# PRESSthink
## BY JAY ROSEN

Story location: http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

**JUNE 27, 2006**

# The People Formerly Known as the Audience
## That's what I call them. Recently I received this statement.

The people formerly known as the audience wish to inform media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes with the platform shift you've all heard about.

Think of passengers on your ship who got a boat of their own. The writing readers. The viewers who picked up a camera. The formerly atomized listeners who with modest effort can connect with each other and gain the means to speak— to the world, as it were.

Now we understand that met with ringing statements like these many media people want to cry out in the name of reason herself: *If all would speak who shall be left to listen? Can you at least tell us that?*

The people formerly known as the audience do not believe this problem—too many speakers!—is our problem. Now for anyone in your circle still wondering who we are, a formal definition might go like this:

The people formerly known as the audience are those who *were* on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another— and who *today* are not in a situation like that *at all*.

- Once they were your printing presses; now that humble device, the blog, has given the press to us. That's why blogs have been **called** little First Amendment machines. They extend freedom of the press to more actors.

- Once it was *your* radio station, broadcasting on *your* frequency. Now that brilliant invention, **podcasting**, gives radio to us. And we have found more uses for it than you did.

- Shooting, editing and distributing video once belonged to you, Big Media. Only you could afford to reach a TV audience built in your own image. Now video is coming into the user's hands, and audience-building by former members of the audience is alive and well on the Web.

- You were once (exclusively) the editors of the news, choosing what ran on the front page. Now we can edit the news, and **our choices** send items to our own front pages.

- A highly centralized media system had connected people "up" to big social agencies and centers of power but not "across" to each other. Now the horizontal flow, citizen-to-citizen, is as real and consequential as the vertical one.

The "former audience" is **Dan Gillmor's** term for us. (He's one of our discoverers and **champions**.) It refers to the owners and operators of tools that were one exclusively used by media people to capture and hold their attention.

Jeff Jarvis, a former media executive, has written a **law about us.** "Give the people control of media, they will use it. The corollary: Don't give the people control of media, and you will lose. Whenever citizens can exercise control, they will."

Look, media people. We are still perfectly content to listen to our radios while driving, sit passively in the darkness of the local multiplex, watch TV while motionless and glassy-eyed in bed, and read silently to ourselves as we always have.

Should we attend the theatre, we are unlikely to storm the stage for purposes of putting on our own production. We feel there is nothing wrong with old style, one-way, top-down media consumption. Big Media pleasures will not be denied us. You provide them, we'll consume them and you can have yourselves a nice little business.

But we're not on **your clock** any more. Tom Curley, CEO of the Associated Press, has **explained** this to his people. "The users are deciding what the point of their engagement will be — what application, what device, what time, what place."

We graduate from wanting media when we want it, to wanting it without the filler, to wanting media to be way better than it is, to publishing and broadcasting ourselves when it **meets a need** or **sounds** like fun.

Mark Thompson, director general of the BBC, has a **term** for us: The Active Audience ("who doesn't want to just sit there but to take part, debate, create, communicate, share.")

Another of your big shots, Rupert Murdoch, **told** American newspaper editors about us: "They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it."

Dave Winer, one of the founders of blogging, **said it** back in 1994: "Once the users take control, they never give it back."

Online, we tend to form user communities around our favorite spaces. Tom Glocer, head of your Reuters, **recognized** it: "If you want to attract a community around you, you must offer them something original and of a quality that they can react to and incorporate in their creative work."

We think you're getting the idea, media people. If not from us, then from your own kind describing the same shifts.

The people formerly known as the audience would like to say a special word to those working in the media who, in the intensity of their commercial vision, had taken to calling us "eyeballs," as in: "There is always a new challenge coming along for the eyeballs of our customers." (**John Fithian**, president of the National Association of Theater Owners in the U.S.)

Or: "We already own the eyeballs on the television screen. We want to make sure we own the eyeballs on the computer screen." (**Ann Kirschner**, vice president for programming and media development for the National Football League.)

Fithian, Kirschner and company should know that such fantastic delusions ("we own the eyeballs…") were the historical products of a media system that gave its operators an exaggerated sense of their own power and mastery over others. **New media** is undoing all that, which makes us smile.

You don't own the eyeballs. You don't own the press, which is now divided into pro and amateur zones. You don't control production on the new platform, which isn't one-way. There's a new balance of power between

you and us.

The people formerly known as the audience are simply *the public* made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable. You should welcome that, media people. But whether you do or not we want you to know we're here.

**After Matter:** *Notes, reactions & links*

Check this out: **The People formerly known as The Congregation** (March 28, 2007.) Revises and extends my remarks into the situation with organized religion today…

> We are The People formerly known as The Congregation. We have not stopped loving the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Nor do we avoid "the assembling of the saints." We just don't assemble under your supposed leadership. We meet in coffee shops, around dinner tables, in the parks and on the streets.

