

The Fourth Nature

If per Cicero, wilderness was the first nature, agriculture a second and gardens a third, then surely the city is a fourth. Throughout its history the city has been set in opposition to the first, sustained by the second and given rise to the third. Always outgrowing its local limitations, the city has thrived through expansion into new territory. But now, with no new territory to grow into, the city confronts the dilemma of inexorably consuming its host.

The planetary city must now, therefore, sustain itself through forms of contraction, not expansion. This means creating new forms of densification and related public space. It means creating new forms of multi-functional infrastructure that harness and contribute to ecological flows so as to “close the loop” on local, regional and global supply chains.

The prerequisite for this is to conceive of the city as an engineered ecology – a fourth nature emerging from the hybridization of the three that preceded it.