

POWER OF NATURE. LIVING IN ONENESS

BY GITTE LARSEN, SØREN STEEN OLSEN AND STEEN SVENDSEN, FUTURISTS, HOUSE OF FUTURES

In 2112 we live in a world transformed by the power of nature. You will be surprised at how much human life has changed. Consensus councils for politics, sharing for business, and meaningful living in 'co-naturality'. And you will understand that all this is the result of deep changes in the way we perceive ourselves and Mother Earth. But you will recognise the impulse within yourself.

We as living beings are nature and therefore the power of nature is also the power of us. The power to change. The power to redefine ourselves and conceive nature and humans as one. This is the story of how we changed the world by changing the understanding of ourselves and by remembering what it is like to be one with nature.

Let us give you the story of how it unfolds, where it has its historic roots and what drives the transformation. Then let us describe to you the future perception of nature. And finally let us portray what politics, business, living, art, and science and technology will look like in this world.

DRIVERS AND BACKGROUND

The mindset that drives 'Power of Nature' has in a sense always been present insofar as humans have always been part of nature and been able to recognize this. But the powerful activation and unfolding of it in the 21st century had its roots in currents, movements and thoughts that first began to arise around 1970. These came both as a culmination of an era of unprecedented material progress and at the same time as a reaction against it.

E. F. Schumacher's book 'Small is Beautiful' was emblematic of the new agenda as were the movements his ideas helped to create. It was a rejection of a way of life that was based on a mindless materialism oblivious to nature and its boundaries, and founded on the creation of large-scale systems, bureaucracies, governments, corporations and mass society. A model of economic development that seemed to satisfy material needs, but in fact perpetu-

ated itself by constantly creating new artificial needs. The eternal race for growth in material prosperity increasingly came at the cost of alienating us from nature, from each other and from our basic, deeper, spiritual and more authentic needs and potential. Throw-away consumerism and economic growth were not making people happy. The fact that this was not sustainable was a big problem but the roots of the problem ultimately lay with ourselves.

It triggered a broad search for new ways of connecting with inner as well as outer sources of meaning. It was not a question of just making it, possibly surviving by scaling back our standard of living, and/or by way of technological development. We wanted to experience the richness of being.

There was a new found interest in philosophy, wisdom, spirituality and practices from all kinds of ideologies and traditions, from indigenous peoples and ancient sources. New artistic and cultural expressions developed. There was a spontaneous flowering of experimenting with new ways of living, working, producing and consuming.

For many decades all this was part of culture, some of it quite mainstream and influential, but most of it more subcultural and fleeting, constantly morphing, and constantly expanding in a process that absorbed and was affected by the cross-cultural inclusion of people from all over the world. What really made all this come to a head resulting in a true mind shift – a paradigm shift – on a global scale were two things. First of all, the failure of leaders and systems to offer new valuable and transformative agendas that would advance human fulfillment and happiness rather than merely aiming to deliver more of the old. Second, a sustained run of adverse developments that triggered global crises on many levels. Climate, hurricanes, flooding, draughts, food scarcity, economic crises which overwhelmed the established leaders and systems. This created an acute sense of disillusion with authorities and a loss of legitimacy for the economic and political system based on experts and representatives. All this came on top of the deep, underlying discontentment with the system of old-style consumerism.

VOICES FROM 2012

'The way we think in the next hundred years must be shaped by caring for everybody and everything, and we must leave our ego-centric way of thinking and behaving behind us. If we do so, it will set a new agenda for our political life, and pragmatism will be a new radical humanism'.

– Ole Fogh Kirkeby, Professor in Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, quoted from his lecture at the second In 100Y-seminar 2011.

The old mindset and paradigm of the modern age that historically underpinned the spreading of democracy and capitalism on a global scale was based on the idea of universal human rights. It became clear that this human-centered paradigm was too narrow, too anthropocentric. We were living in the Anthropocene, but we had forgotten the nature of man. The new mindset had to be capable of including the inherent value of other forms of life and of life itself. Life was created out of the apparent mess and mistakes of nature, and in that sense it was sustainable. The inert wisdom of nature always knows when to let go and release new forms of life and social 'contracts'.

