

Alia

James Dean, Paul Simon, and Madonna. Rebels with Social Causes

Massimiliano Stramaglia*, Tommaso Farina**

Abstract

Every artist is the bearer of his own, innate, and original expressive logic (Weber, 2006). An archaic thought that, in taking shape and extrinsicity, brings out the innermost states of mind of those who choose to measure themselves with art, not only performance art. What emerges from such an approach is the possibility, in a process of self-identification, to represent a symbol for entire generations and segments of the population within a society. Artists can embody the “sense of community”, or what Sarason (1974) defined as the perception of similarity with others, the increased interdependence with others and the willingness to maintain this interdependence by offering or doing for others what is expected of them. The feeling, then, of being part of a fully reliable and stable social structure. This paper, by analyzing from a socio-psychopedagogical point of view the figures of three different global artists – James Dean, Paul Simon, and Madonna –, aims to emphasize how the rebellion and emotional impulse typical of the creative mind can also be associated with specific social causes, representing intergenerational role-models and figures with high pedagogical-emancipatory power.

Keywords: rebellion, activism, adolescence, LGBTQ+, multiculturalism

First submission: 08/10/2024, accepted: 06/11/2024

* PhD, Full Professor in General and Social Pedagogy, Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, University of Macerata – Italy. E-mail: m.l.stramaglia@unimc.it.

** PhD, Research Fellow in General and Social Pedagogy, Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, University of Macerata – Italy. E-mail: t.farina@unimc.it.

The article is the result of a joint effort by the two authors. Massimiliano Stramaglia is the author of paragraphs 1 and 3, Tommaso Farina is the author of paragraph 2 and conclusions. Madonna’s character analysis has already been conducted by Massimiliano Stramaglia in: M. Stramaglia, *Love is music. Adolescents and the world of spectacle*, Saarbrücken (Germany), EAI, 2015, pp. 195, ISBN: 978-3-639-86033-7.

Doi: 10.3280/ess2-2024oa18628

1. The birth of young people and the myth of James Dean

The critical structure of this intervention does not unravel along linguistic or literary assumptions. The perspective which I have chosen to adopt is the pedagogical and educational one: what does the myth of James Dean (1931-1955) represent for past and present generations? Which model of youth does it represent? The second privileged perspective is the psychological one: what happens when the personified symbol of James Dean turns into a cultural icon?

The years following post-war were marked by a growing *Americanism* involving families and young generations (*the American way of life*). In fact, the allied troops spread the typical ways and customs of average American people and Italy and the allied countries realized the American dream through the emulation of symbols linked to overseas heroism-youthfulness. Hollywood cinema spread unrealistic and relativistic lifestyles, which found broad appreciation in the 1950s and 1960s: think about the fashions of *chewing gum*, *blue jeans*, *boogie-woogie*, *cigarettes*, and *mini scooters*. The family model of the Fifties is fully described by Talcott Parsons, who identifies an instrumental role in a husband-father and an expressive role in a wife-mother. According to Parsons, the sexed division of tasks seemed to be the best solution for “a type and environment of life, which were highly appropriate to the advanced citizens of a free society”. Parsons' guiding idea was: American society does not work based on the principle of equality between the sexes, but it works, and it works because it is supported by a coherent structure, the family, in function of whose support roles and functions do not overlap but they combine.

With James Dean, adolescence was born, and family was “destroyed” (the media kinship replaces the carnal one). The adolescent rebellion, which psychologists, sociologists and pedagogists have been dealing with for several decades, has its roots in a Hollywood film star, who is the initiator of a real youth movement more than an actor: James Dean. Handsome and rogue, he is a transversal icon for all the generations following the ones of the Fifties: more or less, every decade has had its James Dean, and in that historical phase the adolescent world became its own planet, which was separated from child and adult realities.

1.1. Adolescence and the need of self-identification

The myth of James Dean is part of that *beat generation*, whose manifesto is the novel by the American writer Jack Kerouac. On the one hand, we must consider that James Dean became an iconic figure thanks to the only one of the three films where he was the protagonist, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). And, on the other hand, his being an anti-star represents the decline of the total

successful favor of Hollywood stars in his time: with James Dean, we have the end of the primacy of cinema over television, which is changing the physiology of the star into someone familiar on television at the same time, as Edgar Morin argues in his essay (1957). This is the reason why family and TV show are consubstantial: in America in the 1950s, both the parental roles and the models conveyed by cinema become forms of *establishment* against which young people need to oppose to self-identify.

It is no coincidence [...] if a television, whose screen was only filled with luminous dots, was turned on and stood out behind the actor James Dean, in a scene from the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). This blank screen seemed to symbolically indicate that intense flow of programs, which had radically changed the role of stars and Dean himself (Codeluppi, 2017, p. 24).

