Like all of the social sciences, archaeology has undergone profound paradigm shifts during the course of the twentieth century. Each of these shifts has been a reaction to or against a variety of outside sources and subjects, but omnipresent among the catalysts necessary for the change has been the Maya world and the practise of archaeology in Central America, Guatemala in particular. The effects of the ‘cultural conversation’ between the Maya and their descendants on one hand, and archaeologists from the United States on the other, resound far beyond the temples of Tikal or the corridors of Copan, to echo among the various cultural groups of Native Americans in Southern California. In-deed, models of civilisations as defined in Central America have come to be a stepping stone for the definition and redefinition of Southern Californian Native Americans. The identities created for these groups by successive generations of archaeologists have reflected directly the three periods of discussion in archaeological thought that will be discussed here (culture history, processual archaeology, and postprocessual archaeology). It could almost be said that the perceptions by US American archaeologists of Southern Californian Native Americans to-day, and the subsequently created identities are the product of the archaeological relationship between those same archaeologists and their surrogate [sic] civilised subjects in Central America.
In order to follow the complexity of the tri-faceted relationship, it is necessary to look at the development of archaeology in conjunction with the areas under discussion. The earliest modern manifestation of archaeology was in culture history, which was the hallmark of the theoretical framework of the discipline until the period of the Great Depression\(^1\) and the Second World War. The object of culture history, as the name suggests, was to formulate a chronological history for a particular culture. Ever since the expedition by Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens to the Yucatan in 1842, the Maya have figured enormously in the concept of American archaeology (Drover “Ancient Civ” 5 April 2005). The interests of archaeology, however, were to record and chronicle, as later demonstrated in the ethnographic account by the 1925 Tulane University expedition to Central America. The account is chiefly concerned with the description of artefacts: they are illustrated, and some guess might be hazarded as to their physical location and purpose, but solely from the standpoint of ‘classical’ archaeology, as defined by ‘classical’ civilisations of the Mid-East and the Mediterranean world (Tulane 260-97). There is no discussion of how these artefacts fit into the Maya cultural process, or of what the Maya culture may even have been like.

To understand the importance of this omission to the native peoples of Southern California, it is necessary to examine the critical role played by urbanism in the social sciences, and in ‘western’ thought generally. Even the word city, ‘deriving from a set of Latin terms referring to membership of the citizenry and to the citizen,’ is telling (Holton

---

\(^1\) In the 1930s, to combat unemployment, thousands of people in the Southwestern United States were put to work excavating archaeological sites. Normally, a local amateur would be given several dozen diggers, and allowed to excavate at his discretion. The careless manner in which this was undertaken caused great damage to many sites (Drover “Introductory Archaeology” 6 Jan. 2005).
3). The only peoples studied in the era of culture history were those who left a legacy of monumental architecture. When coupled with the telling etymology and its trappings, it becomes obvious that ancient peoples not studied, because of their lack of a physical edifice, perceived as the only valid form of civilisation, were and are also denied a place and identity in society. In embracing without question the ancient Maya as brethren of Mediterranean peoples in terms of sophistication (and not, at the time, connecting strongly, the Maya of yore with indigenous peoples of the region to-day), archaeologists were able to, subconsciously or not, use their interpretations for ‘political purposes’ (Ferguson 64). According to archaeologist T. J. Ferguson, ‘the interpretation of the archaeological record was inextricably linked to the political and cultural processes entailed in taking land from Native Americans,’ or in the modern period, I would suggest, to the justification of that theft (Ferguson 64). However, as archaeologists began to seek more complex information about a greater variety of people (not necessarily without similar motives), the paradigms of the discipline shifted, forcing a re-thinking of relationships between archaeologists and their subjects, once again with Central American work proving significant for Native American identities.

Processual archaeology came about as a reaction to the realisation that, while useful, culture history did not say anything meaningful about the lifestyles of the people under scrutiny. The image of the Maya was that they were peaceful, scholarly people who pursued esoteric ends with enigmatic means. They were thought to have lived in isolated citadel-like ‘towns,’ besieged by the surrounding jungle, surrounded by Indians who practised solely swidden agriculture (Drover “Ancient Civ” 3 May). This view, it would seem, was conducive to the idea that the classical civilisations of the Americas
were advanced peoples, but that they were connected in no way with the people around them, the ‘Indians,’ who were viewed as primitive and an eminently viewable picture of the barbaric past. The change in these views can be exemplified by the change in focus of tourism in Guatemala from the 1930s, when ‘tours in Guatemala [focused on] contemporary ‘Indian’ villages and Spanish colonial architecture’, to the 1970s and ‘80s, when the focus changed to an ‘emphasis on archaeological sites’ (Little 37). Although this came along with the supposedly-progressive processual movement, it does not seem to have done anything other than to further the focus on urban sites as the heart of a country’s past and present, and leave the ‘savage…in the garden…as a thing of nature’ (Kehoe 504).

