

University of Alberta

Selbstbestimmtes Leben:
Hamburg's Rote Flora and the Roots of Autonomie in Twentieth Century Germany

by

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For Ronja

Just this tiny space.

Abstract

This thesis examines the German Autonomen in their intellectual historical context. It first examines the history and development of the concept of Autonomie in Western Germany. The thesis argues that this social and political philosophy began in 1968, and developed through the 1970s and 1980s in response to political, social, economic and philosophic discourses. The thesis then focuses upon the occupation of houses in Hamburg and Berlin; a practice that developed out of this political philosophy. Finally, it turns to the “Rote Flora Cultural Center” in the city of Hamburg as a case study and crystallization of Autonomous identity. This political ideology is framed by the thought of political philosophers and theorists, especially Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and Mikhail Bakhtin. Using these contemporary thinkers, the thesis ultimately explains that this radical and little-known political discourse is in fact deeply rooted in the dominant philosophical discourses of the time.

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Introduction: Autonomie

In November of 1989, a group of radical political activists occupied the decrepit, 150-year-old “Flora” theatre in the middle of a poor working class neighbourhood in Hamburg, Germany. Their actions arose after several years of civilian protest against a private corporation, which sought to gentrify their neighbourhood and transform it into an upper-class “entertainment district”. After years of fruitless petitions, marches and other peaceful political actions, the neighbourhood coalesced around the occupation of the theater, and declared it a cultural centre. This action was inspired and led by the left-of-anarchist political group known as the Autonomen.¹ In 2013, the “Rote Flora” remains the stronghold and bastion of Autonomous politics across Europe, and is a key player in state urban planning, restructuring and political affairs. Furthermore, it is the heart of left-wing politics and identity in Germany, and has become the symbol of an Autonomous lifestyle and culture. Indeed, this occupation was not a new phenomenon in 1989, but was rather indicative of the German leftist culture of the time. This thesis will ground the occupation of this theatre in the intellectual, cultural, economic and political history of Germany since 1968, in order to trace out the origins of Autonomie. Ultimately, we will understand why the Rote Flora took on such an integral significance for the political and philosophical identity of this German sub-culture.

Autonomie

But what is Autonomie? One Autonom who writes under the penname Geronimo explains that, unlike most concepts,

‘Autonomy’ is a fragile thing. Or rather: autonomy is no thing at all. It stands for a certain form of relationship between people who associate in order to destroy all forms of oppression. It is a relationship that cannot be grasped theoretically. Theories can only be formulated about phenomena that exist

¹ Because there is no English equivalent of this term linguistically, culturally or politically, I will use the German Autonomie, with individual actors known as Autonom (singular) and Autonomen (plural).

in and by themselves. 'Autonomy' only exists when people start to be active revolutionaries.²

Rather than an object or a "thing", he posits *Autonomie as an action* and a political stance of resistance. This attitude is manifested in and performed by a "relationship between people," through their actions and associations for the common purpose of "destroy[ing] all forms of oppression." In sum, *Autonomie* is an ideology of political resistance to power, emphasizing praxis and action over theory. Above all, it seeks to avoid being a rigid, imposed, static or traditional ideology.³ Instead, by valuing the bonds of, for example, friendship over dogma, *Autonomie* alters in every application. As *Autonom Katsiaficas* explains,

I cannot help but be amazed at how distorted political conceptions become when political ideologies are grabbed wholesale and applied by activists. Like many autonomists, I am inspired by a variety of thinkers from previous waves of action and find their insights extraordinarily important to my own development. Unlike many people in what is called the Left, however, I do not seek to construct a set of arguments that serve as a prism for my friendships and alliances, preferring instead to form these on the basis of feeling and action, not ideological purity.⁴

Autonomie is this individual formation of the self through "friendships and alliances," which are created based on "action" and spontaneous performance of one's political identity.

Despite their explicit rejection of a definition, the unifying characteristic of the *Autonomen* is their ideological stance of rejection. A movement that declares, "We do not fight for ideology", and "We are uncertain whether we want a revolt or a revolution", or "we have no organization per se" is difficult to define.⁵ And this stance is intentional on their behalf. Yet, this aversion to a single, affirmatively worded definition is precisely

² Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, Gabriel Kuhn, trans., (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 19

³ At the end of chapter three we will discuss whether the increasingly absolutist stance of the Hamburg *Autonomen* remained free of rigidity.

⁴ George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 203.

⁵ *Autonomous Thesis*, 1, 7, 8, 1981. Translated in Geronimo *Fire and Flames*, appendix, 173, by Gabriel Kuhn. Appeared in original in *radikal* no. 97 extra (August 1981). These are not the official theses, since "official" is against the very philosophy of *autonomie*. However, they are generally referred to, and represent the basis of most of the movements.

how they can be identified. Rather than imposing a static definition on this movement, a scholar can instead point to this stance of fluidity.⁶ Autonomie is resistance; rejection and inversion of all hegemony, including the logic that would assume a movement can be defined. They state “we all agree that, in the first place, we want to dismantle and to destroy—to formulate affirmative ideals is not our priority.”⁷ Indeed, they stress that there is no homogeneity to the movement, or even the concept, as Autonomie is “also Autonomie of the individual. We are no homogeneous entity; our community and culture does not support heterogeneity. We are chaos!”⁸ Even the theses of Autonomie generally referred to or at least performed by the movement, and cited in text several times, are demonstrative of this plurality. As Kuhn explains, “to this day the straightforward convictions and sentiments listed in the original paper remain at the core of autonomous identity, even if every single one of them has been passionately discussed and, at times, decidedly rejected by parts of the movement.”⁹ In addition, they declare “No power to no one! This also means “no power to the workers,” “no power to the people,” and ‘no counterpower.’ No power to no one!”¹⁰ Thus, in sum, Autonomie is a radical ideology concerned with *negating* the existing power structures, and *refusing* the system of capitalism, without demanding its replacement by a different or unified “counterpower” structure, especially not their own.

⁶ Hayden White makes a very similar argument about Foucault in *The Content of the Form*. Due to the latter’s resistance to a unifying thesis or theme, the reader must then define him based on his style. Style, like rejection are actions rather than static entities. This similarity will be explored in chapter three when we turn to Foucault as part of the leftist milieu in this historical period.

⁷ Autonomous Thesis, 7, 1981.

⁸ “auch Autonomie des Individuums. Wir sind keine homogene Einheit; unsere Gemeinsamkeit unterschlägt nicht die heterogene Vielfalt. Wir sind Chaoten!” “Chaoten” could also be translated “anarchists”, but since “anarchismus” is used later within the same text, I chose to avoid that interpretation. But “amorphous” could also be used here. *Theses zur Autonomie in unsere Bewegung*, #10. ASB, Undated box. Published in radikal Nr.98, 9/1981

⁹ Autonomous Thesis, Kuhn forward,173.

¹⁰ Autonomous Thesis, 5, 1981.

Furthermore, one can point to some other similarities between Autonomous groups.¹¹ As an Autonomien and scholar George Katsiaficas outlines the principles shared by most autonomous groups

collectivism; independence from political parties, trade unions and capital circulation; popular power, self-determination and decentralized direct democracy; consensus based decision-making (or horizontality); diversity and pluralism; the revolution of the everyday; internationalism; and conscious spontaneity, militancy and confrontation as tactics.”¹²

Like anarchism, Autonomie is a collective, grass-roots, decentralized, anti-hierarchical and anti-organizational movement that engages in often militant and spontaneous action as their tactical method of confrontation. While a branch of anarchism, Katsiaficas explains that the term Autonomie was adopted in order to “establish distance” from other leftists, in particular the “party oriented Marxist-Leninist groups”.¹³ As I shall explain in great detail in chapter one, the Autonomien were “radical clusters that appeared within...the counterculture” from a Marxist milieu, but after the decisive events of 1977, which would forever divorce them from Marxism. Rejecting this inheritance, they eventually “merged into a multifaceted formation that eventually became known as the Autonomien.”¹⁴

The discursive formation of Autonomie within this history is one of the focuses of this thesis. Geronimo argues that

¹¹ It is here that many contemporary anarchist authors seek to perform anarchy by refraining from a definition. By positing commonalities, I seek to balance a respect for this cultural decision with the scholarly need to communicate the characteristics that I am discussing. See contributions and methodology section in this introduction for more.

¹² Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton, “Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics”, *Progress in Human Geography* 30, 6 (2006), 733-34.

¹³ While the German Autonomien have some sympathies with “an ‘original’ communist idea that has been distorted”, they also explicitly state that they have not organized or “found one another at the workplace. Engaging in wage labor is an exception for us. We have found one another through punk, the “scene,” and the subculture we move in.” They reject a workerist notion of identity, for work itself it an element of the “order and domination” that they fight against. As Katsiaficas explains, Autonomie presents a “revolutionary alternative to both authoritarianism socialism and the need for one true revolutionary party or revolutionary sector of society.” (*Subversion of Politics*, 8) Both Geronimo and Katsiaficas were present and active during the German squats of the 1980’s, and express that the situations faced by the Autonomien, and their actions in response “were as clearly distinct from the traditional organizations of the workers’ movement as they differed from the traditional forms and theories of anarchism.”

¹⁴ Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 8

the autonomous movement formed as a radical and militant wing within the New Social Movements. Despite historical links to the 1968 uprisings, there were hardly any personal connections and many autonomous activists seemed to be unaware of the history their own movement built on.¹⁵

As a movement divorced from the “history [of] their own movement”, the Autonomien define themselves as embracing “a ‘vague anarchism’ but we are not anarchists in a traditional sense”.¹⁶ Indeed, while remaining vaguely anarchist, their focus upon the occupation of space and the resistance of gentrification concentrates this particular movement as one specific cluster of anarchism, particularly invested in the lived performance of action within occupied and thus free spaces. However, despite my sympathies to Autonomie and my reliance upon Geronimo as a primary source, as a historian I will seek to combat his claim that “there were hardly any...connections” to 1968. While there were likely very few *personal* connections, as most of the ‘68ers were too old to engage in the Autonomien by the late 1980s, chapter one will nevertheless trace out the *explicit philosophic and discursive* links to history.

Methodology

Such a problematic self-definition brings up the fundamental tension of using scholarship to address such a movement. If a movement that is “unaware” of its own history defines itself explicitly against that history, can a scholar then attempt to impose a historical definition upon them? Similarly, how can scholarship, which by nature crystallizes and defines a topic, be applied to a subject that rejects any solidification within theory or text? In order to address this incompatibility, I am employing a methodology influenced by three distinct approaches, which when combined allow me

¹⁵ Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 18.

¹⁶ He explicitly is referring to the Marxist-Leninist heritage often embraced by the Italian Autonomien in the early 1970s. However, while the Italians were a workerist movement organizing at the factory, the Germans explicitly identified this setting, (see fn 13 above). See Geronimo *Fire and Flames*, and George Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics* for a broader discussion of these differences. “Autonomous Thesis”, 4, Appendix, translated in Geronimo *Fire and Flames*, 1981.

to engage as a respectful scholar and utilize this “definition via a stance of negation”. The first is a cultural theory perspective, influenced by Raymond Williams. The second is a phenomenological and ethnographic approach, drawing on religious anthropologists. Religious phenomenology allows one to observe and present a foreign culture without judging it according to one’s own cultural standards. Finally, I attempt to bring intellectual and cultural history together, and demonstrate that they are inseparable in this case study of social actors actively relying upon and performing philosophical theory. By combining these three approaches, I seek to engage with a foreign culture without imposing a judgment upon it, while still grounding it in its intellectual history since 1968.

Raymond Williams and Cultural Theory

Raymond Williams revises the Marxist concept of base and superstructure, explaining that both the actions of men in their social and economic relations (base), as well as the imposed range of cultural practices (superstructure) constitute society.¹⁷ While the super structure of culture is influenced by the actions of the base, he acknowledges that this culture is also consciously shaped, chosen and formed through a very selective process. Processes such as “education...social training...institutions like the family...organization of work...all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture”. This “central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values...are not merely abstract but are organized and lived.” Furthermore, they are organized consciously, intentionally, and in order to perpetrate

a process which I call the *selective tradition*: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as ‘the tradition’, ‘the significant past’. But always the *selectivity is the point*; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are *chosen for emphasis*, certain other meanings and practices are

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, *New Left Review*, I, 82, Nov-Dec 1973. See Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) for the “orthodox” perspective, in which the base influences the superstructure.

neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms, which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.¹⁸

Williams explains that this “selective tradition” is perpetrated through education, family units, societal traditions, institutions, and in our case study, urban planning, neoliberal economic and spatial restructuring, and the intentional reordering of lower-class communities. He explains that “we can only understand an effective and dominant culture if we understand the real social process on which it depends: I mean the process of incorporation”.¹⁹ This process of incorporation is related to the “selective tradition” with which cultural elites groom and maintain their version of culture. In the Rote Flora, this incorporation of culture is the hegemony against which the Florians struggled.

However, in addition to diagnosing this situation of cultural domination, Williams also offers a model of emergent cultures with which I shall methodologically address the Florians. In addition to residual cultures that pre-date capitalism, he explains that some cultures resist and reject this intentional cultural incorporation by positing their own new “meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, [which] are continually being created.”²⁰ These emergent cultures not only define themselves in opposition to the dominant culture, but more importantly *can be approached as cultures*. Although these emergent cultures must necessarily exist as tiny spaces within and rejections of dominant culture, nonetheless “we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some

¹⁸ Williams, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Residual cultures are those “experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, [but which] are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation.” (Williams 8) Old religious communities, immigrant populations, or other sequestered cultural groups are some examples of these “residual” concepts. While the Florians are not necessarily an old cultural community, they do appeal to a nostalgic notion of earlier folks culture, as we shall see in chapter two. By appealing to a pre-neoliberal notion of community and identity, they attempt to pre-empt the dominant culture that is incorporating them, and delegitimize it by appeal to an earlier paradigm. Williams, 9.

alternative senses of the world”.²¹ In other words, emergent cultures must be recognized as sites of “alternative meanings and values” which need not be judged as a failure to comply with the norms of dominant culture, but rather can be respectfully examined on their own terms. Because it is so incompatible with incorporated and “selectively chosen” society, Autonomie appears to be an impossible and incompatible outlier. Indeed, George Katsiaficas refers to Autonomie as the “invisible movement” when compared to the dominant culture it seeks to reject. As he asks,

is it any wonder that the Autonomes appear bizarre, even insane, to those bent on enjoying affluent consumerism amid political stability? Within societies of material wealth but spiritual poverty, those who act according to a new logic, an erotic logic simultaneously passionate and intelligent cannot help but appear as otherworldly.²²

Note that the Autonomes see themselves as operating “according to a new logic”, a new set of cultural values not based solely on capitalist consumption. Rather than an illogical or “insane” piece of dominant German culture, the Autonomes were an emergent and thus separate sub-culture, governed by a different set of values. For this reason, I will refrain from portraying or judging the Florians as “naïve children” who simply do not understand “how the system works”, or as “hopeless utopians” unable to succeed in modern society. Instead, just as an anthropologist would attempt to fairly and objectively present their subjects in as much sympathetic detail as possible, I will engage in a methodology that treats these radical social actors as a culture. However foreign, “bizarre” or even “insane” this may appear to us, this culture deserves to be described in fairness, without me imposing the very same cultural norms of condescending, condemnation and purely profit-driven values that it so explicitly rejects.

Phenomenology

As the second aspect of my method, Mircea Eliade influences my own

²¹ Williams, 8.

²² Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 236-237.

ethnographic and intellectual historical approach. His phenomenological method takes the practice and performances of religions, or in this case fanatical social movements, on their own terms. This method is mirrored by scholar Uri Gordon's application of ethnography to anarchist groups. He argues that the only way to understand a practice-based philosophy is to utilize a "strategy inspired by ethnography, which stresses first-hand participant observation of the vernacular culture of activists."²³ As we shall see, participant-observation is intrinsically linked to a religious phenomenology. By taking the anarchists on their own terms, and focusing his study upon their actions, way of life, and their performed belief in political resistance, he is able to phenomenologically understand the inspirations of a movement that seeks to subvert the dominating language of a society. Thus, like Eliade's phenomenology, Gordon stresses that a method emphasizing action and experience is the best way to counteract the overemphasis and overreliance of an academic on a source that the historical actors themselves refuse to use. It is also the most compatible way to approach a movement that refuses empirical definition in favour of direct action.

This phenomenology is discussed by Brian Roberts, a scholar of subculture and deviance.²⁴ He relates this approach to what is called the "participant observer" (PO) method, wherein

The observer must not only get familiar enough to be able to see and reconstruct the field as the 'native' sees and experiences it: he must to some degree experience it himself. (In this sense, PO is by definition closer in outlook to Weber's criterion of 'subjective meaning' than to Durkheim's injunction to 'treat social facts as things': its stress on experience and sympathetic identification makes it, fundamentally if not philosophically, phenomenological.)²⁵

In this PO method, an anthropologist or ethnographer participates in the social

²³ Uri Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, (February 2007), 12(1), 31.

²⁴ Brian Roberts, "Naturalistic Research into Subcultures and Deviance", in Stuart Hall, ed, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 243.

²⁵ Brian Roberts, 245.

movement so as to truly understand what might be otherwise baffling motivations. As I shall explore in chapter three, some of the Florians' decisions are inconceivable and seem irrational to an audience not steeped in this logic. By employing phenomenology as a respectful view on the otherwise confusing actions of a radically fringe social movement, I seek to present an understanding of this political ideology to readers. Indeed, this entire project originated from my own desire to understand why these political actors would eventually reject the state's attempt to give them what they had been fighting two decades to achieve. My phenomenological method, based on observation and participation via sympathy, is my attempt to respectfully present their opinions in a language a reader can not only understand, but also hopefully relate to.

However, as Roberts explains, this methodology constantly presents the "dangers of the researcher going native".²⁶ As he elaborates,

closeness has its costs. How can one describe and define a field without taking into account the impact of the researcher's 'participation' on it...? What are the ethical rules, which allow him to distinguish between observation and intervention? What are the dangers of the researcher 'going native'? And can the results of his closeness – a qualitatively full description – get beyond description, to the level of 'science'? PO lays a heavy burden of tact and tactics on the researcher: empathy without identification, understanding without 'being taken for a ride', rapport without compromise.²⁷

As I will discuss in the contributions section, many scholars of anarchism seem to cross this line, for their attempts to accurately engage with an anarchist discourse stray into a defense or performance of anarchism itself. And it is very easy to see why one would do so, especially when dealing with a philosophic stance that rejects any other form of academic language as hegemonic and repressive. The greatest challenge of this project is my desire to present the Autonomous side of the story fairly and in such a way that remains philosophically consistent, without falling into the trap of mere apology. This

²⁶ Brian Roberts, 243.

²⁷ Brian Roberts, 245.

stance must be maintained despite a great deal of rapport, my friendship with and gratitude to the Archivist and Archiv der Soziale Bewegungen, or the bonds of personal friendship forged when fleeing riot police, pepper spray and water cannons during demonstrations.²⁸ Indeed, as confession of bias, the only affiliation that binds me more firmly than my sympathy to these actors is my interest in the history of philosophy. As a method in itself, my desire to trace out this intellectual lineage overshadows my political sympathy, and hopefully will allow me to tread this very fine methodological line.

Intellectual History

Third, I will apply an intellectual historical approach to a cultural movement, in order to demonstrate that even these most unlikely of social actors are deeply rooted in the history of thought. As we will discover throughout this thesis, *Autonomie* is a philosophy of self-determination, praxis and the performance of an ideology. However, these ideas are not isolated notions, but rather are deeply rooted in twentieth century intellectual thought. In fact the historical forefathers of the *Autonomen* were explicitly engaged in cultural and philosophical theory. While the *Autonomen* relied upon this philosophy, they also emerged from the same intellectual milieu as the theorists they cited. I will demonstrate this reciprocal influence by relying upon three thinkers. Chapter two will focus upon Marxist Henri Lefebvre, a twentieth century philosopher and sociologist strongly influenced by Hegel, Nietzsche, early twentieth century avant-garde art, and the study of urban space. His work was fundamental to the Situationists International, was directly involved in inspiring the French protests of May 1968, and is “at the centre of nearly a century of social, economic and intellectual change in Western

²⁸ Indeed, remaining objective to the state contra the anarchists is especially difficult when experiencing the brutality of riot police inflicted against unarmed marchers, including small children. Observing a peaceful march for lower rents or immigrant rights being “kettled” and held by riot police for almost a day with no food or water also allows me to understand why most scholars might lose their emotional objectivity.

Europe”.²⁹ His student Daniel Cohn-Bendit was not only a leader of the 1968 revolution, but was a leader of the later Sponti movement, whose members directly fed into the Autonomen. Second, the same chapter will discuss Mikhail Bakhtin, a literary critic whose work on the Carnival was widely embraced and enacted by the left. Third, Michel Foucault not only attended Autonomous events, but is also a direct product of the same turn to the individual and subjectivity as the Autonomen. Chapter three will thus be an analysis of his ethical turn and its demonstration of Autonomous cultural and philosophic values. Through this fusion of cultural and intellectual history, I will demonstrate that social groups cannot be divorced from their philosophical heritage. By thus grounding the Autonomen in their broader context, I will attempt to provide a more complete understanding of this case study.

Contribution to the Literature

This investigation also seeks to fill an important gap in the scholarly literature. Within German and English scholarship, there are only two texts that discuss the Rote Flora, and I will explain the methodological flaws of both shortly. In general, both the Rote Flora and Autonomie are almost absent from scholarly literature. Indeed, Katsiaficas refers to it as “the invisible movement”. Those few historical or philosophical accounts that do address Autonomie approach it from the perspective of anarchism, which is a slightly different political stance. This usage is also always in relation to North American black bloc anti-globalization movements, which the Autonomen inspired, but which emerged considerably later and in a different economic and political context.

²⁹ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*, (London and New York: Routledge 1999), 1

Furthermore, these anarchist authors do not retain the distance of objectivity that my sympathetic approach nonetheless maintains. While Saul Newman, David Graeber, Uri Gordon and others nonetheless produce excellent work, it is difficult to determine whether their texts are secondary or primary sources. Scholars such as George Katsiaficas and Geronimo are explicit participants in German Autonomie, and although neither discusses the Rote Flora, they are an excellent and primary source demonstration of Autonomous principles. However, while I have a great deal of respect for this self-conscious anarchist methodology, it leaves an absence of “objective” secondary literature, which this work hopes to resolve.

For example, Alejandro de Acosta presents “an emergent philosophy that dissolves the certainty according to which there is or ought to be a centre, principle or beginning”. He seeks not to “teach anarchy but [rather to] enact it”.³⁰ Autonom Geronimo similarly dismisses the academic method entirely, arguing that

The Autonomen are a diverse and shifting phenomenon and any static definition would appear both random and authoritarian. Furthermore, the radical left of the 1970s and 1980s never had a common platform, neither in the form of a publication nor of an organization. It entailed many spontaneous, individualistic, and anarchistic moments that make it difficult to suggest a chronological history. Comrades had better things to do than amass reports of their actions in folders.³¹

David Graeber is similarly dismissive and unashamedly biased, beginning his text with a typically anarchist disclaimer of a central argument or thesis. He “warn[s] the reader immediately: there is no particular argument to this book-unless it's that the movement described within is well worth thinking about.”³² He goes on to explain that

Anarchists and direct action campaigns do not exist to allow some academic to make a theoretical point or prove some rival's theory wrong... and it

³⁰ Alejandro de Acosta, “Two undecidable questions for thinking in which anything goes”, Randall Amster, Graham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, Deric Shannon, *The Contemporary Anarchism Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 26.

³¹ Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 20

³² David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (AK Press: Edinburgh, 2009), viii.

strikes me as obnoxious to suggest otherwise.³³

Like Geronimo and Graeber, most secondary literature relies upon an anarchist methodology that is both faithful to its own philosophy, but is therefore difficult to consider as either scholarly or objective. While my own sympathetic phenomenological methodology seeks to acknowledge the need to both understand and respect this stance, I wish to posit an examination of the Rote Flora that is not explicitly Autonomous. Rather, I am writing an intellectual history as a philosopher and historian, sympathetic but not integrated. This position thus fills an important gap in the otherwise rather polarized literature.

This project also fills a gap in the literature because no literature in German or English engages with the archival sources of the Rote Flora archive. Similarly, there are only two sources that examine the Rote Flora at all.³⁴ The first, a German source, was written by a police officer. Active in suppressing riots and demonstrations from 1997 to 2002, Karsten Dustin Hoffman's dissertation explicitly states that it remains highly critical of the Autonomen. Despite this bias, the manuscript *Rote Flora* appears to be well researched, and begins with several declarations of objective scholarly intent. He also provides copies of an interview request, which he claims to have sent to the Rote Flora plenum on June 6, 2011. Titled the "unanswered interview request", the letter guarantees the potential interviewees "a full copy of the interview" so that they might "include their point of view in the footnotes".³⁵ Hoffman claims that the Florians never answered this request. However, when speaking to the Autonomen myself, they

³³ David Graeber, *Direct Action*, viii.

³⁴ In chapter one I will discuss the Hafensstraße, which was an earlier Autonomous project in Hamburg, lasting from 1981-1986 before it obtained a rental contract. Because of the spectacular and extensive violence and street-fighting involved in the mythos of the Hafensstraße, and because it was eight houses, rather than one theatre, it is the focus of most contemporary literature on Hamburg Autonomie, including Katsiaticas and Geronimo.

