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Jones, A

Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Jones, A 2024, 'Squatted Sacred Spaces: A Left-Radical Political Theology of Hamburg's Rote Flora', *Political Theology*, vol. (In-Press), pp. (In-Press).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2024.2322863>

DOI 10.1080/1462317X.2024.2322863

ISSN 1462-317X

ESSN 1743-1719

Publisher: Taylor and Francis Group

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Squatted Sacred Spaces: A Left-Radical Political Theology of Hamburg's Rote Flora

Ali Jones 

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, Coventry, UK



ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Hamburg's (in)famous squatted Rote Flora to argue that Left-radical squats can be fruitfully read as "sacred spaces." It uses political theology vis-à-vis sacredness to understand fringe Left-radical subjects, and elucidates their purity concerns of space and political subjectivity. To this end, the paper adapts Bataille's "left-sacred to the left-radical subject concerned with purity in the sense of being" "unassimilable" or "holy and set apart" from society. This occurs via maintaining a space that is "non-negotiable" to profane societal values, rather than in any deity-oriented or classical religious sense. Within this reading, these heterogeneous spaces must be maintained and kept "pure" of homogeneous profane (capitalist) influences. The paper analyzes these purity concerns via three manifestations: (1) the squat's spatial purity from profane societal contamination or influence; (2) language and the fear of discursive integration through contracts; (3) the formation and reification of the pure, ascetic identity.

KEYWORDS

Rote Flora; sacred; space; squatting; Autonomie

Sacredness has been a classical concept since canonical scholars such as Douglas (1966), Eliade (1959), Otto (1917), and even as far back as Durkheim (1912).¹ Rather than disappearing amidst the rise of post-secularism,² philosophers such as Derrida and Bataille echo what Janicaud first identified in 1991 as the "theological turn" in French philosophy,³ akin to the "turn to religion" particularly in German thought ranging from Heidegger to Habermas.⁴ Situated within this scholarly lineage, this paper proposes sacredness and purity as fruitful contemporary lenses for understanding how radical subjectivities and squatted spaces are formed and defended in left-radical political counter-cultures. This proposed conception of left-radical sacredness can be understood as that which is not only "wholly other,"⁵ or "holy and set apart" from the "standards of this

CONTACT Ali Jones  ad5052@coventry.ac.uk  Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, IV5, Cheetah Road, CV1 2TL Coventry, UK

¹Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*; Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*; Otto, *Das Heilige*.

²There is a massive body of literature on post-secularism theory. A few key texts include de Vries and Sullivan, *Political Theologies*, Taylor, *A Secular Age?*, etc.

³Janicaud et al., *Le Tourant theologique*.

⁴de Vries, *Philosophy Turn to Religion*.

⁵Otto, *Das Heilige*.

world”⁶ but also especially the unassimilable or “non-negotiable”⁷ that must be protected, even violently, against what I will interpret as “contamination” by profane influences of mainstream society. These sacred spaces can be understood particularly well by invoking Bataille’s heterogeneity of the unassimilable left-sacred. By using Bataille to read squats as the heterogeneous left-radical-sacred, I argue that autonomists effectively create a sacred space in which to demand and demarcate the “purity” of their own subjectivities and behaviors, which must be defended at all costs against homogeneous contamination by the external world. The autonomist squatter movement in Hamburg’s Rote Flora offers an ideal case study of Left-radical “anti-subjects” who define themselves and their heterogeneous sacred space by the strict – I argue purist – negation of sexism, capitalism, and racism that they see as pervading profane Western homogeneous society.⁸ While classical conceptions of religiosity might seem anathema to some Left-radicals, in 45 interviews with autonomist participants in Hamburg, the concepts of “purity” and “moral superiority” were raised repeatedly. Interviewee Xavier, who was active in the Flora for seven years, even called the Flora activists “the perfect German protestants” who were “obsessed with righteousness.”⁹ This paper therefore does not operate within the framework of deity-oriented religion, but rather seeks to apply a form of left-sacred political theology to elucidate why the autonomist movement continues to defend such a dilapidated squat thirty years later, even to the point of adamantly refusing the proffered legal right to do so. Invoking Bataille’s left-sacred to propose the concept of the left-radical-sacred, this paper interprets the Rote Flora in three political-theological respects: (1) the building itself as a sacred space; (2) the purity of language and refusal of discourse; and (3) the formation and self-policing pure ascetic subjectivities within this space.

Autonomie and the Rote Flora

The Rote Flora culture center began to develop in 1987 when producer Friedrich Kurz of the Stella-GmbH group planned to turn the old Flora theater in Hamburg into the site for a production of the *Phantom of the Opera* musical. The State Senate supported this redevelopment as part of a wider restructuring strategy to gentrify the low-income neighborhood, known as the *Schanzenviertel*.¹⁰ The Senate had already formulated and published plans to attract wealthier “creative-type” residents,¹¹ and the head of the Basic Planning Issues Department of the Hamburg Building Authority acknowledged as early as 1973 that this would likely entail the necessary relocation of “undesirable” (i.e., low-income, elderly, immigrant, and working-class) residents in order to free up their currently “blocked” but “highly valuable residences” for use by more “desirable” new middle class residents.¹² However, having obtained the Senate report, citizens and autonomist activists in the low-income *Schanzenviertel* neighborhood vehemently disagreed. They

⁶See Deuteronomy 14:2; Romans 12:2.

⁷Anttonen, “Sacred,” 281.

⁸Jones, “Anti Anti Anti!”.

⁹Xavier, Interview, 11 May 2022., *All interviewee names have been changed.

¹⁰Note that at the time the small, 0.47km² district was not legally an entity, but rather was composed of parts of four neighboring districts. It was officially recognized as the Sternschanze district only in 2008, but was referred to as Schanzenviertel during the 1980s until the present.

¹¹WIS, 1988.

