

Article

# “The Tragedy of Messianic Politics”: Gustav Landauer’s Hidden Legacy in Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin

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**Abstract:** Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) was a German-Jewish anarchist and radical thinker who was brutally murdered in the Munich Soviet Republic. Paul Mendes-Flohr has contributed enormously to the rediscovery of this long-neglected figure, who nonetheless played a crucial role in the intellectual debates of his time. Mendes-Flohr emphasizes the impact that Landauer’s death had on Martin Buber’s conception of politics at a time when Jewish revolutionaries were attempting to combine messianism and activism. In this essay, as a complement to Mendes-Flohr’s insightful work, I will attempt to show how Landauer’s legacy can be traced in two other German-Jewish thinkers, Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin, albeit with important differences. In particular, I want to illustrate how Landauer’s idea of an anarchic diaspora, as well as his idea of revolution as interruption, both based on a unique conception of time, can be seen as two powerful theologico-political devices that he used in order to dismantle a too narrow and too technical idea of politics. I will, therefore, examine how the anarchic diaspora finds its echo in Rosenzweig’s thought, and how the idea of interruption and inversion can be found in Benjamin’s conception of revolution.

**Keywords:** Gustav Landauer; Walter Benjamin; Franz Rosenzweig; German-Jewish thought; community



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## 1. Introduction

In a famous article entitled “Messianic Radicalism: Gustav Landauer and Other German-Jewish Revolutionaries”, Paul Mendes-Flohr brilliantly analyzes the conjunction between messianism and activism among German-Jewish authors after World War I (Mendes-Flohr 2015, pp. 22–44), taking Max Weber’s lecture given in the midst of the Bavarian revolution of 1918/19 as a starting point. In this lecture, in order to rebuke the activists who refused to accept the “disenchantment of world”, Weber compared the Munich radicals’ need for redemption with the “fate of the Jews and the vain, self-defeating longing for Redemption” (ibid., p. 17). This did not happen by chance, since most of them were Jews. Among them was the German-Jewish anarchist Gustav Landauer, who was brutally murdered in Munich on 2 May 1919. Landauer played a crucial role in the intellectual debates of his time, and he was popular as an activist, journalist, and public speaker in many of Berlin’s intellectual circles. Moreover, his brutal death had a tremendous impact on a whole generation of thinkers who interpreted it as a martyrrium, a symbol, or a fault of the German-Jewish destiny.<sup>1</sup> While Mendes-Flohr—who was one of the first thinkers to make a significant contribution to the rediscovery of this long-neglected figure in the field of Jewish thought—has already demonstrated how the “tragedy of messianic politics” (ibid., p. 39) exemplified by Landauer’s death impacted Martin Buber throughout his life, in this article I will try to show how his legacy can be traced in two other German-Jewish thinkers, Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin, albeit with important differences. In particular, I want to show how Landauer’s idea of an anarchic diaspora and his account of revolution as interruption, both of which are based on a unique conception of time,<sup>2</sup> can be seen as two powerful theologico-political devices that he used in order to dismantle a too narrow and too technical idea of politics. I will, therefore, examine how his interpretation of diaspora finds its echo in Rosenzweig’s thought, and how the idea of interruption and inversion can

be found in Benjamin's account of revolution. My main idea is that Landauer's anti-politics, Rosenzweig's a-politics (Meineke 1991, p. 488), and Benjamin's "revolutionary melancholy" (Löwy 2005, p. 11) are three different reactions to the gradual crumbling of an old world whose emptiness had to be filled with new forms found in the Jewish tradition.

In my detection of echoes of Landauer in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* and Benjamin's account of revolution, I will mostly be following a genetic paradigm. In fact, my claim is that Landauer's ideas, especially his radical critique of a linear and progressive idea of history, which were widespread in the cultural debate at that time, had a huge resonance and informed a generation of German-Jewish authors. However, I also think that their approaches fit perfectly with a particular *Zeitgeist* of the time. For this reason, there are also some structural similarities between the profiles of these three thinkers who were conceiving and living the narrow ridge between messianism and politics and looking for another conception of time and community, which they broadly found in the Jewish tradition.

In order to follow the thread of the hidden legacy of Gustav Landauer, I will structure my essay as follows. First, I will discuss this unusual trio of authors. In the second and third sections, I will show how Landauer's critique of progress and his idea of revolution as inversion and interruption can be seen as a model for Benjamin's political messianism, and in the fourth and fifth sections, I will compare Landauer's anarchic notion of diaspora as a model for humanity with Rosenzweig's idea of Judaism. The community yet to come that emerges in the thought of both thinkers has, at its core, a similar critique of the idea of the state and a concept of the bond between human beings. In the conclusion, I will examine Landauer's faults, and question why Rosenzweig and Benjamin positioned themselves antithetically to his sacrificial death, which warned of and prefigured the tragic destiny of German Judaism.

## 2. An Unusual Juxtaposition: Landauer's Effect on Rosenzweig and Benjamin

What do an anarchist like Gustav Landauer, murdered in the Bavarian revolution, a somewhat conservative quietist like Franz Rosenzweig, who was a voluntary soldier during WWI, and a "bohemian" and melancholic Marxist (Konder 1989) like Walter Benjamin have in common, besides their short lives and their German Jewishness? It may seem unusual to juxtapose the hidden connections between these authors, but this trio is provocative and fascinating at the same time. They were eclectic thinkers at the crossroads of various paths, not just either dogmatic or systematic philosophers. They belonged to a generation born in the nineteenth century that lived through the outbreak of the war and was faced with a great loss of structure and order, experiencing a great alienation that led many to a rejection of traditions. The crisis of a whole set of values, which starts with Nietzsche's philosophy, entailed the collapse of classical reason, the failure of the teleological understanding of history, and the distrust of language as a logical and ontological tool (see Pisano 2017). In this context, there was a social and epistemological need for new models in order to find another approach to the world. This attempt was a collective effort that characterized the intellectual work of a generation of German-Jewish thinkers. Landauer, Benjamin, and Rosenzweig drew on the reserve of Judaism, in an anarchic, revolutionary and messianic way, as a heterodox tradition. For them, the Jewish alternative was a guiding image that allowed them to rethink the philosophical and political challenges of the time, namely, the bond between politics, history, and redemption. Even though their solutions were different, it is quite impressive that Judaism offered them a hermeneutical horizon and *Gegen-bild*, as we will see later in detail, in a particular historical moment, which was an incubation period at the end of German-Jewish history.

There has never been a critical comparison of Gustav Landauer and Franz Rosenzweig.<sup>3</sup> This is even more surprising because Landauer and Rosenzweig shared a long-life friendship with Martin Buber, who, by a strange coincidence, served as the executor of Landauer's estate after his brutal death "with exemplary care" (Mendes-Flohr 2015, p. 38).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, after Rosenzweig's death, Buber brought their joint project of translating the

*Tanakh* into German to completion. Buber is, thus, both the bridge connecting Rosenzweig and Landauer and the man who carried on his shoulders his two friends' finished, but incomplete worlds.

