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## Postdigital Intercultures

### 1. Foreword

In this special issue, we aim to explore the field of research of *Post-digital Intercultures* that stems from the hybridisation of intercultural studies, and intercultural pedagogy criticism in particular, and of media education, which have evolved into new literacies education and online citizenship.

Although postdigital interculturalism is presented as a pedagogical field here, it is actually an interdisciplinary field that is indebted to the perspectives that have marked pedagogical-intercultural and media-educational reflection, such as cultural studies, postcolonial theory, anti-racist education, critical cultural anthropology, Freirian conscientization, critical Frankfurtian theory, French media semiotics, media literacy, hate studies, digital activism and artivism, data literacy and new literacies studies.

This is a field of research in which the challenge of living together, education for citizenship, and social relations both among individuals and of individuals with societies and their structures, are studied in relation to the everyday intertwining of socio-cultural heterogeneity/

<sup>1</sup> The present contribution is the joint work of the two authors; however, it should be noted that §§ 2, 3 were written by Stefano Pasta (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore) and §§ 4, 5 by Davide Zoletto (Università degli Studi di Udine); the “Foreword” and § 6 were written by both authors.

complexity and a plurality of languages and environments that are connected to postdigital transformations. Their implications for research and intervention in different formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts are also considered.

In other words, starting from the literature of the last few decades, it is possible to assume that the media contribute to determining intercultural conditions and that, at the same time, socio-cultural conditions contribute to changing media-mediated uses and representations of reality.

More recently, in these media-educational and intercultural studies, it has become apparent that both the media, which are indistinguishable from the rest of life and society, and plural socio-cultural affiliations are part of the (postdigital and intercultural) social fabric in which we live. It is a fabric, and this too is now an acquired trait, referred to as *onlife*, i.e. overcoming the dichotomy between online and offline (Floridi, 2014). Thus, the term “postdigital intercultures” refers to studies characterised by the centrality of both these consciousnesses in their analyses and methodologies. It is not a matter of juxtaposing the two disciplines, or seeing which one constitutes the context of the other, but of grasping their intertwining. By adopting a systemic approach, such a view - which still needs to be refined - allows a better understanding of the innovations that are currently emerging in social phenomena and educational processes.

In order to proceed in this direction, this contribution reconstructs (1) the historical connections between media, technology and migration, (2) how the contemporary rethinking of media education impacts on intercultural reflection, (3) how, conversely, the importance of the intertwining of intercultural pedagogical research with digital media has emerged, and (4) how new scenarios of research and intervention have emerged from the intersection of these processes and dimensions and call for a broadening of our traditional “research imaginary”, also in pedagogical terms. The text concludes with (5) the identification of specific research trajectories that have hybridised the two perspectives within the Italian pedagogical context; and with the presentation of the

articles that are featured in the special issue contained in this issue of «Scholé» that exemplify how the invitation to rethink our pedagogical research imaginary may be expressed.

## *2. Three historical connections between media, technology and migration*

The connection of the two disciplinary fields at the centre of this issue of *Scholé*, i.e. media education and interculture, has historically been put into practice following at least three macro directions.

The first is the established link between media, technology and migration (Alonso - Oiarzabal, 2010): for many years, international migration has entailed migrants' radical detachment from their community of origin (Faist, 2000), and they have been defined as "uprooted" because they have severed their everyday social ties. New means of communication over long distances have changed this situation: since the beginning of the 20th century, first-generation migrants have kept in touch with family and friends remaining in their place of origin by sending letters and parcels (Thomas - Znaniecki, 1918-20). The expression "death of distance" (Cairncross, 1997) was coined, and the boom in cheap international telephone calls has been described as a sort of transnational social glue (Horst, 2006), and technological innovations have provided new cultural spaces for migrants even in migrant societies (Kosnick, 2007). With the advent of the web, the resulting lowering of communication costs, along with the speed and intensity of information have had an exponential impact on communication flows. In particular, there is a greater capacity for processing information, greater potential for interpersonal interaction and greater flexibility towards continuous presence, which, among many other aspects, also modifies the fortunate concept - *the double absence* - with which the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) depicted the migrant as a subject who is perpetually out of place and suffers from both the absence of his or her motherland and a sense of estrangement in the country of arrival where he or she never feels completely welcome and accepted. That

study considered migration a “total social fact”, an interpretation that could be completed with the adjective “onlife” today and is partially complemented by the concept of *double présence* thanks to the social web (Elhajji, 2021).

