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**Three from the margins of anthropology: Hurston, Bohannan
and Powdermaker**

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The University of Arizona, 1994

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THREE FROM THE MARGINS OF ANTHROPOLOGY:
HURSTON, BOHANNAN AND POWDERMAKER

by

Elizabeth O'Donnell Noll

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1994

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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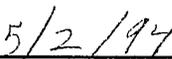


APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:



Ana Alonso
Professor of Anthropology



Date

To my mom and dad, Kathleen and Joseph Noll,
for their love and for encouraging me to be a knowledge junkie,
and for Beth, who never lost interest

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ABSTRACT

I argue for the importance of 3 marginalized works by women anthropologists: *Dust Tracks on a Road* by Zora Neale Hurston; *Return to Laughter* by Laura Bohannan; and *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* by Hortense Powdermaker. It is not generally recognized that these works prefigured recent experimental anthropology and provided innovative possibilities for the discipline. Their marginalization was the result of many factors: I focus mainly on the refusal of anthropology (until very recently) to give due credit to its non-scientific side, and the consistent devaluation of women's work within anthropology.

I analyze and compare the texts, concentrating on narrative style, use of dialogue, use of authoritative voice, treatment of racism, the author's view of herself and her text, and the text's placement in or between the genres of autobiography, anthropology and fiction.

I conclude the anthropological canon should be redefined to include works such as these.

INTRODUCTION

We as we read must become Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner, must fasten these images to some reality in our secret experience, or we shall learn nothing rightly. -- Emerson, *Essays* (n.d.)

Ethnography, the tangible product of social anthropology, has recently been the focus of innovation and controversy. In re-working what an ethnography should be, however, the experimenters have overlooked older examples of innovation which focused on the author's personal experience of doing anthropology. Thus many important works have not been included in the anthropological canon or acknowledged as being a crucial part of its development; their absence lessens the discipline. I have chosen to discuss three marginalised works which are particularly good exemplars of this group: their subject matter contributes to our understanding of the person behind the anthropologist, and their writing styles are innovative. Together the three works span three decades.

Dust Tracks on a Road (1969 [1942]), by Zora Neale Hurston; *Return to Laughter* (1964 [1954]), by Laura Bohannon (published under the pseudonym Elenore Smith Bowen); and *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (1966), by Hortense Powdermaker, are the works I will discuss. In situating these works, I will consider: the relationship of science and anthropology; the postmodern approach in anthropology and its failure to recognize these three authors; the gender bias which feminism has exposed in traditional science; the existence of an underground "women's tradition" in anthropology; the importance of autobiographical writing for anthropology; and the usefulness of personal narrative for a deeper understanding

of the discipline. I will argue that the reasons for the mainstream exclusion of these three authors are complex, but are primarily based on the refusal of anthropology (until very recently) to give due credit to its non-scientific side, or to fully recognize the contributions of women. My analysis will situate each text within the genres of autobiography, anthropology and fiction, examine the author's view of herself and her work, and highlight innovations in the practice of ethnographic writing. I will conclude that canonical acceptance of these works would require a shift in the mainstream definition of what is valuable anthropology. Although signs of such a shift are visible today, there is a very real possibility that the approaches which these texts represent will continue to be considered marginal alternatives instead of challenges to the core of the discipline.

SITUATING THE WORKS

Science and anthropology

These three works are all caught in the crosswinds at the edge of anthropology. In large measure their position there is a result of the ambiguous relationship between anthropology and science. Harding points out that the ideal scientific pursuit is physics, with its isolation from social issues; "Only if the reality of the world of emotions, values, and politics can be successfully denied can social science achieve the status and legitimacy attained by the natural sciences." (1986:232) Hence, anthropology's position is tenuous indeed, and the object of perpetual dispute. Although the study of emotions and politics has always been central to anthropology, only recently has it started to become acceptable to consider the role feelings and power play in the construction of an ethnography. If to be scientific means to be impersonal, works which explore the personal experience of anthropology are problematic: their acceptance into the canon would contradict the status of the discipline as a science.

"Science" is difficult to define. In this paper, I often set it in opposition to "personal," especially in terms of the anthropological enterprise. In her book *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Keller talks of science as a "socially constructed category . . . the name we give to a set of practices and a body of knowledge delineated by a community" (1985:3-4). The value we assign to science is based in part on its ability to explain our world in a replicable, dependable manner. This ability, in turn, is believed to depend on separation from things such as personality,

individuality and emotion.¹ For the purposes of this paper, I will use "science" and "scientific" to mean that form of knowledge which relies on the ideal of an impersonal, objective practitioner and which seeks replicable, quantifiable data as a primary goal.

Anthropologists have long recognized the ambiguity of the scientific status of their discipline, and have sought different solutions to and understandings of it. In his introduction to *Naven* (first published in 1936), Bateson noted that in portraying a culture as realistically as possible, the scientific technique differed from the artistic in one crucial point -- "The artist . . . can leave a great many of the most fundamental aspects of culture to be picked up, not from his actual words, but from his emphasis. . . This impressionistic technique is utterly foreign to the methods of science." (1958:1) The distinction is based on such a minor point that the two techniques end up sounding more similar than different. Bateson stops just short of saying that the methods of science and art are often indistinguishable in the service of anthropology, and that both play a part in producing works of highest quality. Powdermaker says exactly this in her preface to *Stranger and Friend*: "This is the heart of the participant observation method -- involvement and detachment. Its practice is both an art and a science." (1966:9) The necessary relatedness of subject to object is the core of anthropology's dilemma, and the source of much of its value as a discipline, as Stocking explains:

it seems unlikely that method can ever eliminate entirely the anxiety aroused by the subjective encounter with otherness, and as Boas' opposition implies, it may in fact be that our understanding is in some profound sense dependent

on that anxiety. (1989:268)

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz discusses this problem from a different perspective:

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. (1973:29)

Postmodern invisibility

One of the most recent influential attempts to deal with this ambiguity is the postmodernist approach, otherwise known as experimental ethnography. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), by Clifford and Marcus, and Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (1986) are the acknowledged handbooks of this approach. The former is a collection of essays which focus on ethnographic writing as an experimental and literary endeavor; the overall position is that traditional ethnographies lacked attributes critical to today's ambitions -- for instance, earlier ethnographies often were not clearly situated within an historical or political context, or neglected to question imperialist assumptions about the people studied. The Marcus and Fischer volume attempts to define the "experimental moment" in anthropology (as key to the postmodernist movement within the social sciences in general), and to survey its development and its possibilities. The unifying theme of both works is a search for forms of representation within anthropology which agree

with current philosophical positions: namely, that total objectivity is not possible and that science is a social construct, that imperialism (colonialist domination) is wrong, that anthropologists are responsible for allowing those they study to actively "speak," not be spoken for, and so on. This approach, although well-intentioned, is bankrupt on a key issue: it does not give due credit to authors such as Hurston, Bohannan or Powdermaker for their crucial contributions to the development of the "experimental" ethic of anthropology. Many of the "innovations" recommended by the postmodernists (such as writing in a more literary style; constructing those studied as individuals, not as passive objects; understanding that the authority of the ethnographer is not unambiguous; realizing that a strictly scientific method tells only part of the story) were in place already in the work of Hurston, Bohannan, Powdermaker and many others [for instance, see Briggs (1970), Fernea (1969), Mead (1972), Read (1965), and Richards (1956)].

Of the three authors discussed here, only Bohannan is even mentioned in the two bibles of postmodernism -- twice in *Writing Culture* and twice in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Clifford notes that Bohannan's work was a "disturbance" (to the conventional ethnography) which was "kept marginal." "That Laura Bohannan in the early sixties had to disguise herself as Bowen, and her fieldwork narrative as a "novel," is symptomatic. But times were changing." (1986:13) There is no other discussion of her or her work, although Clifford touches on many themes which were well-represented in *Return to Laughter*. When introducing Crapanzano's chapter on the ethnographer as trickster, for instance (1986:6), Clifford makes no mention of the

fact that Bohannan construed herself as a trickster in the final pages of her novel, thirty years before *Writing Culture* was published:

Many of my moral dilemmas had sprung from the very nature of my work, which had made me a trickster: one who seems to be what he is not and who professes faith in what he does not believe. (Bohannan 1964:290)

Elsewhere Clifford discusses the need to reject "visualism," and mentions various authors who have written on this problem. In his view the change is still to come:

Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually -- as objects, theaters, texts -- it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. (Clifford 1986:12)

Clifford leads the reader to believe no author has yet dealt with this issue, ignoring Bohannan's extensive use of language and speech to structure her discoveries in *Return to Laughter* (see page 48, below).

In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* Bohannan fares little better. Her work is mentioned as one of the best of "an outpouring of memoirs about field experience" which composed what Marcus calls an early critique of anthropology (1986:33). Marcus gives the date of this outpouring as the 1960s, and cites a publication date of 1964 for Bowen, overlooking the fact that *Return to Laughter* was first published 10 years previously. Another clue that perhaps these works are not being given close attention is his inclusion of Golde (1986 [1970]) in the same outpouring -- ignoring the sequentiality evidenced by the fact that, in her introduction to *Women in the Field*, Golde specifically states that *Return to Laughter* (among other works) was her inspiration for the volume.

When, as a first-year graduate student, I read *Return to Laughter* by Elenore

Smith Bowen (1954), I recognized something I had been missing in most anthropological works. The fictionalized description . . . was alive and compelling; it served as a constant reassurance when I subsequently engaged in my own field work. The impact of the book on me was the stimulus for this volume and provided evidence of the potential value of such a volume for students of anthropology. (Golde 1986:1)

Women in the Field is a collection of essays by women about their personal experiences doing anthropological fieldwork. Stylistically, the essays are closer to Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend* (which Golde also mentions in her introduction); they are not constructed as fiction, but as autobiographical accounts which shed light on the role of the anthropologist as observer. The essays are reminiscent of *Return to Laughter* in their focus on the importance of the personal and the subjective. Marcus describes such accounts as "celebratory, a genre of confessions about the doing of fieldwork that while exposing the trials and flaws of this activity, portrayed the anthropologist as hero." (1986:34) It is hard to see how this is true of the essays in Golde's volume or of Bohannan's novel, both of which include very unheroic sentiments. In the foreword to the 1964 edition of *Return to Laughter*, David Riesman notes that professionals "have a dream of omnicompetence in which they are never ruffled, angry, irrational, stupid, and tactless, let alone cowardly. Mrs. Bohannan discovers in herself all these failings." (1964:xiv) Not exactly the tale of a hero.

Visweswaran (1988) criticizes the attitude that these works are not serious anthropology, and the postmodernists' assertion that they are not in the same class as the experimental ethnographies of Dumont and Rabinow. She points out that

Bohannan's and Powdermaker's works "question anthropology as a positivist endeavor . . . [and] couched the fieldwork experience in terms of its disjunctions and misunderstandings, long before it was fashionable." (1988:36) It certainly seems that their styles were too innovative to be appreciated. Having dispensed with the "outpouring," Marcus notes that the "distinctive" works of Rabinow (1977) and Dumont (1978) "retained the personal and confessional character of earlier fieldwork accounts, but they were influential in opening a serious discussion about the epistemology of fieldwork, and its status as a method." (1986:34) He gives no specific reason why the works of Rabinow and Dumont opened serious discussion while the earlier works of Bohannan and Powdermaker did not.

