

AL-SUHRAWARDĪ ON MIRROR VISION AND SUSPENDED IMAGES (*MUTHUL MU‘ALLAQA*)

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Abstract. The notion of a “World of Images” located somewhere between the immaterial and the material world was a mainstay of eschatological speculation in late medieval Islam. As has been recognised before, the concept was launched by al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191). However, its more properly philosophical underpinnings, in particular the notion of “suspended” images – images which somehow have an objective, rather than just a mental or subjective, status – merit further clarification, which this article attempts to provide. Since the concept of “suspended forms”, while applied to eschatological matters in the last treatise of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, makes its first appearance in a discussion of mirror vision, I examine in some detail Avicenna’s understanding of mirror vision as presented in the *Shifā’*, to which al-Suhrawardī reacts. I then undertake a detailed reconstructive analysis of two paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, paying particular attention to the question of the ontological status of “suspended” or “self-subsistent” images as well as to the idea that mirrors serve, not as loci in which images inhere, but as loci at which they become manifest (singular *mazhar*).

Résumé. L’idée d’un “monde des images” situé quelque part entre les mondes immatériel et matériel est un pivot de la spéculation eschatologique dans l’Islam médiéval tardif. Comme cela a déjà été reconnu, le concept a été inauguré par al-Suhrawardī (m. 1191). Cependant, ses fondements plus proprement philosophiques et en particulier la notion d’images “suspendues” – des images dotées d’un statut en quelque manière objectif plutôt que purement mental ou subjectif – méritent d’être davantage clarifiés; et c’est ce que cet article entend faire. Puisque le concept de “formes suspendues”, tout en étant appliqué par al-Suhrawardī à des questions eschatologiques dans le dernier traité de sa *Philosophie de l’illumination*, apparaît pour la première fois dans une discussion sur la vision spéculaire, j’examine assez en détail la conception avicennienne de la vision spéculaire telle qu’elle est présentée dans le *Shifā’*, ouvrage contre lequel al-Suhrawardī réagit. J’entreprends ensuite une reconstruction détaillée de deux paragraphes de la *Philosophie de l’illumination* en accordant une attention particulière à la question du statut ontologique des images “suspendues” ou “auto-subsistantes” ainsi qu’à l’idée selon laquelle les miroirs servent non pas de lieux dans lesquels les images résideraient, mais de lieux où elles deviennent manifestes (singulier *mazhar*).

INTRODUCTION*

The notion of a “World of Image” located somewhere between the immaterial and the material world was a mainstay of eschatological speculation in late medieval Islam. As has been recognised before, the concept was launched by al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191),¹ who normally speaks of the “World of Suspended Images” (*‘ālam al-muthul al-mu‘allaqa*).² The chief function allocated to this sector of reality appears to consist in contributing to a reformulation of Avicenna’s (d. 1037) philosophical eschatology. According to Avicenna, the human soul is an immaterial and immortal substance whose fate after the death of the body depends on its previous intellectual formation. A soul whose potential for rational thought has been fully actualised during its earthly life will posthumously be able to perform its proper activity – rational thought – in a completely unhindered way and enter into a permanent state of blissful conjunction with the Active Intellect. Perhaps in order to mitigate this purely immaterial conception of the afterlife, Avicenna allows for the possibility that intellectually underdeveloped souls who have acquired a firm belief in the traditional Islamic depictions of the hereafter might posthumously imagine that they are really experiencing physical pains or pleasures.³ Since the faculty of imagination exercises its activity through a bodily organ, this would require the employment of one of the celestial spheres “as a surrogate brain for the disembodied compositive imagination”.⁴ At most, then, Avicenna reduces the vivid

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¹ Fazlur Rahman, “Dream, imagination, and ‘*ālam al-mithāl*’”, in Gustave E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (eds), *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), pp. 409–19; Roxanne D. Marcotte, “Suhrawardī’s realm of the imaginal”, *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 2 (Moscow, 2011), pp. 68–79.

² Towards the end of §256 of the *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (henceforth: *HI*), in Shihaboddin Yahya Sohravardī, *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 2, ed. by Henry Corbin (Tehran, 1976), pp. 1–260, at p. 241, line 2, al-Suhrawardī uses *al-‘ālam al-mithālī*. – In what follows, *HI* will mostly be quoted by sections in order to permit consultation of the bilingual edition and translation by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination* [Provo, 1999]). Whenever particular lines are cited, reference is to Corbin’s edition unless otherwise specified.

³ On Avicenna’s eschatology see Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York and Oxford, 1992), pp. 109–15; Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (New York and Oxford, 2010), pp. 217–21.

⁴ Davidson, *Intellect*, p. 113. Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Shifā’ Ilāhiyyāt*, 9.7 (Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, ed. and trans. by Michael E. Marmura [Provo, 2005], p. 356). Al-Suhrawardī himself restates this theory in his Persian *Partaw Nāma* (Sohravardī, *The Book of Radiance*, ed. and trans. by Hossein Ziai [Costa Mesa, 1998], pp. 76f.); cf. also *Kitāb*

Qur'anic portrayals of heaven and hell to subjective postmortal states of consciousness, to the imaginings of disembodied souls. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) objected that this position unjustifiably departed from the literal meaning of scripture and was tantamount to unbelief.⁵ Probably in response to this criticism, al-Suhrawardī's introduction of a "World of Suspended Images" ensures that experiences of paradise and hell are tied to some objective correlate – it ensures, in other words, that they are really experiences of *something* (namely, of the World of Images) rather than merely subjective hallucinations. (It must be underscored that al-Suhrawardī nevertheless retains Avicenna's two-tiered understanding of eschatological felicity: those souls who have truly perfected themselves do not enter the World of Suspended Images but attach themselves to the immaterial lights.⁶)

The eschatological function which al-Suhrawardī assigns to the World of Images is thus patent. However, its more properly philosophical underpinnings, in particular the concept of "suspended" images – images which somehow have an objective, rather than just a mental or subjective, status – merit further clarification. In what follows, I shall therefore analyse the two most pertinent passages from al-Suhrawardī's *Philosophy of Illumination*, in the hope of complementing a recent article on the same topic by Roxanne Marcotte.⁷ Since the ontological status of "suspended" images will emerge as perhaps the most crucial aspect of al-Suhrawardī's treatment of the issue, I shall begin with a concise outline of his ontology (viz., his understanding of the fundamental components of reality), against the background of which I shall later situate his doctrine of suspended images.

