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Envisioning Autonomy through Improvising and Composing: Castoriadis visiting creative music education practice

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Abstract

Do psychological perspectives constitute the only way through which the role of musical creativity in education can be addressed, researched and theorised? This essay attempts to offer an alternative view of musical creativity as a deeply social and political form of human praxis, by proposing a perspective rooted in the thought of the political philosopher and activist Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–1997). This is done in two steps. First, an attempt is made to place the pursuit of the concept of musical creativity within a larger educational and societal context of conflicting trajectories that run through (a) Modernity and (b) Education. Then, I revisit the issue of educational value of improvising and composing through creating conceptual links between the process of music-making through improvisation and composition and the project of political autonomy as conceived by Castoriadis. By foregrounding instituting imaginary over instituted imaginary, improvising and composing become active processes of positing new legitimacies, and of creating a music-making context that searches for its own foundations. It is in and through creative musical praxis that we can think about issues of hierarchies, musical values, social dimensions of different music-making processes, our relationship to past values and to historical dimensions of music. By arguing that improvisation and composition might be seen as ways of positing the issue of political autonomy in musical terms, this paper emphasises the role of improvisation and composition as a mode of potentially transformative educational practice that may foster the development of critical consciousness, linking music education to a larger project of re-discovering and at the same time re-defining democracy.

Keywords: music education, Cornelius Castoriadis, autonomy, musical creativity, musical improvisation, musical composition

> [A]rtistic practices are not 'exceptions' to other practices. They represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities. (Rancière, 2004, p. 45)

> You've got to play what you don't know. Which means that you're forever learning how to do something and then un-learning it. This is how we live (Michael Ray and John Gilmore, in Bell, 2003, p. 42).

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> The culmination of this process is the project of setting up [*instauration*] an *autonomous society:* that is to say, a society capable of explicitly self-instituting itself, capable therefore of putting into question its already given institutions, its already established representations of the world. (Castoriadis, 1991c, p. 136)

1. Introduction

Sitting under the sun I am carelessly browsing a newspaper magazine dedicated to the virtues of lifestyle. The editorial catches my eye. It is titled 'The democracy of the aesthetic'. With excessive as much as unfounded confidence and in a deceptively anti-rhetoric jargon the article informs us that currently 'we are experiencing the democracy of the aesthetic' (Tsimelas, 2008, p. 6); appreciation of style thrives, as everyone demands to be surrounded by beautiful, smart and intelligently designed objects. The message is simple and abundantly clear, leaving me wondering where I had been when all this happened. From now on, whoever wants to sell should work hard producing masterpieces of creative advertising which satisfy the high aesthetic standards of the consumers-participants of this democratically-spread aesthetic, and (I would add), comply to the imaginary significations which permeate the regime on which this democratic dissemination of 'the aesthetic' is rooted.

Such pseudo-egalitarian gestures of thought masterfully appropriate and lightheartedly distort the concepts they use; the deluge of consumerism removes all possible radical meanings from concepts such as 'aesthetic', 'democracy', 'creativity', 'openness', obscuring their histories and cutting them off once and for all from their adventurous 'lives' in different socio-historical and theoretical contexts; lives which could be the stringboard of illumination and critique of our current educational situation. The result is closure; as well as the fact that often parroting passes for dialogue. Political philosopher and activist Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–1997) has aptly described this state of affairs as 'an immense social-historical current that is heading in this direction and that is making everything become insignificant' (n.d. b, p. 131). Castoriadis noted that 'the word *revolutionary*—like the words *creation* and *imagination*—has become an advertising slogan; this is what a few years ago was called *cooptation*' (Castoriadis, ibid., p. 131).

This phenomenon goes hand in hand with the gradual retreat of the public sphere; as Paolo Virno (2004) has noted, the modern world experiences a gradual disappearance of the public sphere, with political action being dissolved into an ineffective form of labour: 'political action now seems, in a disastrous way, like some superfluous duplication of the experience of labor' (p. 51) and has been subsumed under what Castoriadis called 'the capitalist-bureaucratic structure of society' (2007d, pp. 133–134). More and more, political debate is being replaced by technocratic discourse coupled with the rise of a militant individualism supported by an excessive emphasis on measured and profitable productivity. We seem to be going through a period where the right to free speech becomes increasingly devoid of meaning. This is an indication that 'the *insignificant* character of public speech in an all-encompassing democracy which appears more and more as being based on *deafness*' (Labelle, 2001, p. 102) creates a curious situation, which requires a re-definition of how one is able to contribute to alternative perspectives and practices.

Castoriadis was highly critical of a shallow notion of 'openness' that supposedly permeates contemporary Western democratic states[1]. The latter he characterised as liberal oligarchies: 'oligarchies because they are dominated by a specific stratum of people, liberal because that stratum consents a number of negative or defensive liberties to citizens. What, then, is the concrete content of that "openness" today, in these societies? It is generalized conformism' (2007d, p. 126; see also 1997b, p. 43).

It is exactly because of current trivialization of 'openness' that we need to resist the deluge of neutralisation. In the field of music education we need to resist to the neutralisation of the subversive potential of radical music education movements that sought to liberate music education from anachronistic practices and to transform education into a way of enabling children to experience '[m]usic as a model of possibility' (Paynter, 2000, p. 24). As a means of resistance to conformism and neutralisation, this paper suggests a reconceptualisation of musical creativity as a deeply social and political form of human praxis. After presenting a general scheme for contextualising the pursuit of the concept of musical creativity within a larger educational and societal context of conflicting trajectories, we revisit the notions of improvising and composing through creating conceptual links between the process of music-making through improvisation and composition and the project of political autonomy as conceived by Castoriadis.[2] This paper argues that by foregrounding instituting imaginary over instituted imaginary, improvising and composing become active processes of positing new legitimacies, and of creating a music-making context that searches for its own foundations. By arguing that improvisation and composition might be seen as ways of positing the issue of political autonomy in musical terms, this paper emphasises the role of improvisation and composition as a mode of potentially transformative educational practice that may foster the development of critical consciousness, linking music education to a larger project of re-discovering and at the same time re-defining democracy.[3]

2. Conflicting Trajectories that Permeate Modernity

A core argument of Castoriadis is that two conflicting, radically incompatible trajectories run through modernity: the first is the 'the unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery' (1991g, p. 272), and the second is the trajectory of *autonomy*.[4] Castoriadis refers to these trajectories as *social imaginary significations*. The concept of *social imaginary signification* lies at the core of his conceptual system and refers to 'the immensely complex web of meanings that permeate, orient, and direct the whole life of the society considered, as well as the concrete individuals that bodily constitute society' (1997a, p. 7).[5] The following excerpt concisely presents Castoriadis' thesis on the core social imaginary significations that characterise modernity:

> At the heart of the modern era, and ever since the end of the 'Dark Ages', two intrinsically antinomic but connected social imaginary significations have arisen ... On the one hand, autonomy has animated the emancipatory and democratic movements which traverse the history of the West as well as the rebirth of questioning and rational inquiry. *The unlimited expansion of 'rational' mastery*, on the other hand, is at the basis of the institution of capitalism

> through its various phases (including, by a monstrous inversion: totalitarianism) ... [R]ational 'mastery', when indefinitely expanded, can in reality be only a *pseudorational* mastery. ... Completely symptomatic in this regard is the present-day tendency toward the 'automatization of decisions'. (1991g, pp. 272–273)

Castoriadis provided detailed analyses of the ways in which 'progress', 'development', total separation between the logic of scientific progress and the political ends of 'development', belief into the limitless power of reason, 'the "virtual omnipotence" of technique' (1991e, p. 192), and the 'pseudo-mathematisation' of economic theory (2007a, pp. 56–61) and 'the "rationality" of capitalism' (ibid., p. 47), jointly constitute the core elements of the modern social imaginary signification of rational mastery.[6] Although Castoriadis was very critical of the post-war situation, he was at the same time very careful *not* to end up in a nostalgic mood for any particular past socio-historical organisation—and this despite his open but not at all uncritical admiration for Athenian democracy (1997c, esp. pp. 106–107; 2008). Castoriadis was always looking for what he called the germ of autonomy, for signs of social imaginary significations that hold the promise of developing into the pursuit of social and individual autonomy: 'I am speaking intentionally of *germ*, for autonomy, social as well as individual, is a *project*' (1991d, p. 163). He was always looking for moments and processes of rupture, for processes of 'liquidating the old significations, and perhaps creating new ones' (1991e, p. 205). Women's silent struggle for emancipation is a characteristic example mentioned by Castoriadis, 1991e, pp. 204–205), for political praxis that occurs 'first, "without foundations" ... and second, without the "authority" or credentials of traditional institutions or theory' (Naranch, 2002, p. 72). This germ has been located at various historical moments, from Athenian democracy (Castoriadis, 1991b) to the open discussions held in Sorbonne auditoriums during the events of May 1968 (Castoriadis, 1987b).[7] This is what permits us to proceed into examining the possibility of viewing the process of musical creativity as emerges through composing and improvising as a potential locus of the germ of autonomy. But before examining this issue, it is suggested that we concentrate into how the two grand trajectories identified by Castoriadis as fundamental characteristics of modernity manifest themselves in the realm of education.

