

Existing in Kinship to Everything

Fourth Nature: Patterns and Paths to Regeneration

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Abstract

Existing means more than only surviving. Means experiencing. Fourth Nature concept brings a new level of experiences for mankind through the consciousness of a new level of interconnectedness between us and the environment. Knowledge that goes through experience turns into wisdom. And wisdom allows us to access cosmic consciousness, where all that existed and all that will one day exist gather. Our daily lives are composed of innumerable experiences, some trivial, some exceptional, but always, the world that surrounds us plays a critical role in it, because we are one. In order to access this wisdom it is necessary to be aware not only of our position in relation to Nature itself, but also in relation to past and future. We do only exist because the planet's evolution through the millions of years allows us to - our existence is worth it in kinship to everything. There is no chance for this civilization to grant its participation in the evolutionary process when we consider ourselves separated or even worse, superior to the essence of Nature. Attending Isocarp 2024 demands, some unseen perspectives are brought as result of the research in which this paper is based - arguing that urban regeneration will properly occur when allied to human evolution. Our actions interfere in the flow, while conscious beings that can select and focus on positive perspectives among the infinite possibilities available for the story to be told. If we do not have positive perspectives, we have no life. At the critical moment we find ourselves in, it is pivotal to recover our capacity of co-creating the exceptional world we live in. But how? Researching manuscripts and old books in different libraries around the world, as well as visiting historical sites, it became clear that our ancestors had this capacity of accessing cosmic consciousness. It is shown in various manifestations in the different areas (and eras) - such as architecture, literature, art and science, but above all, it becomes obvious when we understand how they considered Nature a profound source of well being, healing and inspiration. How they respected Nature as a true partner in what they were creating. What kind of incredible knowledge is written, what kind of amazing energy is hidden, what kind of gorgeous results are forgotten, in all that what was once experienced by them? It is time to gain courage to admit we have been dismissing all this and recover the power we have inside us to co-create the world we know we want to live in. This paper relates some important findings of the Fourth Nature Concept research, that bring us once more the chance to see the invisible and therefore comprehend how to reinvent a coherent life to our role as mediators between tradition and progress.

Keywords

Fourth Nature; Urban Regeneration; Human Evolution; Ancestral Knowledge

1. Existing means more than only surviving

Fear and hope are rife. We are living in unprecedented moments and situations, to which unprecedented thoughts and movements must take place. We are seeing the planet urging for actions from our side, that were until now not common. It is necessary to review our way of inhabiting and coexisting with the planet as a whole. We are one. This is the forgotten truth.

We have been constructing and modifying Nature in our favour since a long time ago. As described in my research, Cicero has written, b.C., about a nature modified by man to fulfil its basic needs - food and transport - so plantations and roads were made and this he described as Second Nature. He does not speak about a First nature, but it is implicit that it is the pristine, the untouched, the realm of Gods. Researchers believe that the Italians in the Renaissance knew about Cicero's concept, because they wrote then about *una Terza Natura*, a Third Nature, as the one being modified by man, added with all technological performances available as well as with art, to bring humanity the pleasure of contemplating (Hunt, 1992). Nowadays, after the unimaginable moment of pandemics and experiencing this huge climate crisis, the Fourth Nature Concept emerges and can be seen as a breath of hope amongst so much fear - due to our capacity for self destruction and disconnectedness.

The Fourth Nature concept is the next step, which is about a shift in our consciousness. It is about us as humanity waking up and getting again connected to what really matters - the flow of life - the way of thinking and acting that will allow us to continue existing and telling the history we want to tell - as Marcelo Gleiser says in *The Dawn of a Mindful Universe* (2023). When we realise the miracles that happen in our everyday life, the way the cosmos is self organised and perfect, maybe we can understand our role in the expansion and in the evolution. Our own evolution as well as the planet's evolution.

It is about seeing ourselves as Nature again - as living beings that are connected to the whole and subject to the same laws of Nature as any other animal or plant. Because we are supposed to be here, and comprehending that our existence is possible only in kinship to everything else that shares with us the here and now is the turning point.

2. Our role

Fourth Nature is the evolution in the humankind relationship to the planet- the needed evolutionary moment we are about to experience as conscious human beings. This is why urban regeneration will only take place if it happens together with human evolution. We are already seeing different sectors working in the circular economy, upcycling, as very significant movements - but they all will succeed when our consumer mentality changes.

