Culture

# A Mutual Parody of Meaning in Circus Clown and Ethnographic Discourse

Kenneth Little

Volume 11, Number 1-2, 1991

DE LA MÉTHODE À LA MODESTIE : FAIRE ET PENSER L'ETHNOGRAPHIE AUJOURD'HUI
FROM METHOD TO MODESTY: ESSAYS ON THINKING AND MAKING ETHNOGRAPHY NOW

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084476ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1084476ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)
2563-710X (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Little, K. (1991). A Mutual Parody of Meaning in Circus Clown and Ethnographic Discourse. *Culture*, *11*(1-2), 77–92. https://doi.org/10.7202/1084476ar

Article abstract

This article traces some of the conversations between a European circus clown named Pipo and myself in order to draw out the characteristics of intertextuality that I argue are key features of the ethnographic endeavour. Central to our conversations was a concern with our mutual productions of identity as clown artist and ethnographer. I explore how ambiguous, parodic, and subversive such productions can be. Along the way Pipo taught me a few good jokes and something of how to tell them and I try them out on modernist anthropology in an effort to make this "body" of knowledge/power parodic.

# A Mutual Parody of Meaning in Circus Clown and Ethnographic Discourse

Kenneth Little

York University

*Do you have a dirty word problem?*
Lenny Bruce

*What metaphor adds to the ordinary is an achievement that uses no semantic resources beyond the resources on which the ordinary depends. There are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor "means" or "says"; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste. A metaphor implies a kind and degree of artistic success; there are no unsuccessful metaphors, just as there are no unfunny jokes.*
Donald Davidson, ***What Metaphors Mean.***

This article traces some of the conversations between a European circus clown named Pipo and myself in order to draw out the characteristics of intertextuality that I argue are key features of the ethnographic endeavour. Central to our conversations was a concern with our mutual productions of identity as clown artist and ethnographer. I explore how ambiguous, parodic, and subversive such productions can be. Along the way Pipo taught me a few good jokes and something of how to tell them and I try them out on modernist anthropology in an effort to make this "body" of knowledge / power parodic.

*Cet article présente quelques unes des conversations entre un clown de cirque européen nommé Pipo et l'auteur dans le but de dégager les caractéristiques intertextuelles que l'auteur soutient comme étant la clef de voûte de la démarche ethnographique. Le point central de cette discussion se rapporte aux productions mutuelles identitaires de l'artiste clown et de l'ethnographe. L'auteur explore comment de telles productions peuvent être ambiguës, parodiques et subversives. Tout au long de leurs rencontres, Pipo lui enseignera quelques bonnes blagues, la manière de raconter et que l'auteur expérimentera en anthropologie moderniste dans un effort de constituer ce «corps» de connaissance/ pouvoir parodique.*

In this paper, I describe a double movement that demonstrates the intertextuality of conversations between myself and a young whiteface clown artist, Pipo Sosman, Jr., that took place during the 1983 season at Circus Knie in Switzerland.[1] On the one hand, I shall attempt to draw out aspects of Pipo's circus and comic self-fashioning as a whiteface clown — an overpowering, authoritative, and elegant task master — as they emerged in our conversations. On the other hand, I shall explore what clown self-fashioning can say about ethnographic self-fashioning (after Clifford 1988:93-94). Tied to my conversation with Pipo is my conversation with the body of anthropological discourse by which I often find myself caught as if by my own whiteface clown; it is a discourse laudable for its brilliance and sophistication, laughable for its officiousness and I am mindful of its potential to administer stiff penalties upon those who dare not take its authority seriously.

The point I want to make is that if there is a meaning to be made of my conversations with Pipo it is in what we, the conversation partners, make of our talk, on our own or together, during the time our conversations took place or later upon further reflection. The issue is not just that of recognizing the power and significance of dialogue, but of under-

standing precisely how dialogue works and how meaning is produced in the interactions of speakers.

In examining Pipo's circus and clown self-fashioning I shall show how he attempts to create his clown work and identity as a unified voice by subscribing to a particular reification of his tradition through which he produces his notions of performance work and self. I, however, am not happy with simply telling his story the way he wants it told — i.e., "from the native point of view." I attempt to stay clear of presenting, and do not wish to describe, a controlling point of view from within the circus, making the native point of view the author's (my) point of view. Instead, I have decided to evoke something of the dynamics of our conversation and of the various voices or narrative contexts of which our conversations were constituted. Thus, my goal is to explore the polyvocal nature of our conversations.

While I decline simply to describe a native point of view, and in fact am critical of it, I equally decline to tell a story from a positioned, univocal, authorial stance where the ethnographer has final influence over the text and thereby gains authenticity. My argument suggests that there is no authorial point of view in the subjects of conversation between Pipo and me. Nevertheless, there is a subject matter, however polyphonous it might be, that we share and it has to do with parody and comedy. I shall describe some of the comedy involved in my attempt to write an ethnographic account that remained true to the anthropological struggle to find a coherent semantic world of native understandings and practices in Pipo's work and life as a clown.

The problem, as I shall describe it, was that my subject matter, Pipo, always threatened to come apart. Any unified semantic content of his life and work, like a joke, is fragmentary, diffused and only partially shared over our differing points of view and social contexts. These fragments may be related in the context of our conversation, but there is no overarching sense that links them as a coherent whole in the way that interpretive anthropologists like to think possible. The point of all this is to show how the dialogue between Pipo and me was open-ended, plurivocal, and intertextual.

## *Dialogue and Authority*

My ethnographic narrative is dialogical in a way that is somewhat different from most critics' use of the term. For example, one of the most compelling critiques of dialogical ethnography has been put forward by Richard Handler (1985) who, after Clifford (1988), accuses those who attempt to write such ethnography of duplicity. Handler (1985:172) defines dialogue as the "[nonmanipulative] inclusion of other voices alongside that of the author." In a comment on Todorov's attempt at writing a dialogical text, *The Conquest of America* (1984), Handler makes the claim that representations of dialogues like those that take place between Todorov and Christopher Columbus may look as if they are displacements of ethnographic authority but, in fact, only confirm the underlying control of the author. Or as Handler puts it:

> *[I]t is one thing to let others (in this case, the sixteenth-century Europeans) speak in words they once uttered but no longer control, through texts that we choose, edit, and contextualize. It is quite another to invite them to share in the final preparation of a text that will be presented to the public* (1985:172).

Dialogical ethnography is doomed because for all of its criticality, the ethnographer still assumes the dominant voice as the editor of what others say and do. Hence the duplicity.

Handler wants to replace dialogical anthropology with what Edward Sapir called "destructive analysis of the familiar and the exotic." He applies Sapir's idea to the analysis of ideologies of cultural distinctiveness among nationalist and ethnic groups. The cultural logic and social idiom that support claims of distinctiveness and theories of cultural difference among nationalists, Handler argues, are usually shared by the social scientists who study them. This "suggests a massive commonality underlying and facilitating the construction or interpretation of cultural difference" (Handler 1985:178). Given this common agreement between nationalists and those writing the ethnography of nationalist groups, a

> *destructive analysis of shared premises is more important than a dialogue with those who share them. Indeed, in this case dialogue will amount to little more than mutually confirming, rather than critically examining, each other's beliefs* (Handler 1985:178).

