

# Foundations, Principles and Inspirational Resources of **Integral Politics**



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## **2. Jean Gebser: The Development of Consciousness and Culture (I)**

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## Preliminary remarks on chapters 2 and 3:

### The development of consciousness, culture and worldviews as viewed by Jean Gebser (I) and Clare Graves (II)

We continue our journey through relevant resources and inspirations of integral politics with two developmental theorists who have laid the foundations for what later came to be known as a core pillar of integral theory, namely the **development of cultures and worldviews**. While Jean Gebser approached the phenomenon from a perspective of cultural philosophy, Clare Graves was an academic psychologist who engaged in over 30 years of empirical research, mostly with his own students. Moreover, the developmental lens appears as the single most important innovation of an integral approach to politics as compared to the modern and post-modern perspectives we know from “politics as usual”.

**Jean Gebser** (1905-1973) was a Swiss-German philosopher whose work “Ever present Origin (Ursprung und Gegenwart)” (1949) is mostly considered as the foundation and first source of the idea of a sequence of developing structures of consciousness and culture, culminating in an **“integral” structure of consciousness**. Gebser was also the first one to have used the term **“integral”** for describing a distinct cultural era going beyond the predominantly rational or “mental” consciousness of modernity. Both of these ideas have huge implications for the ways in which we understand and do politics.

A few decades later, US psychologist **Clare Graves**, as his lifetime endeavor, laid the theoretical and empirical groundwork for what today appears as the most well-known – and widespread model of cultural development besides that of Gebser, Beck/Cowan’s Spiral Dynamics. Even though Graves does not refer to Gebser – and uses his own terminology, the two are specifically acknowledged here, because all later work on integral or metamodern politics builds up on either of their foundations.

Note that by selecting these two authors, we are leaving aside a whole body of developmental research, namely that of individual cognitive and related development in the tradition of Jean Piaget. This is by no means because it would be irrelevant to our purpose – it definitively matters for politics as well, for instance in view of individual leader’s thinking and behavior. But compared to Gebser and Graves, the focus of classical developmental psychology is more specifically on individual development, of which I have provided a more detailed overview in a [previous LiFT bookchapter](http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page_id=625), see [http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page\\_id=625](http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page_id=625)).

In this book, our focus is on collective, social and political development or, put differently, on the **political implications of values, cultures and worldviews** that develop in complexity as people go through the sequences of developmental structures described by the authors selected below. We will start chronologically, with Jean Gebser.

## Chapter 2

### Jean Gebser: The Development of Consciousness and Culture (I)

#### *Biographical notes*

Jean (Hans Karl Rudolf Hermann) Gebser was born in Posen, Prussia (today Poznan, Poland) on August 20, 1905, and is one of the many examples of highly gifted, educated intellectuals who not only was at odds with the existing educational system, but also had a hard time translating his multiple talents into well-paid jobs throughout his life.

He was an early school leaver and did not complete his university studies either. Yet, he went through a banking apprenticeship as a young man. However, he did not turn this into a conventional career, but preferred to explore the world and its cultural avant-garde early on. From 1931, he spent some years travelling in Italy, France and Spain, where he connected with contemporary artists, poets and other intellectuals, before settling in Switzerland for good in 1939. This is where he is reported to have taught courses in psychology (at the university of applied psychology in Zurich) and where he wrote his major works from 1949 on. During these years, he also became an integral part of the artistic scene of his residential city of Bern.



As indicated, Gebser was more of an autodidact than a regular academic, partly due to his extremely broad area of interests. He was awarded a full-time academic job as a professor only very late in his life. When he was appointed an honorary professor for comparative culture studies at the university of Salzburg in 1967, he could not take on the position for health reasons anymore.

"Gebser lived a colorful, unsteady life with many years of wandering; he was intellectually unusually independent, did not belong to any philosophical direction and never had a permanent job that would have granted him a carefree life. Therefore, he also lacked the opportunity to elaborate his conception of the structures of consciousness so broadly that they could have achieved greater impact" (Hellbusch, 2005: 23).

Nevertheless, he was busy reading, writing, translating, giving speeches – which awarded him the literary award of the city of Bern in 1965. But apparently, he also enjoyed life and had a good time among friends and colleagues whenever possible. Fredi Lerch recalls that in his circles, Gebser was known as "the philosopher who laughed the loudest". Anecdotes by Kurt Marti and Gebser's biographer Gerhard Wehr report that "Gebser was not very popular because he 'always laughed like a horse': 'People always knew where Gebser was in Bern'", and "that at that time people said: 'Jean's laugh reaches from the [café du] 'Commerce' to the Zytglogge" (one of Bern's historic clock towers (Marti, 2021).

### **Summary Box: Key concepts, claims and elements**

- \* **Sequence of unfolding structures of consciousness and culture** culminating in an "integral" structure of consciousness.
- \* **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 (potentially) permanently present in every human being.
  - **archaic:** very limited consciousness, serves as 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.

### *Essentials and framing of Gebser's work*

Gebser's work was greatly influenced and inspired by the philosophy and yoga of Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo (see chapter 1) who first used the terms "mental" and "integral", as well as by the French Jesuit, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Besides these substantial influences, he also took up inspirations by many artists, philosophers and intellectuals of his time, such as Picasso, Einstein, Rilke, Husserl and others.

However, while Aurobindo's main focus was on the importance of personal and collective development as a spiritual practice termed "integral yoga", Gebser chose a much more "profane" and empirical approach. Whereas Aurobindo's interest was directed towards a unification with man's highest potential (and, ultimately, the Divine), Gebser framed his work as a synthesis of the history of (cultural) science. Based on a broad reading of European and global cultural history and his study of an impressive archive of cultural artifacts from all corners of the world, his unique contribution to integral thinking is the identification of **six consecutive structures of consciousness from archaic to integral**. Gebser called these structures archaic, magic, mythic and mental, followed by integral as an emerging new structure, and provided a detailed description of each of them (see below).

Nevertheless, Gebser's work also has a **spiritual component**. Being a diligent reader of Aurobindo, it was clear to him that we have to do work on ourselves ("all the real work we have to do is that hardest and most agonising work on ourselves", Gebser, 1986: 676). And he was very aware that it is this work that brings us closer to our ultimate goal, "closer to Spirit". Also, his ideas about where the above mentioned structures come from, clearly have a spiritual dimension: the source of all structures of consciousness is the mental/spiritual realm (*das Geistige*) or the Divine which he also calls "origin" (hence the title of his book "Ever present Origin").<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the strong urge that Gebser addresses to his readers to support and contribute to the emergence of new structures illustrates that his work has both a **spiritual foundation** and a political subtext, beyond mere empirical science: "it is incumbent on people to develop and promote the new mental structure as soon as the previous one has been fully realized" (Hellbusch, 2005: 25; my translation).