Where was the point when we lost track of being truly connected to everything else? Our great grandparents had so much knowledge coming from their daily experiences, which we have totally forgotten. And that was not so long ago. They knew about Nature's cycles and rhythms, and that our lives are totally influenced by these same forces. When to plant, when to harvest, what to plant in each season, how to keep the seeds for the next season. Feeling what our bodies demands are, and finding the support for its well being in Nature that surrounds us.

Because, after all technological development, we are still human beings. We need sunlight, fresh air, we need clean water, we need to walk barefoot on grass to get energy for our bodies to keep their functions and metabolism going on perfectly. This is what we really need. Do our cities provide us nowadays with

it? It does not seem so. We now are totally separated from Nature. Architecture and urban planning are the layers that permeate our relation to the natural world. What an important issue that has not been taken into account lately (Prochnow, 2024).

Specifically in architecture, there is knowledge showing that our houses and cities are not only the walls and floors we see. Its design does really influence our perception and our way of responding to the situations, because it influences our feelings and mood - because there is a connection to other dimensions that is affected by the “envelopes” we put ourselves in (Von Bingen, 1151 - a true inspiration from the XII century).

*We do not benefit from the seven or seventy-seven wonders of a city,
but from the answer it gives to our questions. Says Italo Calvino.*

The main question is towards which objectives are we going to regenerate our cities? We shall aim for cities that do offer conditions for us to practise and feel the connection we are missing. Urban design has this power of enhancing or dismissing this desired and fundamental connectedness. First item on a planning demand shall again be how is Nature in this place where we intend to build? It seems really obvious, but it is something that has become extraordinary. Solar orientation, water management, plants of any size that are native to that specific location, just to mention some basic items. If there is something already built, how can we restore Nature in that place?

It is about creating and designing together with Nature, not against it.

All disasters we see happening are consequences of actions that happened somewhere, anytime ago. Humboldt already said in the 19th Century, that all human actions have consequences in the balance of Nature, but we do not know how, when or where it will take place (Wulf, 2016). So first of all, let's stop interfering in Nature's balance - let's give it the chance to start regeneration by itself.

Fourth Nature is about mutual healing - we let the presence of Nature heal us, while we again “see” it in our cities, when we again want it in our cities. When we value its miraculous processes happening right in front of our hypnotised eyes. This will be possible if we get to know our powerful intrinsic characteristics. Searching for ancestral knowledge, we may find our path back.

One of the recent important findings of the research developing the Fourth Nature Concept is the work of Robert Fludd (1617)- his captivating imagery can inspire an awareness of much that has been lost in modernity.

