

Imaginal Ecology

by Kevin Richtscheid

"For you must not walk as if you are a conqueror. You must not wish to give a name to things, to everything. Things will tell you who they are, if you listen, surrendered to them, like a lover."

Henry Corbin¹

In our world of today, in which the environmental movement has been growing steadily since the 1960s, there is unfortunately often little thought given as to what exactly is the full nature of the ecological cause that is being so passionately fought for. It is usually believed that since the earth is our home, we must preserve it at all costs, and while the preservation of this planet which we've been granted by God to steward is one of the most worthy causes imaginable, there is all too often a failure to recognize that which exists beyond the earth, to also acknowledge the invisible worlds and their relationship with the material. While the ecological movement seeks to preserve the beauty, diversity, and wonder of nature and of the material world, one may be left to consider whether this endeavor might not prove more fruitful if it also more regularly took into account that which transcends it, that which, in traditional cosmologies, the material descends or emanates from, and which is its very root and principle.

Even as we continue to struggle for our ecological livelihood, and while in no way denying the value of this cause, it may be worthwhile to pause a moment and consider what exactly is this nature that we are so bent on preserving. In a poignant critique of the ecological

¹ Corbin, Henry, *The Voyage and the Messenger*, North Atlantic Books; Berkeley, 1998, p.xxxii.

movement in his book *Yuga*, Marty Glass points out that “Nature disappears when it becomes ‘matter’ and ‘data’. As does the whole world. Because ‘matter’ and data’ are external, ‘out there’. Nothing can be real ‘out there’. Nothing *is* ‘out there’. Reality is where inner and outer are one.”² While this may be simply a matter of perspective, it also points to a fundamental difference between those who would define nature as a purely material phenomenon, and the traditional definition of nature that recognizes it as a living presence, infused with and rooted in the Divine. In order for us to see beyond the limitations of the material, then, we should look to this place where inner and outer meet, where the physical world opens to the worlds within and around us and all things, the worlds through which nature is bestowed its very life and ‘reality,’ as Glass says. In particular, we will focus here on the realm that has come fairly recently to be known in English as the *imaginal*, which is where the body is spiritualized and the spirit embodied.³ It is to this intermediary realm of subtle forms, which exists between the sensory and the intelligible worlds, that we first look as we turn our gaze upwards and inwards, towards that which transcends the material existence around us.

“The inability to conceive of a concrete suprasensory reality results from giving too much importance to sensory reality.”

Henry Corbin⁴

What exactly is the imaginal, then? The term was coined by Henry Corbin who translated the Arabic *‘alam al-mithal* or *‘alam al-khayal* into the Latin *mundus imaginalis*, or the English *imaginal world*. Corbin found, in his studies of the Persian philosophical-mystical tradition, something that he recognized had been gradually lost in the West since the abolishment of the traditional tripartite division of humanity into spirit, soul, and body by the Church Council of 869. This loss, he believed, was made more definitive in the Middle Ages, especially as the West came to embrace a more rationalized interpretation of the Aristotelianism of Averrões, the Muslim Ibn Rushd, and to reject the Platonic

² Glass, Marty, *Yuga*, Sophia Perennis; Hillsdale, 2001, p.322.

³ Corbin, Henry, http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm.

⁴ Corbin, Henry, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Omega Publications; New York, 1994, p.5.

angelology of the Persian sage Avicenna, or Ibn Sina. In Persia, however, as in the rest of the Islamic world, it was Ibn Sina's philosophy that would prove far more influential on the later development of the philosophical tradition. Through his angelology and its development in the works of later Muslim sages like Suhrawardi, Ibn al-'Arabī and Mulla Sadra, the imaginal realm always remained in focus, while in the West it gradually came to be denied and even forgotten. When Corbin began to study the works of these philosopher-mystics in their original languages, he had to coin the term *mundus imaginalis* in order to be able to translate what they were speaking about into the European tongues.

Corbin realized that the danger in speaking about this world to contemporary Westerners was that they would mistake it for the world of the imagination, which for them had come to represent a realm of fantasy and unreality. He recognized that the imaginal is equally as real as the material, though, if not more so, and he gradually developed this way of speaking about it which has caught on enough since then that it would be hard to doubt that there is a concrete reality to what he is referring to, even if we cannot point to it on any map or perceive it with our material-oriented senses. This is precisely the nature of the imaginal, though, for it requires the faculty that Corbin called the *active Imagination* in order for us to perceive it, and this faculty has all-but atrophied in most of Western humanity over the last seven or eight hundred years, due no doubt to neglect.

