

How The Times Are Changing: Peter Stothard on the evolution of journalism

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2007/01/13/guest-blogger-tls-editor-and-polis-advisory-board-member-peter-stothard/

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In the first of an occasional series of guest-bloggers, we welcome the editor of the Times Literary Supplement, Peter Stothard, who has also edited The Times itself and is a member of the POLIS board. Today he reflects on how journalism has changed from investigative to analytical.

My old generation of journalists was trained (in as much as we were trained at all) to deal with sources who concealed and lied. The new generation, suggests the New Yorker's Malcolm Gladwell, needs training in the comprehension of what is freely, accurately and massively available. Gladwell's subject, curiously enough, is the Enron affair, associated in most minds with rampant concealment and deceit. Instead, he [argues](#) it is a story of the facts being available but no one able, willing or bothering to understand them. This has produced much [comment](#) from outraged victims of the Enron scandal and their legal and financial supporters. There has not yet been as much notice from those concerned with the training of journalists, one of the groups which society expects to expose this kind of abuse. According to Gladwell, our 'old generation' model kind of story is one like the Watergate affair, a case of deliberate concealment and obscurity only discovered through a Deep Throat.

He call this type 'a puzzle'.

Enron, however, he says, was something different, 'a mystery', in which the keys facts were all out there if only wise eyes could see them.

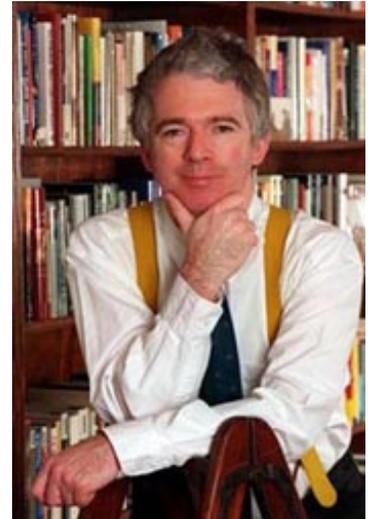
Although journalists played a big part eventually in prosecuting the Enron saga, this was not though a secret source, a Deep Throat of energy futures, but by some of our trade finally untangling a few basic truths that had been there all along.

We hacks are trained, it seems, to solve puzzles but not mysteries, a grander art altogether.

I have some sympathy with Gladwell's view, despite the flaws in his own financial training exposed by some of his [critics](#) .

Even now, from my experience at The Times some years ago, financial journalists model themselves more and more on professional analysts and less on common investigators.

How those analysts are trained, edited and managed is a separate issue – perhaps not the most important that Gladwell raises but worth some thought nonetheless.



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