

This is a preprint of a chapter accepted for publication by Facet Publishing. This extract has been taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive version of this piece may be found in Hicks, A., Lloyd, A., & Pilerot, O., *Information Literacy through Theory*, 2023, Facet Publishing, which can be purchased from www.facetpublishing.co.uk. The author agrees not to update the preprint or replace it with the published version of the chapter.

Information literacy theorised through institutional ethnography

Ola Pilerot

Introduction

Imagine the following scene: a student, let us call her Laura, participates in an information literacy class at a university. She has just started her bachelor programme and is generally a bit unsure about how she is supposed to act in order to be perceived as a good student. The librarian who teaches the class talks widely accompanied by a PowerPoint-presentation about the importance of students being able to determine their information needs, access information effectively and efficiently, being critical about information and information sources. Not only should one be able to understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information, but there is also the need for accessing and using information in an ethically and legally correct way. The student is overwhelmed. Hardly anything of what the librarian says is of the sort that Laura usually thinks of when she is trying to find information on the web or elsewhere. It feels as if she has entered a world foreign to her.

From a research perspective, taking an analytical approach, the imagined scene functions as an illustration of how two traditions of approaching information literacy collide. Even if it is likely that Laura has not approached the concept of information literacy before experiencing the event in the university library described above, she probably has an idea of what it means to be able to find and use information in a purposeful way. However, this activity is not something that she consciously has formulated or put into words before.

This collision between two different ways in which information literacy is being understood can be described with the help of a distinction suggested already in the 1980s by the literacy researcher Brian Street. He distinguishes between an *autonomous* and an *ideological* approach to studying and understanding literacy (e.g. Street 1984; 2006). The former is grounded on an assumption that literacy – autonomously – will have beneficial effects beyond particular literacy events. The autonomous approach anticipates, in Street's (2006, 1) words, that "[i]ntroducing literacy to poor, 'illiterate' people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their 'illiteracy' in

the first place". The ideological approach, on the other hand, conceives of literacy as inseparable from the context in which it is enacted. Literacy, according to this approach, is seen as embedded in social practices with their respective socially and historically developed epistemological traits. To be literate in one sphere of life is thus, according to the ideological approach, different from being literate in another sphere, which, by the way, explains why advocates of this approach speak in terms of literacies, in the plural. Literacy practices and meanings of literacy are linked to the issue of what constitutes worth knowing in a certain social practice and how knowledge and identity are performed by the people in the community of practice where literacy is enacted.

The distinction suggested by Street is recognisable also in the area of information literacy research and practice. In particular, it has been an ongoing, even if sometimes latent, struggle between two contrasting camps where one can be represented by the American Library Association's issuing of the standards for information literacy, which, in the words of James Elmborg (2017, 62), "were committing information literacy to a vision of 'autonomous literacy'." The other camp can be represented by a number of researchers whose work has as a common denominator a theoretical approach more or less grounded in sociocultural and practice theories (see Lloyd's chapter in this volume) and where many subscribe to the notion of information literacies (e.g. Lloyd, 2010; Limberg, Sundin & Talja, 2012; Pilerot, 2016), i.e. an approach that to a great extent resembles what Street (1984; 2006) has termed an ideological approach.

The student, Laura in the introductory scene, entered into the sphere of academia and met a librarian who seems to have given voice to an autonomous approach to information literacy. More specifically, this approach seems autonomous because it is presented as a set of skills that can be transferred and put into use in any context. In that way, it appears as general and decontextualised in character. Being new to higher education, Laura did not immediately grasp the practices and meaning assigned to information literacy in this context. Even though Laura is the only student mentioned and included in the opening scene, she is not alone. There are also other students participating in the same class who are likely to experience a similar sense of uncertainty or even confusion. This dilemma clearly connects to the overarching question to be addressed in this chapter, namely: how is information literacy, as a concept and as a normatively prescribed practice, shaped into its form in a given social context? More specifically, what contributes to establishing individual and collective assumptions and understandings that motivate the people in the setting to enact, teach and promote information literacy in a certain way?

Using theory for understanding information literacy is something that one can do with different purposes. How one employs theoretical reasoning depends largely on what one is striving to accomplish. In this chapter, the aim is to suggest a theoretically informed mode of inquiry that discovers how local information literacy practices are shaped through the *ruling relations* to constellations of discourses and knowledge regimes located elsewhere, in other places and times. This is done through introducing and outlining the critical and explorative approach of *institutional ethnography*. The kind of theoretically infused research approach suggested here contributes to shedding light on processes of ruling and enables a resistance to

information literacy efforts that risk becoming too broad and generic in character including such teaching arrangements that neglect to attend to the specifics in the actual setting where information literacy is taught.

Institutional ethnography is a mode of inquiry and discovery that turns against the reification of the social – that is, it opposes reduction of the social to notions such as structure or system (Smith, 2005, 59). In a sense, it thereby avoids positioning theory as the governing principle of inquiry. One could therefore find it contradictory to suggest institutional ethnography as a topic for a book on theories for information literacy. However, if theory is conceived as a device that allows for a certain explanatory perspective that guides the researcher on what to look for and how to describe and understand that which is under study, institutional ethnography has the potential to offer a lot.

