Cedric Cohen Skalli and Libera Pisano

**Introduction**

The brutal murder of Gustav Landauer, committed by the Freikorps during the demise of the Munich *Räterepublik* on May 2, 1919, is a well-known tragedy that boded darkly for the Weimar Republic. Less well-known is the fact that several months prior, Landauer had been unable to join the beginnings of the Munich revolution as he was bedridden with the Spanish flu in Krombach. Not having fully recovered, he took a train to Munich on November 15, 1918, one week after the outbreak of the revolution. In a letter written on November 8, 1918 to the leader of the revolution, Kurt Eisner, who had just invited him to come to Munich for the “conversion of souls” (*Umbildung der Seelen*), Landauer replied that he “must still rest to stay alive.”[[1]](#footnote-2) A century after his death, Laundauer’s infection with the Spanish flu no longer seems an insignificant biographical detail. Instead, it acquires a new meaning that might help us better understand Landauer’s decision to throw himself into the fray of the revolution as one “who finds not death there, but rather life.”[[2]](#footnote-3) We have tended to forget that the protests immediately following WWI took place during a pandemic, much like the “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations and the current protests in South America, Belarus and Israel, which have all unfolded in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The aftermath of WWI, and to a lesser extent our epoch, share the hectic clash of a worldwide outbreak of infectious disease and revolts attempting to imagine and invent a concrete alternative to a collapsed world.

The vicissitudes of Landauer’s life, his political activism and his legendary death have been the subject of several comprehensive intellectual biographical studies, not least a recent publication by Rita Steininger that also includes a new detailed account of his murder.[[3]](#footnote-4) In the last few years, many academic and cultural events have been organized to commemorate Landauer’s life and work, including various exhibitions and several memorial initiatives.[[4]](#footnote-6) Another groundbreaking step was the publication of the second volume of his letters (1899–1919), edited and brilliantly commented on by Hanna Delf von Wolzogen, Jürgen Stenzel and Inga Wiedemann.[[5]](#footnote-7)

The present volume aims to add to the existing scholarship on Gustav Landauer by shedding a new light on his legacy focussing on the two interrelated notions of *skepsis* and *antipolitics*,and their articulation in the multifaceted features of his life and thought. The mutual entanglement of these two concepts has not yet received proper attention from scholars, who focus mainly on Landauer’s singular account of anarchism and mysticism alongside his conception of revolution and community. The present collection of essays intends to fill this lacuna in Landauer studies.

*Facing our times with Landauer*

A century after Landauer’s death, our time is marked by what political scientists Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes define in *The Light that Failed* (2020) as “the end of the Age of Imitation.”[[6]](#footnote-8) Krastev and Holmes coin this phrase to refer to the end of the Enlightenment’s dream of propagating a universal political organizational form (be it colonial, liberal-democratic or communist), but also to the globalization of communication, immigration, techno-science, and the economy, which has resulted partly in “destroying the idea of a common humanity capable of pursuing common aims,” and often also in “the withdrawal of peoples into barricaded national and ethnic communities.”[[7]](#footnote-9) Such a pluralistic world, both at a national and international level, has emerged out of two centuries of large-scale social and political engineering, colonization, and global conflicts that left individuals and communities deeply disillusioned and traumatized. In a period marked by profound doubt concerning the outcomes of modern politics and our expectations of it, and also by what Ann Applebaum rightly termed “the seductive lure of authoritarianism,”[[8]](#footnote-10) the figure of Landauer can help us rethink the crisis we are living through. Indeed, few writers and thinkers were as aware as Landauer of the challenges we face as individuals and societies in our global traumatic pluralism. Our times call for innovative models of benevolent collaboration to replace the expanding authoritarianism that is based on a vicious circle of the violent imposition of messages, submissiveness and aggression.

Let us examine one episode from Landauer’s life and intellectual development as an example. During his third prison sojourn in 1899–1900, Landauer grew convinced of the possibility of a mystical anarchism. Influenced by his incarceration, but also by his wide reading, he arrived at the conviction that real community starts from an empirical experience of radical isolation, which could also be viewed as a personal conversion. Paradoxically, he found that this period of isolation led him to develop a deeper and more authentic connection with people, their past, and the world. Following inventive pathways that his mind discovered during his physical imprisonment, Landauer forged a new understanding of revolution focused not on the organization of a party capable of seizing power, but rather on a cathartic reparation and renewal of human bonds and communities. This genesis of Landauer’s communitarian thought could serve as an example of how a moment of true isolation – even a lockdown – may lead us to care more profoundly about human, communitarian, and ecological needs. Landauer’s life and work can also teach us how to face the growing lure of authoritarianism with a more care-oriented and relational idea of politics.

