

Jean Gebser – Inspirations Summary Box

Key concepts, claims and elements

- * **Sequence of unfolding structures of consciousness and culture** culminating in "integral" structure
- * **The term "integral" describing a particular cultural epoch** that goes beyond the predominantly rational or "mental" consciousness of modernity.
- * **Structures of consciousness as mental dispositives, evolving filters or whole-body contact lenses** that shape our perception of the world as individuals and societies.
- * **Methodology:** combining a spiritual foundation with interdisciplinary empirical humanities and cultural studies research, evidence-based model of cultural development.
- * empirical observation and description of **five successive, cross-culturally valid structures of consciousness:** *archaic, magical, mythical, mental, integral*.
- * **Spiritual foundation** of his model: spiritual/divine source of all structures of consciousness and of the process of human becoming conscious; human being has the task to actively contribute to the promotion of the new structure that brings him "closer to spirit/origin".
- * Consciousness develops out of the origin in ever new, more complex mutations, integrating ever wider horizons of inner and outer perceptions.
- * **Man is the totality of his mutations.**
- * **New structures emerge** when the prevailing structure of consciousness can no longer effectively deal with the given challenges.
- * **No new mutation is "better" than its predecessor** structure. Each is both gain and loss (increasing differentiation implies increasing distance from the origin/wholeness).
- * **Political relevance of the structures:** all structures are permanently present in every human being.
- * **Overview of the structures:**
 - **archaic:** very limited consciousness, projection screen for holistic utopias and social harmony.
 - **magical:** detachment from and attempt to tame nature; consciousness focused on the outside (nature, tribe/clan), through punctual experience; no inner consciousness and no independent self yet. Nature is animate (psychic energetics). No consciousness and concept of space and time, no abstract concepts, no rationality. Current relevance in group contexts where the ego gives itself up.
 - **mythical:** awareness of the inner world/soul (inner ups and downs); experience of time; two-dimensional polarity, search for truth (meaning/values), security in mythically closed universe; great high cultures and religions; deficient forms lead to absolutism.
 - **mental:** spatial dimension: man locates himself in the universe; goal-oriented, rational, abstract, dualistic thinking, anthropocentrism: man as doer and master of the world; quantifying and sectoring science (measurement), perspectivisation of the world; deficient form: domination and exploitation of the world with disregard for natural cycles, alienation from one's own basic references.
 - **integral:** currently emerging structure, integrating and making whole what has been differentiated and separated before, anthropology: the human being is the whole of his mutations; simultaneous enactment of all structures and their ways of perceiving and sensemaking; can only be experienced practically in an embodied way, not purely theoretically; overcoming mental dualisms through holistic shadow work and (aperspectival) integration of perspectives. Lightness and humor are a core feature of this structure.

Source: Gebser, Jean (2020). *The ever-present origin*. Ohio University Press.

Further reading: IO 1 chapter 2

