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## “Transmedia Storytelling as a Narrative Expansion”

### Interview with Carlos Scolari

Carlos A. Scolari has a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and Communication Languages (Catholic University of Milan, Italy) and a Degree in Social Communication (University of Rosario, Argentina). He is Associate Professor (tenure) at the Department of Communication of the University Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona, Spain). Researcher specialized in transmedia storytelling, collaborative culture, user-generated contents, narratology, and semiotics of new media. Professor in different master and PhD courses in Europe and Latin America<sup>1</sup>.

*Could you give us an introduction about the concepts of Transmedia Literacy and Transmedia Storytelling?*

As Henry Jenkins put it, at the most basic level transmedia stories “are stories told across multiple media”. Transmedia Storytelling is not just an adaptation from one media to another: it is a narrative expansion. This textual dispersion is one of the most important sources of complexity in contemporary popular culture. This narrative expansion is one of the basic properties of transmedia storytelling; the second one is the participation of users in that narrative expansion. How? Producing new contents, for example parodies, new stories, trailers, mashups, or recapitulations. Only in Fancfiction.net Harry Potter’s fans have shared more than 730,000 new stories! This is the territory of participatory cultures, one of the most interesting phenomena emerging from contemporary media ecology. In this context, we are working around a

<sup>1</sup>“Transmedia Storytelling as a narrative expansion”. Interview with Carlos Scolari in Ilana Eleá and Lothar Mikos (Eds.) *Young & Creative. Digital Technologies Empowering Children in Everyday Life*. Gothenburg: Nordicom

new concept: transmedia literacy. From our perspective, transmedia literacy could be understood as a set of skills, practices, values, priorities, sensibilities, and learning/sharing strategies developed and applied in the context of the new participatory cultures. If traditional literacy was book-centred or, in the case of media literacy, mostly television-centred, then multimodal literacy places digital networks and interactive media experiences at the centre of its analytical and practical experience. Traditional forms of literacy generally treated the subject as illiterate, while media literacy focused on the consumer as a passive spectator; transmedia literacy, however, considers the subject to be a prosumer (producer + consumer). Another essential element of transmedia literacy is the learning space. The institutional learning environment for traditional forms of literacy is the school, but new generations are now developing their transmedia literacy skills outside the school (from YouTube to online forums, social media, and blogs). These informal learning spaces will be a key component of transmedia literacy research.

*You are the researcher leader of Transmedia Literacy project funded by European Union. What can you tell us about it?*

We want to introduce new questions and challenges to traditional media literacy. If traditional media literacy was about how to teach youths to deal with (broadcast) media, in this case we are proposing different questions: What are teens doing with media? What do they know? How did they learn to do it? Teens are doing many things with media! They play videogames, share pictures, learn to solve problems, create new contents, and manage their online life. Where did they learn to do that? Outside the school. These are the main research questions of the Transmedia Literacy H2020 research project. The research started in April 2015 and will finish in March 2018. We are developing the research in eight countries.

*Why is it important to focus on non-formal educational settings when investigating teens uses of media?*

Because most of their knowledge about new interactive media comes from non-formal and informal environments. When a child or a teen

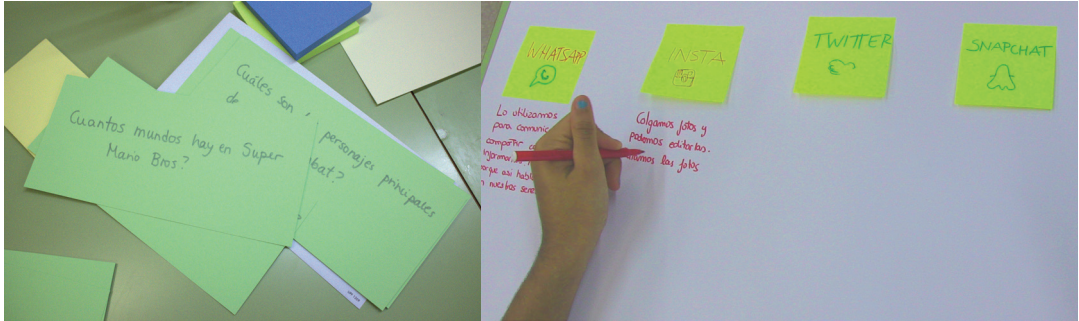


Image 1 & 2. Students analyse and reflect on social media and transmedia narrative worlds

