Chapter One
Structures of Consciousness

Jean Gebser, a “polyhistorian” (Feuerstein 191), draws upon an interdisciplinary paradigm comprising science, philosophy, religion, linguistics, art, archaeology, history, and psychoanalysis in order to provide evidence for the story of human consciousness in *The Ever-Present Origin*. He also finds corroboration for his model in the parallels between phylogenetic (at the level of species) and ontogenetic (at the level of the individual) changes.

Gebser employs a broadly phenomenological approach, since his aim is to explore how changes in consciousness have led to very varied interpretations of the world. As per his schema, the primary structure of consciousness displays features similar to the archaic origins, and the magical, mythical, mental, and integral structures “unfold” upon this “originary,” “ever-present” structure. Consciousness, Gebser insists, is not synonymous with morality, intelligence, or rational acuity (Gebser 99, 204). Instead, it could be defined quite simply as “wakeful presence” (42). This wakeful presence, directed by a particular structure of consciousness, enables a particular kind of perception of the world. In other words, consciousness is not a witnessing function but an active or directive force, and its teleology lies in acquiring

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5 Gebser is at pains to point out that this evidence is but a mirror: linguistic, scientific, or artistic achievements are merely manifestations of a particular structure of consciousness. At the same time, there is no other way to grasp the true nature or structure of consciousness except through these manifestations. That is, consciousness cannot be studied or explored minus the ways in which it creates art, communication models, and rituals.

6 Examples of acquisitions that prove this movement include language and linguistic complexity (moving from naming to synonyms to analogies), and an increase in the number and intensity of the senses. For instance, hearing precedes speaking, as evidenced by archaeological material such as cave
newer “dimensions” for comprehending the world and the self (38). It enhances “the ability to survey those interconnections which constitute us: it is a continuous act of integration and directing” (204).

Integrating projections of reality is one of consciousness’s most fundamental features of functioning. Consciousness can “retract” a “less aware” projection in favor of a “more aware” one (203). However, the “less aware” stage does not disappear. It becomes “integrated” into the more aware stage(s). Thus, consciousness transcends, not excludes, one perspective in favor of a more inclusive one. However, this process is not an expansion—a metaphor that implies widening—but an intensification of wakefulness. Gebser posits that the outside world is filled with a matrix of “latency”—elements and connections that have not become manifest yet, or were manifest once but are no longer so—and consciousness constantly strives to make this latency “transparent” or lucid (Gebser 6). The point that the latent structures are not lost is particularly relevant to my argument. Consciousness is inevitably inclined towards integration and transcendence, and in order to make everything outside of consciousness as transparent as possible, it constantly revives latent structures, which allow latent perspectives to constantly cohabit with active ones. This also

paintings in which the eyes and ears appear much before the mouth (Gebser 56-58). Such insights are not unique to Gebser, though; John Berger also suggests in Ways of Seeing that “seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (7). Such emergence of the senses is part of Gebser’s notion of “unfolding;” the senses emerge one after the other, and alter our perspective of the world.

As per Gebser’s model, as consciousness becomes more integrative, it acquires dimensions. “Dimension” is the term used to indicate the level of separation between the self and the world. Consciousness begins with zero-dimensionality or no distinction between the self and the other, and moves towards “structural enrichment and dimensional increment” (Gebser 38). According to Gebser, archaic consciousness is zero-dimensional since the self and the world are undifferentiated; the magical structure is one-dimensional or unitary; the mythical structure is two-dimensional or polar; and the mental-rational structure is three dimensional because the self and the dualities form a triangle.
implies that when a particular example is seen as a symptom of a certain structure that either preceded the dominant structure or is yet to become dominant, then it becomes possible for us to understand that all the notions we assume to be absolute or complete are only partial, and that our worldview at all times is incomplete.

Even as he relies heavily on an analysis of cultural and linguistic changes, Gebser is loath to pitch the "process" of consciousness on a time scale because he doesn’t consider the movement of consciousness as a conventional "evolution" that is usually understood in terms of its historical milestones. For Gebser, consciousness does not, like an evolving biological system, discard one form for another; rather, at each point, consciousness carries within it all the structures. However, only one structure wields directive power while others are latent. The origin is "ever-present" because it already contains everything that will eventually unfold, and each subsequent step also carries within it the origin, everything that has preceded it, and everything that will succeed it.

Gebser asserts that space and time are both constructs of our mental-rational consciousness, and their presence in directing our worldview indicates that consciousness has intensified. However, he also deems space and time to be the limitations of the rational structure. In a space-time worldview, the origin would be at one point and move along a path with recognizable milestones, and arrive at an end. Gebser argues that such a track, while inevitable, is also unequal to the task of understanding how different consciousness structures mutate and emerge from one perennial source or origin. He avers that the origin, or any structure, is never lost.

While Gebser’s model is perfectly in tune with his overall argument that the divisive nature of rationality inhibits a holistic view of consciousness, Georg Feuerstein posits that there is no way out of linear plotting when we are trying to provide artistic, social, or scientific proof for the various structures of consciousness. Both Feuerstein and Gary Lachman raise the same objections to Gebser’s deliberate evasion of the exact eras of each structure’s development, and state that it quite possible to sustain Gebser’s model even while using history as a support. Another point Gebser makes is that this "movement" of consciousness is not a progress or a regress. In other words, it is not an evolution. Ken Wilber, on the other hand, reconfigures Gebser’s model in an evolutionary mode, and suggests that the best is yet to come (viii-xi).

If each structure of consciousness is considered to be a part, and consciousness itself is a whole, then we can posit that the part is always the whole, and the whole is only visible in parts. This approach is called "systasis" or "a process whereby partials merge or are merged with the whole" (Gebser 292).
Gebser prefers to mark changes in human consciousness as “mutations of consciousness” (1) rather than promote the idea that consciousness is “goal-oriented” or evolving towards a “future-oriented finality” (Gebser 42). He makes a case for mutations because these do not assume or require the “disappearance of previous potentialities and properties” (Gebser 39). That is, unlike biological evolution that requires passing through certain stages, with mutations, Gebser can argue for discontinuous or abrupt change because mutations do not rely on a progression of previous stages. Most importantly, nothing in the process of consciousness ever becomes vestigial: “[w]e must first of all remain cognizant that these structures are not merely past, but are in fact still present in more or less latent and acute form in each of us” (42).

