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Can we achieve diversity in digital literacy without a critical reflection on reading? – Part 1 – A new approach to adult literacy programs

Abstract:

This study discusses the use of reading as an instrument for the appropriation of knowledge and for critical reflections from the epistemological viewpoint of Information Science. The authors investigate how the act of reading, when viewed from the perspective of the ecology of literacy diversity, can contribute to confronting and resisting the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination manifested in digital networks. The theoretical approach adopted in this paper finds inspiration in the works of Paulo Freire and Nicolas Roubakine on the acts of reading as a mode of interaction between individuals and their environments. Ultimately, this research infers that the knowledge acquired through reading, as well as the critical reflections provoked by it, may be employed to change how individuals perceive, connect and act upon their social world.

Keywords: Critical Theory, Digital Literacy, Diversity, Information Science, Reading

Agenda:

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1. Initial thoughts: a first look onto the *praxis* of reading

Fui alfabetizado no chão do quintal de minha casa, à sombra das mangueiras, com palavras do meu mundo e não do mundo maior dos meus pais. O chão foi o meu quadro-neqro; gravetos, o meu giz.[1]

[I learned to read, sitting in the yard of my parents' house and under the shades of the mango trees, off the words from a world of my own, one that differed from that of my parents'. The ground was my blackboard; the twigs, my piece of chalk.]

Although any debate over current "hot topics", such as fake news, truth, informational literacy, dignity, and diversity in digital environments, should always be carried out in tandem with a historical and social perspective of the act of reading, this remains a mostly invisible approach to the discussion. Reading, as viewed from critical pedagogical perspectives, such as that of Paulo Freire,[2] or from the anthropological studies of Michèle Petit,[3] [4] [5], is the basis for a substantial part of progressive solutions that contribute to the fight against social inequalities not only in the digital world, but beyond it. In a world where the West exerts its influence hegemonically, oppression is perpetuated in many forms, including by its digital structure. Therefore, how can we propose any solutions for the ethical dilemmas of citizenship without heeding to the vulnerable conditions of digital readers?

It is important that we investigate how many readers there are, where they read, what they read, and what they do with what is read. These questions were first raised over one hundred years ago by Nicolas Roubakine, a theoretical thinker who dedicated his life to the study of social injustices and the psychology of reading. In the 1920's, Roubakine published a vast study on reading and readers, the result of three decades of social empirical research. Roubakine's critical inquiry aimed to understand how reading could be used to transform the poor living conditions of the oppressed working class in czarist Russia.[6]

The present study contributes to this debate by discussing how reading serves as an instrument for the appropriation of knowledge and for fostering critical thinking. More specifically, it investigates how the act of reading, as laid in the theoretical works of Paulo Freire, Nicolas Roubakine, and other prominent thinkers in education and anthropology, may help us oppose and resist any mechanisms employed digitally to oppress and discriminate against groups of people. Considering the ecology of literacy diversity, these mechanisms are often used to either feed the working class with ideas that are aligned to the interests of the ruling classes or to steer them away from ideas that may challenge the system that controls, oppresses, and excludes them, thus directly interfering with how these people perceive, connect and act upon their social environment.

This theoretical research starts by finding parallels between the writings of Paulo Freire and Nicolas Roubakine from the epistemological perspective of Information Science. We interpret Roubakine's concept of the act of reading as "reading the world" through a psychological approach using constructs that evince its use as an instrument to acquire knowledge and encourage critical thinking.

Roubakine's ideas were developed in the face of grave social oppression in the late 19th-century and early 20th-century Russia. Roubakine was accused in 1886 of spreading revolutionary ideas and thus obstructed from holding scholarly positions. Due to his interest in teaching the masses, he worked tirelessly to fight illiteracy and worked as an editor, writer, bookseller, propagandist, and translator, and contributed to other initiatives related to the publishing world. According to Saldanha, it was during his time working as a librarian, following in his mother's footsteps, that his ideas went through a major shift and he began to focus on studying the

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[1] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [8].

