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# Spatial Sovereignities in Squatted “Excess Spaces”

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**Abstract:** This paper proposes the concept of “spatial sovereignities” to understand the governance of squatted spaces, using the case study of Hamburg’s autonomous Rote Flora. Referring very loosely to theories of the “excess flesh” of the *homo sacer* in the state of exception, the paper then inverts these classic theories by instead interrogating a situation where non-state actors establish their own states of banishment and political exception. These “excess spaces” are not created when the “excess flesh” of the banned subject is stripped of sovereignty, but rather when radical actors, possessing full agency and privilege, intentionally establish their own biopolitical self-administration. This ultimately constitutes what I posit as a new form of “spatial sovereignty”, wherein self-banned subjects refuse the social contract to instead carve out alternative forms of sovereignty grounded in squatted excess spaces, which ultimately also develop autonomous forms of self-governance, justice, and self-surveillance within sites of alternative citizenship.

**Zusammenfassung:** In diesem Beitrag wird das Konzept der „Spatial Sovereignty“ („räumlichen Souveränität“) vorgeschlagen, um die Governance besetzter Räume anhand des Fallbeispiels der autonomen Roten Flora in Hamburg zu verstehen. In Anlehnung an die Theorien des „Excess Flesh“ des *homo sacer* im Ausnahmezustand werden diese klassischen Theorien umgedreht und stattdessen auf eine Situation angewendet, in der nicht-staatliche Akteure ihre eigenen Bedingungen der „Verbannung“ und der politischen Ausnahme gestalten. Diese „Excess Spaces“ („Räume des Exzesses“) entstehen nicht, wenn das „Excess Flesh“ des verbannten Subjekts seiner Souveränität beraubt wird, sondern wenn radikale Akteure mit voller Handlungsfähigkeit und Privilegien bewusst ihre eigene biopolitische Selbstregierung etablieren. Dadurch wird letztlich konstituiert, was ich als eine neue Form Spatial Sovereignty („räumlicher Souveränität“) betrachte; eine Souveränität, in der sich selbst verbannte Subjekte dem Gesellschaftsvertrag verweigern, um stattdessen alternative Formen der Souveränität zu schaffen, die in besetzten „Excess Spaces“ begründet sind, die schließlich auch autonome Formen der Selbstverwaltung, der Gerechtigkeit und der Selbstüberwachung innerhalb von Orten alternativer Bürgerschaft entwickeln.

**Keywords:** Autonomie, squatting, sovereignty, Rote Flora, space

## Introduction

In its three decades of occupation, the squatted Rote Flora (Red Flora) culture centre has become the symbolic heart of radicalism in Hamburg, and an ideological icon for the contemporary European radical Left. An urban restructuring campaign lies at the heart of the Flora’s history, and this paper argues that the contestation of this (re)structural violence functioned as the orientation point for

a new form of radical political identity grounded in a segregated space.<sup>1</sup> The squat also became foundational for autonomous political self-determined identity and self-governance in Hamburg, and was thus not only carved out from state purview, but also violently defended as such. In order to understand the vehemence with which this space was guarded, this paper proposes that the squat can be read as a micro-sphere of political sovereignty, governed as it was by an alternative social contract, but not necessarily as a “free space”. To understand the difference, in this paper I propose the concept of “spatial sovereignty” in “excess space”, which is inspired loosely by Agamben’s, Schmitt’s, and Santner’s now-classical discussions of banned “excess flesh” in the state of exception. Using these works only as a jumping-off point to craft a distinct and sorely needed theoretical lens for understanding squats, I *invert* the idea of the exception to examine how it functions when wielded by people claiming sovereign power for themselves. After examining the processes of biopolitical self-administration that such an autonomist self-governing centre soon germinated, I argue that this squatted space ultimately constitutes a unique form of political spatial sovereignty grounded in what I will define as an “excess space”.<sup>2</sup>

## Rote Flora Case Study: Urban Redevelopment as Structural Violence

The squatted Rote Flora in Hamburg’s Schanzenviertel neighbourhood originated in 1987 when producer Friedrich Kurz of the Stella-GmbH group planned to turn the 1835-built “Flora” theatre in Hamburg into the site for a production of the *Phantom of the Opera* musical. The Hamburg senate were in favour, as they planned to redevelop and gentrify the low-income neighbourhood, known as the Schanzenviertel,<sup>3</sup> and had already published plans to create a “high culture” entertainment district to attract wealthier Silicon Valley types to settle in the area (WIS 1987). Elliot-Cooper et al. (2020) refer to the violence of such displacement processes as “unhoming”, which is a form of structural violence targeting lower-class residents, in contrast to the “displacement” faced by middle classes (Slater 2009). In 1988, Mayors von Münch and Voscherau had already acknowledged fears that residents would be redeveloped out of/sanitised from (*heraussaniert*) their homes, but promised this was not the case.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the head of the Basic Planning Issues Department of the Hamburg Building Authority had written as early as 1973 that the restructuring plans would necessarily entail relocating “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 (Lindemann 1973). That urban restructuring programmes are a mechanism forcing working-class people out of their homes has been recognised since Engels’ *The Housing Question* (1975 [1872]). Since then, the connection between such ruptures and state structural violence has been clearly articulated, with Elliot-Cooper et al. (2020) offering one of many literature reviews tracing the varied avenues of harm inherent to forcing people from their homes and support systems. In the Schanzenviertel, these close-knit networks were especially prevalent in the community, and even the

Hamburg Senator for City Development Traute Müller acknowledged the 0.47 km<sup>2</sup> neighbourhood was “absolutely not suited” for such a gentrification initiative (Interview, Müller, 14 August 2016, Hamburg).<sup>5</sup> Due to the low cost of rent and its alternative demographic, it had become what district office employee Heinz Evers called an “interesting niche for students, for young people, for creative people, and for migrants [who] settled in these areas” (Interview, Heinz Evers, 24 November 2017, Hamburg). This low-income, working-class area had also developed a unique sense of solidarity and identity grounded in the space and community, for example with younger neighbours helping the elderly with groceries (Interview, Anna, 21 September 2016, Hamburg). Consequently, the “root shock” or violent trauma (Fullilove 2016) of their rehoming would leave many of the residents unable to live elsewhere independently. This paper will therefore read the redevelopment campaign as a form of “(re)structural” violence against low-income residents.

