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Can we achieve diversity in digital literacy without a critical reflection on reading? – Part 2 – Literacy programs that 'gestate a world'

Abstract:

This paper furthers the discussion that intersects the works of Paulo Freire and Nicolas Roubakine, within the sphere of the epistemology of Information Science, on the role of reading as a tool for acquiring knowledge and developing critical awareness. The theoretical concepts employed in this research are founded on Roubakine's approach to reading, who saw it as a means to socialize knowledge among socially oppressed groups, and complemented by the perception that reading involves reading the world itself. Ultimately, the knowledge acquired through these reading experiences could be used to increase readers' awareness of their environments and create opportunities to resist and oppose the inequalities that are perpetuated in current information regimes.

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

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1. Initial thoughts: the political gesture of reading

A compreensão do processo de trabalho, do ato produtivo em sua complexidade, da maneira como se organiza e desenvolve a produção, a necessidade de uma formação técnica do trabalhador, formação, porém, que não se esgote num especialismo estreito e alienante.¹

[By understanding the process of work, of a productive act, in its complexity, and how production is organized and developed, the need for a more technical education for the working class emerges, one that is not limited, though, by narrowing specialization and alienating purposes.]

How do language constructions interfere in the development of a critical reading of the world, which, according to Paulo Freire,² is paramount for knowledge acquisition? Freire's ideas converge with the scientific experiments of Nicolas Roubakine in Russia,³ before the Revolution of 1917, to give rise to a theoretical and empirical understanding of how reading may ignite social transformation.

The theoretical reflection advanced in the present study intends to show that true emancipation can only emerge from reading if literacy (including digital literacy) is taught to "gestate a world", as per the metaphor of Paulo Freire.⁴ In other words, by connecting the writings of Freire and Roubakine, we strive to understand how reading act as a political gesture.

Paulo Freire writes that it is "impossible to deny the political nature of any educational process", as much as it is impossible to "deny the educational character of any political activity".⁵ Therefore,

Isto significa ser impossível, de um lado, como já salientei, uma educação neutra, que se diga a serviço da humanidade, dos seres humanos em geral; de outro, uma prática política esvaziada de significação educativa. Neste sentido é que todo partido político é sempre educador e, como tal, sua proposta política vai ganhando carne ou não na relação entre os atos de denunciar e de anunciar.⁶

[That means it is impossible, as previously mentioned, to have any sort of neutral education that truly serves humanity and human beings in general, or any political practices that are completely voided of educational meaning. It is in that sense that every political party is also, inherently, an educator and, as such, its political agenda thickens, or fails to thicken, according to the relationship between its denouncing and its announcing initiatives.]

How can this political stance proposed by Freire be investigated from the perspective of Information Science? Roubakine provides us with the methodological exercises to tackle this endeavor. This study thus aims to further a discussion first initiated in the works of Paulo Freire and Nicolas Roubakine and their shared view of reading as the reading of the world. The theoretical definitions employed in this research are anchored in Roubakine's approach of seeing reading as an instrument to acquire the knowledge needed to develop the critical thinking that will, in turn, be used by readers in their real lives, helping them criticize, connect, and act upon their social environments, and expanding the opportunities to oppose and resist mechanisms of control, oppression and exclusion that are supported in current digital technologies to, ultimately, transform the world.

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 Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

⁴ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [13].

⁵ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [15].

⁶ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [15].

2. *Trivium* machines and reading

*Não foi, por exemplo - costume sempre dizer -, a educação burguesa a que criou ou enformou a burguesia, mas a burguesia que, chegando ao poder, teve o poder de sistematizar a sua educação.*⁷

[As I always say, it was not, for example, the bourgeoisie education that created and shaped the bourgeois; rather, it was only after the bourgeois took over power that they were able to systematize their education.]

