**From creativity to imagination with Cornelius Castoriadis**

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**Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to open up creativity teaching and research to the deeper challenges of the humanities and social sciences. It is in part a response to a personal concern, reflecting on my on-off involvement with the field of creativity over a period of twenty five years, that traditional creativity research and teaching, through the unthinking repetition of an accepted body of knowledge, is in danger of destroying the very object (‘creativity’) it pretends to grasp and encourages students to learn. This realisation first struck home about ten years ago when after a prolonged period away from the creativity field I attended the 15th anniversary conference of the journal *Creativity & Innovation Management* in Oxford and found myself in a strange time warp: the same people were talking about the same issues using the same conceptual frameworks and techniques. They all just looked a bit older. But the curious stasis which seems to haunt the academic field of creativity research is perhaps best exemplified by a different kind of personal time warp. In 1994 I co-authored a chapter surveying the field of creativity which, although delivered on time to the editor, somehow disappeared between the cracks of academic life. To my utter incredulity it appeared in a handbook of cutting edge creativity research some eighteen years later, complete with references to ‘recent’ research from the early 1990s (Rickards and De Cock 2012).

What I offer in the following pages to counteract this curious stasis is a philosophical-historical narrative, very much inspired by the work of Cornelius Castoriadis (1987). Castoriadis was concerned throughout his work with the key question of how the ‘new’ can come into being and this required him to focus on the imagination, which has a much more further reaching history than ‘creativity’ (going all the way back to Aristotle’s *De Anima*). It is my contention that a historical awareness of the rich pedigree of ‘imagination’ can help students better to appreciate the operant logic in which modern notions of creativity have been captured. One tentative suggestion I will make in this chapter is that we should push the term ‘creativity’ into the background and focus on developing our students’ imagination instead. With Castoriadis I will advocate an approach to creativity/ imagination that is profoundly political, historical and social which – and this is crucial in the context of management education – links back to the notion of organization and institutions (De Cock 2013). This is a conceptualisation of creativity/imagination as a counterweight to the actuality of the (organizational) world, as the capacity to convert the given confines of the here and now into an open horizon of possibilities (Kearney 1998). The chapter is structured as follows: In the following section I will problematize popular uses and conceptualizations of creativity using recently published handbooks and review articles. I will then introduce a turn to the notion of imagination which allows me to provide some historical and philosophical depth to ways of addressing ‘the new’. This socio-historical and philosophical exploration culminates in the work of Castoriadis in the third section, the implications of which for creativity teaching and research are explored in the fourth and final part.

**The problems with creativity**

In developing my argument I will rely on a number of recent ‘handbooks’ and review articles to sketch the operant logic which underpins the teaching and researching of creativity in a business context. In doing so I will take care to avoid the straw man arguments we often find in these sources, for example, positioning creativity teaching and research against, ‘a traditional view that creativity and innovation are simply of little importance to the success of organizations’ (Mumford et al. 2012: 3). This is often followed by the suggestion that 21st century organizations need creativity and innovation because of the opening up of new global markets and rapid technological developments, and that creativity and innovation are important causes of organizational value, growth and performance in a dynamically changing environment. Managing creativity then becomes about ‘putting into place a variety of factors (e.g. person and contextual characteristics) that will consciously lead employees to develop new ideas to solve problems and create new opportunities’ (George 2007: 446). Underpinning this effort is the belief in ‘the role of the conscious mind and conscious thought’, and models of the creative process applied in creativity training workshops and organizations more generally have therefore ‘a decidedly rationally flavor’ (ibid.: 446). An implicit assumption that goes unchallenged in this dominant narrative of creativity is that both novelty and usefulness are constitutive of creativity, with creativity typically viewed as a precursor to innovation (e.g. Amabile et al. 2005; Rickards and Moger 2006). This leads well-respected creativity researchers such as Sternberg and Kaufman (2010: 468) to suggest for example that ‘those who are imaginative but whose ideas are useless become frustrated dreamers. Those who have useful ideas that are not imaginative become, whether in name or indeed, technicians’. As George (2007) astutely remarked in her overview of the field; questions of ‘what is meant by useful?’ and ‘useful for whom?’ are almost invariably neglected in this mainstream creativity discourse.

Although since the early 1990s creativity has been conceived of as a multilevel construct, operating at the individual, group and organizational level (Woodman et al. 1993; Drazin et al. 1999), most research has very much focused on created products and efforts by individuals (Chan 2013) and on rarer occasions by groups (George 2007). When considering the organizational level, characteristics and processes at the individual level are largely anthropomorphised (Richards and De Cock 2012). It should not be surprising then that despite a huge amount of research output on the role of ‘creativity and innovation’ as components of organizational performance over the past 30 years or so, researchers consistently include the rider in their conclusions that ‘scholars’ understanding of the creative process and the factors influencing it is still quite limited’ (Amabile et al. 2005: 398). The problem lies here not so much in a lack of quality research, but with the stories the field of creativity research tends to tell to itself about itself – very often taking Guilford’s address to the American Psychological Association in 1950 as the beginning of modern creativity research – whilst projecting the ideal of the field as homogenous and creativity as a unitary construct. As Chan (2013: 26) pointed out, for historical reasons (organizational) psychologists have dominated the field of creativity research for the past 60 years, and this has meant that ‘many creativity researchers are still searching for a ‘clearer definition of creativity’ and ways to improve the scientific validity of their research findings’.