*Gustav Landauer’s alternative: antipolitics and skepsis*

The alternative envisioned by Gustav Landauer mentioned in the title of the present volume refers to his specific way of conceiving of a radical form of community that could resist political instrumentalization by abstract entities such as a state, a form of economy or a national identity. The label “alternative” also points to the unique combination of disparate elements that make Landauer challenging to grasp as an activist and thinker. Landauer was a fin-de-siècle writer, a prolific translator, a politician, a journalist, a political thinker and a revolutionary, but also a conservative figure, a German and a Jew with an important role in late 19th- and early 20th-century Germany.

This complexity is manifest in his political positioning. Landauer was not an easily categorizable socialist and revolutionary, as his opposition to Social-Democracy, to WWI, to Bolshevism, to violent anarchism, and to the newly emerging Weimar Republic made clear. Indeed, Landauer refused to surrender to party politics until his death. In his 1913 obituary article on August Bebel, he wrote: “Liebknecht, Bebel, Auer, Singer were all united in only one thing, namely that there exists in fact only one interest: the Party. They did not really concern themselves with tangible issues, neither with the concrete situation of the workers, nor with the German Empire and its politics. All their legislative, organizational and activist work was only a means to strengthen the Party.”[[9]](#footnote-11) True to this cutting critique, Landauer endorsed an approach to social change he labelled “Antipolitik” – an approach opposing the modern hypertrophy of politics, and attempting to free men and societies from the abstract entities they were building to enslave themselves (state, capitalism, nationalism, and parties). He explained this concept to his readers in the journal *Der Sozialist*, which he himself edited, as follows:

The state is a condition, a relationship between human beings, a way in which humans behave towards one another. And one can destroy it by engaging in other types of relationships, by behaving differently with each other. The absolute monarch could say in the past: I am the state; we, who have confined ourselves in the absolute state, we must acknowledge the truth: we are the state – and it shall be so as long as we don’t become something else, as we don’t create institutions which constitute a real community and society of human beings.[[10]](#footnote-12)

 Landauer aspired to a revolutionary return to a communal life whose principle of organization would be both immanent and spiritual. His antipolitics rejected the separation between the care for the body and an autonomous superiority of the spirit that gives rise to abstract entities subordinating individuals and communities to a fictitious purpose. To oppose this submission of life to metaphysical idols, Landauer called for a therapeutic restoration of smaller human and economical bonds – a socialism understood as “unmediated relationships of interests against politics.”[[11]](#footnote-13) It is surely one of the major contributions of the essays gathered in this volume to offer a first scholarly treatment of Landauer’s notion of antipolitics.

The second axis of this volume perfectly complements the first. In view of his distrust of modern politics, it is not surprising to find in Landauer’s work a great attention to skepticism, which can be defined as a lifestyle rejecting any form of political, philosophical or cultural dogmatism. *Skepsis* can be considered to be the main line running through all of Landauer’s antipolitical and philosophical thought. More specifically, his rejection of authoritarian assumptions in all fields of human knowledge is based on a radical linguistic skepticism that the young Landauer developed on the basis of Mauthner’s *Sprachkritik*, and which could be considered the theoretical premise of his anarchism.

In a collection of articles written between November 1895 and February 1896 entitled *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Individuums* (On the developmental history of the individual), Landauer – then 25 years old – closes with a harsh invective against language seen as “the most dreadful reactionary power ever to be fought.”[[12]](#footnote-14) He sees language as the mother of lies who by sleight of hand replaces “real things” with “verbal concepts,” which are *Nichtigkeiten*, non-entities. Through its enchantment, language creates a dangerous web of words, ghostly idols that freeze reality and paralyze the flow of becoming. Language is an obstacle, a set of stable meanings that cannot capture reality in its constant changes. Instead of postulating the existence of the I, the individual, the personality – all of which are nothing but verbal concepts – human beings should rethink the universal bond beyond their linguistic separation. Therefore, Landauer yearned for someone who would be able to strike at the heart of “the mummified and putrefied language.”[[13]](#footnote-15)