For similar reasons, Gebser avoids terms like “levels” or stages (which are “simply spatial constructs”) of consciousness or “evolution” in his framework (43). Instead, he uses the term “structure,” which eludes an unnecessary reliance on a sense of movement in space or time. A structure is not a growth in a particular direction or an “expansion” or a moving forward (in time), but an “intensification” or deepening. This process indicates an unfolding of consciousness, an increasingly comprehensive worldview, and the acquisition of heretofore unused capacities.

Ken Wilber borrows Arthur Koestler’s term “holon” to describe systasis. A “holon” is a whole that is simultaneously also a part of another whole. A holon, therefore, describes the inherent nature of all mental evolution, where each dimension exists in a “natural hierarchy, or an order of increasing wholeness and holism” (Wilber xiii).

Feuerstein points out that a historically centered approach has its advantages over a “mutations” approach. He finds that the former allows for these structures to be viewed not as abrupt breaks but as gradual segues (44-45). Moreover, the historical approach also allows the intermediary phases between structures to be highlighted.

11 Ken Wilber renames a structure as a “mode” of consciousness, which is manifested in the “mood” of the time (43).
While every mutation and every structure is predicated upon the origin and is an unfolding of latent content, and while all structures of consciousness are always already present, for the sake of simplicity, we must plot this unfolding along a temporal axis. In the following sections, I identify the chief characteristics of each structure, its presence in current consciousness, and its historical era of dominance. The movement from the archaic structure onwards begins with utter fluidity to increasing splitting: the gradual compartmentalization of the self, the emergence of the ego, the binaries of mind and body, and the separation between individual and the other. However, Gebser argues that the archaic structure is not lost because it is a timeless concept and is active even today, in the state of deep sleep. Similarly, the magical and the mythical structures asserted themselves as “moods” historically but are capable of taking over our worldview under specific circumstances. These circumstances are usually of three types: when a latent structure temporarily asserts itself, as in sleep and dreams; when an individual mind’s is unable to transcend a structure and integrate perspectives as the rest of society has; and when an individual is able to hold in abeyance the current mode of consciousness and deliberately call upon a latent mood to express himself or herself. It is the last circumstance that I suggest is the case with modernist and postmodernist writers: they consciously call to mind latent perspectives in order to complete the partial view of reality and truth that is available to us through our current worldview.

Gebser’s model gains in credibility when one considers that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, as outlined by Erich Neumann and elaborated upon by Jean Piaget. In a normal infant’s development, from its first days as a neonate to an adult,
all the structures and forms of consciousness that humanity—on average—traverses, are made visible. For example, one can see how time frames change for children of different ages. At the beginning, an infant's time scale is only a discontinuous series of "nows," with a set pattern recurring over and over again. It is the subsequent emergence of an ego or an "I" entity that enables the child to possess a clearer sense of past, present, and future on a linear timescale. Similarly, an infant's needs expand from simple nourishment to more symbolic and abstract forms of life affirmation. Through trial and error, the child cements its selfhood with respect to itself, the family, and the world.

It must be kept in mind that Gebser's sources have arisen from Western civilization, though he asserts that the structures of consciousness and the mutations are common to human beings everywhere. To substantiate his ideas, Gebser gathers evidence from the world over for the earlier structures, but relies mostly on "the Greek theory of knowledge, the Hebrew doctrine of salvation, and Roman legal and political theory" (Gebser 74) to explain how Western man has come to be what he is today. It is Western society that has become "psychistic," and the contemporary Western man displays his "inability to escape from the confines of the psyche" (26). It is from the pivot of the psychistic stronghold, the overpowering dominance of the ego, with its occasional willingness to abandon individuality for undiscriminating communality, the absolute and blind slavery to technology, the mass hypnosis of political ideologies like Nazism, and the civilizational crisis that gripped mid-twentieth century Europe, that Gebser tells us the story of consciousness. However, he deems the nostalgia for an imagined bygone epoch as an erroneous way out of the
current crisis because any radical sliding back into a previous structure is invariably destructive for society. People find comfort in sliding back: participating in a mob or collectively cheering a team can be liberating when the mental-egoic structure constantly pressurizes us to maintain individuality. Gebser points out that sustaining the ego can be a process fraught with anxiety, but this splitting between the self and the other is necessary. The way out is not reverting but transcending.

The Dim Origins: The “Archaic” Structure

The term “archaic” derives from the Greek word archê which means inception or origin. In other words, the archaic structure is practically identical with the origin of consciousness. This structure is characterized by an “identity of consciousness with the world” (Lachman 238). Such a state would appear to be similar to the mythical state of Edenic bliss, but this is actually “a time where the soul is yet dormant, a time of complete non-differentiation of man and the universe” (Gebser 43, emphasis added). In this state, as in “dreamless” sleep, there is no imagination or memory, and there is not even a glimmer of the ego. This structure shows the highest degree of non-differentiation, a “non-distinguishability of archaic man from world

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12 Gebser, Wilber, and Feuerstein caution against mistaking this stage of dimness with the Biblical idea of paradisical unity. Wilber terms the Romantic notion of the noble savage a case of the “pre-trans fallacy.” The idea that man should turn away from the mental-egoic structure and surrender to a magical or mythical structure is a misguided fancy. For instance, it is obvious that archaic humans were used to crude living, possessed primordial urges, and had minimal awareness of themselves or others. There is none of the bliss or pleasure associated with the idea of paradise. If at all there is any bliss, it is that of “ignorance, not of transcendence” (Wilber 31). According to Wilber, the movement should be one of transcendence, not escape.

13 Dreamlessness implies not unity but identity between the self and other, and between the internal and the external. Identity is based on absolute non-differentiation, while unity is possible only when the core of the subject-object relation has been realized.
and universe—a non-awareness by virtue of which he is still unquestionably part of
the whole…” (44-45). Identity, and a “fundamental dimness,” akin to the Freudian
“oceanic feeling” (Feuerstein 52) are the key features of this zero-dimensional
structure. However, Gebser asserts that even in this primordial slumbering state, all
the future expansions are already present. The archaic stage has “maximum latency
and minimum transparency:” all the other structures are latent, and no structure has
been made transparent (Feuerstein 51).