About institutional ethnography

Institutional ethnography was coined by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith in the early 1980s and has since then been further developed by Smith and a growing number of other authors from a variety of the social science disciplines. Smith's (2005, 29) suggestion that it should be seen as a "method of inquiry into the social" is often echoed in the literature (e.g. Norstedt & Breimo, 2016). A slightly more elaborated description presents institutional ethnography as a "critical theory/methodology, with a particular focus on people's everyday lives and how their lives are organized and coordinated by institutional forces" (Kearney et al., 2019, 17). Already before Smith came up with the name of the approach, she worked for a long time along the lines of what eventually would become institutional ethnography. In a paper from the early 1970s she asserts that the "social organization and production of the knowledge itself is the focus of inquiry" (Smith, 1974, 257). This suggestion is still resonating well with the gist of institutional ethnography as it has been developed by Smith and others over the years.

The actual term institutional ethnography will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter. However, the notion of *institutional* implies that the approach seeks to elucidate how knowledge, values and discourses reside in, coordinate, characterise and mutually shape collectively identified and established spheres of society or, in institutional ethnography terms, institutions, such as the market, health care, higher education etc. *Ethnography*, on the other hand, mainly signals two things: in order to explore these institutions, the inquiry needs to start locally, where people are attending to their sayings and doings and the texts and documents that not only contribute to coordinating activities but also serve to connect the local to the extra-local, i.e. settings beyond the local. The other thing concerns the outcome of the study, which consists of an account of the participants' sayings and doings, grounded in interviews, observations and analysis of documents and artefacts.

Nowadays, the literature on institutional ethnography is very rich. The recent publication of the *Palgrave Handbook of Institutional Ethnography* (Luken & Vaughan, 2021), a volume comprising nearly 600 pages with contributed chapters from nearly 40 authors, illustrates the growing engagement in this research approach. Smith's own oeuvre consists of more than ten books and numerous articles and book chapters.

Originally, Smith (e.g., 1987) described institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry beginning from women's experiences of being locked out from many areas of life. She experienced this herself in the late 1960s in connection with her work as a recently graduated academic at a sociology department. At the time, she was a single parent engaged in the women's movement when it became apparent to her how the mainstream mode of male dominated sociology avoided issues that concerned the kind of experiences that characterised her own life outside academia. These experiences, in combination with her readings of Marx, spurred her towards "a new social science that would not start with concepts or imagination, but that would start with actual people, their work, and the conditions of their lives" (Kearney et al., 2018, p. 294). They also lead her to the kind of standpoint theory she operates with according to which knowledge must be seen as socially situated and grounded in experiences (cf. Harding, 2009).

The influence from Marx leads institutional ethnography to taking as its point of departure the lives, materials and actualities of people that for different reasons are silenced and marginalised, thereby privileging a standpoint of people's experiences. In a related vein, institutional ethnography is also profiled as an insider's sociology (Smith, 1992) or a sociology for people (but not of people) (Smith, 2005). These rubrics signal a theoretical as well as a methodological position. From a theoretical perspective, it is asserted that the researcher cannot step outside of society. In contrast to mainstream sociology that, according to Smith, aspires to depict its study objects from an Archimedean point, an outside view supposedly providing a true picture, she claims that "[t]here is no other way than beginning from the actual social relations in which we [all] are participants" (Smith, 1992, 94). From a methodological perspective, this viewpoint is related to institutional ethnography's emphasis of the ethnographical. In addition to Marx' materialism, it has been highlighted (Campbell, 2003) that institutional ethnography also draws on Mead's theory of the self, language and meaning, Bakhtin's reasoning on speech genres and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (cf. Smith, 1999).

The writings on institutional ethnography and the works of Smith are not yet widely used within the area of information studies. A few articles present empirical studies that have employed institutional ethnography as a theoretical and methodological framework (e.g., Kizhakkethil, 2020; Green & Johnston, 2015). Others suggest institutional ethnography for specific purposes such as Ocepek (2018) who, in an exploration of everyday information behaviour as a theoretical concept, argues that it is a framework that contributes to shed light on "the nuances of the everyday world" (p. 398). In a related vein, Dalmer (2019) proposes that institutional ethnography is useful for reframing health information practices research. There is also a small number of contributions offering general introductory overviews of institutional ethnography in relation to information studies (e.g. Stooke, 2005 & 2010; Dalmer, Stooke & McKenzie, 2017).

It is not possible within this chapter to account for and provide a justification for all possible avenues according to which information literacy could be theorised with the help of institutional ethnography. However, its orientation towards people, their doings and sayings, and, in particular, its focus on the role of texts and documents, makes institutional

ethnography a suitable approach for information literacy research. The following section of this chapter presents an account of a set of key concepts. These can be used for elucidating how documents and other material objects as well as discourses with their varying rationalities and logics contribute to the shaping of information literacy as it is presented, perceived and enacted in a given context.