The most difficult task “to overcome, by means of language, language itself and the obstacle it constitutes”[[14]](#footnote-16) consists in the development of communitarian thought, i.e., the acknowledgment that the portion of reality crystallized into a word is always partial and removed from life. Like the state, private property, morality and religion, language is considered by Landauer an enemy of life. Therefore his anarchy is synonymous with life – the life “that awaits us after we have freed ourselves from the yoke.”[[15]](#footnote-17) The anarchist challenge for Landauer is inseparable from a skeptical approach to language, or, in other words, from the striving to free oneself from any attempt at defining, categorizing and limiting through verbal concepts that which can be understood only within a broader unity and harmony. This critical approach to language and its antipolitical implications lies at the heart of the present collection of articles as offering a key to understanding the complex puzzle of Landauer’s life and thought. In an atmosphere of fake news, populism and conspiracy theories, we believe that the contributions offered in this book to elucidate Landauer’s skepsis and antipolitics could help us take more seriously the striving for an alternative articulation of our communitarian and ecological needs.

*Background and content*

The concept for this book was born out of the meeting of the two editors at the Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies in Hamburg during 2016–17, and more specifically out of our joint research on the last months of Landauer’s life in the Munich *Räterepublik* in 1918–1919.[[16]](#footnote-18) During our work, we developed the idea to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Landauer’s death by joining our respective domains of expertise, *Sprachphilosophie* (Libera Pisano) and Jewish political thought (Cedric Cohen Skalli), to convene scholars to a conference entitled *The Skepsis and Antipolitics of Gustav Landauer*. A century after Landauer’s tragic death, in a time marked by a deep skepticism concerning the consequences of modern politics, but also more than a century after the linguistic turn in philosophy, we decided to devote this international conference to the complex articulation of *skepsis* and *antipolitics* in Landauer’s life, thought and legacy. The conference was organized by the Bucerius Institute for the Research of Contemporary German History and Society at the University of Haifa on November 25–26, 2019, and was a great success. It brought together seventeen distinguished scholars from the US, Germany, Spain, the UK, Poland and Israel, bound together by a shared enthusiasm for the intellectual personality of Landauer and the desire to expand and renew extant scholarship on his life and work.

The seventeen scholarly contributions we are proud to present in this volume are organized into four broad categories: 1. Linguistic skepticism in Landauer’s literary and political anarchism; 2. Mysticism, romanticism, and history in the antipolitical stance of Landauer; 3. Elective affinities: Landauer and his contemporaries and 4. Landauer between the defense and renewal of Judaism. By combining history of philosophy, literary critique, cultural and intellectual history, theology and Jewish and German studies, the volume reveals the richness of the notions of *skepsis* and *antipolitics* in the context of Landauer’s life, work and intellectual entourage.

*Linguistic skepticism in Landauer’s literary and political anarchism*

The volume opens with a series of five studies devoted to the multifaceted linguistic skepticism that constitutes the intellectual background of Landauer’s literary and anti-political anarchism. In her essay entitled “The Desert and the Garden, Gustav Landauer’s anarchic translation of Fritz Mauthner’s Sprachskepsis,” Libera Pisano presents Gustav Landauer’s anarchic translation of Fritz Mauthner’s linguistic skepticism. The encounter between the linguistic skeptic and the anarchist has not yet received much scholarly attention – a lacuna Pisano’s and others’ essays in the volume attempt to fill. In her article, the author showcases the crucial role the two friends played in the *Sprachkrise,* a complex critique of language engaged in by poets and intellectuals through literary and philosophical debate during the years leading up to WWI. Landauer commented and edited the drafts of Mauthner’s *Beiträge zur Kritik der Sprache* during his prison stay in 1899. His editing was so extentensive that one can consider him a co-author of the *Beiträge*. Nevertheless, Pisano’s study also reveals differences between the linguistic skepticisms of the two authors: while Mauthner focused his attention on pointing out the metaphorical and illusory value of language and human knowledge mediated by words, Landauer considered the act of doubting our knowledge, language, and political institutions as a path leading to a new anarchist idea of community. Seeking to understand this intriguing form of anarchism, Pisano explores the role of creative metaphor in Landauer’s thought, focusing especially on metaphors linked to music and poetry as well as on the divide between the skeptical *ataraxia* (Mauthner) and anti-political anarchy (Landauer), often referred to using the images of the desert and the garden, respectively.

