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Art and The Ever Present Origin

BA (Hons) Fine Art

2020 - 2021

Submission declaration:

Art and The Ever Present Origin

Submitted by Alexandra Brown to Plymouth College of Art as a research project towards the degree of BA (Hons) Fine Art 2020-2021. I certify that all material in this research project which is not my own work has been identified and that the final word count from introduction through to conclusion is 7012 words.

Abstract:

'Resonance is not created like an act of will; it is experienced autonomously, the stirring of 'like to like', the thrum of the tuning fork inside us.'

- James Hollis

'In creativity, Origin is present'

Jen Gebser

This paper examines Jean Gebser's theories on the structures of consciousness as outlined in his defining work 'The Ever Present Origin' and poses the question, is an evolutionary leap in our consciousness imminent? As artists living a time of intensified societal angst and division, how might we work to assist in an unfolding integral consciousness, in which 'the divided human being is replaced by the whole human being'? (Gebser, *EPO*).

Referencing Gottfried Richter's *Art and Human Consciousness* (1901) to examine how historical changes in the approach to artistic endeavour parallel Gebser's theories and examining the stages of unfolding human consciousness to more fully comprehend what is meant by integral consciousness so that we might participate in its emergence.

Exploring also how participatory art may indicate a movement towards a universal ecological perspective, indicative of the integral, such as that discussed in Mel Alexenberg's 'The Future of Art in a Digital Age.'

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to my parents, Jane and Ian, my son, Oscar, Sophia, Patrick, Vincent and Cornelius. Also to the Concord Institute for introducing me to 'The Ever Present Origin'

'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them' -Albert Einstein

Introduction:

The essay aims to give an overview of the theory of unfolding human consciousness as outlined in 1949 by Jean Gebser in his work the *Ever-Present Origin* and to provide evidence in the form of artistic, scientific, and cultural developments that support his theory. The purpose of which being to more fully understand what is meant by Integral consciousness and speculate as to whether, as Gebser purports, we are on the verge of its emergence.

Citing scholars Jeremy Johnson and Ed Mahood who have both written extensively on Gebser and his theories in chapter one, this paper will explain Gebser's theory and provide a brief analysis of each structure of consciousness.

Later in chapter one, this paper will outline the transformation of consciousness, citing examples that evidence the qualities of each phase of consciousness as expressed through the lens of Western art history, in particular Gottfried Richter's *Art and Human Consciousness* (1982) and the essays of art lecturer at the California Institute of Integral Studies, Allan Coombs.

In conjunction, reference will be made to significant cultural and scientific developments that further support Gebser's argument and assist in a more holistic comprehension of the stages of unfolding

human consciousness as they relate to humanity's developing awareness of space and time. Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* is referenced. The intention here is to assist the reader in understanding what is meant by 'aperspectival' and integral consciousness, a key feature of this phase being the supercession of an outlived structure and the re-integration of the efficient qualities of all preceding consciousness structures.

Both Gebser and Richter describe consciousness as originating in non-differentiated unity; devoid of self-concept, humans experienced an unconscious oneness. At some point individuation occurs, giving rise to dualism until gravitating towards conscious awareness and intentional unity (Brown, 2018, p10). In *Art and the Evolution of Consciousness*, Zachary Brown argues that evidence of their theories is made tangible in the history of art, with help from which 'we can look at the art of our time to become aware of our place in the evolution of our consciousness.' This essay seeks to evidence a movement through individuation towards integration. The work of Hilma af Klint, whose symbolic and pioneering abstract works explicitly depict this narrative, will be studied at the end of Chapter one.

Chapter three will explore a theory of the sublime in art as a possible evolutionary catalyst as discussed by Shelli Renee Joye from the California Institute of Integral Studies in her Thesis *Integral aesthetics: The evolutionary function of the Sublime*.

Chapter four will explain further what is meant by the ecological perspective reflected in contemporary discoveries in the quantum science theories of David Bohm as reflected by participation in art. Is this evidence we are due a shift in consciousness? Will this be the unfolding of integral consciousness?

Chapter One: The Structures of Consciousness: Archaic, Magic, Mythic, Mental-Rational

This chapter will firstly give an overview of Gebser's 'The Ever-Present Origin,' going on to look at each individual structure of consciousness citing artistic, scientific, and cultural landmarks that help illustrate the movement of human consciousness.

Gebser's theory explains four mutations or quantum-like surges of consciousness that have occurred throughout human history and identifies these phases as the Archaic, Magic, Mythic, Mental-Rational, and Integral structures. The names reflect phases of development that are not distinct and unrelated to one another but are, instead, interconnected such that all previous stages are found in subsequent ones. (Mahood, 2020) An aspect of integral awareness is the conscious presentation, or "making present", of all structures.

The mutations fall into three categories;- Unperspectival, Perspectival, and Aperspectival. These terms are not to be understood as an extension solely of concepts used in art history, but as an organising principle for the field of consciousness. (Bougeault, 2016) 'Aperspectival' is the category pertaining to Integral consciousness, the prefix 'A' here implies liberation from confinement.

These mutations are not just changes in perspective 'they are not just paradigm shifts; rather, they are fundamentally different ways of engaging with and experiencing reality,' writes Mahood in his essay *The Primordial Leap and the Present: An overview of the work of Jean Gebser*. As implied by their given names, the mythic structure gives rise to the mythological perspective, the mental-rational to logic and the integral to ecological perspective, which I will explain further in Chapter 3.

The succession of our four mutations is less a biological evolution than 'an unfolding' like that of a flower, which from seed, grows, blooms and bears fruit;- 'each in its own time and each containing its own irreplaceable, unsurpassable, eternal value.' (Gebser,1985) This process is termed by Gebser as substantiation and the efficient phase. The flower then withers and eventually dies, (referred to as destanciation and the deficient phase) but as it combusts, seeding, becomes compost, fertilises the earth, from which the seeds grow once again;- a new incarnation that contains the efficient essence of that which came before.

Key to this understanding, Jeremy Johnson in his book *Seeing Through the World* urges us to note;- 'is not mere intellectual comprehension alone, but a form of spiritual *clarity*...a recognition of wholeness, a-*waring* of past, present and future. The integral is an intensification of originary presence in the human person.'