3. A Castoriadian Perspective on Education

It seems to me that in the field of educational theory as well as in the everyday teaching and learning lives of people, we are currently experiencing the simultaneous deployment of two quite distinctive, even radically opposing trajectories that correspond to the trajectories of modernity outlined above.

3.1 Enforcement of the Trajectory of Corporate Logic

The trajectory of unlimited expansion of 'rational' mastery has led to a situation whereby 'what counts is whatever can be counted' (Castoriadis, 1991e, p. 184). And this has not left the realm of education untouched. A characteristic narrative snapshot offered by James Marshall (2009) could be seen as capturing exactly the core of what is argued in this part:

> Some five years ago in a class of final year Bachelor students, one student said that after her recent teaching practice her practice supervisor asked her this question at the outset of their post-lesson meeting. 'In lesson X, which I observed, how much value do you believe that you added to those students?' Not, how much do you believe that they learned?; not, how well do you think that you taught?; and not, how might you do it the next time you teach X? (p. 81)

The concept of 'adding value' in the above quote forcefully captures the unparalleled attack of corporate modes of organisation on educational policy, structure, and content and on attitudes towards teaching and learning that is currently under way. Education increasingly becomes a tool for the enforcement of the logic and values of globalised post-Fordist capitalism, discrediting the imperative of social justice, as well as its role in countering exploitation. As Peter McLaren argues, current globalised capitalism constitutes:

> ... an abundant and all-permeating social universe that, in its endless and frenetic drive to expand, co-operates in implacable and irreparable denials of social justice and shameless practices of exploitation. Such is the pervasive reach of capital that no aspects of the human condition are left unrent. Indeed, our very subjectivities are stuck in the 'muck' of capital. (2001, p. xv)

The continually increasing regulative power of what Stephen Ball (2003) calls 'performativity'[8] is a manifestation of the power that economism exercises upon educational policy and practice. Economism 'defines the purpose and potential of education' (Ball, 2005, p. 7) and this has important consequences for the teacher/pupil relationships as well as for the relationships between knowledge and students. The emphasis on performativity is intimately linked to the increasing privatisation of education. But as Ball argues,

> ... privatisation is not simply a technical change in the management of the delivery of educational services—it involves changes in the meaning and experience of education, what it means to be a teacher and a learner. It changes who we are and our relation to what we do, entering into all aspects of our everyday practices and thinking—into the ways that we think about ourselves and our relations to others, even our most intimate social relations. It is changing the framework of possibilities within which we act. (ibid., p. 26)

Moreover, the emphasis on performativity entails the total collapse of any notion of school's responsibility for working against the perpetuation of the each time existing social inequalities, let alone for critical theorising on issues of social justice and its role in education. In fact, its aim is to render such discussions both outmoded and irrelevant. Turning children and their families into 'customers' is supported by a comeback of the ideology of school's neutrality and its exclusive focus on knowledge transmission (see for example Polony, 2005). But a primarily economy-driven educational system creates new forms of inequality. Turning families into customers entails that some are better customers than others: 'In this economy, some children then are of high value, are

"value-adding" and much sought after, others, of low value, who "add negative value" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 140) are, where possible, avoided' (Ball, 2005, p. 14).

On another level, exhaustive monitoring and measurement of performance exhausts the process of education itself to such an extent that preference for educational technology which successfully produces instant results leads to an increasing exclusion of experimental practices and a preference for 'institutionally-safe' musical practices. In the UK, according to *The Times*, the 2008 report on the national Key Stage 2 examination results (whose markings, incidentally, have been assigned to a private contractor), notes that '[t]esting was supposed to act as a snapshot of learning—but today that snapshot is often the "the sum of pupils' learning" ' (Frean, 2008, p. 15). Yet, the headline of this article stresses that the problem lies in that the test scores are 'too generous for 1 in 3 pupils' (ibid., p. 15). Down with mediocrity then; let the tests reveal the 'bitter truth' as early as possible; let's 'name, differentiate and classify' (Ball, 2005, p. 19). In the US context, high-stakes testing policies of *No Child Left Behind* encourage 'a kind of rote, short-term, drill-and-skill approach to teaching, one that helps encourage "teachers to focus on low-level knowledge and skills, resulting in less in-depth understanding and less focus on higher-order thinking skills" (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003, p. 40)' (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 5). In all these cases schooling is considered as being 'about clear inputs and outputs, assessments and measurements that can be correlated and compared across disparate sites. Knowledge itself has come to be treated like a perfectly transparent commodity, one that can be treated and dispensed independent of particular actors in context' (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 6).

From this perspective the crisis in education is the result of the corporate attack in education and the new forms of inequality and injustice that this state of affairs is currently creating. The line of criticism that has been outlined above does not aim at painting a bleak picture but at engaging with an analysis of the workings of neo-liberal educational policies and ideological convictions. As Henry Giroux (2002) has pointed out, 'A democratically engaged cultural politics requires that progressives understand and challenge how neoliberalism undermines meaningful democracy in its relentless attempts to valorize private space over public space, commercial goods over public goods, and a wholly privatized, personal notion of citizenship over public citizenship and social provision' (p. 103). And I regard creative music education exactly as such a kind of cultural practice and politics, in need of greater awareness of its role and potential as a vehicle for critical awareness and social transformation—this is, after all, one of the fundamental goals of the present paper.

3.2 Education as a Vehicle for Emancipation: The Death of Authority

Although the trajectory outlined above seems to be the prevalent trend of our times, there is also another facet of the contemporary crisis in education (which began slowly with the advent of modernity, but continues well into our post-industrial—some would say 'postmodern'—world), a crisis which, instead of being a cause of laments, should be seen as the result of a process of opening up debates that had been closed for a very long time. In fact, this trajectory might be seen as a source of hope. What I mean here by hope resists the theological ramifications of the term; rather, hope is here regarded as

'anticipatory rather than messianic, mobilizing rather than therapeutic' (Giroux, 2004, p. 38), a necessary ingredient of 'a temporal orientation to the future' (Browne, 2005, p. 78) that aims at informing our present action.[9]

This second trajectory in the contemporary educational world relates to the death of authority (Arendt, 2006/1968a; 2006/1968b) and its consequences for education (Renaut, 2004). Educational control and the exercise of power within the educational process cannot anymore be justified by relying on traditional modes of authority. Treating children-as-equals within a democratic context has irrevocably opened up questions of legitimacy of control, of knowledge and its accepted forms, and of ways of approaching teaching. Constant critique and questioning of established modes of practice go hand in hand with attempts to justify educational aims on nonfoundational philosophical perspectives (Renaut, 2004).

The issue of creating a common educational ethos cannot be answered by recourse to unquestioned constants borrowed from the past. The content of these constants has to be reasoned and debated. Dealing with the issue of educational power, of how education responds to issues of social (in)justice, (in)equality, as well as the role that should be given to children's voice, has placed us into a state of creative ambiguity which can only lead to tentative answers (Renaut, 2004); we simply do not know how to create an open and democratic school that centres around the maxim of equality and is based on non-foundational and anti-essentialist modes of discourse. But the realization of not knowing—the encounter of what Judith Butler calls 'moments of unknowingness' (2005, p. 136)—means that we resist ready-made answers, acknowledging the value of debating, arguing and experimenting with ideas and practices. Drawing on Adorno's *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (2001), Butler brought to our attention the violence that inheres in the imposition of anachronistic modes of morality and obsolete modes of collective ethos:[10]

> ... although the collective ethos has become anachronistic, it has not become past; it insists itself into the present as an anachronism. The ethos refuses to become past, and violence is the way in which it imposes itself upon the present. Indeed, it not only imposes itself upon the present, but also seeks *to eclipse the present*. (Butler, 2005, p. 5, emphasis added)

An explicit link could be drawn between the violence of imposing obsolete codes of morality with the aim of supposedly restoring what is thought of as the lost moral bonds of (largely mythical) collectives, and the enforcement of disciplinary/authoritarian logics in educational practice, as well as the imposition of unifying narratives pertaining to music history, the universality of the aesthetic and music education's scope, goals and values (Bergeron, 1992; Bowman, 2003; Morton, 2005).