### *Structures of consciousness*

So what are structures of consciousness and why are they important? In Gebser's own terms, his work is a contribution to the history of human consciousness, or, more precisely, of man's becoming conscious as s/he went through "clearly distinguishable worlds whose unfolding has taken place in mutations of consciousness" (Gebser, 1986: 24; *my translation*).

According to the German philosopher Kai Hellbusch, Gebser's concept of structures of consciousness is "something unique in cultural theory that can give orientation in today's world" (Hellbusch, 2005: 22; *my translation*). Hellbusch uses the metaphor of "glasses" – or even "virtual full-body contact lenses" for describing the workings and importance of what Gebser means by structures of consciousness (ibid., 23). In other words, they are filters through which we perceive and make sense of our outside and inside worlds and which "**determine the 'lenses' through which we perceive reality**" – or

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<sup>1</sup> Note that for this chapter, I have worked with the German original of Gebser's "Ever Present Origin". Therefore, all quotations are my translations from the original German text.

what we assume to be reality in general (Ross & Fuhr, 2005: 5). This implies that we cannot perceive the world objectively “as it is”, because we always already perceive it through some kind of perspective, corresponding to our respective level or degree of socialization and experience.

Note that structures of consciousness include not only our thinking in the strict sense, but also the whole range of emotional responses, in short, all kinds of mental activities. As a cultural anthropologist, Gebser was well familiar with the idea of structuralism and its empirical manifestations, i.e. the observation that people *construct* their world based on learnt patterns, archetypes and deep structures that the mind draws on in order to organize information, virtually from birth onwards throughout adulthood (Ross & Fuhr, 2005: 5f). They therefore constitute more than just one quality of mind, but a whole dispositive (in Foucauldian terms) of mental activities, adding up to unique psychological “ways of being” and of responding to the world.

The first more specifically psychological account of structures of consciousness has been provided by Swiss biologist Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980), the founder of cognitive developmental psychology and genetic epistemology. However, Gebser does not seem to have been aware of Piaget’s studies on child development (for a more detailed account of the history of individual developmental theory see [Fein, 2018](#)). It is all the more remarkable that Gebser arrived at very similar observations and results independently of this research tradition, and by entirely different means and approaches of his own.

## Method

Gebser's method is essentially a cultural-phenomenological observation of artifacts and relics of past times, such as pictures, statues, pieces of art and science and other written documents, as well as the study of words and their roots (etymology). So his approach is a **cultural studies** one in the broadest sense of the term, including deep dives into many different disciplines such as archeology, the history of arts (including music, architecture, painting and poetry) and sciences (including mathematics and physics), literature, philosophy, theology/religion, psychology and the history and sociology of law. In his own words, he attempts to „show the respective structure of consciousness of the 'epochs' based on their own valid testimonies, their peculiar forms of expression (images as well as language)”. This method does not start from contemporary consciousness, but “attempts to illustrate, to represent, to make visible, palpable, audible the various structures of consciousness out of themselves, using the means available to them, and based on their own constitution” (Gebser, 1986: 24; *my translation*).

Going through all these disciplines and their areas of empirical interest respectively, Gebser provides a systematic interpretation of how more and more complex structures of perceiving, understanding and making sense of the world have emerged over time. His invaluable merit in this regard consists in backing these up with very detailed illustrations in each area of study, thereby delivering a grounded, **evidence-based model of cultural development**. Since the latter is informed by materials from many different cultures worldwide, it can be said to hold true cross-culturally.

Note that as a cultural scientist, Gebser is very accurate about describing distinct phenomena and therefore provides an extremely differentiated picture not only of what each structure looks, feels and behaves like, but also of how they relate to each other. Moreover, he complains that the linear way of presenting the structures is actually inadequate, given that they are no exclusive, closed entities, but strongly overlap with each other – or are even present within each other, at least as ever present



potentialities. This is why he uses a lot of cross-sections and tables, showing a large number of aspects and characteristics of each structure in each dimension of life.

Another way of responding to the inadequacy of the limitations of linear forms of presentation was for Gebser to coin some original terms of his own. For instance, he created the term “diaphanics” to make more transparent the holistic nature of consciousness structures existing simultaneously, with older ones “shining through” more recent ones.

### *Mutations of consciousness*

Another specific trait of Gebser’s work is his conception of when and how cultural development occurs. Note that Gebser mostly uses the term “mutation” for describing the transition from one structure of consciousness to another one. He explains very explicitly why he prefers “mutations” to the concepts of “evolution”, “development” or “progress”. He sees the latter as too linear and limited, suggesting that a structure was a closed phenomenon in itself that developed in a continuous way. In contrast, he views mutations of consciousness as more holistic phenomena. Each new structure is a mutation emerging from the ever present origin itself, when necessity arises (hence the title of his book), i.e. from the ultimate resource of all possibilities, with which it is therefore always also connected (Gebser, 1986: 213).

This conceptual choice is closely linked to a number of core claims of his model:

1. that consciousness unfolds by **increasing in complexity**, as well as its ability to integrate wider horizons of inner and outer perceptions.
2. It unfolds in the form of **erratic, discontinuous transformations**, rather than in any linear or continuous way.
3. A **structure remains effective** also after a new structure has been "mutated" out of it (the former ones always remain present). Man therefore is best described as the whole of his or her mutations – if s/he succeeds to live this wholeness, i.e. to live out the diverse structures constituting every one of us in a balanced way (Gebser, 1986: 228)
4. New structures emerge when the necessity arises. This is the case **when the dominant structure of consciousness becomes "deficient"**, i.e. when its ability to effectively address the given challenges is exhausted. At this point, its continuous functioning begins to have destructive effects to the overall system or context, and therefore, another, more effective structure of consciousness breaks through. The latter typically brings in a completely new way and kind of thinking, perceiving and responding to the given challenges, and hence can be considered a more complex mutation.
5. In other words, each structure has the potential to become relevant and dominant in the course of a human lifetime, beginning with a period of “**efficiency**” before turning into one of “**deficiency**”. “The former serves the full development of all the possibilities of the respective structure, while the period of deficiency means an encrustation of what has been achieved, its (unhealthy, EF) exaggeration. Quality and quantity, i.e. measure and mass, characterise the two main phases of each structure” (Hellbusch, 205: 24).
6. In the case of particularly challenging situations and situations of overwhelm, existing structures can also be replaced by earlier structures, providing less complex answers and solutions. Those are referred to as **relapses or regressions**, for example in an emergency “fight or flight” response.
7. Finally, Gebser stresses that **no new mutation is "better"** than its preceding structure. Instead, he points out that every new mutation is both a gain and a loss at the same time. It is a loss

insofar as while bringing more differentiation, it thereby also detaches the human being further from the whole. However, it is a gain insofar as it holds the chance to increasingly distance oneself from space and time and thus to overcome these, to gain “space-time freedom” as he says.