The mindshift of 'Power of Nature' rivaled previous social and cultural mindshifts, like the one that established the human rights paradigm itself. Other examples include the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions and – in the social sphere – the changes in relationships between races, between men and women and between adults and children in which the stereotypical, hierarchical and even bigoted views of earlier eras have largely been transcended.

PERCEPTION OF NATURE

Everything is nature, and so are we. Life is, as far as we know, unique to Mother Earth, and our sentient appreciation of life is unique to humans. Therefore we must respect nature, we must respect life, and we must respect ourselves and each other. We must strive to develop and expand our inner and outer capacity for living in ways that are consistent with all life, and the realization that everything is connected with everything else. And that we humans do not have an exclusive right to dominate the world on which we rely, or to deny the dynamics of Mother Earth.

This perception of nature is a deep and authentic human intuition which arguably precedes all types of religious formulations, and which forms the basis for spiritual feelings and cosmic authenticity.

Myths and traditions and their attendant tales and rituals can be seen as rooted in this deeper-running intuition

'From the best to the next'.

– Malene Annikki Lundén, Samsøe Energy Academy, from the evaluation form from the second In 100Y-seminar, 2011.

about nature that is part of the human makeup. And so is our sense of aesthetics, our capacity for artistic expression, our ability to communicate and our need for meaning to our existence. This leads us to pursue all kinds of meaningful 'co-naturality' activities to get in contact with ourselves and thereby nature – from rituals and art to the academic pursuit of knowledge and insights. Even technology and commercial innovation are ultimately expressions of the urge to create what is innate to humans.

POLITICS

The transformation was accompanied by radical political changes in a broad sense, but the paradox was that most of this took place outside the established institutions. Much of it was a change in attitudes, and thinking on an individual and grassroots level.

There was a strong realization that we needed to turn our attention from the outer to the inner world. The problems in the outer world of political domination, of economic competition and of unsustainable exploitation and pollution were identified as symptoms of a failure to connect with our inner sources of meaning.

One consequence was the hasty erosion of legitimacy of outer authorities like governments, bureaucracies, scientific experts and corporations. They had their competences which continued to sustain them, but they were no longer able to guide development. It was not expressed as a collective revolt, rather as a gradual transition where more and more people lost interest in the old political system and kind of said 'So long, we will follow another path.'

Instead local and global connections and flow on a person-to-person level became increasingly important. These were the fora where new models of thinking, living, and behaving were developed. Models that were based on oneness and a truly holistic perception of the natural world.

The emergence of the Consensus Council as a wide-spread social institution was one reflection of this. Con-

VOICES FROM 2012

'Everything is globalised, except the institutions [...] 50% percent of the world economies are entering a green economy, and once a new system penetrates by 20-50%, it will change the system. Others will have to follow'.

– Hans Joachim Schnellhuber, CBE Director, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research; Professor for Theoretical Physics, University of Potsdam; Chair, German Advisory Council on Global Change, Sustainability Lecture: "Sustainability as a social contract", University of Copenhagen, 18 November 2011.

sensus Councils were not formal assemblies of representatives for various established social interests. They were the framework for an open process of dialogue in which participants represented different perspectives on the agenda at hand. They took different forms in different local contexts, but generally functioned as an important and ongoing exercise in deliberative wisdom.

In general a new kind of political consciousness and a new culture of networked decision-making enabled spontaneous agenda-setting, coordination and participatory problem-solving.

BUSINESS

Economic life and business practices were equally deeply transformed. From a reliance on exchange and markets to an emphasis on generosity and sharing. From competition to cooperation. From material to immaterial and spiritual fulfillment. From knowledge to wisdom. An economy built on trust and reciprocity. True business is all about being in good company, and when people changed, business changed.

Old economic concepts had new and different meanings ascribed to them. Markets were understood as a form of social conversation. Value became a multi-dimensional concept transcending the mono-dimensional idea that was associated with money. Wealth was no longer a question of economic growth, but a concept denoting social sustainability, and economic actors were capable of 'we-behavior'.