The following essay by Hanna Delf von Wolzogen entitled “Rufer in der Wüste” also highlights the image of the desert, this time examining the figure of the caller in the desert as embodying Landauer’s linguistic skepticism, and especially its performativity. Weighing the forms of oral speech in public spaces and solitary theoretical reflection against each other, Delf von Wolzogen demonstrates how Landauer’s political and literary activity refers constantly to an either real or imaginary “stage on which the rhetorical situation of calling and the situation of writing at the nocturnal desk takes place as a performative act before the eyes or the ears of the reader/listener.” Further examining Laudauer’s approach to key modern intellectual figures like Spinoza, Hegel, Schelling, and also Mauthner, Delf von Wolzogen reconstructs Landauer’s practical-pragmatical concept of revolution drawn from his linguistic skepticism. For this untypical anarchist, utopia was similar to a call, a breath of language which could turn the futility of words in face of harsh historical reality “into a surmountable distance” (a path in the desert) and into the possibility of “speaking of something new.”

The intersection between linguistic skepticism and politics is also at the heart of Elke Dubbels’ contribution, “Linguistic Skepticism and the Poetics of Politics in Gustav Landauer.” She investigates how Landauer’s search for a new poetic language informs his views on socialism in *Skepsis und Mystik* and *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*. In an innovative way, the author uncovers the links between Landauer’s writings and turn of the century *Weltanschauungsliteratur*. Yet Landauer, as Dubbels demonstrates, was skeptical about a possible fusion of science, metaphysics and ethics in the *Weltanschauungsliteratur* of his time, especially works by Julius Hart. Rejecting Hart’s harmonious vision of absolute truth, Landauer defended the need for multiple images of the worlds and even appealed for new poetic images which could bring social change in human life. As explained by Dubbels, human community itself came to be conceived by Landauer in his later writing as an image – an image of the communal spirit which he tried to invoke and above all to open to a revolutionary change. Therefore, Landauer speaks of socialism in terms of art, reclaiming the creative power of individuals for the transformation of the social realm.

Another relevant aspect of Landauer’s linguistic skepticism is analyzed by Sebastian Musch in his essay entitled “The Buddha’s Laughter.Gustav Landauer and Linguistic Skepticism in Fritz Mauthner’s Novella *Der letzte Tod des Gautama Buddha* (1912).”Starting with the long symbiotic friendship between Mauthner and Landauer, Musch describes their shared fascination with Buddhism, seen as a transcendent bridge between linguistic skepticism and mysticism. The author offers a careful reading of Mauthner’s novella *Der letzte Tod des Gautama Buddha* and its reception by Landauer, who suggested that in these pages his friend “had closed the chasm by laying open his inner life and thus revealed to be a true poet.” Musch situates both thinkers’ interest in the intellectual history of German Buddhism and demonstrates how – in Landauer’s view – this novella was a “watershed moment in Mauthner’s intellectual trajectory” as well as an eloquent example of their shared *Sprachkritik*. In order to achieve this goal, the author analyzes Landauer’s understanding of the figure of the poet, the intellectual foundation of both Landauer and Mauthner’s engagement with Buddhism, and the debate on the nature of German Buddhism, which embroiled Mauthner in dispute with Giuseppe de Lorenzo, one of the foremost Italian Buddhism scholars at the time.

In the essay titled *Specters of Landauer*, which closes this section, Yarden Ben-Zur turns to a description and analysis of Landauer’s skeptical and antipolitical conception of literature. According to the author, “Landauer looks at literature as a revolutionary and looks on reality as a literary critic and scholar. He dares to suggest possibilities that are only open in literature within the realms of reality. In other words, he dares to take literature seriously.” Exploring the multifarious semantic field of the German word *Ent-sagung*, which can be translated as renunciation, resignation, withdrawal or ascetism, and constitutes a bridge between Christian and Eastern thinking, Ben-Zur argues that this term touches the heart of Landauer’s skeptical and poetic way of speaking and acting. Moreover, through a cutting-edge reading of Landauer’s Shakespeare, Ben-Zur shows the affinity between his anarchic idea of revolution and Hamlet’s ghosts. In fact, Hamlet “embodies the conflicts which are bound to revolution, of its almost grotesque sides and moreover of its unavoidable failure (which is also a kind of success).”

