

# Carlos Scolari's On the Evolution of Media: Understanding Media Change

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## Review of Carlos Scolari's *On the Evolution of Media: Understanding Media Change*

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Carlos Scolari new book *On the Evolution of Media: Understanding Media Change* was published by Routledge in 2023 (<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003215233/evolution-media-carlos-scolari>).

The 302 page book describes the evolution of media from the emergence of human speech to the latest developments of artificial intelligence (AI). Scolari not only describe the evolution of media he introduces a new discipline which he calls Media Evolution that emerges from Media Ecology. Although Scolari's analysis of media evolution is based largely on and grows out of media ecology Scolari also draws upon other intellectual approaches as compliments to his Media Evolution approach which he describes in Part 1 Chapter 1. Among these are SCOT (Social Construction of Technology), ANT (A Network Theory), Media History, Media Archeology, Darwinism and to a certain degree Marxism.

In Part 2 Chapter 2 Scolari then describes media ecology, the antecedent of what he considers to be the new discipline of Media Evolution. After completing his survey of media ecology, he wrote "it should be clear where Media Evolution comes from, now, it is time to look at what this new disciplines wants to be and where it wants to go." Scolari describes Media Ecology and Media Evolution as "two sides of the same coin" that "are complimentary." He differentiates the two by suggesting that media "ecology thinks in space while [media] evolution thinks in time." He goes on to say, "Media Evolution is a *proto-discipline that studies media change from a long-term, holistic, intermedia, reticular and complex point of view*" whose goal "is not to predict the future of the media ecosystem but to understand its past and contemporary transformations."

To carry out his program of developing the proto-discipline of Media Evolution Scolari develops in the remaining chapters of Part 2 of his book the following topics which describe in detail how media evolve and how they interact with each other.

- Chapter 3 deals with the "media life cycle" including its birth and what happens to a medium when a newer medium emerges and how the older medium can become extinct or how it can co-exist with the newer medium or how it can be incorporated into the new medium.
- Chapter 4 deals with "emergence" in the sense of the birth, market penetration and growth of a medium.
- Chapter 5 deals with the dominance of a medium and how it operates in its "golden age."
- Chapter 6 deals with a medium's adaptation as the medium's dominance begins to wane.
- Chapter 7 deals with survival and/or extinction when the adaptation of the medium's waning dominance begins to falter.
- Chapter 8 deals with the niche strategy of a medium in which the medium finds a smaller playing field in which it can survive and still be relevant.
- Chapter 9 deals with intermediality, the way in which different media work together. A perfect example are the various channels or capabilities that make up the smartphone, which is at the same time a telephone, a camera and player of photos and videos, a computer, an Internet port, a flashlight, a mirror, etc. The smart phone is a form of remediation, "the representation of one medium in another."
- Chapter 10 deals with coevolution of how the evolution of one medium affects the evolution of other media and vice-versa.

In Part Three Scolari describes a methodological kit for the new discipline of Media Evolution in which he maps “the main ways of doing scientific research on media change and past media, focusing on the data-gathering and the data-analysis techniques that could be part of a Media Evolution research kit.”

- Chapter 11 deals with quantitative methods for Media Evolution
- Chapter 12 deals with qualitative methods for Media Evolution
- Chapter 13 Conclusions includes:
  - 13.1 Media Evolution as a theory
  - 13.2 Media Evolution as a set of methods
  - 13.3 The evolutionary metaphor
  - 13.4 Evolution as a network
  - 13.5 Driving Forces (of Media Evolution)

The details with which Scolari deals with the various topics listed above is too great to describe in a review. Let it to be said that Scolari leaves no stone unturned as he describes Media Evolution, a compliment to Media Ecology, which he modestly describes as a proto-discipline. Our study of media has been greatly enriched by Scolari’s work. For those familiar with Media Ecology, it is a must read to learn about the evolution of Media Ecology into Media Evolution. For those not familiar with Media Ecology it is a great way to learn of this discipline and its evolution into Media Evolution. Either way reading Scolari’s book *On the Evolution of Media: Understanding Media Change* will be a very rewarding experience as it was for me even though I have been an active media ecologist since 1974. There is something new here for every reader.