

## MUSEUM AND THE DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY: A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

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### INTRODUCTION

*“Anthropology museums provide windows on other cultures of the world, but when they are examined more closely, they can also be seen to mirror the profession of anthropology itself” (Ames 1986:IX).*

Over the past few years there has been an intensification in the relationship between museums and anthropology<sup>2</sup>. Although the deeply rooted connection between the two has waxed and waned throughout the last hundred years, the discipline of anthropology is returning to the close relationship that it once had with the museum (Hsu 1995, Talbot 1995, Bouquet 2002). In the early stages of its development, anthropology was closely linked to the museum, which served as the primary place for the display of anthropological work (Hsu 1995, Collier 1954, Ames 1986, Bouquet 2001). Originating as a building to exhibit interesting objects from different cultures, the museum rapidly became more important to the public understanding of societies around the world.

Since 1999, *American Anthropologist* (the principal academic journal of the American Anthropological Association) now includes a section in its journal strictly devoted to museum anthropology. This section serves to both review new exhibits at various museums throughout the United States and to discuss new advancements in the field of museum studies.

*“The American Anthropologist is the flagship journal of the American Anthropological Association. The journal advances the Association's mission through publishing articles that add to, integrate, synthesize, and interpret anthropological knowledge; commentaries and essays on issues of importance to the discipline; and reviews of books, films, sound recordings and exhibits” [www.aaanet.org].*

To a greater or lesser degree, *American Anthropologist* has recorded, perhaps

inadvertently, the trends in museum anthropology within its volumes dating back to 1889. In this paper, I present how the journal *American Anthropologist* has been documenting the rise and fall of an interest in museums in anthropology. I argue that various dominant theories and methods in anthropology, contributed to the neglect of the museum in the discipline throughout the years. In this paper, I investigated the reasons behind the separation and melding of anthropology and museums throughout the history of the discipline of anthropology. Museums and the discipline of anthropology have been molded, created, and maintained through the mutual contributions of one to the other. anthropology has its roots in museums and museums helped shape the discipline of anthropology.

I also present information that documents the increasing importance of and interest in museums as our society moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I believe that an emerging sense of multiculturalism in our society could be responsible for the reappearance of museums in the discipline of anthropology. It has been stated “modern museums are multiplying in number due to the development of technology... and political changes. It may also be the product of a rise in nationalism and regionalism (Hsu 1995:315).”

## BACKGROUND

*“There has been little significant advance in the field since the writings of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, who laid the basis for a positivistic science of society. This is because positivism was severely restricted from the outset. It was assumed that the social world was highly structured, and that it was amenable to measurement by techniques comparable to those used in the hard sciences. But man is a contradictory, manipulating, choosing creature. The element of consciousness renders behavior immensely complex, and the social realm is messy, if not chaotic” (Barrett 1984:3).*

The anthropology museum originated as more of a “cabinet des curiosities” (Collier 1954:768) than any sort of educational facility. Museums were at first thought of as places that only “desirable public should be admitted to” (Ames 1986:5). It was a building that collected obscure treasures of the upper class as well as “objects collected during the great explorations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Collier 1954:768). It was said by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss that, “the anthropology museums are the material archives of the investigated societies” (Frese 1960:64). With the emergence of museum collections, so did the need for museum professionals (Ames 1986). “As collections grew in size and complexity, so did the need to

house and care for them, and, therefore, also the need for people who specialized in the care and management of collections” (Ames 1986:4). These buildings were used strictly to show off curiosities, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many of the collections “shifted from being private property to state property” (Hsu 1995:317), therefore making the objects more readily available for the public to view.

The largest museum in the United States, the Smithsonian Institution<sup>5</sup>, was created in 1846 after “James Smithson, a British scientist, willed his estate to go “to the United States of America...under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men” ([www.si.edu/about/history.htm](http://www.si.edu/about/history.htm)). The Smithsonian Institution is the best illustration of the nature of the museum in this historical period.

### *The Late 1800's*

As museums became more prominent in the eye of the public, they also became more important for the emerging discipline of anthropology. As European colonialism expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became crucial for anthropologists to try to preserve as many cultures as they could before those regions became infiltrated by colonists. At this time early anthropologists had already established anthropology as a discipline, but there was still little actual fieldwork occurring and the discipline had yet to become firmly rooted in academia or the museum (McGee and Warms 2000). In the 1880's museums relied mostly on contributions and purchase for the artifacts that they obtained, rather than gathering them in fieldwork. Also, since there was little to no fieldwork or research, organization of the artifacts was based primarily on geographic local

### *The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Ethnographic research in anthropology continued to blossom under Boas's supervision over the three decades following the 1893 initiative. Artifacts were usually collected by people who worked in museums and sought when it was needed to make an exhibit for the museum (Collier 1954). Boas continued his work as an active field anthropologist rather than following the trend of “armchair anthropology” that was so prevalent in the early years of the discipline. There was a feeling of urgency felt by these active field workers and the museums to get as much information and as many artifacts on “disappearing cultures” before it was too late. This is also known as “salvage anthropology,” or the gathering of anthropological data before the disappearance of a particular society (Barfield 1997). This was the earliest form of fieldwork done primarily by Boas and his students. Most of the funding for

the fieldwork at this time came from the museum because it was in the museums' interest to do so (Frese 1960).