In my view, a proper comparison between Landauer and Rosenzweig has never been undertaken due to Landauer's marginality, especially concerning his interpretation of Judaism, which has only recently been rediscovered by critics; another reason is Rosenzweig's conservatism, which has always been read in contrast to the so-called political messianism of the Weimar Republic. It may seem far-fetched to imagine that Rosenzweig may have had any affinity with a radical thinker like Landauer, although he makes many references to him both explicitly (in his letters) and implicitly (in his works).<sup>5</sup> These two figures elaborated two different forms of anti-politics based on a radical critique of state politics and institutions, including parliamentarism. In both cases, diasporic Judaism assumes a central role, as I will try to demonstrate in the second part of this article.

In Landauer and Benjamin's case, there have been some attempts to investigate the affinities between them, but they do not take into account some decisive passages in Landauer's writings.<sup>6</sup> There is an obvious resemblance between these two authors; in fact, anyone who has read Landauer's work will find echoes of it in the arguments and intensity of Benjamin's prose. Nevertheless, in this case, the principal obstacle to a comparison between these authors is Benjamin's enigmatic use<sup>7</sup> of sources, which makes it difficult to detect where Landauer is quoted, beyond a passage in a letter and a reference in "Capitalism as Religion" (Benjamin 1996). The connection between Landauer and Benjamin was Gershom Scholem, who was particularly interested in the lectures that Landauer gave in Berlin during the war. It was not only Landauer's anarchism that Scholem considered to be important, but also his reflection on language.<sup>8</sup>

While Rosenzweig was a soldier on the front during World War I, and later adopted a "conservative and apolitical disposition" (Mendes-Flohr 2015, p. 37), Benjamin and Landauer shared pacifist views during the war and defended a completely different political position. Both were thinkers who reflected on utopia without being utopian: for Benjamin, the most pressing need was to "organise pessimism" (Benjamin 1999, p. 217), while for Landauer, it was to set the coming community in motion. While Rosenzweig decided to "remain a Jew" with firm conviction after his existential crisis, Landauer, who was far from a religious man, had an eminently cultural and human-centred idea of Judaism, which he believed to have played an indispensable role in the development of humanity.

The tension between two different focal points of Landauer's thought—namely, the German one and the Jewish one—was extremely striking during his lifetime. He claimed his complex and fragmented identity as both a Jew and a German with critical awareness, anticipating the state of mind of the bifurcated soul that, according to Mendes-Flohr (1999, pp. 1–24), characterizes many German-Jewish intellectuals of the last century. In one of his most important writings on Judaism—a highly resonant essay entitled "Sind das Ketzergedanken?" published by the Prague Bar Kochba collective in 1913—Landauer stated:

I am a Jew, a German. [ . . . ] My Germanness and my Jewishness do not harm each other, but do each other much good. Just as two brothers, a firstborn and a Benjamin, are loved by their mother—not in the same way, but with the same intensity—and just as these two brothers live in harmony with each other whenever their paths run together and also whenever each goes his own way alone, so I experience this strange and intimate unity in duality as something precious (Landauer 2012, pp. 366–67).

During their short lives, Rosenzweig, Landauer, and—to a minor extent—Benjamin consciously assumed the plural identity of German Jews, making the encounter and collision between these two worlds one of the determining elements of their philosophical approach. Both Landauer and Benjamin recovered their Jewishness through an encounter: the former with Buber and the latter with Scholem, both of whom tried to emphasize, and

sometimes to force, the Jewish element in their friends' works. However, Landauer and Benjamin remain somewhat on the fringes of an orthodox understanding of Judaism.<sup>9</sup> For both of them, Judaism can be seen as a model and also as a necessary "somersault" (Benjamin 1978, p. 254) in order to rethink the political dimension of time.<sup>10</sup> The next two sections of this article will be devoted to this topic.

### 3. "A Past That Changes": Landauer's and Benjamin's Political Conception of Time

The question of time is of crucial importance within the Jewish tradition, but in the so-called Jewish cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century, this question takes on, if possible, even more importance. The people of the diaspora have their element in time and not in space; in history, not in geography. As Margarete Susman masterfully wrote in the introduction to her *Das Buch Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes* (Susman 1948, pp. 9–11), the gulf between space and time is also the difference between sight and hearing, between Greek truth and Jewish tradition. Unlike a spatialized type of thinking, a thinking that is articulated according to time is constitutively more receptive to the irruption of the unpredictable and the unsuspected. This unpredictable and mysterious aspect of time is also the link between Landauer's idea of revolution, Benjamin's conception of history, and Rosenzweig's new thinking. In fact, in his essay "Das neuen Denken", Rosenzweig emphasizes the need to take time seriously, as it constitutes the core of his linguistic thought, and means "not being able to anticipate anything, having to wait for everything, being dependent on others" (Rosenzweig 1984, p. 151).

In his *Skepsis und Mystik*, his only purely philosophical book, which he wrote as a commentary on Fritz Mauthner's *Sprachphilosophie*, Landauer stated that in order to reach the terra abscondita of anarchism, an alternative path is needed: "To express space through time is perhaps one of the most important tasks for the coming generations" (Landauer 2011, p. 55). According to him, the biggest revolution—a new Copernican revolution—would be the discovery that space does not exist, but that it is only a "symbol of intensive temporal processes" (ibid., p. 96). Therefore, it would be possible to "fill the abyss that has so far separated our inner being from our outer world", since things will be dissolved in a temporal stream: "Then we will cease to consider our intimate life as an enigma and the spaced world as a ghost: both things are dissolved in a psychic, temporal, infinite, multiple flow, whose rough and mysterious weaves we have to investigate through the metaphors of our senses" (ibid.). This extraneousness will be recognized as familiar, since the external world will be transformed in our interiority. This transition from space to time coincides with the passage from objectivity to fluidity, from what is alien to me to what belongs to me, from being to becoming. For Landauer, this temporal revolution is the premise for a revolution of the spirit and for a new form of community.

In his famous essay entitled "Revolution", Landauer harshly criticized an evolutionary and enlightened conception of history, which he believed to have an interrupted rhythm made up of curves and fractures. In his view, history is a succession of "topia", which is synonymous with rigidity and crystallization, and "utopia", which is the dissolution of the topia. There is no definite direction or end of history, but the historical process can be described as the constant back-and-forth between authority and freedom, institution and de-stitution. For Landauer, revolution requires the systematic negation of a stable phase of history and its inversion into a utopia: "Revolution is the period of transition that lies between the old topia and the new topia. Revolution is hence the way from one topia, or from one state of relative social stability, to the next, by way of chaos, rebellion, and individualism" (Landauer [1907] 2010, p. 114). As a temporal caesura, revolution represents the hiatus between a topia that no longer exists and a utopia that does not exist yet. It is not the end of history, but a metahistorical threshold: "Revolution gets stuck in its transitional role" (ibid., p. 115).

