain entirely. I think the colour is an expression of life, even tough things die, they're part of that flow still. They become part of the river of red. In Japan, you'll see a red Maple tree against a green mountain. This incredible red and it's like a wound, a wound in the mountain. There is such an energy and violence about that colour! And I am in a continuous pursuit of the red, and I have this feeling that as I approach its source, the more I begin to understand the colour. There are many lessons to be learned by that colour. And I think that when the realisation was that the colour is also in me, then it's this feeling of both a colour and an energy flowing through all things.

I must have worked here several times before realising the red here, it is not so obvious, just looking underneath stones you find these small soft iron stones, that something so dramatic, so intense, could be at the same time so hidden, so underneath the skin of the earth!

There is a real shock at seeing that colour, something very alien to the river. In fact it is so rooted and about that place. Here I am working with the stone, grinding them down. And I spend all this time, several hours, making a little pile of pigment that I will make into a ball and throw into the river and there will be a splash. And that is just an instant in that cycle of stone as it goes into its process of solidification and then becoming fluid again, and then made solid once again. And I think it is a little memory in the life of a stone, but very much in the spirit, in the nature of stone.
We set so much by our idea of the stability of stone, and when you find that stone itself is actually fluid and liquid, that really undermines my sense of what is here to stay and what isn't.

...

Of course it feels alive! If anything is an expression of the stone alive, almost back to its origin in the volcano, when it, stone was alive, I mean it is always alive, but that visible evidence of movement and eruption of the stone. It's that feeling of energy within it, and that's life!
I cannot then explain beyond that, but I know that there is more than just a simple collapsing and arrival of material. I struggle to say these things and I know I can just about get them out but I there is a world beyond what words can define for me. Words do their job, but what I am doing here says a lot more.

Transcription by Jan van Boeckel, March 2006