

Evolution of Consciousness According to Jean Gebser

Ulrich J. Mohrhoff

Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education

This article introduces and summarizes *The Ever-Present Origin*, the magnum opus of cultural historian and evolutionary philosopher Jean Gebser, largely in his own words. According to Gebser, human consciousness underwent a series of mutations each of which has enriched reality by a new (qualitative) dimension. At present humanity is again undergoing such a mutation: this time from the mental, perspectival structure of consciousness to the integral, aperspectival structure or, using the terminology of Sri Aurobindo, from mind to supermind. The integrality of this consciousness consists in part in its ability to integrate the preceding consciousness structures, rather than suppressing them (as the mental structure does) and hence being adversely affected by them. The article concludes with a brief account of the Mother's personal experience of this mutation.

Everything that happens to us, then, is only the answer and echo of what and how we ourselves are. — Jean Gebser (161)¹

What thou art within, that outside thee thou shalt enjoy. — Sri Aurobindo²

1 Introduction

The book

Ursprung und Gegenwart is the magnum opus of cultural historian and evolutionary philosopher Jean Gebser. Its two parts were first published in 1949 and 1953, respectively. As early as 1951, the Bollingen Foundation ✦ contemplated the feasibility of an English-language version. In his eight-page review, the distinguished philosopher of history and author of studies of the evolution of human consciousness Erich Kahler (*Man the Measure*, 1943; *The Tower and the Abyss*, 1957) encouraged publication, calling the book “a very important, indeed in some respects pioneering piece of work,” “vastly, solidly, and subtly documented by a wealth of anthropological, mythological, linguistic, artistic, philosophical, and scientific material which is shown in its multifold and striking interrelationship.” Gebser's study, he wrote “treads new paths, opens new vistas” and is “brilliantly written, [introducing] many valuable new terms and distinctions [and

¹ Unless stated otherwise, page numbers refer to *The Ever-Present Origin* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985).

² *Essays Divine and Human* (Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1997), p. 468.

showing] that scholarly precision and faithfulness to given data are compatible with a broad, imaginative, and spiritual outlook.” Despite this warmly appreciative and incisive estimation, the first complete English translation was undertaken only in 1975, by Professors Noel Barstad (Modern Languages) and Algis Mickunas (Philosophy) at the University of Ohio. In 1977, after discussions with the author’s widow, Professor Barstad undertook a complete retranslation and is responsible for the English version in its present form. *The Ever-Present Origin*  was eventually published in 1985 by Ohio University Press .

The author

Born in Posen, Germany, in 1905, Jean Gebser was educated in Breslau, Königsberg, Rossleben, and at the University of Berlin. In 1929 he emigrated to Italy and subsequently lived in Spain, where he was attached to the Ministry of Education of the Spanish Republic. After leaving Madrid twelve hours before his apartment was bombed, he spent the years 1937–1939 in Paris, in a circle which included Pablo Picasso, André Malraux, Paul Eluard, and Louis Aragon. In 1939 he left for Switzerland, where he arrived two hours before the frontier was closed, and in 1951 he became a Swiss citizen. For many years Gebser was Lecturer at the Institute of Applied Psychology in Zürich. Although later he was appointed honorary Professor of Comparative Studies of Civilization at the University of Salzburg, Austria, his declining health prevented him from assuming the duties associated with the chair. For his many publications, including books on Rilke, his friend Federico García Lorca, recent developments in the sciences, East-West relations, evolution, and twentieth century civilization and its antecedents, Gebser received several prizes. He died in Berne in 1973.

Jean Gebser on Sri Aurobindo

In the Preface to the second edition (1966) of *Ursprung und Gegenwart*, reproduced in part in the English translation, Gebser cites the following reasons for the addition of new material to the text:

The additions have been necessary in the light of many ominous as well as encouraging events since publication of the first edition. The ominous aspects are conceivably outweighed and counterbalanced by insights and achievements which, by virtue of their spiritual potency, cannot remain without effect. Among these achievements, the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin are pre-eminent. . . . Both develop in their own way the conception of a newly emergent consciousness which Sri Aurobindo has designated as the “supramental.” We defined it in turn as the “aperspectival (arational-integral)” consciousness to which we first referred in *Rilke and Spain* (1940) and later in our *Transformation of the Occident* (1943). It remains the principal concern of the present work to elucidate the possibility as well as the emergence of this new consciousness, and to describe its uniqueness. . . .

The reader will have to judge for himself in what respects our discussion parallels or di-

3 I was fortunate to meet Professor Barstad in 1992 at the XI International Gebser Conference in Shippensburg, PA, following an earlier correspondence by email, during which he granted me the permission to quote at length from his translation.

verges from those of the authors mentioned, the dissimilarities being occasioned by the differing points of departure. Although both authors have a human-universal orientation, Sri Aurobindo — integrating Western thought — proceeds from a reformed Hindu perspective, Teilhard de Chardin from a Catholic position, whereas the present work is written from a general and Occidental standpoint. But this does not preclude the one exposition from not merely supporting and complementing, but also corroborating the others. (xxix)

In a lecture published in 1970,⁴ Gebser made the following statement:

It should be kept in mind: my conception of the emerging of a new consciousness, which I realized in winter 1932/33 in a flashlike intuition and started describing since 1939, resembles to a large extent the world conception of Sri Aurobindo, that was at that time unknown to me. Mine is different from his insofar, as it is directed only to the Western world and does not have the depth and the gravity of origin of the genially represented conception of Sri Aurobindo. An explanation for this apparent phenomenon may be seen in the suggestion, that I was included in some manner within the strong field of force as radiated by Sri Aurobindo.

2 The pre-mental structures of consciousness

Whereas Sri Aurobindo, in his philosophical writings, is chiefly concerned with the large-scale evolution of consciousness, from its initial involution in matter through the emergence of life and mind to the eventual manifestation of the original creative consciousness-force he calls “supermind,” Gebser addresses the evolution of human consciousness on a finer scale, from its initial archaic structure through its magic, mythical, and mental structures to the eventual manifestation of its integral structure.

The archaic structure

The archaic structure is the most remote from the presently dominant consciousness structure and therefore the most difficult for us to envision. It is zero-dimensional in the sense of a total absence of differentiation. There is no subject-object polarity (let alone duality), no differentiation between self and other, between soul and nature, between the individual and the universe. If, in light of our contemporary associations with the word “consciousness,” we were to think of this as pre-consciousness rather than as a structure of consciousness, Gebser would concur:

the early period is that period when the soul is still dormant, and its sleep or dormancy may have well been so deep that even though it may have existed (perhaps in a spiritual pre-form), it had not yet attained consciousness. (43)

Yet the archaic structure was by no means “primitive” in a derogatory sense. Those belonging to it were revered by their descendants as the “true men of earlier times,” as “holy men” (43), as possessors of wisdom.

⁴ Jean Gebser, *Der unsichtbare Ursprung* (Olten: Walter, 1970); “The Invisible Origin,” translated by Th. Röttgers and edited by S. Saiter, *The Journal of Conscious Evolution* 1, 2005 (no page numbers).

The magic structure

The emergence of the magic structure is above all a transition from undifferentiated identity to one-dimensional unity. The magic consciousness is focused on a single “point,” which can be interchanged with other “points” or, as a part, stand for a whole.

The man of the magic structure has been released from his harmony or identity with the whole. With that a first process of consciousness began; it was still completely sleep-like: for the first time not only was man *in* the world, but he began to face the world in its sleep-like outlines. Therewith arose the germ of a need: that of no longer being in the world but of *having* the world.

The more man released himself from the whole, becoming “conscious” of himself, the more he began to be an individual, a unity not yet able to recognize the world as a whole, but only the details (or “points”) which reach his still sleep-like consciousness and in turn stand for the whole. Hence the magic world is also a world of *pars pro toto*, in which the part can and does stand for the whole. Magic man’s reality, his system of associations, are these individual objects, deeds, or events separated from one another like points in the over-all unity.

These points can be interchanged at will. It is a world of pure but meaningful accident; a world in which all things and persons are interrelated, but the not-yet centered Ego is dispersed over the world of phenomena. . . . In a sense one may say that in this structure consciousness was not yet *in man himself*, but still resting *in the world*. The gradual transfer of this consciousness, which streams towards him and which he must assimilate from his standpoint, and the awakening world, which he gradually learns to confront (and in the confrontation there is something hostile), is something that man must master.

Man replies to the forces streaming toward him with his own corresponding forces: he stands up to Nature. He tries to exorcise her, to guide her; he strives to be independent of her; then he begins to be conscious of his own *will*. Witchcraft and sorcery, totem and taboo, are the natural means by which he seeks to free himself from the transcendent power of nature, by which his soul strives to materialize within him and to become increasingly conscious of itself. . . . Here, in these attempts to free himself from the grip and spell of nature, with which in the beginning he was still fused in unity, magic man begins the struggle for power which has not ceased since; here man becomes the maker. (46)

A hunting scene

In his book *Unknown Africa*,⁵ Leo Frobenius describes the following rite, which he observed in the Congo jungle.

