

The Delivery and Consumption of Vacation Performances

Jeffrey F. Durgee
Morris B. Holbrook
John F. Sherry

INTRODUCTION

A defining characteristic of entertainment (with a small "e") as opposed to Art (with a capital "A") is that it belongs to the realm that sociologists refer to as "popular" as opposed to "high" culture. Sociologists like Gans (1974) have often looked askance at the implicit elitism entailed by drawing a potentially pejorative distinction between pop culture and high culture. Yet, at bottom, one cannot avoid the recognition--however grudging--that something can achieve mass popularity only by virtue of its ability to appeal to some fundamental substratum of esthetic, ludic, ceremonial or hedonic tastes. Mass acceptance depends on broad accessibility which, in turn, requires ease of comprehension, primal level of engagement, and communality of appreciation. As Herbie Mann (a commercially successful jazz-rock musician) once told a reporter, "Don't let your taste get in the way of reaching a broader audience." (*Newsweek* 4/2/79).

World Wrestling Federation wrestling matches are good examples of this insofar as they have a basic dramatic substratum which has wide appeal. Another example is what we call "vacation performances." This term refers to events staged for vacationers by professional and semi-professional entertainers. These events, as encountered by researchers during their travels on the Consumer-Behavior Odyssey, constitute the theme of the present chapter.

Specifically, much of one month of the Odyssey was spent amidst summer vacationers in eastern Pennsylvania. These vacationers come from the New York City, New Jersey, and nearby Pennsylvania regions and consist mainly of middle and lower-middle income families. The area, a popular vacation spot for over forty years, offers miles of wooded foothills as well as resorts, health spas, craft shops, discount stores, amusement parks, sight-seeing spots, and special activities such as county fairs or historic festivals. For example, recreations of Civil War battles have become especially popular. While most of the vacationers come with immediate families, some of the resorts are targeted to special groups such as honeymooners, people who want to lose weight, and certain religious sects or cults.

Park owners and promoters in the area have found that in order to attract vacationers, they must stage special events. For example, owners of amusement parks feel pressure to

design and build bigger and more exciting rides. Meanwhile, fair and resort promoters find that they draw bigger crowds if they provide special performances and stage shows. Thus, an amusement park seems to attract larger attendance if it stages a cowboy gunfight two times a day, while a revolutionary-war period theme park generates more interest if it features a brief show about some period-related event.

The present chapter focuses on these stage shows. In brief, we consider five shows: a small circus, a country-and-western music show, and comedy routine along with a medieval joust at a renaissance festival, and a newlywed game at a honeymoon resort. Each lasts approximately thirty minutes and is designed to appeal to all family members (with the exception of the honeymoon game). All give vacationers a chance to rest and be entertained passively--as opposed to walking around the parks and being involved actively in rides and amusements. All punctuate the day-long experience of being at a park ("shows at 11:00, 2:00, and 4:00"). All bring the theme of the park to life (e.g., a battle display at a Civil War park). And all involve between five and six principal actors, acrobats, musicians, or comedians performing for audiences of from one to two hundred people.

These shows command our interest for at least three reasons.

First, they reflect a general trend toward vacation performances. This trend is occurring nation-wide and is interesting to consider from a mass consumption standpoint. For example, it is possible that much of the shows' popularity is due to television. Because of television, vacationers have become a ready market for holiday programs that are similar in format and content to standard network programs--i.e., thirty minutes long, with heavy action or comedy components, low intellectual content, and readily identified story lines. Another factor that might account for the trend toward vacation shows is the desire to collect show experiences. In this connection, vacationers were noted to boast that they had seen "the Renaissance show, the old time music show, and the western stuntman show."

Second, in its own right, each show has a peculiar type of magic, a unique way of involving people in its content, flow, and personalities. The shows therefore provide condensed versions of large-scale stage shows. This makes it possible to scrutinize them carefully so as to consider which show

elements do or do not "work," which ones appeal to which audiences, which reactions are stirred by which elements, and which ways the audience and actors relate to each other.

Third, these shows represent collectively a genre of cultural performance that is reflexive in nature. Such performance serves to reveal people to themselves, and allows them to re-experience in significant measure the experiences of their progenitors and forerunners (Turner 1985, 187;207). These contemporary shows have their roots in the ritual process, and involve the communication of the sacred symbols of community, the ludic deconstruction and recombination of the culturally familiar, and the simplification of social structural relationships (Turner 1985, 293). According to Turner (1985, 295-296) these performances collectively are

"...one of the many inheritors of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity, and uses all the sensory codes, to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwining of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms (temples, amphitheaters), incense, burnt offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, painting, body painting, body marking of many kinds, including circumcision and scarification, the application of lotions and drinking of potions, the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions. And so much more."

The shows described in the following pages convey a constellation of meanings through which individuals, as actors and as spectators, conspire to reproduce the cosmos.

