3 • reversals and inversions

ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

In order to discuss the first nonsense operation, the operation of reversals and inversions, we might begin by considering culture as a set of ways to organize experience. In other words, since culture is an outcome of interactions that members see as orderly, rule-governed, productive, we can consider it as isomorphic with the orderly, rule-governed, and productive processes by which it is created. This common-sense coincidence of process and product has long been present as a contradiction in the use of the word *culture* in English. The origin of the word lies in the Latin *cultura*, the tending of natural growth. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, "Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process." It evolved to have three "broad active categories of usage": (1) The independent and abstract noun that describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development. This usage originated in the eighteenth century; (2) The independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group, a usage originating with Herder and the philosophers of the nineteenth century; and (3) The independent and abstract noun that describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activities.[1] Thus from the beginning, *culture* has been tied into notions of process, development, hierarchy, and production, and we can see that these terms—characteristic of the use of the term *culture*—have been carried over as the defining characteristics of culture, the thing itself.

Not surprisingly, cultural anthropology has produced models of culture concerned with development and hierarchy, and, more recently, with models of culture as classification. Classification is particularly apt as a model of process and product, for members' versions of the state of things are emergent in classification as a verb, an activity, and the state of things is characterized as a classification, an order brought about by ordering. The idea of culture as classification presents a state of things

where there is an apparent isomorphism across several domains of meaning; the order of the world will be mirrored in the order of its various elements. Durkheim's and Mauss's early work, *Primitive Classification,* appearing in 1903, was the first anthropological inquiry into the relationship between social and religious categories and systems of logic. They wrote of "primitive classifications":

First of all, like all sophisticated classifications, they are systems of hierarchized notions. Things are not simply arranged by them in the form of isolated groups, but these groups stand in fixed relationship to each other and together form a single whole. Moreover, these systems, like those of science, have a purely speculative purpose. Their object is not to facilitate action, but to advance understanding, to make intelligible the relations which exist between things.[2]

This early model came packed with an idea of classification as systematic and rule governed, and by the time of structuralism, culture appears in a constellation of concepts—classification, structure, rule-governed behavior—that approximates another structural model, that of language. Edmund Leach has gone so far as to consider culture as mutually understood systems of communication.[3] With this definition, members' reality-generating conversations, their communication of culture, comes to be considered as culture itself. But once culture is seen as an order analogous to the order of communication, a transformational principle is introduced. The order of communication is a shifting and emergent order; the classification process does not work like a clock so much as like a living thing.

Classification as a model for those procedures by which thought, language, and culture both reify and recreate each other was most elegantly explored by Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss took up the idea of homology implicit in Durkheim's and Mauss's emphasis on "fixed relationships." In *The Savage Mind* he wrote that "analogous logical structures can be constructed by means of different lexical resources. It is not the elements themselves but only the relations between them which are constant."[4] We can consider culture to be not the content of a classification, but the systems of relationships by which the classification is constructed and modified.

As does structural linguistics, structural anthropology sees classification as a system of differences, and thereby a system of similarities. All meaning becomes positional meaning—meaning defined by a relationship to an *other*. From his early work on totemism, Lévi-Strauss argued that the organization of nature is not a consequence of social organization and its particular needs, but rather, that the relationships between species are analogous to the relationships between clan groups.[5] By means of this analogy, animal classifications are used "to think with," as are the metaphorical relations between sex and marriage rules and dietary prohibitions. His point has been taken up in many specific

studies in symbolic anthropology. S. J. Tambiah found in his study of Thai classifications that "it is in respect to the universe of land animals that attitudes of affinity and separation, opposition and integration, fuse to produce the complex correspondence of sex rules, house categories and animal distinctions."[6] Similarly, R. Bulmer concluded from his study of zoological taxonomy among the New Guinea Karam that cassowaries, dogs, and pigs stand in special metaphorical relationships to humans analogous to relationships *between* human categories.[7] While orders of experience may be separated through classification, the logical relations between them may retain some degree of constancy, and one system of relationships may thereby be used as a grid upon which another system of relationships can be mapped regardless of specific content.

The connection to the model of intertextuality presented in part 1 becomes apparent—rather than positing a causal relationship between different domains of discourse, our concern is with the ways in which these domains are used to "think with," the types of operations used in moving from one domain to another. "The logic of depiction requires that the whole of logical space be given as soon as one place in it is determined," writes Mary Douglas.[8] We can see cultural classifications as metaphorical in nature. They are not only internally metaphorical in the sense that by means of part/whole relationships different terms share characteristics and thus form overlapping and emergent areas, they are also analogically metaphorical—the relationships between sets of terms share characteristics. An example of an internal metaphor would be:

legs/horse
legs/table

where one *term* is interchangeable with one other term. But in analogical metaphors, it is the *relationship* between each set of terms that is metaphorical, as it is in "Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage":

love : marriage : : horse : carriage

The discussion of metaphor in part 1 as an is/is not phenomenon connected with play and paradox was primarily concerned with examples of internal metaphor—short cuts like "busy as a bee" and fresh cuts like "dawn of the rosy fingers" (perhaps already a short cut). With a model of analogical metaphor, we can move to a consideration of the relationships between domains of textuality. The examples from totemic systems that state "bear : deer : hawk : : clan b : clan d : clan h"[9] show a relationship between the text of nature and the text of culture that is isomorphic, "congruent." Similarly, as Jakobson maintained, metonymic

relationships increase the effect of the real, the *given* in discourse. For instance, if "bear : clan b" implies all of the above analogy, or if Tolstoy uses "hair on an upper lip" or "a bare shoulder" to refer metonymically to his two types of female characters, there is an increase in the "effect of the real."

This kind of isomorphism is particularly apparent in the structural analysis of myths. For the structuralists, form and content are of the same nature, subject to the same analysis. Lévi-Strauss has suggested that there is not something abstract on the one hand and concrete on the other. Content draws its reality from its structure and what is called form is the structural formation of the local structure forming the content.[10] Dell Hymes provides an example of this interrelationship between form and content in his analysis of a Clackamas Chinook myth, "The Wife Who Goes Out Like a Man." Hymes found that in this myth oppositions in culture are mediated through the structure of the myth.[11] Thus the genres that are isomorphic with the social organization of nature and the social organization of the set of members will vary across sets of members. The native system is, as well, a system of differences between types of discourse defined by their relationship to other levels of organization shared by members. "Significance is always phenomenal," argued Lévi-Strauss in his confrontation with Paul Ricoeur in 1970.[12] The organization of significance in one domain of experience will have import for other domains of experience.

ANOMALY, AMBIGUITY, AND AMBIVALENCE

Thus far in this discussion of culture as classification I have been concerned with intertextual relationships that are complementary and domain reinforcing. But any system of classification comes built with leaks and anomalies. We have only to think of the rule "All rules have exceptions." The problem of a "leak" in the system of rules brings us back to Richard Hilbert's "nonsense experiment." When confronted with gaps in their system of knowledge, members will take refuge in the use of special cases such as exceptions, fate, chance, accident, and nonsense. They will thereby create a condition that is an "impossible context"—that is, a context that can never be contextualized, that can never take place in the "real world" and thus can never contaminate that real world. Edmund Leach has suggested that "language gives us the names to distinguish the things; taboo inhibits the recognition of those parts of the continuum that separate the things."[13] Leach further suggests that for any category p distinguished from an environment $-p$, the overlapping area that is both p and $-p$ will be taboo. The category "p and $-p$" points to the paradoxes of play and metaphor as "new categories" that stand in an is/is not relation to a prior state of affairs. This is one

reason why the metaphorical behavior of nonsense, play, and paradox is removed from everyday life, cut off from its reality-generating conversations and contexts, and limited to the "never never land," the contexts of playground, ritual, and fiction.