It was in this time period that professional anthropological organizations began to emerge. Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) is presently the leading organization for anthropologists. Although there were several other American anthropological societies in existence at the turn of the 20th century, this new, national organization was formed to promote the science of anthropology, to stimulate and to coordinate the efforts of American anthropologists. [[www.aaanet.org/history.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/history.htm)]

Initially, the AAA was only about 175 members, and the organization grew slowly through the beginning of the century. Franz Boas only wanted to include a select group of professional anthropologists to be members, but the AAA president, W.J. Magee, disagreed ([www.aaanet.org/history.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/history.htm)). He believed that all people interested in the discipline should be allowed to be members. The membership of this organization is now reaching numbers close to 10,000 and there exists a distinct sub-group dedicated to museum anthropology ([www.aaanet.org/history.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/history.htm)). Since then, there have been many other organizations<sup>3</sup> that are affiliates of the AAA that reflect the diverse interests of anthropologists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Early to Mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century advanced, new ideas and theories persisted in the field of anthropology. There was a strong "emphasis on descriptive and comparative studies of material culture" (Collier 1954:771). Many of the museum curators were also university staff, and it was thought by Alfred Kroeber, a very influential anthropologist at the time, the museum was the center of anthropological teaching (Collier 1954). Not only did museum staff members regularly teach in the university setting, they also wished to enlighten the public with as much accurate cultural information as possible. Oftentimes they achieved this with extensive labeling of the artifacts on display (Collier 1954).

At early to mid-century, evolutionary ideas were also coming into play, and this impacted anthropological museums by leading them to modify exhibits. A significant amount of eager research was done on the study of evolutionary theories and anthropologists worked with biological paradigms to try to find material evidence supportive of new evolutionary theories (Frese 1960). Around this same time period, there also developed a concentrated focus on "primitive societies," most of which had foraging subsistence systems. This

interest was displayed in the various exhibits in museums. This emphasis on technologically less complex societies became a trend in anthropological museums and is still somewhat evident today. The fascination with these “primitive societies” is hinted at in the language chosen to describe them. Anthropologists viewed what they termed “primitive” cultures as models for stages of early human evolution. The peoples “were equated with those living at the birth of human culture. Conceived as survivals of the latter, the primitive peoples obtained the foremost place in both evolutionistic anthropology and its museums” (Frese 1960:48).

From 1930 until around the 1950’s anthropology and museums started to diverge as the focus of anthropology moved away from the museum orientation. During this period, most social and cultural anthropologists lost interest in material culture and technology, although Archaeology students still utilized the museums’ facilities. Another deterring factor to the discipline of anthropology was that museums at the time did not widen their exhibits to include current anthropological interests and trends. This lag is mostly due to the high costs involved in changing and adding exhibits, as well as the extensive labor it takes to do so (Collier 1954).

As the mid-twentieth century approached, the contribution of museum workers to anthropological theory decreased dramatically. This is evident in the large number of students with doctorates in anthropology that considered the museum as non-academic and did not regard museum workers as being dynamic intellectuals (Collier 1954). This attitude has been explained as a result of the increasing amount of specialization occurring in the discipline and because anthropologists believed that the museums have nothing to offer their students due to the museums’ inability to update the exhibits to match the newest ideas in anthropology (Collier 1954). Frese made an important statement in the 1960’s explaining his disenchantment with museums by the anthropologists of that time.

“Within the development of cultural anthropology as a whole, the museums are faced with two problems... several of the more newly developed subjects of study in the general anthropology deal with the present world... the museums, however, mainly possess material of the past. Secondly, most if not all of the recently added subjects in Cultural anthropology have little to do with the direct study of artifacts. Still they may be of great significance for a widened interpretation of the material collections in the possession of the museums” (Frese 1960:70). The idea that the museum has to update its exhibits to match current trends in anthropology would be a way for museums to be integrated once more into the discipline of anthropology.

### *Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

More recently, modern museums are multiplying in number and diversity of focus. "Increasing attendance figures and high public profile have become the two most common factors used to rate the success of museums" (Ames 1986:10). Also, in the past few years, the purely scholarly ideals of the museum are being critically considered. Museums are now expected to appeal to the masses by depicting images of social reality, such as an objective depiction of what cultures look like today (Ames 1986). "Rather than museums existing for the purpose of preserving and studying collections, especially in North America, at least, now exist more and more for the purpose of serving the public" (Ames 1986:11).

