

Alia

Exploring adolescence, street education, and detached youth work European origins through Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia*

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Abstract

What does it mean to consider urban spaces as educational contexts, and what occurs when streets lose their value as resources for young people? This article explores these questions through a transdisciplinary lens, drawing on insights from the humanities, social sciences, pedagogy, and social education. By conducting a pedagogical and sociological analysis of Franc Roddam's 1979 movie *Quadrophenia*, the paper examines the nuanced characteristics and contrasts inherent in adolescence. It also traces the emergence of *street education* and *detached youth work* methodologies across Europe. In its concluding section, it considers new directions in social work and youth education within informal settings, reflecting on the challenges of today's complex, fast-paced, and multicultural society.

Keywords: Detached Youth Work, Street Education, Adolescence, Art-based Methodologies, Social Work

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Introduction

In contemporary urban settings, what happens when streets and other public spaces are no longer recognized as valuable resources by young people? Engaging youth in non-formal contexts through social education may help reduce conflict and vandalism – and, in more severe cases, prevent deviant behaviors and criminality – by restoring the intrinsic value and generative potential of these environments. This raises important questions:

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- What forms of social and educational work can be devised to channel the vibrant energy and occasional turbulence of adolescence (Charmet and Rosci, 1995)?
- How can we ensure that under-stimulating or socially fragmented settings do not transform natural adolescent rebellion into feelings of alienation and marginalization?

To explore these questions, this article adopts a transdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from the humanities, sociology of communication, social sciences, social education, critical pedagogies, and art-based methodologies. One promising avenue is *street education*: a method for planning interventions directly within urban territories that engages adolescents in a context familiar to them. Streets are not merely routes for transit. They are dynamic environments imbued with cognitive, emotional, relational, and affective significance for informal youth groups. As places where people meet and interact, streets serve as stages for forming relationships – with peers, significant adult figures, public personalities, and role models – that are essential for emotional and expressive development.

The nature of these relationships is crucial. As Massimiliano Stramaglia (2015) argues, interactions in adolescence offer opportunities to negotiate autonomy, experience new values, and affirm self-identity within supportive symbolic contexts. Such engagements, which occur in the informal setting of urban spaces, are instrumental in the socialization process and in fostering the personal growth of young individuals during one of the most formative periods of their lives: adolescence.

Ultimately, by reimagining urban spaces as active sites for learning and personal development rather than as passive transit corridors, educators and policymakers can harness the latent potential of the city to support youth development and mitigate the risks of social alienation.

1. Theoretical frameworks adopted: critical pedagogies and social education

According to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988) and social education perspectives, street education represents an intervention that transcends the traditional “educational containers” of schools or exclusive non-formal settings as the sole venues for youth learning. Instead, *street education* actively engages informal adolescent groupings – especially those facing risks and disadvantages – to guide them toward positive developmental trajectories. In the field of social pedagogy, street education is positioned as a response to

the challenges that conventional educational agencies face when reaching detached or marginalized youth.

This methodology focuses on adolescents gathered in informal settings and aims to support them by developing protective factors that mitigate the risks associated with social disadvantage. Moreover, it fulfills dual social mandates: not only does it educate, but it also exercises a form of social control that can help prevent deviant behavior (Firme and Stone, 2017). By drawing on the transformative ideas of Freire and Giroux, street education offers a dynamic strategy that bridges the gap between formal and informal learning environments, empowering young people to overcome barriers to their personal and social development (Lohmeyer *et al.*, 2024).

Among the first contemporary philosophers and educators to emphasize the centrality of experience in the educational process there's John Dewey (1916). He argued that learning naturally develops through the interaction between individuals and their environment. Within this paradigm, the environment is not merely a passive backdrop but an active educational resource that, when consciously utilized, fosters the holistic development of human potential. Dewey's approach underscored the importance of transforming everyday experiences into a dynamic learning laboratory, where knowledge is constructed through both action and reflection.

Several decades later, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) expanded upon this idea with their concept of *situated learning*, which highlights how knowledge is formed within the context of social and cultural practices. From this perspective, learning is not an abstract, universally transferable process but is deeply embedded in the everyday dynamics of specific communities and their local contexts. Active participation in communities of practice facilitates contextualized learning, which emerges through direct experience, engagement, and the shared negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998). Consequently, a sense of belonging to a place plays a pivotal role in the learning process, as a strong connection to the local context serves as the foundation for authentic, meaningful education.