Another important strand of this trajectory of emancipation relates to the question of the legitimacy of raising the question of the relation between politics and education, and of bringing political considerations within the realm of education. This issue has opened once and for all, with education being a field of public life where important political issues are being debated. Let me only remind you of the highly informative debate between Ralph Ellison and Hannah Arendt concerning the Little Rock case.[11] The open questioning of schools alleged neutrality should be seen as part of a larger context: the exposition of the cultural, ideological and political embeddedness of educational thought and practice and

of research practice itself (Popkewitz, 1990), the openness to post-positivistic research paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, and for a recent discussion of contemporary threats to this openness see Maxwell, 2004), as well as to critical, feminist and post-colonial perspectives, and the recovery of hitherto silenced voices and practices of resistance, has been, from the 1960s onwards, an active and hard-to-ignore intellectual trend.

4. Creative Music-Making: From the Trajectory of Psychologisation to that of Politicisation

As already stated, the two conflicting trajectories that have been abstracted with reference to the realm of education can be regarded as manifestations of the two larger trajectories that, for Castoriadis, permeate modernity: the first is '*[t]he unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery*' (1991g, p. 272), and the second is the trajectory of autonomy. In this paper I argue that music education's approaches to collaborative composition and improvisation have followed pathways which can be described in terms of trajectories that are analogous with those societal and educational trajectories we have already discussed. The first trajectory relates to the development of psychological perspectives of musical creativity that sought to place it under the auspices of a form of scientific rationalisation that is positivistic, individualistic and essentialist, favouring safe predictions, normalisation and effectiveness. The second trajectory is that which can be described as an unfinished—and often deeply ill-understood—project of the 1960s and the 1970s where group improvisation and collaborative composition were music educators' response to the death of musical and educational authority and to the call for creating an education which is a vehicle of social transformation and allows us to glimpse to the possibility of envisioning different realities[12] (Figure 1). I find it particularly important to address this issue at a time when the return of a reactionary logic that laments the death of the worship of musical past sweepingly ridicules the efforts of past progressivism.[13]

Therefore, the aim of our present endeavour is to place the educational value and potential of improvisation and composition under a perspective that (a) goes beyond psychologistic conceptions of musical creativity and (b) re-defines the role of creative work, highlighting its potential subversive role against '"automatization of decisions"' (ibid., p. 273) which seems to pervade everyday educational philosophy and practice.[14] It is my firm conviction that unless we find a way of letting grand theoretical constructions—like that of Castoriadis' conceptual world—speak to our immediate contexts where we live, think and act, the divide between thought and action will get larger and larger, and our local practices will keep on being regulated by abstract policy-making establishments. Unless we find a way of seeing how personal and political autonomy might materialise in particular creative music-making contexts, our theorisation of the value of music-making and its possible connections with the development of responsible action will be limited. In what follows, I would therefore like to explore more specifically the possibility of creating conceptual relationships between the process of music-making through collaborative composition and improvisation and the project of social and individual autonomy as conceived by Castoriadis. But before proceeding we should try to clarify the particular meaning that the concept of autonomy holds within the universe of Castoriadis' thought.

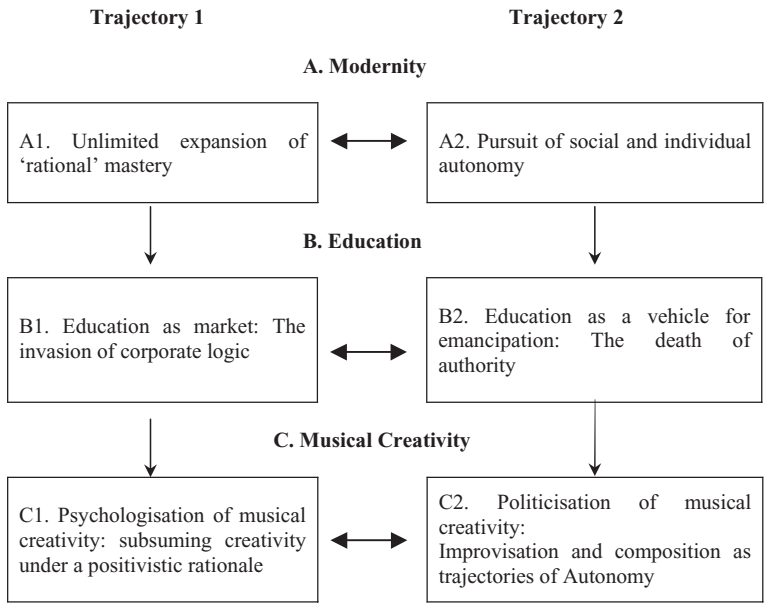

Figure 1: Contextualizing improvisation and composition as trajectories of autonomy
An admittedly schematic presentation of the two main trajectories that run through (a) Modernity (b) Education (c) Musical Creativity. The aim of this diagram is to contextualize the pursuit of the concept of musical creativity within a larger educational and societal context of conflicting trajectories. It is argued that through such a contextualization one might be able to create a viable alternative socio-political pathway for the development of creative musical thought and action.

4.1 Defining Autonomy

For Castoriadis, autonomy can be defined as the project of initiating (a) the activity of explicit self-institution and (b) the lucid, reflective questioning of the very legitimacy of this institution. In his own words, autonomy is 'the capacity, of a society or of an individual, to act deliberately and explicitly in order to modify its law—that is to say, its form' (1997f, p. 340). Moreover, autonomy constitutes 'the reflective return upon oneself, of criticism and self-criticism, of a questioning that neither knows nor accepts any limit' (Castoriadis, n.d. b, p. 151). For Castoriadis, autonomy is not just a by-product of a particular form of politics. Rather, 'Politics is a project of autonomy. Politics is the reflective and lucid collective activity that aims at the overall institution of society. It pertains to everything in society that is participable and shareable' (1991d, p. 169). Thus, for Castoriadis we can talk of the existence of politics *only* in those cases when the project of autonomy becomes a central concern of collectivities. In this sense, current liberal democracies are not dealing with politics *at all*—rather, they constitute powerful oligarchic bureaucratic regimes.

Autonomy has two facets, the internal and the external; it is a project that operates both on the level of individual and on that of the collective. On the level of the individual, autonomy entails on the one hand the acknowledgement of the role of radical imagination, its endless capacity for creation, its indeterminate spontaneity, and on the other its capacity for endless questioning of its own history. In the words of Castoriadis, individual

autonomy 'consists in the instauration of an *other* relationship between the reflective instance and the other psychical instances as well between the present and the history which made the individual such as it is' (1991d, p. 165).

At a collective level, 'The project of collective autonomy means that the collectivity, which can only exist as instituted, recognizes and recovers its instituting character explicitly, and questions itself and its own activities' (1991a, p. 20). In contrast with definitions of individuality as possessive, bounded, and guarded against the others, Castoriadis emphasised that 'my freedom *begins* where the other's freedom begins' (1987a, p. 92), adding that 'without the autonomy of others there is no collective autonomy—and outside such a collectivity I cannot be *effectively* autonomous' (1990, p. 85). This entails the adoption of a radical stance towards plurality: 'If I accept the idea of autonomy, as *such* (and not only because "it is good for me") ... then the existence of an indefinite plurality of individuals belonging to society entails immediately the idea of democracy defined as the effective possibility of equal participation of all in instituting activities as well as in explicit power' (1991d, p. 168).

Castoriadis revisited Athenian democracy, the Freudian unconscious, Marxian praxis, and Kantian autonomy, producing a novel theory of autonomy which sought to overcome the weaknesses of the traditional concepts of (liberal) democracy, subjectivity, political praxis and liberal conceptions of (rational) autonomy. As Andreas Kalyvas (1998, p. 163) notes,

> From Marx, Castoriadis preserved the emancipatory project of the revolutionary transformation of society and the radical intuition that history is open and indeterminate, susceptible to the struggle and creative action of self-organized collective actors. From Freud, he appropriated the extraordinary discovery of the unconscious, which he developed into a theory of the radical imagination as the source of genuine historical creation, thereby cleansing it of the reductionist and positivistic tendencies found in traditional psychoanalysis.

