



# WILD RENAISSANCE

New Paradigms in Art, Ecology,  
and Philosophy

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Ecology, and Philosophy

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# Opening

A radical shift has begun. A Renaissance, which can only be described as *wild*. Art is its harbinger, concentrating its energy and shedding light on its trajectories. Anchored in the global ecological context, nourished by philosophy and the environmental sciences' resounding critiques of modernity, and borne by new methods, this is a movement that is poised to take over the whole of society.

The "wildness" evoked here does not reference one of the connotations this term may have had in the past but designates the invention of a new meaning. Clearly, the myth of the hostile and primordial wilderness, and by the same token its association with idyllic freedom and purity, have left the sphere of anthropology for good. What is in question here is a possible world whose emergence we are observing; it is a formulation of the forces of change that are rewriting humanity's sense of belonging on Earth; it is a developing mode of thought and action committed to the prospect of a compelling and sustainable way of life. This is the domain of a *wilding* humanity.

The Anthropocene,<sup>1</sup> our new geological era in which human activity is recognized as the primary cause of Earth's transformation, means that we must reinvent the way we dwell in the world. Most authors recognize that this era began in the period of massive acceleration that followed the end of the Second World War (some argue earlier). It followed from the Holocene, a period of some 11,700 years characterized by relative climatic stability that enabled the development of agriculture and the flourishing of great civilizations. The Anthropocene marks a turning point. Today, our environmental and societal problems are unanimously recognized by the scientific community. Successive reports from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), private foundations, and independent researchers have sounded the alarm.

The reports of the IPCC, which have doubtless received the most media attention of all, are the work of hundreds of authors and contributors from more than 60 countries worldwide. They include the conclusions of tens of thousands of published books and articles with their work. While they noted certain advances, thereby showing that action is possible, the efforts being made are a long way from

matching the scale of the problem. Given the inadequacy of the policies currently being pursued, grave consequences are to be feared for health, means of subsistence, food security, water supply, peace between peoples, migratory flows, and the economic situation generally.

The decade 2010–20 began with the hottest year ever recorded and then broke that record at least five times. Although scenarios for the future vary according to the models used and also depend on the evolution, or otherwise, of our way of life, global warming is undeniable and its speed is very likely to accelerate, not to mention our other causes for concern.

We have long known that ecological problems and climate change in particular are accelerating the propagation of diseases and making it harder to foresee their occurrence. The affected zones are going to expand or shift, and countries that once were not concerned will become so if it is not the entire planet that is affected. As numerous experts have pointed out, the COVID-19 global pandemic which burst upon us in 2020 must be fundamentally understood (whatever its exact cause) as a consequence of our erosion of natural habitats, our overconsumption of meat and wild animals, human overpopulation, and the intensification and acceleration of the global transportation of persons and goods.

Our current development models are critically overstraining the ecosystems' capacity for adaptation and resilience.

The interrelations are global. The stakes are not only environmental (as if that could be a separate question) but touch on our ways of thinking, of living, of being.

The Wild Renaissance suggests an answer. It is not the fruit of one author's imagination; it is the expression of the convergence of numerous works of research, art, design, and architecture, the discoveries of environmental sciences, philosophy's quasi-general reevaluation of our relationship with the Earth (particularly living entities); more broadly, the desire for another world for which more and more voices are taking up the baton. It inaugurates a profound paradigm shift, which avoids disaster scenarios and the aporias of the nature/culture duality, as well as the limitations of alternative concepts such as Gaia.

It introduces a new rationality, a new ontology, and an enriched comprehension of life; it sheds light on the workings of the Real,<sup>2</sup> places man within a relational dynamic, and defines a framework and a scale to think with. It broadens the scope of art. It explains how to act. It goes from theory to practice. It is the manifesto for man's reconciliation with himself and with the world.