When creativity researchers working in the mainstream tradition do set out to explore ‘extended historical changes in the concept of creativity’ (Runco and Albert 2010: 3) this leads to some, no doubt unintended, comical effects such as in the suggestion that: ‘Aristotle, Kant, and many other luminaries had much to say about creativity, but… they did not base their ideas about it on rigorous empirical evidence’ (ibid: 4). Whilst acknowledging that ‘still no concept of ‘creativity’ existed’ by the 17th century, Runco and Albert (2010: 9) manage to explore pre-Christian views (Aristotle and the Romans) in just over half a page, then taking just a page to get to the 18th century Enlightenment via Locke and Hobbes. Suggesting that 18th century debates on the imagination were ‘tedious and tangential’, they give thinkers of the time some credit as they came close to the holy grail of creativity in that ‘their discussions of ‘imagination’ led as early as the 1730s to the phrase, ‘the creative imagination’ (ibid.: 9)’. For good measure they outline their underlying assumption (again, one that is very typical in the dominant narratives of creativity) that ‘history is the medium in which ideas and events build up and arrive, with some significant effects rarely going away’. This is a view of history as a ‘slow boil’, or what Walter Benjamin (1999:254) once described as ‘historicism’s bordello’ we need to blast open (also see De Cock et al. 2013).

Only recently has there emerged an acknowledgement of the need to examine critically the discourses of creativity, ‘laying bare the institutional interests, ideological assumptions, and social consequences of different constructions of creativity’ (Chan 2013: 22) and to open up the concept methodologically and theoretically. In doing so, we must of course be heedful to distinguish between the self-designated field of ‘creativity research’ and the wider range of intellectual endeavour that has implications for understanding creativity (De Cock 1996; De Cock and Rehn 2006). My suggested turn to the social sciences and humanities, albeit not always grounded in ‘rigorous empirical evidence’ as Albert and Runco (2010) demand, precisely aims to respond to what is a rather ironic feature of creativity research and teaching in an organizational context: that it is profoundly uncreative on its own terms, offering little novelty and questionable usefulness (Rehn and De Cock 2009). Or as George (2007: 466) put it somewhat more subtly in her conclusion to a substantial state-of-the-art article, ‘one might wonder to what extent the literature on creativity is succumbing to a certain single-mindedness or routinization that, while enriching our understanding of creativity in incremental ways, is not leading to the kinds of breakthrough advances that are the true marks of creativity in the scholarly domain. While perhaps a harsh overstatement, the existing literature has approached creativity in ways that do not always do justice to the very nature of creative endeavours’.

**From creativity to imagination**

Attempts to historicize the notion of creativity, as in the effort by Runco and Albert (2010) discussed above, are all too rare in the creativity literature. And perhaps there is a good reason for this: there is simply not all that much too historicize in the first place. Mason (2003) points out that while the noun ‘creativeness’ was used in English from the end of the 18th century, the term ‘creativity’ itself appeared late in the 19th century and became common only well into in the 20th century. In French and German the nouns *créativité* and *Kreativität* were actually derived from Anglo-American usage in psychology and came into general use only in the second half of the 20th century. What this shows us is that both popular and academic conceptualisations of ‘creativity’ actually do not come trailing with all that much historical freight behind them. If we want to explore historically how ‘the new’ comes into being we thus must engage with the much older and richer concept of ‘imagination’. Not that we will find a slow and irreversible build-up of ideas and events (cf. Runco and Albert 2010) when considering the concept of imagination. Rather, what we encounter are ‘successive movements of discovery and covering back over that have marked the history of the question of the imagination’ (Castoriadis 1993: 3). Crucial breakthroughs are ‘followed immediately by a strange and total forgetting’, something Castoriadis (1993: 2) referred to as the ‘scandal of the imagination’. Casey (1976: 15) talks in this respect of a negligence by philosophers with few ‘convincing and lasting distinctions been made between imagination and the group of sibling acts that would include memory, perceptual illusion, fantasy, delusion, and hallucination’. Whilst it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to give an exhaustive historical overview, it is still useful to summarize some of the key intellectual discoveries Castoriadis referred to, if only to build up a rich and thematically organized concept of imagination and open up a space for Castoriadis’s very imaginative take on imagination.