According to Bezerra, today's massive production and distribution of information in both social media and other digital settings reveal the potentially negative impacts they exert on social environments, most commonly through the excessive amount of information in circulation that is fabricated, decontextualized, or subject to other mechanism of disinformation.⁸

Bezerra also highlights the fact that governments, corporations, and individuals attempt to manipulate and control information in a way that mostly goes "unnoticed" and may be perceived as "harmless", as is the case with how some platforms monitor and filter content according to a user's online behavior. These practices may potentially interfere in the social environment of internet users and impact how they understand, interact, and act upon their environments.⁹ Many are the instances in which the information acquired through these practices, detached from a more critical perspective, shrouds the complex social relationships behind it, such as the vested interests and ulterior motives of those who produced the information, all of which reverberate "silently" through readers and, thus, through their social structures.¹⁰

In a broader sense, monitoring users' browsing data may contribute to further discriminate and oppress certain groups and individuals when used for economic gains (for example, to create targeted advertising), or to advance political, ideological, and social agendas, thus representing an obstacle for freedom, ethics, and democracy.^{11 12}

Saldanha contributes to this discussion by addressing the problems that arise from an improper use of digital devices from the perspective of the philosophy of information. To him, these devices often serve as the expression of language techniques that use data to generate propaganda through what Saldanha labels as the fabrication and simulation of sources and "truths". The author thus lays bare how, if used poorly, these devices may conduct us into catastrophe and barbarism.^{13 14}

More specifically, Saldanha points to how this type of information, which is produced and distributed online by companies, government agencies, and individuals on social networks, produces a new symbolic language (an algorithmic language, most notably) that collects data to exploit, subdue, and control others. According to Saldanha, language is thus used to oppress and discriminate certain groups and jeopardizes democracy. This negative impact occurs regardless of the veracity of the information, for the mechanisms used to produce and distribute information in these devices are made to foster a belief that what is shared is inherently true. Therefore, the generation, distribution, collection, and access to data ultimately serve those who control the "cyber machinery", that is, those who own the tools that make up current information regimes, and thus can be used to manipulate data in order to shape how readers perceive their environments and to align their beliefs to the interests of the ruling class. By controlling the narrative and shaping how readers assign meaning to the

⁷ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [16].

⁸ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 60.

⁹ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 60.

¹⁰ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho; Schneider, Marco; Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Ascensão e queda da utopia tecnoliberal. 9.

¹¹ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 38.

¹² Bezerra, Arthur Coelho; Schneider, Marco; Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Ascensão e queda da utopia tecnoliberal. 9.

¹³ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, arqui-segredos e pós-verdades. 93.

¹⁴ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 178-179.

information acquired, these regimes result in potential oppression, marginalization, discrimination, control, and subjugation.¹⁵

Regarding the power relationships established by those who control these digital devices and, therefore, current information regimes, Saldanha reveals an “[...] art to dominate the machines that, in turn, dominate and alienate the people”.¹⁶ From a critical perspective, these digital devices manipulate language and fabricate “truths” through technologies that subtly obscure our understanding of how data is produced, extracted, manipulated, and disseminated; they thus legitimize “[...] concrete and dynamic manifestations of signs that get dispersed among connected resources. These signs are continuously employed in a process of recontextualization that builds and maintains the superstructures programmed within the finite space of the rulers’ field of action.”¹⁷ In other words, language technologies are exploited with the purpose of furthering oppression and subjugation.

The techniques employed in these platforms, sugar coated to be presented as “harmless” features that customize the user’s experience, turn out to be vehicles for propaganda that aims at influencing how individuals perceive their environments and interact with them. Readers assign meaning to the acquired information according to what is presented to them in these platforms – during their browsing activities –, as dictated by the interests of the ruling classes who want to benefit (economically, politically, and/or socially) from monitoring and exerting control over those who use these platforms.

The social impacts of these practices may have dire consequences, not only due to the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination they promote, but also because they inhibit more questioning and challenging stances. Bezerra considers these as paramount not only for users to be able to exercise critical thinking, but also to help us expand our own views of the world after contacting the new perspectives and possibilities that emerge from questioning approaches.¹⁸

Among the dangers and risks posed by the “improper” use of these technologies, it is worth listing how these networks, besides being used to prescribe how users should acquire information and assign meaning to it in a way that legitimates oppression and social discrimination, are also built to convey an idea that the information they carry is “correct”. The ill-intentioned use of these devices thus feeds prejudice and perpetuates inequality, affirming the belief that reality, as shown – oppressive and abiding to the ruling classes –, is what it is and could never be any different.^{19 20}

The potential use of these technologies to reinforce discriminating categorizations serves an information regime that is, itself, oppressing and discriminatory in essence. The modes of production, distribution, access, and acquisition of information in these environments are unequal and monopolized by the ruling classes. Therefore, the material and symbolic conditions required to develop critical thinking are subject to the will of the few who conveniently decide what is “true” or “real” according to their own interests and who shape the categories to which the social world must adapt.

