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***Abstract**: At the end of the 19th century, violent attacks by so-called anarchists gave the anarchist movement an increased amount of publicity. In the meantime, the success of "scientific socialism" promoted rationality to the rank of a new political doctrine. This article analyses the joint criticism of violence and materialism in the discourse of Gustav Landauer (1870-1919). The German philosopher and revolutionary made an original contribution to anarchism in theorising its incompatibility with violent means of action. He also made a crucial move for the theory of ideas in affirming that reason was not the solution, but often the cause of violence.*

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Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, anarchism experienced a massive amount of publicity due to several attacks against institutions and politicians led by persons who called themselves anarchists. In the media and in official statements, anarchists were often presented as mere terrorists, passionate beings whose romantic actions fell short of being taken seriously. Along with the rise of social sciences and the political success of "scientific socialism" came a new doctrine defended by major political parties throughout Europe:[1] all claims for social change were expected to adopt the language of rationality.

This crude distinction between irrational anarchism and more scientific approaches was stimulated by the efforts made by various Marxist thinkers to discredit their anarchist opponents.[2] However, it failed to give an actual account of various noteworthy contemporary anarchist attempts to think and experience the construction of a different and freer society. The most original anarchist approach comes from the German philosopher and activist

[1] The main conveyor of this doctrine was the Second International, created in 1889, six years after Karl Marx's death. It represented the Marxist movement until the First World War, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was its cornerstone.

[2] The massive bureaucratic edifice of the main party in the Marxist Second International not only parted from the anarchists in terms of tactics, it also often opposed them on theoretical and doctrinal grounds. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: a History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1962), 223–56.

Gustav Landauer,[3] born in 1870 from a Jewish family[4] and killed during the crushing of the Bavarian Council Republic in 1919. An opponent to the separation between means and ends, he criticised the use of physical violence in politics for strategical reasons, and promoted another kind of radical change instead, rooted in a common spirit of solidarity. This spirit or *Geist* was supposedly present in every individual, acting there as the root to community. According to Landauer, the historical materialism promoted by Marxists of his time completely failed to acknowledge the role played by this spiritual reality, and mistakenly put any non-materialistic aspects aside. Just as the use of violence as a means of action could never lead towards a more peaceful society, this attitude was regarded by Landauer as causing a growing gap between people's aspirations and their achievements.

Gustav Landauer tackled the problem of radical change in society in a manner that neither followed the logics of political parties, nor directly attacked the system. Based on an analysis of both texts and context, this article shows the coherence between two aspects of Landauer's philosophy: his refusal to let scientific explanations direct all aspirations for social transformation and his rejection of violent means of action. Previous works focusing on Landauer's understanding of violence often missed the fact that these are just two sides of the same unorthodox version of anarchism: in taking into account non-materialistic considerations, Landauer's project claimed to go beyond sheer rationality and to show the possible violence implied in an all-too-rational approach of society.

I. Anarchist against Violence: a Matter of Coherence

One of Gustav Landauer's substantial contributions to anarchist thought is the theory he developed on violence. Although it was rather common among anarchist thinkers and activists to refuse the use of deliberate violence as a means of action – it is now admitted that "violence is *not* an essential feature of anarchism"[5] –, Landauer's view on the matter proved peculiar in many ways. For those unaware of actual anarchist tactics, his reluctance to support so-called anarchist is probably the most striking. When forced by political events to explicitly theorise the distinction or even the opposition between violence and anarchism, Landauer came up with challenging ideas, for anarchists and non-anarchists alike.[6] He created a theoretical framework which, apart from Leo Tolstoy's work, was still absent from anarchist theories.[7] Interpreting non-violence in terms of its potential for social change, Landauer finally proposed a redirection of violence towards the self in order to achieve genuine transformations.

[3] Gustav Landauer's works have only been partly translated into English. His 1911 book *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* was translated in 1978 by David J. Parent. Gabriel Kuhn translated Landauer's 1907 book *Die Revolution* and a series of short texts in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, ed. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010). I provided my own translation for those texts unavailable in English, mostly relying on the edition of collected works by Verlag Edition AV.

[4] Although this cultural belonging played an important role in Landauer's thought, his family was non-practising, and he considered himself an atheist. See the volume of collected articles edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Anya Mali, *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

[5] Andrew Fiala, "Anarchism and Pacifism," in *Brill's Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy*, ed. Nathan J. Jun (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 152.

[6] Landauer's approach to violence is systematically analysed in my thesis: Anatole Lucet, *Communauté et révolution chez Gustav Landauer* (Lyon: École normale supérieure, 2018), 507–27.

[7] According to Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), 223.

A. A Counterproductive Strategy

At the beginning of the 1890s, as "propaganda by the deed" got increased publicity in the European media[8] (especially with the series of attacks led by French anarchists Ravachol, Émile Henry, Georges Etievant, etc.), the German government launched harshly repressive measures against the anarchist movement. In October 1893, Landauer was sentenced to prison for writing an article which advocated "disobedience to the law." After two months in his cell and just before being freed, he was sentenced to nine additional months for his alleged actions aiming at a violent overthrow of the political institutions. By the end of 1894, another fourteen authors of the anarchist paper *Der Sozialist* [9] were imprisoned for "incitement" to revolutionary action, never for actual deeds.[10] In this context, it became of paramount importance for anarchists to clarify their relation to violent action. Several articles were published in *Der Sozialist*, insisting on the intrinsic gap between violence and anarchism, trying to part from the widespread image of anarchists as terrorists.