To trace the theoretical and practical antecedents of *street education*, we can also look to historical pedagogical models such as those of Don Bosco and Don Milani in Italy, and Paulo Freire in Brazil (Paroni, 2004; Firme and Stone, 2017). In Europe, significant early interventions in *street education* emerged between the 1970s and 1980s. These initiatives were largely driven by volunteer groups and third-sector associations inspired by similar efforts in the United Kingdom and the United States, aimed at preventing drug addiction through the active involvement of professional operators working directly with young drug users (Batsleer and Davies, 2010).

Initially, these experiences focused on reaching out to informal groups and marginalized young people, though they were often marked by spontaneity, the lack of codified methodologies, an emphasis on individual cases, and an insufficient multi-dimensional analysis of the youths' backgrounds. By the mid-1980s in Italy, for instance, re-education and prevention interventions in suburban areas around Turin and Milan exhibited significant limitations. However, during the following decade, prevention experiences began to inform the training of educators who were taken directly to the streets. This period saw the emergence of local education initiatives and the introduction of specialized professional roles designed to support adolescents identified by social services in the context of their daily lives and relationships (Farina, 2020).

This evolution led to two major outcomes. First, the intervention target broadened to encompass a wider range of comprehensive experiences. Second, a distinct professional profile, that had not previously existed, now emerged. Today, social work and *street education* specifically target disadvantaged youth through projects funded by local institutions, aiming to forge new, holistic relationships with informal groups of adolescents. According to Fabrizio Guaita (1998), there are three main levels of prevention for disadvantaged youth, each corresponding to different types of interventions by street operators:

1. *Primary prevention*: maintaining the state of ease through extracurricular area animation.
2. *Secondary prevention*: interventions on states of distress and risk of marginalization through community empowerment and networking.
3. *Tertiary prevention*: interventions on deviance, crime or active pathologies through therapeutic support and accompaniment.

Street interventions are recognized as vital opportunities to activate and nurture the latent potential and skills of children and adolescents within their informal peer groups and local communities. These initiatives are designed to promote transformative change and to mitigate the adverse effects commonly associated with adolescence, particularly the detachment from socially shared norms and values. In this context, the role of the street educator has evolved into a dual function: one as a mediator-bridge facilitating connections between youths and their communities, and the other as a resourceful interlocutor providing guidance and support. These roles often intersect, mutually reinforcing each other to create more comprehensive and impactful interventions.

2. From “Teddy Boys” to “Quadrophenia”: the cultural roots of *detached youth work*

It is worthwhile to step back and examine the cultural roots and social mandates from which *street education* and *detached youth work* emerged in Europe. This development can be traced to the United Kingdom during the 1950s and 1960s. In the early 1950s, young Englishmen began adopting attire inspired by Edwardian-era dandies: a reaction against the postwar bleakness. These young people, known as “Teddy Boys”, quickly became a central element of British youth culture during the 1960s. As the notion of the “teenager” was taking shape, large segments of the youth population were increasingly seen as detached from traditional society. This cultural shift alarmed policymakers, who feared that the rapid social transformation was encouraging young people to reject established norms and social control (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; Batsleer and Davies, 2010; Farina, 2020).

Soon, the Teddy Boys organized themselves into gangs and engaged in public clashes: a development that was further sensationalized by international media, which stigmatized the subculture. By the 1970s, the Teddy Boys had morphed into an underground phenomenon, flourishing in pubs and clubs, and aligning themselves with the underground music scene instead of mainstream artists. Their path eventually intersected with that of the rockers – another emerging subculture – initially in a spirit of coexistence (Frith, 1983; Gelder, 2005).

A key cultural artifact of this turbulent period is the 1979 movie *Quadrophenia*, directed by Franc Roddam. The movie vividly portrays the conflict between two distinct groups: the Mods, representing well-dressed, modern young people cruising on stylish Italian “Lambretta” scooters, and the Rockers, characterized by their leather jackets and powerful, American-style motorcycles. This cinematic work encapsulates the broader cultural struggle between American hard rock and British rockabilly, reflecting the dynamic tensions that defined youth subcultures at the time (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003).

