

[Parade Parodies on Screen: that can't be real, or could it be?](#)

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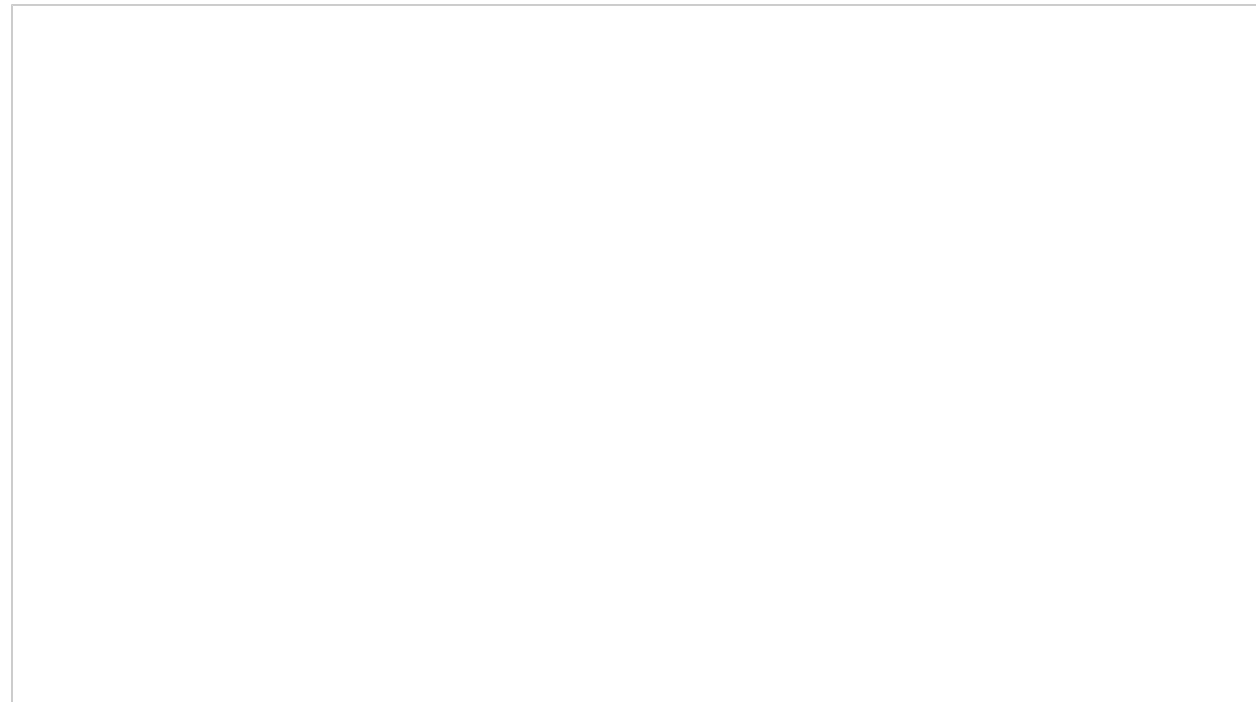


Are you a movie director, writer, or someone who thought, “you know, this show would be better with a parade scene”? No. Maybe you’re a person who believes parades are boring? Oh, the horror. Either way, I have a list of humorous parade parodies from movies, television commercials, sketch comedies, and live streaming broadcasts that are sure to make you reconsider what you think about a parade.

Since parades are recognizable, familiar scenes, often presenting a happy, family-friendly, positive image of local communities, they are excellent instruments of parody and subversion because we take them so seriously. People organizing, creating, and performing in parades are committing to serious, imaginative thought, money, time, physical and emotional energy, and maybe even pain. Spoofing the beloved parade form sounds villainous I know, but the examples I discuss have basically an affectionate, playful vs. aggressive attack quality.

Deep thoughts to prep you for the journey

Let’s think about what makes us laugh or squish our faces up. When have you thought to yourself, “Oh no, that is so wrong” or “You must be kidding” while watching something crazy, absurd, or completely inappropriate? Have you ever smiled and shaken your head side to side or dropped your jaw in astonishment of what you just saw or heard? What makes something funny or not funny?