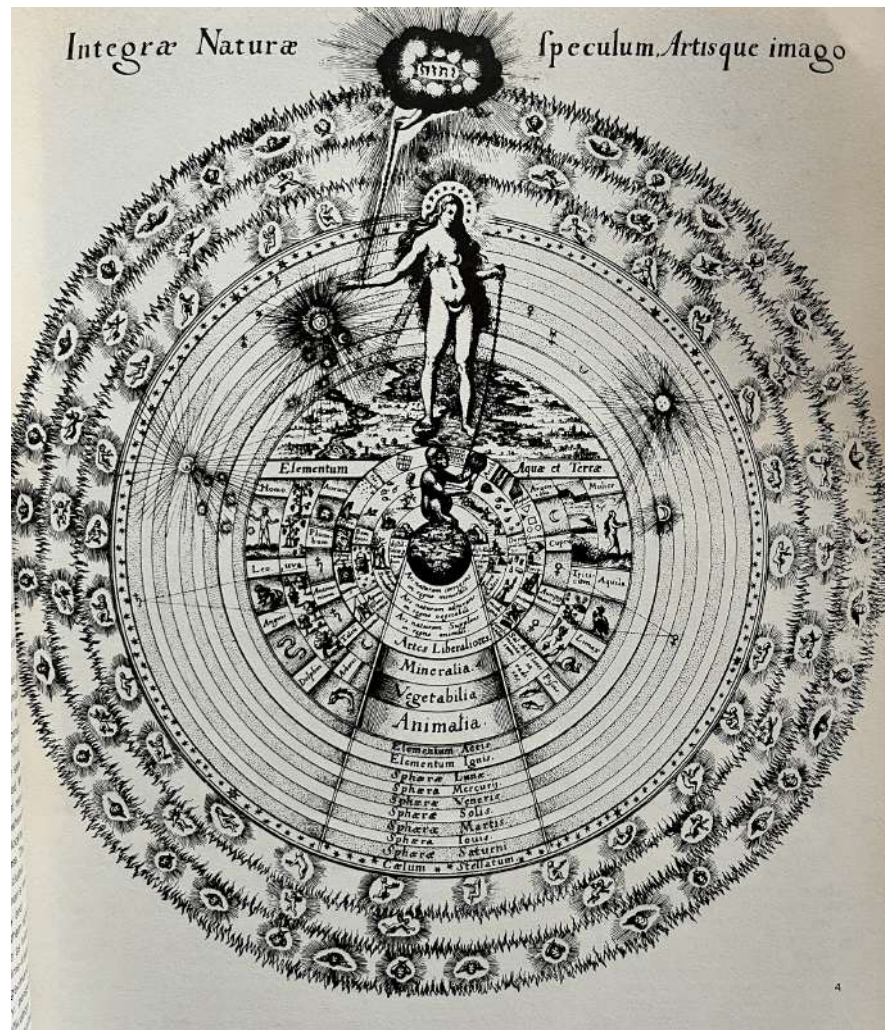


Figure 1. Integrae Naturae. Source: Fludd, Robert - Utriusque Cosmi Historia, 1617.

Integrae Naturae (fig.1) is one of his most impressive works showing how the cosmos can be understood. It shows Nature as the divine mediator between humanity and the creative power of the universe. It has its left hand attached to the divine and the right hand holding a chain attached to humanity - here symbolised by a monkey - or the lowest level of human consciousness as a rational creature. Our position on the planet, in turn, is as mediators between the unmanifested world and the manifested one.

When we think that everything we see manifested or created was before in someone's mind - we get to understand our responsibility, and once again, why regeneration must occur together with human consciousness evolution. And it becomes even clearer seeing that our minds are much more malleable than what is already materialised - it is possible to achieve huge changes, when we change our thoughts.

3. Reinventing the (in)visible - is searching for harmony between microcosm and macrocosm

One of the essential problems we are facing today not only as city dwellers but also as planners, is that we do not see ourselves as Nature. In this sense, we do not see or imagine the city as one form of Nature, as it should be. This is also why regeneration depends on human evolution: it is an inside out movement. Everything is connected, as has been said, from Hildegard von Bingen, in 1151 (fig.2) as well as by Fritjof Capra in 1980.

And why is seeing the city as one form of Nature so important? Because there is an intrinsic flow in Nature, because nothing is missing and nothing is wasted in Nature. This is totally the opposite of what we see in our urban settlements. They are unsustainable. Almost everything must come from somewhere else - for instance: food, energy, water - and an unimaginable amount of waste is produced and must go out of the city's limits. Is this not sick? We are living sick in sick cities.

