Cedric Cohen Skalli and Libera Pisano

**Introduction**

The brutal death of Gustav Landauer, murdered by the Freikorps at the end of the Munich *Räterepublik* on May 2, 1919, is a well-known tragedy, auguring bad for Weimar Republic. Yet, much less know is the fact that several months earlier, Landauer could not join the Munich revolution at its beginning, since he was in Krombach bedridden by the Spanish flu. Not completely recovered, he took a train to Munich on November 15, 1918, one week after the outbreak of the revolution. In a letter dated November 8, 1918 to the leader of the revolution, Kurt Eisner who had just invited him to come to Munich for the conversion of the souls (*Umbildung der Seelen*), Landauer replied that he “must still rest to stay alive.”[[1]](#footnote-1) One century after his death, the Spanish flu is not anymore a meaningless detail in his life. It acquires a new meaning and might help us to understand better Landauer’s decision to jump into the breach of the revolution as somebody “who finds not death, rather life there.”[[2]](#footnote-2) We have tended to forget that the protests immediately after the WWI took place during a pandemic, much like demonstrations such as ‘Black lives Matter’, the current protests in South America, in Byelorussia and in Israel, which have unfolded in 2020 during the covid-19 pandemic. The aftermath of WWI and to a lesser extent our epoch too share the hectic clash of a planetary lethal disease and revolts attempting to imagine and invent a concrete alternative to a collapsed world.

The vicissitudes of Landauer’s life, his political activism as well his legendary death have been the subject of several comprehensive intellectual biographical studies, not least a recent publication of Rita Steinberg who includes also a new detailed version of his brutal murder.[[3]](#footnote-3) Recently many academic and cultural events have been undertaken to commemorate Landauer’s memory, such as exhibitions as well as several initiatives for memorials[[4]](#footnote-4) and the recent groundbreaking publication of the second volume of his letters (1899-1919) edited and commented magnificently by Hanna Delf von Wolzogen, Jürgen Stenzel, and Inga Wiedemann[[5]](#footnote-5).

The present volume wants to add a new perspective on Gustav Landauer to the existing scholarship. It attempts to shed new light on his legacy focussing on two interrelated notions of *Skepsis* and *Antipolitics* and their articulation in the multifaceted features of his life and thought. The intertwinement of these two concepts has not received proper attention by scholars, who focus mainly on Landauer’s singular account of anarchism and mysticism, alongside his conception of revolution and community. The current collection of essays intends to fill this lacuna in Landauer studies.

*Facing our time with Landauer*

One century after Landauer’s death, our time is marked by what political scientists Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes defines in *The Light That failed* (2020) as “the end of the Age of Imitation.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Krastev and Holmes mean with this formula both the end of Enlightenment’s dream of spreading a shared political organizational form (be it colonial, liberal-democratic or communist), but also the globalization of communication, immigration, techno-science, and economy which resulted partially in “destroying the idea of a common humanity capable of pursuing common aims” and often “in the withdrawal of peoples into barricaded national and ethnic communities.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Such a pluralistic world, both at an international and national level, emerged out of two centuries of grand scale social and political engineering, colonization, world conflicts, which inflicted upon individuals and communities deep disillusions and traumas. In a period marked by a deep doubt concerning the outcomes and expectations of modern politics, and also by what Ann Applebaum rightly named as “the seductive lure of authoritarianism,”[[8]](#footnote-8) Landauer’s example can help us to rethink the crisis which we are living in. Indeed, few writers and thinkers were as aware as Landauer of the challenges we face as individuals and societies in our global traumatic pluralism, which calls for innovative models of benevolent collaboration instead of the expanding authoritarian models based on the vicious circle of violent intromission of messages, submissiveness and aggression.

Let us take one example from the life and intellectual development of Landauer. During his third sojourn in prison in 1899-1900, he became convinced of the possibility of a mystical anarchism. Influenced by incarceration but also by his many readings, he discovered that the real community starts from an empirical experience of radical isolation, which could also be viewed as a personal conversion. This period of isolation paradoxically developed in him a deeper and more authentic connection with human beings, their past, and the world. Through inventive paths, which his mind opened up in physical imprisonment, Landauer forged a new understanding of revolution focused not on the organization of a party capable to seize power, but rather on a cathartic reparation and renewal of human bonds and communities. This communitarian thought could serve as an example of how a moment of true isolation – even a lockdown – can lead us to care more profoundly for human, communitarian and ecological needs. Landauer’s life and work can teach us also how to face the raising lure of authoritarianism by a more care-oriented and relational idea of politics.