The Clifford and Marcus volume also ignores the precursors to "experimental" ethnography in ways that are less obvious. For instance, Mary Louise Pratt ponders the dearth of vivid ethnographic writing:

There are strong reasons why field ethnographers so often lament that their ethnographic writings leave out or hopelessly impoverish some of the most important knowledge they have achieved, including the self-knowledge. . . the main evidence of a problem is the simple fact that ethnographic writing tends to be surprisingly boring. How, one asks constantly, could such interesting people doing such interesting things produce such dull books? (1986:33)

The question is even more intriguing if one acknowledges that the works of Hurston, Bohannan and Powdermaker are more interesting than most ethnography of their time (or of other times), yet are not mentioned, even as marginal exceptions to the rule. It almost seems as if being interesting disqualifies a work as true ethnography, and even prevents it from being recognized as a parent to other, "truer" (more dull,

and so more "scientific") ethnography.

The invisibility of achievements by women is exploited by Clifford in order to avoid dealing with the experimentalists who preceded the postmodernists:

Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts. Where women had made textual innovations they had not done so on feminist grounds. . . Feminist ethnography has not produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such. (1986:20-21)

The nature of this trap is peculiar: although women anthropologists produced many of the first "fieldwork novels," since they (apparently) didn't do so for feminist reasons, didn't detail their reasons and philosophies in theoretical terms (the very antithesis of the *raison d'être* for their work), and didn't call it feminism, it doesn't count. In other words, their work was not self-conscious enough -- or, more absurdly, their work was not up to the standards set by Clifford in 1986. The whole point of innovation is doing something unlike the standard: if these women were innovators, by definition their works would not share all the standard attributes of ethnographies. It is a matter of who is doing the defining: in their time these works were defined as not being real anthropology because they were too different, in this time they are defined as not contributing to the analysis of ethnographies because they're not different enough. Regarding the early experiments, Marcus states, "Although the elements of a methodological critique could be read into these works, they were not presented as such." (1986:33) What Marcus ignores is that because the form of any given work is consciously chosen, theory must be implicit in form (Betteridge, personal communication). These works were methodological critiques -- only the

authors chose to illustrate their criticisms instead of spelling them out.

Gordon (1988:15) also criticizes Clifford for his refusal to recognize these contributions:

By expecting feminist claims to be exclusively feminist (an impossibility by definition as long as the world isn't feminist -- at which point the word "feminism" would cease to exist) Clifford creates a double bind. Feminism must produce innovation that is completely distinct from any other; if it doesn't live up to this impossibility then it ceases to be either feminist or innovative.

Although the texts they wrote share with feminism an attempt to move beyond the constrictions of traditional science, anticipating Clifford, whether or not Hurston, Bohannon and Powdermaker were feminist authors is irrelevant. The value of their contributions to anthropology is independent of this judgement. If these three (and others) are to be excluded on the grounds that they are not feminist, the discipline will have lost many great minds to the vagaries of anthropological fashion -- for who was a "feminist" in 1942 or 1954? (Of course women throughout history have worked to better their lot, but the term "feminist" is a recent creation. To dismiss women's efforts because they did not call themselves by this fairly modern term is absurd.)

In an article published before *Writing Culture*, Clifford laid out some of the groundwork for his magnum opus:

neither the experience nor the interpretive activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent. It becomes necessary to conceive ethnography, not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects. Paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to paradigms of discourse, of dialogue and polyphony. (1983:133)

Although the creation of social experience is certainly the product of negotiation between two or more people, the creation of a written work such as an ethnography by a sole author must be, to some degree, under the sole authority of that author. Hastrup suggests it is not only possible but necessary to assume the authority of a story-teller, along with the responsibility of that position: "The purpose of ethnography is to speak *about* something for somebody; it implies contextualisation and reframing . . . We must not blur this major responsibility of ours by rhetorics of 'many voices' and 'multiple authorship'" (1992:122). Implicating others in the project (polyphony) doesn't take away the responsibility of the author in any case -- it is simply unavoidable in the act of creating and making choices. Bohannan, Powdermaker and Hurston all illustrate this point in their works -- they do not share the authority or the responsibility of being the text's creator, but they also do not set themselves up (within the texts) as possessors of inviolable authority. This points to a question which feminism is now addressing -- the necessity of a non-absolute authority. Haraway puts it this way:

Feminists don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something, and unlimited instrumental power. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future. (Haraway 1991:187)

Pushing boundaries: science and feminism

Contrary to Clifford's assessment, feminism has presented anthropology with

crucial issues to address, such as the study of gender and gender bias in fieldwork, and a critique of science which threatens (at least theoretically) the very core of the discipline (Harding 1986). Moore points out that feminist perspectives, in addition to demonstrating the centrality of gender relations, have sought to "establish new research procedures, new standards for research and new relationships between academic theory and practice." (1988:196) In a deeper sense, feminism is responsible for calling into question the association of science with masculinity, objectivity and reason, and of nature with subjectivity, emotions, and femininity, and for identifying these divisions as "central to the basic structure of modern science and society." (Keller 1985:7-8) One change wrought by feminism, evident in this paper, is the use of gender neutral language: male-specific pronouns were commonplace only a few decades ago, as evidenced in the writing of all three authors, but now the use of "the anthropologist, he" seems jarringly inappropriate.

The biases in scientific analysis, which feminists uncovered, have marginalized women both as researchers and as subjects (Harding 1986, Martin 1987, Rapp 1992, Reiter 1975). The prevailing definition of "science" dictates not only what is and isn't acceptable, but also what is lionized, and what is marginalized. As Keller explains:

To both scientists and their public, scientific thought is male thought, in ways that painting and writing -- also performed largely by men -- have never been. As Simmel observed, objectivity itself is an ideal that has a long history of identification with masculinity. (1985:76)

According to popular belief then, when a woman writes from a subjective point of view, her work has two strikes against it: her gender and her perspective, both of

which imply sentimentality rather than rational thinking. For this reason, not necessarily reasons of quality, works perceived as being unscientific have been dismissed. Although it is impossible to prove, I believe the three works in this discussion have been marginalized in this way for many years. What is undeniable is that science has a masculinist bias, that women in general have been treated as beings of lesser importance, whose work, whether it be science or art, is less consequential, and that these three authors have not been recognized for their contributions to recent anthropological concerns. Whatever has kept these texts on the sidelines, it is not lack of quality; their influence on later writing attests to their value, as do conversations I have had with those familiar with their work.

These works, along with others, are part of an underground tradition in anthropology which is passed along more by word of mouth than by institutional forms such as lectures or assigned reading. This "tradition" mostly consists of writings by women, many of which are on the margins of anthropology, and many of which focus on subjective, personal accounts of fieldwork. It is a tenuous tradition, to be sure, but evidence of it crops up occasionally, as in Powdermaker's citation of Bohannan in the preface to *Stranger and Friend* (1966:11), in Golde's mention of both Bohannan and Powdermaker in the introduction to *Women in the Field* (1986:1), and in the recent re-valuation of some works (Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend* has been re-issued, and Harper & Row has put out new editions of much of Hurston's writing). Certainly the last few decades of feminist scholarship have created an atmosphere where the value of works like these is more likely to be recognized.

However, the treatment accorded Bohannon, Hurston and Powdermaker until recently demonstrates that anthropology as a discipline can only reflect the society from which it springs -- an academic community with a pro-male scientific bias has a difficult time welcoming a work as groundbreaking if it is written in a subjective style by a woman. Reiter said, "All anthropologists wear the blinders of their own civilization " (1975:13), and this is true even (or perhaps especially) when the gaze is directed at the anthropologist's own culture. The feminist critique of science is therefore crucial for future assessments of these works and others, since their true worth will be acknowledged only when science's blind spot toward women is eradicated.

Given the depth and the intricacy of the bond between science and society, this may prove to be an all but impossible task. Haraway suggests that by accepting the traditional ideology of science we have granted it "the role of a fetish, an object human beings make only to forget their role in creating it" (1991:8). For Harding, Western society's reluctance to question the nature or structure of science indicates that science is placed in the realm of the sacred. She suggests regarding science as a social construct would make it easier to understand how gender helps structure science. Unfortunately, as she points out, "All that stands between us and that project are inadequate theories of gender, the dogmas of empiricism, and a good deal of political struggle." (1986:57) Additionally, there is an inherent problem with the re-working of a masculine science to include the feminine, since rejection of and control of the feminine are central to this culture's definition of masculinity (Harding

1986:55). And lest the reader start feeling complacent, Harding raises the issue of the self-reinforcing nature of the relationship between masculinity and science:

Science reaffirms its masculine-dominant practices and masculine dominance its purportedly objective scientific rationale through continual mutual support. . . [this] leads to false and oversimplified models of nature and inquiry that attribute power relations and hierarchical structure where none do or need exist. (Harding 1986:121)

Although the obstacles to its creation are seemingly infinite, feminist scholarship has at least considered the possibility of a science without a gender bias. Rubin's hope is for a gender-free world: "The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is" (1975:204). Keller, writing ten years later, has a similar dream -- a science "premised on a transformation of the very categories of male and female, and correspondingly, of mind and nature" (1985:178). Feminism has done invaluable work, even if it is still mainly considered a marginal enterprise. It has challenged the most basic assumptions of science and provided scholars with the noble goal of creating a gender-free science. In doing so, it has helped reform anthropology -- not least by rescuing from obscurity the works of some women anthropologists.

Women's tradition: maintenance and disappearance

As I mentioned above, I believe Hurston, Bohannon, Powdermaker, and others belong to a tradition which runs alongside that of "real" anthropology. Although not included in the discipline's mainstream, their work remains influential

among a small group of scholars (Altorki 1988, Golde 1986, Gonzales 1984, Gordon 1988, Lionett 1989, Visweswaran 1988, Whitehead and Conaway 1986), and there is a continuity of topic which relates the earlier works with the more recent. Ironically, some degree of marginalization seems to be one of the marks of membership in this tradition.

On a personal level I am a witness to the thoroughness of the marginalization of these and other works by women: in a required course on cultural anthropology in my first year of graduate school, we read the work of one woman (Mary Douglas) the entire semester. In my first 3 years of graduate school (1989-1992), in a department considered one of the top three in the country, I never heard of Hortense Powdermaker or Laura Bohannan or Dorothy Lee or Jean Briggs or Audrey Richards. I knew of Zora Neale Hurston through my own reading, and her *Mules and Men* was on the reading list for one class. This seems a serious oversight, especially when feminist anthropology has been contributing valuable insights for over two decades, and women anthropologists have been doing work for three quarters of a century. Since then, works by women have been added to the syllabus of the required class. In addition, there are specific classes in the department which focus on gender; my disappointment, however, stemmed from the lack of recognition of women's work in a "core" class, which, for anthropologists not majoring in the cultural subfield, may well have been their only exposure to this body of knowledge. Although much has been written recently about the marginalization of women in anthropology (Gordon 1988, Haraway 1991, Harding 1986, Lamphere 1989, Moore

1988, Okely and Callaway 1992, Rapp 1992), it still seems to be common knowledge only in an underground sense, and not yet an "official" part of the mainstream doctrine.