Taboo can be seen in terms of the states of anomaly, ambiguity, and ambivalence. The anomalous stands between the categories of an existing classification system; it threatens the integrity of text and context by being neither one nor the other. The ambiguous is that which cannot be defined in terms of any given category; it threatens the integrity of individual categories, being "either this or that or something else." The ambivalent is that which belongs to more than one domain at a time and will not fix its identity in any one member of this set of domains; it is "both this and that." In terms of the intertextual construct, irony brings in ambivalence, a threat to the hierarchy of interpretations, by talking through two domains at once. And as fictive texts move more and more away from the classificatory system of the everyday lifeworld, their status becomes ambiguous and anomalous—ambiguous because reflexivity puts their generic characteristics in increasing jeopardy, and anomalous because their contexts become increasingly "impossible." In her study of pollution and taboo, Mary Douglas wrote: "Dirt was created by the differentiating activity of the mind, it was a by-product of the creation of order. All through the process of differentiating its role was to threaten distinctions made; finally, it returns to its true indiscriminate character.... Formlessness is both the symbol of beginning and growth and decay."[14]

Like dirt, texts become increasingly "formless" or antiformal as they move away from a given system of order, for *form* is defined only in terms of congruence with the existing system of order. Consider the costume of the clown or fool and its formlessness. As William Willeford has pointed out, "Charlie Chaplin's baggy trousers and shapeless shoes have antecedents in the dress of Elizabethan clowns. Lumpishness suggests chaos registered by consciousness as a mere crude fact; the audience is confronted with something relatively shapeless, yet material."[15] At the same time, these categories are totally dependent upon the existing system of order for their anomalous, ambiguous, and/or ambivalent status. As we have seen in the process whereby metaphors move from fresh cuts to short cuts, changes in the system of order will bring about incorporation of anomalous, ambiguous, and ambivalent categories and the creation of new categories of these types. Thus the disorder of nonsense may be seen as a not-yet-incorporated form of order, an order without a context, without a place in the everyday lifeworld.

One nonsense-making character who has received particular attention from symbolic anthropology is the trickster, the personification of

ambivalence who appears as raven, crow, and hare in North America; spider, frog, and tortoise in Africa; the rabbit in Afro-American folklore; and the fox in South America. Paul Radin wrote in his classic study of the Winnebago trickster:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.[16]

In the Winnebago cycle, trickster tries to go to war alone, makes his right arm fight his left, causes the death of his brother's children by doing everything "strictly forbidden to him"; cohorts with some dancing ducks before attempting to kill them; then talks to his own anus; burns his anus and eats his intestines; loses part of his penis; changes into a woman and marries a chief's son; eats a laxative bulb that fills him with enough gas to scatter a village with his wind; falls into his own excrement; eats some children and their mothers; gets his head caught in an elk's skull; imitates a muskrat, a snipe, a woodpecker, and a polecat; frees the Mississippi of obstacles and causes a waterfall to fall on the land.[17]

These activities of trickster systematically violate the kinds of dietary and marriage rules that in the preceding discussion of analogical metaphor were so important to the isomorphic relationships holding between the organization of nature and the organization of social relationships. The systematic nature of trickster's activities points to his position as a violator of not only specific taboos, but also of the idea of a taboo, the idea of a rule that cannot be violated. Trickster as shapeshifter takes on the form of other species, changes sex, marries and copulates with the same sex and with opposite species, and violates all dietary prohibitions. Furthermore, trickster narratives themselves violate generic rules, being neither profane nor sacred and often appearing in contexts, such as sacred contexts, where they are anomalous, uncategorizable.[18] While trickster embodies a range of negations, he/she also, according to Radin, "is represented as the creator of the world and the establisher of culture."[19] As the embodiment of disparate domains, trickster is analogous to the process of metaphor, the incorporation of opposites into a new configuration. He represents both the breakdown and the emergence of the classifications constituting culture.

PROPER NOTS

The activities of the trickster figure often show the first of a series of operations for turning the common-sense, everyday lifeworld

into nonsense—reversals and inversions. The systematic violation of categories and norms of behavior that trickster presents appears as a negation, a reversal, an inversion, of those cultural categories and behavioral norms that make up common sense. If we see culture as a way of classifying and organizing experience, then it holds that each category p will not only have an environment $-p$ from which it may be distinguished metonymically, but also that many categories will have a "proper" $-p$, an exact inverse in the hierarchy of relations between paradigmatic sets. This is the simplest, most basic type of inversion. Since not every category has a proper not, this gesture first of all involves a reduction of the world into sets with two elements. The varieties of relationships between the two elements are further reduced to two: + or -. The set has a minimum of complexity and a maximum of manipulatability.

The theory of logical types is helpful for an understanding of "proper nots," for it sees categories as arranged according to levels of abstraction: In the set of "not popsicles," for instance, we included "bracelets, nails, hot dogs, and rubber bands." But, to use an example from Bateson, we did not include something like "tomorrow," since using "tomorrow" would involve a jump to another level of logical type. The proper "not floor" would be "a ceiling," just as the proper "not master" would be "a slave." Similarly, right side up/upside down, frontwards/backwards, serve as directions for proper nots. "Proper nots" consist of the reversal or inversion of whole units, and thereby involve the interpreter with all those features that are seen to be significant enough to identify. The proper not is *not* made by saying "This is not this because it has one arm instead of two, or three legs instead of four." Rather, every significant feature is inverted, and thus the proper not depends upon a symmetry built into the classification of things, a symmetry that is perhaps derived from the symmetry of the body. The child's most fundamental experience with inversion is the experience of his or her whole body being dangled upside down, an experience that results in turning the whole world upside down as well.

TAKING THINGS BACK

Reversibility may be a characteristic of our perception of culture in general, and particularly of the idea of culture as communication. While we see the natural world as constant—unchanged by the desires and purposes of human activities except in so far as human activities interrupt or interfere with the natural order—we see culture as constantly in process, transformable, and manipulatable when considered as a process of communication. This point is implied by Lévi-Strauss's statement that one could limit "the expression 'structures of

subordination' by opposing it to 'structures of communication'; meaning thereby that there are, in society, two major structural types; structures of communication which are reciprocal and structures of subordination, on the other hand, which are univocal and not reversible."[20] This distinction between reversible and nonreversible structures not only holds against the intertextual division between realism (univocal and nonreversible) and irony/metafiction (multivocal and reversible), it is also symptomatic of a more basic division between fictive and nonfictive events in social life. Nonfictive events are those that happen in social time, that "really did occur" and cannot be "taken back." In contrast, fictive events are framed as reversible events. They can be taken back by saying "This is just a story," or "I was just joking," by asserting their paradoxical is/is not status as events and nonevents. This basic division is evident in games where there is a period that "does not count" and where scores can be reversed back to zero. Here the text of experience virtually can be erased. When experience "really counts," nothing can be done to reverse its ongoingness. The whole domain of "practice," however, gives us another example of a fictive domain, a domain that can be reversed. And from the previous discussion of nonsense and learning, we can see that the reverse—that all fictions are practice domains—may be true as well.

