

Skepsis and Antipolitics

The Alternative of Gustav Landauer

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An Elucidation of Landauer's Concept of Antipolitics

Cedric Cohen-Skalli

Introduction: Landauer, Chief Editor of *Der Sozialist*

In the 1 September 1910 issue of *Der Sozialist*, its editor-in-chief Gustav Landauer¹ incorporated a short presentation and partial translation of the essay *On Voluntary Servitude* (*Discours de la servitude volontaire*), which was written around 1550 by Michel de Montaigne's close friend Étienne de La Boétie (1530–1563).² Although his was not the first German translation of the essay—which was authored by the political philosopher Johann Benjamin Ehrhard (1766–1826) and had appeared more than a century prior, in 1793, in the journal *Der Deutsche Merkur*—Landauer imparted a new topicality to this provocative essay that was deeply rooted in his notion of antipolitics, which the following pages will aim to clarify. As the editor-in-chief of *Der Sozialist*, Landauer was probably behind the decision to insert his translation of La Boétie's text at the bottom of pages 2 to 5 in a smaller font, below three main articles printed in a larger font as the core of the newspaper: Friedrich von Sallet's 1843 article on popular sovereignty ("Volkssouveränität"), Proudhon's 1849 article "Les Malthusiens," also translated by Landauer, and an article criticising the Tsar's visit to the Kaiser in early September 1910.

The meeting of the two monarchs was an attempt to reach a *détente* between the two neighbouring empires and their conflicting interests.³ However, from the perspective of *Der Sozialist*, this visit was a disgrace:

1 On Landauer's role in *Der Sozialist*, see Rita Steininger, *Gustav Landauer: Ein Kämpfer für Freiheit und Menschlichkeit* (Munich: Volk Verlag, 2020), 25–28.

2 On the *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, see Simone Goyard-Fabre, "Introduction," in Étienne de La Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, ed. Simone Goyard-Fabre (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 17–127.

3 See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 167, 188–90; Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 319–350.

In our last edition, we expressed our protest against the Russian Tsar's visit to Germany. Things happened as we predicted: the working and oppressed people in Germany, who followed the [1905] revolution with great enthusiasm, have now forgotten the blood shed by their brothers. A few true socialists might shout themselves hoarse, but their call will not be loud enough to awaken the sleeping masses. The great political parties have decided to remain silent, for whatever reason.⁴

The editorialist (perhaps Landauer himself) continues his article by expressing deep sorrow about the workers' apathy and by dreaming of a "huge march led by the working class in Giessen, Wiesbaden, Mainz, Offenbach, Hanau, and Frankfurt, to greet the Tsar in its own way."⁵ How was it possible that Nicholas II, "a svelte young man, whose kind bourgeois appearance would betray only a mediocre functionary,"⁶ could rule over such an "immense empire?" Moreover, how could it be the case that "the world could build up expectations for this young Tsar, when for more than a century it had been raising hopes for the new Tsars"⁷ in vain?

Part of the answer to these harsh questions can be found in the opening article of the issue, entitled "On Popular Sovereignty." There, the political essayist Friedrich von Sallet (1812–1843)⁸ explains:

The people, the mass of the population, stands in terms of number and force in a relation of overwhelming superiority to the few powerholders and their little flock of favourites. The people can undoubtedly impose its will, as soon as it wants to [...]. If the people endure political servitude, it bears it only because it wants to.⁹

4 Gustav Landauer, "Der Zarenbesuch," *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 17 (1910): 134. All translations of Landauer's texts are mine unless stated otherwise.

5 Landauer, "Der Zarenbesuch," 134.

6 Landauer, 134.

7 Landauer, 136.

8 Friedrich von Sallet was born on 20 April 1812 in Neißé. Theodor Paur wrote a first *Lebens- und Bildungsgeschichte* of Sallet in a volume compiled by some of his friends and dedicated to him immediately after his early death in Reichau on 21 February 1843 due to an "incurable respiratory disease" (*Leben und Wirken: Friedrich von Sallet's nebst Mittheilungen aus dem literarischen Nachlasse desselben, herausgegeben von einigen Freunden des Dichters*, ed. Theodor Paur [Breslau, 1844]). See also Theodor Paur, "Biographisches Vorwort," in Friedrich von Sallet, *Sämmtliche Schriften* (Breslau, 1848), 1:1–viii. At only about twelve years of age, Sallet had already undergone his primary induction into the armed forces, in whose charge he would remain until 1838. Paur further emphasises Sallet's later, yet eager studies of Hegel's writings. His collected writings were published in five volumes (Breslau, 1845–1848), comprising a wide variety of literary genres.

9 Friedrich von Sallet, "Volkssouveränität," *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 17 (1910): 129.

As von Sallet phrased it, “who else could be a servant, but a free man?” With the progressive enlightenment of the people, the existing domination would “last only for a short transitional phase; then the existing order will be overturned, while the new order, proceeding from the awakened popular will, shall be built.”¹⁰

However, if almost seventy years after these words, in 1910, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Tsar Nicholas II could still rule over the destiny of Central and Eastern Europe, this was partly because the awakening of the popular will Friedrich von Sallet had envisioned had been curtailed by an inhumane policy implemented by the elites, which this same issue of *Der Sozialist* criticises by publishing a new translation of Proudhon's *The Malthusians*:

Dr. Malthus, an economist, an Englishman, once wrote the following words:

“A man who is born into a world already occupied, his family unable to support him, and society not requiring his labor, such a man, I say, has not the least legal right to claim any nourishment whatever; he is really one too many on the earth. At the great banquet of Nature there is no plate laid for him. Nature commands him to take himself away, and she will not be slow to put her order into execution.”

As a consequence of this great principle, Malthus recommends, with the most terrible threats, for every man who has neither labor nor income upon which to live to take himself away, or at any rate to have no more children.¹¹

By propagating a widely accepted scientific discourse advocating for the “extinction” of the poor as a natural and beneficial necessity, the nineteenth-century elites had successfully delayed the natural emancipation of the workers. This dubious “success” was due to an act of treason committed by the “educated” elites, as described by Proudhon: instead of contributing to the awakening of popular sovereignty, these elites depicted the people as a mass of “too many,” a crowd of useless individuals who were rightly destined to perish.

If we consider the editorial composition of this issue of *Der Sozialist* as a whole, it seems that Landauer and his coeditors had found a creative way to criticise the Tsar's visit to the Kaiser. They shrewdly chose not to publish their harsh account on the first page, and instead had it preceded by two essays on

10 Von Sallet, “Volkssouveränität,” 129.

11 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “Die Malthusianer,” *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 17 (1910): 130. The English translation, which was made by Benjamin R. Tucker, is taken from *Liberty* 2, no. 17 (1884): 7.

popular sovereignty and the Malthusian ideology of the elites—both of which made plain the historical absurdity and danger of monarchies. Printed after these two devastating critiques of nineteenth-century conservative politics, the report on the meeting of the two monarchs, Nicholas II and Wilhelm II, fully develops the lessons to be drawn from these two essays for the present. It vividly portrays the link between political apathy, the illusion of reformatory monarchs, and the violent crushing of the workers' aspirations and revolutions.

