

(Re)inventing Urgency: The Case of the Smithsonian's Center for the Study of Man, 1968-1976

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Introduction

The Center for the Study of Man was established at the Smithsonian Institution in 1968 to develop international research programs with the goal of “serving the needs of SI staff and scholars from outside whose interests lie in anthropology, archaeology, human ecology and other fields concerned with appraising man’s interrelationship with his physical, biological and cultural environment.” [1] The Center’s objectives, while interdisciplinary in scope, were nonetheless heavily informed by the methods and approaches of sociocultural anthropology. Major projects initiated under its auspices included a program in “urgent anthropology”; the 1978 revision of the *Handbook of North American Indians*; the development of the National Anthropological Film Center (now the Human Studies Film Archives); the establishment of a Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies (RIIES); and planning for a Museum of Man. Other partially-conceived initiatives included a bibliographic and computerization program (to be implemented alongside the 1968 designation of the National Anthropological Archives); a conference and publication series on ubiquitous topics such as population growth, human fertility, and drug and alcohol use; and a community-based American Indian program. [2] The Center remained an independent research unit at the Smithsonian until 1976, at which point its major programs were discontinued or reassigned elsewhere within the Institution.

Although relatively short-lived, the Center for the Study of Man represents a broader set of institutional and disciplinary transformations that challenged the orientation of Smithsonian anthropology during the 1960s and 1970s. [3] Its creation can be best understood as an outgrowth of the intellectual synergy between Smithsonian Secretary Sidney Dillon Ripley, who headed the Institution from 1964 until 1984, and University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax, who served as Ripley's special advisor on anthropology for much of this period. [4] The Center's holistic focus on the interrelationship of humans with their natural and cultural environments reflected Ripley's investment in environmental conservation, while its action-oriented programs and international scope supported Tax's efforts to build a global community of anthropologists after World War II. At the same time, their administrative justification for the Center stemmed in no small part from efforts to appease persistent factualism among the Smithsonian's anthropologists following the 1965 merger of the Bureau of American Ethnology and the Department of Anthropology. Moreover, the Center's expansive mandate reflected broader anxieties of what role the human sciences—and anthropology in particular—might play in addressing the needs of a rapidly changing world. [5]

One case for considering how these different factors came to shape the Center's programming—as well as its gradual dissolution—is through the development of Smithsonian “urgent anthropology.” Initiated as an independent program spearheaded by Ripley and organized by Tax, urgent anthropology quickly evolved into a catch-all idea that rationalized and described the motivations behind several Smithsonian research projects, many of which were then incorporated and redefined as part of the Center. Part of urgent anthropology's appeal had to do with the multiple ways that the concept of “urgency” could be interpreted, defined, and applied to research questions about what it meant to be human. [6] For Ripley, the rhetorical power of urgency offered an opportunity for ecologists to “take stock” of cultural diversity alongside contemporaneous efforts to account for the biological diversity of the Earth's ecosystems. For Tax, urgency provided a call to action for a world community of anthropologists to mobilize their collective knowledge in order to identify solutions to a range of socioeconomic and political problems. This piece emphasizes the close connection between the global organization of urgent anthropology and the establishment of the Center for the Study of Man to showcase how “urgency” helped catalyze as well as deter the expansion of Smithsonian anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s.

Making Anthropology Urgent

The ideological and methodological basis for urgent anthropology derived from an earlier tradition of “salvage ethnography”—the research imperative rooted in the shared belief among many “Western”-trained anthropologists that data (behavioral, linguistic, biological, etc.) about Indigenous communities needed to be recorded and preserved before those communities inevitably disappeared or experienced irreversible cultural loss. [7] During the 19th and early 20th centuries, assumptions about the “vanishing Indian” went hand-in-hand with settler dogmas of “progress,” with the result that the anticipated extinction of

Indigenous peoples came to be seen as both an unavoidable consequence of “modernity” and as the prime directive for anthropologists hoping to capture and preserve primordial expressions of humanity for future study. [8] These convictions took on a renewed sense of urgency after World War II, when expanding sociopolitical borders, rapid scientific and technological developments, and shifting global economic orders accelerated the rates at which people, ideas, and things came into contact with and influenced one another. [9] In 1952, Austrian ethnologist Robert Heine-Geldern reframed these anxieties as an “S.O.S. for Ethnology” in which he appealed to his colleagues to forego their studies of applied anthropology and acculturation—a primary focus of sociocultural anthropologists working in the immediate postwar period—in favor of ethnographic research on isolated cultures with dwindling population numbers. [10]

The ideas behind urgent anthropology gained additional nuance in 1965 when French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss used the salvage legacy of the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology to identify decolonization as the main obstacle for postwar anthropologists. He pointed to the rapid socioeconomic transformations taking place in newly independent nations, and warned his colleagues that the task of accounting for these changes would require more than simply extending anthropology’s salvage methods to previously understudied parts of the globe. Instead, he demanded that anthropology—as the “daughter of this era of colonial violence”—reimagine its relationship with peoples who might have once been considered potential subjects of study and urged anthropologists to do more to support the world’s citizens to become ethnographers in their own right. [11]

Lévi-Strauss’s call to refashion salvage ethnography as an international project sensitive to the autonomy and interests of decolonized nations marks the first point in understanding the intellectual foundations of the Smithsonian’s program in urgent anthropology. The project’s official coinage and institutionalization, however, must be attributed to Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley. Motivated by Lévi-Strauss’s speech, in November 1965 Ripley approached the Executive Council of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to offer the Smithsonian as a center for organizing “emergency or urgent ethnography.” [12] He described the program as a global study of human beings and argued that the collection and preservation of ethnographic data could have potential value for anthropologists as well as scholars in other fields, such as biology, who were interested in studying the underpinnings of human behavior. Likewise, he suggested that documenting examples of human cultural and biological adaptation and innovation might prove helpful to policymakers looking to mitigate global socioeconomic and political unrest.

