Interview / Интервью

The Evolution of Media in New Normal: Creating Bridges Between the Latin American and the European Research Tradition

An Interview *with Professor Carlos A. Scolari*

Эволюция медиа в новой нормальности: наведение мостов между латиноамериканской и европейской исследовательской традицией

Интервью *с профессором Карлосом Сколари*

— *What does mediatization mean in the New Normal?*

— The concept of "mediatization" refers to the processes that lead the media to impose its logic on other institutions and discourses. In this context, researchers talk about "mediatization of sport", "mediatization of politics", or "mediatization of religion": all activities and events in these areas end up being designed and produced for their transmission and media circulation. In general, the theorists of mediatization agree that the media have a great capacity to create realities. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated or consolidated the mediatization processes. By being confined to our homes, personal face-to-face contacts were reduced, making us more dependent on mediated exchanges at all levels. Given that the pandemic is not over yet, it is difficult to say what form the post-pandemic media reality (the so-called "new normal") will take.

— *What is the basic relevant concept and idea of mediatization in the 2020s?*

— We can say that there are two great paths in the theories of mediatization: one originally developed in Latin American around the works of Eliseo Verón, and another one originated in Europe (F. Krotz, A. Hepp, N. Couldry, S. Hjarvard, etc.). The former has a socio-semiotic and discursive basis, while the European is based on a sociological-institutional approach. In both sectors there is a great interest in the new forms of mediatization — especially since the emergence of new social media and communication platforms — and in the scope of these processes. Concepts such as "deep mediatization" by Andreas Hepp (University of Bremen), "hypermediatization" by Mario Carlón, or "post-brodcasting" by José Luis Fernández (both from the University of Buenos Aires) go in that direction.

— *Evolution or revolution? Or media mutations?*

— In recent years I have worked on the development of an evolutionary theory of media change. In 2018 I published a book with the designer Fernando Rapa titled precisely "Media Evolution" and right now I am working on a text for Routledge that should come out between 2022–2023: "On the Evolution of Media". My approach is holistic and seeks to go beyond exclusively continuous and discontinuous views. Let's look at an example: the appearance of the printing press. In the last 500 years there have been interpretations that privileged disruption (there was a before and after from Gutenberg) or continuity (the priting press was important but many elements and processes related to the book did not change). The same happened with the interpretations of the World Wide Web. Personally, I am interested in integrating both visions in the same analytical theoretical framework. Understanding media changes and, more general, the big socio-technological changes means developing a complex perspective that is far from simple oppositions (analog / digital, continuity / discontinuity, etc.). The evolutionary theory of media that I am working on aims to overcome linear models (the classic "timelines") and any kind of predictive approach.

— Has your research field transformed? If yes, what are its main features, especially in (pan)demic mediated reality? Are there any differences in it before/in COVID-2019?

— The pandemic has accelerated certain processes that were already underway, for example the mediatization of some institutions, discourses, and practices. At a methodological level, the pandemic has reinforced the work with data but above all it has consolidated the new forms of online ethnography. In our case, the research we have been conducting on riders and other platform workers had to continue through online meetings. Only now have we been able to return to personal interviews and "in situ" observation. It is possible that in the future these new forms of data-gathering techniques will consolidate.

— Which areas have been influenced by mediatization more? Culture? Society? Real or virtual world? Technologies?

— Mediatization is everywhere. There is no aspect of the social life of Homo sapiens that is not totally or partially mediated. Politics, economics, culture, sports, or religion are highly mediated practices, not to mention interpersonal relationships. Identities are built (and transformed!) in media environments. It is almost impossible to think about the life of Homo sapiens without the media ... According to the proposals of Media Ecology, a theory inspired by the works of Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and other scholars, we create the media but then they transform us. These relationships, as I already said, should not be considered unidirectional: the relationship between Homo sapiens and technologies is never linear.

— What are the problems and threats of mediatization?

— The theories of mediatization can be considered a new phase in the long reflection on the effects of the media. Faced with the limitations and contradictions of the old theories of effects that marked 20th century research, the theories of mediatization offer a different framework of analysis to think about the role of the media in society. Like any other theory, it has advantages and limitations. From my perspective, these theories offer a point of view that goes beyond the behaviorism that marked the research on the effects; on the other hand, the development of a set of methods to understand how mediatization works and how the media construct realities is still pending. In this sense, the dialogue between the socio-semiotic and socio-institutional approaches is very important. To understand how the media construct realities we must combine a series of interdisciplinary methods and categories. Much work remains to be done in this area.

— What are the main directions for your future research?

— On the one hand, with my team we are investigating the platform workers, their informal learning processes, and their relationship with other actors.

We are conducting an ethnography based on the life stories of riders, Uber drivers, cleaning workers, etc. This research is framed under the concept of "interface", an analytical model that we are also applying to other realities (the school as an interface, the museum as an interface, online video games as an interface, the library as an interface, etc.). In parallel, as already indicated, I am working on the development of an evolutionary theory of media change. It is a complicated job, I am putting together an intertextual network of authors and texts that goes from Media History to Media Archeology, through Social and Technology Studies (actor-network theory, theory of the social construction of technology, etc.) and the most recent theorizations about the evolution of knowledge and new materialisms. I am interested in creating a general and long-term framework for media change to avoid excessively short-term analyzes.

Интервью провела М.Г. Шилина / Interviewed by M.G. Shilina

Bio notes:

Marina G. Shilina, Professor, Plekhanov Russian State University of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, ORCID: 0000-0002-9608-352X; e-mail: marina.shilina@gmail.com

Carlos A. Scolari has a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and Communication Languages (Catholic University of Milan, Italy). He is Full Professor at the Department of Communication of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra-Barcelona. Researcher specialized in digital interactive media, transmedia storytelling and media ecology/evolution. He was PI of the H2020 EU TRANSLITERACY project (2015–2018) and since 2018 coordinates the PhD Program in Communication at UPF.

Сведения об авторах:

Шилина Марина Григорьевна, профессор РЭУ имени Г.В. Плеханова, МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова, ORCID: 0000-0002-9608-352X; e-mail: marina.shilina@gmail.com

Сколари А. Карлос имеет докторскую степень. Магистр прикладной лингвистики и языков коммуникации (Миланский католический университет, Италия). Профессор факультета коммуникаций Университета Помпеу Фабра в Барселоне. Специализируется на исследовании цифровых интерактивных медиа, трансмедийного сторителлинга, медиаэкологии, эволюции медиа. Являлся главным исполнительным директором проекта H2020 EU TRANSLITERACY (2015–2018). С 2018 года координирует программу PhD в области коммуникации в Университета Помпеу Фабра.