Autonomist activists also lived in the area, attracted by cheap rent and the areas’ political consciousness,<sup>6</sup> and were acutely politicised to the injustice of the restructuring campaign. *Autonomie* is a contentious, radical Left political milieu that began to loosely coalesce in the late 1970s, inspired by echoes of 1968 and Italian workerist *Autonomia* and *Operaismo*. Many members emerged from the “Sponti” movement in the 1970s, who were themselves influenced by Henri Lefebvre’s “autogestion”, the Situationist International, and Dadaism, and sought to create spontaneous antiauthoritarian movements in everyday life.<sup>7</sup> In response to the perceived Stalinism of the Red Army Faction (RAF)<sup>8</sup>, and especially after the lethal climax of the 1977 German Autumn, the radical Left sought new avenues for political existence that could bypass the seeming stalemate of armed guerilla attacks, the dogmatic control of communism, or ascending neoliberal economic reordering. As one autonomist explains in 1983:

*Autonomie* was a term that, overnight, so to speak, brought our revolt together under one name. Imported from Italy and introduced to the scene via the *Autonomie* theses, it soon came to represent everything that was good and holy to us, and still is. Before, we saw ourselves as anarchists, Spontis, communists, or had diffuse, individual ideas of a liberated life. Then we all became autonomists.<sup>9</sup>

The author refers to the 1981 “theses”, which outlined the movement’s beliefs not in the overthrow of state systems or communist revolution, but rather emphasised self-determined and self-governed individual spaces, practices, and subjectivities outside of state control.<sup>10</sup> In interviews conducted by the author between 2011 and 2023 with 45 autonomists active in the Flora milieu,<sup>11</sup> most referred to these theses when they defined *Autonomie* as the attempt to self-determine and self-govern one’s own life, and to create and defend spaces that allowed them to do so via refusing the social contract, the rule of law, and the state monopoly on violence. Note that these are also three fundamental elements of state sovereignty, which this paper will return to shortly.

It is also important to explain here that the first generation of *Autonomie* reached its highpoint between 1979 and 1984, with a wave of 287 squatted houses across Berlin. Vasudevan (2015) traces this squatting wave in great detail

and explains that most houses were cleared by the police or had signed rental contracts by 1985. During that early/mid 1980s period, autonomists could stereotypically be identified as the balaclava-clad “black bloc” forming the hard “inner core” of a march. As these masses dwindled, some might argue that 1989 marked a profound moment of defeat for the radical Left. However, such a simplistic critique neglects the reality that, a decade later and 300 km away in another city, state, and post Cold-War, *Autonomie* in Hamburg was not the same political movement as that practised earlier in Berlin. As Leach (2009) explains, *Autonomie* has survived by redefining itself with every generation. While the Berlin squats were primarily about housing, the Rote Flora in Hamburg was an uninhabited culture centre. At least a decade younger than those in Berlin, the Flora activists were two political generations later, and had very different priorities. In an interview, autonomist Anna, who was part of the group occupying the Flora in 1989 and served on the plenary body thereafter, joked that the Flora squatters were “like the little sisters and brothers” of the older 1980s activists (Interview, Anna, 21 September 2016, Hamburg). This generational progression does not imply that the Hamburg squat was more political than those in Berlin, but rather that this generation were interested in different forms of politics. Particularly, Flora activists emphasised the self-determined biopolitical administration of themselves in a wider community and culture to a different degree than had been practised in the housing struggles of the 1980s. This focus on the self-administration of their bodies, actions, speech, and even thoughts took political self-determination to a more extreme biopolitical level, but this change does not thereby discount the politics of their predecessors in the 1980s. Other differences must also be noted: despite operating a culture centre that was, in many ways, more open about its ideology than an occupied private flat, the Flora autonomists nonetheless had largely given up on the idea of affecting or even communicating any real societal impact. For example, they were scarcely concerned with (and perhaps not capable of producing) the sheer threatening potential for violence found only a few years early in the 1987 Hafensstraße street violence,<sup>12</sup> or in the threatening symbolism of the ominous black bloc that Manrique (1992) emphasised. I argue that they instead “turned-inward” (Jones 2018b) toward creating and maintaining a radically distinct political identity grounded in a segregated space that, as this paper will argue, functioned as an alternative form of sovereignty. It is this post-1989 rendition of *Autonomie* that this paper investigates using the case study of Hamburg’s Rote Flora.

Before abandoning “external society” in favour of their self-determined realm, however, they at first attempted more traditional methods of resistance. In 1988, Hamburg citizens formed the Residents Initiative Group, while activists registered in parallel as the incorporated (e.V.) entity Flora Group Inc. These groups collaborated to organise protests against the restructuring campaign under the banner “organise the resistance in your neighbourhood!” Demanding a place not for “high culture” elites, but rather a space for “culture from below” for existing residents in the neighbourhood, they planned numerous peaceful marches and petitions against the gentrification plans. Eventually, on 18 March 1988, 250 residents were invited to a public forum to discuss their worries. However,

representatives of the Altona district responsible for the Flora were not present. Administrators from the neighbouring districts were unable to answer any questions about the building site, as it was outside of their jurisdiction, and, according to residents, did not bring even basic information or figures with them. Residents reported that they felt the event was a “farce” (Schanzenleben 1988a). This sense of disillusionment was not new, but rather only one more instance of a deep sense of distrust in a state that many felt was still corrupted by the legacy of National Socialism (see Jones 2018b; Siegfried 2005). One month later, on 20 April, the Rote Flora Group were invited to present their own proposal for an alternative use of the theatre as a culture centre (Flora Gruppe 1988). However, the state senate had actually already signed a building contract with the Stella Group the day before, and 24 hours later demolition began on the old building under heavy police protection, destroying all but the former entrance hall and façade (Schanzenleben 1988b). 150 people had marched to try to stop the destruction of most of the building but were beaten back by police.

Given this timeline, it is understandable that those involved interpreted the consultations as merely a deceptive public relations front, and just one more instance of the “democratic deficit” that Norris (2011) identifies as leading to “disengagement” (Sloam 2013) or political “apathy” (Furedi 2005), or what I refer to as “bureaucratic nihilism” (Jones 2018c). However, acting with the agency and privilege of idealistic middle-class white activists, the autonomists instead turned to an active form of “antipolitics” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) that reenacted politics in alternative, do-it-yourself radical forms (Barrett 2013). They argued that the “displacement” and “unhoming” of urban redevelopment indicated the (re)structural violence of a state with little interest in the needs or voices of residents, which nullified that state’s democratic legitimacy in their eyes. Despite class and ideological differences, many residents agreed, and one told a district newspaper reporter that peaceful methods were no longer working, and that instead “maybe we have to resort to some more radical means” (Schanzenleben 1988c). In interviews, autonomists stressed that the state had lost its claim to the monopoly on violence (Interview, Josef, 21 November 2016, Hamburg), and that its (re)structural violence could only be answered with counter-violence, as peaceful methods were not being “heard” (Interview, Anna, 21 September 2016, Hamburg). For the Flora Group, this meant continual nightly acts of sabotage against the building site, until city police became exhausted at diverting all their manpower to guard the half-destroyed shell and began to protest themselves, in some cases helping the citizens’ initiative to distribute flyers against the development (Interview, Watrin, 10 February 2016, Hamburg). Eventually, the production company decided that the development would never be feasible amidst such resistance, and the musical was moved to a new location. The Flora Group were granted the right to use the half-destroyed building for a neighbourhood culture centre for a six-week trial period. When the lease expired on 1 November 1989, they declared the building squatted. When interviewed, the squatters admit that they never expected the occupation to last, and nightly patrols were organised to alert the others—who were sleeping upstairs in shifts—when the police inevitably arrived to evict them (Interview, Pia, 27 September 2016, Hamburg). However, they

