

Technologies pedagogy and mass culture in the legacy of apocalypitics and integrated in the contemporary era

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Abstract: The article explores the relationship between pedagogy, technologies, and cultural consumption, analyzing how the dichotomy between “apocalypitics” (critics of technological modernity) and “integrated” (enthusiasts of innovation) has evolved in the digital era. New generations, particularly Generations Y and Z, are at the forefront of this transformation, with immediate and continuous access to digital media and global cultural content. A critical reflection is offered on the role of digital pedagogy in fostering citizens who can navigate hyperconnectivity critically and responsibly. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this study highlights the need to balance technological innovation with mindful pedagogical reflection, capable of countering cultural superficiality while promoting an emancipatory use of technology.

Keywords: Digital pedagogy, technologies, mass culture, Generations Y and Z, Conscious Pedagogy

1. Introduction

The publication of *Apocalittici e integrati* in 1964 represents one of the key moments in critical reflection on media and mass culture. Umberto Eco, with his sharp semiological analysis and interdisciplinary approach, outlined a fundamental distinction between two opposing attitudes toward mass culture: on one side, the apocalypitics, critics and pessimists regarding the cultural homogenization produced by mass media, “*The apocalyptic ultimately consoles the reader because it allows them to glimpse, against the backdrop of catastrophe, the existence of a community of “supermen” capable of rising, if only through rejection, above the average banality*”, (Eco, 1964, p. 19); on the other side, the integrated, optimists who believed that the media could democratize access to mass culture, “*Mass culture is not typical of a capitalist regime. It arises in a society where the entire mass of citizens participates equally in public life, consumption, and communication; it inevitably emerges in any industrial type society*”, (Eco, 1964, p. 38). This dichotomy reflected the cultural tensions of the 1960s, a period marked by the explosion of television, the spread of cultural consumer products, and the consolidation of the welfare society (Bocci et al., 2023). Today, sixty years later, the cultural and technological landscape has profoundly changed. The advent of digital technologies, global hyperconnectivity, and the emergence of new generations, such as Generations Y and Z, have radically transformed the concept of mass culture and the way it is consumed, produced, and



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taught (Castiglione, 2024). In this context, Eco's contribution remains extraordinarily relevant, providing tools for interpreting new cultural dynamics. Thus, the interactions between pedagogy, new technologies, and mass culture represent one of the most current and complex themes of contemporary society, (Galofaro, 2024). The digital revolution has not only transformed the ways in which cultural content is communicated and consumed but has also reshaped the processes of learning and teaching, requiring a critical reconsideration of traditional educational paradigms. Pedagogy, understood as the discipline that studies educational methods and processes, now operates in a context where digital technologies and mass cultures have become integral parts of everyday life, especially for Generations Y (Millennials) and Z (digital natives), (Quarantino, 2023). These new generations grow up in environments characterized by hyperconnectivity, immediate access to information, and an on-demand culture that favors the rapid and fragmented consumption of cultural content. Tools such as e-learning platforms, educational applications, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and immersive environments like the metaverse are transforming the way educational experiences are designed and delivered, (Guaraldi & Nenzioni, 2023; Buccini, 2023). Learning, therefore, is becoming increasingly personalized, supported by technology that allows educational pathways to be adapted to the individual needs and learning rhythms of students, overcoming the rigidity of traditional educational systems, (Rossi et al., 2023). Similarly, the use of technology promotes Problem Based Learning (PBL) and peer collaboration, even in virtual and globalized environments, (Poletti, 2024). However, the introduction of technology also raises critical issues in education, highlighting the need for a balanced and conscious pedagogical approach. The superficiality of learning is exacerbated by the speed at which information is consumed, reducing the time available for critical reflection and in-depth analysis. Functional digital illiteracy manifests in the difficulty of correctly interpreting online content, increasing the risk of exposure to misinformation and manipulation. Finally, the digital divide exacerbates social and educational inequalities, creating a gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not, with repercussions on learning quality and future opportunities. These controversies surrounding mass culture are amplified by both traditional and digital media, which exert a strong influence on the construction of cultural and social identities, particularly during the formative years. In this regard, education plays a crucial role in providing tools for critically and consciously interpreting these dynamics. In fact, media literacy is an essential pillar in preparing students and citizens to interpret, analyze, and use content from mass media and social networks, (Ranieri, 2019). Umberto Eco had already anticipated how mass culture could influence society in an ambivalent way democratizing access to culture while simultaneously fostering homogenization and critical passivity, (Grillo, 2024). Today, an updated pedagogy must promote the ability to recognize fake news, informational biases, and communicative manipulations, as well as foster ethical and critical awareness in the production and sharing of online content. A pedagogical didactic approach should expose the most insidious virtual forms of these phenomena, making them recognizable, especially to younger generations. This educational model, therefore, starts from human rights and extends to their protection. The training of teachers, educators, and education professionals should focus on acquiring digital citizenship skills within an "active learning" perspective, (Palermo, 2024). Mass cultures, often criticized by the apocalypses as superficial entertainment forms, can instead become effective educational re-

