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FROM 'WE' TO 'ME'

The Changing Construction of Popular Tabloid Journalism

© Martin Conboy and John Steel

In 1886, while serving a three-month prison sentence, the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette had time to record his thoughts on 'The Future of Journalism' for the Contemporary Review. Stead was sure that it was the 'personal touch' in newspapers that would transcend the vapidness of a hypothesised 'we'. Nevertheless, it was to be the ability of newspapers, exploiting his own pioneering take on the New Journalism, to articulate a plausible version of collective voice which was to dominate the journalism of the mass market of the twentieth century. A refinement of the language of this collective articulation of the interests and tastes of a mass readership comes in the popular tabloid newspapers of the period following WWII and reaches its most self-consciously vernacular expression in the Sun from the 1980s onwards. However, when comparing the print version of the contemporary Sun with its on-line version we might expect to witness a radical departure from traditional notions of the popular predicated on an appeal to a relatively homogenous collective readership and a move to a more atomised, self-assembling notion of the on-line reader. The 'personalized' touch of this form of journalism is very different from that envisaged by Stead but by exploring the ways in which a theme which he considered central to journalism's mission (its address to an audience) is adapting to an online environment, we may be able to reconsider the changing definition and function of the 'popular. In doing so, it may allow us to reflect upon the implications of a move from 'we' to 'me' in the articulation of audience in the online version of the Sun.

KEYWORDS composite; individuation and fragmentation; online; popular journalism; readership; The Sun

Introduction

History teaches us that the future of journalism is not being discussed for the first time. It was reflected upon most explicitly by W.T. Stead as long ago as 1886. He had both cause and opportunity to ponder! The cause was the change being wrought within daily journalism by the confluence of voting reform, the subsequent growth of mass markets buoyed by the vast profits available from carefully directed display advertising and most significantly the popularizing influences on newspaper style and content emanating from democratic mobilizations in the United States (Schudson, 1978: 60). The opportunity for his deliberation was provided courtesy of his confinement in Holloway Prison for his part in the employment of a young girl, Lizzie Armstrong, in the sting which was to create the furore of investigative journalism exposing under-age prostitution in London's East End

known as 'The Maiden Tribune of Babylon' (Conboy, 2004; Örnebring, 2006). In 'The Future of Journalism', he declaimed:

The future of journalism depends entirely upon the journalist.... But everything depends on the individual – the person. Impersonal journalism is effete. To influence men you must be a man, not a muttering oracle. The democracy is under no awe of the mystic 'We'. Who is 'We'? they ask; and they are right. For all power should be associated with responsibility, and a leader of the people, if a journalist, needs a neck capable of being stretched quite as much as if he is Prime Minister. For the proper development of a newspaper the personal element is indispensable (Stead, 1886, p. 663).

Stead provided a euphoric vision of a government by journalism; ambitious individuals who can talk to and on behalf of a readership as a single constituency – a philanthropic view of journalism for the people or on behalf of the people; a platonic view with journalists as enlightened individuals reflecting the best interests of the people. Stead, despite his position as the instigator of much of the populist style of the New Journalism, was very much in the tradition of journalism as a form of education. In fact he stands at the threshold of the paradigm shift from the educational to the representational ideal of journalism (Hampton, 2004); one of the last in the line of educator-journalists before the arrival of the journalist whose main aim was not to educate a popular audience but to match their tastes. The individual address to the group which Stead articulates is radically altered by the eruption into the daily newspaper market of the *Daily Mail* in 1896. It shifts the discourse decisively towards an approximation of the tastes of the reading masses, a carefully targeted "representational ideal". Even its first sales slogan: "The penny paper for a halfpenny", hints at the newspaper's attempt to appeal to an audience who were upwardly aspirational in terms of social class. There may have been populist and commercial intent in the broadening out of this representational ideal but the intimacy of tone of the new mass journalism declared its personalized character strategically in order to mask the absence of any real bond with its readers beyond the rhetorical or the commercial (Salmon, 2009, p. 29). Furthermore, as readers were addressed in personal tones about matters which touched upon the everyday, they were increasingly marginalized from politics which affected their daily lives (Hampton, 2001, p. 227) which meant that by the time of the *Mail's* formative influence on the journalism of the twentieth century the 'democratic component' of the Americanized import of the New Journalism (Wiener, 1996, p. 62) at the heart of Stead's vision for the future of journalism had well and truly been subordinated to a commercialized engagement with its audiences.