A second connection lies in research into how the media describe - or rather mediate - migrants and, more generally, the diversity of a society (Koopmans *et al.*, 2005; Binotto - Bruno - Lai, 2016; Giorgi - Vitale, 2017). Such research includes studies on the role of the media in relation to different forms of prejudiced thinking (stereotypes, prejudice, racism) (Pasta, 2018), their implications in intercultural relations, and therefore in intercultural and anti-racist education (Santerini, 2003; Eckmann - Eser Davolio, 2002), on the ways in which migration is experienced and narrated in the countries of departure, and on how the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism change (Kissau - Hunger, 2010). Among the various contributions that have problematised the field of inquiry, the critical postcolonial perspective is noteworthy, as it found its propelling centre in cultural studies (Hall, 1996; see Zoletto, 2011 and for its expression in the Italian context) and is intended here as a critical and self-critical “distancing” of Western thought from a set of relations and representations that are produced or also conveyed by the media and on which both knowledge and practices addressing the Other were based during the colonial period (Mellino, 2005; Zoletto, 2015; Burgio, 2022).

The third connection, from the perspective of critical media literacy studies, concerns the mutual changes in the various cultural fields that are the outcome of the encounter between diverse societies and media products (De Block - Buckingham, 2007; Badr - Samour, 2023). Gilroy thus addresses «multiculture [as] an ordinary feature of social life» (2005, p. XV): by foregrounding the importance of studying ordinary, everyday experiences of diversity and its (digital) mediation, new connections are made between media education and “mediated cosmopolitanism” (Ponzanesi, 2020). It should be borne in mind that although the “convergence to the digital” (Jenkins, 2006) represents a new *koiné*, social media are changed by the cultural contexts (values, moral beliefs,

culturally encoded behaviour) in which they are used, thus taking on different functions. This is the thesis of the extensive survey, coordinated by Daniel Miller (2018), that studied the ways in which people use social media in different countries around the world (southern Italy, south-eastern Turkey, two sites in China — one in the rural area and one in the industrial area — Trinidad, England, southern India, northern Chile and Brazil) through an ethnographic approach. This third connection is also dynamic and continuously questioned. As Julian McDougall and Isabella Rega sustain in their essay in this issue of «Scholé» (*supra*, pp. 9-10):

In our research, across Cultural Studies, Education, Media Literacy and Digital Artivism, we have come to understand differently how sociocultural heterogeneity and techno-cultural transformations both enable new intersections of media literacy and citizenship and compel a more, and a differently more, diverse media literacy and a re-negotiation of what we are thinking about when we talk about a more diverse citizenship. [...] However, we have also come to understand that such a shift is epistemological.

### *3. Starting from media education*

At the time of the platform society (Van Dijck - Poell - de Waal, 2018), three changes in the interpretation of media education, which go so far as to question its very construct, transversally impact on the three fields of connection mentioned above<sup>2</sup>.

A first step is the assertion of media co-authorship (Boyd - Nowak, 2013) in an information ecosystem characterised by apparent disintermediation (Missika, 2006), or rather by new forms of mediation (Zuboff, 2019). The emergence of the social web entails the shift from viewers

<sup>2</sup> The analysis of the three changes in the interpretation of media education that are explored in this section is drawn from Rivoltella's studies and, in particular, from *Media education* (2017a), *Tecnologie di comunità* (2017b), *Nuovi alfabeti* (2020), *Pedagogia algoritmica* (with C. Panciroli, 2023).