sources. For example, mass cultural products (films, TV series, video games, and music) can be used as educational texts to stimulate critical and interdisciplinary analysis. In the same interactive mode, the metacognitive and social educational value of play has long been recognized in education, drawing interest from various disciplines, including anthropology (Huizinga, 1938), sociology (Caillois, 1967), psychology (Freud, 1920; Piaget, 1955; Erikson, 1963; Winnicott, 1991), pedagogy (Montessori, 1970), and philosophy (Fink, 1969). This tradition extends to modern educational gaming and the engaging qualities of gamification, which facilitate experiential learning by immersing students in interactive and motivating dynamics, (Shell, 2008; Vezzoli & Tovazzi, 2018). Digital narratives and the creative use of social media can serve as tools for developing communication and cultural competencies. The contemporary challenge, therefore, lies in finding a balance between the use of technology and the development of critical and reflective thinking, (Testa, 2023). Consequently, pedagogy must integrate technologies ethically and consciously, avoiding both the uncritical enthusiasm of the integrated and the outright rejection of the apocalypics. It should encourage an active digital culture, where students are not just passive consumers but creative content producers. Furthermore, it must promote an interdisciplinary approach that bridges technological, humanistic, and social dimensions, preparing citizens to navigate the complexities of digital culture with critical thinking and autonomy, (Mancini & Sebastiani, 2024). In summary, the dialogue between pedagogy, technology, and mass cultures must be grounded in theoretical reflection that acknowledges Umberto Eco's legacy, updating critical thinking to address contemporary challenges. Pedagogy is tasked with shaping individuals who are conscious and capable of interpreting mass culture and new technologies not as opposing forces but as opportunities for both individual and collective growth, (Ranieri et al., 2023).

The publication of *Apocalittici e integrati* in 1964 represents one of the key moments in critical reflection on media and mass culture. Umberto Eco, with his sharp semiological analysis and interdisciplinary approach, outlined a fundamental distinction between two opposing attitudes toward mass culture: on one side, the apocalypics, critics and pessimists regarding the cultural homogenization produced by mass media, "*The apocalyptic ultimately consoles the reader because it allows them to glimpse, against the backdrop of catastrophe, the existence of a community of "supermen" capable of rising, if only through rejection, above the average banality*", (Eco, 1964, p. 19); on the other side, the integrated, optimists who believed that the media could democratize access to mass culture, "*Mass culture is not typical of a capitalist regime. It arises in a society where the entire mass of citizens participates equally in public life, consumption, and communication; it inevitably emerges in any industrial type society*", (Eco, 1964, p. 38). This dichotomy reflected the cultural tensions of the 1960s, a period marked by the explosion of television, the spread of cultural consumer products, and the consolidation of the welfare society (Bocci et al., 2023). Today, sixty years later, the cultural and technological landscape has profoundly changed. The advent of digital technologies, global hyperconnectivity, and the emergence of new generations, such as Generations Y and Z, have radically transformed the concept of mass culture and the way it is consumed, produced, and taught (Castiglione, 2024). In this context, Eco's contribution remains extraordinarily relevant, providing tools for interpreting new cultural dynamics. Thus, the interactions between pedagogy, new technologies, and mass culture represent one of the most current and complex themes of contemporary society, (Galofaro, 2024). The