Core elements of institutional ethnography for the understanding of information literacy

More specifically than previously indicated, the notion of institution in institutional ethnography refers to a bundle of document and text-mediated relations that taken together encircle a specific established and predominant set of ordered social actions and procedures. According to Smith, institutions are “forms of social organization that generalize and universalize across multiple local settings” (Smith, 2005, 42). In this sense, for example, mass media, the market, health care and education are institutions even though they obviously are distributed over a number of different sites and contexts. Considering information literacy an institution with its particular literature, generalised values, practices and traits, a multitude of sites and contexts are brought to mind. These are spanning over broad and general instances such as workplaces and leisure to more specific locations such as schools and libraries, media-, communication- and information studies departments, ministries of education, governmental bodies, publishers, think tanks and so forth. Among the tasks of the institutional ethnographer is to explore the practices and processes that contribute to coordinating what is going on in these locations (cf. Smith, 2006).

The perspective taken here entails a focus on the ways in which constellations of people interact with their material surroundings, including texts, documents and other material objects. Through a theoretically grounded perspective in line with the main tenets of institutional ethnography, the subsequent sections offer a strategy for producing a “cartography” of information literacy as an institutionalised phenomenon. It is argued that information literacy is shaped not only in the local contexts where it is observably practised, but also by its interrelated connections to trans-locally positioned complexes of governing and shaping forces. What is going on in the room where the teaching librarian is talking about the importance of identifying one’s information needs cannot be completely disconnected from, for example, the policy makers’ office at the governmental body.

Returning to the introductory scene with Laura, the newly embarked bachelor student, the cartography is outlined through identifying and mapping these connections as they are materialised through objects such as documents that convey, for example, ideologies, logics and rationalities; modes of control and standardisation; and rules and regulations. Likewise, material arrangements and tools such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), classification systems, platforms, algorithms, furnishing etc. also function as connections between places that are distributed in time and space. Smith (2005, 226) explains that the “project of mapping institutions always refer back to an actuality that those who are active in it knows (the way that the phrase YOU ARE HERE works on a map). A map assembles different work knowledges, positioned differently, and should include, where relevant, an

account of the texts coordinating work processes in institutional settings". Since the map in this chapter is represented in text, the metaphor of a cartography is the preferred term (cf. Latour, 2005, 16).

A fundamental idea in institutional ethnography is that social practices are "organized by and co-ordinated with what people, mostly unknown and never to be known by us, are doing elsewhere and at different times" (Smith, 2001, p. 160-61). From an ontological perspective, this can be viewed as a spatio-temporal arrangement comprising a wide web of what Smith (e.g., 2005) describes as "the ruling relations". These relations coordinate activities "across and beyond local sites of everyday experience" (Smith, 2002, 45). The ruling relations should not primarily be seen as a mode of domination but as a way of organising society. In Smith's words, they are "forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places" (Smith, 2005, 13).

The mass production of texts and documents of all sorts is thus a fundamental condition for the ruling relations since this has enabled "access to words from beyond those spoken locally" (ibid.). The transportation of documents and ideas over long distances, both geographically and temporally, opens up for ways of doing and decisions taken locally, which are grounded in trans-locally developed discourses and systems of knowledge. Throughout the literature on institutional ethnography, not the least in Smith's own work, the emphasis is on texts as mediators of the ruling relations even though there is also a line of reasoning in some institutional ethnography texts regarding other material objects as "yielding sets of instructions for how to act towards [them]" (Smith, 1990, p. 42). In this chapter and in line with this latter line of reasoning, the notion of text is extended to also comprise the wider notion of documents, which often comprise elements other than texts and other material objects that have the potential to function as connectors of the ruling relations. In institutional ethnography, and in particular in this chapter, the ethnographic exploration of texts, documents and other mediating objects is key. This is because, as Smith (2001, 159) puts it: "exploring how texts mediate, regulate and authorize people's activities expands the scope of ethnographic method beyond the limits of observation: texts are to be seen as they enter into people's local practices of writing, drawing, reading, looking and so on. They must be examined as they coordinate people's activities".

Documents of various sorts constitute a fundamental resource for the identification of the generalisability of institutional regimes, that is, the predominant characteristics in terms of practices and values and what counts as valid knowledge. Observations and interviews with people in the local setting under study, in turn, are crucial for discovering how the institutional regime contributes to coordinating, enabling and constraining, locally enacted practices. The constitution and implications of the ruling relations between, on the one hand, documents, discourses and systems of knowledge and, on the other hand, local practices, is of prime interest to the institutional ethnographer. In other words, through the method of ethnography, with specific attention to documents, the institutional ethnographer is engaged in discovering how people's everyday practices are "hooked into a larger fabric not directly observable from within the everyday" (Smith, 2005, 39).

In addition to the prominent position of documents, the notion of discourse is also central to institutional ethnography (e.g. Smith, 2005), in particular the coordinating power of discourses (see also Alison Hicks' and Noora Hirvonen's chapters in this volume). Institutional ethnographers acknowledge Foucault's conception of discourse where knowledge does not primarily reside in the individual but is located externally, infused in practices, thereby forming imposed and coercing subjectivities in the shape of regulating orders. The example of such an order in focus for this contribution is information literacy in the way it has become institutionalised as a societal imperative formulated, expressed and enacted on various levels through discourses and activities such as teaching, policy-making and research.

