

Chapter 5: Transformations of the Dynamic Mandala

With regard to maps in general, there is a difference between maps that have transformation built into them and maps that don't. Both kinds of maps can be transformed, but in the map with built-in dynamics the transformation is part of the map, whereas in the map that lacks built-in dynamics the transformation is imposed from the outside. The mandala of Figure 4–1 that I described in the preceding chapter has transformation built into it and therefore it demands transformation. Why? The mandala is self-referential: it refers to the whole Kosmos and also to itself. Thus, the dynamic in the mandala refers to the dynamic of the Kosmos and the mandala itself.

How can the mandala be transformed? In general, it can be transformed by the following changes:

1. Decrease or increase of the number of circles.
2. Decrease or increase of the number of concept pairs and lines.
3. Change of the structure of the mandala. This includes a replacement of concepts by symbols, mathematical transformations (see McFarlane's mathematical mandala in the next chapter), and the change from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional structure. It may also involve a reversal of center and periphery which leads to the destruction of the typical mandalic form.
4. Organic/artistic transformations through the creative genius of the artist. Since each organic/artistic mandala is a new, original creation, it is not an actual transformation of another mandala, but it can be seen as such.

The above kinds of transformations lead to conceptual, symbolic, mathematical, and organic/artistic mandalas. Let us first look at conceptual transformations.

Changing the Number of Circles

First let us decrease the number of circles from two to one. In this case the single circle that is left represents simply form, manifestation, the Many (Figure 5–1). Thus, this reduction to one circle also reduced the number of concepts to just one and we obtain the simplest mandala there is (Figure 5–1).

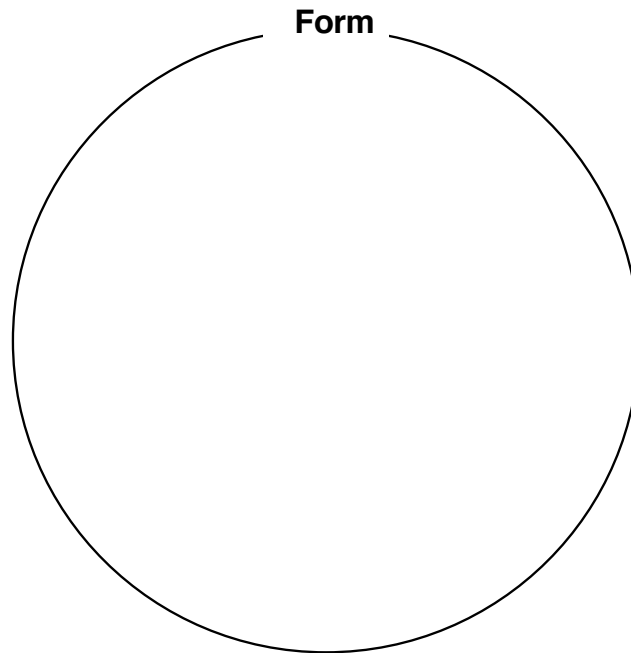


Figure 5–1. Mandala transformation with only one circle and one concept, which is form.

Now let us increase the number of circles. For example, let us add four circles outside the outer circle and two circles inside the inner circle of the basic mandala of Figure 4–1. This gives a total of eight circles (Figure 5–2).