At this point, the paper wants to build on the pedagogical-social perspective introduced in my lectures for future social educators. In fact, during the 2024/25 academic year, after screening *Quadrophenia*, working and discussion groups were established during class to examine the socio-cultural dynamics of 1960s and 1970s England¹. This initiative resulted in an in-depth study employing a

¹ The names of the students who participated in the working group whose qualitative research results are being examined are the followings: Carmen Guarino, Mariele Marzoli, Monica Rastelli and Silvia Zavagno.

transdisciplinary analytical approach that integrates insights from the sociology of cultural and communicative processes alongside social pedagogy.

The evaluation framework emerging from the group work underscores how, in the late 1970s, British organizations, policymakers, and national institutions recognized innovative social work methods as pivotal to reshaping local and national policies. These methods aimed to restore a shared understanding of civil coexistence among young people by engaging them within their everyday environments and addressing their lived experiences and language. At a time when adult figures appeared increasingly disconnected from youth, these new approaches laid the foundation for modern *Youth Work*: a model that originated in England and subsequently influenced practices across Europe (Jeffs and Smith, 2005).

3. *Quadrophenia*: a generational manifesto of identity and rebellion

Quadrophenia (1979), directed by Franc Roddam, was inspired by the 1973 concept album of the same name by The Who, who also produced the movie. The title *Quadrophenia* is a play on the term “schizophrenia”, alluding to the dissociative identity disorder. Pete Townshend, The Who’s guitarist and primary songwriter, envisioned the movie as a reflection on the aspirations and disillusionments of his own youth. He crafted the protagonist, Jimmy, as an embodiment of all four band members, attributing to him four distinct personality traits: the tough guy, the romantic one, the madman, and the good guy (Townshend, 2012). The movie serves as a generational manifesto, capturing the restless pursuit of identity and social transformation among 1960s youth: a generation yearning for change but repeatedly thwarted by the rigid, conformist structures of British society. Set against this backdrop, *Quadrophenia* explores the emergence of two rival subcultures: the Mods, defined by their stylish aesthetics and modernist sensibilities, and the Rockers, who embraced a rebellious, leather-clad countercultural ethos. These informal groups, hidden within the social fabric of postwar Britain, embodied the tensions between individual expression and societal expectations, ultimately shaping the trajectory of youth identity and subcultural movements (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003).

3.1. Mods and Rockers: clashing subcultures in postwar Britain

In postwar Britain, the emergence of youth subcultures was driven by social class, economic conditions, and evolving cultural influences. Among these groups, the Mods and the Rockers became emblematic of the generational

divide and societal tensions of the 1960s. Their rivalry, famously depicted in *Quadrophenia*, symbolized deeper cultural and social fractures within British society (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003).

The Mods: modernism and style

Originating in East London, the Mods – short for “Modernists” – were predominantly from middle-class or aspirational working-class backgrounds. They were influenced by Italian and French fashion, jazz, and later, rhythm and blues. In *Quadrophenia*, the charismatic “Ace Face” – performed by a very young Gordon Sumner (Sting) – embodies the quintessential Mod leader, epitomizing impeccable style and confidence.

Characteristics and lifestyle (see “Quadrophenia” at 1:00:55):

- Social class and occupation: typically, well-paid office or sales jobs, allowing for disposable income.
- Fashion: tailored suits, parkas (often military-green fishtail coats), and accessories that reflected affluence and meticulous grooming.
- Vehicles: the Mods favored Italian scooters like Vespas and Lambrettas, often heavily customized with mirrors, headlights, and decorations: serving as both status symbols and practical urban transport (Muggleton, 2000).
- Music and attitudes: the Mods embraced a “cool” aesthetic, listening to soul, rhythm and blues, and later, bands such as The Who and Small Faces. Their self-assured, sometimes aloof demeanor reinforced their reputation for snobbery and exclusivity.

The Rockers: rebellion and raw energy

The Rockers, by contrast, emerged from the working class and rejected the aspirational materialism of the Mods. Rooted in 1950s American rock and roll culture, they embraced a rugged, anti-establishment identity that valued freedom, masculinity, and rebellion (Gillett, 1996).

