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A Combined and Uneven Development Approach to the European Neolithic

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Abstract ■ The split in Marxism between stagism and combined and uneven development is reviewed through examination of the writings of Karl Kautsky and Leon Trotsky. Based on the premise that strict stagism is a flawed Marxism, the theory of the Neolithic of the Marxist archaeologist V.G. Childe is scrutinized and redeveloped. It is argued that the resulting theory provides a better starting point for analyzing the Neolithic period than do currently popular approaches.

Keywords ■ Childe ■ combined ■ Marxism ■ Neolithic ■ stagism ■ uneven development

Marxism in Neolithic studies

Neolithic archaeology ‘in many ways . . . is a debate in search of a paradigm shift’ (Robb and Miracle, 2007: 99). Indeed the debate between migration and acculturation, and between economy-first and ideology-first outlooks has grown predictable and even stale. This article proposes that a Marxist approach has much new to offer Neolithic studies.

While Marxism has been a feature of archaeological thinking on the Neolithic ever since the time of V. Gordon Childe and accordingly might be thought of as an old theoretical framework, the particular brand of Marxism that Childe brought into currency in archaeology is informed in large part by stagism and mechanical evolutionism. An approach based instead in the theory of combined and uneven development, which is taken to represent the true tradition of Marx, is novel. The implications of such a theory are explored with reference to the work of Childe, leading to a view of the Neolithic both similar to and radically different from that of the eminent Australian. It is then demonstrated that this view does not suffer from the shortcomings of the standard approaches to the Neolithic, and therefore that there is much to recommend it.

Stagism versus combined and uneven development

Two theories have competed in Marxist thinking on social development for over a century: *stagism* and *combined and uneven development*. The theoretical

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rift goes right back to an unresolved tension in Marx. In *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* he wrote:

In the last instance the community and the property resting upon it can be reduced to a specific stage in the development of the forces of production of the labouring subjects – to which correspond specific relations of these subjects with each other and with nature. (1964: 95)

But also noted:

All the forms in which the community imputes to the subjects a specific objective unity with the conditions of their production, or in which a specific subjective existence imputes the community itself as condition of production, necessarily correspond only to a development of the forces of production which is limited both in fact and in principle. (These forms are of course more or less naturally evolved, but at the same time also the results of a historic process.) (1964: 96–7)

So while ‘specific’ socio-economic relations ‘in the last instance’ can be reduced to ‘a specific stage in the development of the forces of production’ and are ‘of course more or less naturally evolved’, they are ‘at the same time also the results of a historic process’. This is a contradiction. The first claim is that, by analysis of the forces of production alone the form of society – of property relations, political organization and economic structure – can be determined. The second is that historical trajectory is also a factor. The only way this can be read as consistent, and what Marx surely intended, is to understand that socio-economic relations are bounded and for the most part determined by the forces of production, but also influenced by the ‘historic process’.

Marx was an empiricist and probably intentionally left the relation between ‘historic process’ and material determination open-ended because he did not have sufficient data to address the question. In exploring this point, later Marxists gravitated into two camps. The first, which can be labelled *stagism*, considered the importance of the levels of the forces of production in determining the form of society significantly greater than did the second, which hoisted the banner of *combined and uneven development*.

Leon Trotsky was a champion and popularizer of combined and uneven development (CAUD). In *The Permanent Revolution, and Results and Prospects* he wrote: ‘Marxism teaches that the development of the forces of production determines the social-historical process. The formation of economic corporations, classes and estates is only possible when this development has reached a certain level’ (1969: 37), thereby demonstrating that he accepted the basic consensus of Marxism that the realm of possible relations of production is both bounded by and, within those bounds, influenced by the forces of production. However, he elucidated several points within this consensus where CAUD differs from stagism.

CAUD claims that stages can be skipped. This is a consequence of uneven development. Some societies develop socio-technically at a slower rate than others, and then, when forced by internal or external necessity, or by choice, make up the difference in one great bound:

... historic backwardness ... permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without traveling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past. (Trotsky, 1932: 27)

These techno-cultural imports, however, are only socialized on the basis of pre-existing forms, so that:

The possibility of skipping over intermediate steps is ... by no means absolute. Its degree is determined in the long run by the economic and cultural capacities of the country. The backward nation ... not infrequently debases the achievements borrowed from outside in the process of adapting them to its own more primitive culture. In this the very process of assimilation acquires a self-contradictory character. Thus the introduction of certain elements of Western technique and training, above all military and industrial, under Peter I, led to a strengthening of serfdom as the fundamental form of labor organization. European armaments and European loans – both indubitable products of a higher culture – led to a strengthening of tsarism, which delayed in its turn the development of the culture. (Trotsky, 1932: 27–8)

As a consequence of the possibility of skipping stages in a fashion ‘by no means absolute’: ‘the development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historical process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character’ (Trotsky, 1932: 27). CAUD argues that the historical process blends stages together, and that stagists make an error in considering them ‘not only entirely distinct but also separated by great distances of time from each other’ (Trotsky, 1969: 131) when, in reality, there is always: ‘a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms’ (Trotsky, 1932: 28). This developmental pastiche is decisive in determining the character of society: ‘it is false that the specific features are “merely supplementary to the general features,” like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process’ (Trotsky, 1969: 147).