At the time, Landauer became tired of the common assimilation of violence and anarchism, both by opponents of anarchism and by its advocates.[11] This is what made him start a series of articles trying to prove wrong critiques such as the one levelled by Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, who wrote in 1895: "We will not ask what is left of the anarchist who has divorced himself from the tactics of "deeds"."[12] Noteworthy is the fact that, in his efforts to build a more coherent anarchism, Landauer was very preoccupied by the same confusion between violence and action among persons who claimed to be anarchists themselves. In an 1897 article, he wrote:

> It is impossible to deny that anarchists have been involved in a number of the last decades' assassinations. However, in principle, anarchism and violence have nothing in common. The anarchist idea is a peaceful idea, opposed to aggressiveness and violence.[13]

Behind the definition of anarchism that is implied here, there seem to be two main explanations for the radical distinction between anarchism and violence. The first one is about the very political nature of violence as a means of action; the other concerns its counterproductive consequences. In his attacks against violent actions by proclaimed anarchists, Landauer accused them of not being anarchist enough: although they faced the state and tried to prove it could be destroyed by their action, they failed to behave as actual anarchists.

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[8] There were actually very few attacks, especially in Germany, compared to the publicity they prompted.

[9] From 1891 to 1893, *Der Sozialist* was the organ of the opposition by a group of young members of the SPD (the "Jungen"). In 1893, under Landauer's influence, it became a prominent anarchist journal, published until 1899. Landauer resumed its publication from 1909 to 1915. See Ruth Link-Salinger Hyman, *Gustav Landauer: Philosopher of Utopia* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 34. Landauer understood "anarchism" and "socialism" as two synonyms. His libertarian socialism opposed both mass political movements (social-democracy) and the initiatives led by individualist anarchists.

[10] Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer*, 87.

[11] In a letter to his friend Fritz Mauthner, Landauer wrote: "By the way, I will soon give the anarchists a piece of my mind in an article on the most recent events; I am tired of the glorification of these so-called "deeds"." (quoted in Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings*, 84.).

[12] George Plechanoff, *Anarchism and Socialism*, trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 139. In the same passage, the author stressed an ambiguity in Élisée Reclus' admiration of Ravachol similar to that which can be found in Landauer.

[13] Gustav Landauer, "A Few Words on Anarchism," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 80.

> For what has the killing of people to do with anarchism, a theory striving for a society without government and authoritarian coercion, a movement against the state and legalised violence? The answer is: nothing at all. […] the anarchist politics of assassination only stems from the intentions of a small group among them that wants to follow the example of the big political parties. […] What they are trying to say is: "We too are doing politics […]!"[14]

This internal critique of anarchist actions somehow anticipated Max Weber's 1919 analysis of violence as the specific means of action in politics, that which is used by the politicians who share an "ethics of responsibility" (directed towards ends, in a Machiavellian fashion), as opposed to the "ethics of conviction" (concerned with the means, and therefore refusing the use of violence).[15] Noteworthy is the fact that Weber's first draft of the conference used the concept of "*Machtethik*" (ethics of power) instead of "*Verantwortungsethik*" (ethics of responsibility). It seems that the first choice made Weber's critique more explicit, as the "responsibility" he had in mind was actually based on that of the great political leader. Therefore, Landauer's refusal of violence was coherent with his anarchist "antipolitical" stance,[16] i.e. being socially engaged (therefore not simply "apolitical") but aside from the classical political means of action, and more so from its specific one: violence. In their attempts to change the world, anarchists are to yearn for a kind of power distinct from sheer domination, he wrote.[17] Therefore, the justifications of anarchists who engaged in violent action relied on a double fallacy: not only did violence hinder their very anarchist claims, making them much more "state-like" than they wished, but it also proved an inappropriate means in itself.

> These people expect everything from violence; on my part I think that absolutely nothing can be expected from violence, neither from the violence of the current ruling class, nor from the violence of so-called revolutionaries, who would try and dabble in commanding a socialist society through dictatorial decrees […].[18]

In Landauer's perspective, these means of action did not fit anarchist approaches due to the very end they aimed at, and to the specifically anarchist conception of social change involving a coherence between means and ends. While a most common conception, shared by Max Weber as well as by current supporters of "just war theories" (and to a large extent by Marxist thinkers of the Second International), advocates the resort to violent means for achieving peaceful ends, Landauer and most anarchists defended a strong and necessary coherence between the means and the ends:

> What the anarchists must realise is that a goal can only be reached if it is already reflected in its means. Non-violence cannot be attained by violence.

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[14] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism" in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 85.

[15] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans H. Gerth (London: Routledge, 1991).

[16] Gustav Landauer defined himself as "antipolitical," in a way which revealed his anarchism as well as his spiritual approach to social change, opposed to the technical nature of politics. On this very matter, his position was typical of *Kulturkritik*.

[17] Gustav Landauer, *Ein Weg zur Befreiung der Arbeiter-Klasse*, 5. In this text, Landauer distinguishes between the power *(Macht)* that the working class should be willing to have and the fictional one that can be given by taking part in political institutions.

[18] Ibid., 8.