¹⁵ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, *arqui-segredos e pós-verdades*. 92-93.

¹⁶ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, *arqui-segredos e pós-verdades*. 93.

¹⁷ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, *arqui-segredos e pós-verdades*. 99.

¹⁸ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: *Vigilância e filtragem de conteúdo nas redes digitais*. 13.

¹⁹ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: *Teoria crítica da informação*. 49

²⁰ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, *arqui-segredos e pós-verdades*. 99.

3. Information regimes in the digital world: social and technical dilemmas

As contradições que caracterizam a sociedade como está sendo penetram a intimidade das instituições pedagógicas em que a educação sistemática se está dando e alteram o seu papel ou o seu esforço reprodutor da ideologia dominante.²¹

[The contradictions that characterize our current society penetrate the intimate world of pedagogical institutions, where systematic education is provided, and alter its role to replicate the ideology of the ruling class.]

One of the major consequences of the unequal distribution of power in information regimes is that the contents accessed by the majority of the population – who, in large part, are barred from opportunities to develop more critical stances – are filtered and misguided. Readers are lured into sharing content that does not reflect the real world; to the contrary, what they are told to be “real” is in fact oppressing and discriminatory propaganda spread by the ruling classes in such a way that prevents readers from reassigning meaning to it.

In other words, these technologies are subject to the manipulation of a ruling class that not only controls digital devices and the language used in them, but also assigns meaning to the information that is distributed and accessed by those who interact with these information environments on a daily basis. This control allows the ruling class to steer people’s behavior in a direction that benefits the few while disregarding the hardships and oppressions suffered by the many. Language, here, is employed both politically and ideologically to control and subjugate others, illustrating how digital technologies may be used as the central tool to mediate and propagate these practices.²²

According to Bezerra, these practices make apparent our pressing need to develop readers’ critical thinking skills to allow them to scrutinize the information acquired in these devices and to ethically employ it in their own lives. More specifically, Bezerra states that there is a direct correlation between the ethical use of information to resist and challenge the current mechanisms of control, subjugation, and oppression – which profit from an improper and ill-intentioned use of these technologies – and the development of a heightened awareness of how these information regimes govern the society we live in.²³ To this end, it is important to ponder, reflect, and critically understand the flow of information and, most notably, the power struggles between groups whose symbolic and social contexts are deeply unequal. This process involves challenging why things are the way they are, instead of being something else. Such critical exercises raise readers’ awareness on the existing social oppressions, a paramount step to allow them to stand up against these practices and resist their negative effects.

This perspective illustrates the symbolic thickness explored in the works of Michèle Petit, who sees the acts of reading as a means to represent readers’ subjectivities and the context in which their reading experiences take place.²⁴ Bourdieu complements this view, reminding us of the symbolic power exerted by a particular narrative – which, according to him, is carried within an object, such as a book – to exercise control and power within a certain space and time. This symbolic power described by Bourdieu also underscores the importance of critical reading practices. In his writings he stresses the importance of investigating the social and historical conditions of each act of reading, as well as the interests and motivations behind the narratives propagated in reading objects and their impact on information acquisition.²⁵

Among the possible practices to promote critical thinking, in the form herein proposed, are those suggested by Nicolas Roubakine in late 19th century and early 20th century Russia. Roubakine explained that reading could

²¹ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [16].

²² Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, aqui-segredos e pós-verdades. 93.

²³ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 60.

²⁴ Petit, Michèle: A arte de ler.

²⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre: Leitura, leitores letrados, literatura. 134.

be used as a tool for opposing and resisting the mechanisms of oppression and social discrimination, as long as it was used to acquire knowledge and develop a more critical awareness. Other authors have since contributed to this effort. Bezerra²⁶ investigated the competences needed for critical thinking from the perspective of Information Science, whereas Budd,²⁷ Dumont,²⁸ and Salomão²⁹ discussed the transforming potential of reading as tool for knowledge acquisition and critical reasoning.

4. A symbolic twist in the acts of reading: “the words of the people” “gestate the world”

*A pesquisa do que chamava 'universo vocabular nos dava assim as palavras do Povo, grávidas de mundo. Elas nos vinham através da leitura do mundo que os grupos populares faziam. Depois, voltavam a eles, inseridas no que chamava e chamo de codificações, que são representações da realidade.'*³⁰

[A study into was called 'lexical universe' revealed to us the words of the People, which gestated a world. They would come to us from the way these popular groups read the world. And then, go back to them, to take part in what was called, and I also call, codification, that is, representations of the world.]

