Jack Lindsay’s Alienation

by Ben Harker

Marx struggled all his days to free
Our minds and hearts from slavish lies,
So we might live in harmony
With nature and our fellows here.
(Jack Lindsay, ‘The Fetish Thing’)1

In early 1936 the Australian-born Jack Lindsay (1900–90) had been in Britain for a decade and had established himself, through over thirty published books, as a freelance classicist, translator, poet and historical novelist. Finding himself between projects, and contemplating a new work on the synergies between Freud and Marx, he bought the major works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, which, as he later admitted, he’d until that point pontificated upon but barely read.2 ‘From almost the first moment’, he wrote fifty years later in his autobiography, ‘I felt that . . . I had come home’. The texts yielded the ‘missing links’ in his ‘dialectical system’, triggering a conversion to Marxism which, while by no means unusual in his generation, was initially at least strikingly philosophical and theoretical rather than practical and political.3 It was an intellectual encounter, Lindsay later insisted, inseparable from an ongoing psychodrama (Lindsay’s interest in Freud was by no means purely theoretical). Reading the Marxist classics, Lindsay later claimed, enabled him to confront and transcend the ideas and identity of his father, the larger-than-life Australian painter and aesthete Norman Lindsay, of whose Nietzschean sexual utopianism Lindsay junior had formerly been a zealous, if conflicted, apostle. Whereas Norman Lindsay’s key text, Creative Effort (1920), had previously affirmed for Lindsay junior a vision of an intellectual elite bringing transcendental insights to benighted humanity (Jack was flattered to be included in such distinguished company), Marxism promised to restore to the whole of humanity its creative and productive essence and was naturally more compatible with the abiding socialism that Jack had never shared with his right-wing father.4 The political implication of that conversion to Marxism in the 1936 moment of Popular Fronts and the Soviet Constitution seemed obvious to Lindsay. ‘The Soviet Union and the C.P.s of the world’ presented themselves to him as the unlikely means to individualization and identity, ‘the new form of authority’, as he put it, ‘to which I could yield pure allegiance’.5

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The accuracy of Lindsay’s reading of his Marxist turn is impossible to judge, but he was certainly ‘ripe’ for Marxism, and his commitment to these new forms of authority would exceed in length and breadth that of many of his contemporaries. Lindsay would remain intellectually oriented by the Marxist canon for the rest of his life and loyal to the Soviet Union until its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. An enduring if paradoxical pattern was set in 1936: on the one hand a naive confidence in the Soviet Union as heralding humanity’s potential emergence from class society (a faith which alienated him from Liberal and many Leftist currents as the years went by); on the other a searching restlessness in his engagements with theoretical Marxism which soon set him at odds with the Communist Party of Great Britain, although he would never revoke his membership. Little that happened to him in the rest of his life or to his subsequent reputation makes sense without reference to this pattern and its paradoxes, including the unmappable vastness of his oeuvre. From 1936 this always prolific freelancer believed that Marxism needed to be tested ‘in field after field, situation after situation’, a compulsion that drove ever more frenetic critical and creative endeavour (Lindsay recognized no distinction between the two). Books were sometimes conceived and written in a matter of weeks, and he published a further forty-three works between 1936 and the end of 1950; neither George Orwell nor Graham Greene was more visible in Britain’s book pages in those years. By the end of his life Lindsay had published another ninety books, making a total of one hundred and fifty authored books and twenty more of translated and edited works, ranging across fiction, anthropology, historiography, classics, science, biography, autobiography, philology, philosophy, poetry, Marxist theory, polemic and travel writing. Unifying the great breadth was what Lindsay thought of as a single subject, ‘the forms in which humanity has kept on realising itself and its relations to nature’, and more specifically ‘the alienating process (in Marx’s sense) and the struggle against it’. Individual works were always regarded by Lindsay as micro articulations of his evolving macro system, and he was incensed by accounts of his work which failed to see this.

Posterity has not been kind to Jack Lindsay, this self-confessed ‘odd man out’ and ‘continuing outsider’. His work has been described as a ‘magnificent ruin’ and is today almost entirely out of print. Isolated works remain valued within individual disciplines, especially his richly contextualized biographies of artists and writers, and there have been recent signs of critical appraisal, especially around his importance as a historical novelist. But the overarching politico-cultural project within which the works were written – the Marxist metalanguage in whose terms they are most legible – sank gradually in cultural visibility through the Cold War, disappearing suddenly through the cracks that opened during the traumatic realignments of the British Left in the post-1956 decade. Lindsay has left little trace. The purpose of this article is to restore to view his post-1936 trajectory by exploring the alienation of Jack Lindsay in both senses, asking what he thought, how
and why it was he was marginalized and what, if anything, has been lost in the process. One central claim is that Lindsay’s theoretical Marxism is not reducible to that of ‘British Communism’ or the ‘Old Left’, but exceeded and was mostly in tension with the Marxism of his party and its Soviet models, despite his political affiliation. One section of the article therefore reconstructs his formative theoretical clash with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1945, identifying what was at stake on both sides. A second section traces the consequences of that theoretical estrangement in the late 1940s and 1950s, explaining how, despite Lindsay’s oddness within his own party, his ongoing CP and Soviet-facing affiliation also isolated him from an emerging New Left with which he actually shared much theoretical ground. His absence from the debates of that 1956–68 moment, I argue, above all accounts for his ongoing invisibility in traditions of Marxist thought in Britain today. A third section catches up with the octogenarian Lindsay and his Marxism in 1981, and assesses his late theoretical work. Shaping all three sections is a concern with tracking the development of Lindsay’s Marxism in ways that will, I hope, make his wider critical and creative work more legible.

A ROOM IN A PUB

On 2 November 1945 the recently formed Writers’ Group of the Communist Party of Great Britain held a meeting at the Salisbury pub, St Martin’s Lane, in central London, attended by the party’s cultural wing and figures from the leadership. Those assembled discussed a twenty-one page document, circulated in advance, entitled ‘Marxist Theory of Culture’ and written by Jack Lindsay. The political context for Lindsay’s theoretical intervention was highly charged, and amplified its dissonant tones. Lindsay spoke in the run-up to the Eighteenth Party Congress, the first following the party leadership’s misjudgement of the General Election (pessimistic about levels of radical class feeling, the party had initially advocated a continuation of the wartime coalition). The mood in the party was duly restive: critical pre-congress resolutions and unusually open debate in the Communist press vented a widely shared perception of a leadership theoretically weak, and adrift from the working class and history’s movement. Lindsay’s typically prolific work as playwright, publisher, editor, novelist, poet, journalist and critic during 1944 and 1945 had made his own more upbeat reading of the moment abundantly clear. For him wartime production arrangements, including the Joint Production Committees in which Communists had loomed large and enhanced their prestige by managing wartime output in solidarity with the beleaguered Soviet Union, had eroded ruling-class hegemony, undermining the logic of private ownership and priming the ground for a potential process of transition towards socialism. The ‘upsurge’ of working-class participation in cultural activity across music, theatre and writing – a process assiduously promoted and chronicled by Lindsay – signalled for him a new confidence and consciousness in the
‘rising class’, weakening the hold of established, metropolitan elites and opening out the cultural field. In his more optimistic moments Lindsay sensed a ‘cultural revolution’ if not a new renaissance in which culture might be powerfully reconnected with society’s productive class and processes. It was certainly for Lindsay a historical fulcrum in which economic, political and cultural possibilities aligned and whose central dynamics Communists needed to grasp. His presentation linked Communism’s slowness in doing so – indeed, its inability even to recognize what was at stake – with the Communist movement’s deeper intellectual failure to produce an adequate Marxist theoretical account of culture, class and consciousness.

