

**KEEP IT SIMPLE, MAKE IT FAST!**

**an**  
**APP**  
**ROACH**  
**to UNDER**  
**GROUND**  
**MUSIC**  
**SCENES**

**VOL. 6**

**Paula Guerra & Ana Oliveira**

**Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!**

*An Approach to Underground Music Scenes*

Volume 6

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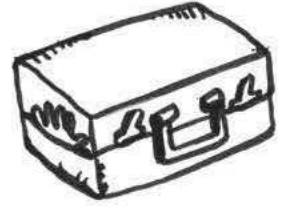
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## 3.1. POP PEDAGOGY AND ADOLESCENCE

Massimiliano Stramaglia<sup>41</sup>



### × ~~Abstract~~

Pop pedagogy is an approach used for analysing media content and devising new reading keys to develop a critical spirit and to provide tools, which help defusing the manipulation operated by current forms of communication. Pop pedagogy draws on art, sociology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and semiotics. It is a transdisciplinary pedagogy. Madonna owes a great part of her success to her name: in America, researchers tried to explain how “the game of the name” was the way Madonna has always attracted public attention, calling herself Madonna (after her mother, Madonna, who died when Madonna was five), but posing as a “whore”. The contrast is pleasant, it creates discussion, it makes what is uncanny plausible.

**Keywords:** pop pedagogy, pop culture, education, adolescence, Madonna.

### 1. A new kind of education... starting with Marilyn Monroe

Hearing from Luisa Santelli Beccegato, who claimed a “more aggressive pedagogy, towards the past, in psychological and psychoanalytic terms” (Beccegato, 1994: 306), in 2011, I published my first work about Pop pedagogy: *Love is music. Adolescents and the world of spectacle*, which combined the new frontiers of Italian Catholic Personalism with the psychoanalysis by Donald W. Winnicott (1960) and Gustavo Charmet (1995). Psychiatry and psychoanalysis also opened to issues concerning popular culture, such as Marilyn Monroe’s case.

*\*Perfectionism comes at a high price in terms of anxiety and depression; it paradoxically causes more anxiety in gifted people than in the less gifted ones, conditioning a wrong relationship with goal achievements and, ultimately, success. [...] Many of Marilyn’s pictures are perfect, she was herself in some films and some appearances, as many people testified. We wonder if she was ever aware of it since she has strenuously pursued her ideal of perfection right up to the end. It is also very likely that she fell into the trap of identifying herself with the perfection of her own image, which could not fail to disqualify everything else in her real life (Dell’Osso & Dalle Luche, 2016: 204-205)*

The psychotherapist Nicola Ghezzani also wrote about Marilyn Monroe and the:

*\*moral masochism [...], a singular attitude, which punishes and characterises people with low self-esteem and obsessive, depressive self-doubt. [...] On this regard, I would like to just recall a few of the great minds who committed suicide from depression: [...] Marilyn Monroe, [...] Guy Debord [...] and a thousand of other people. Not to mention all those who died from indirect suicides (drug abuse, alcohol, marginal acquaintances, risky behaviour, etc.) and serious illness, which occurred because of antisocial behaviour and self-destructive tendencies. A real genocide of the best ones! (Ghezzani, 2021: 94-95)*

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At the beginning of his career, Edgar Morin also wrote a book about Hollywood Stars with a specific section devoted to Marilyn Monroe. According to the Sociologist, the actress represented:

*\*the vanity of all the success; beneath the shell of the superstar, the unarmed innocence of the dressmaker; the tragedy of childhood and adolescence, which success, friendship and love could not overcome; behind glory, loneliness; the character of an ill-loved though much-loved woman; fun which has become the enemy of happiness; emptiness beneath intensity; the discomfort of false existence; unrealised aspirations; behind the most extraordinary smile, death (Morin, 1995: 189)*

Regarding the crystallised image of the actress and the symbolic death, which accompanies every form of hypostatisation, Pierluigi Malavasi described Andy Warhol's poetics also referring to the famous work portraying Marilyn Monroe: beauty and death merge to the point that one becomes the guarantee of the other.