This is the purpose of the present chapter. First, to preview briefly, we describe the performances of interest in depth. We then use these to analyze themes and forces that might help us understand (1) the increasing popularity of vacation performances, (2) the sense of involvement or magic they produce in the audience, and (3) the cultural significance of performance.

DESCRIPTIONS OF PERFORMANCES

The Merrio Circus

On Saturday, August 2, the Odysseans visit the Green County Fair near Centertown, NY. In our eagerness to get off to an early start, we reach the gate at 10:00 a.m., only to learn that the main fair grounds do not open until noon. This allows ample opportunity, while waiting, to visit the goat show--an event

that, with its carefully calculated and complicated multiattribute scoring system (based on general appearance, straightness of back, slope of rump, and milk-giving capacity as indicated by largeness of udder) bears an undeniable resemblance to the Miss America Pageant (except that, in the case of goats, talent is irrelevant and the criterion of breast size is made somewhat more explicit). Owners of the caprine contestants include local farmers, but also some gentry from the surrounding community, such as the Madison Avenue advertising executive who becomes an informant and eloquently explains his positioning strategy for winning blue ribbons.

After a two-hour delay, during which we *more* than satisfy our curiosity about the standards for judging the relative merits of goats, the fair finally opens for business. We lug our camera, tape machine, and other gear through the front gate and wander past the little stalls, food shops, and other concession stands. In one undercover area, a man sells electric pianos. In another, a man runs a charity game in which children pay a small fee to fish for prizes. Everyone wins something, though usually not much. We pause to admire and photograph the tattoos of the Barker who runs the electronic handwriting-analysis machine. Then we devote some serious time and energy to interviewing two pet salespeople--one who sells ferrets and another who specializes in parrots.

Besides the attractions already mentioned, the fair's square mile of grounds includes a two-lane midway, livestock exhibits, produce exhibits, horseshoe-throwing contests, rides, fortune tellers, beer tents, a petting zoo, and a large open dirt stadium area for horse races or, on occasions, major stage productions with big name entertainers. The racetrack sits in the middle of the fairgrounds, and the rides, exhibit halls, and midway booths are arranged around it.

The Merrio Circus is a short walk from the midway. It offers four shows a day, all under a large red-and-white tent. There is no charge because admission is covered as part of the price of the fair. The "cast" consists of a ringleader named Mr. Merrio, three women performers, two male clowns, and one older male roustabout. The single ring is surrounded on three sides by bleachers with three tiers. The audience, including standees, averages around 150 people and consists mainly of mothers, some fathers, and many, many children. There are four bright lights suspended from the tent roof. Taped music comes from some tinny-sounding speakers.

Before the Merrio show begins, one of the clowns comes out to warm the crowd. He says, "Let's have a little noise," and the many children yell, timidly at first but louder and louder as the clown asks for more.

The ringleader then comes out and introduces the first act, "Miss Neena and her trained pig Ralph." Ralph weighs over 300 pounds and is led on a leash. He runs out very fast, jumps two hurdles, and leaves. The hurdles are only six inches high; so the act draws a lot of laughter.

A second woman performer comes out, "Miss Keysa and her Canine Review." The review includes two king poodles dyed pink. The two dogs run around, jump over each other, and push a barrel. Miss Keysa then has one jump a jump rope. Afterward, the ringleader says, "What a mess of mutts that was."

A clown named "Big Mac" now enters. Mac boasts to the ringmaster that he can balance three small balls on the end of a broom handle. He does, but shows later that he has tricked the ringmaster by putting a wire through the centers of the balls. The children howl.

Next, Miss Neena returns, this time on a two foot high ball. She manages to jump rope on it but falls when she tries to walk it up and down a seesaw. All the while, the tinny music plays a tense rock-and-roll theme. Miss Neena walks the ball up a long ramp, turns, then walks it back down.

A trained llama is next, jumping hurdles and crawling on her knees. She is "Calypso, the High Jumping Llama." "She is certainly graceful," says the ringmaster.

Big Mac returns and boasts to the ringmaster that he is the world's strongest clown. He invites children to pull on two ropes, one in each of his hands. About sixty children run into the ring. They pull very hard, but get nowhere because the two ropes are actually one rope that runs through the clown's sleeves. Big Mac steps out of his coat, and runs out of the ring.

The ringmaster then enters the ring astride an Appaloosa, "Apache Bandolero," and rides through a brief dressage routine. The horse prances to rock-and-roll music; gets on one knee, then two; and lies down while the ringmaster stands on its side.

Miss Keysa returns and climbs up the "Spanish Web," a long rope with a loop for her wrist. She hangs from the top of the tent, about 16 feet from the floor, and spins slowly to another rock-and-roll theme.