It is peculiar and illogical that feminist anthropology, while no more partial than any postmodern theories, is sidelined while other approaches are seen as constituting the very core of anthropology. Feminism has helped created an alternative, important to numerous scholars, but many argue that it hasn't changed the basic canon, whether due to conscious resistance, unconscious strategies, or to structural causes. The irony is that while many things are flexible and contested in cultural anthropology and writing ethnography, one thing which is amazingly consistent is the marginal place of women and their work.

Lutz (1990) says that her attention was drawn to what she calls the "erasure of women's writing" in anthropology by the discounting of feminism in significant, influential texts, among them Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Using citations as an indicator, she found that over a five-year period (1982-86) female anthropologists were cited only 18% of the time, although they make up 30% of all cultural anthropologists and published 30% of recent literature in the field. She also found that men cite women authors only half as often as women do (1990:620). Lutz comments:

Writing is, however, intended to be read, discussed, and evaluated, and it is in these activities that women's work is marginalized -- that is, treated by authoritative evaluators as peripheral to the field's center or as less significant than men's work. Listening to women's voices in academia follows patterns established in the culture at large; previous research has demonstrated that

readers' or listeners' assessments of the value and importance of a statement are definitively influenced by the gender of the author of that statement. (1990:616)

Lutz concludes that it is reasonable to believe the cause of this erasure has to do with "the devaluation, in some combination, of women's intellectual capacity, of the value of the approaches they are perceived to take, and of the topics they sometimes examine in greater number than men do." (1990:622) It would be interesting to compare topics preferred by men to those preferred by women, but Lutz does not elaborate on gender-specific choice of topics. She does note that work on women's lives is "seen as relevant only or primarily to the field of gender," whereas studies of predominantly male groups need not cite work on gender -- the view of masculinity as universal and femininity as marked is still operating.

Gonzales found that American Anthropologist published 665 obituary notices between 1888 and 1980 -- 623 of these were for male anthropologists and 42 were for females (1984:16). She comments, "The reality of most women's careers as anthropologists was and continues to be that they are marginal professionals." (1984:4)

In addition to their gender, another factor which aided in the marginalization of Hurston, Bohannan and Powdermaker was use of language which marked their works as unscientific -- or rather, their failure to use language which could have been recognized as scientific. Their concentration on their emotions was an especially unprofessional tactic, and it was unmitigated by lapses into scientific prose: they proposed few overarching theories of society, and in general portrayed the people

they studied as individuals, not as units in a scheme. Because they wrote this way, and because they were women, they were not taken as seriously as they should have been. Spender (1986) has shown that women were the first novelists, contrary to popular belief, and that their achievements have been almost entirely lost to modern understanding of literary history. She believes it is not an accident, and not a result of inferior quality (as many of the now-forgotten works were best sellers in their time), but the consequence of deliberate efforts by men to belittle the works and their authors and ultimately erase them from the literary history which men then claimed as their own. Whether it was a deliberate effort, or just a tacit assumption that women's work could not possibly be equal to or better than men's (the more insidious situation), the consequences of this erasure have had widespread, long-term effects.

When . . . the literary traditions represent the views and values of one small select group of men who agree that those who are not in their own image are not worthy of recognition -- or that they are available for exploitation -- then the divisions of good and bad, rich and poor, dominant and subordinate, are readily constructed. And the implications of such divisions extend far beyond the confines of the woman writer; they affect women, men, the whole society." (1986:143)

I submit that a tacit assumption of the same sort has resulted in the marginal status of Bohannon, Hurston and Powdermaker. Their work is judged by a standard that proclaims creativity is fine as long as it fits a dominant academic perspective and uses the correct (preferably impenetrable) language, decided on by a small group of people; and men who cross the boundaries are more likely to be considered "ground-breaking" than women who do so. In another volume Spender elaborates on this

problem:

while only one sex possesses the power to legitimate meanings, its meanings become the totality, its partial meanings are accepted as complete . . . by such means is sexual inequality constructed, reinforced, and perpetuated . . . No matter what women do or say, no matter how they represent their experience, in these terms, if it is not also the experience of men, it will be consigned to the realm of nondata. (1984:199)

Or it will be considered nature instead of culture -- essentially the same thing as nondata in many situations. Martin, describing a French doctor's innovative birthing methods, argues against his view that women regress to a more primitive state during unmedicated labor. "Why can we not see [the women] as engaged in a high-order activity? [A] higher, more essentially human, more essentially cultural form of consciousness and activity." (1987:164)

Keller examines the roots of this issue in her skillful analysis of gender and science. She finds that the association of woman with nature (as opposed to science) in European culture has its roots in the seventeenth century, when alchemists and early modern scientists battled over ideology.

The emphasis the alchemists placed on the powers of love and on the kinship between sexual intercourse and knowledge threatened to embroil the new science simultaneously in passion and heresy; it endangered science's emerging claims to purity. . . The new mechanical vision provided a secure intellectual domain for masculinity by excluding even allegorical cooperation between male and female -- both in its picture of the scientist and in its picture of nature. By promising power and domination, it provided an efficacious antidote to the threats men had come to conflate with women and sexuality. (1985:59-61)

At issue is a changing of the frame. Bateson defined the concept of frame in his essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" (1972). Relevant to my discussion is the idea

that human communication operates on several levels. The frame is a form of metacommunication -- it explains how to understand the message inside it. Conceptually, a frame is related to a premise. Until recently, women's disassociation from science framed their efforts to enter it, and they were at a permanent disadvantage. The worth of innovative scholarship such as that of Hurston, Bohannon and Powdermaker could not be recognized while its framing devalued its authors. Feminism, however, has succeeded in changing the frame -- it remains to be seen if the altered frame is taken seriously enough to force a redefinition of the canon.

Autobiographical authority

Okely and Callaway attempt a redefinition of the canon in their collection *Autobiography and Anthropology*, by suggesting that the use of autobiography can be a way of gaining insight to doing anthropology and writing ethnography. Starting from the premise that anthropology is done by human beings with human beings, they conclude that to ignore or suppress the personal is to warp any study at its inception. The use of autobiography allows the reader to witness the creation of anthropology. "In the anthropological dialogue, we talk *across* established difference and create a world of betweenness. This world is both an intersubjective creation and the object of our analysis . . . it is the source of our knowledge" (Hastrup 1992:118). Contrary to trying to exclude subjectivity from anthropology, the aim of using autobiography is to allow the researcher to acknowledge and even experiment with

her/his presence in the project. "In the study of human being [*sic*] by another human being (and what better medium is there?), the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use." (Okely 1992:32) It is an approach far removed from, and even directly opposed to, the scientific fear of involvement:

Positivism destroys the notion of experience which I wish to evoke. The experience of fieldwork is totalising and draws on the whole being. It has not been theorised because it has been trivialised as the 'collection of data' by a dehumanised machine. Autobiography dismantles the positivist machine. (Okely 1992:3)

Because autobiography can illuminate the creation of ethnography, it can also be the locus of innovation and change. It allows for an intersection between personal experience and scientific study, and so can highlight the uniqueness of anthropology, which is that deuces are wild and no "experiment" can be duplicated. This is a cardinal sin in science, but it is the strength of a discipline which seeks to understand and document human ways of living. Subsequent visits to the place about which an ethnography was written will be to a society changed over time -- not only the objects of study, but the methods and the researcher will have altered. By making this truth unavoidable, autobiography subverts the standard doctrine in a discipline which maintains its worthiness is due to its position as an objective science. This kind of subversion can also be creation -- it asks anthropology to include alternative perspectives.

In the face of evidence that anthropology has long been officially severed from these vital forms of knowledge, it is reasonable to ask why. It is possible that the

sanction of academic and social law (with the male as universal standard) allows the investigator's personal experience and interpretation thereof to be played out within the safety of structured knowledge which "outlaws" the less easily categorized knowledge of the senses and the emotions. Perhaps Bohannan, Hurston and Powdermaker (and others who wrote non-traditionally) were more willing to stray since they were marginalized anyway; since they were not part of the structure's elite and could not benefit from it, perhaps they were more willing to experiment, to risk their standing in the institution. (Okely 1992:12) But why entertain risk in this form? What motivated the early experimenters to write of their personal experience, either in fictional or autobiographical form (not to say they do not overlap)? Okely suggests it was a reaction to the intensity of fieldwork.

Long-term immersion through fieldwork is generally a total experience, demanding all of the anthropologist's resources; intellectual, physical, emotional, political and intuitive. The experience involves so much of the self that it is impossible to reflect upon it fully by extracting that self. Under pressure to be 'scientifically objective,' anthropologists have traditionally compartmentalised that fieldwork experience. (Okely 1992:8)

In order to voice their experience, these women had to switch genres, to one in which their personal understanding of what was important would not be submerged or seen as irrelevant but would instead structure their work. The world of the anthropologist is fractured by the discipline's definition and understanding of quality, when it comes to putting experience on paper. Perhaps these women saw what should not be seen (as women in a supposedly "man's world" or as humans in a supposedly objective world), and they turned to another genre in order to satisfy the demands of their

experience to be heard. Perhaps also they hoped that in this way their voices would last and be part of history, instead of disappearing.

The necessity of narrative

The three works which are the focus of this paper were written as personal narratives, although the authors were all trained as scientists. Above I have speculated on their reasons for choosing such a vehicle; I believe it also has to do with the nature of what is and is not considered appropriate scientific writing. Pratt comments: "personal narrative persists alongside objectifying description in ethnographic writing because it mediates a contradiction within the discipline between personal and scientific authority." (1986:32) Although personal authority has always been part of the construction of truth in ethnography (in the sense of "I was there"), it is in contradiction with scientific authority, which (ideally) rests on the objectivity of practitioners. I will examine both why science, traditionally understood, limits the reporting of human experience, and what allows personal narratives to succeed.

Unfortunately for anthropology, science is defined by its opposite: it is not personal, not subjective, not relative. Although this poses few immediately recognizable problems for science practiced in a laboratory or on a blackboard (but see Harding 1986), it conflicts with the practice of anthropology, where both practitioners and subjects are people, and what is called anthropology or ethnography is created out of the interaction between them. Hence, anthropology must struggle

with the positivist illusion of objectivity, even when this idea is contradictory to its practice and findings.

