An Inquiry Into
An Imaginal Landscape

An MA (Hons) Thesis
The University of Western Sydney Nepean

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
and the scarlet leaves
like fat stars, on cold wet ground
sing sagely of this

in grey morning mist
once more the dark currawong
phrases the question
Summary

Describes an inquiry undertaken into the nature and genesis of landscapes experienced imaginally. The inquiry proceeds by introspection, by art making, and by exploring related writings. Uses the terms pre-conceptual and pre-imaginal to refer to an unknowable dimension, from which the conceptual and the imaginal arise, and attempts to confirm the conceptual and the imaginal as expressions and effects of this dimension. Explores the possibilities of a continual interplay between the imaginal and the pre-imaginal in the inner life of writers and artists.

Statement

I state that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

Ron Dowd

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of my supervisor, Joan Grounds, during the course of this degree. I would also like to acknowledge the help of Noelene Lucas and Joyce Hinterding during periods when Joan Grounds was absent.

I want to acknowledge the support of the writers whose works I have used and quoted, and will continue to use and rely on in my art practice. Writing this thesis has been an opportunity for me to bring together strands of other writings that have appealed to me for some time.
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I. Inquiry
Introduction and Terms

This thesis describes a research project conducted at the University of Western Sydney Nepean during the period 1998 to 2001. The project has encompassed art making as well as literature research, reflective contemplation and thinking.

I chose the thesis title, *An Inquiry into an Imaginal Landscape*, before the commencement of the project, and I have endeavoured to remain close to this line of inquiry, to see where it leads.

The approach I have taken in writing the thesis is to document the art making and thinking processes which have taken place over the period of the candidature. I am interested in recording the various stages in the development of the inquiry - to show how it has developed and, in my view, deepened.

Figure 1 shows the outline of the proposed study, written in November 1997. Apart from one area that I have not pursued (relating to the proposed use of colour and paint), the inquiry has proceeded along the lines planned for it, as stated in this proposal.

In this project I use the word *imaginal* in the sense meant by James Hillman. A quotation from Hillman, which for me provides a good summary of his approach to the word, appears in the proposal shown in Figure 1.1 Another useful quotation from him is:

> In the beginning is the image, first imagination then perception; first fantasy then reality.2

However, Hillman does not so much define imaginal as work with it and explore it in the course of his extensive writings. This approach is in keeping with his imaginal view of the psyche itself - he proceeds in a hermeneutic3 rather than a rationalistic way.

A work of Hillman's that explains his approach very clearly is *The Dream and the Underworld.*4 Here he makes distinctions between the modes of operation of, on the one hand, the "daytime ego", the Apollonian, the heroic; and on the other hand the imaginal ego, the Dionysian, the hermeneutic. For Hillman, psychotherapeutic work can and should be a transformative process for the ego - from its heroic daytime stance to one more in connection with its underworld, imaginal roots (one more closely associated with gods such as Hermes). Having involved myself in Hillmanian psychotherapeutic work for some time, I wanted in this project to be true to that experience, and to continue the soul's nekya5.

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1 The quotation is from Hillman [1], p23.
2 Hillman [1], p23.
3 Following the way of Hermes. For more on what this way is, see *Hermes As Guide*, on page II-45.
4 Hillman [2].
5 An imaginal underworld wandering, without heroic return. For a background to the nekya, see Hillman [2], p20 and 21.
An Inquiry into an Imaginal Landscape

Man is primarily an image maker and our psychic substance consists of images; our being is imaginal being, an existence in imagination.

James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*

The window is the absence of the wall and it gives air and light because it is empty.

There is a vastness beyond the farthest reaches of the mind.

Sri Nisargadatta, *I Am That*

Outline of Field of Interest

The proposal is for a body of work that comes from the direct and powerful experience of an imaginal space. How vast is this space? Where, if anywhere, does it lead? What is gained or lost by inquiring into it? Who is inquiring? What is left afterwards?

The space relates to landscape, but not necessarily to any particular physical landscape or location. The inquiry is also not necessarily connected with travel to physical places.

The direct experience of this landscape is primarily through a meditative practice.

The inquiry is a *sounding* (as in a whale, diving deep), and involves investigation of the imaginal sounds with which the space is imbued. There are natural sounds such as wind and bird-song. Sounding is also at the root of the idea of the person, which could in this case be both the subject and the object of the inquiry (*persona* re, to sound).

Both Eastern and Western traditional texts may be used as references and "reality checks" on this space. The resulting works and related writing will be tested against the realities of other persons (who view them). Investigation will also be made of contemporary writings on related subjects.

An emphasis will be placed on the use of materials that "materialise" the subjective states in which this landscape is experienced. This is the impetus behind the recent use of balsa wood in related works. The emotive values of colour and painted surface will also be investigated.

Figure 1: Outline of the Proposed Study
In this project, I started with landscapes seen in inner spaces - in dreams, in meditations and in reflections, and I wanted to be true to where these powerful images seemed to want to lead me.

This gives the sense in which I intend the word landscape to be read - not as any particular actual landscape that can be seen at a geographical location, but as an inner space, a sweeping extent seen by insight or by concept.

As I describe further in subsequent pages, the inquiry into the imaginal landscape has led me to intuitions of spaces that seem to be prior to those based on the imaginal and the conceptual. Such spaces, which could be called pre-conceptual, have become of more interest to me.¹

I think a better term than imaginal landscapes for these pre-conceptual spaces is pre-imaginal landscapes. So in summary, the project and the thesis moves from imaginal landscapes on to pre-imaginal landscapes; or to paraphrase and oversimplify, from Psyche to Zen.

However, as Hillman would say, the tools we have to work with are words, and each one of these is deeply rooted in the imaginal and the archetypal. So even when I refer to the pre-imaginal, I am speaking using imaginal devices.² For this reason the work becomes a kind of circular (or possibly spiral) hermeneutic, reaching nowhere (the imaginal continually attempting to divine the pre-imaginal, but always in the terms of the imaginal), or reaching nowhere understood in the light of day.

¹ Although they were of interest from the beginning as well - see the quotations from Sri Nisargadatta in Figure 1.
² For example, when I say that I have an intuition of the pre-imaginal as a field, it comes with powerful imaginal connotations of field. It seems we can never separate the two.
Intimations about the Wood

- The Jump Zone exhibition, and the connection to Tantric yantras.
- Yantras as philosophical/spiritual/scientific devices.
- Beginning to use balsa to stand in for the experience of a meditative state, in which thoughts were curtailed and stopped for short periods.
- The experience of "becoming dry like balsa".
- The pre-conceptual.
- The Bird Field exhibition and the way the experience of hearing bird song in this meditative state led to thoughts on the body as a sounding vessel.

Jump Zone

In the exhibition Jump Zone (1997), I was fascinated with flat forms that could be built into a landscape. These forms were influenced by a computer game that was popular with my son at the time - Microsoft Fury.

In Fury, the goal of this game is to navigate your spacecraft over inhospitable, empty and sometimes hostile landscapes to Jump Zones, which are portals to other universes. These portals operate as "levels" in the game. If you can avoid the enemies shooting at you, and the perilous landforms, and navigate your craft to a Jump Zone, then the rules of time and space are temporarily suspended. You are transported to the next level of the game. This level could be in an entirely new universe system.

Jump Zones, as special magical areas in the ground, are transformational. The image shown in Figure 2 is of a Jump Zone from Fury. Jump Zones are based on flat geometric forms, and the flat two-dimensionality of them was interesting at the time. They connected strongly with Tantric yantras, which I had been studying and copying by drawing.

Once inside a Jump Zone, "other forces" take over the control of your craft, to some extent. There are long, vertical, twisting subterranean tunnels to be negotiated at high speeds. You have only partial control of the navigation. I found the Jump Zones to have strong connections to the psychic processes described as taking place when there is an engagement with a Tantric yantra.¹

Yantras, the visual analogues of the more well known sounded mantras, are traditional devices for centring the mind and re-capturing an experience of reality. They are meant as meditative and transformational devices. Similar to Jump Zones, Tantric yantras are, on the surface, very two-dimensional.

Figure 3 shows an example of a Tantric yantra. This particular yantra is a form of the most well known of traditional yantras, the Sri Yantra. Much has been written of the history and correct construction of this yantra. The triangular forms from which the yantra is comprised are important, and considered to be highly acoustically energetic.

¹ Such processes are described in Rawson, p10.
Figure 2: Approaching a Jump Zone in Microsoft Fury
Although the yantra, through Western eyes, may be associated with quiescent passive states, this is far from the case - such devices are seen to be highly active and charged within a traditional Tantric practice. They are also considered to portray the third and fourth dimensions, and to invoke a powerful sense of transcending space and time.

For more about the construction of Tantric yantras see Philip Rawson's *Tantra - The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*. This book contains an introduction to the transformational intent of yantras, and the importance in Tantra of questioning commonly accepted ideas of time.