[M]embers of the hunting tribe of Pygmies (three men and a woman) drew a picture of an antelope in the sand before they started out at dawn to hunt antelopes. With the first ray of sunlight that fell on the sand, they intended to “kill” the antelope. Their first arrow hit the drawing unerringly in the neck. Then they went out to hunt and returned with a slain antelope. Their death-dealing arrow hit the animal in exactly the same spot where, hours before, the other arrow had hit the drawing. . . . [H]aving fulfilled its magic purpose. . . this arrow was then removed from the drawing with an accompanying ritual designed to ward off any evil consequences of the murder from the hunters. After that

⁵ Reprinted in Leo Frobenius, *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* (Vienna: Phaidon, 1933).

was done, the drawing itself was erased. (47)

Several characteristics of the magic structure are illustrated by this scene.

The *egolessness* is expressed first of all in the fact that the responsibility for the murder, committed by the group-ego against a part of nature, is attributed to a power already felt to be “standing outside”: the sun. It is not the pygmies’ arrow that kills, but the first arrow of the sun that falls on the animal, and of which the real arrow is only a symbol. (Nowadays, of course, one would interpret it just the other way around and say: the sun’s ray is a symbol of the arrow.)

In this linking of the responsibility of the hunters’ group-ego (assuming the form of four human beings performing the rite) with the sun — which, because of its brightness, must be considered a symbol of consciousness — it is clear to what extent the capacity for consciousness of these human beings is still on the outside or connected with the outside. With the Pygmies in their egolessness, the moral consciousness that they must bear responsibility, deriving from a clearly conscious Ego, is still attributed to the sun. Their Ego (and with it an essential part of their soul) is still scattered over the world, like the light of the sun.

This leads us directly to the second characteristic: *point-like unity*. This is expressed in the visible interchangeability of the real and the symbolic causative element: that is, in equating the ray of sunlight and the arrow.

At the basis of this point-like unity lies a natural *vital nexus*, not a rational causal one. This point-related unity in which each and every thing intertwines and is interchangeable, becomes apparent when the symbolic murder in a rite, performed before a hunt, coincides exactly with the actual one committed by the hunter. In the spaceless and timeless world [of the magic structure], this constitutes a working unity which operates without a causal nexus. (48)

Spacelessness and timelessness are further characteristics of the magic structure. They are the reason why

every “point” (a thing, event, or action) can be interchanged with another “point,” independently of time and place. . . and of any rational causal connection. Every point. . . can not only be linked with any other point but is identified with it. One can substitute for the other completely. (48–49)

It is the lack of spatial and temporal separation that allows things, events, or actions to be effectively correlated or to influence each other in a non-causal or pre-causal manner. Gebser attributes the phenomena studied by parapsychology to this spaceless and timeless structure, which, like all previous structures, remains active in us or capable of being activated.

This merging with nature, which in its spacelessness and timelessness also connotes a remarkable boundlessness, explains the well founded powers of magic man — powers which survive today in the form of human mediums. Magic man possessed not only the powers of second sight and divination, he was also highly telepathic. Today telepathy is based on a mass of authenticated data; even the most hard-bitten rationalist can no longer deny its existence. It is explained in part by an elimination of consciousness, which obscures or blacks out the ego and causes it to revert to a spaceless-timeless “unconscious participation” in the group soul. Clairvoyance may be interpreted in the same way. (55)

All magic, even today, occurs in the natural-vital, egoless, spaceless and timeless sphere.

This requires — as far as present-day man is concerned — a sacrifice of consciousness; it occurs in the state of trance, or when the consciousness dissolves as a result of mass reactions, slogans, or “isms.” If we are not aware of this sphere in ourselves, it remains an entry for all kinds of magic influences. . . . In the final analysis, our machines and technology, even our present-day power politics, arise from these magic roots: Nature, the surrounding world, other human beings must be ruled so that man is not ruled by them. This fear that man is compelled to rule the outside world — so as not to be ruled by it — is symptomatic of our times. (49–51)

On the other hand, magic “loses its effectiveness the moment it is stripped of its basic vital connections and relations; the injection of consciousness disturbs and interrupts the ‘unconsciously’ binding vital energies.” (49)

A meeting of two consciousness structures

There is a moving document of this loss of effectiveness in the face of a “superior” consciousness structure.

There are surely enough historical instances of the catastrophic downfall of entire peoples and cultures. Such declines were triggered by the collision of deficient and exhausted attitudes that were insufficient for continuance with those more recent, more intense and, in some respects, superior. One such occurrence vividly exemplifies the decisive nature of such crises: the collision of the magical, mythical, and unaperspectival culture of the Central American Aztecs with the rational-technological, perspectival attitude of the sixteenth-century Spanish conquistadors. A description of this event can be found in the Aztec chronicle of Frey Bernardino de Sahagun, written eight years after Cortez’ conquest of Mexico on the basis of Aztec accounts. The following excerpt forms the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of the chronicle which describes the conquest of Mexico City:

The thirteenth chapter, wherein is recounted
 how the Mexican king Montezuma
 sends other sorcerers
 who were to cast a spell on the Spanish
 and what happened to them on the way.
 And the second group of messengers —
 the soothsayers, the magicians, and the high priests —
 likewise went to receive the Spanish.
 But it was to no avail;
 they could not bewitch the people,
 they could not reach their intent with the Spanish;
 they simply failed to arrive.

There is hardly another text extant that describes so succinctly and so memorably the collapse of an entire world and a hitherto valid and effectual human attitude. The magic-mythical world of the Mexicans could not prevail against the Spaniards; it collapsed the moment it encountered the rational-technological mentality. The materialistic orientation of present-day Europeans will tend to attribute this collapse to the Spaniards’ technological superiority, but in actual fact it was the vigor of the Spanish consciousness *vis-à-vis* the weakness of the Mexican that was decisive. It is the basic distinction between the ego-less man, bound to the group and a collective mentality, and the individual securely conscious of his individuality. Authentic spell-casting, a fundamental element of the collective consciousness for the Mexicans, is effective only for the members attuned

to the group consciousness. It simply by-passes those who are not bound to, or sympathetic toward, the group. The Spaniards' superiority, which compelled the Mexicans to surrender almost without a struggle, resulted primarily from their consciousness of individuality, not from their superior weaponry. Had it been possible for the Mexicans to step out of their egoless attitude, the Spanish victory would have been less certain and assuredly more difficult. (5-6)

The mythical structure

Just as the archaic structure was an expression of zero-dimensional identity and original wholeness, and the magic structure an expression of one-dimensional unity and man's merging with nature, so is the mythical structure the expression of two-dimensional polarity. (66)

While, according to Gebser, the liberating struggle against nature in the magic structure brought about a disengagement from nature and an awareness of the external world, the mythical structure leads to the emergent awareness of the internal world of the soul. The mythical structure is also distinct from the magic in that it bears the stamp of the imagination rather than the stress of emotion.

In the magic structure, the vital connections reach awareness and are manifested in emotional forms: in actions dominated by impulse and instinct and subordinate to the demands and ramifications of spontaneous, affective reactions such as sympathy and antipathy. We have already spoken of the pre-perspectival nature of the one-dimensional magic structure; it is spaceless and timeless, and has an emotional and instinctual consciousness responsive to the demands of nature and the earth. The mythical structure, however, whose unperspectival two-dimensionality has a latent predisposition to perspectivity, has an imaginatory consciousness, reflected in the imagistic nature of myth and responsive to the soul and sky of the ancient cosmos.

Although still distant from space, the mythical structure is already on the verge of time. The imaginatory consciousness still alternates between magical timelessness and the dawning awareness of natural cosmic periodicity. The farther myth stands removed from consciousness, the greater its degree of timelessness. . . . By contrast, the closer its proximity to consciousness, the greater its emphasis on time. . . . The great cosmogonical images in the early myths are the soul's recollection of the world's origination. In later myths, the soul recalls the genesis of earth and man, reflecting the powers of light and darkness in the images of the gods. Slowly the timeless becomes temporal; there is a gradual transition from remote timelessness to tangible periodicity. (67)

3 The mental structure

The philosopher Immanuel Kant is justly famous for his insight that space and time, rather than being features of a mind-independent "real" world "out there," are "pure forms of experience." What Kant apparently did not realize is that the "pure forms" of our present consciousness are temporally limited; they arose by a mutation of consciousness and they will be superseded by another mutation of consciousness.