Quite contrary to positivist wisdom, the main lesson of anthropology in general is that the absolute distinction between subject and object is a modernist artefact, generally belied by social exchange in the non-modern societies traditionally studied by anthropologists. (Hastrup 1992:117)

Some anthropological works have challenged the contradictions of a strictly scientific approach within the boundaries of the discipline, among them *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986), edited by Turner and Bruner, Fabian's *Power and Performance* (1990), *Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork* (1986), edited by Whitehead and Conaway, and *Anthropology and Autobiography* (1992), edited by Okely and Callaway. These writings take up the related issues of narrative, experience, and subjectivity in anthropological work.

Whitehead and Conaway explain that the scientific approach is actually incomplete:

Like other social scientists, anthropologists traditionally have tried to achieve objectivity through scientific rigor. They frequently viewed (and some still do) personalized accounts of field experiences as unmitigated self-indulgence. Such confessional narratives were regarded as appropriate for travelogues but of no value to objective scientific writing. To be scientific, however, we must reveal our methods; and when such "confessional" anthropologists stated their methods, they acknowledged that their own field behavior and person were part of their data . . . depersonalized reporting does not reflect either the methods or the experience of anthropology. (1986:2-3)

Initially, anthropology's goal was to develop general rules or laws for society, as distinguished from merely descriptive travel writing; in this scientific pursuit, individuality was seen as inappropriate, irrelevant and even misleading. This led to

the idea that too much involvement will skew the results of a scientific project. As Rosaldo points out, "Going native" is said to mean the end of scientific knowledge. Often traced to Malinowski's legendary fieldwork, this view asserts that the optimal field-worker should dance on the edge of a paradox by simultaneously becoming "one of the people" and remaining an academic." (Rosaldo 1989:180) What is asserted is that the anthropologist's experience must be ordered in certain ways to be considered scientific. Everyone knows that anthropologists are human, and it logically follows that they must have human thoughts, emotions and visions, but their status as professionals has traditionally depended on how successfully they hide their personal life (Malinowski 1967). I suggest that experimental ethnography is often still engaged in this practice, although it professes to be more revealing and less authoritative; the works I have read [for instance, Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980); Smadar Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation* (1990); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977)] have struck me as being less honest than earlier works. They include the self on theoretical grounds, but do not allow the narrative to be structured around the self. Thus the addition of the self is merely another problem which the researcher studies, not an admission that the researcher's professional authority may be fallible. Rosaldo puts this problem another way: "Whether thickly describing the language of experience or elegantly designing a formal model, much ethnography tells more about forms of activity in general than about how any particular instance was carried out. All too often in the process, lived experience is robbed of its vital significance." (Rosaldo 1986:103)

Rigorousness of thought is often taken to be a quality unknown outside of the strict discipline of science, just as the value of a work is often taken to be proportionate to the amount of theory it contains. Neither of these assumptions is true, but they tend to color our perception of unscientific writing and non-theoretical works -- they are too often part of the frame through which we view works like Hurston's, Bohannon's or Powdermaker's. We often forget the more subtle truths of writing, such as the idea that a theoretical stance can be implicit in a work's form, or that complex issues can be expressed very well in non-academic language. Harding suggests perhaps too much is expected of theory:

Coherent theories in an obviously incoherent world are either silly and uninteresting or oppressive and problematic, depending on the degree of hegemony they manage to achieve. Coherent theories in an *apparently* coherent world are even more dangerous, for the world is always more complex than such unfortunately hegemonous theories can grasp. (1986:164)

Personal narrative does not operate under the same constraints as scientific writing, and so can sometimes succeed where science fails. Bruner points out that many ethnographers add vivid pieces of personal narrative to enliven their accounts.

In effect, the experiential component returns to the account as a byproduct rather than as an explicit object of research. We systematically remove the personal and the experiential in accordance with our anthropological paradigms; then we reintroduce them so as to make our ethnographies more real, more alive. (1986:9)

He argues that personal narrative is in some ways more useful for cultural description than a scientific approach, since it "emphasizes order and sequence, in a formal sense, and is more appropriate for the study of change, the life cycle, or any developmental process" (1986:153). He also stresses the ambiguity and

incompleteness of any narrative endeavor.

Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future. But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete. There is no fixed meaning in the past, for with each new telling the context varies, the audience differs, the story is modified . . . (1986:153)

The personal narrative succeeds in part because it has no pretensions to an absolute truth, only to an integral inner structure. The author is not held to an objective ideal, and so his/her authority is dependent only on its construction within the text. In addition, there is no limit to the number of stories to be told about a society, in contrast to the case with scientific ethnographies, which privilege a singular truth. In personal narrative, no one ever has the last word, and no one expects to. The gossamer quality of experience is, by definition, that which cannot be reproduced or replicated -- authors of personal narrative know this, and know that their constructions can only be partial (Rosaldo 1989).

The trick, perhaps, is to appreciate that the project of interpretation does not promise a finite, total understanding: the object, the phenomenon, the other, can never be fully apprehended in itself, indeed it is an essentialist error to imagine that it even exists as such. (Watson 1992:137)

The personal narrative can construct the object as an individual taking an active part in the process of knowledge production. Because of this, the personal narrative can show knowledge being constructed between the subject and object, whereas in science, "The knowing mind is active but the object of knowledge is passive." (Harding 1986:124) In constructing characters an author is creating a kind of fiction, but this does not preclude a work's truth value. As Birth puts it, "In a

sense, the true test of an ethnography's factuality would be how useful a reader would find it if he or she were to travel to the society in question." (1990:552) The process of re-creating experience in writing is only hampered by a pretense to absolute authority and total objectivity. As this traditional ideal of science gives way to alternative forms of knowledge, anthropology will be broadened by the recognition that ethical concerns are valid within scholarship. This in turn will allow for the possibility of social and political critique. (Rosaldo 1989:181)

Personal narrative is not confined in the same ways as categorical scientific description: certainly narratives have their own conventions, but they are able to escape some of the boundaries which prevent science from telling a story which includes the experiential. Especially important is their ability to capture the constantly changing nature of existence. "Retellings never cease; there is an infinite reflexivity as we go from experience to discourse to history. Eventually, all experience is filtered out and we end where we began -- with the story." (Bruner 1986:148)

THREE AUTHORS: QUALITY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

I will analyse three autobiographical works by anthropologists -- *Dust Tracks on a Road*, *Return to Laughter*, and *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* -- for their success in translating the anthropological experience to text. I have argued that the authors' stylistic devices and goals prefigured "experimental anthropology," and in these analyses I will show why these are works of highest quality and of importance for the discipline. They stand on their own as vital and innovative contributions to the development of mainstream anthropology.

Zora Neale Hurston

The 1969 printing of Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), was published by Arno Press and the New York Times in a series called "The American Negro: His History and Literature." If the series title was inappropriate, still the reprinting was a preface to the resurgence of interest in her work which was to begin a few years later with an essay by Alice Walker in *Ms.* (1975). The last two decades have seen an appreciation of Zora Neale Hurston's work greater than that of her own time. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. states in the afterword to *Dust Tracks* (1991:262) that since Walker's essay was published, Hurston's work has garnered a larger audience than it did between 1934, the publication date of Hurston's first novel, and 1975. The disappearance of her work for about 30 years coincides with what we have learned about the fragility of women's place in history, but the situation is more complex than that. Some have

questioned whether Hurston's writing was an attempt to appease or pander to a white audience (Angelou, in Hurston 1991:x). The critics of her own time charged her with being out of step, with creating "pseudo-primitive" characters, and (from novelist Richard Wright) for doing for literature "what the minstrel shows did for theater, that is, make white folks laugh." (Washington, in Hurston 1990:viii) Hurston was criticized for not working from an explicitly political perspective and writing social realism, as the most influential African American writers were doing in the 1930s. In this sense Hurston, Bohannon and Powdermaker were in similar situations -- they were all marginalized for using their creativity in ways that didn't fit the norm of the time for their product, whether anthropology or autobiography or fiction.

Dust Tracks on a Road is the only work in my analysis which is primarily framed as an autobiography, not a novel or a fieldwork chronicle. It is, however, the autobiography of an anthropologist, and is kin to the works by Bohannon and Powdermaker for this reason, among others. All three are some mixture of autobiography, anthropology, and fiction, and *Dust Tracks* is the most thoroughly mixed of the three. In the foreword to the 1969 version, Darwin Turner notes, "as someone once said, *Dust Tracks* may be the best fiction Zora Neale Hurston ever wrote." In spite of the patronizing tone, there seems to be some truth to this comment -- *Dust Tracks* has a free and easy attitude about facts and descriptions that makes it seem as if Hurston was perhaps more interested in making myths than reciting realities about her life. (Gates calls her style "mythic realism" (Hurston 1991:261).) Whether this is good or bad of course depends on the reader's

expectation and the critic's perspective. Although he doesn't comment extensively on her writing, Turner paints a rather unflattering picture of Hurston (indeed it is one of the most negative forewords I've ever read):

But this was Zora Neale Hurston -- an imaginative, somewhat shallow, quick-tempered woman, desperate for recognition and reassurance to assuage her feelings of inferiority; a blind follower of that social code which approves arrogance toward peers and "inferiors" but requires total psychological commitment or subservience to one's "superiors"; and a gifted story-teller and charming companion. Here is her story. Read it. She tells it better than anyone else could. (1969:v)

Arguing against the view that *Dust Tracks* is proof of the author's insincerity and untrustworthiness, Lionett suggests the work be considered as an autoethnography, which she explains as "the defining of one's subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis." (1989:98-99) In her foreword to the 1991 publication, Maya Angelou offers this as a possible way of understanding the book's complexities:

There is a saying in the Black community that advises: "If a person asks you where you're going, you tell him where you've been. That way you neither lie nor reveal your secrets." (in Hurston 1991:xii)

The facticity of Hurston's autobiography is questionable, but this is exactly why *Dust Tracks* is such an important work in this analysis: it illuminates the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, and allows a very personal view (the more so because of its author's commitment to creativity) of the human inside the ethnographer.

Hurston begins *Dust Tracks* describing Eatonville, Florida, her birthplace -- "a pure Negro town . . . not the first Negro community in America, but it was the

first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America." (1991:1) She tells of a pleasant childhood, poor but never hungry, of cherishing a corn cob doll and fantasizing that old Mr. Pendir was actually an alligator -- "A tough, knotty hide crept over him, and his mouth became a huge snout with prond-toothed, powerful jaws." (1991:57). Her mother's death when Hurston was nine changed this world.