In the same film, criticism addresses to the typical family structure in a moralistic and bourgeois America, who is respectful of conventions, but generates rebellious children. The protagonists are three teenagers with three different personality profiles, which correspond to three dysfunctional family models. In this sense, the title of the film (*Rebel Without a Cause*) does not fully express the sense of the plot. The young people's portrait emerging from *Rebel Without a Cause* is the one of a generation, who can no longer rely on a family and has nothing but a television to kill time (rather than killing themselves). The outlined dynamic alludes to what the emerging class of teenagers will soon put in place: the choice of a social family composed of peers rather than the family of origin.

[...] James Dean paved the way for the 1960s uprising in America and elsewhere without realizing it at all. A youth, who was able to make his idealism a mainspring for a collective liberation, started that process of reclaiming his own sociological novelty from his maladaptation. [...] the image of Dean crossed the dreams of many people like the image of an unconscious ageless father, who was perpetually the same age [...] (Fofi, 2020, p. 88).

1.2. James Dean in popular culture

According to Edgar Morin's lucid analysis, the person and the character of James Dean are to be considered timeless for several reasons. First, teenagers go from being a "class in itself" to feeling a "class for itself" with him. James Dean provides them with a canon of beauty, specific attitudes, a suitable wardrobe and, as if that weren't enough, a model of passing (or "overtaking") their father. If Edgar Morin, who wrote in 1957, described the adolescent attitude as it was denoted by "boldness and shyness", more recently Gustavo

Pietropoli Charmet is no less and entitles an essay: *Fragile e spavaldo. Ritratto dell'adolescente di oggi* (2009). In terms of popular culture, among the many James Deans, who have followed each other over the decades, we can remember: one, who has recently passed away, Luke Perry, a dark star of the TV series *Beverly Hills 90210* (Star, 1990; 2000), where he played the role of James Dean's clone, Dylan McKay; a handsome actor who played James Dean in the TV film dedicated to him (Rydell, 2001) and could be only called James (Franco) too; and the singer-songwriter Mahmood with the collection of songs: *Gioventù bruciata* (2019), whose cover portrays the artist pouring milk from a glass bottle, which is identical to the one from which Jim Stark (James Dean) was drinking milk in a scene from the film. Not to mention that the lyrics of the song: *Gioventù bruciata* is a manifest accusation against Mahmood's absent father like an echo, which resounds beyond all the space-time limits, and at full speed. Mirror of mirrors, entire generations, and spectacular genres (cinematographic, literary, musical, television) have identified themselves in James Dean beyond his "apparent" death.

He created a fashion, a style, a culture, and a trend. Indeed, James Dean is the first "transversal" hero/teen idol: his myth deserves more than a scientific examination. The first models inspired to a young reality were born in a post-war context of economic boom (the slow recovery which exploded and brought the United States of America to the world) together with the model of Parsons' symmetrical family. We owe the historic birth of adolescence (which became a social phenomenon) and the collective imagination, which saw a family gathered around a table (or a television) – and which currently sees individuals "separated" by several screens –, to James Dean and the popular culture, which his myth still brings with it today.

James Dean was an orphan. He was nine years old when his mother died and he was brought up by his uncle, a farmer in Fairmount. The mythological hero built his own destiny by himself in struggle with the world. James Dean left university, became an icebreaker on a freezer truck, a sailor on a tugboat, a ship boy on a yacht, before grabbing a place under the dazzling rays of that mythical modern sun, that is, the spotlight [...]. James Dean milked cows, looked after chicks, drove a tractor, bred a bull, excelled in basketball, interested in yoga practices, learned to play the clarinet, educated himself in most different fields and, finally, became what represents the incarnation of the myth of a total life in our modern world: a film star. James Dean wanted to do everything, to try everything, to experience everything (Morin, 1995, p. 165).

2. Paul Simon: origins and rise of a multicultural star

In the second half of the twentieth century, embodying the same generative-

introspective process and, subsequently, the role of a global icon of multiculturalism was also one of the key figures of the American folk-rock music scene: Paul Simon. The life experience of the American singer-songwriter is signed with psychological fragility and inner suffering, as well as a remarkable ability to face traumas in a resilient way by means of his art. Characterizing his poetics is the process of “narrative-action” (Stramaglia and Rodrigues, 2018), i.e., the ability – together with its pedagogical significance – to use the cathartic and healing power of the word to tell not only one’s own to others’ vicissitudes but also one’s own and others’ discomfort. Starting from a pedagogical and developmental point of view and going deeper into his family and social-relational dynamics, this section will attempt to show how from a young singer-songwriter, first, and a folk-rock world star later – along with Art Garfunkel –, Paul Simon was able to progressively become a symbol of multiculturalism, as well as one of the leading exponents of World Music.