Processual archaeology, if not unique to, thrives best in the United States, where archaeology is a part of anthropology, rather than of classics, as in Europe. In-deed, as anthropologist Alice Kehoe notes, ‘archaeology in particular [among the social sciences has] lagged behind sister disciplines in becoming conscious of [its] ideological biases’ (Kehoe 503). It was anthropology which took the lead in culture history, dragging archaeology behind, toward the movement to make the disciplines scientific, enough so that, if appropriate rigour was applied to research, bias could be excluded (Fagan, DeCourse 52). Perhaps most significantly, processual archaeology strove for formulaic analysis of culture: because of the scientific process involved, it was and is believed that human behaviour can be reduced to theoretical models based on universal laws. It is important to keep in mind the implications for Central American archaeology, and the effects those implications would have for the native peoples of Southern California. Processualism created complications for archaeologists: it was proven, as rather
dramatically put by archaeologist Richard Adams, that ‘Maya civilisation was not created full-blown in a green flash of Olmec\(^2\) lightning’ (Adams 139). In other words, discoveries in Central America had made it clear that Maya lifestyles were much more complicated, with cities being larger than previously suspected, and filled with people from a variety of social classes and occupations.

The Maya could no longer be idealised once removed from their quixotic pedestal, nor could they be proven to be the source of a direct line of unilineal evolution, an idea which was used to explain why Guatemalan ‘Indians,’ as well as Californian ones, were ‘static cultures at a relatively primitive stage of development compared with European [and by implication, ‘Classical’ Maya] civilisations’ (Ferguson 64). However, archaeology has been slow to realise this. In popular art, and even in academic texts, Southern Californian Native Americans are still portrayed as having been prehistoric peoples who were exclusively unsophisticated hunter-gatherers until the advent of the Spanish, when in fact, ‘there is ample evidence for their active management of food resources to the point of food production’ (Kehoe 507). This analysis illustrates the point that archaeologists control what they investigate, what they present, and how they make that presentation. Processual archaeology, despite the many advances it has made possible (including the greater understanding of the Maya world), has served to gloss over biases with a veneer of science. The natural problem with this (both the reason, perhaps for its popularity with archaeologists who do not want to recognise the validity of non-urban native cultures, and the cause for the postprocessual movement’s beginnings in

\(^2\) It was once widely believed that the Maya had been the result of a linear progression or evolution from the Olmec culture. The Olmec flourished between 1500 BCE and 150 CE, and the Maya began around the time of the end of the Olmec florescence, and continued to around 900 CE (Adams 24).
England) is that archaeology becomes so much of a science that it forces (or allows) archaeologists to lose touch with the people they are studying.

A crucial part of cultures, modern and ancient, is perception of identity, one of the aspects of native culture which has fallen prey to archaeological precepts of urbanism as prerequisite for validity. In his study of Maya global commercial interaction in Antigua, anthropologist Walter Little notes that architecture is key to Antigua’s history, and that it defines the Maya and Ladinos (Little 77). Little notes that the place of the Maya is defined by colonial architecture: they may sell their traditional wares in the markets on the periphery of tourist attractions and the like, but are constantly overshadowed by the edifices of colonial rule (Little 7-8). Nevertheless, the fact that there is the colonial identity, and outside of that, ruins of Tikal, Copan, Kaminerjuya, et cetera, gives the Maya a frame of reference, from which they have chosen to resist attempts to ‘modernise and unite’ Guatemala (Smith 17). Los Angeles is a constructed city that seems to attempt to fully embrace modernism, and the polyglot that modern ‘America’ portrays itself as; by doing so, it denies express affiliation with a colonial regime, but also with Native American culture.

Even before postprocessual archaeology, ‘the decentralised, dispersed, heterogeneous and self-fabricating character of the Los Angeles Indian community [mirrored] the postmodern metropolis that is its matrix’ (Weibel-Orlando 55). By being symbolised by metropolitan sprawl and institutions like Disneyland, greater Los Angeles has been successful in creating the essence of ‘modern’ and ‘productive’ lifestyle, as well as, Little argues, ‘represent[ing] culture to be consumed,’ and ‘teach[ing] visitors how to consume’ (Little 38). Thus, cultures as represented by the ‘science’ of archaeology
(Maya in Little’s case, but equally, and more to the point, Native American), are marketed in innumerable forms, and presented in the same modern environment in which the cultures are themselves interacting, shaping their history, it appears, in an outwardly innocent and positive way, which in stead makes it clear to the viewer that despite the quaint utopianism of the people’s life way, they now have no alternative but to exist in assimilated form as a thoroughly ‘modern’ and integrated part of ‘American society.’ This presents a serious problem when an already disjointed (as explained below) cultural group is attempting to redefine itself after decades and centuries of exclusion as a people.