Such shifts of engagement with the audience of journalism are, however, nothing new and Smith has observed that these shifts have often had much to do with structural inadequacies within journalism's historical ambitions:

In the course of four hundred years the newspaper press has not finally dealt with the issues into which it was born. Its methods of production and distribution are always inadequate to the ideals and purposes which appear to rise from the activities of collecting news. Every century or so they undergo a major alteration...(Smith, 1979, p. 183).

The current reconfiguration of the relationship between product and producers, journalists and consumers seems to constitute another moment in this revolutionary progression where journalism is being forced to reconsider its "ideals and purposes" under the pressure of technological, commercial and political demands. Yet the most significant aspect of this whole realignment is how to maintain a viable relationship with an audience for journalism.

The dominant trend within journalism in general, and particularly over the twentieth century, has been towards a popularization of its discourses. This was principally a

commercial move by the mass dailies in the first instance but spread to other newspaper formats (LeMahieu, 1988) and eventually to other journalism media. From the *Daily Mail* onwards, the engagement of popular papers with their mass audiences became increasingly targeted to idealized versions of the reader profiles they were selling to advertisers. From 1931 the Audit Bureau of Circulation was providing regular and reliable circulation figures for the first time. This meant that knowing the audience mattered more than ever. However, this popularization has always been composed as a composite of an idealized individual acceptable to advertisers and recognisable to the audience themselves. By the eve of the Second World War the transformation of the popular newspaper market to a fully mass market, integrated with advertising was complete (Bingham, 2004, p. 44) and key to this was the identification of the audience in composite form. Christiansen claimed that his “guiding principle” was whether his *Daily Express* would be understood by people in the “backstreets of Derby” or by on “the Rhyl Promenade” in the 1930s (Christiansen, 1961, p. 2). The rise of the individual voice in popular journalism first as the gossip columnist and then as the political columnist from Godfrey Winn to William Connor assisted in the increasingly focused address to a particular reader-type in the relaunch of the *Daily Mirror* from 1934.

Its continued success was rooted in the “successful projection of personality” of which Fairlie wrote in 1957 describing the “Old Codgers” section of the letters page: No other feature in British journalism so superbly creates the atmosphere of a public bar, in which everyone sits cosily round the scrubbed deal tables, arguing the toss about anything which happens to crop up, while the Old Codgers buy pints of mixed for the dads, and ports and lemon for the dear old mums (Fairlie, 1957, p. 11).

For all the success of mass circulation newspapers such as the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* in attracting the broadest range of lower middle class popular readers, it was the *Daily Mirror* which was to first define and then dominate the tabloid market with a language of specifically proletarian appeal (Bingham and Conboy, 2009). Engel has described its new-found appeal under his stewardship in the following terms:

In the fuggy atmosphere of a bare-floored pre-war pub, the *Mirror* was the intelligent chap leaning on the counter of the bar: not lah-di-dah or anything - he liked a laugh, and he definitely had an eye for the girls - but talking a lot of common sense (Engel, 1996: 161). It became a daily popular newspaper which articulated the views and aspirations of the working classes and perfected a vernacular style which transmitted that solidarity even if it was in an intensely commercialised form. A key element in this construction of a working-class voice was the use of letters such as “Viewpoint”, “Live Letters”, “Star letter” and later the “Old Codgers’ ” replies to these letters as a barometer of readers’ views. Also key to its development of a demotic printed language, were the columns of Cassandra (William Connor) who provided an abrasive, populist political edge which railed against unemployment and appeasement and the complacency of the ruling classes in a language able to provoke debate and stir up passions.