2.1. Theoretical frames of reference

Firstly, we want to relate educational styles and approaches to musical artistic experience, emphasizing how differences between sociocultural backgrounds and family climates can affect the artistic desires and aspirations of young developmental-age subjects. To do that, we will move within the systemic-relational paradigm applied to the analysis of family dynamics. From this point of view, in Italy, Michele Corsi (2003; 2011) and Luigi Pati (1984; 2003) were the first authors to study family realities as systems, starting from the theses of Paul Watzlawick (1971) and Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1971). The two Italian pedagogues, insisting on the need to set up the reading and understanding of family dynamics, not only by observing the behavior of individual members of a nucleus, but also by analyzing the modes of interaction of the system-family, illuminated the characteristics of the family as an open system. They emphasized how individual “perturbations” introduced into the system by a member, who has activated an “exchange” with the extra-familial social environment, affect as much the behavior of the individual as the functioning of the entire system (Pati, 1984). Moreover, since families behave as systems, family relational scenarios will be governed, from time to time, by the formal and operational properties typical of open systems, namely: totality, non-summativity, feedback and equi-finality (Corsi, 2003).

Secondly, to highlight the narrative and healing value of music and songwriting poetics from a psycho-pedagogical perspective, we will use the paradigm of “narrative-action” (Stramaglia and Rodrigues, 2018). Specifically, we will see how – to the extent that existential and developmental happenings can generate fragility and discomfort, especially during adolescence – through

the storytelling and the reworking of such happenings, by means of any art form (in this case: music and song lyrics) it is possible to concretely “rewrite” one’s own stories.

The “narrative-action” paradigm is a tool to tell/report one’s discomfort in new words. The crucial juncture of autobiographical narrative is not in the present (the personality structure may blunt but not change); it is not in the past (the family novel can be reread and even rewritten, but the family history remains as such, and the characters continue to play their roles) but it is in the future: where person and context meet (Stramaglia and Rodrigues, 2018, p. 23).

What Stramaglia and Rodrigues describe is exactly what happened to Paul Simon: a fine musician but also a skilled storyteller. This characteristic can be inferred from the literary value of the lyrics that go with his musical compositions.

2.2. *Childhood, preadolescence, and adolescence of a young artist in New York City*

*“In the clearing stands a boxer / And a fighter by his trade
And he carries the reminders / Of every glove that laid him down
And cut him till he cried out / In his anger and his shame
I am leaving, I am leaving / But the fighter still remains”*
(Excerpted from the song *The Boxer*, by Simon and Garfunkel, 1969,
Columbia Records).

Although, throughout his personal and artistic experience, Paul Simon has fallen several times, he has always found the energy and motivation to get back up. From his childhood in Queens, the New York borough where his parents raised him along with his brother, to the shattered dream of a career in professional baseball. From his friendship with Art Garfunkel, which began in high school, to his beginnings in the music business. From the partnership and planetary success of Simon and Garfunkel to the dissolution of the duo; from the depression and divorce from his first wife to the rebirth as a solo artist and the anti-apartheid masterpiece album, *Graceland*, the consecration, the second (and happier) marriage with the American singer-songwriter Edie Brickell, the Grammy Awards, and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. The first question here is: in what family climate did the young Paul spent his childhood? What were his role models? Mr. and Mrs. Simon, both born in America to immigrant parents from Ukraine and Lithuania, moved in the early 1940s from the city of Newark to the New York borough of Queens, in the picturesque Kew Gardens Hills neighborhood, a handful of blocks from Flushing Meadows “Corona”

Park (Hillburn, 2018). Here, housing development and the gradual settlement of a multi-ethnic community, on the one hand, perfectly embodied the “American dream”, and, on the other hand, well represented the growth and consolidation of a diverse New York middle class of professionals, artists, musicians, writers, and intellectuals (Scott, 1983, Yagoda, 2015). The Simon family’s early years in Queens were not the easiest: Lou Simon, esteemed bass player and band member of a radio show broadcast in Newark, had to wait for more than a year to be hired by New York radio station WOR before rejoining his family. Meanwhile, his wife, Belle Schulman, and son Paul had moved to Kew Gardens Hills, but to live at the home of her brother, left alone with a young son to care for after his wife’s sudden death. At the age of 82, Paul Simon still remembers the anxiety by which he often remained overwhelmed at that time: living in the same house in which a mother had disappeared shortly before, without the stable reference of the father figure absent for work almost every week, weekends included, with a mother who could not devote her energy and attention exclusively to him but had to divide her time between her son, brother and nephew. When Lou Simon finally had his engagement in New York, the family moved to another house, and little Paul could begin to enjoy the presence and attention of both parents (Hillburn, 2018).

His greatest joy was listening to and commenting along with his father on baseball games, particularly those of the New York Yankees, his favorite team, which he followed with trepidation and which over the years would “reappear” in some of his most famous songs, such as *Mrs. Robinson* (“Where have you gone, Joe di Maggio”) or *Me and Julio down by the school yard* (“Goodbye to Rosie, the queen of Corona”). The relationship with baseball, in fact, was much more than a radio passion, and, like so many of his peers, at 6 years old Paul Simon was fascinated by the athletic exploits of the Yankees, true heroes of his time, with whom he tended to identify. An identification so strong that it prompted him to attempt a professional career and to clash with another of his demons: his small size. Despite his considerable athletic gifts and a great talent as a hitter, in fact, his 155 cm in height was too little and soon confronted him with the harsh reality: the impossibility dictated by the rule, which the American professional league imposed in the mid-1950s, that he could not be hired under 5 feet 7 inches tall. That was undoubtedly one of the most delicate phases of Paul's adolescence, characterized by an introspective nature, a generous and kind character, and great emotional intelligence.

