

What is Transformative Art & Architecture (TAA) ?

Below words of Rudolf Steiner's, taken from a lecture given to the workers of the first Goetheanum, speak of a new, morally transformative architecture of the future.

"It is probable that our building will not be able fully to attain its goal – indeed we are only aiming at a primitive beginning. Yet if human culture is able to take what is expressed in our building ... and develop it; if the ideas underlying such works of art find followers — then people who allow themselves to be impressed by these works of art and who have learnt to understand their language, will never do wrong to their fellow men either in heart or intellect, because the forms of art will teach them how to love; they will learn to live in harmony and peace with their fellow beings. Peace and harmony will pour into all hearts through these forms; such buildings will be "Lawgivers" and their forms will be able to achieve what external institutions can never achieve.

However much study may be given to the elimination of crime and wrong-doing from the World, true redemption, the turning of evil into good, will in future depend upon whether true art is able to pour a spiritual fluid into the hearts and souls of men. When men's hearts and souls are surrounded by the achievements of true architecture, sculpture and the like, they will cease to lie if it happens they are untruthfully inclined; they will cease to disturb the peace of their fellow men if this is their tendency. Edifices and buildings will begin to speak, and in a language of which people of today have no sort of inkling."

Rudolf Steiner, *Ways to a New Style of Architecture*

As an architectural theory and methodology grounded in Anthroposophy, TAA aims to articulate the theoretical and practical principles that can make Steiner's vision of moral transformation through art and architecture both practicable and teachable.

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A UNIVERSITY TRAINING IN TRANSFORMATIVE ART AND ARCHITECTURE

by Johannes Schuster

TRANSFORMATIVE ARCHITECTURE AND THE BIOSCULPTURAL METHOD

Every student who passes through a training in architecture, will be motivated by the idea that their designs are going to make a positive impact on the world. The question is how we can inspire and equip tertiary students with a living knowledge of how architectural form can become *morally transformative*, that is to say: uplift the soul of those who move within and around them? And how can a such transformative architecture be taught?

This is a completely different question from trying to create a built up environment that is merely well-designed, functional, green, healthy or energy efficient etc. As important all such considerations are, they are in the end utilitarian in nature. Whilst utilitarianism can be efficient, practical, profitable, healthy, even attractive, it can never become truly beautiful nor uplifting. Why not? Because in the final analysis there are always functional and/or commercial motives attached to anything of a purely utilitarian nature.

True beauty on the other hand, can only arise when it is freed from utilitarian motives, which implies that it is given as a free gift and not as the result of a commercial transaction. This doesn't mean that Michaelangelo couldn't have been paid for his work, but it means that the money wasn't what motivated him. This also doesn't mean that functional and utilitarian requirements need to be ignored, but it means they are initially set aside for a later stage in the process. This allows for a creative "open space" to arise within which an inspiration is able to metamorphose a formless spiritual essence into a generative gesture and seed model.

We can admire the beauty of a rose, a spectacular sunset, the gait of a brumby, the smile of a baby or even the humour of a wizened old face. Some manifestations of beauty are universal and not subject to the eye of the beholder, nor are they limited to the phenomena of nature alone. We may also come across them in man-made works of art. When listening to such works as Mozart's *Ave Verum*, Bach's *Magnificat* or Beethoven's *Pastorale* for example, we are transported to another realm, which is highly moral in nature and which, momentarily, transforms us into better human beings than we were before. The architectural equivalent of such moments is to stand in awe inside a great cathedral, look up at a Greek temple or walk up the steps of a great modern building such as the Sydney Opera House. These are all experiences of *universal beauty*.

What is the aim?

There are many architects and architectural movements today whose entire focus is about functionality, sustainability, energy efficiency, health/ ecology/environmental awareness etc. TAA is not primarily focused on any of these. Neither does TAA wish to replace or modify any of such worthwhile principles and ideals, which are already recognized as integral to best architectural practice. Rather than replacing such approaches, TAA adds another perspective which does not replace, but is complementary to existing architectural best practice.

