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Alfredo M. Bonanno
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Feral Revolution (Introduction)

Alfredo M. Bonanno

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This book has a lot to say, far more than it might seem at first sight. But it requires a particular disposition on the part of the reader, a disposition to understand rather than to simply inform oneself.

In fact, there is not merely 'information' here, there are 'ideas', something that rarely happens in American (even 'radical') culture, and this is somewhat disturbing. How many of us are prepared to consider ideas? I don't know. Those who do not want to question their certainties will find confirmation of their beliefs in this book in another guise, ruining the author's solicitations to look at reality differently.

Anyone can spend years 'in the wilderness', Feral maintains, referring to the possibility of entering the reality of which the 'wilderness' marks the extreme limit. It is the moment of truth when we discover whether we are really capable of breaking our bonds with society, the umbilical cord that protects and domesticates us. That is why this book is revolutionary: because it does not interpret reality but tries to take us into reality just as the author himself has ventured, although for no measurable length of time.

It is not a question of clinging tightly to the vine that Feral has thrown down to us from his tree and diving into the fray. It is not a question of a wild attitude or something 'sayable' that can be set out in a formula, but of a totally different idea of reality. Tourists who travel around the world to 'wildly inaccessible' places merely take time off from their lives of accumulative delirium and let themselves go wild within certain well-defined limits. They are always well equipped, take a guide along with them, etc. In the face of this obscene spectacle it might seem that all one has to do to avoid 'doing the tourist' is to omit the safety measures and guide and leave one's baggage at home. Feral, I think, is saying that this is pointless because there is no sense in going to wild places if one carries on seeing them in the way we have been conditioned to. Nature itself can even contribute to domesticating us: 'Nature' domesticates — Feral writes — because it transforms wildness into a monolithic entity, a huge realm separate from civilisation. The same goes for any 'militant' ecologist conception we might decide to choose. Ecologists — even 'radical' ones — play right into this. Rather than go wild and destroy civilisation with the energy of their unchained desires, they try to 'save the wilderness'. This sheds a ray of light on some of the inconclusive debates that have been going on in our papers (and also those of power) for a long time now.

Of course, the first (not very shrewd) impression we might have on reading this book might be that we are face to face with a 'primitivist'. And many have had that impression when reading those of Feral's articles that we have published in our papers and reviews here in Italy. I wonder whether Feral himself with his passion for 'wildlife' (in the first place, man) is sure whether or not he is a 'primitivist'. Something of the sort certainly strikes you when he throws you that vine. The evil wilderness reveals its true essence to him and him alone: 'from my own experiences wandering in these places', making all the panoply of survival equipment unnecessary. It is as though

someone, having had a different kind of experience, forgets that this originates within a specific logical itinerary, simply saying that for him things were different. This is not criticism, simply to show that at times authors seem to obstruct our understanding of their ideas. Deliberately? I don't know. This idea of the world as an absolute, whole entity is something we are reasonably well equipped to grasp on this side of the ocean. It comes as a shock to see it reach us from an American experience, not least from walks among the millenary redwoods. Indeed, one of the significant points of this book is that it has dug into the myth of wild American nature.

Now we are beginning to see that the vine that we caught hold of at the beginning of this introductory adventure does not belong to the specifically 'natural' world of exotic adventure that constantly summons us in our dreams, telling us to abandon the trials and tribulations of daily life. Feral's vine is a rediscovery of the significance of humanity as a whole.

This allows us to see the man-nature relationship differently. There can be no doubt that, in the beginning, nature was considered to be a living being, alive and separate from that weak, naked being, man. But it is not considered hostile until history begins to unfold alongside human beings' separation from nature as a result of technological conquest, aided by religion. The ancient Greek concepts *physis* and *logos* appear at the same time, marking this separation. They denote the transition from the old idea of mother nature to that of nature as something to be possessed and dominated. Man subsequently studied, catalogued, dissected and categorised this nature so as (in all appearances) to make it his kingdom to dominate and exploit.

