

Jean Gebser - A Bridge Between East And West

Integral Consciousness And The Zen Tradition

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Abstract.

Passages in the „The Ever Present Origin“ clearly show how Gebser himself perceived a fundamental similarity between his conception of an integral consciousness and the Eastern Zen tradition and its Dharma, i.e. the teachings of this tradition. This was already pointed out in 1989 by this author, who considers himself since 1981 as a Zen disciple in the tradition of the *Sanbo-Kyodan* (“Religious Organization of the Three Treasures”) based in Kamakura, Japan.

More recently, Rick Muller wrote on „Zen and Gebser“, emphasizing „self-creation“ - simultaneously mythic, mental, magic and integral - as a basic concept. This assertion can also be found in American thought (e.g. H.D. Thoreau's *Walden*) and literature (e.g. Thornton Wilder's *The Eighth Day*). It is this author's conviction that a novel and convincing „Dharma for the West“ can be formulated that will both be free from “eastern ideology” and also will lead out of the „dead ends“ and „traps“, that Western theology and religion have trodden and contrived over the past centuries. It will be pointed out in the author's presentation how German philosophy (e.g. the work of Karl Jaspers) and German literature (e.g. Robert Musil) show similar tendencies in that they integrate the mystical tradition with rational thought. The developing tradition of a *Transpersonal Psychology*, on the other hand, seems to this author a predominantly rational-mental approach to our possibilities as human beings, as we stand now on the brink of either destroying ourselves as a species or attaining a new level of consciousness – and hence, a new culture.

Finally, it will be discussed in some detail, how the logical systems of religion, psychology, psychotherapy react to each other – and to the free exchange between master and disciple in the Zen tradition. To understand what is going on in the disciple's mind, such aspects will be discussed as the relationship between Zen teaching (Dharma), the expectation raised by this teaching, the Zen experience and the meaning and overwhelming importance attached by the disciple to this unique practice.

In short: Gebser perceived an ever present possibility for a transformation of individuals, who will then create a novel culture. Zen tradition argues much the same: Individual transformation will change the world view and hence, the culture. However, each appeal to a person pointing out the necessity of a transformation also raises a resistance that has to be taken into account. Here we have the possibility to perceive as well as to give among ourselves.

It is the aim of the author to further strengthen the bridge already available between both East and West – as well as a bridge leading to a „Beyond“, that

Gebser refers to as Integral Consciousness, which offers a genuine possibility for our „never-ending development“, to use Franz Kafka’s famous saying.

Introduction

In Jean Gebser’s fundamental work, „Ursprung und Gegenwart“, „The Ever-Present Origin“¹ two references are made to the Zen tradition. First, and I quote from the English edition, we find on page 222 the following text:

„As for Eastern civilization, D. Suzuki’s descriptions of Zen Buddhism affords us a view not only of the Eastern experience of the soul, but also of the mental, waking structure which is intentionally realized in the practice of Zen. Yet, because of the rational consequence, Zen students seek to free themselves from it in order to attain, ultimately, a sudden leap or mutation to a *satori*, an elevated supra-wakefulness of consciousness evoked by one of the seemingly „senseless“ or “meaningless” *koans* (a kind of paradoxical sentence). We have defined this consciousness structure of integrative effectiveness as the „rational-integral“.“

The two footnotes within this text read as follows.

Regarding D.T.Suzuki’s work, Gebser writes: „We are familiar with the manifold paths of Hindu Yoga; they „correspond“ to the Hindu who does not think rationally and still, lives predominantly in the mythical structure. These paths are inappropriate for Europeans, in our estimation, or even detrimental within the European milieu, if for no other reason because the complete suppression or exclusion of volition is possible only for the few. The contemporary European can scarcely distinguish any longer between effort of will, intensive concentration, and true meditation, since he attempts to direct all of them by his rationality – an attempt that necessarily leads to unfortunate results.“(243)

And furthermore: „...Satori must in no way be confused with Indic „Samadhi“! Satori is one possibility inherent in the arational (integral) consciousness structure for entering or participating in time freedom; Samadhi, on the other hand, is a means of reverting to magic-mythical timelessness, appropriate to our corresponding irrational consciousness structure.“

„Zen has nothing in common with vague mysticism, since Zen, despite opinions to the contrary, is not mysticism.“(243)

