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Autonomous Ornament: The Structural Homology Between Alphonse Mucha's "Q Formula" and the Eastern Mandala

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Abstract

Alphonse Mucha's oeuvre is frequently categorized as a formalist paradigm of ornamentation within the Art Nouveau movement. This study, however, contends that Mucha's signature Q Formula is far from a mere aesthetic redundancy or a utilitarian embellishment; rather, it manifests as Autonomous Ornament—an autonomous generative process and an inherent rhythm. Adopting a synchronic structural perspective that transcends linear historical causality, this research frames ornament as a dynamic relational medium connecting individual perception with collective evolution across geocultural boundaries. With Theosophy serving as a historical mediation and synthesizing Rudolf Arnheim's psychology of visual perception with Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the ornamental refrain (ritornello), this paper traces the cross-cultural construction of the Q Formula—from Mucha's Moravian Catholic roots to the avant-garde Theosophical milieu of Paris. Through a horizontal comparative analysis with contemporary fin-de-siècle artists—specifically contrasting Gustav Klimt's ornamental dissolution and Aubrey Beardsley's ironic fragmentation—the study underscores Mucha's distinct integrative strategy. Furthermore, it demonstrates a profound structural homology in topological energy between the Q Formula and the Eastern Kālacakra Mandala. Within this pure and vital ornamental logic, the circular main body acts as a centripetal anchor referencing Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), while the boundary-crossing media serve as a metaphor for centrifugal Dependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) and worldly manifestation through clothed repetition. Such ornamental rhythms collapse the classical hierarchy between structure and surface. Amidst the pervasive anxiety of *fin-de-siècle* industrialization, these forms exerted a visual soothing function, providing deep emotional and psychological efficacy. Mucha's ornamental schemata reveal how repetitive and structural rhythms successfully transmuted traditional religious paradigms into channels for the internal integration of the modern subject. The paper thus reaffirms ornament as a form of critical imagination and an independent artistic force, which not only reshapes the psychological homeostasis of the modern subject but also constructs a profound resonance between form and life within a cross-cultural context.

Keywords: Alphonse Mucha; Q Formula; mandala; structural homology; autonomous ornament; cross-cultural

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1. Introduction

Within the flourishing landscape of fin-de-siècle Art Nouveau, Alphonse Mucha's visual schemata have frequently been reduced to utilitarian graphic embellishments. However, when examined through a non-utilitarian logic of ontic development and framed

within an interpretative, hypothetical horizon, Mucha's signature Q Formula emerges not as mere aesthetic redundancy or extrinsic rhetoric but as a highly autonomous generative mechanism. From the perspective of contemporary ornamental theory, ornament is no longer a derivative of structure but a dynamic manifestation of thinking in form. As Jakub Mácha notes in his exploration of repetition with difference, ornament, which appears as clothed repetition, possesses its own depth: "Ornament is not mere decoration, an inessential addition. Its depth interacts with the thing's depth. . . In effect, the distinction between these depths collapses" (Mácha 2025, p. 122). Crucially, from a Deleuzian perspective, this clothed repetition can be conceptualized as an intensive visual series that actively destabilizes the static plane, transforming geometric recurrence into a site of profound ontological production.

To transition from an abstract stylistic observation to a rigorous structural analysis, this study formally establishes the Q Formula not as a loose mannerism but as a bounded geometric archetype governed by four fundamental classification criteria: first, it manifests as a strictly flattened graphic structure possessing a distinct Q-shape or Q-like spatial configuration; second, its primary visual centerpiece is defined by a circle or circular main body featuring a multi-layered nested structure operating on either concentric or eccentric axes; third, it incorporates a clear cross-boundary graphic medium that actively breaches the perimeter to link the interior enclosure with the exterior space; and fourth, the centripetal concentration of the nested core operates in tandem with the centrifugal expansion of the cross-boundary line, establishing a dynamic visual force field equipped with a highly regulated contraction-expansion mechanism.

The methodology of this research is constructed upon a three-tiered analytical framework. At its core, the entire study is established upon an overarching synchronistic perspective, rather than pursuing a reductionist, strictly linear historical transmission. Adopting a synchronistic lens offers a distinct analytical advantage: it enables the exploration of visual and structural resonances across different cultural contexts without forcing unsubstantiated claims of direct historical borrowing. At the same time, this perspective requires critical caution, as it is difficult to establish empirical conclusions. Therefore, this study adopts a hypothetical stance. To provide this necessary grounding, Mucha's engagement with the Parisian Theosophical milieu functions as a key contextual bridge. The late 19th-century Theosophical movement—which actively synthesized Western esoteric thought with Eastern spiritual concepts—provided an intellectual atmosphere that subtly informed Mucha's visual intuition. This shared cultural environment does not serve as empirical proof of direct copying; rather, it acts as a plausible mediating link that helps explain how the formal logic in his works could intuitively converge with the spatial architecture of Eastern sacred diagrams. By positioning Theosophy as this historical bridge, the study opens up a flexible, prospective entry point into Section 4, where the structural homology between the Q Formula and the mandala system is explored in depth.

Second, at the historical-comparative level, a morphological comparison is conducted between Mucha and his key contemporaries—most notably Gustav Klimt and Aubrey Beardsley—to analyze how the *fin-de-siècle* European graphic avant-garde handled the boundaries between abstraction, symbol, and ornament.

Third, at the formal-perceptual level, Rudolf Arnheim's visual dynamics are synthesized with Gilles Deleuze's concepts of energy flow to deconstruct the geometric configuration of the Q Formula. This combined approach enables a dual reading of both visual forces and energy trajectories, evaluating how internal structural tensions govern the viewer's cognitive perception and dynamic experience of space.

The primary objective of this research is to examine Mucha's developmental background and personal trajectory, utilizing Theosophy as a contextual mediator. Adopting

a retrospective analytical lens, this study re-interprets Mucha's distinct structural composition, differentiating it from the formal tendencies toward dissolution, blurring, and dispersion prevalent in the works of contemporaries such as Aubrey Beardsley and Gustav Klimt. It seeks to demonstrate that this adherence to structural order is not a pure coincidence; rather, it arguably represents an intuitive synthesis of Mucha's personal trajectory, cultural background, and religious memory, thereby offering a visual structural force to counteract *fin-de-siècle* nihilism and spiritual fragmentation. On this premise, the study conducts a detailed analysis of the structural homology between the mandala and the Q Formula, integrating both into a visual energy field that operates to construct and stabilize subjectivity.

2. Lineage Archeology and Cultural Affinities

2.1. Personal Trajectory and Religious Imprints

Before examining the cross-cultural homology of Alphonse Mucha's Q Formula, it is essential to conduct a genealogical tracing of the Q Formula itself. Crucially, this retrospective analysis is not intended to provide a deterministic, causal historical validation; rather, it establishes an interpretive, hypothetical horizon through which one can understand how the Q Formula was initially incubated. Within *Le Style Mucha*, these iconic circular structures hold distinct significance in Parisian Art Nouveau. More fundamentally, they can be understood as a visual overflow of the religious experiences accumulated during his childhood in Moravia. The impactful gilded altars, rhythmic Baroque curves, and originally invisible sacred aura of the Mass collectively constituted a deep visual grammar, arguably internalized as the artist's creative intuition.

This study posits that Mucha's time in Ivančice during the 1860s and Brno in the 1870s provided the foundational environment that profoundly shaped his early visual repertoire. As Jiri Mucha, the artist's son and biographer, noted, "his sisters relate he would go to look at the decorators as they were painting the rooms in the fashion of the day with various baroque and rococo embellishments" (Mucha 1966, p. 13). Furthermore, from the age of ten, Mucha supported his education by singing in the choir of St. Peter's Cathedral in Brno. Compressing the purely narrative details of these experiences, this religious environment functioned as an immersive multi-sensory field. Within this space, physical architecture and liturgical performance interacted to anchor a subtle perceptual orientation toward a sacred center. As Jiri Mucha described, it was a "great performance staged before the eyes of the faithful with all the glitter of vestments, burning candles, the peal of the organ and, as the golden chalice is raised, the mysterious tinkling of bells" (Mucha 1966, p. 8).

The opulent design of the cathedral's interior was not merely a visual representation of Counter-Reformation Catholic theology but a systematic visual engineering leading to the transcendent realm through the senses. Baroque art in Eastern Europe, deeply influenced by Byzantine traditions, retained the golden disk-like halos that emphasized planarity and ornamentality. Significantly, this specific compositional method—placing the head of a sacred figure at the absolute center of a perfect circumference, effectively establishing a flattened graphic structure centered around a nested circular body—became an implicit visual grammar that Mucha followed when depicting his female figures. Art historian Victor Arwas also astutely captured how the halo-like circles, mosaic patterns, and crosses in Mucha's posters were unmistakably drawn from the field of religious art: "having grown up in a Roman Catholic environment, Mucha had been fascinated since childhood by church ornaments and religious rites and ceremonies. These impressions were reflected in the sacred aura radiated in varying degrees by many of his posters" (Ulmer 1994, p. 9).