The most significant, recent development in the history of British tabloid newspapers was the relaunch of the *Sun* in 1969. The *Sun* managed to articulate the resonance of Hunt’s ‘permissive populism’ (Hunt, 1998) of the 1970s and 1980s. Once the veneer of didacticism had been stripped away (Bingham, 2009), public discussion of the direct and vicarious pleasures of sexuality became commonplace within a language of vulgar celebration best epitomized by the descriptions of the Page 3 Girl. “Cor!”; “Wot a Scorcher!”; “Stunner!”. It provided a language appealing to women as part of a broader celebration of heterosexual pleasure for ordinary people. “We Enjoy Life and We Want You To Enjoy It With Us” announced the first “Pacesetters” section for women (*Sun* 17 November, 1969, p. 14). Holland (1983) has provided a subtle reading of how the news

agenda of the paper and its raucous appeal formed part of a linguistic endorsement of the power of pleasure in the lives of working class readers, presenting itself as the champion of sexual liberation albeit of a particularly narrow, heterosexual, male-dominated variety. Thomas has summarized the epoch-defining pitch for a new, downmarket popular newspaper in Murdoch's conviction that that the *Daily Mirror* had become too highbrow for its readers by the 1960s and with former *Mirror* journalist Larry Lamb, he set out to produce an alternative that was explicitly based on an updated version of their rival's irreverent approach of previous decades (Thomas, 2005, p. 72). The *Sun* targeted younger readers, dropped the serious ambition of the *Mirror*, embraced the permissiveness of the age and provided a disrespectful, anti-establishment, entertainment-driven agenda. It reinforced its popular credentials by exploiting television advertising and an intensified interest in the off and on-screen activities of the characters in soap operas on British television. Greenslade has summed up its impact in the following overview:

..the *Sun* had shown that there was an audience for softer, features-based material and heavily angled news in which comment and reporting were intertwined. It also adopted a more idiosyncratic agenda, presenting offbeat stories that fell outside the remit of broadcast news producers. It cultivated brashness, deliberately appealing to the earthier interests – and possibly, baser instincts – of a mass working-class audience (Greenslade, 2003, p. 337).

It was the ability of the *Sun* to transform the language of populist appeal away from the *Mirror's* left-leaning progressive brand of politics to a new articulation of the sentiments and policies of the right which provided the *Sun* with its trump card, employing Walter Terry, former political editor of the right-wing *Daily Mail*, and Ronnie Spark to provide a demotic language to shape the editorial ambition for Murdoch/Lamb's shift to the right in 1978. In the 1970s and 1980s the Tories gained the support of the *Sun* (Negrine, 1994) which had become synchronized with the aspirations and identities of the classes which had been credited with the swing to Thatcher in the 1979 election. This represented an astute mapping of the newspaper's idiom onto the hegemonic shift to the ideological project of the Conservative Party in government. Its effect was contagious to many areas of the press, with its rabid anti-union stance becoming a perspective maintained by most of the national newspaper press (Marr, 2005, p. 169). It soon perfected a style of vernacular address which highlighted the perceived interests of a newly empowered blue-collar reader.

Kelvin MacKenzie, the editor from 1981 encapsulated this new mood perfectly. His preferred slogan was 'Shock and Amaze on Every Page' (Chippendale and Horrie, 1992, p. 332) as he displayed bombastic and hyperbolic language on all aspects of life in Britain and beyond. Fiercely patriotic and a staunch supporter of the Conservative Prime Minister, he was always unequivocally supportive of British military involvement. This was demonstrated most infamously by its jingoistic coverage in the Falklands: "GOTCHA: Our lads sink gunboat and hole cruiser" (4 May 1982). The paper adopted "Maggie", feted British soldiers as "our boys" and ran front-page headlines redolent of popular speech as never before: SCUM OF THE EARTH – KINNOCK'S PARTY OF PLONKERS – SUPERSTAR MAGGIE IS A WOW AT WEMBLEY – 70, 80, 90 PHEW WOT A SCORCHER!