*\*Pedagogical reflection can be prompted to some extent by the cultural mediation elaborated by Warhol, who makes use of imagination and technological actuality to carry out a trenchant critique about what is banal in the dynamics of social life. The adoption of the silkscreen technique allows the artist to replicate the images, which he elects as myths of his time's society within the same painting several times [...]. The famous portraits with Marilyn Monroe fully fit into this matter. The actress' image, which is replicated within the canvas, loses all its communicative referentiality, changing it into an abstract and purely decorative module. The detail of the lips, which are frozen in a sensual smile revealing the crown of her teeth, changes Monroe's loveliness into a macabre fetish (Malavasi, 2005: 25-26)*

This is very interesting from an educational point of view. In this first paragraph, Marilyn Monroe's character has been discussed from psychiatric, psychological, psychotherapeutic, sociological, and pedagogical points of view. This means that Pop culture can be interpreted as a bridge among different disciplines: this is what Pop pedagogy deals with. Starting from what is common and popular, every single person can find his/her own parts of personal and collective memories, the society in which he/she lives and the indirect education, which passes through media messages, and he/she can find a *unitary sense* – which is different from the *common sense* – for himself/herself and for the other from himself/herself using all these components. Generational memories represent direct evidence of this phenomenon: memories belonging to a generation are created and contribute to the identity definition of an individual subject and the construction of the social group memory, becoming a *Sign of Belonging*. Who needs to belong to one group outside family at least, more than teenagers? The transition from common sense to unitary sense makes it possible along the course of growth, to arrive at a *Unitary Feeling*: what politics lacks today to cultivate and to preserve the precious good, which democracy represents and can represent for all the people. This is also pop pedagogy.

## 2. Psychosocial and educational aspects of adolescence

Adolescence represents a very delicate phase in the growth process. Teenagers inhabit a “middle ground” between childhood and adulthood: they are no longer children, but they are not adults either. Children seek the protection of adults as a reference. They need adult figures to be able to identify with them, to develop a sense of belonging, to understand the meaning of their existence. After childhood, pre-adolescence (from 11 to 13-14 years old) is an important stage, which properly prepares for adolescence (physiologically, between 13-14 and 18 years old).

In pre-adolescence, boys and girls must prepare themselves to abandon their childhood beliefs: for example, they understand that parents are not always right, they understand that they have organs, which have not only the functions of urination and evacuation, but also sexual and reproductive functions; they understand that there are friends, in addition to family, and one can do things with friends that one cannot do with family. Psychosexual development is very difficult: for example, discovering that one's penis ejaculates can produce feelings of guilt and shame, because it is the same organ, which releases urine: a 'dirty' liquid. It is the same for menarche and breast development in girls: in the former case, the

same organ, which produces urine and blood, can also produce sexual pleasure (even if one hopes she has not had sex at that age yet); in the latter case, breasts 'merely grow' but, at the same time, they cause pleasure at the very moment one involuntarily touches the nipples.

It is important to know that our Western civilisation has done whatever it takes to hide the 'dirtiness', which is supposedly inherent in the sexual sphere, through the transmutation of the (autoerotic or erotic) sexual act into a procreative act. Considering that one enters the adolescent phase at the end of pre-adolescence, it is precisely at that point that one discovers the pleasure of masturbation as a way of understanding whether one's body "works" or not. But from adolescence onwards, both female and male people also discover that it is a source of pleasure to masturbate several times, and it is pleasurable to have sex several times with no intention of becoming parents.

Biologically, human beings are led to have multiple sexual activities even with different people for the simple purpose of reproducing the species. Our culture connected sexual activity to procreative activity for two specific reasons: continence prevents the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases; furthermore, investing all the adult resources within family preserves blood and, above all, the transmission of material goods, which pass from father to child or mother to child.

One comes out of the adolescent phase when one discovers how one's body works and makes it available to "others" (a male or female partner, depending on one's preference).

In the field of pedagogy, we share a very strong focus on *moral values* (Beccegato, 1991) and, therefore, on sexual ethics, even if it is not necessarily based on Christian inspiration.

This means that the intervention of culture on nature must not be restrictive or prescriptive, but relational and respectful for the value of each person and other people. In other words, everyone can choose his/her own sexuality while respecting the values he/she believes in and the values of other people: exploitation, manipulation, circumvention and instrumentalization are actions, which are always considered reprehensible. *Sex must be a form of expression and sharing*, not just a hedonistic action oriented towards giving free rein to one's impulsiveness. Sexual choices call into question the responsibility of the one who chooses.

But only the adult can make a choice: in the adolescent phase, everyone is searching and discovering himself/herself. It is all to be experienced: there are no real certainties. Certainties will never come, not even in adulthood. Anyway, unlike teenagers, adults have psychological and educational tools to manage the plans of risk and uncertainty.