The imaginal world exists between the sensory world of our everyday perception, and the suprasensory world of angel-souls. It is through our awareness of this world that we are able to recognize that the material bodies around us have their principles or archetypes on higher planes, and that we can recognize these principles as they shine forth through those bodies, thus making them symbols of realities which transcend them as individual entities. The imaginal world not only allows us to recognize the symbolic qualities of material phenomena, it is also that which gives meaning to the visions of Prophets, the experiences of mystics, and the events of Resurrection and eschatology⁵; our inability to perceive it surely helps explain the skepticism towards all of these that tends to be prevalent in much of the modern world. Coming to

⁵ Corbin, Henry, *The Voyage and the Messenger*, North Atlantic Books; Berkeley, 1998, p.166.

recognize the existence of the imaginal realm, and beginning to open oneself to perceiving it by re-awakening the active Imagination, are events that herald the beginning of an imaginal ecology in the individual in the contemporary world.

It is thus through learning the ability to perceive with the active Imagination that we begin to recognize the symbolic qualities of things, and that we are able to open to the realities they symbolize, those realities through which they are connected to and united with other realms of existence. As we learn to do so, a transformation in perception begins to take place, and we start to see that the imaginal world is not a place in the sense that we can identify where it is, but rather that it is itself situative.⁶ We come to recognize that the material actually exists within the spiritual, at least from a certain perspective, and this is a realization which is of deep significance for an ecological consciousness as it forces us to acknowledge that our material environment is part of something vaster. We come to recognize that what we see and measure is by no means the beginning and end of who and what we are, that there are other levels of existence accessible to those who have the eyes to see. It is the precise function of the active Imagination to unveil these hidden realities, to perceive these realms that transcend the material.

“Earth will not be healed by some kind of social engineering or changes in a technology that cannot but treat the world of nature as pure quantity to be manipulated for human needs whether they be real or imaginary. All such actions are no more than cosmetics with an effect that is of necessity only skin deep.”

Seyyed Hossein Nasr⁷

Before going any further, the question as to the necessity for an ecology of the imaginal must be addressed. Again we look here for guidance to the words of Marty Glass, who says “The forest, the rivers and mountains, all of Nature, already gone forever... And this because of what has vanished within us. The humanity that can experience forests, disclose them in awareness of their eternity in the Heart, is all but gone... [but their Principle is] never really gone, nothing is ever really gone, it's always there, within, eternal, withdrawing from and returning to manifestation, Life Everlasting... Appearing, withdrawing from appear-

⁶ Corbin, Henry, http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm.

⁷ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1996, p. 287.

ance to its eternity in God, appearing again.”⁸ The lost humanity that can disclose forests as they exist in the eternity of the Heart that Glass is speaking of is the humanity that is aware of, and has regular access to, the imaginal. But, as he reminds us in the second part of this quote, the possibility of this access exists forever, for the imaginal is always there, whether we are aware of it or not. Its ontological reality precedes that of material reality, and it certainly doesn’t rely on our awareness of it for its existence. The imaginal exists on a higher plane, and likely turns upwards for its sustenance, not downwards towards us—for its proximity to the Principle is greater than ours is. It is in part because of this that we feel the need to attempt to preserve our relationship with the imaginal, and to discuss that relationship here. Its importance for us, above all, lies in that it is through maintaining an awareness of this realm that we are able to remember the ideas and inspirations that we have been granted by the grace of the Divine in the purity of their original, archetypal essence, and not in our own ‘imagined’ ideas of what they mean as they develop over time and away from how they were originally transmitted.

In truth, the imaginal realm is probably not concerned with our mundane notions of ‘ecology’ or ‘extinction’. The imaginal likely has no need for our concern at all. An ecology of the imaginal for the sake of the imaginal itself may be entirely unnecessary. What is needed, though, at least for us, is to preserve our awareness of this realm, to continue to acknowledge it and learn to gain access to it, and to work with the forms and archetypes we find there. The imaginal may not need us, but we need it. As we now surely need an ecology of the material for the preservation of our earthly home, or at least for our current mode of human existence here, so do we need an ecology of the imaginal for the health and wellness of our psychic and spiritual existence. If our perspective on reality continues to harden, if we continue to lose the ability to see beyond the outward shape and appearance of things, and if we continue to forget the significance of the realm of the imaginal, we may just be in more danger than any conceivable physical consequence of this opacity.