Beyond their astute strategy for avoiding political censorship, the editors of *Der Sozialist* added another imaginative layer of explanation and criticism to this outdated monarchical rule by publishing La Boétie's masterpiece of early modern political philosophy below the abovementioned articles:

On Voluntary Servitude (Von der freiwilligen Knechtschaft)

A tract by Étienne de La Boétie, translated by Gustav Landauer

[...] This work was composed [...] more than 360 years ago. It was already circulating in manuscripts while its author, who chose to conceal his authorship, was still alive. [...] It was probably well known to the revolutionary republicans, often called the Monarchomachs, who in the next centuries in England, Holland, and France fought against absolutism. [...] The publisher of this tract gave it the excellent title of *Contr'un*—a formula which cannot be translated into German. A literal rendering of it would be: the Anti-Monos, Monos meaning the One, the Monarch, against whom the author fought such a systematic battle.¹²

By disseminating the story and text of La Boétie's *Contr'un*, a source of inspiration for so many revolutionaries in Western Europe, Landauer and his colleagues not only hoped to rekindle the antimonarchic spark among their readers; they also aspired to deliver a more anarchist lesson encapsulated in the first words of La Boétie's tract.

"I don't see any good in having several lords;
Let no more than one be master, let only one alone be king."
That is what Ulysses, speaking in public, said in Homer. If he had said
nothing more than
"I see no good in having several lords," it would have been well spoken.¹³

12 Étienne de La Boétie, "Von der freiwilligen Knechtschaft" (part 1), trans. Gustav Landauer, *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 17 (1910): 130–31.

13 Translation taken from David Lewis Schaefer, *Freedom over Servitude: Montaigne, La Boétie, and "On Voluntary Servitude"* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 191.

If the Tsar and the Kaiser could run their world, this did not only mean that the Russians and Germans had not done away with their monarchs; more fundamentally, it meant that they were still voluntary servants of one or several lords and that a deeper liberation from the psychological need for rulers was necessary in order to prevent the illusory deliverance of passing from the hands of one lord to those of many. This deeper liberation from the rule of the one or the many is at the heart of Landauer's notion of *Antipolitik*, to whose elucidation the present article is devoted. For this purpose, I will juxtapose Landauer's key texts on this notion with several sources that in my view constitute its philosophical background. With reference to La Boétie, Hobbes, Nietzsche, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Aristotle, Tönnies, and Marx, I hope to clarify three central dimensions in Landauer's concept of antipolitics: the psychological critique of political modernity, the search for a renewal of the spirit, and the therapeutic return to the community.

1 The Hidden Psychological Background of Political Transference

1.1 *La Boétie and Landauer: Two Secret Geniuses of Modernity?*

At the end of his short presentation of La Boétie's life and work in the issue of *Der Sozialist* discussed above, Landauer invites his readers to learn "more about the context of this unique publication [*On Voluntary Servitude*]" in his book *Die Revolution*, which had been published three years prior, in 1907. In doing so, he refers to a central discussion on modernity in the book—a period that he delimits following convention as beginning around 1500, but which he defines in the following original way:

The millennium between the year 500 and the year 1500 was defined by one single tendency, namely ordered multiplicity, fed by a common spirit that united everything. [...] The era from the year 1500 until now (and beyond) is an era without a common spirit. It is an era defined by a lack of spirit. It is hence an era of violence; an era where spirit is present only in certain individuals; an era of individualism, and hence of atomized individuals as well as uprooted and dissolved masses; an era of personalism, and hence individual melancholic and ingenious spirits; an era without truth (like any era without spirit); an era of decadence, and hence transition; and an era of human beings without any heart, without integrity, without courage, without tolerance.¹⁴

14 Gustav Landauer, "The Revolution," in Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 135 (with a few light

Landauer seems to elaborate his metahistorical narrative parallel to Ferdinand Tönnies's 1887 *magnum opus* *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, especially to his sociological and critical distinction between traditional organic communities and modern atomistic societies.¹⁵ Partially following Tönnies's understanding of modernity as "a progression towards [an atomistic, mechanistic and conventional] society," Landauer adds theological overtones to his own definition. The modern era is a period of retreat for the *Geist*, understood as the end of the "mythical force of Christianity" and its capacity to produce a complete organisation of social activities. This has turned women and men towards atomisation, massification, and a loss of substance. Another facet of this retreat for Landauer is the individual quest for a new common spirit, which has expressed itself in religious and political revolutions:

Spirit never disappears entirely. If it no longer manifests itself among the people, it appears as an abundant and exhausting force in some lonely individuals.... Our centuries are marked by a desire for freedom and by attempts to attain it. This is what we usually mean when we speak of revolution. All surrogates of spirit are oppressive. Utopia struggles against a specific form of transition. Wise and courageous individuals, full of spirit and soul, lead a struggle that substitutes one form of transition for another, and so forth, until the period has run its time and a new common spirit takes shape, born from the desires and distresses of individuals [...] this is our way: to see a common spirit disappear, and to go through a period of violence and rage—a period of distressed masses and a few ingenious individuals—until we reach a new common spirit. It is now the time to document this way, or, in other words, our revolution.¹⁶

changes). For the original German text, see Gustav Landauer, *Die Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1907), 51–52.

- 15 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris, trans. Margaret Hollis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22–92. For the original German text, see Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1912), 9–100. The proximity between Landauer and Tönnies can be deduced from Martin Buber's 1919 article "Worte an die Zeit: Gemeinschaft," in Buber, *Werkausgabe, Band 11: Schriften zur politischen Philosophie und zur Sozialphilosophie*, ed. Francesco Ferrari, Stefano Franchini, and Massimiliano De Villa (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019), 1161–71. However, Landauer himself does not refer directly to Tönnies in his published work, nor in his letters.
- 16 Landauer, "The Revolution," 136. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 52–53.

Modernity has been torn between nostalgia for a stable common spirit—a return to the era before the community lost its spiritual bond—and a thirst for constant change and revolutions led by inspired individuals. Landauer illustrates this tension through the opposition of two historical figures: Martin Luther (1483–1546), “a symbol for the lack of spirit among people and for times of demise,”¹⁷ and Petr Chelčický (c.1390–c.1460), “the Christian anarchist.”¹⁸ Chelčický and his followers aimed “to revive a society in which life was based on the holiness of each individual and the common spirit of a Christian community.” However, “it was too late,”¹⁹ Landauer concludes. Luther “realized with a cruel sharpness the still subterranean evolution of his century: the separation of life from faith and its substitution of spirit by organized violence.”²⁰ The failure of the revival of the Christian spirit coupled with its retreat into the private realm created the conditions for a further substitution of its manifestation in the medieval communal organisation with the modern political dissymmetry between the absolute ruler and his subjects. Facing this new tyranny, “political revolution has beset people’s minds in rapid succession: first in the Netherlands, then in Scotland, France, and England.”²¹ Revisiting the period of the Wars of Religion and the political revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Landauer deploys an impressive wealth of literary and historical knowledge of radical political thinkers and Monarchomachs such as John Ponet (c.1514–1556), François Hotman (1524–1590), George Buchanan (1506–1582), Hubert Languet (1518–1581), and Juan de Mariana (1536–1624). For Landauer, the political revolution advanced by these thinkers and their followers in Western Europe was proof of the following rule: “What dies *as spirit* remains as an *opinion*, a *conviction*.”²² The common Christian spirit’s retreat into the private sphere left a void within Western societies that was soon to be filled by the confrontation of two historical phenomena: state-building and revolutionary utopias.