*The alternative of Gustav Landauer: antipolitics and skepsis*

The alternative of Gustav Landauer mentioned in the title of the present volume refers to his specific way to think a radical form of community, which could resist any kind of political instrumentalization by an abstract entity such as a State, a form of economy or a national identity. The label “alternative” points also at the unique combination of disparate elements which make him an activist and thinker uneasy to grasp. 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, who had an important role in late 19th and early 20th century Germany.

This complexity is manifest in his political positioning. Landauer was not a socialist and a revolutionary of a known kind, as his opposition to Social-Democracy, to WWI, to Bolshevism, to violent anarchism, and to the new Weimar Republic made public. Indeed, Landauer refused unto his death to surrender to Party politics. In his 1913 obituary article on August Bebel, he wrote: “Liebknecht, Bebel, Auer, Singer were all united in only one thing: there exists in fact only one interest: the Party. They did not interest themselves really for tangible issues, neither for the concrete situation of the workers, nor for the German Empire and its politics. All their legislative, organizational and agitational work were only means to strengthen the Party.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Following this sharp criticis, Landauer endorsed a view of social change he labelled “Antipolitik” – which fought against modern hypertrophy of politics, and attempted to free men and societies from the abstract entities they were building to enslave themselves (state, capitalism, nationalism, and parties). In his newspaper *Der Sozialist*, he exposed to his readers his conception:

State is a condition, a relationship between human beings, a way in which humans behave one to the other. And one can destroy it in engaging into another type of relationships, in behaving one to another differently. The absolute monarch could say in the past: I am the state; we, who have enclosed ourselves in the absolute state, we must acknowledge the truth: we are the state – and it shall be so as along as we won’t become something else, as we won’t create institutions which constitutes a real community and society of human beings.[[10]](#footnote-10)

 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 autonomous superiority of the spirit, which gave raise to abstract entities subduing individuals and communities to fictious finality. Against this submission of life to metaphysical idols, Landauer called for a therapeutic restauration of smaller human and economical bonds – a socialism understood as “unmediated relationships of interests against politics.”[[11]](#footnote-11) 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 other axis of this volume is perfectly in line with the first. In view of his distrust to modern politics, it is not a surprise to find in Landauer’s work, great attention and interest for skepticism which can be defined as a form of life against any form of political, philosophical or cultural dogmatism. *Skepsis* can be considered as the fil rouge that ran through all Landauer’s antipolitical and philosophical thought. More deeply, his rejection of authoritarian assumptions in all the fields of human knowledge is based on a radical linguistic skepticism, which the young Landauer developed on the basis of Mauthner’s *Sprachkritik* that could be considered as the theoretical premise of his anarchism.

In a collection of articles written between November 1895 and February 1896, with the title *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Individuums* (On the developmental history of the individual), the 25-year-old Landauer concludes his thoughts on individuals and individuality with a harsh invective against language seen as “the most dreadful reactionary power ever to be fought.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Language is the mother of lies who by means of a sleight of hand replaces “real things” with “verbal concepts”, which are *Nichtigkeiten*, no-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 which cannot catch reality in its constant changes. Instead of postulating the existence of the I, the individual, the personality which are nothing but verbal concepts, human beings should rethink the universal bond beyond their linguistic separation. Therefore, Landauer yearned for someone who could be able to strike at the heart of “the mummified and putrefied language.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

The most difficult task “to overcome by the means of language the language itself and its obstacle”[[14]](#footnote-14) consists in the development of a communitarian thought, i.e. the acknowledgment that the portion of reality crystallized in a word is partial and distanced from life. Like the state, private property, moral and religion, language is considered by Landauer an enemy of life. Therefore his anarchy is synonymous of life – the life “that awaits us after we have freed ourselves from the yoke.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The anarchic challenge for Landauer is inseparable from a skeptical approach to language, or in other words from the search to free oneself from any attempt of defining, categorizing and limiting what can be understood only in a broader unity and harmony. This critical approach to language and its antipolitical implication offers a key to understand the complex puzzle of Landauer’s life and thought, and it lies at the heart of the present collection of articles. In an atmosphere of fake news, populism, 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 search for an alternative articulation of our communitarian and ecological needs.