To sum up, Gebser holds that “every mutation of consciousness is the apparently sudden, acute coming into being of latent possibilities that have existed since the origin. None of them (...) causes the loss of previous possibilities and qualities, but rather their sudden incorporation into a new structure, whereby the previous possibilities and qualities become overdetermined” (1986: 74, *my translation*). In other words: it is dominated by the new mutation. “The primordial leap comes to consciousness mutatingly, i.e. in leaps. Mutations of consciousness are processes of integration. (...) We are growing towards the complex, integral human being” (ibid.: 75f.), which he describes as a discontinuous process, beyond volitional human control.

Interestingly, Gebser also uses the term “quantum” to describe the discontinuous leaps of consciousness (ibid.: 72).

*With every new mutation, consciousness unfolds further, gaining new dimensions. Yet, at the same time, their common origin is always present in all mutations.*

It is noteworthy that while these observations have later been confirmed by most other structural developmental models, Gebser was able to formulate them exclusively on the basis of his cultural studies methodology, essentially without recourse to empirical psychological experiments.

### ***The five structures and their relevance for politics***

Since Gebser’s structures have been repeatedly described in many contexts, we will limit ourselves to rather short summary overviews, focusing on their core features and their **relevance for political contexts**. As an exception, the integral structure is given a bit more space as the emerging paradigm informing integral politics.

As described in the section above, part of the relevance of all the **structures of consciousness** is that they **are all permanently present** – in more or less latent or acute form – in every one of us today (Gebser, 1986: 81). This means that, even if most of our daily thinking and behavior is determined by one structure, we have access and can draw on all previous structures as well, should the need arise, for instance, to reduce complexity or to speed up decision-making. As to the magic, mythic and mental structures, they continue to be the most important cultural forces in most of today’s societies.

Inversely, the structures are also **relevant as future possibilities**. For even if a specific structure has not emerged as the dominant one in a particular context, it is (at least latently) present in us as a potential. Knowing the landscape of potential structures means that we can make more accurate and realistic evaluations of future developments. Similarly, Gebser stresses that „one can only find something new if one knows the old” (ibid.: 70). Hence, this is of crucial importance in all contexts of societal transition.

On this basis, let us now go through Gebser’s five structures, their merits and limitations, as well as their importance for integral politics.



### *The archaic structure*

Gebser dedicates only four pages to this first, original structure, which he sees as the one closest to the “origin”. At times, he seems to even use the term “archaic” interchangeably with that “origin”. Not surprisingly, he begins his description with the etymology of the word *archaic*, coming from Greek *arché* which means beginning or origin. Among those two meanings, Gebser explicitly chooses “origin”, because in contrast to the beginning, the origin is ever present.

So while the magical, mythical and mental structures emerge from the archaic basic structure, the latter is the first state of being. Gebser therefore admits that it is extremely hard to describe, first, because by its very nature, we dispose of **very few written documents or artifacts** serving as witnesses of this structure. Those we do have are fragmentary or deficient at best and sometimes rather stem from mythical interpretations of those archaic times. Second, because it has the least distance to the origin – yet it is only this distance to an object of study that enables us to describe any specifics at all (Hellbusch, 2005: 25).

Note that what we today sometimes call “archaic” when we speak of various expressions of pre-modern cultures which, from a modern perspective, appear “primitive” and developmentally lacking behind, are generally not archaic in Gebser’s sense of the term. Most probably, they are rather (deficient) forms of magical (or even mythic) consciousness (Gebser, 1986; 86).

As to his own understanding of the archaic structure, Gebser essentially builds upon **two descriptive statements** characterizing this structure: one is a Chinese source claiming that “the real people of those earlier times slept dreamlessly” (Gebser, 1986: 84). The other one points at the missing distinction between the colors of blue and green (heaven and plants), also in early Chinese culture. Drawing on these sources, Gebser concludes that this structure must be conceived as something “close to the biblical paradisiacal original state, if not being identical with this in itself”, a state of or even “before unity” where the “soul is still asleep” and man experienced **complete identity of his inner and outer worlds**. For dreaming is a manifestation of the soul, and only a counterpart (*ein Gegenüber*) offers the possibility of active exchange and hence, of cognitive insights and the emergence of a separate identity.

But while the archaic structure is characterized by a very limited consciousness, Gebser does not qualify it as “primitive”. In contrast, he compares archaic consciousness as that of appointed saints (*berufene Heilige*, *ibid.*: 85) and their **being “in the whole” of micro- and macrocosmic harmony**, as well as in an everlasting mode of being present, with all things having equal value beyond any ex post evaluations (*ibid.*: 93).

This description may help to make clear what the **political relevance of this structure** might be. Given that it has no more empirical significance as a cultural phenomenon today, its presence in any human being’s body-mind nevertheless represents some kind of archetypical memory of a state of harmony. This can act as a **driving force and powerful attractor** – or as an object or screen of projection for unlive dreams, hopes and longings of a deeper, fuller and more holistic life.

It is from this archaic basic structure that magical, mythical and mental structures have emerged.

### *The magical structure*

Gebser describes the magical structure of consciousness as a kind of intermediate stage between the archaic "original state" of absolute connectedness with everything on the one hand, and the formation of a stable ego-consciousness on the other. Actually, he thinks that this process should be further differentiated, and one or two more structures should be inserted between "archaic" and "magical". But he refrained from doing so given the rather incomplete availability of sources (ibid.: 87).

Thus, Gebser characterises the magical structure as a thoroughly ambivalent one, in which man is detached from "harmony". He leaves the state of identity with the whole and with nature, or actively detaches himself from it by attempting to banish nature, to direct it and to make himself independent of it. He begins to see it as something independent, outside of himself, from which he is different and on which he can act, towards which he can direct and exercise his will. Nature thus becomes, as it were, a counterpart, against which man positions himself and through whose being different or outside he begins to perceive and define himself as a separate entity.