**Caused** quite a **stir online** too.

I have been using the phrase, the people formerly known as the audience, **for a while**. But I had never tried to define it. This post came out of reflections after **BloggerCon IV** (June 23-24, "empowering the users") and in anticipation of the **Media Giraffe** conference (June 28-July 1, "Sharing News & Information in a Connected World") but also in the course of writing **Web Users Open the Gates** (Washingtonpost.com, June 19).

**Google Blog Search** for the phrase "people formerly known as the audience." Regular 'ol **Google Search** for the phrase.

"Guys, citizen's media isn't fairy dust that you can sprinkle on an existing program and make it magically interactive, bloggy and web 2.0 compliant." **Ethan Zuckerman** is talking to American Public Media's "**Marketplace**" on how not to approach the former audience:

> So let's get this straight - Marketplace isn't able to answer email from listeners, even when those listeners are offering to help them work on getting a former contributor out of prison. But Marketplace is interested in having me fill out a 19-field form so they can contact me via email and, if neccesary, call me for a quick soundbyte on an upcoming story.

**Dave Winer** gets lyrical at Scripting News (July 1):

> We live in the age that Emerson predicted, self-reliance. Make your own music and your own products. Everyone gets to be creative. The brains are in what we used to call the audience. No more looking up to the ivory tower for all fulfillment. Thank god we don't all have to be as beautiful as Farah Fawcett and Christopher Reeve. Everyone gets to sing. Users and developers party together.

**Amy Gahran** at Poynter about TPFKATA: "Seriously: News pros should be watching and joining this conversation." Amy also **points** to a BlogPulse tool for **tracking** the ripples outward from this post.

Ripple: At the Associated Press Managing Editors **website**, Mark Briggs of the (Tacoma, WA) News Tribune says to fellow editors:

> You need to read the post – and the comments – to understand what is happening "out there."

The audience is off the sidelines and in the game and is going to play. It's up to you to play with it in a way that benefits everyone.

**They used to be our most loyal customers**. Fine Young Journalist, commenting on **this study** by a Harvard master's student ("Emerging Collaborative News Models and the Future of News") says about the users of Digg.com, Slashdot.org and other **wisdom-of-the-crowd** sites… "These aren't just the people formerly known as the audience, they're the people formerly known as *our* audience."

*Should you be in the immediate vicinity, I will be performing this post on Nantucket Island, July 26 at* **Nantucket Antheneum** *(8:00-9:30 pm, Great Hall) as part of the* **Geschke Lecture Series***. If you are a blogger and want to attend, e-mail me.*

**Doc Searls is right** that power "shifting," while crudely accurate, is less than apt for my case. Power is expanding and dispersing because broader participation makes for a "bigger" press. Doc:

> The expansion of authorship from few to many is a postive-sum development. So is the expansion of authority and influence that naturally grows in a market constantly enlarged by broader participation, and not merely by a growing choice of "content."

There are lots of ways for "old" media to adapt to the new system. "Unfortunately, few or none of them are in the toolboxes of the old system." **Read his response** to TPFKATA. And Doc returns to the subject **here**.

Ripples… **Stowe Boyd**: "Once power migrates to the edge, the edglings are unlikely to give it back."

**Jeremie** at Temporally Relevant likes the term: "To be an edgling is to share and participate with your peers through open technology."

Stowe Boyd's follow-up post, **Edglings: A Well-Ordered Humanism and The Future Of Everything** (July 11).

> Personally, I favor the term Edgling because I want to move away from media metaphors, and use economic or sociological ones. This is not about who is "producing content" and who is "consuming" it: which is the basic paradigm of media thinking. Instead, it is about control moving from the central, large, mass-market organizations — which includes media companies, but also other large organizations, like government, religious organizations, and so on — out to the individuals — we, the people — at the edge.

> As power moves from the center to the edge the "Centroids" — those that hold with the centralized power of an industrial era — will scream about all the negatives that they perceive in the out-of-control future that threatens the basis of their worldview. But the Edglings will find it liberating to get out of the stranglehold on information, communication, and the marketplace that centralized organizations attempt to impose.

The Edglings vs. the Centroids. I like it.

"The concept of audience remains valid." At **First Draft**, Tim Porter **responds** to this post:

> We are all each other's audience. A good listener is an audience. So is a critic. Or someone who clicks on someone else's Flickr photo. The publisher-audience relationship remains, but today it is a loop, not a pipe.

I agree with Tim. The audience hasn't "gone away." Porter: "The 'audience' is out there. Journalists need to be out there, too."

Here's the link to a **French translation** of this post: *Le peuple jadis connu sous le nom d'audience.* And here's a **response** in French to the French translation.