There were several facets to the idealized *Sun* reader: "White Van Man", "*Sun* woman" but the reader remained identified as a composite of the newspaper's market identity and never so explicitly as in Mackenzie's vicious assessment of the typical reader he was writing for:

He's the bloke you see in the pub – a right old fascist, wants to send the wogs back, buy his poxy council house, he's afraid of the unions, afraid of the Russians, hates the queers and weirdoes and drug dealers (Chippendale and Horrie, 1992, p. 148).

The popularization of journalism has accelerated as technological convergence has been matched with a cultural convergence around what we could broadly call popular cultural values. This means that what happens in the popular tabloid press has implications for the broader journalism environment. The first trend towards an intensified form of popularization known as tabloidization is the literal transformation of broadsheets to tabloid format; from the *Daily Mail* in 1971 to the *Independent* in 2003. The second is the spread of the tabloid style and news values to the elite press. McLachlan and Golding (2000) chart that the growth in visuals in relation to text is one indicator of tabloidisation, squeezing text out of the frame. Bromley observed this trend as it gathered momentum through the 1990s:

At first, the "quality" press ignored the substantive issues of tabloid news; then decried them. These papers... subsequently began reporting and commenting on the behaviour of the tabloid press, which led to the vicarious reporting of the issues themselves. Finally, the broadsheet papers, too, carried the same news items (Bromley, 1998, p. 31).

The third trend has been the increasing incorporation of tabloid style and audience address into other forms of journalism (Hartington, 2008; Conboy, 2006). Journalism has always been as much about audience as about content. The matching of a particular style of news about the contemporary world to a particular audience able to pay enough to make a profit for the producers has been central to that balance between producer and consumer of journalism. What happens though when that balance is disturbed by fundamental social or technological shifts? Radio journalism had from its beginnings the intimacy of tone in what has been identified as its "sociability" (Scannell, 1996, p. 4) but certainly until the advent of television journalism it had, just like newspapers, articulated a view of the listener as a single audience but unlike newspapers it imagined them as a single organic national whole in empathy with the values of Reith's Presbyterian paternalism and the tones of Received Pronunciation. The popularization accelerated after the introduction of ITN in Britain in 1955 with its surge towards incorporation of entertainment values within televisual styles (Hartley, 1996).

Further technological changes would appear to have destabilized journalism's engagement with a composite notion of the audience. First, the introduction of the interactivity by web 1.0 gave a somewhat different shape to the editorial communication between audience and producers with more opportunity for quasi-live commentary, contribution and response but this was still more or less predicated on the mass as idealized individual. Next, web 2.0 radically appears, initially, to be destabilizing even that relatively recent model. The mass is being individuated and this is the future which journalism is beginning to grapple with as communities dissolve into aggregates of individuals and need to be addressed as such.

The *Sun* first appeared online in 1999 with a site entitled CurrantBun.co.uk. In subsequent years the *Sun's* online presence has undergone a number of transformations, the most recent being in 2008. The *Sun's* current online presence could be described as a patchwork of its paper based content: celebrity gossip, chat, sport, and news stories mixed with a number of interactive features and "converged" content (Deuze, 2008; Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Quinn 2005).

In terms of how the site is presented, the *Sun's* tabloid newspaper identity is of course dominant, with bold headers and lots of pictures, usually of attractive young women in various states of undress (Sparks, 2000). Along the header bar are the "Home"; "MySun"; "Sun Lite" and "Suntalk – The Home of Free Speech" tabs. On the left hand side of the

home page we have a content selection area where we can access, video (from “*Sun* exclusives”, “celebs exposed” and “page three TV” to sport and links to BSkyB news video); news; sport; showbiz; women; health, all of which mirrors the paper version of the *Sun*. The video content resonates with the main frivolous subject matter of the paper version with titillating videos of “page three photo-shoots” and “viral babes” to viral videos of “extreme sheep herding” and “gorillas playing cricket”. Across the site readers/users are given the opportunity to comment on specific stories or share their views on the *Sun*’s many discussion boards. There is nothing here that is markedly different to other tabloid or even quality newspapers’ online versions in that they are attempting to reflect the identity of the newspaper in an online form and promote a level of interactivity (see Chung, 2008; Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