'Integral consciousness thus grows up by reaching down,' states Steve McIntosh author of *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution*, 'It ... fully recognizes the legitimacy and evolutionary necessity of all previous stages of development' and 'produces evolution more effectively because it understands evolution more thoroughly.' The extent of our transcendence, therefore, is determined by the scope of our inclusion, as we gain a better understanding of evolution's subtle methods, growing from within itself, building on what came before (McIntosh, 2007) For this reason it is necessary now to go into more detail concerning each of the specified structures.

Archaic

In the cavernous expanse that Gebser refers to as the archaic structure of consciousness, man exists in unconscious unity with creation in 'dreamless sleep,' (Gebser,1984). Gebser cites a description by historian Richard Willhelm who notes that early Chinese chromatic symbolism had not yet even differentiated blue and green, or earth and sky.

A pre-personal, pre-language time, humanity has no self-concept from which to form a perspective. Gebser categorises this period as Unperspectival. Mahood describes this structure as 'Zero dimensional', 'a world devoid of any perspectivity at all.' It is difficult to conceive of this structure through the lens of our current paradigm, but a vision of the void is perhaps graspable. This is the time of non-differentiated unity that might also be likened to our early infancy before we develop memory. Brown cites Owen Barfield (1988) who observes that 'the material world was indistinguishable from the immaterial world within, and both were involuntarily perceived and related to'.

It is this 'involuntary' aspect that is key in distinguishing this type of oneness consciousness to the awareness of integral consciousness, which is entered through 'conscious effort' (Gebser, 1949) In retrieving the efficient aspect of the absolute consciousness associated with this structure necessary for unfolding Integral consciousness; Joseph Campbell in *Creative Mythology* states that 'buried like a treasure in the darkness' the aim of wisdom is to bring waking consciousness through dream realisations.

Magic

The magical structure beginning roughly 50,000 to 100,000 years ago is characterised by a sense of spacelessness and timelessness and the idea of space and time as illusion. Events, objects, and people are all magically connected. Like a toddler, humans are beginning to recognise themselves as an entity distinct from those around,

but are not fully aware of who they are or what their position in the world is. (Mahood, 2020) The earliest human art seems to come from this period, (Coombs, 2014) in the form of hand prints, suggesting the inception of a self awareness that anticipates the development of identity.



Fig.1 Negative handprint of disfigured hand from Chamber II, Gargas Cave, Pyrenees (25,000 BCE)

Just as memory for a child serves as a function to build a rational conception of their environment, the primitive was able to create the rudiments of cognition by recognising, memorising and realising conception. (Read, 1954)



Fig 2. Chauvet Cave painting

The ability to memorise enables early artists to depict animals and narrative based cave murals, signifying a development in cognitive abilities. The rise of ritual marks the inception of abstract thinking, a necessary precursor to conceptualisation and enabling the possibility for future scientific endeavour.

Mythic

Humans discover the rhythmic recurrence of natural events and establish an awareness of their inner thoughts on those events. Mythologies offer consciousness coherence. (Gebser, 1985) Events, artefacts, and people are woven together in stories and myth becomes the primary form of expression, much of which is concerned with the conception of humans as being separate from God or nature and an acceptance of polarities. In an ancient Sumerian poem, 'The Song of the Hoe,' the god Enlil is described as the deity who separates heavens and earth and creates humankind. (Appendix 1)

Macrocosmic Gods and Goddesses, alive and present, acted through the individual, this is reflected in artistic depictions where the body is 'inhabited by gods' indicating the emerging awareness of possessing a 'soul'. (Richter, 1985, p 176)



Fig 3.

For Gebser, the circle symbolises cyclical time to represent the "two-dimensional" mythical structure. Perspective in art production is two dimensional and representational;- animals are depicted realistically, but human bodies are stylised and this remained the case for almost the entire 3000 years of the Egyptian Civilisation.

Mental

The earliest school of scientific cosmology was the early Greek 'Milesian' school in the sixth century B.C, where we derive the term 'physics', from the Greek word 'physis' which once meant the endeavour of seeing the essential nature of things. (Capra, 1975,p24) Science, philosophy and religion were not considered separate and all forms of existence, both animate and inanimate were considered as endowed with life and spirituality. The most prominent philosopher of his time, Heraclitus of Ephesus, believed in a world of perpetual change and of eternal 'becoming' (Capra, 1975, p25). This is an indication of the ecological perspective in the roots of western civilisation, but this did not remain the case. Heraclitus was challenged by Parmenides of Elea, whose philosophy has been explained with the slogan 'whatever is is, and what is not cannot be'; the inception of absolutism. He considered change to be impossible and existence to be timeless, uniform, and necessary. This caused a divide amongst thinkers and led to the Greek atomists drawing a clear line between spirit and matter (Capra, 1975, p27). This distinction is a precursor to the 17th century Cartesian divide that informs the Newtonian mechanistic worldview that peaks at the pinnacle of the Mental-rational structure.

It was the Greeks who would harbour an early form of established individuation, but only for the notable and powerful (Johnson, 2019) who are still closely associated with having some element of divinity. This is surprisingly still prevalent in modern day monarchical institutions.

In sculptural depictions, the proportions of the arms, legs, and torso were calculated with statistical precision to match the current theories of the 'ideal dimensions of the body' (Coombs,2014). The body is experienced 'in itself as an art work of the gods' (Richter, 1985, p176).