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1 See Rawson. There are also sites on the Internet dedicated to Tantric art (such as http://www.hubcom.com/trantric/)
The yantra shown in Figure 4 is a diagram of the cosmos, and incorporates a "swastika" form. This is a practical device for an everyday transformative practice. The medium is gouache on cloth, obviously made for portability (dimensions approximately 1.1m x 1.1m). As with the case of the Sri Yantra, the central region is thought to be highly energetically charged. Again, despite its two-dimensional form, the yantra is considered to have great depth.

Jump Zones in Microsoft Fury may also be rather flat on the surface of the land, but this belies their depth. Once your craft is sucked into the force field of such a Zone (once you have navigated sufficiently close to it for this to happen) then the tables are turned: no more is it up to your joystick skills to negotiate the Zone. Instead, you now have no choice but to attempt to survive the high-paced ride into the tube-like depths of the Zone. And at some point, you must just give up and be transported where the Zone intends you to go.
Similarly, Tantric yantras are not flat at all. When you look at one you are actually looking (so tradition has it) into the very mouth of reality. You have turned your focus from the usual one of passively experiencing the outpouring of each moment of reality. Instead, you have become aware of the outpouring itself, and in so doing have freed yourself from it. The dragon spitting fire is a common Tantric symbol for the outpouring of reality. To truly engage with a yantra is to face the dragon’s awful fiery mouth.

The other place where one is freed, at least temporarily, from the outpouring of reality, is in meditation. At the very least one can say that one takes a break from too much thinking. One breaks with it, possibly only momentarily, and sees the capacity for thinking for what it is - a tool, like the hand or the foot.

For me, yantras and Jump Zones fit with the processes that occur during meditation. On the face of it the practice is very passive, but this is from the viewpoint of an actively thinking mind. Energetic shocks and jolts can be experienced in meditation which make the concerns of the day-time world and ego seem comparatively less active. This fits with the way yantras and Jump Zones have an unexpected energetic kick to them.

These shocks are jolts of extra consciousness of mind and body. They can be like a slap, or the experience of the skin being suddenly stripped off. (In Hong Kong markets they strip live snakes of their skin, leaving a writhing raw body.)

People (including myself) also see landscape forms in meditation, as well as yantra-like forms and Jump Zone-like forms.

There was a period in 1996 and 1997 when I meditated regularly and for quite long periods. Gradually, I became interested in an underlying subjective grain. The shocks in meditation were interesting, but there was also a constant background, a still, dry grain-like experience, as though the body was comprised of a wood grain.

This reminded me of using balsa for model making as a child, and more and more there was the experience of becoming like balsa itself. Balsa is distinguished by being the wood with the lowest density - it consists of a very open cell structure, much of it just air. It is almost colourless, and is air (kiln) dried.

Balsa became a vehicle, an objective correlate, for the subjective experiences in meditation, of being aligned with a straight, vertical grain. This straight grain seemed closer to the truth of what I am. Also, it is experienced in meditation as something that neither comes nor goes. It does not partake of the shocks and changes which can be experienced in meditation, but is constant whether the flips and shocks come or do not come.

It seemed at the time that the grain was in some ways answering the question of Where do the Jump Zones take you? (or, Where does a yantra take you?)

This grain that is always there, in which changes arise, has been described since ancient times by scientific (mystic) investigators. For example, there are many references to "that which does not change" in the Upanishads\(^1\).

There was a period where I meditated outdoors and had the experience of tasting the grain in my mouth. In one instance, meditating near a group of large trees, I had the sense of being under the bark of these trees, not separate from the wood, and hence of being composed essentially of their grain.

\(^1\) See Eswaran.
When it came to responding with work, the *Jump Zone* exhibition consisted of a series of works made in laminated balsa. The Jump Zones and the yantras inspired the forms of the works. The grain described above was to be prominent in the works. The fact that the colour of the wood was very light (almost colourless) was appealing as well: colour could be said to contain the colourless, so why not go for the basic and never-varying basis (in which all colours arise)?

As far as the patterns cut into the balsa surfaces are concerned, the intention was to remain with very simple forms. I wanted to stay with forms that could be termed "pre-archetypal" (where *archetypal* is used in the Jungian sense). In other words, I asked myself what basic structures could actually invoke archetypes, or more accurately, what pre-existing *formers* could there be deep in the psyche that could predispose certain psychic patterns to arise to consciousness, rather than others?

The term *former* is being used in some psychological circles, to mean a propensity to form a particular archetype.¹

It became clear to me also, that what I was interested in producing in terms of an artistic practice was work that operated as an objective correlate for this whole subjective field of research. This is quite distinct from other art practices that, for example, may be concerned with interrogating current social and/or political issues.

The *Jump Zone* exhibition was held at Room 35 Gallery, Sydney, in May 1997. Approximately 10 large balsa works were shown, along with some smaller works.

The works shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 are from *Jump Zone*. They are each titled *Marker*. I called these works *Markers* because I saw them as pointing to something I was interested in, something like a bookmark. The word also has a connection for me to the idea of the *former*, mentioned above. Also, they are made by simple mark making (cutting). Lastly, I like the connection to the herms of Hermes, which were stone piles used for marking out territory. (For more on Hermes see *Hermes As Guide*, in II Related Material, page II-45.)

¹ Unfortunately, I have been unable to find a reference to the use of this word. The word arose in conversation during a psychoanalyst session.
Figure 5: Marker 1997, (65 x 65 x 11 cm)
**Jump Zone** Exhibition

Figure 6: Marker 1997, (65 x 65 x 11 cm)
**Jump Zone** Exhibition
The works are intended to retain the form of square yantras and to invoke the subtle energy and movement held in a yantra. The black areas are incised in the flat plane surfaces, and the dark space behind the plane surface is revealed. I was keen to keep these spaces dark, to signal an unknown void.

A series of smaller works from the exhibition is shown in Figure 7. These works used balsa forms mounted on acrylic on canvas. They are studies really, and recently someone has called them, aptly, self-portraits.

**Figure 7: Four Small Markers 1997, (each 20 x 30 cm)**
*Jump Zone Exhibition*

Lastly, a series of larger balsa works from the exhibition is shown in Figure 8.

I enjoyed laminating up these larger areas of balsa (from the thin lathes in which it is purchased), and began to use this to make works which themselves become inscriptions. These could be inscriptions on the land alluding to some transformational practice. These works were named after characters or symbols, and were as follows: I-Marker (152 x 49 x 9 cm), Sum-Marker (151 x 65 x 9), X-Marker (92 x 92 x 11 cm) and Double-Marker (each piece 166 x 35 x 8 cm). They are shown left to right in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: I-Marker, Sum-Marker, X-Marker and Double-Marker, 1997**
The Pre-Conceptual and Pre-Imaginal

I have recently found it useful to use the term pre-conceptual as a shorthand for the subjects in my work, and to distinguish it from other work that may be more interested in particular conceptual systems.

I am increasingly interested in that which is prior to conceptual systems, that which in fact makes conceptual systems, and conceptualising, possible. I present the term now to facilitate the discussion, even though it is only towards the end of the current research that I have found the term to be useful in dialog.

The experience of meditation is that we have much less we can call our own, our identity, than we might otherwise think. It appears that the more I remove of "mine" the more I wake up to reality, and have some awareness of the pre-conceptual from which the "mine" arises.

Ramana Maharshi said, in answer to the question What is Mind?:

What is called Mind is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind. Therefore, thought is the nature of mind. Apart from the mind, there is no independent entity called the world.¹

In these terms the "wondrous power residing in the Self" would be the pre-conceptual. What we call "identity", a term often used in the contemporary art world, is much less interesting to me than this pre-conceptual expanse. Identity is only a vehicle for me, a particular combination of embodied circumstances. Although these circumstances of course have enormous impact on our lives, it is always better to know that they themselves are not what define us.

The work of the physicist David Bohm is also interesting in this regard. David Bohm was unique among scientists in seriously and scientifically investigating the nature of mind, using a series of thought experiments. He also involved himself in dialogues with people such as Krishnamurti.² I present some quotations from David Bohm in Bohm's Implicate Order, in II Related Material (see page II-40). For Bohm, the pre-conceptual would, I believe, have been his implicate order.

The danger of living in any one conceptual system is that we are in danger of becoming unaware that that is exactly what it is - a system, or a platform for making mental distinctions. Once we begin to see the world, including ourselves, through this system, all that we see is self-fulfilling prophesy, because it can conform only to this system.

My experience with the Jump Zone work (and this has been an experience repeated during the course of the study) has been that an Imaginal landscape has led me to the threshold of a pre-imaginal landscape. The pre-imaginal landscape is intuited, divined almost. It cannot be known, but there is a conviction that it is there, prior to the imaginal landscape, the landscape of fantasy and reflection. Perhaps the pre-imaginal is the visual artist's, the sculptor's, preferred name for the pre-conceptual, since the term retains a connection to, an echo of, the visual and the spatial.

I have often confused imaginal landscapes and the pre-imaginal landscape during the study, and this seems to me to be of the very stuff of a hermeneutic approach

¹ See Ramana Maharshi, p3.
² See, for example Krishnamurti J. and Bohm, David, The Limits of Thought.
to the psyche. The psyche has yearnings, it craves imaginal landscapes, yet these
 cravings can potentially also be for the psyche's ultimate home, its source and
 place of arising, just as much as they can for the imaginal spaces themselves.