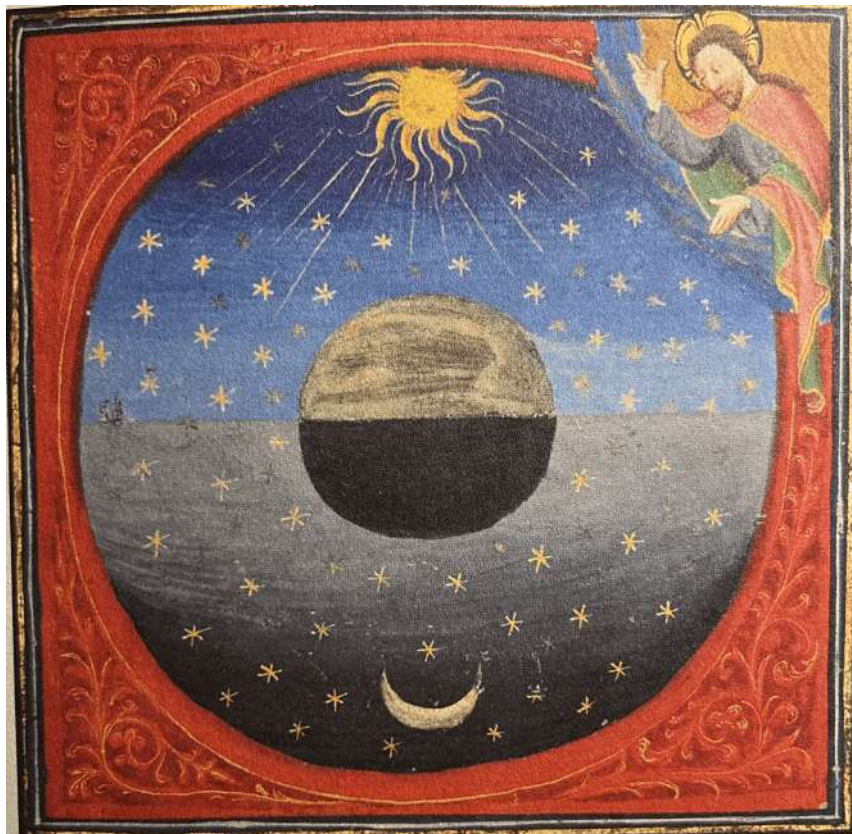


Figure 2: Connection between the heavens and the earth. Source: Ellcock, 2022.

Everything in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, is impregnated with connection, impregnated with relationship.
Hildegard von Bingen, (1151).

The natural flow of life follows some basic rules of Nature - since, as seen in Fludd's image previously, Nature is the mediator between us humanity and the creative powers. When these rules are broken or disconsidered, there are disruptions and consequently unbalance. Being aware of the main rules, we can again have life proper flows and paths.

As above, so below.

We are living a moment where all that happens in our lives needs something external from us. In every scale. We do not produce our food, we do not cook at home, we do not recycle our waste, on a domestic scale. In the same way, we have invented equipment for almost everything - we do not walk, we do not talk, we do not communicate face to face with our neighbours. We do not find happiness within ourselves - we need to consume to have satisfaction - ephemeral satisfaction. This is the (in)visible that we have to reinvent. The joy, the happiness, the wonder at life. As Calvino says, it is the mood of those who look that give shape to the city.

Nature based solutions are a very important path to regeneration, mainly because they give power back to Nature to regenerate itself in the cities, and consequently be close to our daily lives again - making us perceive it and profit from it as a true realer. But they are just a beginning. Each minimal action in our routine ends up creating our reality - when we are able to perceive Nature's presence and cycles, it has direct answers from our body and for our living energy. Factors like our circadian cycle, for example, influenced directly by the places we live in (with natural light presence or not) is responsible for all our hormone system balance. This shows how the microcosm shall pulse and organise itself following the macrocosm rhythms.

Aiming this connection should be the focal point for every project that is designed - the so-called invisible. Being aware of how our cities are built now and how our lives are structured, we understand how we are giving the power over our individual journey to a broken system.

4. Fourth Nature: Patterns and Paths to Regeneration

Our senses absorb and process the world surrounding us. We see, we hear, we smell, we touch, we taste - these information are directly connected to our main processing system. After that, we draw conclusions, we have ideas. Through our ideas we can accept or change what is around us. Nature's presence can modify our perception of the world and consequently the way we interfere with it (fig. 3).

A new reality may not be a new place, it may be a new mindset.

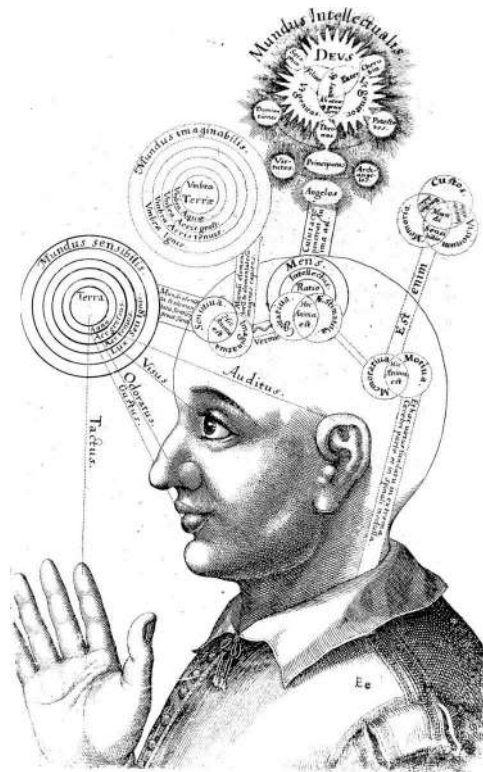


Figure 3. The imagined World by the Spiritual Brain - Robert Fludd. Source: *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* Book (1617).