The *Sun*’s online content provides a number of opportunities for people to contribute and ‘participate’ in debate and discussion about the stories that interest them. A number of features of the website are significant with regard interactivity. The most prominent is the link entitled “MYSun” which proclaims “Your News, Your Views, Your Life”. This section of the website invites readers to write and say what they think about any particular issue or comment on a *Sun* article. Within this section we see further links to particular forums from news, TV and reality forums, to football, lifestyle and even a forum entitled ‘pub banter’. The discussions are moderated and as with many similar discussion boards readers are invited to report inappropriate content. Another feature under the ‘MYSun’ tab is the Blogs section. Here readers have the opportunity to write and update their own blogs. However, though they are identified as blogs, there is little evidence that there is much interaction by readers with the bloggers themselves, though the blogs do have an audience as identified by the number of views column on the page. Yet the number of comments received by bloggers is nowhere near the number of hits the blogs receive. One of the more novel aspects of the *Sun*’s online site is the “SunTalk” section which advertises itself as “the home of free speech”. Here we have *Sun* columnist Jon Gaunt or “Gaunty” as he’s known, chairing a daily talk radio show which can be accessed via the website. Listeners or readers can ring up and speak on air to Gaunty, or they can comment online on the discussion boards. The content of the show is driven by the main news agenda of the day and the *Sun*’s editorial orientation. The talk show therefore gives the *Sun* the opportunity to articulate its editorial lines on whatever issues it deems relevant and also test the water in terms of the political and ideological orientations of their audience (Conboy, 2006). In contrast to the elite press – *The Times*, *Guardian* etc. it could be argued that in providing the interactive features that it does, the *Sun* online is providing what might be termed a space for an alternative non-elite public voice to issues of concern, a sort of tabloid version of an alternative public sphere (Örnebring and Jönsson (2004) in which the everyday concerns of the *Sun*’s reading public can be voiced and aired. Or as Johansson has suggested tabloids such as the *Mirror* and the *Sun* provide their readerships with the facilities to search for a sense of community, which as she says “helps explain the appeal of the sociability, collective identity and clarity as experienced through the *Sun* and the *Mirror*” (2008, p. 411).

However, the *Sun* also uses this space to reinforce its essentially authoritarian populist agenda (Billig, 1990) in which it seeks to both chime with and influence predominantly male, white, working class culture. In a stark example of the delicate ideological line that the *Sun* walks, given its racist heritage (see Searle, 1989), we see ‘Gaunty’ explicitly attempting to set out the boundaries of legitimate racialised discourse. In discussing the BNP and its recent limited success in the European elections, Gaunt attempts to draw a dividing line between the right wing views of the *Sun* and the racism of the BNP. He proclaims:

I take it as a badge of honour that this racist (Nick Griffin), and his second in command Goering, sorry Simon Darby, are refusing to speak on the Home Of Free Speech. The only reason the BNP got voted into the European parliament is that mainstream politicians have been too afraid to tackle the subjects that really concern ordinary people. For the record, they are uncontrolled immigration, political correctness, law and order and benefit cheats. These are the concerns of most Brits whether they are black or white. The solution isn't to vote for a party that doesn't allow our fellow citizens with different skin tones to Griffin to be members. You can be Right-wing, back the free market and want to quit Europe without being a racist. You can believe only people who have paid into our pot should be able to take out without donning a white hood.