*Background and Content*

The idea of the book is born out of the meeting of the two editors at the *Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies* in Hamburg during the years 2016-2017 and more substantially out of our joined research on the last months of Landauer in the Munich *Räterepublik* in 1918-1919.[[16]](#footnote-16) During our work, we came to the idea to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Landauer’s brutal death in joining our respective domain of expertise, *Sprachphilosophie* (Libera Pisano), and Jewish political thought (Cedric Cohen Skalli), and in convening scholars to a conference titled *THE SKEPSIS AND ANTIPOLITICS OF GUSTAV LANDAUER*. One century after Landauer’s tragic death, in a time marked by a deep skepticism concerning the consequences of modern politics, but also by more than a century of linguistic turn in philosophy, we thought 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, November 25 and 26, 2019. This conference was a great success. It brought together seventeen distinguished scholars, coming from the US, Germany, Spain, UK, Poland and Israel, bound together by the same enthusiasm about the intellectual personality of Landauer, and the same desire to expand and renew extent scholarship on his life and work.

The seventeen scholarly contributions we are proud to present in this volume are organized along four broad rubrics: 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 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 skepsisand antipoliticsin Landauer’s life, works 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, which constitutes the intellectual background of Landauer’s literary and anti-political anarchism. In her essay titled *The Desert and the Garden*, *Gustav Landauer’s anarchic translation of Fritz Mauthner’s Sprachskepsis***,** Libera Pisano displays Gustav Landauer’s anarchic translation of Fritz Mauthner’s linguistic skepticism. The encounter between the linguistic skeptic and the anarchist has not yet received proper attention by scholars – a lacuna Pisano and other essays in the volume attempts to fill. The author demonstrates in her article the crucial role the two friends played in the *Sprachkrise,* a complex critique of language discussed by poets and intellectuals in philosophical and literary debate during the years leading up to World War I. Landauer commented and edited the drafts of Mauthner’s *Beiträge zur Kritik der Sprache* during his permanence in jail in 1899. His editing was crucial to such an extent that one can consider him as a co-author of the *Beiträge*. Nonetheless, Pisano’s study reveals also differences between the linguistic skepticisms of the two authors: whereas Mauthner focused his attention on the metaphorical and illusory value of language and human knowledge mediated by words, Landauer considers 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 metaphoric creativity 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 the anti-political anarchy (Landauer), often referred to with the images of the desert and the garden.

The following essay of Hanna Delf von Wolzogen *„Rufer in der Wüste“* highlights also 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 up 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 a real and 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.” Depicting further 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 scepticism and politics is also at the heart of Elke Dubbels’ contribution, *Linguistic Scepticism 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 shows the link between Landauer’s writings and the *Weltanschauungsliteratur*, which thrived around 1900. Yet Landauer, as Dubbels demonstrates, was skeptical about a possible fusion of science, metaphysics and ethics in the “Weltanschauungsliteratur” of his time, especially the one of Julius Hart. Rejecting Hart’s harmonical vision of absolute truth, Landauer defended the need for multiple images of the worlds and even appealed for new poetic images which could bring a 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 tries 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 scepticism is analyzed by Sebastian Musch in his essay titled *The Buddha’s Laughter.**Gustav Landauer and linguistic skepticism in Fritz Mauthner’s novella Der letzte Tod des Gautama Buddha (1912)****.***Starting from the long symbiotic friendship between Mauthner and Landauer, Mush describes their shared fascination with Buddhism, seen as a transcendent bridge between linguistic skepticism and mysticism. The author proposed a careful reading of Mauthner’s novella *Der letzte Tod des Gautama Buddha* and its reception by Landauer, who suggested that in those pages his friend “had closed the chasm by laying open his inner life and thus revealed to be a true poet”. Musch situates their interest in the intellectual history of German Buddhism and demonstrates how – according to Landauer’s perspective – this novella was a “watershed moment in Mauthner’s intellectual trajectory” as well as a blatant example of their shared *Sprachkritik*. In order to fulfil 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 scholars of Buddhism at that time.

In the essay titled *Specters of Landauer*, which closes this section, Yarden Ben-Zur turns to the 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 with 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 poetical 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 ‘anti-political’ stance of Landauer*

The second section of the volume contains four essays, which sets out to elucidate Landauer’s concept of antipolitics in its historical dimensions as well 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 deals with the creative translation and appropriation of La Boetie’s thought by Landauer, who 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 to more reciprocal and communal human relationships. Therefore, antipolitics means first for Landauer the re-absorption of modern political transference into social and individual immanence, as in 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 searched to cross back the political Rubicon of the separation between private and political realms, highlighting critically the regression at the heart of 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 for his anarchist antipolitics*.* Bielik-Robson deploys a detailed analysis of Landauer’s interpretation of Meister Eckhart as a catalysator for a different understanding of the Judeo-Christian theological tradition, centered on a primordial creative godhead which 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 raise 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 diffused 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 eternity.” In an essay titled *“Jede Zeit ist inmitten der Ewigkeit",* Asher Biemann demonstrates how Landauer’s original synthesis between progress and conservation is rooted in his conservative concept of time, in his commitment to the past and in 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, relies something “mild” 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 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, history meant “neither a rapid progress for Landauer nor a revolutionary reversal,” but a patient, lingering progression in which the past is “still becoming, as our own unfinished reality.”