This fundamental distinction between nonfictive and fictive events is further demonstrated in the way we classify pranks and crimes. The interface between pranks and crimes is determined by the reversibility of their effects. Soap can be washed off windows, paint can be sandblasted, windows can be replaced, but scars and death are not held to be reversible. "Hurt" is defined in terms of the body's capabilities to reverse damage. When fraternity members get their heads shaved during "rush," they have confidence that their hair will grow back. It is interesting that when fraternity pranks do result in serious injury or death, it is not the activity "pranks" that is blamed, but the failure in classification. To say "They do not know when to stop" is to say that the fraternity members passed "a point of no return," a point where reversible actions become irreversible because of an error in framing. When people make continued classificatory errors of this type they move from being a prankster to a delinquent, and their participation in social life is forcibly restricted. A reversal of the fraternity illustration of the role of reversible events in the context of social life is the "neck riddle." These riddles narrate events known only to the poser of the riddle, a criminal condemned to death.[21] If the condemned man can tell a riddle that no one can answer, his life will be spared. Carl Withers provides this example:

A man was condemned to be hanged and was riding horseback to the gallows with his hangmen. They offered to spare his life if he could think up a riddle none of them could answer. At the gallows he asked without dismantling:

> Under gravel I do travel
> On oak leaves I do stand
> I ride my pony and never fear
> I hold my bridle in my hand
>
> (Answer: he had put gravel in his hat and oak leaves in his boot. The answer is the riddler himself)[22]

This type of riddle has the power to reverse its own context, the context of death, to its inverse, the context of life—from seriousness to play—so long as the arbitrary power of the riddler is not tampered with, so long as it is allowed to be framed as a riddle.

While play activities "do not count" and are seen as both atemporal and temporary in status, they also reverse the hierarchy and equilibrium of the common-sense world. In many games there is an outcome that is disequilibrial and reversible. Sutton-Smith has written, "Someone ends up being a winner. One could argue likewise that the intentionality of play is to do things differently; to make a unique response to customary circumstances, and to move events away from their cognitive and affective equilibria." He suggests that the intention of play may be to upset the customary balance of things.[23] Games and play often contrast symmetry and asymmetry. Although this is not true of all games, many times the players begin with equality and end with inequality. There is an implicit arbitrariness in the game status, since the "play" of the game will go back to the beginning state of undifferentiated status before the next play.[24]

Similar states of disequilibrium appear in carnival and rites of inversion proper. Here the mayor is a tramp and the tramp is a mayor, the servant is the master and the master becomes the servant. And in these activities oppositions can become complements and complements become oppositions—a unit can consist of a set of proper nots, or two elements in a contiguous relationship can be transformed into proper nots. Disequilibrium takes the form of segmentation. While unifying rites bring together diverse statuses into equilibrium, the opposite occurs in carnival—closeness is transformed into distance. Kristeva, following Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, has said that carnavalesque discourse is an insult to official discourse—the discourse of law—and that carnavalesque discourse is distinguished by a law that is a transgression, and thereby an antilaw.[25] Thus the work that reversals and negations accomplish is not only a defining against, but a fragmenting, a separating off. When one system transgresses another, it is a splitting and a cutting across. Just as trickster's right hand fought his left, the fool and the clown often appear in pairs that are *split*, in pairs of

opposites: Lear and his fool, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Don Giovanni and Leporello, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Shem and Shaun, often exchanging roles, producing a confusion of identity. One has only to think of the popularity of twins in many TV situation comedies, or the confusions of *Finnegans Wake*: "equals of opposites, evolved by a onesame power of nature or of spirit, *iste*, as the sole condition and means of its himundher manifestation and polarised for reunion by the symphysis of their antipathies."[26]

Thus far I have discussed certain aspects of reversals in relation to culture as classification and communication: (1) the symmetrical inversion of proper nots, (2) the hierarchical inversion of relationships, (3) the fragmentation involved in transgressing any system of order. In the remainder of this chapter I consider some specific types of nonsense reversals in fictions: inversions of classes, reversible texts, discourse that denies itself, and the inversion of metaphor.

INVERTING CLASSES

The earliest cartoon is believed to be a "comic strip" papyrus dating from the New Kingdom.[27] The cartoon depicts the breakdown of an old social order—lions are happily playing checkers with gazelles, wolves are protectively watching goats, and a cat is tending a flock of geese. The cartoon reconciles the antinomies lion/gazelle, wolf/goat, cat/geese, by turning "natural enemies" into social allies, and in the case of the first picture, the disequilibrium between the lion and gazelle is transformed into the initial equilibrium characteristic of the game—the impending disequilibrium brought about by the checkers match will be determined by a game order rather than a natural order.

Thomas Wright has said that, among the Egyptians, "The practice having been once introduced of representing men under the character of animals was soon developed into other applications of the same idea, such as that of portraying animals engaged in human occupations or of reversing the position of men and animals so that animals were represented as treating human tyrants in the same manner as they are usually treated by such tyrants."[28] This method of making nonsense, the inversion of animal and human categories, is perhaps the most prevalent of all proper not inversions. Bergson wrote in his essay "Laughter," "Picture to yourself certain characters in a certain situation: if you reverse the situation and invert the roles, you obtain a comic scene."[29] While Bergson was mainly concerned with the comic effect of "something mechanical encrusted on the living," the inversion of human into mechanical categories, his rule of inversion follows just as well with "something living encrusted on the mechanical"—the

inversion of mechanical into human categories. Alice, confronted with the Queen's croquet ground where the croquet balls are live hedge hogs and the mallets are live flamingoes and the arches are soldiers bending over on hands and feet, remarks, "You've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive; for instance, there's the arch I've got to go through next walking about at the other end of the ground—and I should have croqueted the Queen's hedgehog just now, only it ran away when it saw mine coming!"[30]

The inversions of animal and human categories and mechanical and human categories often involve a transformation of the same domains as those that were prominent in the studies of analogic metaphor cited before—animal categories, social categories, dietary categories, and sexual categories. Consider this nonsense rhyme collected by the Opies in their study of *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*:

> The sausage is a cunning bird
> With feathers long and wavy;
> It swims about the frying pan
> And makes its nest in gravy.[31]

This example shows a neat inversion in the following manner:

sausage : frying pan	: :	bird : nest
bird : frying pan	: :	sausage : nest
sausage : bird	: :	frying pan : nest

Inversely, the humor of the "How Panurge played a Trick on the Parisian Lady which was not at all to her advantage" chapter of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* turns a human into an animal. By sprinkling the Parisian Lady with "bitch's perfume," Panurge turns her into a literal bitch and she is besieged by male dogs.[32] The inversion here of animal and human categories is particularly radical because it has been done through sexual characteristics.