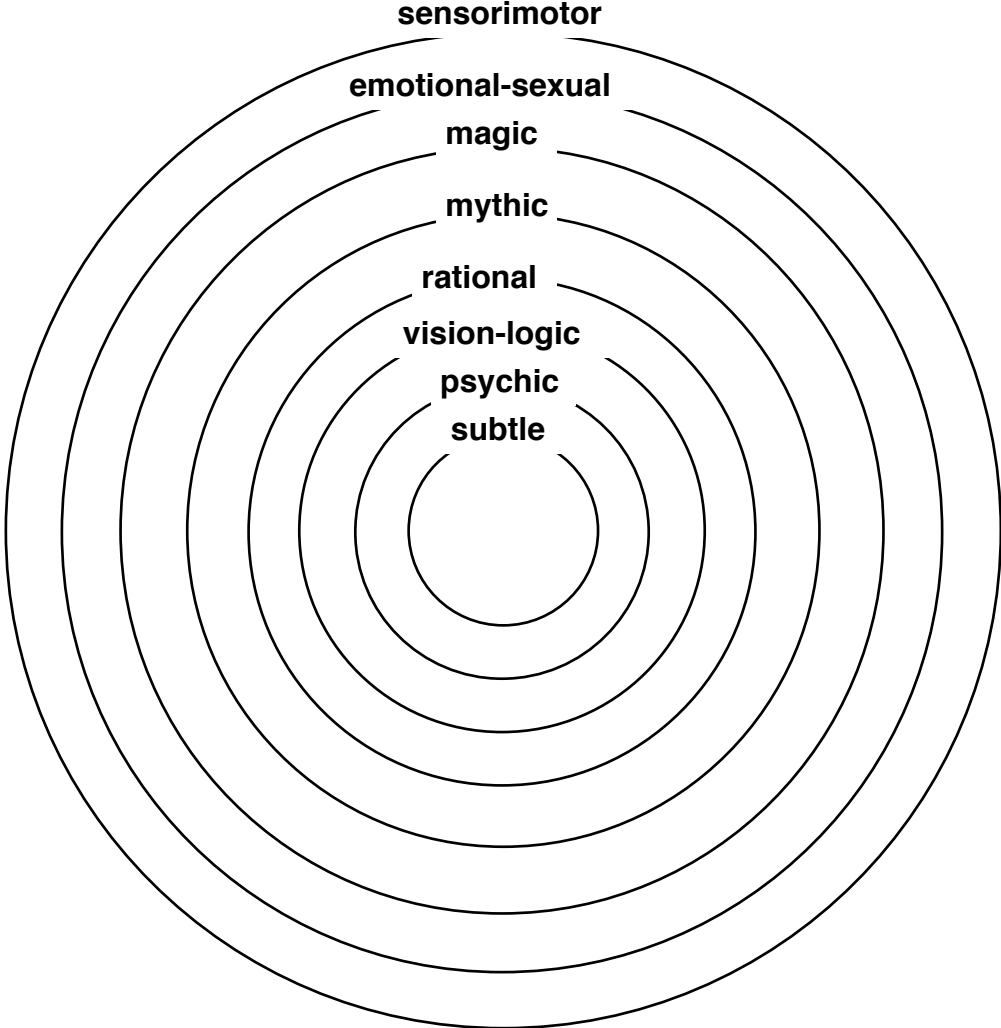


Figure 5–2. A mandala transformation that represents ten levels of Wilber’s hierarchy of levels of consciousness.

These eight circles of Figure 5–2 correspond to eight of the ten levels Wilber (1998: 109) distinguished in one simplified version of his hierarchy of levels of consciousness in the upper left quadrant of his map. The ten levels are as follows: 1. sensorimotor, that is, the physical body; 2. emotional-sexual, that is, emotions, biological drives, bioenergy, etc.; 3. magic, the early form of mind with little differentiation of subject and object; 4. mythic, “where magical power is shifted from the ego to a host of mythic gods and goddesses” (Wilber 1998: 109); 5. rational, that is, the more highly developed mind that makes possible science as we know it; 6. vision-logic, “the highest function of the gross-realm mind” (Wilber 1998: 110) which is capable of recognizing different perspectives and therefore is also called integral: universal pluralism; 7. psychic, which is the beginning of the transpersonal or spiritual realms and is often characterized by mystical union with nature (nature mysticism), 8. subtle, characterized by deity mysticism, 9.

causal, also called formless because it is emptiness (formless mysticism), 10. nondual, where form is emptiness and emptiness is form (nondual mysticism). All of these 10 levels are represented in the mandala transformation shown in Figure 5–2. The rational level comprises the fifth circle, which corresponds to the outer circle in the basic mandala of Figure 4–1. The level of vision-logic is the sixth circle which is the inner circle in the basic mandala. Then the psychic and subtle levels are inside the inner circle of the basic mandala. The causal (formless) is represented by the empty center of the mandala. And the nondual corresponds to the mandala as a whole because it is the union, the oneness, of form and emptiness. Thus, the mandala transformation of Figure 5–2 represents all ten levels of Wilber's simplified version of his hierarchy of levels of consciousness in the upper left quadrant of his map.

It would be easy to devise a mandala transformation that represents all 17 levels of Wilber's complete hierarchy (Figure 1–3). All one would have to do is to add another five circles to the mandala transformation of Figure 5–2, which means that there would be eleven circles outside the outer circle of the basic mandala and two circles inside the inner circle of the basic mandala as in Figure 5–2.

We can conclude then that simply by increasing the number of circles in the mandala we can represent all levels of consciousness in Wilber's map. To also represent the four quadrants of his map, we would have to divide the manifest part of the mandala into four quadrants (see below at the end of this chapter).

Changing the Number of Concept Pairs

The number of concept pairs in the mandala can be increased or decreased. As a result we obtain mandala transformations with varying numbers of concept pairs. I shall present three such transformations with one, two and twelve concept pairs instead of the four in the basic mandala of Figure 4–1.