Despite its Kantian origins Castoriadis' conception of autonomy breaks away from its conception as the result of rational judgement, and therefore from a conception of autonomy as a state of freedom based on rationality.[15] More specifically, Castoriadis moves away from Kant's notion of autonomy in three important respects (Kalyvas, 1998; Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 30). He cleanses autonomy of its transcendental ramifications 'by eliminating the rational mastery of inner nature, the unconscious, and the repression of heteronomous desires' (Kalyvas, 1998, p. 163). Also he moves away from conceptions of autonomy as self-determination arguing 'for a substantive reinterpretation of autonomy as self-realization' (ibid.). Finally, Castoriadis abolishes the idea of absolute foundations, which can be justified by regression to teleological conceptions of human nature: 'Castoriadis decenters autonomy by avoiding the postulate that there is a "total man," an "absolute subject" behind the act of self legislation' (ibid.). Having re-defined and radicalised central concepts of the western philosophical tradition, Castoriadis could not any more rely on traditional forms of justification. He was of course aware of that, and he went even further, arguing that 'The idea of autonomy can be neither founded nor proved since it is presupposed by any foundation of proof. (Any attempt to "found" reflectiveness presupposes reflectiveness itself)' (Castoriadis, 1991d, p. 172). The only

inherent and distinctive human capacity that precedes all other is for Castoriadis the potential to create: 'It is our capacity for creation that shows us why the essence of man could not be logic, not be rationality' (1997g, p. 105). Autonomy is itself a creation, one that seeks to move beyond essentialism while permitting the possibility of limitless critique of one's own foundations, resisting postmodern inclinations towards the collapse of the possibility of critique altogether. Castoriadis aimed at an 'explicit and emphatic understanding of the concept of autonomy as a normative criterion with which one judges, criticizes, and chooses between different institutional structures and practices. ... His concept of autonomy emerges precisely as a viable response to the aporias of critical thought' (Kalyvas, 1998, p. 165).

At this point an important clarification parenthesis is necessary. From the arguments presented so far and from what will follow in the remainder on the paper, it is clear that Castoriadis' conception of autonomy cannot be further away from neoliberal notions of 'autonomous chooser' (Marshall, 1996a), as well as from the way autonomy is understood by liberal philosophers of education—i.e. as an advancement towards independent rationality, e.g. R. F. Dearden,[16] or R. S. Peters (see Olssen, 2006)—or educational theorists (e.g. Levinson, 1999; Reich, 2002). Liberal conceptions of autonomy as an educational goal presuppose that the notion of the individual, of the relationship between individual and society, and of rational mastery, are understood in ways that differ radically from those employed by Castoriadis.[17] Employing a Foucaultian perspective, Marshall (1995, 1996b), Fitzsimons (2002), Olssen (2006), and Devine and Irwin (2006) offer a devastating critique of what could be called 'the autonomous chooser fallacy': 'what is presupposed in the notion of the "autonomous chooser", says Marshall, is that the notion of autonomy needed to make choices, and the notion of needs and interests entailed as a result, have not been manipulated or imposed in some way upon the chooser, but are the subject's own. A Foucauldian critique rejects such a possibility' (Olssen, 2006, p. 59). Now, this is exactly what Castoriadis would call a state of heteronomy: 'Pregiven meaning *is* heteronomy' (n.d. a, p. 81) as is the inability to acknowledge the ways in which we are conditioned by means of institutions and practices that exclude our active and continuous questioning of these very institutions and practices.

Having presented the core tenets of Castoriadis' conception of autonomy, we now turn to the field of musical creativity. In what follows, we attempt to substantiate the claim that two distinct trajectories can be identified running through music education's apprehension of creative music-making, and that these trajectories correspond to the larger societal and educational trajectories already presented in this paper (Figure 1).

4.2 Psychologisation of Musical Creativity: The Subsumption of Creativity under a Positivistic Rationale

In her editorial of a recent issue of *Philosophy of Music Education Review* Iris Yob (2007) comments on the tension between creativity and critical thinking that permeates our profession, attempting to reconcile the two 'camps'. However, the conflict between the two, which has persevered in music education thinking for the last fifty years, is not just the result of academic caprice. It rests on the conception of creativity as an inner process that is hidden but nevertheless available to scientific quantification,[18] and as well as to an

understanding of the notion of critique as the result of rational examination of the conceptual and historical dimensions of the issues at hand. Yob's very equation of creative with divergent thinking and of critical with convergent thinking (see ibid., p. 90) is, I argue, a characteristic consequence of the psychologisation of musical creativity; it is a consequence of the pseudo-rationalist deluge that dominated the human sciences in the post-war period with the advent of cognitive psychology. The subsumption of creativity under a rationale that deprives it of political and social dimensions conceals the possibility that creative action might involve (social) critique, that it might be a manifestation of a critical attitude. This in turn rests on an age-old division between theoretical critique—reserved for the realm of philosophy—and action.

Within the field of music education, various research approaches and practical applications place great emphasis on the development of children's creativity (Brophy, 2002; Dolan, 2005; Hickey, 2003a, 2001a, 2001b; Kratus, 1995; Paananen, 2006; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Swanwick & Cavalieri-Franca, 1999; Tafuri, 2006; Walduck, 2005). Many of those approaches, however, fall under the continuous and sweeping deluge of psychologising educational encounters. According to Gur & Wiley (2009) 'psychologization (Apple, 1996) refers to the way in which psychological issues become centralized in theoretical discussions, evacuating critical (including political, philosophic, and societal) issues'[19] (p. 308). They adopt a view of cognition within which creativity emerges as a private mental problem-solving process, even in those cases where the social dimension of creative collaboration is not neglected. Moreover, many studies of children's composing and improvising view creativity as a mental ability, which unfolds in distinct, uniform, and largely pre-defined developmental stages (Brophy, 2002; Hickey, 2001, 2003b; Kratus, 1995; Paananen, 2006; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986).

For example, in relation to Paananen's (2006) study which sought to establish a developmental path of the use of rhythmic structures in children's improvisations, one could directly question whether children, who 'were tested individually in a MIDI environment' (p. 354), were enabled to deal with improvisation or any other form of creating music whatsoever. Against the procrustean power of the MIDI-provided pulse, most qualities that musicians and educators associate with improvisation disappear. And they disappear because of the fundamental logic that permeates the core of the rationale of the research. It is one thing to seek to learn how children think rhythmically in various contexts and quite another to aim at producing universalist claims about of rhythmic development cut off from any meaningful way of making music. Claiming that a 'major development at the dimensional stage (about 5–11 years) happens in *the hierarchical relations of musical event structure*' (ibid. p. 366) rests on the belief that 'music can be studied adequately by reducing it to sequences of pitch and rhythm, devoid of the other conditions that make music "music" ' (Regelski, 1996, p. 6).

Similar problems can be identified in efforts to standardise assessment criteria and procedures and apply them for different purposes. Here I am primarily referring to studies of students' musical creative endeavours which aim at creating hierarchies between children of high and low creativity (Hickey, 2001b), assessing improvisational skills and their development as measurable competencies, 'clean' of all social influences (Kiehn, 2007), using tests to measure children's creative 'aptitude' (e.g. Webster's Measure of Creative Thinking in Music (MCTM-II), see Hickey, 2001b; Webster,

1990), treating person, process, product, place as variables influencing the (pre-defined as) psychological process of creativity (Hickey, 2003b), eliminating questions of meaning, personal value and (social) significance, or turning them into aspects of (the psychological state of) flow or optimal experience (Byrne, MacDonald & Carlton, 2002; MacDonald, Byrne & Carlton, 2006). These approaches to the study of creativity seem to be based on a mixture of essentialism, rationalism, and impressionism that turns creativity into an individualistic trait, which can be measured, predicted and accommodated within already instituted practices.[20] Such perspectives dominate educational approaches to creativity, silencing the very possibility of bringing forward the existence of multiple socio-political dimensions of musical creativity.

The seemingly apolitical perspectives put forward by such studies tend to function as discourses which legitimise the role of psychology as a scientific field which aims at guiding teaching as to what is worthwhile educationally. As a result, issues of adult-child power inequalities, of gender power relationships, of institutional power structures, and of the selection of discourses and practices according to market relevance are silenced. In what follows, I will try to put forward a view of musical creativity that might go beyond the confines of music psychology, a view that might be able to reveal the critical power that resides in collaborative efforts to compose and improvise—this perspective is based on the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis.

4.3 Politicising Musical Creativity: Improvisation and Composition as Trajectories of Autonomy

For Castoriadis, creation is a condition of being, both on the level of the individual and that of the social-historical; it is the capacity and the potential for creating new forms, and not yet another psychological 'factor'. This capacity, this *vis formandi*, is referred to as *the instituting social imaginary*: 'there is, in human collectivities, a power of creation, a *vis formandi*, which I call the instituting social imaginary' (2007b, p. 72). The ability to generate forms of living together and the creation social imaginary significations that permeate these forms of living, and the fact that these forms and these significations are neither contingent nor necessary stand at odds with the whole inherited philosophical tradition. For, as Castoriadis argues, inherited philosophical tradition is either exceedingly 'theological, and therefore reserves creation for God ... or it is rationalist or determinist, and therefore obliged to infer everything that is from first principles (and from what, then, do we infer the first principles?) or else to produce it out of causes (and from what does one produce the first causes?' (ibid., p. 73). The creations that are the result of this *vis formandi* cannot be reduced to purely biological or rational underpinnings. This is sometimes upsetting for those who believe that the role of science, and therefore of research on creativity is to *discover* the rational or biological foundations on which creativity rests.

