

Article

Embracing Life: Gustav Landauer's Anarchism as Rejection of Death

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Abstract: This paper examines Gustav Landauer's mystical anarchism, focusing on the concept of overcoming death as a core element of his thought. It explores Landauer's rejection of death as both a linguistic superstition and a limited worldview, emphasizing the collective whole over individualism. The essay suggests that Landauer's representation of revolution moving from space to time includes his account of mystical anarchy, which fosters a deep connection with the past and a sense of unity with the world and humanity. This shift in perspective promotes a more fulfilling and meaningful existence within a larger, authentic community that is an antidote to the constraints of death.

Keywords: Gustav Landauer; death; anarchism; mysticism; community; linguistic skepticism

The one who does not know death,
who has reverence for life
and no fear of death,
is as strong as nature.

Qui potest mori, non potest cogi.

Mauthner (1980, vol. II, p. 478)



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1. *Der Todesprediger*

In his novel with the Nietzschean title *Der Todesprediger* (Preacher on Death), originally published in 1893, the German–Jewish anarchist Gustav Landauer tells the story of Karl Starkblom, who from an early age devoted his life to the study of philosophy and to unravel the mysteries of the world. This devotion leads him to a life of solitude, a rejection of any form of compromise and a deep aversion to the values of contemporary bourgeois society. Over the course of his life, Starkblom discovers socialism as a transformative path that leads from thought to action. This phase is short-lived, however, as he is confronted with the limitations of socialism, which does not confront death and the inherent meaninglessness of life. In response, Starkblom writes two essays that celebrate the concept of death. Marguerite, a woman in love with him, comes across his writings and tries to rescue him from this existential crisis. She gives him the idea that reason is not the only dimension of human existence, but that there are also emotions and feelings, especially love in the form of brotherhood. Influenced by Marguerite's words, Starkblom returns to his original political vocation and celebrates life as an ode to life. He writes: "You shall not be alone, you shall unite, you shall live and leave death to death" (Landauer 2014, p. 140).¹

The overcoming of death that marked Starkblom's path can be interpreted as the core of Landauer's anarchic thought, in which the experience of life as a whole is linked to revolution. For him, the essential prerequisite for a profound concept of community, which transcends physical space, is a mystical process that everyone must undergo. This essay will explore Landauer's mystical anarchism as a means of transcending the concept of death. I argue that he rejects the idea of death not only as a product of linguistic

superstition but also as a limited worldview that focuses only on the individual and neglects the collective whole. According to my reading, Landauer's account of revolution based on a transition from space to time can be understood as a depiction of anarchy, as synonym for life, triumphing over death. I posit that, in Landauer's thought, the individual overcomes the fears and constraints associated with the concept of death by cultivating a deep connection with the past and embracing a sense of oneness with the world and fellow human beings. Rather than seeing themselves as isolated beings at the mercy of mortality, the individuals recognize their role in a larger, ongoing story that extends beyond their individual lifetimes. This perspective helps them overcome the limitations of a narrow, individualistic worldview and opens the door to a fuller and more meaningful sense of existence in the context of a larger community. This authentic community is the antidote to death.

2. Necrophiliac Language

Gustav Landauer was a German–Jewish radical thinker who was brutally murdered during the Bavarian Revolution in 1919.² He was an activist, writer, journalist, and editor of the anarchist journal *Der Sozialist*, a literary critic and translator of authors such as Tagore, Shakespeare, Whitman, Kropotkin, Wilde, and others. After a period of passionate political involvement at the end of the 19th century, he entered the 20th century in prison, where he translated Meister Eckhart³ and worked on revising Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zur Kritik der Sprache* (Contributions towards a Critique of Language). Influenced significantly by his new wife, the poet Hedwig Lachmann, Landauer began the new century with a determination to withdraw from politics and concentrate on study and translation. In 1907, Landauer resumed his political commitment when he was invited by Martin Buber, whom he had met in 1900 in the "Neue Gemeinschaft" circle by the Hart brothers in Berlin, to contribute to his series "Gesellschaft". This series included contributions by Georg Simmel and Mauthner, who had written about religion and language, respectively. Landauer's contribution to this series was the publication *Die Revolution*.

