

Vindicating Politics, Re-Spun

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Sunday, April 26, 2009

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It was nice to read [Allen Garr's piece](#) last Wednesday in the Courier. It sure helps that he's one of the handful of good journalists in the province, and this piece shows why.

Essentially, he's reporting on how national media skipped their fact-checking and trusted a highly biased civic blog that reported completely incorrect information about a new Vancouver manager's pension. There are a few issues here.

1. My editorials are highly biased, a bias I state and celebrate. [CityCaucus.com](#) is run by part of Sam Sullivan's junta, so it's radically anti-populist and far right wing. I don't have a problem with biased commentary, though I work hard against their bias constantly.
2. Bloggers are not held to the same standards as "real" journalists: things like getting fired for making things up, plagiarizing, not checking facts. Blogs can claim, in the end, to be just rants. And while it's not wrong to report on blog content, anyone who is a professional journalist shouldn't assume anything on a blog is valid beyond the opinion it is wrapped in. I pay very careful attention to the validity of new facts I introduce in my editorials. Generally I just comment on and analyze other facts, reporting and press releases. "Real" media and public media will need to negotiate some ground rules for interaction and validity in society. The free commuter daily headline papers show that people don't want to pay for news anymore, so the business model may be dead regardless of whatever magic media owners try to wield. Public media is here to stay. Democracy can, not will but can, be served by this.
3. Garr called local television "sloppy and lazy". He's absolutely right. Six-second sound bites and everything Neil Postman ever wrote about why the whole medium is anti-intellectual back up his claim.
4. There needs to be a long, nuanced dance in media circles about the relationship between new and old media. Old media has lost competence and relevance as a check against political power. Its role as a free press in a democracy is shattered from the hyper-corporatization of media models. The CanWest/Global Frankenstein is a spectacular example.
5. New media, even social networking sites, [NowPublic.com](#), my site, [Altnet.org](#), [Rabble.ca](#), [The Tyee](#), and many others demonstrate the illegitimacy of the [Metro chain](#) of Twitter-sized journalism and what's become of the dailies lately. Extra sad and pathetic is that while dailies are bleeding out or closing because of owner's poor financial health, CanWest has recently begun a [chain-wide navel-gazing, self-justification exercise](#) about why newspapers still matter. They're not wrong, but they're not the ones to lead the charge to save the model; they are the poster-child of the death of the current model of newspapers. More likely, they're just encouraging investors and the 19 subscribers left not to bail out on their 26 cent share price, down from \$12 two years ago. Nevertheless, the navel-gazing is framed like this "In the first of a series we look at the siege mentality that is gripping the newspaper industry as once-mighty publications stop their presses for good." I predict CanWest/Global will close the Province newspaper in Vancouver after the provincial election. I just have a feeling. Since it's their redundant daily in Vancouver, it can be

ethanized. But the scary thing is if it turns out the not-so-tabloid Vancouver Sun is the expendable brand.

6. Read more Allen Garr. And Frances Bula, and Charlie Smith, Gary Mason, and Andrew MacLeod and basically everyone at The Tyee. It will make you think that journalism still actually means something. While they operate as intelligent, respectable public journalists, they also address themes and do solid analysis. They aren't afraid to take a side and show a bias, but they back it up with sound rationale. Most of the lame journalists in the country can't even do that, or their editors spike their intelligence. Either way, most fail to accomplish meaningful injections of thoughtfulness.

So, do your job as readers and citizens and engage. And when [usually] corporate media cuts corners and sleezes or lazes out, reject them, call them on it and turn to progressive new media. It will refresh your optimism!