APRENDICES - DESGRABACIÓN EN INGLÉS

Episodio especial: Carlos Scolari

INTRO

"Technology in the classroom", people immediately think of an electronic blackboard, a projector.

The classroom was always full of technology.

I believe that they are institutions or interfaces that are dedicated to reproducing, above all, knowledge,

and that it is sometimes difficult for them to adapt to these rapid socio-technological changes.

So a lot of people are worried about TikTok and young people.

And in 20 years people will say: "How nice it was to be connected on TikTok and WhatsApp all day".

PREVIA

Do you live in Barcelona?

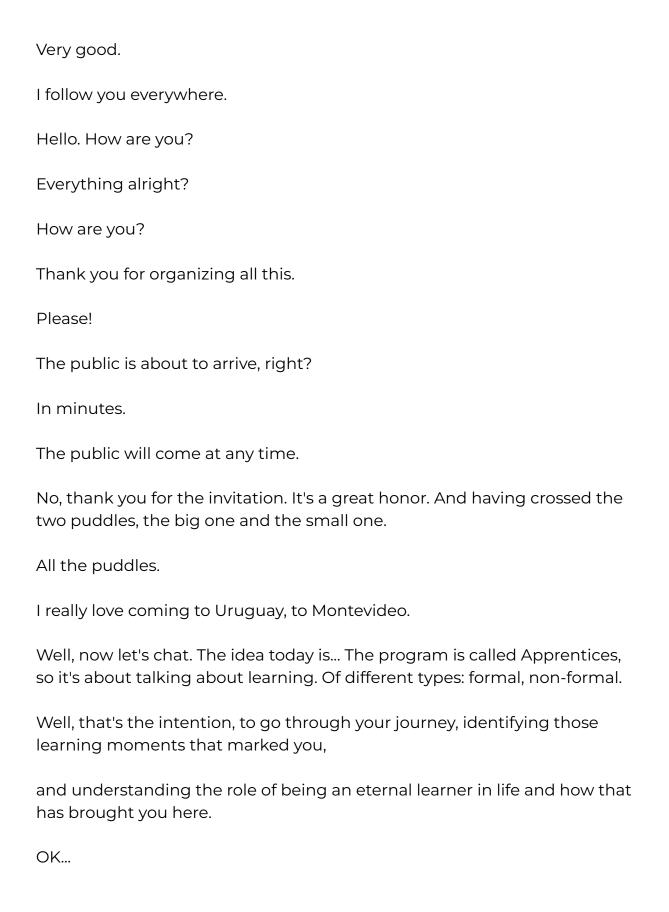Yes, I work in Barcelona and live 60 kilometers away.

How nice.

During the pandemic I had to record some videos at home. My daughter grabbed me and did my makeup.

Very good.

I follow you everywhere.

Hello. How are you?

Everything alright?

How are you?

Thank you for organizing all this.

Please!

The public is about to arrive, right?

In minutes.

The public will come at any time.

No, thank you for the invitation. It's a great honor. And having crossed the two puddles, the big one and the small one.

All the puddles.

I really love coming to Uruguay, to Montevideo.

Well, now let's chat. The idea today is... The program is called Apprentices, so it's about talking about learning. Of different types: formal, non-formal.

Well, that's the intention, to go through your journey, identifying those learning moments that marked you,

and understanding the role of being an eternal learner in life and how that has brought you here.

OK...

Here I am.

Carlos. Take one.

CHARLA

Above all, I consider myself a professor and researcher of communication and the media. I am a media researcher professor who, due to a generational issue, I've had the opportunity to see great changes in the world of communication that have not ended and are moving faster and faster. I mean, as I always say, it's like being an entomologist who goes to the Amazon and discovers new butterflies and bugs all the time. I imagine a botanist who discovers new plants and flowers. And I think of the experience as a bit like that, studying something that is mutating very quickly whose change we experienced. We were lucky to see some amazing changes that force you to be in good theoretical, academic and pedagogical shape.

How does a kid from Rosario come to be interested in communication in the media?

Yes, I went to primary school in Rosario, except for the last year. Later, with my family, we went to live in Patagonia. I went to high school there at the age of 16 (in 1981) at the time of the dictatorship, and we put out a magazine, one of the alternative magazines of the time. A couple of issues came out where I wrote a couple of articles. One article was about Queen, which was my favorite band, and another article was a critique of Kiss, which was all the rage, you know? I mean, the thing about Kiss was that it was a group that attracted the youth and the adults of the time said: 'Young people are watching these things!'.