### 3. The Age of Stardom: everybody is James Dean

During adolescence, discoveries lead to the emergence of socially acceptable forms of *exhibitionism*. Just as one discovers new forms of expression at a bodily level, in the same way one seeks no longer confirmation of these ways of expression from family, within whom one still feels like a child, but above all outside with teachers and friends, because one is also *seeking a place* in society. This search for confirmation and approval leads teenagers to expose or to overexpose themselves to receive compliments about their adequacy and, above all, their importance. While one tries to feel adequate and to receive love from one's parents (by also throwing a tantrum) as children, during adolescence one tries to make one's place in society and to receive love from people one considers important to make it less painful to give up one's role as a child. At that point, it is no longer enough to have parents, who remain fundamental and whose task is to accompany their child lovingly in the course, which will lead him/her to an adult identity, but it is necessary to become *The Protagonist of the Scene*. The peer group fulfils this task in the first instance: it is in the peer group that the teenager discovers who he/she is and how he/she could be in relation to other people, either by carving out a role for himself/herself or by suffering or accepting what other people hang around his/her neck. It is in the peer group that they make their first alliances, they confront each other, they fall in love, they share their experiences, and they reap their first socially marked sufferings and disappointments. Every teenager is divided between the desire to *Become Big* (or *Become a Big*) and important and the fear of growing up. Precisely for these reasons, adolescence is a risky age: many teenagers lose their way (Farina, 2022), they make existential experiments through dangerous behaviour

or by taking psychotropic substances, and they have disproportionate sexual behaviour because they have not learned to manage their bodies yet. To be successful, all the celebrities of the Star System have always had an adolescent behaviour, that is oppositional, transgressive, provocative, manipulative, sometimes violent.

This mainly arises from “recycling” the characteristics of the first real showman, who was specifically created to reflect a youthful style: James Dean. James Dean is the Hollywood matrix of all the male and female actors and pop stars, who have succeeded him (Stramaglia, 2021: 99-107). While Marilyn Monroe was created to please men and Marlon Brando to please women, James Dean was born to be a *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) like all the teenagers. Adolescence itself was born as a social category in post-war America: before the economic *boom*, people went straight from childhood to youth. From James Dean onwards, the very young people had a voice of their own: the market for records, fashion and junk food grew; teenagers became a social category and acquired the right to a psychosocial moratorium: a period of truce while waiting for growing up. Today’s teenagers are the offspring of James Dean and all his clones: not by chance, Gustavo Pietropolli Charmet defined them as fragile and swaggering (2009). Paraphrasing Luigi Pirandello (1921), in this paper we define them as *Artists in Search for Stardom: bloggers, influencers, gamers, DJs, sporty boys and girls*, who are absorbed in their world, such as Audrey Hepburn, or open to new challenges and adventures, such as Tom Cruise.

## 4. The Theory of affective myths

The Theory of Affective Myths was introduced in the field of psychoanalysis to effectively explain adolescent developmental dynamics. The theoretical matrix of reference goes back to Franco Fornari’s thought, but the systematisation referred to in this paper is derived from two works by Gustavo Charmet and Elena Rosci (1995: 126-169) and Diego Miscioscia (1999: 85). This theory is very fascinating because it makes it possible to correlate: 1) adolescent development with the adolescent need to feel as protagonists; 2) prominence of Media Stars as a reflection of the adolescent growth (the specific target of many Stars). Affective Myths are unconscious or semi-conscious stratagems through which teenagers rework their previous (childhood) identity and “design” their own image as adults. What teenagers are faced with is a real showdown: in fact, adolescence calls into question the affective wounds of childhood (Galimberti, 2009: 12) and tries to heal them in some way. However, parents are no longer enough for teenagers: in fact, most of the childhood wounds come from the parents themselves, who cannot be both wounders and healers. The image of parents takes second place (to avoid further disappointments and because parents symbolise childhood) and teenagers tend to idealise themselves through other reference models: for example, by identifying themselves with the peer group, which seeks a “centre” (a symbolic place of recognition) through common hobbies (*football, dance, music, TV series*).

Showbiz personalities are available for more evolved identifications: that is why 1) teenagers imitate the Bigs and 2) the Bigs take on adolescent attitudes. The former finds what they would like to become in their idols; the latter find a very profitable market share in teenagers.

There are eight *Affective Myths*.

