

Chapter 1.

The Aperspectives

To the Point:

This is the first chapter devoted to some ideas I regard as my own. They are the result of a process that has been going on for many years, a process of self-discovery.

More than anything else, my motivation was a gap in my education. I had to leave high school after completing the lower level, and thus I missed important courses in physics, chemistry, and biology, subjects that interested me much more than Latin and algebra. Books by the philosopher Jean Gebser provided welcome help. Gebser combed through the entire spectrum of scientific disciplines in search of new categories of thought and came up with the concept of the “aperspective age”—as opposed to the era of perspective that was the Renaissance and the non-perspective period that preceded it (*Abendländische Wandlung*, Zurich 1943).

What I realized was this: that we live in an age of paradigmatic shift—of shifting patterns of thought that place our view of the world on an entirely new footing—shifts of the kind that have occurred many times over the course of human history.

In the Renaissance, for example, which Gebser refers to as the age of perspective. It was preceded by the non-perspective era, which is reflected in the flat, two-dimensional character of Byzantine panel painting up to the tentative realism of Giotto. From that point on, art achieved an unprecedented degree of pictorial realism—the perfect illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface.

The impact of that shift went far beyond the sphere of art. Art was the medium through which people were made aware of space as such. Such artists as Masaccio, Uccello, Leonardo et al. created the new image of the world in their paintings. Within a very few years, they had fully elaborated Brunelleschi’s discovery of what it took to construct perspective precisely, namely a point of view and a vanishing point. And thus the human being was defined as an individual who observes God and the world from his own vantage point. That was the new mode of perception, and it was both shocking and liberating at once.

One has to stop and think about that for a moment. At first, we thought the world was flat. Then we learned that it is a sphere. How incredible this must have seemed to people at the time! The idea of living “on top” of this globe can be reconciled with the experience of living on a flat surface, provided the globe is large enough. But what about “down below”? It took Newton’s definition of gravity to give plausibility to the new insight, since it could not be experienced first hand. And things proceeded from there. We had to accept that the Earth revolves around the Sun and not the other way around, as we see it with our own eyes. Today we know a great deal more. We know that the Earth is not only not the center of the universe but merely a tiny planet that races around a tiny star named the Sun at the edge of a minor galaxy; and that the whole universe is racing along with it. The gap between our knowledge and our perception has grown progressively wider. Or, expressed in different terms, what we perceive has grown less and less true.

It is no wonder that artists were not a part of the vanguard that rang in the new age this time. Our knowledge of space and time, of energy and matter, of becoming and passing away has become increasingly abstract.

Yet in my view, one of the key functions of art is to make life more accessible to experience at all levels—to bridge the gap between knowledge and perception, to make reality visible and thus a bit more familiar: art as a vehicle for establishing truth.

We do find some traces of the new paradigmatic shift in art. In Cubist paintings, for example, the old temporal space becomes a new spatial time, where different standpoints are represented within the same painting. Or in early sculptures by Georges Vantongerloo and later ones by Max Bill, which can be traced to the strips of August F. Möbius, one of the forefathers of the new way of thinking. But evidence like this is rare.

This was the field in which I wanted to work. My thoughts revolved around Einstein’s theory. I learned that the universe is not boundless and infinite, as was once thought, but both limited and infinite at the same time.

That was the point of departure for the pictures I called Aperspectives in keeping with