¹²Lindemann, “Wohnen in der Innenstadt”, in *Stadtbauwelt* 37/1973, p.55f, cited in Schultz, “Rote Flora,” 10. Archival Source.

protested using first peaceful, and then escalating forms of sabotage against the building site, until the musical was eventually moved to a new location. The autonomists registered as the charitable corporation “Flora Group Inc” (Flora e.V) and were granted a six-week contract to use the half-destroyed building for a neighborhood culture center, before declaring it occupied on 1 November 1989. The mayor feared widespread civil unrest, as support for the culture center was widespread: even the police had cooperated with citizens by handing out leaflets during the initial campaign.¹³ Within the sudden national political turbulence that erupted eight days later after the fall of the Berlin wall, the squat slipped from the national radar and simply remained.¹⁴

The Flora autonomists in Hamburg are a branch of the broader German autonomous movement from the 1980s, although with several important differences. *Autonomie* is historically understood as the classic threatening “black bloc” militant core of masked and helmeted protestors in 1980s marches, or those who squatted a wave of houses first in Frankfurt in the 1970s, and then across Berlin in 1981–84.¹⁵ However, by 1989 these occupations had all been cleared or signed rental contracts, and the Hamburg activists in a reunified Germany were a generation younger, with different concerns than their predecessors during the Cold-War. Both generations shared a concern with creating segregated spaces outside of and against society. However, for the Berlin wave these were living spaces, claimed from the ample empty flats in post-war West German cities, while the Flora was an uninhabited culture center that at least originally sought to integrate local residents. According to participants, *Autonomie* in Hamburg (like Berlin) emphasized the refusal of: the state monopoly on violence, politics as discourse in the public sphere, and the legitimacy of traditional parliamentary democratic methods. But it also placed enormous emphasis on creating oneself in opposition to the three “Antis” (Sexism, Fascism/Racism, Capitalism), as articulated in a 1990 volume that was widely read throughout the movement.¹⁶ This new generation focused on the self-formation and self-determination of the autonomous political subject. They did not occupy houses for living spaces, but rather to establish a grounding point for their identities as subjects set apart from state structures (including the [re]structural violence of gentrification).¹⁷ The self-governance of that new subjectivity in segregated spaces was kept strictly pure from external influences, within a micro-society that developed its own forms of legal/judicial, discursive, behavioral and ideological structures, as well as a stark form of embodied self-administration.¹⁸

Methodology

This research was conducted using grounded theory as part of a cultural history from below of the “politics of everyday life”: approaches that trace the “everyday” political

¹³According to a member of the citizens’ initiative engaged in the protest against the musical theatre. Stefan, Interview 10 February 2016.

¹⁴See Blechschmidt, “Flora für alle,” 153–68.

¹⁵See Vasudevan for a detailed account.

¹⁶See Strobl et al., *Dreizueins*. See Jones, “Anti, Anti, Anti!” for an in-depth analysis of the three Antis.

¹⁷See *Ibid* on gentrification as [re]structural violence.

¹⁸This is examined in Jones, “Spatial Sovereignities”; Antipode, Forthcoming.

lives of otherwise often neglected historical actors.¹⁹ I presented myself as a left-empathetic cultural historian chronicling the everyday life of movements “from below,” but not as an autonomist Participant Observer; neither was the research covert. I used a well-respected gatekeeper to approach the Flora governing plenary body for consent, and after determining that I was not an extremism scholar,²⁰ leading plenary members not only agreed to interviews, but also endorsed other members participating. Interviewees were then identified using the snowball sampling method,²¹ leading to 45 semi-structured interviews and oral histories between 2011 and 2023. Participants were self-identified autonomists active in Hamburg between the late 1980s to the present.²² Most interviewees were generally most politically active between the late 1980s to the early 2000s (although a few remain engaged to date). It is important to note that there is almost no other primary research-based scholarship on the highly secretive Flora society, as participants generally refuse to provide “translations” of their practice, lest it force them into the homogeneous power structures inherent to discourse.²³ Indeed, many contemporarily active participants interpret scholarship as a hostile, power-laden discourse, and refused contact. I addressed this tension explicitly in each interview by explaining my intention to write an empathetic cultural history “from below” that could claim discursive power/truth for an alternative narrative than that of state intelligence bodies. Interviewees agreed with this need for a well-documented account, particularly one that was explicitly *not* linked to the police, intelligence services, or the field of extremist studies, which a former unofficial speaker described as “a nest of Nazis,” and to whom all participants refused to speak.²⁴

Using gatekeeper access and then established goodwill, from 2011 to 2023 I researched in the autonomist Archive of the Social Movements (ASB). These documents included local newspapers, autonomist press releases and pamphlets, articles from the Flora’s monthly *Zeck* magazine, as well as extensive other documentation produced within the scene. In 2016, with unprecedented permission of the plenary body, I was granted the first scholarly access to their restricted internal documentation, including internal memorandums, meeting minutes, and diary-like reflective entries from the organizing plenum. Situating this archival data within interview data, grounded theory analysis identified an emphasis on the “reinheit” (purity) of autonomist ideology, action and deed, as well as the importance of preserving the squatted space from the “contamination” or “integration” of external societal structures. This was verified and confirmed in a 2016–2018 s round of interviews with participants.

¹⁹Particularly the ground theory of Bryant and Charmaz. Lange 2003; Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte.

²⁰In an interview with the unofficial speaker and one of the original squatters from 1989, my “not working in extremism studies” was emphasized as the critical factor in their decision. Andreas, Interview, 17 February 2016.

²¹Biernacki and Waldorf, “Snowball Sampling”.

²²Additional interviews were conducted with non-autonomist members of the citizen’s initiative campaign; as well as city district managers, city redevelopment agency employees, and the State Senator of Interior Development, all in-post in the late 1980s and early 90s. This research was granted ethical approval from the IRBs of the University of Alberta, the University of Cambridge, and Coventry University.

²³There is one published German PhD dissertation, *Rote Flora*, supervised by extremism scholars, based only on secondary sources. It was written by Hoffman, a police officer, to whom participants refused to speak. Another published dissertation studies processes of collective learning in the movement: Hoefft, *Stillstand in Bewegung*.

²⁴Andreas, Interview.

From Bataille's left-sacred to the left-radical-sacred

Radical sacred spaces, like those of the Flora, can be understood particularly well by invoking Bataille's heterogeneity of the unassimilable left-sacred. By creating such heterogeneous squats, autonomists effectively created a sacred space in which to demand and demarcate the "purity" of subjectivities and behaviors, which must be defended at all costs against homogeneous cooptation by the profane capitalist world. To briefly summarize: Bataille divides the world into categories of profane and the sacred, including in the latter a left-sacred (darkness) and a right-sacred (light). He explains that in the current reality of impoverished modernity the profane is no longer capable of the social cohesion upon which identity and meaning can be founded. The profane or "mainstream" realm attempts to offer this "homogeneity," but the dominating nature of modernity, coupled with the rationalization of religion means that the homogeneous instead actually becomes a force of artificial hegemony that destroys and negates the natural wonder, chaos, and animality that are so crucial to the sacred.²⁵ He juxtaposes this with the sacred, which negates and de-centers the profane by offering a heterogeneous space of utter difference: the "wholly other" or the unassimilable "non-negotiable." This (dark) left-sacred encompasses the "ambiguous horror" that is dangerous, impure, unyielding, awful and transgressive.²⁶ It violates any order imposed from above, and instead elicits the unassimilable nature of sacrifice and suffering.