In connection to this idea of revolution, Landauer develops an odd conception of temporality, where the past is neither completed nor complete; precisely for this reason, it can be repaired, preserving the link between the old and the new. In "Revolution",

Landauer speaks of a *Vergegenwärtigung* (“making something present”) (ibid., p. 111) of the past that is not finished, but is an entity subject to becoming: “The past itself is changing—no matter how paradoxical this might sound” (ibid., p. 121). This revision of the temporal dimensions also entails a revision of the notion of causality: there are no fixed causal links, and “all so-called causes change with each new effect” (ibid.). There are two forms of the past: a fixed one—“the excrements” (ibid., p. 122) of the past—and one that is alive and changes with us. Landauer also speaks of the “force of praxis” (ibid., p. 111) of the past that manifests itself in every action in the present; the past lives in us.

This idea of a past that is incomplete, but able to be repaired is very similar to the temporal conception that Benjamin presents in his famous theses *On the Concept of History*:

The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. [. . . ] There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply. The historical materialist is aware of this (Benjamin 2003, p. 389).

In addition, it can be said that this anamnestic idea of the past and remembrance (*Eingedenken*) is very present in Landauer’s conception of time. In fact, in Landauer’s “Revolution”, every utopia, every inversion of the topia, is the memory of the utopias that were: “Each utopia contains the passionate memories of all former utopias” (Landauer [1907] 2010, p. 116). This anamnestic idea of history and the duty of remembrance can be even considered to be a Jewish *mitzvah* in their conceptions of history.

Benjamin’s image of the past flashing back into the now alludes to the mechanism of memory and the involuntary return of images. Benjamin explains that:

The dialectical image is an occurrence of ball lightning that runs across the whole horizon of the past. Articulating the past historically means recognizing those elements of the past which come together in the constellation of a single moment. Historical knowledge is possible only within the historical moment. But knowledge within the historical moment is always knowledge of a moment. In drawing itself together in the moment—in the dialectical image—the past becomes part of humanity’s involuntary memory (Benjamin 2003, p. 403).

This relationship is very reminiscent of Landauer’s leaps between topia and utopia, where memory and history are deeply embedded. For Landauer, just as it is for Benjamin, this anamnestic leap is connected to the revolutionary action and to the explosion of the continuum of history. Indeed, as he said in the fifteenth thesis: “What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode” (ibid., p. 395).

In his *For Socialism*, Landauer’s historical conception radically defies the Hegelian idea of history as the self-realization of the spirit, of which Marxism would be the main political descendant. According to Landauer, the confidence in progress that is inherent in Hegelianism and Marxism is not only dogmatic, but also dangerous. Landauer reads the Marxist conception of history as a necessary development; it is a “spiritless conception of history” (Landauer [1911] 1978, p. 61) determined by providence. He criticized the Marxist injunction of waiting for the supposed right moment that had

postponed this goal further and further and pushed it into blurred darkness; trust in progress and development was the name of regression and this ‘development’ adapted the external and internal conditions more and more to degradation and made the great change ever more remote (ibid., p. 109).

Benjamin similarly carries out a serious critique of historicism and its theoretical framework. His critique of progress is already to be found in his early writing, “The Life of Students”, where he writes:

There is a view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and

epochs advance along the path of progress. This corresponds to a certain absence of coherence and rigor in the demands it makes on the present. The following remarks, in contrast, delineate a particular condition in which history appears to be concentrated in a single focal point, like those that have traditionally been found in the utopian images of the philosophers. The elements of the ultimate condition do not manifest themselves as formless progressive tendencies, but are deeply rooted in every present in the form of the most endangered, excoriated and ridiculed ideas and products of the creative mind (Benjamin 1996, p. 37).

This critique remains unaltered in the thesis where he criticizes the additive procedure of historicism: “Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time” (Benjamin 2003, p. 396). For Benjamin—according to the famous image in the ninth thesis—progress is a storm blowing from Paradise, caught in the angel’s wings, that drives him into the future while he is looking at the piles of debris growing before him. Benjamin, like Landauer, denounces the dogmatic character of the idea of progress: “The concept of mankind’s historical progress cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must underlie any criticism of the concept of progress itself” (ibid., pp. 394–95). Beyond the critique of the dogmatic character of the idea of progress, Landauer and Benjamin consider it to be an obstacle to political action.

In addition, Landauer also criticizes the Marxist assumption that the only subject capable of revolution is the proletariat. He refuses to consider the proletariat as the predestined and privileged revolutionary agent. In his vision, it is not a matter of class, or perhaps, more precisely, a matter of historically favoured social groups, for radical transformation requires the development of cooperation among all working members. Furthermore, the Marxist definition of the proletariat is given only as an economic factor that does not consider spiritual poverty, which is the only source of real change. In place of a dictatorship of the proletariat, Landauer called for a democracy of the entire working community.<sup>11</sup> In his work *One-Way Street*, which was written between 1923 and 1926, Benjamin expresses a very similar criticism towards the Marxian optimism about the proletariat:

The only question is whether its downfall will come through itself or through the proletariat. The continuance or the end of three thousand years of cultural development will be decided by the answer. History knows nothing of the evil infinity contained in the image of the two wrestlers locked in eternal combat. The true politician reckons only in dates. And if the abolition of the bourgeoisie is not completed by an almost calculable moment in economic and technical development (a moment signalled by inflation and poison-gas warfare), all is lost. Before the spark reaches the dynamite, the lighted fuse must be cut (Benjamin 1997, pp. 66–67).

Later on, there is also the same criticism in his theses, but this time against Social Democrats, who see the proletariat as the only class capable of adopting “the role of a redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength” (Benjamin 2003, p. 394).

This optimistic and dogmatic confidence in inevitable collapse is at the root of Marxist determinism, which prevents action; Landauer’s writings, by contrast, place a strong emphasis on the voluntary aspect and on a call to action. In contrast to Marxism, Landauer does not want to patiently wait for the historical future; rather, radical change is located in the here and now of human action. In thesis XVIIa (ibid., pp. 401–2), Benjamin speaks of the secularization of the idea of messianic time in Marx, and accuses the Social Democrats of elevating this conception to an ideal in the Kantian sense, thus making it an infinite task. The classless society, thus, becomes an asymptote, which for Benjamin—as for Landauer—constitutes a “trouble” (*Unheil*) because “once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogeneous time was transformed into an anteroom,

so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity" (ibid.). On the contrary, adds Benjamin, "in reality, there is not a moment that would not carry with it its revolutionary chance—provided only that it is defined in a specific way, namely as the chance for a completely new resolution of a completely new problem [*Aufgabe*]" (ibid.). The entrance into this chamber strictly coincides with political action, which for Benjamin has a clear messianic significance.

Thus, revolution must not be postponed to an indefinite future, but can occur at any moment and open the door to the spirit. Landauer underlined this idea in a fascinating speech during the council revolution in Munich: "So anyone can help the revolution, anyone can join it wholeheartedly through any door, most of which are already open" (Landauer 1974, p. 58). This sentence seems to be faithfully quoted by Benjamin when, in Appendix B of the theses, he states that for the Jews, the future is not a homogeneous and empty time, but rather "for every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 2003, p. 397).