Those are clear words, well chosen to point out a bridge between orient and occident. Furthermore, Gebser thus confirms, for the individual, a possibility to attain a novel structure of consciousness, following the integration of heretofore never experienced states of consciousness, e.g. enlightenment. Both Zen and Gebser point to the possibility, even the necessity, of a transformation in the human being, and hence in culture. Gebser carefully refrained himself to describe a „way“, or, in Japanese, „do“, towards this novel structure. In his work, there are other possibilities, e.g. „imparting and perceiving truth“, the translation of „Wahrnehmen und Wahrgeben“, which terms are difficult to

translate indeed. To me, it is not only „perceiving“, but living in truth truthfully, and also, not only „imparting“ truth, but be truthful and offer truth like a *warm cloak to a freezing human being*, as we say in German, rather than flinging it upon the naked skin with a wet towel. Also, the German term “wahren”, one of Gebser’s favorite terms to describe our new relationship to the world means both to watch over, look after, take care of, keep safe, taking somebody into one’s own care, thus maintaining a close and caring relationship – and also imparting a ring of the truth which is beyond words.

In the best of the American tradition, similar thoughts can be found since the beginning of the 19. Century. So called New England Transcendentalism, in particular Ralph W. Emerson’s works and the teachings of Henry D. Thoreau immediately come to mind. In the 20. Century, it is Thornton Wilder², whose work Jean Gebser was familiar with to the extent that he translated some of it, who expressed thoughts similar to Gebser’s, who perceived a new possibility for the structure of human consciousness. Let me quote from Wilder’s late masterpiece „The Eighth Day“, where he describes an example of what you might call „New Man“:

„We have described these men and women in negative terms – fearless, not self-referent, uninteresting, humorless, so often unlearned. Wherein lies their value? We did not choose the day of our birth nor may we choose the day of our death, yet choice is the sovereign faculty of the mind. We did not choose our parents, color, sex, health, or endowments. We were shaken into existence, like dice from a box. Barriers and prison walls surround us and those about us – everywhere, inner and outer impediments. These men and women with the aid of observation and memory early encompass a large landscape. They know themselves, but their self is not the only window through which they view their existence. They are certain that one small part of what is given us is free. They explore daily the exercise of freedom. Their eyes are on the future. When the evil hour comes, they hold. They save cities – or, having failed, their example saves other cities after their death. They confront injustice. They assemble and inspire the despairing.

But what do these men and women have faith *in* ?

They are slow to give words to the object of their faith. To them it is self-evident and the self-evident is not easily described...

There is no creation without faith and hope.

There is no faith and hope that does not express itself in creation. These men and women work. The spectacle that most discourages them is not error or ignorance or cruelty, but sloth. This work that they do may often seem to be all but imperceptible. That is characteristic of activity that never for a moment envisages an audience.” (99/100)

To pursue this topic into our present times, of course Ken Wilber’s work, in which he draws heavily from Gebser, acknowledging his contribution, stands out both as a vast compilation of relevant facts and a deeply felt conviction that new consciousness is indeed close at hand, if now only for the few, but

eventually for all mankind. It should be noted that Wilber, himself a Zen disciple as well as well learned and experienced in other Buddhist traditions, has in recent years, instead of constructing ever higher levels of consciousness, begun to refer quite modestly to an integral consciousness in the sense Gebser coined this term. If we take his constructs, efforts on a mental level, e.g. All Levels/All Quadrants, to be a reminder of the vast scope to be experienced and then to become the foundation of every action, we have at our hands, if a bit too explicit for my own taste, something similar to Gebser's new art of "Wahrnehmen und Wahrgeben".

So, while many texts from many authors seem to converge in a new and (ever) present possibility, thus encouraging many men and women to look out for themselves rather than to lean on traditions that are felt to become obsolete, there are other movements in the world of the mind that inspire less hope and trust, but rather fear and even shame. I am referring to an increase in fundamentalist beliefs and ways of life, both within the Christian and the Muslim traditions, which can only be described, in Gebser's words, as highly deficient mental structures, including even magic and mythical memories from a past long thought to be overcome by mental structures.

It is in the face of these structures and the dangers they bring to human global development, that Gebser's perceptions and the teachings of the Zen tradition, again brought together, clearly point to a way to increase our awareness and, hence, not only our understanding of the world, both biological and social, but „imparting truth“ to it, all beings included.