Lastly, CAUD argues that nations, each of which is ‘an original combination of the basic features of the world process’, may have different roles to play in supra-national development: ‘It is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type’ (Trotsky, 1969: 147). While stagism is inclined to see nations (or societies) as each on their separate and essentially identical internally driven paths of development, CAUD views the potentialities of their development as intrinsically connected. On this basis, Trotsky justified the October revolution:

‘But do you really believe,’ the Stalins, Rykovs and all the other Molotovs objected dozens of times between 1905 and 1917, ‘that Russia is ripe for the socialist revolution?’ To that I always answered: No, I do not. But world economy as a whole, and European economy in the first place, is fully ripe for

the socialist revolution. Whether the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia leads to socialism or not, and at what tempo and through what stages, will depend upon the fate of European and world capitalism. (1969: 129)

Thus Russia, underdeveloped in comparison to western Europe, was, thanks to its national peculiarities, to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would promote revolution in countries that enjoyed material circumstances more favourable to socialism. Once those nations had achieved socialism they in turn could ensure its victory in Russia. The proposed sequence relied in every step on the theoretical idea that the developmental potentialities of nations are intrinsically connected.

It might seem that, given the number of addenda and refinements CAUD makes to the concept of stage, it essentially discards the concept. That is incorrect. It simply emphasizes the 'at the same time also the results of a historic process' part of Marx's formulation, that social 'forms are of course more or less naturally evolved, but at the same time also the results of a historic process' (1964: 96–7). Thus, while the concept of stages such as 'capitalism' and 'socialism' is retained as useful, at the same time analysis must focus on 'not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development' (Trotsky, 1973: 108), 'not a workers state in general, but a given workers state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement' (1973: 108), not a stage in general, but a historically particular instantiation of a general socio-material essence.

While CAUD emphasizes the 'at the same time also the results of a historic process' part of Marx's formulation, stagism stands squarely with 'more or less naturally evolved'. Karl Kautsky, whose name is commonly associated with stagism, made an analogy between a stage transition and the act of birth:

The analogy between birth and revolution, however, does not rest alone upon the suddenness of the act. If we look closer we shall find that this sudden transformation at birth is confined wholly to functions. The organs develop slowly, and must reach a certain stage of development before that leap is possible, which suddenly gives them their new functions. If the leap takes place before this stage of development is attained, the result is not the beginning of new functions for the organs, but the cessation of all functions – the death of the new creature . . . the slow development of organs in the body of the mother can only proceed to a certain point, they cannot begin their new functions without the revolutionary act of birth. This becomes inevitable when the development of the organs has attained a certain height. We find the same thing in society. Here also the revolutions are the result of slow, gradual development (evolution). Here also it is the social organs that develop slowly. That which may be changed suddenly, at a leap, revolutionarily, is their functions. . . . And as at the birth of the child, all the functions are simultaneously revolutionized – circulation, breathing, digestion – so all the functions . . . must be simultaneously revolutionized at one stroke, for they are all most closely bound together. (Kautsky, 1902)

This passage contains the main motifs of stagism.

First, social organs are contrasted to their functions, so that while a society may import a technology or social form of a different stage-origin, that is not stage-mixing because its function remains within the social context of the present stage. The example Kautsky gives is of a railroad. Under capitalism it may function to enrich and empower a gang of capitalists, while under socialism it may function to provide efficient transportation for the masses, but these functions are independent of the growth of the railroad as a social organ – the reach of its tracks and the speed and capacity of its trains. To Kautsky the mere presence of something like a railroad is irrelevant to a society's stage status because its function will remain within the pre-existing stage's scheme. It is only when the railroad and every other social organ reach a certain level of development that they engender a stage-break.

Trotsky basically agreed with this idea, as witnessed in the quotation where he furnished examples of various products of western European culture that served to strengthen reactionary tsarism (Trotsky, 1932: 27–8). But CAUD views the 'process of assimilation' of techno-cultural borrowings as inherently 'self-contradictory' because fitting new elements into a social web inevitably changes not only the new elements but also the web. The advanced imports are 'debased', but they also open new vistas of developmental possibility by altering society's material basis and engendering new social contradictions. To stagism, they instead are left to mature, much as the rest of society, and like a few extra oranges on a tree, whose presence does not bring any sooner the harvest.

Second, the leap between social stages is on the one hand 'inevitable' given sufficient development, and fatal without it. Kautsky hammered the latter point, likening over-eager revolutionaries to 'a pregnant woman, who performs the most foolish exercises in order to shorten the period of gestation, which makes her impatient, and thereby causes a premature birth' and cautioned that 'the result of such proceedings is, as a rule, a child incapable of life' (Kautsky, 1919). He also returned more than once to the former, arguing that:

... in all industrialised countries the proletariat must, along with the development of industry itself, inexorably gain in strength and maturity, and its eventual victory is assured. And this victory, which will arise from the struggles of countless millions, cannot depend on whether or not any single individual has caught the right moment for it. (Kautsky, 1925)

This heavy lean towards structure underlies much of stagism, and can be contrasted to CAUD's more balanced view of the agency–structure dialectic:

History has provided the basic premise for the success of this revolution... History does not at all assume upon itself – in place of the working class, in place of the politicians of the working class, in place of the Communists – the solution of this entire task. (Trotsky, 1974)

Third, stagism claims that ‘all the functions’ must be ‘simultaneously revolutionized’. This is part and parcel of the conception of a divide between the growth of social organs and the alteration of their function. CAUD also recognizes that there are moments when the ‘slow accumulation of changes at a certain moment explodes the old shell and brings about a catastrophe, revolution’ (Trotsky, 1973: 111), but further argues that the chaotic and haphazard nature of development leads to a constancy of change, not just of the strength and significance of social institutions, but of their function. Where the stagist sees stages as clean breaks from the past, ‘entirely distinct’ ‘and also separated by great distances of time from each other’ in the words of Trotsky, CAUD paints a more complex picture, in which for instance archaic institutions may survive after the revolutionary break and later become the object of struggle, as the feudal institution of the Church has survived many countries’ bourgeois and even socialist revolutions.