Life picked me up from the foot of Mama's bed, grief, self-despisement and all, and set my feet in strange ways . . . It seemed as she died that the sun went down on purpose to flee away from me. That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as in spirit. (1991:64-65)

Hurston's father remarried, and the stepmother had such antipathy for her stepchildren that the ones who were old enough scattered. Hurston was sent to school in Jacksonville for about a year (exactly how long is unclear), then spent several years staying with various relatives and friends and working as a nanny, a receptionist, a "lady's maid" and a waitress. It is unclear from her account how old she was when she started school again, but a chronology (1991:273) shows her finishing high school in Baltimore at age 27, leaving Howard University with an associate degree at 33, and earning a bachelor of arts degree from Barnard College in 1928, at 37. At her graduation from Barnard, Hurston did not see herself as underprivileged, but in fact emphasized the good fortune that had come her way:

Booker T. Washington said once that you must not judge a man by the heights to which he has risen, but by the depths from which he came. So to me these honors meant something, insignificant as they might appear to the world. It was a long step for the waif of Eatonville. From the depth of my inner heart I appreciated the fact that the world had not been altogether

unkind to Mama's child. (1991:124)

Hurston does not speak of racism as an impediment to her education, and indeed mentions no personal confrontations with institutionalized racism or prejudice. As Maya Angelou points out (1991:x), Hurston must have lived through the race riots and experienced much more racially motivated ugliness than she discusses in *Dust Tracks*, but she goes out of her way to stress how accepted she was at Barnard (1991:122), and distances herself from those who feel life has dealt them a raw deal:

I take no refuge from myself in bitterness. To me, bitterness is the under-arm odor of wishful weakness. It is the graceless acknowledgement of defeat. . . I see nothing but futility in looking back over my shoulder in rebuke at the grave of some white man who has been dead too long to talk about. (1991:206-7)

In a chapter titled "My People! My People!," Hurston discusses the complexities of prejudice as she has seen it operate. Her topic is not so much interracial prejudice as intraracial -- the hierarchies based on lightness of skin and economic position which she sees as contradictory and severely divisive. Hurston herself claims to have gotten past such idiocies and come to a point where the color of skin truly does not matter:

Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any racial group as a whole. God made them duck by duck and that was the only way I could see them. I learned that skins were no measure of what was inside people. . . I began to laugh at both white and black who claimed special blessings on the basis of race. Therefore I saw no curse in being black, nor no extra flavor by being white. (1991:171)

Hurston sidesteps the reality of institutionalized racism, not denying it exists, but not describing its place in her life either. Her struggles as a woman are also only

glancingly acknowledged -- institutionalized sexism is as absent from her memoirs as is institutionalized racism. Perhaps she felt her loud, proud voice, the voice of a traveler and risk-taker, would not have been as strong had she admitted to impediments she could not conquer or change, or had she written her life as anything less than a bold adventure where her will was the deciding factor. It is true that Hurston escaped at least some aspect of the rampant self-prejudice she describes in her fellow African Americans -- had she fallen into the thinking that "[t]he Spirituals, the Blues, *any* definitely Negroid thing was just not done (1991:169)," she certainly would not have spent years doing fieldwork on the African American folklore of the South, the hoodoo of New Orleans, and the music of Bahaman blacks. It also seems, however, that she must have distanced herself from her culture somewhat, in order to study it from the point of view of a (white-college educated) anthropologist. She often observes those around her (strangers and friends) with a detached amusement. Since she does not make an overt connection between her education and her approach as a writer, it is difficult to know if it was her training that allowed her this distance, or her personality. The complexity inherent in the writing of *Dust Tracks* becomes clear when one realizes that Hurston was struggling not only with a convoluted racial situation (being black in the white-dominated discipline of anthropology studying her own black culture in a society prejudiced against blacks and through a literature dominated by whites), but also with the interface between anthropology, fiction, and autobiography. Working among her own people surely must have highlighted the contradictions inherent in anthropology, and perhaps one

reason why Hurston turned to fiction was that the relationship of the privileged anthropologist to the informer was too similar to the asymmetry found between white mainstream society and the black anthropologist. Lionett elaborates on this:

Her position of fundamental liminality -- being at once a participant in and an observer of her culture -- would bring home to her the distorting effects of that problematic shift from orality to fixed, rigid textuality and thus would reinforce her skepticism about the anthropological project . . . Having shared in that rural culture during her childhood in Eatonville, she could not adopt the nostalgic pose common to those Western ethnographies that implicitly lament the loss of an Edenic, and pre-industrial past. (1989:99)

The complexity of Hurston's background is reflected in her style. Although *Dust Tracks* is simplistic in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure and theoretical content, Hurston's writing is very difficult to unravel. As Angelou says of the book, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to find and touch the real Zora Neale Hurston." (1991:xii) The complexity is in things said and unsaid, in the suggested twist between fiction, truth, dreams and memories, in the narratives within narratives, and in the descriptive, deceptively simplistic way she discusses social and emotional problems. In one paragraph she describes her parents' relationship,

My mother took her over-the-creek man and bare-knuckled him from brogans to broadcloth, and I am certain that he was proud of the change, in public. But in the house, he might have always felt over-the-creek, and because that was not the statue he had made for himself to look at, he resented it. But then, you cannot blame my mother too much if she did not see him as his entranced congregations did. The one who makes the idols never worships them, however tenderly he might have molded the clay. You cannot have knowledge and worship at the same time. Mystery is the essence of divinity. Gods must keep their distances from men. (1991:67)

The language is very simple, even emphatically "countrified," yet at the same time

Hurston waxes philosophical. The overall impression is one of ambiguity and a tongue-in-cheek authority that leaves the reader wondering what to take seriously. Is there a deeper meaning between the lines? The last two lines of this paragraph obviously refer to much more than just Hurston's parents' marriage, yet the almost flippant narrative style challenges the reader to believe the message is even that simple. It is difficult not to think that Hurston is talking about her own life here, her anthropological studies, her personal affairs, and her writing. And if this is true, it solves part of the puzzle of her autobiography's vagueness: she is unclear about certain details and ambiguous in her style because she wants to maintain her distance and keep her mystery.

In this way Hurston turns the typical construction of the author's authority upside down. She pokes fun at the idea of facticity as an indication of a writer's authority: the reader is thus left unsure whether she is or isn't an authority on her subject. This approach is doubly ironic in *Dust Tracks* since it's Hurston's own life the reader doubts she truly knows. Hurston refuses to construct her authority in accepted ways, and so highlights the paradox inherent in the authority of an author - it is only as effective as the author chooses to make it. Nobody could know Hurston's life as well as she, yet she chooses to write as if this knowledge is in question, or as if she is purposely writing it "wrongly." The reader is forced to decide whether or not to have faith in Hurston's mystery, whether or not to accept *Dust Tracks* as a story or reject it. Especially because this is an autobiography, it is difficult for the reader to accept that it may not be factually accurate; if it was a work

of fiction, this would be allowed, and if an anthropological piece, accuracy would be demanded. And not only accuracy (not always easy for the reader to judge) but the *appearance* of accuracy would be demanded, usually manifested in the author's construction of authority. Hurston refuses to tip her hat to this conventional construction of authority and, in addition, mixes elements of different genres (fiction, anthropology, and autobiography) until *Dust Tracks* does read as the autoethnography Lionett mentions -- an innovative combination of all three genres, reflecting Hurston's own search for the truth. In this Hurston anticipated Bohannan's and Powdermaker's creations.

Hurston's descriptive language is spare. She conveys powerful emotions and creates vivid images using metaphors and simple statements. In the following passage she talks about going to school after her mother's death:

School in Jacksonville was one of those twilight things. It was not dark, but it lacked the bold sunlight I craved. I worshipped two of my teachers and loved gingersnaps with cheese, and sour pickles. But I was deprived of the loving pine, the lakes, the wild violets in the woods and the animals I used to know. No more holding down first base on the team with my brothers and their friends. Just a jagged hole where my home used to be. (1991:69)

Later in the book she talks about her dramatic exit from a town where she was doing fieldwork:

It seemed that anybody who had any fighting to do, decided to settle-up then and there. Switch-blades, ice-picks and old-fashioned razors were out. One or two razors had already been bent back and thrown across the room, but our fight was the main attraction. Big Sweet yelled to me to run. I really ran, too. I ran out of the place, ran to my room, threw my things in the car and left the place. When the sun came up I was a hundred miles up the road, headed for New Orleans. (1991:139)

Her imagery is not solely visual, but involves other senses:

There is something about poverty that smells like death. Dead dreams dropping off the heart like leaves in a dry season and rotting around the feet; impulses smothered too long in the fetid air of underground caves. The soul lives in a sickly air. People can be slave-ships in shoes. (1991:85)

Hurston rarely uses dialogue, preferring to tell stories in her words while sprinkling them with short quotes for emphasis. The longest sections of dialogue generally have to do with folklore. Occasionally a character gets more than one line, but only when she/he is important to the story or talking about somebody important to the story. Hurston's life seems to have been peopled with bigger-than-life humans who take on an almost mythical stature under her pen, thus when speech gets into the text it is usually striking, rollicking, outrageous. This quote is from Hurston's landlady, who is describing a woman who will become Hurston's friend:

"Tain't a man, woman nor child on this job going to tackle Big Sweet. If God send her a pistol she'll send him a man. She can handle a knife with anybody. She'll join hands and cut a duel. Dat Cracker Quarters Boss wears two pistols round his waist and goes for bad, but he won't break a breath with Big Sweet lessen he got his pistol in his hand. Cause if he start anything with her, he won't never get a chance to draw it. She ain't mean. She don't bother nobody. She just don't stand for no foolishness, dat's all." (1991:137)

Hurston sports her command of colloquial language within the narrative, often to ambiguous effect (as above), but the speech she encloses in quotes is, almost without exception, the most colloquial of all. She is translator for herself -- using her Northern education to frame and mediate the speech of her native South, trying to bring the lively orality of her background into the written tradition while not betraying one or confounding the other.

Lionnet points out that Hurston prefigures the work of Geertz and Turner in establishing the "inescapable similarities" between her identity as an anthropologist and as a writer, (1989:103) and that Hurston's approach prefigured Stephen Tyler's outline of the future of the discipline in *Writing Culture*: "The ethnographic text will [be] . . . a palpable reality that uses everyday speech to suggest what is ineffable, not through abstraction, but by means of the concrete. It will be a text to read not with the eyes alone, but with the ears in order to hear the 'voices of the pages.'" (Tyler 1986:136, Lionnet 1989:115). Certainly Hurston's work, although not an ethnography in the strict sense of the word, is a guide to the construction of a "palpable reality" on the written page.