A more structurally significant visual archetype can be found in his expressive religious works from adolescence. At the age of eight, Mucha drew the sketch *Crucifixion* (Figure 1)

in his hometown. Although this early study appears naive in perspective and anatomy, its treatment of the halo behind the suffering Christ—not as a misty, diffuse shadow, but as a boundary-clear, substantial, and disk-like wheel—demonstrates a traditional continuity. In Mucha's hand, sacred radiance was materialized. While this early study represents a naive rendering of religious content, it nonetheless preserves a powerful sense of "presence" (*Präsenz*). Strictly speaking, from the analytical perspective of our new definition of the Q Formula, this sketch does not constitute a complete Q Formula; however, the physical posture of Christ's body undeniably functions as a primitive graphic medium that links the interior and exterior of the disk-like halo field. Consequently, this formal configuration can be interpreted as playing an active role in incubating the Q Formula within an objective environment of religious immersion. Bohemian religious painting in the early 19th century occupied a transitional zone between the cult image and modern aesthetics. According to Machalíková's analysis, art theory of this period was caught in a polarity between the concepts of *Präsenz* (the true present/presence) and *Repräsentation* (representation/depiction) (Machalíková 2014, p. 531).



Figure 1. *Alphonse Mucha, Crucifixion*, 1868. Pencil, crayon, and watercolor on paper. Image in the public domain.

Under the influence of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, contemporary visual culture sought to historicize and narrate sacred scenes through realistic techniques, no longer pursuing sacred symbolism but rather the truth of creation through naturalistic brushwork. However, in *Crucifixion*, Mucha was actually manifesting "*Präsenz*"—rendering the work itself as a sacred "presence." In parallel, this study suggests that the future Q Formula similarly operates based on this foundation of a planar, non-representational "presence". This aligns with what Machalíková describes as the cultural psychology of Catholic Bohemia, where folk piety still held faith in the "miraculous power" of mercy pictures: "the distribution of these depictions was an effort to support the Catholic faith and forms of piety. . . this emotional component was consistent with the nature of folk piety" (Machalíková 2014, p. 536). This widespread validation of spiritual presence within local folk piety can be proposed as having a similar structuring effect on the intuitive incubation of Mucha's geometric formula.

This solid halo holds crucial genealogical significance: it aims to reveal that Mucha was profoundly shaped by both early religious immersion and Byzantine-style flattened art. This combined influence was transmuted into an internalized visual grammar, providing the fertile soil for the future visual form of the Q Formula.

2.2. The Prague Astronomical Clock: Internalized Cosmology

Although Alphonse Mucha was in Paris in 1896 creating his iconic *Zodiac* (Figure 2) for the magazine *La Plume*, the compositional logic of this work manifests a cultural *habitus* deeply rooted in Central European geoculture—one that feels dissonant with its immediate French context. Crucially, the incubation of the Q Formula must be understood as extend-

ing beyond the purely ecclesiastical domain, radiating outward into the grand arena of public architecture as a form of broader cultural immersion. While traditional biographical narratives often emphasize Mucha's formal return to Prague after 1900, *Zodiac* (Figure 2) already demonstrates a striking structural homogeneity with the city's architectural landmarks. Although direct evidence of a conscious imitation of the Prague Astronomical Clock (Prague Orloj, Figure 3) is absent, within the context of the 19th-century Czech National Revival, the Orloj was no longer a mere chronometric machine; it had been sublimated into a circular totem of Czech national identity. Through the visual reconstruction of the calendar dial by Josef Mánes—the "father of Czech national painting"—this collective memory sedimented into a recognized national visual paradigm. Through the lens of *habitus*, the structural isomorphism between the Zodiac and the Astronomical Clock can be interpreted as a compelling product of the implicit internalization and gradual assimilation of this geocultural space. Thus, the concentric structure of the Orloj was not mechanically mimicked as a physical object but was rather invoked as an immanent rhythm within the collective visual memory.



Figure 2. Alphonse Mucha, *Zodiac*, 1896. Color lithograph, 63 × 47 cm. Printed by F. Champenois, Paris. Metadata sourced from Bridges (1980).



Figure 3. Prague Orloj in the public domain.

Originally constructed in 1410, the core design philosophy of the Prague Orloj was to serve as a dynamic replica of the cosmos. Through an intricate mechanical apparatus, it synthesized planetary movements, lunar phases, and solar cycles within two massive circular facades. The upper dial indicates the lunar phases and the positions of the sun and the zodiac, while the lower dial features twelve scenes of seasonal labor and their corresponding zodiac signs. From the perspective of formal morphology, the distinct multi-layered nested features of the Astronomical Clock exhibit an absolute structural alignment with Criterion 2 of the Q Formula, serving as a macro-scale visual precursor to its flattened geometric perimeter. Furthermore, by rigorously pairing the zodiac signs with the representation of monthly agricultural labors, the Orloj successfully downloaded the abstract, cosmic universe into a shared public physical space. In this visual tradition, cosmic celestial order is intimately bound to the rhythms of mundane life. As James Webster explored, the "fantastic signs of the classical zodiac materialize in medieval art across Europe in a variety of media, often paired with the Labors of the Month to comprise a compelling visual tradition" (Williams 2021, p. 59). By pairing astronomical cycles with localized seasonal activities, these visual forms were "woven into the fabric of public life through visual art," effectively embedding the macrocosmic order into everyday human experience. This seamless integration of cosmic rhythm and daily existence provides a crucial perceptual foundation for the shared resonance—or empathy—that connects human consciousness with the universe.

This visual narrative achieves the routinization of the sacred order. By embedding zodiac symbols and Bohemian rural life into nested disks, the Orloj utilized its "presence" in public space to expand the boundaries of the religious, becoming a vessel of hierophany that governed both time and space. Evoking the literature of Julia Wetzel, this structural engineering demonstrates that by creating a highly calibrated "sacred domain" within a "public space," the clock establishes a profound resonance between the macro-cosmos and micro-everyday life, thereby operating with an undeniable, localized quality of "presence" (Präsenz). As Julia Wetzel notes, "The Ancient Lares created a sacred space outside temples. A comparison of them to the astronomical clocks suggests that the clocks also create a sacred space based on location and iconography" (Wetzel 2023, p. 90).

The sympathy established between the macro-cosmos and micro-life through these circular patterns points toward a possible manifestation of Mucha's cultural *habitus*—an aesthetic predisposition for thinking in form. When intersecting directly with the formal analysis of Zodiac, it is clear that while the overall composition presents a distinct portal or arch-like outline when viewed from a distance, its internal graphic architecture already fully prepares and satisfies the structural criteria of both Criterion 2 and Criterion 3 of the Q Formula. Specifically, the Prague Orloj stands as the quintessential embodiment of Criterion 2; due to the deep assimilation of this geocultural *habitus*, Mucha instinctively mobilized the architectural paradigm of the cosmic clock when tasked with designing a functional calendar like Zodiac, which was "originally designed as an in-house calendar for the company" (Salcman 2021, p. 501). Conversely, the prominent realization of Criterion 3 within Zodiac, the female head (and her flowing hair) functioning as a boundary-crossing medium, can be interpreted as a direct cognitive result of the religious imprinting of Christ's body as a primitive graphic medium in his early piece, Crucifixion, as established in Section 2.1. Yet, despite its functional origins, Mucha reproduced the cosmic order of Prague through the visual paradigms deeply embedded in his national memory.

Consequently, driven by the intense soaking of this dual experiential environment—both the ecclesiastical cathedral and the public architectural matrix—the ornamentation in both the Orloj and Zodiac successfully transcends mere calendar functionality, aesthetic garnish, or passive commercial attachment, elevating instead into a profound manifes-

tation of clothed repetition. Through the delineation of lines, the closure of circles, and the overflow of curves, Mucha evokes the cultural *habitus* and visual grammar endowed by his environment. In conjunction with his formative religious immersion, this visual practice gradually evolved into an endeavor to construct a bridge toward transcendental authority and cosmic harmony through a centripetal, substantial geometric order. Crucially, this geocultural tracing does not represent a mechanical, reductionist historical explanation; rather, it demonstrates how this multi-layered sociocultural immersion prepared a foundational formal substrate. Against the broader backdrop of *fin-de-siècle* nihilism, this substrate catalyzed a profound resonance with the surge of occultism, while Mucha's subsequent engagement with the Parisian Theosophical milieu introduced Eastern cosmological frameworks, specifically those structured around nested circular forms, into his immediate creative and intellectual sphere.