The ideas expressed in this book all convey a 'vital energy' that has been numbed, often killed, by the domestication of civilisation. The real wild, not the caricature circulated by travel agencies in illustrated brochures, cannot be tolerated by civilised society. The latter must eliminate it in order to guarantee its own survival and preserve order. As Feral writes, 'Civil-

isation will not tolerate what is wild in its midst. But I never forgot the intensity that life could be. I never forgot the vital energy that had surged through me. My existence since I first began to notice that this vitality was being drained away has been a war between the needs of civilised survival and the need to break loose and experience the full intensity of life unbound'.

But what is this 'vital energy'? Feral does not tell us exactly, although evidence of it is to be found in many parts of this book. Like all leading concepts, it appears indirectly in considerations that would be meaningless without its logical premise. The violent response to the aggression and control constantly exercised by power is an attempt to free ourselves from the domesticating conditioning that civilisation has brought to every moment of our lives, and cannot simply be seen in terms of defence. That would be a losing battle. You might as well just accept the structures of power and find a niche to survive in. This rebellion — contrary to that of the pacifists who maintain that nonviolence is the best form of defence (not realising that the latter is simply the other side of the same coin as violence) — is an 'aggressive, dangerous, playful attack by free-spirited individuals against society'. What characterises the attack is its insurrectional nature. In the thesis developed here it is not a question of something that is clearly visible and transformed into codified behaviour with projects and programmes. It is more a question of the 'vital energy' mentioned above.

I don't know if Feral realises how radical the consequences of these ideas are. In the first place, how fruitful they will be to the readers who have the courage to penetrate his theses completely and not be influenced by first impressions of 'primitivism'. But if this path — or perhaps Heidegger's idea of a clearing in the woods would be more exact here — is to be travelled, there must be no doubt about the fact that the world is constantly making distinctions between what is transformable and what is produced by the logic of power. If this unity of the world where nature is not distinct from humanity, or the

And now I ask one last question: can the totality we carry in our hearts, the wild experience that Feral talks about, be said in any way other than by having recourse to language, which is always locked within progressive experience? After all, the pieces of writing we are presenting here are merely words. We need to encounter what these words betray rather than illuminate, elsewhere, in our hearts, at the cost of our lives. Otherwise they will lose their meaning and return to the circumscribed, miserable activity of talking for the sake of it. The same goes for the project: words, mere words, that it is up to us to read in another way.

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wilderness from the Japanese city with its advanced urban technology, has any significance at all, it is in this 'going beyond'. That is to say it is to be found at the very moment in which one's own personal tension and wild vital energy comes alive and sets to transforming the conditions of domestication. If we were to imagine this going beyond as one single, circumscribed event to take us to a condition forever free from domestication — as was the case with the Marxist thesis — the point of arrival would be no more than a higher level of domestication, one where we would not even be aware of being domesticated.

But let us not lose sight of our argument. Adventure, in order to be such, is always adventure in act. If it were simply adventure tout court it would end up being institutionalised and the wild, vital instinct would become limitless and with no measure of contrast, so we would be unable to dream or attack. When Feral says: 'All social relationships have their basis in the incompleteness produced by the repression of our passions and desires. Their basis is our need for each other, not our desire for each other,' that certainly doesn't mean to say that the objective is the abolition of society and the creation of a new human condition to take the place of the incompleteness that comes from the repression of our passions and desires today. The elimination of this repression is a process, a going beyond, it is not something one simply finds around the corner, the opposite of domestication. Even if things were to go according to Stirner's idea of the 'use of the other' rather than the 'need for the other', that could never become something finite. Anything I know to be finite is to be found in the graveyard, and even there more surprises than the wildest revolutionary fantasy might imagine possibly await us.

