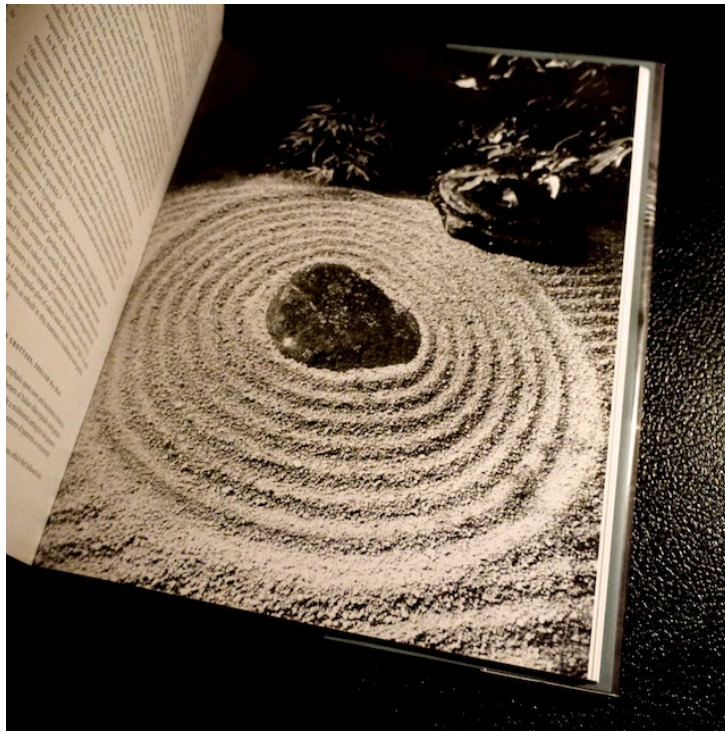


Sand Apparatus History

I came up singly with the concept of drawing digitally in sand (the sand plotter idea) and with the functional principle of doing this magically from under the sand tray using magnets (the magnet drive idea). I envisioned the piece all at once and very clearly (an epiphany!) while looking at the picture of a Japanese temple garden. I was reading "Designing the Earth: the Human Impulse to Shape Nature", a book by David Bourdon (Abrams, 1995). When this happened in 1998, I had been through ten or so Siggraph Art Gallery shows already, I had been plotting for 24 years then. I was eager to open up my medium, and was looking actively for ways to do so.

Here is the image (page 197) that induced my instant insight (I still own this book). I think it happened because instead of showing an entire rock garden, the photo only presented a microcosm at the smaller scale of my plotter drawings, making the jump easier for my mind. Seeing a familiar algorithmic pattern, I thought "I could do that! How?" and I imagined the hidden magnetic solution that would elegantly remove any non-zen, obtrusive, mechanical distraction in tune with the quiet spirituality of Japanese temple gardens.



So I had these ideas. When I revealed them to a fabricator at hand, he was very skeptical and reluctant at first, stating at the time he did not believe in kinetic art. But he tested my principles, saw they worked and started building a device, then another, and ended up as a brazen plagiarist.

Note: After the fabricator's defection early 1999, I built a better device myself and exhibited it in the SIGGRAPH Art Gallery in 1999 and 2005, and many other venues. From 1999 on, I have built several other instances, and continue to this day with the help of three collaborators (David Bothman, engineering; Victor di Novi, wood plinths; and Iannis Zannos, sonification).

Tags: Sand as Medium, Digital Sand Gardens, Sisyphus, Sisyphé, Odysseus, Ulysses, Ulysse, Telemachus, Telemaque, Ptolemeus, Ptolémée, Mentor, Anicca, Anitya, Ephemerality, Impermanence