According to Ken Wilber, archaic consciousness was the dominant mode for
the “Dawn Man,” from three to six million years ago to about 200,000 years ago. By
then, the natural world had already experienced many years of evolution, moving
upwards from insentient to multicellular animal and vegetal life forms. The archaic
epoch covers the physiological evolution from our pre-sapiens ancestors including
Australopithecus africanus, and Homo habilis, all the way to early Homo erectus.14
Wilber explains that Dawn Man “began his career immersed in the subconscious
realms of nature and body, of vegetable and animal, and initially ‘experienced’ himself
as indistinguishable from the world that had already evolved to that point” (26).

The primary driving force for this “keen-sensed gatherer and hunter” was his
instinct, and his continuous urge to appease his physical and sexual needs (Feuerstein
56). At this juncture, there is no capacity for reflection, no separation between inner
experience and the outer world, no comprehension of death, and no other existential
fears because both history and memory were undeveloped. These humans cannot be

14 Feuerstein prefers that Homo erectus be considered as magical man, given his creative intelligence,
his ability to make more sophisticated tools, and his tendency towards higher social cooperation (58).
Wilber, on the other hand, views the early Homo erectus as still immersed in identity or, at best,
experiencing the first steps towards magical consciousness.
labeled aggressive or peaceful; whatever they did were only in reaction to the environment. There was probably a very low recognition of physical pain or mental anguish.

Wilber borrows a symbol from Eric Neumann to signify this archaic structure: the mythological figures of the "uroboros" and "pleroma" (Wilber 26). The uroboros is the primordial mythic serpent devouring its own tail, signifying an immersed and closed lower life form. It is the symbol for "round, self-contained, narcissistic, naturic embeddedness" (33). Pleroma is a Jungian term to describe the "potential of physical nature" (26). These figures aptly capture the initial stage of the human condition which is "embedded in physical nature (pleroma) and dominated by animal-reptilian impulses (uroboros)" (26). In other words, everything exists in a state of "participation mystique"15 of unconscious identities. The natural and material world is, as it were, the nourishing mother, and the fulfillment of basic desires requires no further act of the will or ego.

Ontogenetically, the archaic epoch can be witnessed in an infant's consciousness which is "yet pre-individuated, and is analogous to the high degree of latency (or minimal complexity) in deep sleep or in the state of unconsciousness" (Feuerstein 52). A human baby's first state of being goes through what Piaget terms "protoplastic consciousness"—akin to archaic consciousness: in its initial days of

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15 This term has been used by Erich Neumann as well as by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Neumann uses it to indicate the child's first few months when it exists in a "psychic mother-fluid" and does not "exist" as a separate person. In this state of "unitary reality," "from which the opposites, ego and Self, subject and object, individual and world have yet to be crystallized," the child eventually separates herself and creates her own identity (Neumann 15). Lévy-Bruhl uses the term pejoratively to indicate a pre-logical mentality that fails to recognize a number of distinctions that Western rationality considers absolutely essential (Spurr 268).
existence, the infant is "unable to make any distinction between the self and thing" (Piaget 235). Nor does it possess the higher faculties of emotions or logic. It functions on the simplest levels of reactions, sensations, and instincts. Tracing a path from a neonate to the early hominids, it can be speculated that the latter must have had a synesthetic view of the world, much as infant psychologists say babies do. Piaget suggests that "the world is regarded by the primitive consciousness as a continuous whole that is both psychical and physical at the same time" (236). Moreover, the only time frame for babies, as for archaic man, is the perpetual present. A child's struggle from birth to adulthood is essentially a battle to carve out an individual identity that is as separate from the world as possible. Deep sleep or what Gebser terms a "nuclear dream,"—a lucid and meaningful dream in itself but which cannot be reconstructed in words in a wakeful state—is akin to archaic consciousness in today's dominant mental-rational structure.

Intermingled Reality: The "Magical" Structure

As consciousness intensifies, it acquires more dimensions (or levels of separation), and the mind begins to become more attuned to the senses. With magical consciousness, a newer comprehension of time dawned, the sense of hearing became honed, and the archaic man's sense of complete fusion with nature began to fissure ever so slightly. Wilber uses "Typhon"—the half man-half snake Titan born of the Earth goddess Gaea—to symbolize the first glimpse of consciousness's extraction from identity and immersion, and the initial state of the creation of the self (46). The therianthropic Typhon represents a state when there is—as yet—no clear distinction.
between mental and physical self. It can be speculated that while the realization of an ego or a separate identity was still very blurry, magical consciousness opened the path to unity with nature rather than identity with it (Gebser 46).

Parallel to the mythic fall from Eden into history, humans lost the bliss of ignorance and gained a hazy realization of mortality, finiteness, vulnerability, and mental anguish. Magical consciousness is believed to have dawned in the time of the Homo erectus (Feuerstein 68). The Neanderthal era of 50,000 – 200,000 years is considered to be a low typhonic stage, and the Cro-Magnon era of 10,000 – 50,000 years ago, a high typhonic stage (Wilber 69).

"Magic" refers to the condition of the self and other no longer being totally immersed into each other but existing in a state of fused togetherness. That is, the boundaries between the naturic world and the individual self in the magical structure were still "utterly fluid," but there was also the onset of the dim recognition of separateness. In that sense, the self and the other, internal emotions and external reality, have drifted apart but are, nevertheless "intermingled" with one another. No logical connection could be established between these parts; instead, they existed in a "magical association and contamination." While identity was slightly "interiorized," it nevertheless operated in a fluid and plastic medium in which natural elements, animals, other humans, and the nascent self all intermingled freely (45). In other words, magical humans existed not in a "participation mystique" but in Gebser's "participation magique" (Feuerstein 66).