If, on the one hand, Bezerra acknowledges³¹ the central need for a critical assessment of how information is produced, distributed, and mediated in the digital technologies that make up current information regimes, Bourdieu's symbolic focus, on the other hand, draws our attention to the need for a thorough investigation on the social conditions that enable reading itself.

The unequal distribution of resources impacts how meaning is assigned to the object being read. This is governed by the interests of the ruling classes and, therefore, pose as an “obstacle” that hinders readers from critically examining their environments. From a critical perspective, we point to a strong need for challenging the motivations behind the production of reading materials and the ulterior motives behind the narratives they carry, all of which aim to steer readers into a certain direction and into thinking and acting in a certain way.³²

The ideas advanced by Bourdieu forces us to acknowledge that no reading material reaches the hands of readers “unscathed”, that is, free of the marks that are etched by the subjectivity of those who write it. These marks emerge from implicit assumptions and categories that have been socially constructed to determine what is true, and readers are unconsciously influenced by these elements when consuming these reading materials.³³ The meaning assigned to a reading object – which could be either a book, or any piece of language technology – therefore results from the social and historical contexts in which readers are placed in a certain space and time, shaping their social world. From a symbolic perspective, the appropriation of a text is itself a means to assign meaning to this very world.

According to Petit, books and other reading artifacts, if seen as material objects and language techniques, operate in the symbolic realm and are manifest when readers assign meaning to the writings of an author and reinterpret the reading artifact according to their own experiences and world views, resulting in potential impacts on their social environments.³⁴ In other words, there is a symbolic power that emanates from the writer and is consolidated by the readers. It permeates mental structures and, thereon, social structures: “[...] a book

²⁶ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação.

²⁷ Budd, John: Phenomenology and information studies.

²⁸ Dumont, Lígia: O imaginário feminino e a opção pela leitura de romances de séries.

²⁹ Salomão, Amanda: Leitura, apropriação de saberes e transformação pessoal.

³⁰ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [13].

³¹ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: Teoria crítica da informação. 56.

³² Bourdieu, Pierre; Chartier, Roger: A leitura: uma prática cultural. 234.

³³ Bourdieu, Pierre; Chartier, Roger: A leitura: uma prática cultural. 248.

³⁴ Petit, Michèle: A arte de ler.

may change readers' perception of their social world. That perception, in turn, may transform their social world itself."³⁵

When transplanted to the context of current information regimes, Petit's and Bourdieu's views may be reinterpreted to address digital reading environments. Digital technologies also affect social structures by manipulating how readers receive information. They integrate a domain teeming with class and power struggles and are used to impose narratives and shape the social world in order to perpetuate hegemonic ideologies. Therefore, a more critical assessment of what is read digitally is a pressing need. Additionally to the development of critical thinking skills with regards to information acquisition, it is also important to revive certain types of reading experiences, as proposed by Nicolas Roubakine in the context of the epistemology of Library & Information Science. His approach may be mimicked in digital environments to develop a more critical assessment and critical thinking over what is read, leading to new forms of reading the world.

In the early 20th century, Nicolas Roubakine strove to develop a science that analyzed and investigated the psychological phenomena related to the production, distribution, and consumption of books, named the psychology of reading, or bibliopsychology. Roubakine's reflections focused on how readers psychologically experienced reading artifacts, aiming to investigate the impact these artifacts might have on readers and on society. He believed information artifacts resulted from social and historical contexts and he thus challenged whether it would be possible to say that a reading object could control its own content, detached from the subjectivities of readers, modes of interaction, conditions for the acquisition of knowledge, and the space and time in which this process took place. The answer to his inquiry lies in a thorough understanding of the modes of production and consumption of these artifacts, from the perspective of how reading experiences impact marginalized and discriminated social groups.^{36 37 38 39}

Based on the epistemology of Library & Information Science, Roubakine suggests that reading is, in itself, an interaction between readers and their environments. Reading processes are thus continuously influenced not only by the reader's psychology, but also by the intersubjective connections between the reader and the outside world, which depend on the subjectivity, context, and circumstances in which reading takes place in a certain space and time. The works of Freire and Petit point to the same direction, advocating that reading materials have social contours. Reading is understood in its more broad and symbolic sense, involving not only decoding the words written in the artifact, but also decoding the world; that is, perceiving and interpreting our environments by assigning and reassigning meaning to them in multiple ways. Readers, according to Roubakine, are psychological beings who take part in a world full of oppression, suffering, and inequality. Reading, thus, becomes an instrument to generate and raise a more critical and collective awareness.⁴⁰