A SURVEY OF AL-SUHRAWARDĪ'S ONTOLOGY

At the beginning of the second part of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, in §109, al-Suhrawardī takes stock of the basic kinds of entities to which everything which exists must ultimately belong. At the bottom of this ontological inventory is the distinction between "states" (singular *hay'a*) and substances (singular *jawhar*), a contrast introduced already in the first part of the *Philosophy of Illumination*: a state is something which "inheres in something else in which it is wholly spread out" (*ḥāllan fī ghayrihi shā'i'an fīhi bi-al-kulliyya*), while a

al-Talwīhāt al-lawḥiyya wa-al-'arshiyya, in Shihaboddin Yahya Sohravardi, *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Corbin (Tehran, 1976), pp. 1–121, at pp. 89f., lines 15ff., and *HI*, §244.

⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. and trans. by Michael E. Marmura (Provo, 2000), pp. 208–25.

⁶ *HI*, §§244, 250.

⁷ See n. 1 above.

substance does not inhere in something else.⁸ Suhrawardīan states are clearly concrete particulars rather than multiply exemplifiable universals.⁹ Al-Suhrawardī combines this “nominalist”¹⁰ ontology of concrete particulars with a form of conceptual constructivism: while first-order predicates such as “X is red” assert the existence of a particular state in a particular subject, other predicates – such as “X exists” or “X is a colour” – do not correspond to specific states, for there is no state of existence, or of colouredness in general. For example, to say that X is a colour is merely to say that there is a predicate Y such that X is Y, and Y is a colour predicate. Al-Suhrawardī describes such second-order predicates as “intellectual considerations” (*ʿtibārāt ʿaqliyya*) constructed by human minds.¹¹

On this distinction between substances and states, al-Suhrawardī superimposes a second distinction, that between luminous and non-luminous entities. He posits that light does not merely occur as a state of something else but can also possess substantial being in its own right.¹² Consequently, the contrast between the luminous and the non-luminous does not only apply to states but also to the substances underlying them, thus yielding a total of four basic ontological categories: luminous and non-luminous states, and luminous and non-luminous substances (al-Suhrawardī himself speaks of “accidental lights”, “dark states”, “pure lights”, and “barriers”).¹³ Luminous substances can only possess luminous states, while non-luminous states (*e.g.*, the possession of a particular shape and of quantitative determinations such as weight) invariably have non-luminous substances as their bearers. Luminous states, however, can be possessed both by luminous and non-luminous substances, the latter case amounting to a body whose non-luminous determinations (shape,

⁸ *HI*, p. 61, 13f. (§52). – The stipulation *shāʿīʿan fīhi bi-al-kullīyya* is meant to distinguish accidents from mere parts. Al-Suhrawardī is here trying to improve upon Avicenna’s definition of the accident in *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, 2.1 (Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, p. 45), part of which he goes on to cite.

⁹ In this respect, al-Suhrawardī’s notion of states resembles the modern concept of tropes, on which see Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd edn (Abingdon, 2006), pp. 71–9.

¹⁰ John Walbridge, “Suhrawardī and Illuminationism”, in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 201–23, at pp. 207f. and 210.

¹¹ These two classes of predicates are distinguished in *HI*, §68. On *ʿtibārāt ʿaqliyya* (a term borrowed from Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī) see *HI*, §§56–68, and my comments in Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophie der Erleuchtung: Hikmat al-ishrāq*, trans. with commentary and introduction by Nicolai Sinai (Berlin, 2011), pp. 279–81, p. 332.

¹² See my “Al-Suhrawardī’s *Philosophy of Illumination* and al-Ghazālī”, forthcoming in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*.

¹³ The opposition of the luminous and the non-luminous must not be construed dualistically: a non-luminous substance – a body – is simply a substratum which totally lacks the nature of light. Darkness is thus definable in privative terms: “darkness is simply an expression for the lack of light (*adam al-nūr*)” (*HI*, pp. 107, 17 – 108, 1 = § 109).

colour etc.) are illuminated by the luminous state that is physical light.¹⁴

The luminous, then, must not be reduced to physical light. Instead, al-Suhrawardī construes luminosity in terms of manifestness (*zuhūr*), thus hardwiring an epistemological dimension into the very foundation of his ontology: “light is that which is manifest in its own essential nature and that which through its self renders other things manifest” (*al-nūr huwa al-zāhir fī ḥaqīqat nafsihi wa-al-muḥhir li-ghayrihi bi-dhātihī*).¹⁵ A luminous particular, whether a substance or a state, is suited, firstly, to be apprehended and, secondly, to enable the apprehension of other things. In the case of luminous substances, these two features are conjoined with a third one: according to al-Suhrawardī, luminous substances are not merely envisaged as maximally transparent *objects* of apprehension, but are identical with the self-conscious *subjects* whose existence he accepts as a given. Hence, a self (*dhāt*) which is essentially manifest to other selves is also self-manifest: self-manifestness is not an additional trait over and above manifestness, but identical with a substance’s being uninhibitedly manifest.¹⁶

After thus having acquainted ourselves with the basic structure of al-Suhrawardī’s ontology, we are now in a position to approach his doctrine of the “World of Images”. §225 of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, which introduces the notion of “suspended” forms, continues a discussion of the status of mirror images begun in §104. Thus, the concept of suspended forms, while applied to eschatological matters in the last treatise of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, makes its first appearance in a strictly epistemological context. It is therefore appropriate to begin with Avicenna’s understanding of mirror vision, to which al-Suhrawardī is responding.

AVICENNA ON MIRROR VISION

Two passages from the *Shifā’* are particularly relevant. The first occurs in the meteorological section of the *Ṭabī‘iyyāt* part, where Avicenna prefaces his treatment of halos and rainbows with a general discussion of mirror vision.¹⁷ Halos, rainbows, shooting stars etc.,

¹⁴ See *HI*, §111.

¹⁵ *HI*, p. 113, 6f. (§117). The formula must not be mistaken for a proper definition, for “nothing is more manifest than light, and nothing is less in need of a definition” (*HI*, p. 106, 13 = §107). – As demonstrated in Sinai, “Al-Suhrawardī’s *Philosophy of Illumination* and al-Ghazālī”, al-Suhrawardī’s understanding of luminosity is to a large extent indebted to al-Ghazālī.

