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Deleuze and
Artistic Research

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Edited by Paulo de Assis and Paolo Giudici

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Volume II

The Dark Precursor in Image, Space, and Politics

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On the Concept of Creal

The Politico-Ethical Horizon of a Creative Absolute

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Process philosophies tend to emphasise the value of continuous creation as the core of their discourse. For Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze, and others the real is ultimately a creative becoming. Critics have argued that there is an irreducible element of (almost religious) belief in this re-evaluation of immanent creation. While I don't think belief is necessarily a sign of philosophical and existential weakness, in this paper I will examine the possibility for the concept of universal creation to be a political and ethical axiom, the result of a global social contract rather than of a new spirituality. I argue here that a coherent 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 principle.

BACK TO THE (ANTI-)ABSOLUTE

How can 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 would be the manifestation of an ethico-political 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 universal should be a concept of immanent creation ("the Creal"), perhaps the only absolute that, logically, would constantly self-destroy and re-emerge again. This epistemic and existential Creal-strategy is expected to efficiently prevent the over-territorialisation of hegemonic positions, thus providing a stronger bulwark than the laissez-faire of capitalistic pseudo-relativism. A non-anthropocentric creational axiom might also nurture a *constitutional* 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 this universal value *Creal*. I propose to call the horizon of its social implementation *Krealpolitik*. This absolutist strategy can be understood as the positing of an open common ground compatible with epistemic, social, and

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existential pluralism, now that the general devaluation of integrity and the schizoid-paranoid form of individualism produced by capital-humanism have failed to counter the totalitarianism of globalisation in which the formula “laissez-faire” mostly liberates markets.

ENTER CREAL

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

In an 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” is analogous to 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—is not necessarily teleological: it is likely to exuberate in all real and virtual directions, without a spiritually predefined goal.

The Creal might be the implicit dark matter 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 artists would add that the less we tried to control reality, the more *creal* we would become, as proposed for example by the surrealists, chief among them Breton, who thought surreality was “a sort of absolute reality” (Alquié 1965, 149). This reactivates one of the oldest philosophical questions: destiny or agency? It is sometimes 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, a Krealpolitik 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 axiom of a post-post-modern cosmology, the Creal would be such a *disparation*, an exuberation of impressions, compositions, and decompositions, a constant suggestion of “multiplicities of n dimensions” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 212). Difference is not only a movement; it is a feeling, proceeding from a glide of vibrations, our metamorphic state of desire. 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 themselves be seen at best as acts of playful faith or artistic *ritournelles*. To be a cosmologist might not be enough to participate in cosmopolitics. Moreover, positing a source of all things could be interpreted as a fetishisation of the past: 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 an axiomatic universal, rather than insist on affirming its ontological truth. Not unlike Kant’s regulative principle (*Critique of Pure Reason* A673/B701, Kant 1998, 607) 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 such a virtuality in view.

Lacan ([1986] 1997) has shown how any discourse, any web of belief, revolves around a more or less invisible 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 web of values sometimes virtualised by the chain of signifiers, sometimes expressed in god-like—or spirit-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*, a master signifier (Lacan 1991, 56). It can function as 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 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 (solidarity), 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 neo-liberalism is, following Lacan, *jouissance* (de Miranda 2007), and social control would be its pseudo-opposite value.

If the revolutionary and *poietic* “people to come” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 218) do not nurture a meta-absolute, then conservative ensembles might

extend the dominion of their own absolute by overcoding unprotected pseudo-relativist territories. Absolutised values are partly combat concepts, partly the spirit of social bodies, and each group spirit, each “esprit de corps,” is both a love and a “war machine,” even if war is not its main purpose (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 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 (an interpreter of the cosmic semiosis) is never totally creal, and never totally one. Crealectics is a zigzag in between the actual and the virtual, on the crest line. Reality is the offspring of the mutual and complex admiration between the Creal and the One (a cosmological relationship I have tried to describe in more detail in de Miranda 2012). Homothetically, Krealpolitik shall propose the healthy psychological practice of admiration to replace capitalist envy.

KREALPOLITIK

If we agree that plural and choral forms of intelligence and world-forming 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).

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 interesting theory still presupposes that a global community of communities possesses a meta-universal: in this case, even if it remains more or less implicit in her theory, Mouffe’s ontological absolute is the very concept of conflict or struggle. It remains a negative absolute.

In a similar fashion, 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 places of “esprit de corps” as the spirit of seditious collective bodies, a ghost in a “war machine” intended to dissolve official forms of imperialism and this also supposes a somewhat military vision of social life as war. What if we replaced the still reactive and anthropocentric absolute of agony and combat with a more affirmative and posthuman Krealpolitik?

Let's assume that each organised group will tend to conquer as much symbolic and social territory as possible, by the virtue of corporate *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 agonism that is proposed by Mouffe et al. to prevent totalitarianism raises the question of the superstructural institution itself. To avoid the naturalisation of war, I 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 principle that constantly self-destructs and constantly re-emerges again, as does any desire-without-object (de Miranda 2007).

To become a Creal-citizen, a chaosmopolite, is to be able to co-create a plurality of worlds. It is not enough to say that the Creal is the concept of *if*, the imaginary of possibility, the desire for alternatives, or the idea of infinite probability. It needs to be the core axiom of a global social contract. Will this global contract become a new form of secular religion? Perhaps, but in this case religion would derive from politics and ethics, rather than the contrary.

If we are to equate pluralism and monism (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 20), we ought to institute—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 tends to generate self-hatred, renunciation, or culpability among the creative, poetic, and intellectual classes because the latter tend to confuse, morally, the luxury and richness of their perception of life with a socially privileged existence. A Krealpolitik proposes instead a triumphant reappropriation of the promises of spiritual fecundity and non-materialistic luxury.

CREALISM AND ANTHROBOTICS

Humans are "rope[s] over an abyss" (Nietzsche 1961, 43), bridges between Creal and One. Our equivocal position in the middle of a chaotic universal, on one side, and a 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 ontology of war. Nothing *is* the Creal because, by logical necessity, the Creal flows everywhere. All *tends to become* at the same time one and many, and the biosemiotic reality thus produced is a development of realities and discourses, following a crealectical materialism. The paradox of realism is that these lines or webs of in-betweenness appear solid, as for example in blood veins, institutions, or networks. But what if such

structures are scriptural intensities, or differences of interpretative intensities?

Protocols and institutions are a social manifestation of the attraction of One. Art, philosophy, and poetry are a social manifestation of the strange attraction of the multiple. Or vice versa. We can play the world-forming game healthily 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 hybrids, 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 chaomic 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 desire 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 member of a poietic 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). This is not only about auto-poiesis: humans and non-humans tend to form webs of *hieropoiesis*, in which what is produced is a certain idea and sensation of what is sacred.

If a collective is an axiomatic, intrinsically normative system, we can infer that a Krealpolitik would satisfy the requisites of a healthy system when the choral intelligence generated by 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 renewal.

CONCLUSION: A PROLEGOMENON

This chapter was a short prolegomenon to the concept of Creal, with many aspects left to unfold. It can be summed up as follows: humans tend to act according to absolutised imperatives, whether they are conscious of them or not. War, conflict, or struggle seem to be the dominant imperative of modernity. To end this global regime of agony, I have proposed that we globally agree on a common ultimate principle, the Creal.

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