However, one evening in the summer of 1954, as he was about to listen to the radio report of a Yankees game, Paul Simon stumbled by chance upon the song *Gee*, sung by Daniel Sonny Norton, and was struck by the energy of the rhythm and blues sounds that were beginning to emerge from the music scene of those years (Scott, 1983). For Paul, that was just the beginning of an

infatuation that would turn into an overwhelming passion between 1954 and 1956, thanks to the birth of the “King” of rock 'n roll, a handsome young man from Tupelo, Mississippi, who answered to the name Elvis Presley. The irruption of Elvis into American popular culture was for Paul Simon – and for many other artists of his generation – a totalizing experience (Gillet, 1996). Having overcome the disappointment of the shattered sports dream, Presley quickly supplanted the Yankees and became Paul’s new hero. An icon – on par with James Dean – from whom to draw inspiration and nurture a new idea of self that, little by little, was taking shape (Stramaglia, 2011). The impact that the figure of Elvis Presley had on Paul Simon (and the 1940s generation) was such that it prompted him to harness his first guitar and revolutionize his life as well.

2.3. *Graceland, Africa, apartheid, and multiculturalism*

Simon and Garfunkel’s entire musical output is punctuated by artistic divergences, temporary break-ups and reunions followed by live concerts with crowds of fans each time convinced they were witnessing the duo’s last performance. During the most famous “reunion”, the 1981 reunion in Central Park from which the eponymous album *The Concert in Central Park* was born, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel performed in front of nearly 500,000 people. Fame and success, however, came as early as the first half of the 1960s with the release of their most famous single, *The Sound of Silence*, followed in 1968 by Mrs. Robinson, which reached the top of the world pop-charts after being featured on the soundtrack of Mike Nichols’ Oscar-winning film, *The Graduate*.

Considered in those years among the leading exponents of the youth counterculture – here understood as a cultural and behavioral model opposed to that dictated by the dominant paradigm in the United States and Europe of the 1960s and 1970s – Simon and Garfunkel had become true icons for college student audiences and literary circles, on a par with the Beatles or the Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, or Joan Baez (Hillburn, 2018). They were able to narrate through many of their songs a decade marked by crucial events in American society: the assassinations of Kennedy, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the drama of racism and the struggles for civil rights, while the Vietnam War, against which they took a strongly opposing stance, slowly and inexorably wore on in the background.

After the duo finally disbanded in 1970, Paul Simon, for several years, traveled the world in search of new stimulation and inspiration, immersing himself in the music and culture of many countries. He traveled to Peru, Brazil, Africa, and Europe, settling for a long period in London, where he met artists

and producers from the British music scene and continued to focus on his solo career. He released four albums between 1973 and 1983, and in the meantime cultivated his passion for World Music, which found its fullest expression in *Graceland*, the most famous of his solo albums: more than 16 million copies sold worldwide and a tour of Africa that would stir much controversy (Gillett, 1996).

In 1984, while seeking inspiration following the lack of success of the album *Hearts and Bones*, released the previous year, Simon listened to a compilation of South African bands entitled *Accordion Jive Hits*, vol. II. He was so impressed by that tribal sound, rooted in the traditional music of the Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu tribes, that in 1985, after contacting some local musicians and groups, he flew to South Africa. Unfortunately, he did so at a particularly critical time for the country. Apartheid, in fact, was in one of its harshest phases: the United Nations had just passed severe economic sanctions and authorized the cultural embargo. In addition to the activists, many artists had already denounced the South African regime: Peter Gabriel wrote *Biko*; Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Bono Vox, Ringo Starr, Lou Reed, Miles Davis, and Herbie Hancock (to name only the most famous) formed the ensemble *Artists United Against the Apartheid*. By flying to Johannesburg and recording much of the *Graceland* album in South Africa, in fact, Paul Simon broke the cultural embargo and was accused by many of being racist.

On the contrary, *Graceland* proved to be a unique opportunity to introduce the South African sound to the world and demonstrate that artistic expression can break the shackles of political oppression. During the recording sessions in South Africa, Simon was attacked harshly by anti-segregation movements, with pickets in front of the recording studios and subsequent attempts to boycott the African tour. The movements also criticized Simon's lyrics, pointing out that they did not contain an explicit enough message against apartheid, although a closer look at his literary and musical output would have revealed to them otherwise. Indeed, the singer-songwriter's artistic work has always been characterized by using lyrics bordering between the real and the surreal, seemingly out of context. Narratives supported by compositional and rhythmic implants that are hardly found in other contemporary folk-rock songwriters, such is their sophistication. Songs constructed and orchestrated with method and rigor, once again revealing their father's legacy, and speaking to the listener using sharp metaphors. Much more social and committed messages than it seems at first glance (or listening).