In his study of nonsense, Emile Cammaerts wrote, "Nonsense steps in gradually, first through the animal story, then through the confusion of all classes and values, finally through the creation of such wild images that they defy classification." He says that nonsense is "a world of topsy-turvydom in which cockle-shells grow in a garden, barbers shave pigs and lions and unicorns are fed on bread and plum cake."[33] The inversions of nonsense work not only by proper nots, as they would if the customer shaved the barber, but by inversions of the terms of a complement—hence the barber shaves a pig, not a man—and other inversions. Carroll's work offers more examples of topsy-turvydom. Father William is sure that standing on his head incessantly will do him no harm, and he also likes to somersault backwards in through the door.[34] The Cheshire Cat gives a definition of madness by inversion:

"You see a dog growls when it's angry and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore, I'm mad."[35]

The inversions of the final dinner party in *Through the Looking Glass*[36] show the use of inversion as a principle to cut across a set of activities. This is the beginning of play with an institutional order, an order affecting a range of behaviors, which we saw above as the inversion of hierarchical relationships in many rites of reversal and game situations. At the Shipley School in Philadelphia, students hold "backwards days" in which a wide range of activities within the institutional order of the school are reversed. On these days everything that is said is taken to mean its opposite—students walk backwards down the halls and systematically do the opposite of all commands and requests of teachers.[37] In many American high schools there are annual class days where students parody the behavior of teachers and football players dress in cheerleaders' costumes and cheerleaders wear football uniforms. Other travesties of this type include students saying the Lord's Prayer backwards in order to "raise the devil," or the inversions typical of the Black Mass.[38] Children take particular delight in nonsense that reverses roles based on size:

> Down in the meadow
> Where the corn cobs grow,
> Flea jumped on the elephant's toe
> Elephant cried, with tears in his eyes,
> Why don't you pick on someone your size?[39]

These inversions of scale are related to the humor of ambiguous boundaries—the humor of giants and dwarfs, stilts and costumes that shrink or enlarge a figure. When such humor depends upon the inversion of categories that stand in a proper not of scale to each other, we can see it as an example of a reversal as well as an example of boundary play.

REVERSIBLE TEXTS

The reversal is a particular threat to hierarchy and direction. If we see everyday life as "getting somewhere," with an implication of progress, the reversal reminds us that what goes up must come down, and that what happens in the domain of culture can often be turned back on itself. Because we see language as something nonmaterial, as something that has no "concrete" effect upon the physical world, it is often a forum for exercises in reversibility. We can see this exercise not only in discourse that is "taken back," but also in several speech play forms that readily demonstrate their ability to turn back on themselves,

to proceed ambivalently in either of two directions. The reversals of these texts are "internal" to the text, that is, they involve a reversal of features present in the text. For example, "The goose that stepped into the elevator and got peopled,"[40] is an example of an animal/human inversion that is effected on the linguistic level by the false linguistic analogy of goose : people : : goosed : peopled. Other linguistic inversions can be performed by reversing phonemes:

> Geat but not naudy
> Med the sonkey
> Tainting his pail
> Bly skue[41]

or by reversing morphemes:

> Most people don't know it,
> but actually there isn't a diff
> of bitterance between a
> hipponoceros and a rhinopotamus.[42]

In the mid-nineteenth century, the form of phonemic and morphemic inversion known as *contrapetterie* was popular in France: "Elle fit son prix. Elle prit son fils," "Il le dit a deux fames. Il le fit a deux dames."[43] Playing with these forms involves a reversal of the temporality of speech from the outset. Their cleverness is largely derived from the "foresight," the perception of the text as an integral whole, which precedes performance. They involve a consciousness of the text as *text*, a discourse with boundaries within which one can manipulate its constitutive elements. Conundrums, for example, work with morphemic or lexical inversions by structuring a riddle question whose answer will consist of two symmetrical parts, each half being in some way a linguistic inversion of the other: "What is the difference between an angry circus owner and a Roman hairdresser? One is a raving showman and the other is a shaving Roman." Conundrums turn pairs of "nots" into "proper nots," exact reversals, by moving the status of each member away from the classifications of the everyday world, where they are already improper nots, to the level of linguistic signs, where they can become "proper nots." There are, of course, many differences between an angry circus owner and a Roman hairdresser, but the only differences that count here are linguistic differences.

Each inversion and reversal undercuts the status of the original order, inverting the animal and the human, or the human and the mechanical, or the linguistic sign and what it signifies. Inversions of animal, human, and mechanical categories call status and role relationships into question, and linguistic inversions emphasize the reversible and flexible nature of communication. With the printed page, reversibility becomes available to the entire text as an object—the text can be

rearranged in mechanical space in accordance with a variety of orders. Lewis Carroll, who liked to play his music boxes backwards for relaxation, frequently wrote letters back to front, not only in mirror writing, but with the last word first and vice versa so that one had to begin from "the end" and end at "the beginning."[44] One of his *Letters to Child-Friends* reads: "For it made you that *him* been have *must* it see you so: *grandfather* my was, *then* alive was that."[45]

The palindrome is perhaps the most perfect linguistic reversal, equivalent to being able to turn the whole body upside down. The word comes from the Greek, *palindromos*, "running back," and the palindrome is defined as a word, verse, or sentence that reads the same backwards or forwards. The palindrome can work on the lexical level, as in MUM, ANNA, DEED, ANANA, MINIM, MADAM.[46] This is the simplest type of palindrome. A lengthy list of English palindromes appears in the English translation of G. Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers*, for the novel's genius of wordplay, Bustrofedon, spends much of his time "unlocking" them. Bustrofedon comes up with "tit, eye, nun, kayak, level, sexes, radar, civic, sos (the most helpful), gag (the funniest), boob"[47] in his list of palindromes, and "live/evil, part/trap, flow/wolf, diaper/repaid, reward/drawer, drab/bard, Dog/God!" in his list of "mirror words."[48] The palindrome can also work on the level of the phrase, as in "Madam I'm Adam," "Able Was I Ere I Saw Elba," and "A Man, A Plan, A Canal, Panama," or on the level of the entire text—Lalanne's *Curiosités littéraires* includes an example of a palindromic poem by the thirteenth century poet Baudoin de Condé:

> Amours est vie glorieuse,
> Tenir fait ordre gracieuse
> Maintenir veult courtoises mours
> Mours courtoises veult maintenir
> Gracieuse ordre fait tenir:
> Glorieuse vie est amours.[49]

Similarly, Bustrofedon longs "for a book written entirely back to front so that the last word became the first and vice versus. And now I know that Bus has taken a trip to the other world, to the opposite, to his negative, to his anti-self, to the other side of the mirror."[50]

Another type of text that uses mechanical space to effect its inversion is "Jesuitical" or "equivocal verse," in which the lines can succeed each other either down or across the page:

I love my country—but the king	Above all men his praise I sing
Destruction to his odious reign	That plague of princes, Thomas Paine
The royal banners are displayed	And may success his standard aid
Defeat and ruin seize the cause	Of France, her liberty and laws[51]

This kind of verse is a graphic display of irony—talking in two contradictory voices at once. Reversals may be seen to be inherently ironic

because they produce both a doubling and a contradiction. They are a "doubling back" and have to do with the impossibility of nonsense to go anywhere, to proceed in a straight line towards a "purpose at hand." Consider Monty Python's "Minister of Silly Walks" or Samuel Beckett's Watt, who always prefers to have his back to his destination. Here each motion towards implies a corresponding motion against. With Watt, the net result is movement without direction:

Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination and could sit down.[52]

Even Watt's thought becomes increasingly palindromic, reading back to front. "As Watt walked, so now he talked, back to front." On page 164, his inversions begin: "Day of most, night of part, Knott with now." The narrator tells us that "the inversion affected not the order of the sentences, but that of the words only." Then Watt began to invert not the order of the words in the sentence, but the order of the letters in the word. Then he inverted the order of the sentences in the "period," then the words in the sentence together with the order of the sentences in the period, then the letters in the word together with the order of the sentences in the period. Then he began to invert the order of the letters in the word together with that of the words in the sentence, together with that of the sentences in the period, until finally:

in the brief course of the same period, now that of the words in the sentence, now that of the letters in the word, now that of the sentences in the period, now simultaneously that of the words in the sentence and that of the sentences in the period, now simultaneously that of the letters in the word and that of the sentences in the period, and now simultaneously that of the letters in the word and that of the words in the sentence and that of the sentences in the period . . . I recall no examples of this manner.[53]

Watt's movements are the movements of any self-denying and critical operation—the movement of thought caught against itself. The reversibility of discourse is made possible by the reversibility of knowledge itself. Bouvard and Pecuchet discover that while Doctor Morin's *Manual of Hygiene* says that nervous people should avoid tea, Decker prescribed in the seventeenth century that one should drink fifty gallons of the stuff a day to swell the pancreas. "This information shook Morin in their esteem," writes Flaubert.[54] And this is the beginning of Bouvard's and Pecuchet's realization that there can be contradictions in knowledge:

"And from disregard of dates they passed to contempt for facts."[55] The contempt for facts is a contempt for the conditions of knowing that brought about the discourse itself—a contempt for the implicit knowledge underlying the interpretive procedures used in creating "the truth" as well as "reality."