never did. The political context then drastically altered eight days later when the Berlin Wall fell. Amidst the resultant national turbulence state officials were overwhelmed, for example by thousands of East German citizens arriving to claim their promised resettlement money (Interview, H.P. Strenge, 9 August 2016, Hamburg). In the context of this turmoil the squat slipped from the political radar (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg). Subsequent follow-up attempts to secure the space through rental contracts failed in 1992 due to unrelated political scandals. District Manager Strenge was also amenable to alternative uses for the space, believed that “we have enough glamour culture already in Hamburg” and that alternative cultures should also be given a chance (Interview, H.P. Strenge, 9 August 2016, Hamburg). Finally, the state also feared the physical and political damage from the riots that erupted whenever police sought to enter the building, and so the squat simply remained (Jones 2018c).

### Spatial Sovereignty

While the Berlin squatting wave has been detailed by geographers (Vasudevan 2015, 2017), the space of the Flora itself has not been examined, nor has scholarship sought to investigate the philosophy of how a 1990s form of *Autonomie* functions within/against political theory as a form of radical Left “antipolitics”. To offer this potentially fruitful avenue of analysis, I juxtapose a spatial understanding of the squatted Flora against classical theories of political sovereignty. To very briefly summarise, canonical scholars such as Schmitt (1985:6–7) emphasise that “it is precisely the exception that makes relevant the subject of sovereignty”. Agamben (1998:15) clarifies this inclusion/exclusion by explaining that the “paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the judicial order”, and is therefore the one who is both bound by the law, but paradoxically can choose to suspend it. He adds that the sovereign is the one who can exclude bodies from states, and thus statehood itself, effectively reducing them into what Santner (2011) calls merely bits of “excess flesh”, which are “banned” from citizenship, or “abandoned” in Nancy’s (1993) words as only so much “bare life”, in Agamben’s (1998) classic term. However, while these canonical theories are very useful for understanding banned flesh or bare life in camps, they are less applicable to spaces intended to be emancipatory.<sup>13</sup> Neither do they account well enough for the form of “affirmative biopolitics” (Nabi 2024) practised by radical political movements who seek to administer their lives and bodies “from below”. This article therefore wishes to use these canonical theories *only* as a jumping-off point in order to propose a distinct theoretical avenue applicable to squatted spaces.

Rather than further exploring or simply applying these theories to yet another case study, this paper wishes to instead *invert* them, in the interest of offering an alternative mechanism for analysing squats and sovereign spaces. It therefore investigates a historical example when a state could not excrete or “ban” people into bare life using (re)structural violence, because those agents pushed back against and instead “banned” the sovereign from their own space and processes of political subjectivity and self-formation. By refusing the application of external



governance, the activists claimed and created their own form of radical subjectivity via the act of administering themselves biopolitically “from below”, as this paper will examine in the following sections. The Rote Flora thus offers a particularly poignant example of what I call spatial sovereignty, claimed by a group of citizens—possessing full privilege and agency—who chose to refuse the social contract as they felt it was nullified by the (re)structural violence of a state planning to ban “undesirable” people from their homes. Instead, they pushed back spatially to establish a micro-polis of independent political sovereignty, even if only the size of one building. This space was not a “destituent power” (Agamben 2014), as it remained constituted by a form of self-administration that recreated power structures, but it does pose an alternative form of constituent power that is nonetheless of enormous interest. It is this space—outside of external state sovereignty yet not excreted by it—that this paper proposes as the concept of excess space, which riffs off of but also inverts Santner’s “excess flesh” stripped of rights and citizenship and excreted or abandoned into Agamben’s camp of exception. This paper traces this process of claiming, defending, and governing this concept of spatial sovereignty in excess spaces within the historical case study of the Rote Flora.

## Free Spaces and Excess Spaces

At the time of its occupation in 1989, the physical and symbolic space of the squat was intended to be a “Free Space” (*Freiraum*)—which was actually a relatively common concept in social and protest movements during the 1980s and 1990s. Sarah Evans (1972) coined the term when explaining women’s liberation attempts in the civil rights movement, and some of the first German squats were actually occupied by women in order to create a space free from patriarchy, sexism, and the machismo of male activists. Leach and Haunss (2009) build on this work by pointing to the wide relevance and long history of the concept by surveying the wide range of conceptual approaches to these “intermediary spaces”, which have been referred to as networks, institutions, subcultures, communities, cultural havens, safe spaces, amongst many other terms.<sup>13</sup> Polletta’s (1999) article “Free spaces” explains how such sites became the foundation for prefigurative identity construction. However, as Polletta herself points out, this term has become so ubiquitous that it can encompass almost any space, including, according to Fantasia and Hirsch (1995:146), “block clubs, tenant associations, bars, union halls ... student lounges and hangouts”. Polletta points out that some scholars define free spaces as being a “physical space” (Evans and Boyte 1986) whereas others define them as existing in linguistic codes and language (Scott 1990), or even cyberspace (Gamson 1996).

While all these spaces are likely a version of free, I strike a nuance here between free spaces and the radical sovereignty of excess spaces. While some squats might offer spaces to live as one chooses, not all free spaces create an alternate (and often rigid) counter-hegemonic society that claims sovereign power and wields biopolitical self-administration.<sup>14</sup> Interviews with participants from 1999 demonstrate how this differed from merely “free” space, with one participant explaining:



“no, living ‘free’ is not the right word ... rather it’s about self-governing one’s own life”.<sup>15</sup> Most remained highly critical of the idea of “free space”, and the unofficial former speaker of the Flora responded to an interview question about whether the Flora was a free space by asking: “Free space—free *from what?* We are not a free space!” Andreas went on to explain that:

... it *should* be a free space, or at least an offering of possibilities. These possibilities can be achieved here with fewer constraints than in state centres, at university or elsewhere. An autonomous free space that tries to open up certain possibilities for people who can try them out or realise them without economic exploitation and constraints. (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg)

Hans-Martin, active in the squat since the beginning, clarifies this by explaining that the “term ‘free space’ is difficult because there is no such thing” (Interview, Hans-Martin, 27 December 2016, Hamburg). For both, the space is not the utopian “freedom” to simply do anything, but an opening of possibilities with less “economic exploitation and constraints”, albeit still absolutely subject to internal ones. As Andreas explains:

