**An elucidation of Landauer’s concept of Antipolitics**

In this paper, I would like to elucidate, even if only partially, Landauer’s concept of *Antipolitik.* For this purpose, I would like to confront a few central texts of Landauer with three sources which constitute an important philological background of Landauer’s notion of Antipolitics.

**The first source is La Boetie’s *Discours sur la servitude volontaire* or in English *On voluntary Servitude***

Gustav Landauer is less known for his decisive role in introducing to German readership the Speech ***On voluntary Servitude***written by Montaigne’s great friend, Etienne de La Boetie, around 1550. Indeed, Landauer inserted in his 1907 Essay *Die Revolution,* a few pages of translation and commentary on La Boetie’s Speech,which count among the first German discussions of La Boetie’s political thought*.* Later in the years 1910 and 1911, he published in his newspaper *Der Sozialist* several translations of important passages of the work.

*In his 1907 Essay Die Revolution, Landauer devotes a long discussion of modern times, a period delimited by him chronologically as beginning around 1500 and continuing until his very days in the year 1907.* Landauer defines theologically and politically as a time of retreat of the Geist, therefore of political revolution. At the heart of this discusson, one finds a few fascinating pages on La Boetie’s Speech ***On voluntary Servitude.*** I am quoting a translation of Landauer:

Be resolved no longer to serve; and you will find yourselves free. I do not want you to push or to shake him, but only to no longer support him, and you will see him, like a great colossus, of which the base been removed, collapse of his own weight and break.

In an article the meaning of the Greek term κολοσσός, the famous linguist Emile Benveniste explains us that the word κολοσσός designated at the origin “a substitute” or “a double” of the deceased which was meant to perpetuate his presence *post mortem,* by presenting a statue of stones bearing some physical resemblance with the deceased. This figure of stones was a promise of eternity for the deceased, but also became soon a human figuration of the divinity, which could bestow his or her protection on the citizens of the Polis, like the famous *Colossus of Rhodes,* this bronze statue,which the people of Rhodes set up for the god-Helios after their victory against the ruler of Cyprus at the beginning of the 3rd century BC.

In the second section of the Book of *Daniel,* Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the collapse of the statue conveys the transient nature of Empires and Kingdoms, coming and falling one after the other, in contrast to the future messianic Kingdom of God. The colossus, the huge statue, expresses on the one hand the search for eternity of men and political regimes, as if stones could overcome death. On the other hand, it conceals human anxiety about the transiency of human life and political power.

Landauer read La Boetie’s explanations in the Speech ***On voluntary Servitude***demonstratinghow it is the voluntary servitude of the subjects or citizens *which* produces the colossus, understood here as the dissymmetry between the ruler and the subjects. Landauer was much impressed by La Boetie’s theory, and wanted to share it with his German readership. Therefore, he translates in *Die Revolution* the lines I quoted, but he also translated another very suggestive passage La Boetie’s *Speech*, preceding it with a few words of commentary:

The tyrant’s power comes from the voluntary servitude of humanity. “From where has he taken so many eyes with which he spies you, unless you give them to him? How does he have so many hands with which to strike you, unless he takes them from you? The feets with which he tramples your cities, where does he get them from, if they are not yours? How does he have any power over you except through you? How would he dare to come after you, unless he had information from you? What could he do to you, if you weren’t acting as fences of the thief who steals from you, accomplices of the murderer who kills you and traitors to yourselves?”

The effect of political augmentation which constitutes the dissymmetry between the ruler or the State and the subjects, is labelled by La Boetie “treason to oneself,” pointing for Landauer to the new psychological background of modernity, the separation or transcendence of political power from society and individuals. A situation opposed to the Christian spirit of Middle Age, defined by Landauer as the following:

The Christian era was characterized by the totality of these forms – forms that were interrelated and organized without ever creating a social pyramid or totalitarian power. The social priority of the Middle Ages was not the state but society, or, to be exact: *the society of societies*.

This moment of political separation is famously described by Hobbes as the “Generation of the great Leviathan:”

This is more than Consent, or Concord; it is a recall Unitie of them all, in one ant the same Person, made by Covenant of every man with every man, in such a manner, as if every man should say to every man, I authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner. (Leviathan, 120)

Be resolved no longer to serve; and you will find yourselves free, writes La Boetie, and translates Landauer.