In this intermediary stage, the glimmer of separation brought about the creation of the horde or clan, and "we" began to gradually become distinct from the
outside world. The "egolessness" of magical humans at the peak of this structure arose from being fused with the group. Moreover, the group itself was fluidly and vegetatively intertwined to the world beyond it. In order to maintain the status quo of the group, some form of internal communication was essential. While language was yet to be invented, there is evidence of proto-linguistic development, and the use of certain paleo-symbols. However, this epoch is defined as "mouthless" by Gebser. Gebser suggests that magical humans realized the world through "details" or "points." In this world, the part (point) stands for the whole, but also the whole for the part, because there is no consciousness of the whole (46). These "points" that Gebser mentions are interchangeable at will, given their inherent fluidity. The world is hence a plane on which inanimate objects, people, animals, emotions, and elements of nature exist in a web of interrelations. The slumbering ego's understanding of the world is mirror-like: the self and the outer world exist as confused, with inner experiences like emotions and dreams being participants in this confusion. The kind of world that mental-rational human beings experience in dreams today was (both waking and sleeping) reality for the magical humans. Merely experiencing

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16 According to Gebser, hearing as a sense did develop in this epoch, but the recognition of sounds was limited to the primal noises of nature and to rhythms. The use of rhythmic drumming in magical rituals is a throwback to this limited sensory power. However, magical consciousness can more definitively be characterized by "mouthlessness," as seen in prehistoric cave paintings from Australia and in Sumerian idols of the fourth to third millennium BC (56). Mouthlessness indicates the lack of language or symbols that can be used to carry out complex communication. The proto-linguistic development of magical consciousness indicates that only the most basic communication between people was possible. In child development, this is exhibited in babies being attuned to sounds around them, and producing only incoherent sounds of limited range.

17 Karen Armstrong uses the example of the Australian aborigines to make a similar point. She states that "Dreamtime" is experienced by the aborigines in sleep and in moments of vision. This is especially experienced just before a hunting ritual (Short History of Myth 12). The perspective of Dreamtime supports Gebser's claim that the magical structure asserts itself in dreams and on certain other occasions.
something, whether in dream or reality, automatically made it real. The content and
form of dreams are also best described through terms such as fluidity, intermingling,
condensation and displacement.  

What sets the magical apart from the archaic consciousness is that even
through the fusion, there is the first recognition of boundaries. And with boundaries
comes the sense of danger, taboo, and superstition. Every time the knowledge of
boundaries pushes itself to the fore, it leads to existential anxiety. In order to combat
these emerging fears and to cope with the growing sense of separation from the
world, man made his first attempts to wrench himself away from nature and to
control it instead. With this struggle began the formation of the will. The primary
manifestations of this will, driven by impulse and instinct, were expressed through
sorcery, totems, and taboos. The struggle for power over nature also pushed man
towards becoming a creator: in order to fight the fear of the animal, he created an
image of the animal that could be "magically" killed. This, in turn, gave rise to the first
instances of self-expression.

Of the various aspects of existential fear, the starkest was the dread of death,
and so came about physiological and mental ways to escape mortality. Death denial
manifests itself differently in each structure. Wilber suggests that in the uroboric
stage, death denial was simply a drive for food and shelter. In the typhonic times, it
was not enough "to flow with whatever the present brought, ignorantly rejoicing in

18 Freud's concepts, "condensation" (where a number of elements like themes, figures and ideas
become fused into one entity), and "displacement" (where a desired or emotionally charged object is
substituted by a more acceptable symbol), as well as Frazer's concepts, "contagion" and "similarity"
that characterize magic, are closely connected to this aspect of magical reality. Frazer's concepts are
discussed in detail in the next chapter.
the immortality of food . . . The new self had to preserve the present, to consciously carry it forward to the next present, and the next, and the next, as a promise that death would not touch it now. (66-67)

An associated function of death denial is a reorientation of time. The typhonic humans not only lived in the present but were also gradually becoming aware of their present. This led to marked changes, such as people beginning to live in larger groups (of twenty or thirty) and beginning to hunt larger game. Magical consciousness recognizes the dimensions of simple present and near future, but not long term past and distant future. Farming did not develop during this epoch since man was still concerned only with the immediate future. Even death was a disruptive, magical occurrence that occurred in the present. It did not forebode sorrow in the future.

The historical/archaeological evidence for what magical consciousness must have been like include the Paleolithic cave painting of the Sorcerer of Trois Frères. This image is a composite figure, with the ears of a stag, the eyes of an owl, a full beard, the torso and legs of a man, the bushy tail of a wolf or horse, the prominent genitalia of a lion or some other feline creature, and the paws of a bear. The body parts of this figure are all equally important and interchangeable. And yet, the figure itself is distinct from its environment. It is "magically composed of all sorts of different and 'confused' parts—it is a 'man,' but one still interconnected not only with its body but with the bodies of nature, from owl to bear to lion. In other words, it is typhonic" (47). Moreover, such an image is an exteriorization of the artist's own being, or an extension of the artist.
The painting itself may be seen as a primary expression of magical consciousness. Other Paleolithic cave paintings also show images of animals drawn on top of each other or fused into each other's bodies. While this might appear to be art to today's viewer, it must be remembered that the magic man's motivation was not aesthetic pleasure but the exercise of magic. Gebser avers that this manner of magical hunting can be exemplified in the hunting rituals of the Pygmies in the Congo jungles. In these magical hunting rituals, hunters draw the image of the prey such that the first rays of the sun pierce the drawing. The hunters perceive a deep and very real connection between the sun's rays hitting the image, and their own arrows slaying the actual animal.

Such hunting rites are paradigmatic of five key features of the magical perspective: "egolessness," "point-like unity," "spacelessness and timelessness," "merging" and "magic reaction" (Gebser 48-50). The hunting group's egolessness is mirrored in the role of the sun. In order to assuage the primary guilt that arises from having to kill a being (an animal in this case) that is so closely related to oneself, the drawing is made in such a way that it is the sun's rays that "kill" the animal and not the hunters. The real arrow is merely a symbol of the actual arrow of the sun. Point-like unity is expressed in the visible "interchangeability" of the real and symbolic actors—the sunrays and the real arrow, the drawing and the animal. Gebser claims that point-like unity is possible as a "working reality" only in a spaceless and timeless

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19 This is called totemic identification, and is still prevalent in voodoo practices, where inserting pins in a "symbolic" doll is equivalent to controlling the actual person the doll represents. But for magic to be successful, the doll and the person are deemed the same; even while physically distinct, the two have a deep, unbreakable connection. Frazer uses this example to elaborate upon his approach to magic. This is discussed in the next chapter.
universe. Every point, be it an action, thing, or event, can be interchanged with another, independent of the constraints of time or space. There is no rationally explicable connection between cause and event, the image and the animal.