to *prosumers*, i.e. the union of *producer* and *consumer* (Toffler, 1980), which, from an educational point of view, may be translated into the proposal of Onlife Citizenship (Pasta - Rivoltella, 2022). Usage and production are necessary since languages, in addition to being read, must also be produced, or rather used to produce messages. This is why Rivoltella (2020) sustains that there is need for new *literacies*: in fact, new media make it easy to produce and publish content on the web without mediating apparatuses. Critical-spirit education, in which the three conceptual matrices of Freirian conscientization, Frankfurt critical theory and French media semiotics may be recognised, is the most classic legacy of media education (Rivoltella, 2017a) and remains valid in the current social web, e.g. with regard to fake news (McDougall, 2019). However, with a smartphone in hand, this is only half the story: it is still necessary to educate the cultural producer that each user has become toward responsibility, which is understood as assessing the consequences of one's actions in the digital environment. This is accomplished through the creation and sharing of content that is created in turn by other users, i.e. so-called *User Generated Contents* (van Dijk, 2011). In an intercultural perspective, there are several implications of such a process: minority groups are no longer merely the object of media representation but rather producers, generators and users of information in digital format (Dekker - Engbersen, 2014; Scholten - van Ostaijen, 2018); moreover, the social web, as well as supporting migration and inclusion processes (Brown, 2016; Andreotti - Solano, 2018; Pasta, 2019), can sometimes be the “threshold of visibility” for forms of media activism and “artivism” (Medrado - Rega, 2022; Pasta, 2023a).

A second change in perspective concerns mediamorphosis (Rivoltella, 2017b), with the shift from a logic of mediation to one of mediatisation (Colombo, 2020). The idea of mediation considers *media as tools* that make communication possible even when the sharing of space and time is lost: this is what the previously mentioned studies that investigate migrants' communication with those left behind in their countries of origin and at different stages of the journey seek to do (Dominescu, 2014; Altin, 2004).

A subsequent conceptualisation is that of media *as environments*, by noting how media colonise spaces, especially urban ones, and hybridise them. This phase, which is characterised by online groups based on collaboration in which people enter into relations with other subjects, produce, edit and archive materials, also responds to this meaning. For example, for second generation immigrants in Italy in the early 2000s, online forums were the spaces in which they began to exchange their first testimonies on their condition, thus coming out of a dimension of loneliness with respect to their own experiences, setting up networks and experiencing forms of civic activism aiming at their recognition and the reform of citizenship law (Granata, 2011).

In addition to memory and the world itself, media mediate our relationships (Thompson, 1995), both when living in a geographical elsewhere and when living in the same place or together (Turkle, 2011). Therefore the media<sup>1</sup> are more than just tools or environments: they are a *connective tissue*, the skin of our culture that contains and represents the first point of contact with the outside world. They can thus become - quoting the title of Rivoltella's study conceptualising mediamorphosis in this way - *Technologies of Community* (2017). *Hate Studies* (Siegel, 2020; Schweppe - Perry, 2022) show how online groups that polarise against a target are forms, however distorted, of community (Pasta, 2018); similarly, we see forms of pro-migrant community technologies (Marino, 2021), or of how social media create and expand bonds around identity and aggregative debates such as #Nappytalia (Afro-Italian Nappy Girls), a community of Afro-Italian women with connections in other nations that formed on social media around the valuing of curly Afro hair, free of ironing, as a defining element. Another example may be seen in the role of technologies in the construction of communities (including those of migrants) that are connected to certain sports (e.g., for a case study on cricket, see Zoletto, 2010, pp. 111-129).

It should also be emphasised that the information ecosystem is flat-formed, i.e. it bears witness to the prominence of web companies, through algorithms, in the organisation of data and, therefore, in the mediation of relationships, the selection of sources and knowledge of

the world. This has led to sustain the presence of a “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019) – that is, a new form of capitalism that proliferates on the basis of the possibility of influencing our consumption choices precisely because of the surveillance that data enable it to exercise over us - and to theorise the need for a shift from media education to data literacy, or AI literacy, or algorithmic pedagogy (Cobo - Rivas, 2023; Rivoltella - Pancioli, 2023). We limit ourselves here to noting that, as the aforementioned postcolonial critique has pointed out, power asymmetries are not neutral and indifferent in cultural mediation and in relations among cultural affiliations (cf. Critical Digital Social Research, in Fuchs, 2019). McDougall and Rega write (*infra*, p. 50):

Our way of understanding media literacy as deeply situated in cultural, geo-political and media ecosystem contexts seeks to avoid universal, “neutral” solutionism and to understand tensions and nuances, such as the ways in which media literacy interventions in response to “information disorder” relate to freedom of expression, civic agency and epistemological value systems. This intersection of media literacy and activism is often realised in community media through a combination of action learning and indigenous epistemologies.