... we also are subject to a certain form of constraint. We have to regulate and finance the operating costs. We have to ensure the maintenance of the building. We can’t just organise events with free entry and alcohol at cost price. (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg)

The role of these “constraints”—which both Andreas and Hans-Martin acknowledge are self-inflicted—is what distinguishes this space from the “free spaces” attempted by movements in the 1980s (although with the caveat that these ideals might never have actually been fully achieved either). Initial documentation reflects this utopian ideal, with the 1988 “Use Concept” referring to the space as a “free space” but also the “offering of possibilities” Andreas mentions—a site where creative, spontaneous possibilities have the opportunity to emerge (Flora Gruppe 1988). However, by the second version of this official “Use Concept” four years later in 1992, the space was not described as “utopian” or “free”, but rather as “the attempt to build structures that are free of hegemony, self-governed, and collective” (Flora Gruppe 1992). The shift in emphasis from utopian freedom to a space of collective structures and governance demonstrates the crucial difference between this squat and the understanding of earlier, potentially “free” spaces. Indeed, the issues of self-administration occupied much of the community’s time, as well as their written documents and oral histories. Interviewees in 1999, and again from 2011 to 2023, stress the often-tedious nature of managing a functioning culture centre. This encompassed scandals over sexism in the mid-1990s (Jones 2018a), a debate over whether to contest structural racism against dealers (most of whom were refugees or migrants), debates over whether to allow alcohol in the originally drug- and alcohol-free space (Jones 2018c), or simply sorting out entrance rates for concerts or the price of drinks in a space meant to be free from economic exchange. All of these issues were discussed, debated, and legislated within sovereign a micro-structure that eschewed the legal, justice, and administrative structures of external society. What Blechschmidt (2009) compares

to daily negotiations between old roommates about who would wash the dishes seems a far cry from the limitless possibilities of creativity promised by some of the literature on free spaces, despite the fact that both emerge from a radical Left politics. Therefore, rather than the freedom of a free space, this paper uses the lens of an excess space in order to emphasise the self-governance and self-administration of structures in the centre, and, as will be discussed shortly, ultimately upon the bodies of participants themselves.

## Illegal Spaces and Law-Free Spaces

Mainstream media and politicians often referred to the squat pejoratively as a *Rechtsfreier Raum*, which connotes a “legal vacuum”, or literally a “law-free space”. However, the squat was in fact quite the opposite of the lawless chaos and anarchy presented by the tabloids. Instead, within a few years it developed into a micro-polis—self-determined and self-governed by radical versions of justice, law, and expected behaviour, with a possibly overly-adamant internal organisational structure (Haunss 2000). This in fact developed to the extent that the plenary body was accused of becoming a communist politburo-style central committee (*Zentralkomitee*). Such conflicts escalated to the extent that in 1995, six years after occupation, the entire plenary body abruptly resigned amidst this widespread critique (Zeck 1995). Such structures may have operated independently from societal legal frameworks, but they operated nonetheless. This will be examined further below, but as one example, there were group mechanisms of visceral punishment against men accused of sexual misconduct, which were self-regulated and imposed by the movement rather than by any external police involvement. In fact, many aspects of this self-governance became hyper-acute, with members feeling “pushed to their very limits” in terms of self-surveillance and the expectations of being a “perfect revolutionary subject all the time”,<sup>16</sup> as has been analysed in length elsewhere (Jones 2018b). What is important to note here is that rather than being a lawless legal vacuum, the squat was in fact a highly organised micro-society, with alternate versions of justice, norms, and behaviour. These features, grounded in the space of the squat, indicate that this was not merely a “free space”, but rather a well-ordered, albeit radical, alternate form of sovereignty.

This distinction was clearly manifested in actual concrete space, and the building exhibited borders that were physically and symbolically defended as sovereign. For example, inside the front doors of the building was a painted mural declaring “Welcome to *our* Europe. *These* are *our* borders” (see Figure 1).

The declaration of a national border at the door of a dilapidated squat may seem ostentatious, but it actually indicates the vehemence with which the site was considered to be distinct from the geographic and spatial purview of the state. The importance of this demarcation was demonstrated by the case of a forced police entry and search on 6 July 2008 (Zeck 2008b). This transpired when a woman was attacked on the street, several members of the Flora group ran out to help her and allowed her to take shelter in the building. However, when police arrived, they took the opportunity to force entry to the building, using water



**Figure 1:** “Our Borders”—the Flora front entrance, photographed from the inside in 2015, declares a border between the squat and the rest of Europe (photo by author, 2015)

cannons to break down a door, arrest 13 people who were in the building, and search every room (ibid.). According to a press release, the Flora’s lawyer was outside of the building by 6:30am to represent his client, but he was ignored by the police, who broke down doors in order to search locked rooms (Zeck 2008a). Critical to this incident is the press release in which the group describes the search as a border violation of their space (Flora Plenary 2008). The seriousness of this transgression can be understood by the fact that it 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 (Zeck 2008b). These responses indicate the importance that was attributed to the sovereign nature of the space, as well as the radical identities grounded in it.

For this reason, the site of the space had to remain a resistant exception to state sovereignty. It was therefore imperative that the squat remained illegally squatted, for only then could it push against state power while also carving out a

paradoxical site within/outside of it. This is demonstrated by the heated debate when offered a very lenient rental contract for continued, legal use of the space, which the group nonetheless ultimately refused. The plenary body argued that:

The occupied status of the Flora offers possibilities and strategies that would otherwise be impossible due to legal and economic constraints. In addition, it multiplies opportunities to repeatedly transgress the current political rules of the game and to produce ruptures in the dominant prevailing political order. (Zeck 2001)

To enter a contract would therefore not only undermine the sovereignty of the squat, but also prevent the radical nature of that space from critiquing, transgressing, and attempting to subvert “the dominant prevailing political order”. Furthermore, it would be impossible to negotiate with a state from a position of weakness, as to sign a contract would mean acknowledging the power structures of the state, and thereby enter into them as a subordinate. Instead, the only option to be taken seriously in this context was to speak as one sovereign to another, as will be discussed shortly. Spatially, this meant that the Flora had to remain not only illegally occupied, but also in the paradoxical zone of inclusion/exclusion to the state in order to retain its political identity. The building’s location in the heart of the rapidly gentrifying Schanzenviertel neighbourhood maintained a spatial contestation of neoliberal city restructuring precisely *via* juxtaposition.<sup>17</sup> In other words, it was only by refusing state sovereignty *inside* of the physical limits of the city that the squat could offer an exclusion and exception *outside* of city sovereignty. Just as the sovereign is defined as that which is simultaneously outside the law and yet bound by it, the state of excess space could only be created by pushing back against the state, while remaining tied to it via that resistance. As a spatial state of exception, the building was both bound by rejection of the state and yet outside of its control: a “law-free space” determined by its refusal of that same law, effectively making it sovereign.