³⁵ "Ich gaurentiere Ihnen den vollständigen Abdruck des von Ihnen autorisierten Interviewtextes, so dass Sie Gelegenheit haben, Ihre Sichtweise im Anhang meiner Studie darzustellen. Karsten Dustin Hoffman, "Appendix 5", *Rote Flora*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2011), 402.

explained that they never received this letter. Furthermore, in this letter he explains that he has already collected many archival sources. In his forward, he also explains that

it is important to me to explain that I never spied on anyone, but rather collected all of my data openly. I have never misled anyone based on political sympathies, and always pointed to the educational character of my curiosity.³⁶

Indeed, his work relies extensively upon archival sources, which are only available at the Autonomous Archive of the Social Movement (ASB). However, despite this claim, the lead archivist explained that he had never met Hoffman, had never seen him in the archive, and had no idea where he obtained his sources.³⁷ He further scoffed at the idea that a police officer might have been allowed to access his archive. After the case of a police spy who in 1990 had infiltrated the Flora Plenum and lived as “Christina Manz” until discovered by the Autonomen, it would not be surprising for other police “spies” to have been part of the Flora.³⁸ Indeed, the lead archivist mentioned the 1990 case of police spying explicitly when I inquired about Hoffman’s work. While Hoffman claims to have been open about his political views, background and “political sympathies”, it seems very unlikely that the Autonomen would have given him access to their archive, especially considering that even demonstrated leftists have a hard time accessing it without the right introductions, networks, and credibility.³⁹ Furthermore, that the lead archivist was adamant that Hoffman never entered the archive under that name, and especially not as a former police officer, seriously undermines the credibility of the text.

³⁶ “Daher ist es wichtig mir zu erklären, dass ich niemanden ausspioniert, sondern alle Daten offen erhoben habe. Ich habe niemanden Sympathien für seine politischen Positionen vorgegaukelt und stets auf den wissenschaftlichen Charakter meiner Neugier hingewiesen.” Karsten Dustin Hoffman, “Vorwort des Autors”, *Rote Flora*, 9.

³⁷ Interview with Ami, Nov 12, 2012.

³⁸ “Achtung: Bullenfrau in Hamburg!”, Dez 1990, ASB, Rote Flora Flugis und Konzept Geschichte Binder I.

³⁹ I was able to access the archive due to my own politics, associations and political activities. For example, I participated in several political rallies and conferences over two years, met with squatter Andreas Blechschmidt at a congress, worked with a well-known leftist professor, and dressed in my decidedly “alternative” fashion. In addition, I still had to be introduced by a friend who worked with the Zapatistas. Despite this “credibility”, I was still interviewed at length about my political ideologies and goals for the project before being granted access to documents.

The only other source, and only English language text examining the Rote Flora, is Laura Naegler's dissertation *Gentrification and Resistance*. Published online in 2012 after I began my own research, the book is a well-researched book about criminology, contested spaces and gentrification. It propounds the argument that "in a paradoxical process, Sternschanze's criminalized resistance is increasingly incorporatized into the dynamics of consumerism".⁴⁰ Thus, "the commodification of resistance and its incorporatization into consumerism turns it into a constituent of the process of gentrification it is originally aimed to defend. [sic]"⁴¹ Pervasive grammatical flaws, widespread typos, lack of editing and overall extremely poor writing and translation aside, the text remains a strong resource within criminology and gentrification studies. However, what undermines the text is that the Autonomen themselves have made this argument for over a decade, in several published sources. While Naegler presents this "paradoxical process" as her own provocative and creative thesis, Florian and squatter Andreas Blechschmidt has been presenting and publishing this same argument, sometimes dubbed the "Kassandra Effect" since 1998.⁴² In interviews, books, flyers, plenum statements and issues of *Zeck*, Blechschmidt and the Autonomen lament that their efforts at resistance were instead incorporated by the state and turned into tools that further identified the Schanze as the hip, politically edgy, and thus highly desirable neighbourhood. Indeed, this "paradox" is discussed in the widely distributed 2000 manifesto "Flora bleibt Unverträglich" available absolutely everywhere the left gathers in Hamburg, including being literally glued to lampposts in the Schanze. Indeed, Naegler cites this manifesto extensively in her manuscript as a source, but not in regards to her

⁴⁰ Laura Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance*, (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 12.

⁴¹ Naegler, 13.

⁴² See Andreas Blechschmidt, "Gleichgewicht des Schreckens", in StadtRat Hgs. *Umkämpfte Räume*, (Hamburg: Verlag Libertäre Assoziaton, 1998). The archival documents are literally so full of this argument that a comprehensive list cannot even be attempted here. The "Kassandra Effekt", or the argument that the Rote Flora tragically aided the gentrification it sought to resist, is a common understanding in the archival documents and Autonomous literature, and does not represent any sort of new or provocative thesis.

actual thesis.⁴³ While the translation of the sources and case study from German to English perhaps merits repeating this argument for a new audience, nowhere does Naegler acknowledge that Blechschmidt had published this idea over a decade before she did, or that it is considered “common knowledge” among the Autonomen. While she otherwise cites Blechschmidt and the manifesto, she does not explain that her manuscript’s thesis is taken directly from his work. Thus, while this source is a useful compilation and includes original ethnographic research, it cannot be relied upon as the only scholarly text in this literature.

In addition to the shortcomings of these two texts, neither seeks to trace out the intellectual history of the Autonomen, or to connect these social actors to their post 1968 lineage. Therefore, this investigation seeks to fill this gap in the literature by reading the 1990’s Hamburg Autonomen amidst the historical discourses that would eventually turn into *Autonomie*, the focus on the self and the determination of one’s own life. As an interdisciplinarian, I seek to combine philosophy, history, critical geography and urban sociology in order to trace out the complex nature and intellectual history of this case study in a respectful, sympathetic, but nonetheless scholarly and non-Autonomous manner.

Overall, this thesis is an intellectual history that seeks to explore the concept of *Autonomie* as a cultural identity. It will rely on philosophers Henri Lefebvre, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Michel Foucault in order to not only ground the Autonomen in their context, but also provide a lens through which their discourses are crystallized and presented. Using this approach, I will explore *Autonomie* as the attempt to create a free,

⁴³ “Flora bleibt Unverträglich”, 2001, s.3. *ASB*. Available in pamphlet form on every archive table. Also in Box “Rote Flora Flugis und Konzept Geschichte”. Also available online at <http://florableibt.blogspot.de/>.

ethical, self-determined life, which is practiced through the performance of inversion, rejection, political resistance and the occupation of space.

Chapter One: The Roots of Autonomie

Autonomie is a slippery political ideology that tries to resist any imposed definition by hegemonic language. Operating to the political left of anarchism, a collection of disparate radical groups practiced this idea in the 1980s and 1990s, emphasizing self-determination, self-creation, self-governance, and a politics of the first person. These social actors espoused an anti-capitalist ideology, often enacted through physical occupations of houses. Collective living in a direct-democracy was also typically practiced by small groups of individuals who sought to reject and overturn what they viewed as a corrupt and irredeemable society. This lifestyle also focused upon the creation of one's self and of emergent micro societies as feasible alternative cultures. While rejecting any notion of society-wide change, and demanding no "power" or hegemony "for anyone", including themselves, the Autonomes still sought to create tiny pockets of a free and resistant utopian society through their individual actions and lifestyles.⁴⁴ While chapters two and three will engage directly with these spaces and practices of freedom, this chapter will trace out the historical origins of these radical political actors.

Despite the autonomous claim that they reject all leftist organizations of the past, especially Marxism, and to be in constant change, chaos and flux, I will instead show the historical trajectory of this political ideology as deeply rooted in the student protests of 1968. This chapter thus provides a detailed history of German leftist protest from 1968 to the occupation of the Rote Flora Theatre in 1989.⁴⁵ The story will have two

⁴⁴ Autonomous Thesis, 5, 1981.

⁴⁵ There are many elements of this story that cannot be included here, due simply to purposes of brevity. The Situationist International was an important philosophical influence, and directly inspired the Sponti actions of the 1970s, as we shall see. More directly, the Green Party and the Womens Movement were both historical participants in the trajectory that led to autonomie. The Green Party emerged out of early autonomous anti-nuclear organizing and protest, and was conceptualized at an Autonomous protest in the late 1970s, which I will discuss in limited detail in this chapter. Similarly, some argue that Autonomy as a concept actually originated from the women's movement, as political women felt they had to have free, independent spaces to act autonomously from

peaks, and the first will initially lead from 1968 to the violent kidnappings, bank robberies, murders and plane hijackings actions of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in 1977. These events, known as the “German Autumn”, had many lasting impacts on both the structure leftist organization as well as the self-conception of the Autonomen. After 1977, leftist radicals would react explicitly against the failure of the RAF; turning from an organized, Marxist structure to small, increasingly autonomous groups concerned more with the practices of everyday life. The second peak will be the neoliberal economic policy of gentrification, against which the Autonomen would crystallize their identity and resistance in the 1980s. As the history unfolds, we will slowly narrow our concentration from proto-autonomous actions across much of Northern BRD to a specific site in Hamburg city-state’s Schanzenviertel, where the history of Autonomie congeals in one occupied theatre, the Rote Flora. This case study will then provide the focus of chapters two and three, and their discussion of space and identity. Chapter one will provide the historical context for this drastic occupation, and trace out the ideological, political and social influences that led to the Hamburg Autonomen.

The Shadow of 1968

The historical roots of the Autonomen can be found in the Western European student movement of 1968. However, while 1968 lasted only for one “red year” in France, the reverberations of “May 1968” echoed throughout Germany throughout what has since been dubbed the “red decade” of 1969-1977. During this time, ideas and practices of radical politics, direct action and civil disobedience were developed within the context of a moral and philosophical framework. I will explain that these modes of thought were both an explicit product of the red decade, and would also shape the

patriarchy. This aspect will provide the focus of a future investigation, but unfortunately cannot be adequately explored in this history.

discourse and practice of the Autonomen in the next three decades. While many autonomous sources reject this heritage, it is only in the historical context of this decade of unrest, and the moral engagement with the legacy of the Second World War, that the Autonomen developed.

German historian Hans Kundnani describes the students and activists of 1968 as the “post-Auschwitz Generation”, and explains, “‘1968’ in Germany was therefore a moral movement before it was a political one.”⁴⁶ In his argument, the moral overtones of 1968 stemmed from the students’ war-guilt; compounded by their parents perceived inaction during the Holocaust, and their own desire not to repeat this mistake. Indeed, the movement was strongly influenced by the writings of Marcuse, as well as Adorno’s cry that Auschwitz must be prevented “at all costs”.⁴⁷ As Kundnani explains,

The students coming of age in 1968 did not merely dream of a better world as some of their counterparts in other countries did; they felt compelled to act to save Germany from itself. It was an all-or-nothing choice; Utopia or Auschwitz.⁴⁸

The ‘68 generation felt an obligation to “save Germany from itself” and its dark past, which they perceived as possible only through their radical direct action against the status quo. This moral and ethical desire and the consequential “crisis of identity” was therefore “tightly linked” to a “crisis of authority”. Confronting “the immediate innate feeling of an unjustified and dark inheritance” was painful, but became a pressing moral paradigm in the struggle to prevent Auschwitz by fighting for Utopia.⁴⁹ Many students in the ‘68 movement thus reacted to and attempted to invert this “dark inheritance” by embracing Marxism as “a ‘contrary creed’ to that of their fathers and grandfathers.” In chapters two and three we will explore how this process of inversion and rejection

⁴⁶ Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Aushwitz*, (London: C .Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2009), 11.

⁴⁷ See Theodor W. Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ Kundnani, 12.

⁴⁹ E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power: The Green Party in Germany*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 30.

would become most important element of *autonomie*. As early as 1968, this motion “enabled the post-war generation to distance itself from the atrocities of the past”, and provided thus an “antitoxin to Hitler’s teachings.”⁵⁰ Part of this “antitoxin” included the complete rejection and “de-legitimation” of their fathers and the ideology of the earlier decade. “In that wider sense, the post-war generation in Germany was a ‘fatherless’ one.”⁵¹ The moral crisis of the Red Decade can thus be summarized as a post-war angst compounded with a moral obligation to reject the perceived evils of Germany’s fascist past. This resulted in a decade of youth who rigorously questioned bureaucratic, cultural, economic, political and social ideology and attempted to overturn these traditional structures through personal and political action.

Modell Deutschland

As this Red Decade progressed, much of this political resistance became crystallized around the issue of capitalism and Neoliberalism. As sociologist Ronald Inglehart summarizes, Western publics in the second generation after the Second World War began to shift from a “Materialist” to a “Post Materialist” value set. This involved a change in values from “giving top priority to physical sustenance and safety, toward heavier emphasis on belonging, self-expression and the quality of life. This shift was traced to the unprecedented levels of economic and physical security that prevailed during the postwar era.”⁵² The generation of May ’68 was thus one that valued moral goods more highly than economic security or stability. Furthermore, they established themselves as a moral crusade campaigning against the economically driven concerns of

⁵⁰ Kundnani, 11.

⁵¹ Kundnani, 11. Historians Frankland and Schoonmaker agree, and further add that “the theme of a crisis of authority by political systems after major military defeats with a substantially different political culture is not at all new”, but rather can be traced back to the French Revolution and the Ancien Regime, amongst others. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution*, (New York: Doubleday, 1955), originally published in 1855; and W. Kornhauser, *the Politics of Mass Society*, (Glencoe, Ill, Free Press, 1959). In Frankland and Schoonmaker, 39, fn 36.

⁵² Ronald Inglehart, “Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity”, *The American Political Science Review*, 1981, 880.

their fathers, especially when a Neoliberal government policy began to threaten social services in the next decade.

However, in the early 1970's the "Materialist" generation still largely populated the German government.⁵³ To the left, this "corrupt" and "out of date" mindset was symbolized in the "Modell Deutschland" economic policy, which would become the crystallization point of moral conflict between the two generations in the 1970s and 80s. Emerging from more than a decade of a Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands leadership, "Modell Deutschland" was coined in 1976 as SPD campaign slogan, but quickly came to represent economic stability and the cooperation between capital and the middle class at the cost of working class rights and the voices of citizens.⁵⁴ In essence, it was a "reform-oriented restructuring of German capital that did ensure a phase of economic growth and prosperity... Its productivist adaptation to the logic of accumulation was closely tied to a steadfast Atlanticist foreign policy along with a refinement of the corporatist state that included repressive measures against the left."⁵⁵ To the post-1968 left, this "logic of accumulation" stood in direct juxtaposition to their Post Materialist values. In fact, as a recession in 1974-75 deepened, the welfare state went into sharp decline. Leftists observed an increasing privatization of resources, housing, and basic social services and became embittered and frustrated by a state that they viewed as still fascist. Indeed, by the end of 1974, after the October 1973 Yom Kipper War, the Arab states cut supplies of oil to the west, sending the price of crude oil up by 172% between 1973-1974. In 1974, the West German economy grew by only

⁵³ An exception to this would be Willy Brandt's "March through the Institutions", where the government attempted to incorporate younger individuals active in 1968 into its civil service. We shall discuss this shortly, but in brief, the 1969 "March" was followed only three years later by the "Berufsverbot", where loyalty checks were conducted on all government employees, and anyone with ties to leftist organizations was removed from their position. Such a harsh policy mediated any effects the "March through the Institutions" had.

⁵⁴ Note that in this context we are discussing national politics, as opposed to municipal or state politics. See Andrei S. Markovits, ed., *The Political Economy of West Germany: Modell Deutschland*, (New York: Praeger, 1982) for a debate on this issue.

⁵⁵ Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Racialism in the West*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1989,) 172.

0.4%, while in 1975 it shrank by 3.4%. Consequently, unemployment rose from 600,000 in 1974 to 1.1million in 1975.⁵⁶ In response, the left began to protest the lack of jobs for young people. However, rather than investing in social services, the formerly left-centre SPD party moved to the political right. The SPD “Abgrenzungbeschluss” of Nov. 14, 1971 “clearly defin[ed] the boundaries between it and the other groups and parties of the left” and established the SPD as a centre-right party committed to economic growth rather than social welfare.⁵⁷

Citizens began to feel disempowered and frustrated; a sentiment that increased in 1975, when “the SPD-FDP government coalition turned increasingly to austerity policies, cutbacks in social spending, and more repression” against leftists who spoke out.⁵⁸ For example, while the lower classes, having lost any parliamentary representation, began to suffer from these cutbacks, the state simultaneously repressed leftist dissent, even instating the controversial “Berufsverbot” of 1972, which engaged in loyalty checks on all civil servants, and removed those with leftist affiliations from their positions. Indeed, two significant aspects of Modell Deutschland were a drastically larger police force and increased spending on security. Between 1965 to 1976 police spending increased by 565.2%, while Verfassungsschutz [Constitutional Protection Service] spending grew by 170.2% between 1969-1976.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, social spending and programs were cut. The population experienced the rapidly neo-liberalizing state as increasingly repressive, restrictive, and as extending hegemony over their daily lives. For a generation already defined by moral rather than economic goals, and increasingly frustrated by what they perceived as the fascism of the German

⁵⁶ Kundnani, 125.

⁵⁷ Barbara Marshall, *Willy Brandt: A Political Biography*, (St. Martin’s Press: New York, 1997), 79.

⁵⁸ Boggs, 84.

⁵⁹ Michael Ryan, *New Studies on the Left*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1 & 2 (1989), as found on <http://www.germanguerrilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/stammheim.html>

economic state, Modell Deutschland came to represent everything that they stood against.

One exception to the left's disillusionment and frustration was Willy Brandt's 1969 slogan to "dare more democracy". As part of this platform, he proposed a "march through the institutions" to bring '68ers into the civil service and allow leftist intellectuals a place to engage with the state in open, transparent, and democratic methods. As März explains, "they wanted to open up the SPD to leftists, and to win back the support of the 'toiling masses'. The policy sought to reform the anti-authoritarian, direct-democratic spirit of the extra-parliamentary opposition from within", via integration with the SPD.⁶⁰ This openness even produced a short-term optimism, and leftist activist Kurt Sontheimer remembers "for a short period, we were even partly happy with our relationship to the state."⁶¹ Furthermore, Brandt offered a degree of political amnesty to political activists arrested between Jan 1, 1965 to December 31, 1969, and "his leniency to the rebellious '68ers had symbolic value. It actually looked as if the new "Peace Chancellor" Brandt wanted to draw a line under the events of the past few years, and offer these 'troubled youth' a place in society once more."⁶² For a short period, even the left felt as though there might be a place for them, even within Modell Deutschland.

However, only three years later the January 28, 1972 Berufsverbot (employment prohibition) destroyed these hopes. This law allowed the German state to conduct

⁶⁰ "Sie wollten die SPD für linke Positionen öffnen, um die 'werktätigen Massen' weiderzugewinnen, und im antiautoritären, basisdemokratischen Geist der APO von innen reformieren." Michel März, *Linker Protest nach dem Deutschen Herbst*, (Hamburg: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 75. See Also Gerd Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt*, (Kiepenheuer & Witsch. 2001), 203-206.

⁶¹ "Für eine kurze Periode waren [sie] halbwegs zufrieden mit den Verhältnissen in der Bundesrepublik", erinnert sich Kurt Sontheimer". März, 76.

⁶² "Seine Nachsicht gegenüber den aufrührerischen 68ern hatte Symbolkraft, sah es doch so aus, als wolle der neue Kanzler einen Schlusspunkt unter die Ereignisse der vergangenen Jahre setzen und der 'unruhigen Jugend' wieder einen Platz in der Gesellschaft anbieten." März, 76.

loyalty checks on all civil servants and job-applicants, and to dismiss those with any history of leftist affiliations. While the political reasons for this policy will be explained shortly in our discussion of the RAF, the repressive law

resulted in loyalty checks on 3.5 million persons and the rejection of 2,250 civil service applicants. Although only 256 civil servants were dismissed, the decree had a chilling effect. By criminalizing such mundane actions as signing petitions and speaking openly against government policy, the decree went beyond its intended effect.⁶³

The brief period of SPD-leftist reconciliation was this effectively ended, and leftists recoiled from the state, feeling betrayed and tricked. Similarly, some argued that even the hopeful slogan “dare more democracy” was only Brandt’s attempt to align his Ostpolitik with the policies of NATO and the U.S, which were widely protested at the time. As a hope for “more democracy” revealed itself as an economic policy for attempting trade with Eastern Germany, and as those “troubled youths” once welcomed into the state were then promptly fired from their positions, the ’68 generation lost whatever small faith they had in the “Peace Chancellor”.

Out of this sense of disenfranchisement, resentment and disillusionment, it is not entirely a surprise that the terrorist political actions of the radical RAF began during this time, especially targeting those hallmarks of neoliberal culture and Modell Deutschland. Indeed, the RAF bombed banks (December 22, 1971), police stations (May 22, 1972), and the US Army Corps (May 11, 1972). While we will explore the RAF shortly in greater detail, the fundamental concerns of left-wing radicals were born out of the disappointment of Brandt’s failed reforms, the increasing state control and repression, and the emphasis upon an export economy at all costs - including the rights of workers and citizens.

⁶³ Katsiaficas, 64.

Of course, one could also argue that Brandt's Berufsverbot emerged from a political climate in which he had to be seen as standing strong against such leftist terrorism. His biographer Barbara Marshall explains that the summer of 1972 was politically contentious for the Brandt coalition, as the massive societal support for the RAF and other left wing groups caused the state to appear "helpless".

A dangerous situation was opening for the Brandt government as the right aligned itself with law and order and everything to the left could conveniently be labeled 'sympathizers'. This had two consequences: it prevented a rational debate and it pushed Brandt far more in the direction of the authoritarian use of state power.⁶⁴

Whether Brandt was to blame for the Berufsverbot, or if it was simply a calculated political symbolic reaction to leftist violence and increasing public pressure, the left perceived it as both as repression and a betrayal, effectively foreclosing the debate. Furthermore, his succession by Helmut Schmidt in 1974 ushered in an era of increased fiscal conservatism, and "represented a shift from idealism to pragmatism, and from a politics of symbols to one of results. From now on, the priority would be economic stability, not social reform, which in the new climate had become a political liability."⁶⁵ Whereas society had "dared to dream of more democracy" in 1969, not three years later were they suffering under increased state control and anti-leftist repression. Schmidt's leadership would only further deflate the dreams of 1968, and in this crisis of political disillusionment it was only three more years until the 1977 season of violence and political terrorism that would be known as the "German Autumn" (Deutsche Herbst).

Spontis and Student Movements

During this time, a rapid influx of youth seeking better lives resulted in overcrowded universities, which were still run by what students perceived to be a hierarchical and undemocratic administration. Young people saw little room to realize

⁶⁴ Barbara Marshall, 79.

⁶⁵ Kundnani, 12,

the ideas of equality and democracy being promised by Brandt, or by the insights of Critical Theory from 1968. Furthermore, the economic austerity measures of the 70s and the sudden expansion of educated graduates combined to produce a situation in which too many “young people with political skills and changed political values” were faced with little social hope for job prospects or political change within the status quo society.⁶⁶ In Ronald Inglehart’s now well-known concept of a “silent revolution”, the new Post Materialist values emphasized “matters of conscience, a desire for more participation in decision-making processes and an emphasis on creativity. These were contrasted to old materialistic values which stressed the need for economic security and for traditional attitudes to authority”.⁶⁷ As students increasingly experienced economic hopelessness, political frustration, and the inability to reform their educational institutions from within, radicalism grew amongst their age demographic.

Much of this frustration and sense of exclusion was expressed in the radical “Sponti” group within the German Left Wing. This student movement would become an important precursor to the Autonomen, lending them both theory and political practice. One well-known Spontis was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had been a leader in the French May ‘68 movement. He had also worked with Henri Lefebvre and was highly influenced by the latter’s participation in the Situationists International.⁶⁸ Drawing explicitly on this intellectual heritage, the Spontis reacted to the state’s political repression with absurdity, performance, theatre, as well as with direct political actions and street fights. As I will explore in Chapter 2, these elements connect the Autonomen to their intellectual origins in the Spontis. Like the former, the latter did not belong to political

⁶⁶ Frankland and Schoonmaker, 31.

⁶⁷ See Ronald Inglehart, “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1971), pp. 991-1017. See Elim Papadakis, *The Green Movement in West Germany*, (St. Martin’s Press: New York, 1984), 1.

⁶⁸ This is a long and complex relationship that cannot be summarized here for purposes of brevity. See Kristin Ross, Interview with Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International in 1983, *October*, 79, Winter 1997. See also “The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations”, in *The Internationale Situationniste*, #4 (June 1960). Available online at www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/moments.html.

parties, but rather engaged in self-directed and spontaneous actions without any formal affiliations or even declared political demands.⁶⁹ Their emergence in Frankfurt am Main was simultaneous with the first squatters, to whom we shall turn shortly. But initially, it is important to note that both Spontis and squatters were frustrated with a system in which they saw no place for their own voices or values. Instead

the Spontis advocated Autonomie, the self-organization of the oppressed, the spontaneity of action, but also their own emotional expressions (to live more from the gut than the head).⁷⁰

This “emotional” and “spontaneous” response were often an attempt to reinvigorate a self-determined life “from the gut” or the heart, and thus explicitly rejected and attempted to perform a reversal of “normal” or “logical” political arguments. Using humor and irony, they attempted to subvert the dominant paradigm and express their utter lack of faith in it. For example, they elected a pig to a university office in Münster in 1978, and a dog to the academic Senate in Ulm. Similarly, they rejected traditional Marxist and Leninist approaches, instead propagating nonsensical slogans such as “the revolutionary must swim among the masses like a fish on a bicycle”. The Autonomen would turn to the same performances of carnivalesque absurdity in order to communicate their refusal of societal norms. Similarly, operating from a position of political and social disillusionment, the Spontis sought to reject, mock and invert what they perceived as the broken, irredeemable structures of society. This anti-rational theatre of the absurd was applied both to current power structures as well as to more traditionally organized Leftist resistance.⁷¹ In this way,

in appearance, actions and organization, the Spontis are probably the clearest precursor of the autonomous. They belong on the margins between the Marxist-Leninist groups of the University and the undogmatic left...⁷²

⁶⁹ See Katsiaficas, 63 for more here.