Consciousness is thus focused outside, and indeed guided externally. For man depends on the external environment in order to perceive himself and constitute his identity in every moment. In Gebser's words, "consciousness is not yet in man, but rests in the world" (ibid.: 88, *my translation*). The experience of being oneself is thus not yet internalised (integrated) and hence, dependent on constant physical interactions with the (natural as well as social) outside world. The self constitutes itself by *experiencing* the moment. So in addition to "working off nature" as a counterpart, one's clan or tribe are constitutive points of reference. The ego is therefore still a **group ego/identity** and dependent on the "support of the we" (ibid.: 89).

At this point it already becomes clear that the magical structure of consciousness is not only a historical phenomenon, but that we can find many examples of it in the present. To understand these out of their own logics must be a core concern of an integral politics. But let us first complete Gebser's description of this structure.

Two constitutive features of the magic structure explain its typical consideration of nature as an animate being: the absence of a stable, centered ego or self and its being embedded into the natural (and social) environment. The latter gives rise to phenomena and rituals such as incantation, totem, and taboo. In the state of "ego-lessness", every movement in the outside world is directly associated with one's own self, indeed causally linked to one's own being, "thinking," and willing. Outside world and one's own inner world stand in an interactive, dialogic, if not symbiotic relationship.

Gebser characterizes the self-concept and world-view of the magical human being in detail, based on five features. Interestingly, their universal meaning is also confirmed by Piaget's research in developmental psychology, as well as by studies in developmental sociology (Dux, 2014; Oesterdieckhoff, 2013 and 2013a).

1. **Ego-lessness:** the external orientation of magical consciousness means that the not yet existing individual perceives themselves as intertwined with and hence dependent on the environment (and vice versa!). This also implies that the responsibility for everything happening around them is primarily seen externally. The self is powerless and irresponsible. (The sun, the wind is to blame; animals are put on trial etc.; Oesterdieckhoff, 2013).

2. **Point-like-unitary world:** the "unawakeness" and undifferentiatedness of magical consciousness limits it to very concrete, punctual perceptions of single phenomena (one point/thing at a time), while a broader overall view (logical coordination) of multiple phenomena is not yet possible. Since these single perceptions cannot be logically linked, the elements of magic attention are interchangeable. It makes no difference between real causing factors and unreal projections, both have the same value. Since cause and effect are not clearly distinguished, everything and anything is equally valid.
3. **No sense of space and time:** the limited awareness of magical consciousness can also be described as a lack of context sensitivity. Each point (thing, event, action) is independent of any rational causal connections. Where perceptions cannot be contextualized, they are arbitrarily linked in symbolic ways. Gebser also speaks of "psychic energetics". This mode of sensemaking ends as soon as consciousness is able to understand rational causation.
4. **Embeddedness into nature:** In connection with this still rudimentary ego consciousness, Gebser also speaks of a "discrepancy of the reference to unity" (Gebser, 1986: 93). On the one hand, man perceives himself (and other acting/moving beings, be it people, arrows or the sun) as "unaccented", i.e. non-ego-like and integrated into the larger context; on the other hand, he fights, as it were, against this integration and his own powerlessness resulting from it (see below, point 5).  
On the one hand, the perception of being integrated goes with a lack of differentiation between part and whole – both are seen as interchangeable and equally valid (the part stands for the whole and vice versa – pars pro toto, see point 3 above). Thus generalizations occur, where no distinction is made between single case and general rule. Magic "thinking" is therefore dominated by analogies and accidental associations ("sympathetic equating; also what seems similar is equated). On the other hand, the magical man fights against nature – and thereby works on his becoming more conscious.
5. **Magical reaction to this embeddedness:** The hunting ritual as a shaped/directed action is the best example of a power-giving reaction that makes man a doer: he braces himself against embeddedness, thus detaching himself from nature and actively confronting the world. According to Gebser, with this "leap into consciousness" (Gebser 1986: 96) he follows both the urge to exercise his own will and that to be free. At the same time, driven by the fear of having to dominate the outside in order not to be dominated by it, man remains externally guided. Since only the act of "opposing against" creates distancing and thus possibilities of becoming conscious, he remains, as it were, trapped in a constant having-to-be-against-something (incipient polarization, *ibid.*: 95f.).

These mechanisms describe a **pre-rational way of thinking**, as we can observe it also today in many contexts, be it in pre-rational cultures, in post-truth communities or in the case of a "sinking back into the collective". Examples are mass events or psychoses, trance states or group contexts, where non-verbal, subcutaneous, telepathic communication takes place or is suggested, and where the ego gives up its independent thinking and responsibility.

At the same time, they also point to a positive side of the magical way of being which, according to Gebser, lives on in medial people. After all, the magical person was able to remote-view, to remote know and to communicate telepathically. They thus had abilities which today we associate with the "group soul" of ants, bees etc. or study as "paranormal" or, more recently, as quantum phenomena. Although these abilities can be actively trained and (re)practiced, "we today" must, as a rule, first actively switch off our more developed, rational consciousness and let go of the ability to be conscious in order to access them (Gebser, 1986: 101, 92).

Gebser, at any rate, very explicitly contrasts this form of existence with the enlightened "moral consciousness" of today which can bear a responsibility because it is based on a clear "I", whereas responsibility in the magical context behaves "like the light of the sun: scattered over the world" – thus, there is no responsibility.

Gebser therefore warns against an unconscious slipping into comparable spheres: "The magic heritage (...) is (...) still not overcome. (...) In such cases we are dealing with people, things or ideas which were able to cause us to bind a part of the disordered, ergo negative-shadowy remaining psychic energy to them by projection (transference) and which thus received that power over that part of our self which we ourselves were not powerful enough to put under our own power. (...) If we do not become aware of this sphere within us, it remains a still activable gateway for all magical influences" (Gebser, 1986: 92f., *my translation*). In other words, "anyone who does not realize that he has to control himself falls prey to magical thinking!" (ibid., 96).

With this, Gebser mentions a **central element of integral politics**: As a result of knowing the structures of consciousness, and in particular their continuous impact in all of us, the challenge is to make this impact conscious. Integral politics tries to productively integrate all of the structures instead of either fighting them or letting them impact us as unconscious shadows in uncontrolled, dysfunctional ways. This process of actively creating awareness and integrating formerly unconscious energies is called **shadow work**.