Let us first look at a mandala transformation whose number of concept pairs has been increased to twelve (Figure 5–3). In this mandala we still find the four concept pairs of the mandala of Figure 4–1. But in addition the following eight concept pairs have been included: Continuum/discontinuum; fuzziness/exactness, where exactness refers to sharpness in the sense of either/or logic; openness/closure; cooperation/competition; flexibility/rigidity; variability/invariance; context-dependence/context isolation; complexity/simplicity. Adding all of these concepts gives us a more detailed characterization of the holistic and mechanistic worldviews. (I am in

the process of writing another book that is based on this version of the mandala.) Of course, not everybody would agree that all of the twelve concepts are either necessary or sufficient. Some might insist that some of the concepts should be excluded, whereas others would find it necessary or desirable to add still other concepts or to replace some of the twelve concept pairs by other pairs. All of this could be easily accommodated by creating other mandala transformations with the desired concepts and concept pairs. And all of these transformations could be seen as complementary with each other, representing different perspectives of the holistic and mechanistic worldviews.

Each of the concept pairs could be seen in three or four dimensions representing Wilber's four quadrants or the Big Three.

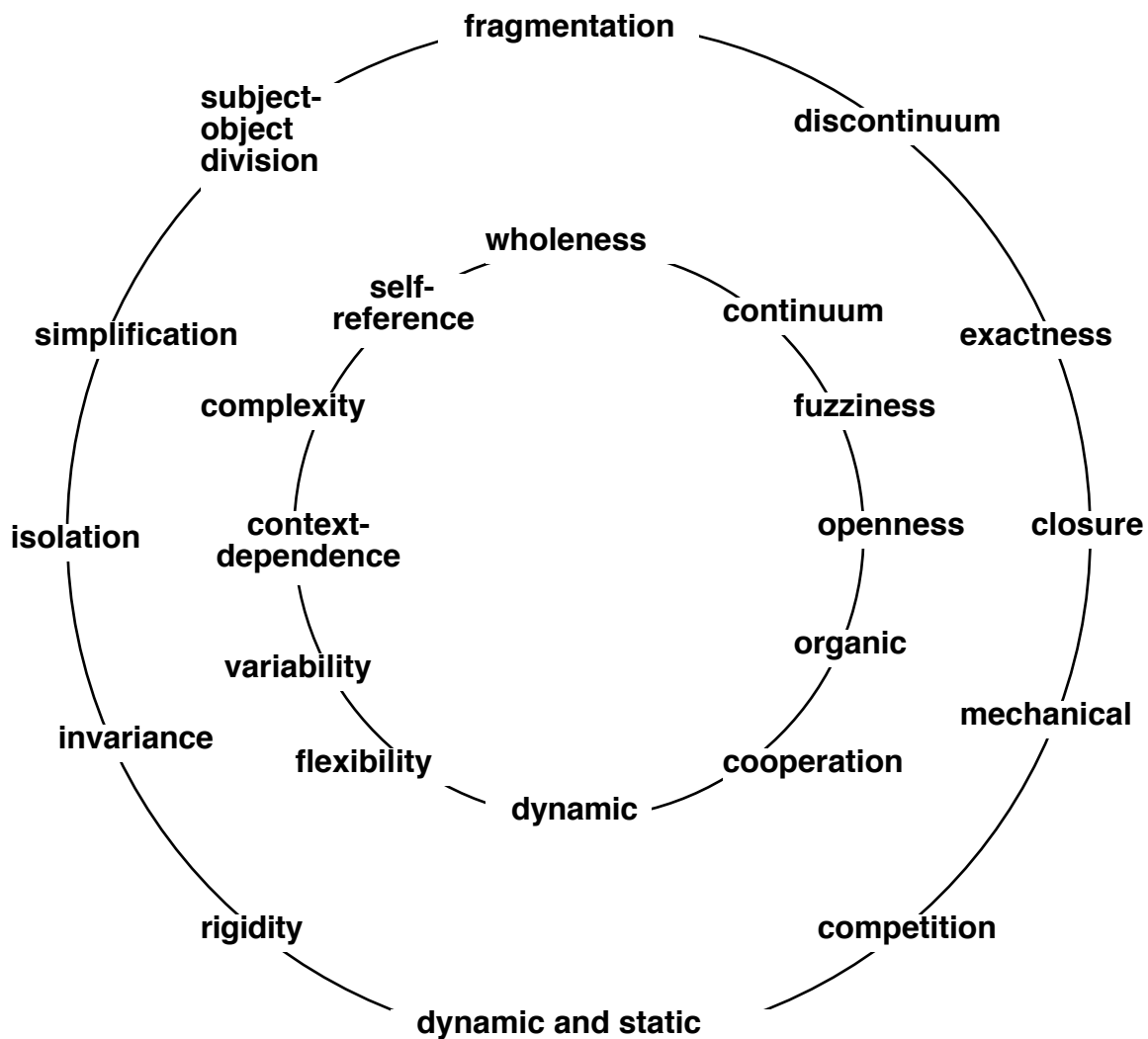


Figure 5–3. Mandala transformation with 12 concept pairs.