When I had the honour and the pleasure, to be with you at last year's conference in New York at NYU, I found that Rick Muller had addressed a similar topic, some years ago, that I will now briefly remind you of. Though I disagree with him on some points, the main theme of his paper³ is quite in accord with my own attempts at understanding Zen and Gebser. Though I do not think that Zen is a „mythically dominant construct“, but rather an outcrop of a highly developed and well trained „mental mind“, namely the Buddha's and later those of the Indic, the Chinese and Japanese patriarchs, with their backgrounds of Indic philosophical thought as well as Taoist traditions in China, Muller's main point is very well taken: Integrality is not something we seek, but rather something we have (to realize and integrate into our daily life). In pursuing this, we indeed practice „self-creation“, thus contributing to the „Eight's Day's Agenda“, to use Wilder's notion of our future. By this he did not refer to elaborate plans for some distant future, nor did he seek „Utopia“, which is, according to Oscar Wilde⁴, forever something beyond the horizon, but rather those things that have to be done moment by moment, matters of seemingly little importance, but vast possibilities to achieve „quality“, as Robert Pirsig⁵ pointed out in his great book on „Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance“ over 30 years ago. Again, however, it is not a „Metaphysics of Quality“, that Gebser tells us to speculate on (see Pirsig's homepage „Metaphysics of Quality“), but our day – to – day work, even from breath to breath. In this sense, we speak in

German of „matter“ at hand, things to be done „matter of factly“, as a matter of fact. Again, Wilder has a wonderful way to give us examples from the life of his main character, John Ashley:

„John Ashley was a man of faith. He did not know that he was a man of faith. He would have been quick to deny that he was a man of religious faith, but religions are merely the garments of faith – and very ill cut they often are, especially in Coaltown, Illinois.“ (98)

Here another American writer comes to my mind, William James and his work on „The varieties of Religious Experience“. There he draws the distinction between faith and creed, stating that faith is a matter of experience, while creeds are mostly „over-beliefs“, speculative and thought out systems of understanding and explanation „after the fact“ of a religious experience. Thus we come back to the Zen tradition, which lives from this experience and survived because of its ever present possibility.

As it now enters „the West“, of course it is and will be further changed in its adaptation to another culture. As Muller rightly pointed out, Zen and the Tao cannot be explained. I may add: Neither can Integral Consciousness be explained, however hard we try to understand Gebser's new terms „Synairesis“ following „Perception“ and „Systase“, following „Systems“. These are something that must be „fully experienced individually“, as Muller pointed out, forthwith including Gebser's term „Ever Present Origin“. Thus, enlightenment, (Jap.: Satori; not to be confused with 18. Century „Enlightenment“ as a philosophical-cultural movement), becomes the key-word for an experience, that propels men and women out of their accustomed mode of living, lets them experience „nothingness“ along with the deeply felt conviction, that all beings are forever „saved“, that they are free from suffering. The Buddhist' core teaching, the „Heart Sutra“, expresses this basic fact very simply and sincerely. „Coming back“ from such an experience, deep feelings of joy and even gratitude (though there is no belief in someone to be grateful to) persist and help to change our way of life.

The ten famous pictures „The Oxen and His Shepherd“ (see for example Ph. Kapleau, 1981) remind us of the rather long way that stretches before the Zen disciple – even after enlightenment. Please be content with a brief description here:

1. We see a man who has lost his real self, symbolized as an ox.
2. This man now perceives the tracks of this ox, e.g. scriptures.
3. First encounter with the real self.
4. The man finds it difficult to master this experience
5. He learns to keep in touch
6. Even to tame and ride home on his oxen.
7. After more fervent practice, ox and shepherd are forgotten
8. Nothingness, great enlightenment, is experienced.
9. After that, the mountains are again mountains, the streams streams again.
10. Return to the marketplace, to teach in public.

It would be interesting to search, in Gebser's work, for similar patterns, thus contributing to the question whether Gebser's work contains, however well hidden, some hints as to a „way“, a „Dō“ in Japanese, pertinent to Integral Consciousness. It is noteworthy, however, that Gebser refrained himself from formulating any such „ways“. Instead he insisted on pointing out that „this“ will come, if not for certain (there can be no certainty in these matters), then as a possibility. Thus, he continued, however involuntarily, a tradition founded by the German novelist Robert Musil⁶, who spoke of a „Sense of Possibility“ which he contrasted to the much more favored „Sense of Reality“ of our times.

Let me quote Muller on this:

„Zen and Gebserian insights don't presuppose rational awareness. All individuals have integral moments. There are those who have never heard about Zen, or integral reality, yet, they live their lives in the moment. They live integral lives and have acute Zen awareness. They don't spend years studying, meditating, practicing zazen, going to conferences or debating the subtle distinctions of hermeneutics, techne, or ethnomethodology.