You can believe in capital punishment without becoming a member of a lynch mob. You can want to get rid of political correctness without calling people Pakis. You can want to protect British industry without hating Johnny Foreigner. You can believe people should fit in or ship out without denying their rights and culture. And you can wrap yourself in our flag and be proud of our history and successes. Unfortunately, if you expressed any of the above in recent years the fascists on the Left and in the BBC shut down the debate or tried to portray you as Little Englanders at best, and racists at worst. These deluded fools are to blame for Griffin and Darby - the Dumb and Dumber of British politics - grabbing a foothold. But Griffin and his henchmen don't represent me and you shouldn't let them represent you.” (downloaded 17/6/09) at: http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/columnists/john_gaunt/2477555/Jon-Gaunt-BNP-Nick-Griffin-wont-talk-to-me-Thats-a-badge-of-honour.html)

There are a number of things about this extended quote that are of interest here. The first, as noted is the attempt to draw a clear distinction between the values of the *Sun* and the BNP. Gaunt reaffirms his, and the *Sun's* commitment to a set of broadly rightwing values that it perceives chimes with their general readership. Here, and elsewhere, when the *Sun* discusses the BNP we see it attempting to negotiate complex ideological terrain, some of which it arguably shares with the BNP – notions of British identity, pride in the nation, working class identity, secure borders, Euroscepticism, anti-Political Correctness etc. Gaunt is in a sense giving his readers permission to be “right wing” and articulate much of what being an acceptable right winger believes, without having to worry about being racist. Yet, of course, as Billig (1990) has demonstrated the *Sun's* dilemmatic ideological character enables it to offer “discursive variability” with which it can appeal to a spectrum of values and beliefs which are often internally incoherent. This then allows the *Sun* to “fence off” its own racialised rhetoric from that of the BNP while the *Sun's* negotiation with the normative claims it makes regarding the BNP re-affirm the *Sun's* commitment to a set of values which broadly chime with its perception of white working class people. The *Sun* online continues, as one would expect, to attempt to negotiate this complex ideological terrain yet this is in the context of a set of individuated spaces that the *Sun* online constructs. The *Sun* then reverts to its familiar ideological role in attempting to offer normative popular rhetoric within an individuated yet paradoxically homogenised space.

What is also interesting in the above quote from Gaunt is the way in which the *Sun* attributes the success of the BNP to the left in Britain, exemplified in the BBC and the “failures of mainstream politicians to tackle the subjects that concern ordinary people”. Interestingly here the only real tangible problem with the BNP is in relation to their stance on not allowing non-whites to become members of their party. It is possibly no surprise

that the *Sun* should push this line given the perceived threat that the BNP poses to pick up traditional working class conservative voters. Again we see the *Sun* here conforming to Örnebring and Jönsson's notion of an alternative tabloid public sphere, offering a focus of peoples frustration and anger at the political system in Britain, reflecting and shaping this view at the same time (Steel, 2009).

But in what sense does the *Sun* offer space for its readership to facilitate to the transition from 'we' to 'me'? Has the 'me' been sidelined in preference for familiar ideological and professional values of the executives at News International and the journalists responsible for the *Sun* online respectively? There has been significant research on the pressures of providing greater interactivity within mainstream media, on both institutions and individual journalists. For example Domingo (2008) examines journalists' perceptions of interactivity in online news using ethnographic studies of four newsrooms in the US. Domingo suggests that there is a strong culture in these newsrooms which adheres to traditional roles of journalists' power. Rather than seeing interactive features of online news sites as circumventing traditional power relations between the journalist and the public, journalists saw interactive features as a hindrance to their everyday routines. He argues that:

Journalists in the cases analyzed embraced interactivity as a crucial feature of their work, but in practice the professional culture and the priority given to immediacy – which fitted better the values and routines of traditional journalism – made them perceive audience participation as a problem to manage rather than a benefit for the news product, except for the case of the online only portal. The fact that interactivity is counterintuitive with the principles of traditional journalistic culture tended to diminish the willingness to explore audience participation (2008, 698).