And in the summers where I was finishing high school, they needed a photographer for a newspaper in Patagonia, where I lived, so I came as a replacement for the photographer who had gone on vacation, so I was there two months working with my camera. After that, military service and the whole story, then I returned to Rosario to study Communication. The

Social Communication degree at the National University of Rosario, a return to my city of origin, so to speak. And my mother asked me: 'Communication? Why don't you study a degree?' In other words, a career in Engineering, Law...

Communication was something else, it was a way of life, we used to say. But well, I decided to study communication and I got hooked. The second year I had a very good teacher, Mercedes Pallavicini, who taught Communication Theory. I got hooked on the theoretical stuff and in the third year of communication, I was a student assistant in Communication Theory. That was my first teaching experience, and the teacher who inspired me had a very democratic, very Freirean vision of education. We did a little bit of everything. I was a student-assistant, but sometimes I had to teach, sometimes I had to correct texts, and I got to learn the tricks of the trade, you know?

What was the appeal of theory that got you hooked on it?

If I rationalized it, I would say: 'I like the possibility of thinking, of giving meaning to what is happening.' I was lucky to work for newspapers. At 16 or 17, I was working as a photographer in a newspaper, and I've done advertising, corporate communication stuff, a lot of educational communication. I have been lucky enough to do things in communication, but always through a theoretical reflection, giving meaning to it all, thinking about new categories of analysis. Because, a bit like what I was saying before, the media ecosystem changed a lot, and when you think you already understood something, you theorized it, after a while it changes and you need new concepts. I love that. Which has a dose of creative making too. Making good theories also involves reading a lot, knowing what you are researching, but also sometimes to think about a concept, something, it also has a creative side that I really like, it seduces me.

At a certain point, you had to leave to study. Let's talk about a bit that. Those of us in academia go through the same thing sometimes: "OK, it's time to leave if we want to learn more about that". How is that?

I lived in a beautiful period at the university because I entered at the beginning of 1983. The military government was still there, so I experienced the famous transition, and then the democratic opening at the university. A climate that was not exactly like the 60s but had something of that, of the university being a good place, a good place for debate. So, it was a very nice time, and I finished my bachelor's degree on June 23, 1987. And at that time there were not many postgraduate degrees or doctorates in Argentina. But there was also, in the late 80s, a certain personal dissatisfaction. And I think it happened to many of us. Democracy returned and there were many exaggerated expectations. And I wanted to continue studying, I wanted to see other things. And I looked for scholarships to go to Colombia, Mexico, Spain, Italy, everything. And none came up, but I kept insisting, and my girlfriend got a scholarship to go to Italy. So we went to Italy, she with the scholarship. I arrived in Italy in 1990 and caught two revolutions because a few months later the political system exploded due to corruption, the famous Tangentopoli. And the other revolution, apart from politics, was digital. If you think back, in August 1991, Tim Berners-Lee uploaded the first web page to his server in Switzerland. That was a nuclear button not even he was aware of.

He didn't know what he had done.

He wanted to share scientific articles. That's why he made the HTML language, HTTP, he invented all of it to share scientific articles. He wasn't thinking about Milei memes or cuddly kittens. His platform was to share scientific knowledge, and back in 91 I bought a Macintosh. And I got hooked on that and at that time I started reading books and studying two concepts that accompany me to this day, interface and hypertext, at the very start, 91, 90, 91, 92. That's when I fell in love with all of it.

How did you come to the concept of interface, and how did you develop it?

Yes, the concept of interface. Well, already in the 80s, when Mac appeared and the graphical user interface became popular, there began to be a lot of research. The sector called human-computer interaction was born, and everything about software usability in the 80s. They discovered that you

could have the best software, with the best code, but if the graphical user interface was not good, you were doomed to failure. In the 90s, the concept of interface obviously moved to the web. The first generation of websites was a disaster. It was interesting because it was much more democratic, because you had programs to make websites, but there was no knowledge of design in general, there was almost no knowledge of web pages because it was a totally new thing.