17 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 137. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 54.

18 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 137. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 54.

19 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 139. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 57.

20 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 142. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 63.

21 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 145. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 67.

22 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 146. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 69.

At the heart of this vision of early modernity encompassing both the privatisation of faith and the struggle between the absolute ruler and the Monarchomach, Landauer places the forgotten figure of La Boétie:

Let us go back [...] to meet a man [La Boétie] [...] who conceptualized this revolution, gave it a psychology and its classical expression. [...] In the era of individualism, the genius precedes events. His work often remains ineffective for an extended period, appearing to be dead. Yet, it remains alive for a very long period, and waits for others to apply its ideas practically; men of great and strong spirit, even if they are not necessarily inspired by such a visionary and fateful solitude.²³

Did Landauer identify with this portrait of La Boétie as the hidden genius of early modernity and consider himself a hidden genius of later modernity? Whatever the answer to this psychological question, it is nevertheless certain that Landauer developed major aspects of his antipolitics in the subsequent pages he wrote on La Boétie.

1.2 *A New Colossus*

Combining translation, paraphrase, and summary, Landauer reveals the content of La Boétie's tract to his German readers. Aiming to present his and La Boétie's antipolitical views, Landauer raises the question: "What can be done against the servitude that has come over humanity?"²⁴ The answer is given with a translated passage:

Be resolved no longer to serve; and you will find yourselves free. I do not want you to push or to shake him [the Monarch], 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.²⁵

23 Landauer, "The Revolution," 155 (with changes). For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 84.

24 Landauer, "The Revolution," 158. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 88.

25 Translation taken from Schaefer, *Freedom over Servitude*, 196–97. Landauer's translation into German is very accurate and elegant: "Soyez résolu de ne servir plus, et vous voilà libres. Je ne veux pas que vous le poussiez ou l'ébranliez, mais seulement ne le soutenez plus, et vous le verrez, comme un grand colosse à qui on a dérobé sa base, de son poids même fondre en bas et se rompre" (La Boétie, *Discours*, 139); "Sei entschlossen, keine Knechte mehr zu sein, und ihr seid frei. Ich will nicht, daß ihr den Tyrannen verjagt oder ihn vom Throne werfet; stützt ihn nur nicht; ihr sollt sehen wie er, wie ein riesiger Koloß

La Boétie and Landauer's use of the term "colossus" should command our attention. In an article written in 1932 on the meaning of the Greek term *κολοσσός*,²⁶ the famous linguist Émile Benveniste (1902–1976) explains that the word originally designated "a substitute" or "a double" of the deceased, meant to perpetuate his presence after death in the form of a stone statue in his likeness. Initially, this stone figure constituted a kind of promise of individual immortality, but it soon also became a human figuration of the divine, which could bestow protection on the citizens of the polis. The most famous example is the Colossus of Rhodes, the bronze statue erected by the people of Rhodes to the god Helios after their victory over Cyprus at the beginning of the third century BCE. In the second chapter of the book of Daniel, however, Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the collapse of the composite statue hints at the transient nature of empires and kingdoms, rising and falling in succession. The gigantic statue of the colossus expresses, on the one hand, the individual and collective longing for immortality, as if stones could overcome death, while on the other, it betrays human anxiety about the transience of life and of political power.

In the excerpt from *On Voluntary Servitude* that Landauer translated, La Boétie develops the notion of the colossus further beyond its classical understanding; that is, beyond man's projection into eternity through a stone substitute. He adds that the voluntary servitude of subjects or citizens builds another kind of colossus: the political dissymmetry between the ruler and the ruled. Impressed by La Boétie's theory and infused with the desire to pass it on to his German readers, Landauer translates another very suggestive passage, preceding it with a few words of commentary:

The tyrant's power comes from the voluntary servitude of humanity. "From where does he take so many eyes with which to surveil you, unless you lend them to him? How does he have so many hands with which to strike you, unless he receives them from you? How can he have any power over you except through your agreement? What could he do to you if you were not serving as fences for the thief who steals from you, accomplices of the murderer who kills you, and traitors of yourselves?"²⁷

den man die Unterlage nimmt, in seiner eigenen Schwere zusammenbricht und zertrümmert" (Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 89).

26 Émile Benveniste, "Le sens du mot *κολοσσός* et les noms grecs de la statue," *Revue Philologique* 58 (1932): 118–135.

27 Landauer, "The Revolution," 156 (with changes, the translation from La Boétie is taken from Schaefer, *Freedom over Servitude*, 196). For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 85–86.

The political augmentation that produces the “colossal” dissymmetry between the ruler and his subjects is defined by La Boétie as the subject’s betrayal of him or herself. This terminology innovatively points to the psychological background of political modernity, understood as the separation or transcendence of political power from society and individuals. This separation is only made possible by a renunciation of the more reciprocal and communal human relationships that—according to Landauer—defined the Christian spirit of the Middle Ages, viewed as a “totality of autonomies (*Gesamtheit von Selbständigkeiten*)—forms that were interrelated and organized without ever creating a social pyramid or total power.”²⁸ In translating La Boétie, Landauer sought to find a novel way of grasping the dismantling of the “social priority of the Middle Ages” and the replacement of the medieval “*society of societies*”²⁹ with a modern projection onto the new ruler and an emergent state authority.³⁰

1.3 *A New Insight into the Leviathan*

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

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment.³¹

28 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 131. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 43.

29 Landauer, “The Revolution,” 131. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 43.

30 On German “medievalism,” see Carla Melanie Heelan, “Origin and Antitype: Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany, 1806–1914” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33493307>.

31 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Revised Student Edition*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120.

