The Myth of Rationality and the Dualistic Concept of Knowledge on the Example of the Formation of the Concept of Information Literacy

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This study analyses the approaches discursively applied in conceptualising information literacy in modern society on the model of two ideal pure types – Enlightenment and Neo-Romanticism. The study places these approaches at the core of contemporary society as competing and complementary approaches. It analytically reviews each historical approach and analyses its influence on the formation of educational theories using information literacy as a model. The hypothesis is that if the conceptualisation of the new is not to remain unsatisfactory and problematic, it will be necessary to find a way to overcome the incompleteness of modernity and abandon efforts to renew both the Enlightenment and Neo-Romanticism.

Keywords: information literacy, modernity, modern society, romanticism, enlightenment, neo-romanticism, philosophy of education

INTRODUCTION

Unfinished modernity represents a philosophical contemporary theme (Beck 2009; Latour 2021; Rubtsov 2022). In this study, we will attempt to view modernity through the lens of two defining phenomena for its existence – on the one hand, the Enlightenment (Floridi 2014; Trawny 2021), which has been transformed into a commonly reflected current associated with modernity, and on the other hand, we will analyse neo-romanticism as a kind of ideological counterpoint to it. The study shows that the rationalist reductions (Gramelsberger 2023) typical of analytic philosophy and the Enlightenment tradition are not sustainable in the complexity of contemporary society.

For two reasons, information literacy is fundamental for modern thinking (and society). First, it is understood as a necessary competence for life in the information society (Cohen, Garasic 2024). This epistemic tool has moved out of philosophy and is part of the broader social and economic environment. The second reason is that, however, formally, it exhibits the characteristics of a rational and logical system; as an epistemic filter (Lavazza, Farina 2023), it is unsustainable and dysfunctional with this reduction. This study, therefore, focuses

on the analysis of the conceptual myth of rationality and logic and seeks to point out that if philosophy is to provide an epistemic framework for thinking about the contemporary world, it must abandon this 'Enlightenment' myth and replace it with a more dynamic, complex concept (Floridi 2019).

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Information Literacy, defined by Zurkowski (1974), is based on an idea evident in modern thought's foundations (Latour 2021). He argues that two (contradictory) concepts are essential to modernity – purification and hybridisation. In the case of information literacy, we can see this approach in the attempt to define a pure (purified) sphere in which the phenomenon will be placed. Other approaches and studies will then emphasise the link between information literacy and different types of literacies (Hodgman 2005), such as digital (Bawden 2001) or health (Lawless et al. 2016).

Information literacy can be seen as a phenomenon that is difficult to define (Bawden 2001) but can be understood as the general ability of an individual or system to interact with information in a specific way in a specific information space. This definition is very general and requires further elaboration for practical clarification (Virkus 2013), and different authors approach it in significantly different ways. For the analysis we focus on, it will be essential to trace the underlying philosophical underpinnings of these approaches from a historical perspective.

Underlying the understanding of information literacy as such is the notion that Trawny considers (2021), namely that the concept of enlightenment is at the core of modern society. What was brought about by the information revolution and the development of technology in the early 1970s and what Zurkowski builds on (1974) is another Enlightenment reminiscence. According to Trawny (2021), such an approach presupposes a fundamental misunderstanding of the Enlightenment, which plunges the Occidental cultural circuit into more profound and complex crises.

Indeed, it can be agreed that technology development and society's relationship to it has a strong Enlightenment ethos on several levels. The first is undeniably the idea that technology will make work more efficient and solve the world's problems (Narvaez Rojas et al. 2021). The emphasis that the Enlightenment began to place on professional identity, as the fixed structure of a person's identity, is constantly being eroded by technology and must be restored. Periodically, there are discussions about the transformation of professions, concerns about changes in the labour market, and the disappearance of professions (Eloundou et al. 2023). The third key pillar is the effort to discard metaphysical assumptions and to emphasise the importance of reason and rationality.

Technology is not only a consequence of the Enlightenment (and its neo-variants) but, above all, its source. The limits of the Enlightenment approach are apparent and well described in the literature. Criticism can be found in the field of behavioural economics (Kahneman 2003), which emphasises motivations for decision-making other than rational ones; in the field of cognitive science, one can encounter criticisms from Damasio (1994; 2018), who emphasises the impossibility of distinguishing between emotion and rationality (Arendt 2006, 2007; Bauman 2007).