Characteristics and lifestyle (see “Quadrophenia” at 1:01:13 and 1:20:32):

- Social class and occupation: working-class backgrounds, often in manual labor jobs. They resented middle-class aspirations and distanced themselves from mainstream society.
- Fashion: black leather jackets, denim jeans, and boots, heavily inspired by 1950s American rock icons like Elvis Presley and Gene Vincent.
- Vehicles: unlike the scooter-riding Mods, Rockers identified with powerful motorcycles, particularly British brands such as Triumph and BSA, which reflected their affinity for speed and individualism (Wall, 2003).

- Music and attitudes: they were drawn to early rock and roll, rockabilly, and rhythm and blues. Their subculture was defined by an anti-authority stance, a brotherhood-like loyalty, and a rugged, no-nonsense attitude toward life.

The stark contrast between Mods and Rockers culminated in violent clashes, most notably the infamous 1964 “Brighton riots”, which were widely covered in the British press and further sensationalized by moral panics. These tensions reflected broader anxieties about youth culture, class struggle, and shifting social norms-making their legacy a crucial part of Britain’s subcultural history (Brake, 1985).

3.2. Jimmy’s identity quest: belonging, rebellion, and self-discovery (see “Quadrophenia” at 0:07:57)

Jimmy, the main character of *Quadrophenia*, embodies the restless energy of adolescence, shaping his identity through the philosophy of the Mods’ subculture. His journey reflects Erikson’s (1968) theory of identity formation, where the need for individuality coexists with the deep desire for group belonging. He expresses this duality through flamboyant actions – seeking to stand out within his peers’ group – while simultaneously relying on the *esprit de corps* that provides structure and affirmation in his search for self-definition (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). The movie captures a pivotal stage in Jimmy’s psychological and social development. His attachment to the Mods’ subculture functions as a temporary anchor, reinforcing the significance of peer validation. However, as *Quadrophenia* illustrates, this unity is fragile. The camaraderie and collective defiance that initially offer him pride and security begin to disintegrate in the face of real-life experiences, disillusionment, and shifting personal realities. One of the most striking visual elements of Jimmy’s character development is the decoration of his bedroom, which serves as an intimate reflection of his evolving values and aspirations:

- Cultural and musical icons: the posters and images on his walls depict musicians and athletes who challenge traditional norms, symbolizing a generational shift in ideals. The Mods movement, deeply intertwined with music, embraces bands like The Who and The Small Faces, whose lyrics and aesthetics reinforce themes of rebellion, style, and youthful defiance (Stanley, 1995).
- Sexual exploration and liberation: Jimmy’s fascination with sexual freedom reflects the broader cultural shifts of the 1960s, a period marked by changing attitudes toward relationships, personal autonomy, and the rejection of conventional morality (Marwick, 1998). Promiscuity is not just an act of

rebellion but also a declaration of personal agency, aligning with the Mods ethos of self-expression and modernity.

- The mythology of the “Battle of Brighton”: Jimmy idolizes the May 1964 clash between Mods and Rockers, a three-day bank holiday riot that became a defining moment in British subcultural history. His fixation on newspaper clippings and memorabilia underscores his deep-seated need for collective identity and validation. To him, the Mods’ defiance against authority and their working-class rivals is a source of pride, reinforcing his belief that belonging to this movement offers meaning and protection (Cohen, 1972).

Jimmy’s arc in *Quadrophenia* ultimately serves as a poignant exploration of adolescent disillusionment. His journey through rebellion, self-assertion, and the eventual collapse of his subcultural ideals illustrates the impermanence of youthful identities shaped by external validation. The dissolution of the Mods’ brotherhood in the movie reflects the inevitable passage from collective defiance to individual self-reckoning, marking a crucial step in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Frith, 1983; Marwick, 1998; Corsi, 2003).

3.3. Family, authority, and the breakdown of traditional values in *Quadrophenia* (see “*Quadrophenia*” at 0:40:53)

The Mods and Rockers generation of the 1960s embodied a fundamental challenge to traditional family structures and parental authority. As young people increasingly detached from the societal expectations of previous generations, they experienced a profound disconnect from the language, educational models, and relational dynamics of adults (Parsons, 1949; Pati, 1984). This generational divide, shaped by rapid cultural shifts and economic transformations, laid the groundwork for the emergence of *detached youth work*: a form of social intervention aimed at re-establishing connections between young people and their life contexts (Marwick, 1998; Jeffs and Smith, 1999; Davies, 1999).