### *The mythical structure*

Gebser's description of the mythical structure of consciousness is comparatively brief, but equally concise. If the magical structure was characterized by the discovery of the outer world, then mythical consciousness adds that of one's own inner world or soul. In this structure, man opens up an inner space of perception and thus becomes capable of no longer merely living through certain moments (*erleben*), but of more actively experiencing them (*erfahren*), i.e. of becoming conscious of what s/he is experiencing. With this, a new dimension enters into focus, that of time, which allows to delimit and describe what is being experienced. The process of describing, in turn, requires language. This opens the space for narrations, as well as for remembering and passing on narratives to one another – the genesis of the myth.

While the magical structure was still strongly characterized by hearing, perceiving, and being integrated into a collective and the natural environment, the mythical human being becomes a speaker and agent. Hellbusch points out the "extraordinarily great power of **memory** for mythical consciousness". It is expressed "in the ancestor cult, which can be found in all cultures that are determined by mythical consciousness" (Hellbusch, 2005: 29, *my translation*).

Another characteristic of this structure, according to Gebser, is its **thinking in two-dimensional polarities**. This holds true in several ways. With the distinction of inner and outer world, waking and dreaming, speaking and silence, etc., human life experience gains both depth and dynamic, since an ongoing tension between two opposing poles demands acts of evaluation and taking sides (Gebser, 1986: 116, 122). Classical mythical narratives therefore deal with polar opposites such as light-dark, good-evil, right-wrong, etc., in which man must find his way, and between which s/he must position him- or herself and (supposedly) decide.

Interestingly, however, Gebser also speaks of a kind of **entangled relationship of both extremes of each polarity** as a characteristic of the mythical structure which constantly circles between and around these. Moreover, the extremes can sometimes turn into each other quite abruptly. It is therefore not surprising that he chooses the circle as the primary symbol of the mythical structure. So mythical thinking is not about an either-or in result of rational conclusions. Rather, it engages in a dynamic process of becoming conscious of one's own self by circling around light and shadow aspects which are both equally important.

Besides myth itself, imagination (pictoriality) also plays a role here (in contrast to emotion in the magical structure). For example, the Narcissus myth tells of Narcissus, who sees his image reflected in the water. Thereby, he "looks into the soul" so to speak and "becomes aware of his own existence". Moreover, "looking into the mirror of the soul (myth) is becoming conscious", says Gebser (1986: 119). Numerous myths deal with a "measuring of one's own soul", in which the soul is at the same time a mirror of heaven and of hell (ibid.: 115). Thus, everything in the realm of the soul functions as a mirror (*speculatio ani-mae*), and every process of becoming conscious inevitably confronts man with his own inner heights and depths ("Everyone who wants to live life worthily (...) instead of being lived by it, must once go through these pains of becoming conscious", ibid.: 125, *my translations*).

This circular, organic movement of balancing between one polar extreme and its opposite, on the one hand, refers to a cyclical understanding of time (like that of the seasons, the course of the sun and the planets or the breath). In this, the mythical structure differs considerably from the following mental one with its linear understanding of time, world and progress (see below). On the other hand, Gebser also emphasizes "the embedded nature of the circle that is encompassing polarity" or "man's being enclosed in the soulful, natural and cosmo-temporal world of embeddedness" (ibid.: 128). The mythical structure is thus, notwithstanding – or precisely because of – its inherent polarities (as polar complementarity), still a very ordered world that is perceived as a holistic whole, or, in Gebser's words, "sheltered in polarity" (ibid.: 130).

Now, **to what extent is this structure politically relevant?** Apart from some artistic representations, Gebser himself, hardly provides concrete examples of the efficiency and deficit phases of this structure, in his description. So we do not yet get specific illustrations of its appearance in concrete societies that are characterized by mythical consciousness. This is done later by Wilber (see chapter 4) and sociologists informed by developmental psychology like Habermas (1990 and 1984) and Günter Dux (2014), admittedly mostly without reference to Gebser. They point out that mythical consciousness has been or still is the formative structure of all great civilizations and religions and is thus of considerable importance in all regions of the world. Furthermore, Gebser's description of mysticism as the most distinguished product of mythical consciousness ("closed eyes looking inward") also refers to the act of inner seeing and this structure's urge in its search for truth and connection with the divine (Gebser, 1986: 112).

The mythical structure is that of all pre-modern, religious empires, from ancient Greece to the "Holy Roman Empire" and its principalities in the European Middle Ages to the Islamic dynasties of our times. The religious myth at the center of this structure is thus directly shaping the external, social and political world in the respective context.

The mythic structure thus continues to be a formative political and cultural force for large parts of the world's population. According to estimates, this affects over 50 percent (Krumm & Parsdorfer, 2014).

Even in Western societies, which are predominantly characterized by mental or postmodern consciousness, it can be assumed that the mythical structure continues to be dominant for about 30 percent of the population.

However, these groups are only insufficiently described by the cultural and civilizational characteristics proposed by Gebser. This is why in my opinion, broadening our view by including newer models of psychological development such as those suggested by Clare Graves (see chapter 3 below), Jane Loevinger and Susanne Cook-Greuter or Robert Kegan seems to be helpful here. For developmental psychology ultimately explains why the cultures described by Gebser took shape as they did (see Fein, 2018).

With regard to the transition from the mythical to the mental structure, Gebser notes that in the 20th century the "deficient form of the formerly organic balancing between polar extremes is characteristic", which he sees as a disturbance of the mythical equilibrium. As a result, the metabolist "falls from one extreme into the other once and for all". Thus he remains "a prisoner of one side of the circle, lacking the center that makes the circle possible in the first place, (...) whereby he brings the circle (...) to a deadly standstill" (Gebser, 1986: 117). Gebser thus sees one-sided, deficient forms of mythical consciousness as the trigger for the transition to the next, more complex, mental structure.

### *The mental structure*

With the transition to mental consciousness, another fundamental transformation in man's understanding of himself and the world takes place, which is decisive and formative up to the present time. With this transition, speaking with Gebser, the "distance from the origin" continues to grow. The two-dimensional circularity of mythical consciousness is broken up, and a third, spatial dimension is added. With an increasing sense of self, body and space, man locates himself as an independent entity ("individual") in the world from which he now emancipates himself, so to speak, and which he thus confronts as something external. So the former polar-holistic ideas, which were characterized by a visual imagination, is replaced by the (goal-)directed, dualistic, rational thinking in the narrower, contemporary sense, characterized by **formal logic, reason and cognitive intelligence**.