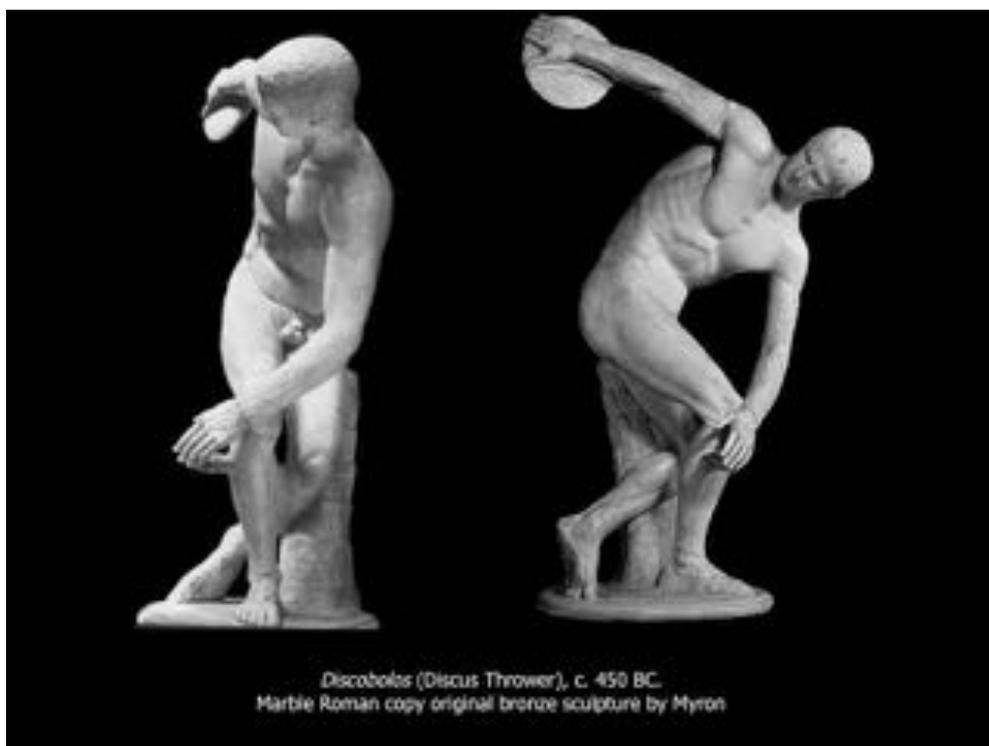


Fig 4

With the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid and of course Pythagorus, the mental structure is fully inaugurated, coinciding with the discovery of causality (Mahood, 2020).

'Despite, or indeed because of Euclidean geometry, there is no evidence of an awareness of qualitative and objectified space in early antiquity or in the epoch preceding the Renaissance' (Gebser, 1984, p16) Although it would take centuries to adequately devitalize and demythologize the word, once a force (magic) and later an image (myth), so that it could express distinct concepts without the use of imagery for rationalistic extremes. (Gebser, 1984, p83)

The mental structure is 'three-dimensional' in its most efficient form and is represented for Gebser by a triangle which depicts a 'trinity' of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis;- the base of the triangle with its two points lying in opposition are unified at the point of synthesis. (Gebser 1985, p87) Art, science and morals are established as separate cultural value spheres. Abstraction becomes a key term for explaining mental activity in this structure and with abstraction comes philosophy, now the primary form of expression.



Fig 4. The School of Athens, Italian Renaissance artist Raphael, painted between 1509 and 1511

Mel Alexenberg in *The Future of Art in a Digital Age: From Hellenistic to Hebraic Consciousness*, explains that 'the single point perspective in Renaissance paintings gives the illusion of a three-dimensional space, receding into the picture.' The sense of standing at one point in relation to an object of art and seeing

its content from an exact position was an entirely new aspect of the human experience. 'It was an awakening to a new dimension of vision and of reality which was consciously celebrated in much Renaissance art' (Coombs, 2014, p6). No people are placed in front of the stage leaving space for the viewer to stand outside the painting looking in. 'Besides illuminating space,' Gebser explains, 'perspective brings it to man's awareness and lends man his own visibility of himself' as a separate entity (Gebser, 1985,p18).

In early empirical science where the same outsider perspective is also the guiding principle, instrumental reason replaces philosophy. The mental-rational structure is known for its expression of absolutes. 'Everything is nothing but matter – atoms,' extreme materialism asserts. This is the inception of reductionism, which both Gebser and Capra agree, leads to an increase in societal Angst and disharmony caused by feelings of isolation and the dissatisfaction of modernity associated with egocentricity, which shall be discussed in more depth further in this chapter. Gebser explains that the distance created, inherent of perspecitivisation, not just in art but throughout western thought, is deficient in that it includes a reduction, and therefore 'the whole cannot be approached.' (Gebser, 1991, p18)

The mental-rational structure may be summed up in Descartes' statement, made at the peak of the scientific revolution in 1637, 'Cogito ergo sum - I think therefore I exist'. The sentiment has led Westerners 'to equate their identity with their mind, instead of with their whole organism' (Capra, 1975, p28)

Descartes' philosophy introduced a brutal division between subject and object, between the thinking mind and the mechanical world, termed the Cartesian Divide. This features a division between the material world or 'objective reality' on one side, which values empirical scientific methods above all else, whilst on the opposing side, the humanities, freed from the objective world, developed according to cultural principles that 'accentuated human freedom

and genius' (Moynihan, 2018). Placed beside Descartes, the physical world had acquired a new objectivity and the subjective self; 'a recently discovered, separated, inner reality' (Coombs, 2014)

During the Age of Reason, also referred to as 'The Enlightenment' in the seventeenth century, materialistic science gained widespread acceptance among European intellectuals. Technological advances, for the first time, allowed observations of microscopic worlds and distant stars. Sir Isaac Newton (1642 - 1726) was able to demonstrate that the natural world was 'amenable to observations and experiment' (c1704) by conducting solely logical and mathematical investigations (Porter, *Enlightenment*, p142). This new empirical understanding seemed to demystify nature and influenced a sense of hubris that humanity was greater than and able to possess absolute control over it.

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55), a founder of existentialism breaks down his theory on Angst into four fundamental concepts: individualism, freedom, sin, and faith. Individualism alludes to the illusion of separation as he wrote in *The Concept of Anxiety*, 1844: 'the human being is individuum and, as such, at one and the same time itself and the whole human race, so that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race.' Freedom here is associated with modernity, whereas in previous ages, such as in mythic consciousness, one's fate previously might have been explained as the will of the gods, but is now considered the individual's personal responsibility, leading to a great sense of pressure and anxiety. Sin, in this instance, is the potential in all human beings to engage in unethical or harmful behavior and finally, faith is one's ability to maintain 'the inner certainty that anticipates infinity' (Clark, 2020).

Jack C. Plimpton (2020) in his thesis *Rational thinking is not Enough*, explains how Gebser adjusts Keirkegaard's notion of Angst as symbolic of a consciousness structure that has outlived itself.