> Anarchy exists wherever one finds true anarchists: people who do not engage in violence.[19]

Though Landauer refers to Leo Tolstoy in the same text, his main criticism of violence at this point is not as strongly opposed to its unethical aspects as it is to its radical inefficiency.[20] Violence, coercion and force are the means states and politicians use to enforce their worldview, an attempt which – according to anarchist critiques – they fail to achieve. A consistent anarchist approach therefore refrains from using the very means that lead to this failure, trying instead to bring about change by one coherent means: changing oneself, instead of trying to impose change directly on others.

B. Mystic Violence, Directed Towards the Self

Landauer's refusal of violence as a means of political action should not be understood as a kind of resignation. He shared the theoretical attacks of those who engaged in violent action, seeing current society as intrinsically unjust and violent. However, although the system in itself could be said to be the cause of much pain, it could not be reached by the blows directed towards its structural incarnations. Hence this definition of the state given by Landauer in 1910:

> A table can be overturned and a window can be smashed. However, those who believe that the state is also a thing or a fetish that can be overturned or smashed are wordmakers and faithful believers in the Word. The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently.[21]

As a matter of fact, for Landauer, attacking politicians cannot solve the problem of the state.[22] Moreover, the violent imposition of any model contradicts the anarchist view of a society of autonomous beings. Our relations to others are to be changed in order to achieve a new society apart from the state. However, the very first step towards this transformation consists in a radical change in our relation to ourselves.

> It is not enough for us to reject conditions and institutions; we have to reject ourselves. "Do not kill others, only yourself" – such will be the maxim of those who accept the challenge to create their own chaos in order to discover

[19] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 86. A similar argument was later given by Hannah Arendt: "Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals. […] the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world." See *On Violence* (Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1970), 4 and 80.

[20] Landauer's relation with Tolstoy's non-violent principles is discussed by Christian Bartolf and Dominique Miething, "Gustav Landauer and the Revolutionary Principle of Non-Violent Non-Cooperation," in *The German Revolution and Political Theory*, ed. Gaard Kets and James Muldoon, Series *Marx, Engels, and Marxisms* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 215–35.

[21] Gustav Landauer, "Weak Statesmen, Weaker People!," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 214, amended translation.

[22] The idea that the state does not disappear is expressed very clearly in Tolstoy's words: "*Le roi est mort – vive le roi!* Then what is the use of killing them?" See "Thou Shalt Not Kill," in *What Is Religion? And Other New Articles and Letters* (New York: Crowell & Company, 1902), 116.

> their most authentic and precious inner being and to become one with the world in a mystical union.[23]

According to this conception, it is because we partly embody the world we live in that we paradoxically contribute to maintain what we refuse. Subsequently, the whole point of rejecting one's self can be considered a quest for authenticity: "killing oneself" means in that case getting rid of the alien-self, created by society, seeking one's own aspirations as an individual.[24] A symbolic and metaphorical suicide (which is really a kind of purification) should then be distinguished from that other kind committed by "the present-day assassins."[25] According to Landauer, those anarchists who undertake violent actions directed towards persons "engage in a new kind of suicide" (several of them were actually sentenced to death). Thinking they act like martyrs, they only surrender to the system they intend to destroy: for that reason, Landauer considered they had given up their authentic self and let their social self take over. Reversely, he who "kills himself" in the metaphorical sense given by Landauer only gives up the atomised and submitted self that was created by society, while the one who kills another actually stops being an original self, he stops resisting by taking up the means of those he seeks to overthrow. In that perspective, violence cannot be said to be completely absent from Landauer's conception of anarchism. Still, it can only be directed towards the self, this inner struggle being the one legitimate and actually efficient way for achieving one's ends.

> But they will not kill anyone except themselves – in the mystical sense, in order to be reborn after having descended into the depths of their soul.[26]

This notion was mostly developed in the talk Landauer gave in 1900 for the members of the New Community *(Die neue Gemeinschaft)*, entitled *Through Separation to Community*. The separation that he advocated was one from the artificial and arbitrary society everyone lived in: killing oneself as partaker of it was seen as the way to unleash another self, one willing to build new social bonds. This conception of violence directed towards the self led Landauer to a reinterpretation of "propaganda by the deed." While this name had been previously used to describe violent actions, he gave it a literal meaning again.[27] He made it the expression of inner attempts to live an exemplary life according to one's own aspirations, claiming that propaganda by the deed "hasn't a thing to do with killing people; rather, it regards the rejuvenation of human spirit and will along with the productive energies unleashed by large communities. [...] Everything else is passion, despair, or a great misconception."[28]

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[23] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 89. On Landauer's understanding of mysticism, see the end of this article and the more complete but less nuanced monography by Charles B. Maurer, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971).

[24] Landauer's notion of self-change partly followed Étienne de La Boétie's idea of servitude resulting from people's willingness to accept it. See Anatole Lucet, "(In)actualiser. La Boétie chez Landauer, du refus de la servitude à la construction de la liberté," in *Les classiques à l'épreuve. Actualité de l'histoire de la philosophie*, ed. Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Samuel Lézé, Actualité des classiques (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2018), 35–53.

[25] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 86.

[26] Ibid., 88.