It is this danger that we have lost sight of as we have come to focus solely on the outer shapes of things, to lose contact with their imaginal

⁸ Glass, Marty, *Yuga*, Sophia Perennis: Hillsdale, 2001, p.311-314.

roots. An integrated and healthy ecology, though, is one that sees the whole picture, and this means seeing beyond the material and recognizing those aspects of creation that are invisible to our outwards-attuned senses. M. Ali Lakhani has noted in relation to this that “intellectual vision through the imaginal realm of archetypes corresponds to (what Schuon terms) metaphysical transparency (in Vedantic terms, the discernment of ‘tat tvam asi’). It is the privilege of the human capability for such discernment (symbolized by the Qur’anic passage known as the Covenant of Alast) which constitutes the ethical foundation of man’s stewardship (symbolized by the Qur’anic notion of *Amanab*)—a metaphysical application of the principle of ‘noblesse oblige’.”⁹ We as humans have been granted with a trusteeship (*Amanab*) from God, which is certainly one of driving forces behind our ecological sensibility, whether we are conscious of it or not. But this trust can only be truly fulfilled when we acknowledge who we are in the fullness of our being, not only taking into account our material bodies, but also the subtle and spiritual aspects of who we are, without which we are nothing at all. As humans in whom a ray of the Divine Intelligence shines forth, we have the potential to be stewards of far more than just the material world, and an ecology of the imaginal helps maintain our focus on not only that realm, but all that exists beyond it.

“The ‘Forests Forever’ people, ‘eco-warriors’, perceive the same ‘reality’ as the lumber companies. They are in perfect accord about what a ‘tree’ is.”

Marty Glass¹⁰

Now that we’ve explored a little bit about the imaginal, and the reason for discussing an ecology of this realm, we can begin to outline what imaginal ecology consists of. While it is not our intention to enter here into a discussion of what the practices of an imaginal ecologist are, and we are far from conceiving what an imaginal activism might look like, or even if one should exist at all, we may be able to at least begin to identify some of the defining features of this cause, before we begin to look at what imaginal ecology looked like in the past.

In order to do so, we will begin by referring again to those potent words of Henry Corbin, himself a key figure in the history of imaginal

⁹ M. Ali Lakhani - personal correspondence, August 19, 2005.

¹⁰ Glass, Marty, *Yuga*, Sophia Perennis; Hillsdale, 2001, 307-308.

ecology, that opened this essay, written by him while contemplating the forms of nature. “For you must not walk as if you are a conqueror. You must not wish to give a name to things, to everything. Things will tell you who they are, if you listen, surrendered to them, like a lover.” These words¹¹ written in Corbin’s youth, at the edge of Lake Siljan in Sweden in 1932, define for us the cause of imaginal ecology, a cause that Corbin would exemplify in his life’s work as it unfolded over the decades that followed. One of the starting points for an ecology of the imaginal is surely when one makes the effort to put an end to the attempt to conquer the world of ideas, to stop strolling through the gardens of the mind and of nature and putting a name on everything, as if that by defining things we gain ownership over them. The equation *definition equals ownership* tends to be an implicit assumption of much of modern thought, and this assumption has to be recognized for it to be overcome so that an imaginal ecology may begin.

Learning to listen to things, and surrendering to them like a lover, as Corbin says, are part of this process of participating in an imaginal ecology. Doing these implies learning to see the things around us not only as material phenomena, not only as the trees and mountains that the ecologically-minded wish to defend and speak for, but also recognizing their symbolic qualities, that they represent Presences—aspects of reality beyond the material. There is no doubt that trees are trees, but when one looks at trees through the faculty of the active Imagination, one begins to recognize them as symbols of universal existence. Trees symbolize life and strength in their very essence, and to recognize this essence is to see them as they extend towards the different levels of existence. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr says¹², “Symbols are ontological aspects of a thing, to say the least as real as the thing itself, and in fact that which bestows significance upon a thing within the universal order of existence.” Trees are not only symbols of certain universal qualities, they are a facet of these qualities as they are manifested within the material world. The Tree of Life for this reason is a symbol common to all traditions, for trees are everywhere part of the collective experience of humanity. Their very verticality points to other levels of existence

¹¹ Corbin, Henry, *The Voyage and the Messenger*, North Atlantic Books; Berkeley, 1998, p.xxxii.