Several helpful terms to think about when discussing humorous parades on screen: humor, parody, satire, mock-documentary

Humor is cultural, contextual, personal, and all kinds of other things. Humor studies, psychology, folklore and various academic fields have tried to understand it.¹ But deducing the exact ingredients, formula, or specific details that make a person laugh can be tedious and at times, idiosyncratic. In an interview with comic theorist and author, Scott McCloud, he posits a few ideas of humor. He suggests humor is read as cathartic (Mark Twain) and as a form of hostility (Sigmund Freud). McCloud refers to Art Spiegelman, another legendary comic author when suggesting that humor targets something, someone, some group, as a sort of victim of the joke. McCloud also states that humor can "inoculate a work from being overly solemn and overly self-important."² Other texts suggest distinct characteristics that could make something funny. For example, humor can come from an exaggeration of a real or stereotypical quality; an understatement; ambiguity or double entendre; a targeting of superiors; wordplay; surprise; or irony. Also, there are always the nonverbal humorous behavior cues like an-eye-roll, eyebrow lift, or hand gesture to emphasize a comic moment.³

Parody can be characterized in many ways too, as funny "humor based on distorting reality" or popular culture creatively reimagined in humorous, incongruous ways. It's often linked to a form of spoofing or "comic replication" or imitation of real-life or well-known film genres such as documentary, drama, horror, news broadcast, or home movies. It takes the familiar, recognizable subject and comically twists, distorts, and deflates the real-life version. Most importantly, parody needs to "trigger (the) viewer's prior knowledge" of a subject, style, character, event, place, society, culture, history, etc. This will enable greater viewer appreciation or offense, depending on the viewer.^{4,5}

And this leads me to a brief discussion of **Satire**. I consider satire to be more aggressively critical and can have more serious intent underlying the comic creation than parody. I enjoy satire tremendously, as it too, is double-edged and has the potential to blur the lines between reality and fiction. Some humorous parades scenes in movies veer more satiric than parodic, such as Charlie Chaplin's "The Great Dictator" and Sasha Baron Cohen's "The Dictator" which mock political figures. Some of the fictional parade scenes I describe below seem to waver between parody and satire at times, though most appear as playful, subversive commentary versus any intense criticism of the parade format or targeted subject, but I guess that is up for opinion.⁶

My disclaimer: how you interpret the following parades on screen as parody, satire, or just cruel or harmless mockery, will depend on you. Some viewers will appreciate the complete absurd twisting of what appears to be an accurate depiction of a parade structure and performance. For others, it might seem offensive though still valued for its realistic mimicry. And then there are those who will see these parades on screen as a distortion of the real thing and supremely inconsiderate and in bad taste or just silly. Twitter social media feeds and comments sections about movies or show episodes have been revealing in these cases, but then again, I can't always tell who is upset or merely feigning disgust and serious disappointment for the laughs. Again, no certainty to what degree you will be amused by these types of humorous parade examples since it depends on viewer environment, technological medium, annoyances with my academic deconstruction of funny stuff, and your personal and cultural knowledge and experiences.⁷

Lastly, **Mock Documentaries**, also known as moc-doc, faux doc, fake doc, pseudo-doc, spoof doc, 'cinema verite with a wink' can best be understood as fictional forms that appropriate documentary style/aesthetic.^{8, 9} For example, a filmmaker may use cinematic techniques, symbols, and everyday references to suggest this is a serious representation of a parade while simultaneously tweaking, distorting, altering the themes, characters, props, storyline, or other aspects for humorous effect. I considered discussing codes and conventions, denotations and connotations, and various Media and Film Studies terminology alongside a talk of Umberto Eco's *Articulations of Cinematic Code*, but I'm afraid I'll drive you aware from my writing quicker than I already have with my lengthy introduction.^{10,11} Just know that humans typically recognize and associate certain things, actions, symbols, signs, with particular meanings and the mock-documentary filmmaker's skill is in the ability to twist the recognizable into something unexpectedly funny.