During World War I, Landauer, along with his wife Hedwig, emerged as one of the few radical pacifists in Germany, seeing the causes of the war in the aggressiveness of the nation-state. When the November Revolution broke out in Munich in 1918, Landauer was encouraged to join it by Kurt Eisner, a former student of Hermann Cohen and leader of the revolution. Eisner was assassinated in February 1919. In the final phase of the Bavarian Republic, Landauer took over the role of "Commissioner for Popular Enlightenment" (*Beauftragter für Volksaufklärung*), which he held for only seven days when the anarchist government was interrupted by the Communists who seized power. In swift response, the Berlin government sent in Freikorps to put down the Bavarian revolution. These turbulent events led to Landauer's arrest on 1 May 1919, which tragically came to a brutal end the following day in the prison yard of Munich-Stadelheim. Landauer was viciously beaten to death. This tragic episode had a significant impact in the constellation of German–Jewish thinkers.⁴

Understanding Landauer's work is a difficult undertaking, as he weaves together a complex web of diverse, sometimes contradictory, philosophical themes. He fuses concepts and discourses that at first glance seem unrelated, such as mysticism and anarchism, conservatism and revolution, pacifism and activism. To grasp his theoretical and political endeavor, it is essential to refer to Mauthner's skepticism of language.⁵ Mauthner and Landauer were linked by a deep and lasting intellectual friendship, which was extremely important—although forgotten—for contemporary philosophical thought. Mauthner left behind an extensive body of work, including three volumes of *Contributions towards a Critique of Language*, a *Dictionary of Philosophy*, a *History of Atheism in Western Society*, and a wealth of essays and novels. For Mauthner, language is superfluous as a means of grasping reality, and knowledge, which depends on words, but remains unattainable. The uniqueness of our experiences is transformed by language into mere tautologies. This reifying quality of language corresponds to its necrophiliac tendency, which robs our

experiences of their vitality and particularity, reducing them to lifeless strings of words and empty repetitions. Although language can only metaphorically allude to reality, words exert considerable social and political influence. Thus, despite its illusory character, language possesses a dangerous power. To question the idols of language is to recognize the hollowness of man-made constructions. All metaphysical abstractions are fallacious, and mere linguistic deceptions lead us to believe that every noun corresponds to a pre-existing substance. When words do not accurately reflect reality, it becomes the main task of philosophy to question language and free ourselves from its superstitious and tyrannical power. Only by becoming aware of the linguistic reification that is at the root of metaphysical delusion can one begin a process of liberation. Mauthner and Landauer, however, have two different understandings of this liberating task: while the former opts for a mystical silence and a more isolated way of life, the latter seeks new metaphors and an alternative language that can pave the way for an imminent revolution; in other words, skepticism serves Landauer as the cornerstone for the community yet to be founded.

Mauthner's linguistic skepticism can be understood as a double-edged antidote within philosophy itself. It serves as a constant critique of language, exposing both its flaws and its inevitability. Mauthner believes that words do not faithfully represent reality and that it is therefore the primary task of philosophy to subject language to a comprehensive critique. This paradoxical task consists of using language to criticize itself—a medium that it attempts to dissect. The aim is to expose superstition and the domination of words over people, which makes linguistic skepticism fundamentally emancipatory. However, Mauthner admits that the superstition associated with words is ineradicable, as he sees it as a necessary consequence of the human way of thinking. The confluence of sensory impressions and the ambiguity of words inevitably lead to metaphorical interpretations of reality. Memory, which plays an important role, preserves traditions and habits and represents an exchange of linguistic habits.