By resolving no longer to serve, the subjects could thus suspend the “generation of the great Leviathan,” this transference of power responsible for modern States, and bring the political colossus to collapse and break. This vision played surely an important role in Landauer’s attraction to La Boetie, in his desire to translate him in German and disseminate his political thought, which was a strong challenge to political modernity.

Yet, Landauer added to this vision of collapse of the colossus a warning of his own:

But conspiracies to chase away or kill a tyrant can be enormously dangerous when conceived by men who are after fame and glory and hence prone to reproducing tyranny.

Modern political action, especially revolution, presented itself as a remedy for unjust political power, while it was, in the history, a way to reproduce it in different forms, and thus to disseminate, amplificate and perfectionate it into more abstract form of Statehood. Before proceeding to his next translation-quotation, Landauer develops further his psychological understanding of La Boetie’s concept of voluntary servitude:

tyranny is ]…[ is not an external evil. It is an internal flaw.

Landauer then present to his German readership another famous passage of La boetie about the necessity to suspend any transference of power. The passage reads as a phantasy of self-resorption of the political transcendence into its immanent psychological background, the individuals:

It is not necessary to fight the tyrant. Neither is it necessary to defend oneself against him. The tyrant will eventually defeat himself. People only need to stop accepting servitude. They do not need to take anything away from the tyrant, they must only stop giving to him. Nor need they change themselves, they need only stop hindering their own development.… When the tyrant does not receive and is no longer obeyed, he ends up naked, without force and without power. He ends up being nothing. He shares the fate of a root that is left without water and nourishment: it turns into a dry, dead piece of wood.

Pursuing his role of German translator and divulgator, Landauer explains that La Boetie anticipated all the later revolutionary thought, and even already went beyond it! If one changes just a few words in La Boetie text! (braucht man wenige Worte bei Boetie zu verändern), then the *Discours* ist the microcosm of Revolution!

The message is: It is *in you*! It is not on the outside. It *is you*. Humans shall not be united by domination, but as brothers *without domination*: *an-archy*.

Landauer explains further: revolution is only spirit in a negative form, a search for spirit in the age of States and Empires. Only an understanding of Revolution in terms of La Boetie can bring political modernity to its necessary psychological regression: *without domination – with spirit*! Writes Landauer. The suspension, the resorption of modern political transference will create, according to Landauer, the conditions in which spirit will cease to externalize itself and return to its individual and social immanence, as in the Medieval Christian era.

In a passage of *Discours* not translated by Landauer, La Boetie defines the possible meaning of the undoing of tyranny:

Nothing should be deater to man than to regain his natural right and, so to speak, to return form being a best to a man...

If for La Boëtie, the “undoing” of tyranny consisted in ceasing to increase the power of the ruler into colossal dimensions, and in returning from a pathological political state, to a state of nature, and humanity, Landauer defines the finality of regression from the political modern state, not in terms of nature, but in terms of resurgence of to a spiritual bound.

**The second literary source to Landauer’s concept of *Antipolitik* I would like to mention is Nietzsche.**

As Siegbert Wolf taught us in his introduction to the volume of Landauer’s *Ausgewähle Schrifte* entitled *Antipolitik*,already 10 years before the publication of *Die Revolution*, Landauer defined himself as “Antipolitiker.” One source of inspiration for this notion of *Antipolitik* is Nietzsche, Siegbert Wolf points in his introduction to *Ecce Homo,* I would like to refer to another text of Nietzsche taken from the chapter *What the German lack* in the *Twilight of the Idols* published in 1889:

In the Section 4 of this chapter one reads:

If one makes a reckoning, it is obvious not only that German culture is declining, the sufficient reason for it is obvious too. After all, no one can spend more than he has – that is true of indivuals, it is also ture of nations. If one spends oneself on power, grand politics, economic affairs, world commerce, parliamentary institutions, military interests – if one expends in this direction the quantum of reason, seriousness, will self-overcoming that one is, then there will be a shortage in the other direction. Culture and the state – one should not deceive oneself over this – are antagonists: the ‘cultural state’ is merely a modern idea. The one lives off the other, tone thrives at the expense of the other. All great cultural epochs are epochs of political decline : that which is great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical, even anti-political...

Nietzsche defines his critical attitude to the new Bismarck Reich in antipolitical terms, opposing *State* as a new passion of the Germans which swallows every former spiritual aspirations, and *culture* as an autonomous and self-sufficient finality or drive. In the section 5, Nietzsche opposes *Bildung* as a finality in itself (*selbst Zweck*) to the *Reich* which transforms any institution, especially the educational one into a factory producing and formatting quickly men useful to the State.