#### 4. Inversion and Interruption: A Messianic Idea of Revolution

Far from being the final outcome of history, the coming of the Messiah is possible at any moment; the course of history is always exposed to a *katastrophè*, which has the etymological meaning of "overturn." For Landauer, revolution is, thus, an interruption of ordinary time, an instant of crisis, an anarchic time lapse. However, at the same time, it is a leap, a sudden irruption of the new, of a "now" (*Jetzt*), an inversion that takes over in order to redeem humanity. Interruption and inversion are also features of Benjamin's conception of revolution. In the "Paralipomena" to his theses, there are several occasions where Benjamin speaks of the Messiah or the classless society as an interruption of history, instead of appearing at the end of a development: "Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake" (ibid., p. 402).

This interruption, which is also an inversion, can also be found in Landauer's conception of revolution as a caesura of time. In his *For Socialism*, Yovel becomes an alternative theologico-political model for thinking about revolution as an institution and a permanent interruption of order. Yovel is the Jewish jubilee year that restores social equality by redistributing property, providing for the release of slaves, the remission of debts, and the restitution of land every forty-nine years, seven times seven. At the end of his essay, Landauer quotes *Leviticus* (25: 9–13), according to which revolution would enter the constitution as a subversion of property.

The voice of the spirit is the trumpet that will sound again and again and again, as long as men are together. Injustice will always seek to perpetuate itself, and always, as men are truly alive, revolt will break out. Revolt as constitution; transformation and revolution as a rule established, once and for all; order for the spirit as intention; that was the great and sacred heart of the Mosaic social order. We need that once again: new regulations and spiritual upheaval, which will not make things and commandments permanently rigid, but which will proclaim its own permanence. The revolution must become an element of our social order; it must become the basic rule of our constitution (Landauer [1911] 1978, p. 130).

For Landauer, the Mosaic social order constitutes the quintessential model of inversion. Revolt as constitution is an extreme attempt to radically rethink the anarchy within the *arché*, the interruption within continuity, the void within time.

I would audaciously suggest that this radical and permanent interruption can be seen as the "real state of emergency" of which Benjamin speaks in his eighth thesis:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to

bring about a real state of emergency,<sup>12</sup> and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism (Benjamin 2003, p. 392).

Just like Landauer, for Benjamin, the interruption also goes hand in hand with the reversal and conversion, i.e., the *Umkehr*.<sup>13</sup> It is not by chance that Benjamin quotes Landauer in his fragment “Capitalism as Religion” (Benjamin 1996, p. 290). In this short text, Benjamin, who is looking for an interruption and inversion of the guilt–debt device of capitalism,<sup>14</sup> finds it in the Jewish tradition, precisely in Yovel, in the form in which Landauer depicted it in his *For Socialism*. In fact, in this essay, Landauer writes: “Socialism is a reversal of this [*Umkehr*]. Socialism is a new beginning. Socialism is a return to nature, a re-endowment with spirit, a regaining of relationships” (Landauer [1911] 1978, p. 136). For both Benjamin and Landauer, revolution is also a *metanoia* of the spirits, an *Umkehr* that means the conversion necessary for the creation of a new humanity.

However, the peremptory need for construction and creation, and perhaps also a greater reliance on the idea of community, is what differentiates Landauer from Benjamin. For Landauer, the spirit that emerges from the anarchist community brings about the redemption of the present. It was precisely this pedagogical need that prompted Landauer to make a concrete contribution to the *werdender Mensch* and to accept Eisner’s summons to Munich in November 1918, which invited him to the “transformation of the souls” (*Umbildung der Seelen*) (Landauer 1929, p. 296, n. 1). In Munich, Landauer invited revolutionaries to behave like Job among the people: “Let us act among the nations, like Job activated by his suffering, abandoned by God and the world in order to serve God and the world” (Landauer [1911] 1978, p. 25); that is, to consciously and tragically bear the burden of one’s own historical mission and metahistorical destiny, but also the urgency of the revolutionary moment and the beginning of the community. For Landauer, his participation in the Munich Revolution was his tragic “somersault” in response to the urgency of history. However, the seductive appeal of transforming the souls of future revolutionaries and his brutal death constituted only one side of the coin. There is also another way of conceiving the problematic bond between (anti)politics and redemption in Landauer’s thought. This path has to do with a less violent attitude and with a particular interpretation of diasporic Judaism, whose echoes are to be found in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*.

### 5. Redemption beyond Politics: Landauer’s Anarchic *Galut* and Rosenzweig’s Diasporic Judaism

A community beyond state and history is a common feature characterizing both Rosenzweig’s and Landauer’s thought, albeit with important differences. For both thinkers, the diaspora is a theologico-political, or rather anti-political, device that is decisive in the development of a radical critique of the nation state and the linear conception of history and time, even if Landauer’s proactive anarchy is antithetical to Rosenzweig’s so-called “quietism.”

In his short lecture entitled “Judaism and Socialism”—which he gave to the Zionistische Ortsgruppe of West Berlin on 12 February 1912, but repeated over the years—Landauer tries to make Jewish socialists aware of the messianic feeling of *Galut* as potentially creating an opportunity for the political redemption of humankind:

*Galut*, exile, which is an inner disposition to isolation and longing, will be for them [Jewish socialists] the final vocation that binds them to Judaism and socialism. For these people, Judaism and socialism will be one and the same; they will know that Judaism and socialism have charged them by demanding [human] solidarity and justice (Landauer 2012, p. 348).

Landauer believes that the redemptive mission and the Jewish people’s commitment to a more intense brotherhood and justice are close to the goals of socialism.

The connection between diaspora and messianism is even clearer in the essay “Are These Heretical Thoughts?” (“Sind das Ketzergedanken?”), where Landauer identified the messianic task of Judaism and its promise of redemption: “A voice tells us irrefutably that the Jew can only be redeemed with all of humanity. To persistently pursue the Messiah in



national banishment and dispersion, and to be the Messiah of the nations are the same thing” (ibid., p. 366). According to Landauer, the Jews’ exile could be a model for deconstructing the nation state, and the detachment from the land makes the Jewish nation “anarchic.” This particular characteristic of the Jewish people is none other than their mission to unite humanity despite the divisive power of the state. In his view, there is a real chance to turn the Jewish people into a model for humanity as a living example of the overcoming of the state. Whereas

the nations that have delimited themselves into states have outside neighbors who are their enemies, our nation has its neighbors in its own breast; and this friendly neighborliness is peace and unity in each one that is whole and acknowledges this unity. Should this not be a sign of the mission that Judaism has to fulfill in relation to humanity and within humanity? (ibid., p. 368).

The Jewish people are the Messiah of the nations, who have been entrusted with a very specific task; in fact, for Landauer, “to be a nation” means “to have a task” (ibid., p. 366). He had a positive conception of the nation as the opposite of the state: while the former is a real bond between people, the latter is a trap and a coercive abstraction. In a letter to Emanuel von Bodmann written in 1912, Landauer clearly defines what he means by nation:

The nation is precisely such an equality of individuals, such a feeling and such a reality, which in a free spirit leads to unity and union. *All nations are anarchic, i.e., without coercion*; the ideas of nation and coercion are completely incompatible. The nation is the best, because it is the only real example in public life of what I call spirit (Landauer 1929, p. 424).