Now we can decrease the number of concept pairs either by simply omitting concept pairs or by redefining concepts in such a broad way that they subsume other concepts.

Let us take the latter strategy. We define wholeness in such a wide sense that it includes continuum, fuzziness, openness, self-reference, complexity and context-dependence. Similarly, we subsume the corresponding concepts of the outer circle under a very broad concept of fragmentation. Then we include the remaining concepts of the inner circle, that is, the organic, cooperation, flexibility and variability in a broad concept of dynamic, and the corresponding concepts of the outer circle under a wide concept of “static and dynamic”. Thus we end up with only two concept pairs: wholeness/fragmentation and dynamic/static and dynamic. On the basis of these two concept pairs, we obtain the mandala transformation shown in Figure 5–4.

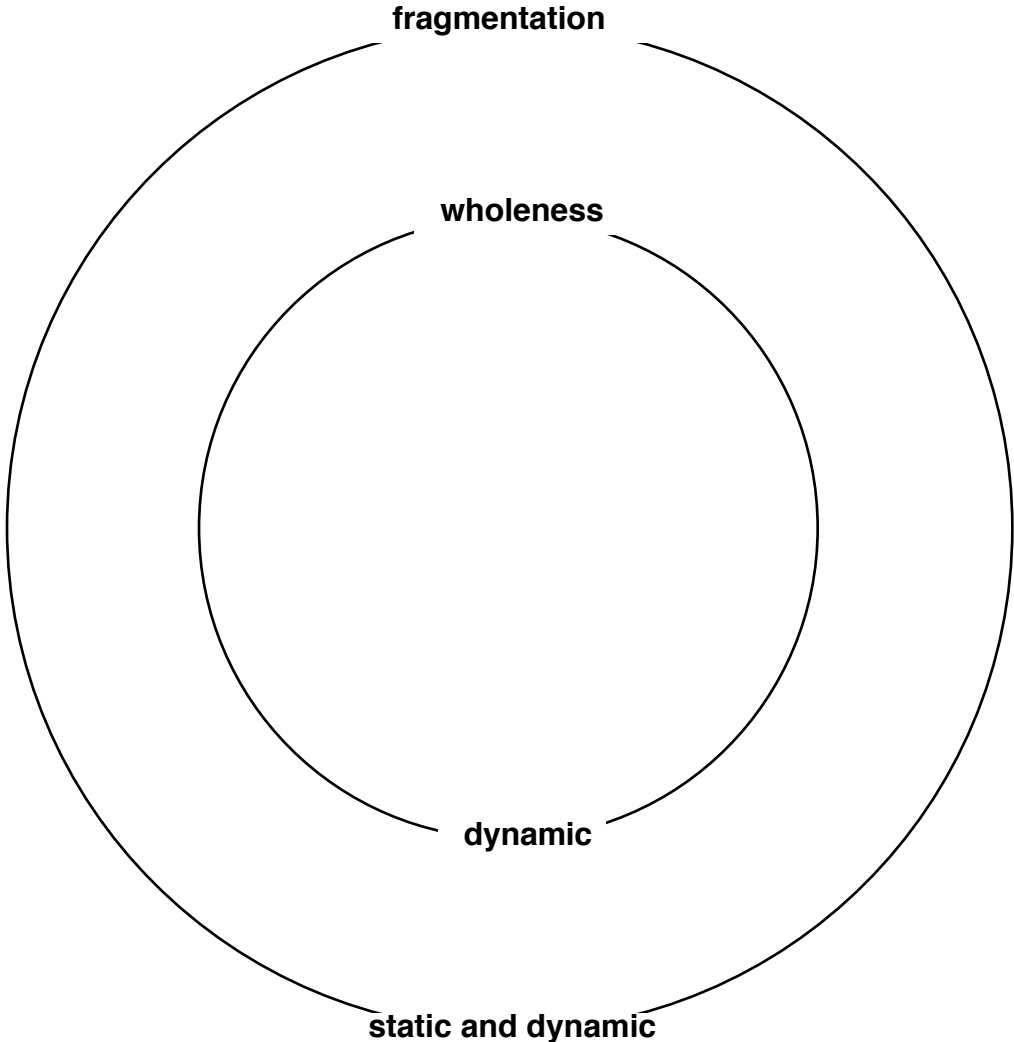


Figure 5–4. Mandala transformation with two concept pairs.