A tentative critical cartography of an autonomous approach to information literacy

The student Laura has encountered a discourse through engaging in a practice that is somehow familiar, since it is about talking, thinking, writing and acting together with others, but still new to her in the sense that it involves "frames, concepts and categories" (Smith, 2005, 225) that she is not accustomed to. The tools she is supposed to use in the classroom are in a way recognisable. There are computers, books and other texts in various formats, there is a teacher – the librarian – and other students, but there is a certain twist to it that makes things foreign, both the actual objects and the terms – the *bibliographic databases*, the *discovery tools*, the *academic genre*, the way in which the librarian *speaks*, the *terms* and *concepts* she uses. Together these things seem to make up a complex entity that is hard for Laura to penetrate and decipher. What makes the situation even more critical for her is that she knows that her performance somehow will be assessed. According to the tenets of institutional ethnography outlined above, the institution of information literacy has taken a certain shape in the location where Laura is supposed to be a good student (cf. Worthman & Troiano, 2019). This shape can be explored through identifying the ruling relations underpinning it. The following cartography is indeed not exhaustive but comprises a set of exemplars that can be followed up in order to get into sight how local information literacy practices are shaped through the ruling relations to trans-locally positioned constellations of discourses and knowledge regimes. In the following sub-sections, a selection of features that together form the tentative cartography is thus introduced.

The standards and the "list approach" to information literacy

Already from the introductory scene, it can be discerned that there are certain expectations or demands on the students who participate in the session. They are supposed to develop a certain type of information literacy that includes a set of specific skills, which are more or less pronounced by the librarian. On one of the many slides that the librarian shows, there is a bullet-point list that dictates what it means to be an information literate student. It may not be bibliographically referenced in the presentation, but here is an example of a certain stance to information literacy that is mediated through a text that circulates widely through the institution of information literacy and that has come to function as a ruling relation into this particular site. As such, it contributes to coordinate and shape the specific practices taking place in the site. Informed by and in line with the content of the presentation, the librarian has designed certain work tasks for the students, highlighted specific areas to which the students

are supposed to turn their attention and introduced particular terms and concepts that characterise this stance.

When the institutional ethnographer traces the origins of this particular text, he or she will likely end up with one of the editions of the American Library Association's standards for information literacy or with any other of the numerous publications that the standards have influenced other authors to produce. (It should however be noted that the standards too are a result of prior research and debate).

In the institutional ethnographer's quest for exploring the shape of IL, it is not enough only to look for texts and documents that mediate ruling relations. There must also be a focus on how these play out in the form of concrete, concerted sayings and doings in the local context under scrutiny, but the search for documents in this way "expands [as Smith notes] the scope of ethnographic method beyond the limits of observation" (Smith, 2001, 159).

The idea of studying documents in context with the aim of exploring the practical implications of these documents for information literacy is not new. One such example is Pilerot's and Lindberg's (2011) study of policy-documents issued by prominent organisations such as IFLA and UNESCO. They concluded that the export of a Western information literacy model focused on text-based information sources and ICTs into non-Western contexts that to a great extent lack ICTs, runs the risk of turning the organisations' educational aspirations for information literacy into an imperialistic project. However, the institutional ethnography approach suggested in this chapter offers opportunities for a richer analysis since it includes a focus on both documents *and* the practices coordinated and shaped by the documents.

Tutorials

Even if not explicitly mentioned in the introductory scene, it is well known that formalised education for information literacy in higher education often includes the use of various interactive digital tools, such as games, quizzes, films and tutorials that are expected to support the students' development of information literacy (e.g. Pinto et al., 2020). These must not necessarily be regarded as documents, but still as material objects that yield instructions for how to be interacted with. As stated previously in the chapter, objects of this kind also have the potential to function as connectors of the ruling relations. Regarding, for example, tutorials for information literacy, it has been shown in previous research (Sundin, 2008) that these tend to imply approaches to information literacy that are different from each other. According to an institutional ethnography perspective, the tutorials also give rise, depending on how they are designed, to different expected actions among those who use them. Accordingly, a design of a tutorial inevitably privileges a certain view that in turn obstructs other possible viewpoints. An example of how a certain view may be communicated through a digital tutorial concerns the specific feature of quizzes, which can be said to underscore a certain understanding of information literacy as concerning something that is either right or wrong. This is a dichotomous view on information literacy emerging from some sort of scale displaying the results of the skills of the person that takes the quiz. In line with an institutional ethnography perspective, this can reasonably be seen as a manifestation of a general idea permeating a capitalist society exposed to competition, which through tutorials and similar

items seeps into local contexts of teaching, namely that students should be assessed and measured concerning their perceived levels of information literacy.