¹² Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, SUNY; Albany, 1989 p.153.

that we cannot see, and the fruits that grow of their branches and fall to the earth below are a perfect symbol as to how something can arise from a material nothingness, and yet provide us with the nourishment our physical bodies need. For those who see that this is a symbol of what is occurring equally on the imaginal plane in relation to our psychic and intellectual bodies, it is not difficult to recognize the validity of this parallel.

Imaginal ecology must inevitably take a stand against modern scientism, rationalism, materialism and nominalism, just as the ecology of the material world stands against the ideologies of globalism, corporatism, capitalism, and greed of all forms. Imaginal ecology refuses to limit its perspective to the material, and strives to see beyond the outer shapes of things, to recognize the essence they open to within them. The imaginal ecologist is one who seeks to recognize, explore, and learn from that world of which Corbin said¹³, “There is a world hidden in the very act of sense perception which we must recover”—and so it also rejects the empirical paradigm. This is another of the guiding principles of imaginal ecology, that there is a potential to perceive more than just what we see with our eyes focused outwards, that there are more to things than just their mass, value, and the place they occupy on a map. The imaginal ecologist is one who strives to listen to things, to hear the voices with which they speak, and to love them in order to experience them so deeply that they come to recognize those qualities in them that transcend the material, that link them to the whole of nature and all of the entirety of worlds. “Surrendered to them, like a lover.” This is the way of imaginal ecology.

“The whole of existence is imagination within imagination,
while true Being is God alone.”

Ibn al-'Arabi 14

Looking into the history of imaginal ecology, we find that it goes back some eight centuries, if not more. Corbin, in his essay ‘A Theory

¹³ Corbin, Henry, *The Voyage and the Messenger*, North Atlantic Books; Berkeley, 1998, p.xxv.

¹⁴ Cited in *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, ed. Perry, Whitall N., p.97.

of Visionary Knowledge’, wrote of the twelfth century Persian Sufi Suhrawardi¹⁵,

“Suhrawardi set out to guarantee the ontological status appropriate to the *mundus imaginalis*. He fully realized that if this world were to disappear—if we were to lose all trace of it—then prophetic and mystical visionary experiences, as well as any event of Resurrection, would all lose their place. They would literally ‘no longer take place,’ for their place is neither of the sensory nor the intellectual world, but that of the intermediary ‘eighth climate,’ the world where the body is spiritualized, and the spiritual is embodied... In the absence of the imaginal world, we are reduced to mere allegory, for the active Imagination itself has been degraded to the status of producer of the imaginary.”

Even eight hundred years ago, Suhrawardi sensed that an awareness of the imaginal world was beginning to be lost, and he foresaw the dangers of what would happen if it was. Within his work, he laid out a framework for understanding and speaking of the imaginal, and for helping ensure its voice would continue to be heard. Suhrawardi’s *ishraqi* (illuminationist) philosophy would prove to be significant in helping maintain and develop this awareness as the Persian mystical-philosophical tradition evolved over the centuries. His ideas were later expanded and challenged, especially in sixteenth century Safavid Iran, during that flowering of Persian philosophy that is exemplified by the school of Isfahan, and in particular by Mulla Sadra, who saw the imaginal body as that part of the human being that survives death, and the imaginal world as the place to which this body then goes.

Mention must also be made of Ibn al-‘Arabī, whose work was key in helping to ensure that the imaginal realm remained in focus in the Islamic world in the centuries after him, and thus that the symbolic faculty of the imagination remained active at least until its modern encounter with the Western world. Ibn al-‘Arabī saw the imagination as the ultimate ground of the cosmos, and all things as aspects, or faculties, of the Divine Imagination. William C. Chittick writes¹⁶ of the Andalusian sage that “In his understanding, the forms that fill the cosmos—including us and our minds—are related to God as dream-images are related to a dreamer. Our own individual imaginations are so many streams in an infinite network of interlocking imagery.” Ibn al-‘Arabī developed a

¹⁵ Corbin, Henry, *The Voyage and the Messenger*, North Atlantic Books; Berkeley, 1998, 125-126.

¹⁶ Chittick, William C., *Imaginal Worlds*, SUNY; Albany, 1994, p. 11.

cosmology of the imagination so precise and detailed that we are still coming to grips with what he was speaking of today, and in his works can be found many aids that can help assure that an awareness of the imaginal will not be entirely lost over the years to come.