digital revolution has not only transformed the ways in which cultural content is communicated and consumed but has also reshaped the processes of learning and teaching, requiring a critical reconsideration of traditional educational paradigms. Pedagogy, understood as the discipline that studies educational methods and processes, now operates in a context where digital technologies and mass cultures have become integral parts of everyday life, especially for Generations Y (Millennials) and Z (digital natives), (Quarantino, 2023). These new generations grow up in environments characterized by hyperconnectivity, immediate access to information, and an on-demand culture that favors the rapid and fragmented consumption of cultural content. Tools such as e-learning platforms, educational applications, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and immersive environments like the metaverse are transforming the way educational experiences are designed and delivered, (Guaraldi & Nenzioni, 2023; Buccini, 2023). Learning, therefore, is becoming increasingly personalized, supported by technology that allows educational pathways to be adapted to the individual needs and learning rhythms of students, overcoming the rigidity of traditional educational systems, (Rossi et al., 2023). Similarly, the use of technology promotes Problem Based Learning (PBL) and peer collaboration, even in virtual and globalized environments, (Poletti, 2024). However, the introduction of technology also raises critical issues in education, highlighting the need for a balanced and conscious pedagogical approach. The superficiality of learning is exacerbated by the speed at which information is consumed, reducing the time available for critical reflection and in-depth analysis. Functional digital illiteracy manifests in the difficulty of correctly interpreting online content, increasing the risk of exposure to misinformation and manipulation. Finally, the digital divide exacerbates social and educational inequalities, creating a gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not, with repercussions on learning quality and future opportunities. These controversies surrounding mass culture are amplified by both traditional and digital media, which exert a strong influence on the construction of cultural and social identities, particularly during the formative years. In this regard, education plays a crucial role in providing tools for critically and consciously interpreting these dynamics. In fact, media literacy is an essential pillar in preparing students and citizens to interpret, analyze, and use content from mass media and social networks, (Ranieri, 2019). Umberto Eco had already anticipated how mass culture could influence society in an ambivalent way democratizing access to culture while simultaneously fostering homogenization and critical passivity, (Grillo, 2024). Today, an updated pedagogy must promote the ability to recognize fake news, informational biases, and communicative manipulations, as well as foster ethical and critical awareness in the production and sharing of online content. A pedagogical didactic approach should expose the most insidious virtual forms of these phenomena, making them recognizable, especially to younger generations. This educational model, therefore, starts from human rights and extends to their protection. The training of teachers, educators, and education professionals should focus on acquiring digital citizenship skills within an “active learning” perspective, (Palermo, 2024). Mass cultures, often criticized by the apocalypses as superficial entertainment forms, can instead become effective educational resources. For example, mass cultural products (films, TV series, video games, and music) can be used as educational texts to stimulate critical and interdisciplinary analysis. In the same interactive mode, the metacognitive and social educational value of play has long been recognized in education, drawing interest from various disci-

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2. Evolution of Mass Cultures: From the 20th to the 21st Century