3. Historical Mediation: Parisian Theosophy and Cross-Cultural Flux

3.1. Fin-de-Siècle Mystical Networks: Disenchantment and Structural Dissolution

Paris at the end of the 19th century was not only the epicenter of the Second Industrial Revolution but also the vortex of the European Occult Revival. As positivism and materialism began to lose their spiritual potency, the "death of God" prophesied by Nietzsche did not lead to total nihilism. As Max Weber famously observed in 1917, the destiny of our era is characterized by the "disenchantment of the world." At that time, "when Western intellectuals speak of the disenchantment of the world, what they have in mind, as often as not, is a gradual decline in mystery. Little by little, physics has extended its reach into more and more areas previously occupied by metaphysics" (Landy and Saler 2009, pp. 1, 7). Against such a backdrop, a cult of certainty was established, treating nature as a machine that could be fully understood, managed, and mastered through deterministic knowledge and technological intervention. As Saler notes, this conceptual shift "elevates scientific knowledge and its 'economy of attention' over all other modes of understanding. This text articulates an ideology that legitimizes the technological control of earth and promises a 'home' created by science" (Landy and Saler 2009, p. 16). However, this very progress of material civilization left humanity in a state of profound spiritual emptiness, triggering a severe displacement of both identity and home. As scholar Eugen Weber captured in his research, French society at the time was deeply immersed in "the discrepancy between material progress and spiritual dejection" (Weber 1986, p. 2). This historical backdrop induced a massive spiritual counter-reaction, as Weber noted, "reaction against scientific materialism and rational explanations encouraged interest in mystery and the supernatural" (Weber 1986, p. 32). In conjunction with the historical background, the early experiential visual field analyzed in Section 2—including the ecclesiastical cathedral atmosphere and the public architectural matrix of the Prague Orloj—did not remain dormant. Under the oppressive weight of this *fin-de-siècle* nihilism, Mucha's contact with Parisian mystical networks can be interpreted as having acted as a potential catalyst, arguably transforming his deeply internalized, localized religious and geocultural *habitus* from passive nostalgic memories into an active, structural "modern antidote" designed to resist rationalized secularization. Within this milieu, Alphonse Mucha was not merely a successful commercial decorator but a central member of Paris's occult social networks.

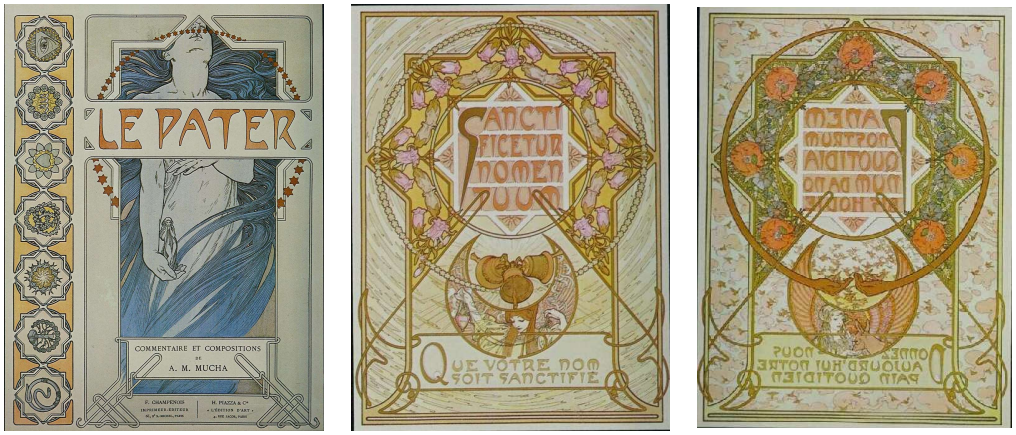
The Theosophical Society functioned as a vital conceptual mediator in this mystical tide, systematically blending Western and Eastern spiritual perspectives. Founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), Theosophy constructed a syncretic narrative seeking to distill a Secret Doctrine from global religions, explicitly advocating for the synthesis of Western Hermeticism with Eastern Vedanta and Buddhist traditions. In the Europe of that era, this cross-cultural integration of non-European metaphysics

and Hermeticism was actively deepened by prominent philosophers and scholars. From Schopenhauer's early theorization of Eastern non-duality and Max Müller's scholarly translations of Eastern scriptures to Édouard Schuré's influential synthesis of Hermetic and Eastern traditions in Parisian artistic circles (*Les Grands Initiés*; Schuré 1912), these philosophical conduits legitimized non-Western and mystical thought, directly shaping the intellectual milieu that informed Mucha's visual mysticism. In the preface to *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky emphasized her belief that "the world's religions sprung from it a mysterious source in their origins and that various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element" (Blavatsky 1888, p. viii). While this "universal source" was an ideological construct of the Society, heuristically, it can be conceptualized as functioning as a mediator. This mediation bypassed the requirement for direct, historical, or causal communication, potentially providing the necessary epistemological conditions for Mucha to acquire a legitimate, stylized visual tool capable of aligning with Eastern visual paradigms.

Crucially, Theosophy introduced its own interpretation of a Buddhist-inspired hierarchy—structured as a series of nested rings—to explain this original element. In Theosophical theory: "The One is an unbroken Circle with no circumference. . . the One is the Ring as also the rings that are within that Ring" (Blavatsky 1888, pp. 11, 22, 38, 42). From a structural standpoint, this "ring within rings" construction corresponds directly to Criterion 2 of the Q Formula (the multi-layered nested circular core). This conceptual overlap suggests a highly plausible cosmological affinity between the Theosophical nested circles and the Eastern Kalachakra Mandala at a macro-cosmic level. By constructing Tibet as a "sanctuary of the secret doctrine" (Blavatsky 1888, pp. xxiii–xxiv), the Theosophical framework built a vital conceptual bridge. It arguably allowed Mucha's creative intuition to achieve a synchronous, topological co-structure with the Kalachakra Mandala. Through this layering of forms, the invisible "One" arguably acquires a form of visual depth, evoking the concept of a universe composed of infinite nested and interpenetrating energy fields.

Mucha's relocation to Paris in 1887 and his subsequent contact with Parisian occult circles, particularly through his association with the Swedish playwright and Theosophist August Strindberg at Madame Charlotte's crémerie, can be understood as a key intersection between his prior Catholic background and the avant-garde spiritual movements of the era (Wills 2023, p. 6). Rather than a mere biographical event, this engagement with Theosophy provided a conceptual framework that interacted with the localized religious and ornamental *habits* established in his youth. Through this intellectual contact, his intuitive use of circular structures was arguably aligned with a broader, systematized mystical vocabulary. Consequently, his childhood Catholic visual memories and the syncretic concepts of Theosophy began to converge, a synthesis that is reflected in his structured visual language, notably in works like *Le Pater*.

In conclusion, within the intellectual context of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, it can be argued that it functioned as a structural framework that stabilized Mucha's prior, internalized geocultural *habitus* and religious imprints. Against the backdrop of existential anxiety and the disenchantment of modernity, his engagement with spiritual movements—principally Theosophy—provided a conceptual catalyst. Under the operation of this catalyst, Mucha's religious and cultural imprints synthesized with the Theosophical concept of a universal religion, achieving a profound equilibrium in *Le Pater* (Figure 4). This ultimately materialized into a structural expression shaped by multi-layered environmental immersion.



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**)

Figure 4. Alphonse Mucha, *Le Pater*, 1899. (**a**) Cover illustration; (**b**) Page illustration for "*Sanctificetur Nomen Tuum*"; (**c**) Page illustration for "*Panem Nostrum Quotidianum Da Nobis Hodie*". Color lithographs, 39.5 × 30 cm. Published by F. Champenois and H. Piazza. Metadata sourced from Bridges (1980).