The Jews are a people of transcendence that can show unity in dispersion beyond a geographical demarcation, and they are a nation based on their common diasporic historical heritage, a temporal legacy rather than a spatial one. For Landauer, the diaspora constitutes an anticipation of a humanity redeemed from the state.

Franz Rosenzweig developed a more radical diasporic philosophical thought for, in his view, *Galut* represented an ontological feature of the Jewish people and its specific difference. In *The Star of Redemption*, the Jewish community is described as a community of blood that is not tied to the land. The Jewish people embodies *Ent-wurzelung* (“uprootedness”) and the negation of autochthony. Unlike all other peoples, who remain tied to the land, the Jews began their history with the divine command to leave the land of their birth for a land that God would show them. Rosenzweig states that

the tribal legend of the eternal people begins otherwise than with indigenoussness. Only the father of humanity, and even he only as regards the body, is sprouted from the earth; Israel’s ancestor, however, immigrated; his story begins, as the Holy Books recount it, with the divine command to go out of the land of his birth and to go into a land that God will show him. And the people becomes the people, as in the dawn of its earliest times so later again in the bright light of history, in an exile, the Egyptian one as later the one in Babylon (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 319).

If all peoples generally have a founding saga or legenda, “*a jus primi occupantis*” (Rosenzweig 1984, p. 533), in the Jewish people’s case, the land belongs to God, as do the language and the law. Unlike the rest, the Jewish people possess none of the constitutive features of the peoples of the world. Rather, their relationship to land, language, and law exists in the form of absence:

Land, language, custom and law long ago departed from the sphere of the living and for us is raised from the living to the holy; but we, we are still living and live eternally. Our life is no longer interwoven with anything external, we have taken root in ourselves, without roots in the earth, eternal wanderers therefore, yet deeply rooted in ourselves, in our own body and blood. And this rooting in ourselves and only in ourselves guarantees our eternity for us (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 324).

The Jews are the eternal wanderers among peoples and languages; they can never feel at home in the world because they know that their homeland is elsewhere. It is a homeland that is the object of *Sehnsucht*: “The land is in the deepest sense its own only as land of longing, as—holy land. And this is why for it, even when it is at home, again differently from all peoples of the earth, this full proprietorship of the homeland is disputed; it is itself only a stranger and tenant in its land” (ibid., p. 319). For this reason, the attempts both to assimilate the Jews and to endow them with a nation state inevitably entail the dissolution of their distinctiveness and their indistinguishability with respect to other peoples.

For Landauer, as well as for Rosenzweig, the diaspora discourse is connected to a radical and metaphysical critique of the state. The positive connotation of the nation in opposition to the state is shared by both. This critique is not accidental, because the idea circulating at that time was that the Prussian state had—with the unification of the German Empire—taken on the historical form of the Hegelian state. Landauer’s anarchist socialism aims to realize the true community and the reconstruction of a world governed by genuine cooperation in direct opposition to Marxist mechanism and determinism. Against all forms of authoritarian centralism, his political project is directed to a regeneration of individual consciousness through forms of self-determination, mutual aid, and federation: “a society of societies” (Landauer [1907] 2010, p. 131). The medieval community was the expression of an authentic social life, as opposed to the modern state. The utopian instances of corporatism and the old ways of managing society are immediately reflected in the attempt to develop an alternative to the modern state, which is responsible for the atomization of the individual.

The state is an irrational fetish that generates social inequality through hierarchy and domination, an absence of spirit that entails coercion, individualism, atomization, and violence: “The state is like a mousetrap: the fat of life attracts us from birth, but then you are inside and you stay inside, and those who want to rebel find the thorns of the law in their flesh” (Landauer 1895, p. 15). While the scaffolding of the state has dried up and crystallized life, the urgency of the present is to make relationships flow again like magma under the crust. The shift from an idea of the state as an abstraction to an idea of the state as a condition or relation is one of the most important aspects of Landauer’s political thought. This conception is profoundly revolutionary, since it does not involve or require violence; rather, the destruction of the state happens through the establishment of forms of mutual aid between human beings. At the heart of his idea of anarchist socialism is an attempt to make authority superfluous and unnecessary through a new kind of relationship and cooperation between men, which takes the form of a communal spirit (*Gemeinschaftsgeist*). His idea of an organic community and a pacific bond between individuals meant a total rejection of the atomization of the state. If isolation and fragmentation are epiphenomena of the state, anarchy is the bond that repairs what is broken.

Rosenzweig’s reflection on the state has its roots in Friedrich Meinecke’s work, in particular *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (Meinecke 1908), which inspired his dense study of Hegel’s idea of the state (Rosenzweig 1920). However, it is no coincidence that during World War I, Rosenzweig rejected his teacher’s ethical historicism and the idea of the nation state as a place for the realization of the universal values of humanity.<sup>15</sup> The place that comes closest to the Landauerian idea of the state as the crystallization of life is to be found in the final part of *The Star of Redemption*. For Rosenzweig, the state is the link between politics and history; it is a concreteness that marks the endless succession of wars and revolutions. In the *Star*, the state is a mousetrap, a violent immobilization of vital relations and a cessation of the flow of time. Thus, writes Rosenzweig,

Life can be either only rest or only movement. And, since time cannot be denied, movement triumphs. Into the wave of the same river you do not go the second time. In uncurbed change and alteration history seems to die away. Then comes the State and hangs its law over alteration. Now something is suddenly there that persists. Of course at first glance it seems as if everything is now solidly fixed,

everything persists. But soon rushing life is already again flowing onward over the solid fixed Tablets (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 352).

There is a contrast between life and the state understood as the crystallization of violence: At no moment can it lay down the sword from its hand; for it must at every moment brandish it again in order to hew with it the Gordian knot of the people's life, the contradiction between past and future, which the people does not resolve, only pushes forward in its natural life. But by hewing it, it removes in every moment, and of course always only for this single moment, the contradiction from the world and thus in every moment dams up in stagnant water the river of the life of the world that constantly denies itself in all time until the final flowing into the ocean of eternity (ibid., p. 353).

For Rosenzweig, the Jewish people—being outside history—are beyond the earthly turmoil of wars and revolutions, and they do not experience the Christian tension between secular and spiritual power. He believed that the war was deeply connected to the defence and possession of the land, as he stated in his war writings (Rosenzweig 1984, pp. 241–369) and in the *Star*. For this reason, the Jew, freed from the possession of land, language, and law—which belong to God—is also “the only genuine pacifist” (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 351). This is also what Landauer had in mind when—as we have seen—he stated in his *Ketzergedanken* that “our nation has its neighbors in its own breast”, which means that “this friendly neighborliness is peace and unity in each one that is whole and acknowledges this unity” (Landauer 2012, p. 368).