Aristotle’s early conception of the imagination prefigured later philosophers’ interest in the mind’s ‘functional architecture’ which posits a hierarchy of the faculties (usually with reason as the king of the faculties). He proposed *phantasia* (of which *imaginatio* is the Latin translation) as part of a wider faculty, having the role of combining experiences into so-called phantasmata, meaning coherent mental representations (Roth 2007). Aristotle thus allows *phantasia* a certain legitimacy as an aid to practical reason: by recalling past experiences and anticipating future ones it can mobilize our present behaviour in a particular direction; yet he held on to the view that imagination is for the most part false (Kearney 1998). This negative view of imagination persisted through the ages and led to a neglect of the question of the imagination, until with Hume and Kant (and to a certain extent Hobbes in the 17th century) it became situated again in the uppermost echelons in the hierarchy of mental faculties (Casey 1976). These modern philosophers developed the basic understanding of imagination as a ‘presence-in-absence’, while generally reversing the negative verdict it had received in the tribunal of tradition (Kearney, 1998). For Hume (1739/1968) imagination mediates between sensory impressions and ideas of memory and judgment, thus placing it in a pivotal role. Imagination is necessary both to our thinking of things when they are not present to our senses and to our thought of them when they are so present, if we are to imbue these objects of perception with any permanence or any existence separate from ourselves (Warnock 1994). The continuity and identity of an object perceived thus can be ascertained only with the aid of the imagination. Yet, Hume also introduced a negative ‘valence’ – imagination as the product of an unfortunate ‘psychological habit’ of believing in a world whose existence cannot be rationally established – which overshadowed the concept’s subsequent development. For Kant (2008), in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the imagination becomes the concealed yet real condition of all knowledge. It is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present and the categories of pure reason are therefore creations and representations of an imagination which is only partially presented, yet ever present. It is the imagination that loosens our relation to, and reliance on, wholly empirical conditions. Imagination is thus acknowledged as one of the most fundamental, if concealed, powers of humankind by Kant (Rundell 1994). If Kant comes close to admitting a sort of primacy of imagination, in the second edition of the *Critique* (1787) he retreats from his discovery and relegates the imagination to a more subaltern intermediary role between intellect and intuition (Bottici 2011).

Twentieth century phenomenological approaches rediscovered the idea of imagination as presence-in-absence: the act of making what is present absent and what is absent present, and thus to elaborate concepts, images and ideas that do not correspond to current or past reality, and that may never be actualized (Roth 2007). As Kearney (1998: 4) eloquently put it: ‘The plurality of terms for imagination… all refer, in their diverse ways, to the human power to convert absence into presence, actuality into possibility, what-is into something-other-than-it-is. In short, they all designate our ability to transform the time and space of our world into a specifically human mode of existence *(Dasein)*’*.* For Sartre (1940) the ability to imagine is identical with the ability to detach ourselves from our actual situation, and envisage situations which are *non-actual*, and thus becomes the very precondition of human freedom and the possibility of action. The capacity to begin something new then depends on our capacity to mentally remove ourselves from where we are physically located and imagine that things might as well be different from what they actually are (Bottici 2011). It is because we can imagine that we can think about things that are absent, including things which no longer exist or do not yet exist, and that we can anticipate how things might be and that we can envision the world as if it were otherwise (Warnock 1994).

From this brief historical survey we can note the permanent dialectic of reason and imagination, with imagination seen as a pre-condition for reason but always becoming subordinated to it (e.g., in Aristotle, Hume, and Kant). It is only in Castoriadis’s work that the basic anthropological trait that distinguishes humans from other species will be no longer the universal innateness of reason but that of the imagination. It is this imagination, furthermore, that enables humans to operate effectively in complex social groupings and contemplate intricate plans for possible future action, by bringing an absent ‘non-actual’ future into presence (Roth 2007). The imagination then is not a single act producing an imaginative output; it is a vital process of communication whereby we pass beyond ourselves towards what is other than ourselves. For phenomenological thinkers like Merleau-Ponty (1968) society itself becomes thus, in a fundamental sense, an incarnation of human imagining. The triple dialectic of reason/imagination, absence/presence and individual/society provides a platform for Castoriadis’s thinking on creation and imagination which suggests a decisive break with the routinization in our understanding of creativity we referred to in the second section.

**The radical imagination of Cornelius Castoriadis**

It is entirely natural to call *imaginary* and *imagination* this faculty of radical novation, creation, and formation... We [therefore] must admit that there is in human collectivities a creative potential, a *vis formandi*, which I call *the instituting social imaginary* (Castoriadis 2005: 125).