Castoriadis proposes the radically unsettling notion of *creation* ex nihilo, which emerges out of the workings of the instituting imaginary: 'Creation here means creation *ex nihilo*, bringing into being a form that was not there before, the creation of new forms of being. It is ontological creation: of forms such as language, institution qua institution, music, and painting; or of some specific form, some work of art, be it musical, pictorial,

poetic, or other' (ibid., p. 73). But creation *ex nihilo* (a concept to which Castoriadis ascribes none of the biblical connotations usually associated with it—in fact he vehemently insists that his usage of the term means neither *cum nihilo* or *in nihilo*) does not come about without the use of particular ideas, materials, traditions, and it does not occur but within particular socio-historical contexts. As Castoriadis states,

> ... when humanity creates the institution and signification, it does not 'combine' some 'elements' that it would have found scattered about before it. It creates the *form* institution, and in and through this form it creates *itself* as *humanity* (which is something other than an assembly of bipeds). 'Creation *ex nihilo*', 'creation of form', does not mean 'creation *cum nihilo*', that is to say, without 'means', unconditionally, on a *tabula rasa* ... . [A]ll historical creation takes place upon, in, and through the already instituted (not to mention whatever surrounding 'concrete' conditions there may be). (1990, p. 74)

The study of the consequences of this radical conception of creation and creativity for how we conceive problems of philosophical and political ontology and action was a life-long task Castoriadis set to himself. But what must be stressed is that the notion of creation as espoused here applies (a) both to collectivities and individuals and also (b) both on a grand level—language is a created institution—and on the level of particular creations, which again can be of a grand or smaller scale: Athenian democracy, Bach's *Musical Offering*, or John Paynter's atelier-like music classrooms.[21]

Nowhere is this propensity for creation more visible than in the making of art. For Castoriadis, if art imitates anything at all, then it is Being itself: Being is a *vis formandi*, and art is a *vis formandi*. Thus art making is a metaphor for the propensity of creation that lies at the core of the instituting imaginary. Just as in the realm of social life the instituting imaginary creates a world, music and art create forms that constitute worlds (Castoriadis, 2007g, esp. pp. 137–138). But, historically speaking, the self-conscious apprehension of the creative power of society by both society itself and inherited philosophy has been a rather daunting task: 'the "creative imagination" will remain, philosophically, a mere word and the role that will be recognized for it will be limited to domains that seem ontologically gratuitous (art)' (Castoriadis, 1997e, p. 245). Castoriadis holds that it has been much more difficult to acknowledge the non-foundational and creative nature of the social-historical domain.

The reason for this is that societies live largely in a state of heteronomy, that is, in conditions that do not allow for the questioning of the legitimacy of the socially created norms, institutions, practices and values. The inability to question the prevailing social imaginary significations as well as to effectively participate in forming new institutions, these are the two core constituent elements of heteronomy. The condition of heteronomy entails that the validity of given values and forms of practices, as well as of power hierarchies shall be left untouched.

Music teaching practices which rely on technoscientific rationales or who base the legitimacy of their values and practices on the authority of supposedly value-free, objective scientific conclusions or to inherited musical tradition, live within a state of heteronomy. In Castoriadian terms, their 'ensemblistic-identitary logic' (1997b, p. 38) co-creates social imaginaries that repress the possibility of autonomy and function as a

mode of concealment of exactly those imaginary significations on which this logic is rooted and which lead to heteronomy. In other words, one of the most important consequences of heteronomy is that it conceals the thoroughly social (and thus created) nature of imaginary significations; notice, for example, how the insistence on thinking in terms of controlling how 'can different be good' (Hickey & Lipscomb, 2006, p. 108) is considered as being driven by purely educational values, concealing the possibility that it might be a response to the post-industrial need for survival.[22] Or to give another example: God gave us the present of musical classicism through Mozart's genius, through 'the gift of the otherworldly' (Nettl, 1992, p. 149)[23]—and the structure of the museum of musical works, which constitutes the predominant metaphor of our conception of the musical past (Cook, 1998; Goehr, 1992) has been fixed once and for all (there are a few places left waiting to be occupied by some of our contemporary composers). And this concealment is not something that can be just blown away. It is deeply embodied in how music teachers feel, move and act, becoming agents of the dominant instituted musical imaginary that perpetuates musical heteronomy. This instituted imaginary 'carries with it the normative social meanings, customs, expectations, assumptions, values, prohibitions, and permissions—the habitus and ethos—into which human beings are nurtured from childhood and which they internalize, affirm, challenge, or contest as they make sense of their place, options, responsibilities within a world, both social and physical, whose "nature" and meaning are also instituted in these imaginary significations' (Code, 2006, p. 30, in Grasswick, 2008, p. 153).

Getting out of this vicious circle is no easy task: institutions functioning on the basis of heteronomy both produce and are produced through heteronomous individuals. And of course '[o]nly an autonomous collectivity can shape autonomous individuals—and vice versa' (Castoriadis, 2007e, p. 176). The role of education is crucial, and what I am trying to do here is to sketch a way out of this vicious circle; suggesting that musical composition and improvisation constitute music educational practices that cultivate autonomy. They entail, in other words, the creation of modes of musical action that constitute instituting practices, and at the same time, they create a context for constant questioning. This is my response to the paradox sketched by Castoriadis in the following manner: 'autonomy is the ability to call the given institution of society into question—and that institution itself must make you capable of calling it into question, primarily through education' (ibid., p. 176).

The concept of creation as espoused here is inextricably linked to the advent of *radical instituting imaginary*. This, in turn, is the basis of Castoriadis' conception of *democracy*. Therefore, a music education that places musical creation at the centre might be a means for contributing to the project of radicalising democracy. 'Such an education is impossible without acceptance of the fact that the institutions we give ourselves are neither absolutely necessary in their content nor totally contingent. This signifies that no meaning is given to us as gift, any more than there is any guarantor or guarantee of meaning; it signifies that there is no other meaning than the one we create in and through history' (Castoriadis, 1997f, p. 341). A democratic music education is one that assumes no external guarantees for what constitutes valid and valuable meaning. It is exactly in moments of improvising and composing that students are immersed in processes of (musical) meaning-making without 'any guarantor or guarantee'. The only restriction

that inheres in this process is that of self-limitation. This radical re-conceptualisation of democracy means that 'democracy recognizes no external limits to its instituting power; the sole limits result from its self-limitation' (Castoriadis, n.d. b, p. 151). The criteria of this self-limitation are not pre-formed but worked out as we keep on discussing our musical thinking. The teacher is not applying pre-established criteria but works with the students on the basis of what they are making. Listen to John Paynter (2000):

> We are not imparting received techniques because what is presented to us did not exist until the pupil(s) invented it. Of course, there are bound to have been influences—all the music the pupils have ever heard, and their musical preferences: what they think of as 'music'—but even if it is derivative, what they produce is what they have made, and to do that they had to take decisions. By focusing on those decisions, and by pressing students to discover as much as possible about why they have made the music as it is ('I just like it like that' is not good enough!), we start them on the path of asking the questions that every composer must ask about every piece: 'Where are these musical thoughts leading? What are the possibilities? Why should I choose that path rather than any other? How do I know when this piece is completed?' (p. 8).

But of course searching for how to create musical meaning, for how and on what kind of limitations we are going to work on, searching for answers to questions such as the ones asked by Paynter in the above quote does not guarantee safety: 'This search always carries with it the possibility of error—but one does not protect oneself against this possibility by the instauration of some external authority, a move that is doubly subject to error and that simply leads one back to heteronomy' (Castoriadis, 1997f, p. 340). The possibility of error, and the *acknowledgement* of the possibility of error may have radical consequences into how we teach. But it seems there is no other way: 'The attempt to found equality as well as freedom, that is, human autonomy, on an extrasocial basis [*fondement*], is intrinsically antinomic. It even is a manifestation of heteronomy. If God, Nature, or Reason have decreed freedom (or, moreover, slavery), we always will be, in this case, submissive and enslaved to this pretended decree' (Castoriadis, 1991c, p. 132).