They just live their lives.” (15)

It is interesting to note that for Muller, Zen and Gebser are “not-two”, to use the phrase familiar to all Zen students: He even goes so far to say Zen/Gebser. I greatly appreciate his perspective and hope to do it justice here.

To proceed from here, one can either go back to late or contemporary philosophy, psychology and belletristic books – or go forward to create a new language, find new words for the unheard-of. I will give some examples of both these possibilities, starting out with a look back in time, and then look a round at our present times.

It is the German philosopher Karl Jaspers who comes to my mind immediately. Son of the city in which I have dwelled these last 25 years, Oldenburg near Bremen (noted for its four fairytale - musicians who decide to spend their last years in a truly Gebserian spirit, saying that something better than death can be found anywhere!) he became famous as a psychiatrist who led this branch of the medical art out of its confusion by a strict methodological approach, discerning “Understanding” (Verstehen) and “Explaining” (Erklären) and ordering the results of these approaches. In the same spirit, he later on approached philosophy and its history, and described in great detail, in his “Philosophical Logic” of 1945, what he then called, true to the tradition, the “Unio Mystica⁷”. It must be said here, that he used this term in much the same sense as Gebser spoke of the experience of an Integral consciousness. Jaspers' reference to Master Eckhart proves this beyond doubt, and we remember that Gebser did not speak of this famous and venerable master as a “mystic”, thus denoting mythical structure, but as an early voice of integral consciousness. This view has been reinforced by the Japanese philosopher Ueda, who contributed to the book dedicated to Gebser on his 60. anniversary⁸. Let me mention here, just in passing, that it was another psychiatrist, the Canadian Richard Bucke⁹, who

spoke of a state of consciousness¹⁰, “Cosmic Consciousness” in much the same vein as Gebser spoke of “Integral Consciousness”. Thus, Bucke became one of the main witnesses for William James at the beginning of the 20. Century. It is probably for good reasons, that it were psychiatrists, who concerned themselves with such states, both claiming them to be perfectly normal, in fact, and strongly asserting, both of them, that they must not be confused with psychotic states of consciousness, however similar, at times, they appear to be. For both, those higher states of consciousness represented the highest possibilities of the human mind, contributing to the creation and the shaping and maintaining of cultures all over the world.

At the same time that Karl Jaspers began his academic career as a psychiatrist, there was a brilliant young student of psychology, in Berlin, who wrote a doctoral thesis on the famous positivist thinker Ernst Mach¹¹, Robert Musil. After career attempts as a soldier, an engineer, and a psychologist, he abandoned all these ways and became one of the most famous writers of the 20. Century, so much so, that his never-ending novel “Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften” was awarded the title “Novel of the Century”. In this work, in its endless ramifications of modern thought and ways of life, the central figure, Ulrich, whose name means literally “rich of herirlooms”, allows himself a one year moratorium, after careers very similar to his author, before he will decide, how, and if, to live in modern times¹². Among the many issues that the author takes up and pursues to our most glorious heights and to our darkest depths, I will only mention his question, whether the “Holy Ways” can be pursued “in an automobile”, as he said. This question I find very intriguing indeed, it is the central question of anyone studying Gebser’s work, whether he or she is a disciple of some mystical tradition or not. Many questions arise from here, e.g. about Stanislaw Grof’s work with LSD and later “Holotropic Breathing” to achieve certain “states of consciousness” without considering the other “treasures”, namely the community, the Sangha, and the teaching, the Dharmā, of Buddhism, as mentioned above. From there, the use and abuse of drugs to “enlarge consciousness” should be remembered, even back to the seemingly wild days of Jack Kerouac and Carlos Castaneda.

To return to Musil, it may be noted that his search ends on a negative note; even though mystical experience is attained, shaped, in the novel, after Musil’s own experience of “daylight mystic” (cf. Mach’s experience on a bright summer day – as opposed to “dark mystique”, in Gebser’s terms rather mythic consciousness) and even though it is found in loving unity, Musil could not describe a way on which to integrate this shattering experience into daily life. Thus, his hero fails in his quest, and the open end of the novel, in beginning World War One, is the beginning of a deep despair¹³. It is also Musil, who was strongly opposing any notion of an upward development of mankind, or of a basically new quality of consciousness. “What are our attempts at betterment”, he says somewhere, “other than trying to dig ourselves out of our graves, where we stand knee-deep already, always digging at different sites.”