Mauthner proposes a conception of language, which is not about rigid rules but about a common framework. Without a direct correspondence between words and reality, real communication is no longer possible, and meaning is determined solely by usage. Mauthner thus sees language as a communal entity in the connections between individuals. In fact, his critique of signification does not extend to the social dimension of language but recognizes it as an inseparable bond of community. Language functions as a "rule of the game" (*Spielregel*) that only acquires legitimacy if it is accepted by several speakers. Mauthner recognizes the deceptive nature of language to grasp reality while acknowledging its communal meaning. The interstitial nature of language arises in human interactions, and it is impossible to determine its exact position as a separate entity. In fact, language exists within a common framework of individual languages that manifest themselves in plural forms. Mauthner's notion of an individual language as an epiphenomenon of numerous active and passive interactions, a result of an imaginary community, plays—as we will see—a central role in Landauer's thought, especially in his critique of the concept of the individual, which is already present in his early writings.

In these works, Landauer begins his critique with a semantic deconstruction that exposes the emptiness of our worldly constructions. In his early essay *Etwas über Moral* (Some Thoughts about Morality), from 1893, he emphasizes that the word "individuum" conveys the idea of the "undivided, indivisible, i.e., the absolutely simple" (Landauer 2009, p. 38). This definition, however, contradicts the reality of the individual, which is a "sum of many drives, impulses of will, perceptions, and thoughts" (Landauer 2009, p. 38). These various elements are linked together by the most basic concept, the "I," which represents only a momentary state of perception; the "I" of yesterday is different from the "I" of tomorrow. Nevertheless, Landauer argues that the "I" can be counted among the "things of the first order" (*Dingen erster Ordnung*)—similar to a chair or a tree—and is not the result of a generalization (*Verallgemeinerung*), like God, law, state, justice, and honor. If the simple things are natural and eternal and the concepts are weak, they require a demystification (Landauer 2009, p. 39). In this way, Landauer's linguistic skepticism lays

the groundwork for a perspective that challenges traditional structures of authority and hierarchy by questioning the fundamental meanings assigned to words and concepts.

The criticism of the concept of the “individuum” is also evident in his 1895 essay *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Individuums* (On the History of the Development of the Individual), where Landauer first emphasizes the kinship between the atom and the individual, both of which have etymological roots in Greek and Latin, respectively, meaning “indivisible” (*Unteilbar*) (Landauer 2009, p. 45). He explores the political implications of whether the individual is an abstraction, much like the atom and God. Both are “nothing real”, while the individual is assumed to be “something whole, coherent, self-sovereign” (Landauer 2009, p. 46). In Landauer’s view, however, “the individual is nothing absolute, but only a part of the community; and this community is no mere abstraction, no mental summary of individual phenomena, but a thoroughly concrete reality, a togetherness by nature” (Landauer 2009, p. 47).

The idea of the individual as an absolute is a deceptive concept generated by linguistic fetishism. Language is, in fact, the “mother of lies” and the “most formidable reactionary force to be combated” (Landauer 2009, p. 63). Its illusory and deceptive nature is described as “a way of talking around things, a sleight of hand to substitute trifles—word concepts—for realities” (Landauer 2009, p. 64). Linguistic inherent conservatism should be recognized as the adversary to be overcome. Language tends to reify words and concepts, leading us to the erroneous assumption that the world is made up of discrete entities, when in fact it is made up of interrelated relationships. Even in his early writings, Landauer’s critique of language serves the purpose of deconstructing the supposed limitedness and separateness of the individual elements in the world and ultimately demonstrating the connectedness with the totality of existence.

Landauer claims that the true essence of reality, seen as a flux in perpetual becoming, eludes language, which is merely a collection of crystallized meanings that have little to do with life itself. He writes: “Because we live so much in the web of language, which is a ghost of language, that our life is much more language than our language is life” (Landauer 2009, p. 64). The ghostly character of language—much like Nietzsche’s idea of a Roman columbarium (Nietzsche 1979, p. 84)—is comparable to death in that it shapes a limited worldview, where discrete entities follow a linear path without recognizing their inherent unity. In other words, from Landauer’s point of view, there is a double relationship between death and language. First, the concept of “death” as a word itself springs from the reification of language, which causes us to perceive separation rather than connectedness and finitude rather than infinity. Second, the referential nature of language exhibits a necrophiliac tendency that makes everything that can be expressed comparable to a sort of King Midas, who turns the living into the lifeless rather than gold. The deconstruction of language reveals the partiality of death and allows us to tap into the essence of life, which escapes the limitation of linguistic definitions.