If for most social and philosophical thinkers through the ages the exploration of the imagination was perhaps a side project, with Cornelius Castoriadis the concept becomes truly central (Karagiannis and Wagner 2012). The key question that concerned Castoriadis is how the ‘new’ can come into being. In his magnum opus, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987), he elaborates the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, the bringing into existence of forms that did not previously exist, a feature of which is its unmotivated and undetermined character. Castoriadis’s aim was very much to develop a way of thinking about ‘the fact that something other than what exists is bringing itself into being, and bringing itself into being as new or as other’ (1987: 185). Crucial to his project was the concept of *radical imagination* which makes, ‘that ‘reality’ exists *for us* – exists *tout court* – and exists *as* it exists’ (Castoriadis 1997b: 321), and any human being can, in principle, re-imagine what another human being has imagined. Creation then means the positive rupture of already given determinations and the positing of new determinations, or what Castoriadis calls ‘social imaginary significations’. This imagined world of signification allows us ‘to create for ourselves a *world* - or to present to ourselves something of which, without the imagination, we would know nothing and we could say nothing’ (Castoriadis 1997: 104). Imaginary significations represent a surplus of meaning, a ‘capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is’ (Castoriadis 1987: 127), which transcends all determinants and presuppositions (Arnason 1989). They thus form a creative potential, an a-causal *vis formandi*, that is immanent to the anonymous collective as well as to singular human beings. For Castoriadis (1987: 366) imaginary significations ‘are obviously not what individuals represent to themselves, consciously or unconsciously, or what they think. They are that by means of which and on the basis of which individuals are formed as social individuals, capable of participating in social doing and representing/saying ...’ They articulate the world in the double sense of imposing form on it and giving access to it and function as ‘the invisible cement holding together this endless collection of real, rational, and symbolic odds and ends that constitute every society, and as the principle that selects and shapes the bits and pieces that will be accepted there[[1]](#endnote-1)’ (ibid.: 143).

Castoriadis hence talks about the *instituting imaginary*, as it is this imaginary that underpins the instituting of society. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s work, he sees the imaginary as crucial to both a *mise en forme* (form giving; shaping) and a *mise en question* (putting into question) of any given institution of society (Karagiannis and Wagner 2012). This imaginary is a kind of ultimate that needs society as medium for its appearance, just as society needs it in order to become institutionalized. Our institutions are symbolic systems that human subjects incorporate into their behavior, and every individual imagination is charged accordingly by the symbols of society which surround it, as it in turn recharges these symbols (Kearney 1998). The institution of a society presupposes the institution of imaginary significations that must, in principle, be able to provide meaning to whatever presents itself empirically. Yet this society also depends for its existence on human subjects created by that society. As Bottici (2011: 25) put it, ‘Society can exist concretely only through the fragmentary and complementary incarnation and incorporation of its institution and its imaginary significations in the living, talking and acting individuals of that society[[2]](#endnote-2)’.

Aiming to avoid the duality of individual and society which has marked much of the history of the social sciences and humanities (viz. debates around agency and structure), Castoriadis works with the dialectic of the psychical and the social-historical, both of which have the potential for creation (Karagiannis and Wagner 2012) but which cannot exist one without the other and which are irreducible to each other (Castoriadis 1997). The radical imagination of the psyche is the equivalent form of expression at the individual level of the instituting social imaginary at the social-historical level: ‘the question of the psyche... is inseparable from the question of the social-historical, two expressions of the radical imagination – here, as radical imagination; there as social imaginary’ (Castoriadis 1987: 274). This is a notion of imagination (and creation) that exceeds the psychological horizon which is so typical of considerations of creativity in business and management studies. To understand imagination we thus need to look beyond individuals and acknowledge the institutional and instituting dimensions through which humans organize themselves collectively. Imagination then is not just a process through which individuals or groups generate creative thoughts and outputs. Human beings are in continuous interplay with the institutions they created, and being sustained and altered by them (Roth 2007). All knowing and acting is for Castoriadis (1997: 105) indissociably psychical *and* social-historical: ‘Man is *psuché*; soul, psyche in its underlying strata, unconscious. And man is society; he *is* only in and through society, its institution, and the social imaginary significations that render the psyche fit for life[[3]](#endnote-3)’.

The radical imagination is for Castoriadis (1997b) the flux or incessant flow of spontaneously emerging representations, affects and desires within the psyche which is singular for each human being. If human beings were given over fully to this radical imagination, they would not be able to survive in society as, ‘the desires that surge forth don’t bear the subject toward a life lived in common’ (Castoriadis 2005: 128). Thus this flux must be channelled and controlled and when this socialization takes place through the absorption of the instituted society and its significations, the most important manifestations of the radical imagination are, up to a certain point, stifled. It is primarily through language that the psyche receives the totality of the social imaginary significations that language bears, conveys and renders possible. Yet, there persists a permanent incommensurability between the social order of imaginary significations and the spontaneous flux of representations which forms the creative core of the individual mind (Dews 2002), and it is this clash between the psyche and the socio-historical which enables meaning to remain in principle open, or if in danger of closing upon itself, to be reopened through interrogation (Rundell 1994). The presence of the radical imagination thus implies the potential ability to question and lucidly examine social significations as a social discourse as well as a personal identification (Urribari 2002).