It is important to note that what makes this space “excess” rather than simply “illegally occupied” in fact points to the key distinction between this theory of excess sovereign spaces versus Schmitt’s states of exception. An *illegal* space is judged according to the rules of the state sovereign, who decides what is legal or not. Even a state of exception would remain tied to the sovereign, who, as Agamben (1998) tells us, is bound to the law by the paradox of being able to choose to suspend it. In that sense, refusing to obey the law of a state still implies a connection to that state, making the state of exception nonetheless part of the state one is being pushed out of and judged (as illegal) by. Those bodies banned from the state are given or denied agency by that state that nonetheless controls their fate, even in choosing to ban them into a state of exception. Even illegal spaces are still tied to the law of the state. In contrast, an *excess* space is not a state of exception, in the sense of a state sovereign choosing whether or not to suspend a law or strip a body’s agency by pushing it into a camp.<sup>18</sup> Instead, excess spaces claim their own sovereignty via assuming the role of the state themselves. This stance was made possible by the (re)structural violence that effectively nullified the social contract, allowing autonomists to declare their own sovereign space, in which one is not illegal or legal according to state definitions, but rather subject

to a different power of self-governance. As will be explained in the following section, this is not necessarily emancipatory, but is still a form of “biopolitics from below”. As Foucault (1978) famously explains, biopolitics<sup>19</sup>—or the administration of life—is the fundamental task of the modern sovereign, and a self-administration of this life “from below” would therefore allow those in these excess spaces to claim sovereign power and wield it upon themselves. This squatted space can therefore be defined as sovereign with its own biopolitical structures. It is this space—outside of traditional state sovereignty yet not excreted by it, and self-administered by bodies claiming the power to ban states and govern themselves and their bodies—that this paper proposes as the concept of “excess space”. These excess spaces offer a physical orientation point for the spatial sovereignty that activists claimed and self-imposed when they *replaced* three of the most fundamental tenets of the social contract: (i) the state monopoly on violence and the rule of law; (ii) peaceful discourse in the public sphere; and (iii) biopolitical self-administration of subjects, to which this paper will now turn.

### ***The State Monopoly on Violence***

The concept of spatial sovereignty is perhaps best elucidated in terms of claiming the state monopoly on violence. Classic democratic theory often invokes Hobbes’ state of nature, in which inherent societal violence can only be replaced by the Lockean social contract. A population sacrifices their right to use violence to a sovereign power, who thereafter provides the protection of a state and the rule of law, but in exchange for exclusively holding the right to wield violence. Most democracies are founded upon this monopoly, with all other forms of violence (at least in theory) liable to be charged as criminal and punished by the state. What is striking about the Flora group is not only their refusal of this monopoly by the state, but in fact their claim to the right of its execution themselves. Autonomists believe that their use of violent *Militanz* (“militancy”) is distinct from mere violence, which they believe to be unjust (Jones 2018b). Instead, every autonomist interviewed for this study agreed with former unofficial spokesperson Andreas’ definition of *Militanz* as “violence that is morally righteous” (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg). Autonomous *Militanz* is usually only permissible as self-defence (*Selbstverteidigung*) and counter-violence (*Gegengewalt*) against structural, physical, or other forms of violence.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, it can be used for what they deem to be righteous causes, such as hindering neo-Nazis (Interview, Hans-Martin, 27 December 2016, Hamburg) or interrupting violent attacks on refugees, as in the series of pogroms (1992–1995) in former East Germany.

Throughout the history of the Flora, the vehement, potentially violent defence of the space (or more precisely, of its meaning) was deemed similarly justified. As squatter Blechschmidt (2009) writes, when the space is threatened, “the state’s monopoly on violence is deliberately and willingly put into question in order to make an eviction too costly to attempt”. Furthermore, the autonomists in the Flora argue that state (re)structural violence nullifies the state monopoly on violence, as the state no longer wields violence to protect citizens, but rather against them. In this case study, this (re)structural violence manifested in the attempted banning of



“undesirable” “low-income” residents from their homes in the Schanzenviertel, to make space for the musical theatre and the gentrification campaign intended to bring in upper-class entertainment seekers to displace the working-class residents. Andreas explains that the Rote Flora could only have been saved through the use of limited counter-violence against this state violence. He clarifies that “it was clear to everyone in the Flora that we are not eager to be violent, but rather that we retain the right to use violence as a legitimate method of political confrontation” (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg).

In the types of confrontations which the group found themselves in, where not only (re)structural violence was being applied by the state, such a method appeared increasingly justified. One very pertinent example occurred shortly after the occupation. On 29 July 1992 Ralf and Knud, two members of the Flora group, appear to have been effectively framed by police officers who accused them of placing boards on a railroad as an (alleged) attack on a commuter train. They spent half a year in prison before being ultimately found not guilty at trial. Later freedom of information requests revealed that the officers in question had been tasked with following and apprehending two suspected members of the Red Army Faction, had misidentified the two Flora participants, and had placed criminal charges (after telephoning their officers for instruction) accordingly (Interview, Knud, 13 April 2016, Hamburg). In this case, Josef, a close friend of Knud, explained that his belief in the state holding the right to monopoly on violence was shattered:

For me, that was a case of state terrorism, as in, *they* themselves put those things on the rails and *that* is state terrorism. 100% and absolutely clearly. Whoever does something like that, that is, *terror* in the name of the state, that's *state terrorism*, and Knud and Ralf were charged with it, 100% *deliberately*, using false statements. And that was really kind of a formative experience for me ... that the State Security Service goes so far as to simply throw two people in jail. To do *that* and especially when they did it *themselves*: *they* put those planks on the rails—that has all been investigated now, [regarding] the damage and everything. *They* did it. (Interview, Josef, 21 November 2016, Hamburg)

Josef relayed his shock at the experience, and emphasised how it completely disillusioned him about his own belief in state justice, and effectively the rule of law itself, as officers' accusations and actions “had no consequences” for them. “That is really the most shocking thing about it”, he said, which called into question for him “what would normally be out of the question: *any faith in the state itself*”. In light of the (re)structural violence of the gentrification campaign, as well as the alleged misuse of justice in the lengthy court case, autonomists felt had no choice but to claim the monopoly on violence themselves, which was, effectively a claim to sovereignty.