Gebser describes the mental structure as **the anthropocentric structure per se**, placing man himself in the center of attention and thereby turning the world surrounding him into an object. Man thus not only becomes the measure of all things (Gebser, 1986: 132), but also the creator of his future, the executor of self-imposed goals, and the one who is shaping the world.

In this context, man's concept of time also changes from a cyclical, circular, to a linear, directed conception. In contrast to the mythical structure's reconnection (religio) to the immeasurable and irrational, the attention of the mental structure is directed towards the desired future (ibid.: 145).

For this purpose, mental consciousness provides man with a whole range of new cognitive instruments. With their help he develops cultural techniques for dealing with his natural and social environments, as well as with himself. These include measuring, calculating and computing (ibid.: 126), writing, law and legislation, as well as humanities such as philosophy and psychology.

Man's process of mentally finding himself also brings forth a new relationship to the earth. From this emerge, on the one hand, the quantifying natural sciences. The act of counting as a basis for statistical recording, ordering and sectoring (as well as sub-sectoring, ibid.: 150) replaces mythical evaluations



and narratives. On the other hand, mental consciousness provides man's self-relationship and his social relations and with a new basis. The "illumination of the world through thinking" also extends to man's inner life, the psyche, which is now increasingly made visible objectively, not least in order to strengthen the ego ("the [directed, EF] perspective fixes both the observer and the observed," *ibid.*, 160).

Finally, the newly acquired **capacity for abstraction** impacts social life not only in abstract sciences such as mathematics and philosophy, but also in the form of secular law and written legislation (*ibid.*: 134).

In this context, Gebser points out that the terms "right, right-wing, right and straight" are closely related or even identical in many European languages. This is another respect, in which the mental structure moves away from the circular polarity of mythical consciousness' *coincida oppositorum*, towards a "mental splitting up and tearing apart polarity", as a result of which it produces a duality of opposites (*ibid.*: 128). These mentally constructed opposites no longer correspond or complement each other (as the mythic structure's poles do), but exclude each other as right or wrong (*ibid.*: 145). A unification of opposites can therefore only be realized in a third – impermanent and temporary – synthesis, which is why Gebser chooses the triangle as a signature for the mental structure (triangular or pyramidal thinking).

*"From the safe place of the two-dimensional (...) holding circle of the soul (...), man steps out into the three-dimensional space: there is no longer a polar complementarity. Instead, there is the alien opposite, the dualism, which is to be bridged by the mental synthesis, this mental form of the Trinity. For there is no longer any question of unity, correspondence, complementation, let alone wholeness" (ibid.: 128, 134).*

And over all areas of mental life hovers, as it were, the statement of Parmenides: "For thinking and being is the same" (*ibid.*: 132). Only what is thought through is real. It is therefore not surprising that art also increasingly depicts man as a thinker: the forehead is prominently displayed, the human countenance takes the place of that of the gods (*ibid.*: 133).

This quote is an indication that this structure, too, besides its indisputable achievements, brings with it great limitations and "pathologies". Gebser explicitly points to this when he distinguishes between *mental consciousness* as the superordinate structure and *rational thinking* as a specific, deficient manifestation of the former.

He sees the efficient form or phase of mental consciousness as a kind of emancipation movement out of the former structure in the sense of a re-balancing or rearrangement of the center of gravity. The deficient one, on the other hand, describes an exaggeration, by which the new structure de facto strives for domination at the expense of the former one. Moreover, every emancipation process contains the danger of perspectivization and sectoring where it becomes deficient (*ibid.*: 159). In the case of the mental structure, Gebser identifies this point where mental consciousness is no longer "measuring and judging" in service of concretization of man and space through thinking and understanding ("thinking is being"), but where the rational loses measure and indiscriminately subjects everything to quantification (cf. Hobbes' statement: "thinking is calculating in words," Gebser, 1986: 163).

Gebser comments relatively extensively on this deficiency phase. He does so by naming a number of "consequences of the perspectivization of the world" and of **the mental structure's tendency to ra-**

**tionalize, divide and destroy everything** (ibid.: 155). In his opinion, this leads to "isolation and massification", to overproduction, inflation, partisanship, mechanization and atomization. According to Gebser, there is a certain point in the process of mental quantification, of the "so-called progress", where an "inexorable fall into the masses" begins, where an "autonomous contentlessness triggers chain reactions that are inappropriate to the earth, leading into dissolution" (ibid.: 150). - This observation seems quite visionary in the context of climate change.

Interestingly, Gebser speaks of the entire "European, perspectival, rational world merely (as) the "deficiency phase, probably the final phase of an exclusive validity of the mental-rational structure" (ibid.: 127), the beginning of which he locates as early as around 500 B.C. in Greece (ibid.: 126). – All the more curious may one be about what follows this structure as the next, more efficient new mutation in his opinion.

The **political relevance of the mental structure** is again not discussed in very concrete detail by Gebser, but it should be obvious to contemporary observers of current events. Fabian Scheidler, for example, does this all the more clearly – a few decades later – in his most recent book "Der Stoff, aus dem wir sind" (2021). It in particular explains the climate crisis and the crisis of biodiversity very directly based on the modern, anthropocentric and unilaterally quantifying thinking of the early modern period, which Gebser described as the deficient mental structure. The **large-scale and "sustainable" destruction of natural cycles and systems** we see happening today could only occur out of a consciousness that no longer sees itself as an inseparable part of these cycles and systems, but rather as their master and ruler.

It is not by chance that the (deficient) mental structure is also associated with the archetypal masculine. The **anthropocentric urge to control and dominate the world** has parallels in patriarchy, which, as a social force, clearly demonstrates the "reverse side" of this objectifying, separating, dualistic structure: "All 'thought processes' operating in extreme abstraction denaturalize and invert the real dependencies" (ibid., 163). Being no longer embodied, they are also alienated from the earlier structures. While these continue to exist, they are not integrated and consequently no longer find a legitimate form of expression. In a nutshell, "**man has isolated himself and thus cut himself off from his basic resources and reference points**" (Gebser, 1986: 164, *my translation*).

It is this situation that, according to Gebser, calls for a new mutation in order to reintegrate what "belongs together in a fundamental way: the mental and the material," cognition, imagination, and emotion (ibid.: 165).

### *The integral structure*

*"Nowhere is the new so visibly present as where something 'perishes' (zugrunde gehen) – going back to the very bottom which of itself always also contains the new"* (Gebser, 1986: 263, *my translation*).