TAA arises from a *monistic, spiritual perspective*, which elevates architectural design from the utilitarian, functional and conventionally aesthetic or fashionable level to a spiritually objective '*transformational*' level. It does this by aiming for an experience of *Universal Beauty* i.e. not "subjective beauty" that lies in the eye of the beholder, but *Universal Beauty*.

What is Universal Beauty?

For the purposes of TAA, beauty becomes universal when it bears within itself an element of "Goodness, Life (Beauty) and Truth". TAA therefore seeks to create morally transformative architecture through the incorporation of the qualities of "Goodness, Life (Beauty) and Truth".

How can this be achieved?

TAA and its Biosculptural method have identified a number of concrete, practical steps and design criteria to help bring this about. While the theory of TAA is based on the universal principles of spiritual science, which are not likely to change with the passage of time, the practical methodologies of how this theory is applied may vary and change over time. Both TAA and the Biosculptural methodology complement each other and form part of the same TAA course.

In its present form, TAA addresses three perspectives of form creation, all of which are essential to create a meaningful and spiritually uplifting environment. They are:

1. The Spiritual nature of the Creative Process
2. The 4 Ethers as Nature's Etheric Language of Form
3. Consciousness of Form in the Consciousness Soul Age

Creative Process – Spirit Essence

Understanding and working with the spiritual nature of the creative Process is necessary to help incorporate spiritual essence into architectural form. We can approach the archetypal nature of the creative process by studying the creative steps of cosmic evolution, which reveal themselves to be the steps of WARMTH – LIGHT – MOVEMENT – FORM. We can also trace the same steps in the archetypal plant gestures over a 12 month period. More about the creative process shortly.

Language of Form – Living Form

“Spirit cannot act in the world without form”. All forms of nature ultimately have a spiritual origin and are therefore filled with purpose, meaning and beauty. The form itself arises within physical substance through the creative tension that exists between the polarity of life forces and physical forces as explained by Ernst Marti. Understanding and appreciating the dynamic tension that exists between these polar opposites is the first step towards a universal and living architectural language of form. This is why we can begin to learn how to create new and meaningful forms by studying the form language of the 4 Ethers and the 12 formative forces connected with the zodiac. More about language of form below.

Consciousness of Form – Human Being

Every form has consciousness. There are 4 archetypal categories of form connected with the typical forms of the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom and the human kingdom. The spiritual counterparts of the lower kingdoms are not physically incarnated within their material bodies. Only the human form can incorporate a spiritual centre or Ego. Since the forms we wish to create are to serve, above all, the human kingdom, and since the human being was created in the image of God, it behoves us to study the *“lawfulness of the human body”* as Steiner puts it. This in turn will help us to find the new architectural principles and forms capable of serving the spiritual evolutionary goals of humanity in the age of the consciousness soul.

12 Form Criteria

TAA has identified 4 archetypal form criteria connected with each of the current three TAA perspectives: ***Content, Language and Consciousness***. This adds up to a total of 12 fundamental criteria acting as a foundational guide during the design process, as well as an orientation map in the evaluation of the transformative potential of architectural form.

The Spiritual Perspective

Although TAA’s spiritual perspective adds only one extra layer to the design process, it is however a layer that is very likely to have a significant effect on the chosen geometric forms, final appearance and the overall feel and atmosphere emanating from any given project.

Why “Biosculptural”?

The name *Biosculptural Architecture* implies a deliberate association with the name *Biodynamic Agriculture*. Both are practical endeavours that arise out of anthroposophical principles and both seek to establish concrete links between cosmic/spiritual and earthly/physical realities. Just like biodynamic agriculture seeks to bring plants into a dynamic relationship with the cosmos, in order to draw increased life force into fruit and

vegetable, so does Biosculptural architecture seek to embody soul/spiritual qualities within the “sculptural” and “living” forms of a building.