¹⁶ The self-consciousness of luminous substances is discussed in *HI*, §§114–120, on which see again Sinai, “Al-Suhrawardī’s *Philosophy of Illumination* and al-Ghazālī”.

¹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’: al-Ṭabī‘iyyāt*, vol. 5: *al-Ma’ādīn wa-al-āthār al-‘ulwiyya*, ed. by ‘Abdalḥalīm Muntaṣir *et al.* (Cairo, 1965), pp. 40–6 (2.2). The passage is also discussed in Paul Lettinck, *Aristotle’s Meteorology and Its Reception in the Arab World: With an*

Avicenna says, are “imaginary phenomena” (*khayālāt*), meaning that “our senses come across (*an yajida*) the visual image (*shabah*) of a thing together with the form of some other thing, as we come across the form of a man together with the form of the mirror”.¹⁸ Avicenna unequivocally asserts that the reflected form “is not really imprinted in the matter of the second thing which transmits it and which is seen together with it – just as the form of a human person is not truly imprinted and does not subsist in the mirror; for if this were the case, it would have a definite position and would not change place as the person regarding the mirror changes his place, when the seen object is at rest.”¹⁹ Avicenna then goes on to list three possible accounts of how we perceive such images (*ashbāh*):

- (1) The first theory is based on the extramission theory of vision – to which Avicenna devotes an extensive refutation elsewhere in the *Shifā*²⁰ – and explains that a mirror deflects the optical rays emitted from the eye towards some other object, thus causing the perceiver to imagine (*yukhayyalu* ‘*indahu*) that he is apprehending the form of this latter object as residing “in” (*fī*) the mirror, although this is not the case.²¹
- (2) The second theory states that if a visible object is located opposite our organ of sight and a transparent medium (*mu-shiff*) intervenes between them, and if the object is actually luminous, then its visual form will appear (*tatashabbahu*) in the eye. This, however, does not mean that anything is emitted from the object and traverses the transparent medium until it arrives at the eye. Rather, the transparent medium transmits (*addā*) the visual form insofar as it enables something which possesses a visual form (*dhū al-shabah*) to produce an image in the eye. As Avicenna explains at some length, this requires no contiguity between the agent and that which is acted upon, only the fact that both are located opposite each other (*al-muḥādhāh*). According to this paradigm, mirror vision occurs when some visible body M has a surface that is sufficiently polished in order for the form of some other body O to be transmitted to the eye together with the form of M. This

Edition and Translation of Ibn Suwār’s Treatise on Meteorological Phenomena and Ibn Bājja’s Commentary on the Meteorology (Leiden, 1999), pp. 277–83.

¹⁸ Avicenna mostly appears to use the terms *shabah* (“appearance” or “image”) and *ṣūra* (“form”) interchangeably. For present purposes, we may gloss an object’s visible “form” as encompassing those aspects of its configuration that are visually perceptible (size, shape, colour, texture).

¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ma’ādin*, p. 40, 6–10.

²⁰ See McGinnis, *Avicenna*, pp. 102–10.

²¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ma’ādin*, p. 40, 12–19.

does not mean that the form of O is imprinted in M, only that the transmission of the visual form of M is the cause of the transmission of the visual form of O. Although this second theory, which is labelled “the doctrine of the validating physical scientists” (*madhhab al-ṭabīʿiyyīn al-muḥaṣṣilīn*), clearly corresponds to Avicenna’s own view, at least in the present context he seems prepared to accept the first theory as a serious scientific alternative and postpones resolution of the conflict between (1) and (2).²²

- (3) In contrast to (1) and (2), the third theory considers mirror images to be really present or “imprinted” (*munṭabiʿ*) “in” (*fī*) the mirror. Avicenna bluntly rejects this theory, for a form imprinted in something would not change its position merely because the observer himself moves. Rather, the two forms – that of the mirror and that of the object reflected therein – are united only in vision; one of them is “a sort of cause” (*illa bi-wajh mā*) for the fact that the other is transmitted to the eye; when they are seen together, “it is supposed” (*ẓunna*) that one of them is actually “in” the other.²³

Thus, in his *Meteorology* Avicenna unequivocally insists on the subjective or mental status of mirror images. He portrays both extramissionists and intromissionists as united in their refusal to countenance any imprinting of mirror images in the mirror. Despite the fact that a mirror clearly has some role to play in the transmission of visual information to the eye (or of one’s visual ray to the object of vision), mirror images only *seem* to reside in the mirror.

It is in the context of Avicenna’s plea for the intromission model in the psychological part of the *Shifāʾ* (more precisely, in Chapter Five of the third treatise, entitled “On Vision”) that the phenomenon of mirror vision is again brought up.²⁴ Proponents of the extramission model, Avicenna writes, claim that mirrors prove the existence of rays.²⁵ For, Avicenna has the extramissionist contend, the phenomenon of mirror vision only admits of two explanations:

- (i) Before the form of the mirror is transmitted to the eye, the form of the object seen in the mirror must already have been transmitted to the mirror and become apparent in it (*mutamaththilatan*

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 1 – 42, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 42, 7–18.

²⁴ *Avicenna’s De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifāʾ*, ed. Fazlur Rahman (London, 1959), pp. 115–19 (3.5).

²⁵ The same claim is also found in Adelard of Bath (first half of 12th century), see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, 1976), p. 93.

mutashabbihatan fihā) – i.e., the image of the object must somehow have come to reside in the mirror before reaching the eye.²⁶

- (ii) A ray proceeds from the eye, arrives at the mirror, and is then reflected on to some other object, at a particular angle (which is presumably equal to the angle of incidence).