This linguistic dismantling has enormous political implications, emanating from the deep connection Landauer sees between the individual and humanity, which is not limited to biological and cultural heritage, but extends to our actions and work. His critique of the isolated individual can be interpreted as his linguistic and political rejection of the concept of death to overcome the separateness and isolation that he sees as inherent in traditional notions of individualism. Landauer emphasizes a deep sense of community and solidarity among individuals and underscore the idea that people are not isolated beings but interconnected components of a larger whole, which continues even after death. In fact, according to him, the seeds of our ancestors live on in us and our own seeds will live on in our descendants. He writes: “The indivisible has disappeared, for it has divided itself; but a part of humanity has survived and continues to exist. Humanity is not an abstract, lifeless concept; humanity is the tangible reality, while the individual human being is only the transient, changeable and disappearing shadow through which humanity becomes perceptible” (Landauer 2009, p. 49).

Landauer's critique of the concept of self-autonomy is based on the notion that the individual is a composition of various "soul forces" (*seelische Kräfte*) (Landauer 2009, p. 57), related to internal and external factors. Not only is the human soul influenced by physical conditions, heritage, and environment, but the will is not free either, being determined by both internal and external circumstances. He opposes a simplistic notion of freedom based on the self-sufficient soul, asserting that only a non-absolute or conditioned individual exists as "part of a firmly anchored, indestructible complex of causes" (Landauer 2009, p. 57). In fact, he sharply criticizes the idea of an original "I", an "*Ur-ich*" that exists in spiritual and physical autonomy. According to Landauer, "there is no original I, there are only individuals as parts of the human and the world community" (Landauer 2009, p. 60).

For him, human existence is inseparable from the collective, and the vitality of humanity endures through generations and extends beyond the lifespan of the individual. Human actions and contributions leave a lasting impression on the tapestry of humanity and individuals living together form an organism, a "community of bodies" (*Körpergemeinschaft*) (Landauer 2009, p. 52). For Landauer, at the beginning there is community. In fact, he rejects all theories that community is a human invention, invoking the Aristotelian notion of the *zoon politikon*, which characterizes humans as social animals. He argues that society was not "invented" (Landauer 2009, p. 61) but inherited from our animal ancestors, since Aristotle viewed humans as inherently social beings.

The essay *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Individuums* concludes with the prophetic wish for a human being who will one day undertake this endeavor and strike at the heart of the most pernicious helper of the dark and inhibiting forces—antiquated, mummified, and decaying human language. This reflects Landauer's quest for a revolution of language essential to his broader vision of political and social transformation. He writes: "Hail to the human being who will one day accomplish this work, and who will strike at the heart of the worst helper of the dark and inhibiting powers, the retarded, mummy-like and decayed human language" (Landauer 2009, p. 68). The conservatism of language should be considered a serious and difficult enemy that must be defeated by new revolutionary forms of expression.

3. Mystical Anarchism

Landauer's effort to overcome the necrosis of reified language with all its political ramifications is effectively stated in his work *Skepsis und Mystik*, where he offers an in-depth analysis of Mauthner's *Sprachskepsis*. In this work Landauer deals not only with his skepticism of language but also with the mystical journey, which he believes is essential for every human being.⁶ This mystical aspect of his anarchism, combined with his critique of language and political thought, forms a unique complex in the history of philosophy. In Landauer's thought, death is a multi-layered concept. On the one hand, it is perceived as a linguistic illusion, as an artificial, false construct that can be transcended through a mystical conception of community and an alternative understanding of time. On the other hand, death is also seen as a conscious surrender to a deceptive perception of the world, a surrender which serves as a decisive step on the path to recognizing one's own deep connection with the whole. It is in this complicated interplay of ideas that Landauer unfolds his philosophy, in which the symbolic act of embracing mortality becomes a transformative bridge to a mystical anarchism.