The evolution of mass cultures from the 20th to the 21st century represents one of the most significant transformations in modern cultural history. In the 20th century, mass culture was dominated by traditional media such as radio, cinema, and television. These channels played a crucial role in shaping collective imaginaries, influencing social behavior, and creating a shared cultural experience. However, the transition to the 21st century has been marked by the advent of digital technologies, which have redefined not only the modes of production and consumption of cultural content but also the social, economic, and political dynamics associated with them, (Meda, 2011). Already in the second half of the 20th century, Marshall McLuhan anticipated a perspective in which communication media would not merely serve as transmission tools but would directly influence human perception and thought. His theory of the "*Global Village*," where human beings are no longer isolated but constantly connected to the rest of the world (McLuhan & Powers, 1992, p. 87), emphasized how every technological innovation reshapes society and its cognitive structures. This concept finds full confirmation in today's digital era, where global interconnection, the spread of social media, and the pervasive use of digital tools have transformed individuals from mere spectators into active content producers. This shift has exponentially multiplied the flow of information and reshaped collective memory. Derrick De Kerckhove, further developing McLuhan's ideas, introduced the concept of "*connective intelligence*," highlighting how the internet is not merely a tool for accessing information but an actual extension of the human mind, (De Kerckhove, 2019, p. 123). Through new digital media, knowledge is no longer confined to individual minds but becomes a collective memory, instantly accessible from any part of the world. While this has democratized access to knowledge, it has also raised critical

questions about the quality of information, the ability to independently process content, and the increasing fragmentation of knowledge. In today's mass society, modern technological tools for connection and sharing have materialized both the profound and paradoxical meaning of McLuhan's famous principle: "*the medium is the message*." In this scenario, communication channels do not merely transmit content but assume a predominant role over the message itself, demonstrating how the medium significantly influences users, shaping and transforming their thinking. McLuhan had already identified the roots of this epochal transformation with the invention of Gutenberg's movable type printing press, an innovation that profoundly changed Western European culture from the 16th to the 20th century, giving rise to a new *forma mentis* and a different human typology, (McLuhan, 1976, p. 39). Today, with hyperconnectivity and the speed at which content is produced and consumed, McLuhan's axiom "*the medium is the message*" takes on even greater significance. The evolution of mass culture has seen a transition from humans relying on memory and direct experience, to those immersed in electronic orality, and finally to contemporary individuals, who are constantly connected to an uninterrupted flow of data and information. However, this expansion of knowledge does not always equate to a deep, critical engagement with content. The abundance of information and its immediate accessibility have, in many cases, reduced the time available for processing and critical reflection, leading to an increasingly rapid and often superficial consumption of cultural material. The mass cultures of the 21st century, empowered by new technologies, have made knowledge more accessible while simultaneously making it more difficult to discern the quality of information. The transition to the digital era has transformed this scenario, redefining the very concept of mass culture and the ways in which it is consumed and transmitted. The contemporary reality, interactive and hyperconnected, is characterized by digital technologies that offer "*infinite cognitive possibilities that are not always selectable or realizable*", (Suerz, 2015, p. 70). This has greatly expanded the scope of mass cultures. The internet has eliminated geographical barriers, enabling the instant access to cultural content on a global scale. Social media, in particular, have turned every user into a potential content creator, inaugurating a new era of cultural participation, (Djamaluddin et al., 2023). Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the landscape by automating the production and distribution of content, personalizing it according to user preferences, and creating new forms of cultural interaction. The current challenge, therefore, lies in finding a balance between the use of new technologies and the development of critical thinking—one that goes beyond mere data accumulation to foster an authentic and conscious understanding of information.

3. Pedagogy and Technology: A New Educational Paradigm

The advent of digital technologies has marked a turning point in education, profoundly transforming teaching and learning methods, tools, and dynamics. In this new educational paradigm, traditional pedagogies are confronted with both the opportunities and challenges introduced by technological innovations, requiring critical reflection and conscious planning. Education is increasingly shaped by the "*continuity of data, user identity, and their history*" (Fabiano, 2024, p. 154), highlighting the need for pedagogical adaptation to the digital landscape. The integration of digital tools has led to the widespread use of e-learning platforms, enabling access to educational content