To sum up, **Transformative Art & Architecture (TAA)** is a newly formulated theory of how spirit relates to artistic and architectural form. As a theory it is fully grounded in Rudolf Steiner’s research of the spiritual universe and our place within it. As a **Biosculptural methodology**, it has developed a series of practical steps and criteria, which can be applied in architectural practice.

EXAMPLES OF A TERTIARY CURRICULUM IN BIOSCULPTURAL ARCHITECTURE

The Creative Process

Through Anthroposophy we can come to understand how the creation and evolution of the world itself is a creative process on the part of many spiritual hierarchies. This process unfolded in four archetypal steps that could be summarised by the principles of: WARMTH – LIGHT – MOVEMENT – FORM

The Hermetic principle of “as above - so below” implies that such fundamental principles apply on all levels of creation, from the largest all the way down to the lowest scale.

Therefore, every truly creative process must allow these four steps to take their course. There must be personal commitment, enthusiasm and engagement (WARMTH). There must be appropriate skills, information and an element of artistic/spiritual inspiration (LIGHT). There must be a sufficient amount of time and space to allow the design to evolve, so the solutions have time to “cook” and mature (MOVEMENT) before the process is finally able to yield a concrete, comprehensive and beautiful result (FORM).

If any of the four steps or principles is missing in the design process, the results are being compromised. So, for example:

Lack of WARMTH	means the results are likely to be	tight, cheap, generic
Lack of LIGHT		boring, uninformed, uninspiring,
Lack of MOVEMENT		impractical, rigid, inflexible
Lack of FORM		chaotic, fragmented, arbitrary

These four archetypal steps inspire the four stages of the creative process. Within the architectural design process the 4 steps mean:

1. Clarify Intent and resourcing (WARMTH)
2. Seek Inspiration (LIGHT)
3. Create the Life & Soul Gestures* and the Seed Model* that resonates with the inspiration (MOVEMENT)
4. Grow the seed model into a purposeful, living whole (FORM)

*The Life Gesture, Soul Gesture and Seed Model represent 3 specific stages of a 12 step design process. All 12 stages reflect the archetypal plant's 12 growth gestures over a 12 month rhythm. The 'seed model', for example, represents the germinating spring seed, which bears within itself the formative blueprint of the mature plant form. The study of these relationships forms part of the first teaching module of the TAA course.

Etheric Language of Form

The transition from a 'seed model' to the final form is comparable to the growth of a plant from seed to flower. This is where the form language of the four ethers provides a useful template in design development. It is only through a living, etheric form language that the soul/spiritual qualities of the original inspiration are able to condense into outer form. Therefore, the study of the form language of the four ethers, plus, at a more advanced stage, the study of the formative forces connected with the zodiac, become a necessary part of any TAA based university curriculum.

Based on Steiner's indications, we can begin to relate to and understand the formative forces via the eurythmy gestures, which give expression to the form impulses behind the vowels and consonants. This is complemented by observing and studying the many plant forms of nature in the context of their particular gestures, medicinal properties and relationships to the planets and the zodiac. All of this of course opens up a huge field of research for generations of interested students and practitioners at the tertiary educational level.

A university training in Biosculptural architecture would involve an experience of eurythmy, speech formation and the observation of natural forms in a way which reveals their gestural language.