Scarcely five hundred years ago, during the Renaissance, an unmistakable reorganization of our consciousness occurred: the discovery of perspective which opened up the three-dimensionality of space. This discovery is so closely linked with the entire intellectual attitude of the modern epoch that we have felt obliged to call this age the age of perspectivity and characterize the age immediately preceding it as the "unperspectival"

age. These definitions, by recognizing a fundamental characteristic of these eras, lead to the further appropriate definition of the age of the dawning new consciousness as the “a-perspectival” age,⁶ a definition supported not only by the results of modern physics, but also by developments in the visual arts and literature, where the incorporation of time as a fourth dimension into previously spatial conceptions has formed the initial basis for manifesting the “new.” (2)

Restricting ourselves here primarily to the art of the Christian era, we can distinguish two major self-contained epochs among the many artistic styles, followed today by an incipient third. The first encompasses the era up to the Renaissance, the other, now coming to a close, extends up to the present. The decisive and distinguishing characteristic of these epochs is the respective absence or presence of perspective. . . . The achievement of perspective indicates man’s discovery and consequent coming to awareness of space, whereas the unrealized perspective indicates that space is dormant in man and that he is not yet awakened to it. . . .

The illuminated manuscripts and gilt ground of early Romanesque painting depict the un-perspectival world that retained the prevailing constitutive elements of Mediterranean antiquity. Not until the Gothic, the forerunner of the Renaissance, was there a shift in emphasis. Before that space is not yet our depth-space, but rather a cavern (and vault), or simply an in-between space; in both instances it is undifferentiated space. This situation bespeaks for us a hardly conceivable enclosure in the world, an intimate bond between outer and inner suggestive of a correspondence — only faintly discernible — between soul and nature. This condition was gradually destroyed by the expansion and growing strength of Christianity, whose teaching of detachment from nature transforms this destruction into an act of liberation. (9–10)

Petrarch’s ascent of Mount Ventoux

There is a document extant that unforgettably depicts the struggle of a man caught between two worlds. It is a letter of the thirty-two year old Petrarch written in 1336 to Francesco Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro. In it he describes his ascent of Mount Ventoux, a mountain in Southern France, to the northeast of Avignon, where the Rhône separates the French Alps from the Cevennes and the principal mountain range of Central France.

For [Petrarch’s] time, his description is an epochal event and signifies no less than the discovery of landscape: the first dawning of an awareness of space that resulted in a fundamental alteration of European man’s attitude in and toward the world. . . . Petrarch’s letter is in the nature of a confession; it is addressed to the Augustinian professor of theology who had taught him to treasure and emulate Augustine’s Confessions. Now, a person makes a confession or an admission only if he believes he has transgressed against something; and it is this vision of space, as extended before him from the mountain top, this vision of space as a reality, and its overwhelming impression, together with his shock and dismay, his bewilderment at his perception and acceptance of the panorama,

⁶ “ ‘Aperspectival’ is not to be thought of as merely the opposite or negation of ‘perspectival’; the antithesis of ‘perspectival’ is ‘unperspectival.’ The distinction in meaning suggested by the three terms unperspectival, perspectival, and aperspectival is analogous to that of the terms illogical, logical, and alogical or immoral, moral, and amoral. We have employed here the designation “aperspectival” to clearly emphasize the need of overcoming the mere antithesis of affirmation and negation.” (2)

that are reflected in his letter. It marks him as the first European to step out of the transcendental gilt ground of the Siena masters, the first to emerge from a space dormant in time and soul, into “real” space where he discovers landscape. . . .

“Yesterday I climbed the highest mountain of our region,” he begins the letter, “motivated solely by the wish to experience its renowned height. For many years this has been in my soul and, as you well know, I have roamed this region since my childhood. The mountain, visible from far and wide, was nearly always present before me; my desire gradually increased until it became so intense that I resolved to yield to it. . . . While still climbing, I urged myself forward by the thought that what I experienced today will surely benefit myself as well as *many others* who desire the blessed life.”

Once Petrarch reaches the summit . . . his narrative becomes unsettled; the shifts of tense indicate his intense agitation even at the mere recollection of his experience at the summit. “Shaken by the unaccustomed wind and the wide, freely shifting vistas, I was immediately awe-struck. I look: the clouds lay beneath my feet. [. . .] I look toward Italy, whither turned my soul even more than my gaze, and sigh at the sight of the Italian sky which appeared more to my spirit than to my eyes, and I was overcome by an inexpressible longing to return home. [. . .] Suddenly a new thought seized me, *transporting me from space into time*. I said to myself: it has been ten years since you left Bologna. [. . .]” In the lines that follow, recollecting a decade of suffering, and preoccupied by the overpowering desire for his homeland that befell him during the unaccustomed sojourn on the summit, he reveals that his thoughts have turned inward. Still marked by his encounter with what was then *a new reality*, yet shaken by its effect, he flees “from space into time,” out of the first experience with space back to the goldground of the Siena masters.

Having confessed his anguish and unburdened his soul, he describes further his perception of space: “Then I turn westward; in vain my eye searches for the ridge of the Pyrenees, boundary between France and Spain. [. . .] To my right I see the mountains of Lyon, to the left the Mediterranean surf washes against Marseille before it breaks on Aigues-Mortes. Though the distance was considerable, we could see clearly; the Rhône itself lay beneath our gaze.” Once again he turns away and yields to something indicative of his poetic sensibility. Helpless in the face of the expanse before him and groping for some kind of moral support, he opens a copy of Augustine’s *Confessions* where he chances upon a phrase. It stems from that realm of the soul to which he had turned his gaze after his initial encounter with landscape. “God and my companion are witnesses,” he writes, “that my glance fell upon the passage: ‘And men went forth to behold the high mountains and the mighty surge of the sea, and the broad stretches of the rivers and the inexhaustible ocean, and the paths of the stars, and so doing, lose themselves in wonderment’.”

Once more, he is terrified, only this time less by his encounter with space than by the encounter with his soul of which he is reminded by the chance discovery of Augustine’s words. “I admit I was overcome with wonderment,” he continues; “I begged my brother who also desired to read the passage not to disturb me, and closed the book. I was irritated for having turned my thoughts to mundane matters at such a moment, for even the Pagan philosophers should have long since taught me that there is nothing more wondrous than the soul, and that compared to its greatness nothing is great.”

Pausing for a new paragraph, he continues with these surprising words: “My gaze, fully satisfied by contemplating the mountain [i.e., only after a conscious and exhaustive survey of the panorama], my eyes turned inward; and then we fell silent. . . .” Although obscured by psychological reservations and the memory of his physical exertion, the concluding lines of his letter suggest an ultimate affirmation of his ascent and the atten-

dant experience: “So much perspiration and effort just to bring the body a little closer to heaven; the soul, when approaching God, must be similarly terrified.”

The struggle initiated by his internalization of space into his soul — or, if you will, the externalization of space out of his soul — continued in Petrarch from that day on Mount Ventoux until the end of his life. The old world where only the soul is wonderful and worthy of contemplation . . . now begins to collapse. There is a gradual but increasingly evident shift from time to space until the soul wastes away in the materialism of the nineteenth century, a loss obvious to most people today that only the most recent generations have begun to counter in new ways. (12–15)

Birth of matter, ego hypertrophy

The transition mirrored in Petrarch’s letter of six hundred years ago was primarily an unprecedented extension of man’s image of the world. The event that Petrarch describes in almost prophetic terms as “certainly of benefit to himself and many others” inaugurates a new realistic, individualistic, and rational understanding of nature. The freer treatment of space and landscape is already manifest in the work of Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Giotto. . . . With Leonardo the perspectival means and techniques attain their perfection. His *Trattato della Pittura* . . . is the first truly scientific and not merely theoretical description of all possible types of perspective. It is the first detailed discussion of light as the visible reality of our eyes and not, as was previously believed, as a symbol of the divine spirit. This emergent illumination dispels any remaining obscurities surrounding perspective, and reveals Leonardo as the courageous discoverer of aerial and color, as opposed to linear, perspective. . . . Above and beyond this Leonardo’s establishment of the laws of perspective is significant in that it made *technical drafting* feasible and thereby initiated the technological age. (12–19)

Space is the insistent concern of this era. In underscoring this assertion, we have relied only on the testimony of its most vivid manifestation, the discovery of perspective. We did, however, mention in passing that at the very moment when Leonardo discovers space and solves the problem of perspective, thereby creating the possibility for spatial objectification in painting, other events occur which parallel his discovery. Copernicus, for example, shatters the limits of the geocentric sky and discovers heliocentric space; Columbus goes beyond the encompassing Oceanos and discovers earth’s space; Vesalius, the first major anatomist, bursts the confines of Galen’s ancient doctrines of the human body and discovers the body’s space; Harvey destroys the precepts of Hippocrates’ humoral medicine and reveals the circulatory system. . . . Galileo penetrates even deeper into space by perfecting the telescope, discovered only shortly before in Holland, and employing it for astronomical studies — preparations for man’s ultimate conquest of air and suboceanic space that came later and realized the designs already conceived and drawn up in advance by Leonardo.

This intense desire evident at the turn of the sixteenth century to conquer space, and to break through the flat ancient cavern wall, is exemplified not only by the transition from sacred fresco painting to that on canvas, but even by the most minute and mundane endeavors. It was around this time that lace was first introduced; and here we see that even the fabric could no longer serve merely as a surface, but had to be broken open, as it were, to reveal the visibility of the background or substratum. Nor is it accidental that in those years of the discovery of space via perspective, the incursions into the various spatial worlds mentioned above brought on with finality a transformation of the world into a spatial, that is, a *sectored world*. The previous unity breaks apart; not only is the world segmented and fragmented, but the age of colonialism and the other divi-

sions begins: schisms and splits in the church, conquests and power politics, unbounded technology, and all types of emancipations.