Now we can take the final step in the reduction of concept pairs: we can combine wholeness and dynamic into the concept of holodynamics, which is the dynamic within the whole; and we can subsume “static and dynamic” under a still wider concept of

fragmentation. Thus we end up with only one concept pair and obtain the mandala transformation of Figure 5–5.

Holodynamics and fragmentation in a way characterize the levels of vision logic and rationality in Wilber's hierarchy, especially the version of Figure 5–2. Vision logic is integral, holistic, and encompasses different perspectives. Wilber (1998: 110) described it as "a synthesizing, unifying mode of cognition" and as "unity-in-diversity". Since the diversity can be seen dynamically, the unity is a dynamic unity, that is, holodynamics.

Rationality, that is, the rational level in Wilber's hierarchy, can be seen as fragmenting. Being based on words that refer to concepts, rationality fragments the wholeness of experience into fragments that are designated by words. For example, the spectrum of colors is fragmented into bands, each of which is said to represent one color. Thought in general is fragmenting because it dissects reality into this and that. Vision-logic is also based on thought and therefore Wilber (1998: 110) considers it the highest level of the gross-realm mind, which means that it has not yet transcended the limitations of the dissecting mind. However, since vision-logic embraces many perspectives in the sense of a both/and logic, it is far less confined than rationality at the preceding level. Furthermore, holodynamics views reality in terms of processes that interconnect and thus form a whole.

Having said this, it must also be recognized that there is a continuum between the rational level and that of vision-logic and therefore any strict distinction is doomed to fail. Anybody who upholds a broader definition of rationality, can object for good reasons that the above characterization of rationality is too narrow. Nonetheless, one can say that vision-logic is less fragmenting, more inclusive and more holistic than rationality at the rational level.