I quite agree that 'social roles are ways in which individuals are defined by the whole system of relationships that is society in order to reproduce the latter', and so 'society is thus the domestication of human beings — the transformation of potentially creative, playful, wild beings — who can relate freely in

terms of their desires, into deformed beings using each other to try to meet desperate needs, but succeeding only at reproducing the need and the system of relationships based on it'. But, due to the principle of the man-nature unity that sees separation as something that is useful only to power, I believe that the elimination of this condition could never be completed once and for all.

This is an essential point as far as I can see. If we were to imagine a condition where the explosion of vital (wildly insurrectional) energy had become something permanent, that is to say, become a *fait accompli*, we would be doing no more than finishing off the job of domestication. In other words, we would simply have become more sophisticated domesticators.

This is what happened to the Marxist ideas that appeared in the wake of Hegel's theses: the proletariat were to bring about their own extinction and be victors in their struggle against the bourgeoisie. This would mark the end of class society and philosophy, i.e., of the ideas that had reflected this contradictory movement throughout the various phases of its historical development. Stirner was also a prisoner of this schema when he founded the union of egoists as the free condition of the future. This was to be realised from the (vital?) energy activated by one's own personal insurrection, but again was to be realised once and for all. We can no longer have any faith in models that predict a clear future, not even one that would give space to the 'fullness of the passions'.

But perhaps I am exaggerating here. Perhaps Feral has nothing complete and finite in mind, and there are points in his book that seem to indicate this. When he writes, 'The playful violence of insurgence has no room for regret. Regret weakens the force of blows and makes us cautious and timid', he is talking of finishing with the past. In the joyous rebel violence of insurrection and individual liberation we cannot take a retrospective look at the already done: having no regrets cannot mean anything else. But anyone who has no regrets has no his-

stretch out a hand and widen its range at any moment. I, adventurer of the incredible, am capable of extending to infinity in the same way that I can live freedom and not allow myself to be guaranteed by it.

It is within this absolute tension that I place my project, not in vain distinctions that assign degrees or procedural levels to doing. I sketch out a path in the absolute, howl and jump for joy, and only here do I allude to this tiny portion of reality: a smile, a handshake, a walk among the fireflies in the evening shadows. And there is nothing I can do about it if someone points to the moon but only sees their finger, the stages in the journey. These levels, the specific occasions, are all illusory. They dress up an idea that lives elsewhere. They are analyses, even subtle ones, of something that, seen in its individual parts, is nothing more than brute reality. The vital lymph of all that is elsewhere in the illusion that supports it. Reason can only weaken it, scientific seriousness only mask it.

It is the light of freedom in its 'wild' totality that illuminates the project and makes it perfectly useless to this world. How many see the project in quantitative terms and ask themselves what the point of it all is. But why make such an effort only to stop half way? Their intuition tells them to gaze at their finger, the moon is too far away and too difficult to comprehend. But tell me, in all sincerity, is that a good enough reason not to have a project?

I have many in my heart, and I cannot turn them into talking ghosts to make them become objects of fascination for others except by dressing them up in cast-off clothing: analyses, considerations of events, organisational conditions. These are at the root of the vigorous certainties of the world of the domesticated, but can also be interpreted differently by those who rebel. I do not think such efforts are an obstacle to rebellion. I do think they need to be seen for what they are: mere reflexes of totality which can only be expressed in the modest language of progressive experience.

needs to be destroyed along with the other creations of power because it belongs to the world of limits and rules? In other words, can a project be realised within the context of the wild insurrection that Feral is talking about? Or does this by its very nature refuse such a thing because it is a residue of domestication?

Allow me to develop these questions as I believe them to be of considerable importance.

If I negate the past, and this procures me the means for attack by essentialising my destructive strength; if I negate history — as we have said — I can have no future either. In itself this can only upset palates that have been ruined by Macdonald's hamburgers. But this absence of future is not simply a great black hole. It is an absence that I avert as a presence. Although a lack of something, it is not 'absurd'. That is to say, it is not something that I cannot understand, otherwise it would be a mystical kind of faith which might even have subversive connotations at times, but could never accept practical destruction.