“Be resolved no longer to serve; and you will find yourselves free,” La Boétie had written a hundred years before Hobbes’s *magnum opus* (1651). Landauer’s choice to translate this extract from *On Voluntary Servitude* in his own book *Die Revolution* was not a coincidence. Two hundred and fifty-six years after *Leviathan*, the German-Jewish anarchist intended to deliver a message about his notion of antipolitics. About forty years after the unified Wilhelmine Reich was founded as an attempt to centralise the mosaic of social and political entities inherited from the Middle Ages, Landauer aimed to challenge his readers’ understanding of the political transition from the medieval to the modern period. In echoing and disseminating La Boétie’s call to “no longer serve,” he perhaps hoped that subjects could halt the “generation of the great Leviathan”; that is, the transference of power that gave rise to modern states. More probably still, he wanted to reverse the arrow of time or progress by first pointing at the destruction of the medieval forms of association implied by the rise of “the great Leviathan.” Indeed, Hobbes precedes his description of the constitution of a political sovereign by rejecting “the joining together of a small number of men,” the spontaneous sociability of “living creatures” or the idea of a voluntary covenant between men as the basis of social organisation.³² According to Kropotkin, later followed by Landauer,³³ all these features constituted the spirit of social associations in the medieval period. By unearthing the figure and work of La Boétie, Landauer intended to expose the unprecedented step-up in submission responsible for the establishment of modern political sovereignty and its obverse erasure of the less hierarchical medieval forms of association. La Boétie’s model of voluntary servitude serves Landauer as a unique source of psychological insight into the Leviathan—into the reasons behind the transition from medieval society to the modern state. This insight played an important role in Landauer’s attraction to La Boétie and his desire to translate him into German and disseminate his thought as an antidote to political modernity.

1.4 *The Reabsorption of Modern Political Transference*

Three years after publishing *Die Revolution*, which gave such prominence to La Boétie, Landauer translated the entire tract, the first part of which appeared in the abovementioned 1910 issue of *Der Sozialist*. As an astute editor, he decided to place a translation of the following passage from La Boétie below the report on the Tsar’s visit:

32 See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118–20.

33 See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1939), 154–79.

If we see not a hundred, not a thousand men, but a hundred provinces, a thousand cities, a million people not attack one who is alone, who treats everyone like a serf and a slave, what shall we call it? Is it cowardice?³⁴

In juxtaposing the monarch's visit with La Boétie's vivid description of the subjects' cowardice, Landauer hoped to educate his readers on the psychological sources of modern domination, but also to contribute to the future collapse of the colossus. However, Landauer's vision of this collapse was not identical to the political project of the Monarchomachs and their later revolutionary followers. "Conspiracies to chase away or kill a tyrant," he wrote, "can be enormously dangerous when conceived by men who are after fame and glory, and hence prone to reproducing tyranny."³⁵ If political revolution presents itself as a remedy for unjust power, in Landauer's antipolitical view, however, it often serves to extend and perfect the existing order into ever more abstract forms of statehood. Political revolution is neither the end of nor the solution to the modern articulation of voluntary servitude and political projection onto the sovereign, since "tyranny [...] is not an external evil, but an internal flaw" (*nicht ein Übel draußen ist, sondern ein Mangel im Innern*).³⁶ The fall of the colossus will only proceed from the suspension of the individual transference of power to the ruler, from the reabsorption of the political transcendence of the state back into its immanent psychological background, the individuals:

When the tyrant is not given anything and is no longer obeyed, he ends up naked, without force nor 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.³⁷

For Landauer, La Boétie anticipated—and even surpassed—all later revolutionary thought. *On Voluntary Servitude* is the key, the microcosm of true revolution. One need only "change a few words in La Boétie's text" (*braucht man wenige Worte bei Boétie zu verändern*):

34 Schaefer, *Freedom over Servitude*, 193 (with slight changes). See *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 17 (1910): 134.

35 Landauer, "The Revolution," 159. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 89.

36 Landauer, "The Revolution," 159. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 89.

37 Landauer, "The Revolution," 159. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 89–90.

The message is: It is *in you!* It is not outside. It is *you*. Humans shall not be united by domination, but as brothers *without domination: an-archy* (*Die Menschen sollten nicht durch Herrschaft gebunden sein, sondern als Brüder verbunden. Ohne Herrschaft; An-archie*).³⁸

Revolution is only spirit in a negative form, a search for spirit in the age of State and Empire. Only an understanding of revolution in La Boétie's terms can bring political modernity to its necessary point of psychological regression, following Landauer's antipolitical motto: *without domination—with spirit!* The suspension, the reabsorption of modern political transference, will, according to Landauer, create the conditions in which the psyche will cease to project itself into political colossi and return to its individual and social immanence, as in the medieval Christian era.

In a passage of *On Voluntary Servitude* not quoted by Landauer in *Die Revolution*, La Boétie defines the possible goal of the undoing of tyranny: "There is nothing a human should hold more dear than the restoration of his own natural right, to change himself from a beast of burden back to a man, so to speak."³⁹ If, for La Boétie, the "undoing" of tyranny consists in ceasing to magnify the ruler's power to colossal dimensions and in going from a pathological political state back to a state of nature and humanity, Landauer defines the finality of his antipolitical regression from the modern state not in terms of nature, but in terms of the resurgence of a spiritual bond.

2 Regeneration of the Spirit

2.1 *The Spiritual Conversion of Anarchist Antipolitics*

The term and notion of *Antipolitik* appears in Landauer's early anarchist articles from the 1890s. It designates a critical positioning vis-à-vis the organisation of the workers' movement into parties and syndicates. In the July 1897 article "A Few Words on Anarchism," Landauer declares: "We [anarchists] do not consider ourselves to be a party."⁴⁰ For him, "the party is only an abstract and authoritarian concept, not a psychic reality"; furthermore, it "is from the beginning the child of unreason, dependence, and unphysiognomy."⁴¹ The division

38 Landauer, "The Revolution," 160. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 91.

39 Schaefer, *Freedom over Servitude*, 195. For the original text, see La Boétie, *Discours*, 136–37.

40 Gustav Landauer, *Anarchismus*, vol. 2 of Landauer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegbert Wolf (Lich: Edition AV, 2009), 233.

41 Landauer, *Anarchismus*, 233.

of society into political parties results from the decomposition of the corporative and federative medieval governance and the subsequent construction of state administration. This evolution was a topic dealt at length in Kropotkin's 1902 *Mutual Aid*, a book that Landauer translated in 1904.⁴² It was also at the centre of Tönnies's conception on the transition from an immanent communal organisation to a conventional State regulation of individualistic interests. Landauer transposed these socio-political conceptions into a psycho-historical concept: the modern retreat of the spirit into the individual (the genius). This evolution prompted individual thinkers to develop theoretical concepts of a utopian society that could be implemented by the abstract entity of the state. The immanent and organic community was replaced by an idealisation of society that reduced its "psychic" reality, its internal rationality, its independence, and its beauty to a partial principle (liberalism, nationalism, socialism, etc.). In order to reshape society according to the chosen principle, the genius must gain the state's approval for his cause by mobilising as many people as possible into the relevant "party." Nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics is thus a struggle between parties to determine which partial principle—uprooted from its premodern communal context—should be imposed by the state apparatus and its agents onto the individuals forming a people, now divested of their agency and reduced to a "mass." Following this critique of political parties, Landauer defines the antipolitics he recommends for anarchists with an ingenious play on words: "We have no political aspirations; rather, we have aspirations against politics" (*wir haben vielmehr Bestrebungen gegen die Politik*).⁴³

However, in a February 1898 article entitled "The Poet as Procurator," Landauer adopts a more nuanced approach to antipolitics. There, he writes: "I should keep silence on the Dreyfus affair, first as a Jew, second as a German, and third as an *Antipolitiker*."⁴⁴ After having ironised against "the fiery, excited, and fanatic way in which international Jewry (*die internationale Judenschaft*) sided with the Jewish officer Dreyfus from the beginning,"⁴⁵ Landauer presents the antipolitical stance he may have adopted:

42 See Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 154–207. For Landauer's translation, see Kropotkin, *Gegenseitige Hilfe in der Entwicklung*, trans. Gustav Landauer (Leipzig: T. Thomas, 1904).