Those who look for a "statement" or an overtly sided position in Paul Simon's lyrics will be disappointed. Returning again, for a moment, to the accusation of the *Graceland* detractors, it is worth pointing out that perhaps they had not heard the song *Homeless*, in which the extraordinary vocal group

Ladysmith Black Mambazo sings a cappella along with Simon a lyric that, alternating between the Zulu language short stanzas in English, describes the experience of being homeless in their own country, due to the violence and deportations suffered by black South Africans under the “strong wind” of the Apartheid government. It is precisely this narrative capacity, which also holds a profound pedagogical significance, that from the second half of the 1980s onward becomes the hallmark of Paul Simon’s musical production, which will tell in some of his famous songs the plight of certain populations of the “south” of the world and the abuse they suffer, often taking a critical look at American society and its imperialistic connotations.

Tab. 1 - Example of “narrative-action” applied to the lyrics of some of P. Simon’s songs. The portions of text excerpted are direct references to the histories of the peoples of the global South, in particular, South Africa and South America.

Song: Homeless	Song: Spirit Voices	Song: Adios Hermanos	Song: Born in Puerto Rico
[...] Strong wind destroy our home / Many dead, tonight it could be you And we are homeless, homeless / Moonlight sleeping on a midnight lake [...]	[...] By moon we walk to the brujo's door / Along a path of river stone Women with their nursing children / Seated on the floor We join the fevers and the broken bones [...]	[...] It was the morning of October 6th, 1960 / I was wearing my brown suit Preparing to leave the House of D / Shook some hands, then adios Brooklyn amigos [...]	[...] I was born in Puerto Rico / We came here when I was child Before I reached the age of 16 / I was running with a gang and we were wild [...]
Album: <i>Graceland</i> (1986)	Album: <i>The rhythm of the Saints</i> (1990)	Album: <i>Songs from the capeman</i> (1997)	Album: <i>Songs from the capeman</i> (1997)

Playing along with him on the stages of the African tour – which was a huge success – Paul Simon brought all the musicians with whom he had recorded the *Graceland* album in the studio, including his longtime bassist Bakithi Kumalo, guitarist Ray Phiri, drummer Isaac Mtshali, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and exiled South African artists Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela. All the tour concerts ended with a choral performance of the ANC, Nelson Mandela’s party’s anthem, *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*. Thanks to the extraordinary talent of the musicians with whom he chose to collaborate, the New York singer-songwriter was able to unite extremely diverse cultures and experiences into one voice and one message of hope and peace.

3. Madonna's LGBTQ+ activism. A socio-cultural approach

In 1992, the globe's the most famous pop star in the world, Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone (Madonna), became subject of studies in some American universities. The most worshipped *Material Girl* of the Eighties, in the view of the researchers, was the icon of "postmodern feminism" and the deputed mother of a Cultural Revolution that could even re-write religions, classes, ethnicity, and genres. Georges-Claude Guilbert finds a true "Madonnalogy ever present in USA, Japan, Western Europe and in much of the rest of the world" (Guilbert, 2002, p. 82) since "everybody", willy-nilly, "has an opinion about Madonna" (Ivi, p. 88) Helped by the same icon, who in 2005 gave a lecture at the University of New York. Madonna is not common artist, but a hypertrophic system of signs and symbols bound to the worlds of spectacle, art, music, cinema, and fashion. According with Claudia Bonadonna "Every moment of her existence has been tracked, examined and investigated as a university subject; [...] the pop icon stages the ground zero of universal communication" (Bonadonna, 2002, p. 21). The impersonality of Madonna's body-text-sound made some observers sustain that her huge success was possible exactly because "she lacks a markedly characterised personality" (Codeluppi, 2017, p. 14).

3.1. *The exhibited body of Madonna*

Franco Ferrarotti disapproves Madonna's personage performances, agreeing with those who find her cold, insignificant, expressionless. According to the sociologist "she has nothing feminine about her. She is an ephebic and asexual being, maybe androgynous. The vulgarity is not in the touching or in indicating the lower parts, but the void that these audacious gestures awkwardly try to cover" (Ferrarotti, 1995, p. 26). But "how can it be 'that' thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands young gather and wait hours, to participate with a very high level of emotion" to the shows of a "miracle baby" "in which more than anything, is miraculous the lack any singing talent" (Ivi, p. 28)? The body is exhibited and "coldly" represented by Madonna, "the firm muscles thoroughly shaped in the fitness room" (Bertoncelli, 1999, p. 271), are the dreamy and nostalgic material of the mother. In the autobiographical documentary *Truth or Dare (In Bed with Madonna)* the pop star's spectacular communication become clear. It describes the peculiarly love and affective relationship that she established with the group of artists who accompanied Madonna in the Blond Ambition Tour. All but one of her dancers were gay. "When we left Japan, I got affectionate to the dancers and started to feel like a mother for them" (Keshishian, 1991). A mother in flesh, bones, music, and spirit. "I think to have

subconsciously picked up emotionally fragile persons or who need to be cared for. I think that this comes to me naturally. It satisfies my need to be cared for” (*Ibidem*). In the documentary, Madonna reveals the affective substrate (or underlying “guilt”) of her need of mother (or to be mother).