*Platformisation*, as the most advanced stage of mediatisation, is characterised by the migration of media into our lives, *everywhere* and *everywhere*, everywhere and in such a way that devices may be found anywhere (Greenfield, 2006). This is the reality of the Internet of Things, a reality made up of intelligent (smart) objects made so by the presence of technology hidden within them.

This condition of “digital surrounding” has been questioning media education for at least a decade. By coining the expression “onlife”, Floridi (2014) has overcome the dichotomy between online and offline. Through the concept of “postmediality”, Eugeni (2015) acknowledged that mass media are finished, in the sense that their recognisability as material instruments and the era in which devices controlled one-to-many communication are over, and that it was not possible to access public space without this mediation. Rivoltella and Rossi (2019) have theorised the gradual shift of media and technology education towards



education *tout court*, with the consequent reconfiguration of education in digital citizenship, which is no longer thought of as a transition to “life on the screen” (Turkle, 1996), or as “one” of the citizenships, but rather as a non-separable constituent part of citizenship education<sup>3</sup>.

The “postdigital” – this is the third instance of reconception – has entered academic thinking, *primarily* in the centres of the University of Edinburgh and Coventry University, after it had already asserted itself in other fields of culture, e.g. arts (Bishop *et al.*, 2017), music (Cascone, 2012), architecture (Spiller, 2009), humanities (Hall, 2013), social sciences (Taffel, 2016), and many inter-, trans-, and post-disciplines between them (Berry - Dieter, 2015). The term dates back to an article in *Wired* by Nicholas Negroponte (1998), in which he stated: «Face it - the digital revolution is over». This does not mean that the digital is not important. However, continues Negroponte, «its literal form, the technology, is already beginning to be taken for granted, and its connotation will become tomorrow’s commercial and cultural compost for new ideas. Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence».

We refer to the work of Florian Cramer (2015) and Petar Jandrić (Jandrić *et al.*, 2018; 2023) for a more accurate definition, but this perspective points to the urgency of thinking about existence and (intercultural) relations after the digital has redefined them in depth according to the previously mentioned mediamorphosis. The term “postdigital” therefore does not indicate life after the digital, but rather thematises the consequences of the digital, from the perspective of the present issue, which is to be applied to the relationship with diversity and the challenge of living together (*Postdigital Intercultures*).

In this way, it is possible to re-read Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) theory of global cultural flows from a postdigital point of view: in the context

<sup>3</sup> «Speaking of media education has become a pleonasm: there is no need to add ‘to the media’, because in informational society, education is already always and in any case a process that takes media and technologies into account» (Rivoltella - Rossi, 2019, p. 92; translated by the authors).

of globalisation characterised by acceleration, the notion of “mobility” is more useful for understanding contemporary society than its stable structures and organisations. The social subject, in fact, must deal with two types of flows: human flows, i.e. transnational migrations, and symbolic flows, conveyed by equally transnational digital media. In both cases, the subject is materially or symbolically (*onlife*) transported, deterritorialised and traversed by a multiplicity of discourses deriving from different social and cultural horizons and loaded with the most diverse symbolic and semiotic registers. In this manner, the ‘intercultural issue’ is brought back to the centre of contemporary globalised society.

#### *4. Starting from Interculture*

Many of the complexities, tensions, and hybridities that have been outlined so far also emerge significantly when questioning certain developments in current pedagogical-intercultural research. There is, in fact, a strong awareness in this field that it is necessary to turn to new fields of research and that, in order to tackle them, we need to equip ourselves with equally new epistemological and methodological approaches (see Catarci - Fiorucci, 2015; Fiorucci - Pinto Minerva - Portera, 2016; Tarozzi, 2015; Santerini, 2019; Portera - Moodley - Milani, 2020; Portera, 2022; Agostinetto, 2022) From this perspective, the intertwining with the digital and the environments, flows, and practices that are connected to it (in other words, the intertwining with the postdigital scenario mentioned above) constitutes a particularly urgent and significant trial.

John B. Thompson’s famous words – «if “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun”, as Geertz once remarked, then communication media are spinning wheels in the modern world and, in using these media, human beings are fabricating webs of significance for themselves» (Thompson, 1995, p. 11, with which he in turn refers to: Geertz, 1973, p. 5) – seem to be even more significant today, especially when one considers that so-called “cultural differences” are certainly not the only element to emerge within the complexity of educational contexts.