[27] This literal understanding actually reflects the first and fundamental meaning of the notion, as it had been coined by activists at the end of the 1870s. See Daniel Colson, "Propagande par le fait," in *Petit lexique philosophique de l'anarchisme: de Proudhon à Deleuze* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2001), 251–52.

[28] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchism in Germany," in *Anarchism in Germany and Other Essays*, ed. Stephen Bender and Gabriel Kuhn (San Francisco: Barbary Coast Publishing Collective, 2005), 17.

As a consequence, once the violence which emerged from the feeling of discomfort in the actual world has been redirected towards the self, the only way for anyone to bring about change in a coherent manner is to start it, here and now. On this matter, Landauer expressed his own views in rephrasing Tolstoy's ideas:

> Tolstoy seems to say: […] you men think too much about the environment, the future, and others; you separate means and ends too much, as if an end could be gained in this way. You think that questionable means are justified by a noble goal. For us, however, the moment alone exists; do not sacrifice reality to a phantom! If you want the proper life then live it now.[29]

II. "Be the change you want to see": embodying change

Gustav Landauer was strongly opposed to mechanistic and scientific explanations of social changes. For him, the world could not be conceived as a machine which human beings would be able to change in any possible way within the limits of natural laws.[30] As part of his "antipolitical" approach, Landauer advocated the embodiment of social aspirations, the self being the only actual medium one had a grasp on to change society as a whole. This approach was partly motivated by his criticism of Marxism: for Landauer, the abstractions of historical materialism were unable to give a proper hold on people's destinies and to fulfil their revolutionary yearnings as individuals. As such, he saw the doctrine of the Second International as a pretext for sheer resignation, when he advocated instead a kind of present-day activism, filled with a spirit of voluntary renewal.

A. Unspirited Historical Materialism

In his 1911 book called *Aufruf zum Sozialismus (Call to Socialism)*, Landauer provided a detailed account of his own conception of anarchism-socialism, in a strong and ongoing opposition to the Marxist socialist doctrine. The Marxist movement's evolution during the Second International, away from the initial workers' dynamics and towards a more bureaucratic functioning, was perceived as a reproduction of dictatorial attitudes that Landauer already criticised in the state. More specifically, the eviction of anarchists from congresses of the Second International contributed to his hostility towards a doctrine he opposed throughout his life, calling it "the plague of our times and the curse of the socialist movement!"[31]

Besides the authoritarian aspects Landauer criticised in the major political party of Germany, he fundamentally resented the very doctrine underlying the Marxist's conception of social change.[32] Historical materialism, as it was further developed by Friedrich Engels after Karl Marx, relied on a basic historical assumption that a defendant of the coherence

[29] Gustav Landauer, "Peter Kropotkin," in *Internationalismus*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2008), 203. Translated by Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer*, 136.

[30] Landauer doubted the validity of so-called "laws" directing the transformations in society. This is why he refuses, at the outset of *Revolution*, to consider sociology as a science. See "Revolution," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 110.

[31] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, trans. David J. Parent (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1978), 32.

[32] For a comparison between these two currents of socialism, see Lucien van der Walt, "Anarchism and Marxism," in *Brill's Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy*, ed. Nathan J. Jun (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 505-558.

between means and ends could not accept.[33] In 1877, Engels famously wrote: "The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is rather pushed to an extreme. But at this extreme it changes into its opposite."[34] This very conception seems to postulate a break and an incoherence, positing the emergence of a new world order (the socialist one) from its very opposite, or at least from something that had nothing to do with it.

> This further consideration only proves the same point we must repeat again and again, that which is the cornerstone of our socialist doctrine: the needs created by capitalism do not lead to socialism. There is no miracle, the flower does not rise from the dirt, no more than fleas come into being from sawdust: socialism does not originate out of capitalism.[35]

The Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International, as it was defended by its main theorist Karl Kautsky, relied on the assumption that one had to wait until the social and economic conditions were "ripe" for change. Only then could a revolution happen and lead, through the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the abolition of all social classes. Relying on such an assumption and calling it a science, Marxist thinkers after Engels coined any other socialist approach "utopian,"[36] considering they were indifferent to actual conditions and merely idealistic.

> The Utopians' mode of thought has for a long time governed the Socialist ideas of the 19th century, and still governs some of them. […] To all these, Socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power. […] To make a science of Socialism, it had first to be placed upon a real basis.[37]

That critique of any "non-scientific" (i.e. non-materialistic in the Marxist meaning) approach to socialism and the opposition it implies between abstract "philosophical knowledge" and a "very practical aim,"[38] proved the "most pointed shaft" in the "fray" between Marxism and non-Marxist socialism, as Martin Buber wrote.[39] However, this criticism failed to give an earnest account of the conception defended by these so-called "utopian socialists."[40] Gustav Landauer built a conception of socialism which relied on spiritual grounds, more than exclusively material ones, he called upon the "ideal" of society, and did not resent using the hardly understood notion of *Geist*: a spirit leading every person towards the construction of the society they aspire to. "We want to show […] that socialism

[33] See the article Landauer published a few weeks after Engels' death: "Friedrich Engels und die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," in *Anarchismus*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 2* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2009), 176–79.

[34] Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, trans. Emile Burns (New York: International Publishers, 1894), 313.

[35] Gustav Landauer, "Der Arbeitstag," in *Antipolitik*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 3.1* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2010), 293.