In *Quadrophenia*, the breakdown of intergenerational communication is evident in Jimmy’s interactions with his parents and other adult figures. His home environment lacks emotional warmth, with his mother’s distracted indifference and his father’s authoritarian, violent tendencies. Their inability to understand or engage with his struggles reflects the wider social crisis of the time, where traditional institutions failed to accommodate the emerging youth culture (Marwick, 1998; Bonazzi and Pusceddu, 2008). This aligns with research on authoritarian versus neglectful parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby and Martin, 1983), which suggests that rigid, punitive parenting

fosters adolescent rebellion, while emotional neglect exacerbates detachment and identity crises. Jimmy and his peers actively reject the traditional values imposed by their parents, challenging societal norms in several keyways:

- Marriage as an oppressive institution: the Mods' subculture views marriage not as a nurturing partnership but as a restrictive, monotonous arrangement that stifles personal growth (Gelder, 2005). The movie underscores this through the young characters' aversion to the predictability of domestic life.
- Monogamy as an obsolete norm: romantic relationships within the Mods' scene embrace a sense of fluidity, challenging traditional monogamy as an outdated structure that inhibits emotional and sexual freedom (Hebdige, 1979).
- Rejection of authority and conventional roles: the youth subcultures of the era defy societal expectations regarding discipline, responsibility, and hierarchy, instead favoring collective identity within their peer groups (Cohen, 1972).
- Parental misunderstanding and psychological dismissal: Jimmy's father resorts to pathologizing his son's emotional turmoil, labeling him "schizophrenic" and "dissociated" rather than attempting to understand his internal conflicts. This reflects broader societal anxieties about youth subcultures and their perceived threat to the moral order (Hall and Jefferson, 1976).

The generational clash in *Quadrophenia* ultimately highlights how subcultures serve as alternative socialization spaces when traditional institutions fail to meet the emotional and psychological needs of adolescents (Steinberg, 2001; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). The failure of Jimmy's family to provide meaningful support mirrors the real-world conditions that contributed to the rise of *detached youth work* interventions, designed to bridge the gap between alienated young people and a society that had largely abandoned them.

Family relationships can be complex, often shaped by generational differences in values, roles, and expectations. These disparities can lead to conflicts, particularly when parents fail to empathize with their children's experiences and interests (Corsi, 2003; Watzlawick *et al.*, 2011). In this case, Jimmy struggles with parental neglect and judgment, as his tastes in music, fashion, and friendships are not only unappreciated but actively criticized. His parents, rather than offering guidance through empathetic engagement, dismiss his identity and passions. This lack of understanding is evident when Jimmy's father continuously interrupts his music-listening experience with unsolicited

comments, disregarding his son's enthusiasm and imposing his own subjective standards.

The generational gap manifests not only in tastes and preferences but also in the way authority and relationships are navigated within the household. Jimmy's parents, having been raised in a post-war environment where strict adherence to rules was emphasized over emotional connection, struggle to create a culture of open dialogue and mutual respect. Their parenting style, rooted in traditional, authoritarian methods, leaves little room for negotiation or understanding.

As Jimmy's behavior becomes increasingly deviant, rather than addressing the root causes or providing support, his parents resort to rejection. The mother, rather than fostering a meaningful conversation, engages in a confrontational and judgmental approach, ultimately disowning her son and expelling him from the home. The issue of amphetamine use, instead of being acknowledged and addressed as a serious concern requiring intervention, is merely cited as a justification for exclusion, further illustrating the failure of the parental role in fostering a supportive environment (see "Quadrophenia" at 1:31:53).

This situation exemplifies a broader societal issue: the rigid, authoritarian approach to parenting often leads to estrangement rather than resolution. Research suggests that authoritative parenting, which balances clear expectations with warmth and responsiveness, is far more effective in fostering healthy development (Baumrind, 1967; Erikson, 1968). Empathetic guidance, active listening, and open dialogue are essential components of positive parent-child relationships. When parents fail to engage in these practices, the result is often emotional alienation, which can contribute to rebellion, substance use, and familial breakdown.