The over-emphasis on space and spatiality that increases with every century since 1500 is at once the greatness as well as the weakness of perspectival man. His over-emphasis on the “objectively” external, a consequence of an excessively visual orientation, leads not only to rationalization and haptification but to an unavoidable hypertrophy of the “I,” which is in confrontation with the external world. (21–22)

Perspective locates the observer as well as the observed. It locates the “I” in a tiny part of an ever-widening space. In order for it to be adequate to its expanding world, the “I” must be increasingly emphasized. While unaperspectival consciousness inhabits a world of images, perspective consciousness inhabits a world of images that are synthesized into three-dimensional objects, which appear to exist independently both of the “I” and of each other. Their double independence is what makes these objects “material.” At the same time, this increasing materialization of the world occasions a corresponding rigidification of the ego. Thus, on the one hand, the expansion of space brings on the gradual expansion and consequent disintegration of the “I” and, on the other hand, the materialization of the world rigidifies and encapsulates the “I”.

Although man’s horizons expanded, his world became increasingly narrow as his vision was sectorized by the blinders of the perspectival world view. The gradual movement toward clearer vision was accompanied by a proportionate narrowing of his visual sector. The deeper and farther we extend our view into space, the narrower is the sector of our visual pyramid. As it developed over the centuries, this state of affairs gave rise to the most destructive of the stigmas of our age: the universal intolerance that prevails today and the fanaticism to which it leads. A person who is anxious, or who is fleeing from something, or who is lost either with respect to his own ego or with respect to the world — it holds equally true in both instances — is a person who will always be intolerant, as he feels threatened in his vital interests. He “sees” only a vanishing point lost in the misty distance (the vanishing point of linear perspective of which Leonardo once wrote); and he feels obliged to defend his point fanatically, lest he lose his world entirely.

The European of today, either as an individual or as a member of the collective, can perceive only his own sector. This is true of all spheres, the religious as well as the political, the social as well as the scientific. The rise of Protestantism fragmented religion; the ascendancy of national states divided the Christian Occident into separate individual states; the rise of political parties divided the people (or the former Christian community) into political interest groups. In the sciences, this process of segmentation led to the contemporary state of narrow specialization and the “great achievements” of the man with tunnel vision. . . . As for a simple onward progression and continuity (which has almost taken on the character of a flight), they lead only to further sectors of particularization and, ultimately, to atomization. After that, what remains, like what was left in the crater of Hiroshima, is only an amorphous dust; and it is probable that at least one part of humanity will follow this path, at least in “spirit,” i.e., psychologically. (23)

Mental time

The temporicity of myth differs from the temporality of the mind. The temporistic movement of nature and the cosmos is unaware of the temporal phases of past, present, and future; it knows only the polar self-complementarity of coming and going which completely pervades it at all times. It is devoid of directionality, whereas the past and

the future, viewed from the present of any given person, are temporal directions. It is this directional character of "time" which underscores its mental nature and therefore its constitutional difference from natural-cosmic temporistic movement which is mythical in nature. Or, we might say that [mental] time differs from [mythical] temporicity because of its directedness. (173)

As soon as the Now is interposed as an "in between" between past and future, it ceases to be a purely mental modality of time and becomes a spatialized modality. It is no longer merely oriented, but has the additional (and deficient) aspect of spatiality. . . . This setting-fast of time as "in-betweenness" is a perversion of time, since time thereby acquires spatiality. (179)

By being interposed between past and future, the Now becomes as divider. And by thinking of past, present, and future as "parts" of time, it is time itself that gets divided. Pointing to the "lack of time" characteristic of our material, spatially accentuated world, Gebser asks rhetorically: "How is anyone to have time if he tears it apart?" (180)

By virtue of the fact that it was itself divided, time became measurable; but it thereby forfeited its original character. (178)

Time as a quality or an intensity was simply not taken into account and was deemed to be only an accidental and inessential phenomenon. Time, however, is a much more complex phenomenon than the mere instrumentality or accident of chronological time. The fact that we today still think in terms of the spatial, fixed, three-dimensional world of conceptuality is an obstacle to our realization of the more complex significance of the phenomenon. . . . As long as the epoch paid tribute to the three-dimensional world conception, time remained a suppressed force, and as such appeared with a vengeance when it was finally freed (or freed itself). (285–286)

"I have no time" — this million-fold remark by man today is symptomatic. "Time," even in this still negative form is his overriding preoccupation; but when speaking of time, man today still thinks of clock time. How shocked he would be if he were to realize that he is also saying "I have no soul" and "I have no life"! For perspectival man, time did not yet pose a problem. Only man today who is now awakening or mutating toward the aperspectival consciousness takes note of every hour of his apparent lack of time that drives him to the brink of despair. (288)

[T]he one-sided emphasis on space, *which has its extreme expression in materialism and naturalism*, gives rise to an ever-greater unconscious feeling of guilt about time, the neglected component of our manifest world. As we approach the decline of the perspectival age, it is our anxiety about time that stands out as the dominant characteristic alongside our ever more absurd obsession with space. It manifests itself in various ways, such as in our addiction to time. Everyone is out to "gain time," although the time gained is usually the wrong kind: time that is transformed into a visible multiplication of spatially fragmented "activity," or time that one has "to kill." Our time anxiety shows up in our haptification of time . . . and is expressed in our attempt to arrest time and hold onto it through its materialization. Many are convinced that "time is money," although again this is almost invariably falsified time, a time that can be turned into money, but not time valid in its own right. A further expression of man's current helplessness in the face of time is his compulsion to "fill" time; he regards it as something empty and spatial like a bucket or container, devoid of any qualitative character. But time is in itself fulfilled and not something that has to be "filled up" or "filled out." Finally, our contemporary anxiety about time is manifest in our flight from it: in our haste and rush, and by our constant reiteration, "I have no time." It is only too evident that we have space but no

time; time has us because we are not yet aware of its entire reality. Contemporary man looks for time, albeit mostly in the wrong place, despite, or indeed because of his lack of time: and this is precisely his tragedy, that he spatializes time and seeks to locate it “somewhere.” This spatial attachment — in its extreme form a spatial fixation — prevents him from finding an escape from spatial captivity. . . . (22–23)

In everyday life, few are aware that the motorization, mechanization, and technologization impose quantitative conditions on man that lead to an immeasurable loss of freedom. Machines, film, press, radio [today we can add to these the electronic time sinks of TV, video-games, and the Internet] lead not only to mediocrity and a dependency relationship, but also to an increasing de-individuation and atomization of the individual. The extent of these dangers is exemplified by present-day sports. What was once play has become a frenzy of record-setting. The attendant devotion of the individual — submerging himself in the mass of spectators — to a worthless phenomenon is a symptom of the contemporary transitional era. The addiction to speed [and, nowadays, doping] reveals the deep anxiety in the face of time; each new record is a further step toward the “killing of time” (and thus of life). The preoccupation with records is a clear sign of the predominant role of time. Even the mass psyche is enslaved by time; it attempts to surpass and free itself from time in a negative way without realizing that each new record brings us closer to the death of time instead of leading to freedom from it. The addiction to overcoming time negatively is everywhere evident. . . . Precisely these exertions, fleeing into quantification, are a temporal flight born of the time-anxiety which dominates our daily lives. (537)

In summary, then, the following picture emerges: there is on the one hand anxiety about time and one’s powerlessness against it, and on the other, a “delight” resulting from the conquest of space and the attendant expansion of power; there is also the isolation of the individual or group or cultural sphere as well as the collectivization of the same individuals in interest groups. This tension between anxiety and delight, isolation and collectivization is the ultimate result of an epoch which has outlived itself. Nevertheless, this epoch could serve as a guarantee that we reach a new “target,” if we could utilize it much as the arrow uses an over-taut bow string. Yet like the arrow, our epoch must detach itself from the extremes that make possible the tension behind its flight toward the target. Like the arrow on the string, our epoch must find the point where the target is already latently present: the equilibrium between anxiety and delight, isolation and collectivization. Only then can it liberate itself from deficient unperspectivity and perspectivity, and achieve what we shall call, also because of its liberating character, the *aperspectival world*. (22–23)

The danger of regression

We must again approach here . . . a phenomenon that is truly terrifying so long as we remain unenlightened about it. We refer to the *incursion of deficient magic phenomena into our world* — the regression noticeable everywhere of our rational attitude to one of deficient magic. It is not as if the mythical attitude alone is over-activated today, although the imagistic aspect of the cinema or the inflation of psychic imagery made conscious are clear testimony of a process of unbridled and uncontrolled regression to the deficient mythical structure. Far stronger than this is the regression to the deficient magic structure. The relation of both the magic and the mental structures toward something outside of themselves — that of the magic to nature and of the mental to the world — results in a stronger affinity between them than between either and the mythical. . . .