Terms such as “transnationalism” (Guarnizo - Smith, 1998), “intersectionality” (McCall, 2005), “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007) – which correspond to just as many epistemological, methodological and research perspectives – suggest, on the one hand, the need to grasp relationships (and, indeed, “intersections”) among a plurality of elements: age, gender, socio-economic aspects, linguistic repertoires, etc. On the other hand, they highlight how these relationships/intersections emerge within contexts that not only are always “*power-laden*” (Valentine, 2007), but can hardly be traced back today to an idea of circumscribed localisation and detached from networks and flows that go beyond both the local and national dimensions. Moreover, the directions of such flows, as research by Ulf Hannerz (1992) and the aforementioned Appadurai (1996) has demonstrated, are in any case also directed by the asymmetries in the micro- and macro-relationships that are present among people and groups within different cultural and socio-economic contexts. For instance, Appadurai himself points out how individuals and groups construct/represent their own and other people’s lives today by also resorting to repertoires of often digitally mediated images and narratives which, on the one hand, are conveyed by a multiplicity of global flows while, on the other hand, they are always localised within specific contexts (and constraints) starting from equally situated perspectives.

It is within educational environments characterised by these tensions and ambivalences that the digital, in its various expressive forms, thus contributes today to “weaving” (adopting Thompson’s metaphor) not only cultural differences, but also the multiplicity of the previously mentioned relationships/intersections: the scholars gathered in the New London Group have pointed out, not coincidentally, that «the proliferation of communications channels and media supports and extends cultural and subcultural diversity» (New London Group, 2000, p. 9).

It is not only a matter of being able to better grasp, thanks to the digital, the pre-existing “superdiversity” and “intersections” with respect to the digital environments themselves. Rather, we could hypothesise that it is *also* by virtue of the features of digital environments - or perhaps

also by virtue of the mentioned characteristics of our *postdigital* experiences in the increasingly extensive and indistinct “borderland” between online and offline - that relationships/intersections take shape. Once again, it is important to bear in mind, however, that, far from having characteristics of presumed “neutrality”, even such a postdigital “borderland” and the experiences that take shape there – not unlike, after all, other less metaphorical borderlands of today (Anzaldua, 1987) – are traversed by tensions, contradictions, and power relationships: forms/processes of participation and emancipation as well as marginalisation, discrimination, and stigmatisation can emerge there.

The aim of research and pedagogical-intercultural intervention in heterogeneous and postdigital contexts cannot, therefore, only be that of understanding how the digital may be a valuable resource to promote interaction among people and groups with different backgrounds, or just that of investigating how it can support increasingly equitable, inclusive and intercultural learning and citizenship paths. In fact, it will also be a question of understanding how the postdigital condition substantially contributes today to the shaping of the differences that encounter one another (and sometimes, unfortunately, still clash) in heterogeneous educational contexts in which access to various resources (including digital ones) is certainly not equally distributed. Furthermore, it will be a matter of trying to describe and understand how the postdigital scenario contributes to defining everyday and situated conditions (i.e., the mixture of strengths and weaknesses, of potential and constraints) *also* of the educational relationship and of educational work in their various intercultural (but also, for example, intergenerational) forms, as well as the transformations of the relationships among the various educational agencies that are present throughout the territories (Catarci, 2014; Tramma, 2017). While these territories (and educating communities) increasingly appear to be characterised by significant social, cultural and linguistic complexity, they are also increasingly difficult to circumscribe within traditional boundaries. This was suggested, for example, by Ruud van der Veen and Danny Wildemeersch when examining the educational features (and especially those related to adult and community learning) of highly com-

plex and heterogeneous contexts such as contemporary urban ones (van der Veen - Wildemeersch, 2012).

In their analysis of the educational values of such contexts, Van der Veen and Wildemeersch move precisely from the detection of certain tensions that emerge there and also shape certain aspects related to diversity into unprecedented forms. For instance, the two authors focus on the tension/co-presence of “real” and “virtual” learning environments and the implications of such dynamics on socialisation and *community education* processes (*Ibi*, pp. 6; 8-9). In light of the features described in the first paragraphs of this contribution, we could perhaps now broaden this perspective by pointing out how our experiences change *also due to* the coexistence of *online* and *offline* dimensions.