So while both stagism and CAUD accept a basic Marxist frame for their debate, there are significant differences in their approaches. The spirit of each can be summed up by a representative quotation. To CAUD ‘the laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism’ (Trotsky, 1932: 28), while to stagism there is no way to ‘clear by bold leaps . . . the obstacles offered by the successive phases of . . . normal development’ (Kautsky, 1919, quoting Marx’s preface to the first edition of *Capital*, vol. 1).

Gordon Childe: between stagism and combined and uneven development

The present author believes that CAUD represents the spirit of dialectical materialism and that stagism, especially in its more rigid forms, is a distortion and even a falsification of Marxism. To justify this view would take endless pages, as it also would delve into the vicissitudes of the historical debate between stagism and CAUD in an attempt to determine which side has been favoured by history. Therefore, the author simply takes the value of CAUD as given, and seeks to investigate what CAUD can offer archaeology.

One of the more frequently discussed stage transitions in archaeology is the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition. V.G. Childe, an early Marxist archaeologist, called this ‘the Neolithic revolution’ and took it to be one of the decisive moments of human history. Much of the theory of this archaeological titan has stood the test of time, and certainly it has framed subsequent discourse (Patterson, 2003: 53–89). Analysis of his work reveals an uneasy balance of stagism and CAUD. Understanding the dynamics of this balance can serve as a point of departure for a new theory of the Neolithic based thoroughly in CAUD.

Childe took Neolithic to mean 'food-producing'. Explicitly following Morgan (Childe, 1954: 30), he labelled food-producers as 'barbarians', while food-gatherers were 'savages'. The Neolithic revolution was thus a revolution in foodways, other technological advances being of a less important character:

The polished stone celt used to be regarded by archaeological systematists as the type fossil of the neolithic phase. And it was of course used by most, but not all, neolithic societies... But it hardly seems sufficiently important to define a phase that is better characterized by the epoch-making development of food-production. (Childe, 1944: 30)

To Childe the advent of the Neolithic was the precondition for human progress, the only way to escape 'the impasse of savagery' (Childe, 1954: 55; also 1965: 69): 'In early and primitive societies the quest for food was and is the most absorbing preoccupation for all members of the group. The enlargement of the food-supply was therefore presumably the indispensable condition for human progress' (Childe, 1944: 2). So far, so generically Marxist.

Childe viewed Neolithic communities as tending towards small, kinship-based agglomerations:

In any case it may be assumed that the clan structure and community based on 'kinship' survived the neolithic revolution unscathed. Among barbarians today land is normally held by the clan in common. If not tilled collectively, plots are allotted to individual 'families' for use only and are generally redistributed annually. Pastures are of course commons. (Childe, 1954: 73)

The members of these 'social organisms' 'all cooperated for collective tasks', on the evidence of the 'ditches, fences, or stockades' that surrounded 'many neolithic villages in western Europe and in the Balkans' (Childe, 1954: 66–7).

To Childe the essence of the way of life in these Neolithic villages came down to a particular configuration of three Ss: specialization, self-sufficiency and surplus. His basic thesis was that:

On the analogy of modern barbarians each neolithic household would grow and prepare its own food, make its own pots, clothes, tools, and other requisites. . . . Moreover each village could be self-sufficing. It grew its own food and could make all essential equipment from materials locally available – stone, bone, wood, clay, and so on. This potential self-sufficiency of the territorial community and the absence of specialization within it may be taken as the differentiae of neolithic barbarism to distinguish it from civilization and the higher barbarisms of the Metal Ages. A corollary therefrom is that a neolithic economy offers no material inducement to the peasant to produce more than he needs to support himself and his family and provide for the next harvest. If each household does that, the community can survive without a surplus. (Childe, 1954: 67)

The Neolithic was thus characterized by a prioritization of self-sufficiency both at the household and village level, and a dearth of surplus and

specialization. But Childe recognized that this was only an essence, and within the bounds of tolerance it could be and was varied upon – a dialectical approach rather than an Aristotelian one. He recognized particularly that all over Europe there were examples of intercommunal specialization in flint procurement (Childe, 1944: 61, 1954: 68, 1965: 87) and declared the ‘miners’ ‘highly skilled specialists’ who ‘almost certainly lived by bartering their products for the surplus corn and meat produced by farmers’ (1954: 68). Even non-specialized ‘self-sufficing communities’ ‘were not mutually isolated; they exchanged pots and doubtless other commodities,’ at least in Greece (Childe, 1975: 99). So ‘the self-sufficiency of the neolithic community was potential rather than actual’ (Childe, 1954: 69, see also Childe, 1965: 86). He further admitted that surplus production, specialization and trade did exist to various degrees in different places at different times in the Neolithic (Childe, 1944: 61, see also 1965: 87).

Indeed diversity was central to Childe’s view of the Neolithic as a broad phenomenon. He recognized that the Neolithic lifeway was much varied over space and time, and stated this plainly:

There is no ‘neolithic culture’, but a limitless multitude of neolithic cultures. Each is distinguished by the varieties of plants cultivated or of animals bred, by a different balance between cultivation and stock-breeding, by divergences in the location of settlements, in the plan and construction of houses, the shape and material of axes and other tools, the form and decoration of the pots, and by still greater disparities in burial rites, fashions in amulets, and styles of art. Each culture represents an approximate adaptation to a specific environment with an ideology more or less adequate thereto. The diversity results from a multiplicity of minor discoveries or inventions, at first purely local and conditioned by geological or climatic or botanical peculiarities, or from arbitrary, i.e. unexplained, idiosyncracies. (Childe, 1954: 70, see also 1965: 87)

It is worth noting that the reason for the differences are both evolutionary, as cultures are ‘an approximate adaptation to a specific environment’, but also historically contingent, resulting also from ‘arbitrary’, ‘unexplained’ sources and thence spreading, as they are only ‘at first purely local’. Childe in this quotation balances stagist evolutionism with combined and uneven development and historicity.