FILM ANALYSIS: PARADE PARODIES AND SATIRES ON SCREEN

“Drop Dead Gorgeous” is a 1999 mock documentary, dark comedy. It is a movie directed by Michael Patrick Jann and written by Lona Williams about small-town beauty pageant contestants in Mount Rose, Minnesota. And with pageants, you often have the idea of a sweet, innocent, delicate, virginal-like princess competing for a crown. However, this movie subverts all these ideas, and the parade scene is no exception.

I begin with a *mise-en-scène* critique of the parade, describing what is filmed and how it is filmed. In the parade scene, there are all the elements of a typical parade and documentary film aesthetic, right until it doesn't. For example, the entire movie has a documentary film crew mainly unobtrusively following the contestants around, capturing their daily life through observational (fly on the wall, spectator positions) and interactive (interview, testimonial interactions) modes of filming. A proper documentary, technically.^{12,13,14,15}

Surprisingly and entertainingly, the contestants' personal stories and parade happenings are absurdly exaggerated and over the top comedic. Though from personal experience documenting numerous real rural town pageants, I've heard contestants describe their proudest accomplishments as hunting to riding 4-wheelers and driving tractors and that probably wouldn't be thought typical beauty queen behavior. I wasn't even an ideal beauty queen myself having won my first pageant because I choreographed my carnation flower to a banjo playing mc and lost my third one because I didn't know wide leg sitting in a gown was inappropriate and noticeable to judges.

So, there are many aspects of the movie's parade scene that ring true and authentic. For example, the technical placement, framing, of two beauty pageant contestants in formal gowns and coiffed hair sitting on the back seat of a convertible while waiting behind a decorated float is familiar parade imagery. I've documented in real-life, many beauty queen contestants in convertibles, as well as contestants sitting on hoods of cars and truck beds and standing out of sunroofs, and possibly on a riding lawn mower, horse, horse carriage, and towed swamp boat. Though, I admit I always think of the convertible and decorated float as quintessential parade rides and a more believable parade prop as a queen conveyance.

This one particularly humorous and inappropriate parade scene of the movie with two pretty and poised contestants, the 1st and 2nd runner-ups, begins as a classic reproduction of a parade scene. Except it appears the contestants are uncomfortably choking on the queen's parade float exhaust smoke. The smoke connoting the toxicity of this crowned pageant winner who is visually pretty on the surface but obviously cruel, tone-deaf, and full of insults with a smile. The smoke, literally, and the crowned winner, figuratively, both potentially make people sick and helpless. Also, this might be a hint to who has been killing and maiming the competition. The scene continues with these

contestants conversing, one asking the other to hide her neck, ears, and inner thigh hickies if she were to die from the gas fumes. It's the conversation topic, timing, and exasperated response to the questions that builds the laugh as the bite mark locations become more embarrassingly intimate.

Then there's the banter between the crowned winner and her stereotypical, aggressive pageant mother who was a former Teen Princess winner herself. In tragically, and insanelly over the top, gallows humor, the swan float of the crowned princesses explodes, and the mother freaks out, screaming insults while yelling "the swan ate my baby!" and confessing about the contestant attacks. It's dark. It's mocking the sanctity of pageant royalty and parades, the quaint Minnesota rural town and accent, high school stereotypes, and so many other things. Yet, I can't help but appreciate the accuracy and insanity of this version of beauty pageants and small-town life.¹⁶

"Drop Dead Gorgeous" movie parade scene (1999)

Farmer's Insurance "Hall of Claims: Red Hot Mascot" is a thirty second, 2017, U.S. commercial that begins with a three-piece-suited, Farmers Insurance man walking a potential customer through their museum of mishaps, which kind of reminds me of my recent visit to the traveling popup, Museum of Failure. Deliciously funny and unappetizingly sad simultaneously, like the frozen Lasagna dish sold by the Colgate toothpaste company and the partially-eaten snack, Grizzly Chomps, marketed by Hostess bakery products.¹⁷ Product failures, parade failures, and scenarios with disastrous outcomes are good fodder for laughs sometimes, even if it seems in bad taste.