3.2. Structural Logic in Le Pater

Within Alphonse Mucha's artistic trajectory, the 1899 publication of the illustrated book *Le Pater* represents not merely a milestone in his transition from a commercial decorator to a philosopher-artist but a visual manifesto of the syncretic nature of his spiritual world. On the cover (Figure 4a), the central translucent divine presence gazes upward, establishing a spiritual bridge between the secular and the transcendent through flowing hair and ascending gestures. The complex vertical array of symbols on the left—including the "Eye of Providence," the "Ouroboros," and various astral elements—suggests a profound affinity with Theosophy and occultist thought, reconstructing traditional Christian texts within a broader, universal spiritual milieu. Mucha's pervasive use of the six-pointed star or its variants (Figure 4a–c) is interpreted by Hale as something more multi-dimensional than a purely Jewish symbol, likely resonating with Theosophy and occultism: "The six-pointed star has a variety of meanings, depending on its context... choosing this type of star does make it more likely that the images would be read in ways that are not traditionally Christian" (Hale 2016, p. 12). The most pivotal iconographic evidence of this universalism is the conspicuous absence of the cross. As Hale astutely notes, "Mucha included a wide range of religious symbols in *The Lord's Prayer*, from stars and burning hearts to the eye of providence. Yet one of the most prevalent symbols associated with Christianity is conspicuously absent from the text—the cross" (Hale 2016, pp. 16, 44). In its place, the Eye of Providence confronts the reader, while the divine space is filled with a female personification of love and an androgynous manifestation of light. This calculated integration of esoteric iconography points toward a deliberate dilution of not only orthodox Christianity but also the localized content of the Zodiac, guiding the viewer away from regional theology toward a universalist spiritual outlook. Iconographically, occult symbols are utilized throughout; structurally, however, it retains a geometric structure reminiscent of a religious halo, along with a nested circular structure akin to the astronomical clock. From the perspective of Theosophical doctrine, the nested circles of the astronomical clock share a consistent compositional baseline with the concept of "The One" (the ring within rings). Crucially, this very baseline serves as the presentation of the cosmological vision represented by the Mandala in subsequent analysis.

Le Pater should be understood as a functional design project rather than a purely independent fine art creation, as it was originally conceived as an illustrated book to guide lay recitation and contemplation of the Lord's Prayer. Despite these commercial and functional constraints, the visual composition of the plates arguably exhibits a distinct Q Formula trend. This layout can be systematically analyzed through the four fundamental criteria of Mucha's Q Formula: First, the presence of a Q-like planar geometric structure. In Figure 4a, this is manifested in the Q-like structure composed of the figure, the flowing hair, and the six-pointed star ring; in Figure 4b,c, the larger upper circle, the smaller lower circle, and the diagonal lines on both sides of the smaller circle collectively construct a Q-like shape with multiple boundary-crossing media. Second, the deployment of a nested circular-like main body. In Figure 4a–c, this is represented by the overlapping geometry of circles and squares forming a six-pointed star—or its partially obscured or deformed variations—which functions as the nested circular core housing figures, text, or floral patterns. Third, the incorporation of boundary-crossing media. This is exemplified by the female figure and her flowing hair in Figure 4a and the tilted lines or linear extensions emanating from the six-pointed star in Figure 4b,c. Fourth, a visual dynamic perspective established by the relationship between the nested body and the crossing media. Given the functional purpose of *Le Pater*, this visual dynamic is primarily oriented toward guiding cognitive eye movement. Although the formal expressions of the boundary-crossing media vary across the three plates, they consistently bridge the text inside the circular core with the text at the bottom of the page. By virtue of this Q Formula structure, the reader's gaze is systematically guided back and forth between these two textual zones. From this structural analytical perspective, it can be argued that Mucha achieved a profound synthesis of diverse cultural, religious, and esoteric discourses, ultimately crystallizing into a highly structured and unique visual style.

To better evaluate this structural approach, a horizontal comparison with Gustav Klimt is instructive. While Mucha uses geometry to build an integrated sacred structure, Klimt employs decorative ornamentation to dissolve the boundaries of the human subject entirely. During the 1890s, as Schorske observes, "In the nineties, the very nature of reality became problematical for Klimt. He did not know whether to seek it in the physical or the metaphysical, in the flesh or in the spirit. These traditional categories were losing their clarity and independence. The crisis of the liberal ego came to focus on the indeterminacy of the boundaries between them" (Schorske 1981, pp. 229–30). In Klimt's Symbolist work *Philosophy* (Figure 5), marginalized human figures overlap, their physical contours dissolving into a cosmic mist. Conversely, in his Golden Phase works, such as *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (Figure 6), the physical contours of the figures are often subsumed by dense, flat, repetitive geometric patterns and Byzantine-inspired textures. This visual dissolution of subjectivity may be interpreted as a psychological escape from the alienated ego imposed by modern industrial civilization. "Klimt's ornamental fields do not merely serve as embellishments but rather act as a visual mechanism of ego-dissolution. This approach reflects his intellectual generation's psychologized world-view, one that suffers the deathly dissolution of the boundaries of ego and world" (Schorske 1981, p. 234). In this state, individual identity is willingly surrendered to a transpersonal, collective, or cosmic realm. By drowning the individual's boundaries in a sea of gold and pattern, Klimt offers a mystical refuge from the psychic fragmentation and existential anxiety of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

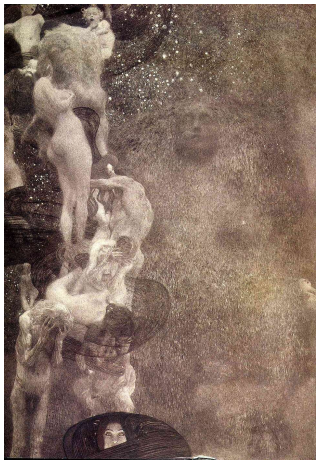


Figure 5. Gustav Klimt, *Philosophy*, University ceiling painting, 1900. Image in the public domain.

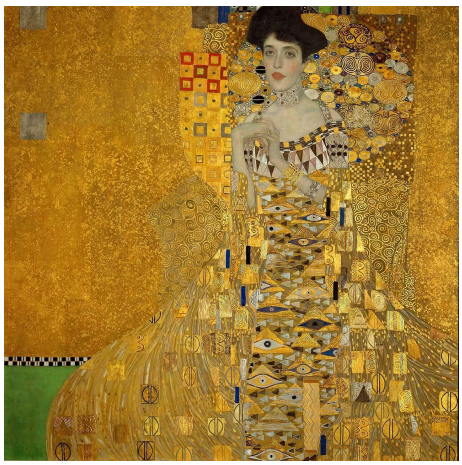
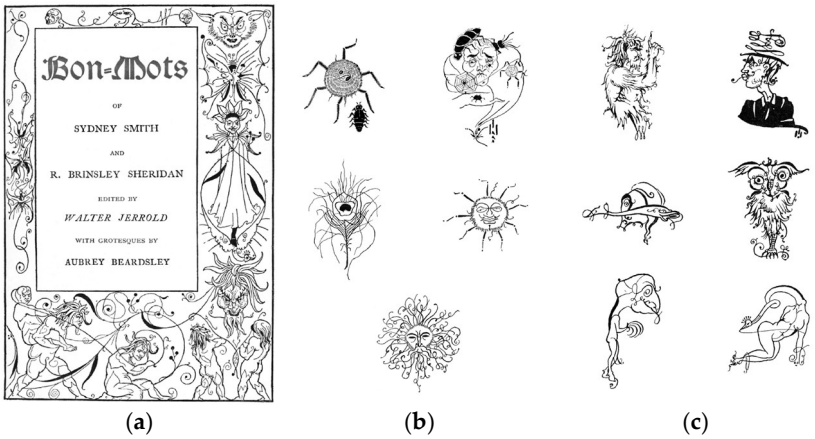


Figure 6. Gustav Klimt, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer *I*, 1907. Image in the public domain.