Even though Gebser refused to resort to hope as a principle, in the sense that Ernst Bloch did so remarkably eloquent¹⁴, but rather soberly spoke of a new possibility, which it is, nevertheless, our duty to nourish and help grow, there is hope, I think, in the integration of spirituality, as it is nowadays called, into our life. In particular, it is the Zen tradition, as I would like to assert once more, that may help strengthen the beginning of the new integral culture. Let me therefore, in conclusion, refer to some practical issues which arise when one attempts to practice zazen and begins to search for a teacher and a sangha in modern, even in postmodern times¹⁵.

Having, for myself, found both a teacher and then a community of disciples, in the Zen tradition of the “Three Jewels”, Kamakura, a school which was founded by Harada Roshi, then led by Yasutani Roshi¹⁶ and later by Yamada Koun Roshi¹⁷, I am glad to have met both the German Jesuit priest Hugo Makibi Enomiya Lassalle and Robert Aitken Roshi, who lives now in retirement on Big Island, Hawaii, very close to the last active volcano there. I have heard that he recently moved back to Honolulu to be close to the Diamond Head Sangha there. His books, e.g. “Taking The Path of Zen”¹⁸ as well as “Master Raven”, are very concise guides on the way, “on which there is no coming and going”, as the saying is. Already in 1983, Enomiya-Lassalle drew heavily from Gebser, along with Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin, to point to a new culture based on Integral Consciousness¹⁹. It was his teaching, that brought me to Gebser’s work in 1984. Since then, I have offered courses on Gebser quite regularly at my university, which carries the name of Carl von Ossietzky, the Winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace in the thirties.

I have felt strongly, ever since, that a “westerly” Dharma, or a Dharma for the West should be formulated, which will have to take 2000 years of philosophical, scientific and technical development, in the west, into account. In this attempt, I have written a book “Zen in The West – New Teachings for an Old Exercise”. I will show you some of its lines of argumentation, stating first, now almost a matter of course, the close relation between Zen Teaching and Gebserian thought. What interests me here is: How do people respond to the Zen message when they first hear it? How will such a message take roots within one or the other? What happens when practice begins, and what when it begins to hurt as well as to encourage?

Let me start with a phrase I found in Lin Yutang’s German edition of the Tao Te King in 1955. There, he cites Tschuang Tse’s essay about the main streams of thought in old China. The phrase goes: *Some of our elders taught as follows ...* That teaching is then described; after that, the text continues: *Some people heard of these teachings and loved them; they then ...did such and such, making mistakes about the teaching, inventing fancy clothes to distinguish themselves from other disciples and so on and so on...So I am asking the same question as a very actual one: Some people like Jean Gebser taught as follows; Ken Wilber heard about this and loved this teaching, he then ... Or just: You and me heard about this teaching, we loved it, and now we do – what?*

Since we have learned, very painfully, that there is no absolute truth anymore anywhere, that there is no “totality” or “Ganzheit” to be found – both being mental concepts – we will have to be content with and fervently practice what Gebser called “Gänzlichung”, which in the English translation reads “integration”; now I think that term does not wholly encompass what Gebser meant to express here. “Integration” I take to signify the incorporation of some parts, formerly alien in some way, into a whole, that will eventually embrace all that we perceive, experience and then “know”. Gebser seems to tell us, that this “process” will never be complete in the sense that a final totality will eventually be in our reach – and then even at our disposal as a novel technology. Rather, we will take one step after the other in to the “open”, thus experiencing and pursuing, what the American Zen teacher Charlotte Yoko Beck²⁰ so aptly called the “ABC”, meaning “A Bigger Container” . Here I need your help indeed, to circumscribe what we might mean by that. A new kind of speech, circular may be, must be practiced, much like the circular perambulations of women giving birth to a child, formerly seen in the “Kreissaal”, a meaning that is completely lost when you translate “Kreissaal” with “labour ward”: At the beginning, at the moment of birth of a novel structure, one can but practice such circular movements, gropings of speech, poetic nonsense perhaps, metaphor if possible, meaning conveyed and confirmed in a dialog, not a discourse any more, but mutual efforts of expression and understanding reinforced, and thus shaped, into a new structure. Thus, there is no “ideal” anymore, that can be ultimately reached only in eternity, but a moment to moment attempt at “intensifying” consciousness, as both Gebser and the Zen teachers insist. It follows that there is no “Dharma” except in everything around us – and that is precisely what the Buddha taught. As my teacher, Paul Shepherd, frequently put it: Every digression, every disturbance, every thought, emotion will become, when realized, a reminder to resume our practice, be it the concentration on the next breath, the next number in the count of breaths, the koan we work on.