The epigraph to Lindsay’s presentation was lifted from What Happened in History (1942) by Lindsay’s associate, the Communist-sympathizing anthropologist V. Gordon Childe, who attended the Salisbury meeting. ‘An obsolete ideology’, it ran, ‘can hamper an economy and impede its change for longer than Marxists admit.’ The epigraph referred to the stubborn refusal of bourgeois ideology to depart history’s stage at a moment when anachronistic liberal capitalism had already been exposed as incapable of co-ordinating the economy to defeat Nazism. But reading between the lines, it also signalled inwards, suggesting conservative ideological reflexes within the Communist movement itself. This was the theme Lindsay would develop, arguing that the movement’s economist tendencies – manifested in its narrow focus on industrial militancy and its sidelining of matters of culture, tradition, national feeling and popular consciousness – were themselves a consequence of Marxism’s historical theoretical emphasis on political economy. Though that was crucial in Marx and Engels’s day, Lindsay argued, the Marxist tradition had subsequently failed to engage with and dialectically incorporate into its analysis significant twentieth-century intellectual developments (Lindsay singled out anthropology, psychology and genetics). Far from Marxism being what Fredric Jameson would later describe as an ‘untranscendable horizon’ encompassing the totality of intellectual developments into an unfolding historical narrative, its approved Communist version was for Lindsay hardening into ‘mechanistic use’ and degenerating into a parochialism masked by its bullish confidence. In particular it had failed, he argued, ‘to produce an adequate theory of culture’ (p. 21), a failure that was especially damaging in an era whose tasks were increasingly those of ‘the cultural levels’ (p. 16).

Standing behind Lindsay’s presentation, though never cited directly, were two key works central to the interwar Communist movement’s construction of theoretical Marxism: first, the thousand-page Handbook of Marxism (1935), a portable anthology of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin approved by Moscow, reprinted by the Left Book Club in 1937 and edited by leading party propagandist, Emile Burns; and second, the international Communist movement’s own good book, History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B): Short Course, a party primer constructed from the ‘orthodoxy’ of what Lindsay called ‘ruling theorists’ (p. 18). Published in 1939, edited
and authorized by the Central Committee of the CPSU, and often assumed
by party members to have been written by Stalin himself, the so-called Short
Course was accurately described by E. P. Thompson – who also attended
Lindsay’s presentation that night – as ‘a document of the very first historical
importance’, and a ‘gigantic historical fabrication’ which formed ‘the funda-
mental “education” text of Communists from Stalingrad to Cardiff and
Calcutta to Marseilles’.  It was a book which had been imported into
Britain in ten-thousand-copy consignments, promoted through a series of
intense recruitment and educational drives, and it was integral to the
Stalinization of Marxism within the Communist movement.  In particular
Lindsay focused upon the fourth chapter of the Short Course, ‘Dialectical
and Historical Materialism’, in which Marxism’s central theoretical tenets
were compressed into twenty-five irrefutable pages and which was published
separable as a tie-in pamphlet.

Protecting his flank, Lindsay presented his paper as a dutiful answer to
Stalin’s call for ‘creative Marxism’ (p. 6) and structured it, mirroring the
Short Course and the approved protocols of Communist theoretical dis-
course, around quotations from Marx and Engels. He began by quoting
the often cited passage from the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique
of Political Economy in which Marx summarized central concepts: the ‘mode
of production in material life determines the general character of the social,
political and spiritual processes of life’; ‘social existence determines’ con-
sciousness, rather than the other way round; revolutions occur when the
material forces of production come into conflict with ‘the existing relations
of production’, a process in which ‘the entire immense superstructure is
more or less rapidly transformed’ (p. 1). In the Short Course, this quotation
is presented as the final word – ‘a brilliant formulation of the essence of
historical materialism’ – encapsulating the preceding lesson. For Lindsay,
however, it was a starting point in an argument about dangerously reducti-
vist readings of Marx.

Lindsay justified his sceptical position by quoting now well-known letters
in which Engels cautioned against conclusions about ‘superstructural’ activ-
ity being deduced from economic facts, and in which he explained that his
and Marx’s earlier positions had sometimes been knowingly economist in
order to counter the entrenched idealism of their philosophical and political
opponents. Lindsay’s claim was that this very tendency straightforwardly
to read the cultural off the economic also characterized official party
Marxism and its priorities (‘something happens below, and something
abruptly happens above’ (p. 16)). His objective was to provoke a more the-
oretically sophisticated version of what Engels termed ‘dialectical reci-
procity’ (p. 7) between the categories of economic base and cultural and
intellectual superstructure, and to attempt to flesh out the position only
tantalizingly suggested by Engels himself, potentially opening space for dif-
ferent ways of conceptualizing culture and of making political and cultural
interventions.
To do this, Lindsay made a series of moves and revisions which are familiar in so far as they substantially anticipate significant later theoretical shifts and reappraisals, not least in and around the work of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams.32 The central problem for Lindsay was the received Marxist model – currently being further entrenched by the Short Course – of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ as a way to envisage the relationship between a society’s economic structure and intellectual and cultural life.33 For Lindsay these terms were deeply problematic, as ‘base’ was increasingly taken to mean an economic foundation while ‘superstructure’ implied a ‘structure’ of established institutional and organized forms (p. 5).34 Both terms, Lindsay insisted, congealed dynamic processes into abstracted frameworks, and gave rise to related and undialectical models for conceiving the relationship between the two spheres. One of these models was ‘determination’ (the usual translation of the German ‘bestimmen’) in the sense of base ‘determining’ superstructure’;35 the other was ‘reflection’ in the sense of the superstructure ‘reflecting’ base as though entirely separate from it.36 These terms would later come to preoccupy the New Left of Thompson and Williams.37 Lindsay confronted them by going back to Marx, and distinguishing between Marx’s more sophisticated positions and those offered up as the irrefutable truth by the Short Course.

Reversing the ordering logic of the latter’s fourth chapter, Lindsay’s foregrounded not the ‘Preface’ to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, and its all-too diagrammatic base-superstructure clarity, but the more developed coverage of the same theoretical terrain in the first chapter of Marx and Engels’s The German Ideology. Whereas the Short Course’s approved passage from the Preface posited ‘determine’ in the sense of direct prescription (base dictating superstructure), The German Ideology stressed instead determination in the sense of conditioning, or the setting of limits. And where the Preface granted a priori status to production (‘the real foundation’), casting culture as a secondary projection, The German Ideology insisted that production’s materiality was itself inescapably social and cultural, and forever enmeshed in human communication. Marx’s meaning was, for Lindsay, that a broader conception of ‘life’, not abstracted economic activity, ‘determines consciousness’ (p. 15).

Lindsay was concerned to invigorate a sedimenting Marxism by privileging agency and process over structure, and to restore a notion of the subject as dynamic, complex and, essentially, productive.38 Time and again he supported his ideas from Marx’s early writings, especially the Holy Family – a text conspicuously absent in Burns’ Handbook of Marxism – and the as yet untranslated ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ (1844), which Lindsay had read in the German, and would consistently identify as a seminal text in the development of his thought.39 His key point was to emphasize the absolute centrality of matters of creativity and culture to what he saw as the correct Marxist model of history and society, and here he made a number of interlinked claims. One was that culture needed to be
conceptualized after Marx as productive – ‘part of the whole dialectical process which involves economic activity’ (p. 19) – and not via a theory of ‘reflection’ or knock-on determination that vulgarized Marx’s position. Culture, in other words, was not to be seen as the superstructural icing on the social cake, but an active ingredient in the mix, an insight Lindsay developed and applied in his cultural analysis of the period, notably *Song of a Falling World: Culture During the Break-Up of the Roman Empire* (1948), which argued that culture expressed emerging and often chaotic social forces and energies, constituted the epistemological and perceptual lifeworld in which incipient modes of production arise, and prefigured future social and political developments. Another key idea, again derived from the early Marx, was that humankind was most itself – ‘essentially free and human’ – when engaged in creative production. Creative production for Lindsay corresponded with humanity’s core, and the historically-generated impediment to that true identity or ‘free being’ was the alienation produced by class society. The concept of alienation shadowed Lindsay’s paper in 1945, for which the ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ formed a semi-visible sub-text. Alienation would be underscored explicitly in his *Marxism and Contemporary Science* (1949), a book which fully assimilated the Manuscripts and argued more confidently for continuity between Marx’s early and later work. Implicit in both works was the claim that, in the depths of alienated class society, works of art were an uncanny clue to what humanity really was, and was capable of fully becoming.

