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**On the Concept of Creal: The Politico-Ethical Horizon of a Creative Absolute,
with Deleuze, Guattari, and Lacan**

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Back to the (anti-)absolute

How could communities of passion avoid the—internal or external—menace of totalitarianism? By signing a global social contract in the name of pure and absolute creation.

Such a contract could be the manifestation of a politico-ethical agreement, the consensual idea that an absolutised supra-axiom, carefully chosen, should supersede values pertaining to specific and agonistic groups of power. I propose, with the help of Deleuze, Guattari, and Lacan, that such a contractual hyper-absolute should be a concept of immanent creation (“the Creal”), the only absolute that, logically, would constantly self-destroy and return to life again. This epistemic and existential Creal-strategy is meant to efficiently prevent the over-territorialisation of hegemonic positions, thus providing a stronger bulwark than the current dominant laissez-faire of capitalistic pseudo-relativism. A non-anthropocentric creational absolute axiom could nurture a—*constitutional* in all senses—desire for the kind of radical novelty that is a source of political and existential experimentation and openness.

“Concept[s] must be created” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 5): I have taken to calling such a politico-ethical entity *Creal*. I propose to call the horizon of its social implementation *Krealpolitik*. This paradoxical absolutist politico-ethical strategy can be understood as the positing of an open common ground compatible with epistemic, social, and existential pluralism, now that we know that the general devaluation of integrity and the schizoid-paranoid form of individualism produced by capital-humanism have failed to counter the totalitarianisms of globalisation: the formula “laissez-faire, laissez-passer” mostly liberates markets.

Introit Creal

The French novel *Paridaiza* (de Miranda 2008a) described a totalitarian digital duplication of our planet. A small group of rebels slowly subverted the hedonistic-fascist system in which millions of players were more or less willingly imprisoned. The liberators implanted a virus within the codes of the immersive world in the form of a disruptive signifier. Five combined letters functioned as the grain of sand in the gears: “*Créal*,” a French portmanteau neologism for *créé-réel*, “created-real”—hence “Creal” in English.

In a simultaneous essay on Deleuze (de Miranda 2008b), now republished in English (de Miranda 2013), the concept of “Creal” qualified a non-anthropocentric multi-universal of the kind proposed by modern process ontologies: “Creal” designated what Deleuze (1994, 117, 120) called “disparateness” or “second-degree difference,” what Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 208) called “chaosmos” or “plane of immanence,” what Bergson ([1911] 2007) called “duration,” “creative evolution,” or “life,” and what Whitehead ([1929] 1976, 21) called “creativity process,” adding that “creativity is the universal of universals characterizing the ultimate matter of fact.” The Creal—that is, the Real as a “chaosmic” creative stream—does not seem to be teleological: it is likely to explode in all real and virtual directions, without preference or a spiritually predefined goal. The Creal hypothesis designates an immanent, ever-present, ever-absent dark precursor that embosses the real: “Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated” (Deleuze 1994, 119).

The Creal might be the implicit dark precursor of artists and poets. To artists, pure creation is certainly a valid absolute, even if we were trained in the last century to be suspicious of absolutes. Some would add that the less we tried to control reality, the more *creal* we would become, as proposed for example by the surrealists (Alquié 1965). This reactivates one of the oldest philosophical questions: destiny or agency? It is often forgotten that Deleuze and Guattari themselves, supposedly the champions of anti-voluntarism, did not advocate *laissez-faire* nor submission to chaos: “We require a little order to protect us from chaos . . . We only ask that our ideas are linked together according to a minimum of constant rules” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 202). Accordingly, the Creal should act as a minimal “umbrella” against the rain of chaos, such that it would remain chaos-friendly, as Gene Kelly in *Singin’ In the Rain*, the man “deprived of consciousness” but pointing to the opposite extreme: infinite consciousness (Deleuze 1989, 61).

Totemic “chaosmos”

Most process philosophers are cosmologists. Every cosmology possesses its dark precursor, a prime entity, a universal—or multiversal—principle. “We call this dark precursor, this difference in itself or difference in the second degree which relates heterogeneous systems and even completely disparate things, the *disparate*” (Deleuze 1994, 120). If it were the central absolute of an innocent cosmology, the Creal would be such a *disparation*, a becoming of impressions, compositions, and decompositions, a constant suggestion of “multiplicities of n dimensions” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987, 212). Difference is not only a movement; it is a feeling, proceeding from a glide of vibrations, our metamorphic state by default. Pure immanence is a pluriversal, not heading anywhere in particular: it is *disparating*. The verb *disparatar*, in Portuguese, means playing nonsense, going in all directions like a facetious child, machining manifestations of play: “We call this state of infinitely doubled difference which resonates to infinity *disparity*. Disparity—in other words, difference or intensity (difference of intensity)—is the sufficient reason of all phenomena, the condition of that which appears” (Deleuze 1994, 222).