'Anxiety' writes Gebser 'is always the first sign that a mutation is coming to the end of its expressive and effective possibilities.' High levels of communal Angst are 'caused by many factors such as modernity's...fixation yet powerlessness against time.' (Plimpton, 2020)

Gebser explains that the culmination point of anxiety acts as a catalyst for liberation from constriction, and an ensuing 'mutation' (Johnson, 2019). 'In this sense anxiety is the great birth giver' (Gebser, 1984, p134)

Thus it seems there are definite stages which mark an increase of mental awareness, of inward intensification, directly attributable to the aesthetic faculty, signifying an unfolding of consciousness. Events including the implementation of ritual, the birth of philosophy and sciences and many more specific events, such as the realisation of an ideal type of humanity in Greek art; all these stages in the evolution of humankind are due to refinements of perception involving a transformation of awareness of perspective that support Gebser's theory. Observable also from the precipice of integral consciousness is the deficiency of the mental structure's temporal inclination to fragmentation. Bohm in agreement with Capra considers the perception that all these fragments are separate is really an illusion leading to 'endless conflict and confusion' (Bohm, 2004).

'To sum up a very complex process, the achievement of human autonomy has been paid for by the experience of human alienation' (Tarnas, 20016, p17)

Chapter Two: Messengers of the Integral

Spanning the late 18th and 19th centuries, the art, literature, music and philosophy of the Romantics sought to challenge the status quo by opposing its cerebral rationale, that in contrast to intuitive feeling, had culturally manifested in vast economic and social disparity. The rise in popularity of an absolutist mindset regarding what constitutes right and wrong, true and false among those in positions of power and governance, French philosopher Foucault speculates, led to barbaric social policies (Porter, 2001).

The attitude of the U.K governing bodies can be summed up in a statement made by a prominent and acclaimed writer of the time, Norman Pearson who said that 'Poor people are made of inferior material... and cannot be improved.' Besides the workhouses there was no provision for the great many people living in poverty.



Fig 5. Victorian Workhouse

The Romantics were inspired by a desire for liberty, and they denounced the exploitation of the poor. They promoted 'integration and wholeness' (Breckman, 2015, p1) also a leading theme for

Gebser, who employs these exact terms. (Gebser, 1949, p273) Often referred to as 'The Father of Romanticism,' in 1762 Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract* declared: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.'

In agreement with Gebser, Rousseau was among one of the first to perceive, 'the basic structural deficiencies of the Enlightenment and to suggest the existence of a fundamental tension between its principal goals and human well-being' (Garrard 1994, pp. 97-120) Furthermore, he stressed the importance of 'intuitive feeling and sentiment over reason' (Breckman, 2015, p1).

The Romantics also sought the sublime, a term defined as 'a greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation'. 'The sublime marks the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits,' writes Phillip Shaw in his 2006 paper entitled 'The sublime.' I shall explore the sublime as a possible catalyst for expanding consciousness in chapter three.

A growing disillusionment with the Newtonian mechanistic and reductive worldview spawned a new appreciation of spirituality, which was articulated in a re-evaluation of nature's influence in sublime art that sought to reacquaint nature, people and divinity.



Fig 6. The monk and the Sea, Caspar David Friedrich, 1808-10, Oil on Canvas

German Romantic landscape painter, Caspar David Friedrich (1774 - 1840) in his brooding work 'The monk and the Sea' which features a small figure against a dark and seemingly infinite sky articulates Gebser's sense of the 'unknowable void'.



Fig 7. Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, Caspar David Friedrich, c1818, oil on canvas
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanderer_above_the_Sea_of_Fog)

This piece entitled 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog' offers a subjective and emotional response to nature and speaks to feelings of the sublime. It shows a young man stood high above a landscape and has the viewer placed behind the subject in the painting, witnessing and sharing in his contemplation of the vast unknown before him.

The cartesian divide forced art into a more subject role, which in merging with romantic ideals greatly influenced new approaches to subjective art. The 'decentred unbound subjectivity' (Boucher, 2021, p3) of the Frankfurt School founded in 1918, focused on two approaches; art as an anticipation of human and social wholeness and art as critical self-reflection or 'totality' and 'reflexivity.' 'For the first time man enters into the interior space within himself, finds himself there and awakes...he begins to create out of himself.' (Gebser, 1985, p176)

'A new psychic awareness of space' is emerging, proclaims Gebser (Gebser, 1985, p176). The body is now 'inhabited by man' where 'the stirring and inner tension of the individual are the very essence of the experience.' (Richter, 1982, p 176)

The collapse of boundaries between inner and outer laid the foundations for the philosophy of immanence in the 20th century as proliferated by the likes of Giordano Bruno who insisted that the universe is infinite and could have no 'center' and Spinoza, who's fundamental philosophy was the unity of all existence; both stances that would later be proclaimed by new discoveries in quantum sciences and experienced by the ecological perspective, discussed in chapter four.



Fig 8. Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Saules au Bord de l'Yerres*, 1876.

The impressionists painted with spontaneity. There is a sense of liberty inherent in these works; a palpable transcendence. There is an innate dreamlike quality reminiscent of the waking dream state of the magical structure that Joseph Campbell spoke of as the 'goal of wisdom.' (Campbell, 1968, p653) Capturing the ephemeral effects of light and movement, their paintings are a patchwork of sensory information, presenting 'a closer approximation to the visual world around us,' because 'objects are not crisply delineated 'things,' but are merely elements within a wider fabric that is the landscape' (Morrell, 2004).