Course syllabi and other steering documents

In the opening paragraph of this cartography, the ACRL's standards for information literacy were brought up as a potential intermediary of a ruling relation. Another set of documents that make their mark on what is going on in classrooms (and elsewhere) throughout the university consists of authoritative and controlling course syllabi and other steering documents. These documents represent what Smith (2001, 173) describes as standardised and standardising genres. Both course syllabuses and steering documents such as ordinances for higher education are normative in character prescribing certain activities and, in particular in the case of syllabuses, dictating certain texts that students are supposed to read. The concept Smith (Smith and Schryer, 2008) suggests for explaining this arrangement, when authority and control is exercised through documents, is *documentary governance*. An important feature of documentary governance relates to the material aspects of documents. Despite the assumption that most often it is the content that people are interested in when they are interacting with documents, "[n]ew technologies of writing and reading create new possibilities for coordinating work and other activities" (Smith and Schryer, 2008, 115). As has been indicated above, when documents travel along digital infrastructures throughout the networked society, texts become reproduced all over the place and at different times, which contributes to the stretching out of the ruling relations. In this way, documents and the content they carry are separated from face-to-face communication and become charged with a certain discursive force making them into general ideas and concepts rather than local statements situated in the particular context in which they reach the reader. What this arrangement does, how documentary governance plays out in a certain setting, needs to be investigated when the shape of information literacy is explored.

Marketisation and commodification of academia

Another feature of interest in the fictitious introductory scene, which relates to yet another societal institution (in the institutional ethnography sense of using the term), namely the market, concerns the literature and the tools for finding the literature, that the students are expected to work with while at university. As the qualifier to literacy in this case is information (and not, for example, media or digital), an analysis of what shapes information literacy must necessarily take into consideration the characteristics of the information the students are expected to develop literacy in relation to. That both universities and their libraries are trying to withstand forces of commodification and marketisation is not new (e.g. Giroux, 2016; Levinson et al., 2020).

In her article on "The McDonaldization of Academic Libraries" and their various efforts to respond to the aforementioned forces, Karen P. Nicholson (2015) asserts (with reference to Quinn (2000)) that libraries employ "'Just-in-time" approaches to collection development—including a greater reliance on interlibrary loan and document delivery services, [and] standardized approaches to information literacy instruction". They "focus on quantity, such as inputs (like financial resources, number of staff, gate counts, number of volumes) and outputs (for instance, circulation stats, online transactions), as a surrogate for quality".

Furthermore, there is a “growing predictability of academic libraries’ collections resulting from the use of approval plans and journal aggregator databases” (Nicholson, 2015, 328). That the market finds its way into the institution of information literacy becomes visible through the libraries’ ambition to regulate, standardise and slim line its collections and services. Following the fundamental principles of institutional ethnography where a core assumption is that there is a linkage between, on the one hand, documents and material arrangements and, on the other hand, social organisation (Smith, 2001), the outlined scenario must be accounted for when exploring the shape of information literacy in this setting.

Yet another observation can be made regarding ruling relations related to tools for retrieving literature in this setting. In a call for the “decolonization” of scholarly communication, Jonathan P. Tennant (2020, 1) shows how Clarivate Analytics’ Web of Science (WoS) and Elsevier’s Scopus platform display “an alarmingly warped version of reality: research from Africa, South America, and major parts of Asia is almost non-existent”. Both WoS and Scopus are clearly biased against research from non-Western countries, research published in other languages than English. They also demonstrate a clear emphasis on research from the sciences at the expense of research from the arts, humanities and social sciences. By limiting and orientating students toward a certain kind of literature, this too is more than likely to contribute to the shaping of the kind of information literacy that is enacted in the setting in question.

Other possible focus points for the institutional ethnographer exploring information literacy in context

For practical reasons, a cartography needs to be restricted to a manageable set of items, in particular here, in this chapter, since its main purpose is to illustrate the idea of mapping the institution of IL, but also in real-life research projects where the researcher always needs to make decisions regarding what to focus on. Many more items could have been included because they bear a possibility of functioning as connectors of ruling relations in the context under scrutiny. Such examples include – but are certainly not limited to – discourses and practices concerning active learning, for instance manifested through specifically designed furnishing – e.g. so called active learning classrooms – and pedagogies (cf. Hicks & Sinkinson, 2021). Especially from a library perspective, it could also be fruitful to interrogate intellectual tools such as bibliographic classification systems, which “contribute to the promotion of identity and values of the institutions in which they are to function in a way that goes beyond their bibliographical function” (Hansson, 2021, 1). On a larger scale, there are also reasons to ponder the forces brought in motion by ubiquitous algorithmic platforms and search engines, which constantly and in all spheres of life contribute to shaping the ways in which information is sought and used (e.g. Haider & Sundin, 2019).

In summary, the argument is that information literacy, according to this tentative institutional ethnography analysis, emerges as a phenomenon that is anchored and enacted in its local context but to a great extent is shaped by ruling relations mediated by conglomerations of texts and documents and other material objects. By applying an institutional ethnography lens, it becomes visible how information literacy appears in the light of, and is being shaped by, features such as ideologies (e.g., neo-liberalism), ways of governing (e.g., corporate

management in HE) and accountability and assessment practices in higher education (e.g., curriculum development and assessment of individuals). In Smith's words, this can be explained as if "[t]he various agencies of social control have institutionalized procedures for assembling, processing, and testing [...] the behaviour of individuals so that it can be matched against the paradigms which provide the working criteria of class-membership" (Smith, 1990, 12). Or, more specifically, in the case of Laura, the working criteria of being a good, information literate student according to the autonomous approach to information literacy. The institution of information literacy in this particular setting, "its conceptual organization, forms of social action, authorized actors and sites, and so forth, are concerned precisely with creating an order, a coherence" (Ibid., 44) that matches the ruling relations and according to which people in the setting are expected to act.