*Mysticism, romanticism, and history in the antipolitical stance of Landauer*

The second section of the volume contains four essays that set out to elucidate Landauer’s concept of antipolitics in its historical dimensions, as well as in its mystical and romantic sources of inspiration. In the essay “An Elucidation of Landauer’s Concept of Antipolitics,” Cedric Cohen-Skalli seeks to clarify Landauer’s concept of antipoltics, juxtaposing his key texts on this notion with central sources that constitute its philological background. In the first section of his article, Cohen-Skalli discusses the creative translation and appropriation of La Boétie’s thought by Landauer as he developed a new understanding of the psychological background of political modernity. This element can be understood as the separation or transcendence of political power from society and individuals, made possible only by a renunciation of more reciprocal and communal human relationships. Therefore, for Landauer antipolitics means above all the re-absorption of modern political transference into a social and individual immanence resembling that of the medieval Christian era. The second section of Cohen-Skalli’s article explores the spiritual conversion of anarchism accomplished by Landauer, especially his endeavor to harmonize the Nietzschean individual rebirth with revolutionary aspirations. In the final section, the author sheds new light on Landauer’s antipolitical return to the basic form of society defined as the economical association securing the self-sufficiency of the small community. Confronting Landauer with Aristotle’s *Politics*, Cohen-Skalli shows that the German-Jewish anarchist strove to un-cross the political Rubicon of the separation between the private and political pheres, critically highlighting the regression at the heart of this antipolitical fantasy.

In the following contribution titled “Let us see how we can become Gods!” Agata Bielik-Robson interprets Landauer’s mystical writings as a philosophical and theological justification of his anarchist antipolitics*.* Bielik-Robson deploys a detailed analysis of Landauer’s interpretation of Meister Eckhart as a catalyst for an alternative understanding of the Judeo-Christian theological tradition, centered on a primordial creative godhead that encompasses the human subject. Eckhart’s notion of *theosis* provides Landauer with a unique concept of *Gotteswerden*, “becoming-God,” which teaches human individuals how to rise above their natural and social conditioning and embrace the ultimate freedom so far attributed only to the divine absolute. Relying on a philosophical interpretation of the Joachimite tradition and Scotus’ and Ockham’s nominalism, the author depicts Landauer as the “first thinker of *anacosmism*: a teaching of not just a nominalist ‘*turn* to the worldly’ but of an emphatic *re-turn* to the world which first must be lost in order to be regained in a new form.” Furthermore, Bielik-Robson points to another central dimension in Landauer’s understanding of mysticism: the *ana-baptism*, Landauer’s belief in the possibility of a second community. In view of Landauer’s unique antipolitical mysticism, the author points at the diffuse and mostly concealed nature of Landauer’s influence on Lukacs, Bloch, Arendt, Taubes, but also Derrida and Celan. This forgotten Landauerian background is defined by Bielik-Robson as a “sacred anarchy of universal *theosis* in which men-turned-gods relate to one another freely.”

In his *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* Landauer defines socialism as the “creation of future things as if they had been present since the beginning of time.” In an essay titled “Jede Zeit ist inmitten der Ewigkeit,”Asher Biemann demonstrates how Landauer’s original synthesis of progress and conservation is rooted in his conservative concept of time, his commitment to the past and his concept of eternity. Exploring Landauer’s mystical conception of time, Biemann shows that at the heart of Landauer’s call for a new social order lies something “gentle” and “enduring,” *Sanftes und Bleibendes*, a “covenant,” as he put it, “between our striving lives with the eternal forces that connect us with the world of Being.” Landauer’s antipolitical view of history is reconstructed by Biemann around the notion of the Middle Ages, the Christian age, whose unique synthesis of freedom and constraint represented, for Landauer, the “only time of flowering in our history,” an age in which “forms of society, of knowledge, of history penetrated each other.” Therefore, for Landauer history meant “neither a rapid progress [...] nor a revolutionary reversal,” but a patient, lingering progression in which the past is “still becoming, as our own unfinished reality.”