Now, the extramissionist argues, if (i) can be shown to be false, then (ii) must be true, which would entail the need to posit the existence of visual rays.²⁷

Avicenna's extramissionist interlocutor then duly undertakes the task of refuting (i) by claiming that the idea of a form becoming apparent in (*tashabbaha fī*) a mirror before being transmitted on to the eye requires that the form become apparent in a particular part of the mirror's surface. This, however, conflicts with the by now familiar phenomenon that mirror images change position (*intaqala*) when the observer does so, even if the reflected object itself does not move at all. For how could this be the case? After all, the form in the mirror must have been transmitted to the mirror before being transmitted on to the observer, which means that the latter's position should in no way affect the place in the mirror where the form of the reflected object appears. Consequently, there cannot really be one specific place in the mirror at which the form becomes apparent (*mawḍi' tata-shabbahu fīhi al-ṣūra*).²⁸ Believing to have thus disposed of alternative (i), the extramissionist maintains that the fact that mirror images change place when the observer does so must be due to the fact that the observer's optical ray, now proceeding from a different position than before the displacement, strikes the mirror at a different angle of incidence. As a result, the mirror image is only imagined (*takhayyala*) to reside "in" (*fī*) a particular part of the mirror's surface.²⁹

The extramissionists appeal to the phenomenon of mirror vision means that Avicenna cannot limit himself to arguing that the extramission model entails impossibilities; he must also put forward a satisfactory intromissionist account of mirror vision – i.e., an account which, unlike (i) above, has no need to resort to the notion, clearly viewed as out of bounds by Avicenna, that mirror images possess an objective presence in, or are imprinted in, the mirror. This challenge is met in Chapter Seven of the *De Anima*'s treatise on vision. There Avicenna distinguishes three ways of responding to the "question" posed by the extramission theorist. The most important one is clearly the second alternative, which fleshes out the idea, already

²⁶ *Avicenna's De Anima*, ed. Rahman, p. 118, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118, 8–10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118, 10ff. (quoting 18f.).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119, 1f.

encountered in Avicenna's *Meteorology*, that objects of vision act upon the eye (= imprint their visual forms upon it) without this requiring that they also do so upon the transparent medium in between. This basic constellation is then extended to include a mirror by construing the latter as yet one further medium interposed between the object and the perceiver. Thus, the object imprints its visual form upon the eye *via* the air, and possibly also *via* a mirror, but this does not mean that the object first imprints its form *upon the air*, which then imprints it *upon the mirror*, whence it is finally imprinted (presumably after once more having been imprinted upon air) upon the eye.³⁰

According to what seems to be Avicenna's preferred solution, mirrors therefore serve strictly to relay sight: they function as visual conduits permitting sensory access to things which do not happen to be located immediately in front of us. (Of course, a mirror is also itself a visible object and will thus imprint its own visual form upon the eye in addition to transmitting that of other objects.) Mirror images do not possess any sort of real presence *in* the mirror, and the link which mirror images appear to have with the mirror is only imaginary, a product of the coincidental perception of two visual forms – that of the mirror and that of the object reflected in it – which in reality are quite unrelated.

PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION, §104

Against this background, let us now turn to the two passages of the *Philosophy of Illumination* which discuss mirror images, §104 and §225. The two paragraphs preceding the former passage, §§102–103, argue against the Peripatetic account of vision as consisting in the “imprinting” (*inṭibā'*)³¹ of a visual form upon the crystalline humour of the eye: the form which configures an object does not in the same way configure the eye of someone beholding it.³² §104 then extends al-Suhrawardī's rejection of such an impressionist analysis of visual perception to mirror vision: “Know that the form is not *in* (*fī*) the mirror”, the first sentence of §104 asserts. This is so, according to al-Suhrawardī, because mirror images change their place in the mirror when the person regarding them moves; in addition, a form in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 12 – 147, 14. – The first of the three alternatives sketched by Avicenna would consist in distinguishing between different kinds of *inṭibā'*, yet Avicenna ultimately abandons this approach (*ibid.*, pp. 144, 11 – 145, 11). The third response concedes that a visible object may after all have an impact on the transparent medium located between it and an observer, but opines that this effect may well be imperceptible, *i.e.*, not consist in an imprinting of the object's visual form upon the medium or the mirror (*ibid.*, pp. 147, 15 – 148, 17).

³¹ The text of Walbridge and Ziai has *inḍibāḥ*, which must be a typo.

³² As *HI*, p. 134, 12f. (§145), will later insist, vision occurs, not by a representation or sensible form of the object of vision somehow coming to be present in the organ of sight, but simply by an illuminated object being opposite a sound eye (*bi-muqābalat al-mustanīr li-al-ʿayn al-salīma*).

the mirror appears to be underneath, rather than in, the mirror's surface. So far, al-Suhrawardī has simply restated Avicenna's refusal to ascribe to mirror images any real presence in the mirror: a mirror is not the ontological bearer or substrate of colours and shapes seen in it in the same sense in which, say, a chair is the ontological bearer of its shape and colour.

§104 additionally dismisses the theory that when one sees an image of oneself in a mirror one is indirectly perceiving one's own visual form by means of a visual ray (*shu'ā'*) that is emitted from the eye, strikes the surface of the mirror, and is thence deflected back towards one's face.³³ This position is justified by reference to al-Suhrawardī's earlier refutation of the extramission theory of vision (in §101), which again coincides with Avicenna. Yet al-Suhrawardī does not reject the foregoing construal of mirror vision merely because it presupposes the existence of visual rays, but also because he denies more generally that when one is perceiving an object O in a mirror one is simply perceiving, in some roundabout way, O itself (or its visual form): "Nor is it [the form seen in a mirror] your own form which you see in some other way."³⁴ This claim, tantalisingly brief though it may be, is clearly at odds with the Avicennian understanding of mirror vision, according to which mirrors merely function as visual conduits. For according to Avicenna's cut-out-the-middleman approach, what one perceives when seeing an image of oneself in the mirror just *is* one's own form, the visible configuration of one's face: whether one's perception of an object O is mediated only by a transparent medium like air or also by a mirror does not alter the fact that in both cases one's perceptual act is directed at O itself (or its visual form). Al-Suhrawardī, however, implies that the interposition of a mirror results in one's perceptual act no longer being directed at O itself. What, then, would acts of mirror vision be directed at? Although §104 does not offer an explicit clue, the answer would apparently have to be that what I see when I see O reflected in a mirror is not O itself but a mirror image thereof: acts of mirror vision would thus seem to be directed not at objects in the world but at mirror images corresponding to them.

Al-Suhrawardī concludes §104 by reinforcing the paragraph's link with the immediately preceding discussion of vision: since forms seen in a mirror are not *in* the mirror, and since the relationship

³³ My German translation of §104 (al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophie der Erleuchtung*, p. 105, 32, and p. 106, 6) twice translates *shu'ā'* as "Lichtstrahl" ("ray of light"), which is capable of being misunderstood as referring to rays of light impinging on the eye rather than proceeding from it (the context clearly shows that reference is to the latter). But note that, as Avicenna remarks in the *Najāt*, extramissionists "often call the thing which according to them issues from the eye, light" (Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* [London, 1952], p. 27).