Sometimes the psyche's longing for the pre-imaginal is couched in the terms of the
 imaginal, and vice versa. In other words, I may "see" the vast tracts of an imagined
 land, a desert, when what I really crave is an original emptiness; and vice versa,
 there may be a moment of intuition about the source of mind (pre-imaginal) and I
 see a vast landscape (imaginal).

*In meditation I see a vast dry plain, larger than anything I have actually seen, and
 mountain ranges shimmering with a beautiful haze in the far distance. And in the
 middle of this plain I see an exquisite pure-red castle, unlike any red seen in
 nature.¹*

**Bird Field**

I commenced the MA research with the intention of pursuing the grain and the
 yantra-like forms further.

The exhibition *Bird Field* (1998), at the Casula Powerhouse Maling Gallery, was the
 result of this enquiry. In *Bird Field*, I began to see the forms themselves as vessels
 that stood in place of the meditating body.

In fact, the Jump Zone forms had already been vessels: their flat surfaces were
 held away from the wall sufficiently (using a box-like construction hidden behind
 the flat surface) so that incisions in the balsa surface revealed black shadowed
 areas. These shadowed cuts were intended to hint at the inside of (Fury) Jump
 Zones, and at the subtle depths of traditional yantras.

The forms in *Bird Field* were now being seen more as vessels, empty vessels. What
 happens when you sit for extended periods, eyes closed, experiencing the grain?
 Depending on where you sit, it's possible to hear delightful (or otherwise) sounds.
 The sounds that luckily permeated my consciousness at this time, during
 meditation, were bird sounds, birdsong.

¹ In other words, I am spontaneously confronted with an imaginal landscape. But there is something
 otherworldly at the "centre" of this landscape (the red castle). I am fascinated to know what this is,
 why I am being shown this, what is its meaning and teleology. What is at the centre of such fantasies?
 What produces the imaginal? I see the scene (I choose to do so) in a metaphorical way, as a story
 about the production of the imaginal itself. The red castle is imaginal, but also now becomes the
 holder of some meaning about the imaginal, in this way it is meta-imaginal for me, a vision about the
 source and nature of the facility of imagining itself.

The reader may have misgivings about the recounting of images seen in meditation (and the potential
 ego-attachment). However, if the "I" is seen as residing in the grain, in the pre-imaginal, then there
 can be the same detachment to the productions of the psyche, seen when the eyes are closed, as
 there can be when the eyes are open (seeing so called "real" landscapes). Rather than disconnecting
 from the imaginal productions of the psyche (which is encouraged in some meditation practices) an
 alternative approach is to inquire into the source of these images.

There are precedents for this in the traditional literature. Saint Teresa of Avila spoke in a richly
 imaginal way of the "Castle" and the "Mansions". And in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad we are told
 that:

*In deep meditation aspirants may
See forms like snow or smoke. They may feel
A string wind blowing or a wave of heat.
(Eswaran [1], page 221).*
I began to have the experience of the bird song emanating from inside my head. There followed some reflections on how we know whether it is not us that generate the bird song, and even the bird itself. And also, what hears the sound, what is left to hear the sound in meditation?

I began to use the term *sounding* as an adjective to apply to an entity that is capable of producing sound, particularly of vibrating in harmony with a pre-existing sound, to produce its own sound. This sound that it produces is imbued with the qualities of the pre-existing sound that causes it to vibrate in sympathy. So a sounding vessel is one ready to be set into vibratory motion, and this means it has an emptiness, a void that can be filled. And when it is set into vibration, its sound is characterised, in part at least, by that which set it vibrating.¹

In answer to the question above (what hears the sound?), the experience was that what is left to hear is a vessel composed of and built of grain (human tissue). And it is a sounding vessel. In fact, if you see an enlarged view of the grain of balsa, it is somewhat like human tissue - and mostly empty space. Is the bird sound outside or inside the meditating vessel? What (or who) is performing the sounding? The vessel (body) is like a musical instrument, a cello perhaps. The idea of a person as a sounding vessel is implicit in the word itself, a *per-sonare*, a "sounding through".

Several of the balsa forms in *Bird Field* are inscribed with waveforms of the songs of well-known Australian birds. I obtained the waveforms by taking short clips of bird song (mostly from web sites) and viewing the clips using sound editing software. Some examples of bird songs collected were the Cockatoo, the Eastern Rosella, the Crimson Rosella and the Spinebill.

An example of work from the *Bird Field* exhibition is shown in Figure 9. This form, the *Void Void Song*, is the one piece in this series which has no sound associated with it. As a meditative device, I think it worked well. Other pieces I am less sure of. Looking back on the work from some distance it now seems that the whole investigation was beginning to become rather overladen with intentions and trajectories - some of the very Apollonian tendencies that have been of interest to me to critique in the research.

A lot of effort was expended on the Bird Field exhibition, including the set-up in a location far from my home, a catalogue including images, a sound track CD for the exhibition (the sound track turned out not be necessary), and an Internet-based animation and multimedia production (which is described in the following section). I feel I had slipped into a way of working which was foreign to the concerns of the work, and to the approach that I had been taking to it. Concerns about the future of my career in the art world had also come into play, a sure sign that the basis on which the work was proceeding was at fault.

¹ I like the simile of a whale performing sounding. The image of a large animal in the depths of the ocean, inquiring into the nature of the vast tracts in which it abides by gently questioning them with sound, is rich. And the objects in its field of sound answer with their soundings.
Two further works from the Bird Field exhibition that I think were true to the spirit of the research are shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11. Other works can also be seen in the screen-shots from the Bird Field animation (see Figure 13).

In Figure 10 is shown the States of a Bird. This consists of Dawn (on the left), a collage on paper (35.5 x 50 cm), and Flight (Field) (on the right), enamel on wax on balsa, (23 x 29 x 4 cm). States of a Bird is an inquiry into two key states of the life of a bird, imagining myself as the bird. This imagining comes from the questioning as to where the bird song originates, and whether or not the meditator is the bird, or vice versa.

The Harp Field is shown in Figure 11. This delicate work was unfortunately damaged (along with several others) during the exhibition. I was interested to make a field, like a ploughed space, which could also be a source of song, of singing. The field could possibly be singing itself into existence.

The word field, by itself, with no related images or fantasies, remains for me an effective "transportational device" in its own right. (It works like a Jump Zone, in a way.) The word seems to hold in itself intuitions about the pre-imaginal. I can only suggest that for me the imaginal roots of this word go very deep, into the unconscious.
Figure 10: *States of a Bird* 1998, *Bird Field* Exhibition

Figure 11: *Harp Field* 1998, (62 x 45 x 5 cm), *Bird Field* Exhibition
The Bird Field Animation

While working on the sculptural pieces for Bird Field, I also produced an animated multimedia piece. This is published on my web site (http://www.sparrow.com.au). The work is built using Flash, an animation environment designed specifically for Internet delivery.

There were several things I wanted to experiment with by making the animation. One was to see whether it is possible to invoke a different kind of energy in an animated piece than is usually done on the Internet. For commercial as well as much artistic usage, Internet delivered animations are usually punchy, fast and attention-grabbing. This is necessary and appropriate for the medium, with its inherent delays and annoyances.

However, I wondered if it was possible to invoke the same kind of meditative energy that I had been hoping to convey in the sculptural pieces. For this reason, I chose a slow, hypnotic drum beat clip that is repeated throughout the piece. Also, the animation proceeds at a leisurely pace (which could be experienced as annoyingly slow by some!).

An image of a Spinebill commences the animation, then this fades gradually, and a drawn line continually re-attempts to form the outline of the bird again. This progression is shown in the stills (screen shots) taken from this early stage of the work, where the bird is being constructed and destroyed. The stills are shown in Figure 12.

I also wanted to use multimedia to link the balsa pieces in the Bird Field exhibition, which relate to specific birds, to the songs of these birds. Multimedia is a good way to do this, as the image can easily have an associated sound. Figure 13 shows sections of three screen-shots that come from the later part of the animation. This part of the animation is intended to give the viewer a flavour of the pieces exhibited in Bird Field. The viewer can navigate to the Bird Field work of their choice, to see the work, and then click the bird’s head symbol to play the sound clip related to the work. The sound clip relates directly to the waveform incisions made in the balsa.

In the Bird Field animation I felt I touched on several areas that could be investigated further to develop an interesting experience for the viewer. However, possibly because I work anyway (earn an income) in the area of the Internet, and in Information Technology in general, I felt there was not the satisfying contrast that I experience through working with physical objects.

Certainly, in building and viewing the animation I did not have the experience of having found an objective correlate for the subjective states experienced prior to making the Jump Zone and the Bird Field exhibition work.

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1 The animation can be accessed by following the Flash link on the home page, or going directly to http://www.sparrow.com.au/bird_field.html.
Figure 12: Stills from the *Bird Field* Animation
Collapse of the Trajectory

- Describes a period of bleakness during which the inquiry appeared too much orchestrated, too much separated from the "inquirer", who seemed to be standing outside the work, yet involved with it.
- In parallel, a move from the "graphic", the flat screen space, back to an historically older space (for me), of databases and conceptual information technology. A much more imaginal landscape.