In the article entitled “Gustav Landauer Now,” which closes the second section of the volume, Sam Brody builds on an analysis by the sociologist Richard Day according to which Landauer “anticipated poststructuralist theory in analyzing capitalism and the state form not as ‘things’ (structures), but as *sets of relations between subjects* (discourses).” Brody demonstrates further that Landauer’s work also prefigured much of contemporary post-colonial and decolonial thinking in its ability to shift between multiple temporalities. In particular, Brody elucidates Landauer’s notion of compressed temporality and his challenging concept of action. Whereas the former notion does not entail a simplistic antipolitical dissolution of the possibility of disruptive events, but rather a spiral-like temporality of the alternation of *topia* and *utopia*, Landauer’s concept of action is considered in relation to the contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of action. Both share the same refusal to give up on the centrality of agency even if they tend to displace the center of gravity from individual to group action. Arguing for the relationality of this notion, Brody reveals a strong coherence between Landauer’s concepts of action and his spiral-like temporality. This articulation explains individuals’ ability to hasten or hinder historical processes as well as the possible eruption of utopia.

*Elective affinities: Landauer and his contemporaries*

The third section of the book presents a series of elective intellectual affinities between Landauer and some of his contemporaries. In her article entitled “Gustav Landauer and Simone Weil’s Politics of the *Ascesis*,” Cristina Basili aims at establishing an innovative dialogue between Gustav Landauer and Simone Weil. She discovers striking similarities between these two eccentric thinkers, both of whom have until now received little scholarly attention. Based on the affinities between their biographical and intellectual paths, Basili unearths the mystical tension that animates both Landauer’s and Weil’s anarchism beyond classical and even socialist political categories, leading the anarchist subject to a form of self-annihilation combined with a renewed care for the other and the world. Moreover, Basili shows that both share a challenging conception of political activity that aims to create a spirit of communality and a radical conversion of the relationship between human beings. Landauer and Weil imagine a society at the center of which stand the needs of the soul, and therefore invite us to renew our understanding of politics and to widen our political imagination in encompassing religion, poetics and science. According to the author, the interest of Landauer’s and Weil’s antipolitical theories lies in their “resemantization of the traditional political language and concepts, especially a community based on reciprocity, respect and cooperation.”

The next essay by Abraham Rubin entitled “The German-Jewish Legacy beyond Jewish Peoplehood” examines the extensive dialogue between Landauer and the Jewish thinker and poetess Margarete Susman and its implications. Rubin demonstrates how the questions of philosophy, culture, and religion that first emerged in their epistolary exchange materialize and metamorphose in Susman’s mature philosophical writings, especially in her original understanding of the idea of nation as well as of the oft-debated nexus of Jewishness and anarchism. Rubin considers Susman’s account of the *nation-as-name*, seen as a task to be fulfilled, as a “direct tribute to Gustav Landauer’s rendering of Zion as a metaphor for the Jews’ diasporic mission.” In addition, the author shows how her “dispersionist and nonfoundational vision of the German-Jewish legacy” could be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the notion of multiple identities, in line with Landauer’s concept of hybridity. Far from seeing Landauer’s political defeat as proof that his ideas were no match for reality, Susman sought to articulate *post-mortem* the political relevance of her friend’s antipolitics.

In the article “The Romantic Experience and the Problem of Community,” Yaniv Feller proposes a comparative reading of Landauer’s and Leo Baeck’s works around the notions of romanticism and romantic religion. Relying on Baeck’s essay “Romantic Religion,” Feller demonstrates how the latter’s category of the romantic shares similarities with Landauer’s philosophy while remaining critical of it, and especially of his understanding of Christianity. For Baeck, the history of the Church is a romantic struggle between its classical (Judaism) and romantic (pagan mystery cults) roots, whereas Landauer casts the medieval infusion of the people with Christian spirit as a highly positive phenomenon. Even if they agree on Martin Luther’s negative historical role, Landauer and Baeck have two antithetic notions of Christian religious experience. Whereas Baeck sees in the romantic *Erlebnis* religion an “individual redemption *from* the world and not *of* the world,” Landauer conceives the renewed self that emerges from the Eckhartian religious *Erlebnis* as the *via* toward a renewed “community, humanity, divinity.” Concerning their notions about historical communities, Feller demonstrates that Baeck envisions the Jews as an “ethical vanguard,” whereas for Landauer, the nation as “an organic, self-emerging and self-conscious unity” along medieval lines constitutes a model with revolutionary potential. Feller concludes that Landauer’s approach to historical and anarchic communities deploys what could be defined as an “anarchic elitism, i.e., his suggestion that not everybody is ready to be part of this new anarchical communal structure.”