For Castoriadis the creative dimension of the imagination is emphatically linked to the capacity to question the existing and the given. This ‘given’ Castoriadis (1987) refers to as the ‘instituted social imaginary’, a solidification and crystallisation of the instituting imaginary. Social reality as it is constituted for us and by us is the result of the dialectic between the instituted and the instituting side of the social imaginary as society continually defines and redefines itself (Bottici 2011). The social-historical then is for Castoriadis (1987: 108) the anonymous collective whole which is ‘on the one hand, given structures, and, on the other hand, *that which* structures, institutes, materializes. In short, it is the union *and* thetension of instituting society and of instituted society, of history made and of history in the making’. For Castoriadis the institution of the social-historical and the creation of imaginary significations always involve both the creation of radical otherness (the new) and the workings of what he calls an ensemblist-identitary logic. All social institutions, the foremost of which is language, have what Castoriadis calls an ‘ensemblist-identitary’ dimension which sits alongside the imaginary dimension and the operations of the ensemblist-identitary logic are represented through the notions of *legein* and *teukhein*[[4]](#endnote-4). It is these operations that provide the imaginary with meaning: ‘The instrumental institution of *legein* is the institution of the identitary-ensemblist conditions for social representing/saying. The instrumental institution of *teukhein* is the institution of the identitary-ensemblist conditions for social doing. The two institutions mutually imply one another, they intrinsically inhere in one another, and each is impossible without the other’ (Castoriadis 1987: 370). Society cannot represent things and represent itself, make things and make itself without applying this ensemblistic-identitary logic which establishes institutions and institutes itself only by instituting *legein* and *teukhein* as well. Castoriadis (1997b: 305) sees this ‘ensemblistic ‘part’ [is] everywhere dense in natural language’. It is impossible to speak in any context whatsoever, without utilizing ensemblistic-identitary operators. He finds this process also at work in the writings of Hegel and Marx, for example, who ‘can say what they have to say that is fundamental about society and history only by transgressing what they believe they know about what being and thinking mean, and who finally reduce it, by forcing it to enter into a system that cannot contain it’ (ibid.: 204). In Castoriadis’s work we thus see the interaction of the instituting and the instituted society at work in that new institutions always need to take account of the already instituted. The instituting imaginary has to contend with different orders of constraints, both external (those imposed by the natural strata, especially biology), and historical (the reproductive inertia within the instituted society), but these constraints do not warrant a deterministic reading. Castoriadis does not privilege the instituting over the instituted; rather the key issue for him that determines the health of any society is the extent to which it recognizes in its institution its own self-creation. Alienation occurs when society does not recognize in the imaginary of institutions something that is its own product, and when it does not see itself as instituting as well as instituted (Castoriadis 1987).

In his last writings – Castoriadis died in 1997 – he attacked Western societies because they attempt to cover over the traces of their contingent social institution, and present themselves as the product of an extra-social, and thus eternal and unchanging source (De Cock et al. 2013b). He particularly deplored the fact that collective terrains were being abandoned with people withdrawing into their individual or immediate-family existence and not worrying about anything that goes on beyond the very narrow circle of their personal interests. This is what Castoriadis (2010) called the *privatization of individuals*, leaving them isolated and maintained in the illusion of their liberty by mechanisms which have become independent of all social control and which are managed by anonymous apparatuses (Castoriadis 1997). If imagination, and indeed creativity, is to mean anything it must be ‘calling into question the institution of society, the representation of the world, and the social imaginary significations it conveys and bears within itself’ (Castoriadis 2010: 82). Our current predicament twenty years on is expressed rather poetically by Jameson (2009: 608) who, without using Castoriadis’s vocabulary, very aptly captures the sentiments expressed in his late work:

We continue murmuring Kant’s old questions – What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? – under a starry heaven no more responsive than a mirror or a space ship, not understanding that they require the adjunct of an ugly and bureaucratic representational qualification: what can I know *in this system?* What should I do in this new world *completely invented by me?* What can I hope for *alone in an altogether human age?* And failing to replace them by the only meaningful one, namely how can I recognize this forbiddingly foreign totality as my own doing, how may I appropriate it and make it my own handiwork and acknowledge its laws as my own projection and my own praxis?

What we take from Castoriadis’s work then is an idea of imagination that is both profoundly individual and profoundly social, with neither being reducible to the other. It is the permanent tension between the two that gives imagination its essentially undetermined character. The creative dimension of imagination is for Castoriadis not primarily linked to the generation of ideas, but rather to the capacity to question already given determinations and to re-imagine what others have imagined. Castoriadis sees the world very much as something we have assembled for ourselves to live in, always instituted as well as always instituting (building, transforming and even abolishing), and it is this very basic realisation I aim to elaborate on when considering some implications for, and practical examples of, creativity teaching and management education more broadly.

**Educating the imagination?**

We have a duty to educate the imagination above all else (Warnock 1976:10).

This final section is structured in three parts. First I will elaborate on some of the key differences between a Castoriadis-inspired take on creativity and imagination and the one put forward by the ‘creativity industry’. These concern the importance of the social, the receptiveness to others’ creation and the fundamental subversiveness (in relation to what exists) of the imagination. I will then illustrate how I have tried to integrate some lessons in my own practice of teaching creativity seminars. I conclude by broadening out the significance of Castoriadis’s thought to Business School education more generally.