Multiculturalism is becoming increasingly important in our society and as a result museums will become more involved in becoming an outlet for different cultures in our society. "As the U.S. exhibits more openly that it is a society of "multiple voices," and that now those voices are each determined to be heard in public arenas...the museums are...involved whether they like it or not" (Talbot 1995:3). The recent trends in the relationship between anthropology and museums will be discussed more thoroughly throughout the rest of this paper. For this moment in time, it is important to understand that for museums, "the isolation is truly over" (Talbot 1995:3).

### **METHODOLOGY**

*"This was the age of reason with implicit faith in the ultimate value of collecting facts and things" (Rainey 1955:15).*

The relationship between museums and the discipline of anthropology has been one that has waxed and waned throughout the years. Through my research, I investigated the relationship between the two since the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline. This research on the association between museums and anthropology is based on the anthropological literature that has been published from 1895 through the present year, 2004.

### *American Anthropologist*

The primary source of information utilized to conduct this research was the leading anthropological journal, *American Anthropologist*. This journal is one of the primary canons of knowledge used in the discipline of anthropology. Although volumes date back to 1889, I reviewed volumes from 1895 through 1995. I analyzed the amount of literature on museums by counting the number of articles that make reference to museums in *American Anthropologist* from 1895 until 1995. I then compared the results to the fluctuation

of influence that museums have had on the discipline of anthropology over the past century. Finally I correlated the relationship between these fluctuations to different anthropological schools of thought to attempt to explain the waxing and waning relationships between museums and anthropology. By reviewing *American Anthropologist*, I was able to gather information from a journal that is directly related to the theoretical trends in the various sub-fields of anthropology. These trends are what I believe changed the relationship between museums and anthropology over the last century.

The data for museums was collected through a year-by-year study of *American Anthropologist's* table of contents. I was able to determine how relevant museums were to the discipline by counting the number of articles focusing on museums in the journal. The timeframe chosen, 1895-1995 was done in order to give a wide range of years that have shown to be very developmental in the field of anthropology. I also wanted to be sure that it was not a coincidence that a museum article appeared in a particular year and thereby creating an unrealistic idea of the relevance of museums.

I conducted my survey for every year starting with 1895 until the year 1932 checking every volume's table of contents for articles and references to museums. After completing the study for those issues, I started to check the journal every decade for the years ending in 1 and 8. For example, for the 1960's I researched both 1961 and 1968. This was done to check for any major shifts in thought during those years. This bi-decade research strategy continued until 1995.

It became clear in the 1960's that museums needed to begin to address the present, which is a difficult task considering that all of their collections deal with the past. This is also a challenge because much of the current thought in the discipline did not deal with the material culture of societies. Despite these restrictions, these new theories can be helpful for museums by providing a wider interpretation of artifacts in the museum collections. They also prompt collecting other documents for museums such as film, photographs, and sound recordings (Frese 1960).

### ANALYSIS

*"...to accommodate—indeed to impress and edify and boggle—everyone that enters (Kopper 1982:191)."*

As discussed earlier, my research strategy focused on a literature review of *American Anthropologist*, the leading journal for the discipline of anthropol-

ogy and perhaps the most significant indicator of the changing trends and interests in the field. By studying this canon of knowledge, I hypothesized that it was possible to determine the degree of interest held by anthropologists in museums throughout the past century.

At the conclusion of my research I had found a definite trend in the number of times museums were mentioned from 1895 until 1995. The quantity of articles was quite low at the creation of the journal and slowly increased until the early 1900's when the numbers spiked and stayed relatively high into the 1930's. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, after the 1930's, the number of articles focusing on museums sharply dropped and then began a slow climb until the 1990's.