“I did not go the cemetery when I was a child. I often did after her death. My mother’s death was a great mystery, and nobody explained it to me, so...what I mostly remember of my mother is that she was...very kind and very sweet, very feminine. I believe that she looked like an angel to me. But I suppose that all five years old think that their mothers are angels. She was very religious too; therefore, I never understood why she had to leave. It was so unfair. I never thought that she ever did something wrong. I often asked myself what I did wrong” (*Ibidem*).

In the booklet of the album *Like A Prayer*, Madonna wrote “This album is dedicated to my mother who taught me how to pray” (Madonna and Leonard, 1989). At the same time, in most countries of the world Madonna placed in the booklet a flyer called *The Facts About AIDS*. In those years, AIDS was considered the gay plague, while the real cause of the infection was unprotected sexual promiscuity. Madonna was the first pop star to take a stand against this kind of discrimination. Madonna is a “replicant”: is the image of images, mirror of mirrors, “ubiquitous object” that “re-multiplies and re-changes and dissolves itself” (Giliberti, 2002, p. 58). She is a “dream of wholeness” composed by “small essences borrowed from a consolidated repertoire” (Ivi, p. 54), “excess” with plenty of “accumulations”. Madonna’s transformations and transvestitism are (planned) meta communications of a “girl” who plays to imitate her mother “using her clothes”. Madonna is *Like A Virgin* (1984) like her real mother in the videoclip of *Ghosttown* (2015) and the Mother of God. Madonna consoles herself “imitating the lost mother”, while the fans play imitating Madonna, in an endless game of mirrors. This is the reason why, along with many others, Madonna is very popular with LGBTQ+ Community. Transforming herself into a *sculpture* manifest of *strenght*, she became at the same time The Queen of the Pop and The Mother of Differences. Madonna herself has always played with her real or presumed bisexuality, to send the message that all sexual orientations have the right to express themselves. Baudrillard leads to an interesting sociological discussion about the star. The collaboration among American professors, who in 1992 defined “Madonnalogy” studies, converged in the volume *The Madonna Connection*, which was answered by the French sociologist and philosopher’s “Madonna Deconnection” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 131). If “the pessimism of Baudrillard is” defined “in sharp contrast to the Vitality expressed by Madonna” (Pribram, 1993, p. 204) for the sociologist, the star expresses only a “fantastic absence of identity” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 132).

3.2. *Sexy icon and suburban tomboy*

Madonna is not only a phenomenon but Incarnation and Media Icon of the Original Struggles: Slave and Queen, Erotism and Love, Transgression and Control, Order and Chaos, Morality and Scandal. She's everything she wants to be, with: "Absolutely no regrets" (Human Nature, 1994). Affective dynamic that springs from Madonna's persona is the incarnation of the innocent guilt of a female child (mourn) and of the masculine as vital principle (survival). "My aggression is a sort of compensation of my sense of inadequacy, to my insecurity. My force is proportional to my weakness" (Galli, 2010, p. 77), she said. Since the beginning of her career, Madonna Ciccone has reserved much of her artistic output for the global gay community. Born as an outsider character and a close friend of Keith Haring, she chose to overcome all the barriers of the bourgeois society. Therefore, she decided to give a punk, non-conformist, and rebellious image of herself, thanks to the linguistic game of her first name. She managed to embody both the sexy icon and the suburban tomboy at the same time. Not surprising, Bob the Drag Queen is opening her shows The Celebration Tour (July 2023). Madonna has always supported the LGBTQ+ community through her performances. As a motherless girl, she managed to become the mother and idol of entire LGBTQ+ generations repressed by patriarchal society. Madonna uniquely embodies the masculine stereotypes of the feminine as identified by Johann Jakob Bachofen (1978) (the Prostitute, the Sadist, the Nurturer) in a post-feminist key: a new and inclusive look at the principles of the Feminine and Difference. Madonna has moved Vladimir Putin, Sergio Mattarella and has been excommunicated and censored in Italy by the Pope. She is not just a pop icon, but a true icon of 1. the art in motion; 2. the art as movement; 3. the art as a form of resistance (in 2019 Madonna also sang "Ciao Bella", a tribute to the Partisans). Sure, "Madonna" is primarily a brand. And her contradictions might even appear disturbing, as Sigmund Freud might say. Provocation, however, has always been the peaceful weapon of the voiceless people. After all, art was born to disturb the peace.