Ripley’s interest in urgent anthropology came less from a deep familiarity with the discipline’s postwar developments and more from his own work in environmental conservation and ecology. Prior to his appointment at the Smithsonian, he had made a career as an ornithologist and specialized in collecting bird specimens throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific. [13] His connections to natural history museums (including the American Museum of Natural History, the Academy of Natural Sciences, the Peabody

Museum, and the Smithsonian, among others) instilled in him a holistic understanding of the environment as something that actively included and was affected by human beings. [14] His travels abroad also helped inspire an appreciation for cultural diversity and human ingenuity. Coming from this perspective, the organization of an anthropological research program that sought to “take stock” of the world’s changing cultures fitted nicely with existing conservation efforts to account for human impact on the environment, and appeared a logical way to identify strategies to prevent further depletion of the Earth’s natural resources.

Ripley therefore considered the “urgent ethnography” program articulated by Lévi-Strauss as an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor from its inception, one that would seamlessly bring together the expertise of anthropologists, conservationists, and other scientists in order to understand a broad set of questions about the changing relationship between humans and their physical environments and with one another. That said, it was not the first time he had championed the possibilities of interdisciplinary collaboration. Shortly after his arrival as Smithsonian Secretary, he created a series of new research offices devoted to multidisciplinary research projects to facilitate greater scientific engagement across the Institution. [15] As part of this, he also merged the previously separate activities of the Bureau of American Ethnology and the U.S. National Museum’s Department of Anthropology to create a joint Office of Anthropology. [16] He reasoned that connecting the exhibition and curatorial focus of anthropologists working in the museum with those assembling ethnographic records in the Bureau would alleviate budget pressures and increase the prestige of Smithsonian anthropology. Instead, the merger fueled pre-existing factionalism that ultimately impeded the integration of the Institution’s human and biological sciences. The promise of launching an urgent ethnography program at the Smithsonian therefore afforded him with another opportunity to experiment with implementing collaborative work at the intersection of ecology and anthropology.

He recognized that in order for the project to succeed, he needed an ally who could help execute his interdisciplinary vision for the program and who could unite the Smithsonian’s anthropologists. He found his match in Sol Tax, an anthropologist based at the University of Chicago and the founding editor of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research’s flagship journal, *Current Anthropology*. [17] Along with his organizational work, Tax is perhaps best-known for developing the concept of “action anthropology.” [18] This methodological offshoot of applied anthropology called for an anthropologist to work in tandem with members of a community in order to help that community diagnose and remedy specific problems or questions. [19] Although originally used to describe interactions with a specific Meskwaki community living in Tama, Iowa, action anthropology and its adherence to strategies of open communication and collaboration gradually became the guiding principal behind nearly all of Tax’s anthropological projects, including the editorial management of *Current Anthropology*. [20] Like Ripley, he argued for the centrality of interdisciplinary collaboration as an integral part of this method. [21] From Ripley’s perspective, Tax possessed the right combination of skills and knowledge needed to oversee

Smithsonian anthropology *and* to develop urgent ethnography as an international, interdisciplinary program; in 1965, he approached Tax to serve as his special advisor on anthropology. Tax accepted the offer—with the caveat that he would retain his teaching responsibilities and home base at the University of Chicago.

Defining Urgency

Tax's arrival as special advisor officially set into motion the expansion of Ripley's program of urgent *ethnography* into urgent *anthropology*. In April 1966, Tax organized a conference co-sponsored by the Smithsonian and the Wenner-Gren Foundation to determine the parameters of what he called a "Smithsonian research program on changing cultures." [22] This conference was attended by approximately fifty anthropologists from across the globe, including notable personalities such as Margaret Mead (American Museum of Natural History, New York), Frederik Barth (Universitetet i Bergen), Claude Lévi-Strauss (Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale), Robert von Heine-Geldern (University of Vienna), Asen Balikci (Université de Montréal), Irven DeVore (Harvard University), J.S. Weiner (University of London), Dell Hymes (University of Pennsylvania), Stephen Boggs (American Anthropological Association), Alfonso Villa Rojas (Instituto Indigenista Interamericana, Mexico), and Lita Osmundson (Wenner-Gren Foundation), among others.

As representatives of anthropology's four fields (as well as many of the discipline's top departments and institutions), the participants embodied the complex and often contradictory views motivating the organization of an international program for anthropological research. Some participants considered the program a natural extension of the discipline's earlier salvage priorities and called for a renewed focus on documenting so-called disappearing cultures in previously understudied parts of the globe. Others argued for a more expansive research agenda that would utilize anthropological expertise to aid communities in the midst of rapid socioeconomic and political development. In particular, many participants coming from institutions based in newly-independent nations stressed the importance of supporting local participation in ethnographic research. [23] Another group, however, worried about the neo-colonial implications of urgent anthropology, especially if funding for the program came through U.S. federal institutions. These concerns stemmed from the field's growing self-awareness of the active role anthropologists had played in supporting imperial projects—an anxiety amplified by the discovery of anthropologists involved with the U.S. counterinsurgency program "Project Camelot." [24]

Mindful of how such negative stigma would affect the Smithsonian's nascent program in urgent anthropology, Tax proposed orienting its activities around the same democratic ideals that guided his method of action anthropology. He emphasized the need for all parties interested in urgent anthropology to continue to openly debate its aims and refine its objectives. To assist with this task, in 1967 he hired Priscilla Reining (at the time a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago) to distribute a survey to the over 900 "associates" subscribed to *Current Anthropology*. The results of the survey echoed the multiple

interpretations of “urgency” articulated at the 1966 Smithsonian conference, with some lauding the potential scientific contributions to be made through the expansion of the ethnographic record and others questioning in what ways the project would benefit communities under study. Many voiced their confusion over how urgent anthropology differed from the discipline’s shifting priorities more generally. One respondent suggested that the program’s emphasis on decolonizing ethnographic research might actually help “crystallize the problem of anthropology’s identity”—an observation that placed the organization of urgent anthropology at the core of the discipline’s period of methodological “crisis.” [25]