Figure 1

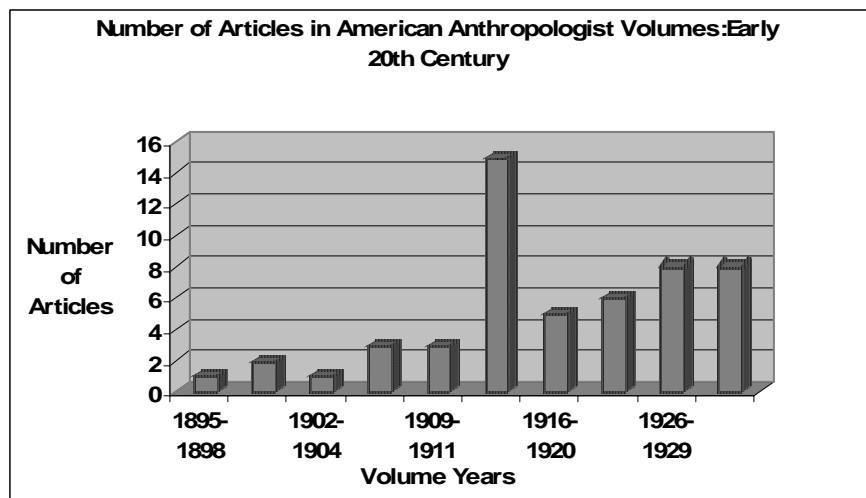
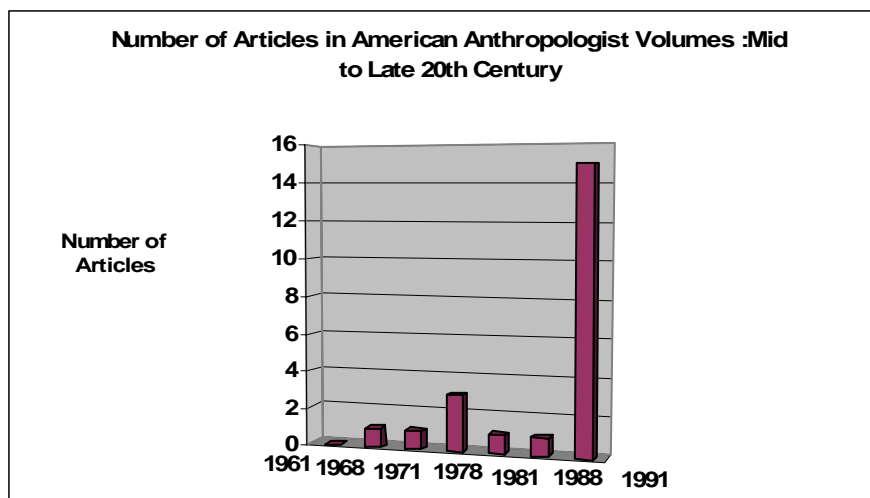




Figure 2



At the inception of *American Anthropologist*, there were few articles directly discussing museums and their purpose, although some articles were actually based on museums' methods of preserving artifacts and the steps that should be taken to conserve the specimens. Other articles that I counted as being relevant enough to include were ones that were written about artifacts held at specific museums and how the museums were interpreting them. Although the word 'museum' was not always in the article title, I determined that there was enough of an emphasis on museums to include those articles in the analysis.

In later years, such as in the years spanning from 1912 to 1932, there were articles focusing on collections in museums, as well as other topics directly relating to museums. In the years 1930-1932, there were 68 separate articles dealing with archaeological excavations arranged through various museums. Although I did not include these articles in the final tally because they only mentioned the museum, rather than being an article about the museum, the large quantity shows the significant emphasis that museums had on the field of anthropology.

In 1978, the *American Anthropologist* began to include a "Museum Exhibit" section under the Audio/Visual Section. This was not a continuing occurrence. It was not until June 1995 that a permanent section was dedicated to

museum anthropology. This section mostly contains reviews of exhibits, but also contains articles about the museum profession.

I believe that these results have followed the trend that I expected. Due to changing theory in the field of anthropology, it is reasonable that the amount of articles focusing on museums fluctuated throughout the century. As new theories emerged, museums were pushed further and further to the fringes of anthropology. The substantial amount of articles in the beginning of the century seemed to reflect the popularity of museums in anthropology. As stated previously, at the inception of anthropology as a discipline, museums were seen as quite important in the field. This pattern continued into the 1930's. At the very beginning of American Anthropologist museums were not mentioned especially often, and I believe that this is due to the fact that it would require a few years for the discipline to be able to evaluate itself and realize the large concentration placed on museums. It is reasonable that there would be a slight delay in the fusion of the discipline and the museum.

It is evident that there is a strong link between the discipline of anthropology and the development of museums. As anthropology gained a place in academia and the attention of the public, these advancements were reflected in the museums of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this was due to the famous anthropologists at the time, Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber. Both of these men were interested in the collection of the material culture of different groups of people and the promotion of anthropology as an academic discipline (McGee and Warms 2000).

### ***Early Twentieth Century: Historical Particularism through Boas and Kroeber***

The school of thought associated with Boas is Historical Particularism. In this theory it was thought that, "every culture is unique and must be studied in terms of its uniqueness" (Barfield 1997:237). It was also a principle of this theory that cultures all borrowed aspects from each other and therefore were interlaced and bound to one another (Barfield 1997). This emphasis on cultural differences was ideal for promoting the museum as a public display and warehouse for human diversity.

Franz Boas also challenged the leading Social Darwinist and unilineal evolutionary theories of the early twentieth century and in particular the evolutionary categories of savage and barbarianism. He launched a critique of the ways that the museums presented indigenous peoples and brought a new focus on the idea of culture areas above unilineal evolutionary stages of cultural development (Barnard & Spencer 2001:73).