³⁴ *HI*, p. 102, 5f (§104).

obtaining between the crystalline humour of the eye and what is seen (*al-mubṣarāt*) is analogous to the relationship between a mirror and the forms which are seen therein,³⁵ the crystalline humour of the eye, too, cannot function as a substrate upon which forms are imprinted. The comparison between the eye and a mirror is already found in Avicenna: the *Dānishnāma-yi 'Alā'ī* summarises “Aristotle’s teaching about vision” as positing that “the eye is like a mirror, and the thing that is seen is like something that shines forth (*bi-tābad*) in the mirror, through the mediation of air or some other transparent body”.³⁶ The comparison is also found in al-Ghazālī’s Arabic reworking of the *Dānishnāma*, the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*,³⁷ although the latter, contrary to Avicenna’s treatment of mirror vision discussed above, speaks of mirror vision as involving the imprinting of a form upon the mirror.³⁸ Quite ingeniously,

³⁵ Al-Suhrawardī’s statement is admittedly elliptical: “the relationship of the crystalline humour of the eye and the objects of vision (*al-mubṣarāt*) is like the relationship of the mirror” – and what? (*HI*, p. 102, 14f.) Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (*Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. by ‘Abdallāh Nūrānī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq [Tehran, 2005], p. 266, 2) adds “to the forms that are manifest [*i.e.*, in the mirror].” This seems to be the most reasonable guess to me; what becomes manifest in the crystalline humour of the eye in a case of ordinary vision is simply the object of vision (see below), whereas what becomes manifest in a mirror is not the object itself but rather an image thereof.

³⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānishnāma-yi 'Alā'ī: Ṭabī'īyyāt*, ed. by Muḥammad Mishkāt (Tehran, 1331 AHS / 1371 AHQ), pp. 90, 9 – 91, 1. The comparison between the eye and a mirror is also alluded to, although not explicitly stated, in the *Najāt* (see Rahman, *Avicenna’s Psychology*, p. 27).

³⁷ On the relationship between the *Maqāṣid* and the *Dānishnāma* see Jules Janssens, “Le Dānesh-Nāmeḥ d’Ibn Sīnā: un texte à revoir?” and “Al-Ġazzālī, and his use of Avicennian texts”, reprinted as chapters VII and XI in *id.*, *Ibn Sīnā and his Influence on the Arabic and Latin World* (Aldershot, 2006).

³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, ed. by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣabrī al-Kurdī, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1936), vol. 3 p. 42, 10–13: the crystalline humour “is like the mirror; if something coloured is opposite to it, then the image of its form is imprinted in it, just as the form of a human who is located opposite a mirror is imprinted in it through the mediation of a transparent body between them”. Al-Ghazālī thus substitutes Avicenna’s ontologically non-committal talk of a form in a mirror “shining forth” (*tābīdan*) from it by the much more fraught concept of *inṭibā*, the applicability of which to mirror vision Avicenna emphatically rejects in the *Shifā*. It is true, though, that Avicenna’s assertion “If the mirror had a soul, it would see when a form occurs in it” (*Dānishnāma: Ṭabī'īyyāt*, p. 91, 8f.) could be taken to imply that visual forms inhere in a mirror in a manner similar to the eye, as the only difference between a mirror and a perceiving subject here appears to consist in the fact that the former lacks a soul. Furthermore, a passage from Avicenna’s *Epistle on the Rational Soul* might also be construed as asserting that forms are properly imprinted upon mirrors: “The [rational] soul becomes as a polished mirror upon which the forms of things become impressed” (cited after Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* [Abingdon, 2012], p. 62). – Incidentally, al-Ghazālī himself (in the *Mustaṣfā* and *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*) denies that mirror images inhere (*halla*) in the mirror, thus permitting him to maintain that although the human soul can reflect “the divine presence” (*al-ḥadra al-ilāhiyya*), the latter does not thereby inhere in, or enter into a union with, the soul (Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, pp. 32f.). A similar statement is found in al-Ghazālī’s *Niche of Lights*, where the state of mystical intoxication is compared to someone who looks into a mirror and “supposes that the form he sees is the mirror’s form and that it is united (*muttaḥida*) with it” (al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman [Provo, 1998], p. 18).

al-Suhrawardī uses the eye-mirror analogy in order to argue that since reflected forms do not inhere in mirrors (a proposition accepted by Avicenna), no visual forms are imprinted upon the crystalline humour of the eye as well. He thus employs Avicennian motives (the eye-mirror comparison and the denial that reflected forms are imprinted in a mirror) to undercut Avicenna's account of sense perception as involving an isomorphism between the perceived object and the sense organ.

PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION, §225

What remains open thus far is how al-Suhrawardī's implied claim that acts of mirror vision are directed at images rather than at objects is to be squared with his Avicennian denial that forms reflected in a mirror are present *in* the mirror. How could an act of mirror vision be directed at an image if no image is present in the mirror? Where else would the image be? For an answer to these questions, we have to turn to §225, which supplements the negative result of §104 (forms seen in mirrors are not "imprinted" in the mirror) with a positive account of the status of mirror images:

The truth about forms in mirrors and imaginative forms is that they are not imprinted, but rather constitute suspended fortresses which have no locus of inherence (*ṣayāṣin mu'allaqa laysa lahā maḥall aṣlan*). They may (*qad*) however have loci of manifestation (*mazāhir*), yet they are not *in* these. Thus, the locus of manifestation for forms in a mirror is the mirror (*fa-ṣuwar al-mir'āh mazharuhā al-mir'āh*), and they are suspended, not existing at a particular place nor in a particular locus of inherence (*lā fī makān wa-lā fī maḥall*); and the locus of manifestation for forms of the imagination is the imagination, and they are [likewise] suspended.³⁹

There are four principal claims that can be elicited from this passage. The first one is purely negative and amounts to a restatement of Avicenna's denial that a form seen in a mirror is imprinted in the latter:

- (i) The image of some object O that is seen in a mirror does not actually inhere in the mirror (= the mirror does not function as its *maḥall*, its locus of inherence) in the same way in which the visible features of some object seen by way of ordinary vision – its colour, shape, or visible texture – inhere in that object.⁴⁰

³⁹ *HI*, pp. 211, 13–212, 3.