Contemporary society supposedly offers individuals a high degree of personal freedom and emphasizes the need to realize a unique creative and productive self; hence the imperative of developing ‘creativity’ in organizations. Yet, the very conditions which create this demand for creativity also deny its fulfillment. The social fragmentation and the ever more attenuated sense of belonging to a wider society have undermined the degree of recognition that can actually validate uniqueness and creativity (Mason 2003). It is here that Castoriadis’s conceptualization of the imagination as not only a psychological or individual phenomenon but one that is always-already dialectically entwined with the collective, offers important analytical grip. Castoriadis believed that in even the most original thinkers there is but a minute part of what they say and write that does not come from society, from what they have learnt, from what surrounds them, and is not simply a trivial elaboration. As he put it, ‘If one wants, metaphorically speaking, to quantify all that, the kernel of what is truly new in a Plato, an Aristotle, a Kant, a Hegel, a Marx, or a Freud represents perhaps one percent of what they said or wrote’ (Castoriadis 2010: 65). Furthermore, whilst it is imagi­nation that allows the creation of the new, what Castoriadis (1997: 111) calls ‘the emergence of forms, figures, original schemata of thought and of the thinkable’, this same imagination makes that human beings are capable of receiving, welcoming and accepting another’s creation. This is also a dimension that is mostly ignored in the mainstream creativity literature. Sternberg and Kaufman (2010: 472), for example, are typical in their suggestion that, ‘a curiosity of creativity is that the fact that one is oneself creative in no way guarantees that one’s reaction to others who are creative will be positive’. For Castoriadis (1997:112), however, the imagination has a double dimension in that it both creates the original and makes us capable of gathering it, in effect creating a new subjectivity that is ‘critically and lucidly open to the new; it does not repress the works of the imag­ination (one’s own or others’) but is capable of receiving them critically, of accepting them or rejecting them’. This chimes with Warnock’s (1994: 173) reflections on an educational policy that develops the imagination, where she cautions against the belief that learners should simply be encouraged to be creative or express themselves. There is nothing *uniquely* valuable for her in producing things that are original (although it may have value of course). For Warnock the main purpose of the imagination is the acceptance and revitalization of shared and continuing values and thus a key societal good to be cultivated. Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) talk about the ‘re-creative’ imagination in this context. They draw a distinction between creative imagination, as the capacity to do things in a new way, and re-creative imagination as the capacity to put ourselves in the place of another, or in the place of our own future, past or counterfactual self.

It is also significant that Castoriadis (1987, 1997) talks about radical imagination; unsettled and unsettling imagination, imagination not limited to already given and known forms. This imagination does not allow itself to be held and contained, nor to be put into place in a clear and assignable relation to sensibility and thought. For Castoriadis every interpretation of the imagination from the standpoint of function is therefore a reduction; its processes can be elucidated and interpreted but not explained. Yet, ‘function’ is precisely what the ‘usefulness’ criterion that haunts the organizational creativity literature always imposes. But this is really a newness that is always-already boxed in by the demand of dominant (organizational) interests, an outcome of which is that technical innovation totally dominates any social innovation. As Castoriadis (2010: 82) put it: ‘everyone is in favor of progress, therefore progressive, and since such progress is always the same thing, it is mere preservation, at the deepest level, of what is’. Furthermore, if we look at the organizational creativity literature with Castoriadis we notice that it is dominated by a methodological individualism of substantial naiveté, with academics continuing to talk and write as if Freud had never existed and as if human beings’ motivations were trivially simple and ‘rational’. What seems to matter above all is to shore up and assure the creativity theory: of what is valid in its very necessity and determinacy. Imagination is, however, in its essence rebellious against determinacy. If we are to engage seriously with Castoriadis’s thought we have to acknowledge in our teaching that the concepts of creativity and imagination can have no definite, uncontested content that gives us somehow privileged access to the new and valuable.