5. The *praxis* of reading and the ecology of literacy diversity

A palavra tijolo, por exemplo, se inseriria numa representação pictórica, a de um grupo de pedreiros, por exemplo, construindo uma casa.⁴¹

[The word brick, for example, may be paired with a picture representation of a group of bricklayers building, for example, a house.]

³⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre; Chartier, Roger: A leitura: uma prática cultural. 243.

³⁶ Otlet, Paul: Tratado de documentação. 41-48.

³⁷ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Gramática de la intencionalidade en los estudios informacionales. 93-94.

³⁸ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: A invenção da Ciência da Informação segundo Nicolas Roubakine (Rubakin).

³⁹ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 196.

⁴⁰ Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

⁴¹ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [11].

According to Roubakine, it is important to understand the social and historical conditions in which the oppressed classes interact with reading materials, whose production, distribution, and consumption have been long governed, almost exclusively, by the elites. Following in Roubakine's footsteps, Saldanha demonstrates that the ideal of socializing knowledge through reading – both artifacts and the world –, when accompanied by the critical reasoning potentially generated through acts of reading, would be able to raise awareness among groups that are oppressed and discriminated against by hegemonic information regimes. The appropriation of knowledge and the potential for critical thinking emerging from this combination could thus be employed as a crucial tool to encourage the masses to oppose and resist the inequalities and injustice that plague our society. Ultimately, this collective effort would be able to reverse the oppressing and discriminatory mechanisms that perpetuate these inequalities and, thus, promote the well-being of all people.^{42 43}

In the works of Roubakine, reading is thus a transforming social *praxis* that develops through the opposition and resistance to existing oppressions, and the fight against inequalities to promote a more equitable access to cultural assets. This perspective summarizes how reading may potentially encourage the oppressed to create a fair, ethical, free, and democratic society, which Roubakine refers to as "a new life" that would enable social emancipation.⁴⁴ Opportunities of reading for all readers thus involves an ideal in which:

*[...] fazer com que todos que, no regime social atual, são oprimidos, humilhados, ofendidos e empobrecidos, que não têm nem os conhecimentos nem as possibilidades de trabalhar para criar melhores condições, possam, também eles, lutar e trabalhar com sucesso, sem verter lágrimas nem sangue; todos podem aprender a criar uma vida nova, e a criar, sempre e em todos os lugares, com perseverança e entusiasmo, e isso sem que sejam advertidos por aqueles que, hoje em dia, constroem sua felicidade e seu bem-estar sobre a desgraça alheia.*⁴⁵

[[...] all of those who are oppressed, humiliated, offended, and impoverished by the current social regime, and who have neither the knowledge, nor the opportunities to produce better living conditions, will be able to also fight and work successfully, shedding neither tears, nor blood. They will all be able to create a new life, everywhere and all the time, out of perseverance and enthusiasm, without being censored by those who, today, achieve happiness and well-being at the expense of the suffering of others.]

Roubakine's views suggest that a potential use of reading as an instrument to acquire knowledge is at the heart of the opportunities for critical thinking. Acts of reading are made of a series of psychological and cognitive processes that establish meaning according to the context and the subjectivity of the reader. From the perspective herein advanced, critical thinking may be then employed to raise critical awareness – especially among readers who belong to oppressed social groups –, of the existing oppressions in order to oppose them. These potentials necessarily require readers to reflect critically over what they read, which, in turn, requires proper access not only to information, but also to the devices that enable reading and the appropriation of knowledge.

Advancing the perspective of the acts of reading as instruments for the appropriation of knowledge and for critical reasoning, Dumont advocates that reading is indeed an action, rather than a passive activity, that is carried out within a network of values and motivations which emerge not from isolated incidents, but from a complex set of activities, sentiments, desires, and thoughts. The meaning assigned to an informational object depends on the relationship established between reader, text, and context; the latter, with its particularities, being the central element of the processes that truly enable readers to take ownership of the artifacts while reading.⁴⁶

⁴² Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: A invenção da Ciência da Informação segundo Nicolas Roubakine (Rubakin).