## 6. Communities Yet to Come: Landauer's Anarchism and Rosenzweig's “We”

In both Landauer and Rosenzweig, the critique of the state is connected to a radical critique of the linear conception of time, loaded with symbolic, political, and eschatological value. In his essay “Revolution”, as we have already examined, Landauer develops his conception of history as a radical challenge to the Hegelian idea of the self-realization of the spirit: it is not a sequence of facts that proceed towards a *telos*; rather, its rhythm is an alternation of utopia and topia. Similarly, for Rosenzweig, history is an alternation of wars and revolutions (see also Rosenzweig 1984, p. 328) that perfectly recalls the oscillation between topia and utopia in Landauer's *Revolution*. However, he believed that the state was an illusory and momentary cessation of this alternation:

For the State is the ever-changing form under which time moves to eternity step by step. In the people of God that which is eternal is already there, in the midst of time. Among the peoples of the world there is a pure temporality. But the State is the attempt, inevitably always to be renewed, to give to the peoples eternity in time. How it can undertake this we shall see. But the fact that it does undertake it and must undertake it makes it into the imitator of the in themselves eternal people that would no longer have any right to its own eternity if the State could get what it is reaching for (ibid., p. 352).

In a way, Rosenzweig's critique of history is more radical than Landauer's. In the essay “Geist und Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte”, Rosenzweig argues that history exercises its power through the ages. However, the Jewish people are outside the historical vice and are free of the violence of time: “The Jewish spirit breaks the chains of the epochs. Because he himself is eternal and wants eternity, he denies the omnipotence of time. He goes untouched through history. No wonder that history and what lives in it are resentful to him, because the time wants everything that lives to reimburse the duty of temporality” (Rosenzweig 1984, p. 538). For Rosenzweig “the Jewish people is in itself already at the goal toward which the peoples of the world are just setting out” (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 351). The Jews are at the goal, *am Ziel*, outside of historical time. This goal is not reached through a development, but the possibility of its advent is always there.

For both Landauer and Rosenzweig, the Jewish people are beyond the politics of the state. However, while for Landauer, the state is a false consciousness that must be

sabotaged by establishing new relations and forms of cooperation, for Rosenzweig, it is an indispensable form of political organization for historical societies, but not for the metahistorical Jewish people. For the other peoples, the state is their only chance for immortality, for the state transforms historical time into an order with the aspect of permanence. The eternity of the state is illusory because it alternates between revolutions and wars. Its eternity is only a mirror image of the real one but, at the same time, it is the destiny of the non-Jewish peoples, the peoples of the world trapped in history. The state is nothing more than a historical device and a concretion of violence; therefore, it cannot be the guarantor of the perfect community. On the contrary, the Jewish people move in the eternity of the liturgical year anticipating redemption in prayer, and this aspiration keeps them away from politics, which belongs to a historical level. In the *Star*, the Jewish people realize their religious vocation far from the threat of history, in the eternity of a liturgical time that can always be renewed, like Yovel in Landauer's idea of revolution.

As Mendes-Flohr stated, after World War I, many Jewish scholars and religious thinkers wanted to "clarify the Jewish messianic doctrine and its relationship to political activism" (Mendes-Flohr 2015, p. 28). The post-war generation demanded a kind of return to history in order to shape its own destiny. In contrast with this tendency, Rosenzweig thought that the Jews were to remain apart from history, but this does not mean that they were to resist the temptation to participate in perfecting the world. To better understand the relationship between Judaism and the peoples of history, it seems appropriate to consider a powerful image used by Mendes-Flohr (1988, pp. 155–57), found in Rosenzweig's preface to "Globus", an essay that he began writing during the war and which was unpublished for a long time. In this text, which makes no reference to Judaism, Rosenzweig sees world history as a process of defining space, drawing borders, and demarcating what is one's own from what is not. The relationship between the land and the sea, as analysed in this writing, is useful to explain—for Rosenzweig as well as for Landauer—the messianic task of the Jewish people, which anticipates, in its difference, their redemption:

The earth is thus destined by creation to be covered by borders for all time. Boundedness is its nature, boundlessness only the last goal, but just as the last goals of history always have their firm and visible substructure in the things of nature, so also here. The earth's constant boundlessness is inherent in the sea from the very beginning. In the sea, nature holds the image of the unity that it has given to the land in the hard work of the history of the world. An image only. For the unity of the infertile sea is not the moving unity of the dwelling place of the last humankind. But it is nevertheless an image; and as long as the glimmer of this image still shines, it will always be impossible for the human being to leave the once-limited everlasting clod and to become stultified in mind; from the sea, a glow always shines that conjures up the unknown outside for him before his sleep-ready soul (Rosenzweig 1984, p. 313).

Just as the earth, trapped in its confines, has the boundlessness of the sea as its goal, so too does historical time with the irruption of eternity, which gives it a meaning and an orientation. The sea, which in these pages prefigures what Judaism will become in the *Star*, can be considered as a figure of the "meta", i.e., of the outside of the earth, the outside of history, which anticipates or exemplifies the eschatological destiny.<sup>16</sup> Historical time is incapable of producing meaning if it does not refer to the horizon of eternity. Just as the sea defines the earth, infinity penetrates, completes, and redeems time. Through the emergence of revelation, history is given a clear and definite articulation. The importance of Judaism lies in the fact that it anticipates, represents, and secures this end. The weakness that comes with being outside history is, at the same time, its (messianic) strength.<sup>17</sup> The Jews anticipate redemption in the liturgical community outside of history, but they act as an agent capable of propelling history forward from the other side. Redemption is a metahistorical *Gegenwelt*, which has no connection with the political and historical category of revolution.

For Landauer, the bond of the anarchic community is the recovery and repair of the disintegrated world through the creation of bonds between men. As stated above, the anarchic community is based on a *tiqqun* or restorative justice: the spirit unites the fragments of the divided world; the Messiah secularizes himself into a community. For Landauer, the spirit that emerges from the anarchist community undertakes the redemption of the present. In the preface to the second edition of *For Socialism*, Landauer describes the revolution as a mystical transfiguration of human relations: “The incredible miracle is brought into the realm of possibility” (Landauer [1911] 1978, p. 21). Like Rosenzweig, Landauer thinks that this *metanoia* takes place in a community. For Landauer, this is an anarchic community, while for Rosenzweig, it is a community of prayer, linked to the rites and liturgy that anticipate the redemption. However, it is also a community of blood, eternal and outside of time and history. This community is made concrete in a practical communion of rituality, and the divine redemption is anticipated in the horizontality of relationships that takes place in ritual communion.<sup>18</sup>

The We is not a plural; the plural arises in the third person singular: it is not an accident if the third person singular calls for the division into masculine and feminine genders; the sexual division introduces, as a matter of fact, the first conceptual order into the world of things, into a mythical simplicity, and it makes visible multiplicity as such. On the other hand, the We is the community of everything developed from the dual; in a manner contrary to the singularity of the I and its companion, the You, which can only be widened, this community can be neither widened nor shrunk. So the final stanza of the song of Redemption begins in the We; in the cohortative, it had begun with the summons of the individuals who came forward from the chorus, and with the responses that came from the chorus (Rosenzweig [1921] 2005, p. 254).