Conversely, Aubrey Beardsley's decorative strategies present a distinct visual response to modern anxiety. Working in the finest possible outline with patches of 'black blot,' his vignettes boldly engage in "linear drawings enhanced by black-and-white contrasts," wherein they incessantly play, alter, and convert. This flat, decorative surface completely rejects spatial depth, leaving the figures suspended in an abstract, vacuum-like space. This formal technique, characterized by a cold, ironic detachment, serves to externalize modern individual isolation and identity anxiety. Within Beardsley's subversion of graphic space, a profound aesthetic rebellion takes place: These works prove to be "that unique touchstone of 'the smallest space and the fewest means'" with which Beardsley achieved "the most." His *Bon-Mots* vignettes introduced a style of book that was *all margin*, demonstrating how, "in an aesthetic reversal of order and hierarchy, the margin came to be crucial, predominant, and fundamental" (Stead 2024, p. 14). As exemplified in the title page frame (Figure 7a), this marginalized style radically disrupts the traditional layout of the page. Rather than integrating text and figures into a harmonious geometric formula to construct a stable subjective framework—as famously seen in Alphonse Mucha's *Le Pater*—Beardsley elevates the periphery into the primary canvas for artistic expression. At the level of symbolic composition, his motifs exhibit a striking quality of distortion, fusion, and the grotesque, frequently depicting figures with deformed, bloated, or uncanny anatomies (Figure 7b,c). As noted in the study: "For Beardsley, calligraphy became a doodle accommodating unexpected shapes. Lines form letters by intertwining with themselves. Calligraphic grotesque elements interlace, birthing new forms within their twisted loops. When recognizable in the

drawing, letters also became tails, whiskers, hair, breasts, muzzles, wings and claws" (Stead 2024, p. 39). This study contends that, whether through the elevation of the margin to the primary stage or the expression of hybridized grotesquerie, this formal strategy serves as an absurd dissolution of subjectivity. Amidst the cataclysmic transitions of the *fin-de-siècle*, this dissolution is deliberately concealed within deformed visual landscapes, employing a cold, ironic vocabulary to confront identity anxiety. In Beardsley's representation, the various iterations of the "foetal" motif embody the co-existence of demise and hope against the late-nineteenth-century backdrop. As the scholar observes: "The foetal form looked both backward and forward, promising growth and harbouring decay. Likewise, the *fin-de-siècle* oscillated between birth and demise, deformation and germination… while the foetus captured and condensed a key vacillation between existence and annihilation" (Stead 2024, pp. 103–4).



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**)

Figure 7. Aubrey Beardsley, Grotesque illustrations for *Bon-Mots of Sydney Smith and R. Brinsley Sheridan*, 1893. (**a**) Title page with an ornate grotesque border frame; (**b**) Grotesque vignettes featuring spiders, webs, and organic motifs; (**c**) Calligraphic grotesque vignettes depicting hybrid figures and stylized creatures. Line block print. Sourced from Stead (2024).

In summary, while *Le Pater* is the visual crystallization of Mucha's intellectual system—fusing Catholic piety, Masonic rational light, and Theosophical cosmic evolution—it is best understood when contrasted with these contemporaneous styles as diverse mystical responses to the overarching background of modern anxiety. All three artists turn to ornament and mysticism as a refuge from the spiritual destabilization of their era, yet their formal strategies diverge sharply. Mucha's visual logic remains fundamentally structural and integrative; he uses the sacred geometry of the Q Formula to construct a centripetal visual order that harmonizes the tension between the material and spiritual worlds. In contrast, Klimt and Beardsley operate through strategies of separation, dissolution, and opposition. Klimt seeks to resolve modern anxiety by dissolving the alienated self into the absolute decorative field, while Beardsley externalizes that same anxiety by isolating the figure in cold, ironic opposition to its ground. While Klimt and Beardsley resort to dissolution and ironic opposition, Mucha synthesizes a structural pathway toward a harmonious, sacred presence.

4. Structural Homology: A Dialogue Between the Mandala and Mucha's Rings

4.1. The Flux of Visual Energy in the Q Formula

In the oeuvre of Alphonse Mucha, the most striking structural characteristic is summarized as the Q Formula. While not every work strictly adheres to this rule, the term accurately describes the iconic compositional logic of his most representative designs: a

significant number of his works "rely upon a group of related concepts in which the circle, or some part of it, is fundamental. A typical one consisted of a well-defined top with trailing middle and lower parts, in a vertical arrangement" (Reade 1967, p. 17). As established in the Introduction, this stylized description has been formalized into our four fundamental criteria. Furthermore, examining this mechanism through the lens of Rudolf Arnheim's visual dynamics aims to reveal that it is far more than a mere stylistic combination of a circle and a tangent. Rather, it constitutes an overarching Q-like structure—primarily synthesized by a circular main body and boundary-crossing media—that functions as a visual and psychodynamic apparatus deeply attuned to human perceptual mechanisms. By upgrading this formalist definition through contemporary frameworks of perceptual forces, Mucha's compositions can be understood as structured fields of directed tension, rooted in the premise that "what a person or animal perceives is not only an arrangement of objects, of colors and shapes, of movements and sizes. It is, perhaps first of all, an interplay of directed tensions" (Arnheim 1974, p. 11). Within these decorative frameworks, the geometric elements often gravitate toward implicit spatial nodes, demonstrating how "if the disk is seen as striving toward the center of the square, it is being attracted by something not physically present in the picture. The center point is not identified by any marking as invisible as the North Pole or the Equator, it is nonetheless a part of the perceived pattern, an invisible focus of power" (Arnheim 1974, p. 11). "In this light, the circular or quasi-circular main body of the 'Q Formula' interacts with the frame boundaries, thereby generating a focused field of visual forces." Although Gestalt psychology had not yet been formally systematized at the time, the nascent perceptual psychology of the late 19th century had already begun to notice the compulsive guidance that certain forms exert on the eye. From the philosophical perspective of Gilles Deleuze, this enclosed circular ornamental field inherently possesses a locking capacity alongside a dynamic inside-outside reciprocity. As Vlad Glăveanu posits, "ornament consists of patterns with order that not only guide human conduct but trigger meaning-making processes, locking the viewer within a specific perceptual and affective field, guiding (often in very discrete ways) its actions, thoughts and emotions" (Glăveanu 2014, p. 85). To fully comprehend how this "locking" and "guiding" operate beyond mere visual illusion, the analysis must be elevated to the intensive dimension of sensation. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze elucidates the biopolitical and non-narrative function of such geometric enclosures: "A round area often delimits the place where the person—that is to say, the Figure is seated, lying down, doubled over, or in some other position. This round or oval area takes up more or less space: it can extend beyond the edges of the painting or occupy the center of a triptych. It is often duplicated, or even replaced, by the roundness of the chair on which the person is seated, or by the oval of the bed on which the person is lying. It can be dispersed in the small disks that surround a part of the person's body, or in the gyratory spirals that encircle the bodies" (Deleuze 2003, p. 1). The "round area" in Mucha's "Q Formula" functions precisely as such an "operative field" that isolates the central allegorical figure, clearing away representational clichés to manifest pure sensation. However, this isolation is by no means a static imprisonment but is mediated by the contour: "the contour, which is the common limit of the Figure and the field. The shape of the contour seems to be very simple: round or oval; it is rather its color that poses problems, because of the dynamic double relationship in which it is caught up. The contour, as a 'place,' is in fact the place of an exchange in two directions: between the material structure and the Figure, and between the Figure and the field" (Deleuze 2003, p. 12). Through this lens, the circular main body of the "Q Formula" ceases to be a passive decorative frame and becomes a highly porous, intensive "membrane." Such a formulation philosophically demonstrates how the circular contour, charged with a chromatic field, inevitably generates an invisible inside-outside connection, facilitating a continuous ex-

change of energy—a dynamic that precisely underscores the cross-media function within the Q Formula.

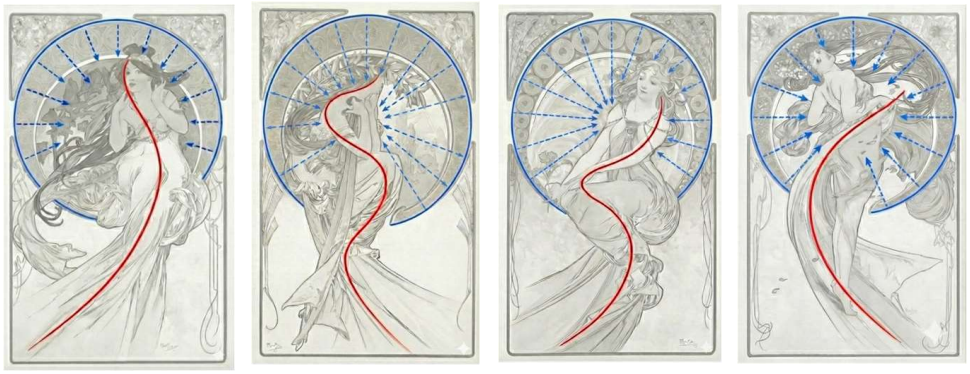
Naturally, regarding the analysis of cross-media boundary-breaking, let us first return to the visual level. Within the framework of Rudolf Arnheim's visual dynamics, the bridging medium in Mucha's "Q Formula" can be conceptualized as an "unevenly made explicit" radial vector. According to Arnheim's foundational analysis of circular structures, "The other elaboration of the circle makes its radii explicit and leads to sunburst patterns, in which straight lines or oblongs radiate from a central circle or a combination of concentric circles. Whereas mere roundness indicates no spatial direction at all, every radius does, but since the family of radii covers all directions more or less evenly, the sunburst figure as a whole still operates at a stage prior to that of differentiated direction" (Arnheim 1974, pp. 178–79). This insight implies that "mere roundness" in itself possesses no differentiated spatial directionality; directional tension manifests only when the latent radii are brought into explicit visibility. Crucially, Mucha's "Q Formula" eschews the omnidirectional, 360-degree equilibrium typical of a standard sunburst pattern. Instead, by strategically deploying lines or shapes as a bridging medium, it makes the radial lines explicit only along specific trajectories, thereby deliberately breaking the isotropic balance. Consequently, within the confinement of a rectangular frame, the "Q Formula" establishes a highly sophisticated dual visual force field: while the circular or quasi-circular main body generates a cohesive centripetal focus through its interaction with the boundaries, the extending bridging medium unleashes a powerful centrifugal orientation. This structural interplay gives rise to a dynamic, dual-layered perceptual field of visual forces. This dual visual force field, co-constituted by centripetal cohesion and centrifugal extension, can be sublimated within the philosophical context of Deleuze: Within this framework, the circular contour, in tandem with the surrounding color field, inherently establishes a dynamic tension between interior concentration and exterior expansion—an implicit flow across spatial boundaries. From the perspective of Rudolf Arnheim's visual dynamics, the circular main body exerts a centripetal force that condenses visual energy within the enclosed space. Meanwhile, the boundary-crossing media of the Q Formula act as a directional vector radius. By breaking the isotropic balance of the pure circle, this vector makes visually explicit what was previously an implicit, invisible spatial flow, driving visual tension beyond the geometric periphery into the external field. Consequently, Mucha's "Q Formula" is by no means a static visual symbol for passive aesthetic contemplation but an active perceptual apparatus. Through the dynamic interplay between circular containment and vector extension, it bridges interior density with exterior spatial flow into a unified visual experience.