Furthermore, every point "can not only be linked with any other point but is identified with it. One can substitute for the other completely" (49). This is symptomatic of a deep fusion between the self and the other, where the other can be of a different species, living or non-living, or it can belong to a different time or geographical location. This is the duality of magical unity, "which can be related to itself and to any point identical with it" (50). The spaceless and timeless "arise from the vegetative intertwining of all living things and are realities in the egoless magic sphere of every human being." Merging is the "interweaving" that underlies the unity which is "not destroyed by any spatiality or temporality; its equilibrium is not shattered by any undue stress on any of the participants" (49). Most importantly, all parts in such a rite are bound by unity and are equal in significance. Everything that seems similar is automatically linked and is treated as the same.

As is clear through the example of the hunting ritual, the hunters, the arrows, the sun, the animal, and the drawing are all egoless, equal, and interchangeable. However, Gebser points out that this seamless unity also couches a discrepancy, albeit an unconscious one. That is, while man is not conscious of his distinction from the rest of the elements in this rite, the fact that he is causing it and carrying it out indicates an unconscious recognition of his separation. The discrepancy of the magical man enables him "to cope with the spell of this magic interweaving and thus escape it." In fact, the very act of a ritual which supplants "natural chaos with a
defined and directed action" shows that man may still be part of a group and still be deeply attached to nature but “he is already acting for himself” (50).

Magical consciousness is ontogenetically expressed in the instance of a year old toddler that has just begun to have an “inkling of self-awareness” and has begun to see itself as separate from the objects around it (Charlotte Bühler qtd. in Feuerstein 62). This stage is characterized by the lack of a clear distinction between reality and imagination. Just as a child unconsciously imitates adult actions in order to be able to do what adults do, magical consciousness has an “active, world-oriented bias.” It is rooted in doing actions and not in thinking about those actions. Furthermore,

The infant establishes his or her rudimentary self-identity by drawing invisible boundaries around the family which includes him or her at or near the imaginary center. These boundaries are created and maintained through the exercise of the infantile will, that is, through active participation in the familial life-world. Much of this occurs in the model world of play which the child takes so seriously ... (Feuerstein 62-63)

Piaget similarly explains that in early infant development, the child faces the cognitive confusion between the self and the other as well as between the whole and the part (Wilber 45). This kind of cognition is what Freud identifies as the pre-verbal, dreamlike “primary process.” Ego boundaries in the toddler develop only at around two years of age. Georg Feuerstein observes that just as parents set up rules and boundaries to protect the exploring child from the hazards of the world, the elders of paleolithic clans created taboos (Polynesian “tapu”) or barriers that were to be
respected and not violated (63). This system of limits kept anxiety at bay and provided a safer ground for exploration and learning. Eventually of course, the taboo-boundaries became more complex and rigid and proved to be sources of anxiety in themselves.

In today’s world, magic is experienced not only in dreams, but also in waking life, in activities that require the suspension of individual thought and complete participation in a group’s communal life. A football game is a benign example of this whereas social phenomena such as mob frenzies and the hold of a political ideology on an entire populace are the more malignant instances of magical immersion. From today’s rationalist point of view, such participation is essentially a regressive submerging, but the Cro-Magnon man was not irrational. He was merely pre-rational.

The Birth of Polarities: The “Mythical” Structure

The increasing importance of totems, taboos, and proto-religious symbolism eventually led to a widening chasm between man and nature, between the real and the symbolic. After the horizontal interfusion of self, nature, and other in the archaic and magical structures, there emerged the vertical (hierarchical) system of gods, humans, and animals. This structure, which relies heavily on the idea of polarity.

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20 The terms “horizontal” and “vertical” appear in Morris Berman’s mapping of the development of human consciousness and are roughly coeval with magical and mythical structures. These terms are discussed later.

21 Gebser emphasizes that mythical consciousness is polar, and it is only with mental consciousness that duality comes to be. Duality is essentially polarity experienced as separateness. Opposites are the basis of both duality and polarity, but only one aspect can be experienced at one time when operating in a dual structure. Polarity, on the other hand, focuses on the underlying unity of the opposites. Polarity views the thesis and anti-thesis as unified: duality views them as mutually exclusive and divided. In a polar structure, “[e]very correspondence is a complement, a completion of the whole.
with complementary bifurcations such as earth/sky, self/other, male/female, summer/winter, heaven/earth, and life/death, is called the mythical structure by Gebser, and mythical-membership by Wilber. A series of rapid and unprecedented social and historical changes also took place with this structure: the use of fire for cooking and hunting; the emergence of semi-permanent residential structures; the development of stone-tool technology including blades and bone tools; the appearance of vivid cave paintings; the domestication of animals; the first experimentations with pottery and the wheel; and the constitution of sedentary communities. However, the two most important changes during the mythical epoch were language and agriculture.

The historical time frame for the beginning of the mythical structure is the mid Cro-Magnon era, between 50,000 – 10,000 BC, when culture developed more rapidly than ever before. Later Cro-Magnons of 20,000 – 12,000 BC (the Neolithic age) are considered to be clearly mythical in their consciousness. During this period emerged the discovery of agriculture and eventually, the expansion of villages into cities (around 5,000 BC) that required complex structures of social, governmental, and religious institutions. This period is the acme of the mythical structure (Feuerstein 76). Wilber, for whom this structure manifests itself in earnest around 10,000 BC, terms this stage the membership stage, because in it, man transforms from a hunter-

Whatever is spoken is corroborated by the invisible and latent unspoken to which it corresponds…” (85). Duality, on the other hand, “abstracts and quantifies the oppositions or antitheses. 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 unit can be realized as the unification of opposites in a third aspect” (86).
gatherer living in a group bound by primal desires, to a social being beginning to
inhabit a web of increasingly *symbolic* systems (94).