[2] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[3] Petit, Michèle: Ler o mundo.

[4] Petit, Michèle. Leituras.

[5] Petit, Michèle. A arte de ler.

[6] Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

psychology of reading to find ways to transform documents into means through which readers could acquire knowledge and change perceptions of their environments.[7] [8]

Roubakine postulates that reading may act as a transforming social *praxis* through which historically oppressed groups could take ownership and socialize knowledge, ultimately heightening a collective critical awareness and allowing people to better understand the mechanisms of oppression employed in their social environments – a goal that could be spread further using digital technologies. Ultimately, that would allow them to resist oppression and clear the path for what the writer terms as "a new life", that is, a world undergone social and political transformation.

Since Roubakine, other researchers have contributed, both theoretically and epistemically, to this debate from the perspective of Library & Information Science, also focusing on the role of reading in the appropriation of knowledge and its potential for transformation, for instance:

- John Budd's reflections on reading in the context of the epistemology of Information Science. Budd focuses on investigating, through a phenomenological perspective, the cognitive processes that take place during the act of reading and thus sheds light onto the ways with which people process the information acquired through reading and perceive their environments[9];

- Lígia Dumont's social perspective on the reading experiences of socially and economically vulnerable women who read romantic novels, illustrating how reading becomes an instrument to acquire information that can later be used by the reader in multiple ways[10];

- and Amanda Salomão's research, suggesting that both individual reading experiences and shared experiences in book clubs may play an important role in developing critical thinking in female readers, thus potentially altering the way they think about themselves and about their environments, especially with regards to gender issues, racism, and social inequalities.[11]

Though these authors adopt distinct approaches, their writings converge in showing that reading helps readers interact with the world around them. Reading can only be practiced within the social and subjective context of the reader, that is, within social and historical contexts that enable the reader's experiences and govern how they interact with and act upon their environments. Ultimately, reading reflects how an individual is positioned in a given space and time, and the knowledge acquire through reading can be used to help readers perceive, interpret, criticize, and connect to their social world.

2. A Hundred years of crowded solicitude: reading as a tool for critical, continuous learning in a revamped adult literacy program

> *Inicialmente me parece interessante reafirmar que sempre vi a alfabetização de adultos como um ato político e um ato de conhecimento, por isso mesmo, como um ato criador.[12]*
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> [It is worth emphasizing that I have always seen adult literacy programs as both a political feat and an act of knowledge, and therefore, an act of creation.]

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[7] Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 195.

[8] Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: A invenção da Ciência da Informação segundo Nicolas Roubakine (Rubakin).

[9] Budd, John: Phenomenology and information studies.

[10] Dumont, Lígia: O imaginário feminino e a opção pela leitura de romances de séries.

[11] Salomão, Amanda: Leitura, apropriação de saberes e transformação pessoal.

[12] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [10].

The past one hundred years of research on reading, including those of Roubakine,[13] Freire,[14] and Petit,[15] [16] [17] cleared the way for more recent studies suggesting that the adoption of a multitude of digital resources in the past 30 years have further fractured the act of reading. Modern scholars now delve into a wide range of topics, from how critical theory may help us understand how reading takes place in an informational environment, to a contextualized investigation of the act of reading online. These social and historical analyses, when seen in the light of digital information regimes, put reading at the center of our current digital challenges, especially after the consolidation of mega data-processing corporations.

Although the works of Roubakine, Paulo Freire, and Michèle Petit were conducted in different geographies, namely Russia, Brazil, and France, they find a common ground in how the authors conceive the act of reading. Three central elements are shared between all three writers: the issue of context, the potential for social and psychological transformation, and the capacity for mobilization that arises from the access to new reading objects and new content. However, there is a fourth element that also binds their writings together: an understanding that reading is more than just a code-deciphering mechanism, but rather a social and psychological experience that mediates how readers perceive the world.