anytime and anywhere. Augmented and virtual reality provide immersive experiences that enhance conceptual understanding, while artificial intelligence introduces new levels of personalized learning through virtual tutors and automated assessment systems. These innovations redefine the role of teachers, shifting them from mere transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning, while students become active participants in their own educational journey. Within this framework, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) has allocated € 2.1 billion under the “Scuola 4.0” initiative. This investment aims to transform traditional classrooms into innovative learning spaces and establish laboratories for emerging digital professions. Additionally, a dedicated funding stream has launched an extensive training program for school personnel, supporting the digital transition in education. The term “Scuola 4.0” reflects the initiative's goal of creating hybrid learning environments that integrate innovative teaching methodologies and inclusive educational practices. This shift underscores the need for a well-structured digital pedagogy that not only incorporates new technologies but also ensures that learning remains critical, reflective, and inclusive in an era of rapid digital transformation. This approach combines the educational potential of physical spaces redesigned through technological integration with the opportunities provided by digital environments, fostering a more interactive and flexible teaching model, (Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito, 2022). Despite regulatory advancements, the adoption of digital technologies still presents several challenges. The introduction of the metaverse as an educational model, for example, brings both opportunities and significant concerns. Not all schools and students have access to the technological resources required to manage complex virtual environments. Moreover, ensuring student safety and privacy in digital spaces is crucial, alongside providing adequate technical and pedagogical support for both teachers and learners. The digital divide further exacerbates inequalities, limiting access to educational resources for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, (d'Avanzo, 2023). Despite these challenges, media literacy has become essential to enable students to critically analyze information, recognize fake news, and participate responsibly in content creation. Addressing these issues requires adopting a critical pedagogy that promotes the ethical use of technology, fosters critical thinking, and creates a collaborative and inclusive learning environment, (Sebastiani, 2024). In conclusion, while digital technologies offer an immense opportunity to redefine educational paradigms, they require a conscious and responsible approach to navigate the challenges they bring. Only through such an approach can we build an education system that shapes critical, creative, and actively engaged individuals, fully prepared to participate in the cultural and social dynamics of the contemporary era.

4. Conclusions

Sixty years after the publication of *Apocalittici e integrati*, Umberto Eco's insights remain highly relevant, providing critical tools to interpret the relationship between humans, technology, and culture in the digital era. Although today's technologies were unimaginable in his time, the dynamics he analyzed such as cultural homogenization and uncritical consumption are now amplified by hyperconnectivity and the widespread influence of digital media. The dichotomy between apocalypses and integrated is not merely a historical category but an invitation to move beyond both technophobic pessimism and uncritical enthusiasm for technology, fostering a

balance between awareness and progress. “*Since television, newspapers, radio, cinema and comics, popular novels, and Reader’s Digest now make cultural goods available to everyone, making the absorption of knowledge and the reception of information enjoyable and effortless, we are living in an era of cultural expansion in which, at last and on a broad level, with the contribution of the best, the circulation of a ‘popular’ art and culture is taking place.*”, (Eco, 1964, p. 18). Mass culture will continue to evolve alongside technological innovations, posing new educational and social challenges that require targeted pedagogical strategies. Among these are the use of interactive educational platforms based on augmented reality and artificial intelligence to stimulate critical thinking, the promotion of media literacy to cultivate informed citizens, the use of mass media as educational tools, and the development of global policies to ensure equitable access to technology. In an increasingly digital context, education must evolve to address the challenges of contemporary society by providing tools for critical analysis, bridging the digital divide, and encouraging active student participation. Eco’s legacy invites us to adopt a balanced and responsible approach to integrating pedagogy and technology, transforming the challenges of the digital age into opportunities for a more inclusive, conscious, and participatory culture. This requires avoiding both the demonization and the uncritical glorification of new technologies. “*It then becomes clear that the attitude of the intellectual, when faced with this situation, must be the same as that of those who, in response to the industrial age of mechanization, did not ask how to return to nature—that is, to a pre-industrial state—but rather asked under what circumstances the relationship between humans and the production cycle reduced them to mere components of the system, and how instead a new image of humanity should be developed in relation to this system of conditioning; a human being not liberated from the machine, but free in relation to it.*”, (Eco, 1964, p. 22-23).

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