Mucha's *The Arts* series (Figure 8) and its structural decomposition (Figure 9) visually exemplify this integrated mechanism. As demonstrated in Figure 9, the circular main body is primarily constructed through nested eccentric circles, which naturally guide the viewer's gaze to move and circulate within the upper composition. When operating in tandem with the boundary-crossing media, this internal visual movement is smoothly led beyond the circular perimeter. This structural coordination aims to reveal that the Q Formula is not a simple dichotomy or rigid opposition between containment and release but rather an integrated visual system. From a Deleuzian perspective, this mechanism indirectly corroborates the idea that pictorial contours inherently harbor both inner and outer flows—two indivisible dimensions that co-exist in dynamic duality.



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**) (**d**)

Figure 8. Alphonse Mucha, *The Arts* series, 1898. Color lithographs, 56 × 34 cm. Printed by F. Champenois, Paris: (**a**) *Music*; (**b**) *Poetry*; (**c**) *Painting*; (**d**) *Dance*. Metadata sourced from Bridges (1980).



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**) (**d**)

Figure 9. Zhang Xuezi, *Structural Decomposition of Mucha's The Arts Series*, 2026. AI-generated diagram based on Mucha's *The Arts* (1898) series. The blue arrows and lines indicate the focusing direction of the circular main body, while the red lines represent the guidance direction of the boundary-crossing media. Metadata sourced from Bridges (1980). Paris: (**a**) *Music*; (**b**) *Poetry*; (**c**) *Painting*; (**d**) *Dance*.

Using *Painting* (Figure 10) as a rigorous case study, this perceptual process of directed tensions can be systematically tracked. First (The Blue Line), the gaze is drawn to the outer, dark-colored crescent boundary, establishing the primary operative field and isolating the central female figure within the composition. Next (The Green Lines), the nested eccentric circles converge toward the lower left, driving a centripetal movement that channels visual forces toward the flowers, perfectly echoing the figure's own intensive gaze. Finally (The Purple Lines), the vision follows the figure's legs and is swept beyond the disk by the fluttering skirt. Here, the boundary-crossing media operates decisively, executing a centrifugal extension that projects the accumulated internal energy toward the boundary of the entire frame. Ultimately, this empirical tracking reinforces how a non-antagonistic dual unity is maintained through pure geometry.

In summary, deconstructing the Q Formula through the combined perspectives of Arnheim's visual dynamics and Deleuze's inner and outer flows of contours aims to reveal that its essence is not a static decorative style but rather a highly coordinated visual perceptual mechanism. Within this mechanism, the circular main body composed of nested eccentric circles and the boundary-crossing media do not conflict with each other; instead, through the synergistic operation of centripetal focusing and centrifugal extension, they achieve a non-antagonistic dual unity. This constitutes a dual structural dynamic integrating "focusing" and "releasing." To further explore the structural homology between this visual logic and the mandala, we need to shift our focus toward the mandala system,

examining the homologous relationship between the Q Formula and the mandala along with its spiritual implications.

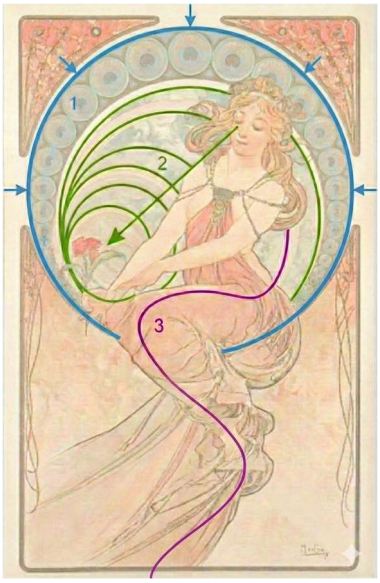
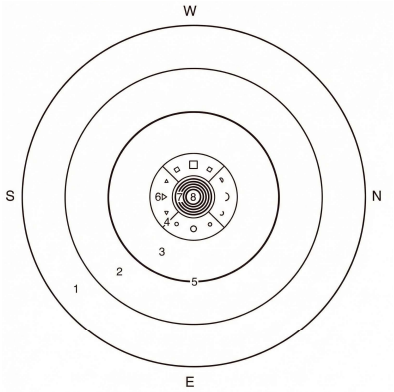


Figure 10. Zhang Xuezi, *Visual Energy Flow Analysis Diagram of Mucha's Painting Series*, 2026. AI-generated diagram based on Mucha's *Painting* (1898). The blue line (1) establishes the primary operative field along the outer crescent boundary; the green lines (2) indicate the centripetal visual force converging toward the lower left; the purple lines (3) represent the centrifugal extension beyond the disk executed by the boundary-crossing media.

4.2. The Symbolic Duality of the Mandala

The term mandala originates from Sanskrit, where the root manda signifies 'essence' or 'core', and the suffix la denotes a 'container' or 'circumference.' Thus, at its most fundamental level, a mandala can be translated as a 'container of essence'. While various Buddhist traditions offer different cosmological models resulting in diverse mandala forms, this study focuses exclusively on the nested circular structure found within the Kālacakra (Wheel of Time) tradition. As Martin Brauen notes, though cosmologies vary, "any one of these various cosmologies is completely valid for the beings whose karmic projections cause them to experience their universe in that way" (Brauen 1998, p. 22). Functionally, a mandala as an instrument of spiritual practice first "delineates a consecrated superficies and protects it from invasion by disintegrating forces symbolized in demoniacal cycles" (Tucci 2001, p. 23), thereby seeking to restore a state of spiritual wholeness. As Giuseppe Tucci notes, despite differences in iconography or theoretical emphasis, the spiritual background remains identical: a "yearning to find out a way from time to eternity, to help the primeval consciousness, which is fundamentally one, to recover its integrity" (Tucci 2001, p. viii).

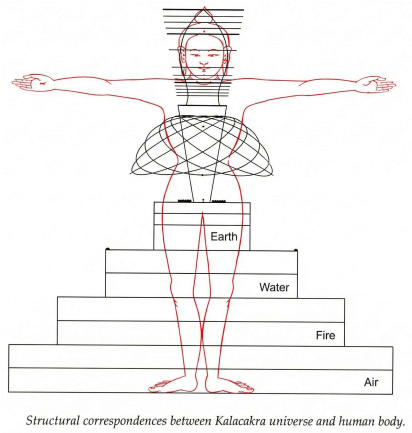
Second, it "serves as a map of the cosmos—a geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern, illustrating the process of emanation and of reabsorption" (Tucci 2001, pp. 23, 25). "Within the *Kālacakra* cosmology, this structure is composed of four colossal round discs (air, fire, water, and earth) with diameters that decrease as they ascend. At the center, Mount Meru is no longer depicted as square but as circular, surrounded by six concentric landmasses, six mountain walls and six oceans. If one includes the water disc, there are altogether seven oceans" (Brauen 1998, p. 22). The mandala itself represents a two-dimensional, bird's-eye view of this cosmic hierarchy (Figure 11).