For Lindsay, these ideas, which were presented in the paper in the form of sporadic insights rather than fully sustained arguments, demanded not merely a reformulation of Communist cultural policy but a fundamental Marxist reconceptualization of the function culture played, or could play, in social processes, history and class struggle. One particular gripe was that Communists, in downgrading the importance of culture, inevitably alienated those who cared most about it (p. 16). But more broadly the paper was framed by emphasizing the complexity of a contemporary scene shaped by ‘a continual interplay between ideas and political results, economic forms and spiritual conflicts’ which could not be grasped by what he called Communism’s abiding assumptions, ‘the all too simple relation of economics and politics’ (p. 1). Echoing and updating ideas from a work he had clearly read, Reuben Osborn’s Left Book Club title *Freud and Marx* (1937), Lindsay argued that the economic case for planned proto-socialist production had already been made and won in wartime economic arrangements and that the greater challenge now was one of dislodging a redundant ideology by making the case for socialism and ultimately Communism at the level of popular consciousness and in part through cultural work. That Communists were not good at thinking about popular consciousness and the messy, contradictory business of human motivation and action, he argued, was obvious from the fact that Communists had not been able to explain why in recent history at moments of economic crisis – Lindsay
mentions Weimar Germany – social groups had manifestly acted in ways opposed to their class or economic interests, seeking instead solace in particular constructions of national culture and tradition. Lindsay proceeded carefully here, but was making a veiled critique of the broader Communist movement’s economist reading of fascism as what J. D. Bernal called ‘aggravated capitalism’;45 again echoing Osborn’s book, Lindsay provocatively insisted that Freud shed greater light on ‘the full content of Nazism’ and its mass appeal than did orthodox Communist readings (p. 18).

His point was also, however, about an unacknowledged discrepancy between official Communist Party theory and what Communists actually did. ‘It is bad’, he wrote, ‘if we do our best work only when we forget or defy what our accepted theory lays down as the basic motivation of men’ (p. 16). It was not, Lindsay argued, that Communists failed to make inroads into popular consciousness and the cultural sphere, but that such interventions – like the ones in which Lindsay had been active in the Popular Front years – were largely intuitive, peripheral and unco-ordinated, not only lacking a theoretical framework but actually at odds with dominant logic and authorized positions. Lindsay was insistent that this mattered more than ever in that contemporary postwar moment (p. 16), although the implied larger argument that he was working towards in his fiction of the period – that developed capitalism, with its enlarged civil society and culture industries, demanded a broader conception of political intervention in general – was not developed here.46 That his analysis faltered at this point, and retreated into criticisms and suggestions for Communist cultural policy rooted in the existing paradigm – that art was a ‘weapon in the struggle’ and could raise consciousness – was not only a question of political caution but also a measure of the theoretical and conceptual vacuum in which Lindsay was operating. Lacking the conceptual apparatus necessary to develop alternative propositions – concepts to analyse the specific ways in which culture and other ‘superstructural’ practices mediated capitalist logic and ruling-class ideology and constituted capitalism’s ways of life – his presentation was as muted on alternative strategy as it was emphatic in its dissatisfaction with current priorities and positions.47

The moment of Lindsay’s theoretical intervention was the tail-end of what E. P. Thompson later termed the ‘radical “populist” euphoria of 1944’, which was also a moment of shifting geopolitics: ‘the shadows of the Cold War were closing in’, Thompson recalled, and ‘certain administrators’ in the CPGB ‘were rehearsing for parts as local Zhdanovs’.48 Thompson later recalled the public humiliation meted out to Lindsay, this ‘revisionist heretic’, in the Salisbury pub that night; according to Lindsay’s memory, the twenty-one year old Thompson was alone in speaking up in his defence.49 The ‘snarling’ dressing-down administered by the party’s leading theorists not only confirmed the scale of the intellectual orthodoxy that Lindsay had sought to expose, but anticipated the stiffening of those tendencies in an already deteriorating Cold War climate. The party’s semi-
official cultural commissar and editor of *A Handbook of Marxism*, Emile Burns, possibly with the assistance of leading theorist John Lewis, produced a report on Lindsay’s paper: a script prepared for the public encounter which doubled as a document archived against possible future disciplinary infractions.\(^5\) Evidently with the *Short Course* to hand, and reading chapter four forwards rather than backwards, the report’s author dealt with Lindsay’s argument in twenty bullet-pointed paragraphs of escalating exasperation. In response to Lindsay’s epigraph from Childe – who was present to hear Lindsay speak and shook his head in silent solidarity – the report insisted that had Lindsay confined himself to ‘quotations’ provided in the *Short Course*, he would have ‘saved himself a great deal of trouble’;\(^5\) indeed, had Lindsay ‘really studied Chapter 4’ at all he could not have made the mistakes he did.\(^5\) Lindsay was chastised for throwing ‘the whole of Marxist philosophy overboard in favour of Freud’, for presuming to criticize Plekhanov (who ‘Lenin considered should be part of all Marxist study’), and for indulging in ‘mental frolic’.\(^5\) Lindsay’s glossing of inherent productive human energy as ‘spirit’ was seized upon as evidence of his Hegelian whimsy. His insistence that the base was infused with consciousness was brushed aside with the mantra ‘in the beginning was the deed’.\(^5\) The argument that the Preface’s diagrammatic compressions had enabled reductivist readings was dealt with by a glaring instance of the latter: economic changes led to social revolution, the report wearily reminded Lindsay, which led to the overthrow of the old superstructure, the latter having no ‘inner process’.\(^5\) ‘It can be said, summing up’, Burns concluded, ‘that Jack Lindsay has failed to understand the materialist conception of history’, has ‘committed all the errors that critics have committed in the past’ – mistakes fully dealt with by Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Stalin – and is ‘philosophically, an idealist, not a materialist’.\(^5\)

**NO HOME IN THE STRUGGLE**

In the years to come Lindsay would have many more run-ins with the party leadership, some of them well chronicled. Though entrusted to serve on the party’s National Cultural Committee from 1947, he nonetheless faced a harrowing formal disciplinary process when the ideas embryonic in his 1945 presentation were fleshed out and published as *Marxism and Contemporary Science* (1949). As demanded by the Cultural Committee, and under the watchful eye of Emile Burns, Lindsay snuffed out the life of a book significant in its assimilation of early Marx, and in placing emphasis on theoretical continuities across Marx’s writings. Lindsay publicly disavowed his book, even if his carefully worded self-criticism fell short of endorsing the approved positions.\(^5\) His respected literary journal *Arena* (1949-51), considered inappropriately ‘cosmopolitan’ in its receptiveness to significant European intellectual currents increasingly regarded as ‘decadent’, was requisitioned by the party for its stiff-necked struggle against ‘the American Threat to British Culture’, and destroyed.\(^5\) Although
mistrusted in party circles, Lindsay was increasingly thrown back upon them in the early 1950s as the Cold War deepened, finding himself estranged from former Popular Front and wartime allies, shunned by mainstream publishers and subject to two notorious and virulently anti-Communist leader articles in the Times Literary Supplement. These experiences did nothing to sharpen his critical faculties where the Soviet Union was concerned: he visited the Soviet Union in 1949 and 1954, and his novels continued to be fêted there and to sell in the hundreds of thousands. His own orthodoxy hardened proportionately; now keeping his doubts mainly to himself, he wrote novels that resembled socialist realism – one of them ingratiatingly dedicated to his former tormentor Burns – and flagellated himself for ‘the many elements of petty bourgeois conditioning I have to fight and keep fighting’.

The suppressed internal conflict of these years reached the inevitable crescendo with the Soviet Twentieth Congress and the invasion of Hungary in 1956. Unable to envisage a political future outside a party aligned with the Soviet Union, Lindsay nonetheless attacked the Executive Committee of the CPGB for its moral complicity with Stalinism, insisting that his ‘conscience as a communist’ compelled him to challenge the party line from within. He thought of the course he chose as casting ‘all illusions aside’ while rejecting ‘disillusionment too’. Seeing a new political space opening, he initially explored theoretical and political common ground with the emerging New Left, defying party rules by contributing to their publications and stressing the centrality of alienation to Marx’s thought. The party in turn initiated a new round of disciplinary processes, also muzzling Lindsay in its own press. Lindsay pulled back, criticizing the party’s ‘ostrich tactics’ internally while ultimately observing them, and encoding his main criticisms of Stalinism in Thunder Underground (1965), a novel about Nero’s Rome.