A new performer, Miss Wanda, comes out with a person in a very real-looking gorilla suit. The gorilla escapes from his cage and runs into the crowd, dragging a teenage male into the ring by his leg. Miss Wanda cracks her whip over him. She makes him jump on a pogo stick, but he gets away again and takes a purse from a woman in the audience. He climbs to the top of the cage and pulls from the purse a bra and panties, which he places on his head. The children scream. The woman goes after

him, but he attacks her, pulling off her blond wig and skirt. At this, the children scream with laughter.

A grand finale featuring a man riding a motorcycle inside a steel cage globe, the "Globe of Death," is cancelled because it is rainy and the globe is slippery.

Later, driven by the rain to seek shelter in a crowded spot under a small overbarging roof, we pause to interview a man and his wife. They have driven here from Danbury, Connecticut, and are quite disappointed that the rain is so bad. They came mostly to see the circus. It had no jugglers nor big wild animals, but did have horses and dogs and a woman who walked on something (though they could not specify what). They did not feel disappointed, however, because it was free. The drive did not bother them because they do this all the time and it's no big deal. Almost every weekend they go to a fair or flea market or amusement park somewhere in the area (Connecticut or New York). This week, it is time for the Green County Fair, which they've visited before and always enjoy.

The Country-and-Western Show

At the same county fair is a large tented area that can seat one to two hundred people at long tables. At night, shows are held for the fair goers which they can watch while drinking beer and eating pizza. A popular show each evening is "Outlaw", a five-piece country-and-western band with a female vocalist.

All band members wear blue jeans and cowboy hats except the vocalist. She wears a print blouse, skirt, and cowboy boots. The show is about an hour long, broken into two sets.

The audience consists of middle-aged couples with a few children present. Many wear blue jeans. A couple near the front of the audience wears large cowboy hats, which they nod vigorously in time to the song rhythms. Half the audience is talking among themselves while the other half pays close attention to the show. Many couples seem to know each song and mouth the words along with the singers.

The lead singer directs the show. She says, "We'd like to start with a song from the Forrester Sisters titled 'Just in Case'." Like many of the songs, "Just in Case" consists of a half dozen lyrics and a chorus which many in the audience join in singing. The chorus for "Just in Case" is "I saw you with another woman, what can I do? Just in case you ever change your mind and give me one try, just in case you ever change your mind."

The next song is "Your Cheatin' Heart" followed by a more upbeat "Playin' with the Queen of Hearts." One verse of "Queen of Hearts" is: "Midnight and I'm awaitin' the twelve oh five, hopin' it'll take me just a little farther down the line. Moonlight, you're just a

heartache in disguise, won't you keep my heart from breakin' if it's only for a very short time." The chorus is: "Playin' with the queen of hearts, knowin' it ain't very smart. The joker is the only fool who'll do anything for you."

The lead singer says, "Pete Rose has got a little advice for you," and the entire band sings, "Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys."

The next song is "Mama, He's Crazy Over Me," then the singer launches into a song called "It's Alright, It's Midnight, and I've Got Two More Bottles of Wine."

A song follows with the lyrics, "How can I be just your friend. You want me to act like we've never kissed. I've cried and cried. I fall to pieces each time someone speaks your name. Each time I go out with someone new, you walk by and I fall to pieces."

A guitar player steps up to sing the Johnny Cash song, "Folsom Prison." Then another song follows with the chorus, "Satin sheets to lie on, satin sheets to cry on, you've given me everything money can buy. But you didn't keep me satisfied."

The last two songs to end the set are "Wastin' Away in Margueritaville" and a happier, more upbeat "Good Old Mountain Dew".

Comedy Show at Renaissance Fair

The next day (Sunday, August 3), we visit the Renaissance Festival in Sherwood Forest Park, down near Buffern, NY. This festival is a three-day re-creation of life in a small medieval village. The village is set up in a valley surrounded by woods, and consists of tents and plywood buildings assembled to look like medieval street scenes. Admission is relatively high (ten dollars for adult). Yet the parking lot is filled with the cars of vacationing families.

The fair is intended to be an educational as well as a recreational experience. It includes over fifty people dressed in medieval costumes who work in shops, pubs, and craft centers. There are also entertainment centers which feature medieval music, Elizabethan drama, and jugglers.

On arrival, we spend some time at the gate of the Renaissance Festival persuading the manager to let us in free and to give us permission to tape the activities and people. After cautioning us against videotaping anything that is copyrighted or protected by Actor's Equity he lets us in with his blessings.

We head for the Mud Show. The Mud Show features five young "buffoons" in a sort of slapstick romp through a filthy pit filled with deep mud. We shoot quite a bit of footage of these clowns build audience excitement and hustle for coins. The audience responds enthusiastically and is especially receptive to the aspects of the performance that include

wallowing in the mud and putting it into the mouth. Dressed as medieval "street beggars," the five actors put on a twenty minute show four times a day. The beggars wear rags and are covered with dried mud. Several have beards and long hair which are also caked with mud. All speak loudly as they lie in the streets and then enter the pit: "Alms for a poah beggah, alms?"