Handler is right to argue that dialogue rendered as text — the consequence of all dialogue made into ethnography — is really monological since the informants' words are mediated through the ethnographer's dominant, editorial voice. He is right, however, because he defines dialogue literally

as the direct speech of informants and ethnographer in communication. If such dialogue were left unedited it would be almost unintelligible, a confusing and chaotic rendering of questions and answers, thoughts and half-thoughts, false beginnings and promising endings to narratives that shift erratically from topic to topic, full of intrusions, strange voices, interruptions, long silences, and interesting leads.

My understanding of dialogue is different than this. It is closer to what Stephen Tyler has in mind when he suggests that ethnography, if it is to be dialogical, should be a kind of intertextuality, the project of which is not to uncover "the other in univocal descriptions which allegorically identify the other's differences as our interest." Rather such an ethnography must be "a fantasy of identities, a plurivocal evocation of differences making a unity that seems to inform it, and reveals between every line the difference it conceals in every word, that it might not speak for the other 'for us', but let the other's voice be heard, too, and not just 'for us', but 'for both of us'" (Tyler 1987:102). Following the Tyler line on intertextuality, albeit idiosyncratically, I want to put forth a concept of dialogue that suggests some of the shortcomings in Handler's notion of destructive analysis and then, in a provisional way, provide a description of some conversations I had with Pipo.

In his attempt not to be manipulated by others' self-assignations and in his willingness to share with his informants his suspicions of the reliability of his and their cultural categories, Handler leaves unexplored a crucial cultural objectification, that of his own constitution as "author". As a provocative "author", Handler is looking for a "true dialogue", one at least critical of the common Western vocabulary of self-description. But as the self-appointed "destroyer" of the shared and natural giveness of the cultural categories that the author and informants assume, Handler still remains the transcendental manipulator of texts.

The conception of the "author" here is of a uniquely positioned self, writing critical accounts of those who assume that their own lives are natural and objectively real. Foucault (1984:113) points out that the cultural category of the "author", as a unique self, is determined by various forces that define him/her at a constant level of cultural value and accord him/her a particular theoretical coherence and stylistic unity through which all events are observed, recorded and deciphered. While critical ethnographers like Handler recognize that the author is a historically and culturally constituted entity, they fail to recognize the deeper implication of such a claim: namely, that the "author" is not a "real" individual writing "real" texts, but is several selves that occupy different and intercontextualized positions in a text so that, as Foucault (1984:112) suggests, there is no overarching "I" to the text but rather a set of socially constituted "I's" . Thinking of the "author" of an ethnography in this way means recognizing that there is no panoptic "I" (eye) on a search and destroy mission equipped with a method of demystification and attempting to reach a position outside the conventional uses of language. It is to demonstrate how the writing of an ethnography is caught up in language, in a proliferation of voices and vocabularies as "reported speech". It is to demonstrate that all language and linguistic signs are unconventional — language as contingency rather than system or coherence.

Put this way, any account of the dialogue between Pipo and me is also a recognition of the historical and social sedimentations of language use and of the partiality of the accounts of such uses. Such a speech situation is what Voloshinov/Bakhtin called "reported speech" rather than "direct speech."[2] Reported speech does not restrict the practice of a dialogue to simple and direct communication, to the talk that goes on between a speaker (Pipo or me) and an addressee (Pipo or me) in the present (the ethnographic present) and in a determined social context (whatever was going on at the time of our conversation and at the time of my writing). Dialogue is more than just the primary voices of the informants and dialogue partner. It is also "speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance" (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1973:115).

Voloshinov/Bakhtin observed that all speech is reported speech. For example, the speech acts of an ethnographer and dialogue partner carry with them and actively receive other speakers' speech in various historical and social contexts. This reception of other voices in one's speech acts makes speech dialogical. Our words, conversation, and writing are never just our own. Rather, they are part of an arena of juxtaposed texts suggesting that in every linguistic sign we use there is disagreement, heterogeneity, and conflicting viewpoints. The point is not merely that there are several linguistic styles, cultural contexts, and alternative voices in the sign, a presence measured by purely linguistic criteria, but that these

styles, contexts, and voices are juxtaposed, counterposed, and productive of every speech act we and others make. By showing that the ethnographer and dialogue partner continually call into question one another's beliefs and opinions and that the conversations we share are fraught with difference, we can resist the conventional cultural practice of portraying the ethnographer as the "author" and our dialogue partner as a unified, bounded entity.

Tyler (1987:58), after Bakhtin (1988:252-253), argues that all writing goes back to the human voice of the living subject, to dialogue. There is no speech act that is completely unique, that is not "always already" spoken, no voice that is plain and simple. Determinations of uniqueness and simplicity neglect the rhetorical force of "other-voicedness" in every voice that is reported in an ethnography. Language is always "other voicedness" because it is "not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's [author's or dialogue partner's] intentions; it is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1988:294). No speech act is ever a simple act governed by the intentions of a single speaker, ethnographer or dialogue partner, or contained in a single context, but it is itself intercontextual. This distinction between speaker and hearer notes the intersubstitutability of the roles of the speaker and hearer such that neither the ethnographer nor the dialogue partner are just speakers or hearers but are speaker/hearers. Or as Tyler (1987:15) puts it: "A signifier is a trafficker in signs as well as the vehicle of representation. It is not the passive thinglike character understood as the mark of the signified." Bakhtin (1988:293) explains it this way: "As the living socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language is always half someone else's."

Put otherwise, the struggle for understanding in the intertextual production of meaning intersects in the sign. Reported speech constitutes an opening in the otherwise closed world of the sign. It is the introduction of an other's voice, or other voices, in the speaker's words, of other contexts in the "present" context. For Voloshinov/Bakhtin (1973:116) such activity is an integral part of any speech act; it is the possibility of the speech act itself.

In this writing, for instance, I demonstrate the anxious mixture of influences (signifiers) — the voices of social theorists (some more than others), the history of social theory, circus artists, the entertainment industry, other popular entertainments — helpful and antagonistic, that play a part in how I want to say things and what it is I do and do not say. In his conversation with me, Pipo is just as aware of the various contextually specific voices of his father, family, partners, circus history, entertainment media and industry that interact to form how he says things to me and to others and what he wants said and left unsaid. Recognizing these voices and their effects on Pipo's self-fashioning and my own is the goal of the rest of this paper.

## *Ironic Self-Fashioning*

Pipo's self-fashioning emerges when we read it as a particular narrative text (a discourse, by which I mean not just linguistic acts, but also a corpus of interlinked signs, verbal and nonverbal, bound by rules and characterized by regularities that construct and are patterned by social and personal reality) caught within a shifting, multi-voiced field of other such texts. He attempts to forge an authoritative narrative of clown work and circus life against this complex field of conflicting texts that have appropriated and refashioned the signs "clown" and "circus" for their own purposes. Rather than comply with Pipo in his search for authenticity and self-realization, I think it better to attend to the range of narratives against the circulation of which Pipo attempts to fashion a self that he calls `circus'. Pipo's search for self-realization and authentic identity is problematic considering the variety of narratives out of which "circus" and "clown" are now produced.