Fig 9. The judgement of Paris, Paul Cezanne 1862-64

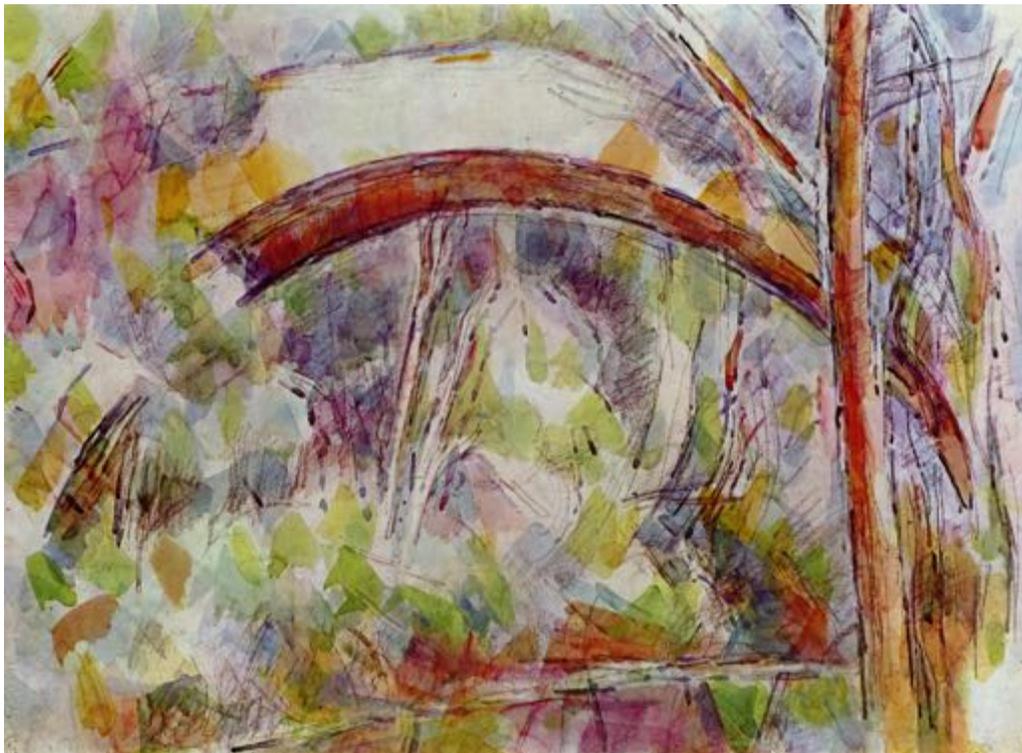


Fig 10. The Bridge of Trois-sautets (le Pont Des Trois-sautets), Paul Cézanne, 1906

'Instead of the precise, mathematical, scientific view of 'things' we see a mass of blurred and fleeting colours that blend into each other and form an impression of the world, upon which our eyes can

rest and explore and so find things in due course, after much looking and exploring' writes Peter Morell in his 2004 essay *Art as Phenomenology: Some Reflections on Impressionism and its Progeny*. Impressionism required a new way of 'active' seeing from the viewer.

Gebser hails Cezanne for his supersession of three dimensional reality quoting Fritz Novotny in his study 'Cezanne and the End of Scientific Perspective,' (1938) who says that within Cezanne's painting, scientific and spatial 'perspective in the old sense is dead.' Cezanne initiates the possibility of 'multiple viewpoints' (Novotny, 1938, p36) within the same painting, a process continued towards the end of the 1880s by artists such as Van Gogh and Gauguin and realised by the cubists (Gebser,1984, p475).

From 1908, Metzinger transcended the single point view, experimenting with a multiple perspective approach that would soon become known as Cubism. The earliest artists of cubist influence include Picasso, Braque, Robert Delaunay and Marcel Duchamp. Though their styles differ, there is a shared expression of four-dimensional space by showing simultaneous perspectives that 'suggest that there is no there because it is all here' (Schinckus, 2016).



Fig 11. Jean Metzinger - *La Femme au Cheval* (Woman with a Horse), 1911-12. Oil on canvas, 162 cm × 130.5 cm (63.8 in × 51.2 in). Statens Museum for Kunst

In 1913 Neils Bohr's remodelling of the atom paved the way for quantum physics, which for the most part deals with subatomic realities. For inspiration, Bohr had the above featured Metzinger painting hung in his workplace, where he realised that an electron could be both wave and particle simultaneously. Bohr maintained that the form electron paths took depended on how you looked at them. Their very nature is a consequence of our observations. Electrons it seems then, behave like a blur of impressionist

brushstrokes that only make sense once you stare at them long enough. It is widely discussed that the representation of simultaneity made by cubism had a great influence on Bohr's discovery (Clarke, 2014).

In contrast to theories from Euclidean geometry and empirical sciences, Bohr proclaimed that 'isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems.' This is furthered in the work of Bohm who coined the term 'holomovement' to describe his holographic universe theory that reveals an inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe as our fundamental reality (Bohm, 1996). It shows we cannot effectively fragment the world into independently existing smallest units and that to deny any part is to impoverish the whole. Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics* states that 'the belief that all these fragments - in ourselves, in our environment and in our society - are really separate can be seen as the essential reason for the present series of social, ecological and cultural crises.'



Fig 12. Pablo Picasso, Drawing (1926) 31 x46.7

Picasso's artistic approach is one of wholeness. The above drawing illuminates a figure from all sides simultaneously. Gebser asserts that Picasso's drawings are aperspectival in that they seek to transcend the mental structure's view of spatialized time, achieving the integration of time as present. This is indicative of the integral, as 'wherever time is able to become the present, it is able to simultaneously render transparent the timelessness of magic, the temporicity of myth, and the temporality of mind.' (Gebser p181)

At roughly the same time, in Germany, Kandinsky puts forth a case for a new approach of line, colour and form in his defining work,

Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1914). He argued that this method would reflect the artist's awareness of their own inner depths in relation to the universe;- Symbolism and Abstraction arise, giving form to the ineffable, seeing the unseen.

'Abstraction lays out a plane of composition' writes Peter Dallow (2006) in his essay *The virtually new: art, consciousness and form*, 'It offers a finite composite sensation as though opening into a plane of infinity, making perceptible 'the imperceptible forces that populate the world,'; 'the zen influenced way of showing as little as possible (minimalism) to allude to everything.'

An exhibition entitled 'Painting the Unseen' at the Serpentine Gallery in 2016 featured the largest exhibited collection of the work of the true pioneer of abstraction;- Hilma af Klint, (1862-1944). Though this title was attributed to Kandinsky, af Klint was truly the first. Due to a dominant patriarchal ideology that refutes the achievements of women, her work was disregarded until 40 years after her death. It must be noted Gebser states that the dissolution of the patriarchy is also a characteristic of integral consciousness (Gebser, 1984,p262)

Driven by a connection via psychic automatism to channel the message from 'High Masters' that 'The origin of everything is the eternal All that is boundless love and infinite consciousness.' (Kleveland) Truly an integral artist, she believed that looking at her paintings would alter the viewers' consciousness through the communication of universal truth and knowledge that is buried deep in our subconscious to guide humanity in a return to oneness. Johnson explains that for Gebser the shift from perspectival to aperspectival consciousness can be described as a 'Leap of thinking style from pyramidal linearity to spherical systasis' (Johnson, 2019, p72) Which is quite literally illustrated in her most defining work Altarpiece (Fig13)



Fig 13. Altarpiece 1, 1915, Hilma af Klint

The particularly notable aspect of af Klints work in relation to the structures of consciousness is that her works intentionally portray a visual narrative of humanity's journey from primordial Oneness, through duality and materiality, to a conscious oneness;- reflecting Gebser's theory exactly.



