

Introduction. Anthropology without history or anthropology in history?

This work is not situated in the same conceptual space as the several excellent histories of anthropology¹ currently available in France. In that they testify to the uncertainties and questionings of a discipline whose first problem is that of defining itself, these histories comprise the field of analysis and reflection of this work. It is something of a paradox that a discipline that has a fair number of researchers still hesitates over which name to choose (anthropology or ethnology) and over the nature of its boundaries (most obviously, those that separate history from sociology). In so far as this is something more than a verbal quibble or confrontation within the universities, and given the empire-building activities that take place there, this hesitation is all the more serious, and bears quite centrally on the meaning and object of our research. What have we sought (if not found)? What are we looking for?

We therefore have to take stock; not because the materials we have accumulated are so significant that we ought to try to evaluate and classify them, but rather because the sheer range of different trajectories and approaches, and consequent confusion of paths, obliges us to attempt a clarification. If an itinerary has been discovered, or rather created and constituted, what is it and where are we going wrong? The problem with anthropologists is not so much one of knowing if they do or do not agree, but more one of understanding if they are speaking of the same thing or not.

The almost paradoxical maturity that anthropology has achieved makes this question all the more urgent, since, as a consequence of this maturity, its prestige, or at any rate, its influence, has grown in direct ratio to its own profound disarray and internal divisions. Several factors may be adduced to account for the attraction that anthropology, albeit in haphazard or misleading forms, now holds for a fairly wide public. There is, first of all, the day-to-day impact of bureaucratic constraints. These are not exactly successful in making individuals believe, given the manner in which their time is taken up with compulsory activities, that when they consume, they are essentially consuming freely, and such constraints therefore arouse or revive

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that taste for other times and other places that has so often characterised the sensibility of westerners. It is an old tradition, certainly, and an artfully ethnocentric one, stirring up a nostalgia, a desire for escape and a need for comparison in the depths of narcissistic reflection in which European intellectuals indulge. The Middle Ages were never finer than under romanticism and savages were never more attractive than in the eighteenth century. Montaigne himself had been captivated by the Amerindians' wisdom and had, like Rousseau and Montesquieu after him, used it as a pretext for reflecting critically on European customs and institutions. He thus established a sensibility and a form of thought that still affect us residually, as much in the writings of the romantics as in the aesthetic and political agitations of the surrealists, and in the most sophisticated of monographs also.

But there is something else at stake now, as both this desire for 'the other' and this self-torment have become more extreme, more crude yet more subtle. Now the intellectuals' notion of luxury would seem to be identified with the dissatisfaction of the common run of mortals. 'The distant coconut palms of proud Africa' haunted the Paris of both Baudelaire and Mallarmé, as did invitations to depart, whether for life or for death; but until recently this was only for those who had had the privilege of further education and, as readers of Castex and Surer and Lagarde and Michard, had fed listlessly off these images. Today, the invitation is extended more widely; travel agents offer us a wide range of brightly coloured illustrations that demand our attention and sometimes, because of a chance tiredness or desire, or because of a lucky camera angle, actually move us.

For the European 'consumer' the world does not become less exotic as it grows more familiar. In dreaming of a cruise to North Africa, if his demands are modest, or if you like, to black Africa, the European will hardly pay any attention to those who come from there. The day-to-day proximity of migrant workers beside our dustbins, drains and building-sites gives them an almost abstract character, and one that is in curious contrast to the concrete urgency of dreams of escape. The discovery of another humanity can hardly be said to be the true concern of the numerous enthusiasts of charter flights, round trips, and holidays in which one undertakes 'exploration' and seeks 'knowledge' of the world, nor are these exactly a sure bulwark against misconceptions and racism of all sorts. But I am concerned here not so much to denounce the essentially pernicious nature of any reduction of another culture to the status of object for one's curiosity or consumption, as to stress how ready the public is to attend to any discourse concerning 'the others', a readiness which is assuredly very ambiguous but which, for this same reason, grows and thus makes more complex the task of those who, professionally, claim to know something about them.

There is in fact, a comparable ambiguity affecting anthropological debate. Some of the above reasons may be held to account for it, but there are others

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too, which are more closely linked to the history of research and to history itself. This debate turns basically on three points, points that can easily be shown to be closely related if not inextricably confused. It concerns the researchers themselves, the meaning of their presence outside their own countries, and the use that can be made of their work. It concerns the populations that are the object both of an anthropological 'gaze' and of colonial or neo-colonial politics whose consequences run from acculturation through deculturation to ethnocide, even to genocide. Finally, it bears on the general validity of the intellectual schemata that western observers use when investigating different societies. There is no great distance separating actual presence from 'gaze', or 'gaze' from model, and political, deontological and intellectual preoccupations thus find themselves naturally bound together.