The Maternal Myth concerns nostalgia for their mother’s tenderness, the protection which their mother’s warmth gave their children, the idea of an “ethical world”, which their mother’s teachings had helped to create in her children’s minds (e.g., Katy Perry’s childish look). The Child Messiah Myth concerns children, to whom the healing task or mission was given by their parents; this elaboration robbed children of their childhood time and teenagers of their light-heartedness typical of that age (e.g., Marvel Superheroes). The Child Messiah negative version is the Myth of the Revengeful Angel: this is a child, who felt abandoned, betrayed by his own family, and tries hard to make up for what was or what he perceives was taken away from him (e.g., *trap* musicians, *bad boys* and *bad girls*). The Myth of the Omnipotent Masculinity concerns boys, who go into crisis because they want to prove to everyone that they are “already big” for reasons of insecurity. Therefore, they have a competitive, arrogant, bullying behaviour, especially towards their peers, but also towards teachers and adult figures (e.g., Wrestling Heroes). On the other side, the Myth of the Omnipotent Femininity concerns girls, who want to appear older than their age: they tell their friends that they had sexual experiences, which never took place, and they may go so far as to bully

shyer classmates or to take on sexually provocative attitudes (e.g., Britney Spears). The Myth of the Child Idol is experienced by children, who were excessively spoiled by their parents during childhood (the “golden children”) and, as teenagers, they always want to be the centre of attention and to excel, entering a deep narcissistic crisis when this does not happen. They are very fragile teenagers because they had parents, who did not accept and love them for whom they were, but they projected their narcissistic ideals onto them. Therefore, as soon as these teenagers disappoint the expectations of their parents, teachers, or peer group, they feel inadequate and develop depressive attitudes (e.g., the character Neil from the film *Dead Poets Society*, 1989). The Myth of the Combined Parent concerns teenagers, who grew up with unstable parents, or with impromptu fits of rage, or they had an authoritarian mother and a submissive father. These are teenagers, who have a bisexual behaviour or a fluid sexuality, in which the boundary between male and female appears very indefinite, or non-existent (e.g., David Bowie). The Father’s Myth has to do with the theme of control: these are very disciplined teenagers, who tend to control their emotions and instincts a lot: they do not generally masturbate and have an excessively rigid and sometimes caricatured sexual morality. These were children, who learned early to put their toys back into the box, children who had never been allowed to be messy and were forbidden to make mistakes. These children become teenagers, who have a compulsive need to tidy up their room: they are not given the permission to laugh, they deny superficial friendship relationships and tend towards exemplary but neurotic respect for the rules.

## 5. A new kind of education... ending with Madonna

Madonna’s popularity conceals many aspects. Following Edgar Morin’s footsteps regarding Marilyn Monroe<sup>42</sup> (see the first paragraph of this paper), it is possible to state that we can find in Madonna Ciccone:

*\*the vanity of all the success; beneath the shell of the superstar, the aspiring singer; the tragedy of a childhood, which success could not overcome; behind the glory, the loneliness of a perfectionist; the character of a much-loved woman but an orphan girl; the fun which became the enemy of normality; frailty beneath intensity; the discomfort of a multi-existence; the unrealised aspiration to be an important actress (as she deserved); behind coldness, the pain of losing her mother (also see Morin, 1995: 189)*

Georges-Claude Guilbert described one of the main elements of Madonna’s character very well: her *indefiniteness* (which commensurate with the market intention to create an “average consumer”: neither male nor female, neither adult nor child, neither white nor black, neither rich nor poor, neither educated nor ignorant).

*\*In some interviews, she practically seems brainless, she utters verbless sentences, she swears like a fishmonger, she lacks vocabulary and gives the impression that she has never read a book in her life. On such occasions, even her voice and accent are nasal and vulgar. On other ones, she expresses in a refined manner, she is distinguished, mature and posed. Her voice is changed, she speaks about psychoanalysis, art films, painters, intellectual writers in a very convincing way. At this point as in many other situations, I suppose we’ll never know the truth – supposing there might be such a thing as a “true” Madonna. [...] In a post-modern context, it is part of the order of things (Guilbert, 2002: 3-4)*

In one of her most beautiful songs, Madonna details the family drama, which robbed her of her mother’s love:

*\*My mother died when I was five/And all I did was sit and cry/I cried and cried and cried all day/Until the neighbours went away/They couldn’t take my loneliness/I couldn’t take their phoniness/My father had to go to work/I used to think he was a jerk/I didn’t know his heart was broken/And not another word was spoken/He became a shadow of/The father I was dreaming of/I made a vow/That I would never need another person ever/Turned my heart into a cage/A victim of a kind of rage (Madonna, Mother and Father, 2003:w/p).*

<sup>42</sup> “Though, Madonna had been fantasizing about fame and fortune for years and was more than happy to give the public the provocative double-meaning female image, which had been absent from the spotlight since Marilyn Monroe’s days” (Randy Taraborrelli, 2001: 90).