[36] This thesis (also mentioned in the *Communist Manifesto*) was mostly developed in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*. Parts of this book were reprinted in Engels' *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.

[37] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Emile Burns (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1908), 74–75.

[38] Karl Kautsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution*, trans. W. H. Kerridge (London: The National Labour Press, 1920), 44.

[39] Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. Richard F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 11.

[40] According to such criteria and considering the peculiar use Landauer made of the notion of utopia, he would definitely not have minded calling himself a "utopian socialist" as opposed to a "scientific" one.

is not just an idea for some remote future, but a reality of every moment."[41] Landauer directly addressed the challenge of his doctrinal opponents, and even returned their argument against themselves: his own way of changing the world required a direct transformation of what could be immediately changed, i.e. every person's way of life. Instead of waiting for the supposedly right time, Landauer claimed that any time was right as long as the people felt in their deepest selves an incentive to change. "There is no other way: *what will really lead to destination must start in the spirit* and must therefore begin on a small-scale."[42] The actual way to a socialist society has to be, in Landauer's opinion, directed by the spirit of solidarity that can only emerge among people who have already returned to their inner self by killing their alienated self.[43] His peculiar way of seeing change in society was distinct from sheer materialism but nonetheless very real: all the more real, he might have said.

> It was not an ideal; it was reality. […] It was not an ideal, because spirit was there. Spirit gives meaning, sacredness and blessing to life; spirit makes, creates and permeates the present with joy, strength and delight. The ideal turns away from the present toward something new. It is a longing for the future, for something better and unknown. It is the road out of times of decline to a new culture.[44]

In that perspective, Landauer's approach cannot be accused of any kind of "idealism," divorced from reality. Sometimes called a "revolutionary romantic,"[45] his approach to society remained very practical, and his anarchism, "spiritual" though it is, did not remain in the ethereal heights of spirit: "We socialists, we want to make the spirit sensible and corporeal."[46] The way they intend to realise this is through "small beginnings," starting from the inner transformation of the self, and going step by step towards a broader change. In that perspective, the construction of small communities (*Siedlungen* or settlements) is seen by anarchists as Landauer as a necessary step for social transformation, any other attempt to change society from above, directly as a whole, being doomed. The pioneers of this socialism want to prove, by their example, that another world is possible, and that socialism is nothing but the way towards socialism, when individuals decide to start by themselves. Filled with a spirit of solidarity, they try to build upon it and to spread it in order to achieve a harmonious

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[41] Gustav Landauer, "Von der Siedlung. Gespräch eines Siedlungsfreundes mit einem unwahrscheinlichen Gegner," in *Antipolitik*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 3.1* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2010), 334.

[42] Gustav Landauer, "Das zweite Flugblatt: Was ist zunächst zu tun?," in *Antipolitik*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 3.1* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2010), 138. See also: "We no longer believe in a gap between the present and the future; we know: "America is here or nowhere!" What we do not do now, at this moment, we do not do at all" in Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 140.

[43] "A cohesive spirit – yes! yes! the word spirit does occur often in this book. Perhaps it happens because the men of our time, especially the so-called socialists, say "spirit" so seldom and act correspondingly. They do not act spiritually and so they do nothing real and practical; and how could they do anything real if they think so little!", in Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 38.

[44] Ibid., 35.

[45] This convincing notion was coined by Michael Löwy, "The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer," in *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. Jack Lester Jacobs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 252–66.

[46] Gustav Landauer, "Gott und der Sozialismus," in *Philosophie und Judentum*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 5* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2012), 305.

society, one which is not only an artificial body but also a common spirit:[47] "*Aedificabo!* I want to build! is the motto of socialists."[48]

B. Hic et Nunc: a Present-Day Activism

If reality is to be built through spirit, one may ask what actual means are to be used in order to create a new society. On that very matter, the aforementioned coherence between means and ends proves all the more necessary: "Means and ends, the way and the aim, are not to be distinguished if one pursues real life, i.e., the realisation of thought."[49] This implies that in terms of socialist realisation, means do not only have to be coherent with ends, both also coincide. This is another reason why Landauer insisted very strongly on socialist settlements being built:[50] no matter how small the attempts, they were the only actual way of realising change, and of giving socialism a chance.

> What are we to do now? What is the next mission for those who did not just arrive among the freedom fighters? For the time being, our first mission is not to look around us and see what others have started. More than ever, it is now time that every individual started *by themselves*.[51]

The difference between Landauer's anarchist project and classical "political" attempts is made clear in the previous quotation. As he had no trust in political means (elections, political parties, trade unions) for achieving social change, Landauer advocated an antipolitical embodiment of aspirations for social change, anticipating the more contemporary notion of "prefigurative politics."[52] This global transformation through individual initiatives was an expression of Landauer's specific version of anarchism, as well as an expression of a broader movement of life reform which happened at the same time in Germany, born from a distrust of mass politics.[53]

> We cannot wait for mankind, nor can we wait until mankind is united, for a common economy and a just exchange system, as long as we have not found

[47] "One could say: *Disregard the material and only focus on the spiritual!* However, I would like to respond instantly: *No, no, this cannot be!* The one who only feels the spiritual with his soul while perceiving his body externally has lost all natural perception and has subscribed to some school's dogma. Body and spirit are not separable on the inside, both are expressions of the soul." in Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 104.