The foundational paradigms of modernity and postmodernity are waning. We are witnessing four fundamental and interconnected changes:

1. "Naturalist" civilizations (in Philippe Descola's sense of the word<sup>3</sup>), which could also be described as "westernized" or "modernist" civilizations, invoke



- a post-naturalism characterized by the absence of “strict divisions” and of “discontinuity of interiorities” between nature and culture, leading to a complete reformulation of relations to the Real and their intelligibility (in other words, a new way of making-world).
2. The aim to dominate, which is the origin of the imbalances afflicting our period, is being replaced by an aim to collaborate. Man’s ambition is no longer to be the master and possessor of all *alterity*, but to act alongside it, using diplomatic strategies.
  3. We are going from a culture of the formal result, from statistically founded, certain predictions, to a culture of finality. It is the objective that counts, more than its form. In this sense, finalism is supplanting formalism.
  4. Man is no longer creating against the forces of the Real; he is creating *with* them. To endure no longer means struggling or resisting, but taking evolution on board. Instead of imposing on the world a marble sculpture capable of outlasting time, we solicit the emergence of a sculpture that “lives” (such is the logic of the artistic movement that we could call *wild creativity*). Resistance is put to one side in favor of adaptation. The development of a new aesthetic and ethical consciousness follows in the wake of these mutations.

Man is becoming aware of the fascinating and uplifting magnitude of what *being* really means. He becomes an accomplished being through how he relates to alterity. His becoming is driven by a dynamic of consubstantiation that imposes on him the necessity of taking the integrity and future of alterity into account.

He is breaking free of the limits and restrictions that have constantly diminished him, turning him into that *homo economicus* whose ecological, human, social, and spiritual dead ends are becoming more and more glaringly obvious. His existence is recovering meaning and dignity. He is returning to the three branches—biological, cosmological, and spiritual—of what is called his *animality*. I shall define this term below.

The operative concepts of the Wild Renaissance ensure that it can be translated into concrete terms. Man’s action is guided by a will to *wild mimesis*. This is what allows him to work in harmony with forms of alterity: a new perspective that we may call a symbiotic perspective is in play (replacing the linear perspective of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century theories which, despite changing and seemingly disappearing, has guided modernity up to the present day, in its achievements and processes). From the conjunction of forces to which it leads arises the dwelling of wildness. The objective impelling this entire process is that of a *concordance*: a striving for concord that can be likened to the spirit of a dance (do not impose but adapt to the partner, always, in the realization and pursuit of a choreography of life).

I do not suggest that the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries lies between hard boundaries, nor that it is in every way the Middle Ages’ opposite—as

I will argue, the evolution was progressive. The temporal boundaries and time periods that historians delineate are certainly useful but often give way under close analysis. But does this mean we should renounce “Renaissance” as a term? I think not. This would mean forgetting the fact that a mindset was invented and theorized, and how much this meant. This would mean forgetting that the alchemic approach to knowledge was starting to give way to that which we see today as the modern scientific approach, forgetting that philosophy was taking back its autonomy having been the servant of religion, forgetting the discoveries that were changing the world’s order and overturning representations, etc.

The Renaissance distilled a group of factors that merit a specific term to qualify them as a turning point. For it is precisely this characteristic as a turning point that interests us. Obviously, the Florence of the Medici and our own world are two very different propositions. Wild Renaissance is not a replica of the moment in time that the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Renaissance was. I propose regarding the Renaissance as a concept when I describe the coming of the moment of *wildness* which is now taking shape. Forged through a study of history, the Renaissance concept becomes philosophical, ecological, and transhistorical here (its nature is determined by the periods in which it comes into being).

Like its Quattrocento forebear in Italy, the Wild Renaissance has not come out of nowhere. It is the result of a gradual rupture, of a proto-Renaissance that I situate between 1860 and 2019. When my doctoral studies led me to find this term, I could not have imagined to what extent 2020 would be a turning point, where visible evidence of aspects of the ecological crisis would erupt with spectacular power, with the planetary COVID-19 pandemic and the giant fires which reached Australia and California, to give only two examples. These 150 years or so, from the mid nineteenth century to today, are marked by a convergence of political history, artistic evolution, the main scientific revolutions, notably in physics and biology, and the birth and development of the sciences and philosophy of the environment. Together, these parameters have culminated in the inception of a new approach to dwelling and a new conception of man’s being on Earth.