In my own teaching I have gradually started building in more time and space for such a critical yet practical reflection on the nature and history of the concepts of creativity and imagination. During a typical twenty hour course (spread over five 4-hour days) I would devote the first two days on explaining the basic tenets of the creativity literature whilst also introducing basic creativity techniques as found in the practitioner literature (Bills and Genasi 2003; Gogatz and Mondejar 2005; Proctor, 2005). After practicing some of these techniques on both artificial problems and issues relating to the students’ work or educational context, I would then encourage them to apply some of these techniques (around mind-sets, conceptual blocks and reversals in particular) during the second day with the aim of challenging the very tenets of the creativity literature (i.e. its focus on individuals and groups, and on ‘containing’ and explaining the creative process): What are the mind-sets at work here? How can we reverse some of these basic assumptions? I have found that such techniques from the practitioner literature can be fruitfully used to subvert some of the taken-for-granted creativity discourse. It is important of course to give the students a degree of confidence in applying the techniques whilst complementing this approach with a rich historical narrative around the idea of ‘imagination’ of the kind outlined above, so that they can connect their own ‘creative challenging’ to this way of thinking. I also use recent videos at the end of day two or the start of day three that link the idea of creativity to wider economic and social issues. *Surviving Progress* (2011) is a recent example of a video that I have used to good effect. It shows how past civilizations were destroyed by ‘progress traps’ – alluring technologies and belief systems that serve immediate needs but ransom the future – and goes on to challenge basic assumptions of our own society (also see Sinclair and Bell in this volume). Again this allows the students to consider critically the notions of creativity and imagination. Over the years I have thus made my creativity teaching both more theoretical (in terms of introducing a philosophic-historical narrative around imagination) and more practical (in terms of getting the students to engage with traditional concepts and ideas using basic creativity tools). What becomes squeezed in my classes, and to some extent dismantled, is the mainstream creativity mantra. Yet, the point here is that we should not simply reject what is currently being done in creativity research and teaching, but rather that we should try and insert an imaginative/instituting dimension into what is quite a petrified instituted field. In Castoriadis’s vocabulary, we have to use the resources of an ensemblistic-identitary logic to somehow transgress it. Just as Castoriadis created a language of his own in using terms like ‘ensemblistic-identitary’, ‘legein’, ‘teukhein’; by shifting the emphasis of the term ‘creativity’ to the term ‘imagination’ – and the historical-philosophical intervention it implies – we can bring in ‘new’ determinations in thinking about ‘the new’ without immediately subordinating them to the significations and determinations that already dominate the field of creativity. After all, as Bourdieu (1990) already suggested, the struggle to know reality almost always has to begin with a struggle against words.

During the second half of the course I introduce the students to a variant of the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) model (Parnes, 1987), namely the MPIA process (Rickards and De Cock 1994; Rickards and Moger 2006). MPIA stands for Map/Mess – Perspective – Idea – Action. Each phase has a diverging (opening up) and converging (closing down) moment. The students are first asked to come up with a collective representation (the Map) of the problem or organisational situation they are facing. The emphasis here is very much on collectively building a platform of understanding. The actual form this representation can take varies, but the basic version involves the use of flipchart paper and marker pens. Once this platform of understanding is established (and very often it gets adapted throughout the process) the students move on to the Perspectives stage. Here they are encouraged to develop the imaginative capacity of putting themselves in another person’s place, play with counterfactuals, and generate as many perspectives as possible on the given problem or situation. They are also encouraged to use various creativity techniques at this stage. I tend to leave the progression to the Idea stage deliberately vague these days, using the metaphorical reframing of the problem at hand, and the subsequent ideas or solutions for that problem in the metaphorical domain, as a launch pad for the Idea stage proper. In the Action stage basic techniques such as force-field analysis or the impact-ease matrix are used to evaluate ideas. I tend to focus most effort in terms of guidance on the first two phases where students are really trying to take the messy reality they are faced with apart. The latter two stages are more about putting it together again in a different way and it is here that confusion and frustration can become quite productive.

Applying the MPIA model involves a group project where the students work on an organizational problem of their own choosing or that of an invited organization (these have included an investment bank, a housing charity, a hospital, a motorcar franchise, and a local council). Students have a significant amount of scope to structure this assignment within set parameters: they have to move through all the stages of the problem solving model and critically reflect on the overall process using course readings in writing up their report. My approach has shifted over the years from getting students to stick to the stages of the model and generate ‘actionable ideas’ for changing or improving the organisation, to implicitly encouraging them to get ‘productively’ lost in the stages of model. I achieve this by taking more of an analyst type role – le sujet supposé savoir (or ‘the subject supposed to know’; Lacan, 1977) – than a facilitator role. Of course I need to inspire confidence in my students (i.e. that I am on top of the material and that I understand what they are doing) and I am the one imposing the model on them in the first place, but I very much aim to keep the actual learning at this point subject to the determinations the students themselves introduce, thus allowing the unbounded and collective dimensions of imagination to come to the fore. To quote from a reflection on a recent group project:

As we stepped from one part of the model to another we felt that some parts were natural whilst others held us back... When we broadened out at each stage it felt slightly disorienting. At many points in the process we found it difficult to focus and regularly asked ourselves: Where are we? What do we do next? The process felt more manageable closed down... Some stages we went over more than once and sometimes we went out of sequence... Metaphors and reversals were used at almost every stage of the process even though we knew they were for the ideas stage... The process was genuinely useful and will be taken into the real life ‘mess’...