Childe leans toward CAUD in passages where he recognizes spatio-temporal combination in development. Temporally, he was comfortable making the argument that Mesolithic populations ‘might be postulated to explain peculiarities in the local neolithic culture’ (Childe, 1975: 124) as well as generalities, such as community structure which had ‘survived the neolithic revolution unscathed’ (Childe, 1954: 73). The implicit idea is that, as CAUD argues, stage transitions are not clean breaks from the past. Childe also saw that the potentialities of social development were intertwined spatially on the basis of supra-societal economic relations:

... in amassing evidence for trade, archaeologists are disclosing one decisive factor in the economic revolutions that delimit the major phases in human

history. The urban revolution transformed the self-sufficing village of barbarism into a city symbol of civilization, when – at least for armaments – imported bronze became indispensable for survival and the supply was accordingly organized. The Industrial Revolution rests upon a world supply of food-stuffs to support the manufacturing population and a world market to consume mass-produced commodities. (Childe, 1944: 59)

Thus Childe follows CAUD in asserting that it is not only socially internal features that drive development, but also external ones.

Childe's approach to the end of the Neolithic shows a balance between CAUD and stagism. To him the 'decisive' move to cultivation, though sufficient 'to distinguish barbarism from savagery', was in actuality only 'the first step' in the Neolithic revolution (Childe, 1954: 55). It engendered contradictions. These were, chiefly, a contradiction between population growth and available land, resulting in a 'flood of expanding peasantry', and a contradiction between a desire for self-sufficiency and the impossibility of attaining that in a 'self-contained and isolated community' on which nature might visit any number of cruel disasters (Childe, 1954: 73–6). When sufficient technological advances had been made, these contradictions were overcome by the urban revolution:

The worst contradictions in the neolithic economy were transcended when farmers were persuaded or compelled to wring from the soil a surplus above their own domestic requirements, and when this surplus was made available to support new economic classes not directly engaged in producing their own food. The possibility of producing the requisite surplus was inherent in the very nature of the neolithic economy. Its realization, however, required additions to the stock of applied science at the disposal of all barbarians, as well as a modification in social and economic relations. The thousand years or so immediately preceding 3000 B.C. were perhaps more fertile in fruitful inventions and discoveries than any period in human history prior to the sixteenth century A.D. Its achievements made possible that economic reorganization of society that I term the urban revolution. (Childe, 1954: 77)

This was the end of the Neolithic: 'The citizens include artisans, merchants, priests, officials, and even clerks. A novel economic order has arisen; new classes have climbed on the backs of the peasantry; the historical period has begun; an economic revolution has been completed' (Childe, 1944: 22). Here we see a touch of stagism – a progression of 'further advances' being made 'on the basis of the neolithic economy' (1944: 12) expands the forces of production until finally the switch of surplus production is thrown and an explosive social reorganization takes place. But there is an equal dose of CAUD. 'Modification in social and economic relations' is cited along with 'additions of the stock of applied science' – that contentious claim of permanent revolution, that is, struggle not just to develop the organs of society but also over their function. And the final revolutionary break was not predetermined: while the birthplace of the urban revolution in Mesopotamia was assigned to predispositions of its particular prehistoric

economic geography in accelerating Neolithic contradictions by both fostering and necessitating trade (Childe, 1954: 88, 98), at the same time 'From a Marxian analysis all that one can deduce is the dilemma – revolution or paralysis. History does not disclose an unfaltering march to a predetermined goal' (Childe, 1947: 73). Childe provided the examples of 'Mesopotamia, Egypt and China' where 'theocratic despotism, relations of production appropriate to the productive forces of the Bronze Age, persisted into the Iron Age' and 'effectively fettered the exploitation of the new forces represented by iron with the result that technology also stagnated' to support his claim (1947: 73).

Childe re-worked

Overall Childe struck a balance between combined and uneven development and stagism in his seminal theorization of the Neolithic. It seems that his natural instinct ran towards CAUD – he was more a diffusionist than an evolutionist – though he also included numerous stagist conceptions.

There is one argument that puts the more techno-mechanical aspects of Childe's work down to the socio-political spheres in which he orbited. Childe was a Marxist and a 'fellow traveller' of the USSR:

Though he never joined the British Communist Party, he was a regular reader of its paper, the *Daily Worker*, often spoke at party organised events, attended meetings of the Communist Party Historians' Group, and was a high profile advocate of friendship and cultural contact with the Soviet Union' (Faulkner, 2007)

During the era of October the Bolshevik party was a party of CAUD, but as Stalinist degeneration set in the theory of 'socialism in one country' replaced the theory of world revolution and stagism accordingly supplanted combined and uneven development:

Having abandoned revolutionary internationalism, Stalin claimed to be building 'socialism in one country'... Soviet archaeologists were ordered to interpret prehistory as a preordained succession of stages, and, moreover, as one which could proceed in one society independently of – indeed, in complete isolation from – the rest of the world. To advocate diffusion . . . was considered reactionary... Stalinism interpreted the past as a mechanical succession of predetermined stages of independent social development. The moderate cultural diffusion that Childe advocated, with its implication of global cultural cross-fertilisation and distinctive political histories, was therefore anathema . . . to the Stalinists whom Childe regarded as mentors. (Faulkner, 2007)

This could not fail to affect Childe as he made 'contact with Soviet archaeologists', became 'familiar with their material' and allowed 'himself to be influenced by the theoretical framework they were using to structure data' (Faulkner, 2007). And at points in Childe's writing this influence is apparent – in the preface to a revised edition of *The Dawn*, where he declares that

'Mongai't's pertinent criticisms in his Introduction to the Russian translation, have induced a less dogmatically "Orientalist" attitude than I adopted in 1925' (Childe, 1975: 33), or in *What Happened in History* where he expresses a diffusionist opinion, but qualifies it as merely 'the contention of the diffusionists', when he was perfectly prepared to make the same assertion elsewhere without any qualification (Childe, 1954: 58, 67).

