

On the Nature of Concrete Things

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Sitting for millions of years beneath great pressure, organic matter becomes ASPHALT¹ it becomes COAL² *Imagine the 50 million year gestation period of petroleum.*

Weather wears down MOUNTAINS³ this makes CLAY⁴

Human hands build MINES,⁵ human tools crush STONE,⁶ build ROADS,⁷ build WALLS⁸ make ASPHALT CONCRETE⁹ *Materials are given shape. These plasterings-together (brick plus mortar, porous grey mass plus oozy black shape) now stand on their own.*

The lump of rock is part of a wall (is it a lump yet?) A part comes off the wall. The wall comes apart. The part that comes off is a lump it is a THING¹⁰

occasional marks the only suggestion of

A piece of a structure in Sweden comes off the structure in Sweden *the original design they have fallen away from.*

it is taken to a studio it is put in a PLASTIC BOX¹¹ it is sent across oceans then rummaged through by Australian customs officials. *The receipt on the wall conjures the ocean, makes us imagine all that space—*

The lump of Sweden sits in an Australian gallery it is looked at by Australian eyes.

IMAGES¹² of distant lumps are looked at. *The projection of a gallery far away abolishes the long distance between Sweden and Australia.*

They are man-made ROCKS.¹³ Crumbling LUMPS.¹⁴ Sitting. Lying. *These rocks are more than fragments. They have a thingness of their own.*

On the other side of the world BITS¹⁵ break off

Disintegration, entropy, collapse.

this makes GRAVEL.¹⁶

- 1 A sticky, black and highly viscous liquid or semi-solid form of petroleum. Derived from the late Middle English, in turn from French *asphalte*, based on Late Latin *asphalton*, *asphaltum*, which is the latinisation of the Greek ἄσφαλτος.
- 2 At various times in the geologic past, the Earth had dense forests in low-lying wetland areas. Due to natural processes such as flooding, these forests were buried under soil. High pressure and high temperatures slowly converted the dead vegetation to coal.
- 3 Mountains are constantly subjected to erosional forces which work to tear them down. Erosion reduces mountains to low hills and plains.
- 4 “[I]f the holding is done by the jug’s void, then the potter who forms sides and bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No—he shapes the void.” Martin Heidegger, “The Thing” in *Poetry Language Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 169.
- 5 The oldest known mine on archaeological record is the “Lion Cave” in Swaziland, which radiocarbon dating shows to be about 43,000 years old. At this site paleolithic humans mined hematite to make the red pigment ochre. Mines of a similar age in Hungary are believed to be sites where Neanderthals may have mined flint for weapons and tools.
- 6 “We pose this question [what is a thing?] only in order to know what a rock is [...] We want to know just that, something that the mineralogist, botanist, zoologist, and metallurgist perhaps don’t want to know at all, something that they only think they want to know while actually wanting something else: to promote the progress of science, or to satisfy the joy of a discovery, or to show the technical usage of things, or to make a livelihood.” Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* (South Bend, IA: Gateway Editions, 1967), p. 9.
- 7 “All distances in time and space are shrinking. Man now reaches overnight, by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel. He now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all.” Heidegger, “The Thing”, *op. Cit.*, p. 165.
- 8 A wall is a solid structure that provides a barrier or enclosure. The word is an Anglo-Frisian and Saxon borrowing (cf. Old Saxon, Old Frisian, Middle Low German, Middle Dutch *wal*) from Latin *vallum*, meaning “wall, rampart, row or line of stakes”. Swedish *vall* is from Low German.
- 9 Asphalt concrete is asphalt (used as a binder) mixed with mineral aggregate then laid down in layers and compacted.
- 10 “With our question ‘What is a thing?’ it obviously is not our purpose to discover what granite, a pebble, limestone, or sandstone is but rather what the rock is as a thing. We do not care to know how to distinguish at any time mosses, ferns, grasses, shrubs, and trees, but what the plant is as a thing [...] We do not care to know what pliers are in comparison with a hammer, what a watch is in comparison with a key; but we want to know what these implements and tools are as things.” Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, *op. Cit.*, p. 8.
- 11 “The vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.” Heidegger, “The Thing”, *op. Cit.*, p. 169.
- 12 “What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. [...] What is happening here when, as a result of the abolition of great distances, everything is equally far and equally near? What is this uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near—is, as it were, without distance? Everything gets lumped together into uniform distanceless.” Heidegger, “The Thing”, *op. Cit.*, p. 166.
- 13 “With our question ‘what is a thing?’ we not only pass over the particular rocks and stones, particular plants and their species, animals and their species, implements and tools, we also pass over whole realms of the inanimate, the animate, and tools, and desire to know only ‘What is a thing?’” Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, *op. Cit.*, p. 8.
- 14 An irregularly shaped mass or piece.
- 15 Construction aggregate, or simply “aggregate”, is a broad category of coarse particulate material used in construction, including sand, gravel, crushed stone, slag, recycled concrete and geosynthetic aggregates. Aggregates are the most mined material in the world. They are a component of composite materials such as concrete and asphalt concrete.
- 16 As gravel, these rocks promise to long outlive us.