Let's take the B-gesture as an example:

The B – Gesture

The experience of the B sound reveals the gesture of B as a formative force, as are all consonants (as opposed to vowels which have a feeling gesture). The specific gesture of B is a space creating force that contains something, and at the same time protects what it contains. In eurythmy the arms come together in the form of an embracing gesture See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toWYtr6Fgpl&ab_channel=LogosEurythmie

Therefore, we could say, the knowledge and experience of the B gesture is fundamental to the creation of all building spaces – spaces which hold and protect – but it is expressed most archetypally in a building for young children. The possibility of inwardness is created by the sheath or skin which surrounds all living creatures. The kindergarten years could be compared to a seed which harbours a strong inward activity that bursts into stem and flower during the subsequent school years and finally bears fruit in the young adult. The quality and form of a seed is a great image for the archetypal gesture of a kindergarten

building. The walls want to be strong and protective and embrace the internal space in a gesture reminiscent of the eurythmy gesture for the letter “B”. The same gesture also reminds us of the gesture of the human embryo, or the curled up gesture of the foetal position, all of which are expressions of inwardness and inner movement. Once the perimeter of the roof line and verandas are taken into account, we get an egg-like form, which is also reminiscent of the shape of a seed or bud. The circular space where the children gather for the story would be roughly in the same location where the head is situated in the embryo.

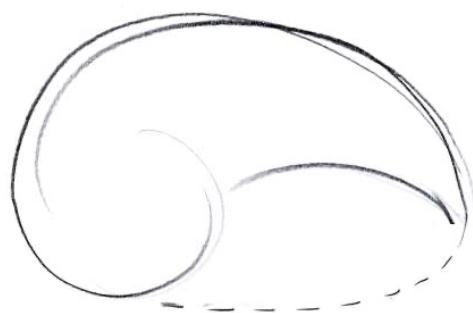


Figure 1: An Archetypal kindergarten floor plan is reminiscent of a “seed, or bud like, embryonic shape” or of the Eurhythmie gesture for the letter “B”.

Developing a Language of Form

The formative shapes created in speech through the consonants and vowels are able to create an infinite variety of meaningful words, language and poetry. Once we learn to understand ever more deeply the formative signatures of the formative forces emanating from the universe, we will be able to start using them consciously to create meaningful forms. The individual form impulses then become like the letters of an architectural alphabet or language of form and in future times we will be able to write consciously in this language of form. In this case it is possible to sense the future potential and reality behind Steiner’s seminal statement about the moral effects of architecture quoted at the start of this essay.

The Higher Purpose

If we want to bring a concrete spiritual impulse into a building, what would such an impulse look like?

Here the comparison with the plant cycle is very helpful. From Rudolf Steiner’s biodynamic lectures we know that the physical pollination of the plant does not ultimately determine its form. Steiner explains that the pollinated seed, being in a state of highest state complexity, would never be able to receive the spiritual imprint of the form. This spiritual form impulse comes from the constellations of the stars is a separate spiritual fertilization process occurring during the archetypal winter phase. If we take this to be the archetypal pattern according to the principle of “As Above – So Below” we can map the human creative process in a similar way.

Without going into the details, which would go beyond the scope of this article, this gives us a process map that parallels the human design process with the 12 creative plant gestures of the year, as shown in Fig. 2 below. You will notice the physical pollination at the bottom, mirrored by the spiritual fertilization at the top of the circle. The cycle begins with pollination and ends with the pre-pollinated flower. The latter late bud/early flower stage, as the culmination of the plant's form, is what concludes the creative process also within the corresponding architectural context.

You will also note the 4 WARMTH – LIGHT – MOVEMENT – FORM design phases described earlier as the Archetypal Creative Process phases.

The "**HIGHER PURPOSE**" for a building represents the pollinated seed of the plant. When chosen in the right way, it creates the spiritual resonance that "draws in" the inspiration for the structural gesture of the form.