So, what do we make of “Zen in the West”, after we heard about this teaching, loved it, and now pursue it? It is our task as well as our possibility, even a necessity, to integrate it into our scientific and technical world, to integrate its teaching into western philosophy and thus contribute to what Gebser showed us to be a novel structure of consciousness, first in the individual, then in a new culture. This also means to set aside all attempts at a mere mental exercise, an intensification of mental consciousness structures alone, e.g. gnostic revivals and dogmatism of all sorts.

I strongly feel that our hope lies in a dialog, carried on in deep mutual trust, as a practice to be pursued fervently, in the face of all possible dangers, misunderstandings and failures. As R. Kipling²¹ once pointed out, there is always the danger, that someone, not certain about the heart of the other, may seek the truth there with a dagger.

How we see the world, how we come to look at the world and at ourselves, to find out what there is outside of us as well as who we really and truly are, all this, and from the very beginning of our existence, stems from dialog and will shape dialog. And as dialog also means “relationship”, we will have to develop this art of relationship maintenance well beyond our present attempts.

Let me give you two examples from my own work that started out in psychiatric training, 1965 at the Mass. General Hospital in Boston, and turned to Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, before I became a teacher at a university as well as a disciple in the Zen tradition.

First, compare with me, with regard to the Zen tradition, the following aspects: Teaching text, Experience, and attribution of importance. Let us read their sixfold interactions in their vast scope from scientific descriptions to markings on the way to heaven –or hell. Thus we may contribute to the hermeneutics, the art of finding and conveying meaning in and from texts.

- A **text** leads to **attributions** which have both conscious and subconscious effects.
- Thus, a **text** shapes, whether we know it or not, our expectations of **experience(s)**, it thus (mis)leads our experience.
- **Experience** itself reinforces or weakens our **attributions**, and expectations.
- **Experience** leads us to (re)formulate **texts**.
- **Attributions** shape, consciously or not, what is accepted as **experience**.
- **Attributions** furthermore tend to cement or canonize **texts** into holy ones.

This “back and forth” as in a triangle will forever continue, what we can and should do is to become aware of these movements, share them with one another, thus helping the other and ourselves – and then contemplate where they lead us in our daily life. As Christopher Fry once put it:

In a sort of a universe

In a sort of a fix.

It's what they call flesh we're in

And a rare old dance it leads us!

Gebser seems to me to say: let us dance freely instead of imagining that we are being moved as by an invisible puppeteer, let us practice and enjoy our movements as well as become clearer and clearer in our perceptions, not as drunkenness, frenzy or ecstasy, but in a holy sobriety, smiling, as Gebser showed us. Thus, even our singing and dancing, as the ancient Canticle on Zazen by Hakuin reminds us²², are the voice of the Dharma. And remember that we dance not in solitude, but in close union with all beings around us. Such a tradition is old, also in the West; the saga of Parzival tells us how a young fool, deprived by his mother of proper training as a knight, intuitively knows how to move in a fight; the story goes on to tell us, that he will lose this skill during formal training, before he can reach a more mature performance. Hence,

it is inevitable that he looks rather clumsy in between. Heinrich von Kleist told us, in his famous novel about the dancer and the puppet, that unconscious graceful movements, when realized by the conscious mind, will be lost – the resulting clumsiness to be overcome only by long and hard training, in the end only by a jump onto another level of consciousness. This comes very close to Gebser's own perceptions and transmissions.

My second example comes from attempts at a theory of action, seeking a basic theory for both social work and psychotherapy. Several years ago, together with my colleague and friend Peter Kastner²³, we proposed a way to speak about human action, that I will briefly recall here in the form of seven short points easily elaborated. Our initial dilemma ran as follows. We want to avoid something like a super-theory, since this can only result in absolute power, and thus to corrupt absolutely. As we acknowledge this, we have to realize that all we can offer is an invitation, a beckoning onto our way of dialog in friendship – devoid of all power save a certain persuasiveness which can be a formidable power indeed. I am not implying that it is also ours. I will now briefly outline our approach in one motto and seven theses.

Our motto runs as follows.

Human action is a symbol of creativity itself

Creativity is a symbol of human activity.