A creative theoretical Marxism was now forming in Britain very close to Lindsay’s key concerns; but on the wrong side of the political divide, he appeared nowhere in it. The writings of his contemporary Christopher Caudwell (1907–37), who had died in Spain relatively untainted by Stalinism, would be assimilated to a degree by the New Left, but Lindsay’s substantial and overlapping theoretical work such as Anatomy of Spirit (1937), Short History of Culture (1939) and Marxism and Contemporary Science (1949) went altogether unread even by those whose work it directly anticipated. E. P. Thompson remained forever warm to Jack Lindsay, even joking in a letter to him in 1961 that Lindsay, with his premature reading of the ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, was the first ‘socialist humanist’, but Thompson made no reference to Lindsay in his major works. Thompson’s fellow former Communist, Raymond Williams, shows no sign of having read Lindsay, whom he had good reason to associate with the party against which he was defining his intellectual project. Lindsay was absent not only from Williams’s work, but from that of those, including Terry Eagleton, who would come to define
cultural Marxism in Britain from the 1970s, in part through dialogue with the formative scene of the first New Left.69 Alienated from the mainstream and the New Left, mistrusted by harder-nosed intellectuals who remained in the CPGB, and lacking, as ever, the profile within a defined disciplinary field available to Communist academics like Maurice Dobb and Eric Hobsbawm, Lindsay was odder than ever.

**CRISIS IN MARXISM**

In 1981 Lindsay published his final theoretical work, *The Crisis in Marxism*, ostensibly a conspectus of post-1920s Marxist cultural thought covering thinkers who included Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, the Frankfurt School and more recent structuralist Marxism. But published alongside his 600-page *Collected Poems* (1981) and his reworked 800-page autobiographical trilogy *Life Rarely Tells* (1982), the book was also a parallel exercise in late self-revelation. Seeking credit where he thought it due, he inscribed his own theoretical Marxism into the traditions under scrutiny, retrospectively adding his voice to a conversation to which he’d listened very carefully, but in which he’d seldom been heard, having by now spent over forty years in the Communist Party, more or less subject to its disciplines, and having found himself a *persona non grata* with the New Left. His penultimate chapter – a medley of extended and annotated quotations from his earlier writings – served to make visible work published in long-forgotten journals, work never published at all (long extracts from his 1945 ‘Marxist Theory of Culture’) and sections from the hefty book published, denounced by the party and dutifully renounced by its author, *Marxism and Contemporary Science* (1949). Lindsay’s justified point was that *The Crisis in Marxism* was no primer but the culmination of a long journey in theoretical Marxism whose ‘various formulations’ paralleled and often anticipated those of ‘recent times’.70 The 1945 paper, he legitimately spelt out, introduced ‘positive points that were new’ (*CM*, p. 126). His description of ‘culture as productive activity’, he noted, had anticipated Raymond Williams’s Gramsci-inflected 1970s work – quoted repeatedly and approvingly here – which described cultural practices as ‘forms of material production’ and rejected base and superstructure in favour of emphasis on ‘a single indissoluble real process’ (*CM*, p. 127).

Alienation remained Marx’s key concept, he argued, and therefore the lodestar of Communism, whose ultimate destination was the recovery and release of ‘the full creativity of labour’ and humanity’s ‘harmonious unity with nature’ (*CM*, p. 154). But the Soviet Union, rather than being the privileged site of that process, was for the first time in Lindsay’s major work now measured against it, and the more Lindsay looked, the more he found. Lenin’s strategies by which Lindsay had initially set such store had, he now argued, succeeded only in exceptional circumstances, a ‘semi-feudal state within a power vacuum created by war’ (*CM*, p. 4). The theoretical orientation of Lenin’s *State and Revolution* – a key text for him in 1936 – had
been wrong in its confidence that the creation of the first stage of the Communist state was a matter of ‘accounting and control’ (CM, p. 156), and had left the Soviet Union ill-equipped for the actual challenges of the construction of communism ‘under which alienation is undermined and finally eliminated’ (CM, p. 154). Alienation had not, to say the least, been the key ‘criterion for judging each step taken’ (CM, p. 155) in the Soviet Union, an absence partly enabled by the degeneration of Marxism itself into ‘Stalinism, a definite ideology’ (CM, p. 7) as he now conceded, and one predicated upon the codification of a crudely mechanistic materialism which distorted Marx’s oeuvre. The brutal reprise of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary1956 in its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was for Lindsay now a terminus, the militarized ‘culmination’ of the ‘failure of Marxist-theory practice’ (CM, p. 6).

For Lindsay the gloom of Western Marxism – he cast his weary eye over Lukács, Bloch, Goldmann, Adorno and Marcuse – was epitomized by the currently fashionable Althusser, whose privileging of structure over agency and whose explicit rejection of the early Marx and the concept of alienation for Lindsay embodied Marxism’s loss of the historical plot and its inability to explain processes of resistance and struggle. The whole tradition under scrutiny was for Lindsay morbidly symptomatic of Marxism’s failures to make a breakthrough in the West, which was in turn a consequence of its failure to engage with the questions he had raised in 1945 and sporadically since, not only in his theoretical work, but also in his cycle of novels analysing the ‘British way’. Questions about how to confront alienation in all spheres and to exert Communist influence across culture, civil society and popular consciousness had been marginalized, he argued, by a combination of blind confidence in Lenin’s methods, the hardening theoretical orthodoxy manifested in the Short Course under Stalin, and a tendency – amply illustrated by Lindsay’s own trajectory – to leave the thinking to the Soviet Union. Neither the logic for casting the international Communist movement in the Bolshevik model nor the movement’s failure to make revolutions in industrialized Germany and Central Europe had been ‘in the least faced, analysed, understood’ (CM, p. 5) by Communists, he now conceded. No party dedicated to socialism had actually ‘known how to build mass-bases’ in advanced industrial countries (CM, p. 3) or to formulate the necessary ‘transformatory action’ (CM, p. 3) across politics and ‘cultural activity’ including education, science, arts and the media. The problem, as he had argued in 1945, was one of self-deception: not only did Communists not possess this knowledge, but they thought they did.

Just as reading Marx, Engels and Lenin had felt like a homecoming in 1936, however, Lindsay’s reading of Antonio Gramsci in the 1970s had been an equivalent if more protracted encounter, blocked, in part, by the Communist Party’s unwillingness to commission the translation of work correctly seen as likely to unleash theoretical dissidence. Gramsci was now identified by Lindsay as the theorist who systematized many of the impulses
and partially formulated positions he himself had been working towards in 1945 and subsequently. Here was the argument – hovering on the edge of Lindsay’s earlier discourse – that developed Western economies with their enlarged civil society necessarily ‘raised the ideological struggle to a new level’ as states’ authority was increasingly grounded in ‘establishing a consensus of support’ across civil society ‘rather than relying on force and coercion’ through state apparatuses (CM, p. 140). And while Lindsay in 1945 had both asserted the active role of culture in economic, social and political processes and fallen short of offering an alternative cultural strategy or policy, Gramsci now furnished a repertoire of concepts mediating between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ – hegemony, consent, wars of position, intellectual, civil society, historical bloc, organic crisis, the conjuncture – through which complex societies could be analysed and counter hegemonic possibilities formulated. Above all – and Lindsay’s original line on Gramsci followed from this – here was a model of socialist transformation deeply if unconsciously compatible with the early Marx and the concept of alienation. While not itself extensively explicit about alienation, Gramsci’s model was, for Lindsay, implicitly attuned to this core concept in Marx’s writing in refusing ‘all forms of reductionism’ and containing within its logic ‘the first crucial steps towards the ending of alienation’ (CM, p. 159). The Leninist model, with its emphasis on ‘a sudden and rapid overthrow of the bourgeois state’, was dangerously susceptible to the intensification of social alienation as the party mutated into the bureaucratized state to defend the revolution, a criticism that has recently resurfaced in debates about the idea of communism now. But the Gramscian model, in which ‘the revolutionary class and its allies’ strove for ‘hegemonic unity in cultural, ideological and political fields before the decisive transfer of power’ (CM, p. 158), was necessarily predicated on the ceaseless, creative and prefigurative confrontation with alienation which was for Lindsay forever integral to Communism’s true project (CM, p. 155). Communists were for Lindsay exiles from an unalienated future. The measure of their readiness to challenge for power in a fallen world of capitalist alienation – to possess the necessary moral and cultural prestige, in Gramsci’s terms – was precisely their ability to intimate in their conduct and actions that unalienated world of which they were premonitions. Gramsci’s value was that he offered the foundations for broadening conceptions of what a reconceived Communist Party might be and do towards the end of the twentieth century and beyond.