As a reaction to the Enlightenment, a phenomenon is taking shape in Europe that will be referred to (more broadly than is customary in mainstream literature) as Romanticism. Romanticism arises as a reaction to the strong petrification of the reductionist (exclusive)

position of reason and rationality as a reaction to a technicised society. Its central themes are the search for one's identity and the fractured nature of humanity, the emphasis on emotion rather than reason, and the attempt to show that art can often communicate more about reality than scientific studies. Romanticism is characterised by the pursuit of mastery over nature, the shaping of the personality as unique and brilliant, and is associated with the formation of the successful man as a charismatic leader (or in the new concept of influencers), overcoming the limits of Enlightenment rigidity and inhumanity.

This dichotomy can be seen in the attempt to distinguish the two streams from each other clearly. Thus, Husserl (Husserl 2012) or Patočka (1992) will speak about two worlds – the natural, real world, the world we can easily glimpse directly and unmediated, and the world of science and technology. However, this division of worlds ceases to make sense in the context of technological change (Floridi 2019). Husserl and Patočka were members of an industrial society where such a distinction represented, at least in part, a functional abstraction model. At this point, we note three essential aspects that we will use in our analysis below. However, we recognise that their selection is eclectic, and we are confident that other choices will lead to similar conclusions of the analysis.

1) We live onlife. Floridi says that most of the time, we live not online and offline separately, but these two modalities intertwine to form a shared epistemic and identity experience – an onlife. Suppose we seek information, communicate, collaborate, relax or seek relationships. In that case, if we create or read, we are likely to perform these activities onlife – in online and offline environments as a shared concept (Floridi 2011; 2013 a). Patočka's or Husserl's division does not correspond to the reality, the experience of the current generation.

2) Social constructivism is replaced by informational constructivism. Floridi says that the real allows the observer to interact informationally (Floridi 2014). Only what we can get information about and informally interact with can be considered accurate. Most of the image of the world is made available to us through media and technology. We use technology for cognition as much as we use our senses. Technology has exceeded the cognitive possibilities of the individual so intensely that it co-creates a new version of this shared space of man and technology. The infosphere is the space of informational interaction in the epistemic, ontological and ethical environment (Desai et al. 2022; Floridi 2013 a, 2019).

3) We live in an era of the rise of artificial intelligence (Azambuja, Silva 2024; Devedzic 2022; Floridi 2023). Artificial intelligence brings similar concerns to those of Copernicus, Einstein or Darwin – we are faced with the question of who humans are, what makes them special or unique, and what their specificity is (Floridi 2014). Fundamentally, artificial intelligence shows that it is neither the ability to solve mathematical problems, pass the bar exam, nor play chess. Everything that the Enlightenment ideal of man is based on is lost in the context of artificial intelligence, surpassed by technology.

These three examples show that the division of the world associated with Descartes's philosophy, which separates res cogitas and res extensa, emotion and rationality, and which has become the basis of the modern way of thinking that has made possible the development of science and technology, encounters its fundamental limits (Damasio 1994).

THE ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORY OF INFORMATION LITERACY

At this point, we will show how strongly information literacy's historical development is fixed on Enlightenment ideas. We will not be concerned with systematically analysing historical development but with illustrating a particular thinking style and viewing information literacy.

Zurkowski (1974) understood information literacy as an extension of the industry field – it is available to everyone. It is another subject that can be used in parts of the production process or services. Burchinal (1976) emphasises the ability to use information to solve problems in work and personal activities, especially linking it to the ability to use technology. Owens (1976) sees information literacy as a prerequisite for work productivity and competence for exercising citizenship. Thus, in the 1970s, there was a clear connection between industry and rationality; information literacy was only a specific extension of the way of working with technology; it is a form of dealing with machines.

Horton (1983) understands information literacy as the ability to use technical means to obtain information and then to further a problem or how to use technology to solve information needs. Breivik (1985), in his conception, works with an emphasis on working effectively with information (cognition is still very similar to industrial process) and already works with a dimension of some critical thinking and relationship to details – information literacy here becomes progressively an analytical skill. Ochs (1991) talks about how technological change has necessitated a new form of information literacy, which students must acquire in school. Rader (2002) emphasised the importance of technical skills in dealing with information as a form of economic adaptation. Mosley (1998) returns to the link between information literacy and analysis, seeing it as a form of critical thinking.