Although the Jump Zone and, particularly, Bird Field work was about a questioning of a subject-object (dualistic) fantasy, it is ironic that there remained a researcher, a striving would-be artist performing the investigation. I inevitably had to be confronted with this fiction, and had to question the very research activity itself, and what it was serving. There followed a period of disillusionment.

To me, the question of what it is that neither comes nor goes is paramount. The striver, the person with a trajectory, also comes and goes. What is left when the trajectory itself dies out? Obviously, the only place we can be in time and space is here, now. When a mental trajectory dies out, this here and now is again seen as the only reality. All else is subtle and not-so-subtle constructions and manipulations of the mind. And the mind itself comes and goes.

Ramana Maharshi, with his question "Who am I?" ("Nan Yar?") asked this essential question. If we are not the mind or the body, who are we?\(^1\)

Ramana was an extraordinary individual, who lived almost his entire life on the slopes of his chosen mountain in India. After a profound experience of essentially dying, in his early teens, the rest of his life was lived, as far as we can see, from a place of no trajectories. He had effectively already died.

Such an individual can be a marker in our struggles with our place in, and interactions with, the world. I have certainly found this to be the case for myself, particularly during periods of doubt and questioning. Such questions included Why make art? What is art-making serving? Why have an audience?

As described in the following sections, my response to these questions was to find a place in which I felt there could be a sense of abiding, of being subsumed by the work itself, living within it, rather than being an observer of it and of the social structures in which it is made and exhibited.

The disillusionment with my approach to making work extended into my income-producing activities as well, and was related to it. I had begun working in more graphics-oriented activities in the Information Technology industry, and I found this to be very surface-oriented and lacking in depth. As described in the following sections, I found that by returning to working in more conceptual spaces (such as database design and software architecture) I also found a sense of abiding in this work.

\(^1\) See his *Who Am I?*, Ramana Maharshi.
Entering the Landscape

- Where to go, where to abide?
- Finding a landscape in which to abide, that makes the personal possible.
- Standing at an open door.
- Homage and Turning to.
- Carving the landscapes as performing the work on abiding.

One irony that I discovered in this is as follows: the collapsing of the trajectory which the researcher, the seeker, has himself set up is itself the gateway to the landscape he was originally drawn to enter.

At this time I realised that the grain (referred to in previous sections) is not merely a metaphor or a way of speaking. Rather than this, it is the fabric within which one can potentially abide.¹ The colourless plane (plain) is no longer something to which I cling, to reinforce a connection to a promised land. Rather, it is that within which I can operate.

"Seek it, and it runs from you; don’t seek it and you abide in it." All the spiritual traditions say this, but hearing it from the traditions is nothing until it serves as confirmation for an experienced truth.

Imaginal landscapes, and the pre-imaginal, are then no longer objects of the research, but are revealed as homelands within which abiding occurs. A question that arises is: What is the extent of an imaginal land? It seems that the boundaries of such a land cannot be found, or if boundaries are found, upon examining them are found to be artificial. It becomes more difficult for there to be a compartmentalisation, mentally speaking, of different activities and interests in one’s life. This is no longer theoretical, but found to be the only way of abiding.

Where to Abide?

It seems crucial to have a place in which to abide. I refer to this place in which to abide as the imaginal landscape; open, without extent, vast. In Zen language it could be related to "the iron bar ten thousand miles wide"².

The Chandogya Upansihad speaks of the Brahmaloka as follows:

In the city of Brahman is a secret dwelling,
the lotus of the heart. Within this dwelling is a
space, and within that space is the fulfilment
of our desires. What is within that space
should be longed for and realised.³

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¹ I stress that the word grain is a term that I have used for a somatic experience, rather than for a concept. I use the word to refer to a subtle bodily vibration, a cellular awareness, that is always present (though often experienced more strongly in meditation). It is the bodily sense of who I am, evident whenever I look for it by turning my attention to it.
² I say "could be" because I am not sufficiently familiar with Zen Buddhist philosophy. This quotation is from Suzuki D.T. [1]: p96. This reference elaborates further on a (sometimes intentionally) confusing philosophy.
³ Eswaran [1], p191.
David Bohm speaks of the same place as the *implicate order*.¹

My experience has been that when the trajectory (career) of art making came to an end, there was a crisis that extended to other parts of my life, including personal relationships and the means of gaining an income. All these areas were found to have their trajectories, and their falsities. The level of confusion and disenchantment was sufficient so that I asked the question “Where to abide?”² with some intensity.

**Abiding in the Information Age**

Along with the end of the art-making trajectory came a crisis relating to deriving an income. I had moved from a traditional Information Technology career over many years, to an involvement in web design and other screen-based graphics and animations. I had embraced "cyberspace", seemingly an incontrovertibly real new psychic space, and one sure to provide imaginal landscapes.

It was revealed, however, that psychically this was not the case. For myself, the experience of cyberspace is stultifying and flat, limited by the computer screen through which it is fantatised. Graphics, purely visual markings relating to another "space", flicker on flat plate glass.

The problem about what is currently known as cyberspace, for me, is that whatever is delivered is mediated through the psyches of those who have created its fantasies. Cyberspace is not the "real" thing, merely an image or product of the "real" thing. The "real" thing, on the other hand, is the landscapes in the psyches of those who have constructed and delivered the "space". This for me is where the psychically healthy depth lies - for the developers of the fantasies and not so much for the consumers.

I have since gradually moved towards architecture roles within web-based e-commerce. Here there are some conceptual landscapes that thrive and invigorate. There are the qualities of seeing through the screen (the physical computer screen) to the landscape, rather then at the screen to see what is on its surface. I think there is a connection here to the distinction between scopic³ and carnal seeing, developed in some commentaries on visuality in contemporary art theory⁴.

I wonder if along with the rapid development of the new medium of the Internet there is also involved a rapid maturation process of the associated underlying cultural, and specifically visual, regimes. This could be similar to the way the relatively rapid ontogeny of an individual child mirrors our collective phylogeny. So we may be seeing a shift generally, in Internet-delivered content, from visual

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¹ See Bohm’s *Implicate Order* in Section II, Related Material (page II-40) for more on this.
² I am using the word abide in the sense that it is related to the word abode, a place in which to dwell. I mean by this the sense of being psychically at home, rather than being in any particular physical home. I like the way that the dwell point in a machine is the point at which it pauses. The mechanics become still.
³ The word scopic comes from the Greek scopein, meaning to spy, to lookout, especially without being seen. The Panopticon is often quoted as an example of an ideal prison design, demonstrating the workings of scopic thought and behaviour. In the Panopticon the guards are invisible, so the prisoners act at all times as if they were being watched. The radial geometry of the Panopticon supports this behaviour. In scopic situations there is no dialogue, and the observing is said to be Cartesian. For a discussion on panoptic mastery and scopic seeing, versus other regimes of visuality, see Martin Jay, *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, and Jonathan Crary, *Modemising Vision*, both in *Foster, Hal*.
⁴ For more on this distinction, and for notes on other approaches to visuality, see *Scopic, Carnal and Beyond*, on page II-38.
regimes considered to be pre-modern (for example, the scopic) to those which arose with modernism (such as more body-oriented regimes, sometimes called the carnal).

Such a shift in visuality, necessary for the various restructurings that went along with the rise of modernism, is described by Jonathan Crary:

The body which had been a neutral or invisible term in vision now was the thickness from which knowledge of vision was derived. This opacity or carnal density\(^2\) of the observer loomed so suddenly into view that its full consequences and effects could not be immediately realized. But it was this ongoing articulation of vision as non-veridical, as lodged in the body, that was a condition of possibility ... for the artistic experimentation of modernity...\(^2\)

**At the Open Door**

Unlike imaginal landscapes, the pre-imaginal landscape is not a fantasy landscape. It is not related to an active, mental, image-making process, which is the process that we are involved in most of the time.

This active process of holding mental images, and continually examining and re-examining them, is a powerful function of the mind. The images always relate to the past. We have a fantasy of them also relating to the future, which they cannot: the future considered in this way can only be a series of projections of what is already held in the mind.

The function of holding and working on mental images is one that we rely on for our actively negotiating in the world (whatever world we are negotiating in, from the business world to the art world). However, because it is the mode of relating privileged by our culture, it is difficult to see other modes, let alone operate from a position of having a connection to these more marginalised states.

Many writers on the prevailing patterns of our consciousness have commented on the fact that this powerful capacity of image making and projection in the mind is undisciplined. We have let it rule us, rather than have it serve us. Krishnamurti, as a superb example, spent most of his life speaking of this situation. Krishnamurti’s Notebook is an exquisite evocation of what I speak of as imaginal landscapes, leading to the pre-imaginal.\(^3\)

The Notebook is a record that Krishnamurti kept of his daily states of consciousness, during most of 1961 and into 1962. In almost every day’s note, Krishnamurti starts with beautiful descriptions of landscape. These become for us, as reflective readers, imaginal landscapes. Yet by the end of each day’s note he has once more moved to intuitions of the pre-imaginal.