It is also important to note Bataille's Marxist-influenced critique of the bourgeoisie as part of the "profane," which informs his theory of the sacred, and offers a bridge to the Marxist heritage of left-radical politics. Heterogeneous space is presented as the binary opposite of the homogeneity of mainstream versions of capitalist social and economic norms. Bataille argues that impoverished modernity means that even liberal-democratic societies have lost their crucial sense of cohesion, identity, and solidarity. In fact, from a humanist-Marxist perspective these spheres have become so focused upon economic "exchange value" that the meaning of social cohesion is not only shunted to "use value" but is in fact lost entirely. White expands on this, explaining that, for Bataille, modern economic rationalization of "exchange values" means that "nothing is sacred anymore since nothing is valued for itself" – neither the "use" of a thing nor its "exchange" for something else truly reflect the thing itself as a sacred entity in its own right.²⁷ This goes further than the neo-Humanist Marxist valorization of use value, and emphasizes the importance of the sacred apart from both mechanisms of valuation – as an unassimilable thing in its own right that once offered what Eliade called an "fixed point" of meaning and identity "orientation," but has since been lost.²⁸ Other scholars have picked up on this notion, such as Habermas' argument that "something is missing" that once held societies together,²⁹ or Wydra's conclusion that the creation of the politically sacred today usually occurs as a response to the "brokenness" of economic reality itself.³⁰

²⁵See Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 13.

²⁶Bataille, *Absence of Myth*, 106–8; Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 36; See Pawlett, *Sacred and Society*, 20–23.

²⁷White, *Bataille Philosophy of Sacred*, 54.

²⁸Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22–24.

²⁹Habermas et al., *What is Missing*, 2011.

³⁰Wydra, *Politics and the Sacred*, 12–13.

As the modern capitalist state/the profane seeks to impose homogeneous order, the left-radical sacred opposes this with all forms of alterity it can muster, which this paper will read as the left-radical “non-negotiable/non-contractable/non-reconcilable” (*Unverträglichkeit*) in section d below. Key to this understanding of being “wholly other” is the notion of remaining pure-from such profane contamination. This paper will examine the Flora through the lens of this left-radical heterogeneous political theology in terms of the following elements: (a) the sacred threshold; (b) the sacred space physically, financially, and culturally; (c) the pure ascetic subjectivities grounded in that space; (d) the purity of discourse and action.

(a) Sacred Thresholds

The heterogeneous purity of this left-sacred space can be interpreted particularly fruitfully using the trope of a “threshold” to profane society, as scholars have argued. Anttonen invokes Durkheim’s claim that the sacred provides a category of value whereby social groups can establish their boundaries and identity, and that this “sacred exists *only in contrast* to things in the profane sphere of social life.”³¹ Within this binary, religious anthropologist Douglas emphasizes the importance of purity, as sacrality can only be maintained if a space remains pure from the profane world, just as the space of the Flora was kept pure of economic contamination.³² This notion of a pure space held in sharp contrast to the profane external world beyond a threshold can be applied directly to the Flora. Inside the building, the backs of the front doors are painted with the message: “Welcome to *our* Europe. *These are our* borders” (see Figure 1). This intentionally dangerous and inaccessible threshold presents border to the quasi-sovereign space that was kept holy and set apart from external profane reality. To pass through them was to leave the pure space governed by distinct values, and transgress that sacredness to the profane reality outside.

Indeed, many scholars have articulated the significance of boundaries, doors, gateways and passages as liminal zones or threshold between the realms of the sacred and the profane,³³ or as the “rite of passage” leading to the world of the sacred.³⁴ The canonical Eliade describes thresholds as “the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.”³⁵ By entering the Flora, one passes out of a world where the Antis can flourish, and crosses the frontier to a space where they must be purified from thought, deed, and word. Douglas also emphasizes this symbolic and sacred importance of boundaries, limits, doors, and entryways as a part of maintaining this boundary from the profane.³⁶ The purity of such spaces is maintained by this threshold – a ritual and physical separation from the homogeneous external and corrupting secular world, even as it offers a cleansing “escape” via the threshold. The sanctity of the space must therefore be kept pure from any profane contamination or crossover.

³¹Anttonen, “Sacred,” 275.

³²Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

³³For example, see the edited volume by Van Opstall, *Sacred Thresholds*.

³⁴Van Gennep, *Rite of Passage*.

³⁵Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 25.

³⁶See *Ibid.*



Figure 1. “Our Borders.” The Flora front entrance, photographed from the inside in 2015, declares a border between the building and the rest of Europe⁸⁸

One can also understand the very real “threshold” of the Flora in terms of the “repulsive,” “dangerous” nature of the squat and its entryway. Bataille describes the sacred man as being “unassimilable” to either the Marxist-inspired use or exchange values of the profane.³⁷ He cites Mannerot in describing these “dangerous classes” as refusing to yield to the “subordination” demanded by homogeneity.³⁸ Such “beggars” or “outcasts” cannot be reconciled with the standards demanded by polite society, and instead continually produce a rupture in the profane – which in itself is a type of threshold. In term of the physical space, [Figure 2](#) shows the “gaping maw” of the Flora in 2014, its front steps covered in mattresses inhabited by persons experiencing homelessness and/or living with alcoholism, while those who deal drugs linger on the fringes, knowing they can operate relatively freely in the shadow of the squat. As the epitome of Bataille’s dangerous “multitude” – those who did not adhere to standard homogeneous expectations of capitalist work and order – the imposing presence of these “outcasts” kept the threshold to the Flora intimidating, unsafe, and inaccessible to “mainstream” visitors unwilling to transgress typical standards of safety and behavior.

[Figure 2](#) depicts the building in 2014, whereas [Figure 3](#) depicts it in 2022, after extensive refurbishments in 2015 when the façade was renovated by a new generation in an

³⁷Bataille, *Absence of Myth*, 106.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 107.



Figure 2. The Gaping Maw of the Threshold. The entry to the Rote Flora in 2014, with encampments on the steps.⁸⁹

attempt to appear more inclusive, welcoming and open to society. Despite still being covered in trash and the imposing figures of what Bataille would call sleeping “outcasts,” it is intended to present a significantly *less* threatening image than in Figure 2, although both remain deeply (and intentionally) “unassimilable” to *bürgerlich*³⁹ law-abiding citizens in profane society.