The disjunctive tone of Pipo's self-fashioning highlights the ambivalence of any attempt to figure a self in this highly complex field of intertextual narrative voices. As Baudrillard (1983) and other postmodern writers argue, in the contemporary late-capitalist world of Europe, any attempt at creating a practical and coherent narrative of wholism and reason (be it a narrative of self, nation, class, or organized capitalism) is provisional. There no longer exists a macro-narrative against which all other narratives can be read and understood. Late-capitalism is not a narrative of certainty, rather, it has fragmented into narratives of uncertainty, disorder, play and pluralism, all of which are conditioned by the decodification of cultural and economic forms (c.f. Lash and Urry 1987). For Baudrillard, capitalism has become simulation; it is no more than a complex field of narrative texts that speak as contextually specific cultural, political, and economic forces which impinge upon each other and subvert each other's

dominance so that no particular voice gains complete hegemony. In simulation, a narrative text — like Pipo's discourse on being truly 'circus' — strives for presence (authentic and privileged grounding) only to discover that those narrative texts upon which he relies for the foundation of a 'circus' self are themselves facsimiles, "already-made" texts that are themselves the transformations of other texts in what may be described as a mad proliferation of intertextual relations. Nowhere is there a narrative text simply present to us or him.

Thus, we must take care in our own theoretical discourse not to position Pipo's discourse of 'circus' self-fashioning as a privileged text nor to privilege this text as a grounding of all other texts. The signs "Pipo," "clown," and "circus" are part of a fabric of intertextual relations. At this particular historical juncture, these terms are located in multiple narrative texts (discourses) on entertainment and the commodification of leisure, corporate advertising, therapy, postmodern theory and comedy, religion, education, and politics, to name a few. They each produce "clowns" and "circus" as textured, multidimensional objects touched by the forces of particular discursive histories.

For Pipo, his partners, and other circus clown artists performing entrée (comic sketch) comedy in the 1980s and 1990s means working at a time when circus performances and productions are caught in an economic and culture industry crossfire. Most older circus artists realize that the economic priorities and social responsibilities of the modern circus as a popular entertainment spectacle have changed since they were young performers, especially since the 1950s. The dynamism and popularity of the circus and its acts, including the clown entrée, have been eclipsed by more popular and exotic spectacles that appropriate and organize circus artists, routines, costumes, performance techniques, and imagination according to their own purposes. Artists from outside the circus, who are trained in ways much different than circus artists and who refer to other authorities outside the circus, now use the term "circus" to describe their performance work and the images and entertainments they create. Such popular work and images have little to do with circus artists' intentions or conceptions of entertainment.

Nowhere is this appropriation and fragmentation of circus form and style of performance more apparent than with circus clowns. The material sign "circus clown" has become central to several domains in the late-twentieth century culture of spectacle consumption. The visual media of print, cinema, and television use the circus for their own purposes, producing clown images that are neither produced nor proscribed by circus artists. Clown comedy and images proliferate through everything from Rocky and Bullwinkle, to Pee Wee Herman, to "Killer Klowns from Outer Space" (a popular grade B movie), to comic book characters like Zippy the Pinhead, the anxious, postmodern clown. Poster and postcard companies have made a specialty market of generic clown images, while reproductions of modern artists' representations of circus scenes and clowns are sold in art galleries internationally.

Then there is the ubiquitous "clown as hamburger" school of Ronald McDonald clowns where young men are trained *en masse* to represent the McDonalds Corporation. Mass produced and redundant, thousands of young people have become "Ronald" clowns, or rather, performing "McComics". Closely allied to this mass production of clown artists is the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey circus school where again young enthusiasts are attracted to the "exotic and wonderful world of the circus ring" during the show. Each printed programme includes an application to the "wacky world" of clown school. Here the attraction is a romantic quest for enthusiasts to find the clown within themselves in their hidden talents.

This form of cultural production and circulation happens, Baudrillard argues, when sign-value takes precedence over use-value. The point is that the value of this clown work shifts from the artist's labour as a clown to the sign-value invested in the product or brand name. It is not the use-value of the product (the artist) but the circulation and consumption of its sign-values, the exchange-value of the sign (Ronald or Bozo) that is central.[3]

Circus clown artists and images are appropriated and consumed in other ways. For example, there is no shortage of clown schools in North America and Europe, sometimes associated with "new" circuses (like Cirque du Soleil in Canada or the Centre National des Arts du Cirque, École Supérieure in Châlons-sur-Marne, France), where in a few years young performers can learn the art of clown comedy, everything from mime to slapstick. These schools have multiplied quickly, producing large numbers of artists that have taken to theatres, arts and comedy festivals, circuses, and the streets to perform as comic artists.

The better talented and more popular of these artists get work in the established traditional European circuses, as circus directors and entertainment agents cash in on their popularity. Their teachers and fellow performers argue that the popularity of these new forms of comedy and clown work emerged because the traditional entrée clowns of the circus had become deadly boring and their comedy out of date. "New" clowns, along with "new" circus have developed an array of performance forms that more or less confront the conservativism of the traditional circus clown performance. Take, for instance, David Gale's instructions to the British theatre group Lumiére and Son's production of his "Circus Lumiére," performed during the 1988 London Festival of New Circus. In his text of instructions entitled "You Have To Laugh," Gale explains what he sees as the crux of the Lumiére circus project, namely, redefining the role of the clown.

> *This redefinition involves in part a recovery of qualities that seem to have faded from the expressive repertoire of the contemporary clown. ... [I insist] on defining the clown as the Laughter Demon of Sex and Violence. [This] [i]s clearly at odds with what is popularly expected of the Funny Circus Fellow. If one questions the man in the street closely a curious discovery can be made — many people have never found clowns remotely amusing and commonly feel rather puzzled at their presence. Most people have quite rightly given up hope and look to the movies for laughs....*
>
> *Modern clowns are so traditional.... We want clowns who cut each other's head's off and emasculate their foes with blow-torches in an age where Savak ties naked leftists to iron bedsteads which are wired to the mains. Our clowns must belabour each other with electric cattle prods so that our audiences are not lulled into nostalgia for the Golden Age of the Victorian Circus.* (n.d.:1-3)

Here is violence with a difference. This is not a plea for traditional slapstick routine and character development, although Lumiére and Son appropriate many of these elements. Nor is this a plan to replace traditional circus entrée comedy which, by Gale's estimation, is dead anyway. Rather, this is just one of a number of appropriations of the terms "circus" and "clown", giving them unique signification by producing them out of different contexts.

There are still other narrative contexts out of which popular clown images are invented. For example, within the U.S. Episcopal Church, there is a "Clown Ministry" that uses the healing power of laughter through clown comedy to understand points of faith. There are now clowns working in hospitals and clinics as therapists. In Montréal, a woman in clown costume persuades battered children to express their feelings with the use of a few tricks. Or, there are the ubiquitous clowns we see in annual parades and festivals when once a year men and women of the business community don the motley to entertain children with bad tricks and stupid routines. Parents point out these performers to their children, call them clowns, and they watch them with the same enthusiasm as if they were watching clown artists in the circus ring.