3.4. Adult and educational agencies referrals

Jimmy is employed as a messenger in an advertising agency, where his responsibilities include distributing mail and delivering various materials across different departments. However, his detachment and restlessness reflect the broader disillusionment of a generation – the youth of the 1950s and 1960s – who resisted the rigid expectations of traditional society and the constraints of the corporate world (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977). Despite having a stable and well-compensated position, Jimmy perceives his role as monotonous and unfulfilling. His job as a deliveryman, while providing financial security, remains a modest and uninspiring occupation. His frustration with the constraints of employment becomes evident when his employer reprimands him for unwarranted absences.

3.5. Advertising, communication, and consumer identity (see “Quadrophenia” at 0:25:07)

Advertising represents a powerful tool of identification, shaping consumer behavior and influencing social norms (Codeluppi, 2012). In one revealing scene, two employees from the communications department engage in a discussion in the office bathroom, reflecting on the success of a recent advertising campaign. The campaign, titled “People Like You”, promotes a cigarette brand and has been well received, particularly among the medium-high target audience, which includes professionals, college graduates, and young managers. This emotional marketing strategy capitalizes on the notion that smoking a cigarette can symbolize a peaceful, satisfying love life, subtly linking product consumption with personal well-being (Kehret-Ward, 1988).

However, the cigarette manufacturers’ ambitions extend beyond this demographic, aiming to capture the attention of a younger, more impressionable audience. The concern shifts to the low-middle target youth market, epitomized by the character of Jimmy. The tobacco industry is aware that this segment holds significant potential yet remains difficult to access as traditional forms of marketing fail to penetrate the youth’s growing resistance to conventional advertising (Cova *et al.*, 2013). The employees reflect on the challenges of reaching this audience, which, in their view, is largely indifferent to the health risks associated with smoking. In an ethically charged moment, one employee dismisses the relevance of lung cancer concerns, suggesting that “Young people like it. That’s not what they’re worried about. Good thing I quit when I did. Business is Business!” This exchange underscores the industry’s willingness to overlook health risks in favor of profits, highlighting the commodification of youth and the ethical dilemmas embedded in advertising practices (Coombs *et al.*, 2011).

The bathroom scene also serves as a subtle but telling social commentary on the era. The presence of early personal care appliances – such as electric razors and shaving products on the sink – signals the period leading up to the economic boom, a time when consumer goods were becoming more integral to personal identity and societal aspirations (Riesman *et al.*, 1950), Debord, 1994; Baudrillard, 1998). These items, in their daily use, symbolize the increasing importance of consumer culture and self-presentation, marking a shift toward greater materialism and the growing significance of the individual’s public image in the postwar economy (Giddens, 1991).

3.6. Love, peers, and group influence

Although Jimmy outwardly rejects societal norms, his perception of love is

rooted in a romanticized notion of exclusivity, suggesting a paradox between his desire for freedom and his emotional aspirations. He seeks Steph's (the female lead character) attention by orchestrating opportunities for them to spend time together. To assert his importance and influence, he introduces the idea of using amphetamines, which he has procured.

As intimacy develops, their experiences diverge significantly, leading to a dynamic that ultimately exposes Jimmy to ridicule. The peer group serves as both a means of self-expression and a platform for social rebellion. When its internal dynamics become destructive, it fosters opposition to the adult world and a rejection of societal rules. The group's collective identity often supersedes personal friendships, as seen in the violent beating of Jimmy's friend, Rocket, illustrating the prioritization of gang loyalty over individual bonds. Despite this, moments of deep camaraderie and reflection exist beyond the gang's influence, emphasizing the dual nature of peer relationships. The gang dictates norms that overshadow personal allegiances, reinforcing a culture where adherence to group expectations takes precedence (Hebdige, 1979; Farina, 2020). Jimmy's assertion, "I'm Jimmy, and I don't want to be like anyone. That's why I'm a Mod", encapsulates his struggle for individuality within the constraints of subcultural identity. The rivalry between Mods and Rockers embodies serious violations of societal norms, often manifesting in acts of violence and aggression, experimentation with and abuse of drugs and general opposition to law and order (Cohen, 1972; Foucault, 1977).