Plan view of the cosmos according to the Kālacakra Tantra: (1) air disc; (2) fire disc; (3) water disc ('seventh ocean'); (4) earth disc; (5) fire or vajra mountain; (6) southern continent Jambudvipa with seven mountain chains; (7) six rings each comprising a land mass, mountain wall and ocean (liquor, water, milk, curd, ghee, molasses); (8) base of Mount Meru.

Figure 11. Zhang Xuezi, *Structural Reconstruction of the Plan View of the Cosmos to the Kālacakra Tantra*, 2026. AI-assisted diagram based on Brauen (1998, p. 22). The outer labels (E, S, W, N) indicate cardinal directions. The numbered elements (1–8) represent the cosmological structure: (1) air disc; (2) fire disc; (3) water disc ('seventh ocean'); (4) earth disc; (5) fire or vajra mountain; (6) southern continent Jambudvipa with seven mountain chains; (7) six rings each comprising a land mass, mountain wall, and ocean; (8) base of Mount Meru. The different geometric shapes (circles, squares, triangles, semicircles) denote the elemental discs and cosmological realms within the mandala layout.

This all-encompassing cosmic narrative is known as the Outer Kālacakra. Correspondingly, the Inner Kālacakra refers to the microscopic human anatomy mapped onto this same structural logic. Viewed in three dimensions (Figure 12), Mount Meru at the center of the universe corresponds to the human spinal column. The four elemental discs supporting the cosmos correspond to the distance from the soles of the feet to the hip bones. The tracks of the planetary winds in the upper cosmos find their counterparts in the human respiratory system (the lungs), and the uppermost portion of the cosmic model corresponds to the human head. As Brauen posits, "the inner Kālacakra is made up of what lives in this environment, human beings, whose structure, composition, and inner periodicity correspond exactly with that of the outer wheel of time" (Brauen 1998, p. 51).



Structural correspondences between Kalacakra universe and human body.

Figure 12. Zhang Xuezi, *Structural Reconstruction of Correspondences between the Kālacakra Universe and the Human Body, 2026.* AI-assisted diagram based on Brauen (1998, p. 52). The red outline marks the microscopic human anatomy, while the black background lines represent the macrocosmic architecture. The lower stepped discs correspond to the four elements (Air, Fire, Water, Earth) mapped to the legs and lower body; the middle dome structure indicates the planetary winds and lungs within the chest; and the upper horizontal lines represent Mount Meru and the celestial realm corresponding to the human head.

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Between the Outer and Inner *Kālacakra*, there exists a structural fractal relationship—a macro-micro duality perfectly unified within the geometric order of the mandala. From a comparative cultural perspective, this structural dualism resonates profoundly with the concept of Sympathy discussed in Section 2.2 regarding the Prague Orloj and Mucha's *Zodiac*. Whether in the Eastern *Kālacakra* or the Western cultural *habitus* Mucha encountered through the astronomical clock, one may discern a structural resonance that gestures toward an underlying cognitive schema common to both hemispheres. Rather than suggesting direct historical transmission, this structural homology can be hypothesized as a synchronistic phenomenon—revealing a deep-seated "cultural-structural gene" shared across civilizational boundaries. Both traditions independently arrived at an isomorphic visual system to resolve the existential tension between the infinite, macrocosmic universe and the finite, microcosmic human subject.

The above section has elaborated on the meaning and function of the mandala in Buddhism, while a specific analysis of the Q Formula was already conducted in Section 4.1. Because the mandala is not merely a two-dimensional visual image, it is necessary to clarify from which analytical perspectives we should examine it. First, as discussed in this section, its significance within the Buddhist worldview—both as a tool for spiritual practice and through the concepts of the Outer and Inner Kālacakra—cannot be overlooked. This section has already established a resonance between the duality of the External and Internal Kālacakra and the cultural context of the Astronomical Clock. Nevertheless, a tool for spiritual practice must be viewed comprehensively in relation to its ultimate purpose, which serves as the precise entry point for the discussion of structural homology starting in Section 4.3. Furthermore, in the field of Jungian analytical psychology, the mandala also possesses practical effects in relieving anxiety and stabilizing emotions—effects that are supported by contemporary research. This perspective likewise cannot be ignored. For instance, a systematic review by Zhang et al. (2024) provides clinical evidence that mandala art interventions effectively alleviate negative psychological symptoms—such as anxiety, stress, and depression—while reducing physiological indicators of distress.

4.3. Centripetal Gravity and the Integration of the Self

In exploring the structural homology of Mucha's Q Formula, it is first necessary to establish a macro-dialectical frame of reference: the unity of Form and Emptiness in Buddhism. In the Heart Sutra, the realization that "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form" constitutes the ultimate description of cosmic reality. It must be explicitly clarified, however, that invoking the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra here does not imply that Mucha was deeply versed in these Eastern classics, nor does it constitute an empirical historical assertion; rather, they are employed as a retrospective heuristic frame of reference through which to perceive the virtual cosmic dynamics within his work. Regarding Form (*Rūpa*), Edward Conze explains that it "covers the 'material' or 'physical' aspect of the world, and it comprises chiefly the four material elements, the five sense organs, and the five sense objects" (Conze 2001, p. 82). "As for Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), he delineates three dimensions: (1) Etymologically, it conveys that something, which looks like something much, is really nothing; (2) As a spiritual term, it denotes the complete denial of, the complete liberation from, the world around us; (3) As a technical term, it signifies the absence of any kind of self" (Conze 2001, p. 80). In alignment with the visual dynamic breakdown established in Section 4.1, we can systematically separate the circular or quasi-circular main body of the Q Formula from its cross-media tangent line, mapping them, respectively, onto a homological reading of Emptiness and Form.

From this interpretive standpoint, the enclosed rings of the mandala can be hypothesized to correspond with the metaphysical pursuit of Emptiness—an alignment that is

structured as a "theoretical juxtaposition" rather than a claim of intentional transmission. "In Tibetan Buddhism, the mandala serves as a ritual instrument (*yantra*), whose purpose is to assist meditation and concentration" (Jung 1968, para. 714). It arises from the practitioner's yearning for sacred space. "Its primary function is a visual mapping of the state of enlightenment. By entering the boundaries of the mandala layer by layer, the practitioner replicates the process of moving from sensory chaos to the center of awakening—a journey of transfiguring the legacy which Man carries with him from his birth until reaching the primordial equipoise regained after the experience of life" (Tucci 2001, p. 83).

This movement from periphery to center is more than a doctrinal return; it can be hypothesized as a profound existential strategy to manage psychological chaos. "Entering the 20th century, C. G. Jung reconstructed this archetype of order through psychology. Jung's engagement with the mandala was not a mere theoretical abstraction; it was rooted in his own psychological crisis and subsequent recovery. During his intense confrontation with the unconscious, Jung drew his first mandala in 1916 and began regularly recording daily mandalas in *Liber Novus* (*The Red Book*). As Jung later reflected, these mandala images functioned as cryptograms on the state of my Self that were delivered each day, revealing the circular image to be a self-regulating attempt by the psyche to restore inner harmony and order" (Shamdasani 2009, pp. 205–6). This personal practice gained a plausible historical and cross-cultural link in 1929, when Jung encountered Richard Wilhelm's translation of the Taoist classic *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (*Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi*). This encounter potentially validated Jung's speculative belief that the mandala was a universal "archetype of wholeness" common to both the Eastern spirit and the Western psyche.

He observed that when an individual's worldview is thrown into chaos by subconscious intrusions, the "severe pattern imposed by a circular image of this kind arguably compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state—namely, through the construction of a central point to which everything is related" (Jung 1968, para. 714). This can be interpreted as an instinctive attempt at self-healing. Jung posited that the centripetal structure of the mandala corresponds to the ultimate goal of psychological development: Individuation. He described this as "'Formation, Transformation, Eternal Mind's eternal recreation.' And that is the self, the wholeness of the Personality" (Jung 1972, p. v). To illuminate this evolutionary process, it is helpful to articulate a critical distinction between the Jungian concepts of "ego" and "Self." The ego serves merely as the superficial center of conscious awareness—a finite, rational construct that is highly vulnerable to fragmentation during spiritual or cultural crises. Conversely, the Self constitutes the supraordinate archetype of psychic totality, an absolute center that harmonizes both conscious volition and the vast expanse of the unconscious. It is this cosmic synthesis, rather than the fragile ego, that the geometric core of the mandala stabilizes. In *Mandala Symbolism*, he noted that "the center of the mandala is a source of energy that manifests an irresistible compulsion and urge to become what one is—a center felt not as the ego, but as the Self" (Jung 1972, p. 73).