But despite these obvious influences, Faulkner takes too dim a view of Childe's capability to critically assess his Soviet colleagues. He was no slavish disciple, and in fact dismissed the Soviet tendency towards narrow evolutionism as 'an ideological defence against Hitlerism' (McNairn, 1980: 165). It has been pointed out that Childe's scholarship was never in line with Soviet orthodoxy (McNairn, 1980: 153–8), and the claim that Childe regarded Soviet archaeologists as 'mentors' appears based on an arrogant boast by the Soviet archaeologist Alexander Mongai't (Trigger, 1980: 14–15) rather than on any admission of Childe's.

Childe's stagist, or mechanical evolutionist, inclination is better explained by internal factors. In *History* he outlined a typical, if unrefined, Marxist conception of the historical process, paying heed to relations of production, ideology and agents besides just forces of production (1947: 68–80). But despite this apparent felicity with standard Marxist thought, Childe in his actual interpretation relied disproportionately on technological explication. There are several reasons. First, he insinuated that since tools are a common archaeological find, archaeology should be especially concerned with technology. Second, Childe was an optimist about human progress, and technology is a part of human life in which a story of progress is clearly told (Childe, 1944: 1, 109). Third, it is possible that Childe had an unorthodox interpretation of Marx (McNairn, 1980: 124).

Childe's stagist tendencies can therefore be attributed to a variety of factors, from Stalinist influence through to various scholarly particularities. But stagism was only part of Childe's theoretical approach. If one treats it as a hindrance, a theoretical error, and looks at his work from the perspective of CAUD while filtering out the stagism, a new theory emerges. To reiterate, the point is not to faithfully reproduce Childe, which would only repeat that which has been read by everyone anyway. The point is to apply a theoretical scalpel to his work and extract a new theory, one free of dubious Marxism. Once one looks past the salutes to Stalinism, the dutiful but unimpressed adherence to Morgan's evolutionary scheme, the quest to validate the three-age system, in short the obeisance to a rigid stagism, a vibrant theory becomes visible, one squarely rooted in combined and uneven development. This may not be the theory of Childe, but it is a theory based on Childe.

Childe called the adoption of cultivation 'the first step' in the Neolithic revolution. Childe did say that 'the first step' of adopting cultivation was sufficient 'to distinguish barbarism from savagery'. But it appears as a dutiful recognition of the Morgan–Engels scheme, something along the

lines of his life-long quest to prove that 'Thomsen's ages coincided with major stages in man's socio-economic development' (McNairn, 1980: 83; see Childe, 1935, 1951: 22–7), and can be disregarded as an error of stagism. After all, Childe took the essence of the Neolithic to be self-sufficiency on a village and household scale, and a low level of surplus, specialization and trade. A corollary of this economic configuration is a lack of inequality, for there is little exploitable labour upon which to base it. But Mesolithic societies also had all of those traits. On the basis of this essence there is no difference between the two. Indeed, the idea of a sharp contrast between the Neolithic and the Mesolithic, a given of Childe's stagism, is contradicted by many of his other observations and ideas (Childe, 1951: 84, 1954: 73, 1965: 71, 82).

Theoretically such a difference is unsustainable. An economic revolution by itself is merely an expansion of the forces of production. In Marxism this is not a real revolution; Childe was introducing his own variation on Marxism with this concept. A revolution in the typical Marxist sense is a social revolution to overcome contradictions engendered by expansion of the forces of production and to restructure society in order to allow the social organs to continue to grow. That is something even Kautsky and Trotsky would agree on.

Anthropological investigation buttresses this point. Anthropologists have sought to delineate differences between hunter-gatherer and food-producer social outlooks. But, regardless of what differences one accepts as real, the question of the nature of the transition remains. One anthropologist studying this process made the following warning:

In changing the emphasis from subsistence to the ideological basis of diverse economies, different sets of social relations became apparent. Like modes of production, modes of thought are in 'articulation'; and in my observations in southern Africa, the foraging mode of thought has proven more resilient than either traditionalist or revisionist understandings would predict. My concern has been with the continuity of the foraging mode of thought in transitional societies (i.e. ones that no longer practise 'pure' foraging but possess livestock or crops), and it is apparent at least in the Kalahari that the transition is a slow one; people can hold on to ideologies reflecting foraging for generations, even when their systems of production have undergone transition. (Barnard, 2007: 8)

Barnard went on to add that 'generations' was only the anthropologically observed duration and that the full time-scale could well be on the order of millennia (2007: 14). His conclusion was that what his and others' ethnographic observations 'indicate is that mode of thought is slower to change than mode of production. Social relations (relations of production, if you like) retain the structures of hunter-gatherer times if these are deeply rooted in cultural understandings of sociality' (2007: 14).