1. Every action is meaningful action, even those that are not easy to perceive as such at a first glance.
2. The meaning of actions discloses itself in a symbolic way, as symbols.
3. These symbols can be perceived only when a close and intimate personal relation is achieved. Even so, there will always be a residue.
4. Freedom of choice is one of the fundamental faculties of the human being.
5. Every intimate relationship tends to limit this freedom. It is because of this that resistance arises.
6. This resistance has to be carefully perceived, taken into account, and valued.
7. To be able to achieve this, there has to be transformation.

Brief, even laconic, as these sentences come, there can be no doubt: Explanations as well as exercises pertaining to them are vast, and endless, sometimes highly rewarding, at times so many wasted breaths. Today and here, however, I will only add a few words.

As to our motto, it is plain that the two sentences are mutually exclusive, the one being, in essence, a theological statement, the other a psychological, even psychoanalytical one.

In the first thesis, we maintain that "meaning" is not found, but created fresh at every moment. What it is – see thesis two – can be ascertained only in a dialog. This dialog circles around symbols, we say, indicating the clear cut signs of language are not always sufficient to disclose a meaning. Sometimes, even the

body and its language have to be taken into account. In thesis three, we emphasize our relationship which enables this mutual search for meaning.

Thesis four strikes a different note – it comes straight from our mental structure, emphasizing freedom in opposition to mythic involvement. It follows, for mental consciousness, what is said in thesis #5. The resistance, well known to all of us, endangers our relationships. It must not be fought off or denied, but, as in thesis #6, worked on. This, however, is possible only after a jump to a new level of consciousness, that Gebser termed the Integral. As long as this level is not attained, there will be strife, even war, among us.

See how we tried to impart some hope, to show a new possibility, rather than a technique, of dealing with the many differences, seemingly impossible to overcome, among people. Both from Gebser and from Zen come the assertion that these differences are not our last word but rather a leftover from a glorious past, the achievements of our mental structure, by now not only obsolete, but dangerous.

It is important, to come to an ending now, though never to an end, to realize that despite all our efforts, there will always be a residue, something that remains outside in the open, probably right behind the horizon, perhaps far away. It is this remains, the residue, as we say, this rest, that in itself is a symbol of creativity, to be cherished, not to be dreaded. There is one among the many hundred Zen Koans, that stresses this point. It runs as follows²⁴:

Goso said, “For example, it’s just like a great cow passing through a latticed window. Hear head, horns, and four legs have passed through. Why is it that the tail can’t pass too?”

So even if enlightenment has been experienced, it has yet to be integrated, thus to become one with our daily life. Gebser’s teachings make the same point at so much more length. Note that there is never a real shortage of “time”, but always a plethora of free time to be experienced.

However, it is time to come to an ending, though not to an end. I have discussed the relationship of the Zen experience to Gebser’s truth-givings, thus stressing the point that a transformation similar to the one experienced by Zen adepts is a condition necessary for the attainment of integral consciousness. There is another angle of that relationship that I have not touched upon and will now at least hint at. The Buddha’s teaching, as it is preserved also in the Zen communities, stressed the Four Noble Truths about suffering, the causes of suffering and the end of it. Nirvana as a name for enlightenment, as well as for the actual experience of the end of suffering always had an undertone of leaving the world, more specifically the Six Worlds from the Wheel of Life, forever. It may be that Gebser’s teachings, when they come to the minds of Zen students, help to stress another point – and that is making a plea for life itself and the art of living on our planet Earth. The joy of being, the Radiance of Being, as Allan Combs put it, the joy of being together, bound by love to all creatures, is

something that in the Zen tradition is very much alive – possibly as an heirloom from Chinese Taoism. Thus it may well be, as Niels Bohr, the famous physicist, maintained is, that the opposite of a deep truth is another deep truth. The Buddha's teaching was and still is such a truth – what Gebser had to say has the same ring of truth, though it may appear, on the surface, to deny the Buddha's truth – saying.

There is some evidence for this in Gebser's texts, but the deeper relationship between Gebser and Zen is not touched thereby, I think and feel strongly.

As always, there is a story relevant to these points, also in the Jewish tradition. Remember with me the Rabbi who admitted two adversaries to his presence, and upon hearing the one saying "You are right" – as well as later on to the other "You are right". Upon hearing this, his wife admonished him saying "They can't both be right", and he said: "You are right".

So let me rather close with a Zen Saying from The Little Zen Calendar, which the participants of our meeting probably remember quite fondly:

When all things to the One, even Gold loses its value.