Gebser wrote "The Everpresent Origin" in 1949, i.e. shortly after the end of the Second World War and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the destruction of which clearly demonstrated the pathological tendencies of human dominance over the world by rational and technical means. Today, the climate crisis even more clearly underlines Gebser's dictum that mutations have always appeared as necessary when the ruling structure of consciousness is no longer sufficient to cope with existing challenges (Gebser, 1986: 395).

The integral structure is the last one in Gebser's model. In 1949, he describes it as the newly emerging structure, whose outlines are therefore just beginning to emerge. Although in the second part of "Ever-present Origin" ("Manifestations of the aperspectival world") he deals quite extensively with manifold, already visible manifestations of the integral structure, Gebser at the same time admits that his contemporaries (1949) were still in a "transitional epoch coming to an end". This also implies that the final shape of the integral structure is not yet fully visible and that corresponding descriptions must therefore remain fragmentary and in some sense speculative. Gebser formulates the general claim of his work rather modestly as "uncovering the basic concern of our epoch" and as "a contribution to clarifying a complex situation". He calls it the "attempt of a more comprehensive overview" which is "quite aware of existing gaps" (Gebser, 1986: 693).

At the same time, Gebser does not leave the slightest doubt about the coming of the new, integral epoch. Even more, he emphasizes that "each one of us today, each one in his own way and no matter where he is, is not only a witness, but **we are all also instruments of what is becoming reality**" (ibid.: 379). In other words, similar to Aurobindo, he assumes that this next step of development – or in his terms, the new mutation – must appear with a certain natural necessity, given the dysfunctionality of the existing mental-rational paradigm. He continues: "Therefore, it is necessary that we acquire the means by which we can also shape this new reality from within ourselves" (ibid.). What is needed, in particular, is an adequate understanding of this development, its implications, and how it can consequently be actively supported.

So what are the main features of the **integral, aperspectival structure**? In general terms, Gebser sees it as that force of consciousness which reunites, integrates, or, in his words, "complements" that which was previously differentiated and, in some respects, separated. It is the attempt to unify everything that was previously divided, in the sense of making it whole again, the "attempt to restore the greatness of man from its parts" (ibid.: 166, 171). Of course, this is not about a mere synopsis, but about the "restoration of the unharmed original state, enriched by the inclusion of all previous achievements" (ibid.: 167). While the previous structures have de facto replaced their respective predecessors by "overdetermination", the integral structure is explicitly concerned with consciously acknowledging and integrating them all in an appreciating manner as valuable and valid (partial) realities. For integral consciousness can "adapt to the different degrees of consciousness of all individual structures" and allow them to become transparent (visible) and to shine through (*diaphane*) (ibid.: 167). In doing so, it does not prefer any perspective a priori, but holds – impartially as it were – the space for all existing perspectives. This is what the term "aperspectival" refers to.

*"Man is the whole of his mutations."*

This points at the **integral anthropology** sketched out by Gebser, according to which "every human being is not a sum of the above described mutations, but their holistic embodiment, which latently also includes the potentially next following mutation" (ibid.: 173). This means that structures that have once been lived through "are captive" and consequently, **perceptible in a holistic, "diaphanous" way** (ibid.: 179), even if any linear (textual) representation only allows to describe them one after the other (ibid.: 181).

Furthermore, this integral anthropology means that the human being who succeeds to value the totality of his or her mutations, i.e. to live out their constituting structures giving each of them an equal weight (ibid.: 228), can make targeted use of the respective strengths of each structure. Clare Graves

(see chapter 3 below) will later report enormous, empirically observable gains in efficiency and problem-solving capacity associated with this structure (see chapter 3).

So it depends on the **degree of conscious integration** of the former, always existing structures, whether the human being moves towards more wholeness or, in case of challenging situations, withdraws into the patterns of earlier structures or even regresses into these. For example, adults are usually less impulse-driven than younger children. Even if they may still have strong impulses and emotions, they have mostly learned not to act them out immediately in every case, but can choose how they want to react to a certain impulse or deal with an emotion.

The success of this integration depends on some specific capabilities of the integral structure, first of all the act of "holding something in one's consciousness (*wahren*)". By this, Gebser understands both the activities of perceiving, becoming aware, and of actively "facing, affirming and acknowledging" what is perceived (*wahrnehmen, gewahr werden, wahrgeben*) (Hellbusch, 2005: 32).

Secondly, Gebser emphasizes the specific **conception of time** as a constitutive capability of integral consciousness. He calls it "time freedom" by which he means the integration of and thus liberation from all previous notions of time by an act of "considerable self-distancing and thus overcoming of self". By "leaving (...) the familiar sense of self (...) and being able to place itself 'above' the previous notions of time", integral consciousness can realize time as holding all of them simultaneously. Gebser also speaks of the "conscious form of what was originally pretemporal" and therefore locates it in the vicinity of "high forms of spiritual enlightenment" such as satori or Aurobindo's universal consciousness (Hellbusch, 2005: 33).

So we are dealing with a real **quantum leap into a new quality of consciousness** here (Ken Wilber, following Graves, will later speak of the leap into second tier consciousness). In this regard, Gebser never tires of emphasizing that we are talking about an intensification of consciousness and not only its (quantitative) expansion (Gebser, 1986: 168).

This makes it ever more difficult for the earlier structures to perceive or even to grasp this new structure, because "viewed from that older structure of consciousness (it) is above its reality. (...) Therefore, people resist perceiving (it), and rather make an attempt to assimilate" it to what they know (Hellbusch, 2005: 32). Meanwhile, developmental psychology has confirmed the observation that the earlier structures can grasp later, more complex-dimensional ones only in their own reduced – and therefore inadequate – way, which often leads to disregard, incomprehension, or even dismissive reactions.

In fact, Gebser emphasizes that "the aperspectival world cannot be imagined," that is, it cannot be understood abstractly or just theoretically. Rather, it "can only be perceived (directly in practice)" (Gebser, 1986: 365). It is about a practical consummation of perceiving and being perceived, the act of "making whole" (ibid., 366). And this is always a very concrete, embodied process. Therefore, **the capability of concretizing** is another typical competence and prerequisite of the integral structure. For according to Gebser, only the concrete can be integrated, and "only matured, mastered concretions can be building blocks of integration" (ibid.: 167). He therefore considers a certain "degree of maturity and equilibrium" to be a precondition of any concretization (ibid.) and emphasizes that the new consciousness "will not become fully valid as long as it is not lived and implemented in everyday life" (ibid.: 672).