The flashback scene of the insurance-covered mishap is revealed in a wide angle shot of a parade scene with festive identifiers of red, white, and blue draped banners on buildings and cheering fans waving pompons and balloons. A title with the assumed date of the documented mishap overlays the action suggesting time-period authenticity. In the background is a marching band in walking formation with multiple brass tubas on display. They wear identical, military style, black, red, and white uniforms while playing traditional John Philip Sousa sounding musical arrangements. You've heard this music and probably have an imaginary parade forming in your mind right now, even if you never heard of Mr. Sousa the man.

As the camera tightens, it focuses on a costumed mascot with a smiling molded head of red and yellow flames. This mascot cheerily rides on the backseat of a convertible gesturing with molded fire-looking gloves to the crowd. Quickly the camera shifts to serious-looking individuals on the curb yelling variations of a "you're on fire" line. First, there's the surprised, wide-eyed girl yelling the line. Followed by a man, holding a soda and straw, who yells the line in a matter-of-fact, it's so obvious, dude, vocal tone. Each time, the camera returns to the mascot who is shown responding excitedly with a "you bet I am" and an "oh yeah" line while air guitar shredding. At last, a woman points with her pompom and yells the line, adding directions for the mascot to look behind him/her/it. The ironic wordplay between these individuals and the mascot is now clear as the camera focuses on the mascot seeing these large flames spewing from the convertible trunk. The camera shifts angles, so it feels as if we, the viewers, are standing behind people in the crowd, witnessing the chaos as it unfolds, more like a voyeur/spectator accidentally catching a crazy spectacle. The mascot upon awareness of the flame danger, panics and screams while clumsily falling off the car in a funny, over-the-top

exaggerated slapstick performance. The scene cuts back to the museum scene, and the insurance man continues with ironic wordplay suggesting, “that’s one way to fire up a crowd, but we covered it” followed by a scene of a car trunk with flames and “Hot 1” license plate.

A humorous parade parody embedded within a real television commercial for an actual product. The end marketing jingle, “We- are-Farmer’s--, bump, bump bump, bump, bump, bump bump” further validates its association with the real. (*Check out Tish and Cord’s various versions of the jingle. You’ll know who these parade hosts are at the end if you don’t already.)

Farmer's Insurance "Hall of Claims: Red Hot Mascot" commercial (2017)

Portlandia “Allergy Pride Parade” (Season 2, Episode 2, aired in 2012) is a Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein’s sketch comedy short videos. Every detail, from the parade host announcers’ clothing and presentation to the bleacher decorations, sounds of a marching band, audience clapping, and the participation of groups representing various interests fit the cultural model of a real parade and live event broadcast. Except that, it’s a hilarious, absurd parody of a parade of allergy sufferers. Not the cheeriest of themes, nor something typically celebrated or proudly paraded to the public, unless you are pretending you have allergies when you really have a cold and don't want people to think you're contagious. And with any parody, there's often lampooning of the real. So with this heightened awareness of all sorts of allergies nowadays, its good comedic material for a series known for making fun of all kinds of human behaviors and concerns.

Their sketch begins with a construction of a convincing parade event. The wide camera shot pans across decorated bleachers and parade participants twirling, dancing, and motorizing along the route. The camera moves to a close-up of the parade host announcers, Linda Lawrence and Marc Gimmer. They sit beside each other at a table with mics labeled with radio/television station identifiers. Linda sports perfect hair-sprayed hair and a mint green suit jacket, turtleneck ensemble. Marc wears a starched suit and a tie in a beige color palette.

The hosts announce each upcoming parade participant, while on-screen digital titles display affiliations and associated allergies. The participants appear sad and miserable, which is completely opposite to the expected and encouraged happy smiling, waving, and energetic performances typical of a parade. At times, even the host, Marc, appears annoyed and less than enthused as he laughs in a flat tone and comments sarcastically.

As each of the allergy sufferers of dairy, wheat, soy, peanuts, shellfish, and makeup are presented, the absurdity of this kind of celebration grows. Familiar parade characters are upturned, such that there is a clown, but he’s sad and not in makeup due to a makeup allergy. There is a choreographed dance routine on stilts. Though it's not a parade dance, you would imagine. Instead, it's a person convulsing from an allergic reaction to shellfish, which is surprisingly entertaining. The routine also reminds me of Pepto Bismol commercials where people perform stomach ache, diarrhea and nausea dance moves. Funny and well done choreographies about unappealing bodily functions.