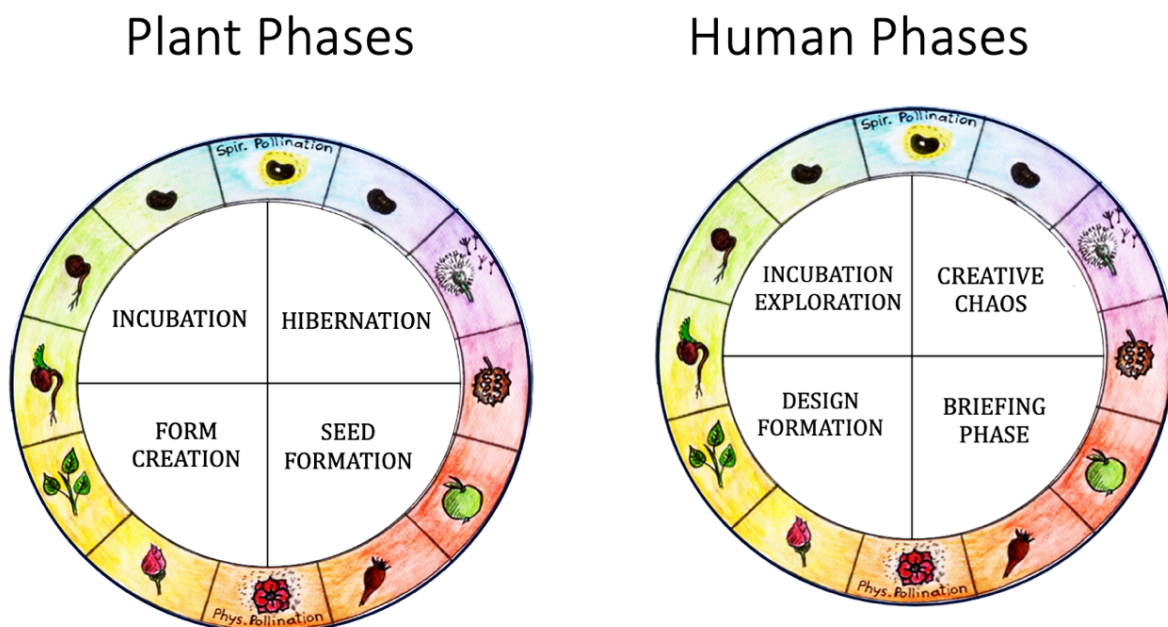


Figure 2: Comparison of the human creative process with the yearly plant cycle.

As shown in the examples below, the **HIGHER PURPOSE for classes 1-10** of the Little Yarra Steiner School was the evolving consciousness of the students, which is reflected in the floor plans and roof gestures of the buildings. A more detailed explanation of the higher purpose behind the metamorphosing classroom shapes can be found on

<https://biosculpturalarchitecture.com/showcase/>

SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE LITTLE YARRA STEINER SCHOOL

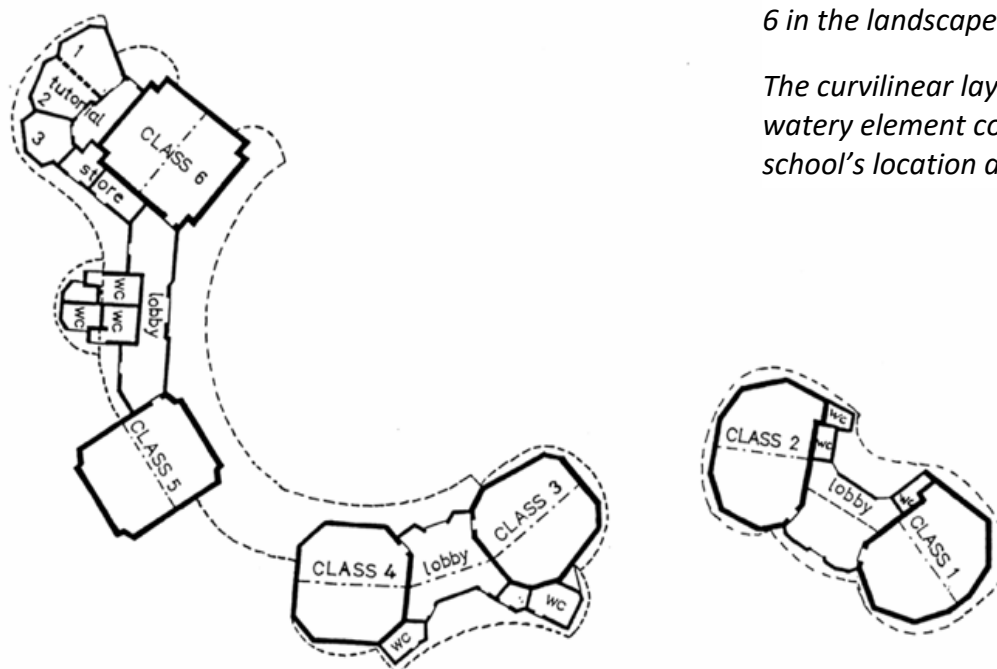
I applied the principles of Biosculptural architecture to the design of all the initial Little Yarra buildings over the first 20 years of the school's establishment phase.

