

**THE BLOG****All the World's a Blog**

By Marty Kaplan

03/23/2006 12:01 pm ET | Updated May 25, 2011

This week I moderated a panel with Kevin Drum, Kevin Roderick and the original Wonkette, Ana Marie Cox. The topic - Have bloggers replaced newspapers, and should we care? - elicited a unanimous yawn from the panelists; without big city dailies, they agreed, there would be no political blogosphere.

One unexpected theme that emerged, though, got me wondering. It's the idea that political blogs are a self-consciously theatrical space, where bloggers believe they must stylize themselves, exaggerate, play stock roles. Kind of like Kabuki, or the WWE.

In this formulation, bloggers take public positions more extreme, less nuanced, easier to stereotype, than they would over beer with friends (you know, in "real" life). It's as though there's something about the Web, and the attention economy, and maybe polarized contemporary politics, that requires bloggers to slip on these costumes before they enter the fray. Online is onstage.

It's not that they're inauthentic, or pretending to believe things they don't; it's that the medium itself elicits the kind of gestures and voice projection that play more to the balcony than to people you'd actually have a conversation with.

Maybe the right analogy is to the difference between the banter of the commentariat in the green room, and their bloviation when the camera light is on. In any event, it's kind of surprising (to me, anyway) how something that people can notoriously do in their pajamas can seem to require such ritualistic and mannered discourse.

Wonkette, by the way, said she was going to copyright the phrase "commentosphere" - a realm she and the other panelists thought deserved a whole 'nother kind of analysis, and played by yet another set of rules (ones no less different from the way people usually communicate with one another).

**Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/martykaplan](http://www.twitter.com/martykaplan)**

**Marty Kaplan**

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director