In addition to the “outcasts” guarding this dangerous threshold, the ugly and dilapidated building itself represented a physical rejection of the aesthetics and norms of homogeneous profane society. Durkheim presents the sacred as something fear inducing – residing on that fine line between awe-some and awe-ful.⁴⁰ Bataille also points to the “repulsive” and dangerous nature of the left-sacred, explaining that “[one] feels a kind of impotent horror in the presence of the sacred.”⁴¹ As a space set apart, the Flora was a forbidding, fearful, intentionally ugly gaping eyesore in the increasingly gentrified neighborhood around it. This was encouraged and maintained as a permanent juxtaposition to the glittering upscale gentrified neighborhood, and to force that profane world to encounter the dangerous and repulsive nature of the left-sacred. One of the squatters Oskar explains the rationale behind this:

The autonomists in the Flora completely refused to be assimilated. They instead declared: the building is old and awful and hateful and that is actually a good thing, because that way it remains a point of contrast to the rest of the gentrified quarter.⁴²

And yet this hateful, ugly old building was also somehow deeply attractive. The dangerous nature of the forbidden left-sacred was so alluring that the Flora was listed on state tourist brochures as an “exciting” marketing attraction for what one journalist described as voyeuristic “latte macchiato sipping tourists” seeking to “slurp” their expensive coffees

³⁹Bürgerlich is not directly translatable, but refers to “good upstanding normal citizens”, rather than “bourgeois”.

⁴⁰See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

⁴¹Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 36.

⁴²Oskar, Interview with Author, 11 April 2016.



Figure 3. An Awe-ful Eye-Sore. The refurbished Flora in 2022, its steps still covered in mattresses, trash, and encampments⁹⁰

from a safe distance while peering into the “wild life” of the exotic and “authentic” political left.⁴³ This escalated to such an extent that the plenary body declared themselves to be complicit in gentrification itself, due to the attractive nature of the dangerous space. (While their degree of actual responsibility for a state restructuring campaign planned as early as 1973 remains suspect, it is interesting to note the hint of self-flagellation in such eagerness to solicit blame). Their claims also emphasize the dual nature of their role as both a “dangerous foreign element” that can never quite be resolved but simultaneously an attractive “it-factor.” As the plenum itself writes:

This ambiguous relationship – a mixture of tourism magnet, secret lover of the chamber of commerce, and bourgeois society’s most hated object – shapes the role of the Flora.⁴⁴

The ambivalent relationship of the Flora in the city evokes the nature of the left-sacred as horrible, but also, according to Bataille, also permanently:

ambiguous. Undoubtedly, what is sacred attracts and possesses an incomparable value, but at the same time it appears vertiginously dangerous for that clear and profane world where mankind situates its privileged domain.⁴⁵

In this ambiguous liminal role, the left-sacred space remains not only awe-ful and dangerously attractive, but also challenges the homogeneity of “that clear and profane world” of homogeneous capitalist logic. It stood “wholly other” and “set apart” from

⁴³Maximilian Probst, “Jetzt noch autonomer”, ZEIT Online, Nu 03/2014, 9 January 2014.

⁴⁴Rote Flora Plenum, “Unverträglich Glücklich: Widerstand und Perspektiven der Roten Flora”, 2009. Available online at <http://www.nadir.org/-nadir/initiativ/roteFlora/texte/widerstandundperspektiven.html>.

⁴⁵Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 36.

the profane, while also offering a threshold to the left-sacred, for those who dared to enter.

(b) A Sacred Squatted Space: Physically, Financially, and Culturally

The physical space of the building was guarded against police and state incursion, as well as any perceived external surveillance. For this reason, no photos are allowed past the building's entrance, (participants recall smashing the cameras of those found contravening this rule) and therefore more detailed images cannot be reproduced here. Apart from real security concerns, this also suggests the quasi holiness of a space that cannot be translated or represented to the profane world, and had to remain self-contained and sacredly "set apart." In 1990 a Flora Solidarity Hymn (see [Figure 4](#)) was published, and while of course this must be read as slightly tongue-in-cheek, it also opens the door to the trope of the squat as a type of symbolic temple.⁴⁶

The spatial importance of this demarcation was demonstrated on 6 July 2008 when a woman was assaulted on the street and took shelter in the building. Police took the opportunity to force entry using water cannons, arrest 13 people inside, and search the building. Their transgression resulted in riots and solidarity demonstrations of more than 800 in Hamburg, as well as solidarity demonstrations in seven cities in two countries: Freiburg, Düsseldorf, Hannover, Bremen, Berlin, Leipzig and Copenhagen.⁴⁷ Defilement of the space was not taken lightly.

Financially, Left-sacredness and its critique of exchange value also helps elucidate the symbolism of the Flora as a space kept pure of all profane economic exchange. Squats are, by definition, held without legal permission, and thus fundamentally oppose capitalism and its homogeneous logic. While some spaces are squatted simply to avoid paying rent, the Flora autonomists were concerned with symbolically refusing economic and social norms of profit in the culture center. For example, one member described the Flora as the only place where it is possible to actually talk to others without being bound by commercial exchange (for example, buying a coffee to justify sitting at a table in a café).⁴⁸ There was also a deep concern with refusing the transactional nature of capitalist exchange, as squatter Martha explains: "We wanted to protect these spaces against the plastic world, against plastic people: a critique of consumerism."⁴⁹ She indicates the importance of pushing back against homogeneous values and economics, and instead maintaining not only a space, but also a culture that was pure from any capitalist consumption. Sedlmaier traces this rejection of consumption in the German radical Left since the 1960s, and how Marcuse's influence on the 68er generation highlighted and sought to counter this form of violence.⁵⁰ Instead of consuming new items created by a "hostile" capitalist system, squatters emphasize a DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, with a scene-wide focus on *Instandbesetzung* – a playful neologism of repairing/renovating while occupying – to counter the predominance of ripping down old houses to build

⁴⁶Flora Hymn, Archival Source.

⁴⁷Zeck, Archival Source.

⁴⁸Neues Deutschland, "Auch die kein Geld haben," Archival Source.

⁴⁹Martha, Interview, 15 September 2015.