The Primary School



Figure 3 LYSS primary School Class room footprints 1 to 6 and classes 3 – 6 in the landscape view.

The curvilinear layout also reflects the watery element connected with the school's location adjoining the Little

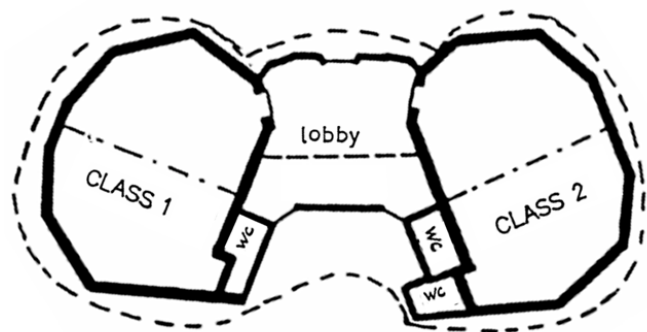


Classes 1 & 2

Although the Kindergarten had not yet been built during the time of my involvement with the School, one can see a further development of the same B gesture illustrated in fig.1 in the footprint and roof lines of the class 1 & 2 buildings, which represent a metamorphosis from the archetypal Kindergarten seed gesture. Unlike the upper classrooms from class 4 up, all of which have some form of clerestory windows looking out into the world with interest, the roofs of the lower class rooms are more like protective shells, nurturing inward activity.



Figure 4: LYSS classes 1 and 2



In this way most classrooms, with the exception of Classes 11 & 12, which also had not yet been built during my time at the school, represent a metamorphosis of the archetypal, holding-protecting movement of the B gesture. The actual metamorphosis corresponds to the development of consciousness from the young child to the young adult as illustrated in fig.9.

Classes 5 & 6

The consciousness of the child from Kindergarten to the upper school undergoes enormous changes. It represents a progression from inward focus to outward interest, from dreaming to wakefulness, from picture thinking to abstract thinking. This evolutionary sequence is expressed architecturally in the change from rounded informality to more linear, geometric formality, which begins with class 5.

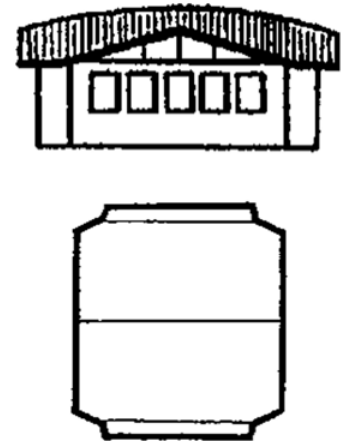


Figure 5: Interior of the Class 5 building: the greater degree of formality is connected with the intrinsic nature of conceptual thought, which begins to awaken in the class 5 child