To be clear from the start: the Wild Renaissance is not limited to “nature” (an epistemologically outdated term,<sup>4</sup> whose use is nonetheless defended<sup>5</sup>); it concerns reality in the broad sense; that is to say, it also includes human activity. It must be understood as a new relationship with the world, which is taking shape in all the spheres of existence and at all levels of society. The Renaissance is therefore linked with the Earth, with humanity, with life, it wields a possibly universal echo chamber, capable of welcoming all culture, all art.

The Wild Renaissance takes a view of the evolution of mentalities and methods that is principally western, but open to dialogue with other ideas, from concepts that differ geographically, historically, intellectually, etc. Any effort at thought is bound

to be partially subjective (we each belong to a community, an individual and collective history, a body, and so forth). We must see the richness there, and an asset if this endeavor can lead to concepts that call to others, that might spark fecund dialogues that give way to cross-pollination and new inspiration. I hope that Wild Renaissance figures amongst these. The ease with which the non-western arts glide onto these pages seems proof that it might. My dearest wish is that authors from different horizons, armed with knowledge different from ours, discuss and prolong its possibilities.

The aim of this book is not to set out a panorama of all the contemporary theories and approaches that consider how man conceives of himself in the world and possible alternatives, which could be from science and technology studies, critical posthumanism, actor-network-theory, multispecies ethnography, object-oriented ontology, for example, no more than it aims to investigate the innumerable discussions on the merits of the term Anthropocene or the pertinence of the 80 or so alternative designations to date.<sup>6</sup> I will not discuss further the exciting work in the domain of *ecocriticism*,<sup>7</sup> of which studies like *Picture Ecology* edited by Karl Kusserow demonstrate the interest. I also explore this in my book *Le Musée monde. L'art comme écologie* (2022), proposing a return to the essence of museums and an accompanying reconsideration of our notion of the world.<sup>8</sup> The ambitions of this study are already vast and one would fear losing the reader in a whistle-stop tour which risks losing sight of our primary aim: showing that a new form of Renaissance bearing new paradigms is emerging, what this consists of, what is the new attitude that is attributed to it and how this manifests. Of course, it is not for us to say if this Renaissance will last into medium- or long-term history, or if its momentum will be thrown off by counter-fires or other initiatives.

This study invites the reader to explore, first of all, the genesis and, subsequently, the mechanism of this incipient Renaissance. It is in art that the signals are the most advanced, and it is in taking art as our guide that we will reflect upon it. Indeed, rather than assert a new ideology, what we need is the language and the illumination of poetics. We need open, evolving arguments. We need an approach that combines the resources of the intellect and of the senses.

Before us, then, is the door to this flourishing Italy of art and humanism, which we must open, and the hand of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) that we must take in order to prepare to make a leap in time, to resume our path through the effervescence of the nineteenth century, to follow the avant-gardes, to go back through the decades, and observe the growing density of the horizon before which we stand today, as expressed in contemporary art, design, architecture, urbanism, agriculture, research, and beyond, in order to gauge the importance of the moment we are living through.





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A Renaissance is underway. A response to today's environmental and societal issues that raise the question of the survival of the human species in our time. Artistic, philosophical, and political, it acknowledges the scientific revolutions of recent decades and takes a stand on the promises of technoscience and transhumanism.

The Wild Renaissance movement addresses the growing aspirations for adopting new ways of living on Earth. Humanity no longer behaves as a master and possessor, imposing its will on a passive and purposeless nature. Instead, it listens to

a new partner: the world around it. It discovers the potential of its forces, engages with them, involves itself, and combines them with its own. A new era is taking shape, restoring humanity to its "wild" dignity and giving meaning, joy, and ambition to its existence. In this era, an art is emerging that is redefining the paradigms of creation and this book is in the vanguard of that movement.

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