The pre-imaginal landscape has for me become a kind of shorthand term for a lived experience of another state. This is not an exalted state, nor an attempt at transcending the mundane, in any sense. To be exalted or to transcend still requires an experiencer, one who transcends. Such a person nonetheless remains rooted in the dominant mental position described above, merely playing with the landscape as a concept.

\(^1\) My italics.


\(^3\) Krishnamurti J.
I am not trying to give any sense of privilege or specialness to the idea of a pre-imaginal landscape, nor to myself intuiting its nature. Imaginal landscapes (or conceptual landscapes) are available to, and inhabited by, everyone. Many people, however, appear to make less of a conscious turning towards them in themselves, and have less interest in them. They live in them rather than observing them as well.

For me, it is an interest in the landscape-producing facilities and landscape-abiding desires of the psyche which lead to intimations about the pre-imaginal. Sometimes these "landscapes" are conceptual spaces in the realm of Information Technology. Sometimes they are dreams of actual landscapes. But the point for me is to abide in them consciously, and to ask what such desire for abiding means. By wanting to abide (consciously) in these imaginal landscapes, what does the psyche want? What is it showing me? Where is it going?

A simile (and it is only that) is that it is like standing at an open door. We always stand by the open door to the pre-imaginal. But we can choose to turn in that direction, and maybe even to enter, or not. "We" may be an undisciplined mental fiction that has desired for all of its conscious history, and became lost in its perceived powers and abilities. We can possibly always make the choice whether or not to walk through the door... and the pre-imaginal landscape is what awaits us.

To walk through the door is an act of surrender, of renunciation. We are encouraged in renunciation by many traditional texts. For example, the Isha Upanshad, of 2000 BC says:

Rejoice in him through renunciation.
Covet nothing....

What do we enter when we walk through the door? Our language does not contain words for it, other than shorthands that point to it. Thomas Merton, the Christian mystic, spoke of the Palace of Nowhere. An anonymous 12th century Christian mystic called it the Cloud of Unknowing. For Saint Teresa of Avila it was The Mansions. Lao Tsu, writer of the Tao Te Ching, spoke of The Uncarved Block. The Zen poet Ikkyu spoke of a Crow with No Mouth. Julian of Norwich said that All Will Be Well. An interest in imaginal landscapes, and from what they arise, is an attempt at discerning what this place might be.

Homage

In all these images, there is a turning to involved. This turning to seems to me to be emotionally powerful, because we decide to let go of a defended position of individuality.

Such a position (defended individuality) is good for much of critical analysis, including some art discourse. We can assume the dualistic position of an intellect operating against a work or a theory. This is often the position taken by theorists and critics. The "notions" raised by theorists and critics seem to work at this level, where the subject sifts and either retains or discards arguments about other arguments, or about occurrences in the world. But sometimes very little in the way of a turning to has occurred. We are always ready to back track, to assume the "objective" stance.

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1 Eswaran [1], p208.
For example, in a recent newspaper review of traditional Chinese painting, a local reviewer spoke of "the Taoist notion of...". But a Taoist has no need of a notion, only the reviewer does. The Taoist sees, by the grace of the tao, the uncarved block, the imaginal landscape within which he abides. The reviewer appears not to see. There is nothing occult or spiritual about the seeing by the Taoist. In fact, there are many things that we are just happy to see, and we assume they don't need to be argued for or against, or treated as notions.

The Upanishads take a similar, pragmatic and down-to-earth view of this landscape that can be turned to. No faith or dogma is required.

*Turning to* is an act involving emotion and intuition. The emotion attached to it (such as tears and an opening of oneself) may be a function of how firmly the decision has been made in the past not to pass through the open door, to renounce. The intuition is a difficult experience to address. There is an expansiveness, a clean weightiness, a perception that space has become larger, and this brings with it its own truth. A poor simile is like leaving your car keys on a high shelf, and hunting to the point of exhaustion for them, all around the room. Then someone gives you a ladder, which you position in the centre of the room. From this high vantage point it is immediately obvious and very easy to see where the keys lie. Listening to wise people can have this effect - the truth of what they say is an intuitive seeing, and has a clean weight to it.

This is the sense in which I am using the term homage. Homage is a love of wisdom (a *phil-*osophy), of the intuitively realised truth, of abiding in imaginal landscapes. It sometimes comes in the forms of wise people, who also inhabit imaginal landscapes. It is homage to them, and bigger than this, homage to us, as cohabiters of imaginal landscapes.

Our homage is truly a home-age, an abiding, where individuality is a mere happening on the surface of a deeper truth.

**Love and Wood Carvings**

*My experience is that we cannot truly love except with some intimate connection to a pre-imaginal landscape. Only when the desire and the need for the object have been killed do we walk through the ever-open door. This is renunciation again, in different words.*

Love requires a lover only up to a certain point. After this, and where the love becomes true love, there is only being in love, being in the landscape (connected in some unknown way to the pre-imaginal). How is this experienced? As a grain without limit, is one way to put it. The landscape is now one of wood, and then we are made of its grain. Some Balinese carvings of the Buddha are made of a light-coloured wood, and the grain direction is chosen so that it runs vertically down the meditating body. One can look at such a carving from the point of view of it being a form in space, and see it conventionally as a well-carved icon. Alternatively, one can "walk through the door", and compassionately experience the grained form as oneself. One is in love with it then, knowing it as cohabiter of a limitless grain. There is only love. We have had a totally different experience of the same icon.

*All true love extinguishes the lover, no matter for how short a time this happens. What of the personal is left, after handing over to the landscape? There is a sense of grace in this, without ever having to know anything about where grace comes from. All we can say is that at some point of renunciation the constructed universe falls in and home-age, love, is a given.*
This is the sense in which I began to make small carved works: as an alchemical practice in which working on the material in physical space (the wood) is actually working on material in psychic space.¹

In recent years the art world has become bored with the idea of art being made from an “alchemical” perspective. The currently accepted view is that “alchemical” works are dated, a hangover from the 1970s. This is because commentators see artists going to traditional alchemical writings and practices for subject matter. The criticism is rightly made in many cases. However, the “alchemical” as I mean it is an approach unrelated to specific traditional or modern practices, forms or materials.² Even the word “alchemical” can and should be read alchemically: as work on something which it is actually not; as a way of working using what we have (the gross body and mind) to approach something we have difficulty working on (the psyche). This is what my recent “landscape” carvings try to do:³ to engender a personal environment where an imaginal landscape, and in turn the pre-imaginal landscape, becomes a priority in terms of moment-to-moment awareness. In the same way as experiencing the grain of the Buddhist woodcarving, building an imaginal landscape is an offering of body and strength to, a being in love with, a tentatively intuited order of awareness. That is where the work derives its energy and reality, rather than being directed toward outside goals.

To operate from the pre-imaginal landscape would be to have a different view of relationships from that held previously. What are these encounters, some fleeting and others long-lasting, that happen in our lives? Who can explain how they work, why they happen, what is their meaning, if any? From an individualistic viewpoint, they are interactions with a not-I, to be longed for or treated with dislike, and even possibly avoided. They are punctures in the continuum of oneself, threats even. They involve us in mythological realms, consciously or unconsciously, and leave us with roles that seem psychically (archetypally, such as the Oedipal), or karmically, pre-formed. (If someone becomes a shadow for me, why do I continually think of them, or even bump into them in the street?)

But from within the pre-imaginal landscape, relationships would be of a different character. We would now see people as composed of the same grain as ourselves, as outpourings from the same essential stuff, the stuff known as Self in the Upanishads. We are all within a continuum that is “me”.

All relationships are actually relationships with the divine, that which we divine. We divine by entering imaginal landscapes, pointing us onwards to the pre-imaginal.

In the Bhagavad-Gita there is a book known as the Thousand Names of Vishnu. Commentators⁴ have written on the power inherent in this work to invoke the myriad facets and qualities of the Self - another name for the pre-imaginal landscape. In relationship we encounter these same qualities in human form. By operating from an awareness of the pre-imaginal landscape (that is, by really abiding in an imaginal landscape) we enter into a relationship with these qualities, as our own qualities, as seen in other people. It is much harder to have judgements about someone when you see that person as an aspect of yourself.

All of the above is of course conjecture, an attempt at divining.

¹ These works are described further in The Carved Block, on page I-29.
² For more on a living alchemy and its connect to Hermes, see Hermes As Guide, on page II-45.
³ See The Carved Block, Page I-29
⁴ For example, Eswaran [2]
Performing the Work on Abiding

I see the construction of landscape elements (like the carvings described in the next section) as a kind of meta-abiding: an abiding in which actions are performed which consider and mould the nature of abiding itself. It is like an alchemist who performs dew-collections at sunrise because he knows that the psychic processes and transformations which he calls dew-collection are healthy things to be involved in - but he goes one step further and actually collects the dew.

In a similar way, the act of carving landscape elements is in itself an abiding, and its subject is the imaginal landscapes and pre-imaginal landscape in which one abides.