So this void contains a great many things, and the more I go ahead in my rebellion the more freedom takes form and talks to me. It tells me of the dream of my life, because that is what is at stake here, not just one of the many games that I can play during my life. In severing all links with the past and rebelling against domestication, I am presenting myself bare to the future. This new bareness is all that I have and is also the whole of freedom, without any hidden parts or reserves. I feel freedom flare up in my veins, even for an instant in that room full of books under the severe expression of a revolutionary of times gone by. It is not a place fixed in time that I can retire to every now again in my mind. It is my whole self, my totality, always. It is my love that cannot be dissected, a little here, a little there. It stays whole, always, a totality that continues to grow. We can only experience infinity if we erase from our minds the idea of something static such as the whole of everything that exists. And this totality would be sterile were we not able to

tory either. History is a retrospective look at what one has done as opposed to what one might have done, and the difference is always a sorry list of mistakes to be avoided in future.

So, anyone who, rather than dedicate themselves to this necrophilic pastime prefers to cultivate their own life of destructive passion in the eternal present of revolt against everything that is aimed at regulating their life, can have no future either. The culture that suffocates us sees this lack of future as something negative, proposing a perspective in the logic of 'a little at a time' in its place, the method suggested by Popper in the scientific field. The present world is entirely based on such theories of accommodation. The fire only reaches a few who, like Feral, are burning their fingers to support the thesis of the oneness of the world and the fact that it is quite inseparable. That might make us wince, but it is the way things are and corresponds to our original thesis. If we eliminate all regulating ballast we have no reserves to put in the place of what we destroy. Otherwise it is not really a question of destruction. When Durruti said in the early months of the Spanish revolution that the workers could destroy everything because, having built it all once they could do so again, he was referring to a situation that has now disappeared for ever.

The same problem arises concerning certain passages in 'The Cops in Our Heads'. Here Feral points out: 'The attempt to make a moral principle of anarchy distorts its real significance. Anarchy describes a particular type of situation, one in which either authority does not exist or its power to control is denied. Such a situation guarantees nothing — not even the continued existence of that situation, but it does open up the possibility for each of us to start creating our lives for ourselves in terms of our own desires and passions rather than in terms of social roles and the demands of social order. Anarchy is not the goal of revolution; it is the situation that makes the only type of revolution that interests me possible — an uprising of individuals to create their lives for themselves and destroy what stands in

their way. It is a situation free of any moral implications, presenting each of us with the amoral challenge to live our lives without constraints. Since the anarchic situation is amoral, the idea of an anarchist morality is highly suspect. Morality is a system of principles defining what constitutes right and wrong behaviour.' — Here I get clear confirmation of what I am trying to say, yet, at the same time I perceive a contradiction. Perhaps I am splitting hairs, but the question seems to me to be of no little significance. The confirmation is all in the movement that guarantees nothing, even in a situation based on the refusal of authority. But a situation enclosed in the refusal of authority would be contradictory. In fact, Feral sees the problem and says that anarchy is not and never could be the aim of the revolution, but is the situation (I would say the personal situation) that makes the revolution possible. And I agree, but this can only define itself as 'amoral' if it continues in the perspective of 'going beyond', never becoming something established. Otherwise this final 'whole' condition would require moral rules in order to organise itself and persist in time.

The cops in our heads, along with the domestication they reflect, represent the opposite pole to the concept of 'wild nature'. It is this separation from nature that makes civilisation possible, producing the techniques that change the latter into something artificial and enjoyable in small doses, when kept at a safe distance. Everything becomes clear in this framework and Feral dwells upon it in detail, excitingly at times.