Questions about how urgent anthropology might help the discipline reorient its waning sense of purpose similarly preoccupied conversations at two subsequent planning conferences held in July 1968. The first of these, organized by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, India, concentrated on how urgent anthropological research might be conducted in order to answer questions specific to the cultural and socioeconomic transformations taking place within India following the country’s 1949 independence. [26] The conference took to task the field’s emphasis on documenting so-called “primitive” vanishing cultures and instead focused on how cumulative anthropological knowledge might be mobilized to help inform Indian policymakers on national development. [27] The second conference, a working group led by Tax at the 8th annual meeting of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES) in Tokyo, took place a few weeks after Shimla and outlined an agenda differentiating between “two-types” of urgent anthropology. Type I projects referred to research on populations and cultural groups perceived to be in danger of physical extinction. Type II projects, on the other hand, stressed the study of behavioral change among societies undergoing rapid change (albeit with stable population numbers). [28] In both cases, participants reiterated the need for documentation and data collection, keeping sight of how anthropological observations might serve both the urgent needs of nations and researchers working in the present *and* the articulation of new anthropological theories for the future.

Expanding Urgency

The identification of two types of urgent anthropology also reflected its bifurcated position within the Smithsonian. These “two types” mirrored Ripley’s and Tax’s individual stakes in supporting the development of a program in urgent anthropology—namely, Ripley’s desire to “take stock” of the world’s disappearing cultures in order to better understand human/environment relations and Tax’s efforts to foster an international community of anthropologists united by the collaborative methodology of action anthropology. Perhaps for this reason—and despite the absence of a more focused direction for the program—in 1967 the Smithsonian began awarding small-grants of up to \$1,000 (about \$7,000 today) to support research in urgent anthropology. These grants received matching funds from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, thanks to Tax’s continued work with the organization and the pivotal role of its journal, *Current Anthropology*, for articulating the scope of urgent research.

Projects eligible to receive urgent anthropology small-grants fell into two categories: 1) projects that focused on acquiring data from “all types of societies” that might otherwise be lost, and, 2) collaborative projects among different anthropological institutions and staff that would “aid with the development of the discipline of anthropology on a worldwide basis.” [29]

The small-grants program had internal benefits for the Smithsonian as well. Some of the first urgent anthropology grants supported existing research projects organized by several of the Institution’s anthropologists. Office of Anthropology Curators Eugene Knez, William Crocker, Clifford Evans, and Betty Meggers each profited from the availability of funds that supplemented their investigations of culture change in parts of Korea, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, respectively. [30] These projects helped legitimize the Wenner-Gren’s financial investment in the organization of urgent anthropology at the Smithsonian while serving as models for the program’s implementation in other institutions.

By the end of 1967, however, several members of the Office of Anthropology had become wary of how urgent anthropology’s growing scope might impact the availability of resources and funding for other types of projects. [31] These concerns became reality when Smithsonian administrators slashed the Office of Anthropology’s 1968 annual budget by nearly \$100,000 as part of the redistribution of government funds to support the Vietnam War. [32] Tax allocated what remained towards the continued operation of the Office’s pre-existing long-range programs, leaving little available for individual staff projects. [33] Moreover, he used two dedicated budget lines to hire Priscilla Reining and Samuel Stanley—both former students—to help him execute urgent anthropology and its management through *Current Anthropology*.

Tax recognized that the Office of Anthropology’s financial constraints would inevitably affect his ability to develop urgent anthropology and recommended that the Institution’s anthropological programs once again be divided. Instead of returning to the original designation of the Department of Anthropology and the Bureau of American Ethnology, he proposed that the Smithsonian should establish a separate, project-driven center consisting of an international and interdisciplinary group of scientists who could collaboratively research universal “crisis problems” affecting humankind. Such collective expertise, he argued, would in turn support Ripley’s efforts to integrate anthropology and ecology at the Smithsonian. More importantly, the broad scope and separate status of the center would help overcome the bureaucratic red tape of the Office of Anthropology and enable the Institution’s anthropologists to return to the preparation of exhibitions and other projects more closely aligned with their immediate research interests.

In July 1968—just weeks before the urgent anthropology planning meetings held in Shimla and Tokyo—Ripley established the Center for the Study of Man as an independent office within the Smithsonian. Although the Center would be physically located within the Museum of Natural History and would continue to maintain an association with the Department of Anthropology, its director would report directly to the Secretary. In the absence of a

permanent director, Ripley appointed Tax in the dual-role as Acting Director of the Center and as advisor on anthropology.

Tax proposed organizing the Center's activities along a tripartite structure of administrative, research, and educational programming. This structure accounted for existing projects that no longer neatly "fit" under the purview of the Department of Anthropology while also creating space for more experimental and less clearly-defined initiatives, like urgent anthropology. [34] The Center's programs were divided into the following categories: 1) administrative programs, which included planning for new facilities; 2) research programs, which encompassed the long-range projects initiated under Tax's advisement of the Office of Anthropology; and, 3) educational programs, which ranged from moving the production of *Current Anthropology* to the Smithsonian, to arranging a seminar series for resident fellows and scholars, to constructing new repositories dedicated to collecting and preserving anthropological materials.

Notably absent from this impressive roster of programs, however, was any clear indication of who would oversee their implementation and management. As Acting Director, Tax suggested using the open democratic methods of action anthropology to guide the Center's operational strategy. He recommended the appointment of volunteer project managers who would be "intellectually responsible" for the Center's programming but who would retain full-time affiliations with their home institutions. [35] This arrangement was not unlike Tax's own position as Ripley's offsite advisor on anthropology. Such administrative flexibility, he argued, had the added benefit of allowing for greater international participation in the Center, thereby making it easier to deemphasize its physical basis within a federal institution.