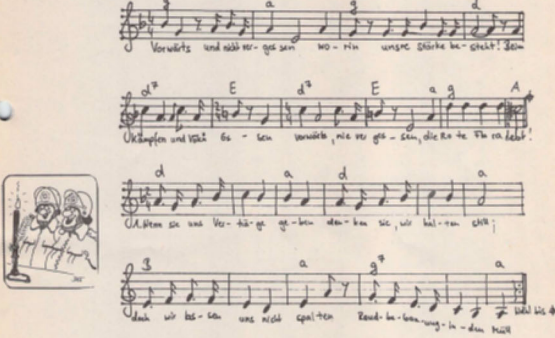
⁵⁰Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence*.

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Flora

SO LI HYMNE

Musik: Hanns Eisler, Text: Becht/Flanck*



Vorwärts und nicht ver- ges- sen wo- hin unsre Stärke lie- gekt! Dem
 Unk-ampfen und Un- ge- - sen - wende, nie ver- ges- sen, die die die die ver- leidet!
 Un-ken sie uns Vor- wärts ge- - sen - den - ken sie, wir bei- ren ein!
 Dank wir bei- sen uns nicht spalten Rand- be- leu- tung- in - dem Hall



* Flora - Unterhüter - Chor
Innen

1. Denn der Kampf gegen Savernung
 ewig nicht nur Dink und nicht
 Unser Traum von Roter Flora
 Staatsgewalt im nicht berichtet
 Vorwärts und nicht vergessen...

2. Selbst wenn Sie dann erkennen wollen
 sehen wir doch dadas bei dadas
 Unsere Ketten werden halten
 freiwillig gehen wir nicht.
 Vorwärts und nicht vergessen
 wenn unsere Stärke besteht -
 Wessen Flora ist die Flora?
 Wessen Welt ist die Welt?
 Unser!

Flora Solidarity Hymn

Forwards and never
 forgetting
 where our strength lies!
 Whether fighting or eating at
 the people's kitchen
 Forwards and never
 forgetting
 The Rote Flora survives!

If they give us contracts
 they think we keep quiet
 but we will not be divided.
 Throw [the idea of] row
 housing in the trash!

Because the fight against
 restructuring unites not only
 you and me
 Our dream of Rote Flora -
 State power will not break

(chorus) Forwards and never
 forgetting...

Even if they want to evict
 We will remain tightly
 together
 Our human-chains will hold
 We will not go willingly

Forward and never
 forgetting
 where our strength lies-

Whose Flora is the Flora?
 Whose world is the world?
 Ours!

Figure 4. "Flora Solidarity Hymn"⁹¹

unaffordable new condominiums. This refusal of the consumerism of the profane "plastic world" was only one instance of the Flora group's emphasis on "creating spaces within this society where things can be different,"⁵¹ particularly in regard to the homogeneous capitalist emphasis on economic profit above all other values.

Other instances of cultural contamination occurred during music concerts, which sought to offer counter-cultural and underground genres not welcomed by mainstream venues. Participants in the events-planning group recounted the deep conflicts that arose when trying to offer spaces for people of a migrant background to stage reggae or dub concerts in the 1990s, but then recoiling when some song lyrics included homophobic or misogynist phrases. On the one hand, supporting independent artists from migrant backgrounds or minority music genres was a political stance against profane and capitalist culture, and created a space to counter homogenous entertainment industries. On the

⁵¹Edna Interview, in Poppenborg.

other, any infiltration of homophobia was a contamination of the autonomist identity grounded in the three Antis, and an assault on its foundation in spatial purity. Other enormous scandals occurred throughout the 1990s, especially when men active in the gay community hosted raves in the basement of the building. Axel recalls that one attendee “from Berlin” removed his shirt as he danced, which was entirely normal for the Berlin rave scene and gay culture. However, this was read as violent and oppressive against women, and the confused dancer was promptly evicted.⁵² Another debate erupted when the first basement rave organized by a group of gay men included naked images shown on a screen. Several male, heterosexual Flora members were so outraged that they cut the cable to the projector.⁵³ This led to another enormous scandal about which Anti was being transgressed in this instance. Was cutting the cable a homophobic assault on gay men? Or rather an act of protecting the sacred space from the violence and misogyny of profane pornography and capitalist commodification of bodies? In both cases, the sacredness of a space that had to be kept pure from the Antis (sexism, racism, capitalism) clashed with the attempts to offer an alternate to the outside society and its capitalist logics. Such instances demonstrated not only the enormous difficulties of navigating a left-sacred identity grounded in being unassimilable and in utter alterity from profane values, but even more so in the critical importance placed on segregation and purity from it. This manifested even more predominantly in the self-formation of the pure and righteous subject, to which this paper will now turn.

(c) Righteousness and Pure Ascetic Subjectivities

The ascetic nature of *Autonomie* is aptly demonstrated by attitudes towards parties and alcohol, both of which prompted enormous and divisive debates in the Flora community. Initially the squat was a strictly straight-edge, alcohol-free space, which is surprising given the accusations of hedonism often leveled against the German Left since the 1960s, as for example in the 1971 volume *The Hedonist Left*.⁵⁴ However, *Autonomie* can perhaps best be understood as an attempt to complete the 1968ers unfinished work of making every aspect of the personal political, although now with the knowledge that Lefebvre’s “revolution of everyday life” could only happen internally, and outside the structures of society rather than via any naïve cooperation with it. This hardline stance perceived drugs and alcohol, (alongside new musical styles and many other forms of pleasure or fun), as threatening the integrity of the self-determined, segregated and purely political subjectivity. Of course, the impossibility of such a purity regime caused tensions almost immediately: by 1993 the plenary body were forced to acknowledge the mountains of smuggled-in empty drinks cans left behind after concerts. Needing ways to finance the center, they eventually conceded to the sale of beer as a source of funding, which triggered enormous schisms in the group. Simultaneously, the mid-1990s emergence of a younger generation of activists interested in music other than traditional left-radical hardcore, or who saw dancing as more than mindless consumption,

⁵²Axel, Interview, 22 November 2022.

⁵³Noah Interview, 19 October 2022.

⁵⁴Kerbs, *Die hedonistische Linke*.

began to cause cultural tensions of identity that ultimately resulted in the entire plenary body abruptly resigning in 1995.