Fig 14. Evolution no.16, Group-VI, 1908, Hilma af Klint, Oil on Canvas, 102 x 133 cm

The above painting is the finale in the series entitled *Evolution*, which follows *Primordial Chaos*. The series begins fairly monochromatically featuring recognisable human and animal forms, reminiscent of the earliest art depictions of the archaic and magic structures of consciousness and becomes more colourful and abstract resulting in the above, *Evolution no.16*. Priya Hemmenway in *The Secret Code* writes; "Logarithmic spirals and tendrils represent evolution; the letter 'U' stands for the spiritual world, opposing 'W' for matter". This painting features the letters as symbols representing the spiritual and matter depicted on either side of the canvas below and linked together on both sides above, evocative of duality versus unification.

'The work encompasses so much information, that you are left with a sense of universality or shared spiritual DNA' writes art critic and author Clayton Press (2018) in *Hilma af Klint; Paintings for the Future*. This expresses exactly how I felt in encountering *DataVerse*, a digital installation by Ryoji Ikeda at the 2019 Venice Biennale *May You Live in Interesting Times*.

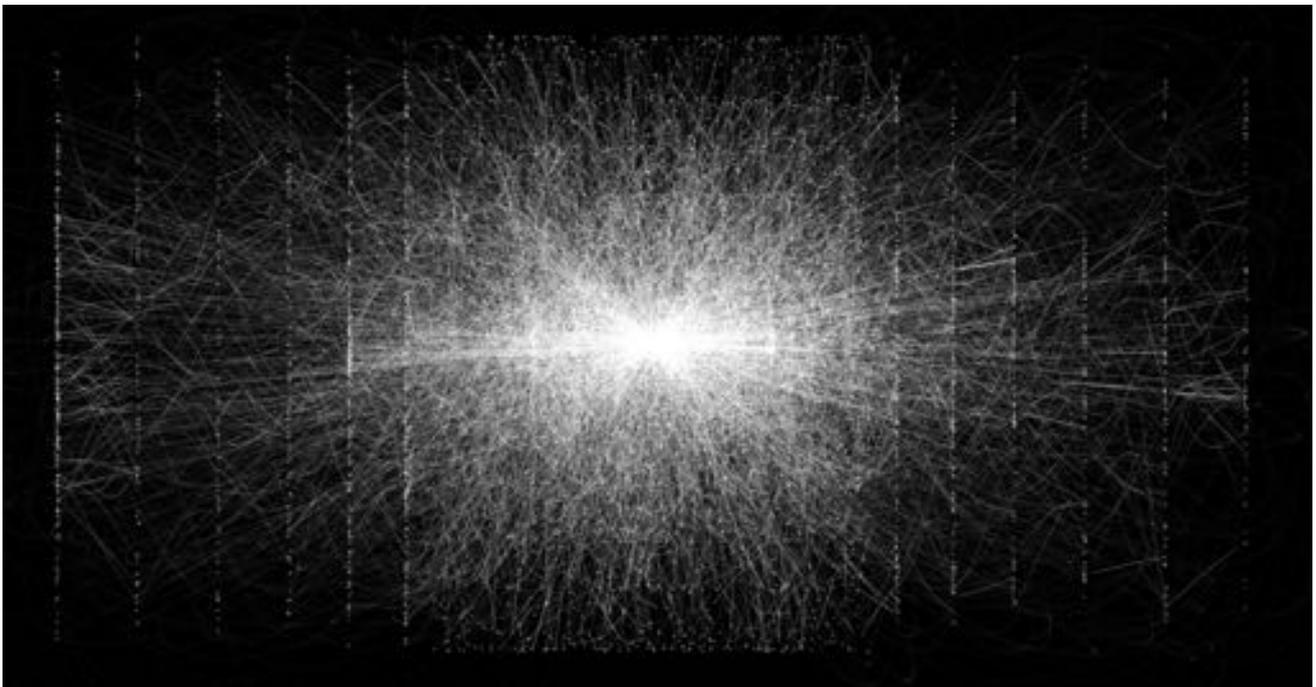


Fig 15. Ryoji Ikeda, *DataVerse*, 2019, DCI-4K Projector, computer, speakers, dimensions variable (W12.29 x H6.5m)

Like af Klint, Ikeda's work functions as a medium between the visible and invisible worlds, his immersive installations reveal 'hidden facets of nature' (Garcia,2019). Whereas af Klint's information was received intuitively, Ikeda draws upon scientific data obtained from various institutions such as CERN, NASA and the Human Genome Project. Only made possible by modern technologies, this data is processed, transcribed, converted and transformed, making it 'possible to visualize and sonify the different dimensions that coexist in our world, from the microscopic to the macroscopic.' (Garcia,2019)

Mel Alexenberg interestingly makes the link that 'the sweeping technological changes we are experiencing today were predicted some two thousand years ago in the Zohar, a classical text of Jewish mysticism. It describes how the outburst in scientific knowledge and technological advancement would be paralleled by an increase in sublime wisdom or spirituality. Integrating the wisdom of the mind and the wisdom of the soul, which is the role of the artist, we can begin to usher true unity into the world' (Alexander, 2006, p172).

In the article *Ryoji Ikeda, A Cosmic Journey from Infinitesimal to Astronomical*, Rodrigo Garcia writes that 'his works compel the audience to move beyond an anthropocentric perspective, to expand their understanding of the world, and to begin a new way of sensing: by completely giving oneself over to the connections among perception and soul, scale and space and time.' (Garcia, 2019)

Via his immersive, sublime, digital works, Ryoji Ikeda opens the possibility for different ways of seeing the world and ourselves. The 'idea of embracing the infinite is useful for understanding Ikeda's work more generally' writes Finn Blythe, who describes the work as 'a probing investigation into the unknown and immeasurable, a voyage to the borderline of human perception that brings hair-raising encounters with the sublime' (Blythe 2020).