“Boas launched his attack on anthropological orthodoxy in 1887 by criticizing the organization of the U.S. national museum collections (one room for pottery to illustrate its evolution, others for musical instruments, weaponry, etc.), a gutsy act for a 29-year-old immigrant who as yet had no anthropological employment and few publications” (Barnard & Spencer 2001:73).

Boas also conducted “salvage anthropology” in order to collect the material goods from cultures that were in danger of vanishing (Barfield 1997). Although salvage anthropology may be questionable today, it did initiate the collection of information about cultures, as well as the material objects for the museums. Boas argued “that the essential justification for the maintenance of large museums lies wholly in their importance as necessary means for the advancement of science” (Ames 1986:15). He also believed in the importance of museums as the “only means of bringing together and of preserving intact large series of material...to serve the progress of science” (Ames 1986:15).

Alfred Kroeber also focused on the material aspect of culture, but concentrated on how they were affecting society and whether or not individuals had an effect on their culture as a whole (McGee and Warms 2000). He believed certain aspects could not be defined in the terms of individuals and were therefore super organic (Barnard and Spencer 2001). He stressed “the great significance of unconscious culture processes in the development, maintenance, and change of human cultures” (Barfield 1997:271). Despite this interest in the super organic nature of culture, Kroeber also believed that both individual and super organic aspects of culture could be perceived through material culture, such as a woman’s skirt lengths (McGee and Warms 2000).

Despite his shift from some of the basic ideas of Historical Particularism, Kroeber held his position in various museums and moved easily between the field, the museum, and the classroom (Bohannon and Glazer 1988). As the discipline of anthropology continued to advance, museums seemed to become decreasingly important as a source of dispensing knowledge about different cultures. This was based on changing interests and thought in anthropology. “The rapid growth of anthropological interests and specialties has resulted in an ever-widening gap between the total range of anthropological activity and the more slowly changing, traditional interests in museums” (Tschopik and Collier 1954:772).

***Mid-Late Twentieth Century: Functionalism, Cultural Ecology, Structuralism, Cultural Materialism, and Symbolic/Interpretive Approaches***

When the number of articles addressing museums in American Anthropologist decreased at mid century, the reduction correlated with the theories at the time. The shifting ideas in anthropology moved away from the museum and began to focus on other aspects of society besides material culture. The drop in article numbers around the 1930s and 1940s can be attributed to the theories of Functionalism and Cultural Ecology that began to develop in the mid part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This shift in theory resulted in a moving away from the traditional placement of museums.

**Functionalism**

Functionalism was introduced in the 1920s and is an anthropological theory that “attempts to describe the various institutions that made up society, explain what they do, and show their contribution to the overall maintenance of society” (McGee and Warms 2000:158). Functionalist thinking associated with Malinowski emphasized the way that all aspects of society and culture functioned to meet the needs of the individual in society, whereas thinkers such as Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard considered all aspects of society as existing to maintain the structure and cohesion of society (McGee & Warms 2004: 153).

This new approach in anthropology exaggerated the growing gap between the discipline and museums and diminished the relevance placed on the artifacts of different societies. Functionalism represented “a sharp methodical break with overly facile and decontextualized comparisons manifested by much nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropology: museum displays organized as linear sequences of progress” (Barfield 1997). Functionalism represented one of the largest breaks between the museum and the discipline of anthropology because “with the introduction of Functionalism the drifting apart of general anthropology and the museums received a strong impulse” (Frese 1960:67).

One of the leading thinkers in Functionalism at this time, Radcliff-Brown, believed that culture was an abstract idea, and anthropologists should concern themselves with the ideas of universal laws and human behavior (Barnard & Spencer 2001: 140; McGee & Warms 2004). It can be argued that Functionalism was concerned with the intangible, such as social correlations and interconnections, and not with the artifacts under glass at the museums.

As the mid-century approached, museums no longer offered the discipline of

anthropology a forum that suited the visual display of cultures. This was primarily due to the lag in exhibit updating (Collier 1954). This lag in the museums' ability to display the cultural knowledge generated by anthropologists is an indicator of how fast the discipline was developing at the time (Frese 1960:69). Competing theories and interests other than those emphasizing material culture began to develop, pushing museums and anthropology even further from one another.

Another developing theory at this time was that of Cultural Ecology. The emphasis of this theory focuses on how culture developed through human adaptation to the environment (McGee & Warms 2004:237). This theory also lacks focus on material culture, as well as looking at it differently, therefore pushing museums into the margins of the discipline. Other theories that further separated museums and anthropology were Structuralism and Cultural Materialism. This divisive trend continued into the 1970's when museums were, for the most part, on the periphery of progressive anthropologists' thought.