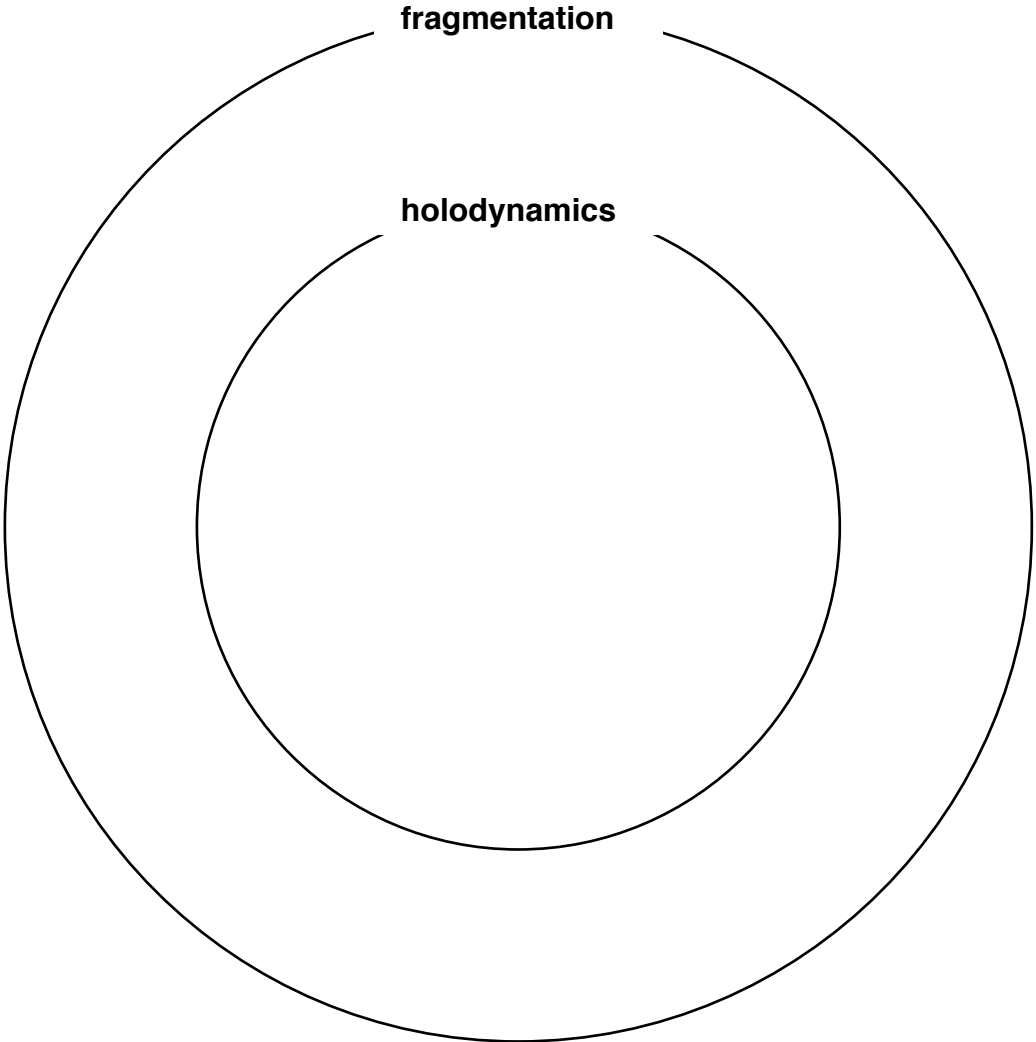


Figure 5–5. Mandala transformation based on only one concept pair.

Changing the Structure of the Mandala

There are many ways to change the structure of the mandala. One way is to depart from the arrangement of two concentric circles by forming clusters of subsidiary concept pairs around major concept pairs. For example, in Figure 5–3 the three concept pairs of continuum/discontinuum, fuzziness/exactness, and openness/closure are very closely related to wholeness/fragmentation or even part of that major pair. Therefore, these three concept pairs, instead of being equal members of the two circles, could be grouped around wholeness/fragmentation, and the same could be done in other parts of the mandala. In addition, yet other concept pairs that were not included in the mandala of Figure 5–3 could be added to the clusters. As a result the mandala would be transformed into a compound structure.

Another way to change the structure of the mandala is to transform it from its two dimensions into a three-dimensional structure. Even as it is now in its two dimensions, it can be visualized as three-dimensional. We imagine that the paper represents emptiness. Then emptiness is not only in the empty center of the mandala, but at the base of the whole mandala because emptiness is the paper and the whole mandala is on the paper. Now, in a microscopic perspective, the ink of the words that is added to the paper creates microscopic elevations from the plane of the paper and thus the words are in a third dimension which, however, is continuous with the paper and even part of it. Since the words represent form and the paper emptiness and since the two are one, form is indeed emptiness and emptiness is form.

If this description is not clear, let me use an analogy. Imagine a landscape mandala with a plane in the center and mountains surrounding the center. We could say that the center represents emptiness and the mountains form. Now recognize that the mountains do not only surround the plane in the center, but arise also from this plane. Thus, the plane is at the base of the whole landscape mandala. The mountains that arise from this plane are not distinct from it, but one with it as the ink of the words is one with the paper. Therefore form, represented by the mountains, is one with emptiness, represented by the underlying plane from which the mountains arise.

The conclusion of this analogy is that the mandala and its transformations can be seen as two-dimensional in a macroscopic perspective and as three-dimensional from a microscopic perspective. As two-dimensional structures they show emptiness visibly only in the center, whereas as three-dimensional structures they arise from emptiness, that is, the emptiness in the center extends across the base of the whole three-dimensional mandala. And there is no separation between emptiness and form. In a sense the three-dimensional mandala presents the oneness of form and emptiness more clearly than the two-dimensional mandala because in the former the continuum is so obvious, whereas in the latter the empty center may appear distinct from the surrounding circles.

Another structural transformation of the mandala is to reverse center and periphery so that the circles will occupy the center and emptiness the periphery as shown in Figure 5–6. This transformation is of special interest for two reasons:

1. It is so radical that it leads to the dissolution of the mandalic structure in the strict sense, which has the source or emptiness in the center and the manifest arising outward from the center in a two-dimensional mandala or upward in a three-

dimensional mandala. Thus, the mandala as a self-referential dynamic mandala has not only its transformation but even its dissolution built into it: it carries within it the potential of its own destruction as we carry the germ of our death within us. Let it be clear, though, that death and destruction are also a transformation, a transformation in which the oneness of emptiness and form does not perish. Only form manifests itself differently.

- 2. The reversal of center and periphery of the mandala is also of special interest because it leads to Wilber’s AQAL map that has form in the center and the formless or spirit at the periphery. We arrive at Wilber’s map if we divide the new structure into four quadrants and interpret it in a temporal evolutionary way so that the central point becomes the Big Bang. From this point the stages of the hierarchy unfold in time, eventually leading to the transpersonal stages that include the formless (which has been renamed in Wilber 2006, Fig. 2–4).