In that sense, these writers see reading as a means for individuals to interact with the world around them that is subject to the influence of subjectivity, context, and living conditions. In other words, reading depends on readers' perceptions, interpretations, and understanding, but is also dependent on a dialogical relationship with the reader's environment and the interests that influence and govern what must be read and, most importantly, how it must be read. [18]

Petit's considerations are centered around the importance of reading, from an anthropological perspective, in the overall context of social, economic, and political crises[19]. Her writings allow us to better understand reading experiences as symbolic interpretations of readers in their environments, translated into different informational objects, such as, among others, books, words, and sentences – and more recently, algorithms and internet posts – that symbolize the reader's subjectivity, experiences and psychological configurations in a given space and time; objects that continuously direct and redirect how the reader perceives, conceives, and connects to the world.

Her writings point to the realization that the act of reading has social and symbolic contours, leading to, according to Petit, new ways to perceive, understand, learn from, and interact with the world. In other words, there are multiple ways through which a reader may capture and recreate meaning through reading.[20] [21] These perspectives suggest, as shown by Salomão, that opportunities for critical thinking emerge from reading when the information acquired through this practice is employed in the real lives of readers to assign new meanings to their environments: "reading the world" to ultimately transform it.[22]

Therefore, reading is not the act of receiving visual information through written words carried by a physical object (whether in print or digitally), but rather the experience of interacting with the world through "verbal communication" (in the sense that language acts as a driver of knowledge acquisition). In this second

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[13] Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

[14] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[15] Petit, Michèle: Ler o mundo.

[16] Petit, Michèle. Leituras.

[17] Petit, Michèle. A arte de ler.

[18] Salomão, Amanda: Leitura, apropriação de saberes e transformação pessoal. 23.

[19] Petit, Michèle: A arte de ler.

[20] Petit, Michèle: A arte de ler.

[21] Petit, Michèle: Ler o mundo.

[22] Salomão, Amanda: Leitura, apropriação de saberes e transformação pessoal.

perspective, "verbal communication" alludes to both the structure laid out by the philosophy of language and to western thinking itself as supported by language-related liberal arts, by logic, grammar, and rhetoric, the classical *Trivium*, which now power the structuring and adoption of online elements.

Literacy, as proposed by Paulo Freire's theorical thinking[23] and revisited in the age of digital literacy, refers to the ability of a reader to understand the dialogical structure between logic, grammar, and rhetoric, which supports the interests of oppressing groups in all the modern configurations of "verbal communication" (that is, the *Trivium*). Literacy today thus must develop the reader's ability to understand, among other things, what a racist algorithm is and how it operates, as well as what Google's and Facebook's terms and conditions imply.

One of the most celebrated initiatives in the world to pursue a more critical education is the Brazilian adult literacy program, known by its acronym EJA (in Portuguese: *Educação de Jovens e Adultos*), which stemmed from the political efforts of the pedagogical community in Brazil. Paulo Freire, the philosopher and educator whose works are the backbone of this movement, through his experience, was able to, on the one hand, show the extent of epistemic social inequality in the country – that is, the vast empty space represented by the unexplored potential for readers to actively build the hegemonic knowledge themselves –, and on the other hand, identify and co-constitute opportunities for Brazilians to create a truly dialogical learning experience, in which readers interact with the world in order to transform it.[24]

In that context, the emergence of more recent information regimes urges us to ponder over the impact of the hyperproliferation of reading experiences through *Trivium* machines and, thus, the need for a novel educational program for adults, for they are the ones directly in charge of reinterpreting the world and inspiring child readers. The adults who massively interact with digital environments end up being ethically responsible for current transformations and, therefore, are in need of a critical theory of reading that helps them overhaul their educational thinking, learning practices, and observation methods. It would be no overstatement to say that the need for a freirian digital literacy program for adults is a public emergency to safeguard true citizenship worldwide. Such a program, in Paulo Freire's words, would be both a political feat and an act of *poiesis* – one that produce new worlds.[25]