### **Cultural Ecology**

Ecological approaches developed in the 1950's and emphasized human interaction with the environment (McGee and Warms 2004:238). Cultural Ecologists were primarily concerned with the "cultural adaptation formulated by human beings to meet the challenges posed by their environment" (McGee and Warms 2000:226). These thoughts were based on the idea that culture developed through human adaptation to the environment. Cultural Ecology, as well as many other ecological and neo-evolutionary ideas of the time, was influenced by the political ideas circulating in society. The cultural ecologists of this time "systematically applied concepts from biological ecology to human ecology and adaptation as the dynamic process of interaction between population and ecosystem" (Barfield 1997:137). The central emphasis on the environment was also a deterrent to the bond that anthropology and museums had shared at one point.

There are other reasons why interests in anthropological museums at mid-century decreased that are not necessarily related to evolving anthropological theory. As the century passed, people developed wider knowledge on world affairs. Due to an increase in communications and technology, Americans grew more informed about geography and history than people were when the anthropological museum was first established in the late 1800s. Museums were no longer a leading source of information about the world. Alternate forms of communication, such as radio and television were more popular than visiting a museum. These other ways of reaching the public are quicker

and more convenient than visiting a museum when it comes to informing (Frese 1960). During my research, one article from the 1958-1959 volume of *American Anthropologist* caught my attention because it dealt with the future of museums and museum work. The argument that “museums are here to stay” (Whiteford 1959) is the most important revelation in this article. Other sections of the article spoke about the renewed emerging emphasis of museums in the discipline of anthropology. It piqued my interest because it seemed somewhat out of place during this time period, although the author was indeed correct in the prediction of the resurgence and revitalization of museums in the discipline of anthropology.

### **Structuralism**

Structuralist theory was created by Claude Levi-Strauss in which he argued that the “anthropologist needs a systematic method to uncover the underlying structure of cultural forms” (Barfield 1997:452). The task of structural analysis is to “break cultural ideas up into their unconscious meaning and finding the binary relationships between them. By uncovering this core we will reveal the hidden essentials of human thought” (Toborowski NP). There are two sides to Levi-Strauss’s theory, “One is scientific, interested in applying the latest techniques in set theory, chemistry, etc. to unpacking other modes of thought; the other side is a mood of atonement for the cultures destroyed by colonialism and modern civilization by way of creating a new Talmud, a collection of fragments from the past together with a critical apparatus that can revivify those fragments as tools for speculative thought” (Barfield 1997:452-453).

It is clear that Claude Levi-Strauss’s theory of Structuralism was not helpful to strengthening the relationship between museums and anthropology and this trend continued into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. With an emphasis on deep structures of the mind, myth, linguistics, and a primary concern for universal structures above cultural differences, this school of thought resulted in little interest in documenting diversity, and even less interest in material culture and behavior (Barrett 1984:101). While Structuralism generated much interest in and synthesis with literature, psychology, linguistics, and the humanities and sciences in general, it did very little for promoting the relationship between museums and anthropology.

### **Cultural Materialism**

Cultural Materialism is a theory that was developed largely by Marvin Harris (McGee & Warms 2004: 285). It represents a synthesis between ecological anthropology and evolutionary anthropology (Barrett 1984:49; Barfield

1997). This theory is best known for how it “links infrastructure, structure, and superstructure” (Barfield 1997:96). The infrastructure includes natural and cultural aspects fundamental to survival and human adaptation. Structure is the political and domestic economy and superstructure represents collective cognitive and ideological patterns that stand for symbols in society (McGee & Warms 2004:285). The superstructure includes aspects of culture such as religion and music (Barfield 1997). This theory constituted a significant shift away from the museum in anthropology because of its heavy emphasis on the unconscious aspects of society and culture. This theory was emerging at the same time as Symbolic and Interpretive anthropology and although they are very different theories, they competed with each other for the anthropological audience throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology**

Symbolic and Interpretive theories are imbedded in Structuralist thinking and developed simultaneously in the late 1960’s and 1970’s. Although they shared the same paradigmatic orientations, they utilized different approaches to understanding cultural phenomena (Barnard & Spencer 2001:535; McGee & Warms 2004:467). Symbolic anthropology “takes as its basic tenets the ideas that indigenous meanings are the goal of research and that these meanings, though not explicit, may be discovered in the symbolism of such things as myth and ritual” (Barfield 1997:459). Interpretive anthropology provides insight into other societies from the etic point of view. It insisted on the “importance of the active negotiation of meaning, the decay and growth of symbols, and the richness of linguistic metaphoricity” (Barfield 1997:263).

Interpretive anthropologists believed that cultures could be read as texts, and that anthropologists could read a culture over the shoulders of their informants (McGee & Warms 2004:467). The differences in etic and emic perspectives were taken into account with this theoretical orientation and Interpretive anthropology thereby sparked a new interest in the “native’s point of view” (Barfield 1997). These new concerns with interpreting a society and understanding the “native’s point of view” contributed greatly to the reappearance of museums in the anthropological field.