This last point is significant, as the Smithsonian's status as a U.S. government institution presented a major obstacle to the organization of a truly global urgent anthropology. Following the 1966 Smithsonian planning conference, Tax received a tip from American Anthropological Association President Stephen Boggs that an anonymous conference participant had circulated a memo characterizing urgent anthropology as a "smokescreen" for American officials seeking access to otherwise restricted parts of the world. [36] Participants at the 1968 Tokyo Congress issued similar critiques. Laila Shukry El-Hamamsy and Cynthia Nelson, both faculty at the American University in Cairo, questioned whether efforts to delineate "two types" of urgent projects ignored more critical considerations about who had access to particular regions and resources. [37] Wenner-Gren Director Lita Osmundsen voiced her own reservations about the program's close ties to the Smithsonian, warning that it was not in the Foundation's best interest as an international funding agency to "butter the SI [Smithsonian Institution] bread" through financial support of its small-grants program. [38] Norwegian ethnologist Fredrik Barth urged Tax to consider a different institutional home for the project's activities altogether:

"Perhaps the Smithsonian, and U.S. Government dollars are not the answer. But how else then can we make a start on setting up more

effective structures for the task of urgent anthropology? A breakthrough here would mean more for the development of the discipline right now than any amount of theoretical innovation, and you are in a better position to promote it than anyone else I know.” [39]

Barth’s comments about Tax’s critical role in getting urgent anthropology off the ground reveal the extent to which Tax had secured his place as a key player among an emerging community of international anthropologists, even despite his Smithsonian connection. In fact, the group’s decision to elect him as the ICAES’s next president was among the only tangible outcomes of the 1968 Tokyo Congress. Combined with his position as Editor of *Current Anthropology* and his new role as Acting Director of the Smithsonian’s Center for the Study of Man, his appointment as President of ICAES cemented his status as the official figurehead and organizer of “world anthropology.” [40]

Organizing World Anthropology

Tax’s leading role in organizing “world anthropology” inevitably influenced the ever-expanding scope of urgent anthropology. In the wake of the Tokyo Congress, he published an editorial in the pages of *Current Anthropology* in which he identified not two, but three tasks for “world anthropology” that he described as being “equally urgent.” These were:

- 1) the *human problem* of the forced acculturation or physical destruction of peoples;
- 2) the *scientific problem* of the rapidity of change of traditional forms and the destruction of data on human variety; and,
- 3) the *problem of educating people* in anthropological points of view (emphasis mine). [41]

According to him, these three tasks required the transnational organization of anthropology in “every corner of the world.” [42] The pursuit of urgent anthropology therefore could not be divided into “two types” of research that positioned “Western” salvage priorities in opposition to the research interests of developing nations, as had been suggested during the Tokyo Congress. Rather, urgent anthropology’s central aim should be the consolidation of approaches and perspectives from all cultural and national traditions to support of the study of “world problems.” [43] Coincidentally (or perhaps not), Tax’s three newly-defined urgent tasks for world anthropology mirrored the tripartite structure of administration, research, and education programs he had outlined for the Center for the Study of Man.

The overlap of ideas driving “world anthropology,” urgent anthropology, and the Center for the Study of Man became especially apparent in the Center’s official press release. Circulated just after the Tokyo Congress, the announcement included quotations from Ripley and Tax underscoring the holistic merits of global research for understanding the “universal problems” of humankind and for delineating the human sciences as the study of “one species in complete communication and interrelation.” [44] Yet the release also began with a lengthy excerpt taken from Lévi-Strauss’s 1965 speech—the same speech that had catalyzed the

Smithsonian's program in urgent anthropology. Newly-appointed Program Coordinator Samuel Stanley similarly borrowed language from the speech for the release's closing statement: "We find ourselves today in a rapidly changing world. If value systems evolve out of a solution to problems, and if you suddenly solve a long-standing, really vexing problem of man, the effect on values can be profound." [45] This deliberate use of Lévi-Strauss's words to bookend the Center's press release suggests that although urgent anthropology may have been listed as a distinct program, the ongoing conversations about how best to implement global anthropological research had proven critical to shaping the Center's overarching mission.

The composition of the Center's membership similarly reflected the close connection between "world anthropology" and urgent anthropology. Of its initial nineteen members (not including Tax and Stanley), six came from countries outside of the United States. Its international membership included: Claude Lévi-Strauss (France); Surajit Sinha (India); M.N. Srinivas (India); Chie Nakane (Japan); Fredrik Barth (Norway); and Laila Shukry El-Hamamsy (Egypt). Each of these individuals had participated in one—if not all—of the planning conferences devoted to the organization of urgent anthropology. Of the Center's U.S. members, four came from institutions outside of Washington: Dell Hymes (University of Pennsylvania); Douglas Schwartz (School for Advanced Research); Sherwood Washburn (Harvard); and George W. Stocking (University of Chicago), while the rest held appointments at the Smithsonian: Henry B. Collins (Ethnology); John Ewers (Ethnology); T. Dale Stewart (Physical Anthropology); Waldo Wedel (Archaeology); Gordon Gibson (Ethnology); William C. Sturtevant (Ethnology); Robert Laughlin (Ethnology/Linguistics); John Napier (Primatology) and Wilcomb Washburn (American History). As with its international membership, almost all of the U.S. participants had some familiarity, if not direct involvement, with the development and organization of urgent anthropology.

The subject expertise represented among the Center's members revealed the centrality of anthropology as the main disciplinary force behind its programs. [46] Tax similarly reinforced the significance of anthropological perspectives in a briefing document circulated to Center members before their first meeting. In it, he again pointed to the three tasks for world anthropology outlined in response to the Tokyo Congress, but reflected that these tasks now seemed "too narrow" given the Center's international and interdisciplinary scope. Instead, he suggested that the Center focus on three new "urgent problems" whose solutions would prove critical for future human survival. He described these problems—"war in a nuclear age; the population spiral; and the growing pollution of our planet"—as belonging to the study of "human ecology" and, in a nod to Ripley, suggested that addressing them would require collaboration with scientists working in multiple fields. [47] Nonetheless, he advocated that the global organization of anthropology held "the most promise" (emphasis mine) for identifying solutions to these problems and suggested that the Center should assemble a comprehensive directory of anthropologists and research projects—an endeavor not dissimilar from the organization of urgent anthropology.