⁷⁰ “Die Spontis traten für Autonomie, die Selbstorganisation der Unterdrückten, für die Spontaneität von Aktionen, aber auch von eigenen Gefühlsäußerungen (mehr aus dem Bauch als aus dem Kopf leben) ein.” Thomas Schultz und Helmu Gross, *Die Autonomen*, (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag), 1997, 2.

⁷¹ Katsiaficas, 63.

⁷² “Die Spontis sind wahrscheinlich in bezug auf Auftreten, Aktionen und Organisation die klarsten Vorläufer der Autonomen. Sie gehörten in Abgrenzung zu den marxistische-leninistischen Gruppen an den

As these liminal figures between the Marxists of the late 1960s and the Autonomen of the later 1970s and 1980s, the Spontis were active from the late '60s to the late '70s. Along with most leftist groups at that time, they were faced with severe police brutality and repression following the events of the Deutsche Herbst in 1977. Despite an attendance of between 5,000 to 25,000 people (sources vary, but seem to converge on a figure of about 20,000), their "Tunix" (the colloquial imperative form of "nix tun" or "do nothing") congress in Berlin in January 1978 was nonetheless the effective end of the movement. Thereafter most Spontis filtered into the Greens, the peace and anti-nuclear movements and most notably, the Autonomen.⁷³

Deutsche Herbst

Indeed, the pinnacle of the post 1968 resistance was the so-called Deutsche Herbst, a spree of violence and kidnapping enacted by the Red Army Faction (RAF) from September to October 1977.⁷⁴ While Michael März has expertly covered this topic in great detail, I shall attempt a brief summary here so as to trace out the background influences of the German Autonomen.⁷⁵ It is important to note how the actions of the RAF were prompted both by the moral outrage of the 1968 generation, but also influenced by the Sponti-style disillusionment with power, political protest, and even communication. Rather than engaging in political dialogue, the RAF sought to create spectacles of violence, so as to "wake up" society and force it to consider the injustice of both economic inequality and Germany's involvement in American foreign military

Universitäten zur undogmatischen Linken und resultierten wie diese aus dem Zerfall des SDS." Schultz und Gross, 26.

⁷³ "Dennoch war der Tu-nix-Kongreß das Ende der heterogenen Sponti-Bewegung. Ein Teil von ihnen gründete Alternativprojekte (dies entsprach der Integrationslinie der SPD), andere gingen zu den Grünen oder der Friedensbewegung, und aus einem weiteren Teil bildeten sich die Autonomen." Schultz und Gross, 27.

⁷⁴ The RAF is sometimes referred to as the Baader-Meinhof gang. However, this nomenclature implies a hierarchical leadership by Andreas Baader or Ulrike Meinhof, which the group explicitly spoke against. Furthermore, they referred to themselves as the RAF, whereas "Baader-Meinhof gang" was a term used by unsympathetic press and politicians.

⁷⁵ However, see März, *Linker Protest Nach dem Deutschen Herbst* for an excellent and thorough examination of this topic. I cannot possibly engage in enough detail here to describe the nuances of this vitally important decade of left wing resistance.

policy. While the RAF still utilized organized leftist resistance to some degree, they did not turn to the peaceful marches or sit-ins of 1968. Instead, their form of political organization took the form of small, independent cells operating anonymously within a wide network of supporters. This gradual “checking out” of society and turning to individual actions and spectacles would become one of the most important influences upon the German Autonomen, who relied exclusively upon this individual approach to political resistance.

In 1968, Andreas Baader organized the bombing of a Frankfurt department store, in order to protest what he perceived as consumerism and the societal indifference to the Vietnam War. He fled Germany after his arrest, but was caught in April 1970 and sent to prison. Ulrike Meinhof was a columnist for *Konkrete*, a leftist magazine funded primarily by East Germany, and an “intensely moral figure, driven by a sense of outrage at injustice in Germany and around the world and in particular at what she, like many in the student movement, saw as continuities between Nazism and the post-war Federal Republic”.⁷⁶ Both Baader and Meinhof emerged from the student protest milieu of 1968, but were both considerably older and far more militant than many of the students. In 1970, Meinhof used her journalist credentials to arrange a meeting with the imprisoned Baader, at which time they escaped until being recaptured in 1972. Between 1970 and 1972, the RAF conducted numerous bombings and radical actions, including a Frankfurt “shootout” that led to the death of a police officer; a bank robbery; a bombing of the US Army Corps V in Frankfurt; the bombing of a police station in Augsburg; the bombing of the politically conservative Axel Springer publishing house, as well as other actions.

⁷⁶ Kundnani, 19.

After being held in isolation in Stammheim prison, Baader and his accomplices engaged in hunger strikes in 1974 to protest their conditions. Indeed, while not endorsing the actions of the RAF, many sources have argued that the isolation was inhumane, and in fact worse than physical torture. Michael Ryan's "The Stammheim Model" relies on medical and psychological data to examine the enforced isolation that the prisoners were subject to, and argues that these conditions were a political act of control meant to severely punish the prisoners and reassert hegemony over them.⁷⁷ Leftist sympathy for the prisoners was widespread, especially among intellectuals, and Jean-Paul Sartre came to visit Baader in 1974 to protest the harsh conditions under which he was held. The prisoner's lawyers have similarly been alleged as sympathizers, even to the point of smuggling notes and instructions between prisoners and to outside sympathizers. Indeed, the documentary film "The Baader Meinhof Complex" poignantly chronicles the gradual radicalization of this lawyer, as he witnesses the slow death of one prisoner due to withheld medical treatment.⁷⁸ Despite his profession, his increasing disillusionment with the state and the prison administrators is a symbolic representation of much of the movement's utter disbelief that justice would ever be possible for the political left.

On 9 May 1976, Meinhof was found dead hanging in her cell. While the state declared it a suicide after a long period of depression and estrangement from Baader, members of the RAF argued that she was murdered by the state. Ryan points out that one of her attorneys legally challenged the state's claim, explaining that any claims of estrangement were a "monstrous claim" and a falsehood, and that he himself "talked

⁷⁷ Michael Ryan, "The Stammheim Model", *New Studies on the Left*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1 & 2 (1989). As Baader himself wrote somewhat incoherently about what he called "the dead-wing", it "is only a means in a strategy, isolation is only a terrain.... (I)solation is only the reaction of the prison system." Bakker-Schut, Pieter (ed.), *Das info: Briefe der Gefangenen aus der RAF, 1973-1977*, (Kiel: Neuer Malik Verlag, 1987), p. 51. As translated in Ryan, 1989.

⁷⁸ Uli Edel, *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, Constantin Film Verleih, 2008. See also Stefan, Aust *Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex*. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2008)

with Ms. Meinhof ... last Wednesday ... regarding the suits. There was not the least sign of disinterest on her part, rather we had an animated discussion in the context of which Ms. Meinhof explained the group's point of view." Ryan further presents evidence from her autopsy and the results of the "independent international commission of inquiry", formed at the request of that attorney. The autopsy, delivered by an independent committee on December 15, 1978, found that Meinhof was strangled to death before being hanged. It also presented the conclusive medical evidence of her violent rape shortly before the strangling.⁷⁹

While the allegations were never presented in court, Meinhof went from a legend to a political martyr, and her suspicious death galvanized leftist activism across Germany. The RAF outside of Stammheim began to demand the release of other captives, whose lives now seemed in peril. The RAF kidnapped the President of Employees association, or the "boss of all bosses" Hans-Martin Schleyer, and demanded the release of Baader and his accomplices in exchange for his life. As part of further attempts to free their comrades, the RAF outside of prison killed a federal prosecutor named Siegfried Buback, and Jürgen Ponto, the director of the Dresdener Bank during a robbery. However, the state instead reacted on 6 September 1977 by declaring a communication ban with all imprisoned members of the RAF. As a response, the RAF allied with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to hijack a Lufthansa airliner on October 13, 1977. Again, they demanded the release of the eleven prisoners at Stammheim. Instead, the state organized a special military task force, and the plane was boarded Oct 18, 1977. The next day, Baader and several comrades were found dead in

⁷⁹ The report stated, "The two autopsy reports mention a marked edema in the external genital area and swelling of the two calves. The two reports mention an abrasion covered with clotted blood on the left buttock. The Janssen report also mentions an ecchymosis on the right hip. The chemical analysis for sperm had, according to the official statement, a positive result, in spite of the absence of spermatozoa." See Ryan, 1989 for an indepth discussion as well as further medical reports.

their cells in Stammheim.⁸⁰ In reaction, the kidnapped Han-Martin Schleyer was executed and his body left in a car in France. The Deutsche Herbst had ended.

The Deutsche Herbst had a lasting effect on the entire spectrum of the German left, from environmentalist petition-signers to the radicals who had murdered Hans-Martin Schleyer. Particularly, it led the left to question its own forms of organizing. As Autonom Geronimo explains,

the German Autumn of 1977...further strengthened a widespread skepticism regarding traditional forms of radical organizing. The rejection of cadre groups, an emphasis on the so-called “politics of the first person,” direct action, direct democracy, and the establishment of a “counter public” [*Gegenöffentlichkeit*] were pillars of the New Social Movements.⁸¹

After the RAF, the proto-Autonomen began to distance themselves more explicitly from Marxist, Leninist and Communist groups, as well as from all widespread social movements and organizations. Their suspicion of the explicitly Marxist Baader-Meinhof group and its organizational structure seemed to be justified by the tragic and brutal end met by those members. Furthermore, while the RAF operated structurally as many small cells, the hierarchy present within those cells was viewed as a political liability. Activists saw political spokesmen such as Ulrike Meinhof as both a target for state repression, and also an imitation of the hegemonic state itself. Thus, both to avoid providing themselves as target for the drastically increased police presence brought into existence under Modell Deutschland, and to refrain from repeating the mistakes of the RAF, activist groups eschewed both leadership and any explicit Marxism. Finally, the roots of the RAF in 1968 and their Marxist discourse established them as an “earlier generation” of social resistance, against which later Autonomen would attempt to distance themselves and their critique. Youth began to turn to an explicitly anti-

⁸⁰ Whether this was suicide or murder has been greatly contested. There is much evidence on both sides, and one should see März for an indepth investigation. However, it is important that RAF sympathizers generally viewed it as a murder.

⁸¹ Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 18.

organizational structure to answer their distrust of any form of institutional (left or state) hierarchy. Autonomie as a radical self-organization was an obvious choice for resistance following this disillusionment with the methods of the RAF.

Simultaneously, the state responded to the RAF with incredibly brutality. Schultz and Gross have documented this state repression in reaction to the Deutsche Herbst. For example, when a newspaper published a leftist obituary of one of the RAF's victims, expressing explicit criticism of the RAF and of violence, it nonetheless triggered "widespread repression" nationally, including the search of houses, over one hundred legal proceedings being initiated against the journal, and those professors in Lower Saxony sympathetic to the left being made to denounce the text and declare their "loyalty to the state".⁸² Similarly, universities began to restrict the teaching of critical theory in universities, leading to a general societal sentiment of living in "Nazi times" once again. The historians Schultz and Gross explain

The state repression, surveillance and control were especially due to the new laws implemented after the Deutsche Herbst. At borders men were searched and separated, other times machine guns were held under their noses at street controls. The laws used came from the Nazi times, and every leftwing utterance was connected to the RAF, and every critical article fell under [anti terrorist legislation] §129a or §88, for everything there was a formula. Increasingly more people felt gagged and adopted the motto "whoever doesn't fight back, lives his life inverted."⁸³

Just ten years after students had rebelled against the "Auschwitz generation", it seemed that "Nazi times" had returned to Germany. Especially in the shadow of the transition from the "reform Utopia" of "peace chancellor Willy Brandt"⁸⁴ to Helmut Schmidt's hard

⁸² Geronimo, 72

⁸³ "Die staatlich Repression, Überwachung und Kontrolle mit neuen Gesetzen nahmen insbesondere nach dem 'Deutschen Herbst' 1977 erheblich zu. An der Staatsgrenze wurde mensch auseinandergenommen, bei Straßenkontrollen wurde einem die Maschinenpistole unter die Nase gehalten. Die Meldegesetze stammten aus der Nazizeit, jede linke Äußerung wurde mit der RAF in Verbindung gebracht, jeder kritische Artikel fiel unter §129a oder §88, für alles gab es ein Formular oder eine Speicherung. Immer mehr Menschen fühlten sich geknebelt und machten sich weider das Motto 'Wer sich nicht wehrt, lebt verkehrt' zu eigen". Schultz und Gross, 32.

⁸⁴ Geronimo, 47.

conservatism, and in the state's reaction to homeless, jobless and frustrated youth, it increasingly seemed that

Besides frustration and the "no-future" mentality [taken from the Sex Pistols 1977 song "God Save the Queen", and embraced by punk culture in general] came the realization that the system is not only selectively wrong, but rather addresses itself against the people, and that there can be no true liberation of the individual, without abolishing the system in whole.⁸⁵

Indeed, young people who saw the '68 movement as failing to resist the Nazi heritage implicit in German society began to seek other ways to live differently than their parents. Having now lost faith in a seemingly totalitarian state, as well as in organized left wing or Marxist protest, youths began to turn to the practice of every day life as a site of resistance. Schultz and Gross explain that "dwindling career opportunities for apprentices and students, and the desire not to live and work like their parents led many young people to seek a different form of life." They desired a life held in common with like-minded people, where they could feel creative. Particularly relevant was the difficulty of earning enough money to eat and live amidst the economic recession and dwindling job market, which fueled the disillusionment and angst of young people.⁸⁶ The reaction to state repression, combined with the economic possibilities, the fear of Nazification, the loss of hope in organized leftist protest, and the increased conservatism of education thus led to the radicalization of many individuals, which would manifest itself in the 1980s in the squatting movement and the demands for autonomous spaces.

The 1978 Tunix Sponti Kongress best demonstrate the leftist response to this new political situation. Organized in response to the Deutsche Herbst, the Spontis called not for a violent uprising or political kidnappings, but rather for members to sail away to

⁸⁵ "Neben Frust und No-future-Einstellung kam die Erkenntnis, daß das System nicht nur punktuell falsch, sondern an sich gegen die Menschen gerichtet ist und daß es keine wirkliche Befreiung des einzelnen geben kann, ohne das System in ganzen abzuschaffen". Schultz und Gross, 35.

⁸⁶ "Einerseits schwanden die Berufsperspektiven für Auszubildende und Studenten, andererseits wollten viele auch nicht so leben und arbeiten wie ihre Eltern, sondern sich zusammen mit Gleichgesinnten ausleben, kreativ sein, ein Leben jenseits der Arbeit fühlen. Problematisch war allerdings, das nötige Geld für Wohnen und Essen zusammenzubekommen." Schultz und Gross, 33.

the beaches of Tunix. This was their way of “checking out” of a society they no longer felt any affiliation with, hope for, or loyalty to. As the conference call published by the Spontis declared,

We have been here too long! The winter is too sad, the spring too contaminated and the summer is too suffocating! It smells unbearably from the smell of the offices, the reactors, the factories and the highways. The muzzles no longer taste good, and neither do the plastic wrapped sausages. The beer is as flat as the morals of the bourgeois. We no longer want to always do the same jobs, and always make the same faces! They have bossed us around enough, and controlled our thoughts, checked our apartments and passports, and bashed in our faces. We will not allow ourselves to be made small, made all the same, and bottled up. [From now on, we refuse to be arrested, insulted, and turned into robots]. We are fucking off!... to the beaches of Tunix.⁸⁷

This “sailing away”- explicitly stated as an escape from and destruction of Modell Deutschland - has been hailed as the formative moment of the Autonomous movement. It was a radical rejection of culture, politics, traditional means of protest and even the leftist forms of organization that led to the Deutschen Herbst and the subsequent brutal repressions.⁸⁸ At a time when all forms of left-wing protest were not only discredited, but also being attacked, sailing away to utopia seemed to be the only solution that remained. As congress organizer Küster later said,

They were the right words for the right time... The feeling in the scene was at an all time low. The RAF attacks had led to more repression and pressure to conform. The Communist groups in the universities were in an identity crisis. And the Spontis? They were depressedly hanging around in the bars or playing soccer.⁸⁹

The idea of the Congress was that

⁸⁷ “Uns langt’s jetzt hier! Der Winter ist uns zu trist, der Frühling zu verseucht und im Sommer ersticken wir hier. Uns stinkt schon lange der Mief aus den Amtsstuben, den Reaktoren und Fabriken, von den Stadtautobahnen. Die Maulkörbe schmecken uns nicht mehr und auch nicht mehr die plastikverschnürte Wurst. Das Bier ist uns zu schal und auch die spießige Moral. Wir woll’n nicht mehr immer dieselbe Arbeit tun, immer die gleichen Gesichter zieh’n. Sie haben uns genug kommandiert, die Gedanken kontrolliert, die Ideen, die Wohnung, die Pässe, die Fresse poliert. Wir lassen uns nicht mehr einmachen und kleinmachen und gleichmachen. Wir hau’n alle ab! ... zum Strand von Tunix.” Cited in Geronimo, 71. Alternate translation by Gabriel Kuhn noted in parenthesis.

⁸⁸ “Treffen in Tunix”, Tunix Flier, published in Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, Otto Kallscheuer, Eberhard Knödler-Bunte: *Zwei Kulturen. TUNIX, Mescalero und die Folgen*, (Verlag Ästhetik und Kommunikation, Berlin 1978), 93. Quoted in Sabine von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination! The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 116.

⁸⁹ “Es waren die richtigen Worte zur rechten Zeit, sagt Küster. „Die Stimmung in der Szene war damals auf dem Nullpunkt.“ Die RAF-Attentate hatten zu mehr Repression und Konformitätsdruck geführt. Die K-Gruppen an den Hochschulen waren in der Sinnkrise. Und die Spontis? Hingen depressiv in Kneipen herum oder spielten Fußball.” No Author. *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27.01.2008. Available online at <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stadtleben/tunix-kongress-am-strand-von-utopia/1150926.html>

it should be a farewell, said Küster, a lavish celebration of the utopias that one then finally wanted to bury in graves. The name “Do Nothing” spoke of the attitude toward life of many students, for whom work was synonymous with the deprivation of liberty.⁹⁰

The Congress mood was more peaceful than most previous Sponti actions, and demonstrations involved only “the symbolic routine” of throwing of eggs and paving stones at police rather than any serious rioting.⁹¹ However, it was nonetheless the first massive demonstration since the Deutsche Herbst, and did involve a flag emblazoned “Modell Deutschland” being pulled through the streets and then lit on fire in front of police.⁹² However, generally participants discussed jails, nuclear power, considered starting a newspaper called *TAZ*, and debated the founding of a political party under the working title of “the Greens”.⁹³ The congress was a funeral of sorts, a tiny space of recluse from Modell Deutschland, in which the left could gather to mourn what they had lost.

As I will discuss in chapter three, Michel Foucault himself attended the conference, and left convinced of the security concerns of the neo-liberal German state.⁹⁴ Like Foucault’s later work, the focus and aim of Tunix was not the violent revolt of the RAF, or “the signal to escape from the unpopular BRD, but rather to create one’s own world within it. The theme was ‘help yourself,’ said Küster.⁹⁵ This notion of building an independent utopia within the hostile state would become the mantra of the

⁹⁰ “Es sollte ein Abschied sein, sagt Küster, ein rauschendes Fest der Utopien, die man anschließend zu Grabe tragen wollte. Der Name Tunix entsprach dem Lebensgefühl vieler Studenten, für die Arbeit ein Synonym für Freiheitsberaubung war.” Ibid.

⁹¹ Michael Sontheimer, “Soziale Bewegungen: Auf zum strand von Tunix!”, *Der Spiegelonline Zeitgeschichten*, Available via: http://einestages.spiegel.de/static/authoralbumbackground/1287/auf_zum_strand_von_tunix.html

⁹² Geronimo, 73.

⁹³ One should note that *TAZ* would later become the most prominent leftist newspaper, and exists to this day. Some leftist posters portray the Autonomen throwing rocks, Molotov cocktails, and copies of *TAZ* as political weapons. Similarly, the Greens would go on to become the main leftist party in Germany. The origins of both can be traced to the Tunix Congress. “Die stellten ihr wichtigstes Projekt vor: Die „taz“. Auch die Idee einer linken Ökopartei mit dem Arbeitstitel „Die Grünen“ wurde besprochen.” No Author. *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27.01.2008. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stadtleben/tunix-kongress-am-strand-von-utopia/1150926.html>

⁹⁴ Indeed, his 1979 concept of “battle-ready democracy” can be traced to the RAF in 1977, as he was very involved in attempting to achieve political amnesty for RAF members in France. Matthew G. Hannah, Foucault’s “German Moment”: Genealogy of a Disjuncture”, *Foucault Studies*, No. 13, May 2012, 117-118.

⁹⁵ “das Signal, aus dem ungeliebten Staat BRD auszureisen, sondern sich darin seine eigene Welt zu schaffen. „Die Botschaft war: Hilf dir selbst“, sagt Küster.” No Author. *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27.01.2008.

Autonomen. Furthermore, it would provide the essential structure of German post-RAF resistance in general. Indeed, Tunix was an explicit reaction both against Model Deutschland and a hopeless turning away from the methods and outcome of the RAF, as it “became clear that violence was no longer the way to change society. But somehow one had to do something. The answer was ‘do nothing’.”⁹⁶ Rather than the organized, violent or theoretically informed attempt to overthrow a repressive state, the twenty thousand participants sought to find ways to establish small escapes within the state – to both bury their dreams of utopia on a faraway beach, and to create those small oasis and pockets of paradise within their own lives. As participant Bruno Gmünder recalls, “Somehow, between Stammheim [the high security prison where Baader and Meinhof were killed] and Mogadischu [where the hijacked jet was stormed by special forces] our dreams were dissolved. Then we opened up our eyes: our entire direction was all wrong, we needed a course-correction.”⁹⁷ It was a radical change from the aims of the RAF, and would provide an important turning point towards radically subjective practices of everyday life engaged in by the Autonomen who emerged from the Sponti and RAF movements. It also foreshadowed some of the later concerns of the German left, including the anti-nuclear movement, the Green Party, and the Antifascists, to whom we shall now turn.

Antifa

The RAF sought to wake society up to the injustice around it, and the Spontis sought to check out of an impossible situation by creating individual utopias. Following this trajectory of disenchantment with their state and police, the Antifa[scist] movement saw a desperate situation where authoritaries perceived as colluding with Fascists were

⁹⁶ Spätestens nachdem die RAF-Morde in den "Deutschen Herbst" gemündet hatten, musste auch dem Letzten klar geworden sein, dass mit Gewalt nichts zu machen war, um eine Gesellschaft zu ändern. Aber irgendetwas musste man tun. Die Antwort darauf war Tunix. Mathias Bröckers, "Gegen ModellDeutschland", Taz, 25.01.2008, available online via: <http://www.taz.de/!11527/>

⁹⁷ "irgendwo zwischen Stammheim und Mogadischu hatten sich unsere Träume aufgelöst...Und jetzt öffneten sich unsere Augen: Die ganze Richtung war falsch gewesen, wir brauchten eine Kurskorrektur." "Wir waren alle Tunix!", *Die Tageszeitung*, 25.01.2008, in März, 204.

unwilling to deal with the dark heritage of Auschwitz. Rather than checking out from or waking up a society that they viewed as irredeemably corrupt, the Antifa simply decided to take matters of justice into their own hands. While Antifa began as an ancillary aspect of the Autonomous movement, it later became one of the central principles of the movement. It originated in 1968, when students began to argue that the police repressing their protests included some of the same officers who once worked for the Nazi state. During the next two decades, prominent Neo-Nazi organizations emerged, and in 1981 there existed more than 83 neo-fascist groups with a combined membership of 20,000, and 22 additional fanatical Neo-Nazi action groups with less than 1000 members.⁹⁸ While major violence between the Nazis and the Autonomen would only emerge in the late 1980s, the widespread sentiment that society was corrupt and unredeemable was exacerbated by the state's seeming cooperation with Nazis. For example, When Autonomen tried to prevent fascist rallies in 1989, they were attacked by police, and Katsiaficas reports that much of the time, energy, and resources of the Autonomous movement had to be redirected to fighting fascists and interrupting their rallies, because the state wouldn't intervene.⁹⁹ As one squatter from Frankfurt explains,

Even with the mobilization of the racist consensus, we still had massive numerical problems. Thousands of attacks on refugees, on houses with immigrants, and on people who simply didn't look German enough, in small towns, in the countryside and even in big cities completely overwhelmed the remaining autonomous structures.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the Antifa felt hopeless and disillusioned with the state power that charged squatters with membership in terrorist organizations, but seemed to turn a blind eye to fascism. They recall "having the feeling that there was no way to stop [fascism and their Pogroms] from above or from below, and that we were at the door to the 'fourth

⁹⁸ Ian Derbyshire, *Politics in West Germany From Schmidt to Kohl*, (Chambers: Cambridge, 1987), 81.

⁹⁹ Katsiaficas, 172.