After the 1970’s it is apparent that museums grew more important in anthropology. This trend slowly increased until the present day. I believe that this trend is occurring because of the renewed interest in the cultures of various societies. The emphasis on multiculturalism in the United States is becoming more important and widespread in the public in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and understanding this new concern for ethnic diversity is essential

to anthropologists. There is a continuing emphasis on culture and ethnicity and museums are seen as much more dynamic compared to what they used to be (Bouquet 2001). It is also seen as crucial to understand other cultures besides our own due to the increasing amount of globalization throughout the world. Societies that historically have had little contact may have much more now due to globalization. The renewed focus on museums is coming at a time where the public is becoming increasingly more interested in other societies around the world.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### *Current Trends in Anthropological Museums*

It is apparent that ever since the late 1970's and 1980's, museums are growing more prevalent in anthropology after being "sloughed off...to become a fully-fledged social or cultural discipline in the universities after the field-work revolution of the early twentieth century" (Stocking 1990:772). Museums today are seen as much more dynamic than they were fifty years ago. This is due to the increasing emphasis on multiculturalism society in the United States and the escalating importance placed on culture (Bouquet 2001). "The rediscovery of the museum within anthropology has taken place at least in part through fieldwork-the very practice that was supposed to mark the watershed between the museum period and the university period. The musealisation of culture, the framing and investment of both objects and practices with new or extra meanings should be a matter of central concern to anthropologists" (Bouquet 2001:14).

Museums play an important role in the expression of the values of society. They are now expected to "cater" to the masses and represent the realities of different cultures around the world. Rather than just a building to house and collect artifacts, museums are becoming a place that exists more and more for the public interest, and not just as places where traditional societies are put under glass and preserved as attractions (Ames 1986).

Critical anthropological theory influenced by Postmodernism also enhanced the relationship between museums and anthropology. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century fast approached, anthropologists began to look at the study of cultures in a different way. It grew increasingly important to represent the "other" in a way that allowed the voice of "the other" to emerge without being simplified by an etic anthropological interpretation (McGee & Warms 2004:575). This theory also brought about changes in ethnography in which anthropologists would now be "writing for multiple and diverse audiences with different sets



of demands and intellectual frameworks” (Barfield 1997:370).

Postmodernist approaches do not consider it to be credible for ethnographers to take an omniscient approach without including the writer’s own involvement in the society (Barfield 1997). A reflexive perspective and voice that we now see in anthropology replaced former beliefs in detachment, objectivity, and omniscience. Postmodernists believe that “objective, neutral knowledge of another culture is impossible” (McGee and Warms 2000:517). Postmodernist approaches reduce all understanding of reality to individual understandings, and this reductionism makes it difficult to generalize about societies because any attempt at generalization forces those cultures and individuals into our own society’s way of understanding the world (McGee and Warms 2000).

This new way of thinking is all centered on letting the members of a society represent themselves in a collaborative and autonomous manner (McGee and Warms 2000). By doing this, museums are being brought back into the discipline because of the fantastic way individuals in cultures can express themselves. The emergence of Postmodernism itself was a crucial examination of the canon of anthropology. It analyzed and transformed the past century’s ideas about anthropology to develop into a new critical orientation that is embraced by most modern anthropologists. This transformation of the discipline also included a transformation in museums, which now had to modernize to reenter the newly self-aware and critical field of anthropology.

Over the past few years, the strictly scholarly aspects of the museum are being pushed aside and the United States seems to be showing its pride in being a diverse, multicultural country (Talbot 1995). Different societies are all vying for a place in the public arena. The museums are the prime institution for giving these groups a voice, and they are getting involved in promoting multiculturalism as a means of promoting the multiple voices that Postmodernism mandates (Talbot 1995).

This new museology “emphasizes the social, interdisciplinary, communicative, and creative functions of the museum” (Hsu 1995:322). It is now looked at as a creative new tool for communication, rather than just for just exhibition and diffusion (Hsu 1995). This does not mean that museums should be concentrating strictly on entertaining the public. Museums should be “in an area of continuous field work in anthropology” (Hsu 1995:312). It is now required that there be a balance between entertaining the public and maintaining the scholarly aspects of the museum. But, due to the emerging

interest in museums as a way of communication for different cultural groups, anthropologists need to consider the museum as an important part of the discipline (Hsu 1995).

***Critical Reflections on Research and the Future of Museum Anthropology***

Conducting this research was a somewhat large task, and I had rather ambitious ideas about what I could accomplish. While I am confident that the research I did for this topic was thorough and quite detailed, I would have liked to explore every year. Due to time constraints, I was not able to accomplish that goal. Completing every year may have made the changes in the focus of museums more obvious, however, the bi-decade approach I used adequately showed the trends in the relationship between museums and anthropology.

If time would have allowed, I think that a more concentrated study of what exhibits and cultures were being reviewed between 1995 and 2003 would have given a better idea as to how museums are being used in the present day. I am curious as to what societies and cultures are the focus of recent exhibits, as well as what *American Anthropologist* deems worthy enough to review.