The final point of making the landscape elements is not to produce art works, or to further one’s position in a social milieu, but to fructify the land in which one abides. This becomes less and less a discretionary act, but for reasons of psychic health is a necessary one, of prophylactic value.
The Carved Block

- Remaining with simple landscape forms.
- An acceptance of what cannot be known.
- The rifts and cleavings of new energy; songs of the plain.

Returning to Art Making

There was a period of approximately one year during which I made no work. The return to making work was something that seemed to happen as part of an organic turning to, as a part of an abiding in the imaginal landscape. I found that it was pleasing to depict some of the forms I was experiencing and enjoying in some imaginal landscapes.

At the time, one of the imaginal landscapes I inhabited was as my role as systems architect and writer for a large e-commerce project. This project involved distributed processing - in other words, there were software and hardware components that were geographically and logically distributed in different locations. These all needed to communicate in quite complex ways. The "architecture" of this "environment" (both terms are in use in Information Technology) I was reading as an imaginal landscape in which I was abiding.

For more on the connection between Information Technology and this sense of abiding, see Abiding in the Information Age, on page l-23.

The first carved works I made were components in this conceptual landscape. Having depicted these components in several works, I began to find that they were too much just that: depictions. Instead of there being some kind of "story" that went with them, I began to become more interested in the carving marks themselves, and the way that these alone could depict landscape. There was a movement in interest from forms that could appear in a landscape to the landscape form itself.

Simplicity of Forms

In carving landscape forms, I became drawn to simple forms, to mountains and valleys.

The act of carving these works has been about "finding" the contours of the land in the wood, and following them with the gouge. This has been a pleasurable experience. When carving a valley, I have been working at the scale of the valley, imaginatively, and there is always (when the work is going well) an intuitive feeling for how the valley drops away, and how it would really work in nature. These works turn out repeatedly to be simple forms, and seem to have their own logic.

As well as there being vertical-oriented land forms, I have also found it interesting to see how river valleys and watercourses work in the wood. These, too, seem to have their own logic, and whenever I have attempted to diverge from this logic the sculpture no longer has any credibility.

These works only ever seem to have credibility when the viewer is persuaded to enter the landscape space on its own terms. I experience this myself (when looking
at those of the sculptures that "work") as a change of scale in my own experiencing of them. If I am drawn into relating to the work on its scale, spontaneously suspending the scale of the room around me, then I feel that the sculpture has been effective. It is often the simplest forms that have the ability to do this.

Another possible factor in whether or not these works are effective is the space in which they are viewed. The works are made and displayed in a domestic space, and being in such a place invokes certain unconscious associations. At the time of writing, it has not yet been possible to test these works in an exhibition space, however I see this as being a useful source of feedback in the future.

The work *Three Land Forms*, which is an example of this approach of letting the gouge find its own way more, is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14: *Three Land Forms* 2000, (each piece approx. 25 x 25 x 17cm)

Subsequent to making some of these works, I have found it interesting to find an historical precedent for depicting simple forms in the East. Yi-Fu Tuan speaks of this in *Topophilia*:

The Chinese term for the art genre "landscape" is shan shui (mountain and water). The two major axes of landscape painting, vertical and horizontal, are abstracted from the juxtaposition of steep hills and alluvial plains that is characteristic of Chinese topography. The elements, mountain and water, are not quite equal in religious and aesthetic value: mountain takes precedence despite the Taoist emphasis on the superior ways of water. Mountains have an individuality that rivers and flat lands lack.¹

This abstraction of the two major axes is an experience I have had while carving the simple landscape forms.

I have recently made several "mountain" and "rock" forms, and again these seem very much to have their own logic and movement. I have also found with these works that a kind of "double watching" has to take place during their making. At one level there is watching to see that the surfaces of the form are falling away as natural forms could be expected to do. And at the same time there is a concern that the individual gouge marks are speaking honestly about the possible composition and history of the rock or mountain. I have certainly had the experience of the forms having an individuality, existing prior to them being carved.

¹ Tuan, Yi-Fu, p127.
An example of a work, "Rock Form," where I felt this double watching was taking place during its making, is shown in Figure 15.

![Figure 15: Rock Form 2001 (47 x 31 x 16cm)](image)

**A Simple Resting**

As Shunryu Suzuki says:

"...whether or not we have experience of our true nature, what exists there, beyond consciousness, actually exists..."

There is a sense of relief in this for me, for here is a Zen Master speaking of our need for ultimate acceptance, in the end, for what it is that we do experience, and for nothing more. The enquiry into imaginal landscapes, and into the pre-imaginal, ends in no blinding flash for me, no experience of ultimate release or sartori. Instead there is a deepening of what was already there at the beginning.

Further, not to be underestimated, there is the joy of connecting and re-connecting with texts describing inquiries that have gone before, and written by exceptional people.

Finally, there is a sense of a simple resting that is invoked by the inquiry. Ironically, a connection must continually be made with this, as it is a resting that the stresses of the world can quickly disturb.

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1 Suzuki, Shunryu, p 127.
Taoism, also, has always known the value of the simple, and of the importance of acceptance. It is interesting to see the emergence of Taoism in recent environmental philosophies, and in environmental ethics\(^1\). This ancient philosophy made new enables us to live with some conviction as to our actual state of integration with both our imaginal and our physical environments, not as separate entities opposed to them, but as discrete "focuses" of them. The latter seems a much more healthy way of living, and is of course much better for the environment.

David Hall, speaking of Taoism in his essay *On Seeking a Change of Environment* describes in the following quotations the concepts of tao and te:

...*tao*...[is] a totality not in the sense of a single-ordered cosmos, but rather in the sense of the sum of all possible orders.\(^2\)

...*te* may be understood as the particular focus or intrinsic excellence of a thing.\(^3\)

The concepts of tao and te form a single notion, tao-te, which is best understood in terms of the relationship of field (tao) and focus (te). By recourse to the model of the hologram, one may get some notion of the relationship of tao to te.\(^4\)

If I think of myself as *te* then imaginal landscapes could be pointers to the pre-imaginal, to the field of *tao*. What I consciously experience of myself is mere focus of tao. But if the pre-imaginal, *tao*, is the holographic plate, then everything and everyone is evenly distributed throughout it.\(^5\) It is interesting that this view of Hall's corresponds closely with that of David Bohm, approaching the subject from a scientific viewpoint.\(^6\)

A recent work that holds for me the experience of simple resting is *Five Places for a One Month Surrender*. This work was made over a period of three months in 2000, and making it was in a sense a meditation on this meditation itself of simple resting. The work is shown in Figure 16. (The dimensions of the bases of the individual pieces are approximately 24 x 15 cm.)

In *Five Places for a One Month Surrender* I feel I explored some places in imaginal landscapes in which one could abide and simply rest for a one-month period, surrendering worldly concerns.

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1 The term environmental ethics is defined as "The application of well-established conventional philosophical categories to emergent practical environmental problems" by J Baird Callicott, quoted in Roger T. Ames *Putting the Te Back into Taoism*, Callicot, J. Baird and Ames, Roger T., p113.
2 Ibid., p108
3 Ibid., p108
4 Ibid., p108
5 The nature of a holographic "negative" is such that in each part of it is an aspect of every part of the scene that can be reconstructed from it. If I cut out a small section of a holographic plate, I could still reconstruct the entire scene from that section - the scene would just have less definition.
6 See Bohm's Implicate Order on page II-40 for more on this.
Figure 16: Five Places for a One Month Surrender 2000
Songs of the Plain

Figure 17 shows a recent work, Site, made during preparations for the final degree exhibition.

In Site there is for me the energy of new beginnings (which I have previously sensed at times when a project is concluding). It is as though the energy of a simple resting has experienced an undercurrent or upwelling, which is imaginally experienced as rifts and cleavings.

![Image of Site 2001](image)

Figure 17: Site 2001 (30 x 29 x 16cm)

At the end of the academic inquiry into the imaginal landscape I sense the renewing power of continued inquiry, of its energising aspects.

The plain (in all possible senses of the word) is becoming for me a powerful metaphorical holder of the pre-imaginal, of the scape, the field, the given. Works such as Site could be depictions of either uprisings (imaginal uprisings) from the pre-imaginal, or of decayed returns to it. (The title Site intentionally does not address whether we are observing a natural uprisings or a decaying structure.)

Our thoughts, conceptualisings, imaginings and fantasies can be seen as uprisings, rifts and cleavings in the pre-imaginal, in the plain. To see these as expressions and effects of the pre-imaginal is for me a freeing relativisation of them. I see future works as further expressions of this, further songs of the plain.
II. Related Material
Some Other Writers On Abiding

The feeling of abiding in a landscape is one of the most interesting discoveries to come out of this project, for me. And from that conscious abiding, to have the space and silence to intuit something of what the pre-imaginal might be.

I have discovered writings other than those already discussed, during and before the research for this paper, that also point for me to this space of abiding. This section mentions the works of these writers.