Returning to Street's (1984; 2006) distinction between an autonomous and an ideological approach to information literacy, it is worth mentioning that also the latter approach, the ideological, would not be able to fully escape being shaped and coordinated by the ruling relations. However, institutional ethnography studies of the kind suggested here contribute to shed light on the processes of ruling, which, in turn, enables a conscious resistance to information literacy efforts that are too broad and generic in character, that is, such teaching arrangements that do not attend enough to the specifics in the actual setting where information literacy is taught.

Institutional ethnography studies are in many ways similar to a number of other theoretical approaches employed for studying information literacy. They share, for example, an interest expressed by representatives for sociocultural theory in explicating "the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs, on the other" (Wertsch, 1998, 24). They also resemble a practice theoretical approach in the urge to elucidate social phenomena "without losing touch with the mundane nature of everyday life and the concrete and material nature of the activities with which we are all involved" (Nicolini, 2012, 9). What mainly makes an institutional ethnography approach specific for studies of information literacy is its accentuation of a bottom-up perspective – "a sociology from people's standpoint" (Smith, 2005, 1) – and its focus on the ruling relations as mediated by documents and other material objects.

Concluding discussion

After having outlined the tentative cartography of information literacy, the remaining part of this chapter is aimed at pinpointing the connections between institutional ethnography as a theory and the study object of information literacy. The concluding discussion thus serves to illuminate institutional ethnography's ontological assumptions concerning information literacy studies, the enablers and constraints of institutional ethnography for information literacy research and its repertoire of methods.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions – people, activities, contexts, knowledge and learning information literacy

From an ontological perspective, institutional ethnography provides a conceptual framework for attention to actualities, of how the social exists, is configured and coordinated. As is

mirrored in the starting point for this chapter, it takes people and their concerns with real life issues as its point of departure. In this sense, institutional ethnography can be viewed as a standpoint theory (cf. e.g. Harding, 2004). Peoples' doings and sayings, their positioning in the world, their interactions with material objects are viewed as concrete actions inseparable from context. In line with what Street (1984, 2006) terms an ideological approach to information literacy, institutional ethnography views information literacy as a phenomenon that is embedded in social practices, which display their respective socially and historically developed epistemological traits. Epistemologically, institutional ethnography builds on the idea that knowledge is derived from interaction with others and with the material surroundings. It is never neutral and always local in the sense that there is no general knowledge, which is held to be true by all over all time and space (cf. Bowker, 2010). A key feature with institutional ethnography, however, is its dual analytical perspective where the local always is seen as connected to the extra-local. This is where the ruling relations come into the picture. It has already been clearly stated throughout the chapter that documents and texts serve as mediators of these relations that connect sites over space and time. Institutional ethnography does not aspire to assess individuals' (or groups') information literacy, but if it would communicate an approach to what it might mean to be information literate, it would be emphasised that the ability to identify and trace the ruling relations in context constitutes a fundamental, critical ability. Learning information literacy in this sense implies a wider perspective that stretches beyond certain information sources and prescribed practices for finding and making use of information. It requires that the learner casts a critical gaze upon society at large (cf. Andersen, 2006).

Enablers and constraints of institutional ethnography for information literacy research
Through its awareness of power structures, which are made visible through the identification of discourses, rationalities and ideologies, mediated through documents and objects and conceptualised as the ruling relations, which infuse the practice of information literacy, institutional ethnography enables an understanding of information literacy as a politically charged concept and practice (see also John Buschman's and Johanna Rivano Eckerdal's chapters in this volume). At the same time, it also comprises a focus on lived experience, bodies and material arrangements. The connections between the local and the extra-local calls for the institutional ethnographer's attention. On an analytical level, the theory thus presupposes the researcher to work according to an oscillating mode, which includes certain moves that can be described as zooming in and out in relation to the study object (cf. Nicolini, 2009). It is a matter of simultaneously operating with close-ups and views from a distance. The crux is to highlight doings and sayings in practice and relate these to the ruling relations. This big task requires a lot from the institutional ethnography researcher and indicates some of the potential pitfalls with institutional ethnography. By aiming for the "full picture" concerning what contributes to shape information literacy in context, the researcher runs the risk of being entrapped in too broad overarching analyses that miss out on the minute nuances in practice.

Repertoire of methods

This theoretical stance implies a certain repertoire of methods. The perhaps most obvious feature of this repertoire is the ethnographic aspirations. The researcher needs to delve into

the context under study, but this can be done in more than one way (cf. Smith, 2006). Interviews are widespread in institutional ethnographies, but rather than treating them as sources about individual experiences, the institutional ethnography interview serves to “reveal the ‘relations of ruling’ that shape local experiences” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, 15). Participant observation is also put forth as a method for institutional ethnographies. Diamond (2006, 45) particularly highlights how observations can help to accentuate “the presence of the author, and the author’s embodiment [as well as enhancing institutional ethnography’s] goals of incorporating place, time, motion and the presence of larger social organization within local situations”. A continuous focus on documents and texts is among the trademarks of institutional ethnography and implies that the researcher is required to identify and scrutinise these, both as they take place in practice and as located elsewhere but with a connection to the context under study. In the tentative cartography above, it has also been shown how the researcher can work with previous research, which is not necessarily conducted in the tradition of institutional ethnography, in order to underscore certain aspects of the ruling relations as contributors to the shaping of information literacy in context.