Agriculture, by itself, was the most remarkable turning away from magical
existence and towards a mythical world. While hunting is an activity of self-
preservation oriented towards the present, farming is directed towards the future:
the result (harvesting) appears only in the distant future of the action (sowing). This
then became a prototype for other actions that could be imagined to stretch beyond
the present. A religious rite (appeasing the rain god) could be carried out now, in
anticipation of results in the future (actual rain). There is, therefore, a remarkable
expansion of thought beyond the present into the future, and also the replacement of
immediate needs with "directed and channeled mental goals" (Wilber 94). In other
words, the farmer becomes the archetype for one who is able to defer gratification
and control factors in the present for the sake of the future. Farming is both a cause
and an effect of the human comprehension of cyclical time. This prompts Gebser to
call this mythical epoch the age of circularity. Gebser, in very poetic terms, describes
the cyclic-mythic movement of time thus:

> It is a form of movement that leads from one phase of the moon to
> another, from new moon to new moon, nine moons to nine moons,
> birth to death, spring to winter; from the tides of the earth to the tides

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22 However, this mythic "temporicity" is not to be confused with mental "temporality."

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. (Gebser 173)

That is, temporicity is characterized by cyclicality, while temporality is visible in linear directedness.
of the body which blossom forth, bear fruit, and attain completion, just as the year unfolds, bears fruit, and completes its cycle, like the stars which ascend, reach their zenith, and descend. In this the cosmos itself forms a circle... (166)

Gebser's reason for naming this structure "mythical" is quite straightforward: the mouth (or language) and myth are inseparable, as myth is derived from "mythos," meaning word, discourse, and sound (65). The mythic structure is indicative of the shift of the primary sensory mode from magical hearing to mythical speaking. Proof of this is found in cave paintings where a prominent mouth appears after the "mouthlessness" of magical imagery. The creation of language appears to have started between 70,000 and 50,000 BC (in the late Pleistocene age) and peaked around 10,000 BC (Wilber 98-99). The emergence of language coincided, aided, and structured mythical consciousness and the growing separate self. For the first time, memory, social interaction, and planning could be carried out. Activities could be divided into past, present, and future times. Language also created a distinction between the interior world and external reality.

While archaic consciousness rested on intuition, and magical consciousness was largely dependent on emotions, mythical consciousness rests on imagination (as in the Latin root "imago" or image). Imagination is "the duplication of external realities in the plastic field of the psyche... [It] is not limited by and to the forms of matter" (Feuerstein 77). The use of the imagination by the mythical perspective is clearly evident in more than one instance. Mythical man creatively and metaphorically projected natural forces, seasons, the sun, and the earth as imaginary
power centers—namely gods—and thus gave birth to the first religious pantheons. In fact, the first idols also appeared at this time, most notably those of the great Mother Goddess of birth and nourishment. The surplus of food that accompanied the rise of agriculture as well as the deepening complexity of social life that accompanied the creation of city states led to the creation of such symbolic systems as bartering. Eventually, the symbolic system of money and transactions was created. The symbols themselves could be verbal or physical, but they possess a reality deeper than that of the object on the physical plane. Symbols are "presentational or creative (constituting a higher level of reality per se), as well as reflective or representational (capable of conceptually representing or reflecting lower levels of reality)" (Wilber 101). It must be noted that language essentially facilitates communication about something that may physically and temporally be absent, but which is shared in mutual imagination and stored in memory. Language, therefore, allows for the transcendence of the physical, or for what Piaget would call "concrete operations," which marks the beginning of logical thought processes, and "decentration at the level of actions" (xxxii).

23 Feuerstein points out that religion functions primarily on two levels.

Religion is, on one level, a matter of memory (the ability to reach back into the experienced past) and, on another level, of feeling (beyond magical emoting and archaic presentiment) and of social sentiment. And both memory and feeling (together with introspection) are capacities that were added to the human repertoire of adaptive responses through the emergence of the mythical consciousness. (87-88)

24 For Wilber, money is an extremely important symbol of death denial. "After all, money represented the new surplus of food-life, and therefore more money meant more life..." (108). Money, or any object that was used in exchange for a product or service, became automatically elevated in the minds of men. This explains why gold and precious gems, and even perfumes like frankincense were used in temples and pyramidal burials. Wilber also argues that this surplus of food also created, for the first time, a condition where survival was no longer the primary goal. This eventually led to the development of the arts, mathematics, and a sophisticated economic system. Specialized professions emerged, with administrators, educators, and others not having to be direct participants in food production (110).
Finally, imagination also augmented the variety and frequency of rites and rituals that would ward off death. Sacrifices made to fertility goddesses often operated on symbolism. For instance, since blood has a close relation to fertility, female deities would often be appeased through blood-sacrifices. Mythical rituals were composed of three main parts: the image of a deity who controlled nature (imagination), words that invoked the clemency of this deity (language), and the sacrificing of humans or animals (action).

To summarize the structures of consciousness discussed so far: the archaic structure is, in Gebser's terminology, zero-dimensional identity and undivided wholeness; the magical structure is pre-perspectival, one-dimensional, and marked by man's emergence from his embeddedness in nature; the mythical structure, finally a step out of "pre-history" (history here indicates consciousness's recognition of the passage of time), is based on an unperspectival, "two-dimensional polarity," having an "imaginatory consciousness," and seeming to be on the "verge of time" (Gebser 66-67). The emotionality of magical consciousness allowed for communal fear or sorrow or pleasure but did not make room for genuine empathy. With mythical consciousness, a world of private feelings opened up, and the ability to discuss in the abstract, using symbols, made private emotional worlds accessible.