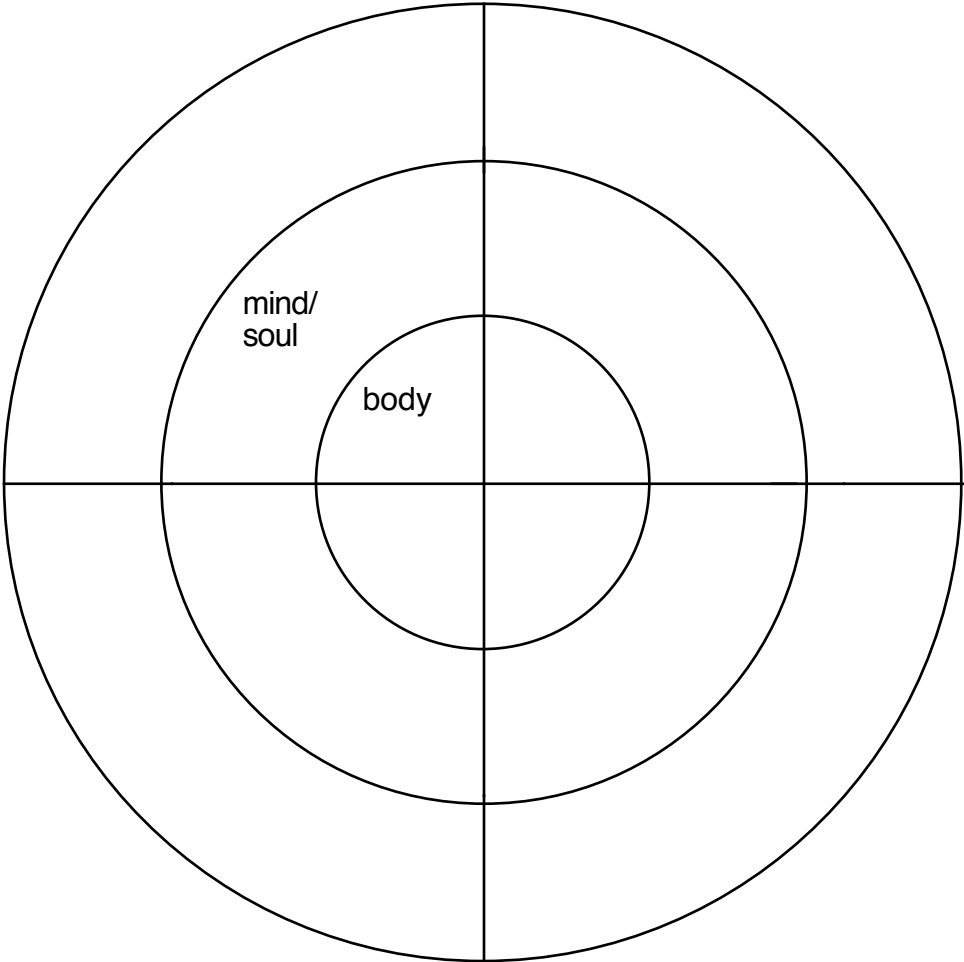


Figure 5–6. Radical mandala transformation that leads to the dissolution of the mandalic structure in the strict sense and to a simple version of Wilber’s map where only three levels are distinguished, which in the upper left quadrant are body, mind/soul, and spirit (not labeled).

In Figure 5–6 I have presented Wilber's map in a simple form with only three levels: body, mind/soul, and spirit. I could have drawn separate concentric levels for mind and soul as Wilber does. And I could have included all seventeen levels of Wilber's complete map (Figure 1–3). However, even the simple form of Figure 5–6 conveys the basic structure of Wilber's AQAL map. I did not label the outmost concentric level that represents spirit, the formless, emptiness, because I consider it more appropriate to indicate emptiness by an empty space. I even would have preferred to omit in this empty space the lines that separate the four quadrants because I think that the formless is beyond the four quadrants.

In any case, the fact that one of the mandala transformations produces Wilber's AQAL map is highly significant. It means that Wilber's map is a special case of the mandala: it is one of the many transformations the mandala can undergo. More specifically, it is that transformation that reverses the structure of the mandala, includes the four quadrants, interprets the mandala as a hierarchy and in terms of temporal evolution.

Note that other transformations of the mandala can also be subdivided into four quadrants and thus represent four-quadrant maps that can be interpreted hierarchically or nonhierarchically: one would have to begin with a version of the mandala in which the circles are not differentiated into different concepts (for example, Fig. 5–2 or 5–5), or one would have to place concept pairs or lines into the appropriate quadrants (see Chapter 4).

Organic/Artistic Mandala Transformations

How do we get from conceptual to organic/artistic mandala transformations? Since the mandala is self-referential and the organic is one of its key concepts, the mandala itself can be made organic and this opens up the way for endless organic/artistic transformations.