43 Landauer, *Anarchismus*, 233.

44 Gustav Landauer, *Internationalismus*, vol. 1 of Landauer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegbert Wolf (Lich: Edition AV, 2008), 62.

45 Landauer, *Internationalismus*, 62.

The *Antipolitiker* in me could say: Why should this affair concern you? Isn't it a dirty private affair of the ruling class? Should I agitate myself for an officer of the general staff, who would be ready, like all his fellow officers, to engineer plans to annihilate the proletariat? And who are those who speak for him [Dreyfus]? Are they not, except for men of honour like Clémenceau and Zola, politicians of the worst kind?⁴⁶

However, in the body of the article, Landauer distances himself from the antipolitical attitude of many French anarchists, and concludes his paper by translating the final lines of Zola's *J'accuse*, published three weeks prior by the *Aurore* in Paris: "As for the people I am accusing, I do not know them [...]. To me they are mere entities, agents of harm to society. The action I am taking is no more than a revolutionary measure to hasten the explosion of truth and justice."⁴⁷ Landauer eventually identifies with Zola's action which aimed to shed light on the state's injustice and called to release one of its victims.⁴⁸ A few years later, in a 1901 article entitled "Anarchist Thoughts on Anarchism," Landauer sharpens his critical understanding of anarchist antipolitics:

Political parties carry out positive political action; therefore, anarchists, as individuals, should do positive antipolitics, and thus negative politics (*so müssen also die Anarchisten als Einzelne, positive Antipolitik, negative Politik treiben*). This line of thought lies behind the political action of anarchists, the propaganda of action, of individual terrorism.⁴⁹

Acknowledging the "fundamental error of revolutionary anarchists, in which I shared for too long," Landauer declares that his "ideal of non-violence" cannot be achieved "by violent means."⁵⁰ Moreover, he insists that "anarchy is not an affair of the future, but of the present." Renouncing the projection into a political future and therefore also rejecting the necessary technology of means it presupposes, Landauer formulates the antipolitical dimension of anarchy in spiritual terms. Anarchy is a "fundamental disposition in every thinking man," "an urge to give a new birth to oneself."

46 Landauer, 62.

47 Landauer, 65.

48 Landauer did not content himself with an enthusiastic praise of Zola's courage: he wrote his own *Appeal to Public Opinion* regarding another case of injustice, that of Albert Ziethen, who was wrongly accused of murdering his wife.

49 Gustav Landauer, "Anarchische Gedanke über Anarchismus," *Die Zukunft*, 26 October 1901, 134.

50 Landauer, "Anarchische Gedanke über Anarchismus," 136.

This highest moment should come for everyone: a moment in which, to use Nietzsche's words, a person recreates in himself the original chaos, in which he allows the drama of his drives and his most urging interiority to appear before himself, as before a spectator, and then observes which of his personalities should reign in himself, which is his true self—the one whom he differentiates from the traditions and heritages of the world of his ancestors—what the world should be to him and what he should be to the world.⁵¹

Here, Landauer refers to the fifth section of the prologue of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883–1886), where, in an instant of conflict and misunderstanding, Zarathustra reveals to his audience that he sees the present moment as a last window of opportunity: “The time approaches when human beings no longer launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human.”⁵² The time of the last human being is drawing nearer, “the one [the last human being] who can no longer have contempt for himself.” Still, it is not too late; therefore, Zarathustra enjoins the people: “One must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos in you.”⁵³ In Landauer's writing, this last chance for humans to “set themselves a goal” reaching beyond their all-absorbing humanity turns into the necessity of a mystical and psychological conversion of anarchism.⁵⁴ Instead of committing acts of terror, anarchists should psychologically “kill” themselves in a “mystical death that will lead to rebirth through a deep immersion in oneself.”⁵⁵ Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls for transcending mankind by rediscovering one's “chaos” and drive to go beyond humanity and its modern self-enclosure. Fifteen years later, Landauer asks anarchists to turn their weapons against their own ego. “Only he who has crawled through his own humanness (*durch seinen eigenen Menschen durch gekrochen*) and waded in his own blood can help to create a

51 Landauer, 137.

52 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra 1–IV*, vol. 4 of Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1988), 19.

53 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 9. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra 1–IV*, 19.

54 On this aspect, see Gustav Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik. Versuche im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*, vol. 7 of Landauer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegbert Wolf (Lich: Edition AV, 2011).

55 Landauer, “Anarchische Gedanke,” 138.

new world, without encroaching upon others' life."⁵⁶ Landauer replaces the virility of anarchist action and attack with a feminine image of immersing oneself in one's psychological chaos and giving birth to a new self for a new world. Even if Landauer immediately adds that there is no "renouncement of action," the actions he proposes to anarchist readers are outside the general scope of political action: "cooperatives of villages, consumers or apartments," "public gardens and libraries," "new schools."⁵⁷ This is where, as he believed, the mystical union of reborn individuals with the world could happen—not in the mobilisation or the projection of change onto the transcendence of the state apparatus. "He who awakens the world flowed in himself to a new life [...], the world will be to him like himself, and he will love it like himself."⁵⁸ In this renewed intimacy between man and world, anarchy reaches its true spiritual definition and its psychological conversion, harmonising the Nietzschean individual rebirth with revolutionary aspirations.

2.2 *In Dialogue with Nietzsche's Antipolitical Stance*

Landauer's spiritual notion of antipolitics can be further illuminated by Nietzsche's chapter entitled "What the Germans Lack" in *Twilight of the Idols*, published in 1889.⁵⁹ In the fourth section of this chapter, we read:

Even a rapid estimate shows that it is [...] obvious that German culture is declining [...] In the end, no one can spend more than he has: that is true of an individual, it is true of a people. If one spends oneself for power, for power politics, for economics, world trade, parliamentarianism, and military interests—if one spends in the direction the quantum of understanding, seriousness, will, and self-overcoming which one represents, then it will be lacking for the other direction. Culture and the state—one should not deceive one-self about this—are antagonists: "Kultur-Staat" is merely a modern idea. One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even anti-political.⁶⁰

56 Landauer, 138.

57 Landauer, 138.

58 Landauer, 138.

59 Nietzsche's influence on Landauer's life and thought can be sensed from reading his letters and diaries. See Gustav Landauer, *Briefe und Tagebücher 1884–1900*, ed. Christoph Knüppel, 2 vols. (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2017).