Lindsay’s simultaneous commitment to ‘the party’ on one hand (now an ideal rather than a reality) and to alienation as Marx’s crucial idea on the other, made him an odd man out once more in a ‘Gramscian’ moment when debate on the Left, including in his own greatly shrunken party, was cleaving around questions of political strategy, and stabilizing the political options into an opposition that for Lindsay misread Gramsci’s thought and foreclosed the possibilities within it. Lindsay gave short shrift to those
traditionalists, both within and beyond the CPGB, who emphasized Gramsci’s ‘war of manoeuvre’ or revolutionary insurrectionism and who saw in Gramsci only a Leninist. Lindsay was emphatic that in ‘advanced bourgeois communities’ those with ‘purely political programmes’ which left untouched ‘cultural and moral hegemony’ had no chance of breakthrough (CM, p. 143). At the same time, Lindsay cautioned against a ‘Eurocommunist’ culturalist reading of Gramsci which forgot basic Marxist-Leninist lessons of class power and assumed that ‘the whole struggle is one of breaking down the forms of consensus that bind people to a class society’ (CM, p. 5). Counter-hegemonic struggle across cultural, media, educational and scientific spheres was crucially necessary to challenging advanced capitalism, as Lindsay had been arguing for fifty years, but it was never sufficient, and must be ‘linked at all points with the strategy of a war of movement, of political attack aimed at transforming the State and its organs of coercion, its economic bases in monopoly forms of industry’ (CM, p. 5). The theoretical and creative work of imagining the form and function of ‘the party’ necessary to integrate what Lindsay called ‘all levels’ of struggle (CM, p. 4) in the image of an unalienated future remained ahead of the Left, the octogenarian Lindsay argued in 1981. Gramsci had merely enabled the formulation of the problem that needed solving.

CODA

Lindsay’s oeuvre fell ever further from view as his life, the short twentieth century and (for some) history itself came to an end in the 1990s. But a quarter of a century on, aspects of it seem unpredictably current. Invigorated by capitalist crisis and the global political and social movements of the last decade, recent and ongoing theoretical debate on the left has returned to the ‘idea of Communism’. This debate focuses on countering a capitalism that ‘seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable’ and on reinscribing Communism – whose basic precept for Alain Badiou is that the expropriation of labour by capital is not historically inevitable – into the ideological sphere. Within that conceptual space, the debate has recently moved from ‘events’, ‘identities’ and disaggregated ‘multitudes’ to rethinking the form and function of the ‘Communist Party’, a process emboldened by the limited breakthroughs of Occupy, Podemos and Syriza, and often conducted with explicit reference to Gramsci. The 1950s and 1960s New Left, having necessarily defined itself in opposition to ‘the party’, has little to teach directly here. But the writings of Lindsay and other fellow-Communist loyal-dissidents, who remained faithful to the idea of ‘the party’ while being critical of the actually existing parties to which they paid subscriptions, are beginning to look like a usable, if problematic tradition. Moreover, Lindsay’s wider oeuvre, forever alert to processes of alienation in developed capitalist societies although silent on questions of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, has abundant if erratic insights to offer about spheres now recognized as key sites of struggle for a refashioned Left, including
capitalism’s degradation of the environment and its prodigious production of mental illness. The concept of alienation, meanwhile, long contested within Marxism, especially since Althusser, for allegedly positing a transhistorical human ‘essence’, is itself showing some signs of resurgence, notably in the work of Kojin Karatani. Revisiting, refining and developing the early Marx’s position – held dear by Lindsay – that a future Communism would be a restoration of primitive communism at an unimaginably more developed economic level, Karatani argues that Marxism needs to prefigure a way beyond capitalism by imagining in the future the restoration of ‘the reciprocity of the gift’ that defined primitive clan society. More broadly, ideas of alienation and their foregrounding of humanity’s inherent creativity are proving a useful, if sometimes strategic, essentialism for challenging neoliberalism’s ‘business ontology’ in which, as Mark Fisher puts it, ‘it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run for business’ and for contesting neoliberalism’s ensuing transformation across social life of quality into quantity and processes into products, or audits of them. Lindsay’s forgotten and uneven work has been fairly described as marred by ‘projections, jejune emotions, data manipulation, reprehensible footnote practices and ideological blinkering’. But its central concerns – tracing the processes of alienation through social formations, sifting human history for moments of resistance to that alienation, and attempting to prefigure a society in which values of creative production and communication are generalized across society as a whole – speak loudly to ever-sharpening problems.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Jack Lindsay, ‘The Fetish Thing’, in Who are the English?: Selected Poems 1935–1981, Smokestack Books, Middlesbrough, nd (2014), p. 132.
2 The book was published as The Anatomy of Spirit: an Inquiry into the Origins of Religious Emotion, Methuen, London, 1937.
3 Jack Lindsay, Life Rarely Tells, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 761. As the fifty-one interviews with 1930s middle-class Communist recruits conducted in the 1980s by Margot Kettle reveal, motivation for joining the CPGB was overwhelmingly a sense that the party was ‘doing something’ to confront unemployment, fascism and rearmament. ‘It wasn’t theoretical Marxism’, recalled Victor Kiernan, ‘because the Marxism of the day was coming out of Russia … it wasn’t very good Marxism’. Kiernan interview: CP IND KETT 03/01, file 03/23, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester (henceforth (LHASC).
4 Lindsay, Life, pp. 174–5.
5 Lindsay, Life, p. 763.
6 Lindsay, Life, p. 761.
7 Lindsay defended the Moscow Show Trials, for instance, chillingly writing that the ‘cleavage between the men who trusted the powers of the masses, and the men who trusted only their own “cleverness” had to come’. Lindsay, letter in Tribune, 18 March 1938.

8 Lindsay, Life, p. 808.

9 Lindsay’s historical novel The Stormy Violence (Andrew Dakers, London, 1941), for instance, was written in less than three weeks; long theoretical works were planned in a single day: Life, p. 790. The most comprehensive bibliography of Lindsay’s works is in Culture and History: Essays Presented to Jack Lindsay, ed. Bernard Smith, Sydney, 1984, pp. 395–406.

10 Searches of the now digitized TLS give a rough indication of a writer’s cultural visibility. Searches for the period between 1 Jan. 1935 and 31 Dec. 1949 reveal that Lindsay was mentioned 161 times, Greene 159, Orwell 117.

11 Lindsay, Life, p. 809, p. 793.

12 In particular Lindsay was irritated by the essay on his work by his friend Alick West in the latter’s Sunlight on the Mountain (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1958). This overlooked what Lindsay called ‘the many-sided struggle against alienation’ which he saw as his central theme. Lindsay, Life, p. 783.

13 Lindsay, Life, p. 782.

14 Alec T. Bolton, ‘John Lindsay (1900–1990)’ in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online version, accessed 12 Aug. 2014; exceptions include a handful of his translations of classical texts and his recently issued Selected Poems 1935–1981.

