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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: Marty Kaplan of Annenberg School of Communication on the blurred line between objective and opinionated journalism

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

This is MARKETPLACE. I'm David, but thank goodness my name is not Lou. Did you see Lou Rukeyser, the long-term host of "Wall Street Week," burning his bridges on PBS television the other day after the show's brass tried to move him from the host to the commentator's chair? Then there is the other Lou, Lou Dobbs, CNN's top financial journalist. He prefers to blend commentary with anchoring, a mix that flared into controversy this week.

Both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* have run articles questioning why Dobbs has been so unabashedly supportive of Enron's beleaguered accountant, Arthur Andersen. Last week, Dobbs got pretty worked up when a professor tried to make the point on his show that Andersen partners had still not fully embraced the need for reform. The newspapers point out that this same accounting firm used to sponsor Dobbs' show a couple of years ago, and the company reviews the books of Space.com, a company that Dobbs partly owns. MARKETPLACE business of media analyst Marty Kaplan is associate dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at USC.

Dr. MARTY KAPLAN (Annenberg School of Communication, USC): I think there is a difference between journalism and entertainment, but I think most of modern culture has worked to obliterate that difference, and some of that has come from inside the news business, where, through soft features and aggressive food-fight kinds of shows, the distinction between reporting facts, giving a context for them, doing your best to be objective and offering analysis, and opinion and raucous give-and-take--that distinction's been eroded in order to keep audiences watching. It used to be that there were higher walls between editorial commentary and objective reportage. Those are porous membranes now.

BRANCACCIO: So should it be more clearly labeled? Should Lou Dobbs put on a special commentary hat when he says that the Justice Department, he believes, is plainly wrong?

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, I think he tries to draw a distinction between interviewing newsmakers and offering commentaries, but, in fact, those distinctions do get quite difficult to make when you have someone like Jim O'Toole the other day being...

BRANCACCIO: This is the USC professor being interviewed by Lou Dobbs about Anderson.

Dr. KAPLAN: ...who was being hammered by Lou Dobbs in a way that a typical moderator, anchor, such as yourself, would not do. I'm not sure that he needs to pull out the Punch-and-Judy apparatus. In some ways, when viewers watch any cable show now, they need to bear in mind that what they're likely to be getting is the carnival midway, rather than the High Church.

BRANCACCIO: [IN A RAISED VOICE] But, Dr. Kaplan, do you mean to sit there and tell me that you do not buy this entire argument about conflicts of interest that Lou Dobbs seems to have with the fact that Arthur Andersen paid him for a speech, with the fact that Arthur Andersen, a few years ago, was an underwriter of the company? How could you-- how could you say that?

Dr. KAPLAN: Are you a little too exercised by this question?

BRANCACCIO: You're avoiding the question. You're sitting there, and I asked you a very simple question.

Dr. KAPLAN: I'm wondering what's going on inside that formerly objective head of yours.

BRANCACCIO: Maybe it's going to attract ratings. I mean, the fact is I'm much more interesting when I'm exercised, and clearly I have a point of view here.

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, it sounds as though Minnesota Public Radio's gone cable.

BRANCACCIO: Marty, thanks. Martin Kaplan is also the director of the Norman Lear Center at USC.

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