The shaping of information literacy according to institutional ethnography

In the introduction, two overarching questions were posed: how is information literacy, as a concept and as a normatively prescribed practice, shaped into its form in a given social context? And what contributes to establishing individual and collective assumptions and understandings that motivate the people in the setting to enact, teach and promote information literacy in a certain way? According to the approach of inquiry outlined in this chapter, information literacy is a socially shaped, institutionalised phenomenon anchored and manifested in multiple settings. Since individual local settings always are connected through the ruling relations, as these are mediated through documents and other material objects, these manifestations of information literacy are inseparable from practices, discourses and values prevailing in society at large. Interaction among people and with the things used, the texts consulted and the documents that are allowed to underpin information literacy provide its certain shape. The examples of features included in the cartography suggested in this chapter are all potential contributors to the shaping of information literacy. The concept and practice of information literacy is value-laden. There is always a normative dimension. Depending on who is talking about or advocating for information literacy, the different features that potentially contribute to shaping information literacy are emphasised in varying degrees. According to an idealistic discourse, information literacy is empowering and employed or enacted for good causes. But when information literacy – for example in the shape of a certain learning and teaching arrangement, as in the fictive opening scene of this chapter – is scrutinised through the lens of institutional ethnography, it becomes visible how information literacy might always be approached and enacted differently. In addition to introducing and outlining a set of central tenets of institutional ethnography, this chapter has shown how information literacy can be related to features such as marketisation and commodification, digital technologies and algorithmic logics (Gaw, 2022), politics and forms of governing, material configurations, and other specific logics and rationalities.

References

- Andersen, J. (2006) The public sphere and discursive activities: information literacy as sociopolitical skills, *Journal of documentation*, **62**(2), 213-228.
- Bowker, G. (2010) All knowledge is local, *Learning Communities International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts Australia*, **2**, 138-149
- Campbell, M. (2003) Dorothy Smith and knowing the world we live in, *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, **30**(1), 3-22.
- Dalmer, N. K. (2019) Considering the local and the translocal: Reframing health information practice research using institutional ethnography, *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, **71**(6), 703-719.
- Dalmer, N. K., Stooke, R., and McKenzie, P. (2017) Institutional ethnography: A sociology for librarianship, *Library and Information Research*, **41**(125), 45-60.
- DeVault, M.L. and McCoy, L. (2006) Institutional ethnography: Using interviews to investigate ruling relations. In Smith, D. (ed.) *Institutional ethnography as practice*, 15-44, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Diamond, T. (2006) "Where did you get the fur coat, Fern?": Participant observation in Institutional ethnography. In Smith D. (ed.) *Institutional ethnography as practice*, 45-63, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Elmborg, J. (2017) Lessons from forty years as a literacy educator: An information literacy narrative, *Journal of Information Literacy*, **11**(1).
- Gaw, F. (2022) Algorithmic logics and the construction of cultural taste of the Netflix Recommender System, *Media, Culture & Society*, **44**(4), 706-725.
- Giroux, H. A. (2016) Public intellectuals against the neoliberal university. In Denzin, N.K. and Giardina, M.D. (eds.) *Qualitative inquiry outside the academy*, 35-60, Routledge.
- Green, L., and Johnston, M. (2015) Global perspectives: Exploring school-based Brazilian librarianship through institutional ethnography, *School Libraries Worldwide*, **21**(1), 1-18.
- Haider, J., and Sundin, O. (2019) *Invisible search and online search engines: The ubiquity of search in everyday life*, Routledge.
- Hansson, J. (2021) Bringing political upheaval and cultural trauma into order: A document-theoretical approach to the social significance of bibliographic classification systems, *Proceedings from the Document Academy*, **8**(2), 1-22.
- Harding, S.G. (ed.) (2004) *The feminist standpoint theory reader: intellectual and political controversies*, Routledge.
- Harding, S. (2009) Standpoint theories: Productively controversial, *Hypatia*, **24**(4), 192-200.
- Hicks, A., and Sinkinson, C. (2021) Participation and presence: interrogating active learning, *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, **21**(4), 749-771.

Preprint of: Pilerot, O. (2023). Information literacy theorised through institutional ethnography. In: Hicks, A., Lloyd, A., & Pilerot, O. (eds.), *Information Literacy through Theory*, 2023, Facet Publishing.

Kearney, G. P., Corman, M. K., Gormley, G. J., Hart, N. D., Johnston, J. L., and Smith, D. E. (2018) Institutional ethnography: a sociology of discovery—in conversation with Dorothy Smith, *Social Theory & Health*, **16**(3), 292-306.

Kearney, G. P., Corman, M. K., Hart, N. D., Johnston, J. L., and Gormley, G. J. (2019) Why institutional ethnography? Why now? Institutional ethnography in health professions education, *Perspectives on medical education*, **8**(1), 17-24.