60 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 62–63. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung, Der Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Dionysos-Dithyramben, Nietzsche*

Nietzsche defines his critical attitude towards the new Bismarckian Reich in antipolitical terms, by establishing an opposition between State—the Germans’ new passion, seen as swallowing all former spiritual aspirations and achievements—and *Kultur*. The genius, “an explosive material in whom tremendous energy has been accumulated,” bursts forth into a “great destiny”⁶¹ without requiring any political mediation. This “will to life” has been alienated by the Reich, which submitted it “to a brutal breaking-in with the aim of making, in the least possible time, numberless young men to be fit to be utilized [...] in the state service.”⁶² For Nietzsche, the growing intrusion of the political realm into every sector of human activity, especially culture, results in the decadence of the German spirit: “*Deutschland Deutschland über alles* was, I fear, the end of German philosophy.”⁶³ In his view, antipolitics meant the necessity of recovering a certain *Pathos der Distanz* and therefore of resisting the “displacement of the center of gravity” towards the state resulting from the establishment of the Wilhelmine Reich.

Starting from 1871, subjects of thought and debate were being dominated by the empire and its “news,” making it almost impossible to maintain the mental distance necessary for the spontaneous development of the spirit:

All unspirituality, all vulgar commonness, depend on the inability to resist a stimulus: one must react, one follows every impulse. In many cases, such a compulsion is already pathology, decline, a symptom of exhaustion—almost everything that unphilosophical crudity designates with the word “vice” is merely this physiological inability not to react.⁶⁴

The decadence of the German spirit consists in a political hypersensitivity to the news that destroys the possibility of spiritual unfolding by forcing the individual to “stand with all doors open, to prostrate oneself submissively before every petty fact, to be ever itching to mingle with, plunge into other people and

contra Wagner, vol. 6 of Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1988), 106.

61 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 97. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 145.

62 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 64. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 107.

63 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 60. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 104.

64 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 65. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 109.

other things.”⁶⁵ In contrast, spirit and culture begin with “habituating the eye to repose, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgement.”⁶⁶ The opposition between the slow temporality of the spirit and the rapidity of political connectedness, between a self-centred freedom and political alienation, is at the core of Nietzsche’s project to “*sound out idols*”—to render audible the silent projection of our “metaphysics of language” into entities like being, cause, ego, free will, and state. “I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.”⁶⁷ In the end, Nietzsche’s antipolitics consists not only in sounding out the tyranny of metaphysical entities over life, but in restoring the “innocence of becoming” (*Unschuld des Werdens*).⁶⁸

Landauer often paints his antipolitical aspirations in veiled Nietzschean colours of spiritual regeneration. In his 1909 article entitled “Zur Geschichte des Wortes ‘Anarchie,’” Landauer distinguishes between two forms of anarchy. The first “wants to reach through the external anarchy of disorder, the revolution, an order free of domination.” The second “emphasises more or less exclusively the inner anarchy, the inner unshackling as a way towards community.”⁶⁹ Landauer associated this second form with Nietzsche’s understanding of the antipolitical nature of spirit and culture.

Zarathustra’s famous chapter “On the New Idol” (“Vom neuen Götzen”) provocatively depicts the death of peoples in “the coldest of all cold monsters” and the demise of plural collective life forms in the common lie of the state. “Everything about [the state] is false; it bites with stolen teeth, this biting dog.”⁷⁰ Creatively developing Nietzsche’s critique of idols, Landauer sketches a historical evolution from the Ancien Regime monarchy, based on voluntary servitude, to abstract modern states, based on a new type of servile transfer of peoples’ spontaneous social organisation.

The transition from monarchic domination to state domination gave birth to two contradictory revolutionary trends: nation-state building on the one hand and state dissolution in society on the other. For Landauer, the anarchist inversion of state-building corresponds to the resurgence of an immanent

65 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 65. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 109.

66 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 65. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 108.

67 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 38. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 78.

68 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 54. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung*, 97.

69 Landauer, *Anarchismus*, 77–78.

70 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 35. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra I–IV*, 61.

spirit, understood as a psychological and social principle—both individual and collective.

We will eventually reach a point when state and society—or the surrogate of community in the form of authoritarian power, on the one hand, and the true spiritual union (*Geistesbund*) on the other—will be separated, and 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 by the creative spirit. For Étienne de La Boétie, 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.⁷¹

Landauer uses a strange and particularly powerful formulation in German, *das Schmutzigste des Unsaubern*, “the dirtiest of the unclean,” to designate the psycho-social degeneration that accounts for modern state building: self-coercion and self-denial. Here, Landauer echoes Nietzsche’s vitalist critique of the state, especially the opposition between state and life. “State I call it, where all are drinkers of poison, the good and the bad; state, where all lose themselves, the good and the bad; state, where the slow suicide of everyone is called—‘life.’”⁷² The revolutionary antipolitics envisioned by Landauer seeks to end the pathological psychological projection of men’s and women’s inner spiritual and relational principle onto a state apparatus. “There, where the state ends,” writes Nietzsche, “only there begins the human being who is not superfluous.”⁷³ For Landauer, the psychological empowerment of individuals and communities proceeding from the future dissolution of the state will correspond to the regeneration of spirit, not in Zarathustra’s sense of “the rainbow

71 Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings*, 173. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Die Revolution*, 113.

72 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 35. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra I–IV*, 62.

73 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 36. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra I–IV*, 63.

and the bridges of the overman,"⁷⁴ but rather in the sense of a renewed psychological, social and economic life, whose basic principles I would now like to briefly outline.

3 A Communitarian Economy

3.1 *Back to the Grundform of Society*

Landauer's notion of antipolitics has been characterised up to this point as an undoing of colossi or idols, an interruption of political externalisation coinciding with a regeneration of the immanent spirit of individuals and nations. This articulation of depoliticisation and spiritualisation delineates a regressive notion of salvation, rolling the building of modern states and their atomised individuals back to the *Grundform* of society.

No world statistic and no world republic can help us. *Salvation can come only from the rebirth of peoples out of the spirit of community! (die Wiedergeburt der Völker aus dem Geist der Gemeinde.)*

The basic form of socialist culture (*die Grundform der sozialistischen Kultur*) is the league of communities, with independent economies and exchange systems. Our human prosperity, our existence, now depends on whether the unity of the individual and that of the family, which are the only natural groups that have survived, will be intensified back to the unity of community (*sich wieder steigert zur Einheit der Gemeinde*), the basic form of every society.⁷⁵

This passage from Landauer's 1911 *Call to Socialism* illuminates the link between salvation, the rebirth of the spirit, and a return to the basic structure of society. This basic structure is defined, in antipolitical terms, as the *Bund der selbständig wirtschaftenden Gemeinde*—the economic bond securing the self-sufficiency of a small community. For Landauer, a retrogression from centuries of state- and empire-building to the self-sufficient unit of economic activity will liberate the spirit from its modern urge to alienate itself in transcendent and expansionist political and capitalistic forms. It would therefore accomplish a

74 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 36. For the original German text, see Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra I–IV*, 64.