When Childe called the adoption of cultivation 'the first step' in the Neolithic revolution, he had in mind as further steps the technological

advances that were made before the Bronze Age (Childe, 1954: 77). But, in a passage of a rarer type, he also recognized that:

The 'neolithic revolution' was not a catastrophe, but a process. Its several stages were doubtless modifying the social institutions and magico-religious ideas of food gatherers and hunters. But it would be long before any new system or systems, more appropriate to the nascent economy, became firmly established. Ere then the second revolution may already have been beginning. (1965: 99)

Permanent revolution, the implacable enemy of stagism, raises its head. This is the true characterization of the Neolithic – a period of accentuated contradictions issuing from a material basis that was increasingly misarticulated with relations of production and ideological superstructure. And it is no coincidence that Childe finds that 'new . . . systems, more appropriate to the nascent economy' only 'became firmly established' 'ere . . . the [beginning of the] second revolution'. That is because the second revolution – the urban revolution – was in reality the only revolution. The second revolution was a reordering of social relations, when 'new classes' 'climbed on the backs of the peasantry' (Childe, 1944: 22), unlike the so-called Neolithic revolution, which was purely economic and had no class content.

To sum up, once the stagism is filtered out, Childe's theory of the Neolithic revolution is the theory that the whole Neolithic was a revolution. In other words, *we should not be talking about the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition, we should be talking about the Neolithic transition*. The Neolithic was not a stage in itself, it was a transitional phase – the dying throes of an old way of life mixed with the birth pangs of a new. Childe himself admitted this, in his own way: 'Perhaps any new system of organization and belief, adapted to the neolithic economy, had not become established and rooted when the economy itself began to dissolve in the Orient' (1965: 100).

In Europe this transitional phase was a period of CAUD. Europe only began to receive the economic innovations that had been brewing in south-west Asia after they had developed and multiplied for thousands of years. The gradual economic changes that characterized the advent of the Neolithic in south-west Asia were not a necessary feature of the process in Europe. In some cases they may have been, but the other option, the sudden receipt of thousands of years of technological innovations – in agriculture, pastoralism, pottery, stone tool technology and undoubtedly more – was also available. Therefore, while the Neolithic did not necessarily mark an immediate social revolution, in Europe there is every indication that the period was one of accelerated possibilities and historically unique combinations.

Following the theory of CAUD, the transitional character of the Neolithic was not confined to a progression of technological advances within a given social paradigm culminating in a stage transition. Rather, social renegotiation was endemic – a heightened state of activity in the

permanent revolution. In this excited matrix of development and contradictions, there were 'many Neolithics', each proceeding on its own course of technological progress and social renegotiation. These Neolithics, however, were mutually influencing and affected the potentialities of each other's development through both diffusion and the effects of supra-societal interaction.

The final result – stage transition to a new socio-economic configuration characterized by surplus production, social inequality and trade – was neither homogeneous nor predetermined. For instance, there is an obvious difference in how Middle Eastern and south-eastern European societies resolved their contradictions – an urban revolution versus demographic de-agglomeration. Particular social histories, particular trajectories of technological advance and population growth, particular roles in the supra-societal world, and the actions of agents of change all play a role in leading to heterogeneous solutions to essentially the same historical contradictions.

Neolithic studies – economy versus ideology

A division on archaeological thinking on the Neolithic in the first instance comes over the question of definition, and it is not a matter of pedantry but a matter of understanding. To one approach:

... defined in a polythetic way and deprived of a common central characteristic, Neolithization remains a vague and vaporous neologism, any concrete meaning of which is obliterated by the polythetic nature of the phenomenon and the regionally variable composition of its attributes ... (Zvelebil and Lillie, 2000: 60)

And the best way to define the Neolithic is monothetically by 'the development of agro-pastoral farming' (2000: 60). The other way of thinking objects to those:

who have equated the word 'Neolithic' with 'agriculture', and proceed to discuss the developments of the period concerned as if all of the cultural and social innovations were subsidiary to the inception of farming ... [as] while in some cases the availability of domesticates may have immediately brought about far-reaching changes, in others the first moves towards agriculture and pastoralism may have taken place in the context of other changes which may have been of equal or greater significance. (Thomas, 1999: 13)

This approach thus prefers a polythetic definition based in social practice – the Neolithic belongs to the 'realm of ideas' (Thomas, 1991: 7). Both sides accuse the other of decoupling ideology and subsistence (Rowley-Conwy, 2004; Thomas, 1991: 7). But decoupling is not the issue. The real issue for each side is that the other assigns priority to its favoured sphere. That is true in both cases, and it is why both approaches are insufficient.

The economic view follows Childe in defining the Neolithic by the advent of farming. This view categorizes Neolithization as ‘the biggest single upheaval that Northwestern Europe has ever undergone’, and stresses the great speed at which the uptake of multiple new techno-cultural traits occurred (Rowley-Conwy, 2004), and evidence for a rapid and sweeping shift in diet away from marine resources (Richards and Hedges, 1999). The spirit can be summed up by an evocative quotation:

Agriculture was an economic juggernaut moving fitfully across Europe and overwhelming previous ways of life... [T]he arrival of agriculture was an unforeseeable contingency, and the upheaval it caused must have been huge. For the successful reproduction of local forager descent groups, agriculture must have been a catastrophe. It is almost inconceivable that any socio-ethnic groups survived intact across the transition. Major movements of people were probably frequent. (Rowley-Conwy, 2004)

It is no wonder that detractors have accused such narratives of rehashing the aggressive migrationism and technological fetishism rooted in the ‘traditional, culture-historical approach’ and the ‘palaeoeconomic’ perspective’ (Thomas, 1991: 7; e.g. Case, 1969; Cole, 1963) by treating the uptake of Neolithic technological elements as a revolution in and of itself and stressing the component of migration in the Neolithization process.