In the article titled *Gustav Landauer Now*, which closes the second section of the volume, Sam Brody starts from the analysis of the sociologist Richard Day, according to whom 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 preceded also much of contemporary post-colonial and decolonial thinking, through his ability to shift between multiple temporalities. In particular, Brody elucidates Landauer’s notion of compressed temporality and his challenging concept of action. Whereas the first 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 with 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 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 hurry 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 a few 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, who have received until now little scholarly attention. Relying on the affinities between the biographical and intellectual paths of the two atypical thinkers, Basili then 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 the human beings. Landauer and Weil imagine a society whose center are the needs of the soul, and therefore invite us to renew our understanding of politics and to widen our political imagination in a way mixing 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 titled *The German-Jewish Legacy beyond Jewish Peoplehood* deploys and studies the intense dialogue between Landauer and the Jewish thinker and poetess Margarete Susman. In this contribution Rubin demonstrates how the questions of philosophy, culture, and religion that had 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, is 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 acknowledging of the multiple identities, in line with Landauer’s concept of hybridity. Far from seeing Landauer’s political defeat as a 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 propose 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 demonstrate how his category of romantic shares similarities with Landauer’s philosophy, while being 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 understands 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 the visions of 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 of historical and anarchic communities deploys what could be defined 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 a spiritual and mystical trend 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 intellectual similarities between three unconventional Jewish figures – Gustav Landauer, A. Almi, and Abba Gordin. Scepticism, anti-politics and the deification of the self were features of their 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 for 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 of her study, Tuerk argues that Jewish spiritual anarchists developed an understanding of “individuals’ need for and aptitude to social bonds,” leading to “identification of God and humankind, religion and psychology, the old and the new.”

*Landauer between defense and renewal of Judaism*

The last section of the volume focusses on Landauer’s complex attitude vis-à-vis Judaism mixing 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 of all Sieg examines Landauer’s reaction to Wilhelmine society’s indifference toward cultural anti-Semitism. He shows how Landauer chose not to glorify his historic origins, but rather to overcome religious and ethnic differences by love and the power of sexuality to defuse Jewish identity, and to surmount Jewish endogamy. Secondly, Sieg turns then to Landauer who – in comparison with Buber’s emphasis on Jewish identity – refused any posture “strongly emphasising one’s own nationality” as a “weakness. In view of their history, Jews experienced different form of cultural appropriations and “should therefore be wary of hypostasing their own tradition.” Later, Sieg analyses Landauer’s views on the Great War and shows how he was clear-sighted in political matters. Rejecting patriotic rapture and intellectual demission, Landauer developed an individual path during the War which had great influence on Buber and moved him away from glorifying Jewish patriotism. Finally, Sieg closes his essays describing how during the 1918/19 Revolution, Landauer was overwhelmed by a more brutal anti-Semitism, leaving his enthusiasm for utopian ideals and for Eisner’s *Weltanschauung* hopeless.

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 1916-17 series of lectures in Berlin on Strindberg, and especially to 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 distinguished in Strindberg'’ 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, which “refers primarily not to the Unity of God (= not monotheism) but to the Unity of all human beings,” therefore to a mystical understanding of “the interrelationship of all beings”. Harvey develops further 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 in which sense, the figure of Abraham and the Eternal Jew are fused together “in 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 sceptical 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 interpreted his articles, “Judentum und Sozialismus” (1912) and “Sind das Ketzergedanken?” (1913 as an answer to the positions of his friend. According to Kunze, “Judentum und Sozialismus” is an abbreviated Landauerian version of Buber’s *Drei Reden*. Yet one year later, Landauer wrote differently, leaving the Buberian emphasis on unity in favour of plurality. This multiplicity is constitutive of Landauer’s idea of “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.” By considering himself as a Jew and a German, Landauer defends a complex idea of identity and could not share Buber’s idea of unity – not as an exclusive unity or as the purification of oneself. For Landauer, the strength of his hoped-for becoming nation lies in the ability to produce a unity in diversity as he felt it 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-1)
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-2)
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-3)
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 150 years after his birth has been 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 a valuable work of dissemination his writings and thoughts – a monument has been erected to honor his memory. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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-5)
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-6)
7. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ann Applebaum, *Twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. August 15, 1910, *Der Sozialist*, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. June 15, 1910, *Der Sozialist*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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-12)
13. Ibidem, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibidem, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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-15)
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-16)