Another way of highlighting the distinction between the archaic and the magical structure on the one hand, and the mythical structure on the other, is through Morris Berman's notions of "horizontality" and "verticality." Horizontality is commensurate with magical consciousness, since its "diffuse or peripheral
awareness” gives rise to unwitting egalitarianism (3). Berman’s term for magical consciousness is “paradox” because a paradox “includes holding contradictory propositions, or emotions, simultaneously; sustaining the tension of this conflict so that a deeper reality can emerge than one would have if one simply opted, for example, for Self or Other” (6). It is simultaneously focused and unfocused, “hovering” and “peripheral” rather than “intense or ecstatic” (9). Verticality, or the projection of mythic consciousness, is based on the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Mythical consciousness consists of “sacrality,” projected upwards, in the realm of the gods, while the human world is lower along the vertical axis. This is the basis of religion, as well as, of religious architecture. Places of worship such as ziggurats and temples reach towards the heavens and leave the earth for mere mortals (12). In other words, the magical structure projected only faint boundaries between the self and the external world, which mythical consciousness deepened. More than the division of the external world along two planes (symbolic and actual), it also marks the beginning of the internal division between body/physical being and spirit/mental/imaginary being, and gradually attributed values and hierarchies to these dichotomies. It must be noted that all these dichotomies nevertheless existed in polar unity.

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25 This notion of horizontality is also echoed in Octavio Paz’s formulation of magic (with regard to ancient Mexican culture and its reflection in the literary mode of magical realism) as characterizing a “universal sympathy.” Paz alludes to magic as “a vital fluid that unites all animate beings—humans, animals, plants—with the elements, the planets, and other stars” (qtd. in Zamora 549).
The Full Emergence of the Ego: The "Mental" Structure

As consciousness deepens, there is an increasing sense of differentiation between the self and the world, and a commensurate lessening of participation. With the mental structure, there was a drastic separation between the self and the other, and separate categories also began to be recognized within the self. That is, this was the time of both the ego and self-reflexivity.

When a child first realizes that it is an independent being, free from the absolute control of parents, this realization creates both a sense of freedom and a heightened fear of alienation. Similarly, human societies of the mental-egoic structure began to become, by and large, collections of free-willing, individual personalities who could exercise choices, negotiate on communal and interpersonal behavior, and commute between the ontological division of external stimuli and internal thinking. Myths, mythologemes, and membership were found to be inadequate once a strong and independent egoic structure began to emerge, and societies changed with the creation of the individual.

The mental-egoic structure, Wilber asserts, was the last collective alteration in consciousness in the history of mankind. He divides this structure into three phases: low (2500 – 500 BC), middle (500 BC – 1500 AD), and high (1500 AD – present). The low egoic period was a time of "transition," characterized by the breakdown of the

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26 Gebser's mythologemes are the universally valid "visible" creations through which the ego articulates the awareness of itself and its emergence. Gebser finds five mythologemes that are most fundamental to this awareness of the ego: sea voyages, Narcissus's confusion of the self and its image, the sun, the descent into Hades or the Underworld, and the birth of Athena (69). In mental consciousness, "philosophemes"—created through thinking rather than imagining—replace mythologemes as forms of expression (84). Besides, philosophemes have only individual or contextual validity, while mythologemes are the ego's articulation in all humankind.
membership structure. This was also reflected in social, religious, political, and philosophical changes (188). The middle egoic period is marked by the appearance of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Solon of Greece, Pythagoras, and others. The high mental period was marked by Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton.

With the mental structure, perspectival comprehension was finally inaugurated, and with it, space becomes a dominant axis for the imagination. Perspective is the ability of the visual senses to map and open up dimensions of space, and to study how the eye evaluates distance with time. Perspective also divides the observer and space: "it fixes man on the one hand, and the world on the other" (Gebser 94). Gebser points out that this is literally the time for conceptualizations, for geometry and qualitative measures (83, 84). In language, difficult and complex synonyms were formed. Consciousness also changed with respect to time: activities began to be increasingly predicated on the past, and the power of memory became overwhelming. There also came about the difference between the notions of personal and communal histories. Time began to be perceived as linear rather than cyclical.

It can be inferred that under a mythic time-scale system, accumulation of guilt or property was precluded since it was understood that everything is renewed periodically, in sync with the cycle of nature and with the help of ceremonies. But in the mental period, the ego became the power center, and its creation and destruction became a matter of linear history.27 With this linearity, power and accumulation of

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27 The earliest forms of recorded (oral or written) histories can be found around 1300 BC with Herodotus’s writings (Wilber 213). The comprehension of history was foundational for the creation of nations, racial distinctions, and an overall hierarchical sectioning of the human race. Similar texts are the Babylonian *Ecclesiastes* (1000 BC) and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2000 BC) (Feuerstein 96).
wealth (tools to counter the anxiety of death) acquired a sort of timelessness and immortality.

The early mental period was the time of geographical exploration, growing trade relations, and Neolithic technology. In the period of transition from the mythic to the mental, there was also a reduction in polytheistic totemic religions and a tendency towards monotheist ones. Rapid growth of populations in cities, the creation of the concepts of crimes and laws, the rise of nationalities, and the conjoining of war and slavery are some of its other features. Civilizations like the Sumerian and the Egyptian had already flourished and waned; this was the time of the Greek polis states. The Greek polis is the epitome of the idea of dialogue, of heightened individualism, and of the separation of private life from public life. The Great Mother goddess, who demanded the sacrifice of the self, was replaced by the hero—a human embodiment of divinity (Wilber 192). That is, maternal gods of fertility gave way to paternal heroes who embody the ego and human will. Consequently, by Homeric times, gods had already begun to resemble humans.

Coinciding with Karl Jasper's "Axial Age" (600-200 BC) (Feuerstein 108), the mental structure can be defined as the birth of the ego and the "emergence of directed or discursive thought" (Gebser 75), which is no longer polar but sharply dualistic in nature. It can be said that the mental period opened possibilities for truly rational and logical thought. It became possible to study thought itself, and to introspect and analyze the self. When the ego becomes individuated enough to act completely on its own, there is greater opportunity for it to impinge on another's will, and thus laws and ethics needed to be laid down. The emergence of law meant that "man had to
direct and judge himself" (Gebser 79) vis-à-vis others, and had to abide by rules made
by humans. Laws work on the principle of rationality, where there must be
consistency, and the ability to formulate patterns of precedence, causes, and
consequences. Gebser draws examples of law-making from a number of sources.
These include: Moses laying down the Ten Commandments; Parmenides, Lycurgus,
and Sophocles creating and documenting Greek laws for politics, pedagogy and art;
and Mānava-Dharmasāstra in India (75-80). In this mood of rigorous lawfulness of
Apollonian reason, Dionysian cults can be viewed as ways of reprising the older
magical and mythical worldviews.