3.7. *The street (again) as a symbolic and transformative space (see "Quadrophenia" at 1:57:37)*

The street reappears, once again, as a central and symbolic space, a place and yet a non-place (Augé, 2009). It serves as a dynamic setting where informal groups traverse the city, forming part of a broader system of interdependencies. The socio-spatial patterns within these streets are shaped by an intricate web of signs and sounds that define perceptions of urban space (Costa *et al.*, 2011; Gambini, 2015). Within these informal aggregations, multiple histories and lifestyles intersect, offering a site of cultural and social confluence. The street is not merely a physical pathway, it is also a space of consciousness-raising. It becomes an experimental ground for personal freedom, facilitating the development of critical thinking, self-awareness, and self-representation (Dewey, 1938; Sarracino, 2011). Jimmy's journey through the street represents an emancipation from societal constraints, an evolution towards self-realization. He achieves freedom by embracing his inner potential rather than conforming to external expectations.

The Italian pedagogue Paolo Gambini (2015) describes the street as a “great experiential laboratory”, emphasizing its role in personal and social transformation. Through this lens, *Quadrophenia*'s narrative can be seen as a gradual process of individuation. Jimmy distances himself from the Mods subculture, forging a distinct identity rooted in his values, aspirations, and personal uniqueness. This departure from the group signifies a break from external conditioning, a necessary step toward authentic self-expression. Jimmy's realization is further solidified in a symbolic act: rejecting the scooter, once a cherished emblem of identity and freedom. No longer imbued with its former meaning, the scooter is discarded over a cliff, a gesture reminiscent of The Who guitarist Pete Townshend's ritualistic destruction of guitars at the end of concerts (Townshend, 2012). This cathartic act signifies a profound transformation-growth as a process of shedding outdated ideals and embracing renewal.

4. Detached youth work and street education today

Social street work today is primarily focused on preventing youth distress, typically through projects funded by local authorities aimed at fostering stronger, more integrated relationships between institutions and informal adolescent groups in local communities. Nevertheless, over the past three decades, adolescence has undergone a profound transformation in its developmental dynamics. This shift is closely tied to significant changes in family structures, the evolving relationship between young people and the adult world, often strained interactions with educational institutions, and the role of peer groups (Corsi, 2003; Stramaglia, 2021).

From this perspective, those engaged in street work are tasked with playing a bridging role. This function goes beyond mere mediation, important as that maybe it involves reconnecting the individual with his or her sense of self and history, repairing broken relationships within groups, and rebuilding the web of connections between individuals, groups, and community services (Perkins and Long, 2002; Farina, 2020). Street interventions create opportunities to foster processes that enhance the potential and skills of minors, the informal groups they form, and the local communities to which they belong. The goal is to drive change that reduces the negative impacts of existing problems, and, when possible, prevents them from arising altogether (Sarason, 1974; Giroux, 2011). In this context, the street educator takes on dual roles: that of bridge-builder and resource-interlocutor. Often, these two aspects of the role are intertwined, enriching one another within educational projects. These projects not only work toward specific objectives but also contribute to reshaping the professional

approach of the educator (Naldini, 2003). Additionally, the street educator functions as an “antenna” within the community, facilitating intergenerational relationships and serving as a key point of reference for adolescents and young people. This role is reinforced through active involvement with institutions and services in co-designing educational actions and activities (Farina, 2020). It is a critical function that requires ongoing support from institutional networks and recognition from the local community, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness.

5. Toward new frontiers of *street education* between art, environment and interculturalism

Having briefly explored the key stages in the evolution of social and street work, we now turn to the relationship between educational dynamics and the artistic, environmental, and intercultural spheres, considering them as potential new frontiers for engaging young people in non-formal and informal educational contexts.

- *Art-based practices*: when used as a research-action methodology with youth, can serve as a catalyst for civic engagement and an effective tool for fostering active citizenship (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). According to Carvalho (2017), art-based education, through participatory civic practices, strengthens community ties and stimulates discussions on pressing local social issues. In contrast, Murdoch (2016) proposes that the term “art-based research” should be replaced by “art-led development,” emphasizing the critical role of the arts in promoting community cohesion. Art, in this context, facilitates interaction, collective action, and the deepening of social bonds through performance and non-performance approaches to development policies.
- *Artistic experiences*: serve as a powerful means of personal and collective communication, allowing for the expression of shared social realities through symbols, images, metaphors, experiences, and emotions (Foster, 2007). The true potential of the arts emerges when they break away from static representations, engaging directly with the bodies and intentional actions of those involved. This engagement stimulates critical reflection by evoking sensations that challenge perspectives (Thomson and Davies, 2019). Christoph Wulf and Bernd Hüppauf (2009) underscore the significance of the play-performance dimension in learning, highlighting how rituals and their ritualization contribute to the performative formation of communities. The tangible and sensory aspects of bodily enactment,

shaped through language and imagination, are crucial in educational processes (*Ibid.*).

