

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Clipping Beauty, Clipping Intelligence

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Happy New Year (!) from Your on the Street Reporter.¹ For all of us, may 2015 be better than 2014. May we have the same joys, fewer sorrows, more successes, and fewer failures. May you and I also keep the same breathing habits. If we can remain loyal unto our past practices, they might even continue to help us keep breathing. It is not insignificant that the old saying, “Habits die hard” is interpreted in more ways than one.

Taking on the New Year, last night, I was watching a television program devoted to a Library of Congress award (The Gershwin Prize) to Billy Joel for his contribution to popular music. Being a fan of Mr. Joel, I was looking forward to the show, hoping I would see and hear this talented man leave his seat in the audience, and come to the stage to play his magic.

Entertainer Michael Feinstein spoke about Joel's accomplishments over the years, stating: “The Gershwin Prize recognizes and celebrates the link between classic American song and contemporary music. Art is a continuum, and the choice of Billy Joel as this year’s recipient is an eloquent demonstration of how new music is born from the inspiration of what came before.”

Toward the end of the program, Mr. Joel came on-stage. He sang and played several of his compositions, including “Piano Man,” the last piece of the evening. Kevin Stacey played the harmonica and sang the lyrics for this piece, an extraordinary performance.

I was not disappointed with the contributing musicians/singers, such as Tony Bennett, Josh Groban, John Mellencamp, and the dancers. This latter ensemble danced to several of Billy’s pieces. During these performances, I was spell-bound, especially one duet piece created by Twyla Tharp.

Clipping Beauty

Make that somewhat spell-bound. The participants were performing on a large stage. From an initial clip, I could see the entire stage and all the dancers as they enthralled the audience to the tunes of Mr. Joel. But not for long. For the remainder of the program, only short video clips were shown of their movements. The same held true for video images of Billy Joel, the audience (including U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and former Justice Sandra Day O’Conner), and the accompanying band.

I was not surprised by seeing these short clips. The practice of feeding one, two, or three-second snippets of stimuli for our senses has become the standard way of presenting information to viewers. I have become somewhat inured to this practice of clipped presentations. But not entirely. Its dominant presence on many media has led me to read more books and watch less television.

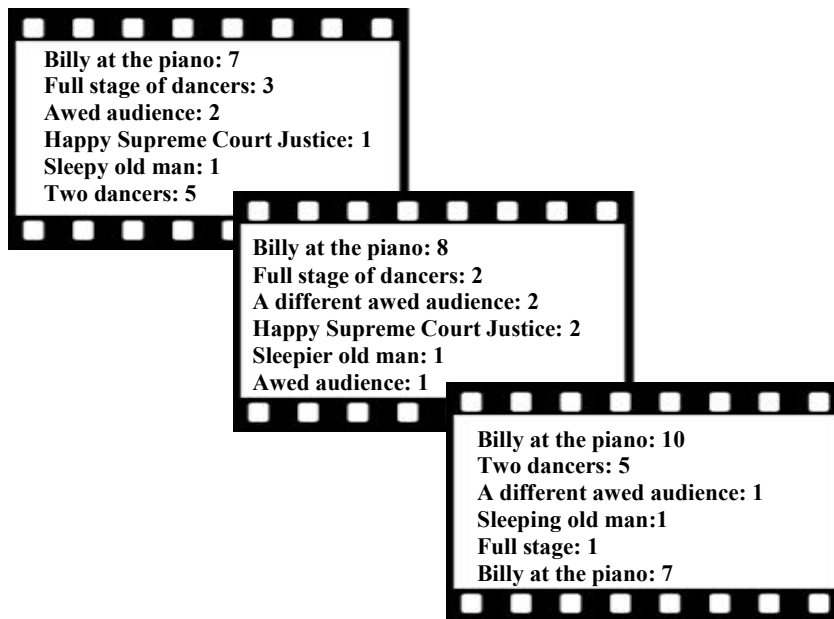
¹As part of my New Year’s resolution, I pledged to my editors that I would reduce the use of exclamation points at the end of my sentences.

For last night’s program, it was particularly disruptive. Before long, I was distracted from the show and began to concentrate on how often and how long these clips came about. The figure below reflects a typical 60-second timeframe during which Billy Joel was playing.

In keeping with today’s trends of dispensing information, I have created visual images of the event to aid any reader who is paragraph-impaired. I have also taken the liberty of using line-art of a film frame to symbolize the playing of Mr. Joel’s show. I considered simply listing the sequence of the clips, but that approach would have simulated literacy without visual aids, a no-no in today’s image-laden world.