4. Conclusions

Research on the experiences of James Dean, Paul Simon, and Madonna, on the one hand, leads to reflection on the educational and re-educational significance of the artistic experience. On the possibility of personally confronting, or helping others, in a process of identification, to overcome conditions of inner loneliness and alleviate the psychological suffering that follows (Astori, 2017; Galanti, 2007). On the other hand, here, we wanted to

stress the point of social recognition. According with Honneth (2002), if social recognition is granted in the presence of strong drives toward social conformity, it automatically becomes a subtle way of integrating and subordinating individuals to the culture and power relations present in the social system. The stories and the life experiences of James Dean and Madonna on the contrary, push social recognition towards a real “sense of community” in which the more the individual enjoys ample social space and material and moral resources for his or her self-actualization, the more willing he or she will be to make concessions even regarding his or her identity, while otherwise identity becomes the surrogate for all frustrations. Furthermore, the story of Paul Simon, deals with a similar pre-eminence of identity, that occurs in societies inspired by the criteria of cultural pluralism and respect for minorities. In this case, according with Nancy Fraser (1997) recognition is granted solely based on community membership, according to an interpretation of multiculturalism that is widespread today and, nonetheless, which must be condemned. From this perspective, the American songwriter fought for the opportunity to free artists subjected to strong pressure to conform to the identity defined by their community minority. For this he was accused of betrayal to other members of his community, when he did not follow the rules of the cultural embargo imposed by the United States to South Africa. Now, to conclude, on the “sense of community” embodied by the three artists examined. From a psycho-pedagogical and social point of view, the sense of community should never be read solely in terms of belonging, emotional connection, influence, and satisfaction of needs, but also in terms of sharing common life stories and symbols, or in terms of social, value connections and mutual recognition (Perkins and Long, 2002). It follows that, both on an individual and collective level, the presence of charismatic figures with high emancipatory power can contribute to elevating the “quality of life” of a community by embodying life satisfaction, a sense of belonging, a lower level of inner loneliness, a sense of social recognition and, finally, the consolidation of one’s identity (Fisher, Sonn and Bishop, 2002).

References

- Andersen C. (1991). *Madonna. Unauthorized*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Astori S. (2017). *Resilienza. Andare oltre: trovare nuove rotte senza farsi spezzare dalle prove della vita*. Milano: San Paolo.
- Bachofen J.J. (1978). Eterismo, diritto materno, ginecocrazia. In I. Magli (ed.), *Matriarcato e potere delle donne* (pp. 117-130). Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Baudrillard J. (1996). *Il delitto perfetto. La televisione ha ucciso la realtà?*. Milan: Raffaello Cortina.

- Benson C.A., Metz A. (Eds.) (1999). *The Madonna Companion. Two Decades of Commentary*. New York: Schirmer Books.
- Bertoncelli R. (1999). Il nudo, il corpo, il rock. In G. Fossi (ed.), *Il Nudo nell'Arte. Eros Natura Artificio* (pp. 263-291). Florence: Giunti.
- Bonadonna C. (2009). *Madonna. Heaven. Testi commentati*. Rome: Arcana.
- Bonazzi F., Pusceddu D. (2008). *Giovani per sempre. La figura dell'adulto nella postmodernità*. Milan: FrancoAngeli.
- Brooks A. (2017). *Madonna. A Role Model for All Women*. Woodville: Unibooks.
- Calabrese O. (1988). Appunti per una storia dei giovani in Italia. In P. Ariès, G. Duby (Eds.), *La vita privata. Il Novecento* (pp. 79-106). Rome-Bari: Laterza.
- Charmet G., Rosci E. (1995). *La seconda nascita. Per una lettura psicoanalitica degli affetti in adolescenza*. Milan: Unicopli.
- Codeluppi V. (2017). *Il divismo. Cinema, televisione, web*. Rome: Carocci.
- Corsi M. (2003). *Il coraggio di educare. Il valore della testimonianza*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Corsi M. (Ed.) (2011). *Educare alla democrazia e alla cittadinanza*. Lecce-Brescia: Pensa MultiMedia.
- Cross M. (2007). *Madonna. Santa e peccatrice*. Milan: Postmedia.
- D'Acerno F. (1999). Madonna. The Postmodern Diva As Maculate Conception. In P. D'Acerno (Ed.), *The Italian American Heritage. A Companion to Literature and Arts* (pp. 491-498). New York: Garland Publishing.
- Debord G. (2008). *La società dello spettacolo*. Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai.
- Deflem M. (2019). The New Ethics of Pop: Celebrity Activism Since Lady Gaga. In M. Stramaglia (Ed.), *Pop cultures. Sconfinamenti alterdisciplinari* (pp. 113-129). Lecce-Brescia: Pensa MultiMedia.
- Dell'Osso L., Dalle Luche R. (2016). *L'altra Marilyn. Psichiatria e psicoanalisi di un cold case*. Florence: Le Lettere.
- Dion M. (Ed.) (1994). *Madonna: érotisme et pouvoir*. Paris: Editions Kimé.
- Falconi F. (2011). *Mad for Madonna. La Regina del pop*. Rome: Alberto Castelvechi.
- Galanti M.A. (2007). *Sofferenza psichica e pedagogia. Educare all'ansia, alla fragilità e alla solitudine*. Roma: Carocci.
- Fofi G. (2020). *Il secolo dei giovani e il mito di James Dean*. Milan: La nave di Teseo.
- Fisher A.T., Sonn C.C., Bishop B.J. (2002). *Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications*. New York: Plenum.
- Fraser N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflexions on "Postsocialist" Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Galli P. (2010). *Madonna. Cronistoria della regina del pop*. Milan: Blues Brothers.
- Giliberti E. (2002). Madonna. Come si costruisce un corpo-citazione. In M. Baroni (Ed.), *Streghe, madonne e sante postmoderne. Eccedenze femminili tra cronaca e fiction* (pp. 49-66). Rome: Meltemi.
- Gillett C. (1996). *The sound of the city. The rise of rock and roll*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Guilbert G.C. (2002). *Madonna as Postmodern Myth. How One Star's Self-Construction Rewrites Sex, Gender, Hollywood and the American Dream*. London: McFarland & Company.