Both of these invasions of the secular triggered enormous internal divisions, and can be best understood as a transgression, not only into the sacred space, but also in the ascetic nature of the straight-edge, hardcore-listening, black-and-white thinking autonomist subject. As participant Oskar explains, autonomists traditionally understand themselves as (hyper-masculine), black-clad, straight-edge street fighters.⁵⁵ Scholar Manrique expands on this, analyzing the traditional Berlin black bloc image as a process of “self-abnegation” and “self-stigmatization” where an individual autonomist seeks to disappear into a threatening, faceless mass of pure political refusal.⁵⁶ But in Hamburg this symbolic group formation had shifted to the individual level, with the configuration of each subjectivity to include a hyper fixation on morality and self-regulation toward solely political concerns. Determination to be “the better people and [to] try to build a better world!” as participant Anna explains, this involved an ascetic refusal of all forms of profane capitalist pleasures such as commercialized music, or the apolitical haze induced by consuming drugs or alcohol. In other examples: the people’s kitchen offered a strictly vegan menu, and Oskar recalls the enormous debates over setting out rat traps for fears of cruelty to animals. In each instance, participants demonstrated a deep concern with prefiguring a purely political, just, and righteous moral superiority performed via an asceticism that was nevertheless impossible to achieve [Figure 5](#).

The self-formation of these radical subjectivities was grounded in the purity of the radical sacred space, wherein external contaminants were (theoretically) kept at bay. However, as radical subcultures across Germany sought to police these values through the 1990s, fears arose that homogeneous contamination no longer threatened spaces, but could also take root inside of the ideas, practices, speech, and habits of individuals cloistered within radical communities.⁵⁷ After the 1990s publication of the booklet on the three Antis (racism, sexism, capitalism), the group became increasingly concerned with cleansing itself from these internal forms of creeping profane contamination, in terms of both the sacred space and the radical subjects grounded and operating in it. These concerns manifested particularly in terms of sexism, which participants sought to purge from themselves and the space using any means necessary. For example, Fabian describes how the men met at anti-sexist men’s cafés in the early to mid-1990s in order to examine their own behavior in a quasi-group-therapy setting, and to publicly identify and eliminate any sexist thoughts or behaviors.⁵⁸

This also extended to violent practices of group purging to eliminate any “oppression from within” in order to remain pure, resistant, and arguable even holy.⁵⁹ For example, attempts to purify the community exploded during a series of sex related scandals, which are documented and analyzed elsewhere in greater length,⁶⁰ so will only be briefly summarized here. The debates led to a series of increasingly violent

⁵⁵Oskar, Interview, 11 Sept 2015.

⁵⁶Manrique, *Marginalisierung und Militanz*.

⁵⁷Walter, Interview, 1 August 2015.

⁵⁸These practices have a long historical precedent in the radical Left, particularly the group psychotherapy of the Kommune I in the 1970s. See Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties*, 51–58 for a detailed discussion. Fabian, Interview with Author, 10 August 2016.

⁵⁹Flora Plenum, Archival Source.

⁶⁰Jones, “Anti Anti Anti!”.



Figure 5. Drugs or Alcohol. A sign in the entry to the Flora prohibits drugs and limits alcohol usage (Photo by Author, 2015).

attacks upon the Left-wing cabaret group *Heiter bis Wolzig*, after they presented a pantomime of inverted intercourse, which women interpreted as glorifying rape. Shortly after, one of their members was accused (by a third party) of having non-consensual relations with a woman while on tour. The resultant scandal spread throughout Left-radical communities across Germany, and escalated rapidly. This led to butyric acid being thrown at the St Pauli football fan club headquarters, where one fanzine was produced that had questioned the scene response, or associates of the band and their friends being hospitalized after being beaten in the street.⁶¹ It is particularly

⁶¹See *Ibid.*, and Archival Sources: Heiter bis Wolzig, “Sie Anten, wir Fragworten!” Plenum, “Heiter bis Wolzig – Peinlich bis Bitter”.

noteworthy to consider the reflections of Uwe, a Flora member who himself faced rumors of non-consensual acts in a relationship, (although the claims were soon determined to have been fabricated by a jealous third party). Any man in this position was put in real physical danger of physical retribution, no matter if the claims were later retracted. As Alfred explains:

The perpetrator, he had absolutely no rights. And if he was accused of rape or marked as a rapist, he was totally hung out to dry, without rights, totally strung up: there would be flyers identifying him, also with his photo on them.⁶²

What is important to note here is that, despite his own experience of this same process, Uwe was in ardent support of the reprisals against the accused cabaret group member. In an interview 20 years later, Uwe still holds to his belief that “rapists must simply be thrown out of our milieu: It is a matter of *purity*, and our own moral superiority.”⁶³ The vehemence of these incidents and the absolutist attitudes towards them indicates the seriousness with which the community sought to expunge anyone even distantly related to the corrupting threat of sexism. It also reflects the danger posed by even the barest contact with such profane contaminants.

This striving for a sacred purity of the self became increasingly rigorous and strict, as participants sought to ascetically form their subjectivities into perfect and holy heterogeneous subjects. Participant Clara acknowledges the difficulties of such a continual process of self-formation and self-purification, and that she had to continually work to “develop herself” towards this ideal behavior.⁶⁴ And yet, the constant striving towards purity took its toll, as members felt unable to admit that they could not attain the perfect ideals they demanded of themselves. Clara explains that:

If you then say something contrary openly somewhere at an event or in a plenary session [...] you’re just gawked at like the eighth wonder of the world and you have discredited yourself entirely over it. Because it is simply not PC [politically correct].⁶⁵

While she continued to try to develop and form herself as a pure subject adhering to the group values in the sacred space, she also complained that no one felt safe to acknowledge their own lack of holiness or perfection:

Because no one dared to say: I also sometimes have such and such thoughts. And they are not revolutionary at all, or somehow don’t fit at all into this image.⁶⁶

Due to the high standards of purity demanded of the radical subjects in their insular micro-society, Anna explains that the stress and tension of this constant striving pushed participants “to their absolute limits.” In trying to manifest a site of radical morality, where black and white logic allowed them to declare themselves pure and morally superior, members found themselves threatening to violently expel dear friends based on rumors, attacking other Left-radical groups with acid, or constantly flagellating themselves for their own thoughts and worries. Anna explains that although they were “just

⁶²Alfred, Interview 13 April 2016.

⁶³Uwe, Interview 21 September 2016.

⁶⁴Clara, Interview, in Poppenborg.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

trying to create a better world,” the contradictions of such purity concerns increasingly left her with:

The feeling that people are being destroyed, just completely. Because the lives of individuals and the psyche of individuals are attacked in such a way that it no longer has anything to do with what we actually stood up for, what we fought for, for a *kind of better world*, where something like this can't happen. Where this kind of violence simply has no place.⁶⁷

In a culture dedicated to purity, any intrusion of foreign thoughts, words, or actions became an threat of absolute contamination – the sacred ideal had to be maintained at all times, no matter how unattainable this might actually be in fallen reality.