I also considered using a computer chip for the figure, as it would represent today’s digital and audio worlds. But a picture of boring silicon and associated unromantic chemicals would be not be provocative enough to entice a reader to delve further. (Not us, of course!)

The captions inside the frame represent the images presented on the TV screen and the number of seconds the image was on the screen. This sequence is not an exact re-enactment, as I recorded this mentally while watching, and not on a notepad (and with a small bit of tongue-in-cheek). But it is an accurate reflection of what a television viewer beheld. The numbers after each clip denote how long (in seconds) video was on the screen.



I would have liked to have seen more of the full stage in which the dancers displayed their skills. For the somnolent old man to Billy’s right, perhaps fewer clips. A couple shorts would have sufficed.

Clipping Intelligence

I understand the idea of clips that veer away from the images that led me to tune to the channel in the first place. I support the concept of these clips permitting more than the performers to participate ---however vicariously---to its production. From the distant vantage of a small screen,

I understand why these short clips of performers and audience are intended to draw us into the screen, into the event itself.

That said, 18 videos clips were shown in 60 seconds. Just as I was about to adjust my visual and mental focus, a new scene appeared. The full stage of the dance troupe was shown infrequently and for a couple seconds. Perhaps I'm showing impatience, my age, or my curmudgeonly personality. Perhaps all three, but I found the visual and audio bites distracting.

Although the performers do not know they are being clipped at the time, they later see that the commercial recording of (perhaps) their one chance at glory has been eclipsed by the face of a person in the audience. Some people would call this practice demeaning to the performers, and I would be hard pressed to argue their point.

The practice of short clips is common today. Arnold can kill hundreds of bad-guys in 20 one-second shots. What an adrenaline pump! More Arnold, we want more! Just don't take so long.

We see the practice on the news, MTV, advertisements, and other presentations. It is as if viewers do not have the intelligence to absorb an image for more than a few seconds. I would not be surprised if Twitter set up new rules that shortened text messages, as 140 characters might be seen as taxing the frontal cortex. Or Beethoven's Fifth being cut to its first four notes, so listeners can get back to their iPads.

What is gained by short clips? More for the visual and audio buck? Less boredom? I venture to say what is often *gained* is superficiality and lack of much understanding about the subject.

One thing for sure, clipping non-audience performances such as a movie or TV scene takes pressure off the performer. The performer does not have to give a consistent performance, only bursts of skill. The less adroit parts are edited-out, with re-takes pasted in with the other clips.

I cannot fathom how movie actors can endure take-after-take of "A rabbit, George!" (from *Mice and Men*.) Our son Tommy has "taped" me on more than one occasion for video programs. I am abjectly incompetent reciting scripted dialogue. Yet precise second-by-second renditions were needed to produce a 60-second trailer for YouTube. Tom had me do take-after-take. By the day's end, I was ready to lay a hand on my son for the first time in his life! (Sorry editors.)

Overall, my work for that afternoon was at best, a C-. Tom's editing rendered the material into a delightful video, as seen on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moTIKxrCR3w&list=FLTp1Q5GQ4Gq4jE5H-3EXX2A.>²

A 4 Minute 33, Second Non-cut Classic

Try an experiment. Watch a current singer's performance on television. Then go to YouTube and retrieve Judy Garland singing "The man that got Away" from the movie *A Star is Born* (See picture on next page for a shot of the "alternative take 2" version of the song).

² Tom and a colleague also wrote the music and lyrics for the trailer.

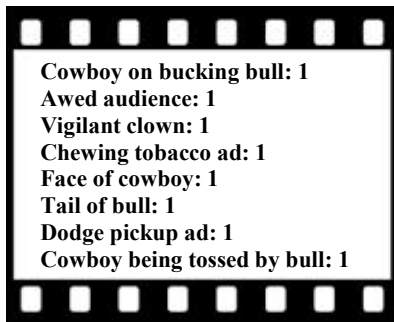


Ms. Garland did this 4 ½ minute classic with one “clip.” The continuity of the performance---no sudden shots to a trombone player, etc.---showed the talents of the singer, the musicians, and the choreographer. (The film editors’ union were likely not happy.)

Trends

- Golf is coming under assault because it takes too long to play 18 holes.
- Tennis, the same, as a player gets two tries to put in a serve.
- So is baseball, because it’s a leisurely game of nine innings.
- So is foreplay, because “fore” means before, which requires waiting for a climax.

Here is a video clip of the future of bull riding, in which the rider tries to stay mounted on the bull for 8 seconds:



Have I destroyed your love of the images you see for entertainment? Good, complain a bit. Maybe it will result in our watching a singer sing, or a dancer dance for more than three seconds at a time.