Thus he writes, 'There can be no program or organisation for feral revolution, because wildness cannot spring from a program or organisation. Wildness springs from the freeing of our instincts and desires, from the spontaneous expression of our passions. Each of us has experienced the process of domestication, and this experience can give us the knowledge we need in order to undermine civilization and transform our lives'. And we cannot deny this. But only on condition that everything continues in the never-ending process of going beyond, in the

tion with no relationships, therefore relations. Like everything that passes between human beings, the latter depend on taste, desire, love, pleasure, but also hatred, fear, anxiety, and much more besides.

I do not think that this vine would ever be capable of consolidating itself once and for all. I do not think that one can interpret the wild condition as merely 'vital energy' in act from Feral's writing. His freedom is what one cannot have anything better than. It is the totality of freedom, the completely free condition, without limits, impediments or order, not even of a moral or aesthetic character. Once taken into consideration, this totality can only be conceived as complete if one sees it as something in movement. Freedom is growth to infinity, otherwise I would have to admit that I, free at last, would end up dazed in a complete stupor: absolute freedom would become the absolute cancellation of man. Totality is therefore always in the course of development. It is in act, yet always totally present at the moment I think it. That is the totality I have in mind when I think of absolute freedom, which destroys limits and domestication. If I were to see it as something circumscribed I would be thinking of God, merely putting one word in place of another. And this absolute totality would upturn itself and become the concept of absolute tyranny, throwing me out of my involvement, obliging me to adore it as something other than myself.

So, if we agree with the idea of freedom as something both infinite and in act there is no reason why we cannot acknowledge different processes of approach within this totality and actively go beyond the conditions of submission dictated by chains and domestication. Is there anything contradictory in that? I don't think so.

Basically, this concern can be summed up in the decision to develop a project. So the question is: can the totality of my wild rebellion and freedom, precisely as Feral intends, be linked to a project? Or should the latter be considered something that

throwing me into the process of going beyond a condition that I loathe and which offends my good taste. If I define myself wild and a lover of the real wilderness (not that of the tourists), allowing a certain 'primitivism' to be understood between the lines without ever actually admitting it, that is nothing but a set of choices. Only those who have taste can choose. And taste, love and desire are expressions of that genetic-historical combination that continues to be what we are and impels us to go forward. When I think of freedom, unspecified freedom which has nothing better beyond it, it is my whole self that I put into this thought. I am not a dreamer talking about his visions, but an experimenter who goes into his visions and is prepared to risk his life for them.

Admission to such a condition of freedom cannot be gained through normal procedures of reason. It cannot be deduced from what we know through our daily experience (chains and domestication) but is born elsewhere in the genetic-historical interrelation that produces our most radical impulses, our wildest desires and dreams of eternal love that nothing can ever dim, and the taste for wild adventure. In a word, everything that Feral talks about and much more besides. If I were to limit myself to thinking about this coldly I would never be able to convince myself that it existed or that it was something worth involving myself in and risking the tranquillity of the chains which the culture of domestication renders more or less bearable. If I go beyond this level, (and how many millions of people never do!) it is because at some point I become unreasonable, throw all care to the winds, and act. But in practice it is impossible to put all one's projects, taste, desire and love aside. In fact, in throwing down his vine, this wild man who lives in a tree and wanders free among the American redwoods is throwing me an object of love. He is linking me to him with love in the hope of taking me with him to that tree of freedom, another wild man like himself. Because life in freedom would be a poor thing indeed if it were simply a territory of complete desola-

movement of freedom that does not see what is freed as something other than oneself and one's desire to unleash this 'vital energy' that continues to flow from an inexhaustible source. Feral's acrobatic juxtaposition of ideas culminates in this endless transition, the tension that never solidifies, the barricades that never cease fighting, the violence that never quells. Well, as a soliloquy, it's not bad. It fascinates and redeems us from our daily chores. The individual rising up with the torch of freedom in one hand and hatchet in the other, as one unforgettable comrade once said, is the classic image of anarchist iconography. And many anarchists still dream of reaching this condition of privilege. Not the privilege of the elite, for goodness sake, but of someone who has held the truth in his hands and with superhuman strength is extirpating the world at its roots. And the others? Feral has not read Stirner so superficially as not see that the next step must be that of reaching others, a community of individual insurgents, a totality of individuals each developing his or her own personal insurrection. But this condition cannot be reached through one specific experience. Nothing in the world of domestication can force us to decide in favour of this condition of privilege, this 'going beyond' in act.