*Mutatis mutandis*, what van der Veen and Wildemeersch’s analysis invites us in any case to keep at the centre of the current research and intervention agenda in the pedagogical-intercultural sphere - and what McDougall and Rega, for example, strongly emphasise in this special issue as well - is the “situated” character of the educational experience, also in its postdigital form, and the tensions within which it is placed. Urban spaces, as previously mentioned, are an example of this. On the one hand, as the authors observe, the traditional distinctions between the formal and informal aspects of learning (and contextually between institutional and non-institutional aspects) are changing; on the other hand, digital environments also contribute to defining the opportunities and constraints within which it is possible to experiment new and unprecedented forms of aggregation. However, at the same time, and just as often, they can feed into boundaries that are rigid and sometimes actually contribute to old and new forms of marginalisation (*Ibidem*).

### *5. New research and intervention scenarios?*

One of the central aspects, from a pedagogical-intercultural - but we could say, perhaps, also pedagogical point of view *tout court* - is the fact that this focus on the emerging differences at the intersection of

different *flows*, different *meanings of the local dimension* and different *languages, tools and environments, including digital ones*, poses a challenge that is as urgent as it is pedagogically necessary for what Greg Dimitriadis terms our “research imaginary” (2008, p. 81).

This is not an easy challenge to take up, as the various elements that were outlined in the previous paragraphs have been (and are being) investigated within very different disciplines and perspectives. Nevertheless, it is precisely such variety that offers just as many epistemological and methodological contributions to the exploration of the pedagogical-educational issues that are emerging in the heterogeneous contexts of the postdigital era.

To provide just one among many possible examples, the intersectional perspective (given the aforementioned awareness of the always situated and relational dimension of differences, as well as of processes of inclusion/participation, and of those of exclusion/marginalisation) appears capable of profitable dialogue today. This is necessary in order to explore, for example, the *power-laden* features of postdigital contexts - with the epistemological and methodological awareness that has been consolidated in the media-educational sphere around the paradigms and methodological tools used to reflect on the various media. Rivoltella had already pointed this out back in 2001, starting from the importance of enhancing a methodological approach that was both semiotic and ethnographic. However, just as many connections emerge with reference to the aforementioned matter of transnational (or “trans-local”) connections that reshape today’s highly complex socio-cultural and linguistic contexts and to which the study of postdigital research can provide an essential contribution.

Moreover, the intertwining of the pedagogical-intercultural and media-educational research field appears to be potentially particularly fruitful considering the previously mentioned postcolonial perspective, which invites us to overcome the purely binary logics that tend to polarise the educational relationship within stereotyped oppositions. These consist in oppositions between those who are always represented as being “expected” only to teach/help, and those who

instead – as they are “represented” as lacking resources (knowledge, skills) – could only learn/be helped. The invitation to focus research and intervention on the intertwining of socio-cultural complexity and postdigital transformations would rather try to identify and explore, without abdicating the scientific and pedagogical responsibility of the researcher/teacher/educator, a complex “territory”, full of potential/opportunities as well as risks/constraints, which is ultimately presented as “common ground” for all those who inhabit, on both sides of the educational relationship, today’s “super-diverse” learning contexts.

As an example of the pedagogical relevance of broadening our research imagery, we could start – to remain in the sphere of urban contexts – from a reflection by the aforementioned Dimitriadis regarding the study of (and educational work with) youth cultures. As the scholar noted in fact, «educators and others interested in urban youths have tended to hold onto and locate young people’s lives within a fairly circumscribed set of boundaries – home and school» (*Ibi*, p. 82). However, the author claims that it seems relevant today to consider how «this project of “territorializing” young people’s lives is itself a debilitating function of power» (*Ibidem*). Here is an example of how a “rethinking” of the research and intervention imaginary is necessary today precisely to safeguard, nurture and contextualise the emancipatory mandate of educational work, in this case, with young people. As an example of such a broadening in the early 2000s, Dimitriadis had already cited the overcoming of simple “dichotomies between home and school culture” by suggesting, in the words of Levinson and Holland (1996, p. 26), a focus on areas of cultural production that «intersect with each other in complex ways, difficult to predict a priori» (*Ibidem*).

