



IN THIS ISSUE

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Participation is not what it used to be, and the problem is not merely one of vocabulary.

While Paulo Freire's discussion of the relationship between the world and the word remains crucial, the context in which such relationship exists has changed dramatically. Freire referred mostly, if not solely, to the written word. But what about the influence of the media on our understanding of the world?

Take "Big brother", for example. Termed as a "reality show", the TV program was created in The Netherlands in 1997 and to date it has been broadcasted in more than 70 countries.

You might be familiar with its format.

A group of strangers agrees to live together in a specially designed house – mind you, also the set- fully wired with cameras and microphones that register everybody's moves 24 hours a day for a period of no less than three months. During their time in the house, members of the group are cut from all forms of communication with the external world. Every week, each member of the group 'votes' for the roommate that they would want to see expelled from the house, giving way to a list of "nominees" - candidates for expulsion. The audience, in turn, is "invited" to 'vote' a candidate from the list, and the subsequent losers in the 'election' process are thrown out of the house one by one. Viewers must pay to emit their vote via a phone call or sms. That's how they 'participate'. As I write this, the website of Argentina's fifth edition of the "reality show", now in progress, indicates that 25.000 people 'voted' online for the expulsion the three nominees in the past week.

My point is: What kind of critical literacy capabilities are necessary today in order to be prepared to participate in the struggle for a better life?

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What understanding of participation is at work when audiences worldwide find entertainment in having the chance to expel somebody from a situation for more or less arbitrary reasons?

What is the effect of exclusion being rendered banal by the media?

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This ninth issue of *Glocal Times* looks into participatory communication research, presenting highlights of the last gathering of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)'s Participatory Communication Research (PCR) Section, which took place in Paris in July 2007.

Karin Wilkins and Young-Gil Chae make a case for considering participation as structural within the production of media strategies, presenting their ongoing research on social marketing projects, which assesses the structural conditions of campaigns in relation to their projected constructions of participation as well as identified themes and goals.

Tom Jacobson makes a case for the quantitative assessment of participatory communications programs through focusing on communication in the form of dialogue as conceptualized by Jurgen Habermas in this theory of communicative action.

Rico Lie discusses the role of the scientist in participatory communication research processes vis-à-vis the fact that somehow the concept of participation has been rendered void of meaning in its transition from alternative to mainstream.

Paolo Mefalopulos discusses the difference between a communication-based assessment and a communication needs assessment.

Jan Servaes, Tom Jacobson and Ullamaija Kivikuru, all of them former Heads of IAMCR's PCR Section, share their views on the Section's history and future in the broader context of the field of communication for development and social change.

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In reliving his *pedagogy of the oppressed* under the title of *Pedagogy of*

hope (2003), Paulo Freire stated that “The reading and writing of the word would always imply a more critical rereading of the world as a ‘route” to the “rewriting” –the transformation- of that world”.

A critical rereading of how we understand participation in/through communication and how we assess it are ever more necessary.

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