15 Lindsay’s biographies of painters retain some currency with art-historians, notably his J. M. W. Turner (1966), which formed the basis of a renewed correspondence with his painter father, and his Cézanne (1969), Courbet (1973), Hogarth (1977) and Gainsborough (1981). Among literary critics his George Meredith (1956) has fared better than his John Bunyan (1937), famously savaged by F. R. Leavis in The Common Pursuit (1948). Lindsay’s literary work is analysed in two essay collections: Culture and History, ed. Bernard Smith, and Jack Lindsay, the Thirties and Forties, ed. Robert Mackie, 1984. For Lindsay’s work as a fine-press publisher in the 1920s, see Jack Lindsay: Faithful to the Earth, ed. Paul Gillen, Sydney, 1993 and John Arnold, The Fanfrolico Press: Satyrs, Fauns and Fine Books, Pinner, 2009. For his work during the Popular Front, see Ben Harker, ‘“Communism is English”: Edgell Rickwood, Jack Lindsay and the Cultural Politics of the Popular Front’, Literatuure and History 20: 2, 2011, pp. 23–40; Elinor M. Taylor has a fine chapter on Lindsay in her doctoral thesis, ‘Popular Front Politics and the British Novel, 1934–40’, University of Salford 2014, forthcoming as The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934–40; Lindsay’s theories of culture are mapped by Philip Bounds in the forthcoming British Marxism and Cultural Studies, ed. Philip Bounds and David Berry (2016). John T. Connor gives an especially rich account, ‘Jack Lindsay, Socialist Humanism and the Historical Novel’, The Review of English Studies 66: 274, 2014, pp. 342–63.

16 Lindsay’s autobiographical and theoretical writings give multiple accounts of the event: Life, pp. 801–2; Meetings with Poets, Muller, London, 1968, p. 151; The Crisis in Marxism, Moonraker, Bradford on Avon: 1981, p. 122. E. P. Thompson wrote about it in his obituary of Edgell Rickwood, PN Review 6: 2, 2014, pp. 342–63.

17 My dating is deduced from correspondence quoted in Lindsay’s Foreword to Sally Green, Prehistorian: a Biography of V. Gordon Childe, Moonraker, Bradford on Avon, 1981, p. xii.

18 This is chronicled in British Communism: a Documentary History, ed. John Callaghan and Ben Harker, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2011, pp. 148–62.

19 These views are sampled in British Communism, ed. Callaghan and Harker, pp. 160–2.

20 In 1944–5, for instance, Lindsay was active in the Army Bureau of Current Affairs as script-writer; he also wrote Robin of England, staged by Unity Theatre. He was a director at the Communist dominated Fore Publications through which he was closely involved in the cultural journal Our Time. Alongside journalism, lecturing work and writing pamphlets, he published in 1944–5 a theoretical work on poetry, Perspectives for Poetry (1944), a poetry collection, Second Front (1944), and two novels, The Barriers are Down (1945) and Hullo Stranger (1945). He also co-edited a book of wartime poetry, New Lyrical Ballads (1945) and wrote an enthusiastic chronicle of the so-called ‘cultural upsurge’, British Achievement in Art and Music, Pilot Press, London, 1945.

21 Lindsay commented on this in his wartime factory novel Hullo Stranger, Andrew Dakers, London, 1945.

22 Jack Lindsay, British Achievement in Art and Music; Jack Lindsay, ‘Fuller Life’, World News and Views, 9 Nov. 1945.
23 Lindsay, British Achievement, p. 36.
24 Lindsay, ‘Marxist Theory of Culture’, pp. 15–16.
25 Lindsay, ‘Marxist Theory of Culture’, p. 1; further page numbers in parenthesis in the text.
26 Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (1981), Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 21, 10.
27 E. P. Thompson, ‘Caudwell’, Socialist Register, 1977, pp. 228–76, p. 240; Thompson, ‘Edgell Rickwood’, p. xxvii.
28 ‘The History of the CPSU’, Party Organiser, April 1939, pp. 5–8; ‘The History of the CPSU’, Party Organiser, May 1939, pp. 10–15; ‘Studying the History of the CPSU’, Party Organiser, June 1939, pp. 4–5; Dave Cope, Central Books: a Brief History 1939–1999, Central Books, London, 1999, p. 16.
29 CC of CPSU (B), History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union/Bolsheviks/Short Course, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1939, pp. 105–30.
30 Short Course, p. 130.
31 Engels to Schmidt, 27 Oct. 1890, Engels to Bloch, 21 Sept. 1890, Engels to Mehring, 14 July 1893. Lindsay’s source here was clearly Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence 1846–1895, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1934, in which these letters are numbers 214, 213 and 227 respectively. Translated and edited by Dona Torr, these letters were key texts for the post-war Communist Party Historians’ Group, whose meetings Lindsay often attended. As David Parker argues, for the historians the letters provided the theoretical foundations from which crude base-superstructure models could be resisted. See his Introduction to Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution: Debates of the British Communist Historians 1940–1956, ed. David Parker, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2008, p. 54.
32 In different ways, both came to share Lindsay’s concern with moving beyond the types of orthodox simplification found in the Short Course, a text Williams, like Thompson, would later recall from his CP days for its distortions, evasions and silences: Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780–1950 (1958), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963, p. 274; Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review, Verso, London, 1979, pp. 41, 48.
33 Refining those terms was central to Williams’s subsequent theoretical project. In Culture and Society (1958), a book he began in the late 1940s partly as a result of his own failure to stimulate a more open theoretical conversation with Communists, Williams worked through many of the same passages of Marx and Engels as Lindsay had analysed in 1945. He reached the same conclusion, that ‘base and superstructure’ can best be taken as ‘suggestive analogy’ rather than ‘descriptions of reality’ and that, even in the former case, modification is required. Williams, Culture and Society, p. 273; the book’s long genesis is detailed in Francis Mulhern, ‘Culture and Society, Then and Now’, New Left Review 55, January–February 2009 (accessed online, 25 Feb. 2014); for these debates, see Ben Harker, ‘Politics and Letters: the “Soviet Literary Controversy” in Britain’, Literature & History 24: 1, 2015, pp. 41–57. Another key Williams essay here is ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’ (1973), reprinted in Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980), Verso, London, 1997, pp. 31–50. Though often at odds with Williams, E. P. Thompson likewise worried away at base-superstructure, or what he called ‘a metaphor out of the text-book of a constructional engineer’, casting widely in Marx’s writing and beyond for alternative conceptual models. E. P. Thompson, ‘An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski’ (1973), reprinted in The Poverty of Theory and other Essays, Merlin, London, 1978, p. 120; here Thompson echoes his earlier work, ‘The Peculiarities of the English’ (1965), also republished in the collection. This in turn develops ideas from his ‘Socialist Humanism’, New Reasoner 1, 1957.
34 For Lindsay in 1945 these terms were already problematic; by the time he developed his ideas for his next theoretical book, Marxism and Contemporary Science (1949), they were ‘hopelessly question begging’ and ‘force on the mind a spacial [sic] material relationship which distorts the issue’. Much later Lindsay would revoke them altogether, insisting that ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ were used infrequently and only casually by Marx and Engels, and were no more than ‘a rough shorthand . . . never worked out or applied in any coherent or extended way’: Lindsay, Marxism and Contemporary Science, Dobson, London, 1949, p. 185; Lindsay, The Crisis in Marxism, Moonraker, Bradford on Avon, 1981, p. 13.
35 Lindsay would later write ‘determine comes from the mechanical sciences . . . it suggests that consciousness is mechanically controlled by the “material world”’. The italics are Lindsay’s; Lindsay, Marxism and Contemporary Science, pp. 36–7
36 Plekhanov's *The Materialist Conception of History*, a celebrated text in the Communist movement that bore Lenin's imprimatur, was identified by Lindsay as the origin of many errors in reducing 'superstructure' to 'a multiform reflection in the minds of men of...the state of productive forces' (p. 6). For Lindsay 'reflection' masked the complex dialectical dynamics of the interconnectedness of 'base' and 'superstructure' and crucially exiled agency from creative processes – a key concern for Lindsay. This point was echoed much later by Williams, who also took issue with Plekhanov's popularization by 'dominant tendencies in Soviet Marxism' and argued that the term reflection 'succeeds in suppressing the actual work on material – in a final sense, the material social process – which is the making of any art work'. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 3, 97.