DISCOURSE THAT DENIES ITSELF

The metacommunication necessary for the message "This is play" or "This is a fiction" implicitly carries a denial and a criticism—a denial because of the status of the representation as an activity that is framed as both real and not real, and a criticism because the discourse has been framed, set off, and is examinable from many sides and able to be manipulated. For children, play and fictions hold the fascination of something that is both a lie and not a lie. Thus they are as powerful as a taboo in an anomalous position—a taboo that attracts. Within the rules of fictive discourse, one can "take back" something that is said, since what was said was both said and not said:

> A bottle of pop, a big banana
> We're from southern Louisiana
> That's a lie, that's a fib
> We're from Colorado[56]

Using pairs of opposing terms, children's speech play often pits discourse against itself. Whereas "reversible texts" ambivalently move backwards and forwards, denying any privileged reading, discourse that denies itself systematically proceeds by cancelling itself out. A "narrative" is produced that is self-cancelling, like an equation where everything is voided and the result is 0=0. Here is an example of this type of nonsense:

> Ladies and jellyspoons:
> I come before you
> To stand behind you
> To tell you something
> I know nothing about.
> Last Thursday
> Which was Good Friday
> There will be a mothers' meeting
> For Fathers only.
> Wear your best clothes
> If you haven't any,
> And if you can come,
> Please stay at home.
> Admission is free
> So pay at the door
> Pull up a chair

> And sit on the floor.
> It makes no difference
> Where you sit
> The man in the gallery
> Is sure to spit.
> We thank you for your unkind attention.
> The next meeting will be held
> At the four corners of the round table.[57]

Such rhymes, too, are ironic, talking in two contradictory voices at the same time. The narrator splits into two contradictory narrators, each denying each other's discourse. The paired oppositions that the narrative presents are states that cannot tolerate each other, yet that in the frame of the discourse are allowed to be and not be at the same time. They are versions of the same paradox by which all fictions are allowed to "exist."

In literature the same device can be exploited, for while the order of reading from left to right across the page captures the temporal order of speech, it can also depict graphically the juxtaposition of opposites. In *Molloy*, the first of Beckett's trilogy of novels, the voice of the character Moran begins, "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm—all is sleeping."[58] He tells the story of his strange search for Molloy and then his part of the narrative ends, "Then I went back into the house and wrote. It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining."[59] Even minor details, which are usually the ammunition of realism, are not to be trusted when Moran speaks. He lets us know, "When I said turkeys and so on, I lied."[60] And when Moran gives information, he is not above taking it away immediately: "What then was the source of Ballyba's prosperity? I'll tell you. No, I'll tell you nothing. Nothing."[61] The effect is a narrative that continually undercuts itself and whose conclusion undercuts everything that has taken place, presumably even the cancellations that the narrative has already internally revealed. *Tristram Shandy* similarly plays with the reader's gullibility: Sterne gives a description of Fontainebleau in chapter 27, then tells the reader that "there are two reasons why you need not talk loud of this to everyone. First, because 'twill make the said nags the harder to be got; and secondly, 'tis not a word of it true."[62] These denials emphasize not only the reversibility of fictive status, but also the position of the fictive narrator as a person who does not have the responsibilities of the narrator of common-sense discourse. The fictive narrator does not have to "stand behind" what he says; he can play trickster, changing the rules of the game, undercutting the reader's assumptions. When Beckett and Sterne deny the reader an absolute knowledge, they are denying a knowledge of the narrative's condition of origin. We are not presented

with a text that is rooted metonymically to the everyday lifeworld. Rather, we must accept the fluctuations of a text that is continually self-transforming, that flaunts its detachment from everyday contexts. With literary texts, we are ironically confronted with a "physical" text, but it is a text whose absent author and absent context of origin make it all the more fleeting.

The footnote,[63] like equivocal verse, offers an opportunity for discourse to deny itself visually as well as verbally. As the depiction of a voice splitting itself, the footnote is from the beginning a form of discourse about discourse. Swift takes much advantage of the possibilities of the footnote in his *A Tale of a Tub*. In the fifth edition (1710), he denies the main text of the tale by adding his own footnotes:

This great work was entered upon some years ago, by one of our most eminent members: He began with *The History of Reynard the Fox* but neither lived to . . .

*The author seems here to be mistaken, for I have seen a Latin edition of *Reynard the Fox* above a hundred years old, which I take to be the original; for the rest it has been thought by many people to contain some satirical design on it.[64]

In a further parody of learning in a text that is already a parody of learning, Swift includes notes from William Wotton's *Observations upon the Tale of the Tub* (1705) along with his (Swift's) own footnotes. At one point he makes a double contradiction by having Lambin, a sixteenth-century French scholar, submit a footnote denying Wotton's footnote:

*By his coats which he gave his sons, the garments of the Israelites—W. Wotton.

**An error (with submission) of the learned commentator; for by the coats are meant the doctrine and faith of Christianity, by the wisdom of the Divine Founder fitted to all times, places and circumstances—LAMBIN.[65]

Lambin was, of course, dead long before *A Tale of a Tub* was written. The irony of Swift's footnotes lie in their contradiction of knowledge within a text setting out to demonstrate contradictions in knowledge. Beckett's famous "haemophilia" footnote in *Watt* is another example:

Sam's other married daughter Kate, aged twenty-one years, a fine girl but a bleeder (1)

(1) Haemophilia is, like an enlargement of the prostate, an exclusively male disorder, but not in this work.[66]

A footnote two pages later says that "the figures given here are incorrect. The congruent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous."[67] The footnote in the work of Swift and Beckett is more than a device for supplementing the text, for addressing careless and careful readers "all at once," as footnotes do in nonfictive, "scholarly," texts. In nonfictive texts, the footnote aids the illusion of the real by giving a glimpse of

"all that has been left out," all the given information that makes up the true, the real, world. To enter into an agreement with the footnotes of a text is to step further into the text. But in the fictive text, the footnote is often ironic. It stands on the interface between the fiction and reality. To enter into an agreement with the fictive footnote is to stand outside and inside the fiction at the same time. When Beckett and Swift have their footnotes contradict the text, the reader is threatened by a loss of any distinction between the real and the fictive. The assumptions of the reader are split and undercut with every splitting and undercutting of the text. As in the "Ladies and jellyspoons" type of discourse, the process that denies the discourse puts the audience in jeopardy as well.