What I have tried to describe through the vehicle of the signs "clown" and "circus", are some lineaments of the age of the spectacle, which I take to mean the age of proliferation within a sign discourse (or of the discourse itself) that can be appropriated (recreated) or made to stand in for any other discourse. Thus the discourses of the visual media, of film, print, theatre, and photography, the entertainment industry, the fast-food industry, popular postmodern theatre, or the therapeutic cultures of religion and psycho-therapy each invents its own specific or generic clown and circus signs that are the appropriations of other discourses. Each discourse cannibalizes and in turn is cannibalized by other discourses. No sign-value, no code, gains total authority. In the age of the spectacle, clown artists no longer produce commodities, commodities produce clowns: clowns for Christ, clowns for hamburgers, clowns for the various media. The logic of the commodity (the logic of the spectacle) multiplies indefinitely and yet it never makes up a calculus of signs. In other words, there is no real clown, but clowns as sign-value, reality-effects, or simulations. Or, as Baudrillard (1983:back cover) puts it: "The very definition of the real has become *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction.* The real is not only what can be reproduced, *but that which is always already reproduced.* The hyperreal ... which is entirely in simulation."

Given this state of affairs, it seems highly ambiguous to think that Pipo could begin a career as an entrée clown and construct an authentic circus self and circus clown performance, especially considering that this comic form, and the circus tradition through which it gained legitimacy, seemed to be fragmented, peripheralized, and appropriated by others. But this is precisely what Pipo thought he

could do. This makes Pipo's decision to become a traditional whiteface clown worthy of discussion.

Pipo's narrative of circus self-fashioning focuses on his desire as an artist to frame a cultural present in relation to an other world outside the circus in order to produce something that he calls properly 'circus.' This is a desire to purify and reify, that is, to reshape circus clowning into controllable proportion and so legitimate circus identity. He calls this process 'going inside' by which he means two things:

1) It is a physical designation which has to do with his biology. Circus artists say they are uniquely adapted biologically to deal with every physical hardship. They say their biological essence predisposes them to do extraordinary things that others can not do. I will not discuss this definition here.

2) 'Going inside' also means searching deep within one's self and tradition to uncover essential characteristics, the ones Pipo considers fundamental to his work and life. Most specifically, this process begins with one's family history which becomes part of a circus social history and knowledge.

Pipo believes that one important reason why circus clown work and clown artists are so unpopular today, and why they find it difficult to find work, is because they have abandoned their heritage by restricting their work to a limited repertoire of stock routines and sketches. Pipo has little confidence in the conservativism that informs most artists' performance practices even though he understands their motives. In the face of increasing threats from other non-circus 'private' comic entertainers clown artists have resorted to what they know has worked in the past, to what they think defines them and their performance work as uniquely 'circus.'

Pipo believes that in their cultural involution these artists have forgotten the most important characteristic of their 'circus' tradition, namely, the ability to change and adapt, or, in the face of contingency to do whatever is necessary to improve themselves and theirt chances to work. He goes on to say that the earliest modern clown artists lived by this simple principle of change and chance-taking. 'Going inside' means refiguring clown work the same way that their turn-of-the-century circus relatives did by diversifying their comedy, its venues, mediums, and messages in order to combat the pressures of the leisure and entertainment industries and the popular, alternative artists, and therapeutic cultures. The irony is that in order to remain faithful to the intentions of the earliest clown artists' notion of circus life and performance and in order to survive as artists whose essence was 'circus' and to remain loyal to their tradition, Pipo and his partners increasingly had to look outside the circus, especially to the worlds of film and television, for work and inspiration.

Pipo began performing as a whiteface with two young Swiss circus clown artists, Gaston Häni and Rolf Knie, Jr. who asked him to join their duo in 1979. Pipo says that he always thought he would become a whiteface because it was family tradition. Pipo's father had been a popular whiteface clown and even when faced with his father's stern warning about getting out of the circus, that entrée clowning as an art was a thing of the past, he could not free himself of the circus's pull. As Pipo put it, he had been 'caught' by the circus and he was powerless to do anything else but accept the offer of work and this began his career as a professional circus clown artist.

Pipo's entrée work was popular and the trio was very successful. They soon found it possible to diversify their comedy work, doing a number of films in 1980, some Swiss and German television comedy throughout their career together, and finally in 1984, leaving the circus and taking their comedy into the Swiss theatre. They were given the opportunity to expand the range and repertoire of their comedy — sketches, costuming, medium, and venue. In their performance work they were doing what they thought they had to do to stay 'circus' because the 'circus was shit!,' as I was told repeatedly.

This attempt to fashion a contemporary circus identity through the vehicle of clown tradition is ironic in another way also. For even at the historical juncture of *fin-de-siècle* Europe the signs "clown" and "circus" were already appropriated signs, located within such discourse frames as the entertainment industry, the art world, the fashion system, and the world of therapy. In other words, the very whiteface clowns to which Pipo refers in search for legitimation and authenticity were themselves "already made." Pipo understands these clown signs to be the fundamental elements of his "circusness." So any whiteface that Pipo fashions is already caught up in the play and appropriation of signification making the possibility of a final, privileged identity impossible.

In this sense, Pipo's attempt to privilege 'circus' identity makes the signs of his self-fashioning the material available for other uses and appropriations. Pipo, in other words, plays a part in his own appropriation. This makes his self-fashioning parodic. He becomes the butt of a larger joke of postmodern simulation within which his comic work and clown character are recouped and used in ways he cannot control. The circus becomes the site of contestation, a play of multiple significations for him and for others. This malleable, multiple positioning of his 'circus' life and performance work, where Pipo risks recuperation and appropriation at every turn, is an existential reality of dissemination and contingency. This is how Pipo's discourse of self-fashioning is ironic, heterogenous, and never finalized. On the one hand, he produces himself through the contexts of his 'circus' imagination that he understands to be his inheritance as a 'circus' clown artist. On the other hand, others, including myself, constructing other contexts, characterize circus clown artists and their work according to other social, economic, and ethical agendas. Clown artists like Pipo live within the conflictual language of these plurivocal narratives of themselves. The more Pipo seeks to fashion a discourse of closure and grounding, the more open-ended and contingent this discourse becomes.

But now I would like to reverse the direction of my analysis. There is the dimension of irony that we read as the intertextual construction and dissemination of the signs "clown" and "circus." Pipo reads into and inside the narrative of his tradition as we read across narrative voices (discourses) that includes Pipo's reading. There is, however, another dimension of his self-fashioning that speaks to ethnographic description, making it ironic as well and therefore equally subject to parody. By exploring the pragmatics of Pipo's production of self I hope to demonstrate the influence of the narrative of his self-fashioning on my ethnographic inventions of clowns, comedy, and circus culture. In doing so, I will describe some of the irony of my ethnographic endeavour and how understanding its rhetoric allowed me to begin thinking of a parodic ethnography.