Let this one example suffice to show the basic point: wherever we encounter a predo-

minance of insistent requests (and fanaticism is a request blindly elevated to a demand which not only petitions but compels); wherever we find a prevalence of the idea of unification in whatever form — a doctrine of unity, the establishment of an association, a huge organization, a one-party state and the like; wherever we encounter a stress on the concept of obedience, as in an overemphasis on the military, or of belonging and belongings, as in the property claims of capitalistic trusts or family patriarchies; and in general wherever we meet up with overweening emotionalism as in mass assemblies, propaganda, slogans, and the like, we may conclude that we are dealing mainly with essentially *deficient manifestations of magic*. . . . Wherever we encounter an immoderate emphasis on the imagistic, the ambivalent, the psychic — on unbridled phantasy, imagination, or power of fancy — we may conclude the presence of a *deficient mythical attitude* that threatens the whole or integrality. And, too, wherever we are caught up in the labyrinthine network of mere concepts, or meet up with a one-sided emphasis on willful or volutaristic manifestations or attempts at spasmodic synthesis (trinitary, tripartite, dialectical), isolation, or mass-phenomena, we may assuredly conclude the presence of a *deficient mental*, that is, extreme rationalistic source. (153–154)

Synthesis: a rational (deficient-mental) process

What the mythical structure treats as poles of an indivisible polarity (indivisible like the north and south poles of a magnet), the mental structure treats as opposites or antitheses of a duality.

Duality is the mental splitting and tearing apart of polarity. . . . Whereas there is a totality, even though deficient, which can be recompleted in the form of complementarity within the mythical structure, from duality only a deficient, because unstable, form of unity can be realized as the unification of opposites in a third aspect. . . . This unstable form of unity is expressed by the fact that the antitheses or contraries are only able to beget a third element in a temporary for-better-or-worse union, a *tertium* which is again separated at the moment of its birth. (86)

Having been separated at the moment of its birth, the *tertium* becomes one of yet another pair of opposites or antitheses.

[I]t does not represent a new unity but merely a quantity that becomes dependent on its antithesis or opposite, with which it in turn creates once more a momentarily unifying *tertium*. In this we see a further characteristic of our civilization: quantification — for the unification or synthesis via a third element can never be completed in time, only in the moment. The third element, freeing itself, becomes the procreator and carrier of one of the contraries able to engender a new unification and synthesis. . . . Seen as speculation, we could say that the speculative trinity proceeds from dualism and is expressed in what we shall later call triangular or pyramidal thinking when we discuss forms of thought; and such pyramidal thinking, which is characteristic of Plato, has its most trenchant expression in the Hegelian axiom of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. (86)

4 The present crisis

The crisis we are experiencing today is not just a European crisis, nor a crisis of morals, economics, ideologies, politics or religion. It is not only prevalent in Europe and America but in Russia and the Far East as well. It is a crisis of the world and mankind such as has occurred previously only during pivotal junctures — junctures of decisive finality for life on earth and for the humanity subjected to them. The crisis of our times and our world is in a process — at the moment autonomously — of complete transformation, and appears

headed toward an event which, in our view, can only be described as a “global catastrophe.” This event, understood in any but anthropocentric terms, will necessarily come about as a new constellation of planetary extent.

We must soberly face the fact that only a few decades separate us from that event. This span of time is determined by an increase in technological feasibility inversely proportional to man’s sense of responsibility — that is, unless a new factor were to emerge which would effectively overcome this menacing correlation. . . . [I]f we should not or cannot successfully survive this crisis by our own insight and assure the continuity of our earth and mankind in the short or the long run by a transformation (or a mutation) then the crisis will outlive us. . . . Either we will be disintegrated and dispersed, or we must resolve and effect integrality. (xvii – xviii)

The following passage may serve as an example of the resonances between Gebser’s *Ever-Present Origin* and Sri Aurobindo’s magnum opus, *The Life Divine* (Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Publication Department, 2005, pp. 1090–1092).

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man’s ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. . . .

At the same time Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal. The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. . . .

Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life. A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past

which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way.

Back to Gebser:

Epochs of great confusion and general uncertainty in a given world contain the slumbering, not-yet-manifest seeds of clarity and certainty. . . . [T]hese seeds are already pressing toward realization. This means that we are approaching the “zenith” of confusion and are thus nearing the necessary breakthrough. . . . The confusion in the individual’s everyday life, his lack of fulfillment in his work, his isolation in the masses, his powerlessness over against the idle running of anonymity, whether of mechanisms or of bureaucracies — this insecurity and enslavement are only reflections of the general malaise. (531)

Anxiety is always the first sign that a mutation is coming to the end of its expressive and effective possibilities, causing new powers to accumulate which, because they are thwarted, create a “narrows” or constriction. At the culmination point of anxiety these powers liberate themselves, and this liberation is always synonymous with a new mutation. In this sense, anxiety is the great birth-giver. . . . It is no accident that the anxiety orgies of the Renaissance, the dances of death and the doomsday extravagances come to an end precisely when perspective became an effective force through the efforts of Leonardo da Vinci. (134)

Every dead end or lack of recourse is not only an indicator that the course has run out and that a given development has attained its greatest (quantitative!) extent and may at any moment give way to a loss of tension and consequent annihilation. It is also a sign that only a leap, that is, only a mutation, can bring about a solution. Without a doubt we are at such a moment today, not only with respect to the mental structure predominating in us, but also with respect to all the previous structures that make up our integral constitution. (139)

[O]nce, when the mythical structure began to pale, Greek man was faced with a proliferating chaos similar to ours today. The chaos then affected the mythical world which had burst apart, and the threat was a destruction of the psyche. With the aid of directed thinking the Greeks were able to master this chaos. Our chaos today pervades our material-spatial world. . . . The ideas of Plato gave a fixed form to the thought contents of the soul without which the Greeks would never have been able to extricate themselves from soul and myth. This fixation which made the spatial world possible was itself fixed by Leonardo’s perspective. Without it European man would have been lost in space just as the Greeks would have been lost in the soul without the set, idealized points.

Now that this spatial world threatens to come apart because the forces it has unleashed are more powerful than man who realized them, the new capability is being formed in him which is awakened by precisely those seemingly negative powers and forces. Just as *sense-directed thought* — which was able to prevent the Greeks from perishing in the inner world of awakening consciousness (the soul) — was awakened by the ruptured mythical circle, so too could “senseful awaring” be awakened by the bursting spatial world: a [new] “perception” able to sustain us against perishing in the consciously realized external world of matter. . . . [T]he splintered spatial world of our conceptualization is the assurance of the possibility of a space-free aperspectival world. . . . When the Mexicans

in their deficient mythical-magic structure encountered the mentally-oriented Spaniards, the magic-mythical power failed in the face of mental strength; clan consciousness failed in the face of the individualized ego-consciousness. If an integral man were to encounter a deficient mental man, would not deficient material power fail in the face of integral strength? Would not the individual ego-consciousness falter in the face of the Itself-consciousness of mankind? the mental-rational in the face of the spiritual? fragmentation in the face of integrality? (272-273)

Just as we were able to discern an efficient as well as a deficient phase of the magic structure where the one was distinguished by spell-casting, the other by sorcery, so too are we able to discern two such phases in the mental structure; the efficient or *mental* phase and the deficient or *rational* phase which resulted from it. It is the efficient phase which gives this perspectival world its distinctive stamp, which even today is, or at least could be, valid. The European perspectival-rational world represents, in this sense, only the deficient and most likely ultimate phase of the exclusive validity of the mental-rational structure. (74)

The efficient phase of a consciousness structure is primarily qualitative, its subsequent deficient phase predominantly quantitative. The two phases are well characterized by the German word pair *Maß* (measure, moderation) and *Masse* (mass, accumulation, bulk, multitude). Thus “spell-casting still retains the character of moderation, while witchcraft or sorcery is immoderate and unmeasured.” (94)

Leonardo’s development of perspective with its emphatic spatialization of man’s image of the world marks the beginning of the deficient phase of the mental structure. . . . Whereas the Greek world of the classic period is a world of measure and moderation *par excellence*, the late European world and particularly its derivative cultures, the American and the Russian, are worlds of immoderation. (93)

Mutations have always appeared when the prevailing consciousness structure proved to be no longer adequate for mastering the world. This was the case in the last historically accessible mutation which occurred around 500 B.C. and led from the mythical to the mental structure. The psychistic, deficient mythical climate of that time presented a threat, and the sudden onset of the mental structure brought about a decisive transformation. In our day the rationalistic, deficient mental structure presents an equal threat, and the breakthrough into the integral will also bring about a new and decisive mutation. (294)