Discourse that denies itself becomes a matter of structure in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Just as Bouvard and Pecuchet moved from one area of learning to another by a path of contradictions, so *Ulysses*, and later, *Finnegans Wake*, roam from one universe of discourse to another, using a "slash and burn" technique. Joyce wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver on 20 July 1919:

The word scorching transmitted to me by your associates in reply to my tentative inquiry has a particular significance for my superstitious mind, not so much because of any quality or merit in the writing itself as for the fact that the progress of the book is in fact like the progress of some sandblast. As soon as I mention or include any person in it I hear of his or her death or departure or misfortune: and each successive episode dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic) leaves behind it a burnt up field.[68]

The idea of a text that never "goes anywhere," that consumes itself with each narrative step, is also illustrated in this traditional rhyme:

> I'll tell you a story
> About old Mother Morey
> And now my story's begun
> I'll tell you another
> About her brother
> And now my story's done[69]

Like *Finnegans Wake* or the game "Mother May I?" this rhyme uses a strategy of hesitation—each step forward can mean a step backwards. And this means that there is always a threat of having to go back to the beginning, a threat that is realized in the last sentence of the *Wake*, which is also the first sentence. Leo Bersani has written of the same phenomenon in Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie*: "Each section in *La Jalousie*—ideally, each paragraph, each sentence, each word—is a new beginning. Its relation to what precedes it is ambivalent; it picks up and develops an inspiration in order to destroy the source of inspiration, to reinvent the world in a form which, in turn, will suicidally inspire further inventions."[70] With discourse that denies itself we see an

exaggeration of the ability of the fiction to "take back" what it has said. It is a fiction that is caught in a stammer of taking itself back, a self-consciousness that eliminates the possibility of ever being able to say anything definitively.

Thus far, the majority of the examples of literary inversions that I have given have come from the novel, perhaps because the novel, as a genre that has always been concerned with speech, has from the beginning been self-critical. Fielding set upon *Pamela* at once, with *Shamela*, and then with *Joseph Andrews*, the "history" of Pamela's brother. And when Viktor Shklovsky says that "*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel of world literature,"[71] it is because the novel systematically lays bare every device the novel had offered up until Sterne's time. But traditionally, literary nonsense, like folkloric nonsense, has been composed in verse or, perhaps more properly, in anti-verse. "The grotesque impression is produced, not by ignoring the general laws of good poetry, but by upsetting them purposely and by making them, so to speak, stand on their heads ... thought is subservient to rhyme," writes Cammaerts.[72]

Nonsense poetry takes the traditional division between content and form (technique), with its hierarchical weighing of content *over* form, and inverts statuses to present form over content. The nonsense verse of Lear, Carroll, and Morgenstern is not properly *ungrammatical*. Nonsense results from the juxtaposition of incongruities, from the preservation of form at the expense of content. The result is a dispersal of any univocal meaning. Lewis Carroll's *Alice* poems use a set of inversions to change didactic poetry into nonsense poetry: Isaac Watts's "busy bee" is turned into "the little crocodile," Robert Southey's "Father William" is literally turned on his head. The Duchess counsels "Speak roughly to your little boy" in her lullaby to the pig/baby in an inversion of G. W. Langford's "Speak Gently." James M. Sayles's "beautiful star" is turned into "beautiful soup," and the Lobster Quadrille takes on the form of Isaac Watts's moralistic "The Sluggard," only to have a lobster talk and an owl and a panther share a pie in what was once the sluggard's garden.[73] In both the history of the novel and the history of such verse parodies, we can see that the taking over of one text by another is a form of negation, of cancelling out and/or transforming the meaning of the confiscated text. Thus the history of parody is a replica of the reversibility of other structures of communication, of the ability to take back what has been framed as a fiction.

The dadaists and surrealists produced another great body of lyric work that was "grammatical" yet managed to invert the categories and hierarchies of ordinary language and its world, including those of poetry as a genre. Breton wrote that the constraints of art and ordinary language were "the worst of conventions ... imposing upon

us the use of formulas and verbal associations which do not belong to us."[74] Like those narratives that begin and begin again, the surrealist mission was to reinvent the world in every lyric movement. Hugo Ball wrote that the program of dada was to "contradict existing world orders."[75] The surrealists sought to invert the laws of poetry as well as the laws of ordinary language. Traditionally poetry had depended upon inspiration available to a select few and upon taming the subconscious into a logical form. The surrealists offered a poetry of continuous, total inspiration for everybody, the unleashing of the unconscious, and a poetry of process, a poetry that would never be finished, a poetry liberated from the spatial, temporal, and causal constraints of logic.[76] Unlike the nineteenth-century nonsense poets, the dadaists and surrealists were willing to invert the rules of poetic form. The "verse" of the surrealists depended much more upon the logic of talk than upon a logic of rhyme. At the same time, this verse rejected and inverted the logic of talk's ordinary language. Their inversion of lyric discourse thus went one step further than those inversions performed by the nineteenth-century nonsense writers. Dada and surrealism celebrated a poetics of contradiction on the levels of "form" and "content." Tzara wrote in his dada manifesto, "No more manifestoes," declaring, "to be against this manifesto is to be Dadaist ... in principle I'm against manifestoes, as I am also against principle."[77] And Breton wrote in his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* that the qualities of the surrealist image were: "arbitrariness, seeming contradiction, concealment, the sensational ending weakly, gives to the abstract the mask of the concrete or the opposite, implies the negation of some elementary physical property, provokes laughter."[78] In the same year, he wrote "Soluble Fish," the manifestation of these principles within a narrative of contradiction: "Having caught her in my arms, all rustling, I placed my lips on her throat without a word, what happens next escapes me almost entirely."[79]

THE INVERSION OF METAPHOR

In their contradictory movement, these texts present a critique and a denial of univocal meaning and the ideology of univocal meaning found in common sense. Since this common sense becomes efficient by means of metaphorical short cuts, nonsense often takes as its target such short cuts, and thereby undercuts the "taken for granted" nature of the everyday lifeworld. This is the final inversion that I discuss in this chapter: the metaphorical made literal, what Bergson called "the comic effect obtained whenever we pretend to take literally an expression which was used figuratively or once our attention is fixed on the material aspect of the metaphor."[80] This type of inversion insists upon consistency: the rules of logic, devoid of common-sense content, are

presented. Language is continually reduced to a set of parts with a mechanical rule for putting them together. "Skipping the details" and "getting on with the point" are made impossible. Ironically, the effect is often one of abstraction, since tearing down the structure of the discourse into its components makes the structure all the more apparent, if all the more silly.[81]

In folklore, the inversion of the metaphorical and the literal is often enacted by switching frames, specifically by switching from a performance to a "nonperformance" frame. A playful question is switched to the status of a "true" question, and vice versa. The conditions for performance are set up and then taken away at a critical point. Consider "shaggy dog" stories, which play with the ambiguity of joke narratives, narratives that often give no internal sign of being a joke until the punch line. It is the frame that sets up the audience for "a joke." In the shaggy dog story the audience waits interminably for a punchline that turns out not to be a punchline after all. Ultimately, the humor is derived not from an inversion within the narrative itself, but from the frame that says that the joke is and is not a joke at the same time.