Chapter Three: The Sublime as an evolutionary catalyst: Time Freedom

Philosophers have long debated the sublime. Philosopher Edmund Burke wrote in 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' (1756) that fear is a 'principle of the sublime.' Burke says that if we are confronted with potentially catastrophic events such as hurricanes and erupting volcanoes for example, our usual information processing systems are disrupted. When such fear is put at a safe distance however, - as in a painting, for example - we can sense its strength without the threat of physical danger, resulting in a unique feeling of being simultaneously miniscule and insignificant as well as a powerful centre of knowledge, freedom and value in the world. (Shapshay, 2020) A feeling of the sublime results in a kind of joy, that in an intuitive and shocking contemplation of mortality, makes us feel more alive.

Shelli Renee Joye from the California Institute of Integral Studies in her Thesis "Integral aesthetics: The evolutionary function of the Sublime" examines Kant's aesthetics of the sublime as an opening into Gebser's integral mutation of consciousness. Kant said of the sublime that it 'raises the strength of our soul above its usual level and allows us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind' resulting in a liberation from Angst. Joye describes experiences of the sublime via 'works of art have the ability to suspend rational and verbal modes of cognition,' allowing 'for the rise of supersensible states' and 'boost(ing) the mind into wider bandwidths of consciousness... of more comprehensively inclusive aperspectival cognition.' Evidence of an attempt at this may be seen in the sublime art of the romantics, which reflected the desire to transcend the limitations of empiricism that denounced our spiritual nature by inspiring the reconnection of humanity, nature and divinity. Perhaps the sublime

may be a likely evolutionary function in superseding the modern conceptual paradigm, much in the same vain that concept superseded representation.

She states that 'an integral aesthetics will catalyze the transformation of consciousness from exclusively mental into the integral by activating a supersensible state that is at the same time a reactivation and a retrofitting of that mode of consciousness operating prior to human language,' this is what Gebser refers to as 'Origin.'

I feel a resonance with this sentiment in recalling encounters with works such as Ikeda's and af Klint's that have triggered a profound response akin to what Jean Francois Lyotard explains as, the sublime exceeding the ability to supply a concept. Close to a concept would be a simultaneous feeling of all and nothing, the repercussions of which leave one with a profound feeling of connection and oneness reminiscent of the 'pre-personal void.' (Gebser, 1984 p) Kim MacQueen in The Art of Evolving Consciousness furthers to this 'sense of the void,' as emanating a feeling where there are 'no limitations of just being an observer.'

'The observer is the observed' is the statement summarising the pinnacle of the teachings of J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986), widely regarded as one of the greatest thinkers and religious teachers of all time and a close colleague of David Bohm. Many believe that a full embodied understanding of this statement leads to achieving instant enlightenment. An intellectual understanding of this may be the dissolution of regarding oneself as an observer, as an entity separate to that which is observed resulting in the ending of duality as well as, according to krishnamurti, in 'the ending of time'.

This is because time can only exist in relation to something else. When there is nothing else in reality, there can be no time. Artificial measured time - unlike actual or subjective time, is

always the same and linear and is the result of self-centred human consciousness; of a separated ego construct. Our coming to awareness is inseparably bound to our consciousness of space and time (Gebser, 1984, p340); an experience of the sublime acts to transcend our being bound by either.

Measured time is a further fragmentation born of empiricism which contradicts our new understanding of reality, thanks to Bohm, who insists "that wholeness is what is real, and that fragmentation is ...guided by illusory perception'. 'What is called for' he explains 'is not an integration of thought, or a kind of imposed unity, for any such imposed point of view would itself be merely another fragment...Rather, all our different ways of thinking are to be considered as different ways of looking at the one reality...As the saying goes, 'The map is not the territory'' (Bohm, 1996, p7).

Chapter Four: The ecological perspective: Wholeness and Participation

Mel Alexander in *The Future of Art in a Digital Age* explains the ecological perspective, stating that the

'Ecological perspective sees through all realism of human culture, creating an integral structure of consciousness that renders independent disciplines created by the logical mind diaphanous...This transparency invites us to look through disciplines to reveal underlying structures that unite them that are invisible to a mental-rational structure of consciousness. Ecological perspective renders boundaries between disciplines as permeable cell membranes that facilitate the lively exchange of information. Art of integral consciousness and ecological perspective breaks open the frame to create a vital dialogue between realms of discourse through active participation in a dynamic ecosystem of interrelationships flowing between real space and cyberspace.' (Alexander, 2006, p76)

The contemporary art realm increasingly adopts an ecological perspective, liberated from egocentricity, evidenced by a rise in socially engaged practices, land art, participatory art, collaboration and cooperation. A pertinent example would be the 2019's Turner Prize Giving which culminated in an equal share, a decision the artist's arrived at unanimously in order that one nominee's political message might not be judged as more worthy. Not a notion that would have been conceived of in previous years, where competition was fierce and the desire to win of paramount importance. If nominees, Oscar Murillo, Helen Cammock, Tai Shani, and Abu Hamdan 'had to be described in a single word; it might well

be revolutionary' writes Hayley Maitland in *British Vogue*, adding that 'The work for all the artists is concerned in some way with justice, equality and a longing for unity in divisive times.'

Rationalist scientific thinking is gradually being superseded by increasingly pioneering sciences concerned with the interconnectedness of everything and contemporary art also increasingly reflects this. Mel Alexander in *The Future of Art in a Digital Age* cites Suzi Gablik's, *The Re-enchantment of Art* in which she observes that 'artists in our digital age...are creating 'new forms emphasizing our essential interconnectedness rather than our separateness; forms evoking the feeling of belonging to a larger whole rather than expressing the isolated, alienated self... like the new forms of ...participatory art' (Alexander, 2006,p40; Gablik,p5).

Artists working in participatory environments often work with people who feel alienated and socially excluded from mainstream society. By cooperating in non-hierarchical relationships of participatory action they construct acts of the sublime. (Schwarz, 2020)

Claire Bishop, editor of the Whitechapel documents on art issue, *Participation* says that the aim of participatory art is to assist in the individual's ability to determine their own social and political reality, assisted by collective experience that constitutes the work. Collaborative creativity therefore, both emerges from and produces a more positive and non hierarchical social model (Bishop, 2006) Another aspect 'involves a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility. A thought that indicates the alienating and isolating effects of capitalism.'