Lilian Tuerk’s article “*Skepsis* and the Truth of Antipolitics in Yiddish Anarchist Thought” closes the third section of the volume. The essay develops further the historical question of the link between Judaism and anarchism. Acknowledging the marginalization of spiritual and mystical trends in anarchism due to “19th century Marxist industrialism and anarchist atheism,” Tuerk seeks in her study to delineate characteristic elements of Jewish spiritual anarchism through uncovering intellectual similarities between three unconventional Jewish figures – Gustav Landauer, A. Almi and Abba Gordin. Skepticism, anti-politics and the deification of the self were features of these thinkers’ spiritual anarchist thought. Tuerk demonstrates how Landauer’s notion of psycho-social regeneration as well as Almi’s agnostic stance point to a complex attitude of the Jewish anarchist readership vis-à-vis religion and science. Moreover, Tuerk shows that the antipolitical tendency towards retreat is a shared component of Landauer’s and Abba Gordin’s thought, along with their psycho-social notion of deification of the self. In conclusion Tuerk argues that Jewish spiritual anarchists developed an understanding of “individuals’ need for and aptitude to social bonds,” leading to an “identification of God and humankind, religion and psychology, the old and the new.”

*Landauer between the defense and renewal of Judaism*

The last section of the volume focusses on Landauer’s complex attitude vis-à-vis Judaism blending defense, critique and renaissance. The first essay by Ulrig Sieg, “Rebellion and the Power of Accident,” examines Landauer’s wrestling with the peculiarities of Jewish identity in very different contexts. First, Sieg examines Landauer’s reaction to Wilhelmine society’s indifference to cultural anti-Semitism. He shows how Landauer chose not to glorify his ancestry, but rather to overcome religious and ethnic differences through love and the power of sexuality to defuse Jewish identity and surmount Jewish endogamy. Second, Sieg then turns to how Landauer – in contrast to Buber’s emphasis on Jewish identity – rejected any position “strongly emphasising one’s own nationality” as a “weakness.” In view of their history, Jews have experienced various forms of cultural appropriation and “should therefore be wary of hypostasizing their own tradition.” Third, Sieg analyses Landauer’s views on WWI and points out is clear-sightedness in political matters. Rejecting patriotic rapture and intellectual demission, during the war Landauer developed an individual path of thought, which had a great influence on Buber in shifting him away from glorifying Jewish patriotism. Finally, Sieg closes his essay by describing how during the 1918–19 Revolution, Landauer was overwhelmed by the brutal intensification of anti-Semitism, leaving his enthusiasm for utopian ideals and for Eisner’s *Weltanschauung* disappointed.

The second article in this section, “Landauer, Strindberg, and the Promise to Abraham” by Warren Zeev Harvey with an *addendum* by Yael Sela on the Eternal Jew, proposes an analytical survey of Landauer’s lecture series on Strindberg held in 1916–17 in Berlin, and especially concerning the historical view of a poet. Harvey remarks that much of Landauer’s views on Judaism can be traced back to “the Judaism Landauer finds in Strindberg's *Historical Miniatures*.” The author demonstrates that Landauer creatively discerned in Strindberg’s account of human history the character of the wandering Jew (*der ewige Jude*) and his link to the secret of human history, a motif analyzed thoroughly by Sela in her *addendum*. As shown by Harvey, Landauer “seeks to replace that anti-Jewish myth with a positive myth about *der ewige Jude* who bears the secret of *der Ewige*.” Out of Strindberg's *Historical Miniatures*, Landauer develops a notion of Abraham’s blessing that “refers primarily not to the Unity of God (= not monotheism) but to the Unity of all human beings,” and therefore to a mystical understanding of “the interrelationship of all beings.” Harvey further elaborates on Landauer’s understanding of the bondage in Egypt and the redemption, stressing the universal and particular task of Jews “to remember the anarchic and egalitarian promise of Abraham.” In the *addendum*, Sela explains the ways in which the figures of Abraham and the Eternal Jew are fused together “in a generic manifestation of Abraham, who appears as a perpetual motif, a point of origin and a source of inherent human (particularly Jewish) knowledge of the Eternal in various guises throughout history.” The search for the unity of humankind begun for Landauer “with the initial act of individuation embodied in Abraham’s act of separation from his family and birthplace on his way to the unknown.”