### ***Peaceful Discourse in the Public Sphere***

Another foundation of traditional state sovereignty and the democratic social contract is the use of peaceful discourse in the public sphere. Of course, one must also acknowledge the deeply unequal power relations of this dialogue, in which many

voices have significantly less legitimacy in the public sphere (Foucault 1980; Lukes 2005), such as in 1988 when residents were effectively ignored, despite bringing their concerns to open forums in good faith. In terms of the social contract, the democratic state is supposed to be founded on the ideal of peaceful dialogue and debate in the public sphere, rather than violent combat. Yet, the Flora autonomists refuse this fundamental tenet, insisting instead that discourse is a form of power, which is wielded unequally and therefore represents another form of structural violence. Autonomists since the 1980s have further argued that to enter into these unequal power structures would risk a form of integration or co-optation of their radical sovereignty. As early as 1981 the autonomous theses stated: “No dialogue with power! We only formulate demands, to which power can either respond or not.”<sup>21</sup> A set of revised theses from 1994 elaborate upon this, arguing: “We do not engage in dialogue with rulers, because *that is the first step toward integration.*”<sup>22</sup> These declarations indicate the deep Foucauldian concern with language as a structure of state power and inequality, according to which the “public sphere” could never offer an equal space for peaceful communication, but rather only offers “seats at the bargaining table” to certain voices (Flyvberg 1998). Butler (2015) points to this inequality in her work on Occupy Wall Street, where citizens had to use their bodies performatively as voices, as these were the only ways in which they could “speak” anymore. This double bind manifested particularly poignantly in 2001 when the Flora group was offered a relatively fair rental contract for continued and indefinite use of the space. However, rather than negotiate they declared the campaign “The Flora is Non-Negotiable/Un-Contractable!” (*Flora bleibt Unverträglich!*).<sup>23</sup> Their logic was that the space itself had to remain a contestation of state power, and that entering into written or verbal negotiations would allow that power to infiltrate and subordinate the site and effectively neuter their ability to contest (re)structural violence. Furthermore, to enter into a contract would acknowledge the hegemony and unequal dominance of a state that, in their minds, was not upholding the social contract, and therefore no longer earned the rights of a state. The only way to speak in this dialogue was from a position of strength, from one sovereign to another. In the case of the Schanzenviertel restructuring process, citizens and autonomists had discovered in 1988 that public hearings and open forums could very well be *spoken*, but would never be *heard*, as the legal contracts had already been signed. Instead, they had to claim sovereignty in order to be taken seriously, which meant stepping outside of the speech dictated by the state’s broken social contract and establishing a space, in this case through the threat of violence, that would be taken seriously as one state to another. As the Flora squatter Claude explains: “we would never have achieved this only using peaceful protest” (Interview, Claude, 23 March 2016, Berlin). Instead, a different language was needed in order to claim the right to speak—that of a sovereign body in an excess space. Anna, active in the group since 1988, explains that the autonomists had learnt that:

... the moment you engage in peaceful protest, you are immediately stepped on—no one takes you seriously. It is only at the moment when you become violent yourself that you are perceived as an actor to be taken seriously. (Interview, Anna, 21 September 2016, Hamburg)



In other words, regardless of the idealism of the social contract, *in reality* only certain voices had legitimacy at that bargaining table. These voices could not exist in a position of subjection, such as signing a contract with state power. Rather, as the sovereign had seemingly failed to uphold their end of the contract, it can be at least understood why autonomists claimed the right to wield an embodied language that *would* be taken seriously in this new conversation of one sovereign to another.

### ***Biopolitical Self-Administration in Excess Spaces***

To understand the full function of this radical sovereignty, it is also important to recognise the body as the object of biopolitical administration. As mentioned above, biopolitics is the act of bringing sovereign power to bear upon life and transforming that life into an object of power that can be administered (Agamben 1998:6). This theory builds on Foucault’s (1978:135) argument that originally, and “[f]or a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death”. With the advent of modernity, the sovereign transitioned from wielding the power to decide death to “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (Foucault 1978:140). This modern form of sovereignty regulates and manages life itself, via institutions such as asylums, prisons, schools, etc. In an excess space, however, autonomous subjectivities claim this role of sovereignty and create their own administrative and even self-surveilling mechanisms of normalisation. These included models of justice, dress, language, behaviour, and even thoughts, as well as group policing and punishment mechanisms when these norms were transgressed. One example are the gendered norms of dress, action, and identity. Two women in the Flora, Martha and Greta, both refused the term “feminism”, and instead argued that by identifying as “anti-sexists” they were engaged in a political stance shared by everyone in the Flora society (Interview, Martha and Greta, 17 September 2015, Hamburg; see also Jones 2018a). Both also stressed that political women on the Left can *only* wear trousers, while another female participant warns “if you go to the Flora in a dress they will *not let you in!*” (Interview, Agnes, 21 April 2011, Hamburg). All three emphasised the need to match the norms of the group in terms of shabby, tattered clothing and a macho, non-gendered expression, and that any deviation would result in ostracisation. This form of gendered biopolitical self-administration also extended to the surveillance of thoughts and deeds. For example, participant Fabian recalls men forming anti-sexist men’s cafés in the early/mid 1990s in order to monitor their own behaviour in a quasi-group-therapy setting, and to identify and eliminate any unacceptable sexist thoughts (Interview, Fabian, 10 August 2016, Hamburg). Such forms of self-policing also extended to group standards of language, with stigmatisation against anyone who used non politically-correct terminology or criticised the self-administration of behavioural norms. For example, participant Clara recalls that:

If you then say something 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].<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Anna recalls that “everyone had to remain totally silent about [things that were not PC], or else your only option was to leave” (Interview, Anna, 21 September 2016, Hamburg). She explains that this micro-polis of severe self-administration to group norms left her with “the feeling that people are being destroyed, just completely”, and that “the lives of individuals and the psyche of individuals are attacked” for failing to adhere to impossible standards (ibid.). In this strictly regulated society, Clara remembers the pressure she put herself under to adhere to group standards of thought and action:

I often remark to myself that the slogans I scream out in my writing ... deviate often quite a lot from what I actually live out in my private life. Often to *my own great fear*. I don't find that good at all, and I of course would love to be different sometimes, but somehow I am just not there yet. And I still have a way to go *until I can develop myself* to arrive there.<sup>25</sup>

While she acknowledges how difficult it is to actually live according to the political norms demanded in the sovereign space, it is particularly interesting that she felt “great fear” at not living up to these values, and enough guilt that that she had to continually work on herself to “develop herself to arrive there”. Indeed, that she both acknowledged her fear yet still sought to “develop herself” to meet its expectations speaks to the power of that biopolitical administration on the self. This self-regulation invokes the self-surveillance of subjects in that excess space and illuminates how they sought to determine and craft their own subjectivities to meet those norms. While not necessarily positive and emancipatory, what is most pertinent to this paper was that these standards were the products of the group's own self-imposed models of behaviour, action, and justice, rather than those of the external state sovereign. In fact, by recreating the function of a biopolitical administration, and self-imposing this upon their own bodies, the participants were effectively reenacting the role of a sovereign, although now in an excess space.