Another type of joke relies on the frame of the riddle question to prepare the audience for an enigma, only to make the answer a literal answer, and thereby reframe the question as a literal question. These are riddles like "What did one carrot say to the other carrot?" "Nothing, carrots can't talk," or "What's the name of Pontius Pilate's great-grandmother's straw bonnet maker?" "Nobody knows."[82] Similarly, the wellerism works by creating a context for a metaphorical phrase to be read literally: "I may feel the point, but I don't see the joke," as the sheep said to the butcher. "Good blood will always show itself," said the old lady when she was struck by the redness of her nose.[83] The wellerism takes apart the short cut into its component parts. We could make a wellerism of the example of the metaphorical turned literal offered in part 1: "I think the sun rises and sets on you," said one horizon to another. The humor of the wellerism is compounded by its being a quotation of a quotation. The form "as so and so said" is similar to the form of the invisible quotation marks around proverbs. But while the proverb brings more than one voice to its own discourse, bearing the weight of the voice of tradition in a congruent and forceful "fit" with its own discourse, the wellerism is a voice that splits into two contradictory halves, undercutting both its metaphorical and its literal aspects.

Lewis Carroll makes extended use of this kind of nonsense. In his works meaning is often made material, factual, and consistent at the expense of the understanding that makes up common sense. Jacqueline Flescher has said of Carroll's nonsense that meaning "is in a sense self-contained. In spite of the necessity to *mean*, the power of meaning

is reduced to a minimum."[84] The exchange between the White King and Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* is halted by a continual movement from the metaphorical to the literal level:

> "I beg your pardon?" asked Alice.
> "It isn't respectable to beg" said the King.[85]

> "There's nothing like eating hay when you're faint," he remarked to her, as he munched away.
> "I should think throwing cold water over you would be better," Alice suggested, "or some sal-volatile."
> "I didn't say there was nothing *better*," the King replied. "I said there was nothing *like* it."[86]

The confusion with the term "nobody" that follows continues the problem. Sylvie and Bruno have the same troubles with "nobody and somebody,"[87] and even more with the phrase "as busy as the day is long."[88]

An extended literary example of the metaphorical made literal is the "Mr. and Mrs. Campbell" section of Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers*. The chapters are designed along a contradiction: Mr. Campbell narrates an account of an event. Then Mrs. Campbell gives her version, a version that denies many aspects of Mr. Campbell's narrative. Cabrera Infante includes words that have been crossed out by the narrators in a display that permits the rejected word, the cancellation mark, and the correction to all talk at once: "~~Negro~~ Black," "~~officers of the marines~~ naval officers," "~~Who~~ prostitutes."[89] Thus the contradictions within the text are symptomatic of the larger contradiction going on between the two narratives. Infante further diminishes the univocality of the narratives by running footnotes across the bottoms of the pages in these chapters, footnotes that systematically take apart any "short cuts" that the narrators are making. Here is an example from Mrs. Campbell's narrative:

With the best will in the world Mr. Campbell entangles himself in his own verbal gymnastics—the only kind he is capable of—in trying to make me into a prototype: the only kind; the common female of the species. In other words a mental invalid with the IQ^{10} of a simpleton, a cretinous Girl Friday[11], a moronic straight woman[12] . . .

[10] Intelligence Quotient
[11] Literary ref. Mrs. Campbell is addicted to them. See Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* where there is a character named Friday
[12] Feminization of straight man[90]

The effect is to strip the Campbells' language, to translate what does not need to be translated within an ironic context of a book that is a translation of a book that could not be translated—*Three Trapped Tigers* itself.

A bum approaches Harpo Marx and asks him to spare a dime for a

cup of coffee. Harpo reaches into his shirt and pulls out a cup of coffee—this is the metaphorical-turned-literal trick at work in these texts. Gertrude Stein provides a final example of this type of discourse in her "portraits" of painters and her descriptions of everyday objects. Rather than write a description that would move "up" to commonly held assumptions about character and objects, she chooses to break the act of perception into its component parts, and then to define those elements in terms of their relations to each other. Her concern is with difference rather than with the sameness that makes metaphor possible: "All the time that there is use there is use and any time there is a surface there is a surface, and every time there is an exception there is an exception and every time there is a division there is a dividing."[91] Stein's writing is an extreme example of the metaphorical turned literal. It presents what might be more properly called an "antimetaphorical" language in the sense that it rejects the "short cuts" of ordinary language and makes them strange, takes them apart into a new surface that packs its own layers of significance. In this sense her writing presents a critique of metaphor as the only way to move toward abstraction. With Stein's work, particularizing or stripping language of its assumptions turns out to be a movement towards abstraction as well. When the elements of her discourse are taken apart into minimal units of meaning, the effect is "a collection of ones." The discourse is immanently fragmentable, rearrangeable, within a surface that Stein loosely defines as "the object." For the text and object become one— the object is constituted as the text is constituted, by a fragmentation and rearrangement of "seeing."

When the metaphorical is made literal we see that, as was the case with discourse that denies itself, the reader is put into jeopardy. When discourse inverts itself in either of these ways the interpretive assumptions of the reader are inverted as well. The "what anyone knows" common to the everyday lifeworld is undercut, made suspect. The interpretation must begin again and again, fragmenting its assumptions.

In this chapter I have focused upon a set of operations by which nonsense can be made from common sense—the interpretive procedures involved in forming reversals and inversions. The very idea of reversal implies a shared ordering of events, an organization of the world that constitutes the parameters of a culture shared by a given set of members. It is this shared ordering that enables common sense to be taken for granted. Reversals can be performed by exchanging "proper nots," by inverting hierarchical relationships, by reframing in terms of oppositions. Because reversals depend upon a notion of "a prior state of things," they display the same is/is not paradox that is common to play and metaphor —they both affirm and deny an organization of the world with their every gesture. They test the validity of the state of things by turning

that state upside down or inside out or back to front. Like any critical operation, they are what they are about, and in employing them we learn the shape and limits of the categories making up culture. Perhaps most importantly, reversals illustrate this rule for fictions: a fiction is reversible. The distinguishing characteristic of the fiction is its reversibility, its status as a form of play that both is and is not in the world, that both counts and does not count.

NOTES

1. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 76–80, and idem, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).

2. Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 81.

3. See Edmund Leach, "Magical Hair," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88 (1958): 147–64. It is ironic that language itself is an abstraction, a systematic and rule-governed model, imposed over the flux of actual speech.

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 53.

5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

6. S. J. Tambiah, "Animals Are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit," *Ethnology* 42 (1969): 4–57.

7. R. Bulmer, "Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird?" *Man* 2 (1962): 5–25. Reprinted in Mary Douglas, *Rules and Meanings* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 167–93.

8. Mary Douglas, *Rules and Meanings*, p. 27.

9. Sapir and Crocker, *Social Use of Metaphor*, p. 23.

10. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'Analyse morphological des contes russe," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 3 (1960): 137.

11. Dell Hymes, "'The Wife Who Goes Out Like a Man': A Reinterpretation of a Clackamas Chinook Myth," in *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, ed. Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngas-Maranda (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 51.

12. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Paul Ricoeur, "A Confrontation," *New Left Review* 62 (1970): 57–74.

13. Edmund Leach, "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse," in *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. William Lessa and Evon Vogt, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 210.

14. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 161.

15. William Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study of Clowns and Jesters* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 16.

16. Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. xxiii.