Two specific examples in this sense that were cited by Dimitriadis are “community-based learning settings” and the texts of today’s popular culture (*Ibidem*; see also Zoletto, 2019). Both of these are aspects that need to be contextualised within the postdigital scenario. Suffice it to think of a case study like that cited by Dimitriadis himself, i.e. Shirley Brice Heath in *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Works in Communities and Classrooms* (1983). Such research could be contextualised within the

changed current scenario, with its different everyday life and intra- and intergenerational relations, as well as with equally diverse localisations (of lives and communities), linguistic practices and *literacies*, within which the digital plays roles that are certainly different, but nevertheless central and, in most cases, still to be described and interpreted.

Reflections such as those just reported appear to draw further relevance from the issues that have been described in the previous paragraphs, and thus emerge in educational contexts such as those of today, which are more often than not *both postdigital and characterised by significant socio-cultural and linguistic complexity*. As has been suggested several times so far, there are contexts within which these two dimensions *intertwine*, leading to the emergence of configurations that still need to at least partially be explored, *including* on a pedagogical, didactic and educational level.

## 6. Research and Perspectives

There have been attempts to define this field of research on an international level: for instance, in 2012 Robert Shuter spoke of Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS) – founded, on the one hand, on how ICT's impact theories of communication *among* people who do not share the same cultural backgrounds and, on the other hand, on the relationship between culture and new media, namely how culture impacts the social uses of new media within and across societies, and in what ways new media affect culture. The INMS approach, however, has the limitation of enclosing the reflection within intercultural communication (thus incorporating the new condition of “a new media age”), which is only one of the possible research intersections between media literacy and interculture.

In addition, a number of scientific journals have devoted special issues<sup>4</sup> to the topic, which has also been addressed at the conferences of the two main international Francophone and Anglophone intercultural

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. X, No. 4 (2022) *Inclusive Media Literacy Education for Diverse Societies* in «Media and Communication».



studies associations, the Association pour la Recherche Interculturelle (ARIC) and the International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE). In particular, the research axis “*Technologies de l’Information et de la Communication (TIC) et interculturalité*”, which is coordinated by Elaine Costa-Fernandez, was established within the former in 2015 and has resulted in the publication of six books dedicated to this perspective to date.

Narrowing the field to Italian pedagogical studies, let us now try to identify some research trajectories that have hybridised the two perspectives.

A strand of studies that has been pursued at different times is that of education technology, i.e. the use of technologies to support learning and educational processes, e.g. in the Provincial Centres for Adult Education (Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti, or CPIA in Italian) in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (Floreancig *et al.*, 2018), in the case of unaccompanied minors (Fulantelli *et al.*, 2018), in non-formal educational contexts (Ranieri - Bruni, 2013; Zoletto, 2013), heterogeneous and intercultural school contexts (Zoletto - Tommasi, 2022), the reception system for asylum seekers (Pasta, 2021; Giorgini, 2022) and in relation to informal solidarity (Bassoli, 2016), literacy processes (Zinant, 2013), the learning of the Italian language (Welisch - Asta, 2021; D’Agostino, 2021), and the work of educators engaged in highly complex contexts (Tommasi, 2022).

A number of studies have been devoted to the impact of new media and the social web on the transversal themes of intercultural pedagogy (cf. the pioneering Tosolini - Trovato, 2001; but also Zinant, 2017) or certain contexts that have traditionally been the subject of intercultural studies, starting with the children of immigrants (Zinant, 2014) and transnational migrants (Schiesaro, 2018; Pasta, 2019; 2020a; Ferrari - Rondonotti, 2023).