Despite the realities of self-surveillance that developed, this strict self-determination was intended to function in an emancipatory way. Unofficial former speaker Andreas argues that being autonomous in the Flora is a process of “structur[ing] oneself in a way that remains critical of all forms of domination” (Interview, Andreas and Hans-Martin, 17 February 2016, Hamburg). This self-formation is never truly “free”, and he acknowledges that life in the Flora “is a complicated interweaving of hierarchies and patterns of domination that we can only have partial influence upon” (ibid.). However, what is crucial here is the act of deciding for oneself, and of claiming and defending an excess space for those biopolitics to operate on one's own terms. To this end, squatter Hans-Martin defines his own political stance in the space as:

To not let myself, to the best of my abilities, be determined by foreign forces on a personal level. To do everything the way I believe is best, rather than according to social constraints. It is more of a pragmatic approach, to let oneself be dictated to as little as possible from the outside. That is my goal in Flora, this vehement lack of contract. (Interview, Hans-Martin, 27 December 2016, Hamburg)

Both of these squatters, active in the Flora since the very beginning, point to the importance of deciding one’s own laws and self-governing and self-administering according to those chosen structures rather than ones “from outside”. Both admit that this is not completely possible, but still seek to minimise the power of the state social contract and replace it with one of their own creation. While this does *not* mean there are *no* structures of biopower, what it *might* suggest is a different form of subjectivity in which one refuses state biopolitical sovereignty and, claiming the role of the sovereign to administer life, instead subjects oneself to structures of one’s own choosing. These subjects can then seek to self-define and self-govern via an alternate, often equally demanding form of biopolitics, which is constantly reinforced and reapplied in the microcosm of radical sovereignty that developed in the Flora. While certainly not perfect or fully emancipated, at least these biopolitical forces would be self-determined, or at least “to the best of my abilities”, according to Hans-Martin. This form of spatial sovereignty could offer a way to understand what is attempted in squatted spaces like the Flora: the pushing back against structures of state biopolitical, linguistic, and legal regulation, in order to establish a spatial sovereignty of radical subjectivities in an excess space.

## The Flora Today

In the three decades since occupation, this recreation of alternative citizenships has echoed beyond the Flora and is visible today in a network of citizens’ movements and groups in Hamburg. For example, Park Fiction is a community park in the neighbouring St Pauli district founded in 1994 from a residents’ association against a luxury housing development. Artist Christoph Schäfer and film-maker Margit Czenki worked with a collective to gather citizen “wishes” using a Deleuze and Guattari-inspired wish-machine to build a park that could manifest these desires (Interview, Schäfer, 6 May 2011, Hamburg). Similar projects include the transdisciplinary architectural collective “PlanBude”, which arose and stepped in after the St Pauli *ESSO-Häuser* (“Esso houses”) were bought by an investment developer in 2010. Residents protested to keep their homes, declaring them occupied amidst a city-wide solidarity campaign, but were suddenly evicted and the houses demolished in December 2013. City residents gathered in a people’s assembly, which ultimately led to PlanBude being able to gather 2,300 “wishes” from residents about how to use the space in alternative ways to the planned development. This was by no means a sovereign excess space, but rather a successful example of alternative citizenship bridging the gap between radical and mainstream “wishes” for urban space. There are numerous other such initiatives of alternative citizenship, for example the artist collective Gängeviertel (see Fraeser 2015), or the Zomia mobile house occupations since 2010 (Interview, Karl, 18 June 2011, Hamburg; von Appen 2011). One particular initiative worth mentioning here is the “Welcome to the Dangerzone” campaign of 2001, when the city declared a state of exception (*Gefahrengebiet*—literally a “danger zone”) and the suspension of civil liberties after an alleged attack on a police station (claims later determined to be fabricated, while the responses were also ruled unconstitutional). This legal state of exception not only encompassed the Flora but also

extended to three full city districts with 80,000 residents. However, this “danger zone” was transformed into a game by some activists, who launched a campaign for people to walk through the streets after curfew with funny items in their pockets, such as used cat litter, baggies of laundry powder and flour, or adult toys (Sutter 2014). Stamp cards were distributed for participants to gather points every time they were searched and taken into custody, with a promised free coffee at the police station upon completion of the stamp card. In addition to wasting police time and resources (414 pedestrians were arrested for the harmless contents of their pockets), the game was intended to subvert state law by refusing to acknowledge it. Instead, new rules were applied that turned police into unwitting players in someone else’s exceptional danger zone.

Hamburg’s political community is diverse enough to include many different groups, but small enough that, while the Flora group have since ceased to operate as the lynchpin for radical identity and practice in the now heavily gentrified Schanzenviertel, activists generally are at least familiar with and sympathetic to each other’s projects. The newer citizens’ initiatives listed here operate in a political tradition that activist Sofia explains was uniquely socialised and emboldened by the successful Flora anti-gentrification campaign of the 1980s (Interview, Sofia, 9 November 2017, Hamburg). This unique subcultural awareness has inspired a tradition of political self-determination and self-management campaigns that continue to date. Led by a new generation of activists in a movement that is constantly redefining itself, these new initiatives do not demand nearly as much self-administration or self-surveillance as the original Flora squat in the 1990s. At that time, the excess space of the Flora was vehemently defended almost as if it were the sacred (Jones 2024) orientation point of a self-governing power determined to remain sovereign from the external state—even while operating in resistance to it. Of course, no project is utopia, and the squatted Flora developed its own forms of inequality, prejudice, violence, and punishment like any sovereign society. Both Hans-Martin and Andreas acknowledge that the space was never simply a completely free space of utopian freedom—there were still the mundane tasks required to manage and police the space, language, behaviours, and bodies within. However, that self-governing is precisely what allows us to read such spaces as sovereign excess spaces, rather than merely “free spaces”. Of course, we must acknowledge that these excess spaces could never exist completely independently—the paradox of sovereignty means that which is *excluded* must therefore be that which is also *included*. Even sovereign spaces always had to exist in resistance to a mainstream society whose forms of domination continually knocked at their door—often with water cannons. However, by using the lens of excess spaces as sovereign, this paper has argued that such squats can be fruitfully understood not as merely resisting state power, but as functioning micro sovereign-states themselves, even if only the size of one house. This approach allows us to interpret the acts of the Flora group as claims to three of the most fundamental tenets of the social contract, and explains why its members continued to practise a form of biopolitical self-administration “from below” as they formed and governed their own resistant political subjectivities, for better or for worse.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Whilst acknowledging that other scholars would define the Flora as “place”—where “on being inhabited, space is appropriated, given meaning and interpreted and thus transformed into place” (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017:2). However, this paper seeks to resonate with the concept of “free space”, which autonomists appeal to and apply. It would be disrespectful to these sources to disregard their agency in this matter, and so this article takes a broad understanding of space, which encompasses place.

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank Prof Dr Susanne Krasmann and Prof Dr Joachim Whaley for their early feedback on this idea, as well as Dr Nils Schuhmacher for his incredibly constructive reviews.