Further examination of the nature and character of the Southern California Native American populations can give further insight into the difficulties of creating an identity. Firstly, Native Americans make up a very small percentage of Southern California’s population (compared with indigenous peoples comprising 50-75% of Guatemala’s people). In Los Angeles County, Orange County, Riverside County, San Bernadino County and Ventura County, Native Americans make up in each case less than one percent of the population; sometimes significantly less (“LA County Census”). These statistics can be illusory, for it is estimated than only two per-cent of Native Americans Los Angeles County, for example, are descended from a Southern California cultural group (Weibel-Orlando 29). Archaeologists have been able to exploit this diverse and disunited population with relative impunity, and were backed up, to an extent, by the tenets of processual archaeology. To understand the depths and persistence of this exploitation, it is necessary to look at repatriation of Native American skeletal remains and funerary objects, and the very public controversies that they have caused. However,
before doing so, it would be useful to look at the (arguably) final stage of development in archaeological theory.

There are a number of interesting points about postprocessual archaeology, not least among them, the fact that it has failed to develop a strong following in the United States. Postprocessual archaeology developed in direct reaction to what was seen as the oversimplification of culture by processual archaeology, and against structural functionalism as such. Although it has not caught on strongly in the United States (it was developed in Britain and is popular throughout Europe), it would appear that in part at least, the addressing of repatriation in the United States is a by-product of this newest theoretical paradigm. In and of itself, postprocessual archaeology is important for the Maya and the natives of Southern California. Because it repudiates the impersonal aspects of processual archaeology, it leads to greater recognition of the role of ‘western’ society in the ‘decay’ of native American societies. (Additionally, long-time Stonehenge and Avebury archaeologist, Mike Pitts, has demonstrated that too-mechanical an approach can lead to significant misinterpretations of data (Pitts 12).) Kehoe recognises that archaeology did not demonstrate any significant aversion to appropriating colonial stereotypes, and perpetuating them, whether for their own means as professionals, or as white Americans with built-in biases: ‘Doctrinaire views of North American Indian societies, particularly in Anglo America, as egalitarian hunter-gatherers or horticulturalists unable to control nature seem to stem more from the cant of conquest than from reflective observation’ (Kehoe 508). This demonstrates, she argues, the power of culture to naturalise, and the ability and willingness of many archaeologists to recognise this changes the field of battle in the struggle for native identities.
However, repatriation is probably the most central issue, seen as critical by archaeologists and Native Americans in Southern California and in much of the rest of the United States in the recent annals of archaeology. For Native Americans, it is about wresting control of their history from ‘outsiders,’ and for archaeologists, it is about defending their role in academia. ‘Many anthropologists, museum curators, landowners, and hobbyists--some of whom are, ironically, American Indians,’ notes American Indian historian Devon Mihesuah, ‘are hesitant to return objects, citing scientific and academic freedom’ (Mihesuah 153). One example of the potential explosiveness of the matter of repatriation and of Native American land affiliation is the debacle at California State University, Long Beach.

In 1992, CSULB announced that a housing complex would be built on the area of land ‘listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Gabrielino Indian village of Puvungna’ (“Long Beach Press Telegram” 30 June 1993). When the ACLU and other rights organisations protested, they were eventually able to bring construction plans to a halt. The current university president has recognised the ‘ethical and legal necessity of preserving the rights of Native American tribes and communities regarding the Native American human remains and artefacts which the University holds or may hold in the future’ (“CSULB Policy Statement” 1). However, the arduousness of the struggle to attain this recognition demonstrated that inlaid cultural prejudices do not die easily. The urban-centred archaeological legacy created by early Maya archaeology allowed the University to raise protest over the claim the Gabrielino tribe held over the site ‘allegedly’ known as Puvungna. Because there was no significant materiel structure, there was no way to physically demonstrate the connexion between the ancient culture
and its modern counterpart. Despite the legal resolution of the altercation over the question of identification with the site, the site remains a contentious issue.