Landauer and Rosenzweig share a transformative idea of community that functions as a unicum and oscillates between theology and politics (see Rosenzweig 1984, p. 153), outside and inside history. In both, this idea is based on a radical critique of politics, which can be defined as a form of anti-politics. According to Landauer, politics is an artificial device of power that also characterizes Marxism: while politics is an artificial substitute, a technique connected to the state, representation, and institutions, anti-politics is a counter-power (*Gegenmacht*) that refuses to establish itself as power. Unlike Landauer, Rosenzweig did not take into account the catastrophic aspect of messianism, and anarchist violence plays no role in his conception of hope, which remains purely religious.<sup>19</sup> For him, the idea of a redemptive community is linked to eternity and not to time, and it is therefore outside of history and politics. If the Jewish people anticipate redemption, the political community belongs to the level of history, and for this reason, it is imperfect. The form of community in which the Jewish people reject the omnipotence of time testifies to eternity beyond time. For Landauer and Rosenzweig, the Jewish particularity, precisely in its specular difference from all other peoples, becomes a counter-image (*Gegenbild*), and thus acts as a counter-model of history and politics. This exact form of resistance to a common conception of history or culture—namely, the tradition of the oppressed—is what Benjamin found interesting in Judaism. It is precisely in this *Gegen* that the great heritage of Judaism is contained, as is its tragic destiny. How long could this counter-model remain an antithetic paradigm without turning in its contrary? Did its utopian character keep it as an abstract opposition? If not, what was the cost of turning this *Gegen* into reality? As we will see in the conclusion, Landauer’s attempt to bring this counter-model to reality was harshly criticized by Benjamin and Rosenzweig.

## 7. Conclusions: The Tragic Error and the Silent Paths

In January 1922, after reading Ernst Simon’s essay (Simon 1922) from that same year entitled “The Becoming Man and the Becoming Jew” (“*Der werdende Mensch und der werdende Jude*”), in which Landauer is defined as a righteous man who, out of his deep love for humanity, desperately sought a reconciliation of opposites (*Zwei-Einheit*), Franz

Rosenzweig sent his young friend and pupil a letter. In these lines, the philosopher speaks in an almost sibylline manner of the “tragic error” (*tragische amartema*) in Landauer’s life; not a modern guilt, but “an Aristotelian imbalance between the parts” (Rosenzweig 1979, p. 749). The anarchist would not be a “righteous person” (*Tzadik*), because he would not have had enough of that “earthiness” (*Irdichkeit*) or “reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) that makes life a totality. Thus, Landauer would be neither a righteous man nor a martyr, but the personification of a tragic heroic discrepancy. What was Landauer’s fatal mistake? In this letter, Rosenzweig again returns to one of the central questions of his youth; namely, the conflict between *Leben* and *Anschauung*, between being a man of action and being an *Augenmensch*, or the more radical opposition between life and death, which is found throughout his thought.<sup>20</sup> In his first diary, Rosenzweig describes Nietzsche as a “peak climber and as such already solitary” (*Gipfelkletterer und als solcher schon einsam*) (Rosenzweig 1979, p. 22), a person no man would dare to follow. The young philosopher, a medical student at the time, did not sympathize with the fanaticism of the action and remained faithful to an ordinary conservatism. Years later, Nietzsche’s solitude reminded him of Landauer’s tragic end. The anarchist who sacrifices himself in the Dionysian jubilation of the revolution would, thus, embody the antithesis of Rosenzweig, the philosopher outside history.

Similarly, in a letter to Florens Christian Rang written on 18 November 1923, Benjamin dissociates himself from Landauer’s attitude from a German-Jewish perspective. In fact, in this letter, which contains a decisive description of “the current situation of Germanness” (*gegenwärtige Lage des Deutschtums*) (Benjamin 1994, p. 214) and of being a Jew, Benjamin states that in a country’s most terrible moments, only those who truly belong to this people should speak. He therefore wonders whether a Jew is allowed to take part in German discourse and, in this context, he quotes Landauer to corroborate his arguments: “The death of Landauer, who had not ‘spoken’ but ‘screamed,’ is a much graver accusation against the Germans” (*ibid.*, p. 215). Benjamin adds that a Jew who publicly commits himself to a German cause cannot obtain a certificate of authenticity. That is why “secret relationships” between Germans and Jews can exist in different ways:

As for the rest, I believe that my principle is true and apt: nowadays everything having to do with German-Jewish relationships that has a visible impact does so to their detriment; furthermore, nowadays a salutary complicity obligates those individuals of noble character among both peoples to keep silent about their ties. (*ibid.*)

The brutal death of Landauer, who “screamed” his commitment, prophetically revealed the backward step that Benjamin believed German Jews had to take. Benjamin opposes Landauer’s manifest martyrdom with renunciation, silence, and secrecy, his “revolutionary melancholy” (Löwy 2005, p. 11). While for Buber, Landauer “had lived as a prophet of the human community yet to come and fell as its blood-witness” (Buber 1919, p. 291), Rosenzweig and Benjamin criticized his symbolic immolation in history or his immersion in the revolution as a bad example. The lack of earthiness that Rosenzweig considered to be the reason for Landauer’s death is, in a way, the same rebuke that Benjamin made to him of being unable to judge the situation properly at the time. Landauer plunged into revolution and not only made manifest the tragedy of messianic politics, but also the excesses of a concrete need to interrupt the course of history. While Weber—as we saw at the outset of this article—condemned radicalism’s attitude for its longing for redemption, Rosenzweig and Benjamin, as the last witnesses of the fractured German-Jewish symbiosis, opposed Landauer’s messianic enthusiasm and tragic outburst with a more measured and prudent path. If the Munich Räterepublik was—as Martin Buber wrote to Ludwig Strauss—“an unspeakable Jewish tragedy” (Mendes-Flohr 2015, p. 38), Landauer’s brutal death was the first alarm bell for the catastrophe yet to come. Unfortunately, neither fervent hope nor silent vigilance was sufficient to prevent it.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the different interpretations of Gustav Landauer's death, see [Cohen-Skalli and Pisano \(2020\)](#), pp. 184–227).

<sup>2</sup> 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.”

<sup>3</sup> For recent research on this topic, see [Pisano \(2021\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, what Martin Buber wrote about Landauer after his death: “Gustav Landauer was an awakener for us; he has transformed our lives, and he has given our Zionism—which he never mentioned by name—a new meaning, a new intensity, a new direction” ([Buber 1920](#), p. 35).