¹⁰⁰ "Bereits mit der Mobilisierung dieses rassistischen Konsens hatten wir Massiv Probleme, allein zahlenmäßig. Tausende von bedrohlichen und mörderlichen Angriffen auf Flüchtlinge, auf Wohnhäuser mit MigrantInnen, auf Menschen, die nicht Deutsch genug aussahen, in kleinen Ortschaften, auf dem Land und in großen Städten überforderten gänzlich die verbliebenen autonomen Strukturen." AK Wantok, Hgs. *Perspectiven Autonomer Politik*, (Hamburg: Unrast Verlag. 2010), 21.

Reich.’”¹⁰¹ And yet, despite their forces being stretched thin and massively outnumbered, the Antifa Autonomen still felt they had to take justice into their own hands.

Nowhere was this better exemplified than the small town of Rostock in 1992. From 1991-1992 attacks on foreigners had escalated, and in August 1992 “one thousand neo-Nazis in Rostock firebombed a building housing 200 Romanian Gypsies, while demonstrators and citizens chanted ‘Sieg Heil!’¹⁰² Onlookers applauded and chanted ‘Germany for the Germans.’”¹⁰³ Newspapers and “critics accused the police of standing by while “skinhead” demonstrators firebombed buildings housing refugees.”¹⁰⁴ And this critique was not unwarranted. During the entire week of violence surrounding this Neo-Nazi pogrom, which had spread to several nearby towns, less than 100 fascists were arrested. In fact,

The police chief made a deal with the mob: the police would withdraw from the city for four hours, during which time the rightists would have free reign. When the refugee centre was set on fire with at least a hundred Vietnamese inside, the fire department refused to answer the call for help, and police were nowhere in sight.¹⁰⁵

It was only when Autonomen gathered in Rostock to try to break up the pogrom that the attacks ceased, and the police returned in force, detaining over 100 Autonomen within a day; more than they had arrested in the entire week of fascist mob violence and fire bombings. While the German people responded with widespread Antifa movements, and protest marches of 300,000 people in Munich and Essen, and 25,000 in Hamburg, state representatives and politicians refused to visit Rostock, and, according to the left, “police

¹⁰¹ “das Gefühl haben, es gäbe unten wie oben kein Halten mehr und der Weg ins ‘Vierte Reich’ stehe vor der Tür”. AK Wantok, *Perspektiven Autonomer Politik*, 21.

¹⁰² Sieg Heil translates as “Hail Victory” and was the typical Nazi salute. It is currently illegal to make this salute in West Germany.

¹⁰³ Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 167. Source: Jonathan Kaufman, “Foreigners Feel Brunt of German Strains”, *Boston Globe*, Aug 27, 1992. Available online via: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-8756210.html>. Accessed Feb 7, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Katsiaficas, 167. The deal between the police and the mob was made public a year later, due to the newspaper TAZ’s investigation, the states Interior Minister was forced to resign. See 03 Feb 1993 *Die Tageszeitung*, “Polizei bestätigt Pakt von Rostock”

and government cooperation with the neo Nazis left little doubt that antiforeigner violence would be allowed to run its course.”¹⁰⁶ The left’s disillusionment with power, police and the state was strengthened by events such as Rostock, and left the Autonomen increasingly convinced that justice would have to be enacted by the individual, even to the extent of subverting a corrupt state.

Another important influence and origin of the Autonomen was the peace movement, which originally began with the Easter marches of church groups, and was influenced by Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik. However, despite this initial confluence, Ostpolitik soon became intricately connected to NATO and American foreign military policies, whereas the peace movement soon coalesced in protest against the militarization of society, and the alignment of Germany with United States interests. For example, in May 1980, the Bremen ceremony for welcoming new recruits into the federal army was tied to the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the German Federal Republic into NATO. As politicians tried to celebrate the military and global aspects of Modell Deutschland, “opinion around the issue of peace and nuclear weapons” was “polarized”. 500 demonstrators forced their way into the stadium and a violent riot ensued.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, when Alexander Haig, the American Foreign Minister visited Berlin in September 1981, he was not welcomed with the cheering crowds of Kennedy, but rather with a protest against nuclear weapons estimated at between 30,000 to 80,000 people. 2,000 of these confronted police violently, with 200 serious injuries in the subsequent riots.¹⁰⁸ While the movement began peacefully, the protests for peace “served as an important model for young people who were dissatisfied with their situation”. As we shall see later in this chapter, the peace movement would filter into the squatting and Autonomous movement. Rejecting their state, NATO and a society that

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Papadakis, 138.

¹⁰⁸ Papadakis, 139.

welcomed war, peace activists sought a radically individual path, combined with an attempt to “overcome their declining position in society and their search for identity by occupying vacant houses. Militant squatters became committed to the ‘struggle for peace’.”¹⁰⁹

Antinuclear Movement

Developing in conjunction with the peace movement, the antinuclear (anti-AKW) movement would become the most important influence and origin of the Autonomen. Protesting against the constraints of Modell Deutschland and its pro-American stance, as well as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the anti-AKW movement was also vehemently opposed to nuclear power and environmental degradation. Despite restrictions and the “loyalty checks” of the Berufsverbot on left wing and even environmentalist memberships, seven years after the founding of the 1972 Federal Association of Environmental Citizen Initiatives, there were tens of thousands of ecology groups, with membership estimated at over 2 million.¹¹⁰

Historians Schultz und Gross explain that

For the autonomous groups in the anti-nuclear movement, the core idea was the self-determination of the contribution of each individual to the practical resistance under bourgeois morality, and outside of the legal framework of the civil state. It was a collective process of self-awareness with experiments in new social and political actions. The Anti-AKW movement is probably the best example of a self-organization of farmers, the middle class, and left-wing groups.¹¹¹

Nuclear power was the issue that a wide selection of society could unite around, for it affected everyone from farmers, to the middle class, to the Autonomen. Indeed, these organizations and their successes became part of the founding mythos of the

¹⁰⁹ Papadakis, 139

¹¹⁰ Boggs, 173.

¹¹¹ “Für die Autonomen Gruppen in der Anti-AKW Bewegung bestand die Kernidee in der selbstbestimmten Einbringung jedes einzelnen Menschen in den praktischen Widerstand unter Brechnung bürgerlicher Moralvorstellung und außerhalb des legalen Rahmens des bürgerlichen Rechtsstaats. Es war ein kollektiver Selbsterkenntnisprozeß mit Erprobung neuer Sozialtechniken und politischer Aktionen. Die Anti-AKW Bewegung ist vermutlich das beste Beispiel einer Selbstorganisation von Bauern, bürgerlichen Schichten und linken Gruppierungen.” Schultz und Gross, 28.

autonomous movement. As Geronimo explains, left wing “structures might only be possible as structures of resistance, but they can lead to actual change once people realize that they can take matters into their own hands and threaten the dominant economic and political structures.” Thus, through their experiences in the Anti-AKW movement, participants and autonomous groups began to “develop trust” in their own abilities and “independent structures of communication and coordination.”¹¹² These methods and networks were developed in the Anti-AKW movement, which would lead directly to both the Greens as political party, and the solidification of the Autonomen.¹¹³

This movement had two major campaigns within its own historical and self-creating mythos. The first was Gorleben, where in 1980 protests set up “The Free Republic of Wendland” to protest the building site for a planned nuclear power plant. While the occupation was peaceful, “in early July 1980, the Free Republic of Wendland was destroyed in a military-style raid by ten thousand cops. Although the roughly two thousand occupiers did not actively resist the eviction, they were tortured and some severely injured.”¹¹⁴ This level of police violence against a peaceful, non-resisting occupation further soured activists on any cooperation with or trust in their state. The second campaign, at a nuclear power plant in Brokdorf in the Unterelbe region, built upon the movement’s frustration and resentment at this brutal treatment. Citizens had been petitioning and protesting against the plant, which would displace thousands of citizens and destroy several villages “to make space for the construction of pharmaceutical factories and nuclear power plants”. When their calls were ignored, on October 30, 1976, eight thousand people reacted by occupying the construction site, but were violently dispersed by police. On November 14 a second demonstration gathered

¹¹² Cited in Geronimo, 90.

¹¹³ The Green party, proposed at the Tunix conference of 1978, also had its roots in the Brokdorf protests, where many of the founding members began to seek alternative and political means of resistance.

¹¹⁴ Geronimo, 90.

forty thousand people, and “for the first time in West German history, units of the Federal Border Guard were deployed at a protest.” The demonstration was eventually dispersed with gas grenades being shot at the protestors from helicopters.¹¹⁵ While the events of the 1977 RAF and subsequent state repression of the left interrupted the demonstrations, the Autonomen began to nonetheless solidify in response to this state-threat and in memory of their brutal treatment. The first major action after the Tunix conference and the repression following the Deutsche Herbst was a February 2, 1981 march of over ten thousand people at Brokdorf. Gaining confidence from their ability to once again organize a depressed left-wing scene, on February 28, 1981 the Autonomen were able to “channel one hundred thousand people past the police barriers” at the construction site, in an enormous “logistical” success that boosted morale and allowed the Autonomen to reopen communication within the repressed left.¹¹⁶ As a participant in the first Gorleben protest, Geronimo explains, “the political strength of the autonomous groups of Northern Germany, however, was far from crushed by the Brokdorf defeat. The Autonomen simply shifted their focus.” Their pamphlet entitled “Brokdorf” declares that their resistance would now encompass “housing struggles, antiwar struggles... struggles against prison torture, [struggles against everything] that destroys our resources and our environment and that leads to alienated living and working conditions”.¹¹⁷ From this foundation in the anti-AKW movement, the Autonomen expanded their organization and focus to an explicit focus on housing struggles and living conditions. It was thus no coincidence that the housing struggle exploded in Berlin during this same year.

¹¹⁵ Geronimo, 86.

¹¹⁶ Geronimo, 92.

¹¹⁷ *Brokdorf 28.2.81: Berichte Bilanz und Perspektiven*, cited in Geronimo, 95

Why Häuserkämpfer?

The ideological and philosophical reason for occupation as a specific method of protest will become clearer in the chapters that follow, but in summary the housing struggle was “the wish to accomplish our own space, so-called “free space”, and to construct our own self determination, without the control of the state.”¹¹⁸ The squatting movement was an attempt to create spaces free from the hegemony, repression, and economic control of a state seen by many as antagonistic to its citizens. Furthermore, it was an attempt to escape that flawed state through an entirely different method than the violent organized resistance that had so broken their hearts in 1977. Rather, like sailing away to the beaches of Tunisia, the Autonomen sought to “check out” of repressive society by replacing state power by small pockets of resistance. The occupation of spaces was a symbolic attempt to create sovereignty and free subjectivity amidst the overwhelming control of political power.

Squatting was also the activists’ attempt to recreate a society that would emphasize community, shared spaces and living conditions, while allowing young people to combat isolation, disenchantment, and alienation. One Berlin squatter explained that living in the squat gave her “the possibility of always being able to talk to people and to trust them”.¹¹⁹ Another argued that despite the “turbulence” of his lifestyle,

The warmth he had experienced in this community had made him so strong that he would not change places with anyone. He felt that he had extracted a ‘better life’ out of a ‘wretched culture’, and that any efforts by the authorities to destroy the squatters ‘last dreams and freedoms’ would face fierce opposition. The squatters tended to understand the social problems of industrialization not in historical and economic terms but as a sign of the overall decay of civilization into emptiness and war.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ “der Wunsch, eigene Räume, sogenannten Freiräume, zu schaffen und selbstbestimmt, ohne staatliche Kontrolle, zu gestalten”. Amantine, Hg., *Die Häuser denen, die drin wohnen!*, (Unrast Transparent Verlag: Münster, 2012), 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Paradakis, 128.

¹²⁰ Paradakis, 130. See interview in TAZ, 20 April 1982, p 3.

Indeed, the squats were interpreted as an attempt to remedy the isolation of contemporary society by coming together in communities. While one might argue that the concerns with solitary living were a radical response incompatible with modern society, a broad 1981 Shell survey indicated that 79 percent of young people would like to live in this or a similar communal way.¹²¹ As such, squatting became not only a political action, but also a culture; an identity; and a moral remedy for the perceived systematization, fragmentation, and isolation of modern, industrial, and capitalist society.

These sentiments were in fact not limited to youth, but rather were concerns faced by a wide spectrum of society. A Berlin "Health Conference" in 1980 drew over 10,000 participants after describing itself as an expression of "the concern and skepticism by members of the social professions towards a society which pursues its economic and political interests without consideration of individuals and their environment."¹²² This turnout demonstrates that citizens across Western Germany were disillusioned by a state that seemed to value only private business interests over the needs of citizens. Furthermore, recall that this gathering took place only three years after the Deutsche Herbst in 1977, while membership in environmental organizations was still politically and professionally quite risky. Similarly, a 1982 survey of 2000 people in West Berlin and West Germany found that 86% of the population was in favour of a peaceful resolution to the Berlin squatting conflict, while only 14% believed in eviction. Similarly, 45% thought the houses should be rented to those needing accommodation, while 22% thought the squatters themselves should be allowed to rent

¹²¹ Shell Studie, *Jugend*, 1981, Vol. 1, s. 472, in Papadakis, 128.

¹²² Papadakis, 119.

the houses.¹²³ The overall concerns expressed in the poll were of providing housing for citizens, rather than legal property rights. And, for many young people, these housing demands were combined with a desire for community and the resistance of isolation, as well as a political resentment of the state that they felt was denying those basic needs.

As the cultural and philosophical meaning of squatting shall be the focus of the next chapter, let us first return to the history of the movement itself. The first house was squatted in Frankfurt between September and November 1970, in conjunction with the Spontis and the widespread rental strikes of 1972-73. Both of these had emerged partly in resistance against the 1960 state program of transforming Frankfurt into an international commerce and banking capital. A “Proletarische Front” manifesto published in the May 1973 issue of *Wir wollen alles* (We Want it All) declares that

To squat means to destroy the capitalist plot for our neighborhoods. It means to refuse rent and the capitalist shoebox structure. It means to build communes and community centers. It means to recognize the social potential of each neighborhood. It means to overcome helplessness. In squatting and in rent strikes we can find the pivotal point of anti-capitalist struggles outside of the factory.¹²⁴

From these Marxist roots, squatting was increasingly politicized over the next decade. The *Frankfurt Neue Presse* in April 1973 referred to it as “pockets of civil war”, while severe police reactions led to riots in that same year. After a violent clearing of one squat, the Sponti and leftist scene began to focus explicitly on protecting squats through any means necessary. For example, the clearing of a landmark squat, “The Block” in February 1974 by an attack of 2,500 police led to a riot of over 10,000 people, the largest during the 1970s in Frankfurt.¹²⁵

¹²³ TAZ, 19 March 1982, referring to a survey carried out by Infratest for Prof. Peter Grottian (FU, Berlin), in Papadakis, 127.

¹²⁴ Proletarische Front, May 1973, cited in Geronimo 53.

¹²⁵ Geronimo, 53-55.

During that same year, an intentional state displacement of long-term residents in Hamburg's Ekhofstraße 39 was coming to its conclusion. The state aimed to replace a long-term social housing complex with 450 luxury apartments. Tenants initiatives using petitions, flyers and other peaceful means were ignored, so in April 1973 the students brought into by the state to semi gentrify and push out the long-term tenants instead squatted the buildings.¹²⁶ This occupation, occurring in the context of the RAF actions at the time, involved activists armed with "helmets, balaclavas and clubs", as they anticipated violent police responses.¹²⁷ Indeed, their actions, in conjunction with Frankfurt, meant "squatting was no longer discussed as a mere praxis to live rent-free in empty buildings". Instead, it became a highly militant political battle that "would define radical discourse in West Germany" for years.¹²⁸ Indeed, the political struggle of 1973, which was compounded by a neighbourhood-wide and civilian support for the squatters, was ended in May, when six hundred police and a SWAT team armed with machine guns attacked the squat and arrested seventy youths.¹²⁹ In what came to be known as the "Ekhofstraße Trauma", many members of squatting movements went underground or joined the RAF, and squatting was not able to reorganize itself in Hamburg until almost a decade later.

In the meantime, West Berlin had been experiencing a housing crisis since the early 1970s. After the passage of rent controls and protection laws for tenants in 1974, coinciding with the recession from the Yom Kippur War, landlords responded with a capital strike. They began to simply abandon their buildings, so as to become eligible for

¹²⁶ Note that it is a common technique in German urban-planning for the state to gentrify an area by subsidizing students to live there so as to encourage older, long-term residents to leave. Once the neighbourhood has transitioned to a younger (and unfortunately often racially "whiter") dynamic, the state can transform social housing into private housing without facing widely organized resistance from long-term residents. This technique is currently being used in Hamburg as of 2010, though the students there are resisting gentrification as well. In social theory, this is known as the "Pioneer Thesis". See Anonymous, Thesis. Also see my fn 171.

¹²⁷ Geronimo, 56.

¹²⁸ Geronimo, 53.

¹²⁹ Thirty six of them were charged with §129 of the criminal code, anti-terrorist legislation which would later be used widely against activists, but was employed then for the first time.

low-interest loans to build private condominiums. Construction of housing peaked in 1973, and soon

Seventeen thousand people without anyplace to live were registered with the local housing authority as cases of 'extreme emergency', but well over fifty thousand Berliners were looking desperately for somewhere to live, even though estimates showed that there were between seven thousand and seventeen thousand empty houses and apartments, and an additional forty thousand apartments were expected to be cleared out for renovation or destruction.¹³⁰

As housing dwindled, rent prices began to spiral, and *Der Tagespiel* (Berlin) reported on June 8, 1980 "the shortage of houses resulted in standard nonrefundable deposits of around 6,000DM (then around \$3,000) for a small apartment."¹³¹ Citizens began to react by squatting the empty buildings abandoned by landlords, and through Instandbesetzung, or the process of renovating while occupying, transformed them into a livable condition.

As the squatting movement expanded, it became focused in Kreuzberg, a low-cost, largely immigrant neighbourhood abandoned by the state and thus generally free from police interference. By the end of the 1980's, alternative and leftist scene members were settled in 165 squatted houses, and "constituted approximately 30,000 of Kreuzberg's 145,000 residents."¹³² The houses organized themselves with a squatter's council, meeting weekly in order to communicate issues between the autonomous spaces. Early state repression was harsh, and beginning in December 1980

police attacks on squatted houses in West Berlin touched off an escalating spiral of mass arrests, street fighting, and further occupations. Over a hundred people were arrested and more than twice the number injured there when barricade building and heavy street fighting lasted through the cold night of Friday, February 12.¹³³

¹³⁰ Katsiaficas, 87.

¹³¹ Katsiaficas, 108, fn 91.

¹³² Katsiaficas, 88.

¹³³ Katsiaficas, 90.

The need for affordable housing combined with the political disillusionment of young people and led to such instances of violence. Not merely a political movement, nor a purely housing concern, the house-occupation movement combined these concerns with a decades-long distrust of police and state brutality. As a result, the Autonomen became increasingly militant in their political stances. As the housing struggle escalated, violence and state repression increased dramatically in correspondence with the hardening of the Autonomous line.

The state responded to this escalating violence by attacking the Autonomen at their source. The police seized all the issues of the newspaper *TAZ* (the leftist magazine begun at Tunix) during December 1980, and arrested the editors. They also raided the houses of those suspected of leadership, and arrested the entire 128 member squatters council in April of 1981. By August 1981, over three hundred people had been charged, many with §129, the anti terrorist legislation used against the RAF in 1977.¹³⁴ However, as squatting transitioned from a need for housing into the fundamental identification of the Autonomen, the movement reacted by increasing “the number of occupied houses...from 35 to 160 in West Berlin and from 86 to at least 370 (possibly as many as 500) in all of West Germany”, and the report of the Verfassungsschutz (constitutional protection service/secret police) listed as many as “700 known house occupations”.¹³⁵ Facing a nationwide increase in politicized resistance despite their best efforts, the state then finally turned to a policy of legalization, offering rental contracts to the more moderate squats. This reduced them to only 123 illegal squats, while the rest had negotiated a contract. By March of 1984, only 14 illegally squatted houses remained, and by that summer the last squat was evicted. In chapter 3 we will examine the nature of these contracts, and how the Autonomen often defined themselves in opposition to them

¹³⁴ Katsiaficas, 91-92.

¹³⁵ Verfassungsschutzbericht, 1981, s. 71, in Katsiaficas, 92.

on political principle, which only solidified the resolve of some of the more radical groups. In terms of history, even the demise of the Kreuzberg squatter's movement "did not lead to the demise of the Autonomen. The end of the housing struggles opened up space for new political initiatives, discussions, and campaigns."¹³⁶ Furthermore, it would inspire Autonomen across the country to engage in similar practices of resistance and the self-formation of autonomous spaces.

Hamburg Hafenstraße

Indeed, after the "Ekhofstraße Trauma" of 1974, when squatting finally reemerged in Hamburg it was only in direct response to the West Berliner movement of 1980. Afraid of the violence in Berlin, the Hamburg Senate adopted a "Twenty-Four-Hour Rule", declaring that police would clear all squats within one day, often with extreme force. Consequently, activists had to turn to secret occupations, and thus quietly occupied eight houses on the St. Pauli Hafenstraße in fall 1981. The occupation was only declared the following spring, preceding a mayoral election when rental agreements would constitute an important campaign debate. "Fearing riots in the city at an inconvenient time, the Senate granted the squatters the right to stay until the end of 1986."¹³⁷

During the next five years, the Hafenstraße became the epicenter of Hamburg's autonomous movement and the home base of political campaigns, especially the peace movement in 1983, the support for the RAF hunger strikes in 1984-85. A 1986 "Hafentage" (Harbour days) immediately became an annual meeting for the Autonomen across Europe. However, that year the police began to attack the squats with increasing violence, so as to "prepare the eviction by the end of the year, once the rental contracts

¹³⁶ Geronimo, 106.

¹³⁷ Geronimo, 141.

had run out". Citizens responded with a solidarity initiative, and on December 20, 1986, ten thousand citizens marched in support of the Hafenstraße. "There was a consensus that no police cordon would be accepted during the demonstration. When the police approached the one-thousand-strong "Revolutionary Bloc," equipped with helmets and clubs, they were chased away".¹³⁸ "Klaus Dohnanyi, then mayor of Hamburg, was unable to control the Hafenstraße *Chaoten*.¹³⁹ He sent his police to clear out these houses four times without success."¹⁴⁰ In 1986, police managed to clear out three of the houses, leaving five remaining. The movement responded immediately and

released its own counter offensive, marching more than ten thousand strong around a 'black block' of at least fifteen hundred militants carrying a banner reading 'Build Revolutionary Dual Power!' At the end of the march, the black block beat back the police in heavy fighting. The next day, fires broke out in thirteen department stores in Hamburg, causing damages estimated at almost \$10 million. Over the next months, while the city government floundered, the movement kept the pressure up. On 'Day X', April 23, 1987, small groups of Autonomen again retaliated, attacking houses of city officials, court buildings, city offices, and radio Hamburg. In all, more than thirty targets were hit in a fifteen-minute period.¹⁴¹

This resistance continued throughout 1987, and after being declared "public enemy number 1", the houses were heavily fortified in preparations for the police assault. This involved the installation of steel doors, metal bars mounted in windows, and barbed wire and netting hung on the roofs of the buildings and upper stories to prevent police ladders. Rooftop patrols guarded against police helicopters day and night.¹⁴² In response, "four thousand police arrived from all over Germany, and the country's borders were closed to suspicious-looking tourists headed in the direction of Hamburg."¹⁴³ The violence culminated in the Friday November 13, 1987 "Barrikadentage", or Barricade Days, which began when "the squatter's radio station

¹³⁸ Geronimo, 141-144.

¹³⁹ Chaoten could be translated as chaos, anarchists, amorphousness, or mess, as in the idiom "you're a mess".

¹⁴⁰ Katsiaficas, 128

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 129.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

began broadcasting for supporters to join the fight.”¹⁴⁴ After assembling barricades around their houses, thousands of Autonomen fought over four thousand police throughout the night and into the next morning. Unable to break through the barricades, despite the arrival of 2000 fresh police reinforcements, the mayor sought to avert further violence. With the support of the senate, he attempted to create a rental contract. When the conservative senate reneged on this agreement and blocked his attempt six months later, he was forced to resign, leaving the future of the Hafenstraße unclear. To date, the Hafenstraße exists in a legal limbo, where a petty crime by only one of its members would cause the clearing of the entire project. This political betray would be clearly remembered by the Autonomen for years to come, as we shall explore in chapter three.

¹⁴⁴

ibid.



*Barricades built across the Harbour Road during the Barrikadentage*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵

Daniel Bensaid, *Linksunten Indymedia*, 1986. <https://linksunten.indymedia.org/image/63002.jpg>.



A photographer captures images of the burning barricades erected to protect the Hafenstraße against police during the Barricade Days.¹⁴⁶



Activists gather paving stones to throw at police during the street battle.

147

¹⁴⁶ Photos reproduce in *Spiegelonline*, Martin Sonnleitner, "Hausbesetzer und Autonomie: Die Zebras aus der Hafenstraße", Feb 1, 2008. Accessed Feb 13, 2013.



Activists help to take down what remains of a barricade after the street battle ends.¹⁴⁸

147
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ibid.
ibid.