The *phenomenology* outlined by all the biographies about Madonna is as follows: Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone is orphaned at the age of 5; Madonna grows up without a real model of femininity and becomes a sort of “tomboy” in search for her own identity; this search leads her to distance from the Sanctity of Madonna and to behave like a prostitute; a sort of “Satanic Madonna” was finally born, embodying the contrast and the ambivalence, which characterise all her existence; the early “Cinderella Madonna” manages to discover her real identity and marries Fame.

Each of the eight affective myths corresponds to an “embodiment” (or apparition) for Madonna: the Maternal Myth (Madonna chose her own first name as an explosive artistic *nome de plume*, which does not evoke only the Mother of Christ, but also her mother’s name, Madonna); the Child Messiah Myth (Madonna said that she wanted to become more famous than God; she was portrayed with a crown of thorns; she performed hanging on a cross); the Myth of the Revengeful Angel (time after time, Madonna destroys the previous musical “embodiments” as in the case of the video clip *Music*); the Myth of the Omnipotent Virility (Madonna often shows herself as a muscled man); the Myth of the Omnipotent Femininity (Madonna is often wearing the clothes of a *femme fatale*); the Myth of the Child Idol (Madonna usually plays with childish objects, such as Mickey Mouse ears – *Dear Jessie* –, the big white teddy bear from Erotica era, the candies from *Hard Candy* era); the Myth of the Combined Parent (Madonna has a bisexual behaviour); the Father’s Myth (Madonna covers herself with muscles and discipline).

Above all, Madonna evokes the Good Mother, who sacrifices herself for her son, who loves mankind unconditionally. Madonna is partly Italian: her father is from Abruzzo. Her Italian-ness (“Italians do It Better”, as reported on the T-shirt in Papa Don’t Preach video) is ever more evident in her recent choices to spend her summer holidays in Italy: in Apulia, for years, and Sicily (2022).

While she is invited on The Tonight Show to introduce her latest hit collection (*Finally Enough Love*, released on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022), Madonna and the anchor-man Jimmy Fallon play with the letters of the alphabet (psychoanalytically, as Madonna says). Both must associate the first word, which comes to his or her mind, to each letter. Here comes M, and Jimmy Fallon says: “Madonna”. Laughing, he pushes: “What am I supposed to do? Mum? Do I think another one? Mom? Mommy? Mommy?! Do you want me to fail and to talk about my childhood? I promised myself I wouldn’t do it. Not here”.

Madonna, a.k.a. “Mamma”, a.k.a. the “Italian Mamma”. A perfect combination of her deep Italian roots (her father Silvio Ciccone) and the unconditional love for her mother (Madonna Louise Fortin).

An *exemplary daughter*, despite (false) appearance.

## 6. Conclusion

As Michele Corsi writes: “Popular pedagogy can fulfill this task. Supported by academic pedagogy (I do not consciously use the term: ‘scientific’, because both pedagogies, the popular and the academic ones, have the right and the duty to define themselves scientific); the popular one must instrumentally allow society to finally *manage*” (2003: 10). Indeed, the intent of this paper has been to demonstrate how Pop culture and Academic Knowledge could come together to pursue the same goals. Even mainstream characters conceal educational potential: for example, Marilyn Monroe can be the pretext to work on the themes of fatherlessness and secondary needs educationally, while James Dean can be “used” to understand the sense of rebellion, which is typical of youth, and Madonna is used to deal with the orphanhood of a mother and primary needs. The most important aspect emerging from this paper is that *public figures are symbols of the common unconscious or the popular soul*: for example, excluding Netflix Series from the contemporary youth imaginary means missing a significant opportunity to act educationally, forgetting adolescent symbols and signs of belonging and identification. Only through a good mix of pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and psychiatric research, it will be possible to reunite the plan of reality with the one of *imagination*: for example, Madonna is not just an Icon, but a Collective Dream (Turner, 1993). After all, what we dream with our brain is what we believe is possible in our hearts.

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