While the continued publication of *Current Anthropology* offered one potential avenue for disseminating global anthropological expertise, the Center's affiliation with the Smithsonian opened up another channel for expanding the discipline's relevance. First, in keeping with Ripley's efforts to integrate the human and environmental sciences, the Center could dedicate its interdisciplinary programs to researching a different topic each year. Tax argued that the Center could translate these topics into anthropological data explaining the "human factors" underlying contemporary issues like pollution, overpopulation, environmental degradation, and other "universal" problems. [48] Second, research conducted by the Center could be used to guide the construction of interdisciplinary exhibitions for the new "Museum of Man," which Congress recently had approved to occupy the last remaining spot on the National Mall. [49] Finally, the Smithsonian's newly-designated anthropological archives provided a permanent repository for fieldnotes, publications, and other records assembled through Center programming. These materials would then be available for future use in anthropology and other fields interested in understanding human behavior.

The prospect of centralizing the Center's research through the exhibitions of a Museum of Man and within the Institution's archives appeared a concrete and attractive strategy for facilitating world anthropology. In January 1970, Tax announced that the theme of the Center's first international meeting would be "How Anthropology in the Context of a Great, New Museum of Man Can Educate the Public on the Complex Nature of Some of the Major Problems Facing the Survival of Our Species." [50] While this framing helped provide the Center with some sorely-needed focus, it also effectively ensured that its programs would remain tied to Washington, D.C. despite earlier warnings from the anthropological community against aligning too closely with the Smithsonian.

Administrative Obstacles

After nearly five years of refining the scope of urgent anthropology, Tax finally had settled on a suitable organizational framework with the anthropologically-driven, ecologically-oriented activities of the Center for the Study of Man. With its focus on applying anthropological perspectives towards understanding the human in its total environment, the Center appeared to be the perfect combination of Ripley's efforts to integrate the human sciences within conservation efforts and Tax's desire to unify a world community of anthropologists. Yet by the time the international members arrived for their first meeting in May 1970, the Center already found itself in the midst of financial and institutional uncertainty. This instability had a significant impact on the Center's ability to cohere as an independent unit within the Smithsonian, leaving it vulnerable to a series of administrative and bureaucratic challenges from which it would never fully recover.

The first blow came in 1969 when Lita Osmundsen, dissatisfied with the outcomes of the Tokyo Congress, opted to discontinue the Wenner-Gren Foundation's contribution to the urgent anthropology program. [51] This decision unfortunately coincided with a federal audit of the Smithsonian's budget, and the absence of a permanent funding source forced

Tax to remove Priscilla Reining from her role as urgent anthropology's primary administrator. [52] The increased financial scrutiny within the Institution likewise delayed the launch of several new Center programs that had been conceived as part of urgent anthropology's expanded mission. For example, while the construction of an ethnographic film repository had been approved as part of the 1968 designation of the National Anthropological Archives, it would take the National Anthropological Film Center (now the Human Studies Film Archives) nearly seven years to attain the resources needed to open its doors. [53]

The Center's fluid programming structure also made it difficult for Smithsonian administrators to clearly define its relationship with the rest of the institution. Part of the confusion stemmed from the Center's initial justification as a means to protect more experimental programs like urgent anthropology from the internal politics of the Smithsonian Office of Anthropology. As a result, even from its inception the Center provided an administrative catch-all for an assortment of projects that, for one reason or another, didn't quite "fit" within the traditional parameters of museum anthropology. This left the Center's programming somewhat bifurcated in scope. While some projects like urgent anthropology supported Tax's vision for an expansive approach to world anthropology, other projects, such as the proposed revision of the *Handbook of North American Indians* and even the designation of the National Anthropological Archives, appeared better-suited to the interests and pursuits of the Department of Anthropology.

Moreover, shifting programming priorities within the Smithsonian further challenged the Center's ability to act solely as a hub for collaborative international research. At the start of the decade, the Institution redirected much of its focus towards projects and events dealing explicitly with the history of the United States and the Americas in anticipation of the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration of American Independence. This meant that the global focus of projects like urgent anthropology no longer reflected the Institution's immediate interests. Projects such as the *Handbook of North American Indians*, on the other hand, benefited from the shift and received renewed attention from Smithsonian leadership. [54] The fact that much of the *Handbook's* production relied on the labor and expertise of members of the Department of Anthropology in turn reignited old turf wars among the Institution's anthropologists and prompted several members of the Department to advocate for the *Handbook's* return to their centralized management and away from the amorphous oversight of the Center. [55]

The Center also suffered from a lack of strong leadership. As with his duties as Ripley's advisor on anthropology, Tax had taken on the responsibilities as the Center's Acting Director on a part-time basis, with the understanding that one of the first tasks of the Center's membership would be to identify a permanent director to oversee its programs and protect its autonomy. Several people were considered for the role—including physical anthropologist and primatologist Sherwood Washburn, anthropologist and evolutionary biologist Irven DeVore, and archaeologist Douglas Schwartz—all of whom declined citing

obligations within their home institutions. Tax, too, found himself unable to provide significant leadership during the Center's formative years, as his responsibilities as President of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and a residential fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavior Sciences at Stanford kept him away from Washington for significant periods of time. This left only Sam Stanley to fend for the Center's interests in D.C.