⁴⁰ Al-Suhrawardī's use of the root *h-l-l* may be inspired by the way the Avicennian denial of *intibā'* is reformulated by al-Ghazālī (see n. 38 above). That al-Suhrawardī was a close reader of al-Ghazālī can also be shown in other respects (see n. 15 above).

This negative claim is supplemented by the following positive one:

- (ii) The mirror functions, not as a locus of inherence, but as a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for the image of O.

It is (ii) which allows al-Suhrawardī to hold, in spite of (i), that an act of mirror vision is directed at an image of O rather than at O itself, and thus to reject Avicenna's view that mirrors can be, as it were, epistemologically cancelled out of the process of vision: for while a mirror is not something in which an image could inhere, it may⁴¹ nevertheless be the locus at which an image becomes manifest to a subject.⁴² A contemporary approximation of al-Suhrawardī's notion of a *mazhar* would be to think of it as a TV or computer screen: like a mirror, a screen is not the ontological bearer, the *maḥall*, of the images displayed upon it, but it does serve as the locus at which they become manifest, and thus in some sense acts as a material host which anchors them in space.

Still, one might be excused for asking where a mirror image is supposed to be located if it is not *in* the mirror. Al-Suhrawardī would respond that a mirror image is not really anywhere:

- (iii) A mirror image is not spatially located and has no locus of inherence, it exists *lā fī makān wa-lā fī maḥall*.

The default status for visual forms, of course, is to inhere in some substrate, some *maḥall*; yet in exceptional cases, of which mirror vision is one, al-Suhrawardī is willing – or perhaps even eager – to countenance free-floating forms which do not inhere in a *maḥall* but are nevertheless sufficiently real in order to constitute the terminus of a perceptual act. It is this peculiar ontological status which al-Suhrawardī abbreviates by saying that a form or image is “suspended” (*mu'allaq*): in view of the close proximity of the expressions *mu'allaq* and *lā fī makān wa-lā fī maḥall* in the above quotation, it is justified, I think, to view the latter as defining the meaning of the former, at least when *mu'allaq* is used to qualify forms or images. Ordinary forms, as it were, rest upon or are supported by their *maḥall*, while *mu'allaq* forms lack such a foundation and are ontologically suspended in mid-air.⁴³ It must be by virtue of lacking a locus of inherence that al-Suhrawardī, slightly later in §225, describes

⁴¹ See the *qad* in the above quotation.

⁴² John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks* (Albany, 2001), pp. 168f.: “The body, in some mysterious way, is the condition for the form's appearance, but the form is not in the body in the way that the form of the dog is in the body of the dog. Instead the locus makes it possible for the form to be manifest to us – but we see the form, not [only – NS] the locus.”

⁴³ Cf. Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London, 1863), p. 2137b: *amruhu mu'allaq* = “his affair is left in suspense”.

mirror images as “self-subsistent” (*qā'im bi-nafsihi*).⁴⁴ Incidentally, the equation

suspended = existing not at a place nor in a locus of inherence

and the qualification of suspended forms as self-subsistent is also echoed by the early commentaries of Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī and Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī,⁴⁵ which confirms the conceptual analysis just proposed. An appropriate paraphrase of “suspended” would thus seem to be “ontologically free-floating” or “quasi-substantial”.⁴⁶

The passage cited above makes one more claim: al-Suhrawardī's analysis of mirror images is also said to apply to imaginative forms (*ṣuwar al-khayāl*), i.e., mental representations of objects which are either fictitious (unicorns etc.) or not empirically present to us at the moment. Such imaginative forms, al-Suhrawardī submits, are also “suspended”, and they, too, have a *mazhar* – namely, the faculty of imagination (*al-takhayyul*), a material faculty located in the brain. Since §104 states that the eye is related to the object of vision as a mirror is to an image reflected in it, it would seem to follow that al-Suhrawardī is committed to describing the eye as a “locus of manifestation”, too. Hence:

- (iv) The eye and the faculty of imagination also function as loci of manifestation.

This calls for some clarification. Let us first consider the case of the eye. For al-Suhrawardī, acts of ordinary vision are directed at objects in the world rather than at internal representations thereof present in our sense organs or in the mind: a sense organ does not contain miniature replicas of the perceptible features of objects in the world but functions as a window upon the world.⁴⁷ As Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī concisely puts it, vision occurs when the “governing light [= the

⁴⁴ *HI*, p. 212, 3f.

⁴⁵ Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. by Ḥusayn Ziyā'ī (Tehran, 1372), p. 509, 17–20; Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ*, p. 450, 8–10.

⁴⁶ Basing himself on the use of *mu'allaq* and *muta'alliq* in the Arabic Plotinus, Rüdiger Arnzen (*Platonische Ideen in der arabischen Philosophie: Texte und Materialien zur Begriffsgeschichte von ṣuwar aflātūniyya und muthul aflātūniyya* [Berlin, 2011], pp. 145–7) construes al-Suhrawardī's use of the term *mu'allaq* as indicating that some entity is ontologically dependent on, and thus *suspended from*, a higher-ranking entity. While the parallels adduced by Arnzen are certainly relevant to gauging the intertextual resonance of al-Suhrawardī's terminology, I doubt whether they can settle the question of which precise philosophical meaning al-Suhrawardī himself attaches to the term. Jamal Elias, in an oral response to a preliminary version of this paper, has kindly suggested the possibility that the word *mu'allaq* might refer to a form's “attachment” to a locus of manifestation, e.g., a mirror. Yet as far as I am aware, al-Suhrawardī nowhere says that suspended images or forms are *mu'allaq bi-* anything, whether a *mazhar* or, as Arnzen would have it, some higher-ranking being.