Laura Bohannon

Below the title on the 1964 paperback edition of *Return to Laughter* are the words "An anthropological novel"; this appears to be not so much a subtitle as a selling point, or part of the cover design. The cover claims Elenore Smith Bowen is the author, but paragraphs on the back cover and on an inside page announce that Bowen is the *nom de plume* of Laura Bohannon, an anthropologist. A quote from Margaret Mead on the back calls the book "the first introspective account ever published of what it's like to be a field worker among a primitive people." In other words, the novel's identity is based on its proximity to the genres of autobiography and ethnography, and at the same time on the fact that it is technically neither. *Return to Laughter* draws its importance from the unique insight this combination

allows into the inner world of the fieldworker. One goal of experimental anthropology has been to introduce the author/anthropologist into the text; Bohannan accomplished this long before postmodernism existed, and even though *Return to Laughter* was published as fiction, it is at least as ethnographically useful as Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Although Bohannan took pains to ensure her work would not be read as ethnography or autobiography, it succeeded precisely because it is a little of both. In an author's note, Bohannan defines the boundaries between fiction and ethnography as she sees them operate in this book:

All the characters in this book, except myself, are fictitious in the fullest meaning of that word. I knew people of the type I have described here; the incidents of the book are of the genre I myself experienced in Africa. Nevertheless, so much is fiction. I am an anthropologist. The tribe I have described here does exist. This book is the story of the way I did field work among them. The ethnographic background given here is accurate, but it is neither complete nor technical. Here I have written simply as a human being, and the truth I have tried to tell concerns the sea change in oneself that comes from immersion in another and savage culture. (1964:xiv)

Bohannan sees herself as both fiction writer and anthropologist, but what is interesting is her identification of her "simply human" self with the "fiction" that is *Return to Laughter*. The "truth" of her experience in Africa can best be told in a document that is part autobiography and part fiction, one that uses anthropology to further the storytelling instead of as an end in itself. In this way Bohannan's work echoes Hurston's: both are unconventional mixtures of genres, chosen by the authors to tell personally important stories. Although neither author explains the theoretical basis of her choice, their deliberate choice of form is a message in itself. Bohannan was concerned to tell some truth about her experiences which could not be expressed

in the scientific style of her anthropological writing, so she used a fictional framework which allowed her to subordinate factual information to the story of her field experiences; a very different approach than the usual method of writing ethnography, which requires subordinating the individual to the facts, at least in theory.

It could be argued that Bohannan chose an innovative form for *Return to Laughter* at the expense of professional recognition for this work -- indeed, since she published it under a pen name, it seems likely she did not want it connected with her more mainstream work. Certainly, she sacrificed some measure of authority by not writing primarily as a scientist. Her position as the creator of the text, of course, was absolute, but within the text she chose to represent herself as possessing the failings and shortcomings natural to a human, instead of as an uninvolved, infallible professional. For instance, she does not flinch from reporting "unprofessional" emotions and actions, beginning with her reaction to the trials of her first night in the village:

Something cracked. Forgetting all anthropological training and all my blisters, I rose in wrath, thrust the liqueur glass away in a splatter of gin, seized the coffee cup and stalked to the kitchen, declaiming violently in English and not caring whether anyone understood a word -- it sounded so good in my own ears. I made coffee, still orating loudly and shaking the measuring spoon at the cook. I retreated to the veranda and sat down sulkily to be served. (1964:11-12)

Far from being an authority figure, the anthropologist comes out looking like a hot-tempered, ill-mannered fool. And it isn't the only time.

The storm in the air made me irritable, and I was very hungry. I stood on my veranda and scolded across the yard at the cook. Nothing happened. I got really angry. In temper, and in the certainty that this time I was clearly in the

right, I shouted that unless I was fed something, and quickly too, I would fire them all the very night and fend for myself until I could get a new set of servants sent out. (1964:39)

But she seems to lose her temper less the longer she stays, and the more she knows. Throughout the novel, she is also in turn happy, grieving, amused, sick, and frustrated. We see enough of her varied feelings, combined with inner turmoil, confusion and genuine effort, to commiserate and empathize rather than criticize her. In cataloguing these emotions and thoughts for the reader, Bohannan portrays a whole person reacting to a multitude of experiences, not just a cool, detached observer or an ideal theoretical anthropologist/scientist who chooses when and what and whom to study.

I suggest that she found this portrayal necessary to her main objective of "telling the truth": she had to show her professional authority in jeopardy if she wanted to give the reader a realistic view of her experience. The form she chose is only part of her innovation, since she could have retained her authority within the text simply by not writing unflattering scenes. Instead she chose to portray herself in a way which was at odds not only with the construction of a mainstream ethnography, but with adherence to an idealistic code of professional field conduct. Thus she could hardly expect recognition as a professional for this distinctly non-scientific melding of fiction, autobiography and ethnography. In the foreword to the 1964 edition, David Riesman writes that he was "troubled" when the book was first published under a pseudonym, but he made a guess as to why:

The thought crossed my mind that the author herself may have feared that the

book might hurt her reputation as a competent and objective ethnographer, perhaps particularly so among those literal-minded readers who could not separate the book's feeling-tone and subjectivity from its circumstantial chronicle. (1964:xvi)

If the book didn't hurt her reputation, it certainly didn't garner the recognition it should have, nor did it produce in the discipline the kind of waves one would expect from such an innovative work. It became an underground favorite with anthropologists, but was not used in the classroom until recently -- a book for weekend reading but generally not for serious study. This is consistent with the historic place of both subjectivity and women in science (Keller 1985), but its *continued* lack of recognition is peculiar in the light of such recent developments as experimental and postmodern anthropology. One goal of these movements is to introduce the subjective author into ethnographic accounts, to make the reader fully aware of the person behind the written text. As an anthropologist drawing extensively on her ethnographic work to create a book about her personal experiences in the field, it seems obvious that Bohannan should have been hailed as a forerunner of these trends. She was not. Her achievement was left largely untouched by institutional anthropology, perhaps because it was threatening to the maintenance of absolute authority in a way that is not true of other developments in the discipline:

Along with seeing Bohannan as a whole person, we see the people who share the story with her through her eyes. As we learn who the main character is, we learn that her observations are based on her background, her judgement is sometimes

flawed, and the people around her fluctuate in her view depending on her feelings. Sometimes they are beloved, sometimes hated. We learn how everything in the story hangs by the thread of her individuality. Everything is created by her eyes, her mind, her hand. But this doesn't diminish the story's meaning. As Hastrup (1992) points out, there will always be the other, the one who is studied and created by the researcher and writer. The point is not to pretend that this is not so, that there is no hierarchy or that it can be erased if the ethnographer is conscientious enough, but that it is in the nature of the relationship, and the job is to make that relationship clear. This being the case, Bohannan has here accomplished her task with admirable clarity and vision. The people she created come alive for the reader, in a much more personal and vivid way than through a kinship chart or an economic report. Part of the way she achieves this is to treat people as individuals rather than as "the Tiv," or "the Tiv woman." Her characters have names, distinct personalities, and differential impacts on her life. Soon after arriving in the field, Bohannan finds that the rivalry between two important men of the tribe will work to her advantage:

Neither Kako nor Yabo was, by himself, willing to tell any European anything; neither Kako nor Yabo could stand the thought that the other was more valued, by anyone or for any reason. Yabo had set the first, necessary precedent. From then on Kako, and in his wake all the other notables, told me of funerals and expected me to attend them. . . Not for any merit of mine, but because of the relationship between Kako and Yabo, my work flourished like the green bay tree. (1964:82-82)

She finds special comfort with one woman in a friendship which ends tragically with the woman's death at childbirth:

It was difficult to put one's finger on Amara's attraction. True, from my point

of vantage, she was an excellent teacher: she had Atakpa's intelligence without the aggressive impatience that sometimes made Atakpa shake me by the shoulder and scream at me. But it was more than that. Being with Amara was being at peace. The hours we spent together were utterly without event, but they were nonetheless important to me, though I did not realize then, while Amara was still there, how much I depended on her. (1964:120)

Other characters play their part in socializing Bohannan, from telling her pointed fables to showing her how to weed the gardens to teaching her how to dance at a wedding. And even though the reader knows from Bohannan's own words that these characters are composites, they have enough individual attributes and enough motive power to become real people. Partly it is Bohannan's relinquishment of the position of authority that allows them to seem real: they are actors in their own right, not just tools of Bohannan. They have as much or more control over their lives as she has over hers. In this way Bohannan shows how knowledge is constructed between herself and the villagers, as a collective endeavor instead of a solitary one.

But of course control over one's life is a relative thing. Bohannan's narrative puts the tribe in a position of authority over her in many ways, but she does not deal directly with the issue of her privileged position as an anthropologist, or with racism, both of which would work against the tribe's authority. Bohannan's imperialism generally manifests itself indirectly, as when she takes for granted her luxuries and sees the divisions between her and the tribe as preordained, but toward the end of her fieldwork an emotional confrontation forces these feelings to the surface.

My revulsion was within and against myself, because I had forgotten who they were and who I was, because I had come so close to begging their liking at the price of my convictions. Ikpoom was a good man by nature, but he was a savage. They were all savages. For the first time I applied the word to them

in my own thinking. And it fit. What could I want with them? What could they offer save poverty of life and of spirit? (1964:230)

Bohannan writes of her reaction in blatantly imperialist, racist terms, but hers is an individual response to an emotional situation -- her ostracism by the villagers -- not a reasoned belief. She clarifies this later. This passage typifies her most negative response to the villagers, and it is her journey through these emotions that brings her, finally, to a deeper understanding of and sympathy with them. Again, her theoretical stance is not spelled out, but implied -- racism is presented as an obstacle to scholarship and understanding, something the anthropologist must face and overcome in order to get at valuable truths. As she gains more knowledge she is less certain of her righteousness, and at the end of the novel she is humbled -- not by a change in status but by a change in her views:

Whatever the merits of anthropology to the world or of my work to anthropology, this experience had wrought many changes in me as a human being . . . It is an error to assume that to know is to understand and to understand is to like. The greater the extent to which one has lived and participated in a genuinely foreign culture and understood it, the greater the extent to which one realizes that one could not, without violence to one's personal integrity, be of it. (1964:290-291)

Throughout Bohannan the character's mishaps and discoveries, Bohannan the author remains in control of the text. One example of this is in the speech of characters. Bohannan rarely uses extended dialogue, but even so, vividly shows how life is structured by language, both for her and the villagers.

Then she turned her strong, straight back square upon me, like a shield against the mob. Arms akimbo, she harangued them, and one by one, raggedly, they dropped their shouting. She spoke on, assured, without hesitation. She gestured at me with a toss of her head. There was a great roar

of laughter. (1964:21)

Kako was drunk -- for the first time in our acquaintance, gloriously, reelingly drunk -- and Kako had a fat stick in his hand. His favorite wife was drunk. She stood with beery concentration before the door of her hut, with a pot in one hand and a calabash in the other: she would cook whenever and whatever she pleased; if Kako wanted gourd seed sauce instead of okra he could . . . She went into detail. Kako shook his stick at her. The abuse with which she emphasized her first statement was Shakespearian [*sic*] in its gusto. Kako took a firmer grip on his stick and tried to roar her down. He wasn't really angry. Her anatomical comparisons were too flattering. However, no self-respecting man will tolerate obscenity from his wife; to save his face, Kako shook his stick. His "Shut up!" lacked conviction. The whole homestead was listening, entranced, to her vivid, vulgar imagery. "Shut up," shouted Kako, "I'll beat you." He almost purred at her reply. She elaborated. Somebody snickered. (1964:178-79)

Bohannan prefers to tell who said what in her own words, but like Hurston, she often puts short phrases or sayings in quotes.