Ken Wilber’s No Boundary is a powerful work pointing to an ultimate pre-imaginal place. On the subject of abiding, I think he makes a interesting yet simple point - whether we know it or not, all our cognitive processes abide in nature, in the most gross sense, the physical:

I am afraid that Nature is not only smarter than we think, Nature is smarter than we can think. Nature, after all, produced the human brain, which we flatter ourselves to be one of the most intelligent instruments in the cosmos.\(^1\)

In other words, to begin with we are physically abiding in nature, the landscape, completely. How reasonable to assume that psychically and spiritually, we would naturally abide there also?

J Baird Callicott, an environmental philosopher, in his essay The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology, echoes Wilber when he says:

As one moves, in imagination, outwardly from the core of one’s organism, it is impossible to find a clear demarcation between oneself and one’s environment.\(^2\)

And Callicott again, quoting Paul Shepard and his description of ecological thinking:

Ecological thinking … requires a kind of vision across boundaries… It reveals the self ennobled and extended … as part of the landscape and the ecosystem.\(^3\)

Further:

However, if the world is one’s body, and one’s consciousness not only images in its specific content the world around, but, indeed, the very structure of one’s psyche and rational faculties are formed through adaptive interaction with the ecological organization of nature, then one’s self, both physically and psychologically, gradually merges from its central core outward to the environment. Thus, one cannot draw hard and fast boundaries between oneself, either physically or spiritually, and the environment.\(^4\)

I find it intriguing that here is another take on the imaginal landscape - in other words, where I have chosen to begin with a “landscape” seen through imaginings

\(^1\) Wilber, Ken, p17.
\(^2\) Callicott, J. Baird and Ames, Roger T., p62.
\(^3\) Ibid., p62.
\(^4\) Eswaran [1], p63.
and reflections, and proceed to intuitions of the pre-imaginal (which is in effect to
cross a boundary, or to find that there is no boundary, to a pre-conceptual), it is
equally valid and real to proceed physically from oneself and find no boundary (or
cross an imagined boundary) to the actual ecosystem in which we reside, or
alternatively which resides in us.

Ultimately the two approaches seem to amount to the same thing: a renunciation
of the illusion of separateness.
Scopic, Carnal and Beyond

This section contains some notes about some theories and experiences of visuality.

The *scopic*, as a visual regime, is well documented in contemporary art theory. For a footnote describing the use of this term, see *Abiding in the Information Age*, on page I-23.¹ Art theory students are repeatedly exposed to the panopticon as exemplifying this mode of seeing.

The use of the two terms *scopic* and *carnal* together, as a way of distinguishing modes of visuality, was introduced to me in a first year class during my BFA studies.² These two terms have constituted for me a useful summary of the contrasting ways we can approach the visual. The section *Abiding in the Information Age* also contains some references to the use of the word carnal in relation to the visual.

The idea of carnal or fleshy vision also derives from the thought of Merleau-Ponty. For him, what the eye sees is in a close relationship with it - because what we can see is in a sense part of the seeing apparatus, and is touched ("palpated") by it:

> The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory - I do not look at chaos but at things - so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command. What is this prepossession of the visible, this art of interrogating it according to its wishes, this inspired exegesis?³

And also:

> ...since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at.⁴

The fleshy (the flesh of the world), or the carnal, is seen to be no obstacle to this seeing:

> It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporely; it is not an obstacle between them, it is a means of communication.⁵

The position of Nishitani is more radical however, and more interesting to me from the point of the pre-imaginal. Although Nishitani was influenced by Merleau-Ponty, he goes much further:

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¹ See also the various essays in *Foster, Hal*.
² I am grateful to Joyce Hinterding, my lecturer at the time, for introducing me to this material, and for pointing me, more recently, towards the work of Merleau-Ponty. Some quotations from Merleau-Ponty follow in this section.
³ Merleau-Ponty, p133.
⁴ *ibid.,* p134.
⁵ *ibid.,* p135.
In Merleau-Ponty there seems to be not only a desocialization of the body but also a
simplification of the body – a simplification because it is still regarded as the center
from which one looks out onto the world, and it is exactly this center that is cast out in
Nishitani.¹

And Norman Bryson, speaking further of Nishitani:

Nishitani’s move is to dissolve the apparatus of framing which always produces an
object for a subject and a subject for an object. Passing on to the field of sunyata the
object is found to exist, not at the other end of tunnel vision, but in the total field of the
universal remainder.²

Whether it is “Nishitani’s move” or not, we now seem to be moving back towards
traditional knowledge. For a comparison, dating from maybe 1000BC, see the Katha
Upanishad:

The senses derive from objects of sense perception,
Sense objects from mind, mind from intellect,
And intellect from ego;
Ego from undifferentiated consciousness,
And consciousness from Brahman.
Brahman is the first cause and last refuge.³

Lastly, a quotation from D.E. Harding, a modern Zen-influenced seer:

The clearest and most distant of views out is found to be shallow – a view down a cul-
de-sac – compared with the view in, to the headlessness that plainly goes on and on
forever. We could describe it as penetrating to the inmost depths of conscious Nature,
and beyond them to the Abyss beyond consciousness itself, beyond even existence,
but this is really too complicated and too wordy. What a vista of transportation opens
out – or rather, in – when we dare to point in all simplicity at the Spot we are alleged to
occupy!⁴

Harding’s conclusion, that we are a frameless, glassless window for seeing, echoes
the view of Nishitani. He speaks of seeing and living from the standpoint of an
expanded field - accessible continuously and by everyone.

¹ Norman Bryson, speaking in the discussion following his The Gaze in the Expanded Field. See
² Norman Bryson, The Gaze in the Expanded Field, in Hal Foster, p100.
³ Eswaran [1], p 89.
⁴ Harding, p44.
Bohm's Implicate Order

I compiled the following notes and quotations from David Bohm at the beginning of the project, and include them here because I see Bohm's investigations to be central to my becoming interested in imaginal realms, the pre-imaginal and the pre-conceptual. The quotations are from *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*.¹

Both relativity theory and quantum theory lead Bohm to the proposal that:

...there is a universal flux that cannot be defined explicitly but which can be known only implicitly, as defined by the explicitly definable forms and shapes, some stable and some unstable, that can be abstracted from the universal flux. In this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances.²

What is implied by this proposal is that what we call empty space contains an immense background of energy, and that matter as we know it is a small 'quantised' wavelike excitation on top of this background....³

...what we perceive through the senses as empty space is actually the plenum, which is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The things that appear to our senses are derivative forms and their true meaning can only be seen when we consider the plenum, in which they are generated and sustained, and into which they must ultimately vanish.⁴

There is a striking similarity here to Taoist realisations, as described in *A Simple Resting*, in the previous section.

The idea of an implicate order can shed some light onto the nature of being and the present. Whereas it might be commonly held that the present is to be passed over, (past and future holding much more of interest), and that a concentration on the present could actually imply a kind of dimensionless poverty of existence, the implicate order shows why this is actually not the case (and in fact why the opposite may be closer to the truth).

This is a scientifically hypothesising validation of the distinction the medieval Christian mystics were so clear on, between the *nunc fluens* (the passing now) and the *nunc stans* (the eternal now). The implicate order gives credibility to the potential for experiencing, and abiding in, the *nunc stans*.⁵

As Bohm points out, this idea of time as a continuum (time line) in which nothing exists except the present moment (*a nunc fluens*) is a form of fragmentary thinking based on a Cartesian approach to the problem - and it works fine in the explicate order of reality.

¹ Bohm, David.
² Ibid., p11.
³ Ibid., p191.
⁴ Ibid., p192.
⁵ Ken Wilber describes and contrasts the *nunc fluens* and the *nunc stans* in Wilber, Ken, p68-70, and gives an overview of the thought of the medieval mystic Nicolas de Cusa.
In contrast, Bohm uses the example of listening to music to describe another view of moment-to-moment existence:

One can thus obtain a direct sense of how a sequence of notes is enfolding into many levels of consciousness, and of how at any given moment, the transformations flowing out of many such enfolded notes interpenetrate and intermingle to give rise to an immediate and primary feeling of movement.¹

Just as each Now of listening to music (or birdsong) is a complex of unfoldings at a multiplicity of stages and from a multiplicity of dimensions, so one could generalise this to every moment of existence. Far from being lacking in dimension, the continuous consciousness of the present has the potentiality to be a means of experiencing a multiplicity of co-existing implicate orders or dimensions.

In fact, the implication is that the present holds within it in some way representations of all possible presents. This is analogous (as Bohm puts out) to the way a hologram works, where every possible point of the hologram holds a representation of all other points of that hologram.

This is in fact what certain spiritual masters have said in various traditions, for example the Zen Buddhist "no mind" concept, by which I take to mean a direct experience of the nature of the present, which is normally veiled while thinking processes (including desires, which always relate to ideas from the past projected into the future) continue.

This deep experience of Now, the present, can be an entree into imaginal landscapes and the pre-imaginal.