I would also like to add a note of caution as to the accuracy of the numbers dealing with the amount of times the word “museum” was used. I sometimes included an article in the “museum count” that was not strictly about museums if it dealt with a particular group of artifacts housed in a museum. If the museum was spoken about at length, I included the article in the count. I felt that it gave a realistic idea as to how museums were being utilized in the past century.

It is now clear how essential museums were at the inception of the field of anthropology, and how they were so easily disregarded when theories developed leading anthropologists away from the museums on which they once depended. As we move into this century, I believe that it would be quite interesting to analyze the ongoing relationship between anthropology and museums. It is my belief that once again anthropology will be using museums as a way to educate the public and as a channel for societies to express their uniqueness. I am curious to know how museums will react to being changed and molded into a forum that will again benefit and cater to anthropologists. How will museums respond to the new pressure from emerging cultures that would like to display their society to educate others? It will be intriguing to watch the development of the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century museum<sup>4</sup>.

By doing this project, I have learned how essential museums are to the field of anthropology. I have also learned that their relationship waxed and waned throughout the past century, and some of the possible reasons for this separation and unification. How will this new interest in museums affect the discipline of anthropology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In reality, the most important question is whether anthropologists will take full advantage of this incredible method of distributing knowledge to the public or will they again push museums to the periphery of the discipline.

My original hypothesis, that museums have waxed and waned throughout the century due to changing of anthropological thought and theory, was illustrated through a literature review of articles that in effect, represent the canon of American anthropology. This critical approach to understanding the relationship between anthropology and museums has demonstrated that increasing and decreasing importance resulting from trends of thinking in the field in anthropology, has been the fate of museums. It will be interesting to see what will happen to museums in the next few decades. If it follows the trend of the present day, museums will still be in the foreground of anthropology and perhaps come to mirror the synthesis seen in the early twentieth century when leading Anthropologists such as Boas and Kroeber directed major museums and moved easily between the field, museum, and classroom.

### **Endnotes**

1. I would like to thank both Dr. Faith Warner and Dr. DeeAnne Wymer for their help, support and guidance with this paper. Thank you to Dr. Warner for her ideas and assistance creating the outline of this research paper. She has been a constant source of support and encouragement. Dr. Warner has read this paper more times than I'm sure she'd like to think about, but never ceased to give me countless helpful suggestions and comments about it. Thanks also go to my fellow anthropology students for their honest opinions in the peer reviews.
2. Museums, as well as anthropology have been passions of mine for as long as I can remember. I have had the opportunity to have two separate internships related to museums. One of these was at the Bloomsburg Genealogical and Historical Society and the other was with Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. I will be attending graduate school after completing my BA in anthropology to receive the training I need to make museums my career.

3. “Founded in 1906, the American Association of Museums (AAM) is dedicated to promoting excellence within the museum community. Through advocacy, professional education, information exchange, accreditation, and guidance on current professional standards of performance, AAM assists museum staff, boards, and volunteers across the country to better serve the public. AAM is the only organization representing the entire scope of museums and professionals and nonpaid staff who work for and with museums. AAM currently represents more than 16,000 members--11,500 individual museum professionals and volunteers, 3,100 institutions, and 1,700 corporate members. Individual members span the range of occupations in museums, including directors, curators, registrars, educators, exhibit designers, public relations officers, development officers, security managers, trustees, and volunteers” ([http://www.aam-us.org/about.cfm?menu\\_type=about](http://www.aam-us.org/about.cfm?menu_type=about)).

4. This subject is of particular interest to me because of my future career plans. I am going to attend a graduate school and receive extensive training for the curation and development of museums. I believe that educating communities about different cultures is becoming increasingly important in a world of developing globalization. To look at museums from an anthropologist’s eye, I would see a great opportunity to teach and inform about various cultures from all around the world. Graduate programs in Museum Studies are important for those students who have bachelor’s degrees in fields like Art History or anthropology and want to work in a museum. It is possible to obtain an MA in anthropology with concentrations in museum training for students who would like to continue their education in anthropology but still acquire training for a museum setting. These programs are offered at various universities such as Arizona State University, George Washington University, Baylor University, and Columbia University. Most of these programs are possible to complete in 1-2 years as a full-time student.

5. “The Smithsonian Institution is now the world's largest museum complex, composed of a group of national museums and research centers housing the United States' national collections in natural history, American history, air and space, the fine arts and the decorative arts, and several other fields ranging from postal history to cultural history. The Institution includes 16 museums, four research centers, the National Zoo, the Smithsonian Institution Libraries (a research library system), the Smithsonian magazine, the Smithsonian Institution Press, a Traveling Exhibition Service, an Office of Education, and a number of other offices and activities” (<http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian/intro.html>).

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