## *Clown and Ethnographer*

I now find Pipo's attempt at self-fashioning ironic, but it was not always like that. The symbolic theory upon which I organized my fieldwork was centred on cultural semantics and Pipo and his partners were constantly amused by my attempts to find a unified semantic content to their lives and performance work. Pipo clearly understood what it was I was trying to get at, however, he thought that it was an odd, misplaced endeavour. This did not mean that he never thought seriously about every dimension of his comic work. Rather, it meant that he found my ethnographic seriousness funny. While Pipo always directed our conversations about a 'circus' self towards the pragmatics of its fashioning, I stubbornly tried to figure out what the underlying meanings were to his circus life and work. Pipo's discourse was about his material body techniques, the body of circus knowledge, and how to use both. His discourse conflicted with mine, centred as mine was on my training as a symbolic anthropologist trying to uncover the deep meaning of the circus from the "native point of view." I shall go on to talk about the pragmatics of Pipo's self-fashioning as a way of evoking the comedy of my reliance upon a monological and rationalist paradigm for reading Pipo's work and life.

I began to recognize the implications of Pipo's self-fashioning for my own work when considering one of my conversations with him. During the early stages of my fieldwork our conversations focused on the structure and meaning of the clown entrée in the circus programme. What was the comedy supposed to mean to the audience and what could clown artists like Pipo tell me about clown humour and its meaningfulness? It came as a shock when Pipo, looking blank, replied that the entrée comedy could mean anything anyone wanted it to mean. Frankly, he was not at all sure that it meant anything, nor did he care about that particular dimension of his work. Pipo put the matter this way: "Entrée comedy is 'just funny', you don't have to think about it. I can't explain it and I don't want to."

I should have been ready for Pipo's response for I had often been warned by my teachers and other ethnographers to expect this kind of reaction, especially as I began my fieldwork. Perplexed, however, I insisted that Pipo had to have some idea of what he thought the whiteface represented in European culture. As initially designed, my research depended on my revealing the underlying symbolic structures of entrée comedy and the textured and systematic world of cultural meaning to which these symbols referred. Surely clown comedy and personalities were powerful symbols of something. If not, how could they be so popular, so effective, so funny?

To a degree, what I describe is pretty much the commonplace circumstance of fieldwork. It is not unusual for our dialogue partners to react in such ways when we speak to them in an abstract language about concrete things or appear to take the serious and important for the commonplace, or vice versa. Hopefully, through the dialogue process we learn to "merge horizons," share a vocabulary, in short, get to understand something of the lives of our partners in order, finally, to describe in our ethnographies how their world works and how they structure it as meaningful.

These points are so obvious it would seem they hardly bear repeating. When most of my anthropology colleagues read this paper their first reaction was to say that the processes I write about is nothing new to them. But if that is true, why do ethnographies remain, for the most part, monological? Why are the voices of our dialogue partners reduced to normative statements in order to "name and nail" some system? What happens, of course, is that this dialogical process never becomes part of the ethnography. It is forgotten, replaced by systematic representations of the "culture" organized by the monological authority of the ethnographer. In the end, all that was dialogical and open-ended is reproduced as norm, authoritatively described.

However, it was no laughing matter when Pipo told me that he had few if any ideas of what the whiteface clown and entrée comedy stood for. Nor was he simply reiterating some official 'circus' notion of "art for art's sake." For Pipo, the entrée and the characters of which it is made are normal objects of interpretation only with respect to questions about the dynamics of past and future performances — how to do the comedy properly, whether it produces its intended effects, the appropriate response, why it works here and not there. I, on the other hand, wanted to make a metaphysical object out of him, his clown character, and comedy. I was completing Pipo's "otherness" by making his life and work the "object" of my research and description of him.

For Pipo and his partners, the significance of entrée comedy is in its usages and outcomes and not in its supposed underlying symbols. It is how the material characteristics of the comedy (comic signifiers) work, the pragmatics of commonsense circus interests, that challenge him. I think that the questions that intrigue Pipo have less to do with 'what' entrée comedy means and more to do with 'how' it means, less to do with what funny things mean than with making up the funny edge of things. If Pipo's discussion about entrée comedy goes beyond the rhetorical circumstances of entrée performance and circus life, it does not do so by explicating the meaning of the comedy he performs, but by creating the means to solve mundane problems of gesture, language, costume, make-up, comic execution, venue, medium—problems that constitute what I am calling the funny edge of things.

Here is an example of what I mean. When I look at Pipo and watch him work in the ring many questions about his character come to mind, not least of all the issue of Pipo's feminine characteristics. Pipo's elaborate costume and accessories (his stockings and slippers) and most aspects of his make-up seem to be conventional tropes of femininity. For example, Pipo's most recent and favourite costume is a red velvet dress he had made for him in 1987 by the French fashion house of Vicaire. He says he likes it because it hangs loosely and flows with his movement giving him a look of greater elegance and grace. The dress is expensive, in the best taste of the ostentatious whiteface. The shoulders of the costume billow out and down his arms adding refinement to the overall look. The arms are beautifully decorated in large floral designs of white and gold sequins and rhinestones as is the dress proper. His vest is made completely of rhinestones and sequins in a paisley design, and it gives Pipo's torso a supple "hourglass" curve. Topping off the costume is a fluffy white cravat made of soft rippled crinoline to which he attaches a large red jewelled brooch. Other parts of the costume include sheer nylon stockings, sleek yellow leather pumps, and a white conical felt cap.

Pipo's make-up adds to the ambiguity of his gender. The standard features of whiteface maquillage include painting the neck and face white and the tips of the ears and nose and the lips with red lipstick. Black eyeliner and mascara are added to the eyes and eyelashes. But the sign of the whiteface's uniqueness are his eyebrow markings. Pipo paints a thick black line over his white face that runs down the centre of his forehead and continues on to the bridge of his nose and then swoops over his right eye in a strong unbroken arch.

When I first started talking to Pipo about his clown, I directed my attention to his obvious female characteristics. I once explained to Pipo some thoughts I had about the seductive appeal of his clown that had to do with the audience's simultaneous remembering and forgetting of his gender, thereby

making ambiguous and distorting all vestiges of gender identity in his character. For example, Pipo's clown exhibits qualities of cultural refinement and elegance that border on narrow-mindedness and intolerance, promoting an amicable seriousness that harbours a fickleness and nastiness which is often the sign of his undoing and the subject of laughter in the clown entrée. The purposeful ambiguity of these qualities allows him to absorb and simultaneously display opposite gender characteristics. Part of what I thought was so funny about entrée comedy, at least in the way Pipo and his partners performed it, was that it created an ambiguous gender hierarchy which drew attention to the power of patriarchy in Western culture and the unconscious designation of the spectator as male (cf. Mulvey 1975; Kaplan 1987).

Pipo laughed. He thought I was joking. He said that I should be the clown. It was not hard to tell that Pipo cared little for such interpretations. He had very little that was not funny to say about them. Dwelling on them as I did only seemed humorous to him and other circus artists. In fact, I was the butt of clown artist's jokes on more than one occasion precisely for taking such things so seriously. As circus artists put it, a person not of the circus (in this case, an insistent and overly-serious ethnographer/fan/reporter/voyeur) usually gets things wrong or takes things said and done the wrong way.

It was obvious that Pipo considered my interpretation of the entrée to be beside the point. He did not make judgements about the gender of the whiteface because that was not his purpose. Pipo wanted to describe for me the proper application of his make-up, the use of his costumes, the production of his kinesthetic and verbal skills. Demonstration and skill were most important. What I found bothersome about this was Pipo's response to my moving our discussion away from the comic action — its demonstration and description — to a more abstract interpretation of clown comedy images, actions, and their meanings. Pipo found this move laughable.