<sup>5</sup> In Rosenzweig's epistolary, there are numerous traces of Landauer from 1916 onwards: in a letter to his parents, Rosenzweig portrays Landauer as a “modern Ahasuerus” and as one of the best prose writers of the time (cf. [Rosenzweig 1979](#), pp. 266–67); in a letter to Gertrud Oppenheim where he discusses Landauer's 1913 essay entitled “Martin Buber”, he writes: “The most remarkable thing about Landauer's essay on Buber is the bitterly critical warning with which he concludes; indeed, he is right; surely it is less dangerous for a prophet to be a shepherd, a peasant, a craftsman, a prince in his civil profession, than to be a literatus” (ibid., p. 334). This essay so impressed him that he mentioned it in a 1922 letter to Buber (cf. ibid., p. 807). Other references to Landauer can be found in a letter to the parents where he reiterates the need to read Landauer's *Shakespeare* and defines him as “a socialist, and a man as honest as he is lively and intelligent” (ibid., p. 433); in another letter to Gertrud Oppenheim, he defines Landauer's *Revolution* as a complicated and difficult book (cf. ibid., p. 643); in the famous letter to Ernst Simon from January 1922, Rosenzweig speaks of Landauer's tragic destiny, while in a later letter dated 7 December 1922, he asked him not to write Landauer's biography because in his view, the right person to do so was Buber and not him (cf. ibid., p. 872). The last references to Landauer in Rosenzweig's epistolary are to be found in three letters to Buber himself: the first, dated 27 January 1924, in which he asks about the fate of social democracy at that time and about the role that Landauer would play in it (cf. ibid., p. 942); the second, from the same year, in which he claims to have begun reading *Beginnen*, the book of posthumous essays that Buber edited after Landauer's death (cf. ibid., p. 950); and the third, dated 30 January 1925, in which Rosenzweig writes: “Landauer does not belong to other socialists, but to other beginners” (ibid., p. 1023). Another quotation from Landauer is found in Rosenzweig's essay “Apologetisches Denken” ([Rosenzweig 1984](#), p. 680) on the anarchist's harsh criticism of Max Brod's text *Heidentum, Christentum, Judentum. Ein Bekenntnisbuch*. Contrary to what Landauer maintains, Rosenzweig states that the characteristic of an apologetic thought is to represent one's own in detail and to have only a stereotyped image of the other. Besides being a regular reader of the journal *Der Sozialist*, of which Landauer was the editor, Rosenzweig also owned several volumes by him, as is evident from the list of books in his library ([Waszek 2017](#), pp. 101–2).

<sup>6</sup> The only authors to have written essays devoted to this issue are Gabriele [Guerra \(2014\)](#), who analysed Landauer's role in Benjamin's fragment “Capitalism as Religion”, and Demian [Berger \(2016\)](#), who considered the aesthetic aspect of Landauer's anarchism in comparison with Benjamin's theory of translation.

<sup>7</sup> Saverio Campanini, who edited the Italian translation of the correspondence between Benjamin and Scholem, states that Benjamin was almost possessed by the “demon of appropriation” ([Campanini 2019](#), pp. 377–453).

<sup>8</sup> In *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, Scholem, who had the highest admiration for Landauer, stated that the anarchist had encouraged him to read Mauthner's *Beiträge* ([Scholem 1998](#), pp. 52–53); in his *Walter Benjamin. Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*, Scholem reminds Benjamin of his interest for Landauer's *For Socialism and Revolution* ([Scholem 1997](#), pp. 14, 19, 22, 42); in his *Tagebücher* ([Scholem 1995](#)), Scholem often quotes Landauer for his clarity of conviction, his lectures on German Romanticism, and his position on Judaism. For Scholem and Landauer, see [Schwartz \(2015\)](#), pp. 172–90).

<sup>9</sup> Landauer's conception of Judaism is a thorny question that has often been discussed by critics ([Link-Salinger 1977](#), pp. 74–76; [Lunn 1973](#), p. 247; [Delf 1997](#), pp. xxiii–li; [Wolf 2012](#), pp. 9–85; [Pisano Forthcoming](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Helmut Thielen has observed that Landauer's position on Judaism corresponds to a large extent with Benjamin's in that both understand Judaism as a spiritual foundation for a renewal of humanity ([Thielen 2005](#), p. 100, n. 50).

<sup>11</sup> Landauer also saw a connection between Marxism and technology, which he asserted to be responsible for the depersonalization and dehumanization of relationships. Landauer's aversion to technology must be understood as being aligned to his idea of the spirit as an authentic bond between man and man, man and nature, and man and history. In his view, capitalism, the modern state, and technology are all part of the same constellation ([Landauer \[1911\] 1978](#), pp. 60–63).

<sup>12</sup> There is a huge debate concerning “the real state of exception” that Benjamin has in mind (see [Fadini 1985](#); [Agamben 2005](#); [McQuillan 2011](#)). I would like to argue that this “real state” must be read in line with the *Umkehr* in the fragment “Capitalism

as Religion.” In this way, the real state of exception can be interpreted as the Jewish jubilee in the same manner as Landauer conceived it as a permanent revolutionary interruption.

- 13 On the concept of *Umkehr*—*Umkehrung* in Benjamin, see Mauro Ponzi (Ponzi 2014).
- 14 Bern Witte (Ponzi and Witte 2006, p. 343) stated that Benjamin recalls an ancient Jewish tradition of breaking the guilt–debt device by referring to the debt forgiveness of the Jewish jubilee.
- 15 In the first part of his monograph, written during the war with the title *Globus: Studien zur weltgeschichtliche Raumlehre* (Rosenzweig 1984, pp. 313–68), Rosenzweig proposes a comprehensive study of world history and confronts Meinecke’s theses on the modern nation state, in particular on the relationship between territoriality and nationality. However, Rosenzweig goes beyond Meinecke’s position by pointing out two basic contradictions that deny the universal character of the nation state: the nation state is superimposed and forces the government to adapt itself to the general will. Moreover, it protects a dominant people, which is in contradiction with an open concept of citizenship. On this question, see Mendes-Flohr (1988, pp. 138–61) and Pollock (2004, pp. 332–53).
- 16 “In the *Star* the call of *thalatta* will be assigned to the synagogue—the embodiment of eternity and the promise of redemption” (Mendes-Flohr 1988, pp. 155–56).
- 17 “For in the *Star*, the Jewish people stands wholly outside history, largely unconcerned with the political developments of any particular historical moment. Christianity, on the other hand, identifies itself, in large part, with the political developments of history, [ . . . ] it is precisely through such political development that Christianity advances its mission of uniting the world in redemptive love” (Pollock 2004, p. 345).
- 18 “Rosenzweig’s claim about community is twofold: first that the framework of community is a condition of all individual experience and cognition, and second, and perhaps more provocatively, that the Jewish community as the physical embodiment of God’s revelation is a prerequisite for the possibility of any human community” (Batnitzky 2000, p. 62).
- 19 Scholem speaks of “a deep-seated tendency” in Rosenzweig’s doctrine of redemption: see Scholem (1971, p. 323).
- 20 This contrast also has to do with Rosenzweig’s so-called quietism. Already in his first diary, in a long letter of June 1906 to his alter ego Herostratus, who accuses him of being a quietist, Rosenzweig reminds him that every man should be able to decide whether it is more expedient to “enjoy life or to know” (Rosenzweig 1979, p. 50). The first to speak of quietism in Rosenzweig’s interpretation of Judaism was Gershom Scholem in 1931 (Scholem [1931] 1963, pp. 226–34). On this aspect, thanks to the study of Rosenzweig’s diaries, Stéphane Mosès again relates quietism to the notion of Zionism and messianism: “That this quietism was one of the deepest foundations of his world view, and that he did not cease to question it, is attested to by the notes in this diary devoted to Zionism and Messianism” (Mosès 1988, p. 193). See also Braiterman (1998, pp. 203–21).

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