Let me explain. If we decide to do something, this something must already be within our reach in some way. It is there in front of us, visible and comprehensible, even if it concerns the strangest and most remote utopian fantasy. If I decide to break the chains of domestication, I can only do so because I feel the chains and suffer the effects of domestication on my own skin. This historicist interpretation of revolt differs little from the innatist one that assigns the possibility of rebelling to one's own character, maintaining that some individuals are born with genes of rebellion whereas others are more acquiescent and accept the rules of civilisation. Basically, this — questionable if you like — genetic element does also exist within

the individual. It is the element we are talking about, the one called upon to unleash rebellion.

Let us continue. No matter how we look at it, we see that the individual must act, i.e. become conscious that this something, whatever it is, is to be found in front of or within them, and admit that the two hypotheses (the historicist and the innatist) interrelate. The born rebel puts up with less than those who are not in conflict with domestication and chains. So we come back to the wholeness of man, within which distinctions do operate, but only up to a point. We deduce from this that individual insurrection is only possible when the two elements exist, meet and interact. And I think that Feral takes this for granted. But this cannot be compared to anything else. There are no rules to support this condition other than those that might come from further domestication following the breaking of the chains. In this case the rebel would have ended up conforming to the reality of his dreams, now solidified into something permanent.

If we exclude this hypothesis, as Feral does, all that remains is the reappearance of the enemy, recognising it and being moved to insurrection, to infinity. With all my admiration for what Feral says, it seems to me that this situation threatens to become a stalemate. By remaining on the barricades one risks losing sight of what one is actually doing. It is not true that freedom cannot be imagined, or that all one can think about freedom is incomplete, for example 'liberties', the definition of one's own limits and those of others. I know that all that is not true. I know that the fool is he who finds the grain of corn in a world where most people are pecking around blindly in the logic of power which has been embellished with a few adjustments. When his heart floods with hatred for the owners of the chains and the logic of domestication, this being who wants to rebel against all rules — because freedom is above all the absence of rules — has one aim and one alone. And the latter is not utility or domestication but to make the world of suffer-

ing caused by the chains and the stupidity that results from domestication disappear forever.

This aim, as clear as day, is the one about which nothing better can be thought, so includes all strategies and any logic of adjustment, including the single clash and partial conquests of freedom. And there can be no doubt that this reality, of which nothing better can be thought, can be thought, even if it is not physically tangible. It is not simply a question of the chains disappearing or the links of domestication being broken. It is something else, something that gets greater and more marvelous and cannot be obfuscated by the specificity of going beyond. It involves more (or should do), a continual going beyond that never stops, seeing the chains and domestication in their most intimate significance, not simply as the means to a better life as those in power would have it.

If freedom were just a dream, lack of future would be no more than a great black hole and everything would be reduced to either putting up with the chains and domestication as far as possible or to living one's own personal insurrection. Seen in these terms, and given that the capacity to choose between better and worse is determined by laws that are part of one's domestication, there would be no criteria for choice. One would go forward blindly, guided by the genetic lumen, not knowing whether to accept or rebel.

If we choose rebellion we do so because something exists in the future, not just in our genetic and historical past. And this something is not merely part of our intelligence, simply a thought. If that were so the other thought, the logic of acceptance and domestication, would be equally valid. In the best hypothesis in that case I would die of both hunger and thirst just like Buridan's ass, prostrated before the choice of a bucket of hay and a bucket of water.

But things are not like that. I choose because I consider both the breaking of the chains and the elimination of domestication to be acts that thrust me towards a different perspective,