<sup>3</sup> Note that at the time the small, 0.47 km<sup>2</sup> Schanzenviertel district was not legally an entity, but rather was composed of parts of four neighbouring districts. It was officially recognised as the “Sternschanze” district only in 2008, but was referred to as Schanzenviertel, Schanze, or Sternschanze during the 1980s. This is why the officials Hans-Peter Streng and Heinz Evers actually worked for the neighbouring Altona district, which was responsible for the street on which the Rote Flora was located at that time.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Mayors I. von Münch and H. Voscherau, “Staatliche Pressestelle”, 2 August 1988 (Archiv der Sozialen Bewegungen [ASB] 09.232).

<sup>5</sup> All interviews originally in German, translated to English by the author. All interviewee names have been changed, except those where first and last names are listed—at the interviewee’s specific request.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the presence of radical cultures can of course make an area more attractive to live in, and thus contribute to gentrification success. However, I do not argue that the presence of autonomists was solely responsible for this gentrification, as the state campaign had been planned decades earlier. At best, the presence of autonomists was a symptom of, rather than the cause for, this restructuring.

<sup>7</sup> Former Sponti Diethard co-organised the 1978 Tunix congress wherein the German Left sought new avenues of resistance, and thereafter turned to *Autonomie* (Interview, Diethard, 29 November 2016, Berlin; see also Lefebvre 1991). On the Spontis, see Kaspar (2019). On Tunix, see Vasudevan (2015). On the Situationist International, see Knabb’s (2006) translated anthology of their writings.

<sup>8</sup> Due to space limitations, it is impossible to fully trace this history here. See Schultz and Gross (1997) for a history of *Autonomie* before 1989, Vasudevan (2017) for an accessible survey of autonomy internationally, or Jones (2018c) for a detailed history of German *Autonomie*. The German Autumn of 1977 is well documented in Hanshew (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Source: *radikal* no. 123, p. 198 (1983).

<sup>10</sup> See “Theses zur Autonomie” in *radikal* no. 98 (1981). Note that these were the beginning of a conversation that continued over several issues, including commentary, critique, and revised versions.

<sup>11</sup> The author is not a participant in the Flora, but has conducted archival and oral history research on the group since 2011. She has been granted the first access to internal movement documentation and has written the first cultural history of the group “from below” (see Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt 1994). This appeared first as her doctoral thesis, and is forthcoming as a monograph with OUP.

<sup>12</sup> On the violence of these “barricade days”, see the participant-observer account in Katsiaficas (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Please note that the author does not refer to Agamben’s (2014) destituent power here, as the self-governed and self-administered spatial sovereignty in the Flora would remain firmly within the conceptual limits of constituent power.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to scholarship, the concept was widely applied in social movement praxis, such as the waves of over 184 squatted houses in Berlin between 1981 and 1994, or the 12 houses occupied on Hamburg's Hafensstraße in the 1980s.

<sup>15</sup> One possible radical comparison might be Bey's (1985) work on Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) as a short break from the control of state power or policing, much like the well-worn motif of Bakhtin's (1968) carnivalesque festival in which medieval societal hierarchies are temporarily inverted. Bey in fact revised his theory in 1994 to acknowledge such permanent sites (Bey 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Source: Interview with Armin in B. Poppenborg, "Widerstand in Zeiten Neoliberaler Neuordnung: Träumen und Utopien in der Roten Flora", Unpublished research project, University of Hamburg, 4 February 2000 (Archiv der Soziale Bewegungen [ASB] 09.300).

<sup>17</sup> Source: Interview with Clara in B. Poppenborg and F. Pospiech, "Widerstand in Zeiten Neoliberaler Neuordnung—Träume und Utopien in der Roten Flora", Unpublished project report thesis, 4 February 1999 (Archiv der Soziale Bewegungen [ASB] 09.320.II).

<sup>18</sup> In one similar contemporary example, the "Zomia" community of ten *Bauwagonplätzen* ("mobile houses") occupied a Hamburg park in November 2010 to protest the unaffordable cost of rents in the city, and to initiate different models, communities, and forms of living (von Appen 2011). In response, the squatters were offered the free use of a piece of land near the city airport, but refused it, as the purpose of their action was to create a site that contested and juxtaposed city norms from *within* it (Interview, Karl, 18 June 2011, Hamburg).

<sup>19</sup> I must emphasise that this theory *by no means* equates autonomists with the suffering of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. It is crucial to differentiate this excretion of Jewish bare life—subjects stripped of citizenship and political agency—as opposed to the citizenship, agency, and immense privilege that the autonomists held, which they used to intentionally create their own state of exception in the Rote Flora. That members of the radical Left are not accurate in claiming to be comparable to helpless victims of fascism has been discussed in German society since the 1960s, particularly by members of the Frankfurt School. See Jürgen Habermas' warning that the student movement in 1967 was "flirting with terror, with fascist implications", cited in Kraushaar (1998b:250). See also Theodor Adorno's 1967 complaint that "to an extent, the students have taken over the position of the Jews", cited in Kraushaar (1998a:254).

<sup>20</sup> There is an enormous body of literature on this topic, which cannot possibly be reproduced here, apart from a brief discussion. However, see Foucault's (1978) first mention of it, as well as the veritable cottage industry that has sprung up in response, such as *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Cisney and Morar 2016), *The Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics* (Prozorov and Rentea 2017), etc. Hannah (2011) makes a similar argument about the emancipatory potential of biopower for Left politics and the administration of life.

<sup>21</sup> This can be distinguished from later antifascist *Militanz*, as elaborated in Jones and Schuhmacher (2024).

<sup>22</sup> Source: "Thesen zur Autonomen Bewegung" (1981) [https://autox.nadir.org/archiv/auto/81\\_1.html](https://autox.nadir.org/archiv/auto/81_1.html) (last accessed 13 March 2024).

<sup>23</sup> Source: "Thesen zur Autonomen Bewegung" (1994) [http://autox.nadir.org/archiv/auto/94\\_1.html](http://autox.nadir.org/archiv/auto/94_1.html) (last accessed 13 March 2024).

<sup>24</sup> The term *Unverträglich* was a play on words between contract (*Vertrag*) and ability to negotiate/get along (*erträglich*).

<sup>25</sup> Source: Interview with Clara in B. Poppenborg and F. Pospiech, "Widerstand in Zeiten Neoliberaler Neuordnung—Träume und Utopien in der Roten Flora", Unpublished project report thesis, 4 February 1999 (Archiv der Soziale Bewegungen [ASB] 09.320.II).

<sup>26</sup> Source: Interview with Clara in B. Poppenborg and F. Pospiech, "Widerstand in Zeiten Neoliberaler Neuordnung—Träume und Utopien in der Roten Flora", Unpublished project report thesis, 4 February 1999 (Archiv der Soziale Bewegungen [ASB] 09.320.II).



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