It is Suhrawardi, though, who can be considered from our perspective as the father of imaginal ecology, and it was especially in his Persian homeland that its principles were further developed in the centuries that followed his death. As long as *ishraqi* philosophy continued to be influential, and as long as people looked to the mystical Orient (the *ishraq*) that could not be located on any map, precisely because it shines with the light of the imaginal world itself, an awareness of the imaginal was sure to subsist, even as it came to be lost in the West. It was in the surviving texts of the *ishraqi* tradition begun by Suhrawardi—most of which had never even been translated into a European tongue until recently—that Corbin recognized that which the Western world had virtually forgotten. Corbin would later prove to be a key figure in re-presenting this gift to the Western world, this imaginal tree which had been protected and nurtured within the frontiers of Islamic, and particularly Persian, lands and imaginations, in order that it might blossom again within the world at large, in a time when it is surely greatly needed.

“Every form you see has its archetype in the placeless world;
If the form perished, no matter, since its original is everlasting.”

Rumi¹⁷

In a time such as that in which we now live, it might be asked what might be the value of such a venture as this attempt to help preserve an awareness of the imaginal: what exactly is the purpose of remaining aware of what we cannot usually see, what we cannot touch, what fails to provide us with shelter or material nourishment? In a world where millions go without proper food and shelter every day, while our precious natural resources are squandered for wealth and fleeting power, the value of that which transcends the material is undeniable. One might even argue that it is our lack of perception of *essential* qualities, and our inability to recognize that we are more than individual beings limited to outwards forms, that has caused us to lose our sense of bal-

¹⁷ Rumi, *Divani Shamsi Tabrizi*, translated by Nicholson, R.A., rumi.org.uk/divani_shamsi.htm.

ance within the spheres of existence beyond the material that we also partake in. This lack of balance in the greater celestial realms around us directly affects our balance here in this earthly realm, for when we lose our equilibrium in the cosmos, we inevitably lose our sense of place in any component world therein. In order to restore our sense of centeredness, and our awareness of our place in this earthly realm as stewards for the Divine, we may just need to reawaken our awareness of the imaginal. We may need to restore within ourselves a sense of that which transcends the material in order to recognize again its place in the universal hierarchy of being, an orientation we have gradually lost as scientism and materialism have become the dominant ideologies of the day, and as we have further lost sight of that placeless Orient which mystical-philosophers like Ibn al-'Arabī and the *isbraqiyyun* can help guide us back to.

We find in one aspect of the contemporary ecological movement an appropriate parallel of what we are addressing here, and in particular of what imaginal ecology may be envisioned as in relation to the imaginal world. We refer here to *seed saving*, the attempt to save seeds from some of the perversities of corporate interest—which propagates a narrow-minded and unsustainable self-destructive seed philosophy, where plants are genetically modified to not produce viable seeds, and thus not to survive from one year to the next, forcing new ones to be bought and planted each spring. This is a metaphor for the loss of a connection to the imaginal: the seeds of ideas are forgotten once we are no longer conscious of them or of their roots in the imaginal realm, rendering many of our ideas like flowers which have been plucked—beautiful to look at and smell for a while, but distant from their once-firm roots in the soil of the imaginal. The material corollary of this metaphor is the obligation to save the diversity and integrity of our seeds from such destruction, and to create seed banks where the seeds can be protected so that we can continue to plant them and enjoy their fruits. Without saving the germinal seeds of our imaginal reality and allowing their plants to continue to propagate themselves naturally, and without protecting the archetypal roots of our ideas, the approaching Winter may wipe out more than just the source of our material nourishment—it is likely to have a lasting impact upon the entirety of our being.

“Must not everything be found again at the end of the Manvantara,
to serve as a starting point for the elaboration of the future cycle?”