Other investigations have focused on the relationship from the point of view of competence, indicating the link between intercultural and media-educational competences (Fiorucci, 2011; Pasta, 2020b), or begun to explore the possible intercultural value of languages related to technologically mediated practices (Zoletto - Zanon, 2019; Zoletto, 2023), also with reference to video-game practices (Zoletto, 2022). Applications for “media education in multicultural schools” have

stemmed from European projects, with the proposal of the Media and Intercultural Education Framework (MIEF) by the group coordinated by Maria Ranieri of the University of Florence (Ranieri - Fabbro - Nardi, 2019). Also within the school context, in addition to the impact of distance learning on newly immigrated learners (Lapov, 2020), there is the rethinking of the construct of the “digital divide” into “digital educational poverty” (Marangi - Pasta - Rivoltella, 2022), which may not coincide with minors in “educational poverty” (Marangi - Pasta - Rivoltella, 2023); as a matter of fact, a research made in Italian Middle Schools, demonstrates that, in some cases children of mixed couples – parents born in Italy and in a foreign country – show a higher level of digital competence compared to children which parents are both born in Italy or in foreign countries (Pasta - Marangi, 2023). Therefore, enhancing the digital competences of those who are in vulnerable situations, such as some unaccompanied minors, is a promising direction.

Hate Studies, an evolution of “biased thinking” studies, is an interdisciplinary field in which interculturalism and media studies have become intertwined: it interrogates pedagogical thinking in terms of understanding the phenomenon of hate (Ranieri, 2016; Santerini, 2021; issue IX(2) of the journal *Metis* edited by Annacontini - De Serio, 2019) on the social web (Pasta, 2018), the effects of toxic narratives on intercultural relations (Fiorucci, 2019), of detection with algorithmic evaluations (Pasta, 2023b), and ways of countering it (Pasta, 2022, 2023a; Pasta - Santerini, 2021; Paiano, 2023; Bruschi - Repetto - Talarico, 2023). Although hate has become an established interpretative category in recent years, specific studies have delved into specific forms of target election, such as antisemitism (Santerini, 2023) and online islamophobia (Pasta, 2020c).

\* \* \*

The contributions gathered in this special issue provide just as many examples of how the invitation to rethink our pedagogical research imaginary may be expressed, starting from the intertwining of

emerging diversities and the transformations of digital environments and languages. In this sense, these contributions not only contribute to mapping new research topics/problems, nor do they only point towards possible methodological avenues to address them: rather, they also invite the reader/researcher/educator/teacher to rethink the way they position themselves (and, at the same time, take a stand) in today's educational contexts.

It is no coincidence that Isabella Rega and Julian McDougall's study – which opens the issue and its first section – invites us to think about “a new and more dynamic type of media literacy” that can contribute to positive social change, but cannot fail to question “our position as researchers” as well. The essays by Chiara Pancioli and Pier Cesare Rivoltella, and by Pietro Corazza, that complete this first section represent examples of this attempt to reposition, the research and intervention work, including educational work, on the theme of *new literacies*, diversity and citizenship from different disciplinary perspectives, starting from the possibilities and tensions emerging in areas/environments such as those of artificial intelligence, social media and digital platforms in general.

A second set of articles by Lisa Stillo, Gabriella D'Aprile and Glenda Platania, Magda Pischetola and Luiza J. Lima dwells precisely on the theme of citizenship education, including digital citizenship education, highlighting its intertwining with intercultural, inclusive and *global citizenship education* perspectives, and aiming to deconstruct/depower the asymmetrical relations that cross both digital environments and educational contexts to this day. This is also the direction in which the two essays (by Luca Agostinetti, Lisa Bugno and Gaia Moretto and by Alessandra Mussi) that conclude this second section can be read. They respectively explore the intercultural potential of STEM disciplines in primary and lower secondary schools (including those characterised by a high degree of complexity) and the possible role of CPIAs as informal contexts for the construction of citizenship, including digital citizenship, thus attempting to overturn an approach that too often tends

to see only the weak points of learners with a migrant background and of contexts characterised by superdiversity.

Finally, the last part of the issue gathers four contributions (Rosita Deluigi and Laura Fedeli, Michele Marangi, Elena Pacetti, Nadia Carlomagno and Maddalena Marasco) that address the role that digital environments and languages can play in a higher education context that is attentive towards different intercultural and citizenship aspects. They focus on (1) the construction of digital artefacts in a co-teaching experience, (2) digital storytelling from the perspective of community technologies, (3) a course aimed at internationally mobile students, (4) and an experimental playtelling course that was delivered during the pandemic in streaming mode. By doing so, they become opportunities to explore the possibility of promoting intercultural and citizenship education, as well as unprecedented forms/spaces of community also in university teaching contexts.

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