The Autonomen march to celebrate the end of the Barricade Days.¹⁴⁹

The Schanzenviertel

During this same time period, the other side of the St. Pauli District was known as the Sternschanze (or simply the Schanze or Schanzenviertel).¹⁵⁰ With an area of only “0,47km² and a population of about 7,800 people, it is the city’s smallest district” and

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ I will often refer to this as simply “The Viertel”, (the quarter, or city-section) though all four names are used synonymously.

until the late 1990s was “characterized by perceptions of neglect, drug-related crimes and a lack of public security.”¹⁵¹ While statistics are not available before the Schanze became its own Viertel (quarter), as late as 2007 the Viertel was home to 22.8% immigrants and 16.2% welfare recipients, compared to a Hamburg average of 13.2% in 2008.¹⁵² A working class district since World War II, the Schanze became increasingly run-down in the 1970s and 80s, and landlords increasingly abandoned their buildings or refused to modernize or repair them. As the 1989 *Neu Schanzen Leben* newspaper reports, if renters wanted things repaired in their buildings, they had to pay for it themselves. The landlords were only interested in rent profits, but not maintaining the buildings. Eventually, anyone who could afford to leave moved away, leaving only those who couldn’t afford to live anywhere else.¹⁵³ Students, squatters, artists, immigrants and the working class mingled with the elderly on fixed incomes, as well as Autonomen and other leftists, and a high number of drug users. To this day it retains its reputation as the “drug nest” of Hamburg, despite a decade of concentrated efforts to replace the population with the middle class. Indeed, the drug culture of the Autonomen was an important and explicitly chosen avenue of their political and social resistance, to which we shall turn in chapter two.

In the meantime this state-led process of gentrification is the root of our case study. In Hamburg, gentrification can be defined as a state-imposed economic and urban planning policy, by which the land value of inner city neighbourhoods is systematically increased through the expulsion of low-income tenants and the influx of high-income tenants. Indeed, despite the riots and squats throughout Germany to protest housing shortages and rising rents, Hamburg Senate adopted an official policy of

¹⁵¹ Naegler, 43-44.

¹⁵² Naegler, 67

¹⁵³ *Neu Schanzen Leben*, Sept 1989. S. 2. Archiv der Soziale Bewegung, (Hereafter ASB), Box “Schanzen Leben”.

“Standortpolitik”, in an attempt to recreate the city as a cultural capital of Europe.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, they sought to transform the Schanzenviertel into an entertainment district, where musical theatres would soon attract pubs, cafes and nightlife to increase the value of the district and change the culture from one of lower class ‘decay’ to an upper-class entertainment zone. The first project in this process was the old Flora theater, originally opened in 1835, which musical producer Friedrich Kurz of the Stella-GmbH group planned to turn into the site for a production of the Phantom of the Opera musical. Indeed, like the national policy of Modell Deutschland, the State Senate’s *Standortpolitik* was a systematic attempt to recreate Hamburg as a purely economic project. The activists summarized the May 1989 “State Renewal of the Western Inner City (WIS) Report” as having

Confirmed our fears and suggests what is planned in the coming years in Hamburg. In order to become a leading metropolis in the world, in the new millennium Hamburg should become a city attractive to promising industries such as high-tech, aerospace, biotechnology, genetic engineering, media, etc. Being attractive means that industries can accomplish the optimum conditions (infrastructure improvement, investment assistance, communication media services, etc.). In addition, the state must have appropriate human capital, so highly skilled and highly paid employees [document illegible here], who can obtain appropriate housing and living environment in the inner-city regions.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, under the rubric of “metropolis of the future”, the city explicitly sought to create an “ambient” atmosphere and attractive inner city neighbourhoods for the rich and upper-middle classes.¹⁵⁶ These goals were first attempted via large-scale cultural projects, such as the “Phantom of the Opera, which played a role in establishing

¹⁵⁴ Note that henceforth, references to the “state” refer to the Hamburg State-Senate, rather than the municipal government or the national government. Exceptions in chapter three will be specified as referring to the mayor. Generally, however, as a city-state, the State Senate and municipal Mayor worked closely together. The Autonomes and their literature generally refer to the “state” as a united entity, and do not differentiate between the levels of government. This generalization makes scholarly research quite difficult, and it is often impossible to discern which state they are discussing.

¹⁵⁵ “bestätigte unsere Befürchtungen und gibt Aufschluß darüber, was in den nächsten Jahren in Hamburg geplant ist. Um also führende Metropole weltweit bestehen zu können, soll Hamburg zur Jahrtausendwende eine Stadt werden, die für zukunftssträchtige Industrien, wie Hightech, Raumfahrt, Bio- und Gentech, Medien, etc. attraktiv ist. Das bedeutet, den Industrien optimale Bedingungen zu schaffen (Infrastrukturverbesserung, Investitionshilfen, Kommunikationsmedienangebote usw.). Außerdem muß eine Stadt in der Lage sein, dem entsprechenden ‘Humankapital’ (Zitat aus einer Olympie-Studien), also hochqualifizierten und hochbezahlten Angestellten [...], eine maßstabsgerechte Wohn- und Lebensumgebung im innenstadtnahen Bereich zu schaffen.” Flora Besetzt, 1, 11, 1989, s. 3. ASB Box 3 920

¹⁵⁶ Zeck, Nu. 6 August 1992, “Umstrukturierung in Hamburg”, s.6. ASB Box Zeck.

Hamburg as a location for cultural capital on the national and international stage.”¹⁵⁷

Indeed, Cultural Senator V. Munsch hoped that the building project would encourage

a significant cultural chance for Hamburg to become the most successful German city for modern musical theater. The Finance Senator Kiausch specifically brought the Senate’s interest in the project to the point that “the involvement of the internationally successful Cats producer Friedrich Kurz in the Schanzenviertel will not only increase the attractiveness of this city section, but moreso, all of Hamburg will benefit from this.”¹⁵⁸

Indeed, city planners saw Kurz’s proposal as a “godsend” that would only help them to realize their dreams of a “high-culture future” for the Schanzenviertel, while allowing them to “clean up” its image, thus increasing land prices substantially.¹⁵⁹



*The Rote Flora in 1989 before the Occupation*¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ “Phantom der Oper’ spielen hierbei die Rolle, den Standort Hamburg auf nationaler und internationaler Ebene Weltstadtcharakter zu verliehen.” *Flora Besetzt*, 1, 11, 1989, s. 3. *ASB* Box 3 920

¹⁵⁸ “...eine große kulturelle Chance, Hamburg zur erfolgreichsten deutschen Stadt für modernes Musiktheater zu machen. Genauer brachte die Finanzsenatorin Kiausch das Interesse des Senats an dem Projekt auf den Punkt: “Das Engagement des international erfolgreichen Cats-Produzenten Friedrich Kurz im Schanzenviertel wird nicht nur die Attraktivität dieses Stadtteils weiter steigern, ganz Hamburg wird davon profitieren.” Anonymous, ‘Rote Flora- Geschichte und Entwicklung eines Selbstorganisierten Stadtteilzentrums’, (Unpublished Diplomarbeit, Fachhochschule Hamburg, 1992), s. 23. *ASB*, Box Autonomie Zentrum Stadtteilkulturzentrum 09 320, II, s. 21.

¹⁵⁹ Anonymous, Thesis, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Undated photo of Flora before the occupation. *TAZ* selections from 1987, *ASB*, Binder: Presse I

This policy targeted the Schanzenviertel and was conducted through an intermediary body, the “Stadterneuerungs- und Stadtentwicklungsgesellschaft Hamburg” or “Urban Renewal and Urban Redevelopment Agency”, known as STEG. This company was founded in 1986 after Hamburg’s Senate began to react to the increasing decay in the Schanze, but also after a change in German law in the 1970s allowed for public funds to be used for modernizing existing structures.¹⁶¹ As a 1989 response to the citizen protests against Standortpolitik, the Senate assigned STEG as the “official redevelopment agency mandated to implement Sternschanze’s revaluation.”¹⁶² On the one hand, the Viertel’s public image as a near-slum allowed the state to justify STEG, whose official goal was to “enhance safety and ‘quality of life’ especially for families and single-parent households, and in general to improve the neighbourhood’s ‘bad’ image”.¹⁶³ On the other hand, STEG would soon transform itself from a public-private partnership into a private firm, with the explicitly stated aims of creating a “favourable impact on property values in this area”.¹⁶⁴ For the leftwing critics of Modell Deutschland, Standortpolitik, and STEG, it seemed as though “public safety” and “quality of life” were in fact meant only for those wealthy enough to move into the rapidly more expensive Sternschanze. The already disillusioned left felt that these promises were a state-sanctioned excuse for a private company to make a profit from their neighbourhood.

Indeed, despite the rhetoric, in practical terms what took place was an explicit gentrification process, to which we shall now turn. The term “gentrification” was first used in 1964 by the British Sociologist Ruth Glass to describe a process by which the middle class intentionally replaced lower classes while simultaneously upgrading building structures. “As a result of the middle class’ successive invasion, the entry of

¹⁶¹ Naegler, 44.

¹⁶² Naegler, 45.

¹⁶³ Naegler, 45.

¹⁶⁴ Neu Schanzen Leben, Sept. 1988, s.8. *ASB* Box “Schanzen Leben”

private capital advances, and subsequent inflations in rents and ground prices, as well as changes in buildings and infrastructure, led to the displacement of the indigenous population [sic]" and especially in areas with attractive and historical architecture. In the context of 1980-90's neoliberalism, gentrification "gained a strong symbolic meaning, standing for urban progress; for the inevitable and somewhat desirable growth of the city as an economic, social and cultural entity", while ignoring the displacement of lower classes as irrelevant to the growth and progress of a modern city.¹⁶⁵



*1988 Demonstration by the neighbourhood residents, led by Autonomes.*¹⁶⁶

However, fearing increased nightly traffic and tourism from the proposed two-thousand-seat theatre, as well as exponential rent prices and the overall gentrification of the Schanzenviertel neighbourhood, business owners, citizens and activists organized opposition. In February and March 1988 over two thousand citizens signed a petition

¹⁶⁵ Ruth Glass, in Naegler, 29-30. See fn 113.

¹⁶⁶ Neue Schanzen Leben, Sept 1988, s. 9

against the project in the first stages of opposition.¹⁶⁷ When plans to build the theater went ahead regardless, citizens organized under the banner “Flora for everyone” and “organize the resistance in our neighbourhood!” August 2, 1988 saw over one thousand citizens march in demonstration against the music project. However, as the peaceful marches were ignored, citizens became frustrated and felt that their state was ignoring the needs of residents in favour of a private company. This reaction was fuelled by the knowledge that public funds were being used for STEG’s private profit and the creation of an entertainment zone for the upper classes, rather than being put towards renovations or improvements to the dilapidated and often unsafe housing in the neighbourhood. Soon, the peaceful marches progressed to protests involving arson and violence specifically targeting the construction site, Kurz’ firm planning, as well as the construction company. The violence escalated until 13 September 1988, when Hamburg city, fearing a repetition of the Hafensstraße Barricade Days, finally responded to the violence by officially abandoning the theatre plan.¹⁶⁸ The lesson learned by the Autonomen and citizen groups was that peaceful protest; negotiation; and traditional political methods of protest were routinely ignored. It was only widespread violence and targeted property damage that seemed to catch the Senate’s attention.

However, despite citizen calls for a culture center for the lower classes, the Senate declared, “there would be no culture centre in the Flora, but rather housing, shops, pubs, and doctors’ offices.”¹⁶⁹ To the activists, it seemed that the upper classes could easily be granted meeting places, but that a similar opportunity was out of question for those without wealth. They felt that their Senate was dominated purely by

¹⁶⁷ Anonymous Thesis, s. 23. ASB Box Autonome Zentrum Stadtteilkulturzentrum Hamburg Rote Flora 09. 320, II.

¹⁶⁸ See also Naegler, 70.

¹⁶⁹ “Auf der Landespressekonferenz wird das Gerücht offiziell bestätigt, gleichzeitig, der Ort des nächsten Versuch bekanntgegeben. Gegenüber dem S-bahn Holstenstrasse. Für die rest-Flora soll ein städtebaulicher Wettbewerb ausgeschrieben werden: Keine Rote Flora (Stadtteilzentrum), sondern Wohnungen, Laden, Kneipen, Arztpraxen.” *Neu Schanzen Leben*, September/Oktober 1988, p.7. ASB, Box Schanzen Leben I.

private profit – a sentiment rooted in the anti-capitalist protests against Modell Deutschland in the '70s, and continued here verbatim in Standortpolitik. The Theatre stood mostly empty until August 1989, when the city offered the activists a six-week contract for its use as a cultural centre, in an attempt to pacify their continued civil resistance. When this contract expired in November, the activists stayed, declaring the site occupied November 1, 1989. The rest of our investigation will focus upon this specific site of contention, as both the crystallization of Autonomous discourse at that time, as well as the flagship and symbol of the Autonomen across Western Europe.

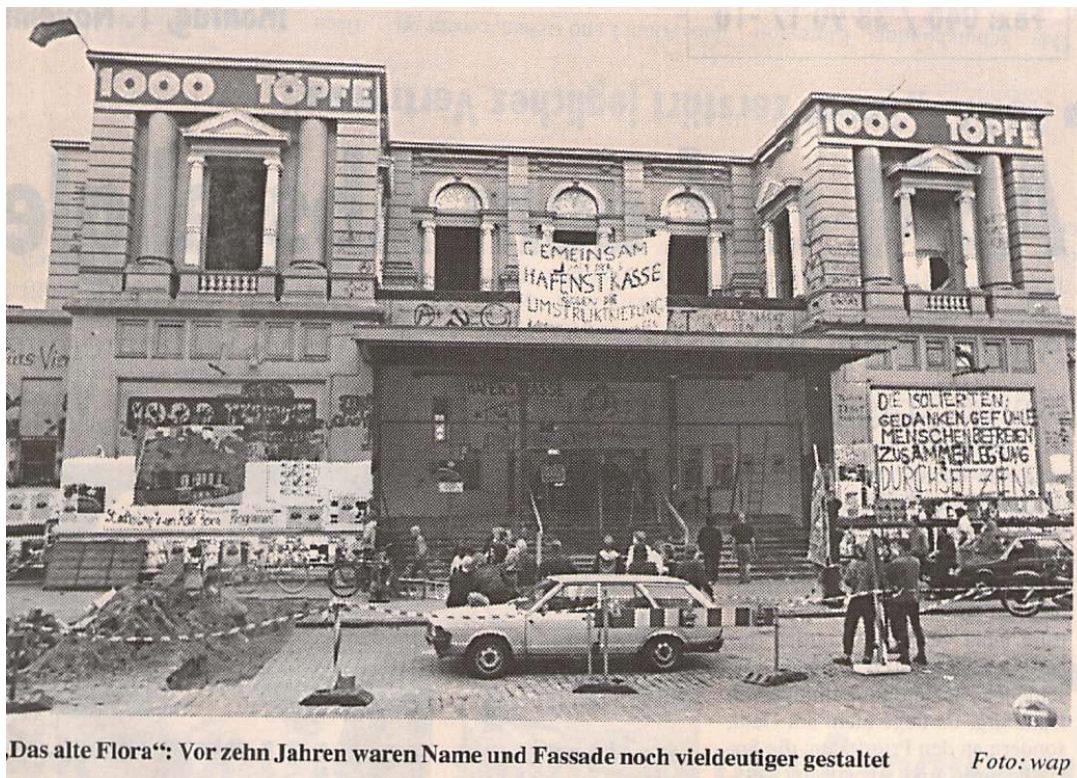


Photo of the Rote Flora after Occupation, 1989¹⁷⁰

Indeed, the citizen resistance to Standortpolitik did not cease with the theatre plans, and, like the Hafenstraße, the united struggle against the Phantom of the Opera became a symbolic founding myth of the Autonomen and of the leftist campaign for

¹⁷⁰ TAZ Hamburg, Nov 1. 1999, s. 23. Photo: "wap". ASB, Binder: Presse I

social justice and equality in city planning. Indeed “gentrification – or rather, anti-gentrification – constitutes one of the core issues on the [Autonomous and leftists] Szene’s agenda”.¹⁷¹ It

is seen as constituting an outright expression of neoliberal-capitalist ideology, of the commodification of everyday life at the expense of those economically and socially marginalized. Simultaneously, the reason why gentrification tackles the core values of the *Autonomie Szene* – and results in agitated and often emotional forms of resistance – is deeply rooted in the subculture’s valuation of cultural space as one of the constitutive elements of collective identity.¹⁷²

The identity of the Hamburg Autonomen was thus crystallized around the issue of gentrification, the defense of “their” Viertel, and the resistance of a middle-class attempt to push them from their homes. In the next chapter we will turn to space as a form of cultural identity, and the grounding of autonomous practice in Hamburg. In terms of both space, and of the trajectory of autonomous resistance that would culminate in the occupation of the Rote Flora, the resistance of gentrification was the attempt to reject the dominance of capitalist society. Like the planned entertainment playground for the wealthy that became an occupied culture centre, the Autonomen were determined to replace capitalist values with their own culture. As Andreas Blechschmidt, one of the original squatters in 1989 explains, the “central point in the development of the Rote Flora since 1988

began with the resistance against the commercialization of the neighborhood, which the state sought to create as a tourist location through the musical theater “Phantom of the Opera”. But it also was about developing your own ideas about culture and politics, especially to develop the connections to a political counter-proposal, which affects the entire social, cultural and economic life – maybe one today could even speak of an autonomous lifestyle. Until about the middle of the 90s there was a certain

¹⁷¹ Note that the “*Szene*” is a term used to refer to the autonomous Scene. As a technical term used by the Autonomen and some scholars, I chose not to translate it. Naegler, 81. See also *Verfassungsschutz bericht*, 2009, 100.

¹⁷² Blechschmidt ends this quote by referencing what “und dem Bewusstsein, selbst Teil eines auch soziologisch fassbaren urbanen Veränderungsprozesses zu sein”. In what he calls the *Kassandra-Effekt*, he argues that the Rote Flora has inadvertently become part of the gentrification process. Naegler also presents this thesis as her own evocative argument several years later. However, this is simply an incarnation of the “pioneer thesis”, explicated throughout archival documents at the ASB. The concept is that the first non-immigrant, non-workers, usually caucasian to populate a working –class neighbourhood “pave the way” for a slightly higher class to arrive, who allow the lower-middle class to feel safe there, and so on. This thesis is described in the Anonymous 1992 thesis, available in the archival materials Naegler references, as well as being expounded by Blechschmidt himself. See Introduction for this discussion. Naegler, 81.

mood, a structure and climate of people who would support this. And finally a third point is the urban context and the process of gentrification, which has altered the entire city quarter. This is the triad of autonomous politics central to the Rote Flora: an attempt to form its own political counter-culture....¹⁷³

Resisting gentrification was thus a way to preserve one's identity, culture, and the possibility for change and new forms of politics. Starting with commercialization, resisting gentrification then became more than a one time protest. It would develop into an "entire social, cultural and economic life" and eventually even "an attempt to form its own political counter-culture" as a "lifestyle". Seen in this light, one can understand why this space would become so symbolically important to the Autonomen. In chapter three we will examine just how important this symbolism of resistance would become.

The Rote Flora as occupied Autonomous culture centre thus emerged from two decades of political resistance, begun in the student protests of 1968, and increasing in intensity through the Red Decade of 1969-1977. As leftist resistance transformed from student marches into armed and violent actions by the RAF, discourse began to shift from utopianism, to Marxism, and finally to the disillusioned hopelessness of the Spontis and the Tunix conference. As the left became disenchanted with the prospects of widespread societal change, their attention shifted from a moral outrage against nuclear war, peace, NATO, Vietnam and the environment into a concern with their own individual way of life and autonomous practice. Similarly, the deadly end met by the Baader-Meinhof group in Stammheim prison and the state repression that followed 1977 put an end to organized leftist resistance, and widespread mass movements began

¹⁷³ "fing an mit dem Widerstand gegen die Kommerzialisierung des Viertels, in dem man mit dem Musical-Theater "Phantom der Oper" Kultur als einen touristischen Standortfaktor etablieren wollte. Es ging aber auch darum, eigene Vorstellungen von Kultur und Politik und vor allem deren Verbindung zu entwickeln, einen politischen Gegenentwurf zu verfolgen, der das gesamte soziale, kulturelle und ökonomische Leben betrifft - vielleicht würde man heute man von einem „autonomen Lifestyle“ sprechen. Es gab bis etwa Mitte der 90er Jahre eine ganz bestimmte Stimmung, eine Struktur und ein Klima von Menschen, die das mitgetragen haben. Und schliesslich ist ein dritter Punkt der städtische Kontext und die Prozesse der Gentrifizierung, die das gesamte Stadtviertel veränderten. Dieser Dreiklang von klassischer autonomer Politik, von einem Versuch eines eigenen politisch kulturellen Gegenentwurfs...ist zentral für die Rote Flora."¹⁷³ Andreas Blechschmidt, Rote Flora Plenum, "Selborganisation statt urbane Inszenierung?", Interview with "The Thing Hamburg", 12 Nov 2006, available online via <http://www.thing-hamburg.de/index.php?id=520>

to congeal into tiny, underground and self-run autonomous groups. Post-Materialist concerns about utopia transformed into questions of immediate physical needs, such as housing, and as the economic crisis of the mid '70s affected an explosion of educated German youth, they began to perform their politics through the occupation of space and a demand for adequate living space. Seeing an increasingly conservative and neoliberal state diverting scarce public funds to private companies for the explicit purposes of private profit and the expulsion of low-income tenants, and recalling the injustices of Modell Deutschland, this economic, social, political, ideological and physical resistance became crystallized in the critique of capitalist neoliberalism. This militant critique would be performed primarily through the occupation of houses, so as to create spaces where an alternative society and economy could be explored. In chapter two, we will turn to the politics of group identity, and the further strengthening of Autonomous discourse through the use of these occupied spaces.

Chapter Two: Autonomie, the Everyday and Selbstbestimmtes Leben

This chapter will draw on the concepts of "culture from below" and the "practice of everyday life" to understand Autonomie's ethos of self-determination. In the Rote Flora, this emphasis is performed and enacted through the occupation of space, through symbolic spectacles of resistance, through movement as a goal in itself, and ultimately by the attempt to create "Rechtsfreiräume", or spaces free of the control of society, capitalism and dominance. These aspects all represent critical elements of the Autonomous demand for the self-determination, self-design, and self-creation of one's own life. Thus, this chapter will thus begin and end with the concept of "Selbstbestimmtes Leben".¹⁷⁴

In order to contextualize this theme, I will trace out the intellectual history of Autonomie as demonstrated by two philosophers. First, in order to understand the historical Zeitgeist of the Autonomen, I will be relying on the framework of philosopher, activist, Marxist and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. As one of the greatest influences upon the left at this time, his work is an indispensable framework for understanding Autonomie. This chapter will therefore spend significant time tracing out his concepts, as the Autonomen relied upon them explicitly. I will explain his philosophy of use and exchange value; everyday and everydayness; culture from below; political resistance through the everyday; theory praxis; and the revolution of everyday life. Secondly, Lefebvre's work is paralleled and complimented by literary theorist and historian Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on the carnival influenced Autonomie to a great degree. Both Lefebvre and Bakhtin describe the spectacle as one tool used in the revolution of everyday life, and thus I will spend a great deal of time trying to understand the political protest as carnival and symbol. Finally, relying on this intellectual heritage, I will turn to

¹⁷⁴ Self-determined life.

space as a spectacle, to the extent that it became a symbolic statement. In the context of a critique of racism and fascism, I will explore why the Autonomen turned to an arguably utopian rejection of state authority, and an open support for the Hamburg drug culture. Overall, by tracing out all of these aspects of everyday life, I will argue that the Autonomen sought to create self-determined lives in a space of freedom.

Selbstbestimmtes Leben

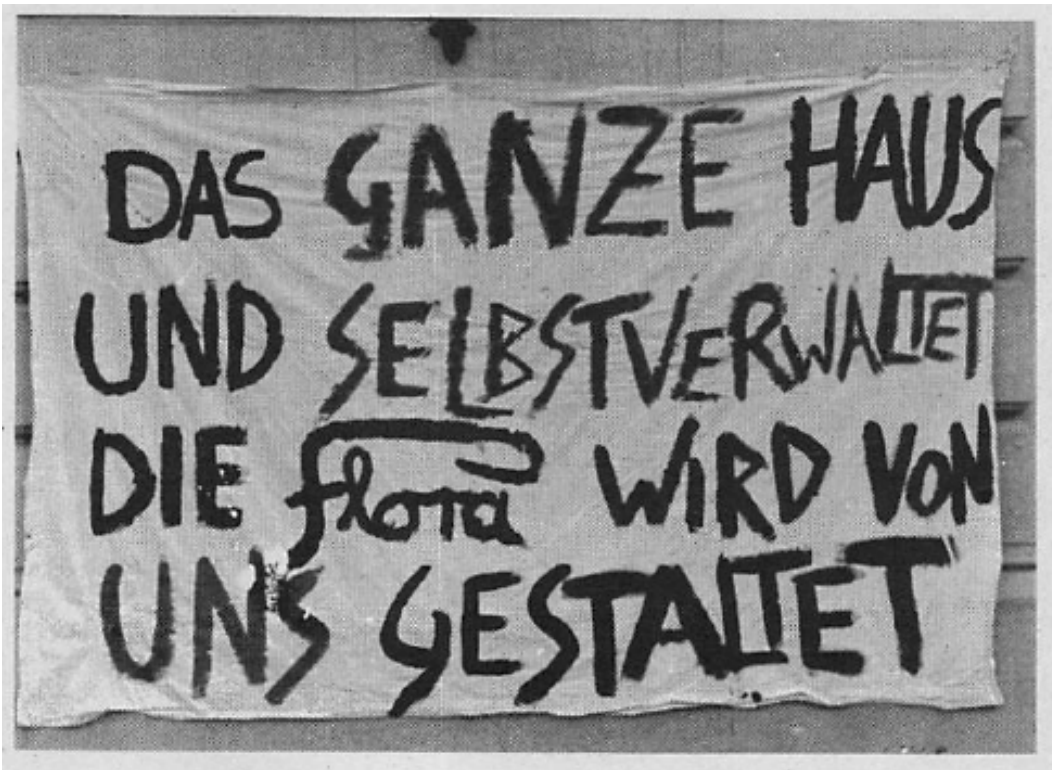
The most important aspect of both Autonomie and the Häuserkampf is the concept of “Selbstbestimmtes Leben”, or the free “self-determination of our own lives”. The Autonomen draw upon this idea when they discuss their own personal and collective identity. For instance, interviewee “A” of the Rote Flora in 1999 explained it thusly: “Autonomie means that man can determine his life for himself”.¹⁷⁵ It was the attempt to resist the state, not through organized Marxist violence, but rather by simply rejecting the state’s authority and asserting the self-creation of oneself. Of course, any movement holding to such a definition will contain contradictions and incongruities, but overall, despite the variation within the widespread squatting network, scholar and historians Schultz und Gross list “self-determination” as the first and most important “slogan of the autonomous movement”.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the 1992 “Use Concept” of the Rote Flora Plenum states that the “Flora is the attempt to build domination-free, self-realized and collective structures...The self-organization is thus foundational principle of the work and the Flora’s self-understanding.”¹⁷⁷ The purpose is not a particular ideology, or the “goal” or result of the “resistance and struggle”, but rather the practice of living free from domination, and seeking to be free to determine one’s own form of life, however

¹⁷⁵ “Autonomie ist...das man sein Leben selber bestimmen kann.” Interview with A, Sept. 17, 1999, in Frigga Haus, Silke Wittich-Neven, und Victor Rego Diaz, *Widerstand in Zeiten Neoliberaler Neuordnung – Träume und Utopien in der Rote Flora*, Unpublished Diploma Thesis, 4, February, 2000. ASB, Box 09 320 II. (hereafter Haus, *Widerstand*.)