Thus, we have now established the two constituents of autonomy: first, the process of instituting ways of meaning-making, and second, the process of questioning: 'The moment of democracy's birth, and that of politics, *is not* the reign of law or of right, nor that of the "rights of man", nor even the equality of citizens as such, but rather the emergence of the questioning of the law in and through the actual activity of the community. Which are the laws we ought to make?' (Castoriadis, 1991d, p. 164). A music education that centres on improvising and composing creates a context in which the germ of autonomy can be created. This should be taken both literally and metaphorically. It is meant literally because the creative process[24] of composing and improvising is a constant effort to create meaningful forms, and also because it creates a context where the value and validity of musical decisions, even the very legitimacy of the each time instituted processes of music-making, are put into question without regression to 'keys to success' provided by external authorities. It is also meant metaphorically, for this collective process of creating music and reflecting upon it, the modes

of creation and performance that are instituted by such a process, can be seen as a metaphor for what Castoriadis meant by '*politics* [*la politique*], namely, the activity that aims at the transformation of society's institutions in order to make them conform to the norm of the autonomy of the collectivity (that is to say, in such a way as to permit the *explicit*, reflective and deliberate self-institution and self-governance of this collectivity)' (Castoriadis, 1990, p. 85). Just as political autonomy aims at creating new legitimacies—being 'a search concerning what law I ought (we ought) to adopt' (Castoriadis, 1997f, p. 340)—, so musical improvisation and composition can be seen as a process which creates new ways of coming to grip with the question: *how should we make music*? Discussions and critical questioning that are based on the students' own work 'will encourage them to think for themselves about what sounds right and why it might be considered to be so, and to know that they have *only themselves to convince*' (Paynter, 2000, p. 20).

This question should be regarded, in this context, as fundamentally open; it does not lead to definitive answers and therefore establishes a new relationship with musical tradition. Involvement in composing and listening might lead to the creation of a different, critical, non-submissive and creative relationship with musics of other people, places, times and cultures. A heteronomous relationship to tradition means that '*the question of the legitimacy of tradition shall not be raised*' (Castoriadis, 1991d, p. 163). Improvisation and composition seen as sites of autonomy can provide the route for an iconoclastic revising of the tradition, in a context of critical questioning which raises the issue of its legitimacy and examines its role in turning education from a site of emancipation to a means of coercion. As Saville Kushner argues,

> The 'knowing' will not always be the neutral, honorific process implicit in our moral vocabulary, knowing has a backwash effect—sometimes we may substitute 'co-option' for 'knowledge'. Blind but purposeful iconoclasm is an alternative curriculum strategy. First know yourself, then confront the canon—that way, at least, you might have developed some armour of your own. (Kushner, 2004, p. 217)

I argue that a conceptualisation of musical creativity through this perspective holds the promise of inspiring socially responsible musical action: it is in and through creative musical *praxis*[25] that we can *think* about issues of hierarchies, musical values, social dimensions of different music-making processes, our relationship to past values and to historical dimensions of music. And this leads to the development of an argument for the educational value of improvisational and compositional music-making, for its apprehension as a means for the development of critical consciousness, moving away from notions of individualistic conceptions of skill development and of acquisition of flexible skills relevant to the music market. Essentially, this relates to the larger question of how could immersion in composition and improvisation lead to critical encounters with the role of music in people's lives (Finney, Hickman, Morrison, Nicholl & Rudduck, 2005; Finney, 2003; Hayward, 2000; Jorgensen, 2003; Prévost, 1995). In an age of 'privatized visions' (Giroux, 2002, p. 93), rethinking our perspectives on the relationship between children's lives and musical creativity seems to me especially important.

5. Conclusion

It has been argued that Castoriadis' notion of autonomy might be a fertile theoretical perspective that helps us to propose a conception of artistic autonomy that goes beyond both Adornian conceptions of autonomy—with their insistence 'that society is ... "inscribed" within art works' (Paddison, 1993, p. 262)—and 'the nineteenth century aestheticism as institutionalized autonomy' (Martin, 2000, p. 201)—both conceptions lead to ahistorical and fetishised views of music-making.[26] Moreover, Castoriadis' conception of autonomy breaks away from the dominant conception of western philosophical tradition that sees autonomy as the result of rationality; it also breaks away from the connection of creativity with divine inspiration, and of psychological conceptions of creativity as a 'technology' of problem solving.[27]

An educational culture that connects its work to the project of autonomy encourages self-constitution of practices, as well as the creation of values and meanings without reference to some superior authority or system of values. But it also forms part of a larger effort of radical democratic politics, as a form of:

> ... public pedagogy that attempts to make visible in a wide variety of sites alternative models of radical democratic culture that raise fundamental questions about the relationship between social justice and the distribution of public resources and goods on one hand, and the conditions, knowledge, and skills that are a prerequisite for political agency and social change on the other hand. (Giroux, 2002, p. 104)

Creative music-making thought of as part of such a context, is transformed to the musical analogue of radical democratic politics. It becomes a form of cultural practice that conceives of musical imagination as a form of radical imagination (in Castoriadis' sense). Through improvising and composing students might be able to pursue questions such as: what forms of (musical) knowledge are legitimate? What does it mean to 'think music'? Where do musical ideas come from? How are we to think of the relationship between individual thinking and the forms of musical practices that emerge on a collective level? What sources of knowledge are legitimate? How do these achieve their legitimation? How are criteria for judging musical value being constructed? How do different forms of music-making delineate conceptions of authority? How can music-making function as an enactment of social justice? The political role of creative music-making understood as an endeavour in pursuit of autonomy relates to its role as an active critique of power relations that rest on domination. This holds important implications for the ways in which aspects of the musical past (including musical canon(s)) function as sources of learning. An educational context in search of autonomy would use composing and improvising processes to explore distinctive aesthetic positions in relation to the making of music, its relationship with particular conceptions of performing and listening, with conceptions of musical ontology, and with the role of music as a mediating force between personal identity and social agency, as well as between the micro-sociality of local music education settings and the macro-dynamics of larger cultural-historical trends. From a music education perspective, this notion of autonomy could be linked to Lucy Green's (2005, p. 91) argument about the particular sense of freedom that arises out of improvisation and composition activities:

> In making music, students have a direct effect upon inherent meanings, indeed bring them into being, and are thus able to imbue the music with a delineated content of their own. The potential freedom, or autonomy of such content from previously taken-for-granted assumptions and definitions is thus potentially exposed. It is precisely by acknowledging music's logical moment of autonomy from social contexts, that we reveal how readily music becomes filled with social content and significance.[28]

This continuous creative re-contextualisation through collective musical action should be seen as part of a larger process where pedagogy creates the context for constant interrogations of 'assumptions and definitions', thereby becoming part of the process of cultivating democracy.[29] For Castoriadis, democracy, that indeterminate process of people thinking, acting, deciding and questioning together on the basis of autonomy, forms the basis for the creation of new ways of living. Transposed to the realm of musical creativity, this entails that musical autonomy would be that condition where improvising and composing function as processes of instituting musical practices, of creating forms of musical practices that envision non-suppressive forms of social organisation, while becoming the springboard of the critical reasoning concerning the foundations of musical practices.

Composing and improvising, liberated both from a skill-based and a problem-solving logic might become an essential means for countering the currently dominant bureaucratic educational regime, they might be transformed into loci where musical freedom is debated. Music education contexts that centre their work around improvisation and composition might be regarded as *instituting* micro-cultures, as contexts where musico-social action produces social imaginary significations that are actively engaged into the project of autonomy through an ever-present critique of their own foundations. From a feminist point of view, Pauline Oliveros has emphasised on the significance of improvisation for personal autonomy, which, at the same time is social autonomy. Oliveros puts the matter like this:

> As the gift of improvisation enters into society, and the life of women, I believe that paradigms will shift. Those who have never experienced power in their being, can know and discover this, and have a voice to speak for themselves without hesitation or reserve. So, the next time you handle a woman a rattle, a drum, tambourine or just invite her to make a sound, remember that you are enabling her to make choices and changes in her life by learning to be in the moment. To be *who* she really is, instead if *what* somebody else has demanded that she be. (2004, p. 70)

Collaborative improvisation and composition not only undermines domination and heteronomy, but leads to acknowledgment of the creative potential of each and every human being to create music, musical forms, forms of music-making together, and to imbue these processes with social imaginary significations that are not simply dictated by various forms of authority. Creative music-making understood in this way might become a social process which contributes to the, for Castoriadis, true object of politics: the creation of '*the institutions which, by being internalized by individuals, most facilitate their*

accession to their individual autonomy and their effective participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society' (Castoriadis, 1991d, p. 173). This perspective leads us towards a re-definition of musical creativity, moving us away from an individualistic problem-solving perception towards a conception of creativity as a process of instituting musical practices, as an embodiment of the project of political autonomy. The focus shifts from the instituted society, to the instituting society, to a conception of democracy as an open project that works against domination and inequality. 'The time of doing must thus be instituted so as to contain singularities that are not determinable in advance, as the possibility of appearing of what is irregular, of accidents, of events, of the rupture of repetition. It must, in its institution, preserve or make room for the emergence of otherness as intrinsically possible' (Castoriadis 1987a, p. 212).