75 Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, trans. David J. Parent (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1978), 125. For the original German text, see Gustav Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919), 130.

sort of terrestrial salvation, regenerating the human spirit in its fundamental form, the free and immanent drive responsible for the association of individuals. The renewed experience of social bonding at its original level is the core of the spiritual salvation envisioned in Landauer's anarchism. From the undoing of political alienation, the individual retrieves the sense of his own agency in binding individuals together. Experiencing this bond directly inside one's self again rather than projecting it onto an abstract entity—this is the antipolitical fantasy of salvation.

3.2 *Family*

In the following lines from his *Call to Socialism*, Landauer defines this basic form of society, a social organisation reflecting individual bonding, using two interrelated models. The first model is that of the *oikonomia* or the family household:

The independent individual (*der selbständige Einzelne*), who lets no one interfere in his business; for whom the house community of the family (*die Hausgemeinschaft der Familie*), 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 federations of states the coercive system of government (*Zwangsregiment*) 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.⁷⁶

In contrast to the political drive of externalisation, which separates labour from decision-making and therefore transfers most of the deliberations and decisions into a higher political sphere separated from the realm of production, the model of the family that Landauer reclaims here seeks to conflate production and thought within the family's economic capacity to sustain and guide itself. Such a conflation limits the necessity of any transfer of authority and expertise to another entity, except in the service of exchange and free association. By elaborating Proudhon's principles aiming at abolishing the distinction between "political and social constitution" and at completely identifying

⁷⁶ Landauer, *For Socialism*, 126. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 131.

“government with society,”⁷⁷ Landauer adopts a regressive stance, resorbing political transcendence and separateness into the family *oikonomia* and a limited range of associations.

Landauer's belief in a redemptive resorption into the family unit is best exemplified in the debate on marriage and women's rights held with his anarchist friend Erich Mühsam (1878–1934) in the pages of *Der Sozialist* in autumn 1910. Expressing his discontent with Landauer's rejection of “matriarchy” as “filth,” Mühsam makes his argument using Rahel von Varnhagen's words that “children should have only mothers.” Moreover, he thus defends the right of women “to have their children with the father or the fathers they themselves have chosen.”⁷⁸ In the next issue of *Der Sozialist*, Landauer offers in response a long article on “marriage” (*Ehe*).⁷⁹ There, he expands on the reasons for his rejection of new forms of legal protection for pregnant working women (*Mutterschutz*), female communism, and novel sexual ethics, describing these not only as a destruction of fatherhood, but as a new “religion” “fallen upon men with demonic compulsion.”⁸⁰ For him, the “demonic” impulse in these new forms of sexual relations and family organisation manifests as a belief in the capacity of a “concept of the mind” (*Geistgestalt*) to “replace what Nature herself has already created as an eternal necessity: love.”⁸¹

True society is grounded on the structure of marriage. In marriage, what is both human finality and nature's power reigns and manifests itself: the vehement and incoercible drive of the sexes towards one another, the memory and desire of a man towards a woman and of a woman towards a man.

Since our spirit is memory and since nothing in ourselves, in our memory, is so strong as the memory of nature, no wonder that it goes differently with us than with animals, in whom the memory of sex always awakens and then disappears [...] The human being retains the memory of sex at all times and places, and therefore transposes his own eroticism to everything.⁸²

77 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Les confessions d'un révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1851), 212–13.

78 Erich Mühsam, “Frauenrecht,” *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 18 (1910): 144.

79 Gustav Landauer, “Von der Ehe,” *Der Sozialist* 2, no. 19 (1910): 146–51.

80 Landauer, “Von der Ehe,” 149. For a more nuanced appreciation of Landauer's approach of femininity, see his 19 March 1913 letter to Martin Buber, Gustav Landauer, *Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, ed. Martin Buber and Ina Britschgi-Schimmer (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1929), 1:434–36.

81 Landauer, *Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, 1:150.

82 Landauer, 1:148.

Marriage, which for Landauer remains indissociably linked with love, is the primal articulation of nature's drives within human consciousness—a Spinozan moment of the perfect coextension of nature's force with human thoughts and feelings, which reaches far beyond sexual attraction and reproduction and transforms the whole human and natural environment according to human erotic tension and the search for harmony. Love and marriage are the matrix of all later associations. Moreover, “the common housing, the working and caring of husband and wife for each other and their children”⁸³ constitutes the prototype of all free social bonds, providing the antidote to the political separation between the sphere of production and reproduction and that of deliberation and decision. An antipolitical regression to the natural and free generativity of family is supposed to reshape and regenerate the entire society based on love, replacing state coercion with men and women's spontaneous concerns for each other's needs.

3.3 *Community*

After the family, the second model that Landauer develops 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 (*Mitleben*). The family is concerned only with private interests. We need a natural core of the common spirit for public life (*einen natürlichen Kern des Gemeingeistes für das öffentliche Leben*) so that public life will no longer be filled and led exclusively by the state and its coldness as till now, but by a warmth akin to family affection (*die der Familienliebe verwandt ist*). This core of all genuine communal life is the local community, the economic community (*Wirtschaftsgemeinde*), whose essence no one can imagine who seeks to judge it, for instance, by what today calls itself “community.”⁸⁴

This model of the community, which reads as both a correction and a development of the first model of the family *oikonomia*, becomes intelligible only when contrasted with the first section of book 1 of Aristotle's *Politics*. Indeed, Landauer outlines the above model after harshly criticizing the *Polizei-sozialismus* of the Social Democrats, which “would seal the ruin of our

83 Landauer, 1:149.

84 Landauer, *For Socialism*, 126. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 131–32.

peoples, and would hold together the fully scattered atoms by a mechanically ironed ring.” By using this mechanical image in which the atoms are held together not by inherent affinities, but by an external force, Landauer aims to convey the incapacity of the state to create natural and generative bonds between individuals. His claim about the state's incapacity to integrate and develop natural social relationships clashes with the opening phrase of Aristotle's *Politics*: “Every state is as we see a sort of partnership” (πάσαν πόλιν ὁ ρῶμεν κοινωνίαν τινὰ οὖσαν).⁸⁵ Aristotle spans the range of possible partnerships or communities from those aimed “at some good” (ἀγαθοῦ τινος) to the one that “aims at the most supreme of all goods” (τοῦ κυριωτάτου πάντων).⁸⁶ Therefore, the method of investigation Aristotle chooses is to study the “natural process of development of the community from its beginning” (ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὰ πράγματα φύόμενα) to its full-fledged form in the polis.

The partnership (κοινωνία) therefore that comes about the in course of nature for everyday purposes is the house (οἶκος) [...].

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.⁸⁷

Aristotle describes the historical evolution towards the polis as a natural development that unfolds the *telos* already present in the first partnership, the family, becomes more visible in the village, and is then fully realised in the *polis*. Landauer too is forced to acknowledge that “the family is concerned only with private interests” and that therefore an expansion from the familial to the

85 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 2–3.