37 Both would concern themselves with precisely what Marx meant by the verb 'determine' (the usual translation of the German 'bestimmen') in the sense of base 'determining' superstructure or social being 'determining' consciousness. In particular, Williams produced significant analysis of the etymology and translation of this highly complex 'keyword' of Marxist thought. For Williams as for Lindsay, the word mattered greatly in that its very ambiguity at once concealed and compounded theoretical confusion: it could mean 'setting limits, exerting pressure', a relationship that left room for more finely-tuned analysis of those complex two-way mediations between the economic and cultural. Or it could mean 'totally predicts or prefigures, indeed totally controls a subsequent activity', an account of the relationship for which 'reflection' – in the sense of a passive re-presentation of what has already happened elsewhere – was an appropriate figure; Williams, 'Base and Superstructure', p. 32. This latter flattening out was especially problematic for Thompson, who later characterized the 'intellectually-constrictive orthodoxy' of the Communist movement in the 1940s and 1950s precisely as 'reflection theory', a model 'descended in some part from [Lenin's] *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* [and codified in the] *Short Course* as doctrine: Thomson, 'Caudwell', p. 240.

38 Concepts 'almost quite forgotten by Marxists' and at some distance from party Marxism were likewise pushed to the fore in Lindsay's presentation, notably man's 'free being', 'essential human power', the latter a phrase, as he noted, repeated in the *Holy Family* with the word 'human' italicized (p. 14).

39 In this paper Lindsay refers to the manuscripts as 'Okonomische-Politische' (p. 14); in his essay 'Towards a Marxist Aesthetic', a version of which was read at the Communist University of London in 1974, he explained that he came into contact with the Manuscripts in the early to mid 1940s: Jack Lindsay, *Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on Twentieth Century Writing*, Wild & Woolley, Sydney/ Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1976, p. 433. Connor has now reconstructed the process by which Lindsay came to read the text: 'Jack Lindsay, Socialist Humanism and the Historical Novel', pp. 346–7. Not translated into English until 1959, the Manuscripts would have a well-documented influence on the maturing of the non-mechanistic, morally grounded and anti-Stalinist 'socialist humanism' integral to New Left political identity and its recentring of agency and subjectivity in historical and political process after 1956. See, for instance, Stuart Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left', *New Left Review* 61, January–February 2010, p. 188.

40 Lindsay, *Song of a Falling World: Culture During the Break-up of the Roman Empire* (A.D. 350–600), Andrew Dakers, London, 1948, p. 284.

41 Here Lindsay approvingly quoted the section from *The Holy Family* which projects Communism as 'man's return to his "universal nature in a universal manner, that is, as a total human being"' (p. 14); Lindsay states that man is 'essentially free and human' in that 'he realises his Whole nature in activity, in production' (p. 14).

42 Here capitalism is morally impugned, after the early Marx, for 'estrang[ing] man from nature, from himself, his own active functioning ... from his *universal essence*': Lindsay, *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, p. 22.

43 Lindsay, *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, p. 22 (Lindsay's italics). 'The Fullness of Life' was Lindsay's working title for the book; this was relegated to a subtitle at the publisher's suggestion: Lindsay, *Meetings*, p. 112.

44 Lindsay's most forceful expression of this idea comes in his essay 'The Role of the Individual in Art', *Decay and Renewal*, pp. 410–11.

45 J. D. Bernal, 'The Scientist and the World Today', *Cambridge Left*, winter 1933; reprinted in Bernal, *The Freedom of Necessity*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1949, p. 345. This reading – standard fare in Communist circles from 1933 – was codified as the party line in Comintern General Secretary Georgi Dimitrov's address to the Seventh World Congress in August 1935, published in Britain as *The Working Class Against Fascism*, Martin Lawrence, London, 1935.
46 Notably *Hullo Stranger* (1945), which tracks the political awakening of Kath Robson, a young working-class woman, during her time as an engineer in a wartime aircraft factory. Lindsay sees alienation in the factory being rolled back through moments of worker control and in the context of production aligned with defending the Soviet Union, Britain’s wartime ally. Narrated from Cath’s perspective, the text is a type of Communist auto-critique, as the inability of the Communist shop stewards to relate and communicate effectively with the modern workforce is revealed. The text measures the difference between the sources of modern working-class consciousness – the family, the print media, wireless, cinema, the dance-hall – and Communism’s narrow interventions. ‘What’s the use of being right?’, Kath asks the main Communist shop steward in one scene, ‘if you can’t make others see it?’ (p. 137).

47 Though again, more sophisticated positions are implicit in the novel, notably when the Communist shop steward, in conversation with Cath, begins to make a proto-Gramscian analysis of the ideological work performed by the popular Hollywood film, *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), before slipping back to the standard position that such films are mere capitalist propaganda (pp. 138–9).

48 Thompson, ‘Edgell Rickword’, p. xxvi.

49 Thompson, ‘Edgell Rickword’, p. xxvi; Lindsay, *Life*, p. 801; *Meeting with Poets*, p. 151.

50 Initialled ‘EB’ [Emile Burns], ‘Notes on Jack Lindsay’s paper on “Marxist Theory of Culture”’, and archived alongside Lindsay’s paper in CP/CENT/04/11. A report written by the Writers’ Group (1946) in which Lindsay was active, summarizing recent activities, presents Lewis rather than Burns as the report’s author; it’s clear from the Writers’ Group report that Lewis was vocal during the meeting: CP/CENT/CULT/01/01.

51 Thompson recalls Childe’s presence in ‘Edgell Rickword’, p. xxvi; Burns, ‘Notes’, p. 1.

52 Burns, ‘Notes’, p. 5.

53 Burns, ‘Notes’, pp. 1, 6, 2.

54 Burns, ‘Notes’, pp. 5, 2.

55 Burns, ‘Notes’, p. 1.

56 Burns, ‘Notes’, p. 5.

57 The book was attacked by ‘C. Allen’ in *Labour Monthly* in November 1949 and by Emile Burns in the *Daily Worker*. The Communist Party internal newsletter, sent out to branch secretaries, described it as a ‘distortion of the Marxist position’ and advised party bookshops not to stock it, ominously adding ‘[w]e are making efforts to have conversations with Comrade Lindsay about this book’: Jack Lindsay’s MI5 file, KV 2/3252. Lindsay’s ‘Note of self-criticism’ appeared in the *Communist Review* (March 1950), pp. 93–4. The affair caused a ruckus when members of Lindsay’s own Marylebone branch demanded a public debate about the arguments, incensed by the leadership’s suggestion that such affairs were beyond the concern of the rank and file and that to pursue them was equivalent to ‘Trotskyist’ splitting. These repercussions ran through December 1949 and early January 1950: LHASC/CP/Cent/Personal and Discipline Files/Jack Lindsay.

58 The first issue appeared in May 1949 and included work by Paul Eluard, Tristan Tzara, Albert Camus, Boris Pasternak and Edith Sitwell. Ridiculed in the *Daily Worker* for unintelligibility, it held out as ‘European, with no Iron Curtain’ for seven issues before being commandeered. Lindsay recalls the period and the journal in *Meetings with Poets*, p. 129. Andy Croft plots the journal’s rise and fall in ‘The Boys Round the Corner: the Story of Fore Publications’, in *A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, ed. Croft, Pluto, London, 1998, pp. 153–7.

59 Lindsay recounts these years in *Life*, pp. 804–5; the TLS furore broke out with an unsigned but deeply hostile review of Lindsay’s *Byzantium in Europe* (1952): entitled ‘A Marxist view of Byzantium’ it questioned whether Marxists ‘can be allowed responsibility for the teaching of history’ in universities, *TLS* 12 Dec. 1952, p. 818; Lindsay retaliated with a letter on 26 Dec. 1952, p. 853. A leader article on 29 April 1955 entitled ‘Marxism and the Novel’ then took issue with his new novel, *The Moment of Choice: a Novel of the British Way* and Lindsay responded on 13 May 1955. He was the subject of a second hostile leader article for his book, *After the Thirties: the Novel in Britain and its Future*, on 29 June 1956 (that this was published by the CP’s in-house publisher indicated the waning of his star in mainstream literary culture).

60 The combined sales of Lindsay’s novels behind the iron curtain, including eastern bloc countries and the Soviet Union, exceeded a million: Connor, ‘Jack Lindsay, Socialist Humanism’, p. 349.