Kizhakkethil, P. (2020) “You make me miss Pune so much”: memory making and documenting in a Virtual Zenana, *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, **72**(4), 687-703.

Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford University Press.

Levinsson, M., Norlund, A., and Beach, D. (2020) Teacher educators in neoliberal times: A phenomenological self-study, *Phenomenology & Practice*, **14**(1), 7-23.

Limberg, L., Sundin, O. and Talja, S. (2012) Three theoretical perspectives on information literacy. *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science*, **11**(2).

Lloyd, A. (2010) Framing information literacy as information practice: site ontology and practice theory, *Journal of documentation*, **66**(2), 245-258.

Luken, P.C. and Vaughan, S. (2021) *The Palgrave Handbook of Institutional Ethnography*, Springer International Publishing.

Nicholson, K. P. (2015) The McDonaldization of academic libraries and the values of transformational change, *College & research libraries*, **76**(3), 328-338.

Nicolini, D. (2009) Zooming in and out: Studying practices by switching theoretical lenses and trailing connections, *Organization studies*, **30**(12), 1391-1418.

Nicolini, D. (2012) *Practice theory, work, and organization: an introduction*, Oxford University Press.

Norstedt, M. and Paulsen Breimo, J. (2016) Moving beyond everyday life in institutional ethnographies: Methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas, *ForumQualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, **17**(2), Art. 3.

Ocepek, M. G. (2018) Bringing out the everyday in everyday information behavior, *Journal of Documentation*, **74**(2), 398-411.

Pilerot, O. (2016) A practice-based exploration of the enactment of information literacy among PhD students in an interdisciplinary research field, *Journal of Documentation*, **72**(3), 414-434.

Pilerot, O. and Lindberg, J. (2011) The concept of information literacy in policy-making texts: an imperialistic project?, *Library Trends*, **60**(2), 338-360.

Preprint of: Pilerot, O. (2023). Information literacy theorised through institutional ethnography. In: Hicks, A., Lloyd, A., & Pilerot, O. (eds.), *Information Literacy through Theory*, 2023, Facet Publishing.

Pinto, M., Fernández-Pascual, R., Caballero-Mariscal, D. and Sales, D. (2020) Information literacy trends in higher education (2006–2019): visualizing the emerging field of mobile information literacy, *Scientometrics*, **124**(2), 1479-1510.

Quinn, B. (2000) The McDonaldization of academic libraries?, *College & Research Libraries*, **61**(3), 248-261.

Smith, D. E. (1974) The social construction of documentary reality, *Sociological inquiry*, **44**(4), 257-268.

Smith, D. E. (1987) *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*, Northeastern University Press.

Smith, D. (1990) K is mentally ill. In Smith, D.E., *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*, 12-51, Routledge.

Smith, D. E. (1992) Sociology from women's experience: A reaffirmation, *Sociological theory*, **10**(1), 88-98.

Smith, D. E. (1999) Telling the truth after postmodernism. In Smith, D.E. *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*, 96–130, University of Toronto Press.

Smith, D.E. (2001) Texts and the ontology of organizations and institutions, *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, **7**(2), 159-198.

Smith, D.E. (2021) Exploring institutional words as people's practices. In Luken, P.C. and Vaughan, S. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Institutional Ethnography*, 65-78, Springer International Publishing.

Smith, D. (2002). Institutional ethnography. In: T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative research in action* (pp. 17-52). London: Sage Publications.

Smith, D. E. (2005) *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*, Rowman Altamira.

Smith, D.E. (ed.) (2006) *Institutional ethnography as practice*, Rowman & Littlefield.

Smith, D. and Schryer, C.F. (2008) On documentary society. In Bazerman, C. (ed.), *Handbook of research on writing: history, society, school, individual, text*, 113-127, L. Erlbaum Associates.

Stooke, R. (2005) Institutional Ethnography. In. Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.), *Theories of Information Behavior*, 210-214, Information Today, Inc.

Stooke, R. (2010) Investigating the textually mediated work of institutions: Dorothy E. Smith's sociology for people. In Leckie, G.J., Given, L.M. and Buschman, J. (eds.), *Critical theory for library and information science: exploring the social from across the disciplines*, 283-294, Libraries Unlimited.

Street, B. V. (1984) *Literacy in theory and practice*, Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (2006) Autonomous and ideological models of literacy: Approaches from New Literacy Studies, *Media Anthropology Network*, **17**, 1-15.

Preprint of: Pilerot, O. (2023). Information literacy theorised through institutional ethnography. In: Hicks, A., Lloyd, A., & Pilerot, O. (eds.), *Information Literacy through Theory*, 2023, Facet Publishing.

Sundin, O. (2008) Negotiations on information-seeking expertise: A study of web-based tutorials for information literacy, *Journal of documentation*, **64**(1), p. 24-44.

Tennant, J. P. (2020) Web of Science and Scopus are not global databases of knowledge, *European Science Editing*, **46**.

Wertsch, J.V. (1998) *Mind as action*, Oxford University Press.

Worthman, C., and Troiano, B. (2019) A good student subject: A Foucauldian discourse analysis of an adolescent writer negotiating subject positions, *Critical Studies in Education*, **60**(2), 263-280.