New economic models for production and consumption developed locally and were frequently upscaled by emulation and copying, sometimes only locally, in other cases globally due to the many vibrant channels of communication and the openness to inspiration.

In every field, craftsmanship was important, not only to customers but as a source of genuine satisfaction for the practitioner. Spontaneity and self-organization were guiding principles, and not by accident but by conscious emulation of nature in a biomimicry effort on the social

'Nature is what is before any beginning and after any end – before any creation and after any destruction'.

– Hans Fink, Professor in Philosophy, quoted from the workshop about mindsets at the fourth In100Y-seminar, 2012.

ONENESS – A VOICE FROM 2012

At the first 'In100Y'-seminar, Dorthe Steenberg connected us to the spirit of water, the primordial waters that nourish Mother Earth, when we arrived at the seminar location after an 'Imaginary Tour' of the canals of Copenhagen in 2112. Below is an excerpt of Dorthe's speech.

'Remember that in every drop of water there is an ocean. 70% of all living energy on Earth is vibrating and communicating through water. Remember always to connect to water, to honour water, and to let the essence of water flow through you, while you talk and communicate freely. Water is what binds all life; everything in water is divine.

In Denmark, we have the famous Little Mermaid in our harbour. In H.C. Andersen's fairy tale about the mermaid, she becomes aware that there is an offer and a sacrifice, in moving from one element, water, to another, the world of the humans. Being a water creature, she knows that she is one with everything (the whale do not think mussels are odd), with all living energy, but when she falls in love and wants legs to walk on the ground with her beautiful prince, she must forever give up being a water creature. She regrets it, and jumps back into the ocean to stay a mermaid, but becomes foam. She is again one with water, but is also forever transformed.

For me, this story illustrates that we cannot leave oneness to become separate; if we remember to honour water and let it flow inside of us, it will not happen. The people of Denmark, a water nation, have an obligation to honour and share the wisdom that naturally flows in our part of the world. If anyone on Mother Earth can bring this essence, which is the essence of freedom and spaciousness, it is we who are gathered here today.'

Dorthe Steenberg is the founder of Alchemy of Peace and is hosting the Peace Summit 2012 in Iceland, an annual international wisdom gathering, www.alchemyofpeace.org/

VOICES FROM 2012

'If people lose interest in nature, they lose interest in themselves'.

– Gry Worre Hallberg, *Fiction Pimp and partner in House of Futures*, quoted from the workshop about mindsets at the fourth In100Y-seminar, 2012.

'Inventing of local and special currencies – a new kind of money. Grassroot business. The joining up of local businesses makes the global'.

– Hardin Tibbs, *futurist*, quoted from the workshop about business at the fourth In100Y-seminar, 2012.

level. The ubiquitousness of this, and the easy and global circumvention of traditional power centres in society were helped by breakthroughs in communication technology, including translation and new forms of deeper communication.

LIVING AND ART

Life in the transformed society was materially simpler, but higher quality and spiritually richer. Hunger and poverty on a massive scale, as known from the previous centuries, was eliminated by generosity and sharing. The enormous and varied selection of products of all kinds that the previous society had excelled in providing for, and the acquiring of which had compelled people to a never-ending pursuit of material wants and rivalisation, were eliminated and replaced with new goods and services.

Settlements, towns and cities were a highly integrated part of surrounding ecosystems with small-scale urban farms all around. Spending time on contemplation and various forms of meditation became an important part of life as a way of connecting with one's inner nature; the mind, the heart and the will. It was also found that the development and observance of various kinds of rituals and ceremonies that celebrated life served the purpose of strengthening social bonds and mutual understanding between people whether in the family or in the wider community.

One of the forms of language that became an important driver in its own right was art. It was the indispensable means of developing and unfolding new captivating narratives of the meaning of life on Mother Earth and the role of human beings. Stories, images, sounds, dancing and performances became integral to people's lives, not as something to passively watch and admire, but as activities that people themselves would take part in.