[48] Gustav Landauer, "Gott und der Sozialismus," 306.

[49] Gustav Landauer, "Socialist Beginning," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 201, amended translation.

[50] This was one of the aims of the *Sozialistischer Bund* (Socialist Alliance), a decentralised organisation Landauer founded in 1908 in order to accompany the realisation of a new socialist society through the cooperation of various groups. At its highest, the Bund is thought to have had 15 autonomous groups of 10 to 20 members. See Christoph Knüppel, "'"Aus Der Scholle Festem Grunde Wächst Dereinst Die Freiheitsstunde." Gustav Landauer Und Die Siedlungsbewegung," *Schriften Der Erich-Mühsam-Gesellschaft*, no. 27 (2006): 50.

[51] Gustav Landauer, "'Unsere nächste Aufgabe," in *Anarchismus*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 2* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2009), 191.

[52] Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society* (Oakland, Washington: AK Press; Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2011).

[53] Matthew Jefferies, "Lebensreform: A Middle-Class Antidote to Wilhelminism?," in *Wilhelminism and its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930*, ed. Geoff Eley and James N. Retallack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 91–106.

> and re-created humanity in us as individuals. Everything begins with the individual, and everything depends on the individual.[54]

The idea that a different society can only happen if people change themselves relates somehow to the conception of violence previously mentioned: it is yet another attempt to get rid of the alien-self, that is to eliminate the violence society exerts on us from within, that those who engage in this process try to live the change they want to see. In doing so, they abandon the "childish faith in radical change outside of [them]selves,"[55] and conceive another version of socialism that is built in harmony with those who experience it, because "socialism is precisely not a violent operation, but permanent health."[56]

This health really means, in the words of Landauer, the absence of violence and tensions between the individual and his spirit, or between the individual and society. In trying to take into account the "spirit," i.e. the individual aspiration to community which had been disregarded by Marxism in its attempt to make everything material and scientific, Landauer did not embrace irrationality; he simply tried to consider individuals wholly, as rational beings as well as emotional and spirited ones.[57]

> The way to a newer, higher form of human society passes by the dark, fatal gate of our instincts and the *terra abscondita* – the "hidden land" – of our soul, which is our world. This world can only be constructed from within.[58]

Landauer's conception of the spirit shows his reluctance towards any raw materialistic worldview, which he saw as necessarily partial and overestimated, when a just balance between cultural and economic variables could give a more appropriate account of reality. From this point of view, no so-called science could actually explain – let alone foresee – social changes. Only the decisive desire of individuals to realise change here and now and to get started on the socialist way could actually achieve this: "First, let us remember that there are no more dead causes or dead laws of nature, no transcendent principles, for us anymore. We only know immanent life, only present forces."[59]

In order to unleash these forces and to give them full expression, no social sciences and no institution of reason was needed, but a "spiritual" – i.e. cultural – education, in an attempt to awaken the spirit of solidarity every individual has inside. This endeavour, supported by the example of pioneers (not by the dictates of political doctrines), is to lead towards a harmonious society, where every individual can find the place they build for themselves in their relations to other individuals.

III. Mystical Community through a Spirit of Solidarity

Gustav Landauer's attempts to bring about a new community rely on two major criticisms, as we previously observed. The first one is a criticism of violence as a deliberate means of action, for it could not lead to anything but another violent society. The external problems have to be solved from the inside, said Landauer, because no other grasp is available for anyone willing to prompt change. Therefore, the only acceptable and useful violence is that which

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[54] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 136.
[55] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 89.
[56] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 87.
[57] The mix between reason and passion was often celebrated by Landauer. See his praise of some anarchists in "A Few Words on Anarchism," 80-81, and the tribute he paid to Jean-Jacques Rousseau on his 200th death anniversary in "Dem größtem Schweizer," in *Internationalismus*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2008), 226–28.
[58] Gustav Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 88.
[59] Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," 101.

people direct towards themselves, in an attempt to use their own behaviours and habits (in terms of consumption, of relating to one another, etc.) as a step towards a different society. In doing so, they not only bypass the wait-and-see attitude of many political parties, but they also show through their realisations the way to socialism. How could it be explained, though, that a mere action of the self would lead to a more global change? The way Landauer conceived of society, as a union of independent individuals gathered willingly around their common spirit of community, gives an original and profound answer to the problem of relations between the self and society.

A. Atomised Societies at the Turn of the Century

The end of the 19th century saw the full development of the industrial revolution in Europe, along with an increase in the dimension of cities, of political organisations, etc. These rapid changes were often interpreted in terms of the relative disappearance of the individual behind the new mass. The modern civilisation superimposed a new scale on every relationship, which meant the end of many traditional social models. One of the first and most influential critics of these dynamics was the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, the 1887 author of *Community and Society*. In this work, Tönnies described how former organic communities, linked by bonds of solidarity and a feeling of belonging, somehow got replaced by artificial societies. In those latter societies, the individuals only relate to one another as egoist selves, willing to fulfil their personal ends. Depending on the perspective, this could either be understood as a liberation of individuals from a traditional and oppressive community, or as the destruction of all the links that gave meaning to human relationships, along with the disappearance of some kind of existence through community.