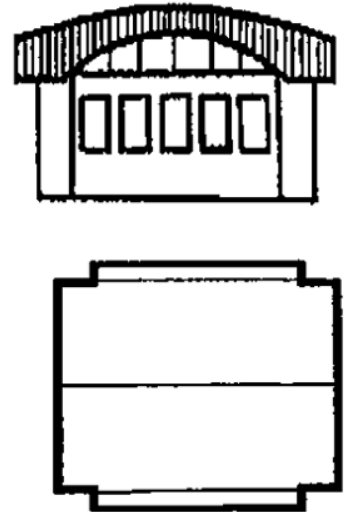
The Class 5 floor plan, for example, encompasses a rectangle in the proportion of the “golden section” which is also the proportion of the windows and a number of other relationships in the room. The corners have not yet crystallised into right angles, but geometrically arise out of two overlapping pentagons. Overall the room has much less of the organic flow evident in the earlier rooms, in favour of greater formality and weight. The greater degree of formality is connected with the intrinsic nature of conceptual thought, which brings structure, form and understanding as against movement and flow which arise from the heart. In the Class 4 and early 5 child there is still a perfect balance between movement and form, but this balance is about to tilt in the following years.



Figure 6: Class 6 building

In class 6 the students learn about ancient Rome and the curriculum branches out into science, geology etc. The greater focus on the physicality of the earth is reflected the rectilinear floor plan, balanced with curvilinear rooflines reminiscent of “Romanesque arches”. The square with its right angles has traditionally been used to represent the Earth Element. As such this “earth bound” form represents the turning point in the evolutionary sequence of class rooms, as shown in Fig. 8 below.

From here on the students leave their childhood behind and embark on the journey towards freedom, as eventually conscious adults capable of giving direction to their lives.



Upper School



Figure 7: In its upright 'mentoring' gesture, the Upper school Teacher and Conference room overlooks the High School precinct below.



Figure 8: Upper school science laboratories and junior high school class rooms - a balance and play between forms combining roundedness and rhythm with angularity, unpredictability and interest.

THE OVERALL LYSS SEED IDEA

In geometrical terms, the architectural journey from the Kindergarten to Class 12 reflects the gradual descent of consciousness from the cosmic circle in the pre-school to the earthly square of class 6 as shown in Fig. 9 below.

The same Fig. 9 shows how this is followed and mirrored by the subsequent ascending process from Class 6 to Class 12.

By time the students have grown into young adults, the circle and the square have interpenetrated each other. This of course is not to be taken literally, but is a symbolic way of saying that the Ego or spirit center of the child has fully incarnated into physical form. Or in less abstract terms, the warmth, life and spiritual connection of the little child, which expresses itself architecturally in round and rhythmic gestures, reappears again in the young adult, but now on a more conscious level, supporting a lively interest in the world and a creative capacity that is able to make informed and astute judgments.

Architecturally, this comes to expression not only in the foot prints, but also in the upright ego gestures of the roof structures and in the balance of movement between roundedness, rhythm and liveliness for the lower age groups and the geometric angularity, dynamic balance and unpredictability in the forms of the upper school buildings.

Here the architectural forms are more related to the angular eurythmy soul gesture for knowledge/thinking and insight. See:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rax4rsqGN7k&ab_channel=LogosEurythmie