We have already seen that, as a point of theory, a techno-material definition is not sufficient to delineate a new stage, a revolution, as this view indubitably insinuates. This is the error of Childe’s technological stagism revived. Besides being theoretically unsustainable, there is also evidence that, in Europe, there were no ‘clear-cut boundaries between the’ ‘created entities’ of foragers and farmers (Borić, 1999; see also Barker, 2006: 379; Higgs and Jarman, 1969). Anthropological comparison indicates that this would not be unusual: ‘Economy was often, perhaps usually, *not* the main way in which Native American tribes defined themselves and their relations with their neighbours’ (Robb and Miracle, 2007: 106).

Of course not every economy-oriented account sees a fitful ‘economic juggernaut’ ‘overwhelming previous ways of life’. Higgs and Jarman (1969), for instance, took the social reality of the period to be complex and more resemble shades of gray than black and white, while Barker found that ‘many early Holocene foragers in Europe were practising forms of behaviour that presaged the animal and plant husbandry systems of Eurasian agro-pastoralism long before they came into contact with the latter’ (2006: 379). But even where economy-oriented approaches avoid the pitfall of the Neolithic revolution concept, the theoretical error of removing the material basis from its dialectical role remains. As Marx put it in criticizing Feuerbach’s materialism: ‘The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism . . . is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object . . . not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively’ (1969). No approach can produce a complete historical analysis

without an account of the interplay of relations of production, ideology and agents.

The ideological approach, which may be contrasted to the economic approach in that it emphasizes precisely the latter two factors, is a hallmark of post-processualism. Daily routines, monumentality, relationship to landscape, social memory, modes of sensory perception, structural transformation, and similar ideologically laden structures and practices are argued to be the motive forces of the Neolithic (Bradley, 1998, 2000; Edmonds, 1999; Hodder, 1990; Thomas, 1991, 1999, 2003, 2007; Tilley, 1996, 2007; Whittle, 1996, 2003). The approach is suspicious of any more economic-oriented outlook on the grounds that it might reduce ideological elements to the status of epiphenomena (Thomas, 2003, 2007: 423). Instead, it views ideology as a motive force:

The Mesolithic/Neolithic 'transition' in Europe has been argued to have been primarily neither technological or economic in character but a matter of changing ideologies of modes of thought mediated through material forms. . . . [I]f we are to talk about causality the Neolithic was a matter of mind over matter or circumstances, a triumph of the will, a new set of ideas . . . (Tilley, 2007: 329)

While this approach has added value to Neolithic studies, especially given the historical domination of materialism, its central claim, that the Neolithic is primarily an ideological phenomenon, can hardly be substantiated. It is like claiming that Dada shaped the modern period. But Dada was a cultural reaction to the inhumanity of the Great War, a war of predatory imperialism inextricably connected to the system of socio-economic organization – capitalism. On the contrary, every epoch has its struggle, now open, now concealed, over socio-economic contradictions, and it is this that gives it its character. To deny this, as does postmodernism, is, like Dada, a symptom of intellectual demoralization in the face of materially triumphant reaction. Shell-shocked, there only remains a retreat into 'the "lite" politics that are prevalent in Anglo-Saxon social sciences today', 'skimmed versions of radical critics', 'depoliticizing mechanism(s)' and ultimately a 'de-marxified version of Marx' (González-Ruibal, 2006).

Analysis of Alasdair Whittle's *The Archaeology of People: Dimensions of Neolithic Life* (2003) can flesh out this critique in an archaeological context. This wide-ranging, thought-provoking book can be regarded as a good example of post-processual Neolithic archaeology. Whittle begins from the premise that 'routines are the stuff of life: innumerable, repeated actions, which time after time keep the world in existence' (2003: 22), and proceeds to analyse different routines in different places and times in Neolithic Europe: routines of movement, food procurement and consumption, bodily adornment and treatment, and experiencing monuments are considered. The book then investigates aspects of the construction of identity, the possible social significance of animals, the social construction of memory, and numerous other factors that went into

producing the many and varied lifeways of the Neolithic. The author's conclusion is that the 'many sidedness' and 'frequent messiness of existence' indicates in the Neolithic there are 'different kinds of history to the single story of directed change' as 'people cannot be reduced to single dimensions, because they existed inescapably in a complex web of routines, socialities and networks, relationships with animals, memories and attitudes to the past, and sanctioning values created by the shared moral community' (Whittle, 2003: 1, 166). 'Fluid identities' make people 'hard to pin down' (2003: 166), and since 'profound and lasting structural change would require alterations in many if not all the dimensions of what constituted identity' it is difficult, perhaps pointless, to think of 'any generalising explanations' (2003: 166).

In substantiating his argument Whittle focuses on the symbolic articulation of daily practice in order to explore the multi-faceted identities generated by the many *habitués* of the Neolithic. He notes that 'routines are embodied, but rarely neutral in meaning', 'the consumption of food is not neutral', and 'the body was rarely neutral' (2003: 22, 27, 30) and commonly makes statements of like implication. What Whittle is saying is that these features of life are not given, but that they are symbolically articulated in ways that contribute to social reproduction. This conception, undoubtedly valid, necessarily implies a universe of other social possibilities – otherwise the features would actually be 'neutral'. What is lacking is an analysis of the interrelated nature of the possible changes, an interrelation that arises from both their origin in a singular culture facing a particular set of socio-economic contradictions and the fact that the social changes in each routine, each aspect of daily life, must make some modicum of sense with regard to each other. They therefore have a degree of thematic unity. For example, socialism and fascism both originated in European culture faced with the socio-economic contradictions of capitalism, and posed solutions that represented a coherent set of changes in a variety of routines and aspects of identity. Similarly, in the Neolithic, the contradiction between both the possibility and the actuality of an ever increasing surplus and a social life hostile to, or at least unprepared for such a surplus, must have lent some degree of thematic unity to the developmental possibilities.