In his 1907 book *Revolution*, Gustav Landauer gave a convincing interpretation of this ambiguous evolution. For him, the individualism of his time lacked "meaning, direction and spirit."[60] The social changes caused by the industrial revolution did not appear to him as a liberation of the sovereign self from the oppressive bonds of community, but as a symptom of the declining *Geist*, the spirit of solidarity. Along with this weakening of the spirit in an atomised society, Landauer admittedly expected and observed the emergence of "great individuals,"[61] a few persons whose role would then be to keep the spirit alive. However, this phenomenon was only the tip of the iceberg compared to the despair of "atomised and abandoned masses." Although Landauer strongly relied on the role played by those few individuals to help revive a spirit of solidarity among the people, he refused to make individualism a system of mere self-promotion.

This criticism of civilisation as a move away from real human nature, or from types of relationships perceived as more authentic, was widespread in Germany at the time, and best known as *Kulturkritik*. Its participants bemoaned the spreading of mechanistic relations, the increasing role of technology and the way materialistic approaches overrode more cultural or spiritual ones. As such, this cultural criticism is best understood as a criticism of civilisation in the name of culture.[62] Landauer's own version of this could be seen as a kind of nostalgia for former kinds of communities,[63] but it was also a tool which he used against the institutions

[60] Gustav Landauer, "Revolution," 169, amended translation.
[61] Ibid., 135.
[62] This distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* is analysed in the first chapter of Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephoot (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
[63] Landauer was highly influenced by Kropotkin's enthusiasm for small peasants' villages during the Middle-Ages. However, he did not wish to reinstate a feudal regime or restore any former society. He was only trying to rediscover that "common spirit" which lived in those medieval societies. See Gustav Landauer, "Revolution," 135–37.

of his time, like the state, in order to achieve a new kind of community. Using a similar distinction as Tönnies', Landauer opposed organic communities and "arbitrary communities,"[64] the latter being forced upon the individual by an institution to which he has no living relationship. For Landauer, when the spirit of solidarity disappears from social structures, men are led by some kind of need to fill its place with various idols, which tend to become necessary and make the return of the spirit even more difficult.[65] These substitutes could either be the state, capitalism or science: their common feature is their ability to rule human behaviours according to arbitrary principles. Such situations mean that

> the unifying spirit no longer prevails in the economy, but that the object-idol rules, i.e., something that is not really a thing, but a nothing, that is mistaken for a thing.[66]

The role of those who feel in themselves the root of community, i.e. the spirit which has been so diminished in others, is then to show through their creations and their example a way to restore a link to the spirit. This is what Landauer awaited especially from poets and artists, whom he saw as the harbingers of the coming community.[67] All their attempts are to inspire others and make the spirit resound in them, so that people would turn to their deepest selves and find there the root of "the most ancient and complete community: a community encompassing not only all of humanity but the entire universe."[68]

B. The Root of Community

Gustav Landauer's socialism was an attempt to bring every human being towards a kind of federal community, which he called a "society of societies."[69] The underlying idea was that of a unity emerging from the individuals getting together, and their small communities relating to one another, without ever coming under the rule of any other institution.[70] This horizontal model, opposed to a transcendental vision of unity, relied on the basic assumption that every human being has in itself the *Geist*, i.e. the spirit of solidarity that serves as a root to community. According to Landauer, this immanent principle, nourished by centuries of solidarity amongst human beings, can bring the people together when they hear it.

> All spirit is communal spirit, and there is no individual in whom, awake or asleep, the drive to the whole, to associate with others, to community, to justice, ever rests. The natural compulsion to voluntary association for the purposes of community is inextirpable, but it has been dealt a hard blow and become numbed […].[71]

Although Landauer's descriptions of the *Geist* sometimes resemble the definition of mutual aid as an instinct by Russian anarchist Kropotkin,[72] the former's conception is to be

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[64] Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," 96.
[65] Gustav Landauer, "Revolution," 141.
[66] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 132.
[67] See Landauer's 1918 call to poets: "Eine Ansprache an die Dichter," in *Literatur*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 6.2* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2013), 67–72.
[68] Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," 96.
[69] Gustav Landauer, "Revolution," 131.
[70] "If socialism is for others a practice of party and politics, it is for us a conjunction of *practice and spirit*." Gustav Landauer, "Judentum und Sozialismus," in *Philosophie und Judentum*, ed. Siegbert Wolf, *Ausgewählte Schriften 5* (Lich/Hessen: Verlag Edition AV, 2012), 349.
[71] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 102.
[72] Among other major texts by the Russian anarchist, Landauer translated into German Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* in 1908.

understood as a cultural reality, more than a mere natural one. Though present in every human being, this impulse to community does not equate to a mechanistic drive for Landauer, it should rather be interpreted in terms of cultural identity, being built and revived throughout history by mankind's endeavours to live a common life. As such, the spirit acts as a kind of collective memory, the expression of which depends on the obstacles or incentives to its expression.