According to Paulo Freire's epistemology of education, the power of the *Trivium* and the opportunities brought by its theoretical-empirical structure – logic, grammar, and rhetoric – are themselves a clear exercise of a critical theory of reading. As stated by Freire,

> *Na verdade, tanto o alfabetizador quanto o alfabetizando, ao pegarem, por exemplo, um objeto, como laço agora com o que tenho entre os dedos, sentem o objeto, percebem o objeto sentido e são capazes de expressar verbalmente o objeto sentido e percebido. Como eu, o analfabeto é capaz de sentir a caneta, de perceber a caneta e de dizer caneta. Eu, porém, sou capaz de não apenas sentir a caneta, de perceber a caneta, de dizer caneta, mas também de escrever caneta e, conseqüentemente, de ler caneta.[26]*

> [In fact, both teacher and student, when holding an object, such as the ribbon I have now between my fingers, are able to feel it and perceive it, and are also able to verbally express the object they have felt and perceived. Like me, an illiterate person would be able to feel a pen, perceive it, and utter the word 'pen'. But I alone would be able not only to feel and perceive the pen, to utter the word 'pen', but also to write the word 'pen' and, consequently, read the word 'pen'.]

This excerpt of his book *A importância do ato de ler* (in English: The importance of reading) brings an example of critical literacy and an understanding of how literacy diversity emerges from context. Acts of reading are

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[23] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[24] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[25] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [13].

[26] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [13].

"verbal" forms of understanding the world – all the objects that make up the world, which includes artifacts (in this case, a pen), as well as their potential for social transformation. By recognizing the role played by the ethics of the learner in literacy, we are able to fully apprehend the power of diversity not as a goal for the future, but rather as the means itself to promote critical education in whichever information regimes adopted at a particular moment in time.

3. Reading and novel information regimes: alienation as a result of excesses and proliferation

> *A insistência na quantidade de leituras sem o devido adentramento nos textos a serem compreendidos, e não mecanicamente memorizados, revela uma visão mágica da palavra escrita. Visão que urge ser superada. A mesma, ainda que encarnada desde outro ângulo, que se encontra, por exemplo, em quem escreve, quando identifica a possível qualidade de seu trabalho, ou não, com a quantidade de páginas escritas. No entanto, um dos documentos filosóficos mais importantes de que dispomos, As teses sobre Feuerbach, de Marx, tem apenas duas páginas e meia...[27]*

> [The emphasis put on the number of texts to be read and mechanically memorized, instead of on the depth of the reader's comprehension, reveals a mythical view of the written word; one that must be promptly overthrown. This same perspective also affects writers, even if by a different angle, when they assess the quality of their work by the number of pages written. However, one of the most important documents ever written in the field of philosophy, Marx's Theses on Feuerbach, are no more than two and a half pages long...]

In the foreword of a recent publication in the field of Information Science, titled *Leitor e Leitura na Ciência da Informação* (in English: Readers and Reading in Information Science) and organized by Lígia Maria Moreira Dumont, Roger Chartier stresses the importance of reading and the need for new research adapted to modern times.[28] Chartier contributes to the notion that readers' appropriation of information artifacts is limited by the opportunities of reading they are provided with in a given space and time. These opportunities, in turn, are determined by both the rules and interests that govern which texts are written and distributed, including the different media used to distribute them, as well as by the expectations and skills of the communities that receive and consume these texts.[29]

Considering that current information regimes involve the massive distribution of an engineered, intentional digital rhetoric (encompassing all possible means of "verbal communication", including *memes*, pictures, website layout, tweets, and more), we may interpret Chartier's writings in the light of the impacts information devices now have in the social life of readers. In that sense, both Bezerra[30] and Bezerra, Schneider & Saldanha[31] draw attention to the fact that these new technologies – and the devices and regimes that emerge from them, which are also determined by the new ways with which information is produced, distributed and accessed – continue to reflect not only the same problems long investigated since Roubakine, Freire and Petit, but also the very debate over the dilemma of reading found in early Greek philosophy, namely in Plato's Phaedrus.[32] However, what has changed with these new technologies is that they have become more widespread and directly interfere in the way readers act upon their environments, by shaping the way they perceive, conceive, and connect to the world.