(d) Sacred Discourses: *Unverträglichkeit*

The autonomist concern with radical spatial purity in their selves, words, actions and thoughts extends to the power structures inherent to discourse, as an engagement in dialogue with a state constituted a taboo function of the legitimacy claims and expectations of that power/knowledge.⁶⁸ This is best demonstrated by the campaign *Flora bleibt Unverträglich* (The Flora Remains Non-contractable), adopted in 2001 when the Hamburg State Senate offered the squatters a rental contract to use the space indefinitely. Apart from the somewhat light-hearted play on words between *Vertrag* [contract] and *verträglich* [implying tolerable, reconcilable, agreeable, sufferable, bearable, etc], the slogan indicates the gravity which the autonomists defended the purity of their heterogeneous alterity at all costs. To declare oneself irreconcilable is a refusal of the entire structure of profane society, including not only the financial exchange of rent, or the legal value of any contract, but also the legitimacy of the state itself. However, in this case it was also a refusal – for the sake of principle – of the opportunity to secure and protect the space indefinitely, which they had been striving for since 1989.

The *Unverträglich* campaign emerged in response to the political context of the early 2000s, when the Hamburg SPD-led senate faced Schill's Right-wing Populist Party in the upcoming state election. Citizens increasingly supported Schill's campaign of “Law and Order,” as violence and unrest were becoming widespread issues, especially in the *Schanzenviertel*. The concern with “internal security” peaked after a year of riots and violence, when, for example, a grenade had exploded in a dance club in the area, providing the catalyst for a political debate over public safety.⁶⁹ In the face of this populist pressure, the Flora became one of ten “focus points” of the state's “internal security” election campaign. In order to avoid losing seats on the center-right to Schill because of the debate over the Flora, the Mayor decided to resolve the issue of security in the *Schanzenviertel* by including an emphasis on “controlling this unruly and dangerous part of the city” in his own platform.⁷⁰ As part of this campaign, the Mayor sought to improve the “image factor” of the

⁶⁷Anna, Interview, 21 September 2016

⁶⁸See Tetlock, “Thinking the Unthinkable”; See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

⁶⁹“Wie sicher fühlen”, *Hamburger Morgenpost*, Archival Source.

⁷⁰“Rote Flora: Vertrag liegt vor. Abriss oder Erhalt?” Archival Source.

Schanzenviertel and to placate this “dangerous city section” through a rental contract and building renovations.⁷¹

Securing the Flora with a contract would provide a significant political victory over Schill’s populist campaign, as the former unofficial Flora speaker Blechschmidt explains:⁷²

They wanted to secure a quick contract, to pin down the status of the Flora at that time. We would be allowed to continue using the building for a symbolic rent. That was a political strategy, so that the SPD could say they had successfully pacified us.⁷³

In addition to a rhetorical victory over Schill’s campaign, securing a legal contract would also undermine the resistant status of the radical space. The Flora as a legal vacuum – or more literally a “law-free-space” (*Rechtsfreier Raum*) – declared itself independent of political, police, or legal oversight. It thus represented the rejection of homogeneity in terms of the rule of law, capitalist economics, private property, and the social contract in favor of a “wholly other” heterogeneous system of internal justice, economy, ideology and even sovereignty.⁷⁴ As a mechanism of homogeneity, a rental contract would, thus, symbolically offer the most effective means of sterilizing this resistance, because the project would no longer be contesting state law, and therefore no longer remain radically heterogeneous, “wholly other” and “set apart” from profane society. Interpreting the situation in this way allows one to understand the symbolic strategy of state policy at the time.

To briefly summarize the contract negotiations: in October 2000, the Senate invited the Flora group to meet for discussions and offered a tentative contract. In contrast to the thwarted contract offered in 1992, which reduced the group to two rooms and would install a kindergarten upstairs, the new contract was relatively generous. At 1000 DM monthly, the rent was very low compared to the neighborhood average, and the promised 400,000 DM renovation budget to bring the building up to fire code was more than the building would eventually sell for.⁷⁵ It also did not include the caveats faced by a similar project only a few kilometers away on the *Hafenstraße* in 1986, whereby any misdemeanor by any member (such as shoplifting) would lead to a nullification of the entire rental contract.⁷⁶ Moreover, fire safety upgrades were urgently needed in a building that had almost burned to the ground in November 1995. Overall, although the contract came from a state policy intended to pacify Left-wing unrest, the terms of the contract were surprisingly fair considering the pressure on the Senate from Schill’s rightwing populists. To many at the time it seemed that this offer could finally offer a resolution to the long-standing dispute. Many therefore found it difficult to understand why the activists would even consider refusing a legal claim to their occupied space, especially given the numerous private investors who had expressed public interest in the building, as well as the rapidly increasing value of the land. In contrast, the

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²In principle, the Flora group is organized horizontally, with occasional media spokespeople nominated when needed. However, having been present since the original occupation, Blechschmidt has emerged as unofficial speaker whose voice carries more weight than any others. For example, no other interviews or access to restricted archival documents were granted to me until he personally gave written approval. On the unofficial “credibility” of such leadership roles in Autonomous groups see Kadir.

⁷³Andreas, Interview, 17 February 2016.

⁷⁴See Jones, “Spatial Sovereignities”.

⁷⁵“Rote Flora: Vertrag liegt vor. Abriss oder Erhalt?” Archival Source

⁷⁶von Appen, “Fast wie noch Tarif”, Archival Source.

standoff between municipal authorities and squatters in Berlin's *Kreuzberg* had concluded with 124 rental contracts by 1984, and Hamburg's *Hafenstraße*, which faced significantly greater physical violence in 1987 had nonetheless eventually also accepted a contract.