17. Ibid., pp. 3–53.

18. See Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1975): 147–86.

19. Radin, *Trickster*, p. 125.

20. Lévi-Strauss and Ricoeur, "Confrontation," p. 65.

21. See Archer Taylor, *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

22. Carl Withers and Sula Benet, *The American Riddle Book* (London: Abelard Schuman, 1954), p. 108.

23. Brian Sutton-Smith, "A Syntax for Play and Games," in *Child's Play*, ed. Herron and Sutton-Smith, p. 300. There is evidence, however, that this is not a

cross-cultural feature of play. K.O.L. Burridge's research on play among the Tangu of New Guinea shows that equilibrium may be the desired outcome of games in a society where cooperation is of primary importance. See "A Tangu Game," in *Play*, ed. Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva, pp. 364–66.

24. Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, pp. 30–32.

25. Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du roman* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 162. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968).

26. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939), p. 92.

27. See Lionel Casson, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Time Life, 1965) and Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (1865; reprint ed., New York: Ungar, 1968), pp. 6–8.

28. Wright, *History of Caricature*, pp. 6–7.

29. Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 121.

30. Lewis Carroll, *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 92.

31. Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 22.

32. François Rabelais, *The Histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 242–44.

33. Cammaerts, *Poetry of Nonsense*, pp. 25–27.

34. Carroll, *Complete Works*, pp. 56–57.

35. Ibid., p. 72.

36. Ibid., p. 264.

37. This account is courtesy of the great lithographer Sam Walker, who was a teacher at the Shipley School from 1975 to 1976.

38. Opie, *Lore and Language*, p. 2. See also H. C. Bolton, *The Counting Out Rhymes of Children* (London: Elliot Stock, 1888), p. 36: "Necromancers of the Middle Ages, pretending to 'raise the evil one,' drew upon the ground mystical geometrical figures—a square, a triangle, a circle—and, placing an old hat in the center, repeated the Lord's Prayer backwards."

39. Lucy Nolton, "Jump Rope Rhymes as Folk Literature," *Journal of American Folklore* 61 (1948): 58.

40. Alan Dundes and Robert Georges, "Some Minor Genres of Obscene Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 75 (1962): 221–26.

41. Carl Withers, *A Rocket in My Pocket* (New York: Henry Holt, 1948), p. 196.

42. Duncan Emrich, *The Nonsense Book of Riddles, Rhymes, Tongue Twisters, Puzzles, and Jokes* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1970), p. 219.

43. L. Lalanne, *Curiosités littéraires* (Paris: Paulin, Libraire-Éditeur, 1845), p. 32. See also Liede, "Die literarischen gesellschaftlichen und gelehrten spiele," in *Dichtung als Spiel*, 2: 43–255, and the "drunkard's discourse" in Joseph Hickerson and Alan Dundes, "Mother Goose Vice Verse," *Journal of American Folklore* 75 (1962): 256.

44. John Fisher, *The Magic of Lewis Carroll* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 70.

45. Quoted in Robert Sutherland, *Language and Lewis Carroll* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 25.

46. See C. C. Bombaugh, "A Palindromic Enigma," in *Facts and Fancies for the Curious from the Harvest Fields of Literature* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1905), p. 516. The "enigma's" solution is that the first letters of the first five words spell the last word.

47. G. Cabrera Infante, *Three Trapped Tigers*, trans. from the Cuban by Donald Gardner and Suzanne Jill Levine (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 223.

48. Ibid., p. 224.

49. Lalanne, *Curiosités*, p. 27.

50. Cabrera Infante, *Three Trapped Tigers*, p. 284.

51. W. T. Dobson, *Literary Frivolities, Fancies, Follies, and Frolics* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1880), p. 143.

52. Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 30.

53. Beckett, *Watt*, pp. 164–69.

54. Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, trans. T. W. Earp and G. W. Stonier (New York: New Directions, 1954), pp. 90, 91.

55. Ibid., p. 141.

56. C. H. Ainsworth, "Jump Rope Verses around the United States," *Western Folklore* 20 (1961): 192.

57. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ed., *Speech Play*, pp. 108–9.

58. Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 94.

59. Ibid., p. 176.

60. Ibid., p. 128.

61. Ibid., p. 134.

62. Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, ed. James Work (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1940), pp. 511–12.

63. Footnotes, of course, do not always lie at the foot of the page, but can also appear as notes following chapters, or as notes at ends of books. The marginal gloss can also be used in the fictive text as a denial and a criticism.

64. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, in *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Miriam Starkman (New York: Bantam, 1962), p. 315.

65. Ibid., p. 318.

66. Beckett, *Watt*, p. 102.

67. Ibid., p. 104.

68. James Joyce, *Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellman (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 241.

69. Benjamin Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1944), p. 786.

70. Leo Bersani, *Balzac to Beckett: Center and Circumference in French Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 294.

71. Viktor Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 89.

72. Cammaerts, *Poetry of Nonsense*, p. 40.

73. Florence Milner, "The Poetry of *Alice in Wonderland*," in *Aspects of Alice*, ed. Robert Phillips (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), pp. 245–52.

74. Quoted in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Viking, 1951), pp. xxvii–xxix.

75. Ibid., p. 51.

76. See Michel Beaujour, "The Game of Poetics," in *Game, Play, Literature*, ed. Ehrmann, pp. 58–67.

77. Tzara quoted in C. Bigsby, *Dada and Surrealism* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 4–5.

78. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 38.

79. Ibid., pp. 53–54.

80. Bergson, "Laughter," p. 135.

81. Sewell, *Field of Nonsense*, p. 54.

82. Emrich, *Nonsense Book*, p. 77.

83. From C. G. Loomis, "Wellerisms in California Sources," *Western Folklore* 14 (1955): 229–45, and idem, "Traditional American Wordplay, Wellerisms, or Yankeeisms," *Western Folklore* 8 (1949): 3.

84. Jacqueline Flescher, "The Language of Nonsense in *Alice*," in *Child's Part*, ed. Brooks, p. 137.

85. Carroll, *Complete Works*, p. 224.

86. Ibid., p. 225.

87. Ibid., p. 371.
88. Ibid., p. 370.
89. Cabrera Infante, *Three Trapped Tigers*, p. 195.
90. Ibid., p. 204.
91. Gertrude Stein, *Selected Writings*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 478.

4 • play with boundaries

THE HORIZON OF THE SITUATION

While reversals and inversions are procedures that define relationships between categories, the second type of nonsense operation that I discuss here explores the activity of category making itself—it is play with the boundaries of discourse. In part 1 I presented a model for the interpretive activities of everyday life that saw textuality as a phenomenon emergent in ongoing social interaction. It was suggested that any situation depends upon members coming to share a conception of the horizon of the situation, a conception of what is relevant (appropriate) to the situation in light of this horizon, and an acting with regard to an appropriate outcome of the situation.[1] The "text" of the situation is contingent upon a notion of relevant context, that is, those aspects of intersubjective experience that will figure in forming the horizon of the situation. Context thus involves more than the immediate environment of a situation, for "immediate environment" is itself emergent in and dependent upon interpretive activities transferred from past situations and adaptable to a present conception of "what is going on."

While the meaning of situations is dependent upon a conception of the present, "unique," state of things, such meaning is an adaptation of all prior states of things brought to what is "at hand." Context does not stand guard around the text of the situation, ready to block any leaks in meaning. Rather, it is emergent in the ongoingness of the situation, the "flow" of reality-generating conversation. The boundaries of social discourse are definitive by virtue of the interpretive work that goes on in such discourse. To try to step outside of the universe of such discourse and objectively examine—make conscious—such boundaries is to experience an ever-receding horizon.

Defining the boundary of the situation will thus have a great deal to do with what in experience will be interpreted and what will not be interpreted—with what will be allowed to "exist" or "appear" in the