When the hosts announce the parade princess is coming up in the line-up, my mind immediately goes to stock images of a crowned girl waving and smiling. However, the next camera shot is an

ambulance, also a frequent community service symbol that appears in many parades along with firetrucks and police cars. The ambulance is carrying the parade princess who is allergic to air, water, and sun; though all we see is her signature pageant wave, albeit feebly, out the back window of the ambulance. It's an extreme example of allergy suffering and an unexpected presentation of a parade princess.

Other parade participants that seem equally incongruous to our expectations are the punks and bikers. The Soi! Punks, a group of angry punks with a soy allergy, are funny cause soy is often culturally associated with bourgeoisie while punk screams working class. Not saying that soy can't be enjoyed by all social classes, but for many, it's just the milk option, no almond milk or rice milk in the bag. And there is the Bug Off Bike Club, a motorcycle gang with insect bite allergies. These big guys on bikes, smacking their arms, seems contrary to the image of tough and rough rebels on wheels. Eventually, and ironically, the parade host, Linda, succumbs to her allergy to dextrose, presumably contained in the thrown parade candy. She chokes, then falls off the stage, and winds up at the end of the parade carried in a hearse. It's disturbingly funny and offensive like many a good parody.

Portlandia "Allergy Pride Parade" comedy sketch (2012)

“Rose Parade hosted by Cord and Tish” Streaming live on Amazon Prime, 2018. It was half fiction/half real news coverage of the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. Years of watching the actual parade on television and visiting the floats after the event, I can say, never was the parade so entertaining to me as this year. I do appreciate the serious “craftsmanship and showmanship” of the real thing, but I needed a good laugh, and these eccentric faux TV anchors put quite a spin on the familiar parade.¹⁸ The fictional characters, Tish Cattigan (former Arizona beauty queen and writer of relationship books) and Cord Hosenbeck (basset hound dog breeder and writer of over 30 books) play TV host characters with earnestness and degrees of inappropriateness.¹⁹ Throughout the show, the off-mic comments overheard, uncomfortable emotional moments / exchanges and the off-the-wall parade trivia, fake and real, interspersed with actual live parade camera footage made this an insane comedic endeavor. Actual Twitter accounts and websites were even created for the host characters.^{20,21,22} These comedian hosts, known for their work on SNL (“Saturday Night Live” TV show) and other comedy shows, cleverly imitated real parade hosts’ behaviors, and appearances with such accuracy, while still injecting it with the nuttiest, most unexpected, funny and ridiculous parodic commentary.

The accuracy of the performance and digital streaming medium eventually led to a number of viewers believing it was real. Some of them voiced their disgust and dissatisfaction with the program on Twitter feeds and Amazon comments' sections. In addition, upset viewers posted one star reviews and complained, saying it was unwatchable, painful, offensive, idiotic, narcissistic, garbage, irrelevant, the worst, rude, disrespectful, and unforgiveable.²³ Crazy, that made it funnier, though probably not their intention. However, who knows, setting up a good joke often requires the straight man or woman, willingly or unknowingly.

(Thinking about what other Tish, Cord and Tim Meadows footage and comments to upload, but this might be the only legal ones I can add. Oh, but there is the 'Copyright

Disclaimer Under Section 107 of the Copyright Act 1976, so maybe I should add more)

I end with this, parades in a movie can be more than a cover for a good guy/bad guy battle or a moment of frivolous abandonment. And sometimes it's just that, but sometimes it's more.