⁴⁷ Cf. Walbridge, “Suhrawardī and Illuminationism”, p. 209; *id.*, *Leaven*, p. 162.

rational soul] apprehends, by means of a presential illuminationist act of knowledge, the objects of vision (*al-mubṣarāt*) which are located opposite the organ of sight (*al-bāṣira*), not anything which is present in the organ of sight".⁴⁸ Al-Suhrawardī's description of the eye as a *mazhar* must therefore mean that the eye manifests an object in the world, rather than a free-floating form or image: although both a mirror and the eye are *mazāhir* in the sense that neither constitutes a substrate of inherence for that which it makes manifest, what is manifested by the eye are *concrete extramental particulars*, not quasi-substantial images, as is the case with mirrors.⁴⁹ Hence, not every *mazhar* necessarily manifests a suspended image.⁵⁰ While al-Suhrawardī denies that a form seen in a mirror is identical with the visual form of the corresponding object, no such distinction can therefore apply to forms manifested by the eye.⁵¹

The fact that describing the eye as a *mazhar* does not imply that it manifests *suspended forms* emerges quite clearly from a passage in Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's *Epistle on the World of Image*, where a distinction is made between those objects of vision which possess "external reality" (*huwiyya fī al-khārij*) – i.e., which exist as concrete extramental particulars – and those which constitute a "sheer apparition" (*shabah maḥḍ*). The latter expression is evidently a synonym for self-subsistent images, for al-Shīrāzī says that an object of vision falling into this latter class "needs another locus of manifestation, such as a mirror".⁵² Mirror vision thus involves two *mazhars*, the eye and the mirror, whereas ordinary vision involves only one, the eye; and it is only in cases of mirror vision that we need to invoke "sheer apparitions" or substrate-less images.

By contrast, the imagination, which al-Suhrawardī also calls a *mazhar*, does involve quasi-substantial forms, and is thus much closer to mirror vision than to direct vision. As §§220–221 of the *Philosophy of Illumination* argue, memories and imaginative forms are not stored in a bodily faculty; rather, one "retrieves" (*a'āda, ista'āda*) them from the "World of Remembrance" (*ālam al-dhikr*). In view of al-Suhrawardī's

⁴⁸ Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ*, p. 454, 16f.

⁴⁹ Walbridge, *Leaven*, pp. 168f., fails to make this distinction.

⁵⁰ Must every suspended image have a *mazhar*? If one assumes that quasi-substantial images do not pre-exist the moment when they are first beheld or entertained, then it would seem that the answer will have to be affirmative. The "may" (*qad*) in the above quotation from §225 could be construed as suggesting the possibility of suspended images which do *not* have a *mazhar*; yet it seems equally possible to understand the formulation in the sense of "there is nothing to preclude the possibility of suspended images becoming manifest in *mazāhir*".

⁵¹ It will be recalled that Avicenna, by contrast, assimilates ordinary vision and mirror vision: regardless of whether or not an act of visual perception involves a mirror or not, it is directed at some object in the world.

⁵² John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 214 (for the Arabic see *ibid.*, p. 250, 2f.).

description of the imagination – a material faculty in the human brain – as a *mazhar*, this must mean that when we imagine something which is not empirically present to us – whether a real person like Zayd,⁵³ or a composite phantasy like a human with a thousand heads and two wings flying through the air⁵⁴ – we are in epistemic contact with an objective reality, viz., a substrateless image which constitutes the terminus of our mental act and for which our brain acts as a locus of manifestation.⁵⁵ It might be said, then, that al-Suhrawardī understands the imagination on the model of perception: when we imagine a unicorn, we are in contact with an entity external to us, just as is the case when we are observing a horse.⁵⁶

THE WORLD OF SUSPENDED IMAGES

In the light of the preceding analysis of §225, there can be little doubt that al-Suhrawardī's ontology includes not only luminous and non-luminous substances and states, but also the additional category of self-subsistent images – for there is no obvious way of reducing quasi-substantial images to any of the four basic ontological categories discussed in §109. Suspended images must certainly not be equated with luminous or non-luminous states, since these by definition exist “in something else”; and it is clear that al-Suhrawardī views images as constituting objective correlates of certain acts of perception and the imagination rather than as mental constructs. All in all, it appears that al-Suhrawardī recognises images as a genuinely basic component of the world – in the same way in which other philosophers have variously recognised universals, abstract mathematical entities, propositions, and possible worlds as genuinely basic components of the world. The outline of al-Suhrawardī's ontology given above thus needs to be expanded by a fifth category.

Al-Suhrawardī's realism about images may strike one as an unnecessary inflation of beings that oddly violates the principle of theoretical parsimony to which he clings elsewhere: it seems out of character that al-Suhrawardī, after accusing Avicenna of reifying the purely mental (*dhihnī*) notion of existence,⁵⁷ should himself choose

⁵³ This is the example used in *HI*, §221.

⁵⁴ The example is taken from al-Shahrazūrī, *Sharh*, p. 506, 2f.

⁵⁵ This does not entail that such self-subsistent images must exist from eternity, waiting for someone to behold or entertain them; they might, for example, come into being when they are first perceived or entertained. This would cohere with *HI*, p. 232, 5f. (§247): “suspended images may newly emerge and be destroyed, like [images] belonging to mirrors and imaginations.”

⁵⁶ Presumably, the substrateless images which we perceive in mirrors, as well as memories, must in some systematic sense correspond to extramental particulars, whereas composite phantasies do not. Yet as far as I can see, al-Suhrawardī does not address this issue.

⁵⁷ *HI*, §§56–60.

to reify a phenomenon – namely, mirror images – which Avicenna considered to be purely mental. However, while al-Suhrawardī often proposes radical simplifications of the Avicennian system,⁵⁸ he is just as capable of drastically multiplying entities – for example, he affirms that there are more than “ten, or twenty, or one hundred, or two hundred, or a thousand, or two thousand, or a hundred thousand” immaterial lights instead of the limited number of immaterial intellects posited by the Peripatetic system.⁵⁹ The fact of the matter is that al-Suhrawardī combines a generally nominalist ontology with a realist understanding of images; in spite of considering the distinction between essence and existence, necessity and contingency, or actuality and potentiality as mental constructs, as *i'tibārāt 'aqliyya*,⁶⁰ he treats images as an ontologically basic and irreducible category of entities, thus leading him to assert what may seem like a truly Meinongian Jungle of quasi-substantial beings.⁶¹ The inflated ontology resulting from this position, so odious to many contemporary philosophers, does not seem to have bothered him, given that the notion of quasi-substantial images permitted him to ascribe a properly objective quality to Avicenna's imaginal afterlife. Thus, al-Suhrawardī's analysis of mirror vision is ultimately geared towards supplying him with conceptual material for his eschatology, and to demonstrate that the experience of quasi-substantial forms with which he credits a certain class of souls has a perfectly familiar precursor in the material world. Incidentally, it is possible that al-Suhrawardī's approach of analysing mirror vision in a way that presents it as an empirical

⁵⁸ *E.g.*, he proposes to do away with the different classes of propositions and syllogistic figures distinguished in Peripatetic logic (§§21, 25–27), downgrades matter and form from metaphysically real constituents of things to mere mental constructs (§§72–74), reduces the five internal sense to just one (§§222–224), and posits that air and fire do not constitute two different elements but rather the same element at different temperatures (§§195–196).