The old man who "really knew things" was badly stricken with palsy. (1964:90)

Soon the old man's eyes were shining as he spoke of the wars and hunts and feats of courage in the old days "before the white man spoiled our land." (1964:91)

At just the right moment, when I had rested but was not yet bored, Nder came back to give me an enormous rooster for my "children" and a duck for myself "because it is the food of Europeans." (1964:95)

Dialogue is more frequent in *Return to Laughter* than in either Hurston's or Powdermaker's texts, but all three authors prefer to narrate verbal exchanges (as above), rather than construct them. This reflects the essential ambiguity of the writer's authority. All three authors show themselves frequently in positions of having little or no authority, yet they chose for the most part not to dilute their narrative with voices other than their own. It seems there are two separate

authorities at issue: first, the authority inherent in being an objective, uninvolved scientist, and second, the authority of being the text's creator. All three authors abdicated the first form of authority, by writing subjective accounts and by portraying themselves as involved, non-neutral humans, but all three retained the second. In fact, retaining the authority of textual creator would seem to be crucial to these writings -- they are important by virtue of the authors' use of personal views, and for their insight into the anthropologist's inner self -- indeed, they might not be as potent or as informative were they heavily diluted with other voices. Another choice was made by Erika Friedl, in whose book, *Women of Deh Koh* (1989), voices other than hers prevail.²

Two additional powerful attributes of Bohannan's writing are her engaging style and her descriptive ability. Irony distinguishes her narrative -- she finds her own mistakes and the actions of others amusing, and often imbues the commonplace with a wry sense of humor. For her first dinner she dresses in an evening gown, and comments "Impervious to the stares of natives, generations of empire-building Englishmen in jungles and deserts have sat down in full evening dress to eat their custard and tinned gooseberries." (1964:11). She reports on a song the women sing about her while they pound her new floor: "I listened, and could not feel they were precisely praise songs: '*Oh, the Redwoman, our mother-in-law/Our mother-in-law has summoned me to work/I perish in her work and have no rest*' Still, it was a nice tune." (1964:64) At a meeting of the elders to settle disputes, she notes "Then we came to "the affair of the goat" -- a rather Holmesian touch, I thought." (1964:165)

Bohannan's descriptive language, which allows her to create powerful images for the reader, is possibly what marks *Return to Laughter* most strongly as a work outside the bounds of classic ethnography. Following are some examples:

Cheerfully, in the friendliest fashion, they swarmed about me, penning me into the corner. The odor of recently consumed beer and the indescribably rotten smell of locust beans hit me like a blow. Nauseated and half faint I leaned against the wall. I called for my boys. Cassava, corm, indigo -- anything with a name -- thrust against my face. Words hurled at me. Again I called. No one could hear. A girl tugged at my skirts to show me her castanets. A bent hag reached out to touch my hair. The noise, the smell of hot, excited bodies closed over me. (1964:20-21)

Already the low-lying parts of the countryside were slowly miring into swamps. Stagnant pools of water lay in every depression of the paths. At night the damp and the torment of mosquitoes kept people by their fires, where they could be swathed in smoke. Only the toads waxed larger, healthier and more numerous. They littered my yard. At night, flicking my flashlight nervously, I had to pick my way among the plump blobs of their muddy flesh. (1964:156)

For a long time Kako and Ihugh stared at each other. During that moment father and son had the same face, unquestionably of the same blood and the same spirit. The contest was decided in that moment and without words. Then the two masks -- one of hulking stupidity, the other of patriarchal benevolence -- again hid merciless ambition tempered by cold intelligence. (1964:169)

But even as he shouted, the women broke into a terrible wailing, a banshee lament torn from soul and body. Standing, hands clasped behind the head, body arched and shaking, with the cry that began in a high scream and sobbed itself slowly down the scale into silence. The fitful firelight touched Amara's body with deceitful warmth and lent her face expression even as it turned the living into strange, weeping shadows. (1964:199)

These passages show why the author's subjectivity cannot be denied or diluted if the readers are to have the full benefit of her vision. In her creation of these scenes she is not writing an objective truth; her "findings" are not replicable or impersonal, but are very unscientific. Although the book is in many ways ethnographic, there is no

pretense that Bohannan is telling anything but the truth she sees and feels. This is in direct contradiction to the effort most classic ethnographies make to grapple with culture on an objective scale, to find truths which hold no matter who the observers or actors are. Precisely because of this difference, *Return to Laughter* is a valuable anthropological work. As Riesman points out in the foreword,

[A]ny assumption that an autobiography of affective experience is an ethnographic irrelevancy would, as I argued earlier, be setting a wrong model for what is truly scientific . . . As a work of ethnography, and as a primer of anthropological method, *Return to Laughter* can stand on its own feet. . . it tells the story from within of what it is like to be an anthropologist in the field, as a human, all too human person. (1964:xvi-xviii)

Hortense Powdermaker

The five long essays in *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (1966) chronicle Hortense Powdermaker's early work in labor unions and her four major fieldwork projects. The book is autobiographical in the sense that it is about the human who writes it, but the focus is clearly on Powdermaker as an anthropologist rather than on her life in general. Admittedly this is a difficult line to draw: one could argue that since Powdermaker spent her life as an anthropologist, a book on her work is a book on her life. Her purpose with *Stranger and Friend*, however, was not so much to look at herself, but to use herself as a window into the complex world of fieldwork. Her intention in writing the book was to clarify the practice of the anthropological process, as she explains in her preface.

Field work is a deeply human as well as a scientific experience and a detailed knowledge of both aspects is an important source of data in itself, and

necessary for any comparative study of methodology. . . This book is an attempt to stand outside and observe one anthropologist -- myself, the only one I can really know -- stepping *in* to societies and *out* of them. It puts under a sort of microscope the participation-observation method as used by an anthropologist in widely different societies. (1966:9,15)

Much like Bohannan, Powdermaker wanted to tell the truth of the human behind the anthropologist. But where Bohannan chose fiction as a genre which would give her license to make a story of her self, Powdermaker chose autobiography. And unlike Hurston, for whom being an anthropologist was only a part of her life as she wrote it, Powdermaker makes her life as a professional the core of her book.

Like the other two works I have discussed, *Stranger and Friend* is an innovative blend of genres. The author has tailored the standard structures of autobiography and anthropology to meet her own requirements, creating a work which is both personally interesting and professionally useful. In restricting the majority of her subject matter to her education and fieldwork, Powdermaker makes it clear that she intends her work to be considered anthropology, in spite of its deviation from standard texts of the discipline. Indeed, *Stranger and Friend* is a departure from a lifetime of "standard" anthropological work by Powdermaker, whose studies include *Life in Lesu* (1933), *After Freedom* (1939) and *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* (1950). Although described as a "classic in the field" (Conway 1992:227), *Stranger and Friend* seems to hold the ambiguous status of a classic which is read but not taught. It may be well-known (and even this is questionable, especially among younger anthropologists), but its fame is as a work on the margins of "real" anthropology.

In each of the four sections on fieldwork, Powdermaker describes her

surroundings, her interactions with the people she is studying, her emotional and physical states and her discoveries and realizations -- in short, her life while doing anthropology. The sections on Lesu and Mississippi, although about her earliest work, are the most vivid, in terms of character delineation, sensory images, and the creation of a world for the reader. Clifford talks about ethnography having literary qualities (1986:4), but I have never read anthropology as engaging, captivating or sincere as this. Powdermaker's Mississippi essay is filled with memorable details about her surroundings and her inner experiences, allowing the reader a glimpse into a very complex and disturbing social world.

As I drove around the Negro section of Indianola and met the people, I was struck by the diversity, particularly in contrast to the homogeneity of the white section. Houses ran the gamut from modest cottages in good condition, such as Mrs. Wilson's home, to dilapidated one-and-a-half-room shanties. Two streets were paved. Unpaved streets and narrow alleys intersected them. Small stores in private homes selling groceries and soft drinks, a shoemaker, a cleaning and pressing establishment, a barber shop, a couple of beauty parlors (literally the parlors in two homes), two eating places, an undertaker, and a pool room represented the commercial aspects of the Negro section. (1966:147)

[M]y compassionate attitude towards whites was severely jolted late one afternoon when I ran into a crowd of about twenty-five rough-looking white men with dogs on a country road. They separated to let me by. I stopped for a couple of minutes and found out what I had immediately suspected. They were out to "get a nigger" who, they said, had raped a white woman in a neighboring county. He was supposed to have fled into Sunflower County. Shaken, I drove on. I knew the Negro would be lynched if caught. The would-be lynchers belonged to the poor-white group so easily distinguishable by their clothes and their red-tanned necks. Their faces, now transformed with brutality and hate, were frightening. (1966:188-9)

Occasionally I wondered who I was, as I passed back and forth between the two groups. When I inadvertently "passed" for Negro, I would return to the boarding house and look in the mirror, wondering if the color of my skin had

changed. There was always some tension in the situation for me. (1966:196)

Using this kind of descriptive language, Powdermaker writes about her work and about experiences which affect her work. She demonstrates in a believable manner how the personal and the professional are deeply and inevitably entwined.

Another strategy Powdermaker uses to create a realistic world is her portrayal of people as individuals. Although her involvement with them is not as thoroughly delineated as Bohannan's relationships are in *Return to Laughter*, still Powdermaker makes it clear how important these individuals are to her work. Soon after her arrival in Lesu, a visit from the chief of her village and his wife and child prevents her from retreating in despair.

At the end of the evening I felt at home not only with Ongus, but also with Pulong and Batu, who had said very little. When they were leaving Ongus said that I should "sing out" if I needed anything and he would come immediately. Their house was directly opposite mine. I was no longer alone. I had friends. I went to bed and fell asleep almost immediately. No more thoughts of madness or leaving entered my mind. Several years later I learned that a definition of panic is a state of unrelatedness. (1966:58-59)

A chapter entitled "Servants" provides the most elaborate description of a field relationship of Powdermaker's. Having had trouble with her first pair of servants, Powdermaker is grateful for the arrival of a new, more agreeable couple.

As soon as Taiti [the original servant] had gone, Sinbanimous and Kuserek lost their shyness. We became friends. The evening after Taiti left, Kuserek came up after dinner to chat and we were later joined by Pulong. She sprawled lengthwise on the floor as was her custom, puffing at her pipe; Kuserek sat on an empty box and I on the one chair and we smoked cigarettes. The latter was a sign of sophistication from having lived in Rabaul. . . The three of us sat smoking and talking until quite late. (1966:71)

Although Powdermaker talks about contacts she makes in her other essays, the bonds

don't seem as personal as those in Lesu. She pays least attention to people as individuals in her essay on the Hollywood study: she never refers to those she studied by name, or even with detailed descriptions. Interestingly, Hollywood was her least satisfying field experience, as she explains in a brief introduction.