These concepts have a common denominator in the Enlightenment narrative of industrial society. Information literacy helps work with technology, with the efficiency of solutions, rationality and goals that are essentially forward and universally given. Indeed, even information literacy frameworks such as the Big 6 (Eisenberg 1999) or the Seven Pillars (Bent, Stubbings 2011) do not account for any broader context. They expect a set of skills and practices that can be rationally applied to solve relatively stable problems and issues.

NEO-ROMANTIC PERSPECTIVES

At this point, we would like to thematise certain aspects that need to be added to information literacy if it is to truly represent an essential tool for understanding the world from the optics of neo-romanticism. In our historical excursus, we have demonstrated the fixation of information literacy on Enlightenment values. In this section, we will highlight some perspectives on approaches that place information literacy more in the actual contexts of contemporary society while at the same time trying to think about them further.

Lloyd (2006; 2010) transcends a critical aspect of the Enlightenment understanding of information literacy and points out that it is not a one-size-fits-all skill. It cannot be normatively defined through individual one-size-fits-all frameworks. However, it is necessary to examine particular populations' needs and interests and relate information literacy to them.

Enlightenment metaphysics assumed that information literacy would refer to that which exists – exists in the sense of empirical objectivist appearance in the world. However, the information environment is more complex – Harry Potter, for example, is much more accurate to many people's behaviour and self-identification than quantum physics. The assumption that conspiracy theories are excluded from the 'proper information environment' is highly reductionist because conspiracy theories and disinformation fundamentally affect people's behaviour. Suppose information literacy is to be a source of understanding of the world and informational interactions within it. In that case, these phenomena must be examined not as external, as disturbances and problems, as ontological evils, but as part of informational reality (Lewandowsky 2020).

Thomas' Theorem emphasises this approach – phenomena are natural if they are confirmed in their consequences. We consider this aspect of information literacy to be crucial. Suppose we are to understand the world we live in. In that case, we need to understand its informational interactions, shaped not only by 'fixed objective reality' but also by stories, disinformation and narratives (Barassi, Zamponi 2020; Berger, Luckmann 1967). It is necessary to be able to evaluate them critically, but at the same time, it is not possible to completely exclude them from the field of informational reality. The principle of behavioural economics applies – people do not always behave rationally and logically, but this does not mean that their actions should not be linked to information literacy.

Neo-romanticism brings with it a fundamental approach to the examination of the subject. While in the rationalist light of the Enlightenment, which information literacy in its common forms adopts, we expect the subject as a consolidated logically functional entity, in the case of Romanticism, we can speak of its instability, its fragmentation, the fact that many other factors – cultural, social, emotional, religious, physical and others – enter into the process of its handling of information. We need to consider the much more dynamic 'fractured' structure of being information agents.

The rise of artificial intelligence (Floridi 2023) and technology itself can be reflected as a source of magical power – humans gain the possibility of 'power over nature', to which they do not have to escape but can use to construct their certainties. Neo-romanticism and the Enlightenment implicitly expect fixed value structures, which are fluid in post or trans-modern society. It is necessary to work with this fluidity within information literacy frameworks. Neo-romanticism is characterised by an emphasis on 'play', the rejection of theory, the idea of technology as a breaking point and the attempt to gain control over it as a source of power discourse. This rejection of theory and critical reflection about forming a new human who can oppose a technicised rational society is one of the essential narratives we must work with (Latzer 2022).

Hejdánek (1997) analysed the pattern against Enlightenment reductionism with the approach of non-object thinking, which can be considered non-entity thinking (Johnson 2017). While traditional understandings of information literacy focus on objects and individuals – facts, sources and information – that are examined in isolation, it seems that for neo-romanticism, what is much more important is the story or the link between these objects, which has no fixed boundaries, subject to constant redefinition. The emphasis on the ability to question and tell a story, to connect and interpret, to synthesise, will stand in some contrast to the Enlightenment emphasis on answers, individuals, facts and analysis.