What is more, such ways of creative engagement might be seen as working against the pervasive nihilism that dominates music education. Here I am referring to all three variants of nihilism (negative, reactive and passive) explored by Bowman (2005). Improvisation and composition counter negative nihilism by affirming the here-and-now, resist reactive nihilism by countering technocratic instrumentalism, and subvert passive nihilism by fostering autonomous judgement and personal commitment. Against the normative discourse of music psychology and its pervasive influence on music 'methods' (Regelski, 2002), the dogmatism of advocacy, and the sweeping power of positivism and scientism which 'have become ideological touchstones for a profession anxious to substantiate its dignity and credibility among the behavioral sciences' (Bowman, p. 2005, p. 31), this paper tried to propose a critical perspective on improvisation and composition and their relevance to education, which seeks to establish conceptual relations between music-making and personal and social autonomy in ways that unsettle traditional conceptions of music-making, of creativity, and of how music education might initiate students' thinking about forms of social organisation and issues of democratic politics.[30] This effort rests on the premise that 'critical thought is in principle anti-authoritarian' (Arendt, 1992, p. 38); hence its educational value.

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Notes

1. Note the extremely worrying but theoretically informative current phenomenon in which 'a certain version and deployment of "freedom" can be used as an instrument of bigotry and coercion. This happens most frightfully when women's sexual freedom or the freedom of expression and association for lesbian and gay people is invoked instrumentally to wage cultural assaults on Islam that reaffirm US sovereign violence' (Butler, 2008, p. 3).
2. It must be noted that Castoriadis' views of particular musics are not only fragmented but, at times, constitute nothing more than sweeping, generalised claims (see, for example,

Castoriadis, 1991f, pp. 241–242; 2007f, p. 82; 1997d, p. 182) which, to the extent that I have understood his work, are in direct conflict with central concepts of his political theory which constitute the core on which this essay is based. But a systematic treatment of these issues lies far beyond the aims of this paper.

3. It must be noted that Castoriadis' thought has not, to my knowledge, entered music education theoretical explorations—the only published reference to Castoriadis within music education literature is a passing one (Aróstegui, 2004, p. 189). To my knowledge, the only exception is Stergios Loustas' MA thesis (2004), which constitutes the first important reference to the possibility of researching musical improvisation through Castoriadis' notion of autonomy.
4. Castoriadis' strict separation between the two has not gone unchallenged. For example, Karl E. Smith (2009) argues that Castoriadis' understanding of the social historical as entailing ontological plurality is negated by his strictly polarised view of modernity as constituted by the simultaneous presence of these two mutually incompatible projects—autonomy and rational mastery—and attempts to offer a pluralistic, rather than a polarised view of modernity. Although the starting point of this approach is theoretically interesting, in my view Smith excessively smoothes out Castoriadis' conception '*[t]he unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery*' so as to be able to work in favour of autonomy.
5. It must be stressed that the concept of social imaginary signification is an abstraction of complex social processes of meaning making. Elaborating on this definition Castoriadis explains that 'I call these significations imaginary because they do not correspond to, or are not exhausted by, references to "rational" or "real" elements and because it is through a *creation* that they are posited. And I call them social because they are and they exist only if they are instituted and shared by an impersonal, anonymous collective' (1997a, p. 8). Commenting on Habermas' (1987) critique of Castoriadis' concept of social imaginary signification, Kalyvas (1998, p. 177) notes that 'Habermas purposefully bypasses Castoriadis's advice to read the social imaginary as "not a substance, not a quality, not an action or a passion", [Castoriadis, 1987a, p. 369] but "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" [Castoriadis, 1987a, p. 143]'.
6. Commenting on the incompatibility between autonomy and rational mastery, Castoriadis notes that 'the unlimited expansion of "rational mastery" cannot but do away with autonomy, which, in turn, qua self-limitation, could not coexist with unlimited expansion of anything, be it of an alleged rationality' (n.d. e, pp. 379–380).
7. As Castoriadis states, 'What May '68 and the power movements of the sixties have shown is the persistence and the power of the project of autonomy, expressed both in the rejection of the bureaucratic-capitalist world and in the new ideas and practices invented or propagated by those movements. But they have also testified to this dimension of *failure* that has so far been indissolubly linked, at least in appearance, with modern political movements: the immense difficulty involved in prolonging in a positive direction the critique of the existing order of things, the impossibility of assuming the project of autonomy, as simultaneously individual and a social autonomy, through the instauration of a collective self-government' (1987b, p. 27).
8. Ball (2003) provides the following definition of performativity: 'Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality", or "moments" of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement' (p. 216).
9. It must be noted, however, that Castoriadis explicitly renounced the notion of hope: 'For Castoriadis, the Athenians answered Kant's third question of interest to humanity, that is, what can we hope, with a resounding claim of "we can hope for nothing". The destruction of

the strongest sense of hope enabled the Athenians to reach a new understanding of the significance of their practices and to institute democracy for the first time' (Browne, 2005, p. 78). Yet, the elucidation of the concept of personal and political autonomy to which he wholeheartedly devoted his intellectual efforts is a major source of hope, and a major source of inspiration for Giroux's (2002) notion of 'educated hope'. I cannot, of course, overemphasise that a core motive for the theoretical justification of the educational importance of composing and improvising as germs of personal and political autonomy that is attempted in the present study, has been exactly this sense of hope that springs from the openness and liberatory promise that characterises Castoriadis' notion of autonomy.

10. The specific quote on which Butler draws is this: 'We can probably say that moral questions have always arisen when moral norms of behaviour have ceased to be self-evident and unquestioned in the life of a community' (Adorno, 2001, p. 16).
11. In 1959, Hannah Arendt, commenting on an racist incident that took place outside a newly integrated school, openly attacked adults' abolition of responsibility to protect the young, exhibited in their act to solve a political issue by 'transferring' it in the realm of education, and insisted that children should not be exposed to political conflicts (Arendt, 1959). Ralph Ellison argued that what Arendt had fatally failed to see was that 'the black parents in Little Rock were instilling in their children an "ideal of sacrifice" necessary to move the nation forward on its quest for true democracy' (Warren, 2003, p. 159). This old debate is not at all outdated (for a recent attempt to answer to Arendt's 50-year-old paper see Nakata, 2008), as the issues raised then are still with us in a variety of contexts, sometimes in even more dramatic ways.
12. In a recent paper, Michael A. Peters (2009) proposes a conceptual map for understanding the process of educational appropriation of conceptions of creativity and their correspondence with particular facets of contemporary capitalism that is different from the one suggested here. Peters argues that the educational appropriation of Romantic conceptions of creativity corresponds to the need for cultivating qualities relevant to the 'risk-taking entrepreneur' (p. 40), whereas more recent, relational, distributed, socio-cultural conceptions correspond 'to the "network" that now animates all forms and emerging genres of electronic textual environments and the knowledge systems on which they are based' (p. 51) and to emerging forms of creative management in current globalised, post-fordist capitalism. Despite its merits, it seems to me that this account conflates Romantic conceptions of creativity with psychological positivist notions, and moreover, does not do justice to the possible subversive potential of sociocultural approaches to creativity that could emerge out of sociocultural perspectives such as those developed by Matusov, St. Julien, Lacasa & Alburquerque Candela (2007), Matusov & St. Julien (2004), Shotter (2001), and Shotter & Billig (1998). Further dialogue is needed, but this lies beyond the scope of the present paper.
13. See, for example Charlotte Gardner's (2008) article in the *BBC Music Magazine*, which laments the declining of standards in music exams in the UK, as well as Richard Morrison's (2008) follow-up commentary in the same journal. In a masterfully populist manner Morrison argues against the 'disaster in the making' that has been caused by 'the tide of "relativism" (the notion that studying Radiohead, for instance, is as good as studying Beethoven) and of child-centred learning (the theory that pupils will somehow discover musical literacy through their own compositions)' (p. 21).
14. This work should be seen as part of a much wider effort of contemporary musical scholarship that has sought to study creative musical engagement (both through improvisation and composition) through a variety of theoretical perspectives that break away from the cognitivist paradigm. Cobussen (2008) has advanced a perspective on listening and interaction in improvisation based on the anti-logocentric philosophy of G. C. Fiumara, arguing that 'Listening (in improvised music) ... becomes an important locus of resistance to orthodoxies of the imagination (conventional systems of thought), challenging indifference' (p. 52). In another study, Cobussen (2005) sought to create a view of improvisational creativity through a Deleuzian conception of noise and Alain Badiou's conception of ethics. Gilbert (2004)

employed Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) notion of rhizome to conceptualise the non-hierarchical character of certain trends in contemporary improvised scene. Toynbee (2003) suggested that we adopt a distributed view of musical creativity that could be informed by Becker's (1982) concept of the art world, by Bourdieu's (1993) habitus, or by Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism. In an earlier study, I have tried to draw certain analogies between the experience of free improvisation and the notion of political and communicative action as developed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1998[1958]) (Kanellopoulos, 2007). The initiation of dialogue among these different approaches would, I think, be particularly fruitful.