⁴³ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 196-197.

⁴⁴ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 196-197.

⁴⁵ Otlet, Paul: Tratado de documentação. 48.

⁴⁶ Dumont, Lígia: O imaginário feminino e a opção pela leitura de romances em série. 46.

From this viewpoint, reading is thus believed to be a form of relationship between the reader and the environment. Here, the act of reading is a fundamental enabler for readers to become aware of the world around them and to be able to transcend the informational artifact and read the world itself, as proposed by Freire and Roubakine. In that sense, in which reading is understood as a means to understand the world we inhabit, Dumont and Pinheiro point to the appropriation of knowledge as a set of acts through which, during the process of reading, an individual may restructure their own world and interpretations, reorganizing previous knowledge after the injection of the information that has been read and interpreted under the light of their own context and subjectivity. The appropriation of knowledge through reading takes place, in fact, through the perception, interpretation, and comprehension of the language signs carried within a reading object. When decoded, these signs communicate with the reader's world and life experiences to encourage the reader to reflect upon what is being read from their own perspective.⁴⁷

The knowledge that is acquired through reading may thus be turned into actions to be carried out in the social world, affecting, particularly, the way readers think, act, and connect to the world. Reading therefore may be used to enhance the process of building a fairer, more democratic society, free of oppressions. Here, again, reading is recognized for its role in the assignment of meaning, as an enabler of critical thinking, first and foremost, due to the critical perspective it inputs onto what is read.⁴⁸

Therefore, according to Bezerra, it is now important to investigate the techniques employed in digital platforms (especially those used to monitor and filter content) and their impacts on how we interact not only with the information object itself, but also, and most importantly, with our social world.⁴⁹ If reading is perceived, as proposed by Roubakine, as a symbolic instrument for socializing knowledge, then it becomes a crucial element for the exercise of critical thinking required to create a fair, free, and democratic society.

By investigating the works of Roubakine, we find that the potential for critical thinking that emerges from the acts of reading lies, thus, in the opportunities to acquire knowledge that can be used to reflect upon the environment so as to "distort" what was given as the "original meaning" of a reading object, often "legitimized" by the writer and believed to be "true" by the reader. Here, the reader assigns new contours and meanings to this material, resulting in a new world view. From this perspective, Bourdieu reflects on how the symbolic power of reading may result from changes in the different players and their vested interests, from opportunities to reassign meaning to their social world and to acquire knowledge that guides and is guided by these new meanings that emerge from reading. In other words, the social world is transformed as a result of the new meanings assigned to it, which, in turn, emerge from the knowledge that is both the cause and the consequence of these new meanings.⁵⁰

Bourdieu explains that,⁵¹ though there will always be attempts to manipulate and control reading objects, if readers are imbued with an awareness of the power struggles in place – what Bezerra⁵² describes as being a conscious awareness of the struggles and contradictions that govern current information regimes – and the unequal distribution of cultural, economic, and social resources, that is, if readers can critically reflect upon their environments, they can thus analyze and critically assess the ulterior motives behind the information found in reading materials. This heightened awareness is precisely what enables readers to challenge what they are exposed to and thus escape the "effects" of their circumstances, that is, reject the rhetoric that serves the ruling classes and perpetuates actions, beliefs, and habits that oppress certain social groups.

⁴⁷ Dumont, Lígia; Pinheiro, Edna: *Incurções teórico-metodológicas da etnometodologia na Ciência da Informação*. 50.

⁴⁸ Dumont, Lígia: *O imaginário feminino e a opção pela leitura de romances em série*. 30.

⁴⁹ Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: *Vigilância e filtragem de conteúdo nas redes digitais*. 13.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre: *Leitura, leitores letrados, literatura*. 141.

⁵¹ Bourdieu, Pierre: *Leitura, leitores letrados, literatura*. 141.

⁵² Bezerra, Arthur Coelho: *Teoria crítica da informação*. 56.

To Roubakine, this reflection stems for an effort to enable historically oppressed groups to take ownership of the instruments (in the *praxis* of reading) used to acquire the knowledge necessary to develop a more critical stance, changing the way these groups perceive their unequal environments to, ultimately, transform them.⁵³ Every piece of information acquired through this experience is, therefore, a potential tool for resisting the mechanisms that promote social oppression and force different social groups into vulnerable positions across the globe, for it may be used to heighten awareness of the macrostructures that sustain economic, social, political, and cultural discrimination in the social world.