⁵⁹ See Walbridge and Ziai (ed.), *Philosophy of Illumination*, p. 99, 16f. (Arabic text). In Corbin's edition, whose text diverges here, the climax ends with two hundred (p. 140, 1). – Damien Janos, “Moving the orbs: astronomy, physics, and metaphysics, and the problem of celestial motion according to Ibn Sīnā”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 21 (2011): 165–214, makes it likely that Avicenna was committed to more than just al-Fārābī's ten immaterial intellects, possibly to more than sixty (*ibid.*, p. 200). However, it is entirely possible that al-Suhrawardī could simply have assumed that Avicenna espoused al-Fārābī's position that there are only ten immaterial intellects, for *HI*, p. 155, 4f. (§165) indiscriminately states that “the adherents of the Peripatetics . . . limit the number of intellects to ten”. And, as §151 of *HI* indicates, even if al-Suhrawardī was aware of Avicenna's position he may nevertheless have felt that the difference between the number of separate intellects in the cosmologies of al-Fārābī and Avicenna was a minor one compared to the plethora of substantial lights advocated by him. In addition, even Avicenna's greater number of immaterial intellects still forms a strictly hierarchical series in which one intellect emanates the following one, whereas al-Suhrawardī also posits immaterial lights which do not form a vertical hierarchy (cf. §§154 and 183).

⁶⁰ *HI*, §§55–60, 63, 89.

⁶¹ On Meinong's proverbial ontological jungle see Dale Jacquette, “On defoliating Meinong's jungle”, *Axiomathes* 1–2 (1996): 17–42.

prototype for the posthumous experience of heaven and hell is inspired by Avicenna who, in his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, suggests that the celestial bodies might serve as a *mirror* (rather than, as he says in the *Shifā'*, as an *organ*) for disembodied souls.⁶²

The preceding analysis of al-Suhrawardī's understanding of suspended or quasi-substantial images opens up a straightforward and philosophically sober way of introducing the notion of the "World of Images" as denoting the total set of all self-subsistent, or "suspended", images. Not being part of the physical world, the world of images, of course, is not *at a particular place*. To say that X exists in the world of images means merely that X is an image, and that al-Suhrawardī regards images as an ontologically basic category. When one looks into a mirror, or imagines a man with a thousand heads, one is in epistemic contact, via a specific *mazhar*, with one of the entities populating the World of Suspended Images. It is true that al-Suhrawardī does occasionally talk as if it were possible to *enter* the World of Images – for example, §247 states that it is *in (fī)* the World of Suspended Images that the punishment of the damned takes place and "estimative happiness" is located⁶³; and according to §244, "the blessed of an intermediate rank and the pure ascetics may find salvation in (*qad yatakhallasūna ilā*) the World of Suspended Images, whose locus of manifestation – *mazhar* – is one of the celestial barriers."⁶⁴ Yet the ultimate purport of asserting that a human soul, after the death of its body, *enters* the World of Images must be that it *has access to* the quasi-substantial images populating this realm, through the mediation of a celestial sphere on which quasi-substantial images are, so to speak, screened: as al-Suhrawardī says in the *Talwīḥāt*, the souls of the deceased "view" (*yushāhidu*) the suspended forms in the celestial bodies.⁶⁵ Hence, if the World of Images is just the sum total of all suspended images, then any talk about *entering* it or *moving around in* it must ultimately be as metaphorical as talk about entering the world of numbers, or the world of Platonic Ideas.

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, in his *Epistle on the World of Image*, seems considerably less hesitant than al-Suhrawardī himself to speak of

⁶² *Aristū 'inda al-'Arab*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, 2nd edn (Kuwait, 1978), p. 72, 8f. I owe my awareness of this passage to Marcotte, "Realm", p. 76. The comparison of the celestial bodies to an instrument (*āla*) is found in *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt*, 9.7 (Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, p. 356, 7f.). If the foregoing conjecture is correct, then al-Suhrawardī would have realised that construing the celestial bodies as functioning like a mirror rather than, as suggested by the *Shifā'*, as a "surrogate brain" (Davidson, *Intellect*, p. 113) held out the promise of conceiving the posthumous experience of heaven and hell in much less subjectivist terms.

⁶³ *HI*, p. 232, 3f.

⁶⁴ *HI*, pp. 229, 10–230, 1. Cf. also *id.*, p. 241, 2 (§256), where it is asserted that someone who was asleep and then wakes up "departs" the *'ālam mithālī*.

⁶⁵ Sohrawardī, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 90, 9f.; see Marcotte, "Realm", p. 76.

people *entering* the Imaginal World, and of controlling a sensible or “imaginal” body there that is equipped with “spectral” sense organs (*ālāt shabahiyya*).⁶⁶ Yet in view of the conceptual foundation of the notion of a World of Image, this, too, must ultimately be construed as a loose manner of talking, similar to the way in which one might speak of entering or moving in cyberspace. As a matter of fact, our contemporary notion of cyberspace provides a particularly fitting modern approximation of the idea of a World of Images: just as there must be some material substrate or locus (a *mazhar*) through which a human soul accesses the World of Image, virtual reality can only be accessed through physical computers and screens. In the Wachowski Brothers’ 1999 science fiction movie *The Matrix*, Neo can perform the most staggering, gravity-defying martial arts feats due to his ability to manipulate virtual reality by mere willpower – similar to the way in which the “the wayfarers”, according to al-Shīrāzī, are able to manipulate the World of Image.⁶⁷ Yet at the other end of the action, Neo’s body must be plugged into a computer network, just as al-Shīrāzī’s “wayfarers” stand in need of a Suhrawardīan *mazhar*.

⁶⁶ Walbridge, *Science*, pp. 208f. (see *ibid.*, p. 242, 15, and p. 244, 3f., for the Arabic text).

⁶⁷ “As they desire and will, the wayfarers therein manifest wonders and miracles: the manifestation of their imaginal bodies in various places at one or more times; summoning such food, drink, and clothing as they desire; and the like.” (Walbridge, *Science*, pp. 208 and 242, 14–17.)