In *Skepsis und Mystik*, Landauer suggests that individuals must be willing to metaphorically commit a "suicide" to engage in a katabasis of the self and abandon their current understanding of the world, as a product of linguistic reification, in order to achieve true community. The self must undergo a profound transformation, freeing itself from the constraints of language and reified concepts to achieve a deeper connection with community. He writes: "I recognize the world and sacrifice my ego to it, but only so that I feel like the world to which I have opened myself. As a suicide plunges into the water, so I plunge tumultuously into the world, but I find there not death, but life. The I kills itself so that the world-I can live" (Landauer 2011b, p. 48) The *Welt-ich*, having overcome death by

acknowledging its connectedness with the whole, must supplant the concept of self as an isolated entity. Landauer's notion of revolution involves a symbolic death and a negation of what is fragmented and separated. This process of transformation leads to a rebirth through death, which establishes a deep connection to the past.

The act of self-annihilation and detachment from the self, as suggested by Landauer, can be realized through an introspective process, which is a deepest sinking into oneself. During this process, the individual performs a profound self-examination, recognizes his inherent connection to the world, and realizes that nothing in it is alien or separate from him. This realization leads to a fundamental transformation as the self perceives itself as inseparable from the world. This process is often described as contraction, an inward movement from the external to the internal, as the individual transcends the boundaries of the self and becomes part of the larger whole. It represents a radical shift in consciousness, away from the isolated self and toward a deep connectedness with the world and community.

To reach this "terra abscondita of our soul" (Landauer 2009, p. 278), a process of individual consciousness and withdrawal is essential to establish a deeper and more authentic connection with the world and the past, which are the necessary conditions for the creation of the community. Landauer asserts that true anarchy can only be the basis for a genuine community if individuals cultivate a mystical consciousness. This consciousness serves to unite individuals who have realized that they are like "flashes of the stream of the soul" (*Aufblitzen des Seelenstromes*) and "a ray of the world, not a stranger" (Landauer 2009, p. 279). Landauer envisions a community of people who have regained a deep connectedness with the past and the world and recognize themselves as an integral part of that whole. In this state of connectedness, love for the world and a sense of spiritual belonging flourish. In this sense, his anarchism fulfills a *tiqqun*, a reparative role working to mend the fragmented pieces of the broken world (see Landauer 2011b, p. 18). The world is in ruins, and the individual must strive for mystical seclusion to attain true unity with humanity.

This mystical awareness enables the immersion of the individual into the whole to affirm unity, it paves the way for the new community and for the overcoming of abstraction, separation, and death. This is deeply connected with Landauer's account of anarchy, which—rooted in a profound skepticism of political institutions and authority—is not merely an abstract model or doctrine but embodies an ethical stance and a spiritual way of life with the goal of fostering a new individual and a community based on genuine social justice. Landauer believes that such a community will naturally embody anarchy, characterized by harmonious, self-governing cooperation among its members. He writes: "Those who awaken the past world in themselves to new life, to individual life, who feel themselves to be rays of the world, not strangers: they come, they know not whence; they go, they know not whither; for them the world will be as themselves, and they will love it as themselves. They will live among themselves as together, as belonging together. There will be anarchy" (Landauer 2009, p. 279).

Landauer's perspective presents anarchy as a holistic harmony in which anarchic *poiesis* or creation plays an important role. One of the most central aspects of his philosophy is the distinction between politics as an artificial system of authority and an anti-political approach. In doing so, he seeks to provide an interpretation of politics that is not institutional or representative but relates to an inner consciousness that encompasses the essence of life. In his essay *Anarchic Thoughts about Anarchism*, Landauer emphasizes: "Anarchy is not a matter of the future; it is a matter of the present. It is not a matter of making demands; it is a matter of how one lives" (Landauer 2010b, p. 87). His revolutionary activism was a form of living, a *Lebensform* that dissolves all dogmatism and is based on an existential and political rejection of death, understood as finitude and separateness.