The core of information literacy in the neo-romantic perspective will not be information practices or needs but information and digital well-being (Nguyen 2021). The ability to strike a balance in an environment we do not fully understand is too complex, dynamic or chaotic for an analytical approach (McLeod, Childs 2013).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our analysis was based on Max Weber's concept of ideal pure types – we contrasted an approach that is quite dominant in the field of information literacy, which is the accentuation of this literacy as a rational tool that enables the adequate performance of certain professions or activities, with critical analytical thinking as the dominant tool of work. This simultaneously places excellent emphasis on objectively existing atomic reality.

Against this notion, we opposed the model of neo-romanticism, which we understand as a kind of defiance against such a conception of reality. It seeks to emphasise the importance of fiction and stories for the construction of reality, the importance of emotions in the process of information processing and information interactions in general. Dividing reality into two worlds, the natural and the technical, does not make sense, and we need new epistemic tools that allow us to know reality with much more coherence.

A comparison of the two approaches can be seen in the Table. The Enlightenment approach is strongly intertwined in modern terms with analytic philosophical approaches and some forms of realism (Floridi 2013 b; Lakoff 2008), while neo-romantic approaches are characterised by concepts associated with pragmatism or phenomenology (Heidegger 1967; Johnson 2017).

From our analysis, neither the Enlightenment nor the neo-Romantic notion of information literacy represents a sustainable form of this essential competence, which is growing in importance in the computerisation of society and the development of artificial intelligence.

Table. **Comparison of approaches to information literacy in Enlightenment and Neo-Romantic discourse**

Enlightenment discourse	Neo-romantic discourse
Reality is objective and empirical.	Reality is socially and informationally constructed.
Emotions reduce the possibility of knowing reality.	Emotions are important and wanted in the process of cognition.
Information literacy is a rational matter.	Information literacy is a complex phenomenon.
The aim is to work effectively with information in different life situations.	The aim is to structure the information environment and life in it.
Information is atomic and delineated.	Information is part of dynamically changing semantic networks.
Truth exists objectively.	Truth is a matter of interpretation.
The primary research tool is the analysis.	The primary research tool is a synthesis.
The stories can be divided into smaller, separately stackable parts.	The story is indivisible.
The cognitive is the transparent process of information organism.	The knower is a unique and largely mysterious information organism.
The outcomes of working with information are primarily intersubjective.	The outcomes of working with information are both intersubjective and subjective.
The process of knowing the knower does not change.	The process of knowing the knower changes.
Information literacy can be decomposed into sub-knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed educationally.	Information literacy is holistic.
The world is predominantly apparent or complicated, and its changes are slow and at least partly isolated.	The world is primarily complex or chaotic; its changes are rapid and interconnected.
The common act of information-literate interaction is primarily rational and influenced by education.	The common act of information–literate interaction is primarily intuitive, based on multilayered experience.

It is impossible to say that for a part of the population and their values, there is not some form of literacy, and at the same time, it is also clear that both models can – despite their contradictions – complement each other. Thus, we see it as a challenge for future developments to create a new trans-modern conception of information literacy that can transcend and integrate these reminiscences of unfinished modernity. Otherwise, we will still be in a situation where it will be apparent that early modernity has exhausted itself and the neo-romantic response to it is unproductive.

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Racionalumo mitas ir dualistinė žinojimo koncepcija: informacinio raštingumo sampratos formavimosi pavyzdys

Santrauka

Šiame tyrime analizuojami metodai, diskursyviai taikomi informacinio raštingumo konceptualizavimui šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje, remiantis dviejų idealių grynųjų tipų – Apšvietos ir Neoromantizmo – modeliu. Tai šiuolaikinės visuomenės pagrindas, kaip konkuruojantys ir vienas kitą papildantys metodai. Analitiškai apžvelgiamas kiekvienas istorinis požiūris ir analizuojama jo įtaka ugdymo teorijų formavimuisi naudojant informacinį raštingumą kaip modelį. Teigiama, kad naujai sampratai reikės rasti būdą, kaip įveikti modernybės neužbaigtumą ir atsisakyti pastangų atnaujinti tiek Apšvietos, tiek Neoromantizmo epochą.

Raktažodžiai: informacinis raštingumas, modernybė, šiuolaikinė visuomenė, romantizmas, Apšvieta, Neoromantizmas, ugdymo filosofija