Sebastian Kunze’s article “Gustav Landauer’s Skeptical Approach towards Martin Buber’s *Three Speeches on Judaism*” closes this fourth section and the entire volume. The author sheds light on Landauer’s reading of Buber’s *Drei Reden* and interprets his articles, “Judentum und Sozialismus” (1912) and “Sind das Ketzergedanken?” (1913) as a response to his friend’s position. According to Kunze, “Judentum und Sozialismus” is an abbreviated Landauerian version of Buber’s *Drei Reden*. Yet a year later, Landauer wrote in a different tone, leaving behind the Buberian emphasis on unity in favour of plurality. This multiplicity is constitutive of Landauer’s idea of the “as-if-nation” [*als ob Nation*] and its Jewish members, who are bringing “the best of what they feel about their old nationality into the new one.” In considering himself as a Jew and a German, Landauer defended a complex idea of identity and so could not share Buber’s idea of unity – neither as an exclusive unity nor as the purification of oneself. For Landauer, the strength of his hoped-for becoming nation lay in its ability to produce a unity in diversity, like the one he felt in himself.

1. Gustav Landauer, *Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, 2 vols., ed. Martin Buber (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1929), II:296, footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Gustav Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik. Versuche im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*, vol. 7 of *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegbert Wolf (Lich, Hessen: Edition AV, 2011), 7: 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For Landauer’s life, cf. Charles B. Maurer, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971); Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Ruth Link-Salinger, *Gustav Landauer: Philosopher of Utopia* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1977); Tilman Leder, *Die Politik eines ‘Antipolitikers’: Eine politische Biographie Gustav Landauers* (Lich / Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2014); Sebastian Kunze, *Gustav Landauer. Zwischen Anarchismus und Tradition* (Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2020) and Rita Steininger, *Gustav Landauer. Ein Kämpfer für Freiheit und Menschlichkeit* (München: Volk Verlag, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The exhibition „Gustav Landauer in Berlin 1889-1917” (27/03/2019- 09/05/2019) was organized by the cultural association “Gustav Landauer Denkmalinitiative” and in particular by Jan Rolletschek, in Rathaus Kreuzberg in Berlin. Moreover, another exhibition in Hannover (22/06/2020-30/08/2020) on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth was organized in cooperation with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and Verdi-Bildungswerk Niedersachsen. In 2017 in the Waldfriedhof of Munich, thanks to the initiative and the support of Siegbert Wolf – who edited Landauer’s *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Lich, Hessen: Edition AV, 2008/2019) and did valuable work in dissemination his writings and thought – a monument has been erected to honor his memory. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
5. See Gustav Landauer, *Briefe 1899-1919*, ed. by H. Delf von Wolzogen, J. Stenzel, I. Wiedemann (Götting: V & R Unipress GmbH, 2020). The first volume was edited by Christoph Knüppel and published in 2 volumes in 2017. Gustav Landauer, *Briefe und Tagebücher 1884-1900*, ed. by Ch. Knüppel (Götting: V & R Unipress GmbH, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
6. Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That failed,* Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy

(New York and London: Pegasus Books, 2020), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
7. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
8. Ann Applebaum, *Twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
9. August 15, 1910, *Der Sozialist*, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
10. June 15, 1910, *Der Sozialist*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
11. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
12. See Gustav Landauer, *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Individuums*, in *Anarchismus* vol. 2 of *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegbert Wolf (Lich, Hessen: Edition AV, 2009), 2: 45-68, at 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
13. Ibidem, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
14. Ibidem, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
15. See Gustav Landauer, Anarchism and Socialism, in *Revolution and Other Writings: A political Reader*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Kuhn, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 70-74, at 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
16. As result of this research, see Cedric Cohen Skalli-Libera Pisano, “Farewell to Revolution! Gustav Landauer’s Death and the Funerary Shaping of His Legacy,” *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 28 (2020), 184–227. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)