4. From Space to Time

A major challenge in Landauer's philosophy is how to express this new mystical consciousness in traditional and conservative words. He considers a revolution of language and the development of an alternative grammar compatible with his anarchism to be urgently necessary. To this end, he proposes a temporal revolution that has political and linguistic implications. He asserts: "We can express time in spatial terms and space in temporal terms, swallow time from space or space from time, but overcoming both fails even at the strongest concentration and contemplation. Expressing each spatiality in terms of time is perhaps one of the most important tasks of men who will come. Because all our language is quantitatively spatial language, qualitatively visual perception [*Gesichtssprache*]*—*the tree, the man, the mammal, all these concepts and above all concrete things are built on visual perception—it would be good with the help of hearing once we perceive the world and laugh it in temporal terms. Music is perhaps only a first beginning for this new language" (Landauer 2011b, p. 55).

Landauer's proposes that this shift from space to time should be viewed as a new Copernican revolution, with profound implications for 20th century philosophy.⁷ In his view, space represents an external domain that exists independently of the self but allows us to conceptualize external objects, things, and the world. He argues that spatial distance, the space between us and what we observe that does not directly touch us, is outside our immediate lived experience and is essentially foreign to us. Space creates a separation between the world and the self. Time, on the other hand, is not something we observe, but forms the framework of our self-perception and is thus a subjective dimension. He writes: "Time is not merely perceptual, but it is the form of our experience of self; therefore it is real for us, for the conception of the world that we must form from out of ourselves" (Landauer 2011b, p. 85).

According to Landauer, the transition from space to time means that the external world should be perceived as a reflection of our internal world, by connecting it with the subjective, temporal experience of the individual. To bring about this chronocentric revolution, it is crucial to recognize that space is ultimately an attribute of time. Landauer asserts: "What appears to us as persistent spatiality is nothing more than a temporal transformation. What we perceive as movements in time are merely the shifting conditions of temporal processes" (Landauer 2011b, p. 96). In this view, time becomes the primary dimension through which we understand and experience reality, emphasizing the interrelatedness of all things in a temporal context. The passage from space to time leads to a mystical concept in which nothing exists in isolation, and death is transcended as an integral part of this *continuum*. In this temporal shift from objectivity to fluidity, from existence to evolution, even death is surpassed.

As mentioned above, the transformation of space into time has significant implications for the understanding of language. It implies a move away from a quantitative way of conceiving it, which often tends toward objectification because it relies on what our eyes perceive. This chronocentric alternative is to be understood as a call to translate the foreign and external into the common and shared, beyond the power of linguistic reification. In Landauer's view, language must undergo a revolutionary transformation that involves the suspension of its denotative function that can never adequately capture the "playful" (*spielerisch*) mystical experience he envisions (see Landauer 2011b, p. 54). Turning to a temporal perspective in language means going beyond mere referential function and adopting a more creative dimension of expression. It underscores the need for language to convey the deep interconnectedness and fluidity of existence and to transcend the limitations of a purely objectifying approach.

As long as we are bound to referential meanings and instrumental forms of communication, language alone cannot provide a solution to this dilemma. However, by exploring alternative forms of expression such as numbers, music, and poetry—as Landauer stated in *Skepsis und Mystik* (see Landauer 2011b, pp. 95–103)—that act as bridges between tangible things and the flow of the soul, we can move from a language of seeing to a language

of listening. This shift opens the potential for the development of new metaphors and alternative perspectives that offer a range of options and free us from the confines of spatial and limited thinking. In this context, poetry, with its symbolic and metaphorical interpretations, proves to be a powerful means of expression. It is able to capture and represent the intricate complexity of the unbreakable chain that connects man to the world, transcending death. Thus, this linguistic revolution enables us to explore and articulate the profound connections and relationships that go beyond mere spatial descriptions to offer a broader and more dynamic perspective on our existence and the world.