In 1995, CSULB won the right to develop the site (“Long Beach Press Telegram” 7.4.95), and it took a full year for that decision to be successfully challenged. It is interesting to note that the grounds on which the University bases its argument is one of separation of church and state, contending that a court backing of the rights of Native Americans to preserve the ground would be an endorsement of an express religion (“Long Beach Press Telegram 7.4.95). However, by appealing to a paradigmatic statute of this kind in the United States (no matter the validity of the argument), the University and its proponents are recognising the existence of a unique Native American culture, validating, if not its legal claims, the group’s identity. Despite the court’s rejection of CSULB’s appeal, the feeling is that the land, and the tenuous identity that rests upon its preservation is still in the balance. It would be interesting if the rulings would have been the same if the University was proposing an academic extension, rather than the construction of residences, a shopping centre, and car parks. Much of the credit for this victory of the Gabrielinos is probably owed to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), in 1990.

NAGPRA was designed to empower Native Americans, and to reverse the age-old trend of one-sidedness in dealing with artefacts. Although it ‘gives Native Americans property rights in grave goods and cultural patrimony, as well as the right to repatriate human remains from federal and Indian lands,’ it has no bearing on private property (Ferguson 66). Despite this, a number of states have gone so far as to pass state laws that, while they do not necessarily allow repatriation, do prohibit unlawful excavations
In principle, the majority of archaeologists probably agree with the legislation, but there is nevertheless a fear that their authority is being undermined. Perhaps the most important legacy of NAGPRA will be to have created the necessity for an open dialogue between archaeologists and Native Americans; a dialogue based not on one group unilaterally dictating the history of the other, but of working together to sort out difficulties as they arise. The CSULB case witnessed Professor Emeritus Keith Dixon become one of the chief arbiters of the dispute, supporting the Native American claims, despite alleged attempts by the University to foist some of the blame onto Dixon himself for failing to record the storage of certain artefacts (Peter Carr Peace Centre).

One of the more interesting aspects of the politics surrounding NAGPRA is the fragmentation of opposing groups; that is to say, as Mihesuah points out, a new ‘cross-cultural conflict,’ which she splits twelve ways, is occurring, with sides ranging from archaeologists who feel that Native Americans are incapable of caring for their cultural history, to those ‘who are willing to return remains only after they have been studied,’ and from Native Americans who want ‘tribal remains and sacred objects repatriated and never studied,’ to those who ‘believe remains should be studied for educational purposes and not repatriated’ (Mihesuah 156). The lines of battle are being drawn up in ways unfamiliar to many US American archaeologists. It seems that although postprocessual archaeology per se is not dreadfully popular in the United States (something that is gradually changing), its effects have been widely felt, and are gaining momentum, creating a confusing environment in which more traditional archaeologists must uncomfortably manoeuvre. It is necessary at this point to return to Guatemala, to
examine behaviour of archaeologists working there, both in shaping postprocessualism, and in reacting to its challenges.

A more enhanced understanding can be had of relationships with and identity-creations of Southern California Native Americans by looking at American archaeologists and their categorisations of Maya and other indigenous peoples of Guatemala. ‘North American [anthropologists and archaeologists],’ Carol Smith asserts, ‘routinely put all [Guatemalan] Indians in the class position of peasants…North Americans continue to consider Indians to be peasants without embarrassment to the present day, though with a certain amount of self-acknowledged confusion’ (Smith 24). This idea is in line with the common perception that ‘Indians’ are a rural people, which belies the fact that ‘most of Guatemala’s Indians are descendants of Maya, but then, given the very small number of Europeans who immigrated to Guatemala, so are most of Guatemala’s non-Indians’ (Smith 3).

For many American archaeologists, bafflingly, to Guatemalan counterparts, who have looked more closely at relationships of so-called peasants with ‘other’ Guatemalans (Smith 24), this view harks back to early days of culture history. In the Tulane expedition, an account of ‘Indian’ agriculture is given: ‘Indian agriculture is very simple. Towards the end of the dry season the Indian selects a place….then the Indian plants his corn [description of swidden agriculture]. This method [swidden] is very wasteful’ (Tribes and Temples 239). Later, the author describes how, ‘reaching a steep climb, we dismounted and drove our animals along, urging them with Indian cries’ (Tribes and Temples 240). ‘The Indian’ is apparently alone, and the description of ‘him’ is not dissimilar to that of a National Geographic narrator describing the antics of a primate or
other animal. The lone Indian, bereft of civilisation, is also male; no mention is made of the possible contribution of his spouse or children, or even of the familial structure of Maya. Moreover, he is inefficient, and his agricultural systeme is not even deemed worthy of proper season names. Moreover, his cry is a primitive one, and puts to flight beasts of burden. Archaeological perceptions in the Maya world, though much advanced since the turn of the century, are nevertheless becoming anachronistic, and for the first time, there is a possibility that interactions between archaeologists and Native Americans are influencing Maya archaeology rather than the reverse. (It would be interesting to investigate, as a different cultural ‘conversation,’ the influence had by the many European archaeologists working in Central America, upon US American archaeologists there.)