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Schultz und Almut Gross, *Die Autonomen*, (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 1997), s.55.

¹⁷⁷ “Flora ist der Versuch, herrschaftsfreie, selbstbestimmte und kollektive Strukturen aufzubauen....Die Selbstorganisation ist dabei das Grundprinzip der Arbeit und des Selbstverständnis in der Flora.” Zeck, nu 7, Oktober 1992, s.4. ASB, Zeck Box.

that determination might look. Within the Rote Flora, this process involves a shared space for the creation of an alternative society, which was autonomous of the current societal norms. Furthermore, this self-determination was autonomous of the restructuring process that the state imposed as part of their Standortpolitik. By creating a culture centre for culture from below, for free concerts, alternative music and politically resistant culture, the activists sought to form their own society. Autonomie for them meant that not only was another way of life possible, but that it could be practiced “here and now”, and could be formed through the creation of an alternate space and culture.¹⁷⁸



“The whole house and self-governing, the Flora is designed by us”.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ “Autonomie: das bedeutet für uns, hier und jetzt andere Lebensformen zu praktizieren.” *radikal*, nu 98, September 1981.

¹⁷⁹ *Zeck*, nu 7, 1992. Poster hung on the Rote Flora.

An Autonomous Space Free from Capital

In their cultural centre, the Autonomen sought to resist dominant economic structures by creating a space where capitalist exchange was absent. Indeed, before the November occupation of the centre, they presented a “Use Concept” to the Senate. As part of this proposal, they repeatedly argue that

The laws that the Hamburg cultural community are expected to obey are those of the free market economy. There is no more space for engaged experimental art and culture (or in political speech: a cultural mission).¹⁸⁰

In order to remedy this idea of culture as only possible in a free market economy, they sought to create a space where culture could exist independent of fiscal exchange. A 1991 *Neues Deutschland* article explains, “for many, the space of the building is the only available location to talk to one another. It is a meeting place where one does not have to pay to come inside.”¹⁸¹ The Nutzungskonzepte (use plans) of the culture centre as a “house for everyone” declare a space free of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism, as well as the domination and isolation of a capitalist society.¹⁸² They attempt to actualize these goals by “putting into practice the utopia of a domination-free and exclusion-free life”.¹⁸³ The Rote Flora contained spaces for music concerts, a “Volksküche”, or low-cost people’s kitchen, a bicycle and motorcycle repair shop and meeting places for various leftist and especially anti-fascist and anti-racist groups.¹⁸⁴ Bands were given free practice spaces, and concerts were held with no entrance fee. The Flora became a place for music, theatre and performances that appealed to those unable to afford the high price of musical theatre tickets. Thus, the Flora embodied the values of the Autonomen in

¹⁸⁰ “DIE GESETZE, DENEN DIE HAMBURGER KULTURSZENE ZU GEHORCHEN HAT, SIND ZUNEHMEND DIE DER “FREIEN MARKTWIRTSCHAFT”. Für engagierte, experimentierfreudige Kunst und Kultur (oder im Politikerdeutsch: einen Kulturauftrag”) ist da kein Platz mehr!” Erstes Nutzung Konzept, 1989, s. 7. ASB Box Rote Flora Flugis und Konzepte Geschichte.

¹⁸¹ *Neues Deutschland*, “Auch die kein Geld haben, brauchen einem Platz zum reden”, Nov/Dez, 5, 1991.

¹⁸² *Inhaltliches Konzepte vorabdruck*, Sept 1992, “die drei Antis oder das Leben hinter den ausprüchen”, s.6. ASB Box Rote Flora Flugis und Konzepte Geschichte.

¹⁸³ “Die Utopie eines herrschafts- und ausgrenzungsfreien Lebens praktisch umzusetzen” Flugblatt der Roten Flora, “Gegen der herrschende Drogen- und Flüchtlingspolitik”, Dez 1997. ASB, Box Rote Flora Flugis und Konzept Geschichte.

¹⁸⁴ The importance of anti-fascism cannot be overemphasized, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this investigation. See Katsiaficas, 162-176.

microcosmic, utopian form. Unable to change the political climate of Hamburg or the opinions of German society, they sought instead to at least control their own cultural topography and attempt to create a tiny autonomous space of freedom.

Auch die kein Geld haben, brauchen einen Platz zum reden N M U



Die Rote Flora in Sankt Pauli ist heute ein BürgerInnenzentrum. Von Leuten aus dem Viertel betrieben, muß sie ohne staatliche Zuschüsse auskommen. Für viele sind die Räume des Gebäudes der einzige Ort, zum reden miteinander. Ein Treffpunkt, wo man nicht bezahlen muß, um reinzukommen. In dieser Gegend wichtiges Kriterium.

Einst befand sich in dem Haus am Schulterblatt ein Tausend-Töpfe-Laden. Pläne des Senats, es abzureißen, wurden zum Teil in die Tat umgesetzt — bis sich herausstellte, daß die Genehmigung ungültig war.

Später beschlossen die Regierenden der Stadt, hier eine Musikhalle zu errichten. Dagegen wehrte sich ein breites Bündnis von Anwohnerinnen und Geschäftsleuten — erfolgreich. Ein Nobelkulturpalast hätte nicht nur chaotische Verkehrszustände verursacht, sondern auch Mieten in die Höhe getrieben. Für viele wären die Wohnungen nicht mehr bezahlbar.

Die Rote Flora ist ein Zufluchtsort. Für die, die kein Geld für teure Kultur haben. Für die, die lieber streiten wollen, als zu Hause zu sitzen und abzuwarten. Die nicht in das Bild einer wohlhabenden Stadt passen. Foto: Joachim Becker

"Even those with no money need a place to talk"¹⁸⁵

Henri Lefebvre: Philosopher Activist

As I will discuss shortly in this chapter, having a space to talk is one of the fundamental components of political group identity and cohesion. Furthermore, a group's political power is grounded in their control of a space, both for their own use, and for their legitimacy in debate with a state.¹⁸⁶ Henri Lefebvre was the political activist, socialist, philosopher and sociologist who developed this concept, and it is to him that the Autonomes owe much of their intellectual heritage. Indeed, they both explicitly and implicitly cite him in their rallies, newsletters and meetings, even to the extent of naming a social movement after one of his texts. His concepts of a citizen's "right to the city", of the use value of city space, and his critiques of alienation are cited and invoked across the twenty year history of the newsletter *Zeck*, as well as in primary and secondary published literature by and about the movement. Indeed, Lefebvre's

¹⁸⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, May 11/12, 1991. ASB, Binder 09 232 Presse 89-90.
¹⁸⁶ See also Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

work had been an important part of the intellectual milieu of the 1968 student protests, and had been used since that time by leftist groups throughout France and Germany. As the first translator of Marx's 1844 manuscripts, Lefebvre was both the French Communist Party's chief public intellectual, as well as one of the leading Marx experts at the time. The students of 1968, the Situationists and the Autonomes who sought to overcome "alienated daily life" had to be steeped in his work in order to make their own critiques. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter one, the Spontis were the predecessors of the Autonomes, and many of the former joined Autonomous groups after 1978. One of the best-known Spontis was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who studied with Lefebvre and was greatly influenced by his ideas. As we shall examine later in this chapter, the Situationists International group were also closely tied to Lefebvre. The Autonomes explicitly relied on and quoted the intellectual concepts that the Situationists and Lefebvre developed together. In addition, Lefebvre's concept of "everyday life" was one of the foundations of the turn to a self-determined lifestyle of autonomy, communal living, and revolution through the everyday.

One could argue that Lefebvre himself was merely influenced by the same intellectual Zeitgeist that led to an emphasis upon these values. Indeed, the everyday was first mentioned in Lukács and Marx himself, and was discussed by Nietzsche as early as the 1870s. Conversely, as the first translator of Marx and a leading public philosopher, it could be argued that Lefebvre's ideas themselves shaped his century and were a catalyst for the philosophical and political critiques of the day. However, while there is not sufficient space to determine whether he was a philosopher influencing the left since 1968, or a political activist recording the ideas and philosophies of that movement. Either way Lefebvre's work is a clear articulation, demonstration and crystallization of leftist discourse at the time. His concept of everyday life was at the

heart of Autonomous protest after 1977, and will thus be used here as a primary source and as a framework for understanding this movement. Overall, Lefebvre's scholarship had been an essential aspect of leftist discourse since 1968, and thus the Autonomen were very familiar with his critiques and slogans. Indeed, his work was so fundamental to the intellectual milieu of Autonomie and the left in general that he was no longer even explicitly cited. It was simply assumed that one knew his ideas and accepted them as part of one's intellectual, political and ideological status quo reality.

Use Value

The Florians sought to implement what Henri Lefebvre has referred to as "use value", which stands in opposition to the "exchange value" of capitalism. Essentially, it was the argument that the social and cultural utility of a thing is just as valuable as the monetary cost of selling that object. In this sense, it means that it is valuable and important to use the Flora as a culture centre and a meeting place for those without the financial means for "high culture" or musical theatre. Indeed, Marx explains that in traditional capitalist systems, "the exchange process of commodities is the real relation that exists between them...The commodity is a use value for its owner only so far as it is an exchange value."¹⁸⁷ Using Lefebvre's analysis, the Autonomen argued, "the duplication of value into use-value and exchange-value therefore develops into a complex dialectic" and "these two aspects of value are never completely separate". Instead, the exchange value can only be considered only in relation to use value. To separate these values creates a situation of "contradiction", which the Autonomen sought to remedy through a renewed emphasis on use value.¹⁸⁸ The Autonomen associated deeply with this critique, as they felt that policies such as Modell Deutschland, Standortpolitik, and the transformation of a working class district into an

¹⁸⁷ Karl Marx, in David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), 155.

¹⁸⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), 77-81.

entertainment district were all examples of an “exchange value” being given precedence over the “use value” of citizens. Instead, they demanded that the state cease a one-sided privileging of only the monetary sale price of the Flora, and instead value the citizens who stood to benefit from it in social and cultural ways.

Everyday Life

Part of this attempt to celebrate a culture for everyone was the celebration of “everyday life” as the site of that culture, rather than economic exchange. As explained in the discussion of use versus exchange value, the Flora as a culture centre for everyone was an attempt to allow citizens to escape the hegemony of economic exchange, and live their everyday lives in a way that focused on their own interests, conversations, and relationships.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, Lefebvre argues that the everyday is the residual of life that is “left over” after one has removed all hegemonic layers of capitalism, which in this discourse represent repression and alienation. Instead of being one particular task, or employment, rather

Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human—and every human being—a whole takes its shape and its form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc.¹⁹⁰

Everyday life is thus not simply the endless monotony and alienation of repetition, nor is it the commercially available “high culture” of musical theatre or consumption. Rather it

¹⁸⁹ It is very important to note that “the everyday” as a concept changed dramatically between Lefebvre and later post-structuralist cultural theorists, such as Michel de Certeau. The earlier notion of Alltag concerned the everyday as, not “a site of routinized, repetitious alienated capitalist colonization, but rather” as the opportunity to “represent... those daily forms of resistance and common culture which consciously and unconsciously generate the wider horizons of class consciousness.” (John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 67). In contrast, the latter focused upon studies of cultural consumption. The Lefebvrian and Autonomous use of the everyday is thus in direct opposition to this latter conception.

¹⁹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, I, 86, in Kanishka Goonewardena, “Marxism and Everyday Life”, *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 124-125.

is the compilation of meaningful actions that might go ignored on the everyday level but which are loaded with cultural significance and deeply-held assumptions about the proper order of things. The Autonomen had long espoused “use values” such as “friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate” or “have a place to talk”, and even “play”. Furthermore, these use values represented the everyday, which would be the site of autonomous political resistance, which we shall examine in depth shortly. Indeed, these actions are not only “use values” and the actions of the everyday, but are also the site of Autonomous counterculture and creative self-determination. The Autonomen “saw themselves as orientated towards a world of everyday practices that allowed the production of art to participate in a network of social relations not defined directly by the exchange of commodities and the exclusionary interests of bourgeois institutions.”¹⁹¹ Rather than the Marxist notion of alienated labor, the countercultural practice of everyday life instead emphasizes the creation and self-creation of oneself so as to escape this economic paradigm. Within this argument, and via the creation of everyday life, the smallest act can be interpreted as an act of resistance or self-determination. The Autonomen used Lefebvre’s concept of everyday life as a blueprint to escape the imposed “high culture” and to replace this domination with a culture from below.

In addition to being the site of culture from below, the Autonomen also used the everyday as the site of a permanent and ongoing political resistance. Scholar John Roberts agrees, arguing that

the concept of the everyday *remains singularly valuable* in mapping the philosophical and political legacy of revolutionary politics and Western Marxism. For what is largely overlooked in analysis of the early work of Lukács, Benjamin, Korsch, Gramsci, is how much the category of the everyday defines – directly or indirectly – the massive counterhegemonic energy and achievements of the period. *Notions of critical praxis and the*

¹⁹¹ John Roberts, 8.

politicization of culture 'from below' are unthinkable without the democratizing and particularizing backdrop of the critique of the everyday.¹⁹²

The Everyday (often called the *Alltag*) is the most “singularly valuable” concept in the history of resistance, especially in the German post-Marxist sense. Through the rejection of a culture from above, the Autonomen instead engaged in a democratized culture from below, which celebrated not the alienating experience of an inaccessible high culture, but rather the moments of everyday life. As we saw in chapter one, their disillusionment with the movement of 1968, with the failed RAF actions in 1977, and with the repression enacted by the state led them to reposition their resistance in the everyday. This made sense to them, because Lefebvre had written, “the ‘everyday’ represents the space and agency of...transformation and critique”.¹⁹³ Thus, the everyday represents those daily forms of resistance and common culture which consciously and unconsciously generate the wider horizons of class consciousness.”¹⁹⁴ In short, the everyday was the site of culture, friendship, and other use values, all of which could coalesce to form a new culture from below, and thus a new “class consciousness” that could reject and replace high culture. Therefore, the Autonomen located their resistance in the place that this high culture could not access.

Theory and Praxis in Everyday Life

Another aspect of Lefebvre’s work everyday life is the attempt to bring theory and practice back into relation with one another. In his critique of much contemporary philosophy, Lefebvre argues that philosophy and social critique must be rooted in their historical circumstances. Running counter to a Hegelian or Kantian understanding of thought as distinct from social practice, Lefebvre instead argues that any theory must instead be rooted in the everyday. It is only by examining everyday life and the actions

¹⁹² John Roberts, 11. Italics mine.

¹⁹³ John Roberts, 67.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

of everyday individuals that a theory can actually represent historical reality. Similarly, the Autonomes rejected an imposed “high culture”, and instead demanded a “culture from below” – a folks or a people’s culture, as we will see in the next section.

As utilized by the Autonomous concept of a “Flora for all”, the power of this designation of the everyday

lies in its relocation of the concept of culture to the practices and experiences of the dominated and an extension of philosophical and intellectual enquiry beyond the professions and the academy. The upshot is a Hegelian transformation of practical reason into a new Marxist understanding of mass culture from below, a ‘new common sense’.¹⁹⁵

What this means, in practice, is that rather than a high culture imposed from above, determined by corporate musical theatre promoters or the Hamburg Senate, instead the residents of the Schanzenviertel became the creators and determiners of culture. “As a result every worker is a philosopher on the basis that critical reason is emergent from an engagement with common sense and not from an identification with abstract postulates.”¹⁹⁶ The idea of everyday life as resistance to alienation thus arises not from “abstract postulate”, but rather from a bottom-up action and engagement with the world. Each individual is able to create and implement culture, rather than passively accepting it from a capitalist framework. This radical democratization of the everyday and of the concept of culture is what “Flora for everyone” means.

¹⁹⁵ John Roberts, 41.

¹⁹⁶ John Roberts, 42.



"Culture from beneath against politics from above. Rote Flora is the whole house"¹⁹⁷

The Autonomen also sought to perform this marriage of theory and praxis by living a philosophy of self-determination. As discussed in the introduction, the Autonomen claim to be a completely autonomous movement. However, as we have seen, their reliance upon Lefebvre actually grounds them in a long trajectory of intellectual and academic thought about political resistance. Such an emphasis on praxis might seem to be anti-intellectual, and indeed the Autonomen are quick to reject much hegemonic language, including that of the academy. However, recall that the philosophy of the everyday is the attempt to live one's revolution through action. Autonomie thus calls for the practice of one's ideology as a radical praxis. While Marxism might be considered an academic discourse now, to these actors, as to Lefebvre, "Marxian thought is not merely

¹⁹⁷ Zeck, nu 7, Okt 1992. ASB, Box Zeck.

oriented towards action. It is a theory of action, reflection or praxis, i.e. on what is possible, what is impossible.”¹⁹⁸ This horizon thus emerges from the radical combination of both theory and practice – from thousands of individuals not only resisting an imposed culture from above, but also engaging in practice inspired by the experience of their own everyday lives. One’s life can be self-determined through performing and acting out her ideas in a way that creates that horizon as a possibility. However, such action cannot be completely devoid of analysis. Despite the breadth of views within the Autonomous movement, the Rote Flora crystallized around the issue of resisting gentrification and *Standortpolitik*, and demanding a culture centre for everyone. This “space for everyone” was rooted in a century-long discussion of theory and praxis, and the philosophically grounded attempt to live one’s critique in a self-determined way.

For the Autonomen this emphasis on praxis is most apparent in the definition of *movement itself* as the goal of political resistance, rather than simply the means. As the 1995 Autonomie Kongress states, “movement is itself the organizational form of the Autonomen”.¹⁹⁹ This practice of their goals is the most important distinction of the autonomous movement, for as they explain the “the Flora is not the goal, it is a piece along the way there. In the Flora we can live our goal”.²⁰⁰ The occupation of this particular place is not the end goal of Autonomie. The goal is the practice of the everyday; it is to *live* one’s everyday life as a movement of resistance itself. However, rather than engaging in praxis as direct confrontation with the state, which failed so spectacularly in 1977, the Autonomen instead turned to “The everyday [as] a means of

¹⁹⁸ John Roberts 103.

¹⁹⁹ Autonomie Kongreß Gruppe, *Der Stand Der Bewegung*, (Berlin: Kongreßlesebuch-Gruppe Selbstverlag, 1995), 9.

²⁰⁰ “Flora ist nicht Ziel, sie ist ein teil auf dem weg dorthin. In der flora können wir ein bißchen ‘ziel’ leben.” “Flora in die Grüte”, *Flora-info* 2, 1990, s.8. ASB, Box Autonome Zentrum Stadtteilkulturzentrum Hamburg Rote Flora 09 320 I.

continuing the theory of praxis by *other revolutionary means*, so to speak.”²⁰¹ Thus, the movement of self-determination, of acting out one’s everyday life in its smallest instances, and of engaging in everyday actions consciously becomes resistance itself. Again, the stress is not on the goal of resistance, for the idea of a violent revolution was beyond the dreams of the Autonomen, and, in fact was ideologically incompatible. The goal of “Autonomie for us can be called: to determine our own lives; against the constraints of the bourgeois society and the state.”²⁰² This life of Autonomie is not the goal of a long struggle” but rather “for us is resistance and struggle” itself.²⁰³ Overall, it “means for us to practice other forms of life here and now.”²⁰⁴ And it is through this philosophically grounded practice of everyday life, through movement and struggle itself that the Autonomen sought to create their resistance.

The Revolution of Everyday Life

This concept of political resistance and everyday life is demonstrated by Lefebvre’s work on the revolution of everyday life. To understand how the Autonomen sought to implement this revolution, we will turn to their notion of culture. They sought to reestablish what they viewed as an “authentic” (i.e. not capitalist or hegemonic) culture from below through the celebration of a folk culture. This folk culture was best demonstrated by the carnival or festival, which Lefebvre also discussed in great detail, drawing on his work with the Situationists. In order to better understand his study of folk culture and festivals, I will utilize Bakhtin’s work on the carnivalesque. I will also rely upon Gavin Grindon’s argument that leftists after 1968 were well aware of Bakhtin’s critique of the state, and utilized his thought extensively in their own

²⁰¹ John Roberts, 12.

²⁰² “Autonomie: daß heißt für uns, unser Leben selbst zu bestimmen; gegen die Zwänge der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und ihres Staates”. *Theses zur Autonomie in unsere Bewegung*. Published in *radikal*, nu 98, 9.1981.

²⁰³ “Autonomie ist nicht das Ziel eines langen Kampfes”, but rather “heißt für uns Widerstand und Kampf.”

²⁰⁴ “bedeutet für uns, hier und jetzt andere Lebensformen zu praktizieren.” Ibid.

discourse. Like Lefebvre, his philosophy is both an example of and an influence upon the intellectual discourses of this time period.

Lefebvre explains that the revolution of everyday life will consist of three major elements. The first is an urban revolution and reform of city space, which would redistribute the city more equitably. Space would be used for citizen and cultural purposes, rather than purely for the neo-capitalist creation of private profit. Second, sexual and family relations would be revolutionized, and the “terrorism” of patriarchy would be replaced by egalitarianism between genders. Third is the notion of the festival. Through their resistance of gentrification and their campaign against the state’s Standortpolitik, the Autonomen sought to fulfill the first element. Although, as discussed in the introduction, I have bracketed both the women’s movement, feminism, the struggle against patriarchy, and the fight for equal rights were also significant aspects of Autonomie. Thus, the Autonomen sought to perform the second aspect of Lefebvre’s revolution. Thirdly, the Autonomous used spectacle as a form of protest, which completes this triad. I will now turn to a discussion of these festivals in terms of culture and street theatre.

Kultur

Firstly, let us examine what a “culture from below” means for the Rota Flora specifically. In their 1989 *Nutzungskonzepte*, the Florians define culture as “the way in which we live”. As a way of life, it must be created and lived in community, and acts to resist isolation. Culture stands “in opposition to one-dimensionality, to reduction and to functionalism”. Since they viewed capitalism as a “reduction” and an alienation of

potential human experience, their conception of culture rejected this “one-dimensionality” and demanded a fuller lifestyle.²⁰⁵ Overall, they argued that

Culture is not a mold. It is an expression of the life of people, resisting the everydayness and a revolt of the subject against enclosure, against the exploitation of living space.²⁰⁶

The Autonomen argued that people coming together in spaces create cultures, and consequently those with different spaces often have different ideas, cultures and identities. However, the emphasis remains on culture as a grass-roots practice that cannot be imposed, implemented, or legislated. In this discourse, it is instead a practice of those resisting the alienation of capitalism. This conception of an “authentic culture from below” cannot be purchased or built through an expensive music theatre. While some, such as Bourdieu or Clifford Geertz might argue that “high culture” is also a legitimate form of culture, for the Autonomen, this is the exact opposite of “a culture from below”. Instead, they saw it as hegemony and an economic scheme, against which they sought to defend their particular version of culture.

In an attempt to reject “high culture” in favour of what they saw as “authentic culture”, the Autonomen attempted to create a way of life determined only by the people themselves. This was not a new concept, for throughout the 1970’s and 80’s German leftists had begun to turn to folk culture in an attempt to preclude bourgeois culture, and return to their more “authentic” roots.²⁰⁷ While the notion of “authenticity” is of course hugely problematic, it was a chief concern for the Autonomen, who tended to see

²⁰⁵ This argument implicitly refers to Marcuse and with text *One Dimensional Man*. The ‘68ers relied extensively upon his work, and this discourse was handed down to the Autonomen through this leftist milieu.

²⁰⁶ “Kultur besteht nicht in der Form. Sie ist Ausdruck des Lebens der Menschen, Auseinandersetzung mit dem Alltäglichen, auch Revolte des Subjekts gegen die Eingrenzung, gegen die Verwerten des Lebensraums.” “Nutzungskonzept”, 1989, s. 4-5. ASB Binder Rota Flora Flugis und Konzept.