Admittedly, as unofficial speaker Blechschmidt recalls, the group was deeply divided on the issue, with many fearing that the refusal of a contract would sacrifice the physical space of the building entirely. Many within the Flora community, including one of the longest serving plenary body members Hans-Martin, believed that the contract was their best option.⁷⁷ However, others, such as Linus, who participated in the negotiations at that time explained:

Sometimes you have to risk the Flora itself to achieve what the Flora is about: resistance. If the building is lost, fine. You know, we risked it. But at least we fought for the meaning of the space rather than losing it by trying to keep it.⁷⁸

Although many argued that they would lose the Flora if they did not accept a contract, the majority of the plenum interpreted the very idea as a homogeneous assault upon their values, principles, and ideological identity. To enter a contract with the state would essentially desecrate the meaning of the space as squatted – and thus outside of the law and resistant to homogeneous societal and capitalist values and structures. They believed that only by remaining outside of civil society and the social contract would they retain the freedom not only to live differently in a self-governed sacred space, but also to remain able to provoke “ruptures in the dominant prevailing political order.”⁷⁹ To be occupied in direct rejection of and contrast to the external profane world, then, was the inherent meaning of the Flora: a sacred space set apart from and non-negotiable with homogeneous capitalist civil society. To negotiate with the state would be to allow profane influences to desecrate this radical alterity, a concept that had been formulated as early as 1981 in the Autonomous theses: “We do not engage in dialogue with rulers, because that is the first step toward integration.”⁸⁰ This “integration” was the chief threat to the squatted space, as to engage in any sort of negotiation or contract with the profane world would desecrate the space, and rob it of its heterogeneous emancipatory potential as “holy and set apart.” Therefore, in February 2001, after two intense months of internal debate, the plenum voted by more than 75 per cent to refuse any contract, as well as any negotiation with the state.⁸¹ They decided that: “By refusing to negotiate a contract, we were able to publicly send a clear signal against this strategy of integration.”⁸² The sacred space of the Flora was *Unverträglich* – non-negotiable/unassimilable/non-contractable – and would remain so, even if thereby inviting the risk of destruction.

However, the Senate did not actually want to risk the violence and riots that would inevitably accompany any eviction attempt. When the Flora plenum effectively called their bluff, a solution was found that would acquiesce to the autonomist demands to remain un-contractual, without also incurring the political pressure to pacify the

⁷⁷Gruppe-*rage*, “Die Flora muss rot bleiben”, Archival Source.

⁷⁸Linus, Interview, 7 December 2015.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰“Thesen zur Autonomen Bewegung”, # 2, 1994, Berlin Autonomie Kongress.

⁸¹“Rote Flora privatisiert”, Archival Source.

⁸²“Flora bleibt unverträglich!”, Archival Source.

threatening heterogeneous space of alterity. Therefore, in March 2001 the new coalition government, (including 19.4 per cent of Schill's Right-wing Populist Party), promptly sold the building to Klausmartin Kretschmer, a land speculator, investor, and a "close friend of the culture senator"⁸³ for 370,000 DM, (significantly less than the one million DM the state bought it for in 1977).⁸⁴ The contract included a clause in the sale that the land could not be sold for ten years, must be used as a cultural center during that time, and that the state had veto power over any sale for a decade. Kretschmer, referring to the investment as an "adventure," seemed content to leave the land to accrue value over the next ten years, with the Flora group belligerently remaining inside. The state could thus claim that the privately owned site was beyond their remit, while the autonomists were able to continue their refusal of profane society in an illegally occupied (albeit tolerated) left-radical sacred space. This uneasy peace continued until 2013, when Kretschmer began to agitate for a sale price of 5 million Euros, with threats to sell the building to an arms dealer if the state did not comply.⁸⁵ This provoked an increasingly violent outpouring of left-radical response, which escalated until the state suspended civil liberties in a state of exception (*Gefahrengebiet*) encompassing the Schanzenviertel and two neighboring districts.⁸⁶ In terms of the Flora members themselves, on 21 December 2013 around 10,000 people, including a 4,700 person militant black bloc, marched in protest. This demonstration notably included what was affectionately termed a "grey bloc" contingent made up of many of the original squatters and activists from 1989 – most of whom were now in their 50s, with careers, families, and reputations, to worry about. Their return to the streets after so many decades points to the enduring legacy of the Flora, and its continued political meaning for those subjectivities forged in its space.

This story ends in 2015, when a political sleight of hand allowed the state to seize the building and transfer ownership to an independent charitable foundation, thus securing the Flora's right to remain an unassimilable pocket of left-radical sacredness, rife with contradictions, contestations, and the defiant refusal of profane homogeneity. Today, the *Schanzenviertel* is no longer the idealized working-class ghetto of the 1980s, where students helped the elderly get their groceries, and spaces could be carved out and held as radical temples to stave off the impending neoliberal colonization of everyday life. Yet amidst the overpriced glamor of expensive cafes and rampant gentrification, the Flora still remains: a gaping heterogeneous left-sacred eyesore determined to hold out despite all odds. Perhaps the Flora, like the autonomists, has become a relic of the past. However, as a *sacred* relic the space retains its power, attesting to over three decades of remaining wholly other, against all odds: a temple to a prior world where "a better world" might still just be possible, if only one could keep the faith.

Conclusion: a political theology of the left-radical subject

This paper has proposed a particular political theology – not of societies or organized religious groups – but rather of hyper-individual subjects and micro-societies in left-

⁸³"Das Phantom der Roten Flora", Archival Source.

⁸⁴"So rechnet sich die Stadt jeden Preis hin", Hamburg Morgenpost, 21 March 2001, p.13.

⁸⁵Der Spiegel, Rote Flora Bleibt Kulturzentrum, 18 Jan 2014.

⁸⁶Gefahrengebiet translates literally to a dangerzone, or state of exception, as in Agamben/Schmitt's sense. See Jones, "Spatial Sovereignities".

radical spaces. It has taken Bataille's left-sacred and applied it to the practices of the radical-Left in squatted spaces. By applying the lens of left-sacredness to autonomists in the squatted Rote Flora, the seemingly anti-logical history of (often violently) defending a dilapidated squat, while simultaneously refusing the offer to continue holding it indefinitely, becomes easier to understand. Despite typical difficulties with understanding such a secretive fringe milieu, Bataille's model of remaining heterogeneous – in terms of being “wholly other” and “set apart” from profane homogeneous capitalist contamination – actually allows us to understand autonomist actions as stemming from purity concerns regarding their selves and their space. Such anti-profane identities were grounded in what Eliade calls an “orientation point,”⁸⁷ and while squats are seemingly the last place one would expect to find a temple, a political theology of the radical subject in squatted sacred space offers an incredibly fruitful lens by which these elusive, “non-negotiable” and “wholly other” purists can nonetheless begin to be understood.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dr Ali Jones is an Assistant Professor of Politics at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations in Coventry. She researches protest, contentious politics, and political violence in Germany.

ORCID

Ali Jones  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0018-0681>

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⁸⁷Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22–24.

⁸⁸Photo by Author, 2015.

⁸⁹Photo credit to Alex Blecher, reproduced under Creative Commons license.

⁹⁰Photo by Author, 2022.

⁹¹Ibid.

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