Pipo was not interested in producing a body of facts which could be made to support propositions about the nature of gender or any other ideology in European culture. The reason he thought it important to speak to me at all was because he guessed I was interested in the pragmatics of his kind of clowning at a time when the contingencies of the culture and entertainment industry and the work of other artists, who have produced a proliferation of comedy forms, have delegitimized circus comedy and clowning. He thought I could help transmit to others outside the circus what it was that entrée clown artists did, how they did it, and why they did it the way they did. His body of thought focused on how the body was comic at a time when such a comic corpus seemed to be losing much of its power of public persuasion. His descriptions of his life and work were meant to demonstrate the sophistication of his comic art, just as much as his performances were. Pipo was trying to explain how his comic corpus had not yet become a corpse, thus clearing up the real problem of communication between circus artists and the public and making the relationship funny and exciting again.

For Pipo I was an instrument in this process. Unlike me, however, Pipo did not see that there was anything more to reestablishing the popularity of clown comedy than to demonstrate his ability to be funny. I was hoping to universalize this local state of affairs by using Pipo's rhetoric to analyze the nature and meaning of comic characters as an index of a larger issue — the cultural meaning of clown comedy in European society. The joke seemed to be on me. For a while, during my fieldwork, I became the caricature of a meaning-monger professor.

As Pipo put it, the biography of a clown character and a clown performance should be the story of the discovery and development of new subtleties of humour and nuances of character. Pipo's humour and character evolved out of his "circus" self and imagination over time, with experience, as he learned to fashion a unique variation of the traditional whiteface clown. He says that his work continues to change and grow more dynamic and subtle as he explores various dimensions of comic action, drawing inspiration from wherever, and applies what he learns to his comedy. Pipo's discussion about the production of clown comedy, however, always focuses on his personal history, the physical characteristics of his whiteface personality as it became defined through costume and maquillage, and his techniques of continuous entrée revision (c.f. Little 1986). These are Pipo's ways of speaking about clowning, they are the vehicles of his 'circus' and clown self-fashioning.

## *Bodies of Laughter*

If Pipo's exposition about entrée comedy goes beyond the rhetorical circumstances of entrée performance and 'circus' life it does not do so by

explicating the meaning of the entrée comedy he performs, but by creating the means to solve mundane problems of gesture, language, costume, make-up, and comic execution. This is the vocabulary of Pipo's narrative. His comedy and discourse on the foundations of his life and work (fashioned out of the bricolage of comic, artistic, and entertainment voices) is expressed as the pragmatics of comic performance and 'circus' identity. I became aware of the practicalities of Pipo's purposes and the pragmatics of his life's work as a clown artist as they emerged out of the anxious influence of his "circus" narrative, multiple voices — voices from within his family and the circus and from the worlds of others outside the circus with whom he has had relationships of various degrees of intensity and length. This is the intercontextuality that opens his discourse to plurivocality and contingency.

Notice that Pipo does not distinguish between demonstration and reason, description and explanation in the rhetoric of his comic self-fashioning. What funny things mean is not pursued in itself for the sake of some underlying structure of theoretical knowledge it might reveal. Rather, the significance of his comedy and identity as an artist is revealed in Pipo's rhetorical demonstrations that culminate in comic performances that are meant to persuade audiences and academics of the funniness of clowns and the validity and support of the language through which their comedy is produced. Meaning is not separate from performance and persuasion. Both logic and rhetoric are a single category, the intent of which is communicated in the clown artist making up the funny edge of things. When Pipo talks about his clown work, clearly it is how he fashions a practical corpus of routines, costumes, and images — taken from various spheres of influence — that makes him funny.

The various comic influences that combine to make Pipo's discourse of comic self-fashioning are his means of knowing how to do funny things with his body rather than simply knowing what such things mean. Through his body and the body of circus knowledge, Pipo directs our attention to the funny edge of things (i.e., to how funny things are) rather than to the fact that things may or may not be funny. The difference is crucial. It is the difference that brings us closer to the ludic and contingent quality of everyday discourse rather than falling into the common categorical separation between a discourse that is funny and irreverent and one that is serious and authoritative.

This separation between serious and ludic is an accepted binary opposition in modern culture. It marks the dominance of official, serious, and high culture over an unofficial, illicit, or low culture. This dichotomy is encoded onto the body in the separation of its upper regions — the mind, heart, the seat of spirit and learning, language, knowledge, and logic —from what Bakhtin (1986:368) calls the "material bodily lower stratum" — the anus, genitals, their physical emissions, and their spiritual and behavioral products like sin, immorality, and impurity. This binary system of behaviour and ideas encodes the rules that govern modern civility and the hegemony of social decency and propriety over the illicit as vulgar, homogeneity and reason over heterogeneity and commonsense. Modern individuals invent themselves out of their social labours to preserve, promote, and manage the validity and dominance of these separations. In other words, among other things, the constitution of modernity and individual identity has to do with the asserted negation and repression of the "material bodily lower stratum" in all of its operational contexts. Of course one of the most powerful expressions of this negation is to be found in the authority of an upper body objectifying logic and an epistemological separation and control of character and identity according to modern and liberal notions of reason and rationality.

Thinking of Pipo's circus clown self-fashioning in this sense adds another dimension to an overall understanding of the carnivalesque (by which I mean a hybrid of the high and low, of sense and nonsense). This clown's self-fashioning is also carnivalesque (i.e. ironic and heterogeneous) because it ambiguates this binary economy of the official high and the illicit low as it is inscribed on the body and body of knowledge of a clown artist. His self-fashioning, as the pragmatics and technologies of his body doings, is funny because it does not respect or attend to the separation of body matters and use from some rationalized codification of the bourgeois body. Pipo does not separate knowledge and reason from bodily practice and performance. This is how artists and circuses ambiguate and transgress the dyadic, upper/lower body, economy of modern European self and society. It is no simple reversal of the low and illicit for the high and the official, the lower body for the upper body. Rather, it is an inversion of this dyad that dissolves an "original" binary identity. As such, the inherited order of social explanation in binary form of the upper/lower body as modern Europeans rely upon it is disorganized. In his life as an artist and

in his performance work, Pipo parodies this binary structure of official European culture thereby demonstrating the contingency of such notions. The irony is that, in his reification of tradition, he adopts that same structure. Hence the great ambiguity of Pipo's production of identity.

I think this is why clown performances, circus artists, and environments are considered simultaneously fun, exotic, and dangerous in European imagination. The circus transgresses official modes of explanation and cultural practice while living off of them. By the example of their lives and performance work, clown artists carnivalize European culture.