61 Lindsay’s novel *Betrayed Spring*, Bodley Head, London, 1953, is dedicated to the unlikely pair of Louis Aragon and Emile Burns: Lindsay’s 1952 party questionnaire, 2 March 1952, CP/CENT/PERS/04/06.
62 Lindsay to Harry Pollitt, 2 April 1956: KV2/ 3256; Letter to George Matthews signed by intellectuals including Lindsay, Christopher Hill, Doris Lessing, Eric Hobsbawm (read out and recorded in Special Branch telecheck on King Street, 20 Nov. 1956); Jack Lindsay, letter to Daily Worker, 14 Nov. 1956; Lindsay to Emile Burns, 13 Nov. 1956 and 12 Nov. 1956, KV2/ 2356.

63 Lindsay in his suitably apocalyptic 1956 poem, ‘Sudden Discords in the Trumpets of the Overdelayed Last Judgment, 1956’, Selected Poems, p. 118.

64 Lindsay defied party rules on publications considered ‘anti-Communist and anti-party’ and contributed to the debate on Socialist Humanism in the New Reasoner; his contribution appeared in issue 3 (winter 1957–8), pp. 95–102. The ensuing correspondence, registering disquiet over Lindsay’s ‘support and association with this type of publication’ is archived in CP/ CENT/ PERSONAL AND DISCIPLINE FILES/JACK LINDSAY.

65 Connor usefully decodes this, ‘Jack Lindsay’, pp. 350–1; Lindsay was conspicuously not trusted to review the books of former comrades and others on the New Left with which he was rightly seen to have too much sympathy – a task largely entrusted to hardliner Arnold Kettle. The work of former member Raymond Williams in particular caused great consternation in the higher echelons of the CP’s Cultural Committee; as Kettle wrote to Rajani Palme Dutt on 15 July 1961, ‘we are often hamstrung by not having authoritative statements of our own position’: LHASC / CP/ IND/ DUTT/ 05/12. The ‘ostrich’ remark is from a report, ‘Some Notes on the Cultural Problems of the Moment’ on 29 Aug. 1958, which Lindsay wrote and sent to King Street, KV 2/3256.

66 Engagement with Caudwell is scattered across William’s major works; see also E. P. Thompson, ‘Caudwell’. A sizeable secondary literature on Caudwell includes four books and Francis Mulhern, ‘The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell’, New Left Review 85, 1974, pp. 37–58.

67 Cited in Connor, ‘Jack Lindsay’, p. 343.

68 Williams makes no mention of Lindsay in his recollections of his Cambridge Communist days, but presents the limitations in Communist cultural debates of the pre-war period in which Lindsay was prominent as a key reason for not rejoining the party after the war. The arguments of the 1930s, he wrote, ‘had led me to an impasse. I had become convinced that their answers did not meet the questions, and that I had got to be prepared to meet the professional objections. I was damned well going to do it properly this time’. Williams never cites Lindsay in his major work, Williams, Politics and Letters, p. 52.

69 Eagleton gives notoriously short shrift to Caudwell in Criticism and Ideology: a Study in Marxist Literary Theory, New Left Books, London, 1976, pp. 23–4, dismissing English Marxism pre Williams as ‘an intellectual irrelevance’ (p. 23). Taking his cues from Williams’s account of CP Marxism, Eagleton’s also overlooks Lindsay, whose work is also absent from Marxist Literary Theory, ed. Eagleton and Drew Milne, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996. Victor N. Paananen, British Marxist Criticism, Garland, New York, 2000, traces a broader tradition which finds some common ground between ‘old’ and ‘new’ left Marxist theories of culture. Significantly, perhaps, the book is from the USA – outside the force-field of the British intellectual left.

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71 See also Lindsay, Decay and Renewal, p. 437.

72 Key texts here include the three wartime novels, We Shall Return (1942), about Dunkirk, Beyond Terror (1943), about Crete, and Hullo Stranger (1945); all analyse the war’s radicalizing effect on popular consciousness. Subtle Knot (1947) deals with the dissolution of the postwar optimism, also the focus of the more ambitious Betrayed Spring (1953). All on the Never-never (1961), which was filmed as Live Now, Pay Later (1962), offers Lindsay’s readings of welfare capitalism and consumerism. Most of these novels feature Leftist or Communist characters seeking to make sense of the ideological and social changes being described.

73 The publication of Gramsci’s work in the 1950s was initially blocked by the Communist Party leadership, notably Lindsay’s former bète noire, Emile Burns, who correctly anticipated Gramsci’s writings unleashing precisely the type of theoretical ructions associated with Jack Lindsay. The small number of selections eventually published as The Modern Prince (1957), though favourably received by those close to Lindsay including classicist George Thomson, yielded only a tantalizing glimpse of the necessary conceptual framework. George Thomson, ‘Gramsci: the First Italian Marxist’, Marxism Today, November 1957, pp. 61–2; Lindsay, ‘The Artist and Politics’, Marxism Today, September 1959, p. 287, n. 1. For the reception of Gramsci, see David Forgaes,
‘Gramsci and Marxism in Britain’, *New Left Review* 176, July–August 1989, pp. 70–88. By the time Lindsay wrote *Crisis in Marxism* he had access to *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), *Selections from the Political Writings* (1977), and a growing literature on Gramsci in English.

74 Alain Badiou, ‘The Communist Hypothesis’, *New Left Review* 49, January–February 2008, www.newleftreview.org/?view=2705, accessed online 23 Aug. 2015; an alternative view is given by Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, Verso, London, 2011, pp. 239–50.

75 In its theoretical breadth Lindsay’s book sought to engage a readership far beyond the British Communist Party to which he had adhered for forty-five years, now greatly shrunked. Such a party remained for Lindsay a necessary condition of socialist advance. In this frame, the book was pitched, *sotto voce*, to the remnants of his party, its shortcomings, and the faultlines currently cleaving it in the wake of the consolidation of a broadly Gramscian, Eurocommunist modernizing leadership in 1977. Forgacs summarizes these positions in ‘Gramsci’, p. 79 and p. 83.

76 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992.

77 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero, Winchester, 2009, p. 8; Alain Badiou, ‘The Communist Hypothesis’; Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, transl. David Macey and Steve Corcoran, Verso, London, 2010; *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, Verso, London, 2010.

78 See, for instance, Pablo Iglesias, ‘Explaining Podemos’, *New Left Review* 93 May–June 2015, pp. 93–22 and his *Politics in a Time of Crisis: Podemos and the Future of Democratic Europe*, Verso, London, 2015, especially pp. 176–96; Bécquer Seguín, ‘Podemos and its Critics’, *Radical Philosophy* 193, September–October 2015, pp. 20–33; Alex Callinicos of Britain’s SWP and Stathis Kouvelakis of Syriza’s central committee debated ‘Syriza and Socialist Strategy’ in central London on 25 Feb. 2015; the debate, hosted by *International Socialism*, was printed in *Socialist Worker* on 14 March and 21 March 2015, and can be viewed on youtube.com/watch?v=FV2CTBjlpQ; Dean, *The Communist Horizon*; Jodi Dean, *Crowds and the Party*, Verso, London, 2016; contributions from Peter D. Thomas, Gavin Walker and Peter Hallward, *Theory & Event* 16: 4, winter 2013.

79 In terms of the CPGB, other key figures are Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012) – who regarded the Italian CP as his political home from the 1950s – and Monty Johnstone (1928–2007), whose now overlooked but significant writings include ‘Marx and Engels and the Concept of the Party’, *Socialist Register*, 1967. ‘Marx, Blanqui and Majority Rule’, *Socialist Register*, 1983, and ‘Is the Marxist Tradition Democratic?’, *Marxism Today*, 1981; all available at www/Marxists.org.

80 John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, *Marx and the Earth*, Brill, Leiden, 2016; Martin Empson, *Land and Labour: Marxism, Ecology and Human History*, Bookmarks, London, 2014; on mental health, Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, pp. 17–30. Lindsay’s work on the environment includes essays in *Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on Twentieth-century Writing*, 1976, and his book *Blast Power and Ballistics: Concepts of Force and Energy in the Ancient World*, 1974; and for what we’d now call mental health, see *The Anatomy of Spirit: an Inquiry into the Origins of Religious Emotion*, 1937, especially chap. seven.

81 Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (1986) has just been republished by Verso; a significant recent work is Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2011; the classic study remains István Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation, 1970*.

82 Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History* (2010), transl. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2014, p. 10.

83 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 17.

84 Bolton, ‘John Lindsay (1900–1990)’. 