For Nietzsche, the growing involvement of every sector of human activity, especially culture, into the political realm resulted in a decadence of the German Spirit – whose object of thought and preoccupation begun to be more and more defined by the States and its news – leaving almost impossible the pathos of the distance necessary to an autonomous development of the spirit.

All unspirituality, all vulgarity, is due to the incapacity to resit a stimulus – one *has* to react, one obeys every impulse. In many instances, such a compulsion is already morbidity, decline, a symptom of exhaustion – almost everything which unphilosophical crudity designates by the name ‘vice’ is merely this physiological incapacity not to react.

Against this decadence of the German Spirit, Nietzsche develops not only an *Antipolitik,* but also eine große Politik, which he opposes to the politics of interest of Empires, and defines as “the will to make of physiology the mistress who decides for all other question” (die große Politik will die Physiologie zur Herrin über alle anderen Fragen machen.)

Without exaggerating the proximity with Nietzsche, it is fair to say that Landauer develops his antipolitical aspirations, partly formulated with the help of La Boetie, especially the “undoing” or “resorption of the State,” in terms of spiritual regeneration. The end of State domination will correspond, for Landauer, to resurgence of an immanent spirit, understood as a psychological and social principle.

I already mentioned earlier that we will eventually reach a point when state and society – or the surrogate of community and authoritarian power on the one hand, and the true spiritual union on the other – will be separated and when only one of them will prevail. In the meantime, however, they coexist in confusion. Their eventual separation will not be abstract but real – it will be brought on by destruction and creative spirit. For Etienne de La Boetie, retreat and passive resistance against *the one* were still directed against the king – in the future, *the one* will be the state. Then it will also become obvious that it is not a particular form of the state that causes oppression. What causes oppression is self-coercion, self-denial, and the worst of all emotions: mistrust, not only towards others but also towards oneself. All this is engrained in the notion of the state itself; a notion that replaces spirit, inner sovereignty, and life with domination, external control, and death.

Landauer uses a strange and strong formulation in German, *das Schmutzigste des Unsaubern*, the dirtiest of the unclean, to designate the psycho-social degeneration which accounts for modern State building: self-coercion, self-denial. With Antipolitics, envisioned by Landauer, the psychological projection of an organizational principle in an external realm will come to an end, and regenerate spirit, inner sovereignty, and life.

***The third source I would like to mention is Arsitotle***

The meaning of Landauer’s *Antipolitik* as a suspension of the political externalization and as regeneration of the immanent spirit of individuals and nations is coupled with a regressive notion of salvation, from States or Empires to *Grundform* of society.

No world statistic and no world republic can help us. *Salvation can come only from the rebirth of the peoples out of the spirit of community!*

The basic form of socialist culture is the league of communities with independent economies

and exchange system. Our human prosperity, our existence now depends on the fact that the unity of the individual and the unity of the family, which are the only natural groups that have survived, is again intensified to the unity of communities, the basic form of every society.

This passage of the 1911*Call to Socialism* makes clear the link between salvation, rebirth, spirit and a certain return to the basic form of society. This basic formed of societz is defined, in antipolitical terms, as the *Bund der selbständing wirtschaffenden Gemeinde*, as the economical association which secures the self-suffiency of the small community. The return from centuries of States and Empires building into the self-sufficient cell of economic activity was supposed for Landauer to liberate the spirit from its modern urge to externalize itself in expansionist political and capitalistic forms – and thus to regenerate human spirit to its fundamental form – the free and immanent association of individuals.

In the following lines, Landauer defines this basic form of societywith the help of two interrelated models. The first model is the *oikonomia* of the family:

The independent individual, who lets no one interfere in his business; for whom the house community of the family, with home and work-place, is his world; the autonomous local community; the county or group of communities, and so on, ever more broadly with the more comprehensive groups that have an ever smaller number of duties — that is what a society looks like, that alone is socialism, which is worth working for, which can save us from our misery. Futile and wrong are the attempts to further expand in states and groups of states the coercive system of government that is today a surrogate for the absent free-spirited unity, and to extend their sphere still further into the field of economics than had previously happened.

In contrast to the political movement of externalization which transfers most of the deliberation and decisions into the higher political sphere of the ruler or the assembly, the model of the family reclaimed here by Landauer consists in the economic capacity of the family to sustain itself and therefore strictly limits the necessity to any transfer of authority and expertise to any other entity – except for the limited necessity of exchanges and free association. With the return to the family *oikonomia*, the antipolitical project of resorbing the political transference takes clearly a regressive shape.