Tax's physical absence from Washington created room for those who opposed his influence on Smithsonian anthropology to begin to call for his removal. The primary grievance appeared to be the escalating tensions between the collections-based work required of the Institution's curators and museum staff in the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the problem-oriented research championed by Tax and the Center for the Study of Man. Clifford Evans, who became Chair of the Department of Anthropology in 1970 and headed the Museum's Senate of Scientists from 1968-1970, was especially vocal about the need to return the management of activities like the *Handbook* and the National Anthropological Archives to the Department and called for a reduction of funding and space requirements for Center projects that had no immediate benefit to the museum. [56] NMNH Director Richard Cowan supported Evans' position, having been put off by Tax's suggestion that truly innovative research in anthropology could not be cultivated within a museum environment. [57] Several Smithsonian administrators close to Ripley similarly advocated that Tax's role as the Center's "Acting Director" be reconsidered altogether and that his status be returned to that of an offsite consultant. For example, Charles Blitzer, Ripley's Assistant Secretary for History and Art, expressed his feelings that Tax had been using the Smithsonian's resources to achieve his own objectives, which, while "perfectly worthy in themselves, did not promise particularly great rewards to the Smithsonian." [58]

The Center survived its first years of existence within the Institution despite such critiques—albeit due more to its perceived importance for developing programs in human ecology than for its contributions to anthropology. Assistant Secretary for Science Sidney Galler recommended treating the Center as a "blueprint" for mobilizing the Institution's staff and resources towards research on human ecology and emerged as one of the few advocates for the Center's continued independence. He suggested disentangling the Center from NMNH altogether by reassigning the administrative oversight of its anthropological programs to the Department of Anthropology and retooling the Center's goals in service of the construction of an ecologically-oriented Museum of Man. [59] Furthermore, he advised that in the absence of a separate structure, that the Center be transferred from the Smithsonian campus and resituated within a university setting, such as Tax's home institution of the University of Chicago. There, he argued, the Center could attract and cultivate a truly interdisciplinary community of scholars free of the collections-based priorities of NMNH. [60] Ripley, however, disagreed with the assertion that such a community could not exist at the Smithsonian, and in January 1971, Galler was replaced by Ripley's long-time associate and fellow conservationist, David Challinor. Without Galler, the

Center's autonomy in the Institution became significantly weakened.

Perhaps anticipating this shift, Tax had already begun to mobilize his network of world anthropologists to bolster the Center's reputation. In 1970, he asked the Center's international members to write a letter of endorsement to Ripley in which they stressed the importance of creating "experimental niches" within anthropology to grapple with the "urgent problems facing modern man." [61] Tax likewise reached out to the heads of several funding agencies—including the Harris Foundation and the Ford Foundation—to pitch the Center as a global task force that could contribute cross-cultural analysis of world problems to international policy. [62] He reframed the Center as an outcome of his decades-long commitment to organizing world anthropology and connected its activities both to his prior work with the Wenner-Gren Foundation and his presidency of the ICAES. [63]

Beyond rhetorically disconnecting from the Smithsonian, Tax further pivoted the Center's activities away from Washington by hosting its 1972 annual meeting in Cairo. He also used the 1973 ICAES meeting held at the University of Chicago to organize Center-sponsored panels—including several focused on international development and economic reform within Indigenous communities—and to introduce a book series in world anthropology that would be published under the auspices of the Center but executed by graduate students at the University. [64] Finally, in August 1974, the Center arranged the first (and last) of its task-force conferences on the "cultural consequences of population change" in Bucharest, Romania. Mirroring the 1966 Smithsonian planning conference on changing cultures, the event featured over thirty participants from across the globe and revolved around the open debate of pre-circulated position papers on how anthropological observations might contribute to the management of the world's growing population numbers. [65]

With his attention turned to other projects and parts of the world, Tax's influence within the Smithsonian dissolved. David Challinor joined the chorus of administrators calling for his removal from the Smithsonian's payroll and in 1974 convinced Ripley to re-designate Tax as a part-time consultant. Together with Charles Blitzer, Challinor recommended that given the Institution's fiscal uncertainty, the Center for the Study of Man be formally abolished following the completion of *The Handbook of North American Indians*, which would receive prioritization in anticipation of the 1976 Bicentennial. [66] Ripley conceded, but requested that the Center's administrative line be reserved for the future Museum of Man and that Challinor coordinate with Porter Kier (who succeeded Cowan as Director of NMNH) to "work back CSM people into the Anthropology Department." [67] Continued delays surrounding the production of *The Handbook*, however, fast-tracked the Center's dissolution, and in January 1976, Challinor reassigned all Center funding and support staff towards the project's completion under the direction of William Sturtevant. All other Smithsonian-based programs initiated by Center (namely the Film Center and the short-lived Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies) were placed under the oversight of Porter Kier and folded into the budget of the Department of Anthropology. With no remaining projects left for him to manage, Challinor discontinued Sam Stanley's position as Program Coordinator,

thereby effectively ending the Center's activities and its organization of world anthropology. [68]

Conclusion

In his 1966 call for what would become urgent anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss warned that the only way that anthropology would “survive” the changes brought on by decolonization would be by “allowing itself to perish in order to be born again under a new guise” (126). Yet throughout the continued process of grappling with its own programmatic transitions and transformations, urgent anthropology—and, in turn, the Center for the Study of Man—never quite found its identity. Although the Center's broad focus on the interrelationship between humans and their physical, biological, and cultural environments was necessary for containing the multiple and ever-evolving meanings of urgent anthropology, urgent anthropology's amorphous intellectual and institutional foundations in turn made the Center's programs difficult to manage—both conceptually and administratively. The history of the Smithsonian's Center for the Study of Man reveals how the organization of global urgent anthropological research became obstructed by its own plasticity.

Part of the reason for this tension can be attributed to the program's origins and continued association with the Smithsonian. Ripley's desire to bridge anthropology and conservation work created space for urgent anthropology's initial development within the Institution and laid the foundations for its reconfiguration through the human ecology-oriented activities of the Center for the Study of Man. Urgent anthropology's unstable position within the Smithsonian's administrative structure, however, challenged the program's durability and its continued relevance to the Institution's broader scientific interests. Instead of supporting the development of more expansive research projects that cut across the human and environmental sciences, urgent anthropology and the Center for the Study of Man came to be perceived as financial and bureaucratic obstacles that detracted from the curatorial work of the Institution's anthropologists.

Urgent anthropology's fluidity presented similar incongruities for Tax and the organization of world anthropology. As Ripley's advisor on anthropology, Tax played a key role in determining the project's contours and overseeing its management. By employing the open democratic strategy of action anthropology to define its scope, he discovered that urgent anthropology offered a powerful conceptual framework with the potential to cut across geographic and disciplinary boundaries. The project's multiple interpretations and applications within different national and cultural contexts in turn opened up new possibilities for mobilizing anthropological perspectives to address a variety of global scientific and social problems. At the same time, urgent anthropology's plurality of meanings posed an administrative conundrum that made it nearly impossible for Tax to take decisive action in a single, cohesive direction.

