

## WORDS FOR STONE

BY PETER SIMPSON

'Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony.'

(Viktor Shklovsky: *Art as Technique*, 1916)

Count your fingers.

One - Two - Three - Four - Five -

Six - Seven - Eight - Nine - Zero.

Fingers are digits.

Digits are numbers:

0 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9

as in the numbering of John Edgar's

DIGIT.

Something modern about these laminated stones, fabricated with the geometry of modernism and figured with the alternating current of a digital code, the binary oscillation of black and white, 0 and 1, the algorithms by which information is encoded and decoded.

Something timeless about these stratified stones, these immaculate stacks of granite and marble, granite and glass, limestone and sandstone.

Something timeless and speaking to (for) both past and future.

Figured one way these tall shafts reach for the stars, figured another they are samples from the earth's core.

of how you could begin again from scratch, if only you could decipher their codes.



Star. stone. bone.

Flagstones. Flag/stones. Flag stones.

Flags become stones if they fall far enough. Stars have fallen to earth, flags have fallen to stone,

stars are fallen stones, stars and stripes (centres of intense explosion) have become as stony ground.

This is what mountains come down to when they fall: a stone in a stream, on a beach.

Cross in the stone,  
remnant of something monumental,  
but decayed, deconstructed, diminished,  
worn; a relic. Red cross;  
sign of succour, sign of care.

A banded stone, a bandaged stone.  
criss-crossed, tied like a parcel.  
But this is no ribbon of stone but a vein  
(cutting both ways) of Indian granite,  
the colour of blood, the blood is in the stone.

Bone/stone:  
a sculptor's rhyme.

Sticks and stones will break your bones  
but names will never hurt you.

Consider, too, the facture of Edgar's stones, the making-by-hand, literally the manu-facture  
(f. f. Ital., *manifattura* & *L. manufactum* made by hand)  
not to mention whatever else they might say to us, signify, represent, resemble, symbolise or otherwise communicate meaning, those 'equivalents for states of mind and feeling' which T.S. Eliot identified with art.

Peter Simpson is a writer, curator, teacher and scholar. He lives in Auckland.

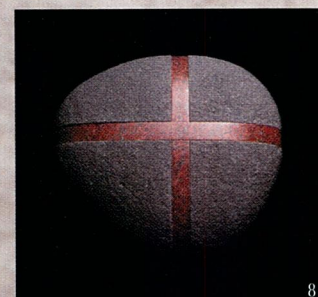


In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of the rock,  
Of such mixed motion and such imagery  
That its barrenness becomes a thousand things.

And so exists no more. This is the cure  
Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves.  
His words are both the icon and the man.

Wallace Stevens.

The Rock, II: The Poem as Icon



### Transformer

1 - an apparatus for reducing or increasing the voltage of an alternating current.

2 - a person or thing that transforms.

(Oxford Reference Dictionary)

Something ancient about these tall stones, broken at the top, taller than all but a very tall man is tall, maybe like the seven foot giants which Louis de Bougainville's men saw on Tierra del Fuego in 1767.

Men with bones as long as

Edgar's **Bone** could stand tall next to these monuments, these boundary markers, these reminders.

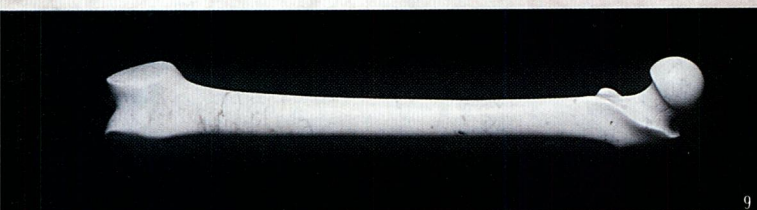
revealing strata laid down by the slow sift of sediment, layer upon layer, aeon after aeon, their slow history now exposed to the air.

Nothing lasts, but nothing lasts better than stone (say the pyramids of Mexico and Egypt) except perhaps words, says Shakespeare:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

(Sonnet 55)

When some future creature is picking over the debris of a dead civilisation (ours?), John Edgar's stones (like the monoliths in Stanley Kubrick's 2001?) might begin to tell



9

8