When spatial consciousness was finally consolidated around 1480-1500 A. D. it was from that time onward liberated for new tasks. Waking, diurnal consciousness had been secured; man had come to an awareness of space; thinking had become feasible. After this achievement modern European man believed that he too, like mythical man once before, had accomplished all that could be accomplished and was content to remain in his state of achievement. But in this case, as before, a decline sets in because of this self-satisfaction, and, beginning with the Renaissance, mental consciousness increases in deficiency and deteriorates into rationalism. This marks the inception of quantification in the newly secured mental consciousness structure, a process we already noted in connection with the deficient epoch of the mythical structure. At the same time, however, the new mutation begins its course which becomes gradually but increasingly visible over the following centuries. This mutation will enter the general awareness at the moment when the deficient attitude reaches its maximum of rational chaos — a moment that we are approaching with finality during the present decades, as should be apparent to everyone. (303)

Here we can discern the tragic aspect of the deficient mental structure. . . : Reason, reversing itself metabolistically to an exaggerated rationalism, becomes a kind of inferior plaything of the psyche, neither noticing nor even suspecting the connection. . . . This negative link to the psyche, usurping the place of the genuine mental relation, destroys the very thing achieved by the authentic relation: the ability to gain insight into the psyche. [For in] every extreme rationalization there is not just a violation of the psyche by the ratio, that is, a negatively magic element, but also the graver danger, graver because of its avenging and incalculable nature: the violation of the ratio by the psyche, where both become deficient. The authentic relation to the psyche, the mental, is perverted into its opposite, to the disadvantage of the ego that has become blind through isolation. In such an instance, man has become isolated and his basic ties have been cut; the moderating, measuring bond of [the efficient mental consciousness] is severed. (97)

5 The concretion of time

The irruption of time into our consciousness: this is the profound and unique event of our historical moment. It presents us with a new theme and a new task, and its realization — which comes about through us — is attended by a wholly new reality of the world: a new intensity and a freer awareness which supplant the confusion that seems to give our world its most characteristic stamp. (283)

Wherever time is able to become “the present,” it is able to render transparent “simultaneously” the timelessness of magic, the temporicity of myth, and the temporality of mind. (181)

The “Present” is not identical with the “moment” but is the undivided presence of yesterday, today, and tomorrow which in a consciously realized actualization can lead to that “presentation” which encompasses origin as an ineradicable present. (294)

The concretion of time is one of the preconditions for the integral structure; only the concrete can be integrated, never the merely abstract. By integration we mean a fully completed and realized wholeness — the bringing about of an *integrum*, i.e., the re-establishment of the inviolate and pristine state of origin by incorporating the wealth of all subsequent achievement. (99)

By granting to magic timelessness, mythical temporicity, and mental-conceptual temporality their integral efficacy, and by living them in accord with the strength of their degree of consciousness, we are able to bring about this realization. This concretion of the previous three exfoliations of original pre-temporality instantaneously opens for us pre-conscious timelessness.

As such, time-freedom is not only the quintessence of time . . . but also the conscious quintessence of all previous temporal forms. Their becoming conscious — in itself a process of concretion — is also a liberation from all of these time forms; everything becomes the present, concrete, and thus integrable. But this implies that preconscious origin becomes conscious present; that each and every time-form basic to the one-, two-, and three-dimensional world is integrated and thereby superseded. (356)

The “aperspectival world” is a “world” whose structure is not only jointly based in the pre-perspectival, unperspectival, and perspectival worlds, but also mutates out of them in its essential properties and possibilities while integrating these worlds and liberating itself from their exclusive validity. (294)

It is not the concern of the present work to show the shaping of the future in “time” since this form of time is at an end. And because time as such is coming to an end and is

being supplanted by time freedom, any temporal projection “forward” is illusory. (296)

The end of philosophy

[T]he qualities of time which are today pressing toward awareness cannot be expressed in mere categorical systems. And so long as they remain inexpressible they cannot effectively enter our awareness. We are compelled, in other words, to find a new form of statement. This not inconsiderable task is further complicated because we must avoid attributing to the new form of statement characteristics which could appear to be “new” but would be in fact merely borrowings from consciousness attitudes already achieved. . . .

And this must be emphasized: the age of systematic philosophy . . . is over. What is necessary today to turn the tide of our situation are not new philosophemes like the phenomenological, ontological, or existential, but *eteologemes*. Eteology must replace philosophy just as philosophy once replaced the myths. . . . Every eteologeme is a “verition,” and as such is valid only when it allows origin to become transparent in the present. (307–309)

[O]ur description does not deal with a new image of the world [*Weltbild*], nor with . . . a new conception of the world [*Weltvorstellung*]. A new image would be no more than the creation of a myth, since all imagery has a predominantly mythical nature . . . and a new conception of the world would be nothing else than yet another rationalistic construction, for conceptualization has an essentially rational and abstract nature. Our concern is with a new reality — a reality functioning and effectual integrally, in which intensity and action, the effective and the effect co-exist; one where origin . . . blossoms forth anew; and one in which the present is all-encompassing and entire. Integral reality is the world’s transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth: a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that transluces [*durchscheint* = shines or shows through] both. (7)

[I]t should be emphasized that perception is not a super-sensory process. Concepts such as intuition and the like are definitely out of place when characterizing it. It is an integral event and, if you will, an integral state of the “itself.” (268)

[T]he itself is on the one hand the central or “deepest” core, the intensity “in” us that is time-free and corresponds with the pre-spatial, pre-temporal presence of origin. It is, on the other hand, this identity of origin itself which pervades and suffuses everything and, if we are able to mutate from the spatio-temporal limitations of the purely ego-centered consciousness, becomes transparent even for us just as the world itself . . . becomes diaphanous. (135–136)

Our way of perceiving the world depends entirely on the nature of our consciousness, for it establishes the boundaries and temporal limits of our world. To the degree that we are able to integrate these boundaries and limits with the help of an *intensification* (and not an expansion) of consciousness, we presentiate the itself. This means at the same time that our *entire constitution becomes proportionately transparent*; and not merely the “part” that is already manifest which we have endeavored to make vivid by our exposition of the individual structures, but also the “part” that is still latent in us which, together with the part already manifest, becomes accessible to integration. (205)

One difficulty which to some will seem insurmountable is the difficulty of “representing” the aperspectival world. This world goes *beyond our conceptualization*. By the same token, the mental world once went beyond the experiential capability of mythical man, and yet this world of the mind became reality. Anyone who objects that the aperspectival world

is, in spatial terms, unimaginable, incomprehensible, impalpable, inconclusive, and unthinkable — and there will be no end to such objections — falls victim to his own limitations of comprehension and to the visual representation imposed by his world. Some will undoubtedly also be irritated by the talk of *arational* possibilities which are not to be confused with the irrational or pre-rational. (267)

A drawing by Picasso

Let us then select and examine from the many new forms of expression a particularly vivid example from the pictorial arts as a first step toward clarifying our intention. During recent decades, both Picasso and Braque have painted several works that have been judged, it would seem, from a standpoint which fails to do them justice. (24)



When we look at this drawing [Pablo Picasso, 1926], we take in at *one* glance the *whole* man, perceiving not just one possible aspect, but simultaneously the front, the side, and the back. In sum, all of the various aspects are present at once. To state it in very general terms, we are spared both the need to walk around the human figure in time, in order to obtain a sequential view of the various aspects, and the need to synthesize or sum up these partial aspects. . . .

In this drawing . . . space and body have become *transparent*. In this sense the drawing is neither unaperspectival, i.e., a two-dimensional rendering of a surface in which the body is imprisoned, nor is it perspectival, i.e., a three-dimensional visual sector cut out of reality that surrounds the figure with breathing space. The drawing is “aperspectival” in our sense of the term; time is no longer spatialized but integrated and concretized as a fourth dimension. By this means it renders the whole visible to insight, a whole which becomes visible only because the previously missing component, time, is expressed in an

intensified and valid form as the present. It is no longer the moment . . . but the *pure present, the quintessence of time* that radiates from this drawing. . . .

[B]oth space and time exist for the perceptual capacities of our body only in the present via presentation. The *presentation* or making present evident in Picasso's drawing was possible only after he was able to actualize, that is, bring to consciousness, all of the temporal structures of the past latent in himself (and in each of us) during the course of his preceding thirty years of painting in a variety of earlier styles. This process was unique and original with Picasso. By drawing on his primitive, magic inheritance (his Negroid period), his mythical heritage (his Hellenistic-archaistic period), and his classicistic, rationally-accentuated formalist phase (his Ingres period), Picasso was able to achieve the concretion of time. (24–26)

One should bear in mind that Gebser spent the years 1937–1939 in a circle which included Picasso.

Comment: Relation of space to time

Although Gebser equates the integral consciousness structure with the consciousness that Sri Aurobindo referred to as “supermind,” there appear to be certain differences. Sri Aurobindo perceived several distinct poises within the supramental consciousness itself. In the primary poise, the self is coextensive with the world, the world is coextensive with the substance that constitutes it, and the substance that constitutes it is one with the self. There is an extension of some kind, but it has neither the quality of space nor the quality of time. Sri Aurobindo⁷ speaks of it as a consciousness that regards “past, present and future in one view, containing and not contained in them, not situated at a particular moment of Time for its point of prospection,” nor “situated at any particular point of Space, but containing all points and regions in itself.” In a secondary poise, consciousness distantiates itself from its content. There now is a distance between the perceiver and the perceived. Concomitantly, the single, non-individuated consciousness of the primary poise adopts a multitude of viewpoints within its content, thereby taking on the aspect of a multitude of situated selves. It is here, in this poise, that the familiar dimensions of space — viewer-centered depth and lateral extent — come into being. In addition to apprehending the content of its consciousness perspectively, from a multitude of spatial locations, the self now apprehends it successively. We can conceive of these two poises one at a time, we can even think of them as complementing each other or as being integral parts of a single, indivisible regard, but it is altogether beyond the powers of mental consciousness to form an adequate concept or image of such a regard.