* the consequence of my analysis of funny parades, might have made this a very unfunny blog. Apologies for killing the frog.²⁴

"Drop Dead Gorgeous" movie parade scene (1999)
Farmer's Insurance "Hall of Claims: Red Hot Mascot" commercial (2017)
Portlandia "Allergy Pride Parade" comedy sketch (2012)
"Rose Parade coverage by hosts, Tish and Cord" (2018)
["Animal House"](#) movie parade scene (1978);
[Saturday Night Live "Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade"](#) sketch (2017)
[Portlandia "Bigot's Parade"](#) sketch (2014)
[Documentary Now! "A Town, A Gangster, A Festival"](#) short video/ mock-documentary (2015)
[My brother, my brother, and me "Tarantulas and Travis did a Hit"](#) Season 1, Episode 3 video/podcast
"Mindhorn" Netflix movie parade scene (2016)
"Okja" Netflix movie parade scene (2017)
["Ferris Bueller's Day Off"](#) movie parade scene (1986)
"Miss Firecracker" movie parade scene (1989)
"Paprika" movie parade scene (2006)
["Hey Look, a parade!: 15 films that use colorful city festivals as backdrops"](#) on AVCLUB website by Steven Hyden, Vadim Rizov, Keith Phipps, Todd VanDerWerff, Tasha Robinson, and John Teti, June 13, 2011.
["5 Famous Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade Scenes in Film and TV"](#) on TIME website by Laura Stampler, November 26, 2014.

Footnotes

¹Academic organizations focusing on humor

- <http://www.humorstudies.org>
- <https://americanhumorstudiesassociation.wordpress.com>
- <https://networks.h-net.org/tags/humor-studies>

²Doug McClean, "Scott McCloud on the Secret of Humor," *The Atlantic* magazine, Feb 4, 2015.

³Louis R. Franzini, 2012, *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively*, pp 131-135.

⁴Craig Hight, 2012, "Ch. 5 Experiments in Parody and Satire: Short-Form Mockumentary Series," In Miller, Cynthia J., *Too Bold for the Box Office: The Mockumentary from Big Screen to Small* (ProQuest Ebook central) pp 1-16.

⁵Wes Gehring, 1999, "Ch. 1 Parody Overview" in *Parody as Film Genre: Never Give a Saga an Even Break* (ProQuest Ebook Central), pp 1-25.

⁶Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, 2001, *Faking it: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, 2006, "Introduction Phony Definitions and Troubling Taxonomies of the Fake Documentary" In Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truths Undoing*, pp 1-35.

⁹James Monaco, 2009, *How to read a film: movies, media, and beyond*.

¹⁰Umberto Eco's, 1976, *Articulations of Cinematic Code*.

¹¹James Monaco, 2009, *How to read a film: movies, media, and beyond*.

¹²Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, 2001, *Faking it: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*

¹³Jennifer Van Sijill, 2005, *Storytelling: The Hundred most powerful film conventions every filmmaker must know*.

¹⁴Bill Nichols, 2001, *Introduction to Documentary*.

¹⁵Bill Nichols, 1991, *Representing Reality*.

¹⁶"Drop Dead Gorgeous" movie script <http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/dropdeadgorgeous.html>

¹⁷Museum of Failure traveling pop-up museum from Sweden <http://failuremuseum.com> and Museum of Failed Products, Ann Arbor, Michigan

¹⁸CW KTLA channel, live television coverage of the Rose Parade in Pasadena, CA January 1, 2018

¹⁹Tish and Cord Host the Rose Parade in partnership with Amazon Prime and Funny or Die

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<http://deadline.com/2017/11/will-ferrell-molly-shannon-host-rose-parade-amazon-funny-or-die-cord-hosenbeck-tish-cattigan-1202213750/>

• "Amazon Users Angered Over Will Ferrell, Molly Shannon Rose Parade Parody"

<http://variety.com/2018/tv/news/amazon-will-ferrell-molly-shannon-rose-parade-1202650939/>

• "Eleven most out there tish and cord comments" <https://www.thewrap.com/cord-and-tish-jokes-molly-shannon-will-ferrell-rose-parade-2018/>

²⁰Websites for Cord - <https://www.cordhosenbeck.com> and <https://twitter.com/cordhosenbeck?lang=en>

²¹Website for Tish - <https://twitter.com/tishcattigan?lang=en>

²²[Amazon Prime site for Rose Parade with Hosts Tish and Cord](#)

²³Ibid.

²⁴Reference to E.B. White's quote about humor

*footnote format is not formal, but consistent in informality

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