The ethical dilemma with reading described by Plato informs us of the risks posed by excesses and by the proliferation of texts, which may result in wicked alienation – intentional wicked alienation that produces and

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[27] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [9].

[28] Chartier, Roger: Prefácio. 11.

[29] Chartier, Roger: Prefácio. 10.

[30] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 32-33.

[31] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho; Schneider, Marco; Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Ascensão e queda da utopia tecnoliberal. 1-2.

[32] Platão: Fedro ou Da Beleza.

distributes false information.[33] On the one hand, the act of writing pieces together a humongous, perhaps uncontrollable, *Trivium* machine capable of producing long-lasting, transportable truths that can be easily distributed, consumed and appreciated in a wide variety of contexts. However, this alphanumeric, semiotic construct – since the Egyptian myth for the birth of writing also applies to the emergence of numbers – would, on the other hand, atrophy the human capacity for critical thinking.

By making use of an artificial memory, created externally by a writing machine, people would no longer need to "exercise" their minds. By gaining access to the smallest of sentences, whether written in stone, wood or in a 140-character tweet, that information, perceived to be true, would be "etched" upon the "blank slate" of a collective mind, especially after it being multiplied across a community, either orally or digitally.

In summary, the emergence and development of new digital technologies offer countless potential benefits to the way readers interact among them and with their societies, as discussed by Bezerra, Schneider and Saldanha, by allowing for a more autonomous and active participation in the production, distribution, and access to information, as well as by furthering their engagement in social initiatives. However, as the authors point out, these same technologies may trigger a series of problems that must not be neglected. One of such problems is the massive amount of data in circulation that is prone to be used to produce and distribute false information through manipulation and decontextualization.[34] These are the same elements found in Plato's thoughts on the ethics of "beauty" in Phaedrus.

By transposing the discussion to the philosophy of information, Saldanha proposes that language techniques, and, more recently, digital informational devices in particular, if unfiltered by critical reasoning, may be used as a means to exert control and perpetuate social oppression and discrimination, ultimately jeopardizing democracy and aggravating social injustice and inequality.[35] [36]

The forms through which readers currently capture and assign meaning to information, most of which takes place in digital environments, and then use it to perceive, conceive, interpret, and act upon their environments, are closely connected to the power relations that govern these information regimes. This appropriation of the world – which we may objectively call "reading" – is founded precisely in the distinction between reading as a code-deciphering technique and reading as a means to critically interpret context, as proposed by Paulo Freire.[37] Bezerra, Schneider and Saldanha embrace this perspective to address how the social world is divided between those who own, to a greater or lesser extent, the "means of production" and those who do not; between those who possess the material and symbolic means to control the processes that operate the production, distribution, mediation, access, and appropriation of information and those who are mere receptors of what has been produced.[38]

The authors go on to say that if the appropriation of information through language technologies is in fact restrained, more broadly, by the values and perspectives held by a given society, then these values and perspectives may be used to legitimate the use of digital devices and, as a result, the interests of those who own them. Such a vertical oppressive movement gives rise to ideas that support the ideology and interests of the ruling classes and perpetuate the oppression and social discrimination of individuals and groups of people perceived as "different", that is, those removed from the center of power and dominance who find no benefits in these practices.

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[33] Platão: Fedro ou Da Beleza.

[34] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho; Schneider, Marco; Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Ascensão e queda da utopia tecnoliberal. 1-2.

[35] Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, arqui-segredos e pós-verdades. 92.