Such a confusion of different perspectives would be thoroughly healthy and justifiable if it did not entail risks of which even the best-intentioned observers have no conception. For it can lead to a mystification of the societies in which they are supposedly taking an interest, even if it does not also entail reducing these same societies, either through paying exaggerated tribute to their virtues or through paying insufficient attention to their diversity, to being nothing more than pawns in a debate that primarily concerns western intellectuals.

In France at any rate the anthropological debate turns on an opposition between those who, in one sense or another, are avowed Marxists, and those who repudiate this line of descent. This distinction has nothing to do with functionalist, culturalist or structuralist options, which are not superseded as such, but which no longer dominate the factional disputes between schools and researchers. Given all the appropriate reservations, one could advance the argument that, of those who repudiate Marxism, there must be many who have been intellectually discomfited by the wrongdoings of the Stalinist epoch; they have therefore tended to place in question the very spirit of western logic, as if it were essentially reductive and imperialist, and have valorised the social and intellectual models encountered in different societies, particularly Stateless ones. It has therefore happened, paradoxically enough, that those same people who used to denounce the positioning of a disjuncture between societies with and without a State or with and without writing, a disjuncture that involved defining one group of human societies in terms of the absence of characteristics peculiar to the other group, have come to reinstate this disjuncture. They have not merely reinstated it, however, but have taken it further, and have stressed instead the deficiencies that the key features of western societies with States imply. Put crudely, our societies are thought to have lost the thing that validates the others, namely, authenticity, a word first employed in anthropology by Claude Lévi-Strauss,² and regrettably no longer used by him alone.

There have been anthropologists (French for the most part) who, faced

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with the century's political disillusionments and with the dubious nature of recent theoretical developments, have yielded all too easily to intellectual constructions that have no genuine anchorage in reality. They have thus given laymen the impression that what they are expounding derives from a particular experience and mode of enquiry, when in actual fact they are imposing, in the course of *illustrating* certain exotic facts, a schema, a 'theory' and perhaps a phantasy. One can thus descry in anthropological texts the noble but blurred outline of a savage who, being nearer to nature than we are, must have refused in advance all that oppresses us (the Oedipal triangle, the State, abstraction), and whose trace, memory or testimony one may still find in the Amazonian forests or in the Australian deserts. With the help of fashion (and under pressure from a demand that actually epitomises the unease of an epoch or a society) a greater and greater number of increasingly picturesque savages are paraded before us. These savages die better than we, live better than we; they know better than we do the secrets of both life and death and the mysterious texture of the real, and how to *see* and turn away from the sterile schemata of analytic thought. There is therefore a risk that intellectuals will, in their disillusionment, amplify the current mood of nostalgia and thus reinforce the mystifiers' lies. This will lead only to obscurantism.

Can we, then, not hope to hear the genuine voice of others? Born of culture shock and of the clash of unequal forces, syncretic movements and messianic cults proclaim the meaning of a defeat that they can only cancel by superseding: the real object for which the defeated of yesterday quite legitimately search is the secret of the whites' strength and the reasons for the defeat they have suffered. Can the newspapers have captured the full irony or drama of the followers of Lumumba or Mulele believing themselves to be bullet-proof if, now that they are dead, we allow ourselves the luxury of believing in the efficacy of their magic? The West knows when and how to exploit doubt or faith for its own purposes. Yet the vision and researches of the defeated³ were based on reality, and when, in the perhaps still-distant future, their attempts at reconquest have ended, they will grasp from the others (from us) a part of the most critical reason for their defeat. People in black Africa do in fact talk of the lost strength that people of bygone times possessed and that they did not hand on, but they also know that it is gone just like everything else. The more clear-sighted African intellectuals, like Paulin Hountondji, object to every attempt, however generous it might seem, to mark out a separate destiny for their world, as if it has ever been more unanimous, less hierarchised and more 'philosophical' than our own. This, then, is the temptation and the vertigo from which a certain form of anthropology suffers, and in constructing a discipline apart for societies apart, it selects only their past (their 'tradition', their state prior to western aggression) and idealises it.