It would, however, be unrealistic to assume that postprocessual archaeology, in any form in the United States, has somehow ushered in an era of unsurpassed tolerance and been able to create an accurate identity of some kind for Native Americans. In her testimony before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the ‘Census 2000, Implementation in Indian Country,’ Glenda Ahhaitty, a Native American from Southern California, in an aside, relates how she, ‘an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma,’ growing up as a Californian, met her husband working in the ‘Indian Village at Disneyland (Ahhaitty 2), ’ promoting an image of Native Americans that was created for packaging and duplication by US American men of Northern European descent. The contradictions inherent in such tangled hybridities only show how complicated the picture remains in the U.S. In her recommendations to the Senate, Ahhaitty suggests that it be determined ‘if the current race definition for American Indians supports sovereignty,
self-determination for the Indian population. Perhaps the answer is not to consider American Indian/Alaskan Native data collection as race data, but in a separate question (as is the Hispanic Origin) American Indian/Alaskan Native Descent Category’ (Ahhaitty 2).

When combined with Ahhaitty’s concern that in Southern California there are not enough available Native American foster families for Native American foster children (Ahhaitty 5), her quandaries illustrate a fear of hypodescent taking over an identity. At the same time, despite her wish to increase Native America participants (as such) in the census, she also shows willingness to recognise Indianness as a matter of origin, and secondary to some degree to more localised identity, a clear instance of attempting to solidify the more global while preserving the uniquely local. These goals of a leading Native American policy-guider are probably remarkably similar to those of the government in the United States, and are summed up here, but with respect to Guatemalan Indians: ‘Non-Indian intellectuals, who have dominated the discourse, believe that as long as Indians retain their separate identity, Guatemala cannot achieve the status of a modern nation’ (Smith 5). The goal of the U.S. government, facilitated in the past and present, in this case, by the work of archaeologists, is to present a nation as united and yet diverse in its unity. The goal of the Guatemala government is to create a unified workforce to serve as a ladder for its climb to ‘modernity.’ Native Americans in Southern California seek to fit into their country, but within a unique framework, and within systems of local solidarity.

It seems entirely remarkable that two cultural groups who have had next to no contact between each other (Maya and Southern California Native Americans) have had
such a profound effect upon one another’s identities. And yet increased globalisation and even increased ‘native’ participation in archaeology (and anthropology) will not lead to a cessation of the unspoken dialogue, for I believe that there are massive problems inherent in systems of Indian relations in both Guatemala and the United States. More trivially, in Southern California, for example, there is still very little realisation of local native history, and its legacy, or even of different worldviews, as cited by James Sandos: perhaps lessons may be learned from a culture in which ‘geographic features [are located] relative to [oneself]…instead of placing [oneself] in the centre of activity and relating landforms to an inanimate realm inferior and somehow subordinate to humankind’ (Sandos 17). Furthermore, postprocessualism, I believe, may be carried too far, to the point that frames of reference are lost, when cultural relativism necessitates the ‘eschewing’ of an ‘allegedly external stance…to refer to and only to the rules, concepts and shared meanings internal to the culture’ (Dixon 79). This, it seems, forbids useful analysis.

More critical still, I believe that the reservation system (as illustrated in a recent ABC news article) has failed dismally: the article cites 50% school dropout rates, triple the national suicide rate, double the national alcoholic rate, and 17 times the national alcohol-related accident rate, based on state surveys (Hastings 1-3). Furthermore, it is still in the interests of the US government, and archaeology, to keep themselves in control of identity creation, evidenced, despite NAGPRA success, by the CSULB case. And in Guatemala, whose archaeological terrain is still largely dominated by westerners, it is in the interest of the government, while attempting on one hand to integrate the Maya into society, to give them a separate and unequal status against which
to define their political elite as a ‘positive force.’ Because of the interrelated motivations, means and goals of the cultures and practises involved, the continual shift of theoretical, as well as practical archaeology, will continue to have an effect upon the peoples of both regions, and will continue to redefine and reconstruct identities.

Bibliography


*Tribes and Temples: a Record of the Expedition to Middle America conducted by the Tulane University of Louisiana in 1925.* Vol. II. New Orleans: The Tulane University of Louisiana, 1927.