But when the One returns to all things, even the pebbles sparkle.

Footnotes

¹ For the successful effort of translating Gebser's great work we will be forever grateful to Noel K. Barstad and Algis Mickunas.

² Thornton Wilder: The Eighth Day. Penguin Books, London, 1968

³ Rick Muller: Zen and Gebser, p. 13-20. Vol.6, No. 1 of „Integrative Explorations. Journal of Culture and Consciousness.

⁴ Oscar Wilde: The Soul of Man under Socialism. In: Fortnightly Review, 1891.

⁵ Robert M. Pirsig: Zen And The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. An Inquiry Into Values. Bantam Books, London, Toronto, New York, 1975

⁶ Robert Musil: Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1952, 1978.

⁷ Already in his „Psychology of World-Views“ (Psychologie der Weltanschauungen) he had dealt extensively with the mystical tradition, in particular with Meister Eckhart.

⁸ I am very happy to be able to donate this book to the Gebser Collection that has been assembled here at Oklahoma and that will, I hope, grow and flourish in the future.

⁹ Richard Bucke: Cosmic Consciousness, 1901.

¹⁰ Please remember that it was Allan Combs, who drew the sharp and useful distinction between „states of mind“, „states of consciousness“ and „structures of consciousness“, thus clearing up some of the confusion around these terms. I am proud to remember, also, that we had invited Allan Combs as a guest speaker at our Jean Gebser Conference in 2000 in Dresden (see „Contributions to Integral Thought“, 2001, Schaffhausen.)

¹¹ Gebser, it seems, thought highly of Ernst Mach, whom he quoted in „The Ever Present Origin“, acknowledging Mach's „fourth dimension“ as related to „time“ and asserting, that Mach's conception „has a distinctly psycho-physical coloration despite his positivist and phenomenological viewpoint.“(342). Please note, that Ernst Mach made a „Mystical Experience“, which he had had „on a bright summer day“ the basis for his further thinking about perception, as he himself said. I owe this anecdote, which is so much more, to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme, who wrote on Mysticism and contributed to several

Gebser conferences during the last years. See our "Beiträge zur Integralen Weltansicht", as evidenced on our website www.jean-gebser-gesellschaft.ch

- ¹² A reference to Charly Chaplin is in order, to the brave little man caught in the machinery of modernism, never despairing, always in love. Little thanks the US offered this valiant knight errant in the early fifties of the last century!
- ¹³ Note, that the opposite is true for another hero, the young Hans Castorp of Thomas Mann's „Magic Mountain“. There, the war ends his captivity on the mountain, to send him to the battlefields where, according to Thomas Mann, he is no more of interest to the writer, having achieved a „normal life“ at last.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Ernst Bloch: *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.
- ¹⁵ There is, at least here in Europe, some debate whether „Modernity“ has even begun properly, or whether it has become obsolete, to be replaced by „Postmodernity“. I do not intend to dwell on this issue, preferring Gabers's clear words on „mental“ and „integral“ structures.
- ¹⁶ Of whom Kapleau speaks very highly, quoting many teishos (Preachings during a sitting period of some days); the controversy around this master has arisen from his nationalistic and antisemitic views, so much so that he was asked to resign from his position by his successor, Yamada Koun Roshi, now dead. His successor again, Kubota Roshi, apologized in public for the political, in particular antisemitic, statements of Yasutani Roshi. What we have to realize here is, that even in a deeply enlightened person, integration of that experience is not always accomplished.
- ¹⁷ Yamada Koun: *Gateless Gate*. Center Publications, Los Angeles, 1979
- ¹⁸ Robert Aitken: „Taking the Path of Zen“. North Point Press, San Francisco, „Zen Master Raven. Sayings and Doings of a Wise Bird.“ Tuttle, Boston, 2002.
- ¹⁹ Hugo Makibi Enomiya Lassalle: *Wohin geht der Mensch?* Benzinger Verlag, Zürich, 1983
- ²⁰ Charlotte Y. Beck: *Everyday Zen*. Harper & Row, New York, 1989
- ²¹ In his famous novel „Kim“...
- ²² Hakuin Zenji: *Canticle about Zazen (Hakuin Zazen Wasan)*
- ²³ Peter Kastner is professor at the University of Applied Sciences at Hamburg.
- ²⁴ This is case # 38 in *Mumonkan (Gateless Gate)*, see above in FN 17).