The pit sits in a theater-in-the-round setting, the audience on benches which ring the elevated muddy stage. The audience, in light-colored summer clothes provides a sharp contrast to the dirty, brown entertainers.

One of the troupe yells, "What is mud spelled backwards?" The crowd, especially the children, roars back, "Dum!" The leader then announces that the troupe will do the five classical elements of Greek mythology: "water, earth, air, fire, and the void". He introduces the first character "Gonzo" as "the Black Sheep of the Medici family." "Gonzo," he says, "will gargle swill for your amusement and edification." Other members of the troupe pass among the audience asking for donations: "fifty cents to a dollar." The leader asks the audience for background music to the act, and it is decided to do the theme from a television show, "Gilligan's Island." While the troupe hums the theme, the audience sings along, and Gonzo gargles muddy water.

Next, the audience endures another request for money, this time for a troupe member who will do "air-obics." The request is for sixty cents. A few people donate money. Then, while the "Beggars Choir" sings a song ("The Summer Wind"), one of the members ("Half-brain Bernard") slips and does pratfalls into a puddle of thick mud. The audience laughs and groans, and the leader says, "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

The troupe members then go among the crowd to beg again-- this time, for a dollar. The theme for this stunt is "fire." A woman is brought on stage from the audience. A comedian stands on a stump above the stage with a foot-long strip of rag hanging from the front of his pants. The other members shout, "Only a fool would let a woman near his tools with fire." Led by a troupe member, the crowd counts backward, 3 - 2 - 1, and the woman lights the end of the strip with a lighter. The flame rises up a few inches, then the comedian dives stomach first into a large mud puddle.

The troupe then begs for a donation of three dollars but there are few donors. This act is "The Void." Gonzo, the star of the first act, lies on his back while the other members cover him in mud. The crowd howls as he is covered and left with a large mud phallus.

The last act calls for a donation of four dollars. The leader asks what is the most disgusting thing that can be done with mud,

and the crowd answers, "eating it!" After another countdown, all members of the troupe take large handfuls of moist mud, and pretend to eat it. One says it is, "a touch too tart."*

After the show, we are pondering the possibility of interviewing the trio sitting behind us when one of the actors--a tall thin young man of about 22 or 23--comes over, takes an interest in the camera, and starts talking. We get the tape rolling, reposition the camera, and begin shooting the interview.

This fellow intends to pursue a career in comedy. He has graduated last year from Columbia University where he majored in Urban Sociology and worked with a comedy-improvisation group. He has been driving a cab, but got this opportunity for a comedic gig and grabbed it.

We ask our informant how it feels to commune so intimately with Mother Earth. In response, the buffoon minimizes the importance of his culinary actions. Before long, he begins clowning for the camera and occasionally lapses into what sound like canned routines. He does have a serious side, however, and makes some earnest statements about his career plans. He first realized he had a flair for comedy when he gave the valedictorian speech in high school. Everybody laughed in all the right places. Now he works on improvised comedy, something he illustrates at the end of the interview, indicating his phone number by holding up the appropriate number of fingers to represent each digit.

The Joust

After these two interviews, we all head for the joust. This is the festival's big spectacle and concludes the day on an appropriately festive note. The joust is held on a three-acre open field, and is attended by over two-hundred vacationers. It begins with some preliminary displays of horsemanship and knighthood. After a while, the Queen arrives. She is "played" by a very attractive middle-aged actress who converses with great conviction about the excellence of today's tournament. This Queen is accompanied by an enormous entourage of courtiers as well as a king, a princess, some knights, and assorted townspeople--all in period costumes. Two knights then ride in on horseback, one in red, the other in black.

The knights gallop at each other. The red knight clicks his lance off the black knight's shield. There's a second pass, and both miss. The crowd boos the black knight, and all laugh. Another pass, and the red knight's lance glances off the black's shield.

Red is given a new lance and charges again. The lance, made of light wood, splinters into many pieces, and Red looks weakened. Black knocks him on the side of his helmet, and he falls to the ground. Black charges, but Red pulls him from his horse. Both draw broad swords and fight. Things begin to look bad for Red as Black's seconds join the battle against him.

Then, to laughter and cries of "oh no!" in the crowd, Robin Hood runs onto the field with his Merry Men and joins the fray. Red throws Black to the ground and is poised to kill him, but the crowd roars back, "no!" Red then charges around the field on Black's horse, picks up the princess, and gallops off into the trees.

The Honeymooners Game

On Monday, August 4, the Odysseans drive deep into the heartland of the Poconos' honeymoon heaven. We visit a memories-oriented tourist town called "Nostalgiaville" and a resort called "Breezy Peaks Lodge." Breezy Peaks' main building has 1940's furniture, rather dirty carpets, and crowds of guests. We shoot some photos of the activity board, some furnishings, and formal portraits of a couple in their heart-shaped tub.