At the end of the 90s, beginning of the 2000s, when I was doing my doctoral thesis in semiotics, semiotics helped me to go slower, shall we say, frame by frame, picture by picture, through the work I was doing with the entire team at the Arsmedia company, and I did a thesis on semiotics of interfaces. And at the end of that, at the end of my thesis, which later became a book I published in Spanish in 2004 called 'Hacer Clic', at the end of that book, I said: 'Well, this little micro analysis of the subject in front of the screen that I studied here, perhaps this type of analysis, this concept, can be expanded and we can think about the great ecosystem of interfaces'. That was published in 2004, and in 2018, after having published many other books, I wrote one called 'The Laws of the Interface', where I made the leap from the micro to the macro, and wrote about the entire socio-technological network based on the concept of interface. And that's where I expanded and started talking about the classroom as an interface, politics as an interface, the city as an interface. And I think that, well, it is a type of method, an approach that we are using even with my research team today. For example, we are now investigating people who work for platforms, such as delivery people. We are also using the concept of interface to analyze them.

How do you see the way in which we move, from technological concepts we know well to those that we still have to learn about?

What you say is very interesting because if one says 'Technology in the classroom,' people immediately think of an electronic blackboard, a projector. The classroom was always full of technology. Already 8000 years ago there would be awls to write on tablets, papyrus, and the classroom. The classroom where we grew up always had technology, with a blackboard, erasers, chalk. The thing is that the technology that was created before we were born is not considered technology. It is part of the

ecosystem, so when one says technology, no one thinks of a pencil or an eraser; we think about the projector, the computer, the drone, and that is an interesting topic. Technology is always there. I believe that we are in a time of decentering because the classic thinking was: human beings create things and we control them.

Marshall McLuhan, 50 years ago, said: 'Humans create media, we create technologies that in turn create environments that modify us and we do not realize it.' There is always this idea that technologies depend on who uses them. No, no, no, technologies, regardless of who uses them and what they are used for, always transform you. I can have the tools that I use to go fight a war or I use them to break stone and build a house. But that tool transforms my hand; I get calluses, like tennis players, and I'll develop more muscles in one arm than in the other. And that happens at a cognitive and perceptual level, and we don't realize it. McLuhan said: 'We are like fish in water.' We are in a media and technological environment that transforms and shapes us and we do not realize it. When does the fish realize that there was water? When one catches it, when you take the poor creature out and it perceives the surroundings. And exactly the same thing happens to us. If any of us wakes up tomorrow, grabs our cell phone, and there is no connectivity and the network is down, we are fish out of water.

Do you see the speed of technological change in the contemporary world as a cause for this? The printing press took 400, 500 years to settle in Europe and become part of the water. And today, TikTok has just been born, it's not nearly as old as the press, and it's already part of the ecosystem or so it seems. Is there a change there?

Yes. There is an acceleration. Yes. You know the things being said about the world moving fast? Mafalda said: 'The world is going very fast, I want to get off.' There are things written in the early 1800s that spoke in those terms: steam engine, the train. And that was a shock. And it is very clear how technology changes our perception of time and space. If you had to go from Barcelona to Madrid on a carriage, it was surely a trip that was planned many months in advance. The train changed our feeling of space, and then the plane or high-speed trains. From Madrid to Barcelona it is only two and a half hours today. Just that. And the same thing happens with communication technologies. It transforms us, all of it. What's

happening? It accelerates more and more. This acceleration is an exponential process. For example, Netflix took about two and a half years to reach 1 million users. The GPT chat took five days. This week marks 12 months since the GPT chat was opened and we found out what it was. In other words, everything is going faster and faster, the life cycle is quicker, the media at its current rate makes it difficult for me to think that Facebook will exist in 100 years. Or a company like Google. Companies, for example, in the automotive world, Ford, General Motors, lasted a century with ease. But now everything goes much faster. And homo sapiens, well, he does what he can.

How do you see the educational system in the middle of that fluctuating, changing ecosystem?

I talk about the educational interface, be it primary, secondary, university, which are different, because the university is about to turn one thousand years old, Bologna, Salamanca, Oxford, the great universities were born a thousand years ago. They say, 'No, the university doesn't change.' No, no, no institution or interface survives a thousand years without change. They change slowly with their own rhythms, as well. But returning to the educational interfaces, I believe that they are institutions or interfaces that are dedicated to reproducing, above all, knowledge, and that it is sometimes difficult for them to adapt to these rapid socio-technological changes. Technology appears, sometimes with very great disruptive potential, but when they end up being accepted into the classroom by the entire educational apparatus, they have lost their edge

 When a new technology enters the classroom, it is no longer new, it is no longer disruptive, and the system domesticates it. There are examples and there are exceptions, but in general it takes a long time, the educational interface takes a long time to adapt to these other changes and, generally, after softening it up, it incorporates it, you know? Perhaps we should accelerate these processes so that if there is something new, and not just technological, something that shakes up the boundaries, it can get in quickly, but this normally doesn't happen. Well, in Uruguay, you have the experience of Ceibal, which is totally different because the characteristics of the country are different. A much smaller, homogeneous country, right? Well, I think that's generally the key, you know? Even today in many

universities, the matter of incorporating digital is being discussed. Digital has been going on for 30 years, 40, right? What we have to see now is how to incorporate the GPT chat into the classroom.