It is precisely when the students rely on me too much in checking whether they are ‘doing the right thing’ that perhaps the outcomes are the least interesting. I continuously encourage students to trust the process whilst at the same time trusting their own imagination (again a case of using ensemblistic-identitary logic to somehow transgress that logic). A key factor is also to work on something that genuinely holds their interest and is meaningful to them so they can keep the energy and motivation levels up. Invariably the groups that get seriously stuck at some point deliver the most surprising and genuinely challenging projects. These are the projects that really take a problem or situation apart and reassemble it in fairly idiosyncratic ways. It is this achievement of ‘taking reality apart and putting it together again’ as a student once commented, even if there is no clear productive ‘outcome’, that leads to the most rewarding learning experiences. And if students do get temporarily stuck at a particular point in the process, I tend to remind them of a beloved Castoriadis quote:

To think is to enter the Labyrinth. . . . It is to lose oneself amidst the galleries which exist only because we never tire of digging them; to turn round and round at the end of a cul-de-sac whose entrance has been shut off behind us—until, inexplicably, this spinning around opens up in the surrounding walls cracks which offer passage (Castoriadis 1986: ix-x).

Of course Castoriadis’s thought has implications for the modern Business School beyond the teaching of creativity courses. Imagination as Castoriadis conceives it involves projecting oneself into a future situation which is opened up on all sides to the unknown. In this sense its key function could be to provide a counterweight to the actuality of the organizational world and to make us think how we and our organizations might be otherwise, rather than featuring as some kind of super-problem solving device within clearly (even though not explicitly) delineated societal parameters (De Cock et al. 2013b). Furthermore, Castoriadis reminds us that we always live in an imaginary relationship to what we believe to be our ‘real’ organizational world. Social imaginary significations actively create a ‘representation’ of the organizational world that shapes the psyche of individuals, making them believe that the representation *is* the reality. These imaginary significations create clusters of affects, permeating the whole of organizational life (Castoriadis 1997). Our institutions and the imaginary significations these institutions bear and convey thus posit and define what is the weight, pertinence, and value of some given information at any given time, which organizational actors will act upon (Castoriadis 2010).

Since a Business School audience has various levels of interest in, and sophistication about, the theories and examples they are exposed to, management education must be necessarily multi-layered to appeal to various groups. We would therefore be well advised *not* to turn our humanities inspired teaching into a purely philosophical or historical investigation. Such an investigation always has to be connected to situations students face in the here-and-now, which they then somehow can tinker with; taking them apart and putting them back together again. Here existing management tools which somehow become ‘*Umfunktioniert*’(rebuilt and re-adapted), to use a Brechtian term, can assist in the process. Specifically, a humanities-inspired take on creativity as ‘imagination’ can reclaim and revitalise the ‘trash’ of creativity training concepts, techniques and examples (‘nine dots’ anyone?) by putting them on a broader canvas and giving them back their suggestive character, and thus the capacity to produce effects by showing things that students suddenly realise they have never seen or experienced before. Rather than some extra utensil in the modern manager’s toolbox, creativity/imagination can thus become (again) ‘a continual regaining of what human beings have never lost’ (Iser 1993: 240). More generally, a Castoriadis-inspired Business School teaching would not be so much concerned with imparting ‘knowledge’ than with calling into question our quotidian organized world, the organization of which is always dependent on specific social imaginary significations. In his exploration of the interplay between the instituting and the instituted imaginary, and the operation of what he calls the ensemblistic-identitary logic (a concept far richer and more suggestive than the over-used ‘mind-set’), Castoriadis opens up a space for thinking ‘the new’ into our historical-organizational moment – he writes about the ‘irruption of the instituting imaginary in and through the activity of an anonymous collective’ (2010: 333) – a move that is particularly pertinent against the background of almost permanent financial crises and the seeming deadlock in dealing with the huge challenges of climate change. A Castoriadis-inspired Business School teaching would thus induce us to render strange what has become too familiar and aim to unsettle the fundamental social imaginaries which hold us all in thrall.

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**NOTES**

1. Examples of such social imaginary significations include: the God of monotheistic religions, the State, the Commodity, Money, the Party, Citizenship (Castoriadis, 1997). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In turn, we as individuals only are what we are by embodying the imaginary significations of our respective societies, to the extent that we are these “walking, working, drinking etc. imaginary significations” (Castoriadis, 1997: 107). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Elsewhere Castoriadis (1997b: 367) describes the psyche as, “a massive and monstrous case of inadaptation. This inadaptation is, somehow or other, subdued by the social institution and the socialization of the psyche – which certainly has, in this regard, a value, not ‘adaptive’, but one of survival: if humanity had not created the institution, it would have disappeared as a living species”. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. As Castoriadis (1997) pointed out in a late article, *legein* and *teukhein* are not concepts of Greek philosophy but Greek words he used to construct new concepts. The main use of “lego” (from which “legein” comes) in Ancient Greek and Modern Greek is “to speak” [lego] (and “speaking” [legein]). Its noun is “logos” which means “discourse”, “speech”, etc. "Teukhein" is not really used in Modern Greek, although its noun [teukhos] is still used (for example, when we want to speak about the “issue” of a journal as distinct from other issues). In Ancient Greek it meant “construct”, “produce”, “build”, etc. I am most grateful to Yannis Stavrakakis (personal communication) for this particular insight into Modern and Ancient Greek. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)