There are many honeymoon resorts in the area. Some are for honeymooners only and prohibit non-honeymooners from using their restaurants, bars, or other facilities. Others cater to honeymooners and non-honeymooners alike.

Nero's Springvale is a club that caters to both groups. It was built recently by a Las Vegas holding company in anticipation that legalized gambling would be introduced into the area. There are separate cabins with dark-stained wood siding, abundant sports facilities, and a large, modern lodge with dining halls, video game rooms, and a nightclub which seats two hundred people.

We quickly find this nightclub. Its audience includes a few honeymooners but mainly consists of groups of friends or "old marrieds" sitting in groups of four, five, and six to a table. These patrons are listening half-heartedly to a loud lounge band (bass guitar, drums, electronic keyboards, reeds, and a female singer). People applaud only on cue.

The leader of the band, "Licentious Lou Sacci" emerges as the master of ceremonies for Nero's very own imitation of "The Newlywed Game." Wearing a black tuxedo and a large-brimmed, white fedora hat, Lou starts the show: "We know the honeymooners--they come in walking funny. Tomorrow is Tuesday. We have a softball game against Paradise Valley and then a volleyball game. Tomorrow night is Mardi Gras night. You'll each receive a mask. We'll have cajun food, then have horse races out at the pool with a dixieland band."

*Geophagy- the eating of earth- is a culturally significant behavior of ethnographic record.

Lou speaks with a heavy put-on Brooklyn accent: "Da guys knows whats I means, da girls don't." He selects three couples from the floor to play the game. Two of the couples are newly married, the third has been married for a year. None of the other newlyweds in the audience want to participate.

Lou gets all three couples on the stage and begins teasing, "We find whips and chains in the rooms when you guys leave. Did you see the mirror over the bed? You didn't? You're only lookin' down!"

The women are sent from the room, and Lou asks the men the first question: "On your first date, would your wife say you were Gentle Ben, Sloppy Joe, or Horny Harry?" All reply "Gentle Ben." The next question is, "What part of a man's body would your wife look at first?" All reply, "chest." Next: "What type of guy would your wife like best, Robert Redford, O.J. Simpson, Tom Selleck, or Boy George?" The answers are "Redford," "Selleck" and "Simpson." Then, "What size banana would your wife like, the small, medium, or jumbo?" All say "jumbo."

The women come back, and the men are excused. Lou asks, "Will your husband say your breasts remind him of fuzzy peaches, warm apples, huge grapefruit, or dried up, sunken bananas?" All reply, "apples." Lou asks, "What is the first name of your last boyfriend?" and, "What is the weirdest place you ever made love?" The players are willing to give ex-boyfriends' names although one woman balks suddenly at the love-making question. She is visibly shaken and tells Lou "that's enough." Lou pries further, however, and she finally relents, "a park bench." Lou then asks, "Who is the moaner?" Then: "Since you've been here at Springvale, how many times have you made love?" To the last question, the woman who balked earlier balks again, "That's none of your business."

The men return, and Lou, upset by the lack of cooperation, says, "This is the worst game ever." He then asks the women the questions he asked the men, and vice versa. The one woman player is still upset, and looks down in her lap. Lou tells a joke, "I heard a guy through the wall last night. He must sell candy for a living because all night this girl is saying, 'Oh Henry'."

One couples' answers are the closest, and Lou says to the other two (losing) couples: "I usually don't do this, but give these two couples bottles of champagne on me, you have been great players." (One couple includes the young woman, who is still obviously upset.) To the winning couple, he says, "I have no washer or TV. The prize is a book, 'How to Honeymoon' and a small trophy (four inches high), and a bottle of champagne."

One of the Odysseans, who owns a summer house in the Poconos, found Lou Sacci's recreation of the "Newlywed Game" a

difficult experience--not so much of Lou's vulgarity as because of the obvious discomfort of his victims. This Odyssean's log contained the following entry:

This newlywed rip-off proceeds with heavy hand through a series of questions that serve mostly to embarrass one black, one white, and one inter-racial couple (all in their 20's). As one might expect, none of the couples shows much inspiration or insight. Often, all three contestants simply repeat each other's answers verbatim. For example, all three men think that their wives like jumbo as opposed to small or medium bananas. The well-spoken young black man thinks that his wife's breasts are like rosy red apples; he thinks his wife would like to have an affair with O.J. Simpson. The extremely shy, even younger white newlyweds stare at the floor and hide behind their fingers while telling their connubial secrets; they have made love on a bench and in a truck but cannot agree on which was stranger. The white woman in the inter-racial couple would most like to have an affair with Robert Redford; this jibes with the independently expressed opinion of her tall, black husband.