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What of the Marxist contribution? Whilst there have been numerous attempts at applying categories like 'mode of production' and 'social formation' to the analysis of societies traditionally studied by ethnographers, there has never been, with one or two exceptions, any systematic endeavour to break with this tradition. Debates internal to Marxism have turned around the question of classes. Marxist anthropologists have asked whether for instance, it was legitimate to talk of the oppositions between elders and juniors in lineage societies in terms of class? Non-Marxists have had a fine time denouncing this problem as typically Europocentrist, and some Marxists have expressed the fear that, in using the term 'class' in too wide a sense (as when one applies it to the different positions occupied in processes of circulation and distribution, for instance, or to reproduction and not to production), one strips it of all operational value. It is common knowledge that, for Marx, class oppositions concern the basic opposition labour/non-labour, some profiting from (exploiting) the surplus labour of others. It is hard to apply a definition of this sort to the reality of African lineage societies, even though they are hierarchised. But is this the most pertinent question? Should we not ask instead if it is possible, from the same anthropological perspective, to undertake the study of a whole range of societal forms, starting not with empirical categories that are always admitted *a priori* (and which the opposition between the disciplines that are supposed to study them, i.e., ethnology and sociology, masks) but with intellectual objects that may be apprehended and constituted through the concrete diversity of societies? The aim here would not be to fix in an artificial synchrony the study of diverse institutional or symbolic forms, but to delineate the real parameters of history. If class relations represent only one of a whole range of power relations, history cannot be identified with the history of class struggle; which is also to say that it does not begin, or end, with the hypothetical establishment of 'classless' societies. In this respect, it is curious to note the emergence of a debate on the existence or otherwise of classes in the present-day socialist societies, a debate not dissimilar to the one whose pertinence some anthropologists have contested when it was applied to lineage societies. In the former situation too, the concept will perhaps have to be over-extended or else renounced.

But non-Marxists (or anti-Marxists), far from mocking or vilifying the Marxists, ought to be grateful to them for maintaining the same categories and for asserting, as they do, the radical difference of pre-industrial societies. It should be said that there is a lofty precedent for all this. Marxist philosophers, even when they are at odds over the meaning or extension of the concept of ideology, are in (implicit) agreement that it should not be applied, or at least not *in toto*, to 'classless' societies. Thus Jacques Rancière⁴ reproaches Althusser for his definition of ideology 'in general', as that system of representations which in every society would assure social cohesion at the price of an effect of opacity; but for Althusser himself division into classes

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adds to the deformation produced by ideology 'in general', the dominating class complicating (over-determining) the general effect of opacity through a mystifying representation of the social system which functions to its profit. In other words, for Althusser (whose definition of class remains traditionally Marxist), classless societies are also without mystification and lie at the innocent end of the ideological spectrum. Rancière goes further, maintaining all ideology is class ideology, and yet he does not deny the existence of classless societies. It is worth pondering the possibility that Marxist philosophers, following in this respect an anthropological tradition that has always paid attention to the integrative functions of the societies it has studied, are effectively assigning one part of humanity to symbolic existence (to representations and to relative harmony) and the other to ideological existence (to manipulations and to struggle). The passage from symbolic to ideological would then be equivalent, on a temporal axis, to the emergence of classes.

One can thus find the same intellectual blank, the same blurred gaze and the same misconceptions in the background of scholarly discourses as characterises popular ethnographic literature. Or, in noble but deceptive terms, there is this same unknowable and unknown quality, one that arouses in many people, along with uncertainty, desire. Anthropological discourse is the less innocent for being part of history; that of others, certainly, since the anthropologist intervened alongside the officer, the administrator and the missionary, but also part of its own history, produced and received by men of a particular epoch and society, in a determinate intellectual and political conjuncture.

One can thus account in part for its difficulties, its regrets, its ambiguities and its predilections. Yet anthropological discourse is also without history or, if you like, outside history. The difficulties it encounters are also strictly intellectual ones, which the diversity neither of cultures in which field-work is done, nor of epochs, nor of theories, will fully explain.

Anthropologists have always had to face two questions bearing on meaning and on function, but have not succeeded in providing any consistent answer to them. The first is, what do the institutions encountered in a society *mean*, given the fact that they are amenable to comparison all over the world; and the second, what use are they? The first question is usually tackled in those anthropological studies which are devoted to the study of symbolic systems, institutions, and beliefs treated as representations. Whether these studies are culturalist, psychoanalytic or structuralist in inspiration, and whether they refer to a culture in its specificity, to drives or to general configurations that occur in the human mind, they are in every case concerned with the expressive value of systems. An entire French tradition undertakes enquiries of this sort. Thus, through works by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, which have unveiled more and more of the intricate and impressive architecture of a system of thought, a cosmogony and a cosmology, the Dogon have

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acquired a fame that extends far beyond the context of academic anthropology. Lévi-Strauss's works have lent substance to the idea of human nature, by identifying universal unconscious structures beneath the various cultural manifestations of the human mind. Whilst they differ in many respects, these enquiries have in common the fact of being, literally, more anthropological than sociological, more concerned to reveal intellectual mechanisms than to analyse power relations or the functioning of institutions; they favour the study of symbolic production, of symbolic systems such as language, marriage rules, economic relations, science, art and religion, which taken together, for Lévi-Strauss, define a culture.