Duality is the functioning mode of mental consciousness and rationality is its
cornerstone. Through the turbulence of the fall of great empires like the Roman
Empire, the rise of others like the Byzantine civilization, the advent of Christianity
and Islam, and the resurgence of Europe after the dark ages, rationality came to
cement its centrality in consciousness. With Dante and Petrarch, rationality and
perspectival vision altered the course of humanity forever:

With the Renaissance the ego, in its full-fledged form, entered the
limelight of human history. And that ego increasingly demanded
freedom from tradition, convention, and the millstone of the past. It
desired to enter into a free relationship to its cultural heritage, its social
context, and its future possibilities. For the Renaissance ego, believing
was a matter not of faith but of seeing—ocular evidence. (Feuerstein
114)
While the mental structure, in itself, is a necessary structure for consciousness, rationality, Gebser argues, is its most deficient aspect, not least because extreme rationality precludes compassion. Rationality rests on duality, which is essentially divisive as well as limiting. It separates the mind from the body, the reasonable from the unreasonable, the quantifiable from the unquantifiable, and leaves very little space for the reconciliation of the two sides. This marks a deviation from Berman's paradoxical structure. That is, mental consciousness cannot admit irrationality and rationality to be aspects of the same entity any more. Besides, in giving rise to reason, mental consciousness becomes so wholly dependent on it that what was only an element within the paradigm at the beginning becomes the paradigm. Reason, "reversing itself metabolistically to an exaggerated rationalism, becomes a kind of inferior plaything of the psyche, neither noticing nor even suspecting the connection" (Gebser 97).

For Gebser, our current vocabulary is a symptom of the absolute control the mental, perspectival vision has on our imagination. Through terms like transcending, overriding, exceeding, grasping, and sub- and super-ordinating, our thinking remains constantly in the thrall of spatial cognition. Even time is imagined to be complementary with the spatial dimension. It must be remembered that the more time is quantified, the greater appears its power in limiting and undermining human life. The dread of mortality was always at the back of humankind's mind, but it manifested itself as a mild pain, a shared social experience, or as the perpetual continuation of life in a different form (as supported by Egyptian and Sumerian myths). With the clean split between the ego and the world, the mental egoic human
uniquely experienced death as a personal event whose threat was inescapable but worth fighting against.

The Harbingers of the "Integral" Structure

Gebser and Wilber both stress upon the existence of those individuals who display anachronistic consciousness: their perspectives are either reminiscent of an epoch transcended by mankind as a whole, or one that has not yet been assimilated by others. Such minds are vital to trace the arc from the past to the present, as well as from the present to the future. Evolutionists like Wilber view the current status of the world as the height of mental-rational deficiency, which will be broken through when the integral structure emerges. Wilber calls this new stage a trans-perspectival, trans-rational stage, not to be confused with pre-rational consciousness.

For Gebser, whose philosophy is set against the backdrop of the Second World War, voices like T.S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, Aurobindo, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin offer the new, integral structure which transcends the perspectival and attains an aperspectival worldview. This emergent integral structure is a sign of the imminent defeat of rationality in the face of the integration and recapitulation of all the structures of consciousness. What this means is that all the latent structures are rendered transparent. However, that does not imply that people will indulge in thoughtless immersion as was symptomatic of the archaic structure. Rather, a new kind of worldview will arise from the knowledge and complete transparency of great divisiveness. Integration means "a fully completed and realized wholeness... the re-
establishment of the inviolate and pristine state of origin by incorporating the wealth of all subsequent achievement" (Gebser 99).

In the poetry of Rilke, Eliot, Paul Valéry, and Friedrich Hölderlin, Gebser sees magical symbols and myths flourishing, but with "astonishing purity" because these poets have "authentically surpassed the mental-rational structure" (502). That is, they are not nostalgically or blindly embracing the past but rendering it transparent without abandoning the mental structure of consciousness. For instance, in Rilke's poetry Gebser finds mythical polarity that transcends the mythical imagination. Both the mythical and the mental structures "are integrated into the integral-arational structure. . . . It is significant that both are surpassed, that is, also 'preserved,' in the double connotation of the word (aufheben-to supersede; to preserve)" (503). The element of integration that is visible in such art is that of paradoxes, where the irrational rests with the rational, the temporal with the timeless, and the real with the mythical. Most significantly, Gebser points out that true integration of consciousness can come only through having experienced, understood, and transcended all the structures of consciousness; "[t]o that end we must constantly relive and re-experience in a decisive sense the full depth of our past" (4).

**Summing Up**

The movement that Gebser traces involves the formation of the ego and its separation from the rest of the world. It also traces the division of the self into parts (mind, body, soul, spirit, dreams, actions, the unconscious and the subconscious), and the division of the world into the elements of nature, animals, and humans, the living
and the dead and so on. It is also a movement towards more complex worldviews, and more aspects of space and time.

From Gebser's model, I draw two aspects that are vital to my argument: the first is that consciousness, by its very nature, integrates and transcends; the second, that latent structures of consciousness manifest themselves in certain situations, but can also be deliberately invoked or revisited in art. The first point indicates that every structure carries within it its preceding structure(s) and its succeeding structure(s). The second point, that latent structures of consciousness can be revisited, must not be confused with nostalgia. Unlike the Romantic notion of the noble savage, the aim of consciousness is not to regressively lapse into a transcended structure, or to circumvent history. I have already mentioned that latent structures of consciousness are never lost, and assert themselves in certain situations. But what is more interesting is the deliberate or conscious invocation of these latent structures. Gebser finds rationality a bane and a force of divisiveness, but it is also the necessary ground on which artists and writers can recall structures that go against the contemporary grain. It must be kept in mind that it is only when the artist is highly aware of the mental-rational structure can he or she truly revisit a latent structure. When the modernist imagination turns towards mythic consciousness, and postmodernist imagination towards magical consciousness, they do so being fully aware that a deficient worldview is being reformulated and redirected by their creative efforts.