Picasso's drawing is aperspectival in that it hints at a regard that does not proceed from a single, fixed location. It is true, and trivially so, that by walking around an object one can see it sequentially from different angles, but if a drawing is to overcome the spatialized time of the mental structure and to integrate and concretize time in the present, it should integrate temporal rather than spatial perspectives; i.e., it should integrate past, present and future more directly, for example by depicting a person at different ages rather than from different angles.

⁷ *The Life Divine* (Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Publication Department, 2005, p. 143).

Gebser is well aware of the inadequacy of contemporary attempts to concretize time, i.e., to transform it from a quantitative dimension into a qualitative “amension”.⁸

Until now the attempts with the fourth dimension have all been inadequate and are comparable to those made with the third dimension during the one-hundred-fifty years between Petrarch and Leonardo da Vinci. The inadequacy of these latter attempts is evident in their false, that is, reversed, inverted, and foreshortened perspectivation. (355)

Gebser’s interpretation of Picasso’s drawing is symptomatic of the primacy over space he attributes to time, as when he writes that “space is based on [mental] time just as surface is based on [mythical] temporicity and the spaceless point on [magic] timelessness,” (355) or that time “is a basic constituent of space, . . . its very basis and basic dimension.” (179) Not that there isn’t a certain logic in attributing the first coming to awareness of a quantitative dimension to the breaking of the mythical circle, which according to Gebser marks the emergence of the mental structure. Given the mythical structure’s emphasis on circular time and the mental structure’s emphasis on linear space, there is indeed a sense in which time – the broken mythical circle – forms the basis of space. But it seems to me that Gebser here takes his metaphors too far. Consider, for instance, Petrarch’s epochal experience of spatial depth as *quality*. One might say that, in evolutionary terms, the mythical sense of time paved the way for the mental sense of space, but this falls short of saying that space is *based* on time.

6 The concretion of the spiritual

Once man sought truth; this was achieved over the millennia by philosophy; once man believed truth, and this bond was made possible over the millennia by relegio [the mythical precursor of religion] and later through religion. And wherever we think and believe, those attainments endure. But for those capable of “a-waring” the whole, the true, this “verition” is no longer a philosophical search nor a faith beset by doubts but a discovery without that search which throughout the ages was, as it were, merely the preparation. (543)

[T]here are powers arising from within ourselves that are already at work overcoming the deficiency and dubious nature of our rational ego-consciousness via the new aperspectival awareness whose manifestations are surging forth everywhere. The aperspective consciousness structure is a consciousness of the whole, an integral consciousness encompassing all time and embracing both man’s distant past and his approaching future as a living present. . . . [It] must emerge from its present concealment and latency and become effective, and thereby prepare the transparency of the world and man in which spirituality can manifest itself. (6)

The phenomenon releasing origin is spiritual, and with each consciousness mutation it becomes more realizable by man. With respect to the presently emerging mutation we may speak of a concretion of the spiritual. The word “concretion” here is not to be considered as the antithesis of “abstraction.” . . . Concretion does not mean a transformation of the intangible into something tangible or substantial, but rather the completion of *con-crescere* [growing together, merging], that is, the coalescence of the spiritual with

⁸ “[O]nly time in the form of chronological time or as a geometricized magnitude is strictly speaking a dimension. . . . In the true sense of time freedom . . . the fourth dimension is an *amension*.” (339)

our consciousness. (542)

We have conceded the status of reality to only an extremely limited world, one which is barely one-third of what constitutes us and the world as a whole. The new integral structure, on the other hand, requires us to recognize all “preceding” structures and the irrevocable efficient actualities which they integrate and make perceptible. (359)

Since the spiritual is not bound to the vital [magic], to the psychic [mythical], or to the mental, but rather shines through to us in their efficacy — be it vital, experiential, conceptual, or reflective — a new possibility for perceptual consciousness of the spiritual for the whole of mankind one day had to shine forth. (542)

This new, self-constituting consciousness structure [uncovers] and surpasses the ultimate and most profound antithesis of rationalism between faith and knowledge, religion and science. Not only because it becomes gradually apparent to what an unsettling degree scientific theses themselves often emerge from presuppositions based on belief — even the world of numbers and their laws has a limited validity applicable only to the materialized aspects of our space-time world — but also because antitheses of this kind are not reconcilable with the new consciousness structure. It is in the transparency of faith and knowledge, and not with their aid, that the sphere of Being becomes perceptible in its entire diaphaneity. (529)

This diaphaneity is all-encompassing: it is a transparency of space and time as well as of light, of matter and soul as well as of life and death. (541)

Only in the mental conception are life and death opposites. (199)

The grand and painful path of consciousness emergence, or, more appropriately, the unfolding and intensification of consciousness, manifests itself as an increasingly intense luminescence of the spiritual in man. . . . (542)

[W]e are not by any means propounding a conviction that rests only on belief in some “divine” governance of affairs. Let us merely be content to consider this mutation of consciousness, like those preceding it, as being latent in our endowment, necessarily breaking forth at an organically determined moment and manifesting itself in accord with its intensity and transformative energy in a way that cannot be . . . ignored or overlooked. (346)

The new attitude will be consolidated only when the individual can gradually begin to disregard his ego. . . . Consciousness of self was the characteristic of the mental consciousness structure; freedom from the “I” is the characteristic of the integral consciousness structure. (532)

The undivided, ego-free person who no longer sees parts but realizes the “Itself,” the spiritual form of being of man and the world, perceives the whole, the diaphaneity present “before” all origin which suffuses everything. (543)

Causation, creativity, effectiveness

A true process always occurs in quanta, that is, in leaps; or, expressed in quasi-biological and not physical terms, in mutations. It occurs spontaneously, indeterminately, and, consequently, discontinuously. (37)

The apparent succession of our mutations is less a biological evolution than an “unfolding,” a notion which admits the participation of a spiritual reality in mutation. (41)

[T]his process seems sudden to us only because certain “processes” — to the extent that

we can speak here of processes — seem to take place “outside” spatial and temporal understanding and conceptualization, thus preventing us from making a spatial-temporal cause-and-effect relationship. We know today, however, that origin, being pre-spatial and pre-temporal, presentiates itself in the respective consciousness mutations, intensifying and integrating them. (39)

In creativity, origin is present. Creativity is not bound to space and time, and its truest effect can be found in mutation, the course of which is not continuous in time but rather spontaneous, acausal, and discontinuous. Creativity is a visibly emerging impulse of origin which “is” in turn timeless, or more accurately, before or “above” time and timelessness. And creativity is something that “happens” to us, that fully effects or fulfills itself in us. . . . Creativity appears to be an irrational process, although it is actually arational. (313)

The additional capacity of “verition,” which becomes a reality with the new mutation, is the guarantee that someone who endures the effects and transformations that are manifest in him by four-dimensional integration effects in turn a transformation of events. This is not in the sense that he or she can exercise, say, a new kind of magic power, a new mythical equiposing or polarizing, or a new kind of mental superiority over persons, events, or processes. It is rather that his or her being present is in itself sufficient to effect new exfoliations and new crystallizations which could be nowhere manifest without his or her presence. (300)

For someone able to place the whole ahead of his ego in his daily affairs. . . , for someone able to act out of ego-freedom, the world and even his daily life will become transparent. And when this happens, the events and phenomena of his surroundings will set themselves right. Both the social and the technological systems (which result from an over-emphasized rationality whose deficient emphasis has made them possible) will restructure themselves since they are incongruous with the new mode of realization and its restructuring of the world. (532)

[T]o the extent that the machine is an objectivation or an externalization of man’s own capabilities, it is in psychological terms a projection. We have already spoken of the decisive role of projection in the emergence of consciousness: it is only because of these projections, which render externally visible the powers lying dormant within man, that he is able, or more precisely, that it is possible for him to become aware of this intrinsic potentiality which is capable of being comprehended and directed.

All “making,” whether in the form of spell-casting or of the reasoned technical construction of a machine, is an externalization of inner powers or conditions and as such their visible, outward form. . . .