Regeneration can be a process that brings together some important points that are usually seen as opposite, but are in fact complementary (just as cities and Nature). For example, empathy and technology - a collective evolution shall permeate any kind of action leading to regeneration - if part of humanity is still suffering or dealing with basic needs deficiency, the other party won't achieve higher levels of satisfactory results. Everyone must increase its life in conditions in order to regenerate the planet - including Nature - because everything is connected. A change in a forest or river course in one continent can change the behaviour of a forest in another one.

This is how Fourth Nature brings up a path: focusing on how technology can be a great partner in summarising data and reading layers of historic change to restore conditions according to each region and to its culture. As well as reaching distant places, to help improve their lives with the conditions and the features existing locally - allowing them to flourish, again, going back to basic, uncomplicating life.

Ancestral knowledge and a new era consciousness: it is essential that we rescue the knowledge that was lost in order to understand the places and how we as co creators can deal and connect to its movements. There is a huge amount of it registered in books and manuscripts. A new era consciousness is exactly about perceiving that for a future to exist, we must realign and understand our position at this moment - not as Anthropocene villains, but as conscious beings that know where we want to go.

The Earth does not need us to save it, it needs us to evolve.

Local intelligence and cosmic wisdom: each place on earth has different characteristics. Reviewing our demands permits slowing down growth in order to match local needs - it is fundamental to rescale the economy to more coherent levels. The results can be surprising: what about making communities regain

confidence to rescue the values and the wisdom of their ancestors, when life was healthier. This knowledge has a high impact in moving our brains again in order to be creative and innovative, thinking about solutions that can be simple and effective.

As shown on figure 3 - the flow of perception, connection and knowledge is a two hand way path. When we have Nature near us and let it influence us, some kind of door opens to a higher feeling inside ourselves- because the universe is perceiving itself through us. On the other hand, the wisdom contained in cosmic consciousness - yes, we are part of a collective consciousness of the planet - can reach our imagination and we get to have new and powerful ideas. Fourth Nature empowers us as true agents of transformation by making us understand we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

5. Some reflections

The emotion of hope requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong. Ernst Bloch

It is not time to do more of the same.

The regeneration concept encompasses a lot more than harm reduction, it is about changing systems to bring back what was lost. To restore and re-establish our presence on the planet in a more equitable way - through different sectors thinking together - such as agriculture (food systems), industry (valuing handmade local articles), real estate (what, where and how to build) and health (physical and mental health, sense of belonging, joy in life) is the motto of our time.

If we do not have positive perspectives, we have no life.

It is imperative to bring back to each person the power of its own life - Innovative methods can mean ancestral wisdom - we have developed so quickly our technological means that our human means were forgotten. And this is what is missing. How to prioritise regenerative processes that benefits Nature as a whole - the planet, humanity, the ecosystem. Not only now but also the future generations. Why do people live so much longer and healthier in places where they eat local and visit friends?

This approach requires a fundamental change in mindset. Understanding how our lives are functioning today has led us to crisis. More activities are needed and less facilities, more focus on our own power, mental and physical power - rather than depending on something outside us or outside our cities. This is the main path proposed by Fourth Nature. We are talking about a complete rethinking from energy consumption to the way goods are produced and delivered to consumers - beginning in the change of the consumers consciousness.

The moment has come for this change - what is all data collected and analysis made for, if we do not see the real target? Let's stop discussing the medicine we should take for the fever, let's heal the cause, the illness. We are absolutely capable of this.

What kind of experience are we allowing ourselves in our existence? Bloch (1995) regards history as a repository of possibilities that can help us to realise the unrealised potentialities - "what we learn from the past are tools for reconstructing the present, not from scratch, not from a point outside of it, but from within its ongoing process".

We carry in us enough good ingredients to engage in a good future - we are ready to reinvent ourselves as a civilization.

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