THE TREND TOWARD VACATION PERFORMANCES

The trend toward vacation performances is ubiquitous. Large parks such as the Universal Cities Studios tour in Los Angeles have added so many stuntman performances that the tour mostly consists of shows rather than rides. Disneyland and Disney World run shows constantly throughout the day (e.g., rock 'n roll singing groups, night time parades), and specialty parks such as the Busch Bavarian Gardens in Virginia (a group of old European-styled villages) feature mainly stage shows. Nearly all historic parks (e.g., Gettysburg Civil War battlefield, Okracoke Plantation in North Carolina) offer recreations of historic events, and even smaller regional parks that are less well known (e.g., "Great Escape" in upstate New York, "Kennywood" in Pittsburgh) feature singing groups, circus-type acts, and stunt shows.

These shows serve many functions for park managers. They legitimize the parks as "big time" in the eyes of parkgoers and lend the park a special excitement (e.g., "Live bands!"). They help manage the flow of crowds insofar as they position them in time ("shows at 2:00 and 4:00") and place ("The western show is located in Frontier Land"). Also, they capitalize on special aspects of the physical setting--for example, the "son et lumiere"

shows which are popular at historic spots in Europe.

It is interesting, however, to consider broader social forces that might help explain the growing popularity of these shows.

One force is television. It is possible that television has shaped peoples' expectations to the point that they now look for television-like entertainment values in all entertainment forms. Further, it can be argued that peoples' experience of such traditional forms as myth, ritual, and narrative has become so mass-mediated, and televiewing so ennobled in the bargain, that people wrest significance from performances in proportion to their ability to reposition their performances as TV shows (Carey 1988). If people watch an average of 6 to 7 hours of television a day, it is not implausible that leisure-related expectations are largely shaped by television. For example, the *Honeymooners* Game show is a direct copy of the popular television show from which it derives. (The added appeal of the resort show is that performers are more likely to confess explicit details of their sex lives than on national television). The joust is similar to storylines from "knights-of-the-round-table" television shows. The circus and comedy show reflect typical television comedy formats: broad slapstick, strong male orientation (men in charge, aggressive content and actions), and short bits of brief content (two to three-minute gags and actions versus longer, more sustained soliloquies and scenes). In fact, given the high action content of most television programs, vacationers might perceive historic park displays and exhibits to be relatively stiff and uninteresting without the more lively, action-oriented distractions. In this connection, the aggression in the vacation shows is especially apparent. Today, television seems to shape expectations in terms of more violent words and actions (e.g., Morton Downey). For example, audience interest was especially aroused in the *Honeymooners* Show when the master of ceremonies repeatedly pried into the sex life of the shy, withdrawn, embarrassed woman player.

A second factor driving the vacation-show trend is the move toward collecting experiences. Like other collecting-type behaviors (see the chapter by Belk et al.) people seem to perceive the vacation shows as challenges--that is, events that are somewhat difficult to endure, yet worth the effort to collect. Bumper-sticker advertisers recognize this, as people like to decorate automobiles with signs that proclaim the many different parks and shows they have seen. Park marketers also realize this and develop advertising that lists all the parks and spots vacationers might visit. As indicated earlier,

some vacationers select parks and experiences to pursue their personal interests (history, thrill-seeking, nostalgia, antiques) while others "try to see as many as they can."

A third factor involves peoples' desire for "short-hand" experiences. For example, vacationers in Paris feel they have fully experienced the Louvre Museum if they see only the Mona Lisa and will stand in line for an hour to accomplish that without bothering to look at any of the other paintings. Vacationers at the Statue of Liberty are most satisfied if they can stand in the small crown atop the statue's head. Similarly, the vacation shows might be growing in popularity because they represent condensed versions of the total park experience. They express, in a more abbreviated form, the excitement and feeling of the whole park. In this, they are the leisure-related equivalents of convenience foods. Thus, the circus encapsulates the general excitement of the county fair, and the Country-and-Western Music Show best expresses the fair's "down home" feeling. The *Honeymooners* Game embodies all of the anxieties about being newlyweds, and the joust not only includes all of the day's performers in the renaissance park, but also encapsulates the excitement and interest in the middle ages.

VACATION SHOW MAGIC

Several of the shows are interesting because they are heavily cut-down versions of larger shows but still succeed in engaging and involving audience members. The circus, for example, is one-fourth the size of the average three-ring event, lasts only 30 minutes versus Ringling Brothers' four hours, and yet draws laughter, cheers, and a sense of awe from most of the audience nonetheless. The Country-and-Western Music Show features singers and instrumentalists with mediocre abilities at best; yet it succeeds in moving most of the crowd to clap hands, stamp feet, and sing along with the music. The earliest recorded "performances," which pre-date Greek and Roman civilizations (Sumner 1940), began as religious ceremonies. Hence, it is not surprising that performances generally attempt to produce a special sense of magic, awe, or other-worldliness. In a sense, as most teachers know too well, this is the difference between a performance and a lecture or a presentation.