15. I think, therefore, that Castoriadis would entirely concord to the thesis, put forward by Lankshear (1982), that 'rationality is heteronomous to the self: that in a sense the person who is rational subjects their "real" self to the government of a rationality which is outside to themselves, and is in fact part of the structure of laws, reasons etc. which are formed in a social context (Devine and Irwin, 2006, p. 15). Castoriadis has forcefully argued that 'there is no rational foundation for reason, nor is there any rational foundation for freedom. In both cases there is, certainly, a reasonable justification—but that comes downstream; it is based upon what autonomy alone renders possible for human beings.' (n.d. b, p. 127).
16. Marshall's (1995, p. 6) concise formulation of Dearden's (1968) position on autonomy as an educational goal is this: 'first, an independence from authorities; second, a disposition to test the truth of things for oneself, whether by experience or by a critical estimate of the testimony of others; and third, an ability to deliberate, form intentions and choose in accordance with a scale of values which is self formulated'.
17. That Castoriadis regarded specific moments within modernity as containing the germ of autonomy in his particular sense should not obscure his critique of the project of Enlightenment with its emphasis on the 'law' of nature and on rational control. Listen to this: 'there is a considerable ambiguity to the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the social law is posited as the work of society, and at the same time it is allegedly grounded upon a rational "nature" or a natural and transhistorical reason. That remains ultimately Marx's illusion, too. This illusion is still another of the masks and forms of heteronomy: whether the law would be dictated to us by God, by nature, or by the "laws of history", it is still dictated to us' n.d. d, p. 274)
18. The rise and prevalence of an anti-metaphysical concept of creativity after the second World War (Elliott, 1971; for its role in the renewal of New Music's interest in improvisation see Kutschke, 1999) has been accompanied by the development of a particular model of scientific inquiry, which constitutes an eloquent example of what Castoriadis has referred to as modernity's '*unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery*' (1991g, p. 272). The idea that penetrated a large part of research about creativity during the fifties and the sixties is eloquently manifested in the following statement: 'America must treasure and foster all the creative ability that she has in her' (Toynbee, 1964, p. 9). This, as well as the title of the text from which it has been taken—'Is America Neglecting Her Creative Minority?'—, are indicative of the core beliefs of a whole generation of researchers: creativity is a trait of certain individuals, which results in the production of valuable ideas, solutions or inventions; it may manifest itself in every domain of practical life; it is desirable for it assists societal progress; it is identifiable, provided that one defines certain criteria and employs experimental methodologies; it can be fostered by a stimulating environment, and therefore it can be developed, especially if it is identified at the early stages of development; lastly, its presence or lack thereof may be predicted through the use of adequate tests. In accordance with this rationale, Thurstone (1964) sought to establish criteria for 'the Selection of Scientific Talent' (p. 10). Hyman (1964) dealt with the question of 'under which conditions does information help you to be creative?' (p. 69). Torrance (1964) developed verbal and nonverbal tests for identifying and evaluating children's creativity. Drevdahl (1964) attempted to identify environmental factors which contribute to the development of creative individuals. And Holland tried 'to devise effective ways of finding those high school students who will perform creatively in college and in their vocations' (1964, p. 299).

19. For general critiques of psychologism and its consequences for educational thinking, see also Egan, 2002 and Williams, 1990.
20. The advancement of socio-cultural perspectives on children's and young people's musical creativity is, however, slowly being regarded as an important research pathway (Barrett, 2003, 2006; Barrett & Gromko, 2007; Davis, 2005). It is argued that such perspectives, by resisting standardisation, and to the extent that they pursue the radical consequences of their foundations, might be helpful in emphasising the emancipatory potential of musical creativity.
21. Here I follow the logic but not the letter of Castoriadis' argument about creation, drawing the consequences that are relevant to our aims here. Talking about the concept of institution, Castoriadis put the matter differently: he talked about the primal institution of society, 'the fact that society creates itself as society' (2007c, p. 100) and the second-order institutions through which it 'articulates and implements itself' (ibid.). These second order institutions (my 'b' in the main body of the text) are divided into transhistorical (e.g. language) and specific, that is, tied to particular socio-historical contexts—e.g. the Athenian polis (Kagan, 1990; Mossé, 1971), public open concerts (see ch. 2 of DeNora, 1995; also McVeigh, 2004), the musical-work concept as a regulatory organisational principle of musical production and reception (see Goehr, 1992), or experimental performances (whose conceptual trajectory is masterfully sketched by Goehr, 2008).
22. Notice also the recent attempts to emphasise the value and usefulness of musical improvisation and creativity as models for development of negotiation and management skills—see Balachandra *et al.* (2005) as well as other papers in the same issue of *Negotiation Journal*; Peplowski, (1998); also Sawyer's (2003) review of other relevant to this topic literature (pp. 180–182). As Peplowski maintains, 'Managers can learn from jazz music, because a jazz band is kind of like a corporation' (Peplowski, 1998, p. 560). The Italian philosopher Paolo Virno in his *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004) offers a theoretical perspective that points towards a plausible interpretation of this recent managerial interest in improvisational skills. Virno argues that the post-fordist notion of work values virtuosity—Virno's use of this concept has many similarities with the concept of action as defined by Hannah Arendt (1998/58)—and also has led to the collapse of the distinction between work and political action. Thus, work seems to be taking over, increasingly operating according to principles that were previously exclusive characteristics of political action. From this perspective, I would argue that improvisation (and its emphasis on virtuosity, taking and pursuing decisions instantly, seeing beyond the immediate while in action, exhibiting flexibility, turning mistakes into new and previously unknown possibilities, and faking confidence) is a way of learning to operate within the post-fordist production model. This line of thought leads Virno to suggest a possible explanation of people's current a-politicisation—but that matter goes far beyond the confines of this paper.
23. In his essay *Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture* (1992) Nettl provides a witty and instructive ethnomusicological perspective of the values that underpin western musical mythology.
24. It should be noted that Castoriadis (who, incidentally, was a passionate music lover and also played the piano) held surprisingly restricted views on music, never dealing with the *processes* of musical creation. Rather, he preferred talking about musical work as the prime example of his notion of creation, emphasising the composer's magnificent ability to instantly create and sustain large musical forms in his imagination (see Castoriadis, 2007f, p. 52) and therefore to posit new legitimacies (ibid., pp. 87–88)—Castoriadis followed a Kantian apprehension of the work of art (as evidenced in Castoriadis, 1991b, pp. 92–101), seeing it as creating new and closed worlds. This, I think, did not allow him to deal with the political dimensions of music-making. Hence he did not pursue the consequences of his conception of autonomy on how we understand the process of creating music.
25. 'Since 1964 ... [1987a; Castoriadis refers to his essay, "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory", which later formed the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*] I have called the activity that aims at autonomy *praxis*: this activity aims at others as (potentially) autonomous subjects and tries to contribute to their efforts to attain full autonomy. (The term "*praxis*" therefore has

here only a homonymic relation to the meaning Aristotle assigns to it.) This activity may take on an intersubjective form the precise sense of unfolding in a concrete relation to determinate beings *intended as such*. Its most obvious cases are then pedagogy (also and especially "informal" pedagogy, which occurs everywhere and always) and psychoanalysis' (Castoriadis, 1990, p. 85).

26. On this matter see also chapter 7 of Lucy Green's *Music on Deaf Ears* (1988), and Peter Martin's latest book (2006) especially pp. 33–36.
27. Kalyvas (1998, p. 177) has noted that 'The originality of Castoriadis's version of political autonomy ... consists in its attempt to transcend both liberal theories of individual, moral self-determination and postmodern discourses of the "death of autonomy." ... Castoriadis has sought to retrieve the emancipatory content of modernity, renewing interest in a post-metaphysical, decentered notion of collective self-institution as the core of radical democratic politics'.
28. Although Green's conception of musical autonomy stems from her distinction between inherent and delineated meaning and is quite distinct from the notion of Castoriadian autonomy, her overall argument fits well to Castoriadis' conception of the creative power of freedom.
29. For a coherent argumentation of how education might be linked to the process of autonomy in Castoriadis' sense, see Giroux (2006, esp. p. 34); for an extensive treatment of Castoriadis' thought by the same author, see Giroux (2002).
30. See for example Woodford's (2005) discussion of the links between music education and democratic practice; from the perspective advanced in this paper, Woodford's neglect of any discussion of the political significance of composing and improvising prevented him from going beyond 'the trivial claim that music educators ought to become more politically involved in the public realm' (Peters, 2008, p. 97).

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