- *Relationship between education and the environment*: here we introduce the concept of “educating space” (Gennari, 1997), which defines educational objectives aimed at engaging, integrating, and fostering the personal growth of young people in their communities. This concept also encompasses the understanding and enhancement of cultural production, social participation, and the promotion of socioeconomic development within the territories where educational initiatives occur. Vincenzo Sarracino (2011) advocates for a pedagogical framework that integrates diverse elements-people, the spaces they inhabit, and the tools and methods used in educational actions. From this perspective, space is not only a cultural unity that fosters growth and opportunity but also a territory that opens to educational communities, allowing them to express and develop their values (Fisher *et al.*, 2002). A territory, therefore, becomes both a laboratory for planning and assessing development strategies and a space for transcending individual cultural limits through the dissemination of new languages and codes. In essence, the environment is a multifaceted, multicultural “fabric” that plays an integrating role, combining different signs, languages, and cultural heritages in an unstructured, non-formal manner (Zanelli, 1986).
- *Interculturalism and critical pedagogies*: in today’s world, it is increasingly essential for educational professionals to guide the new generation in developing critical thinking rooted in the deconstruction of prejudices and the rejection of stereotypes, including those based on race, culture, and gender. This process of internalizing the value of diversity and the enrichment that comes from encountering others (Bruni, 2017) is not only necessary but unavoidable. The growing ethnic heterogeneity in our schools (ISTAT, 2023) compels educators to address, in pedagogical terms, the differences in geographic and cultural origins that students bring to the classroom (Farina and Pacini, 2024). An intercultural, pedagogical-critical, and post-colonial approach should drive the development of new democratic languages and forms of resistance, fostering reflection on how to transform existing relationships of subordination and oppression (Giroux, 2011). Pedagogical reflection must promote a dialogue based on mutual trust, enabling participants to navigate the unknown together and move beyond individual interests toward empathy and mutual understanding (Panikkar, 2006).

Conclusions

A defining characteristic of our era is the relentless and sudden emergence

of transformative processes – economic, social, cultural, and geopolitical – within an increasingly complex society. These changes, in turn, fuel widespread doubt, uncertainty, and fear as individuals struggle to interpret an ever-shifting reality (Castells, 1996; Morin, 2001). The intensification of such emotions not only leads to confusion and discomfort but also exacerbates conditions of anomie, alienation, psychosis, and marginalization (Farina, 2020).

From a pedagogical perspective, the concept of *wandering* serves as a powerful formative metaphor, enabling us to navigate contemporary dynamics through complexity-oriented thinking: an approach that “experiments, dialogues, and transgresses, moving beyond the methodological certainties that oppose its own dynamism with the static nature of what is known, established, and secure” (Gramigna and Rosa, 2015, p. 410). This mode of thinking becomes essential whenever transformation disrupts reality, creating disorientation. Likewise, educators must cultivate the ability to pause within such change, fostering in their students the same capacity to embrace uncertainty (Morin, 2001).

The metaphor of wandering – of setting out, crossing unknown territories – symbolically mirrors the developmental journey of an individual. Each person moves at their own pace, following their unique path, interpreting the journey in their own way, and forming relationships with fellow travelers and the landscapes they traverse (Augelli, 2011). This reflective engagement highlights the crucial interplay between thought and action, with the latter deeply rooted in practice (Schön, 1987). Similarly, the ongoing co-determination between action and context allows for the construction of new, shared forms of knowledge within the very environments where action takes place (Falcone, 2020).

Within these evolving landscapes, street educators can find their bearings through the cultural, theoretical, and practical tools provided by pedagogy – particularly social pedagogy – equipping them to navigate the complexities of educational work.

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