Perhaps most significantly, the universal idealism underlying Tax's and Ripley's investment in urgent anthropology became fundamentally incompatible with the reflexive accountability demanded by 1970s anthropology. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War and in response to the social movements of the late-1960s, sociocultural anthropology faced a moment of self-reckoning that preoccupied the discipline well into the 1980s and '90s—and that arguably continues into the present day. [69] Tax's world community of anthropologists sought to address this upheaval primarily through cross-cultural comparisons that depended upon access to a comprehensive assemblage of ethnographic data. [70] Yet a new generation of scholars called into question the systems of power that contributed to continued economic and political instability worldwide, and turned their attention instead to more historical and localized modes of anthropological inquiry. [71] The hegemonic practice of mobilizing archived anthropological knowledge at the core of the Center for the Study of Man thus found itself at odds with efforts to disentangle the structures of the modern world, even as the need to do so became all the more urgent.

Urgent anthropology and the subsequent creation of the Center for the Study of Man provide an instructive case for thinking about how the interplay between individuals, institutions, and motivations supported the establishment of a research program that, although never fully realized, nonetheless aspired to address very real sets of social, scientific, and disciplinary anxieties using the tools of anthropology. It sought to do so not just through the accumulation and assemblage of ethnographic data, but through the active reconceptualization of anthropological methods that challenged the discipline's sense of self. While the project's tangible outcomes may be limited to the scattered publications and documents still preserved in archives, the specific conditions and processes through which urgent anthropology was conceived and rearticulated demonstrates the field's malleability and its unique capacity to respond to human crisis. The legacy of urgent anthropology, then, exists as much in the physical materials it left behind as it does in the field's history of and propensity for reinvention.

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[1] "Center Formed for the Study of Man" 1968, p. 1.

[2] Additional discussion of specific Center programs may be found in Stocking 2000 and Link 2016b.

[3] Some of the material included in this piece first appeared in Link 2018.

[4] See Link 2016b.

[5] The historiography on postwar developments in the human sciences is vast and ever-growing. For a good summation of some of the major intellectual currents, see Isaac 2007. For an introduction to postwar shifts in sociocultural anthropology, see Mandler 2012.

[6] Link 2016b.

[7] Gruber 1970.

[8] For more recent discussions about the relationship between settler colonialism and salvage anthropology, see especially Qureshi 2013, O'Brien 2010, and Silverman 2009.

[9] For scholarship on applications of anthropological salvage in the Cold War context, see Link 2016b, Milam 2019, and Radin 2017.

[10] Heine-Geldern 1956.

[11] Lévi-Strauss 1966, p.126.

[12] "Official Reports" 1966, p. 761-762.

[13] For a biographical account of Ripley's life and work, see Stone 2017. For a more detail analysis of his conservation work and especially in Southeast Asia, see Lewis 2004.

[14] During this time, he worked closely with Ernst Mayr and G. Evelyn Hutchinson, two important contributors to biology's modern evolutionary synthesis and the development of ecology. Lewis 2004 discusses their influence on Ripley's scientific thought in *Inventing Global Ecology*, pp. 25-53.

[15] These included the Office of Ecology, the Office of Systematics, and the Office of Oceanography and Limnology. Descriptions of individual offices may be found in *Smithsonian Year 1965*.

[16] The early history of the Bureau of American Ethnology and the conditions of the 1965 merger are discussed in Woodbury and Woodbury 1999.

[17] Tax's contributions to the Wenner-Gren Foundation are treated at length in Lindee and Radin 2016 and in Stocking 2000.

[18] For a full characterization of Tax as the organizer of mid-twentieth century anthropology, see Wax 2008. See also Stocking 2000.

[19] On the relationship between action and applied anthropology, see Bennett 1996.

[20] For an account of Meskwaki experiences with and reactions to action anthropology, see Daubenmier 2008.

[21] Tax's recognition of the benefits of interdisciplinary work no doubt inspired his participation in the 1955 Wenner-Gren symposium *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* (which brought together anthropologists, conservationists, demographers, urban planners, sociologists, and others to discuss the future of human/environment relations) as well as his decision to organize the 1959 centennial celebration of the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* at the University of Chicago. See Thomas

1956 and Tax 1960.

[22] Sturtevant 1967, p. 514.

[23] "Conference on Smithsonian Research Program on Changing Cultures," April 10, 1966, Smithsonian Conference on Smithsonian Research Program on Changing Cultures, box 1, folder 1, MS 7045, NAA.

[24] On Project Camelot, see Rohde 2013, pp. 63-89. Price 2016 offers a particularly thorough discussion of anthropology's connection to government and military-funded research during the Cold War. Criticism over the discipline's complicity in colonialism would come to a head the following year in 1967, when Kathleen Gough's infamous remarks and subsequent publications cemented anthropology's reputation as the "child of imperialism." For a discussion of Gough's remarks and their implications for anthropology, see Lewis 2013.

[25] Reining 1967, p. 363. A succinct overview of the epistemological stakes behind anthropology's disciplinary crisis can be found in Bunzl 2005. For canonical examples of publications from the period, see Hymes 1972 and Asad 1973.

[26] The papers and conference proceedings were later published as Abbi and Saberwal 1968.

[27] Abbi and Saberwal 1968, p. 189.

[28] Reining 1969, p. 372.

[29] "Smithsonian-Wenner-Gren Urgent Anthropology Small-Grant Program" 1967.

[30] Sol Tax to Sidney Galler, "Funds urgently needed for special program," September 29, 1966, box 7, folder: Urgent Anthropology, RU 108, SIA.

[31] Richard Woodbury to Saul Riesenber, "Basic Needs of SOA," October 19, 1967, box 132, folder: Smithsonian Office of Anthropology, SOA Bulletin, CSM Records, NAA.