However, such non-mathematical cosmologies, easily disparaged in our scientific times, can be seen at best as acts of playful faith or artistic *ritournelles*. To be a cosmologist might not be enough to participate in chaosmo-politics. Moreover, positing a source of things could be interpreted as a fetishisation of the past: why do we need sources and ontological origins? Thus, what I propose here as Krealpolitik aims to keep cosmology in the background for a moment, in order to define the Creal as a politico-ethical future-oriented and non-anthropocentric axiomatic absolute, rather than insist on affirming its ontological truth. Politically and ethically, what *matters*, what *makes (a) difference* (Deleuze 1994) is to consider the Creal, pure creation, *as if* it were a true absolute, and keep—praxically—such a virtuality in view. It is a matter of performative discourse, of crealectics.

Lacan ([1986] 1997) has shown how any discourse, any web of belief, revolves around a more or less invisible void absolute signifier, the effect of which is produced by the structure of discourse itself, as a ghost in the machine (this is analysed in detail in de Miranda 2007). To be sustainable, a structure, an order, a discourse, a tribe, need to rely on a totemic value or set of values sometimes virtualised by the chain of signifiers, sometimes expressed in god-like—or ghost-like—concepts. The universal or set of

universals around which such-and-such social reality is constructed maintains the cohesion of the ensemble by playing the role of a slippery *axis mundi*. It might be an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie 1956), but it serves nevertheless the process of sense-making and world-making. Human discourses tend to crystallise around an explicit or implicit set of persistent values that allows for their web of belief to catch a maximum of flies. Such “essential concepts,” when supported by a signifier, are often paired with a pseudo-opposite signifier that entertains an illusion of openness or debate: God (atheism), Capital (communism), Competition (emulation), Beauty (decadence), Science (faith), or more recently the “master algorithm” (Domingos 2015) and its pseudo-opposite, the mysterious human factor. For example, the absolute psychological value of capitalism could be, following Lacan, *jouissance* (de Miranda 2007), and social control would be its pseudo-opposite value.

I argue here that the only way to fight against potentially totalitarian absolutes is to replace them with a virtual absolute that cannot territorialise without deterritorialising at the same time: the Creal hypothesis. If the revolutionary and *poietic* “people to come” do not nurture such a meta-absolute, then conservative ensembles might extend the dominion of their own absolute by overcoding unprotected pseudo-relativist territories saturated by envy and competition for *jouissance* as perversion of desire. Absolute values are combat concepts, the spirit of social bodies, and each group spirit, each “*esprit de corps*,” is a “war machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 243, 366).

Here the reader could ask, what would then be the pseudo-opposite of the Creal? Answer: the One. Elsewhere I have shown in detail how for Deleuze the line of multiplicity (of flight) and the molar line of unity are two asymptotical horizons from which reality proceeds as a third line, a crack-up, a zigzag (de Miranda 2013). A crealectician is never totally creal, and never totally one. She or he zigzags in between the actual and the virtual, on the crest line. Reality is the offspring of the mutual and complicated admiration between the Creal and the One (a cosmological relationship I have described in more detail in de Miranda 2012). Krealpolitik proposes the psychological practice of admiration to replace capitalist envy.

Krealpolitik

If we agree that plural and choral forms of intelligence and world-forming agency are desirable, we might wonder how to harness “*esprit de corps*” in order to “sow the seeds of, or even engender, the people to come” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 345, 366, 388).

Chantal Mouffe said: “While we desire an end to conflict, if we want people to be free we must always allow for the possibility that conflict may appear and to provide an arena where differences can be confronted” (Mouffe in Mouffe, Laclau, and Castle 1998). Agonistic pluralism (Mouffe 2013) is the idea that a constant war of absolutes can be politically and democratically virtuous and fecund provided we let no absolute prevail, by institutionalising confrontational argumentation, pluralism, and collective dissent. Yet this still presupposes that a global community of communities possesses a meta-universal: in this case, even if it remains more or less unthought in her theory, Mouffe’s ontological absolute is the very concept of conflict or struggle. While this is very Darwinian, or Marxist, or Heraclitean, it remains a negative absolute.

Most process cosmologies tend to defend an agonal or agonistic conception of creation, at the risk of inoculating an essentialised notion of eternal struggle in their ontology. Henri Bergson (1920, 31) spoke of cosmic creation as an emotive machine that produced worlds and gods via a constant combat of spirit against matter; for him, the equivalent of the *Creal* was an “immense inflorescence of unforeseeable novelty,” and the *Real* was the solidified and somewhat zombified side of life. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) spoke in various pages of “*esprit de corps*” as the spirit of seditious plural bodies, a ghost in a “war machine” that constantly decoded state imperialism, but this supposes a somewhat military vision of social life as war, not unlike Marx’s. What if we replaced the still reactive and anthropocentric absolute of agony and combat with a more affirmative and posthuman *Krealpolitik* vision?