6. Final thoughts: toward a roubakinian reading revolution

É neste sentido que a leitura crítica da realidade, dando-se num processo de alfabetização ou não e associada sobretudo a certas práticas claramente políticas de mobilização e de organização, pode constituir-se num instrumento para o que Gramsci chamaria de ação contra-hegemônica.⁵⁴

[It is in that sense that a critical reading of reality, resulting or not from a literacy program, especially when associated to certain political practices of mobilization and organization, may become an instrument for what Gramsci would call a counter-hegemonic initiative.]

In the epistemology of Library & Information Science, Saldanha's reflections guide us into thinking about how to transgress the hegemonic mechanisms disseminated through language techniques in order to resist and oppose the devastating advances in social control, oppression, and discrimination promoted through digital devices. In Saldanha's view, the problem with using these languages and these devices to propagate oppressing ideas and fabricate what is "real" or "true" lies not in the construction of a narrative, but in the motivations behind its use. The harm, according to him, comes not from the language or the device, but from how they are consumed, often promoting unethical, undemocratic, antisocial agendas to oppress, discriminate, subjugate, and control others for the benefit of the ruling classes. There is no point in condemning these devices, rather, we should use them to challenge and subvert oppressing ideas. One way of doing so, among many other possibilities, would be to encourage readers to critically reflect upon what has been read and consumed.^{55 56}

The path toward a fair, free, ethical, and democratic society is found, thus, in the use of the exact same language techniques to fight oppressive agendas, the fabrication of "truths" within these new technologies, and the effects these fabricated "truths" may have on the real life of readers.⁵⁷ The central proposition put forward in the present study is the development of a critical reflection on the reading object to enable reader to take true ownership of these information environments. Fostering a more critical stance toward the contents being consumed, that is, the use of these languages, may be a promising path to reduce the inequalities disseminated in these devices and prevent the world from descending into barbarism.

The blueprint for this critical stance toward what is read and how language techniques are consumed may be found in the works of Nicolas Roubakine and his ideal of socializing knowledge through reading. Roubakine proposes a transforming *praxis*, recognized as a revolutionary gesture that, as demonstrated by Saldanha, creates and operationalizes anti-hegemonic social categories to counter the hegemonic and oppressing constructs that currently shape our narratives and practices and, consequently, shape how readers perceive and understand their environments.⁵⁸

⁵³ Roubakine, Nicolas: Introduction à la psychologie bibliologique.

⁵⁴ Freire, Paulo: A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se complementam. [12].

⁵⁵ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, arqui-segredos e pós-verdades. 93.

⁵⁶ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 179.

⁵⁷ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Trivium, arqui-segredos e pós-verdades. 101.

⁵⁸ Saldanha, Gustavo Silva: Sem e cem teorias críticas em Ciência da Informação. 196-197.

In that sense, the reflections herein provided aim to reinterpret Nicolas Roubakine's central idea of socializing knowledge among socially oppressed groups through reading to fit more current needs – that is, the production, distribution, access, and acquisition of information through digital technologies –, so as to promote widespread access to information that has long been monopolized by the ruling few. However, critical thinking, stemmed from reading, requires the appropriate social circumstances to grant access to reading objects, as well as the material and symbolic conditions for readers to critically consume these objects. Beyond the critical thinking skills required to scrutinize information, we believe reading – not only of the informational material, but of the world – constitutes a means to impact how reading objects are consumed in digital environments, due to its potential to foster critical reasoning, and to change how the information acquired can be later employed to think, connect, and act upon the world, in search for emancipation.

Such potential, aligned with Roubakine's ideal, comes to life through equal access to knowledge, especially by marginalized and discriminated social groups and classes, who can thus use the information acquire to critically challenge the world as is (and inquire why it is not different) to devise new ways of thinking and living beyond what is imposed by the mechanisms of control and oppression currently employed in modern language technologies. In both its symbolic and practical dimensions, reading therefore clears the way for new opportunities for transformation when used as a tool to democratize the access to information and socialize knowledge, as well as to promote a more critical stance that allows readers to challenge the narratives imposed by hegemonic information regimes, to fight and to resist. Ultimately, the act of reading would pose as a *praxis* that build a new society, rid of oppression, discrimination, and inequality.

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