This consideration also points up the limits of technology, for technology is definitely unable to bestow on man the omnipotence which he imagines himself to have. On the contrary, technology necessarily leads to an “omni-impotence” to the extent that the process of physical projection is not realized. It is, for example, a requirement of a projection that it not be left without temporal limits; it must be integrated. But such integration is possible only if the projection is retracted, and retraction can be realized only out of a new consciousness structure. Psychic projections can be undone only by conscious mental understanding. Does this perhaps suggest that material-physical projections can be resolved through the integrating spiritual capacity of diaphany? (132–133)

7 The Mother's experience

There is a prodigious document — *Mother's Agenda 1951-1973* (13 volumes; Ottawa, Canada: Institute for Evolutionary Research) — in which the Mother's pioneering experience of supramental transformation (to use the terminology of Sri Aurobindo) is recorded.⁹ What follows exemplifies the remarkable correspondences between her experience and Gebser's conception of the integral consciousness structure. On November 17th, 1971, she stated:

It's as if the consciousness were no longer in the same position with respect to things, so they appear totally different. The ordinary human consciousness, even the broadest, always occupies the center position, and things exist in relation to that center: in the human consciousness, you are in one point, and everything exists in relation to that point of consciousness. But now, the point is no longer there! So things exist in themselves. . . . My consciousness is within things; it isn't something that "receives."

One could hardly wish for a better description of the consciousness Gebser characterized as "aperspectival." Earlier, on August 31st, 1963, she remarked:

Before, each thing was separate, divided, unconnected with others, and very superficial. . . . It doesn't feel like that anymore. It mainly gives a feeling of intimacy, that is to say, there is no distance, no difference, no "something which sees" and "something which is seen."

The aperspectival consciousness is also acausal. As quoted earlier, its

"processes" — to the extent that we can speak here of processes — seem to take place "outside" spatial and temporal understanding and conceptualization, thus preventing us from making a spatial-temporal cause-and-effect relationship. (39)

Creativity is not bound to space and time. . . . Creativity is a visibly emerging impulse of origin which "is" in turn timeless, or more accurately, before or "above" time and timelessness. . . . Creativity appears to be an irrational process, although it is actually arational. (313)

Gebser further observed that

The very act of setting aims or purposes emphasizes the negative effect of [the] deficient forms of the magic and mental structures; every set purpose is always charged with might and is, moreover, emphatically self-serving. Thus it is the very antithesis of the wholeness of the world. (94)

⁹ The Mother — born Mirra Alfassa in Paris in 1878 — had many inner experiences from early childhood on. In her twenties she studied occultism in Algeria with Max Theon ♀ and his English wife Alma, a highly developed medium. After her return to Paris she heard of Sri Aurobindo from her friend Alexandra David-Neel ♀, who had visited him in Pondicherry in 1912. In 1914 she traveled to Pondicherry and met him in person. There, she immediately recognized him as the mentor she had encountered in earlier visions, and knew that her future work was at his side. Sri Aurobindo in turn saw in her a powerful embodiment of the Divine Creative Force, in India traditionally known and approached simply as "The Mother." In 1926, when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from outer contacts, she assumed charge of both the spiritual development and the physical wellbeing of his growing group of disciples. In 1952 she created the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education — which also publishes this journal — and in 1968 she founded the international township project of Auroville ♀.

What is effected can be understood systematically, but the power to effect cannot. . . . We should also avoid the error of placing the “effected” into a causal relationship with the “effecting.” (285)

The new world reality . . . is to a great extent free of causality. (358)

Here are some corresponding passages from *Mother’s Agenda*:

What I mean by Oneness is that you can’t distinguish between conceiving the action, the will to act, the action itself, and the result. . . . All is one, simultaneous. But how? It can’t be explained — it simply can’t! You can get a glimpse of the experience, but . . . ultimately, it’s inexpressible. (6 October 1962)

Our habitual state of consciousness is to do something FOR something. . . . There used to be a kind of mainspring, which had its *raison d’être* and so persisted: do this to arrive at that, and this leads to that (it’s more subtle, of course); but this mainspring suddenly seems to have been abolished. Now a kind of absoluteness prevails at each and every second, in each movement, from the most subtle, the most spiritual, to the most material. The sense of linking has disappeared: that isn’t the “cause” of this, and this isn’t done “for” that; there is no “there” one is heading towards — it all seems . . . an absolute — innumerable, perpetual and simultaneous. The sense of connection has gone, the sense of cause and effect has gone — all that belongs to the world of space and time. (25 April 1961)

I have a feeling that to have access to the highest and purest power, the very notion of “result” must disappear completely — the Supreme Power has no sense of result at all. . . . The idea of something behind or ahead in time and so on is . . . it’s rather a Truth changing from immutable Eternity into Eternity of manifestation. (31 August 1962)

Gebser went so far as to “surmise that the physical structure of man is changing and not just his spiritual structure, and that there is a similar mutation taking place.” (335) The transformation of the Mother’s *physical structure* was, in fact, the central theme of her *Agenda*.

If it were a matter of stopping one thing and starting another, it could be done fairly quickly. But keeping a body alive, making sure it continues to function, while at the same time pursuing a new functioning and a transformation . . . that makes a kind of very difficult combination to realize. (6 October 1962)

It’s no longer the heart that must pump the blood, it’s no longer the stomach that must digest the food — the whole functioning has to be changed completely. And every single one of these cells tries to make sure that everything should work as usual! (9 January 1963)

All the automatic habits of millenniums must be changed into a conscious action directly guided by the supreme Consciousness. (22 January 1966)

Every time the rule or domination of Nature’s ordinary laws is replaced at one point or another by the authority of the divine Consciousness, that creates a state of transition that has every appearance of a frightful disorder and a very great danger. (3 February 1968)

Suddenly the body finds itself outside of all habits, all actions, reactions, consequences, etc.; and that’s . . . (the Mother opens her eyes in wonder), then it goes away. It’s so new for the material consciousness that, for a minute, it panics. (20 May 1970)

The education of the physical consciousness (not the body’s global consciousness, but

the consciousness of the cells) consists in teaching them, first, that there is a choice: . . . to choose the divine Presence, the divine Consciousness, the divine Power (all this without words). . . . It is a choice of every second between Nature's old laws, together with some mental influence and the whole life such as it is organized — a choice between that, the rule of that, and the rule of the supreme Consciousness. . . . And it's every second of the day (it's infinitely interesting), with practical examples — for instance, the nerves: If a nerve obeys this or that law of nature, together with the mental conclusions and all that — all that machinery — then the pain starts up; but if it obeys the influence of the supreme Consciousness, then a curious thing happens: it isn't like something getting "cured"; rather, it's as if it disappeared as a sort of unreality. (26 June 1968)

Compare with Gebser:

Just as the supersession of mythical temporicity by mental time was an end of the world — of the mythical world that had become deficient — it is today a question of the end of the mental world which has become deficient. (297)

It is indeed a matter of substituting one world for another. This shouldn't be too surprising, given that the structure of our experiential world — the only one we know — depends on the structure of our consciousness. According to the Mother,

[w]hat we call "concrete," a "concrete reality" — yes, what gives you the sense of a "real" existence — that particular sensation has to disappear and be replaced by. . . . It's beyond words. . . . It's all-light, all-power, all intensity of love at the same time, and a fullness! It is so full that nothing else can exist beside that. And when "that" is here, in the body, in the cells, it's enough to direct "it" onto someone or something, and everything falls immediately into place. So, in ordinary terms, it "heals": the illness is cured. No! it doesn't cure it: it cancels it! That's it, the illness is made unreal. . . . For it isn't the action of a "higher force" through matter, into others: it's a direct action, from matter to matter. What people usually call "healing power" is a great mental or vital power imposing itself despite the resistance of matter — that's not at all the case here! It is the contagion of a vibration. So it's irrevocable. (12 July 1967)

With a certain attitude, everything becomes divine. Everything. And what is so wonderful is that when one has the experience that everything becomes divine, all that is contrary quite naturally disappears — quickly or slowly, at once or gradually. It means that becoming conscious that all is divine is the best means of rendering everything divine — you understand — of annulling the oppositions. (16 October 1971)

The consciousness is on the way to where it is at once the vision of what should be and the capacity of realizing it. (30 October 1971)

For a moment, all of a sudden, I saw how . . . the Divine sees the world. . . . You can't describe how wonderful it is. . . . Naturally, this must begin with the consciousness, and then, gradually, the things will become such, that is to say be aware of themselves in the same way, as the Divine is aware of them. (27 November 1971)

In other words, evil does not merely cease to look evil; it ceases to exist. And yet it is a "mere" change of consciousness that will effect this "objective" change. Let's again recall Gebser:

The additional capacity of "verition," which becomes a reality with the new mutation, is the guarantee that someone who endures the effects and transformations that are manifest in him by four-dimensional integration effects in turn a transformation of events. This is not in the sense that he or she can exercise, say, a new kind of magic power, a

new mythical equiposing or polarizing, or a new kind of mental superiority over persons, events, or processes. It is rather that his or her being present is in itself sufficient to effect new exfoliations and new crystallizations which could be nowhere manifest without his or her presence. (300)

For someone able to place the whole ahead of his ego in his daily affairs. . . , for someone able to act out of ego-freedom, the world and even his daily life will become transparent. And when this happens, the events and phenomena of his surroundings will set themselves right. (532)