For example, within the popular European imagination, there is something peculiar and funny about circus artists that makes them powerful cultural symbols of cultural inversion. On the one hand, circus artists are considered to be legitimate artists with a noble heritage and tradition. Certain artists have become household names, like opera and football stars. Such artists as the clown Grock, the juggler Rastelli, and the dresseurs Gilbert Houcke and Fredy Knie, Sr. are thought of as international symbols of artistic culture; they are refined entertainment culture heros. On the other hand, these artists are still 'circus' artists, which means that they are associated with such marginals as gypsies, carnival people, and with the "shifty," "underside" of society. This makes circus artists hybrid, by which I mean there is an acknowledged ambivalence that undermines the separation of the culturally refined (high) and the culturally shifty (low), the official and the illicit, that inverts and parodies the modern binary code of the high and the low. The high and the low are mutually deformed in the circus environment and by circus artists. While enjoyed and accepted, artists are still held at arm's length. But just like clown laughter, circus artists are signs of instability rather than synthesis and system. In European culture, circus artists are ambivalent "others." Their performance practices and daily lives (the informality of laughter and the exotic) talk back to and back-talk conventional cultural codes that artists nevertheless share with other Europeans.

I want to suggest that there is something funny in circus clown discourse that makes an anthropological body of knowledge and practices — as another encoding of the upper body in the rationalizing practice of ethnographers who are always trying to make sense — funny and contingent too, and which, if we attend to it, may produce a parodic ethnographic discourse. With few exceptions (Bauman 1986; Schieffelin 1985) ethnographers of performance insist that descriptions of performances and performance traditions exist as cultural objects that can be authoritatively described and interpreted. Moreover, these ethnographers usually construct the subjects they work with as generic artifacts, bundles of symbolic relations that are the social facts of an already constituted world. This is part of the ideology of realism. The informant appears as a representative of his or her culture, a type, through which general social processes are revealed. I argue that this technique of realist description and the "finding" of a cultural system of meaning is a species of the larger discourse of the upper body. It is a writing within which ethnography is embedded and which enables the ethnographer to mask the polyphonous constitution of talk and performance with the explanatory presence of the code, norm or system. Enabled by the hegemony of the objectifying logic of Western rationalist culture, ethnography valorized authority, system and reason. This accounts for the primacy of the text in ethnography. Such textualization reduces the voices of dialogue, direct and reported speech, to the system of signs of some stable linguistic nucleus of officially recognized language, to what Bakhtin calls monological authority. The text becomes the privileged object, the re-presentation of actions and things rather than a performance of them.

The disjunction between the world and its representation has promoted an increased reliance upon mimesis whereby the text copies the world in what is taken to be a relation of correspondence or coherence. Truth is validated by the adequacy of this correspondence or coherence between words and actions. Human thought becomes the inner picture of outer objects the "truth" of which privileges clear, unobscure writing because it is best able to report the facts about the world. Judgements about the descriptions, whether they are true or false, depend on the clarity and fidelity of the correspondence or coherence between these two orders of existence. Tyler (1987) calls this writing form "plain style". It is what Rorty (1979) calls a Cartesian hangover, the search for the mirror of the mind that reflects some real undistorted nature.

This concern for clarity, fidelity, and truth in textualization implicitly opposes itself to obscurity, distortion, and fiction. We might even say that this

ideology of textualization is fashioned on metaphors of the upper rather than the lower body. The hegemony of this upper body ideology makes activity, event, and interaction the function of objectified agents which are visualized as distinct things in the world. Such an ideology encourages ethnographers to discover order in structures like culture, language, individual, or economy. These structures become the foundation of reality both in commonsense and science. Moreover, in this upper body ideology, heteronomy becomes autonomy and dialogue is reduced to monologue, as deeds are reduced to the words of one author, a self-sufficient and closed body, who becomes the voice for all. This is accomplished for the purposes of rescuing the text from the lower body, open-ended, ambiguating pressures of heteroglossia, or the noise and diversity of speakers and speech types in dialogue as a mode of social action. What such a rescue job does is valorize language as code, as an enclosed product, over language as communicative practice.

Another way of saying all of this is that I have appropriated a good circus joke and something of how to tell it. Pipo taught me about the funny edge of things and the body of circus clown knowledge as his narrative of self-fashioning. It took me too long to figure out what he was laughing at when I told him my ideas about the meaning of his clown humour. Pipo's words and actions failed to correspond to the nature of discourse as I first conceived of it. I assumed that Pipo's actions, linguistic and otherwise, corresponded to some reality, that they were the medium or key to the nature and meaning of entrée clown comedy. My original intention in talking to and writing about Pipo's character and entrée work was to reveal its meaning by making its contents an index of some larger whole like "circus tradition" or "the meaning of clown humour in the structure of modern European culture". I wanted to use his self-fashioning for explanatory purposes and saw how well Pipo's work and life could be used to discover the reality behind the appearance of the comedy.

I now find it funny that I insisted on finding system and meaning in the way that I did. I also find it funny that anthropology, in its attempts to make the "other" into an object of scrutiny in order to "find" clear, underlying truths, makes itself an official discourse and, as such, an artifact of the upper body. To a clown artist like Pipo, whose life is lived within the carnivalized environment of the circus, all this seems like grist for the comic mill. Pipo and other circus artists made fun of me, and other chroniclers and creators of official circus culture, for trying to get at the meaning and truth of circus life and work. To them it was a joke.

The joke was not entirely on me, however. Through the narrative of self-fashioning, Pipo also makes an artifact of his own tradition, and work, and for that I can laugh at him. Pipo's discourse of self-fashioning is conceived as a story of circus redemption, a response to a culture in which the circus and circus artists feel a loss of control over their artistic and social self-production. From this world of loss he produces a narrative which, by its power as a constructed tradition of comedy, becomes a form to be used by others without recourse to Pipo's ideology of interiority or transcendence. This is how contemporary modes of representations are produced.

But this culture of late capitalism in which circus artists, like others, have to perform and live their lives is not a determined form. It is grotesque, an unfinished form, developing "out of control", and disrupting the systematic boundaries of explanation (cf. Baudrillard 1983). Economy, culture, and spectacle merge as a particular representation that displaces us, artist and ethnographer alike, destabilizing any place from which we may speak, while luring us with a nostalgia for entertainment styles and forms. Simultaneously, this mode of representation, both numbingly coherent and thoroughly incoherent, turns back on itself, subverting its own forms of representation and parodying its own trust in forms.

## *Laughing Together*

Focusing on the dialogue between Pipo and me in which this text emerges, I involve Pipo's thoughts and motives not to criticize or romanticize them but to reveal some of the explicit and implied voices and contexts which he and I brought to bear in this intertextual production. Our interpretations were based not only on differing presuppositions about what motivated our dialogue and the resulting text, but also on a differing history of influences and responsibilities. Pipo's interpretive intentions and descriptions of his life and work, and the commonplace purposes to which they were put, were different than my own. It was Pipo's indifference to my original project that made me reflect on my own purposes and ethnographic self-fashioning. Pipo could not have cared less about abstractions of meaning, symbol, and system that informed the

social context of anthropological engagement. Instead, he was interested in questions concerning the pragmatics of clowning, what he called 'going inside'. If there is a significance to the clown entrée for Pipo it is not to be found as an object of discursive knowledge set apart from the performative contexts involving its proper accomplishment and the pragmatics of comedy skills.