This notion of *Geist*, which Landauer used throughout his life to try and bring about a socialist reality, is rooted in a long tradition of German philosophy. However, it can be said to have found a specific expression in Landauer's work with his critical observations of modernity. Aged 24, Landauer visited several industrial cities and had a chance to encounter workers in their factories. He was struck by the "spiritual degeneration accompanying their economic misery."[73] The spiritual aspect, relatively undermined within the Marxist doctrine compared to the material situation, condemned the workers to be "not a revolutionary class, but a bunch of poor wretches who must live and die under capitalism."[74] The most striking thing for Landauer was the way these workers relied entirely on external organisations to take care of their lives: "such a faith was marked by the conception that "from some secret place," outside themselves, "everything was being prepared" for their inevitable victory."[75] This attitude of voluntary servitude was a shock for Landauer, who tried to make the voice of self-determination heard amongst these workers. His belief that the spirit of community – the goad to an anarchist society – could be found in every individual[76] made him relentlessly try to address all social classes in order to seek in each and every individual the *Geist* which did not depend on their social status, though it was certainly more or less hindered by it. Finding the will to change was the key, but although he saw this as the main factor for change in society – in *Call to Socialism*, he quoted the famous proverb: "Where there is a will, there is a way"[77] –, Landauer did not blame the lack of will (i.e. the lack of spirit) on the individuals themselves. He did not conceive their servitude as positively voluntary, as it did not result as much from a will to be atomised as from a lack of will to community, due to their spirit being buried deep inside by external factors. For that reason, it proved necessary to have pioneers, poets and artists to inspire them, and give them a notion of their true inner self. Only then, once they had realised the capacities and longings to communal links they had in themselves, could they step aside from the outside world to try and find in their deepest self the root to community.

> The more firmly an individual stands on its own ground, the deeper it retreats into itself, the more it withdraws from the effects of its surroundings, the more it will find itself united with the past, with what it originally is. What man originally is, what his most intimate and hidden is, what his inviolable own is, is the large community of the living in himself, his blood and his kin.[78]

The common spirit was also the spirit of community, a spirit that – in the most mystical expressions of his thought – Landauer defined in an equivalence of the individual with the world he lived in. These formulations of Landauer's anarchism as world community were

[73] Letter to Alfred Moos written on December 4th, 1894 quoted in Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 92.
[74] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 86.
[75] Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer*, 92.
[76] "What I call anarchy (without any special attachment to the word) is something that resonates with every man who reflects upon the world and his soul. Every such man will have the urge to give birth to himself, to recreate his being, and – as far as possible – his environment and his world." Landauer, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism," 88.
[77] Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, 30.
[78] Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," 104.

deeply influenced by his work on Meister Eckhart's writings, which he translated into modern German in 1900. Not only did the medieval mystic play a prominent role in Landauer's conception of community through separation, he also appealed to him for his conception of an immanent spirit, more relevant than pure matter, pervading each and every individual and thus blurring the distinction between the individual and the world.[79] In Landauer's perspective, i.e. that of an atheist anarchist, Eckhart's mysticism proved a convenient way to express the relation between the spirit of solidarity (an immanent principle) and individual selves. Consistent with his refusal to consider any separation between means and ends, any attempts to change the world from outside or to let it change following so-called natural laws, Landauer found in Eckhart's writings a justification for his conception of world-change starting in every single individual: "The way to create a community that encompasses the entire world leads not outward, but inward. We must realise that we do not just perceive the world, but that we *are* the world."[80]

Conclusion

More than a century ago, Gustav Landauer made an original contribution to the theory of anarchism in theorising its incompatibility with violent means of action. He also made a crucial move for the theory of ideas in affirming that reason was not the solution, but often the cause of violence. To him, the efforts made by some other revolutionaries to violently overthrow political institutions were doomed, as they remained prisoners of the very outer world they wanted to overcome: crushing the images of oppression, they did not realise the extent to which they contributed to their legitimisation. Acting rationally, they killed mere concepts when they thought they were confronting a system through its representatives. Along the same lines, the attempts by the heirs of positivist thinkers to rule out spiritual powers and to separate the world of ideas from the "real" world led to a raw materialistic system, alien to many essential aspects of society. According to Landauer, in trying to explain every single event and relationship by abstract laws and sheer mechanistic causes, his contemporaries – anarchists and Marxists alike – failed to understand the role played by an important factor which, though "spiritual," did not have the transcendental claims of the religious standards they opposed. They ignored the immanent *Geist*, the spirit of solidarity present in every person, but leaving aside this cultural reality, they failed to bring about any kind of organic society of the kind Landauer called for throughout his life.

Gustav Landauer inherited the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment in refusing the simplistic opposition between material and spiritual realities. He thus devised a complete and coherent analysis of social transformations, rooted in the actual socio-economic conditions as well as in the spirit of solidarity, in civilisation as well as in culture. He wanted to be more anarchist than other proclaimed anarchists (hence his "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism"), adding some depth and consistency to the critiques they levelled against society. Landauer criticised the incompleteness of their cold rationality and, far from advocating any kind of obscurantism, he stood up for the necessity to take into account rationality and material structures as well as the more complex and less measurable spirit of community.

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[79] For more details, see the two majors studies on the role of Eckhart in Landauer: Thorsten Hinz, *Mystik und Anarchie: Meister Eckhart und seine Bedeutung im Denken Gustav Landauers* (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 2000); Joachim Willems, *Religiöser Gehalt des Anarchismus und anarchistischer Gehalt der Religion? Die jüdisch-christlich-atheistische Mystik Gustav Landauers zwischen Meister Eckhart und Martin Buber* (Albeck bei Ulm: Ulmer Manuskripte, 2001).

[80] Gustav Landauer, "Through Separation to Community," 98.

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