The Evolution of Consciousness in the Metamorphosis of the LYSS Floor Plans

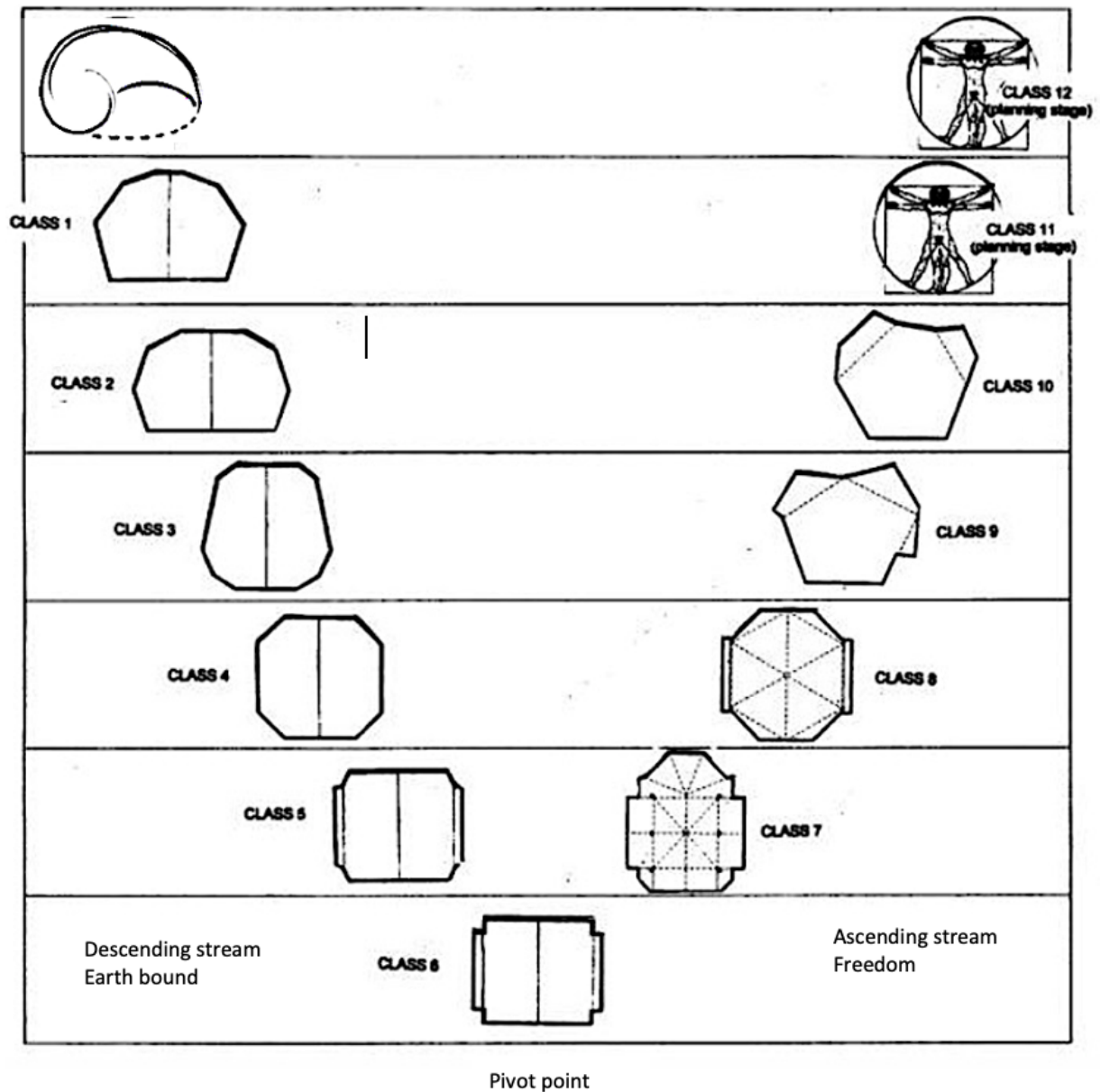


Figure 9: Metamorphosis of floor plans at Little Yarra Steiner School, class 1 to Class 10. The Archetypal Kindergarten Gesture and the Vitruvian Man icons for classes 11 & 12 indicate that those buildings had not yet been designed or built during my time at the school.

Johannes Schuster is one of the founders, first-class teacher, long standing administrator and original building designer of the [Little Yarra Steiner School](#), Victoria, Australia. More recently, Johannes founded the [*Transformative Art and Architecture – International Training Initiative*](#), within which he and his partner Sue Schuster, have been offering courses in Australia, South America, Europe, South East Asia, China and Taiwan. The full TAA course of currently 8 modules (350 hours) provides the theoretical foundation for qualifying as a Biosculptural Architectural Design Consultant. www.biosculpturalarchitecture.com