Other reactions of note:

- **Ulises Ali Mejias** of Teachers College at Columbia University: "Are we really talking about a community of producers, or a mass of producers? Put differently: Is production the new consumption? My argument is that TPFKATA function as a mass of producers…" (And see this **Doc Searls** reply to Mejias.)

- Young PR professional **Jeffrey Team** at Inside the Cubicle: "Well Jay, the demise of the audience is not confined to journalism, it is pervasive in all communications…I am on a personal crusade to get the public relations industry to move away from the term target audience and instead think about communities of interest."

- Independent journalist **Dave LaFontaine**: "I can't help but notice that when it comes to the actual, hard data on what sites people spend the majority of their time at … well, folks, it's the Usual Suspects. Big media."

- **Dave Cormier** at his Education blog: "The revolution, if there is ever to be one, is going to take years of concerted effort. I applaud Mr. Rosen for his manifesto, I worry that too many people think we have already won."

- **Andrew Cline** at Rhetorica: "Exactly who are these people? It seems to me they are not the majority that makes up the semi-fictional 'mass' audience or the thing called 'the public' that so interested John Dewey and Walter Lippmann."

- **Tom Matrullo** at IMproPRieTies: "There is much to be said for the repeating of a theme or set of key ideas, encoded in such a way as both to pique attention and to convey to the already clued-in that a certain set of assumptions about speaking, writing, community formation, were in play, harboring large shifts in power, control, and dominance."

- **Jon Husband** at Wierarchy: "I notice two things …1 … the antibodies and immune system are really big, and are spread out everywhere; 2 … in addition to rejecting the foreign substance/bodies/players, the extant system is also trying to swallow 'it' … eat it so that the fever will be killed."

**Scott Walters** asks how this post connects to the world of theatre, while **elearnspace** says, "I'm waiting for a similar announcement from learners in corporate and higher education," and **this blog** ("advocacy strategy for the age of connectivity") says "Rosen's riff on the Audience is directly related to the way advocacy and organizing groups think about members and supporters."

J-school student Ryan Sholin **imagines** a career path in journalism starting with "the community editor's position."

Wherein it's my job to bootstrap the newspaper's online connections to local bloggers and community members, launch hyperlocal sites comprised mostly of stories written by The People Formerly Known As The Audience, and manage them. This means learning some more web design and coding to modify some existing open source software, but the hard part is getting the

community (and the editors) to see your newspaper as a place for participation.

From the incomparable **Cursor**, Media Patrol column, June 27 edition:

> A **new hire** by Sen. Hillary Clinton, "to help improve [her] image among liberal bloggers," is called "**a major coup**."

> Whereas to Billmon's eye, '**The Swiftboating of Kos'** is "starting to look more and more like a coordinated effort," Ralph Nader finds that "after a while a chronically humorous way of looking at politics becomes a distraction," as the nation's political life **assumes the binary position** year after year.

> A Texas governor's race poll finds incumbent Gov. Rick Perry leading **the pack** — and Independent candidate **Kinky** Friedman in **second place**.

> As Fox News employees are allowed to **hear the whip cracking**, 'The People Formerly Known as the Audience' proclaim "a **shift in power** that goes with the platform shift you've heard about."

**The Economist** in April 2006:

> Almost everywhere, download speeds (from the internet to the user) are many times faster than upload speeds (from user to network). This is because the corporate giants that built these pipes assumed that the internet would simply be another distribution pipe for themselves or their partners in the media industry. Even today, they can barely conceive of a scenario in which users might put as much into the network as they take out.

> Exactly this, however, is starting to happen.

Seth Finkelstein dissents in the comments at **Dan Gillmor's blog**:

> Dan, we're still the audience. If you don't like my comment, you can personally attack me to a number of readers that is *orders of magnitude* more than I could realistically reach myself. I have no effective way to reply. That's "audience".

> If I do volunteer journalism, but it is not propagated by A-list gatekeepers, and not appealing enough for the popular sites, it'll be ignored. That's "audience".

> And what happens if the professional journalist just doesn't care if he or she gets it wrong, as long as it brings in the crowd? That's "audience".

Like the news media, Seth is an inflater of the balloons he pops. He refutes propositions I haven't made: that the audience is no more, that media power has been equalized.

As I wrote in the **comments** to another poster:

> The post I wrote does not say "the people" have the power now, and the media lost theirs. It says there's been a *shift* in power. (And there has, but only a partial one.) It also speaks of a new "balance of power," which is another way of talking about a limited change.

> I'm not claiming that the power shift is total, or even decisive. Only that it's signficant, and changes the equation.

Exclusive influence, monopoly position, the right to dictate terms, dynastic continuity, priestly authority, guild conditions for limiting competition— these have been lost, not the entrenched media's social and market power, which as you say remain considerable.

Don't miss **the comments** to this post.

*Posted by Jay Rosen at June 27, 2006 1:26 AM*