English-speaking anthropologists have tended to favour the second question, and, more particularly, have concerned themselves with systems of representations only in as much as they serve explicitly, implicitly or unconsciously to further the functioning of a social system. Through a kind of paradox peculiar to the history of anthropology, Durkheim has won more of an audience with the Anglo-Saxons than with the French. If Durkheim was concerned with religion, it was not so much in order to decipher the mark of the human mind at work in the constitution of symbols, as to analyse the efficacy of representation: it is because religion *represents* the social, by means of large gatherings and collective effervescence, that it renders it desirable, or in any case, acceptable. There are two main aspects of the Durkheimian approach. First of all, it treats the 'expressive' value of religion as more important than anything else, in that it represents something other than itself. Secondly, it is concerned with elucidating the secret of symbolic efficacy, with understanding the passage from representation to action. The second aspect is at once the most difficult, the most fragile and the most interesting. This doubtless explains why it is that the first should dominate those anthropological monographs that are more or less Durkheimian in inspiration: the idea that one 'level' of reality represents another (and that one can, for instance, undertake a 'reading' of the 'social level' by means of the 'religious level') is the principle that implicitly informs many such accounts. This idea is not, moreover, peculiar to any one theory, and there are assuredly structuralist, functionalist or Marxist modes of yielding to the temptation of specularity.

The subtler analyses in this area strive to disrupt the circular logic of mirror effects and to give some account of the problems of efficacy. Max Gluckman, for example, strives to show that the tensions that are expressed ritually in 'rituals of rebellion' are real, even if their institutionalised expression is a means of reducing them, and Victor Turner insists on the sensory, biological and organic dimensions of symbolic or ritual activity. In Turner's opinion, these dimensions serve to guarantee the passage from the obligatory to the desirable, whereas Durkheim had seen this same passage as depending on the collective nature of that activity.

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But because there is no one answer to these two questions the authors who try to answer them are forced (as are those cited above) to diversify their perspectives, to change, more or less consciously, their objectives, or to allow difficulties that stem from the complexity of the real to harden into doctrinal or disciplinary oppositions. For, if it is true that institutions serve a purpose *and* signify, it is also true that the secret of function does not lie in signification, nor vice versa. It is thus not hard for us to distinguish two major orientations in the history of anthropology (and to locate them in accounts of it), one favouring analyses in terms of meaning, symbol, evolution and the human mind, the other favouring analyses in terms of function, ideology, culture and social organisation. One might think that the former would make it easier to elicit relations between individual psyche and social symbolism, and that it would clear a space for psychoanalysis and ethnopsychiatry, whereas the second, despite appearances (and, for instance, Malinowski's disclaimers), would be closer to history. But I would yet again emphasise that these two approaches, each equally interesting and equally necessary, cannot in themselves, whether considered separately or in juxtaposition, be held to give an exhaustive account of the whole of reality. They express a complexity, and also a helplessness, that the best anthropologists, because they are the best, cannot help but recognise, and to which, beyond the avatars of theory, recurrent oscillations in the history of anthropology bear witness.

In one sense there is no history of anthropology, and current debates, even Parisian ones, do nothing more than revive the old, indissociable, irreconcilable and complementary oppositions between the demand on the one hand, that anthropological signification, individuality and human identity be taken into account and, on the other, that sociological meaning, social relations and cultural specificity also be considered. Whilst there is no identity or human individuality that can be apprehended separately from its social determination, neither is there any institution or specific social organisation that does not set in motion a more general symbolism. Particularly revealing, from this point of view, are all those institutions and ceremonies in which, in a language that is always historically and culturally marked, individual destinies and social organisations are decided. The passage from birth to death is thus marked by puberty rites, graduation rites and marriage rites. Or, in a more political and more restricted register, initiation or coronation rites assume, in massively different contexts, irreducibly diverse but nonetheless comparable forms, that both yield meaning sociologically and, anthropologically, work as signs.