[36] Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 178-179.

[37] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[38] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho; Schneider, Marco; Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Ascensão e queda da utopia tecnoliberal. 2.

However, if one believes exercising critical analytical skills and developing critical reasoning allows readers to take ownership of the information acquired through these devices, that becomes the crucial step in guiding people toward creating and/or sustaining a fairer and more democratic society for all, as Paulo Freire advocated in his writings.[39] This is echoed in Bezerra's studies addressing the need for a critical theory to be built in the context of Information Science. Bezerra advances the importance of developing critical awareness with respect to the information regimes imposed over readers and emphasizes a critical bias as a fundamental element in overcoming current technological, economic, and social challenges.[40] [41]

In a more historiographical analysis, Chartier argues there is an urgent need for further research on this topic, especially with regards to its critical conception, and in connection with what the author describes as "[…] the disquiet caused by current threats to ethics and to democracy".[42] Chartier believes the act of reading as an instrument to exercise critical thinking has become decisive in a world where "hurried, naïve forms of reading" now multiply in social media, accompanied by gross manipulations of public opinion through the same digital technologies that govern these social networks, most of which serve the interests of the ruling classes. This perspective puts Information Science in a privileged position to indicate the conditions necessary for critical reasoning to be potentially exercised through reading. If true, Information Science would be therefore able to tell apart "truth from falsehood, knowledge from fantasy, dignity from barbarism" notably through studies on reading.[43]

The ideas advanced by Bezerra and Chartier evince an increasingly urgent need to raise awareness among the users of these digital devices on the structures that operate and guide their experiences online, so as to unveil the interests, motivations, and power relationships behind every piece of information produced, distributed, accessed and consumed in digital environments. This awareness is made possible by the ability to read – and, in a more critical sense, the ability to understand what is read and how it is read –, which brings us back to the methodology developed by Roubakine to discuss how to educate readers toward a process of social revolution – a permanent struggle for direct social justice.

To contribute to this goal of promoting a more critical awareness against the oppression and inequality potentially advanced by digital technologies in the current information regime, one possible approach in the field of Library & Information Science can be found in the theoretical works Nicolas Roubakine wrote in the late 19th century and early 20th century, where reading experiences are seen as a potential instrument for the appropriation of knowledge and the development of critical reasoning. Roubakine believed reading was more than the sheer act of reading an informational artifact, but rather a symbolic instrument to create a collective critical awareness that allowed readers to socialize knowledge and to think critically not only about what they read, but also about the world around them.[44]

The "roubakinian movement" – and all the stir it caused in Russia –, originated over a hundred years ago, helps us think more objectively about Freire's project in Latin America. Teaching readers to actively construct their social world through reading confronts a more traditional approach that advocates for a more neutral education, which Paulo Freire saw as a gullible perspective on the topic. This perspective, inspired by a philosophy of mechanistic information, aims at an "ideal education" that is "disconnected from what is real, virtuous and good".[45] In that sense, Roubakine anticipates a critical theory to oppose the advances of this analytical

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[39] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

[40] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 60.

[41] Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Vigilância e filtragem de conteúdo nas redes digitais. 5-6.

[42] Chartier, Roger: Prefácio. 11.

[43] Chartier, Roger: Prefácio. 11.

[44] Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

[45] Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [18].

philosophy and its neopositivist approach to the use of language in the informational education of readers.[46] It is the focus on the working class, as proposed by Roubakine, that translates what Freire would later explain as a struggle against the elite's oppressing project of characterizing "the masses" as intrinsically incapable.[47]

In that sense, a superstructure has been built to concentrate education on the elites, as if, as denounces Paulo Freire, it was not only possible, but necessary to nurture a pure and perfect social class.[48] The working class is steered toward the interests of the elite, in an act of epistemicide and disrespect for the perspective, knowledge and experience of others. The harrowing journey undertaken by Roubakine to gather data and delve into the life of each reader in czarist Russia exposes this distinct project to purify and neutralize all creative forces, that is, the political power emanating from the working class.