As a side note, This observation holds true for a number of integral movements who have fallen prey to a "theory bias", neglecting the actual implementation of their vision in practice.

Given the difficulty of mentally describing this structure, Gebser creates numerous new terms of his own to characterize integral consciousness, such as "systasis" (the joining of the parts into wholeness, *ibid.*: 419) or "integral synaeresis" (going beyond mere mental synthesis, 420). As a symbol for the integral structure, he chooses the sphere (of being) (*ibid.*: 169, 672).

Further characteristics of integral consciousness, which can only be briefly touched here, are its

- transgressing the "rational unambiguousness and (the) dualistic either-or of mental consciousness" by integrating transrational ways of cognition; this also includes overcoming the "last and deepest opposition(s) of rational consciousness: between knowing and believing",
- integrating the earlier forms of realization (living through/*erleben*, actively experiencing/*erfahren*, magining) as well as
- their energetics (emotion, imagination, abstraction true).

*Table 1: Some characteristics of the different structures at a glance*

| Struture | Form of realization                        | Energetics  | Efficient                                | Deficient                         |
|----------|--|-------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Magic    | living through ( <i>erleben</i> )          | Emotion     | Banishing ( <i>bannen</i> )              | Zaubern                           |
| mythic   | look/experience                            | Imagination | Silent primordial myth                   | Spoken individual myths           |
| Mental   | infer/imagine                              | Abstraction | Making sense by judging thinking         | Rationalisation                   |
| Integral | To be in the presence of ( <i>wahren</i> ) | Concretion  | Aperspectivel, open conscious perception | Emptiness (atomistic dissolution) |

It is obvious that this integral way of perceiving what is both inside and outside also implies a radically changed relation to the world. This leads us to the **political relevance of integral consciousness**.

The diaphanous way of perception of integral consciousness (allowing all other structures to shine through) enables it, on the one hand, to also shine light onto its own ego and thus to free itself from it. However, notwithstanding its great freedom of ego, it also knows that "all the work, the real work, that we have to do (is) that most difficult and most agonizing work on ourselves" (*ibid.*: 676).

This means, for example, that integral consciousness does not "blame others or the world or circumstances or chance" for all the "misfortunes, quarrels, disputes, misfortunes (etc.)" it may encounter. Rather, it "first and foremost seeks the reason or the liability with itself, in its entire scope". Because it knows: "everything that happens to us is only an answer and echo to what and how we are ourselves. And a **holistic answer only emerges for us if we approach wholeness in ourselves**" (*ibid.*: 211f). – This creates a pleasant contrast to the attitude of *enemy bashing* that we know all too well from *politics as usual*.

Looking at World War II, the beginning of "self-destruction on a suicidal scale", Gebser regretfully notes that many in Europe "believe that one can still lay the blame for all misfortunes onto some neighbor" (Gebser, 1986: 390). He then explains how many of the "theories that have changed the face of today's world from the bottom up (...) were born in Europe". But we (Europeans) "did not muster the strength

of consciousness to administer them with full responsibility." For this would have required a "leap from the three-dimensional world of our fathers into the four-dimensional reality of our days" (ibid.: 391). He describes the nationalism that was dominant at the time as a "prototype of three-dimensional thinking. It conceives "the nature and essence of one's own nation as a constant ideal", in other words, sees the nation as a static concept, whereas from an integral perspective, nations present themselves as "dynamic individual unfoldings of a larger cultural circle" (ibid.).

Indeed, Gebser – in his own humorous way – laments the **political status quo** in some respects as being far away from integral consciousness. This concerns pathological (deficient) forms of mental as well as of earlier structures of consciousness that have simultaneously led to "massification" and to isolation – Gebser also speaks of an "antification (*Verameisung*)" of man (ibid.: 682). Both of these phenomena are very familiar to us from today's late modern and postmodern societies ([see IFIS' integral political salon on the topic of loneliness](#)), not least in connection with the new technologies of the digital age. Even though Gebser could not yet foresee anything of the latter, he already at that time had a critical view on the one-sided quantifying mental take on technology: "Today's technology is (...) time that is not mastered. It is the most impressive example of the failure of rational man with regard to the task of solving the problem of time. Instead of intensifying time, he has quantified it" (ibid.: 678). However, "any excess of quantification leads to impotence, emptiness, and helplessness" (ibid.: 685).

Looking at the subject of politics, Gebser gets even more specific: He calls the political parties of his time, "especially the extreme ones," an "apt example of (...) a reactivated magical clan feeling that has become deficient". Their mostly undercomplex viewpoints could probably be described as symptoms of the "fanatical and blind one-point focus of magical consciousness" (ibid.: 229). And in connection with closed worldviews of all kinds and the mostly irreconcilable counterparts they are constructing, he notes, rather humorously: "We reject neither rationalists nor irrationalists. We leave this mutual rejection to them, since it is nothing else than an homage to dualism, which must be overcome" (ibid.: 365).

With this, admittedly, the **political and social scope of the integral structure** – as well as that of the other, earlier structures of consciousness is sketched out only rudimentarily. The same is true for the tragedy resulting from the deficient variants of each of the former, pre-integral structures. At the same time, it should have become clear how aptly Gebser's analysis and his related model have already described central ideas of the idea of cultural development based on increasingly complex structures of consciousness.

Notwithstanding this scope, Gebser's account retains a remarkable **lightness**, for instance when he speaks of man having to "rejoice through" the structures – as long as he is not "suffering through" them (ibid.: 207). It makes palpable the degree of self-distance he ascribes to the integral structure, after all. The same is true of the poem by Novalis that Gebser cites to illustrate the transition from the mental to the integral structure, and with which we will therefore conclude this overview:

*"When numbers and figures are no more key of all creatures  
When those who sing or kiss know more than those who have profoundly learned,  
when the world will return to free life and to itself,  
when light and shadow will be reunited in true clarity  
and one recognizes the true stories of the world in fairy tales and poems,  
then before a secret word the whole perverse being flies away"* (quoted after Gebser, 1986: 415).

(Translated with the help of DeepL.com, free version, from the original text below)



„Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren sind Schlüssel aller Kreaturen  
Wenn die, so singen oder küssen, mehr als die Tiefgelehrten wissen,  
wenn sich die Welt ins freie Leben und in die Welt wird zurückbegeben,  
wenn dann sich werden Licht und Schatten zu echter Klarheit wieder gatten  
und man in Märchen und Gedichten erkennt die wahren Weltgeschichten,  
dann fliegt vor einem geheimen Wort das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort (ibid.: 415).

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