This section of the book has been the most difficult to write. It is not easy to unravel the tangled threads of an exceptionally complex personal and social situation which occurred almost twenty years ago. Even more important is the fact that Hollywood was the only field experience in which I made no notes of my personal reactions. This, in itself, is significant. I was not the functioning feeling, as well as thinking, human being that I was in other field research. Feelings were muted. I saw myself as an objective scientist. (1966:211)

Throughout the body of the essay she comments on her unhappiness there, and relates these feelings directly to the quality of the study she was able to do:

I lacked in Hollywood the deep feeling tone of the society which a field worker acquires through constant observation and participation. I never felt its culture in my bones . . . (1966:222)

Although friendly with a number of people, I had no intimates as I have had in all other field work. No sense of mutual identification, so productive in understanding both an individual and his society, existed with even one person. (1966:224)

Except for the Hollywood situation, I have never been joyous upon leaving [fieldwork], nor have I hated a society I studied. . . I knew, of course, that the fraudulence of the human relations, the treatment of people as property, the debasement of taste, and the whole dehumanization which occurred in the making of most movies were foreign to my values. But instead of letting my deep feelings spill over into rage, I felt superior. I now wonder what would have happened if the men at the top of the power hierarchy had been accessible to me. It is possible that I might have acquired a feeling of compassion that would have allowed me to get inside their roles and then detach myself, as I had done with white planters in Mississippi. (1966:225-6)

As the above quote illustrates, Powdermaker obviously believes one cannot be a good

social scientist without taking into account one's own feelings, and further, that emotional involvement at some level is not only not harmful but is in fact necessary for a successful study. On the other hand, she also stresses that detachment is part of the anthropological research process. It is this dialectic which Stocking suggested may be necessary to an anthropologist's understanding, and which Powdermaker herself explains is "the heart of the participant observation method" (see page 5). This apparent contradiction signals the deeper logic about anthropology -- that its practitioners are not only stranger and friend to those they study, but protector or danger, companion or annoyance. In other words, the relationship between anthropologists and "their people" is variable, not just for different researchers, but for the same researcher at different times, and it seems a human relationship could hardly be otherwise.

In spite of her efforts to convey the individuality of certain people in her studies, Powdermaker almost never uses dialogue, preferring to describe verbal exchanges in the narrative format.

During the first month, two white women invited me to their homes for lunch. One asked me if I (a Yankee) thought they (the Southerners) were "as bad as they were painted." I replied that I wasn't interested in whether people were good or bad, but in trying to understand them. She was relieved. (1966:151)

Powdermaker joins Hurston and Bohannon in her preference for narrating speech events instead of constructing them dialogically, and she is by far the stingiest of the three in her use of reported speech. She writes so that her own voice is unbroken. In this way she has absolute authority over the text, even though she often stresses

her lack of authority in the stories she tells. Like Bohannan, Powdermaker often portrays herself in a very human, distinctly unprofessional way -- thus abdicating the inherent authority of the ever-objective scholar. In the quote below, she mentions she is bored watching the people of Lesu dance; there are many entries like the following, which she includes in a chapter called "Monotony."

Sometimes I was discouraged. . . now and then I felt overwhelmed by all I did not know, by the number of things still to find out, and by the awareness that there was much I could never learn. . . The steady deterioration of my households goods was depressing. The inside of each of the two [enamel] cups was horribly discolored with large rough black spots. Feeling desperate, I began drinking tea and coffee from a glass which had formerly held peanut butter . . . These irritations were small but they loomed large, even though I was amused at their seeming importance. . . sometimes, in spite of good health and the steady accumulation of data, the monotony, which I could not change, was very oppressive. (1966:95-99)

This in some ways prefigured the experimental fashion of such luminaries as Paul Rabinow (1977), whose narrative in *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* includes comments of a personal nature. "For a month or so I internalized the situation: I was just not good at languages, Ibrahim was being so clearly conscientious and open; it was my fault; Arabic is a difficult language, and so on. My next reaction was anger, both at Ibrahim and myself. Absurd." (1977:26) A major difference between the two is Powdermaker's greater command of style; in her narrative the personal is interesting in itself, not just as a daring challenge to tradition. Also, by elaborating on her subjective feelings and making them the focus of the book, Powdermaker sends a distinctly different message than Rabinow and others. Her concern is not to compromise or apologize for her authority as creator of the text, but to show how her

authority as a scientist is tempered by (and in fact is a function of) her humanness.

Part of the potency of Powdermaker's writing is the naturalness with which she structures the narrative around herself.

I sat watching the women practice. The moon was new and delicate, the sea dark and noisy, and the singing women moved in a circle around a fire with slow dancing steps. They asked me to join them, but I was too self-conscious. I sat watching and held one of the babies. But each night, as the music and formal steps became more and more monotonous, lasting until midnight, I became increasingly bored. I had to force myself to stay awake. (1966:111)

This is in marked contrast to experimental works, in which the narrator self-consciously places herself/himself at key points. For instance, Smadar Lavie often involves herself in the narrative of *The Poetics of Military Occupation* (1990) by referring to herself as "the anthropologist, her" sometimes in alternating sentences with the more common "I/me," and sometimes in the same sentence. "Some distant fear creeps into the back of my mind while the anthropologist accelerates writing her notes." (1990:142) I find this theoretically motivated inclusion of the self in the work to be distracting and unconvincing; it reduces the self-awareness of the writer to an awkward equation, and has no effect on personalizing her exchange with people she studies.

Although there is a superficial similarity between the autobiographical *Stranger and Friend* and works of experimental anthropology, I suggest one of the main qualitative differences is that the more recent, theoretically informed works are constructed artificially. That is, instead of the personally revealing narrative being

an integral part of the story (since it is the story of the narrator), it is an addition, an added layer but not a change in quality or goal. It is possible that this condition has a "political" cause: the experimental works are (despite the name) very much part of the mainstream, and so must remain loyal to the basic beliefs and standards of the mainstream even while they attempt something new. Also, it seems that they have difficulty abdicating the authority of objectivity, while this attitude is inherent in *Stranger and Friend*, *Return to Laughter* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*.

Powdermaker makes no secret of her position; in fact, she begins the book with this statement:

The anthropologist is a human instrument studying other human beings and their societies. Although he has developed techniques that give him considerable objectivity, it is an illusion for him to think he can remove his personality from his work and become a faceless robot or a machinelike recorder of human events. (1966:19)

In the same section (called "Background"), Powdermaker talks about her family, childhood, and education as factors which affected her choice of anthropology as a career. She theorizes that dissatisfaction with one's society leads many to become anthropologists. "Why should a contented and satisfied person think of standing outside his or any other society and studying it?" (1966:20) In this sense it is relevant that she rebelled against her family: "As a child, I did not accept the norms of my upper-middle and middle-class German Jewish background" (1966:21), and at Goucher College was prevented from joining a sorority because she was Jewish. She says of this experience that it was her first "awareness of social restrictions on Jews." (1966:22) Unlike Hurston and Bohannon, Powdermaker early and openly establishes

the connections between her background and her work. In the same way, she is the only author of the three to speak openly about racism as she experiences it. Hurston talks about it in a general, abstract way, and Bohannon deals with it only very indirectly. Powdermaker says little about racism in Lesu (in a preface she notes, "no biracial situation existed: I was the first anthropologist and the first white person to live there, and could set my own role" (1966:12)), but her next project was to study race relations in the South (in the 1930s). In addition to her extensive descriptions of the social world, she notes personal details such as being mistaken for a "high yellow" while in the company of a black woman: "In a few days I acquired some of the feeling tone of what it meant to be an educated Negro young woman in Mississippi." (1966:135) Although she attempts an objective stance, it is clear she believes the system to be inhumane and unjust, and she refuses to engage in expected white behavior which she sees as overtly offensive. For instance, she uses social titles when speaking to blacks -- a practice which stuns a local white bureaucrat and even produces fear in Powdermaker herself.

I, who was not a Mississippian, who was in the state for only a year, who would return to Yale at the end of it, whose life was not bound to the South, had been afraid to tell Mr. Smith that I was breaking the taboo on social titles for Negroes. And I did not think I was a person without courage. The experience added not only to my deeper understanding of taboos, and of the South, but also to my stock of humility. . . The subject of social titles for Negroes was not mentioned again between us. But I assumed that he must have respected my breaking this fundamental taboo. However, I never quite lost my fear that something terrible might happen and I doubt if he did, either. (1966:154)

Powdermaker's willingness to discuss racism as it affects her personally is another

example of the unique structure of *Stranger and Friend*, where personal problems are entwined with professional settings, and each influences the other in a constant cycle of cause and effect. The result is a potent story which gives the reader more information about the doing of anthropology than the typical ethnography. For example, the reader of this passage knows much more about living with the taboos of the South in the 1930s than would have been evident from a mere "objective" description of the fact that whites of the time did not use social titles when speaking to blacks. Powdermaker's pioneering efforts certainly garnered some attention, but the fact that she has been virtually ignored in the anthropological movement to return the author to the text raises questions about her mainstream acceptance. It seems likely that her structural and linguistic innovations were beyond the pale, and raised serious questions regarding the role of the anthropologist as scientist when the discipline was not ready for such questions. In spite of these conditions, Powdermaker did not compromise her creative vision, which may be why *Stranger and Friend* is on the margins of acceptable anthropology.

CONCLUSION

It is not exclusively the domain of theory to say the most important things, and the reverse is also true: things which contain no obvious theoretical angle are not necessarily less important than those that do. The quote from Emerson at the beginning of the paper, for instance, explains the ideal interaction between reader and text in elegant, understandable, even memorable terms which are far removed from a theory constructed in academic language. That theory is implicit in form, that traditional science is an incomplete view of the world, that personal narrative shows important truths about fieldwork -- all these ideas are essential to the development of an anthropology which gives credit to experiences of the humans who comprise the discipline, both the researchers and those studied. The individual is in fact the crux of it all, who in many crucial ways cannot be defined/known and certainly not generalized, but only described, superbly or poorly. It is here these three authors make an appearance. This is their strength -- to describe superbly their experience as individuals, to try and make it as clear and as vivid to the reader as possible, so she/he has the chance to learn it "rightly."

I have argued that the marginalization of these writers is due in part to the traditional role of science in anthropology, in part to their gender, and in part to their style of writing. These overlap to some extent, and intertwine as well with the context within which the works were written. Awarding these anthropologists their due relies to some extent on redefinition of the anthropological canon -- a process which has its beginnings in feminist anthropology, in the use of autobiography, and

in the recognition of the importance of the personal and the political in anthropology. The three authors I have discussed contributed greatly to their field of study, and the true value of their work is shown not just in the texts themselves, but in the courage of the authors to present what they saw, instead of what they were expected to see or what others expected to see of them. In this sense anthropology has benefited from the authors' exhibition of what Dorothy Lee called true autonomy:

Such an individual sees with his own eyes, what is there; not what he has been led to expect to be there. He recognizes his own feelings and deals with experience in terms of these, taking them into account. (Lee 1986:30)

Anthropology could only benefit from a further infusion of this approach.

ENDNOTES

1. Keller writes insightfully on the question of how science came to be constructed in such a way, and why it does not necessarily have to be so, but these points are too complex to discuss in this framework.

2. My thanks to Anne Betteridge for pointing out that although Friedl's technique is completely opposite to that of the works I discuss here, her characters take on life and vividness in a similar fashion. This suggests that the presence of the writer within the work is of secondary importance; what matters more is the relationship between the writer and the people about whom she writes, and her ability to portray them as individuals.

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