- Hilburn R. (2018). *Paul Simon – The life*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Honneth A. (2002). *Lotta per il riconoscimento*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Keshishian A. (1991). *In Bed with Madonna/Madonna: Truth or Dare*. USA: Propaganda Film – Boy Toy Productions.
- King N. (1991). *Madonna. The Book*. New York: William Morrow.
- Madonna, Leonard P. (1989). *Promise To Try*. In Madonna, *Like A Prayer*. USA: Sire.
- Magli I. (1978). Il matriarcato come riflesso mitico della cultura. In I. Magli (Ed.), *Matriarcato e potere delle donne* (pp. 11-36). Milan: Feltrinelli.
- McClary S. (2002). *Feminine Endings. Music, Gender, & Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Miklitsch R. (1998). *From Hegel To Madonna. Towards A General Economy of "Commodity Fetishism"*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Morin E. (1995). *Le Star. Con un saggio di Enrico Ghezzi*. Milan: Olivares.
- Parsons T. (1974). La struttura sociale della famiglia. In R.N. Anshen, *La famiglia, la sua funzione e il suo destino* (pp. 237-276). Milan: Bompiani.
- Pati L. (1984). *Pedagogia della comunicazione educativa*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Pati L. (2003). Dalla "pedagogia generale" alla "pedagogia sociale della famiglia". In L. Pati (Ed.), *Ricerca pedagogica ed educazione familiare. Studi in onore di Norberto Galli* (pp. 277-312). Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Perkins D.D., Long D.A. (2002). Neighborhood sense of community and social capital: A multi-level analysis. In A.T. Fisher, C.C. Sonn, B.J. Bishop (Eds.), *Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications* (pp. 291-318). New York: Plenum.
- Perucchietti E. (2015). *Le origini occulte della musica. Vol. III. Il canto delle sirene. Da Madonna a Lady Gaga*. Turin: Uno.
- Pietropolli Charmet G. (2009). *Fragile e spavaldo. Ritratto dell'adolescente di oggi*. Rome-Bari: Laterza.
- Pribram E.D. (1993). Seduction, Control, & the Search for Authenticity: Madonna's Truth or Dare. In C. Schwichtenberg (ed.), *The Madonna Connection. Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory* (189-212). St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Sani R. (2003). Per una storia dell'educazione familiare nell'età moderna e contemporanea. Itinerari e prospettive di ricerca. In L. Pati (Ed.), *Ricerca pedagogica ed educazione familiare. Studi in onore di Norberto Galli* (pp. 3-41). Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Sarason S.B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott J.A. (1983). *The ballad of America. The history of the United States in story and song*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Stramaglia M. (2015). *Love is music. Adolescents and the world of spectacle*. Saarbrücken: EAI.
- Stramaglia M., Rodrigues M.B. (2018). *Educare la depressione. La scrittura, la lettura e la parola come pratiche di cura*. Parma: Junior-Spaggiari.
- Stramaglia M. (2021). *Compendio di pedagogia dello spettacolo. Educare nell'epoca del neo-divismo*. Roma: Anicia.

- von Bertalanffy L. (1971). *Teoria generale dei sistemi. Fondamenti, sviluppo, applicazioni*. Milano: ISEDI.
- Watzlawick P., Beavin J.H. and Jackson D.D. (1971). *Pragmatica della comunicazione umana. Studio dei modelli interattivi, delle patologie e dei paradossi*. Roma: Astrolabio.
- Weber E.W. (2006). *La musica al centro. Riflessioni sulle relazioni tra la musica e le intelligenze*. Konstanz: EduCultura GmbH.
- Yagoda B. (2015). *B-Side: the death of Tin Pan Alley and the rebirth of great american song*. New York: Riverhead Books.