René Guénon¹⁸

Before we conclude this essay, we will focus for a moment on one of the most universal symbols within the great mythic inheritance of humanity—the symbol of the Flood and the Ark. When the Flood covers the Earth, as it does in virtually every one of humanity’s great traditions, we find a state of chaotic indifferentiation, when the outwards shapes of things intermingle and are dissolved in the watery essence from which they arose. In this state of dissolution, even the human reflections of the ideas themselves merge in this formless soup if they are not carried forth on the Ark, which bears all that survives from before the period of the Flood to the reestablishment of life on solid ground after it. In this we find not only a symbol of material life passing from one state of being to another, as is the most obvious and literal explanation of this symbol, but also of our ideas as they are stored within the Ark in order that they are not entirely forgotten amidst the outwards chaos of dissolution and transformation. The Ark itself is here a symbol of our relationship with the imaginal realm, and it is we who must craft it in order for its knowledge to survive, thereby to maintain our connection to the seeds from which our ideas have arisen. Only by doing so may this connection be maintained before the outwards forms of these ideas are worn away by those first waves of the Flood that are literalism, rationalism, and nominalism, until they are no longer recognizable, until the words we use are cut off from those germinal seeds which once gave them life. Without an awareness of the imaginal seeds of the shapes of this world—an awareness preserved in the Ark of imaginal ecology—our connection to them may be lost, leaving us with little but empty words that are a distant echo of their former reality, no longer retaining the potency of the imaginal.

In the Hindu version of this tale, we find the sage *Satyavrata*, ‘dedicated to the truth’, at the end of the last *Manvantara*, the previous world age, summoned by the fish *Matsya*—Vishnu in his first of ten incarnations of the cycle to come—to build the Ark and store in it the seeds from which the future cycle will grow. *Satyavrata*, who will

¹⁸ Guénon, René, *Fundamental Symbols*, Fons Vitae; Cambridge, 1995, p. 26.

become the *Manu* of our cycle—its primordial law-giver (the laws of nature as they are followed by all things)—thus guides the Ark across the waters of chaos between the cycles. This Ark bears within it the seeds of the primordial revelation, that wisdom known in Hinduism as the *Veda*, which guided humanity in the previous cycle, and which guides all humanities in all of the cycles of existence, in part through the imaginal realm with which humans have an ever-decreasing connection over the descending flow of the cycle. When Satyavrata lands on solid ground, he comes to rest on the Mountain-top, known as *Satya-loka*, the ‘place of truth’, and it is here that the seeds are first planted for the development of the cycle to come, in this case our *Manvantara*. René Guénon speaks of the triangular symbol of the Mountain in relation to this myth, and points out that this symbol is inverted in time, as are all things, and that the inverted triangle it becomes is a symbol of the Cave within the Mountain, as well as within each human being, in this case the Heart.¹⁹ It is within this symbolic Cave—the Heart of each seeker—that this primordial wisdom is kept protected, and so we find a connection to Corbin’s idea, as well as that of all the great sages and prophets of this cycle, and of all cycles, that as the Heart is love’s center, it is through the Heart that we are connected, when we are surrendered, to those aspects of reality which transcend the material. It is through the intelligence of our Heart—which transcends that of our mind, but is usually neglected within the context of a rationalistic civilization—that our connection to the imaginal is maintained and remembered.

“As soon as the emanations of the Essence enter the heart, the heart is situated beyond the formal order and has become capable of discerning the divine intentions within all forms, and consequently of perceiving Unity within diversity.”

Frithjof Schuon²⁰

To sum up this exploration of the idea of imaginal ecology, we must emphasize that its relevance exists less in the realm of the imaginal than in the material realm, where its importance cannot be underestimated. When we come to recognize that an ecological movement that focuses solely on the material aspect of things is subject to the limitations of a materialistic paradigm, we can realize the necessity to look beyond the

¹⁹ Guénon, René, *Fundamental Symbols*, Fons Vitae; Cambridge, 1995, p. 256.

²⁰ Schuon, Frithjof, *Esoterism*, Perennial Books; Middlesex, 1981, p. 231.

outer shapes of things, towards the imaginal, which is more “real”, if in its own way. As we learn to recognize the reality of the imaginal and surrender to it, we begin to realize that there is more to things than just what we see and measure, more at stake than simply trees and animals, forests and rivers, and that it is only when we are no longer aware of the very seeds from which they arise that our access to their essence is cut off. Recognizing that things exist not only on the material plane, and thus perceiving their essences through the active Imagination, helps us in realizing their significance not only as material entities, but as beings whose existence stretches far beyond this earthly realm. An ecology of the imaginal, then, is by no means opposed to an ecology of the material realm, but rather is complementary to it, and based on the same underlying principles. If we strive, then, like Suhrawardi, to preserve our awareness of the ontological status of the imaginal, we may thereby maintain our connection to it; and if we struggle to preserve, like Satyavrata, the seeds of things within our Heart, those seeds will surely live on despite the contingencies of the material world.