Understood this way, the dialogue between Pipo and me is carnivalesque, for it subverts any notion of proper communication. On the one hand, Pipo's self-fashioning becomes a cheeky way to subvert the hierarchical binary system upon which modern society, self, and social science are grounded. The funny thing is that Pipo's body of laughter makes fun of the presuppositions of this binary economy of those, like anthropologists, who seem to support it by the way they do their work and live their lives. He and other clowns, however, need this binary structure to survive so they can parody it. Their work and lives are parasitic upon this binary economy and, as we have seen, are encompassed within it, hence it is paradoxical, duplicitous, and improper.

On the other hand, an anthropological discourse that attempts to be as cheeky with its own tradition of "proper" and clear-sighted ethnography may also be considered carnivalesque. Writing a dialogue sketch that calls into question the very notion of proper ethnography written by proper authors and that calls into question the idea of finding some proper meaning to European clown work means that meanings remain open, transitional, and unfixed because they are always being used in communicative action and embodied in dialogue and appropriated for use in and as other discourses. The point is not to look at the difference between anthropological and circus discourse as the difference between an official (upper body) and an illicit (lower body) discourse, but to understand how all discourse is contingent, open-ended, and "infected" with other voices that overlap in communicative use, in the pragmatics of a dialogue.

This is the difference between an ethnography of performance and a performance ethnographer. As an autonomous author, the former attempts to find the meaning of performance forms and practices, but is not particularly conscious of the fact that the notion of "deep meaning" is a cultural construction, part of developing totalizing practices which not only produce modern individuals as objects and as subjects of study but preserve both in our objectified, meaning-obsessed world. But it is the latter that I have attempted to do and be here.

This writing is meant to be a text of mutual parody which finds power in its use. Through it we may be able to recognize the power of parody and parodic ethnography. As a comparative text, the writing consists of fragments of a dialogue between Pipo and me which means to evoke an emergent commonsense communicative reality that recognizes heterogeneity, the embodiment of linguistic playfulness and kinesthetic diversity that are the basis of all communication. I am trying to perform or enact a carnivalization of discourse, to destabilize and finally alter the notion of an "author" and a "subject" of analysis and the process of ethnographic production. It is the willingness to live up to the contingency of language and the heterogeneity of communication and to recognize that while language often and unwisely is considered to be an abstract, neutral system of normative rules about sentences that the dialogical use of language, that is, communication, is not. Speech communication is dialogical because it enacts addressivity, the awareness of otherness, of dialogue partners, and of languages. Sentences need the play of a "response-ability." What we must recognize is that ethnography is created in dialogue, by the uses of languages in communication with "response-ability" as their major concern, rather than being more or less adequately described in or by a particular language or genre of communication.

## *Notes*

1. Acknowledgements: Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the May, 1989 Canadian Ethnology Society (now the Canadian Anthropology Society) meetings, Ottawa, Ontario, in a session on the anthropology of the body organized by Ellen Corin; at Rice University, Houston Texas, February, 1990; and at McMaster University, March, 1990. I would like to thank all of those who asked questions during those sessions. I am especially grateful to Wlad Godzich, Teresa Holmes, Richard Handler, Michael Lambek, George Marcus, Julie Taylor and Roy Wagner for their close reading and articulate suggestions on how to improve this paper. Finally, I would like to thank David Gale, writer for, and Hilary Westlake, artistic director of, Lumiére and Son's for allowing me to quote from David Gale's "You have to Laugh."

2. While their understanding and use of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue vary, ethnographers like Bruner (1984), Clifford (1986), Dwyer (1982) — whose work

has been influential in the recent ethnographic turn to dialogics — recognize dialogue as direct speech. I am pointing out the limits of this understanding and use of dialogue. In this way I am following Carroll (1983) and Stewart (1983). For ethnographic support, see Crapanzano (1980; 1986).

3. This reproduction of comic and circus clown images, created and promoted by entertainment agents and entrepreneurs, has produced circus artists and their performance work as standardized and sellable commodities completely outside of the control of the artist. Under the appeal for the familiar and reproducible, circus artists' labour and images have been effaced and fit into contexts completely foreign to them. For example, an older, well respected Italian circus clown artist is now contracted to work for a European production of "Holiday on Ice." He and his two boys got the job because they could skate. They thought they would be doing their entrée on skates. Instead, they were made to wear Disney character costume, in effect becoming skating Micky Mouse, Pluto, and Donald Duck. Their work consisted of skating about the rink during the grand parades giving out candies to children. For a man with forty years of experience in the ring as a clown artist this was very difficult to accept. He and his boys did it because they needed the work.

## *References*


BAKHTIN, MIKHAIL M.
1986 Rabelais and His world, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press.

1988 The Dialogic Imagination, Austin: University of Texas Press.

BAUDRILLARD, JEAN
1983 Simulations, Semiotext(e).

BAUMAN, RICHARD
1986 Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative, Cambridge University Press.

BRUNER, EDWARD M.
1984 Introduction: The Opening Up of Anthropology, In Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society, Edward M. Bruner (ed.):2-16, Washington, DC: American Ethnological Society.

CARROLL, DAVID
1983 The Alterity of Discourse: Form, History, and the Question of the Political in M.M. Bakhtin, Diacritics, Summer:65-83.

CLIFFORD, JAMES
1986 Introduction: Partial Truths, In Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.): 1-26, Berkeley: University of California Press.

1988 The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

CRAPANZANO, VINCENT
1980 Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1986 Waiting: The Whites of South Africa, New York: Vintage Books.

DAVIDSON, DONALD
1984 What Metaphors Mean, In Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, London: Oxford University Press.

DWYER, KEVIN
1982 Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

FOUCAULT, MICHEL
1984 What Is An Author? In The Foucault Reader, Paul Rabinow (ed.): 101-120, New York: Pantheon Books.

GALE, DAVID
n.d. You Just Have To Laugh, Manuscript.

HANDLER, RICHARD
1985 On Dialogue and Destructive Analysis: Problems in Narrating Nationalism and Ethnicity, The Journal of Anthropological Research 41: 171-182.

KAPLAN, ANN
1987 Rocking Around the Clock: Music, Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture, New York and London: Methuen.

LASH, SCOTT AND JOHN URRY
1987 The End of Organized Capitalism, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

LECOQ, JACQUES
1973 Mime — Movement — Theatre, Yale Theatre, 4(1): 119-120.

LITTLE, KENNETH
1986 Pitu's Doubt: Entrée Clown Self-Fashioning in the Circus Tradition, The Drama Review 30(4):51-64.

1991 The Rhetoric of Romance and the Simulation of Tradition in Circus Clown Performance, Semiotica, 85(3/4): 227-255.

MULVEY, LAURA
1975 Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Screen 16(3):6-18.

RORTY, RICHARD
1979 Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

SCHIEFFELIN, EDWARD
1985 Performance and the Cultural Construction of Meaning, American Ethnologist 12(4):707- 724.

STEWART, KATHLEEN
1988 Nostalgia — A Polemic, Cultural Anthropology 3(3):227-241.

STEWART, SUSAN
1983 Shouts on the street: Bakhtin's Anti-Linguistics, Critical Inquiry 10(2): 265-282.

TODOROV, TZVETAN
1984 The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, New York: Harper and Row.

TYLER, STEPHEN
1987 The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

VOLOSHINOV, V.N.
1973 Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, New York: Seminar Press.