Let’s assume that each organised group will tend to conquer as much symbolic and social territory as possible, by the virtue of *conatus* and *esprit de corps*. We could even assume for the sake of prudence that each community, even the most “innocent” one, tends to be a micro-fascist monopoly. The institutionalisation of agony that is proposed to prevent totalitarianism raises the question of the superstructural institution itself. To avoid the naturalisation of war that is still so frequent in revolutionary discourses, I would propose that all communities agree on a positive absolute, a pure and constant creation of the real and of the unreal: the *Creal* as an affirmative and generous politico-ethical value that constantly self-destructs and constantly re-emerges again, as does any desire-without-object (de Miranda 2007). Superabundance rather than wars of lacking.

A critic could argue that while the *Creal* presented here seems to be idealistic, utopian, or “innocent,” it is also possible to defend creation cynically and

antagonistically, for example, as “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1942). But, as I have explained elsewhere, I believe that the Creal has less to do with the progress of destructive capitalism than with the message of the Marquis de Sade behind the metaphor of chaotic sexuality: “Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become Republicans!” (Sade [1965] 1971, 296; further analysed in de Miranda 2007). This is where our initial question on destiny and agency reappears, now transposed in the following question: do we need to be citizens to agree on a Krealpolitik? The answer is yes and no: we don’t need to be nationals, but we can be cosmopolitans, or better *chaosmopolites*, citizens of the Creal, and become so by a global “social contract” (Rousseau 2012). To become a Creal-citizen, a chaosmopolite, is to co-create a plurality of worlds, *as if* supported by one meta-belief. Perhaps the Creal is nothing more than the concept of *if*, the imaginary of possibility, the desire for alternatives.

If we are to equate pluralism and monism, we ought to invent—by global social contract—a new form of postnational citizenship based on an agreement concerning the superabundance of pure creation as being our affirmative and consensual absolute value, a sort of political and rational—but non-reductionist—religion. If we train ourselves to believe that the world is not lack and void, ontological misery, but deep prosperity, this would be one step out of the discourse of crisis and austerity that is used to undermine and eradicate the creative, poetic, and intellectual classes in favour of a depressed guilty global precariat. The *poietic* classes are the global refugees we forget to care about because capitalism trains the public opinion against them out of *ressentiment* and envy. Capitalism produces self-hatred, renunciation, and culpability among the creative, poetic, and intellectual classes because the latter are compassionate and tend to confuse, morally, the luxury and richness of their perception of life with a socially privileged existence. Krealpolitik proposes instead a triumphant reappropriation of the meaning of superabundance and non-materialistic luxury.

Crealism and anthrobotics

Humans are “rope[s] over an abyss” (Nietzsche 1961, 43), bridges between Creal and One. Our contemporary equivocal position in the middle of a chaotic universal, on one side, and a henological or unifying horizon, on the other, is our ethical chance: by identifying neither with the multiplicity of the Creal nor with any unified world, we could perhaps avoid falling into the anthropocentric ontologies of a reified globalised world. Nothing *is* the Creal because the Creal flows everywhere. All *tends to become* at the same

time one and many, and the reality thus produced is a connectome. The paradox of realism is that these lines of in-betweenness appear solid, as for example in blood veins, or brain neural circuits. But what if such networks are intensities, or differences of intensities?

Protocols and institutions can be a social manifestation of the strange attraction of One. Art, philosophy, and poetry can be a social manifestation of the strange attraction of the multiple. Or vice versa. We can play the world-forming game as long as we don't identify with our protocols. It is not only that humans are particularly gifted in developing new tools and techniques: we might in fact have always been social machines, on the one hand working unceasingly towards social automation, functionalism, the organisation and codification of the real, on the other hand engaging in more unstructured, aimless dispersions, recreation, and developing chaotic and emotional aspirations (Deleuze and Guattari [1977] 1983; de Miranda 2010). We code and decode our protocols under the dual influence of the Creal and the clamour of unity. We are semi-automatic agents in collective hybrid systems made of flesh and algorithms, with a fluctuating zone of embodiment. The Creal-citizen knows that he or she is an "anthrobot" (de Miranda, Ramamoorthy, and Rovatsos 2016), a poetic social machine. Human societies are organic, poetic, and artificial, and at every moment, we are products and producers, partly creators and partly created, partly automata and partly agents capable of adaptability, self-actuation, and sense-making (Di Paolo 2009).

If a collective is an axiomatic, intrinsically normative system, we can infer that a Krealpolitic would satisfy the requisites of a healthy system when the global social contract favours respectful and harmonious collaborations between and within socio-technical assemblages, human and non-human. Harmony however should not become an obsession (the pseudo-opposite of War): machinic breakdowns are perhaps necessary to allow for crealectics to constantly surprise itself, rather than becoming a rigid method. A method that is our work to come.

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