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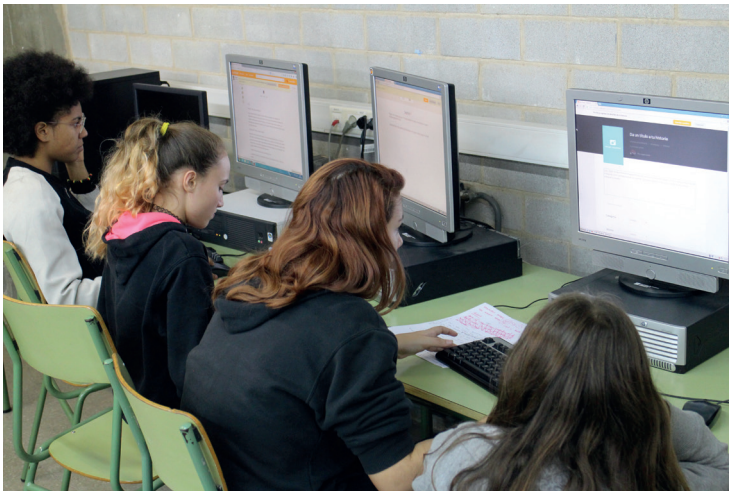


Image 3. Students during the narrative workshop (fanfiction production / narrative expansions)

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has a problem to solve (How to move to next level in this videogame? How to manipulate an Instagram filter?), they do not ask their parents or the teachers: they check their favourite YouTube channels, ask their friends or consult an online community. We should be able to map this territory, identify the ‘transmedia skills’ they are developing outside the school and be able to exploit these skills inside the classroom. In this context, at the end of the Transmedia Literacy project we will produce a Professor’s Kit so any teacher can download didactic activities to exploit the transmedia skills inside the school.

*What is the project status until now and expected outcomes?*

Right now (November 2016) we are finishing the fieldwork in the different countries and starting the data processing. Even if we use nVivo for Teams, this is a very slow process, we have so many inputs (data from surveys, workshops, interviews, media consume diaries, researchers' notes, videos, pictures, etc.). In 2017, we will conclude the data processing and final analysis, and we will work on the creation of the Professor's Kit. We will organise a couple of international events in Europe and Latin America to disseminate the scientific outcomes and present the kit.

In 2008, you co-edited the book “Colabor\_arte. Medios y artes en la era de la producción colaborativa” (Media and arts in the era of collaborative production). Is there any need to distinguish between creative and collaborative media production by youth from what is considered art? How to delimit it?

That book presents different experiences of user-generated contents in media and art. The editors – Mario Carlón, from the Universidad of Buenos Aires, and I – consider there is a ‘continuum’ between art and media practices. In that context, the user-generated contents move from one side to the other. Many users produce content (like the parodies of Hitler in Downfall) that follow the same logic of artists: they ‘intervene’ mainstream contents to generate new interpretations. Duchamp did something similar when he drew a moustache and beard on a postcard of Mona Lisa! The production of new contents by youth, both inspired by media or art, is an unexplored territory. This could be one of the next challenges of Transmedia Literacy research.

*You have been doing research about transmedia storytelling, user-generated content, and participatory culture for many years. What are the most fascinating findings about your studies on digital content creation by young people?*

The creative of user-generated contents is incredible. Fans have a lot of time, they know how to deal with the most advanced software and, the most important thing, they have much passion. It is not easy to separate between youth and adult fanfiction or user-generated contents (sometimes the creators just use a nickname). However, fans know how to organise themselves and generate emerging complex projects that

may involve hundreds of people. For example, fans have created movies with professional-level special effects inspired by Star Trek, Halo, or The Lord of the Rings. In our research, we have found teens that organise international teams to play online videogames like Counterstrike, or girls writing and sharing fanfiction in collaborative platforms like Wattpad. Even if we do not believe in the mythology of the ‘digital natives’ (like adults, not all teens are geeks or digital experts), in every class it was not difficult for the research team to identify advanced videogame players or media content creators.

*And the most intriguing dilemmas?*

As the research is developing in different countries, we only stay with the teens for about a month, sometimes a month and a half. We are thinking about staying more time with them in future projects. In their last book (The Class), Sonia Livingstone and Julian Sefton-Green describe an interesting research experience: they stayed for almost one year in the same school. That is possible if you only work in a single country. In our case, it would be impossible to do something like that in eight countries. However, we have obtained much data about transmedia skills, media practices, and informal learning strategies.

From a general point of view, the big challenge is to redesign the relationship between schools, teens, families, and media. The school is an interface between kids and knowledge. That interface is in crisis. Both ecologies, the media ecology and the educational ecology, are going through deep mutations and we must learn how to deal with them.

*If you could send a message to parents and to teachers about children and youth media creative production, what would you say? What do they need to be aware or inspired by?*

Listen to the teens. When we tested our methodology in a school at Barcelona, one of the kids said: “I can finally talk about the things that interest me”.

Note

1. <https://transmedialiteracy.org/the-people/>