Viewing the mandala as a psychic container, Jung argued that its closed circumference defines the boundary between the sacred and the secular, preventing the dissipation of psychic energy. Whether as a ritual tool or a two-dimensional image for inner integration, "the mandala dictates a clear direction of energy flow: life's energy detaches from objects and streams inward toward the center, seeking a static state subject to no more change" (Jung 1972, p. 74).

According to Michaela Fišerová, this circular structure operates as a visual refrain: "It allows one to become safe in the surrounding chaos, much like a child lost in the dark who starts to sing under his breath to calm the fear of darkness. By repeating a 'ritornello' (refrain) in the mind, the individual produces their own 'assemblage, his territory, his home'" (Fišerová 2025, p. 92). Ultimately, whether it is the Buddhist pursuit

of Emptiness via the mandala, the integration of the Self in Jungian analytical psychology, or territorialization in the Deleuzian sense, all these mechanisms fundamentally operate on a highly concentrated energy of focusing, isolating, and locking. Consequently, they exhibit a rigorous consistency in energy topology with the circular main body of Mucha's Q Formula. To be sure, from an empirical or positivist standpoint, it remains impossible to definitively assert that Mucha directly referenced the mandala, nor can it be claimed that the main body of the Q Formula constitutes an intentional rendering of a sacred Buddhist chart. Evaluated strictly through a conventional art-historical lens, the Q Formula dynamically operates slippages from representation to ornament (be it abstract, figural, or symbolic). However, when reframed against the historical matrix of *fin-de-siècle* industrial disenchantment and collective existential emptiness, this structural composition aims to reveal a depth that far exceeds mere graphic steering. Within the main body of the Q Formula, a retrospective, post hoc analytical lens—grounded firmly in the topological consistency of visual forces—allows the mobilization of the mandala to deeply enrich the ontological meaning of Mucha's form. It endows the circular core of the Q Formula with a vital, strategic purpose: the establishment of a centered subjectivity to actively resist modern psychic disintegration, spiritual alienation, and the fragmentation of the self.

4.4. Centrifugal Tangents and the Visual Manifestation of Non-Duality

In Section 4.3, we invoked Edward Conze's triple definition of Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*). It is crucial to note that his second point—the denial of the world—and the third—the absence of any kind of self—can be hypothesized to point to different dimensions within the structural analysis of the mandala. The enclosed rings of the mandala, much like the circular focusing in Mucha's Q Formula, functionally correspond to Conze's second dimension: the construction of a sacred space that detaches the subject from the chaotic realm of Form (*Rūpa* or the material world) to facilitate the search for the Self. This aligns with Jung's view of the mandala as a *Temenos*—a protected, sacred boundary within which the subject integrates the shadow and achieves psychological balance.

However, from the dialectical perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, an Emptiness that relies solely on circular boundaries arguably remains limited. Remaining static within this enclosed state risks falling into a passive avoidance of the material world—a spiritual deviation known in Buddhist philosophy as "biased emptiness" (*piānkōng*) or attachment to the void. The hypothesized ultimate spiritual state is Non-abiding Nirvana (*Apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*), which shatters the dualism between Emptiness and Form, or between inside the mandala and outside the mandala. As Conze describes the Mahayana ideal, "they do not, like ordinary people, opt for Samsara, nor do they. . . wish to escape into Nirvana. They do not leave or abandon the samsaric world, but it no longer has the power to defile them" (Conze 2001, p. 45).

In the Q Formula, this dialectical process of stepping out of the sacred mandala and returning to the empirical world is visually manifested by the boundary-crossing media—represented by the figure's trailing body or flowing hair. Within the metaphysical framework of "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form", the flow of energy in mandala practice can be interpreted as consisting of two reciprocal movements: first, entering the ring to return to the Self; and second, dissolving the ring to move back into the world. The synthesis of the circular or quasi-circular main body and the boundary-crossing media in Mucha's Q Formula masterfully articulates this dual energy flow through a two-dimensional ornamental style. This structural homology points to an intuitive alignment that transcends time and space. Mucha may not have been an expert in the Madhyamaka philosophy of Dependent Origination and Emptiness (*Pratītyasamutpāda-Śūnyatā*), but through immersion in his own cultural *habitus* and the Theosophical absorption of the

Buddhist cosmological worldview of nested circles, he arguably arrived at a structural truth similar to the mandala via visual intuition.

Thus, as a tool for spiritual practice, the primary function of the mandala is to isolate the material world, thereby enabling the realization of Emptiness. It achieves this effect of isolation and locking through layers of closed circles, which renders the mandala inherently closed in its graphic layout. However, its ultimate purpose, in alignment with Mahayana Buddhist concepts, is to step out of the mandala and return to the material world to experience the dual unity of form and emptiness. It can be argued that the boundary-breaking, cross-media movement of the Q Formula visually suggests precisely this trajectory of energy flow, thereby forming an energy field that unifies this duality. From this perspective, the Q Formula can be seen as visually actualizing both the operational function and the ultimate destination of the mandala. Synthesizing this with our analysis in Section 4.2, within the circular or quasi-circular main body of the Q Formula, the instrumentality of the mandala deepens the capacity to isolate the world, realize Emptiness, or integrate the Self. Conversely, the boundary-crossing media of the Q Formula serve as the ultimate visual manifestation of the spiritual purpose of mandala practice. Viewed from this angle, the two systems complement each other, fully completing the interpretive reading of their structural homology.

Whether in the ancient Eastern mandala or Mucha's Q Formula, the human psyche perpetually seeks a binary balance: the ability to return to the center while simultaneously embracing the world. With an artist's intuition, Mucha eternally froze this profound philosophical structure within that gracefully trailing ring. This homologous phenomenon cannot be reduced to direct cultural borrowing. Rather, it aims to reveal how different civilizations, when confronted with the shared existential task of integrating the sacred and the profane, independently generated isomorphic visual structures. Within this shared cognitive *habitus*, autonomous ornament is no longer an appendage; it is a direct mapping of the trajectory of cosmic energy and a clothed repetition—a profound manifestation of thinking through form.

5. Conclusions and Prospects: The Visual Mandala as an "Antidote to Modernity"

Through a deep genealogy of Alphonse Mucha's artistic lineage, this research penetrates the mist of complex floral curves characteristic of Art Nouveau to reach its resilient and profound spiritual core. The findings demonstrate that the Q Formula is by no means a mere commercial compositional rule for visual pleasure; rather, it functions as a visual and energy conversion apparatus spanning geocultural boundaries, religious philosophies, and cognitive structures. By analyzing the centripetal rhythm of the circular main body and the centrifugal manifestation of boundary-crossing media, this study establishes the Q Formula as a paradigm of Autonomous Ornament within the turbulent context of the late 19th century. The efficacy of this paradigm is rooted in the resonance between mysticism and Theosophical lineages. Through a transcultural isomorphism with the mandala structure, Mucha distilled ornament from a subjective appendage into a form of clothed repetition that acts directly upon the foundational strata of human perception.

The validity of this deep structure has not diminished with the passage of time. As humanity enters an era of digital algorithms—marked by highly fragmented perception and surging information entropy—this complex geometric order, rooted in human cognitive schemata, aims to reveal an integrative potential that extends beyond conventional decorative functions. In an information-dense digital landscape, the Q Formula possesses the potential for a qualitative leap, evolving into a functional anchor of spiritual order. Utilizing the structural closure of the circular main body and the dynamic intervention

of boundary-crossing media, it forcibly carves out a Gestalt field with visual soothing functions amidst the ephemeral flow of signals. This unique centripetal gravity provides contemporary audiences with a centrifugal brake to counter algorithmic alienation, thereby soothing the existential anxiety triggered by information overload. Simultaneously, the boundary-crossing media embody the dialectic of non-duality, suggesting that centripetal integration must ultimately point toward an active return to the material world.

In an age where artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the paradigms of content production, this deep structural wisdom guides creators away from simple image proliferation toward an exploration of formal ontology. Faced with the "aesthetic redundancy" brought about by generative art, the study of the homology between Mucha's schemata and the mandala is no longer limited to historical retrospection; it is a reaffirmation of the return of subjectivity. Just as Deleuze viewed ornament as a ritornello to ward off the dark, and the mandala aims to lead the individual to realize the Self, this primordial yearning for order and meaning has not dissolved in the algorithmic tide—it has gained an even more urgent existential value. Ultimately, Mucha's Q Formula aims to reveal that ornament is not on the margin of truth; it is humanity's enduring effort to anchor dignity and order for the soul within a perpetually shifting world.

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