This duality lies as much in observed reality as in the mind that does the observing, and this latter is forever condemned to choose between its quarry and the shadow that the quarry casts. On the one hand it treats what is absolutely individual as an abstraction, and social reality as the sole observ-

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able reality (Gurvitch's sociology, in this respect, takes this to its logical conclusion, in that the terms 'individual' and 'concrete' are defined as strictly antithetical), while on the other it leaves out economic and social context, and the historical conjuncture, the sole thing to give meaning to the existence of concrete individuals. It permeates or overlaps with all those debates in which, sometimes within the same work, evolutionism and culturalism, functionalism and structuralism, structuralism and Marxism, or even the most recent amalgams of these theoretical options, are opposed.

In another sense anthropology *is* part of history. This is not simply because, as I have already indicated, its problems, concerns and temptations are part of a common heritage. Nor is it just because one would have to be astonishingly blind, when faced with the reality of others, to ignore the relations between force and meaning through which force is opposed to and imposed upon meaning, and each day increasingly so. It is rather because it participates, even if those who practise it are unaware of this, and even if its specificity as a discipline is thus sacrificed, in the advance of forms of knowledge which, in all areas, are identified with the march of history. One can doubtless assert, without therefore being naive or lapsing into paradox, that the more aware anthropology becomes of its involvement in history the more chance it has of eluding its own historical determinations and, if I may put it like this, of not alienating itself from itself. This is both because its existence as a discipline, and the places that feature as objects of ethnographic observation, are products of history, and because as a scientific practice it is also a historical practice, and one that is rarely more and sometimes less innocent than any other.

If one considers the intelligence and wealth of ancient philosophies, or the remarkable intricacy of 'exotic' social systems which, from the Inca empire to Australian nomadic culture, from African chiefdoms to Indian kingdoms, bear witness to the ingenuity and diversity of human genius, to its admirable capacity for combining the sacred, the political and the social, one is sometimes tempted to think that the notion of progress has no more meaning in the human sciences than in poetry. If one reads those contemporary authors who are forever rediscovering America one is all the more likely to be tempted in this way. But one should sometimes be on one's guard against both the *a priori* from which such temptations stem, and the confusions to which they testify. The *a priori* here is that of absolute relativism and complete scepticism. It implies that one system is as good as another, provided it has its proper coherence, and it may well constitute the first stage of a reactionary programme whose equivalent is to be found in the sort of political discourse that follows on from or amplifies the assertion that previous systems had, when all is said and done, more coherence and more meaning. The virtues of the race, the riches of the soil, and the meaning of the compact between man and man are always placed in the past, and whilst these themes may

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constitute the bare bones of reactionary argument, they are always introduced, set in place and articulated through a sceptical discourse that, under cover of a general denunciation, strives above all to devalue the meaning of the present. As the dark side of the idea of progress, 'sceptical' discourse lies (both with respect to its object and with respect to its scope) when it presents itself as the sad truth of a world without history.

This discourse appeals very directly to anthropologists, and in this respect it is clear that its intellectual problems (evolution/diffusion, meaning/function, function/history) overlap with political ones. And if one takes it for granted that anthropologists should not, for all that, seek to be optimists or pessimists, believers or unbelievers, one would also do well to remember that they ought not to smuggle in, for the purpose of analysing some societies, criteria that they had ruled out when judging others. The example that I will now cite illustrates very clearly what risks the anthropologist may be induced to run, when he deems that he is simply applying himself to specific analyses.

In Amerindian society torture has been practised in a manner that is at once subtle and extremely codified; we have, for instance, accurate accounts of the ritual in which the Tupinamba put their prisoners of war to death.⁵ These prisoners might well have spent several years with their enemies, having settled down and intermarried with them, before being executed and then eaten, all according to a ceremonial procedure that was meticulously organised. They knew when this event was to take place, accepted it, and shared their conquerors' and executioners' value system and sense of honour to such an extent that, if the chroniclers are to be believed, they never sought to run away. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in one of his lectures at the Collège de France, observed in passing that practices of this kind are radically different from those in which torture is used in modern western societies to extort confessions. It is always pertinent, in this respect, to recall that no society is more 'savage' than any other, but that it is not therefore necessary to compare the incomparable. One can in fact find an equivalent, in the western tradition, for the system of shared values that the Tupinamba example illustrates; as, for instance, in the 'rules of war', in the implicit code of mutual respect ordering relations between a prisoner and the person responsible for him, and in the saluting of the courageous adversary that comprises the background of Renoir's film, *La Grande Illusion*. Neither a spy nor a deserter is shot without decorum and observation of the rules. From another angle we find in non-western societies cases of violent practices that are explicitly meant to extort a confession. The various forms of ordeal work quite ingloriously on the body of the accused, and it is clearly with these and with other related practices that it is appropriate to compare the punishments and tortures of the dark history of the West.

Each 'rehabilitation', however useful, is nevertheless liable to result in