86 Aristotle, *Politics*, 2–3.

87 Aristotle, 7–9.

communal structure is necessary to give rise to “the common spirit for public life.” However, in sharp contrast to Aristotle, he is not interested in making the necessary passage from family to community, and its corollary clarification of the common good, an anticipation of the state and a justification of its necessity. Moreover, Aristotle makes it clear that “the special property of man in distinction from the other animals, that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities,” is fully exercised only in the city-state.⁸⁸ The natural growth towards the city thus corresponds to the development of the intellectual and social capacity to discern the common good within a specific political sphere.

While aware of the Aristotelian three-stage development of family to village and to polis, Landauer seeks to attain the common interest of public life without resorting to the Aristotelian solution of continuity between “life” (ζῆν) and the “good life” (εὖ ζῆν), and without the supplementary institution of a political realm of decisions and deliberations beyond the economic activity of subsistence. By affirming that “we need a natural core of the common spirit for public life,” Landauer hopes to reverse the full-fledged Aristotelian political notion of the “good life” back into the less developed setting of the common spirit unifying the members of the community in their different labours and interactions. In contrast to the Aristotelian distinction between private care for the family’s and community’s vital needs and the public and general deliberation over the “good life” undertaken by the male citizens of the polis, Landauer’s notion of *Gemeingeist* attempts to reunify the labour for material needs and the community’s intellectual capacity to understand its common interest. Thus, Landauer’s antipolitical notion of the community was meant to pose a fierce challenge to the political age in which he was living: he asked his readers and comrades to uncross the political Rubicon of the separation between the private and political realms, promising that it was still possible to reabsorb politics into the economy, to retrogress into the small-scale *oikonomia* of the village, even to renounce political deliberation in favour of a spontaneous and homogeneous approach to the common good, according to a psychosocial intuitive capacity to identify one’s individual and communal interest. Landauer thus believed that he could replace the “coldness of the state” and its rival parties “by a warmth akin to family affection,” which resorbs political conflicts into family affairs, ultimately solved by common care for each other and community subsistence.

88 Aristotle, II.

3.4 *The Economy of Politics*

While Landauer's dreamed-of resolution of political division into a past and future of communitarian subsistence work and care for each other (*zusammenwirtschaften und zusammensorgen*) arguably constitutes one pole of socialist antipolitics, the other is best substantiated by the following passage from Marx's 1857–1858 *Grundrisse*:

The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature [...] as well as of humanity's own nature? [...] Where he [man] does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something that he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming (*in der absoluten Bewegung des Werdens*)? In bourgeois economics—and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds—this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying-out (*erscheint diese völlige Herausarbeitung des menschlichen Innern als völlige Entleerung*), this universal objectification as total alienation (*diese universelle Vergegenständlichung als totale Entfremdung*), and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end (*die Niederreiung aller bestimmten einseitigen Zwecke als Aufopferung des Selbstzweck unter einen ganz äueren Zweck*). This is why the childish world of antiquity appears on the one side loftier. On the other side, it really is loftier in all matters where closed shapes, forms and given limits are sought for. It is satisfaction from a limited standpoint.⁸⁹

Capitalism is unique in its capacity to mobilise and transform all historical assets and all human dispositions into a totality of economic development. Each capitalistic totality relies on the dissymmetry between the objective alienation of all conditions of production and the living labour of the worker. As a consequence, capitalism necessarily creates a nostalgia for earlier forms of social and economic organisation, if only because of their reassuring limitedness. The socialism of Proudhon and Landauer was a nostalgia of this kind for Marx. However, Marx's patronising attitude relies on another antipolitical economic fantasy: the fantasy that the total alienation and objectivation

89 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Random House, 1973), 488. For the original German text, see Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie [Rohentwurf] 1857–1858* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974), 387–88 (following the 1939 edition published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institute in Moscow).

of man in capitalism will dialectically lead the way to a rational and social attainment of this economical totality in scientific socialism, reducing politics to a technology of seizing power (evolution or revolution) and to a scientific administration of population and production. In Landauer's words,

the capitalist production process [...] does not lead to socialism by virtue of its own further development and immanent laws; not through the workers' struggle in their role as producers can it be transformed decisively in favour of labour, but only if the workers stop playing their role as capitalist producers.⁹⁰

Marx and Landauer mark the two opposing poles of socialism: the resorption of human alienation into the psychological and natural realm of the community vs. the culmination of capitalist alienation in a progressively emerging socialist order. Landauer's antipolitics and Marx's strong limitation of politics are two sides of the same coin: the socialist prioritisation of the economy.

Conclusion: The Therapeutic Virtue of Regression

In an article published a few years after Landauer's death entitled "Kinderanalysen mit Erwachsenen" ("Child Analysis in the Analysis of Adults," 1931), the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi defends the utility of regression as part of 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 (*plötzlich ins Kindische oder Kindliche verfällt*). 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 (*in die kindliche Primitivität sinken und ihn in diesem Zustande frei agieren lässt*)?⁹¹

⁹⁰ Landauer, *For Socialism*, 124. For the original German text, see Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 128–29.

⁹¹ Sándor Ferenczi, *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Michael Balint, trans. Eric Mosbacher, (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 131. For the original German text, see Sándor Ferenczi, "Kinderanalysen mit Erwachsenen," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 17 (1931):165.

In contrast to Freud's own view and practice, Ferenczi believed "that the cathartic result of being submerged for a time in neurosis and childhood (*das kathartische Resultat dieses Untertauchens in Neurose und Kindheit*) has ultimately an invigorating effect."⁹² Similarly, unlike Marx and his followers, Landauer thought that there could be a cathartic effect to the antipolitical regression from the modern state and capitalism to "a joyful life in a just economy" (*freudiges Leben in gerechter Wirtschaft*); that is, in a "socialist village."⁹³

As Nietzsche so bluntly put it, antipolitics wants "to make physiology the mistress who decides all other questions."⁹⁴ It is a cure—a violent return to vital normality, coming after men have lost the spirit that inhabits them and binds society together and developed instead a political and capitalist surrogate, as Landauer would phrase it. Following Ferenczi's essay, we could say that antipolitics strove to be a cure for the traumatic, modern split of the self between "a suffering, a brutally destroyed part, and a part which [...] knows everything but feels nothing."⁹⁵ Landauer's antipolitics sought to be a cure for the repressed traumas that are responsible for the modern transcendence of politics and capitalism, for the modern psychological split between the servant and the ruler, and for the frightening playing out of this traumatic split in modern history.

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92 Ferenczi, *Final Contributions*, 141. For the original German text, see Ferenczi, "Kinderanalysen mit Erwachsenen," 174.

93 Gustav Landauer, *Beginnen Aufsätze über Sozialismus* (Cologne: Marcan-Block, 1924), 109.

94 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887–1889*, vol. 13 of Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, new ed. (Berlin: Deutsche Taschenbuch, 1999), 638.

95 Ferenczi, *Final Contributions*, 135. For the original German text, see Ferenczi, "Kinderanalysen mit Erwachsenen," 169.

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