

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GHENT

### INTRODUCTION

RIK PINXTEN

THIS collection of essays reflects some of the research now being carried out in the departments of anthropology, African studies and ethnic art at the University of Ghent in Belgium. Due to limitations of space, however, the collection is not wholly representative for any of the three departments in themselves. Rather, it cuts across all three of them.

The structure of what can be identified as 'anthropological research' at the University of Ghent has particular historical roots. Although the university was the first in Belgium to teach anthropology, beginning with Frans Olbrechts in the 1920s, its programme has been dispersed over the years between art history/ethnic art and philosophy-inspired African studies. Anthropology proper, the third partner in this case, has had the status of an auxiliary science for most of this century. This structure compares with that of some German institutes, but it contrasts markedly with the British and American systems. The intriguing, sometimes fruitful and sometimes harassing investment in art history proper (for ethnic art) and in philosophy and cultural history proper (for African studies) forces the anthropologist to work in an interdisciplinary way. On the other hand, the reference to sociology, found so often in Great Britain, is absent.

Contributions from all three 'sources' are presented in this collection. Moreover, it will be clear that each contributor situates himself in more than one discipline. Verboven and Pinxten speak as anthropologists, but both lay emphasis on religious studies. Verboven, who was trained in ethnic art, works on African religions. Pinxten, who was trained as a philosopher and is an Americanist

anthropologist by vocation, presents a study in theoretical anthropology. Both authors develop praxiological models, drawing mainly on Bourdieu's work.

Remes is trained in African linguistics and is presently studying for a Ph.D. in the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University, Chicago, USA. He thus bridges African linguistics and anthropology. His essay is a sociolinguistic analysis of the contemporary Afro-American phenomenon of rapping music. Arnaut, who was trained in ethnic art and who is now carrying out postgraduate research in social and cultural anthropology at the University of Oxford, has been trying to capture the core of 'Africanhood' in terms of rhythm, dance and music. His present contribution continues this intuitive quest and expands it to the problematization of African art. Finally, Van Damme offers an overview and critical appraisal of theories about the aesthetics of non-Western cultures. The essay combines art-historical interests and anthropological literature in an attempt to check critically our interdisciplinary understanding of the subject-matter.

We hope that this selection from anthropological work at the University of Ghent will be inspiring to the reader, and that it may help to establish further contacts between us and our fellow anthropologists.