[32] Sol Tax to Dillon Ripley, "Budgetary Dilemma of Fiscal Year 1968," July 19, 1967, box 7, folder: Tax, Sol, Contract, University of Chicago, RU 108, SIA.

[33] These included an archeological program on the study of ancient technologies coordinated by Smithsonian curators Clifford Evans and Gus Van Beek, the publication of a revised version of the *Handbook of North American Indians* edited by William Sturtevant, and the continued development of urgent anthropology.

[34] Dillon Ripley to Bureau Heads, "Center for the Study of Man," June 5, 1968, box 196, folder 3, Tax Papers, SCRC, UChicago.

[35] "Report on Staff Meeting," July 23, 1968, box 132, folder: SOA Staff Meeting Minutes, CSM Records, NAA.

[36] Stephen Boggs to Sol Tax, April 13, 1966, box 98, folder: Washington Conference, Follow-Up, CSM Records, NAA.

[37] "Tokyo Conference Session on Urgent Anthropology—Afternoon," box 128, folder: Urgent Anthropology Transcript—A&T, Reining Papers, NAA.

[38] Priscilla Reining, "Notes on Tokyo Conference," box 128, folder: Trip 1-22 Sept. 1968, Reining Papers, NAA.

[39] Fredrik Barth to Sol Tax, July 19, 1968, box 193, folder 9, Tax Papers, SCRC, UChicago.

[40] I am borrowing the term "world anthropology" from Stocking 2000.

[41] As reproduced in Reining 1971, p. 243.

[42] Reining 1971, p. 243.

[43] Reining 1971, p. 243.

[44] "Center Formed for the Study of Man" 1968, p. 1.

[45] "Center Formed for the Study of Man" 1968, p. 1.

[46] All but two of the Center's members had advanced training in some branch of anthropology, with the vast majority specializing in ethnology or sociocultural anthropology.

[47] Sol Tax, "A Modest Proposal," as included in Sol Tax to Dillon Ripley, April 7, 1969, box 142, folder: Stanley Papers, Center for the Study of Man (cont'd), CSM Records, NAA.

[48] Sol Tax, "A Modest Proposal," as included in Sol Tax to Dillon Ripley, April 7, 1969, box 142, folder: Stanley Papers, Center for the Study of Man (cont'd), CSM Records, NAA.

[49] For more on the development and failed construction of the Museum of Man, see Walker 2013, pp. 196-226.

[50] Sol Tax to Irven Devore, Douglas Schwartz, M.N. Srinivas, Sherwood Washburn, William Sturtevant, "Committee for Planning Spring Agenda on the Museum of Man," January 19, 1970, box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of [folder 1], RU 108, SIA.

[51] Lita Osmundsen to Samuel Stanley, February 1, 1969, Grant # 2077, folder: Smithsonian Institution, Urgent Research Project, Office of Anthropology (through Dr. Sol Tax), Washington, D.C.— to aid general program of cooperative field work in rapidly changing cultures, Wenner-Gren Foundation, Inc.

[52] The audit was in part prompted by the publication of several blind items criticizing Ripley's spending during his first years as Secretary. Stone 2017 details the audits in his biography of Ripley; see pp. 177-186.

Reining was reassigned to a computer data compilation project for *Current Anthropology*, which was discontinued in 1970.

[53] This, too, would be short-lived. For a more extensive account of the Film Center's history, see Link 2016a as well as Homiak 2004.

[54] Link and Krupnik, forthcoming.

[55] Clifford Evans to Sidney Galler, "Center for the Study of Man," May 13, 1970, box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of (folder 1), RU 108, SIA.

[56] Clifford Evans to Sidney Galler, "Center for the Study of Man and Department of Anthropology," 26 June 26, 1970, box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of (folder 1), RU 108, SIA.

[57] Richard Cowan to Dillon Ripley, "Report of the Advisory Committee on Anthropology," May 10, 1968, box 2, folder: Center for the Study of Man (folder 2), RU 108, SIA.

[58] Charles Blitzer to Dillon Ripley, "Confidential," March 20, 1969, box 2, folder: Center for the Study of Man (folder 1), RU 108, SIA.

[59] Sidney Galler to Dillon Ripley, "The Status of the Center for the Study of Man," February 10, 1970, box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of (folder 1), RU 108, SIA.

[60] Sidney Galler to Dillon Ripley, "Future Status of the Center for the Study of Man, 21 Dec. 1970 [with Ripley annotations], box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of (folder 2), RU 108, SIA.

[61] Fredrik Barth, Surajit Sinha, Laila Shukry El-Hamamsy to Dillon Ripley, May 19, 1960 box 8, folder: Man, Center for the Study of (folder 1), RU 108, SIA.

[62] Sol Tax to Harold Howe and Champion, March 9, 1971, box 194, folder 12, Tax Papers, SCRC, UChicago.

[63] Sol Tax to Harold Howe and Champion, March 9, 1971, box 194, folder 12, Tax Papers, SCRC, UChicago.

[64] Sol Tax to David Challinor, "IXth ICAES," November 16, 1972, box 16, folder: Center for the Study of Man (1972-1973), RU 108, SIA.

[65] The Center for the Study of Man 1975.

[66] David Challinor and Charles Blitzer to Dillon Ripley, "1976 Budget Review for the CSM and its future," June 6, 1974, box 1, folder: Center for the Study of Man – 1974, RU 254, SIA.

[67] Ripley handwritten annotations, "1976 Budget Review for the CSM and its future."

[68] David Challinor to Sol Tax, January 21, 1976, box 3, folder 2: Center for the Study of Man RU 329, SIA.

[69] See Grimshaw and Hart 1996.

[70] Tax would continue to develop action anthropology in new directions until his death in 1995. See, for example, Shimkin, Tax, and Morrison 1978. See also Smith 2015 and Stapp 2012 for discussions of Tax's legacy and some contemporary applications of action anthropology.

[71] Patterson 2001, pp. 135-146.