Art served as a tool and a facilitation process for connecting with our inner intuition. And it served as a means for transcending differences in language, culture, and tradi-

tions. It was a great synthesizer and bridgebuilder among humans and among different kinds of insights. At the same time, art in a sense represented the only truly man-made phenomenon, one that was a clear expression of the specifically human nature and that only humans were able to appreciate. Art was how we expressed and connected with universal meaning. Therefore it increasingly became integral to everyday life.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Many great scientists played an important part in the entire transformation process, like Benjamin Franklin, Niels Bohr or Andrei Sakharov had done in earlier times, supplementing their scientific insights with holistic wisdom and communicating inspirational messages of guidance of our relationship with Mother Earth.

Science acquired a deeper quality as a pursuit of knowledge and insight about nature that was valuable in its own right. After all, science is a way of acknowledging and connecting with nature. New branches of science emerged as there were intense efforts of research into spirituality and consciousness as well as a revitalization of fields like philosophy and the humanities.

Technology turned small-scale and local-based, exploiting the huge potential for decentralization that was inherent in digital technology and many sources of renewable energy such as wind, solar and waves. The distrust of large-scale systems, bureaucracies and centralized power made it difficult for large scale technologies to develop. But that didn't stop the intense and dynamic development and diffusion of small-scale systems, drawing on sharing of knowledge, common consciousness and holistic responsibility.



'POWER OF NATURE' Dystopia. Life is not only being. In a 'Power of Nature' world, there is a tendency for introspection and a paradoxical risk of self-absorption in the world guided by powerful social norms. There is a downside risk of a closed-minded life dominated by Big Mother. There is even a risk of cynicism as the holistic view of the world and the emphasis on the cycle of life might spill over into fatalism regarding individual human life. Disease, hunger, conflict and material misery may be factors that could haunt the 'Power of Nature' world.



EMBODYING POWER OF NATURE 2011. Frames from the performance installation 'Two Sensed Futures'. A female creature in office white, nude stockings and high heels approaches slowly, and with increasing trust. She looks at the visiting woman with longing eyes. Her 'home' is a 'cottage' built in the remains of industry and archives overgrown by nature. Nature has taken over the culture that was once built by mankind. And mankind has become something else – this creature over nature. Others look on passively, and many are frightened. Whispers are heard in the room. Will this be our world if mankind allows the forces of nature to take over? Does this room represent the romantic longing for a 'natural state' of being? Sounds of wind in the trees, howling owls, swamp water, the scratching of nails and then ... music ...the remains of what mankind used to be, laughter, a baby crying. Instinct is present, and the creature reacts instinctively to the gazes she receives from the surrounding and engaging participants. When she is looked upon with disgust, she becomes aggressive, when she is met with love she becomes loving.

Read more at http://in100y.dk/downloads/articles/In100Ysem2_article-sensed-futures-participants.pdf





ILLUSTRATION: DOMINIC BALMFORTH

Gammel Strand, the streets around the canal in the oldest part of Copenhagen, 2112. By Dominic Balmforth, architect and partner in House of Futures.

VISUALIZING POWER OF NATURE 2112. The city is flooded 4m above the original ground level. Water has occupied the ground floor of the entire city. Over time, this has generated a rich, diverse, aquatic life, fish, plants and nutrients. Nature feeds off nature and in addition, reclaims stones, metal ore and oil deposits from a submerged, man-made world. It turns these back into nutrients. With its power, nature breaks down old man-made structures, making them inhospitable to mankind (in part), not as an act of destruction but simply to claim back nutrients to power the flow; this is nature's only agenda; Nature is ever contributory. Above the water surface, trees, plants and other species build a new air-borne ecosystem in layers. The higher up

you go, the cleaner you are. Newborns start at the top and decompose with death at the bottom.

Nature and man strike a new working relationship. Nature is not tamed but accepted. It is allowed to grow and in doing so, provides humans with food, clean water and shelter. Trees are 'implanted' with all mankind's intellect; the tools of technology and biological engineering. Mankind's assumed wisdom, its power and governance is not allowed in. Bio-genetic fusion enables natural and manmade structures to morph; upper branches stretch out, wind around and form themselves into love nests. These are temporal human habitats allowing work; love and support for nature and human homes; love for and between other humans.