To deny this, to see aspects of identity as fragmented and disconnected, not interrelated and given thematic direction by the socio-economic milieu, is only possible when ideology is removed from its dialectical role and instead treated as causal. The proof that this is an error is that history discloses results with a degree of homogeneity – the adoption of varieties of fascism in Italy, then Germany and Spain, or in the case of Neolithic Europe, the expansion of tumuli and related practices. Each was appropriate to its socio-material circumstances – they could not have developed fascism in Neolithic Europe, nor could they have returned to Bronze Age sociality in the 20th century – 'ideas do not drop from the sky' (Trotsky,

2007: 119, citing Labriola), no thinker can 'go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch' (Engels, 1970).

These points have long been used by Marxists to critique ideology-centric views, particularly those advanced by the so-called utopian or non-scientific socialists, who thought that achieving socialism was simply a matter of thinking up the right ideas. To the utopian socialists 'when and where' the discovery of this 'absolute truth' is made is 'a mere accident', and once discovered it will 'conquer all the world by virtue of its own power' (Engels, 1970). Similarly, ideology-first Neolithic scholarship, by shearing ideology from its socio-material roots, renders the development of ideas 'a mere accident', and their success or failure a matter of their 'own power'. But even a cursory thought experiment reveals that ideas rest on material foundations, and that their success or failure is based not only on their own power, but on the power of those to whom they are appealing.

Post-processualists would undoubtedly argue that they do not disconnect ideology from material basis. It is true that they do study economic practice – for instance, Whittle's investigation of animal husbandry. But studying the symbolic articulation of man–animal relations does not equate to studying the dialectical relationship of material basis and ideological superstructure, as from that school's perspective stock-keeping could be any practice – the subject of the practice is arbitrary, the ideological implications are what is interesting, the material ones secondary. The post-processualist might counter by claiming that the most starkly ideology-centric views were a product of the fight to counter materialist domination in the early period of post-processualism, and that since that time the Hegelian triad has been completed and a new synthesis is now embodied in their outlook, citing as evidence the more refined rhetorical formulations popular among post-processualists today. But softening the contours need not change the essence of a shape, and the occasional brazen statements, such as the one, previously quoted, by Tilley, matched with a general continuity of the style and content of work reveal that the essence of post-processualism remains qualitatively the same. Indeed, the alternative name 'interpretive archaeology' (the successor term to 'symbolic archaeology') gives the game away from the very first.

To return to Whittle, his main concern seems to be to refute the 'model of steady and ultimately directed change', 'the nineteenth-century idea of evolution' that 'has had a long hold on archaeology' (2003: 163). This valuable endeavour he executes well. But there is more than one theoretical approach that would take this step. Real Marxism also rejects rigid stagism – 'the closed rings of the eternal categories . . . which have reality only as marks on the brain of a pedant' (Trotsky, 2007: 119) – and the brand of evolution that 'has been completely corrupted and emasculated by university professors and liberal writers to mean peaceful "progress" rather than 'the struggle of antagonistic forces' (Trotsky, 1973: 111). The paths diverge after this rejection. Whittle, like Dada, opts to destroy – to replace

an outmoded logic with a resolute anti-logic; to reject patterns. A Marxist approach would instead pursue analysis based on dialectical logic, CAUD and permanent revolution.

Conclusion – CAUD in the Neolithic

Both the economic view and the ideological view of the Neolithic are incomplete. This can be seen in the way each of them approaches the question of Europe's Neolithic CAUD.

The economic view has a tendency to take evidence for CAUD and turn it into evidence for migration. But the uptake of several technological advances at once does not indicate a new people or a revolution. To use an example already furnished, Tsar Peter I's simultaneous adoption of numerous modernizations – techno-cultural importations from western Europe – neither signalled the conquest of Russia by France nor a revolutionary overthrow of Tsarism and serfdom. This historical example has its convincing counterpart in archaeological argumentation (Robb and Miracle, 2007). The substitution of a banal and homogenizing migration for the historic richness of a situation of CAUD is often a sad corollary of an economy-first, tending towards an economy-only, approach.

By reducing the Neolithic to an ideological phenomenon the ideological approach also misses the historical succulence of Europe's Neolithic CAUD. If it is simply a matter of ideologies of local Mesolithic groups eventually coming round to the new Neolithic way of being, then the significances of the external origin and the long-brewing development of the excitative technologies are lost. The 'self-contradictory' 'process of assimilation' is discarded, along with all of its historical piquancy, because there was supposedly nothing to assimilate – the characteristic ideas were indigenously developed. This is like the anti-diffusionist evolutionism of the Soviet archaeologists, only applied to ideology.

In contrast to a forces-of-production or an ideological definition of the Neolithic, a Marxist approach must define any epoch by the relations of production. Capitalism is not reduced to factory work, nor is it equated to any of the various ideologies that contribute to its reproduction. It is defined by the middle step, the relations of production: wage labour, capital as the source of economic power, economic organization in pursuit of profit. In the case of the Neolithic there is no indication that the relations of production were changed from the Mesolithic. Therefore the Neolithic should be classed as the same stage as the Mesolithic – a social configuration of 'primitive communism' marked by relations of production hostile to surplus, communal self-sufficiency, low levels of specialization and low levels of trade. But the material basis was expanded, introducing contradictions. Thus the Neolithic can be characterized as a transition phase. In Europe the phase was based on the spread of exogenous technological

elements that had for a long time developed elsewhere, hence CAUD is applicable. It is only by conceiving of a dialectic of material basis and ideology, framed by relations of production and socio-economic contradictions, in the context of historically particular CAUD, that the Neolithic can be understood.

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