A first step in this direction is to replace the concepts of the conceptual mandalas by symbols. For example, the concept of the organic could be replaced by an organic symbol such as a human body, and the concept of the mechanical could be replaced by an image of a machine or robot. The next step is to give the creative genius of the artist free reign to devise artistic mandalas (see, e.g., Cornell 1994 and Fontana 2005). Frank Sattler painted the mandalas of Figures 5–7 and 8. In Fig. 5–7 the empty center appears distinct from the periphery as is the case in many mandalas. In such mandalas

is important to recognize that through the paper (on which the mandala has been painted) emptiness of the center and form of the periphery are nonetheless one as I pointed out above. In the mandala of Fig. 5–8 no empty center has been drawn explicitly; however, it is present implicitly because the whole mandala conveys so vividly that everything radiates from an invisible source in the center, which is the source of emptiness.



Fig. 5–7. Mandala with an explicit empty center. Courtesy of Frank Sattler.



Fig. 5–8. Mandala in which the empty center, the source, is implied. Courtesy of Frank Sattler.

Besides drawing and painting, many other artistic media and means can be used. For example, colored sand mandalas, sculptures, and architectural monuments can be created. Possibilities are endless.

Since, in the widest sense, the mandala of this book can be seen as a mandala of mandalas, or, more precisely, the set of all mandalas, it comprises all mandalas of the past, present, and future. This means it also comprises the mandalas of the wisdom traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. These mandalas are, of course, not actual transformations of the mandala of this book, but they can be seen as transformations because we can envisage a dynamic relationship between all mandalas.

Since mandalas have been created in practically all cultures, religions, and wisdom traditions, a mandala of mandalas that relates all mandalas also relates the cultures, religions, and wisdom traditions in which they originated. Therefore, the mandala of mandalas has an enormous potential to unify and connect diverse cultures, religions, and wisdom traditions. The unification occurs through the center that all mandalas share; the connection through the different peripheries of the mandalas that can be seen in a dynamic relationship.

Since the mandala of this book also allows transformations that are no longer mandalic, art in general can be considered to be an extension of it. In that case, the mystery is not represented as the center, but as an integral aspect of the artistic creation. In other words, the mystery is implicit. We are touched by it and possibly transformed and elevated through the contemplation of the artistic creation.

Extending the mandala of this book so much poses the question of constraints that I shall discuss in the next chapter with regard to McFarlane's mathematical mandala. Here we may ask: Can any work of art be considered a version or extension of the mandala? The answer is no: only art that in one way or another expresses the mystery of the unnamable in the manifoldness of the Kosmos is part of the mandala. The distinction between art that is and that is not part of the mandala probably is not clear-cut but rather fuzzy, and consequently the extension of the mandala is also fuzzy.

Stillness in the Center of the Cyclone

In spite of the all-pervasive fluidity of manifest reality, which is expressed through the fluidity of the mandala, we should not forget the stillness in the center of the cyclone—we should not forget the emptiness in the center of the mandala. This emptiness is retained even in radical transformations of the mandala, transformations that dissolve the typical mandalic structure such as the transformation into Wilber's map where emptiness is represented at the periphery instead of in the center. Even in

transformations where emptiness seems to be totally obscured, it is still there, but we are no longer aware of it—what actually happens quite often in our ordinary lives.

We have to be careful, though, when we try to equate emptiness with stillness. In a strict sense, emptiness, the center of the mandala, is the unnamable: it cannot be qualified by any word(s). Calling it stillness, which is a word, is contradictory. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to refer to it negatively as 'no fluidity'. And we would have to go even one step further and add 'no stillness' because the unnamable mystery is beyond both fluidity and stillness. It is tempting, though, to say that it is a stillness beyond fluidity and stillness, or to add that it is definitely beyond fluidity because this center, this emptiness, remains the same in all the transformations of the mandala.

Conclusions

The mandala of Figure 4–1, since it is dynamic and self-referential, has transformation built into it and thus demands to be transformed. It can be transformed in many ways by changing the number of circles, the number of concept pairs, its basic structure, and by rendering it organic and artistic. In all of these transformations, the empty center remains the same, because, as the unnamable, it is even beyond fluidity.

One transformation of its structure, namely, the reversal of center and periphery, even leads to its dissolution because if the source or emptiness is situated at the periphery instead of in the center, it is no longer a mandala in the strict sense. If we divide the reversed structure into four quadrants, we obtain Wilber's AQAL map. Thus, Wilber's map turns out to be one of the many transformations of the mandala, which means that it is a special case of the dynamic mandala. The reverse is, however, not the case: the mandala is not a special case of Wilber's map because the mandala cannot be generated from Wilber's map, since his map is not dynamic and self-referential as the mandala. Being only hierarchical and evolutionary in time, Wilber's map is more limited than the mandala that accounts also for nonhierarchical aspects of manifest reality, involution in time and evolution/involution beyond time in the eternal present.