In short, he argues, interactivity is a myth that journalists have to deal with (often unsuccessfully) in their daily lives. Similarly Paulussen et al (2007) studying interactivity and user generated content in newspapers in Belgium, Finland, Germany and Spain, suggests that despite the "hype and high expectations of user generated content" media in these four countries has not really delivered on audience participation. The authors suggests that despite the economic imperative which is driving newspapers to diversify and enhance their operations in relation to user generated content, and external pressure from bloggers and users to move towards a more participatory type of journalism (cf Singer, 2007) an internal commitment to traditional journalistic norms which favour a 'top down' approach remains dominant. Moreover, as Singer (2005) suggests, even when journalists themselves are involved in blogging and engaging with user generated content they tend to adhere to traditional gate-keeping roles and are reluctant to make the most of this purportedly democratizing medium (cf Singer, 1997). O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008) suggest that journalists by and large welcoming the new challenges of the Internet as inevitable, do not necessarily see it as a threat as such to their profession. However, so-called citizen journalism is rejected as not offering "real" journalism and potentially undermining the value of professional journalists. Moreover, their study confirms that journalism is reluctant to abandon its organisational and professional conventions even in the face of rapid technological change (2008, 386). The authors ask the question of whether the profession can "maintain its status quo" or adapt and "shift from its traditional role towards a more democratic community and public debate oriented ideal heralded since the earliest days of Internet news" (2008, 386). Similarly Domingo et al. (2008) looked at the way in which 16 online newspapers interpret online user participation mainly "as an opportunity for their readers to debate current events, while other stages of the news production process are closed to citizen involvement or controlled by professional journalists when participation is allowed" (2008, 326). The authors looked at these

newspapers and assessed their functionality in terms of how much power is relinquished by the journalist in terms of the development of a genuine participatory online news site. The view was that "...the institutional media had largely kept the journalistic culture unchanged even when exploring participation opportunities for the audience" (2008, 335). The paper describes the various strategies that newspapers use but stresses their reluctance to "open up" to active participation as such "core journalistic culture remains largely unchanged" (Ibid, 339). Hermida and Thurman (2008) demonstrate a "massive increase in online opportunities across all but one of the 12 UK national newspapers" (Ibid, 353). The research suggested that editors and executives fear being marginalised by other media and ultimately being left behind. Their research suggests that the industry is "still working out whether and how to integrate user participation within existing norms and practices" (Ibid, 350) brand damage seemed to be an issue. Yet the authors also suggest (following Bowman and Willis, 2003) that user generated content can also help bond users to a newspaper brand. Also in line with other aforementioned research, the authors suggests that "news organisations tend to expand their operations to the Internet based on their existing journalistic culture, including the way they relate to the public" (Ibid, 353).

In the context of this research it is relatively simple to understand why the *Sun* online clings to its traditional discourse and function, to step out from this mode would be truly revolutionary. The attempts at interactivity and encouraging reader participation in discussions in the *Sun* online, in the context of both a dominant brand and ideological orientation highlights the difficulties faced by newspapers across the industry in attempting to negotiate the transition from "we" to "me".

In newspapers, as in commercial journalism generally, the business model which allowed mass audiences to be capitalized through advertising has crumbled. The fragmentation of mass audience into individuated and fractured spaces of consumption might well see the text as well as the advertising of newspapers follow along this pattern of development from a mass to an individuated articulation of community and one driven more by the consumers than the producers of any overall audience design (Bell, 1991).

The popular paradox: developments in contemporary online popular newspapers may lead us to ponder whether the future of journalism might in its fragmented, individuated construction of audience be better suited to answer the demands of the popular to provide something more representative of the tastes and desires of the people than ever the aggregated, hypothesized popular as individual was able to. There exists a tension between the individuation that technology seems to promise and the culturally and politically normative aspects of tabloid journalism. As the popularity of tabloid journalism strengthens its influence on journalism in general, journalism's future will be to a large extent determined by its ability to resolve such tensions. Stead has been proved right in one aspect of the conclusions which emanated from his forced period of reflection on the future of journalism. The personal element remains indispensable. He is also right that the journalist remains the essential conduit in reshaping a personal connection to an audience uninterested in the generalized "We", albeit in very different times.

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