Certainly, Landauer's depiction of time should not be interpreted as a simple progression but rather as a dynamic and ongoing present in which the past continues to exert its influence on future generations. He writes: "We experience the future only as the present and better today than tomorrow. We change the circumstances when we ourselves become others. Oh, we have the Other in us, all of us!" (see Landauer 2010a, p. 190). His account of time is evident in his work *Revolution*, in which he attempts to provide a theoretical framework for understanding it without making dogmatic historical assumptions. In this essay, Landauer harshly criticized the idea of history as something fixed and unchanging, while it is rather an alternation of forces whose influence is constantly present in our lives. Against theories and abstractions, history generates "forces of praxis" in a process of enactment, wherein humans are summoned to actualize the creation of something. In his view, all history is a succession of *topias*, characterized by periods of order and fixed institutions, and *utopias*, marked by the desire for change (see Landauer 2010b, p. 121).

Thus, history is driven by two key elements: a reaction against the environment from which it emerges, and the recollection of all known previous utopias. Also, on this occasion, Landauer assumes that the past is not a closed entity, but an ongoing process of becoming. He writes: "But the forces that originate in the past and are constantly expanding move forward not only of themselves, but also through my will and imagination. So, I do not expand what is already completed, but I shorten what is still in the process of becoming. This is not through my perception or belief, but through my will" (Landauer 1929, vol. II, p. 168). In this perspective, he presents a more dynamic and interconnected understanding of time, in which the past influences the present and the future through the will and imagination of the individual.

Landauer's world-denying attitude and contraction, which is a *conditio sine qua non* for the realization of anarchism, is mitigated by a counter-movement that is a revolutionary projection into the world arising from an inner consciousness. In other words, the movement of negation of the world by contraction is only the initial phase of the process; it serves as the first step in projecting oneself onto the world. The orientation of the negation of the world in the katabasis of the self, the journey inward, paves the way in Landauer's philosophy for the transformative transition to community, referred to as from seclusion to community (*durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft*) (Landauer 2011b, p. 131).

This transition is essentially a conversion or *metanoia* that has profound political implications. Landauer's innovative contribution is that this experience leads to a shift in the hermeneutic perspective for interpreting the relationship between the world and the individual. It enables the individual to question the arbitrary community of the present and to discover a community that conquers death. His mystical and spiritual approach to politics is not merely theoretical but forms the basis for his activism. This is particularly evident in his concept of spirit, which is intricately linked to the community yet to come.

5. Prophet of Life

Landauer distinguishes his spiritual anarchism from Marxism, which is marked by the absence of the spirit, *Geisteslosigkeit*, which also characterizes the modern state. However, the term he uses for "spirit" is controversial, as it represents a transcendence resulting from a tangible connection between people. One could argue that Landauer's idea of spirit is an antinomy, embodying both connectedness and independence (*Verbindung und Unabhängigkeit*).

Landauer's concept of spirit complements his mystical and temporal understanding of community. It is noteworthy that he identifies medieval Christianity as a communal horizon encompassing small communities, and this connection is not coincidental. His concept of the spirit can be interpreted as a secularized expression of communal life in which religious undertones resonate. More specifically, it can be seen as a secularized form of transcendence arising from the interconnectedness of individuals who are aware of their integral role in collective existence. In this framework, Landauer's account of community functions as a dispositive that provides the context for the realization of the spirit in which the verticality of transcendence is transformed into the horizontality of human relations.