While much of the interest and excitement in the vacation-show audiences might reflect the fact that they are with close friends and families on holiday, most of the shows do succeed in getting audience members to "suspend disbelief" and to let themselves be drawn into the experience. Researchers who study the phenomenology of aesthetic behavior describe this as a loss of the self-other dichotomy so as to achieve a

sense of "oneness" with the aesthetic object (Moncrieff 1978; McConville 1978).

In the case of the vacation performances, this sense seemed to be produced in several different ways. We shall provide six specific suggestions.

1. Physical Setting

Their physical settings give several of the shows a special feeling. The deafening noise of the children in the circus, the beer odors at the Country-and-Western Show, and the stage lighting at the Honeymooners Game --not to mention the ear-shattering loudness of the music at the latter two event--all give these shows an unreal quality (Nye 1981). This comes on top of the fact that vacationers are away from home--that is, in a liminal place away from the real, day to day environments. In fact, the physical juxtaposition of the shows within the parks is an interesting ploy. In the language of public relations strategists, this maneuver is called "creating an event within an event." Thus, baseball park public relations people provide not only baseball games but also "old timers" games, celebrities singing the National Anthem, sky divers, and clowns to heighten the excitement of the regular game. Here, the outcome resembles the effect on church-goers who are asked into the altar area of a church during a church service--that is, asked into the most sacred area of the general sacred area. Similarly, the vacation show legitimizes the general park atmosphere, and vice versa. The excitement of being on the Universal Studios' sunny California grounds is greatly intensified as one enters the pitch black studios for a stunt-man show.

2. Contents With High Emotional Significance

The shows are compelling and "draw people in" because they deal with subjects that are very sensitive. The most obvious example is the Honeymooners Game. In this game, overt topics include love making, genitalia, sex secrets, and marital spats. Writers who study entertainment (e.g., Goodlad 1971; Lazarsfeld and Merton 1956) refer to this as "expressing the unexpressible." Sensitive topics also abound in the Comedy Show (e.g., "setting the man's tools on fire") and, to a lesser extent, in the Merrio Circus (When a gorilla rips the clothes off a woman from the audience). In a similar light, the country-and-western songs all deal with a strong fear, the fear of rejection and loneliness. ("I saw you with another woman, what can I do?"). Other themes in the country-and-western music include deviant behaviors such as alcoholism, adultery, gambling, crime, and consequent punishments (e.g., "Folsom Prison"). Less overtly, the joust has deep but veiled sexual significance (e.g., as mating ritual for females

or intense competition among phallic projections), while also touching on emotionally-loaded subjects such as violence and death.

3. Suspension of Disbelief and Other Inhibitions

Vacations are a time when people are freed from normal, day-to-day roles and obligations. Hence, the popularity of shows dealing with subjects which are usually suppressed is not surprising. The circus is a good example. Like medieval festivals, the circus turns normal role relationships upside-down. Just as masters become servants while servants become masters in medieval festivals such as Fasching, in the circus children make adults look funny while animals act out human behaviors (or vice versa for the fake gorilla).

4. Affirmation of Deep Convictions

In spite of role relationships, however, the vacation audience continues to represent middle class morality. And, often, this is what they continue to consume on holiday. Thus, curio shops do a heavy business in statues and T-shirts with pious, patriotic, and patronizing slogans (such as one shirt with a picture of a large bear carrying a rifle and captioned, "Support your right to arm bears"). Implicit messages in the vacation shows tending to reinforce conventional middle-class morality include the following:

- "The pretentious wind up looking stupid."
This theme is evident in many shows. Circus clowns make pompous ringmasters look foolish; comedy show performers mimic important-looking people falling in the mud, and Licentious Lou makes fun of newlyweds' pretenses about their sex lives before marriage.

- "Men should be men, and women should be women."
The sexism of lower middle-class morality is evident in many of the shows. In all of the country-and-western songs, women are represented as helpless and dependent ("I saw you with another woman, what can I do? I cried and cried"). In the Honeymooners Game, the master of ceremonies makes fun of the women ("You didn't see the mirror on the ceiling?") and asks only questions that treat women with inherent disrespect (e.g., "Would your husband say your breasts remind him of dried up bananas?")

- "What really counts in life is true love."

Country-and-western songs stress the value of love over all other things or considerations ("Satin sheets to lie on, but you don't keep me satisfied"). The most important moment in the joust comes at the end when the winning knight carries off the beautiful princess.

5. Sense of Some Other-Worldly, Instinctual Power at Work

Interestingly, many of the shows convey a notion that some other-worldly power or force is at work. Comedians in the Comedy Show act as if they are insane ("touched by the gods?"), and the joust scenario is based on the notion of some "good" force that overcomes evil. In the Weberian sense, circus performers are "charismatic" figures, gifted by the Gods with superhuman capabilities (Weber 1947). They look stronger, more beautiful (thanks, in part, to heavy makeup). They can perform impossible feats. In this connection, one of the circus performers backstage told a story about the animal acts:

It's eerie, but sometimes an old animal trainer will die and no one knows how to do his act. When that happens, the new trainer has to learn the act from the animals.