The inquiry into an imaginal landscape has both an ancient basis and a contemporary scientific basis. It also has a contemporary psychoanalytic basis through the work of Hillman and the post-Hillmanian thinkers (for example More and Sardello). The inquiry is just this exploration of Now and its endless enfolded layers and dimensions, and the proposal is that this is equivalent to an investigation of "I". As many traditions have concluded, any sufficiently deep investigation of "I" reveals it to be an illusory construct. Taking Bohm's words (which he is specifically applying to matter), we could extend them to say that "I" is

...a small 'quantised' wavelike excitation on top of this background....²

The inquiry into imaginal landscapes is a way of delving into something that is obviously beyond thought, beyond images, beyond any single individual. As Bohm points out, the idea of an implicate order is itself only a tentative construct, a possible first step into a "layer" of what might be called reality. It is itself a multidimensional ground from which our reality arises, and this reality includes as well the (explicate order) constructs of time, space and individuality.

But by using the idea of an implicate order we can at least obtain some distance in our thinking from what is habitually taken for reality - the explicate order. For example, as far as individuality goes, Bohm notes that the unfolded construction which we call an individual (in the explicate order) is in reality a continuum of mind/matter beyond the state of "individual" - so that we are all (and at different

¹ Bohm, David, p199.
² Ibid., p191.
times) explicate points of something which is actually of the same nature as everything and everybody else.

From this we can conclude that any person who performs individual actions to change the environment "external" to them is actually performing changes on themselves (and vice versa). This is the truth the alchemists knew, in other language.

Just as Bohm's theoretical conclusions can (as he shows) have practical bearing on the way we act as centres of consciousness, so the idea of inquiring into an imaginal landscape, and its supporting pre-imaginal realms, can be a rich and active way of being in and of the world.
Prajna and Vijnana in Buddhism

The concept of prajna in Buddhist thought is interesting in relation to the experience of imaginal landscapes, and the pre-imaginal. The following thoughts and quotes are not intended as an analysis of this concept, and it's relation to the concept of vijnana, but are mere reflections based on an article by D.T. Suzuki.¹

Suzuki interprets prajna as an intuitive facility which it is possible for the individual to develop. This prajna-intuition is a facility for seeing the world outside of its mentally constructed time and space limitations. He contrasts this with the intellectual, discursive, rational and more familiar mode of being in the world: vijnana.

I am suggesting that the prajna-intuition is not unlike the experience of abiding in imaginal landscapes, and/or intuiting the pre-imaginal. Or rather, I find interesting connections between the two, without claiming even a moderate understanding of what is meant in Buddhist philosophy of either prajna or vijnana.

The following long quotation is worthwhile, as it summarises the differences between the two concepts prajna and vijnana:

The fact is that prajna methodology is diametrically opposed to that of vijnana, or the intellect, and it is for this reason that what prajna states always looks so absurd and nonsensical to the latter and is likely to be rejected without even being examined. Vijnana is the principle of bifurcation and conceptualisation, and for this reason it is the most efficient weapon in handling affairs of our daily life. We have thus come to regard it as the most essential means of dealing with the world of relativities, forgetting that this world is the creation of something that lies far deeper than the intellect - indeed, the intellect itself owes its existence and all-round utility to this mysterious something. While this way of vijnana appraisal is a tragedy because it causes to our hearts or to our spirits unspeakable anguish and makes this life a burden full of miseries, we must remember that it is because of this tragedy that we are awakened to the truth of prajna experience.²

And also:

Prajna is the ultimate reality itself, and prajna-intuition is its becoming conscious of itself.³

In the first quotation above, I am interested in the way that prajna is said to be absurd and nonsensical from the point of view of the intellect. This relates, for me, to the difficulty of articulating my intuitions and feelings about imaginal landscapes, and even more so about a pre-imaginal, and the difficulties in general of using the intellect and theory alone to approach art works and art making. It seems that by using intellect and theory alone, we are continually in danger of overlooking the richness (the "mysterious something") in works, and returning them to a categorised place that allows only for what is already known.

¹ Suzuki, D.T. [1].  
² Ibid., p72.  
³ Ibid., p79.
I am also interested in how the concept of prajna could relate to the pre-conceptual spaces that are described in other traditions. If Suzuki sees prajna as the ultimate reality, then how does prajna relate to that unknowable place seen as the supreme by various mystical traditions (for example, the "Cloud" by the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing, or the "Still Wilderness" of Meister Eckhart)?

Possibly, these pre-conceptual spaces of other traditions are more closely related to the Buddhist term sunyata (emptiness). This is only conjecture, but if it is the case then Suzuki offers a connection:

Epistemologically interpreted, reality is prajna; metaphysically interpreted, reality is sunyata. Sunyata, then, is prajna, and prajna is sunyata.¹

And further on the relation between the two:

Psychologically, prajna is an experience, but it is not to be confused with other experiences of our daily life, which may be classified as intellectual, emotional, or sensuous. Prajna is indeed the most fundamental experience.

[Prajna] is the awakening of sunyata to self-consciousness.²

It appears that there is a place in Buddhist thought for an intuitively realised intellectual "fundamental experience", prajna (which I in my own way experience as an abiding in an imaginal landscape); and that this place can be a vehicle towards intuitions of the emptiness that is a pre-requisite for this reality (sunyata). These intuitions I have been calling the pre-imaginal.

In modern scientific terms, it is as though experiences such as that of the imaginal landscape, and all it provides in terms of an intuitive place "to abide", can be pointers and markers towards the true underpinning of our explicate (experienced) realm of reality. This true underpinning is the holographically organised implicate order described by David Bohm.

¹ Suzuki, D.T. [1], p79.
² Ibid., p79.
Hermes As Guide

Hermes is an important figure ("god") in archetypal psychology, for the reason that he is seen as a model for a more imaginal consciousness than that which is currently dominant. He is seen as an antidote to the prevailing consciousness of our time, which is considered to be rather Apollonian. Hillman and others in the archetypal psychology movement have written much on the role of Hermes in psychotherapeutic transformation, and in artistic and cultural inquiry.

It should be stressed that an interest in a Greek god does not imply a modernistic or pre-modernist approach to culture and art making. For archetypal psychology, Hermes is a living aspect, a psychic reality and potentiality - in other words, an archetype. As such, he is a useful shorthand for an egocentric tendency that is marginalised in our culture, and that holds valuable traits if it can be accessed and lived out consciously by an individual.

One can see Hermes at work in the deconstructions and iconoclasms of post-modernism.

The approach in archetypal psychology is to find the living archetype, the one holding the life, and to work with that. Behind my interest in the imaginal landscape has been an interest in finding those twisting dark paths and twilight recesses imbued with a sense that is hermetic. This is not to consciously follow accounts of stories of the god, but to be true to his ways, and to learn to follow them.

One doesn't go far into the world of Hermes without encountering alchemy. The hermetic vessel was a powerful pressure-cooker for transformation, and all with the blessings of Hermes. Alchemy is just as living as Hermes, and is not to be confused with historical accounts of charlatans attempting to turn base metal into gold. (However, I see Hermes laughing at this point, because at other level - the psychic - this is all true!)

The following quotations from Kerenyi¹ are intended to convey some of the many facets of Hermes.

Hermes can so convincingly hover before us, lead us on our ways, show us golden treasures in everyone through the split-second timing which is the spirit of finding and thieving - all of this because he creates his reality out of us, or more properly through us, just as one fetches water not so much out of a well as through the well from the much deeper regions of the earth.²

And, speaking of the world-experience that Hermes provided for the Greeks, which was in contrast to the experience of man standing alone in the world:

The experience of the world in this manner is open to the possibility of a transcendent guide and leader who is also able to provide impressions to consciousness, but of a different kind: impressions that are palpable and manifest, that in no way contradict the

¹ Kerenyi, Karl.
² Ibid., p51.
observations and conclusions of natural science, and yet extend beyond the attitude
described above, which is the common one today.¹

In Greek mythology, Hermes is often the gatekeeper, he who understands what has
gone before and what is to come. He makes decisions at the threshold.² He also
knows about landscapes, and built (builds) herms, which are boundary markers and
pointers in the land. (The Jump Zone exhibition used markers also.)

Through Hermes, every house became an opening and a point of departure to the
paths that come from far off and lead away into the distance. Standing at the doorway,
he indicates that here is a source of life and death, a place where souls break in, as
though he were pointing out a spring of fresh water.³

And finally:

Whoever does not shy away from the dangers of the most profound depths and the
newest pathways, which Hermes is always prepared to open, may follow and reach,
whether as scholar, commentator, or philosopher, a greater find and a more certain
possession.⁴

¹ Kerenyi, Karl, p53.
² It is said that Hermes decides whether a person remembers their dreams or not. If the person plans to
put the dream into the service of Apollo when he or she awakes (rather than it serving Hermes), then
Hermes might not let that dream through "the gate" to the person's conscious waking state.
³ Kerenyi, Karl, p84.
⁴ Ibid., p81.
I tell myself it's possible to become dry like balsa.
How can I say this?
There is a straight grain, a light open tissue, and the wondering what that is, and who is experiencing.

There is an empty vessel of tissue, sounding.
The bird song seems to come from inside.
Who makes the bird song, and who hears it?
What is the mechanism of sounding?

There is a plain land.
Who says they know this, and what is the land?

Who is breathing?

Lao Tzu says the space between heaven and earth is like a bellows.
Chords vibrate when struck.
The reed of a woodwind responds.

RD
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