Despite Landauer's emphasis that spirit is not fundamentally "distinct from nature" (Landauer 2012, p. 302), he asserts that it involves a nearly messianic transformation of time closely linked to the concept of revolution. In a short essay with the title *Zur Frage der deutschen Verfassung und der Nationalversammlung*, Landauer writes: "The spirit is not a place, where it is opportune to penetrate: rather it is something like a magical time; for all those who have been left behind to their misfortune and perhaps even a little bit to regret, a few moments of contemplation and a devotional and humble silence will do very well" (Landauer 2011a, p. 253). The idea of a spirit as a magical time occurs many times in Landauer's essays and speeches during the Bavarian Revolution.⁸ Through this idea, it is possible to see the intersection between mysticism and activism, prophetism and revolution in his thought. Indeed, his anarchism is so conceived as a spiritual revolution that acquires a kind of prophetic appeal in his thought. One can say that Landauer's depiction of the spirit as "magical time" points to a dimension that transcends conventional temporal understanding. It implies an elusive, almost mystical quality that goes beyond a purely chronological development. For Landauer, the spirit is not a transcendence to be achieved, but rather a transformative moment, an enchanted time, that results in a celebration of life. Spirit as magical time represents a convergence between the mystical and the revolutionary. It emphasizes Landauer's belief in the intertwining of mysticism, activism, and prophetic vision, and presents anarchism as a spiritual revolution that seeks to awaken and transform the individual. In his own words: "We anarchists want to be preachers, and we are primarily concerned with the revolution of the spirits" (Landauer 2009, p. 223). For this reason, the revolution of the spirit must come from what he called a "religion of action, of life, of love" (Landauer 1978, p. 25), which can be defined as a joyful attitude that anticipates hope for a new beginning in the present. His understanding of spirituality differs from the dogmatic or contemplative traditions and embraces a dynamic and collective perspective characterized by a robust proactive stance. His "religion of life" can be understood as a call to a new beginning that emphasizes the active and continuous effort to translate human experience into tangible action.

Landauer writes: "What is it about life? We die soon, we all die, we do not live at all. Nothing lives but what we make of ourselves, what we begin with ourselves; creation lives; the creature does not, only the Creator. Nothing lives but the deed of honest hands and the action of pure true spirit [*das Walten reinen wahrhaften Geistes*]" (Landauer 2011a, p. 296). With his revolutionary credo of life, which runs like a thread through his works from the *Todesprediger* to his last writings, Landauer embraced the Bavarian Revolution with a sense of resignation and steadfastness, experiencing it as "Job among the people" (Landauer 1978, p. 25). The jubilation of revolution in its pro-cosmic euphoria ultimately met a tragic end, confronting the all-too-human challenge of death with life.⁹ It could be said that Landauer's sacrifice during the Bavarian Revolution challenged the fear of death in order to realize a dream of community yet to come. His self-immolation as a prophet of life can be seen as an act of heroic hybris that may not have fully considered the tangible dangers of death. But, on the other hand, the end of his life with the political awareness that death is only an illusion marked the beginning of his lasting legacy.

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Notes

- ¹ On this aspect, see [Despoix \(2015, pp. 121–31\)](#).
- ² For the most recent biographies on Landauer, see [Kunze \(2020\)](#) and [Steininger \(2020\)](#). For an introduction to his thought, see [Cohen-Skalli and Pisano \(2022\)](#).
- ³ On the relevance of Meister Eckhart for Landauer, see [Hinz \(2000\)](#) and [Schwartz \(2015\)](#).
- ⁴ On the Bavarian Revolution and its impact on German-Jewish history, see [Brenner \(2019\)](#).
- ⁵ On this aspect, see [\(Hartung 2013\)](#) and [\(Kosuch 2015\)](#).
- ⁶ On this aspect, see [\(Newman 2020\)](#) and [\(Bielik-Robson 2022\)](#).
- ⁷ As Elliot [Wolfson \(2019, pp. 255–56\)](#) stated: “At the dawn of the twentieth century, Landauer intuited that the great challenge for the coming generations would be to express space through time, to perceive the material world primarily through the temporal prism, to develop a new language based on this change of perception, a language that would be akin to music”. On Landauer’s account of time, see also [\(Biemann 2022\)](#).
- ⁸ On this aspect of the spirit as magical time and the affinity to Benjamin’s messianism, see [\(Pisano 2022\)](#).
- ⁹ On Landauer’s last days in Munich and the reception of his death among his friends, see [\(Cohen-Skalli and Pisano 2020\)](#).

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