'We create a world according to our mode of participation,' concludes Bohm, 'and we create ourselves accordingly. If we think in our present way, we will create the kind of world that we have

created. If we think in a different way, we might create a different world.' (Bohm, 1996)

Conclusion:

There are many more prominent artists, philosophers and scientists, among others, whose participation in the unfolding of human consciousness could certainly be mentioned. This essay has presented a brief overview, with selected examples supporting a theory of unfolding of consciousness as proposed by Jean Gebser. There are too many contemporary scientific, technological and artistic developments of significance to name, such as the potential implications of Virtual Reality. To examine our most contemporary manifestation of consciousness with regard to Gebser's theory, further discussion is required.

It has been discussed that the discovery of perspective during the Renaissance opened up three dimensionality of space. The intellectual attitude of the modern epoch is so entwined with this discovery, that it is referred to as the perspectival era; the age immediately preceding it therefore;- the 'unperspectival'. It is clear that these definitions, by recognition of their fundamental characteristics, lead to the appropriate definition of the emerging integral consciousness as 'aperspectival.' The prefix 'A,' as explained in chapter one, signifies a liberation from perspective (Gebser, 1984, p2) This definition is supported by contemporary sciences and the arts where multiple and simultaneous perspectivity is achieved and where culturally an ecological perspective is adopted, evidencing a shift in consciousness towards the integral.

It may be difficult for us to conceive of an aperspectival world, as this goes beyond our current conceptualisation. However it seems evident that 'the mental world once went beyond the experiential capability of mythical man, and yet this world of mind became reality' (Alexander, 2006, p267).

The increasing sense of 'isolation and alienation' and high levels of 'societal Angst' suggest we are living in a time that Gebser would refer to as the deficient mental-rational structure. This is

reflected in a prevailing mechanistic worldview, upheld by capitalist dominance which puts profits before people, manifesting in an increasingly fragmented modern world on the brink of ecological collapse. It has been suggested that Participatory Art can assist in our 'becoming'.

That we are on the precipice of integral consciousness may be evidenced also in Twentieth century scientific development which now overcomes this fragmentation and leads back to the idea of unity expressed in the early greek philosophies (Capra, 1975, p28)'

As we enfold this deficient structure into the fertile ground, where the seeds of the integral have been sown, spreading 'like a mycelial web - that had to first connect under the surface,' (Johnson, 2019, p178) 'the undivided, ego-free person who no longer sees parts but realizes the 'Itself,' where 'beyond the magic unity, the mythical complementarity, the mental division and synthesis, is the perceptible whole' (Gebser, 1984, p543)

'In the rolling thunder of the imminent present, all that we are, all that we have been and all that we could be is radically with us.'

Jeremy Johnson

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 : 'Not only did the lord make the world appear in its correct form, the lord who never changes the destinies which he determines - Enlil - who will make the human seed of the Land come forth from the earth - and not only did he hasten to separate heaven from earth, and hasten to separate earth from heaven, but, in order to make it possible for humans to grow in "where flesh came forth" [the name of a cosmic location], he first raised the axis of the world at Dur-an-ki.'

Appendix 2:

*'The fourth dimension is freedom from time' (Gebser, 1984, p340)
Time freedom is the conscious form of archaic, original pre temporality.*

- 1. Time freedom can be realized by achieving each of the previous time mutations from archaic pre temporality. By granting to the 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.*

Bohm, On Creativity: the self (p120)

Thus, from early childhood we learn to accept the notion that the world is constituted out of a tremendous number of different and separately existent things. Some of these things are inanimate objects, some are alive, some are human beings. And to each person there is a certain, very special one of these things, which is himself. This 'self' is viewed, in the first instance, as a physical body, sharply bounded by the surface of the skin, and then as a mental entity' (also called the psyche or 'the soul') which is 'within' this physical body and which is taken to be the very essence of the individual human being.. The notion of a separately

existent 'self' thus follows as an aspect of the generally accepted metaphysics, which implies everything is of this nature.

It has to be emphasised that this generally accepted metaphysics is not commonly known in the form of an explicit statement as given above. Rather, it is built up, mainly tacitly, in countless conclusions from experience over a lifetime. Because this accumulated residue of tacit metaphysical thought is largely automatic and habitual, we are not aware of it *as such*.

...the effects of this metaphysical thought on perception and feeling are experienced as reality that seems to arise independently of such thought and that apparently encompasses both the 'external world' of man and society and the 'internal world' of the 'self'.

... So a complex and very pervasive illusion is created..

What is needed to see through the illusion is to perceive that the division of the whole of existence into separate parts is only a convenient form of 'metaphysical art' that fits our general experience with certain limits, and not an expression of 'how things really are.' indeed, it is quite evident that there can be no such sharp division between things in reality. thus , because of the atomic structure no object can have a sharp boundary. ..

In any case, as seen earlier the atoms are constituted of elementary particles which all ultimately merge and untie in the whole movement of the universal field.

Continue with p122

It is clear then, that one cannot actually observe a 'self' that can be sharply distinguished from the total environment.

Appendix 3:

Jean Gebser (1905-1973) was born in Posen, a formerly Prussian city that now belongs to Poland. 'He was a scholar, a linguist, a translator, a poet, a historian, an eloquent speaker, a traveler, an adventurous lover of life, people, and ideas - a man of experience, wisdom, spiritual depth, and charisma'¹ In his lifetime he befriended Lorca, Heidegger and Picasso to name a few and after many temporary european homes, settled in Switzerland, where he began writing his essential text 'The Ever Present Origin' in 1932. Ever the maverick, when first published, his work was considered one of the most controversial intellectual creations of our era. What he had realised was that the phenomenal transformations in the arts and sciences during the first three decades of the twentieth

¹ The Jean Gebser Society, A brief biography <https://gebser.org/jean-gebser-bio/>

century amounted to a change in the very consciousness of humanity, in the way we perceive ourselves and the world.

'Previously the spiritual was realizable only approximately in the emotional darkness of the magical, in the twilight of imagination in the mythical, and in the brightness of abstraction in the mental. The mode of realization now manifesting itself assures that in accordance with its particular nature, the spiritual is not only given emotionally, imaginatively, abstractly, or conceptually. It also ensures that in accordance with our new capacity it is also perceptible concretely as it begins to coalesce with our consciousness.'