The second model related to the first is the community

A natural unity can be attained by us men only where we are in local proximity, in real contact. In the family, the uniting spirit, the union of several persons for a common task, and for a common purpose, has too narrow and scanty a form for communal life. The family is concerned only with private interests. We need a natural core of the common spirit for public life so that public life will no longer be filled and led exclusively by the state and coldness as till now, but by a warmth akin to family affection. This core of all genuine communal life is the local community, the economic community, whose essence no one can imagine who seeks to judge if, for instance, by what today calls itself “community.”

I would like to explain this second model, which reads both as a correction and development of the family model with a comparaison with a famous passage in the first book of Aristotle *Politics*.

The partnership [κοινωνία] comes therefore that about the in course of nature for everyday purposes is the House [οικός]...

On the other hand the primary partnership made up of several households for the satisfaction of not mere daily needs is the village. The village according to the most natural account seems to be a colony from a household, formed of those whom some people speak of as ' fellow-nurslings,' sons and sons' sons...

The partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state; it has at last attained the limit of virtually complete self-sufficiency, and thus, while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for good life. Hence every city-state exists by nature, inasmuch as the first partnerships so exist; for the city-state is the end of the other partnerships, and nature is an end, since that which each thing is when its growth is completed we speak of as being the nature of each thing, for instance of a man, a horse, a household…

Whereas Aristotle describes an historical development toward the polis as a natural development which unfolds the telos already present in the first partnership, the family, while becoming more visible in village and fully realized in the polis, Landauer is not interested to make of the necessary passage from family to community an anticipation of the State, and a justification of its necessity. On the contrary, very much aware of the Aristotelian three stages development family-village-polis, Landauer is interested to reach the common interest of public life without the Aristolian solution of continuity between “life” [ζην] and “good life” [ευ ζην], without the supplementary institution of a political realm of decisions and deliberations beyond the economic activity of sustaining one’s life. The term *Geist* used by Landauer designates both the natural urges of the family and the reflexive capacities of the community on its needs without passing the political Rubicon of the separation between the economical realm and the political realm.

The antipolitical regression imagined by Landauer thought is thus at the height of the political age, of State and Empires building, the wish to bring again men and women before the “before the choice: either to experience the real destruction of mankind … or to make the first beginning of the ascent with our own action.”

Conclusion

As a provisory conclusion, I would like to evoke an article of the psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi published in 1931 in Freud’s *Internazionale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* and entitled *Kinderanalysen mit Erwachsenen, Child Analysis in the Analysis of Adults.* In this article, Ferenczi defends the utility of regression in the analytic cure:

When you consider that […] most pathogenic shocks take place in childhood, you will not be surprised that the patient, in the attempt to uncover the origin of his illness, suddenly lapses into a childish or childlike attitude. Here, however, several important questions arise, which I had in fact to put to myself. Is there any advantage in letting the patient sink into the primitive state of the child and act freely in this condition?

Again the opinion and practice of Freud, Ferenczi thought “that the cathartic result of being submerged for a time in neurosis and childhood has ultimately an invigorating effect.” Against Marx and his followers, Landauer thought also that there could be a cathartic effect in the anti-political regression from modern State and Capitalism to “a joyful life in a just economy” (according his formulation in the 1910 Article *Die Siedlung.*) Landauer explains this term just economy a few lines later: “we have to step out of capitalism: we want to establish… socialist villages.”

As Nietzsche put it bluntly *Antipolitik* is a cure, a physiology, a violent return to vital normality, after men lost their social bonding spirit, and developed instead a political and capitalist surrogate, as Landauer would formulate it.

Yes, Antipolitik is cure, but cure of what? Following Ferenczi’s essay, we could say that Antipolitik wants to be a cure to the traumatic or modern split of the self between “a suffering, a brutally destroyed part a part which […] knows everything but feels nothing.” If we return to Landauer’s translation of La Boetie Speech with which I beguin:

Be resolved no longer to serve; and you will find yourselves free. I do not want you to push or to shake him, but only to no longer support him, and you will see him, like a great colossus, of which the base been removed, collapse of his own weight and break.

We could say that Antipolitik hoped to be a cure for the repressed traumas who are responsible for the modern transcendence of politics and capitalism, for the psychological modern split between the servant and the ruler, and for the frightening play out of this traumatic split in the history of the 19th and 20th century.