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978-0-521-28548-3 - The Anthropological Circle: Symbol, Function, History

Marc Auge

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37

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# The Anthropological Circle

**Symbol, Function, History**

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# Contents

Preface	vii
<b>Introduction. Anthropology without history or anthropology in history?</b>	1
<b>1. The anthropological circle</b>	14
Two axes and four poles	14
Evolution, culture, symbol	18
Evolution, culture, function	22
Symbol, function	25
Symbol, function, culture	33
Culture, symbol	36
<b>2. Some questions concerning the current state of anthropology</b>	42
The philosopher's questions	42
Meaning, non-meaning and structure: Claude Lévi-Strauss	50
Symbol and function: Victor Turner	61
Instances and determination: Marxist anthropology	65
<b>3. From moral crisis to intellectual doubt</b>	78
The object of anthropology	79
Ethnocentrism and anti-ethnocentrism	90
Scientific practice, militant practice	94
<b>Conclusions</b>	101
New sites, new stakes	101
Here, today	102

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

Social logics	108
A myth, a necessity: interdisciplinarity	111
Notes	116
Index	125

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[More information](#)

## Preface

The reader will perhaps be surprised to find that, in my treatment of current anthropological perspectives, I have devoted the best part of this book to French authors and theoretical tendencies. I have chosen to speak of research in progress, of new and tentative approaches and of realignments that in some cases have hardly assumed a definite shape at all. For, while I have no intention of repudiating the official canon, I take it that these new approaches do supersede it and that they delineate a possible future for a critical analysis of the logic of social institutions. In this respect my knowledge of recent or half-completed work, of provocative intellectual currents and theoretical developments abroad, cannot help but be less profound and less in touch, hence my focus on French research. This admission does not, however, render the above hypothesis null and void. For I would maintain that French anthropology, in spite or because of its sometimes excessive taste for theoretical debate (which makes it both receptive to philosophical discussion and vulnerable to intellectual fashions), is at present assembling the basic elements for a novel reflection on the necessary conditions for, and meaning of, a synthetic science, both anthropological and historical, of men in society. I would also argue that this debate, conducted in terms of structuralism and Marxism, is far more advanced in France than in countries with an Anglo-Saxon anthropological tradition.

Finally, let me stress that this work would not make much sense if it were nothing more than a catalogue; it therefore includes elements of assessment. I do not claim, however, in the name of some revealed truth, to award good or bad marks, but rather to take up *positions* in relation to other formulations.