AI.

Yeah, yeah.

Do you see a major qualitative change with the arrival of AI?

Yes, just as bitcoin came and it seemed that everything was going to be blockchain, then the metaverse came, I think this too is here to stay, and I think that the passage of the years and experiences gives me a vision. In the 80s there was a disruption of production due to digital. When the Mac appeared, and later Photoshop. Everything that was graphic production, sound, video, was disrupted, became digitized. In the 90s, with the internet, it was a disruption of circulation. In other words, digital texts began to circulate throughout the planet online. The concept of real-time where we want everything right now. And after the 2000s there was a disruption in consumption. We stopped being Homer Simpson in front of the TV and started to be prosumers. We all like the photos and the cat memes, all of which goes viral. That is, we are not just consumers or audiences, we are generators.

We had three disruptions at different times in the communication process. I believe that we are now in a brutal new disruption of production. It is no longer about using the instrument to retouch a photo, but about the machine making the pictures, creating the images. So we are faced with existential philosophical discussions. I believe that there is a brutal disruption now in production. There will be other areas in which AI will also have an effect, but mostly in production. And in education, because education is text-centric and book-centric, although in recent years we have sought to make it a little more multimedia and transmedia. But the text is always in the middle of the educational process and these machines are textual operators. So how do we evaluate our students? The reality is that today there are millions of boys and girls on the planet using GPT chat to do homework, and the schools may want to look the other way, but there are already studies in Australia, in the United Kingdom. I'll give you an

amazing fact, if you go to Google Trends, which follows trends on Google, if you write in GPT chat, you see that GTP usage went up a year ago. Everyone was searching for GPT chat on Google, with ups and downs, especially starting in February. It went down in July and now it went up again. And on Google Trends you can compare. You track GPT and you track Minecraft. So when GPT chat goes up, Minecraft goes down, and in the summer GPT chat goes down and Minecraft goes up. They're the boys and girls, they are using GPT to do their homework, and in the summer they want to play. And then they're back to GPT chat.

There's a dialogue there between new technological models, new languages and old structures. The university, the State, the family are all interacting with these new ways of communicating and doing.

Family is the big topic here, right? I think that sometimes there is a lot of panic, a lot of apocalyptic discourse, repressive discourse. I believe that you must regulate the use of things and reach agreements. It's tough, but between the school, the family, and the new generations, you have to reach an agreement. Speaking is difficult because generally young people lock themselves up in their little digital bubbles, but I think we have to go that route and not say: 'You can't buy this for up to X years.' Nor do I adhere to certain scientific discourses that claim everything is an addiction to the media and to technology. I believe that there are obviously specific cases of addiction, but our generation would surely have been classified as addicted to television because we spent many hours hooked on it.

The walkman.

Yes, and in the 19th century a child who read a lot was a monster. He was considered an addict.

A sociopath.

And it was dangerous because he was locked in his bubble. Now that I investigate the evolution of the media, when one reconstructs media panics, I remember a scientific article from 1903 that warned that the new medium, cinema, was going to prevent people from differentiating fiction

from reality. The radio generated a lot of discomfort too. It happened with comics in the 50s. McCarthyism banned comics out of fear. And in the 60s, Mafalda debated whether or not to buy a TV set. That's where media literacy was born, in the 60s. TV came and entered every house, so children had to be taught to watch television critically. Umberto Eco proposed semiotic guerrilla warfare to give people instruments to interpret TV. And the cycle went on, with the internet, video games, and now with mobile applications and surely AI. But no one today remembers the dangers of comics or the dangers of radio and television. Why? Because they are old media. They were naturalized and the fears disappeared. So a lot of people are worried about TikTok and young people. And in 20 years, people will say: 'How nice it was to be connected on TikTok and WhatsApp all day'.

How healthy it was...

There's always something worse, a new media monster, right? It's like Silvio Rodríguez's song: 'I kill it and a worse one comes up.' So that's it. When you see and analyze the long-term evolution of the media, you see that these fears are recurrent, just like utopias.