4. Final thoughts: an open field for an adult literacy program…

> *Venho tentando deixar claro, neste trabalho em torno da importância do ato de ler - e não é demasiado repetir agora -, que meu esforço fundamental vem sendo o de explicitar como, em mim, aquela importância vem sendo destacada. É como se eu estivesse fazendo a 'arqueologia' de minha compreensão do complexo ato de ler, ao longo de minha experiência existencial. Daí que tenha falado de momentos de minha infância, de minha adolescência, dos começos de minha mocidade e termine agora revendo, em traços gerais, alguns dos aspectos centrais da proposta que fiz no campo da alfabetização de adultos há alguns anos. [49]*

> [I have been trying to make clear, through this work on the importance of the act of reading – and would like to reiterate now –, my fundamental effort to explicit how this importance reflects on myself. As if I were conducting a study on the 'archeology' of how my own understanding of the complex act of reading came to be, as a result of my existential experience. That is why I have mentioned episodes of my childhood, my young years, the early days of adulthood and why, now, I trace back some of the central aspects of the ideas I advanced a few years ago with regards to adult literacy.]

Similarly to the works of Roubakine and Freire, Michèle Petit's experience in fostering reading in communities that had been severely impacted by economic, social and political crises, most of them in Latin America, also advances this symbolic concept of reading as "reading the world", creating a safe space where readers are encouraged to explore new possibilities in the way they think about their environment and interact with it. Petit emphasizes that this alone is not enough to rid the world of suffering, oppression, and inequality, but that it helps to "steer the wheel" [50] to reveal new possibilities, that is, opportunities for readers to understand the world and live their lives differently – more fairly, ethically, and equally. One of the paths that is cleared by this approach is the social use of reading to take ownership of information and interact with the environment. The critical reflections that emerge from this practice suggest new forms to oppose and resist the oppression and inequalities perpetuated by current information regimes.

Thus, when Paulo Freire[51] proposes a social reflection upon the act of reading in the context of adult literacy programs, he hits the heart of the same struggles we find in the field of digital literacy. As has been demonstrated, these struggles include our need to welcome the diversity of experiences to fuel a more plural approach to interpreting the different forms of learning and to nurture a more critical intentionality as we confront an ever-changing world. The massive amount of data in digital environments does not reflect an asymptomatic "explosion" of political views, or even socially free entropy. Rather, this excess is either engineered or hijacked to perpetuate oppression.

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46 Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

47 Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [20].

48 Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [20].

49 Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [12].

50 Petit, Michèle: Ler o mundo. 63.

51 Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam.

This theoretical perspective urges us to reflect upon a new way to teach adults and young adults – which, of course, does not preclude the teaching of child readers as well. This thought-provoking interpretation focuses on the observation of our current time and on exercising daily transformations, with an understanding that this generation of readers is responsible for producing and consuming digital content, while also being in charge of teaching the next generation how to read the world (with its *memes*, tweets, and images).

Therefore, we are in urgent need of theoretical foundations and methodologies that make use of a critical theory of reading, integrating views and initiatives that help readers take ownership of the world, both socially and technically, an issue Paulo Freire investigated extensively from his own early days. Freire's work teems with examples of a certain "historical materialism", from bricks to pens. His writings[52] point us toward institutional initiatives by public libraries, converging to a movement ignited in Russia, before the revolution of 1917, to turn the working class into readers.

In conclusion, in the field of Library & Information Science, this perspective has been pushed forward since the profoundly empirical studies Roubakine conducted between 1890 and 1910. Today, the political act of promoting literacy in digital environments, inspired by Roubakine's methodology, is an exercise of resistance and epistemic fight for social justice through the act of reading, and our ability to bridge the works of Paulo Freire and Nicolas Roubakine will reveal what possibilities exist for a better future.

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