The implication here is that, once trained, the animals internalize some force which propels them to do their acts. This makes it possible for a new trainer to learn the acts from them. It also suggests some type of living presence of the dead trainer, who has passed away yet who still controls the animals. (In this sense, teachers--who are at least partly performers--cannot help but wonder if, through the expectations of their students, they are controlled by the ghosts of teachers past.)

6. Live Nature of Shows

The shows generate excitement because they are live. People seem to like live shows for several reasons. First, they feel that a live performance is much more personal, more intimate. Obviously, a television program broadcast to one hundred million people has difficulty generating this type of feeling. Second, live shows present the possibility of accidents. The Honeymooners audience is most aroused when the woman player balks at the host's questions. The country-and-western band builds excitement when they say, "We're going to *try* to do a number for you by Hank Williams now." Here, they imply that they *may* not be successful. Third, live performances bring the audience into personal contact with performers, thereby putting them closer to people with the

charismatic qualities referred to above.

Audiences seek this quality of intimacy with the great. Thus, playbill programs in theaters list the major television, movie, and theatrical productions the actors have appeared in. When interviewed backstage after the show, one of the circus performers said, "People are in awe of us. They think we travel around a lot and have exciting lives."

7. Reaction of the Researchers

The performances described in this chapter achieve significance on two levels not yet explored. First, the shows may be considered as "metagenres," insofar as they link "differentiated forms of symbolic action into new wholes by means of a common spatiotemporal location, expressive theme, affective style, ideological intention, or social function" (MacAloon 1984, 250). Second, collectively, these performances comprise a "metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (Turner 1985, 300-301). Through these performances, cultural meaning is negotiated in ceremonial and ritual fashion.

The performances occur in liminal time and liminal space, as critical incidents in what is readily construed as a pilgrimage (Belk 1987, Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; Sherry 1987). Core cultural values--the primacy of culture over nature, integrity, gender roles, fidelity, autonomy and competence, personal accountability, status equality, nostalgia, the uneasy dialectic of work and leisure, competitiveness, fair play, property, etc.--are performed, lampooned, and then re-enshrined through the vehicles of the shows. Participants are invited to meditate on the social order, to consider alternatives to the status quo, and to reaffirm tradition, in a highly charged ceremonial context. It is through such memorable and affecting experiences that the fundamental categories of cultural are continually reappraised and renewed. In an era when, increasingly, products are values for the experience they afford (McKenna 1988), the commoditization of ritual can be expected to have a growing impact on the (de-)formation of culture.

CONCLUSION

As indicated earlier, today's "performances" on television, stage, and movie screen descend ultimately from early religious festivals. People have always come together for expressive purposes, whether to bless harvests, to appease gods, or to celebrate victories. Interestingly, many religions still have strong performance components. Indeed, such components have gained increased impetus in recent charismatic movements. Thus, while the content of a

fundamentalist preacher's sermon matters, equally important is his/her showmanship or ability to excite the crowd by gestures and other histrionic or rhetorical devices.

Note that the focus here is on *forms*. The performance component of the preacher's sermon lies in how he exaggerates basic forms in his motions, speech, and images. In the same manner, professional wrestlers exaggerate the basic forms of wrestling in order to achieve a dramatic effect, even though true sports fans label it fake.

In a nutshell, a "performance" (whether a vacation performance or some other type) takes some basic form from everyday life and modifies or exaggerates it to achieve some effect on an audience. This effect changes the emotional or intellectual state of the audience (or both). Circuses put people in happy moods; country-and-western music shows render them melancholy and reflective; jousts permit them to learn about and contemplate medieval festivals as well as to laugh at the antics of the villains and court jesters.

In other words, like all services, performances or other forms of entertainment intended to cause changes in the state or condition of the customer. A barber cuts people's hair, while a comedian makes them laugh and takes their mind off their problems. It makes sense, therefore, that to compete more effectively, many service marketers increasingly include more performance components in their offerings. Restaurants now place more emphasis on a flashy presentation of foods than on the quality of the foods themselves. Similarly, an airline on the West Coast has become famous for the jokes and banter by its captains and crews during flights. And, of course, some professors who specialize in teaching business programs to executives are as famous for their stories and delivery as for the content of their lectures.

If television-related forms continue to influence peoples' expectations regarding other entertainment services, one might expect that they will also shape more non-entertainment services in the future. In this sense, as MacLuhan (1964) prophesied long ago, we may have found another case in which "the medium is the message."

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HIGHWAYS AND BUYWAYS: NATURALISTIC RESEARCH FROM THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ODYSSEY

**Russell W. Belk
Editor**