²⁰⁷ It is important to note there the difference between this folk culture and the Nazi use of Volkskultur. Von Dirke explains this distinction brilliantly, showing that while Nazi Volkskultur sought to unite the people as an elite nation, united in language, politics and political orientation, autonomous folk culture sought to accomplish the exact opposite. It rejected all hegemony of nation, state and population, and sought to set itself apart from these very elements. See Sabine von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination: the West German counterculture from the student movement to the Greens*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 164-165.

modern society as a “corrupted”.²⁰⁸ For instance, at the Tunix congress this search for “authenticity” involved returning to the fairytale “musicians of Bremen town”. With implicit Marxist overtones, the Autonomen celebrated four animals that refused to be executed once their farmers or owners no longer considered them “useful”. By banding together, they formed a commune and went to live independently in the forest as musicians.²⁰⁹ Of course, the activists also sought to “check out” of a society that would “execute them” like farm animals once their use had expired. They thus identified deeply with this fairytale, and turned to it as an “authentic” version of society. This desire manifested itself for many leftists as a turn to ecology, independent cafes, bookstores, bars, or the tiny, locally owned co-ops and other locations of the “scene”. These communal venues represented their attempt to express their own, independent culture as a pre-cursor to and rejection of Bourgeois high-culture. Similarly, in the Rote Flora, this involved the creation of art, music and political spaces “from below”, rather than allowing the imposition of a musical theatre to benefit only the hegemonic class. However, as von Dirke explains,

the alternative culture faced...a major problem- the exploitative grip of the culture industry on folk culture. This meant that the alternative culture had to excavate the common peoples or folk culture by rewriting the history of artistic practices and cultural institutions, which had been either stigmatized as low culture or appropriated by the culture industry. Three examples stand out in particular: the carnival, the circus and the concept of the fool.²¹⁰

In order to unpack this historical scenario, I shall now turn to a discussion of how the figures of the fool, the rogue, or the clown within the context of the carnival and the

²⁰⁸ The literature is not consistent whether an edenic society ever existed before capitalism, or if Utopia would only exist in a future state. Even Hayden White makes a distinction here between a past and a present utopia in his discussion of radicals and Anarchists. The literature put forth by the Autonomen emphasizes a plurality of voices, opinions and perspectives, and thus often suggests both a past and a future eden. Furthermore, through their emphasis upon living in “the scene”, shopping only at local, politically sympathetic stores, frequenting scene bars and pubs, and relying on independent, leftist literature, the Autonomen sought to create a micro-society that mimicked an idealized “village culture”. Either past or present, the “authentic” culture sought by the Autonomen was their attempt to resolve the perceived corruption of the status quo capitalism. See Laura Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance*, (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011) for a further discussion of “the scene”.

²⁰⁹ See Von Dirke, 113-114.

²¹⁰ Von Dirke, 155.

spectacle provide an ideal model for understanding the Autonomen and their political protests at this time.

As argued by scholar and anarchist activist Gavin Grindon, Mikhail Bakhtin's work was well read in leftist circles at this time. Because he also faced state repression, his work was not considered to be part of "high culture", but rather was accepted as literature in solidarity with the Autonomous discourse.²¹¹ Indeed, Grindon explains that anarchists since 1968 and across North America and Europe have relied on the notion of the carnival. They use this idea as a framework for political protests that utilize street theatre, absurdity, a political "fusion of art and life" and the attempt to theorize "joy and desire" as elements of everyday life.²¹² He situates Bakhtin's work in the intellectual milieu of Raul Vaneigem of the Situationists international, whose work was published at the same time that Bakhtin was translated into English. He also explains that Bakhtin was a significant influence upon Hakim Bey, whose work "Temporary Autonomous Zones" (TAZ) was inspired by Autonomous groups and the German Autonomous newspaper TAZ. For purposes of brevity, I will only focus upon Bakhtin's framework here, but it is important to note how deeply integrated the Autonomen were into this intellectual community. Bakhtin's ideas were not merely a detached theory, but were very representative of the leftist discourse at this time. Lefebvre was also engaged in this widespread discussion of the spectacle, and in fact situated it as the third aspect of his revolution of everyday life. This idea also emerged in the Situationists International, whose concept of a "rupture" was enacted by creating art or spectacles in order to interrupt everyday life. Consequently, Guy Debord was also discussing the Spectacle and

²¹¹ As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Autonomen had a complicated relationship with scholarship. While relying upon it extensively, they were often simultaneously disdainful of academic work as part of the hegemonic system. Similarly, their own definition of their movement as resisting definition is another example of this rejection of imposed or "repressive" language. I will discuss this paradox again in chapter three, but it remains the chief source of discursive dissonance in this literature.

²¹² Gavin Grindon, "Carnival Against Capital: A Comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem and Bey", *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 12, 2004, no. 2147-148.

the carnival at this time, which further reinforces the prevalence of this intellectual framework for the left at this time.

Returning to Bakhtin as a representational crystallization of this discourse, note that he argues that the carnival represents a “second world” of political freedom, where power can be inverted through performance, jest and humor. The world of the carnival is “a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical, and extrapolitical aspect of the world, or man, and of human relations; *they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom.*”²¹³ This space outside of official power was “a utopian realm of community, freedom and abundance”, but must be juxtaposed to the “official feasts of the middle ages”. Like the high culture of musical theatre in Hamburg, the “state sponsored” feasts “did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it.”²¹⁴ Thus, not all carnivals, nor all cultures, were resistant. Published at a similar time, Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* represents the other side of this equation, for the state could provide distracting spectacles just as easily as the left. Thus, a carnival of inversion must be distinguished from an official state carnival of hegemony. The nuance of both Bakhtin and the Autonomous use of the spectacle is the creation of a space of carnival *outside* of the official state carnival, and thus *outside* of state power. Indeed, the leftist German newspaper *TAZ*, formed at the Tunix congress and representative of Autonomous views at this time, examined Bakhtin’s work on the carnivalesque as a space of political freedom.²¹⁵ It

stressed origins of the carnival as a wild and uncontrolled festival of the common people. It maintained that the carnival at first had a political

²¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6. Emphasis mine.

²¹⁴ Bakhtin, 8.

²¹⁵ It should be noted that *TAZ* was originally viewed as the mouthpiece of Autonomous politics. Indeed, the state had arrested the editors in the early 80s and seized all editions of the newspaper as terrorist. By the late 1990s, it was no longer viewed as “revolutionary”, and many leftists viewed it as having “sold out”, but at this time it was still representative of Autonomous discourse in Hamburg.

nature, since during its season and behind the foolscap the established social order was suspended.²¹⁶

This suspension of the social order allowed medieval citizens to engage in the liminal spaces of “play” on the “borderline between art and life”.²¹⁷ Furthermore, this space was not purely art, and not purely a spectacle, but rather was play as “life itself”.²¹⁸ It is the attempt to enact a utopia that exists perhaps only in that liminality but is nonetheless is striven for constantly. As Bakhtin writes,

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.²¹⁹

Within this space of freedom, power can thus be refused, and participants can perform and engage in an alternative version of reality, which glimpses the possibility of different world order.

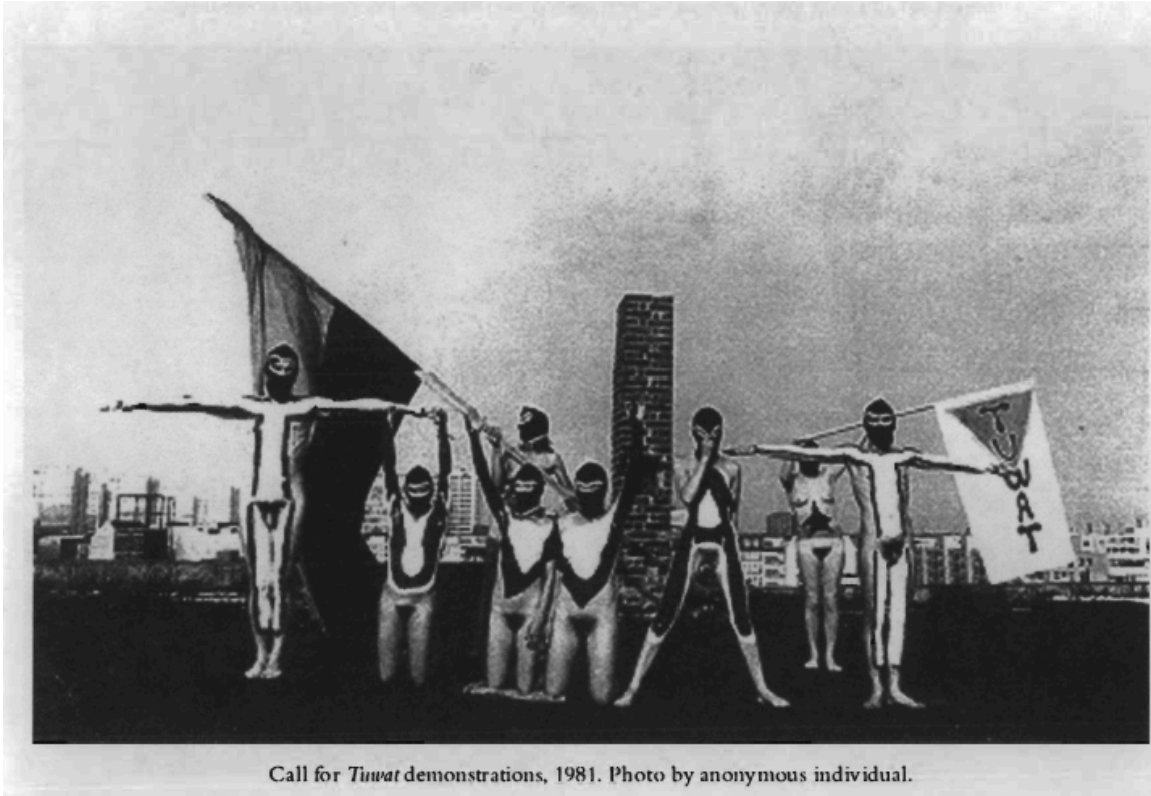
The Autonomen sought to implement Bakhtin in their carnivalesque street protests, which emphasized music, dance, and absurd spectacles. George Katsiaficas documents the naked marches of the Autonomen, where hundreds of women protested the norms of a repressive and patriarchal gender politics by marching, clad only in black balaclavas. Accompanied by loud music blasted on portable trucks, they sought to invert the norms of their society through absurd spectacle. The following image shows a group of Autonomous demonstrators staging a spectacle of nudity as they call for society to “tuwat”, which is a colloquial imperative form of “tun was” or “do something”.

²¹⁶ TAZ, “Karnivalsutopie”, 8 cited in Von Dirke, 155-56

²¹⁷ Bakhtin, 7

²¹⁸ Bakhtin, 7.

²¹⁹ Bakhtin, 7.



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Other demonstrations involved huge installations, life-sized sculptures, and giant floats covered in streamers, balloons, glitter, confetti, and other carnivalesque decorations. For example, in the next photo we see a 2001 demonstration held as a carnival, with activists dressed up in masks to protest at city hall, accompanied by loud carnival music, dancing, parades and theater.²²¹

²²⁰ Naked Autonomen call for others to “do something”. As reproduced in Katsiaficas, 148.

²²¹ “Rote Flora: Demo vor dem Altoner Rathaus”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 28.02.2001. np. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.



Rote Flora activists dressed up for carnival hold up a sign reading “Hands off the Rote Flora!”²²²

Similarly, a 1988 March in Berlin boasted an enormous statue of a Bull, while a May 2011 demonstration boasted protesters dressed as computers, with streamers raining down from occupied apartments.²²³ This carnivalesque atmosphere is also demonstrated by a June 2012 march, which saw Autonomen dressed as cows, in order to protest the gentrification of an old slaughter house. While the Sternschanze still had a desperate need for affordable housing, the old “Rinderhalle” was slated to but turned into a high-cost luxury food market and several other shops aimed at an upper-class clientele. As the cows marched toward the fences surrounding the hall, police in full riot gear swarmed the scene, using their shields, batons and pepper spray liberally. However, as a line of cows lay writhing on the ground, and the police formed a line

²²² Photo from *Deutschwelt*, 28.02.2001. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.
²²³ “Stadt wurde selbst gemacht”, *Zeck*, nu 163, Juli/August 2011, s. 9-10

around the building site, the Autonomen responded not with further violence, but with a carnival. A bicycle powered music truck pulled up, and was soon joined by a portable people's kitchen on wheels. Soon, foldable tables were set up, and a full meal was provided to all the demonstrators. As the police stared on, just out of arms reach the demonstrators began to dance to the music, eating the food and beginning a street party that would last into the evening. The protest and carnival were indistinguishable to the Autonomen.



The Autonomen and the Cow in front of the Rinderhalle



Police surrounding the Rinderhalle once the wounded “cows” had been removed.²²⁴



The People’s Kitchen, a few meters from the line of police



It is considered both a social faux pas and an act of political aggression to photograph the faces of protestors. Photographs could easily be seized by police, who regularly confiscate the phones and cameras of protestors to mine for the contact information of other activists.

This Autonomous carnival demonstrates an attitude as much as a political strategy. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of Autonomie is its refusal to accept a definition or single focus or aim. Instead, it is a constant resistance and struggle and a lifestyle itself. While this constantly mutating focus makes the movement difficult for an academic to describe, it is intended to provide a degree of freedom. Politicians and police cannot locate either the leaders or the central aims of a movement that boasts no leadership and no central dogma. While, as we discussed in chapter one, the state sometimes responded by arresting the entire squatter's council in Berlin's Kreuzberg, at other times this decentralized, carnivalesque attitude is used to embrace absurdity in an attempt to destabilize the "official spaces" of the state. By turning to the carnival, the Autonomen sought to undermine both authority and security forces. For example, Katsiaficas recalls sitting on a terrace in Berlin on May Day 1988, as riots erupted in

Kreuzberg. He describes coolly drinking a beer with a friend, watching the barricades being built around them, and recounts the conversation he had with a friend,

we're driving the bulls [police] up the walls. They don't know what to expect from us. Years ago, when we were fighting them everyday...there were a few thousand of us ready to go at it. It was such a hot day we couldn't stand it, and you know if we were hot, it must have been hell in full riot gear. A few people took over their clothes and before you knew it, people were jumping in to the Hallensee [a small lake] to cool off. Then we all stripped and jumped in. Thousands of us were enjoying ourselves at the beach, while the bulls stood by sweating like pigs not knowing what was happening. The city government, the media, and the bulls could never figure out who gave the order to jump in. They still can't understand our politics or our culture, especially when we don't lose our sense of humor. Right now there are hundreds of bulls looking for us, and here we sit, enjoying ourselves drinking a beer. Look at that moon!²²⁵

Unable to use the language of politics or power, the Autonomen responded with absurd humor. Mutating immediately from a violent street riot to a beach party, they transformed the situation into a carnival. As such, the state's police forces were left unable to enforce power, as it was not illegal to enjoy a beach party on a hot summer's day. Similarly, as riots erupted in Kreuzberg, the Autonomen hid in plain site, enjoying a beer and the absurdist humor of the situation. In these ways, the Autonomen utilized the absurdity and inversion of the carnival. Whether through statues, giant sculpture, street dance parties or beach parties, the Autonomen sought to create a carnival through the inversion of traditional power relations. Unable to arrest citizens for dancing or swimming, and unable to locate the leaders "who gave the order" to engage in such absurd actions, the police were rendered silent, and the "second space" of carnivalesque spectacle was created.

The Autonomen also physically embody the carnival and the resistance of power. In his work on grotesque bodies, Bakhtin explains that "the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal,

²²⁵

Katsiaficas, 138.

abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity".²²⁶ Indeed, the degraded body is unmistakably visceral, material, and concrete. It refuses any "ideal" or "abstract" notions imposed upon it by "official culture" and instead celebrates its own physicality in all of its gore and filth. Similarly, the Autonomen celebrate an embodiment of their resistance through filthy, torn black clothing, the inhabitation of abandoned, ruined buildings, and an emphasis on dirty, unclean, and generally undesirable living conditions. The black masks of the "black bloc" are often worn with no other attire, so that hundreds of nude activists can resist societal pressures to conform to a dress code or fashion. However, the one element of the body normally unclothed- the face- is instead inverted into blackness and anonymity.

²²⁶

Bakhtin, 19-20.



Tuwat demonstration, August 5, 1981. Photo by anonymous individual.

Naked Autonomen marching to call for society to “do something” (tun was).²²⁷

Similarly, the structure of the Rote Flora is heavily graffitied as an explicit effort to “de-beautify” their space and to reject societal notions of cleanliness.²²⁸

²²⁷ Autonomen marching naked August 5, 1981. Anonymous photographer. As cited and reproduced in Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 149.

²²⁸ Naegler, 106-111.



Plate 27 “Schanze must stay dirty!”, Schanzenstraße
 Credit: Laura Naegler (2011)

*Graffiti on the same street as the Rote Flora celebrates dirt as a rejection of “clean”
 bourgeois culture²²⁹*

Like the graffiti on their buildings, the self-mutilation of piercings, studs, ripped clothing and mohawks are a modern version of the Bakhtinian “grotesque images” and grotesque bodies, which

preserve their peculiar nature, entirely different for ready-made, completed being. They remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed.²³⁰

And this ugliness is an intentional subversion and rejection of those “ready-made” norms propagated by the high-culture they seek to reject.

²²⁹ Naegler, 143.
²³⁰ Bakhtin, 25.



An iconized and mythologized representation of the Autonomous hero²³¹

²³¹

As reproduced in Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 108.

Yet, this emphasis on the degraded body isn't necessarily a purely negative action. Rather, the negation is also a creation and an affirmation.²³² Using Bakhtin's theory, the Autonomous body becomes a site of art and an act of resistance. The naked protesters, or the uniform of tattered, grotesque, filthy attire brings together Lefebvre's notion of everyday life as a form of resistance and expression, and Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque as a disruption of established order and power relations. The body of the protestor becomes an affirmation of an alternative culture, where the grotesque clown rejects the standards of the status quo in a way that also points to their absurdity. While the grotesque body represents death, decay, broken ruins of buildings and bodies mutilated beyond recognition, the Autonomous body also represents the creation of one's own values in rejection of the corrupted status quo. Thus, the grotesque body stands "contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development."²³³ However, this opposition is not one of light and dark, life and death. Instead, the grotesque activist body, studded, filthy, black and tattered represents death in a way that subverts the traditional meaning of life. Bakhtin argues that this embodied death and

degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving.²³⁴

By taking society back to its roots, to the distant fairy tales of culture, for instance, or back to a "folks culture", the Autonomen thus perform not only a death, of sorts, but also the possibility of rebirth. While they degrade and mutilate their bodies, and live amidst the filth and decay, they also seek to scratch away all of those hegemonic influences that

²³² Due to space restraints, we cannot get into Žižek, Hegel or Marx in any detail here. However, see *The Sublime Object of Ideology* for a very applicable investigation of the dialectics of negation.

²³³ Bakhtin, 25.

²³⁴ Bakhtin, 21.

have kept them repressed. By returning to the “reproductive lower stratum”, and mucking about in the black, tattered, bloody and visceral lower bodily organs, they are also returning to the “womb” of conceptual new beginnings. In this way, death of the current world order is also a new beginning and the birth of a life of freedom. Their black, tattered clothing symbolizes not only rejection and death of bourgeois culture, but a hopeful child, determined to create meaning anew for herself. In this classic act of resistance, degradation is thus the most poignant performance of regeneration.

As a demonstration of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, let us examine the Autonomous street theatre protests. The micro-carnivals waged by the Autonomen had two meanings. The first is a celebration of vitality, spontaneity, and self-actualization. As von Dirke explains, the “alternative culture” opposed the “bourgeois theatre of the hegemonic culture, which discusses ideas in their universality and on a conceptual level” in favour of “non-conceptual approaches” and theatre only for the individual, as “an important means for its practitioners to rediscover sensuous experience and self-awareness, and ultimately for self-actualization.”²³⁵ They saw impromptu theater as a spontaneous act of self-expression, and thus as the possibility of a truly “authentic”, and self-actualizing culture. As Bakhtin points out, this “second life” of the carnival allows a sense of recreation and change, and allows the high culture imposed by *Standortpolitik* to be flipped on its head by the folk culture from below. In fact,

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ (a l’envers), of the ‘turnabout’, of a continual shifting form top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties...A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extra-carnival life, a ‘world inside out’.²³⁶

²³⁵ Von Dirke, 174.

²³⁶ Bakhtin, 11.

The Autonomen countered such imposed culture through a theatre of absurdity, which rejected logic, language, and instead threw all attempts to understand them back in the faces of a bewildered state. Just as the grotesque body symbolized both death and rebirth, the absurdity of the spectacle included street dancing, loud music wagons, people's kitchens, and also Molotov cocktails and extreme violence. It was an act of spontaneous creation, which replaced a "conceptual" and "abstract" culture form above with an incomprehensible rejection of that very order

Indeed, this brings us to the second meaning of the carnival, which is the inversion of political power. The yearly Schanzenfests are an excellent example of this rejection of law. Every May 1st (Mayday) the left gathers outside of the Rota Flora. A street festival ensues, with music, dance, book fairs and food. Due to the sheer volume of people and the political nature of the event, police are often unable to patrol, and in recent years have simply stopped responding to calls.²³⁷ Furthermore, this absence of order is used by the Autonomen to attack sites that represent capitalism, and attempt to establish their own version of justice. For example, Naegler points out that the Autonomen created a "riot map" in 2010.²³⁸ Using and inverting the tourist map provided by the state as part of its *Standortpolitik*, the Autonomen marked out all of the "big" businesses seen as foreign to their quarter as targets for graffiti and vandalism throughout the day. Similarly, they marked out those sympathetic local businesses and "scene" locations, which would thus be protected from the rioters. Through this inversion of the tourist map, the Autonomen sought to not only re-appropriate their quarter, but also to reverse traditional forms of power and replace them with the lawless freedom of the carnival.

²³⁷ This inverted order has some serious side affects, however. At Schanzenfest 2012 a man was stabbed by two drunken youth, and lay bleeding in near-fatal condition on the sidewalk. However, police refused to respond to numerous phone calls. Fearing for his life, activists finally took stones and attacked a nearby bank, knowing it was the only thing that would prompt an immediate police response and thus the presence of an ambulance.

²³⁸ Naegler, 82.

The Language of Carnival

Just as the Autonomemen sought to invert power and state security through street festivals, they also sought to reject official language in favour of carnivalesque laughter. Bakhtin pointed to the clown or fool, and his nonsensical witty puns, jokes, and silly rhythms, which were subversive via their rejection of communication with the audience in favor of a language the clown spoke only for his own benefit. Language can just as easily be subverted through movement and silent theater as it can by simply absurdity. Witty catchphrases, such as “tu nix”, call for a rejection of all industrial capital relations through a simple joke, and the laughter of carnival or the figure of the clown represent this reversal. Indeed, this refusal remains an enormous element of Autonomous discourse and self-understanding, which will form the basis of chapter three. Similarly, von Dirke points to the incomprehensible gibberish of political street theatre throughout the 1980s, which was produced as a leftist attempt to subvert the function of language itself. Some street theatre protests had no scripts at all, and used only light and movement in an attempt to reject the hegemony of language.²³⁹ Overall, “the alternative culture tried to replace the hegemonic culture’s logocentric aesthetic with an aesthetic of the body, which often went as far as eliminating any verbal communication.”²⁴⁰

This inversion and rejection of language was also used to demand freedom from hegemonic discourse. Note that the logo of the Autonomous newspaper TAZ is the cartoon image of the clown. The mouthpiece of Autonomie at this time was branded with an image representing not only nonsensical (and thus politically resistant) speech, but also a jester whose “wit granted him a certain freedom of speech. He was allowed to

²³⁹ Von Dirke, 168.

²⁴⁰ Von Dirke, 171.

critique the social order, at least as long as he wore the foolscap.”²⁴¹ Like Bakhtin’s clown, the fool, dropout, rogue, and jester all had access to this “certain freedom of speech” within which they could attack the dominant paradigm through the non-threatening realm of nonsense and jest. Indeed, the clown was both non-threatening and consciously non-conforming, since his “retention of the naiveté of the child represents a refusal to submit to the exclusive privileging of cognitive structures and rationality within hegemonic culture.”²⁴² Because this space was not considered serious, it could constitute a micro-sphere of resistance, where the subversion of language and order left a tiny space of freedom for speech that could escape the traditional hegemony of language.

Overall, the carnivalesque and the jester represent the Autonomous rejection of both political and linguistic hegemony. These sites of resistance, informed by Bakhtin’s critique, can be integrated into our Lefebvrian framework of the revolutionary possibility inherent in everyday life. He explains that simply “inventing new terms or changing the names” of things within the same language of dominance is not going to ensure resistance. Instead, “no sooner is it stated than this proposition convicts itself” and falls back into the relations of power.²⁴³ Instead, when faced with this overwhelming alienation and domination,

The answer is everyday life, to rediscover everyday life - no longer to neglect and disown it, elude and evade it - but actively to rediscover it while contributing to its transfiguration; this undertaking involves the invention of a language - or, to be precise, an invention of language - for everyday life translated into language becomes a different everyday life by becoming clear; and the transfiguration of everyday life is the creation of something new, something that requires new words.²⁴⁴

For the Autonomes, the language of politics, economics, and even widespread

²⁴¹ Von Dirke, 161.

²⁴² Von Dirke, 160.

²⁴³ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Sacha Rabinovitch, trans., (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 202.

²⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 202.

organization were closed to them. Since the 1960s, petitions, engaging in democratic reforms, and even peaceful marches had been ignored by the state. The language of power was controlled by an oppressive group, and had been proven to lack any equality of use. Thus, they created an entirely new language, based on movement, and set apart from power through absurdity and spectacle. Such spectacle would reject the language of power itself, and answer it through action and movement, which could not be interpreted without changing one's mindset entirely. Thus, the rejection of language was part of the rediscovery and recreation of everyday life as a site of permanent and ongoing political resistance. Through translation, reversal, absurdity, jokes, rejection and inversion, the Autonomen sought to replace the language of power with their own "new words", new action and new cultural forms.

The Symbols of Carnival

In addition to the language, the Autonomen also performed Bakhtin's carnivalesque in terms of the symbolic political spectacle. In addition to their original occupation of the Rote Flora, the Autonomen also incorporated "symbolic squatting" into their street theater style marches and political protests. Indeed, the very act of occupying a building is itself a spectacularly symbolic act, and is often only intended as such. While the original 1989 occupation of the Rote Flora was remarkably successful, one of the original participants Andreas Blechschmidt describes in a 1999 interview that they always expected the squat to be cleared.²⁴⁵ While the Rote Flora soon became more than a mere emblem, many of the carnivalesque-style marches and protests since 1989 have involved intrusions into space intended purely representationally. Citing an undated issue of Zeck, Naegler describes

symbolic squatting – the momentary illicit intrusion into buildings, which expectably ends as soon as the police forces enter and is meant as a

²⁴⁵

"Zigarettenautonomen als Glaubensfrage", *TAZ Hamburg*, 1 November 1999, s.22.

‘spectacular’ act causing attention rather than a serious attempt at appropriating living space. Through these strategies, it becomes evident that militant resistance is, to a great extent, symbolic: it is aimed at showing disapproval, attracting attention and causing outrage, and questioning the rules of the hegemonic restructuring of space.²⁴⁶

These symbolic acts often involve fireworks, streamers, elaborate costumes, glitter and confetti and colourful balloons. Through this symbolic resistance, and acting as the carnivalesque figure of the jester, the Autonomes thus seek to demonstrate and perform “disapproval”. Through entry into forbidden and privately owned space, they attempt to question and momentarily overturn “the hegemonic restructuring of space” from above, and replace it with a strictly resistant form of space from below- a form that rejects law, property, police force and the capitalist idea of ownership by turning civil disobedience into a festival. Like the clown, the subversion of language, and the use of space, squatting was often only a symbol- an attempt to make one’s voice heard in a situation where language was impossible. The momentary squats were temporary pockets of freedom, and tiny acts of resistance. They were never intended to last, but were only meant as an expressive symbol.

Lefebvre and the Rupture

Let us indulge in a momentary focus upon the particularities of Lefebvre’s thought, so as to better understand the Autonomous symbolic use of the spectacle in their search for political change. These temporary micro-pockets of freedom in the space of the festival create what Lefebvre called a rupture, and what the Situationists called a “moment” As summarized by Roberts,

The Moment is that non-heteronomous gesture or action that stands out from the instrumental continuum of the everyday as a critique of the totality of the moments which constitute this continuum. These moments of negation (in love, play, rest) are obviously destined to disappear and be lost to symbolization, but in their moment of risk or anticipatory fantasy they push back the boundaries of the possible... At the point, therefore, where

²⁴⁶ Naegler, 81-82. Undated Zeck, 21-22.

the subject makes a decision in favour of another reality, the subject produces a cut or tear in the real through which the possibility of non-heteronomous social relations flows".²⁴⁷

In these "moments", a rupture, cut or tear is created through which utopia can be glimpsed and tasted. In his *Production of Space*, Lefebvre explains the differences between the kinds of space, and explains how spectacle can be used to create these ruptures. Implying the type of pre-capitalist Eden that the Autonomes attributed to folk culture, he mourns the loss of social spaces, which he defined as cultural and non-alienated, and thus free from the colonization of capitalism. In his argument, this fall from grace occurred when

a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge (*savoir*), of social practice, of political power, a space hitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communications.... This was truly a crucial moment.²⁴⁸

This moment was when capitalism began to colonize the social space of culture, such as the Florians sought to create, and instead began to transform it into a space dominated only by capital exchange, or "abstract space". In fact, much of his magnum opus discusses this colonization of social space by abstract space, which he defines as the organized, rational structure of capital and alienating exchange value thrust upon space. He explains, "capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the 'world of commodities', its logic and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state."²⁴⁹ This "absolute political space" is "that strategic space which seeks to impose itself upon reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction, albeit one endowed with enormous powers because it is the locus and medium of Power".²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ John Roberts, 80.

²⁴⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans., (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 25.

²⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 53.

²⁵⁰ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 94.

However, by constantly attempting to absorb and overcome all spaces it imposes itself upon, abstract space finds itself containing contradictions. Dialectically, spaces between abstract and social space are maintained as small pockets of instability and contradiction, wherein everyday life can be lived as a practice of resistance. As he writes,

Such contradictions cause differences to assert themselves even as abstract space tends to dissolve all difference. And it is precisely the instability of abstract space that produces the potential to resist its domination, to produce an "other" space, by what Lefebvre calls the "appropriation" of space from its alienation in capitalism - "the 'real' appropriation of space, which is incompatible with abstract *signs* of appropriation serving merely to mask domination."²⁵¹

He argues that by producing these small acts of everyday social space, "insofar as we can conceive it, given certain current tendencies, socialist space will be a *space of differences*."²⁵² Indeed,

The reproduction of the social relations of production within this space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite—or rather because of—its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space 'differential space', because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences.²⁵³

This becomes the concept of the Moment, which leads to moments of rupture as possibilities of breaking through abstract space. Roberts summarizes Lefebvre's "Moment" as "that non-heteronomous gesture or action that stands out from the instrumental continuum of the everyday as a critique of the totality of the moments which constitute this continuum."²⁵⁴ Through these "seeds" and "differences", moments are able to emerge that "stand out from" the everydayness of everyday life. These new

²⁵¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 25.

²⁵² Some might argue that this concept originates in Michel de Certeau's work. However, his *Practice of Everyday Life* was published in 1980, whereas Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* was begun in the 1930s, with the first volume published in 1947. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, and as John Roberts elaborates in great detail, de Certeau represents a very different perspective upon the everyday. His post-structuralist approach transforms everyday life from a revolution of the everyday into a focus upon- one might even argue a sympathetic celebration of- everyday cultural consumption. In the 1981 introduction to his third volume of the History of Everyday Life trilogy, Lefebvre laments this poststructuralist transformation of his concept, arguing the work of later theorists has stripped it of its potential for societal change.

²⁵³ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 52.

²⁵⁴ Johns, 80.

spaces accentuate difference, and negate the hegemony of the everydayness of power, and provide tiny glimpses of Utopia. “These moments of negation (in love, play, rest) are obviously destined to disappear and be lost to symbolization, but in their moment of risk or anticipatory fantasy they push back the boundaries of the possible.”²⁵⁵ And in pushing these boundaries, they show alternatives and differences to the status quo: tiny moments of resistance and revolution amidst the everydayness of everyday life.

These moments of rupture amidst the realm of Abstract Space are also celebrated in the literature of the Situationists International, as well as the organizers of the 1968 May students strike in France.²⁵⁶ Heavily influenced by Lefebvre, these groups sought to perform a rupture in abstract space through the revolutionary practice of everyday life. Lefebvre recalls a conversation with the Situationists, in which they explained to him, “What you call ‘moments,’ we call ‘situations,’ but we’re taking it farther than you. You accept as ‘moments’ everything that has occurred in the course of history (love, poetry, thought). We want to create new moments.”²⁵⁷ They attempted this partly through a Situationist architecture, which sought to physically create the experience of this alternative space. In 1953 Constant published *For a Situation of Architecture*, which “was a fundamental text based on the idea that architecture would allow a transformation of daily reality. This was the conception with *Critique of Everyday Life*: to create an architecture that would itself instigate the creation of new situations.”²⁵⁸ By these Situations or Moments, the group sought to transform the tedium of everyday life by small ruptures and breaks. It was in these moments that they believed an alternate form

²⁵⁵ Johns, 80.

²⁵⁶ Both of these examples could provide much more fruitful scholarship. However, I cite Lefebvre as the inspiration to them both, and leave them for a future examination simply due to the requirements of brevity and focus. See Michel Trebitsch’s preface “The Moment of Radical Critique” to the Volume II “Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Present”, or Kristen Ross and Henri Lefebvre, “Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview”, in *October*, Vol 59, Winter 1997, 69-83. Regarding May 1968, see Henri Lefebvre *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*, Alfred Ehrenfeld, Trans., (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969)

²⁵⁷ Lefebvre, in Ross, 2.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of life could be glimpsed. Furthermore, these discourses formed an important intellectual predecessor to the Autonomous attempt to create moments of utopia, which is why I have taken time to trace them out here.

Rechtsfreiräume: Tiny Spaces of Everyday Utopia or a Rejection of Society?

Indeed, returning now to the Autonomes, these ruptured spaces and transformative architectures are the goal the Florians sought to achieve in their attempt to create *Rechtsfreiräume*, or spaces completely free of the state. In the Rote Flora, this concept emerged amidst the Hamburg Senate's 1997 turn to the slogan of "law and order" politics, by which police presence and digital surveillance as increased, and law enforcement began to bring increasing physical violence against the left. The state and police also began to focus upon drug users and on challenging the open drug culture in the Sternschanze. This policy would continue to be a contentious topic in state politics until 2001, as we shall see in chapter three. Within this political context, the Florians reacted in three significant aspects. The first was the attempted creation of a park behind the building, to campaign against gentrification and create a space "for everyone". The second was the discussion surrounding drug use, dealing, and the open drug culture in the left. This debate occurred in conjunction with what the Florians perceived as explicit state racism, and the state's unwillingness to prosecute neo-Nazi groups. Lastly, this critique of a racist and Nazi sympathetic state led to the left's explicit critique of the security state. Throughout these three aspects, the Florians sought to establish a *Rechtsfreiraum* wherein they could escape and resist not only the law, but also the increasingly right-wing nature of what they considered to be a racist police state.

Flora Park

The declaration of the Rote Flora as a Rechtsfreiraum in 1998 can be traced to the 1991 attempt to create a park in the empty site behind the building. As the Schanzenviertel was rapidly being modernized by STEG and the state's Standortpolitik urban renewal policy, residents increasingly felt as though they had no place to spend leisure time. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Florians were adamant that "even those with no money need a place to talk", to find community, and to have a culture free of capitalist exchange. The Florians thus sought to create a park, so as to provide a green space "for everyone" in the rapidly gentrifying Viertel. However, the state countered their attempt by a political campaign of "The Rote Flora Contra Housing". Appealing to the left's own request for more social housing, the state announced that it would create 42 social housing units in the space. In so doing, they sought to split public opinion, which was very in favour of a park. Indeed, Interior Senator Werner Hackmann appealed to democracy itself, making the park a symbol of chaos, as contrasted to "law and order" and an elected parliament. He asked whether "democratically elected parliament or 'self-appointed' forces in the city would have the final say" in the matter.²⁵⁹ Through this offer of social housing, the state appeared not only to bend to public demands, but also to be more reasonable than the "radicals" who sought to create a park.

However, the Florians sought to undermine what they saw as a patronizing "law and order" distortion of the situation, or what we would now call greenwashing. In issues of their monthly newspaper, they pointed out that the bid for social housing had been placed by Martin Kirchner; a key player in the original attempt to gentrify and restructure the Viertel. They questioned whether a capitalist, for-profit company could

²⁵⁹ 'gewählte Parlamente oder selbsternannte Kräfte' in der Stadt das Sagen hätte." Haus, quoting Werner, in *Widerstand*, 48

ever truly value social housing, and asked why the same individual who had been instrumental in pushing through the initial plan for social housing was then granted the largest part of the building contract.²⁶⁰ They also pointed to the continued involvement of STEG, which would transform into an explicitly for-profit company within three years. In contrast to the public funds being used to gentrify their Viertel for private profit, they again described the rotting and decaying state of their own homes, which had not been renovated for decades.²⁶¹ Furthermore, they listed 35 nearby empty apartments, which were built and advertised as social housing, but then sold to a speculator. The consequence was rent more than double the neighbourhood average. This previous “social housing” had also been created by the senate, through the company STEG, with the explicitly stated purpose of modernizing the Viertel.²⁶² Overall, in this political debate, the state turned to a rhetoric of social housing, which the Florians rejected as an attempt to disguise what they considered to be yet another capitalist ruse by a private company to gentrify their neighbourhood. As a result, in May 1991 they laid sod, and sought to create a park for residents despite the building plans of STEG.

As a result, and acting upon what would become a precedent for “law and order” politics, the state reacted with violence. In July 1991 over 1500 police in riot gear used water cannons to clear 300 Flora activists from the freshly laid green lawn. The park was destroyed and numerous people injured and arrested. This eviction was the first real act of explicit state violence against the Flora, and when interviewed in 1999, several participants explained that it was their most traumatic and disheartening. It seemed that violence would henceforth be part of the state’s “law and order” response to the left. Indeed, six months later, a peaceful New Years demonstration for the rights of refugees was met by a large contingent of police. Interviewee Anton describes returning

²⁶⁰ “Rote Flora Viertelnachrichten”, 1990, s.2. *ASB*, Binder Rote Flore Flugis und Konzepte I.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

to the Flora after an evening of celebrations to find it full of

totally frustrated, bloodied and injured people – Friends of ours who had been at the demo. The atmosphere was horribly depressed. And...I thought it was horrible. For us to arrive there with our Hahas and Trallalas...and to find everyone destroyed on the floor, compared to us all dolled up for the party.... it was pretty terrible.²⁶³

During this time, the state turned to a policy of law and order reinforced by more violence than the Florians had ever encountered. Concurrently, they coupled these police actions with a continued policy of city modernization and gentrification. For the Autonomen, these actions were unforgivable. In their opinion, the state had misused not only their own rhetoric of social housing and citizen's needs, but also the police in an attack driven purely by the desire for private profit. They viewed the clearing of the park as a demonstration that the state acted only in the interests of building corporations, and not for the actual housing needs of citizens. Indeed, over the next four weeks, the police guarded the garden night and day, and eventually built the "social housing", which the Autonomen lamented as the "most expensive in the city."²⁶⁴ Consequently, it was during this time that their stance of a flatly "anti-state" rejection was formulated. As their opinions hardened, they would begin to support any group who acted contrary to the Senate.

During 1991-1993, Germany witnessed an outbreak of neo-Nazi violence, as we discussed in chapter one. Pogroms throughout southern Germany were met with no police resistance, and, as in 1992, the police even cooperated with the Fascists. However, recall that the Autonomen who travelled to Rostock to "take matters into their own hands" and resist the Nazis were met with police violence and widespread arrests. Similarly, in addition to the severe brutality met by a 1991 demonstration for refugee

²⁶³ "dann waren da überall die total frustrierten und blutüberströmten, verletzten Leute, Freunde, die auf dieser Demo da waren. Die Stimmung war super gedrückt. Und...das fand ich, das war entsetzlich. Und dann noch no da anzukommen mit Haha und Trallala...und die alle am Boden zerstört und wir aufgedonnert für Party und....das war ziemlich schlimm." Interview mit Anton, 1999. In Haus, *Widerstand*, 49-50.

²⁶⁴ Haus, *Widerstand*, 49.

rights, in May 1993 neo-Nazis burnt the home of a Turkish family. There were four casualties, with only one survivor who jumped from an upper story window. After a long discussion of this and other such incidents, the monthly newspaper *Zeck* explains that therefore “the antifascist movement has found, as has it repeatedly made clear, that the Neo-Nazis receive a considerably higher tolerance threshold from the state than the radical left. Thus, in principle, nothing has changed.”²⁶⁵ The Autonomen saw “law and order” politics and a state rhetoric of democracy and social housing being applied unequally and untruthfully. According to the Florians, the social housing promised by the state was the most expensive in the city, and the law and order was applied only to the left, while the political Right were free to engage in pogroms and murder immigrants. They had lost all trust in their government, which was compounded by the increasing use of violence against demonstrations for immigrant and refugee rights. As the state’s “law and order” policy became solidified, so too did the Autonomous stance that their state was inherently corrupt and acting not only in the interests of private companies, but also with racist and Nazi sympathies. This racism would become the linchpin of the discussion over the open drug scene.

Indeed, the Flora support for the “open drug culture” behind their building stems both from their anti-state stance and their attempts to combat state racism. This critique of racism has two focuses. The first was the critique that a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood pushed out the immigrants who had nowhere else they could afford to live. Recall that the Schanze was one of the most run-down and dilapidated working class neighbourhoods in the 1980s and 90s. Immigrants, students and workers congregated there, away from state investment and much state control. As such, it became the haven for drug-users; especially as the nearby tourist attraction Reeperbahn

²⁶⁵ “Dabei ist die antifaschistische Bewegung selbst, die immer wieder deutlich gemacht hat, daß Neonazis von staatlicher Seite eine wesentlich höhere Toleranzschwelle genießen als die radikale Linke. Daran hat sich prinzipielle nichts geändert”. *Zeck*, nu 66, Feb. 1998, s.14.

became increasingly patrolled by police. However, the Florians argued that many of these dealers were those unable to find work due to the “high-tech business culture” that the state tried to promote through *Standortpolitik*. As computer and entertainment industries replaced low paying jobs, immigrant workers found they no longer had either attainable employment or affordable housing.²⁶⁶ Secondly, as the Florians argue in their newspaper *Zeck*, the 1997 and 1998 election campaign of “Interior Security” was coupled with an explicit discourse against the blacks.²⁶⁷ This association was made with the assumption that blacks around the Flora must be dealers, and thus were to be the target of immediate police attention, searches, harassment and arrest.²⁶⁸ Seeing the persecution of the drug culture as an act of state racism, and thus, in their discourse, fascism, the Florians sought to take the opposite stance. As such, they declared their support of the open drug scene as a symbolic way of rejecting the state’s decision.

Finally, the Autonomen sought to create a *Rechtsfreiraum* because they saw the state’s persecution of drug use, coupled with increased surveillance and police presence as an attempt to repress and control society. Their December 1997 flyer on the topic explains that the “Flora as autonomous culture center is the attempt to create the utopia of a life free of domination and boundaries.”²⁶⁹ They go on to explain that this freedom incorporates the possibility for contact and conversation between everyone, with as much variety as possible. Interviewee Guste explains that the idea of sharing space with a heroin dealer originally made him react violently, but seeing them in the Flora soon made him question his own assumptions vociferously. He had to “go home and decide whether it never acceptable [to do drugs] or just simply not for him”.²⁷⁰ It was this

²⁶⁶ “Jenseits von Eden”, *Zeck* nu 65 Dez. 1997, s.8

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ It should be noted that this association continues to this day, with police commonly conducting searches of any black male in the vicinity of the Flora.

²⁶⁹ Flugblatt der Roten Flora, “Gegen die herrschende Drogen- und Flüchtlingspolitik”, Dez. 1997.

²⁷⁰ Interview mit Guste, in Haus, *Widerstand*, 51.

interaction and opening of perspective that the Florians celebrated in their discourse. Furthermore, it was the symbolic rejection of the state's attempt to dictate the actions and decisions of one's everyday life. The Autonomen saw the increased police presence, state surveillance and the "law and order" campaign of the Senate not only as corruption, fascism and explicit racism, but also as the attempt to increase capitalist control over their daily lives. In this interpretation, by preventing people of different lifestyles from meeting, the state was controlling peoples' thoughts. As we shall see in the next chapter, the movement's publications cited Michel Foucault's critique of biopower and governmentality extensively. The Autonomen saw the crackdown on drugs as just another example of a corrupt state trying to control their everyday lives.

As a reaction to what they saw as a fascist, racist, violent, corrupt and repressive state, the Autonomen declared the Rote Flora a "Rechtsfreiraum". In it, they sought to create a space where the law of the land did not apply, and they could attempt to shelter themselves from what they perceived to be hegemonic state forces of surveillance and control. This space of freedom will be further examined in the next chapter, as we discuss to what degree this freedom had to remain in opposition to the state. However, the idea of "resistance" was integral to the concept of Autonomie itself, and thus a *Rechtsfreiraum* was by its very nature a space where the state's stances would be rejected, whether that involved racism, fascism, capitalism, or open drug use. Part of resisting law would include inverting the law, to the degree that many criticized the Rote Flora for becoming a drug nest only for the hardest kernel of the Autonomen, and increasingly disconnected from the citizens of the Schanzenviertel. Indeed, many of these residents, and even many Florians, did not wish to associate with heroin dealers, despite the principle of open dialogue, and the drug policy would isolate the Rote Flora

somewhat from its wider support network.²⁷¹ Amidst this increasing division, the 2001 election saw and increased

political 'shift to the right', when rightwing politician Ronald Schill and his 'Partei Rechtsstaatliche Offensive' entered the political state. Schill, Vice-Mayor and Interior Senator of Hamburg from 2001 to 2003, was a proponent of a strict law and order politics; and his populist political campaigns were pervaded by the ideological instrument of fear of crime.²⁷²

It was amidst this atmosphere that the Rota Flora would be sold to a private investor in 2001, as a *Rechtsfreiraum* that refused all dialogue with the state. This will be the focus of our next chapter.

Conclusion

Thus, through an emphasis on a moving performance of their everyday lives, the Autonomen sought to create a free space, in which they would be able to determine themselves, independent of the state and the language of power. Through this enacting of everyday life, they sought to live out their resistance- not as an end goal, but as a constant "resistance and struggle". As Roberts explains, such a revolution is not a one-time, concrete action, but

rather, Cultural Revolution is the transformation of the categories of experience itself. That is, culture (art, aesthetic experience) is directed towards the unpacking and dissolution of the alienated distinction between culture and everyday life. The revolutionary critique of the everyday, ultimately, is the production of a new 'life style' – of new forms of being and doing.²⁷³

Through their actions and spectacles, the Autonomen thus sought to create a culture of revolution – an entirely different way of life that would dissolve this "alienated distinction" between Modell Deutschland and their own experiences. However, unable to use the language of the state to do so, they had to create a new, performative and spectacular language.

²⁷¹ Interview mit Dora, in Haus, *Widerstand*, 51.

²⁷² Naegler, 52.

²⁷³ John Roberts, 109.

Indeed, they had to create a language of art, and to recreate themselves as works of art. The idea of a culture or an ideology had to be explicitly created through movement, praxis, theatre and demonstration. It was something that had to be lived, performed and thus brought to life from the ground up. Indeed, Henri Lefebvre calls out for this revolution of the everyday,

‘Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!’ From an intellectual point of view the word ‘creation’ will no longer be restricted to works of art but will signify a self-conscious activity, self-conceiving, reproducing its own terms, adapting these terms and its own reality (body, desire, time, space), being its own creation; socially the term will stand for the activity of a collectivity assuming the responsibility of its own social function and destiny – in other words for self-administration.²⁷⁴

He expands the concept of “creation” from a static work of art into an act, or a movement, of “self-conscious, self-conceiving” and “self-administer[ing]” activity. A social body will “assum[e] the responsibility of its own social function” and begin to create itself explicitly. Indeed, as the Use Concepts of the Rote Flora state

The Rote Flora is a place for us in which we can develop our own ideas of utopia. Here we want to be independent of the state, and work together in community to get our wishes and dreams back on track and proceed to implement them- responsibly and in self-determination.²⁷⁵

Their utopia, dreams and wishes are “not the goal” but rather a constant “resistance and struggle” and thus a process of implementation - here too the means and medium have now become the goal. Indeed, this act of “independently and self-determined” “self-administration” could arguably be the most poignant aspect of the Autonomen as work of art, for it creates not on a physical, but also a ideological, philosophical, and physical space of freedom. As Foucault explains, by re-creating oneself as a work of art, there

²⁷⁴ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 204. See John Roberts. 109

²⁷⁵ “Die Rote Flora ist für uns ein Raum, in dem wir Ansätze entwickelt haben, bzw. Entwickeln wollen, unsere Vorstellungen und Utopien umzusetzen....Hier wollen wir unabhängig von staatlicher Bevormundung gemeinsam mit anderen den verschiedenen Wünschen und Traumen auf die Spur kommen und darangehen, diese umzusetzen - eigenverantwortlich und selbstbestimmt.” Plenum, Nutzungskonzepte, Sept 1992, s. 5.

remains no passive subject upon which power can act. One has thus, finally, escaped an enforced domination, and replaced its target with an autonomous being. In autonomous and Lefebvrian logic, one is thus able to become the revolution incarnate. Let us examine the historical context for this concept of self-creation in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Unverträglichkeit

In previous chapters, we saw that the Autonomen drew on Lefebvre and Bakhtin to create an artist culture of self-creation and utopian resistance. This chapter will investigate a different aspect of this radical position: the lack of willingness to negotiate with “the state.” Their defiant stance is captured in the Rote Flora’s campaign slogans “Glücklich Unverträglich”; “happily uncompromised”, and “Flora bleibt Unverträglich!”; the “Flora remains without a contract!” Unverträglich is a play on words, literally meaning “without a contract”, but also uncompromising, indigestible, unwilling to get along, unassimilated, upsetting, inappropriate, and unconciliatory. It was both a statement regarding the proffered contract, and also the general attitude of the Autonomen toward organized politics and compromise.

As the state’s “law-and-order” politics continued [into the 2000’s, Senator Helmut Schill sought to establish a rental contract for the Florians to continue using the Rote Flora. However, despite being offered a legally binding claim to their long contested building, the Florians instead rejected the contract. In response, in 2001 the senate sold the land to a private investor. This chapter will focus upon this counter-intuitive strategy and try to explain why the Autonomen would reject the state when it offered them the very thing for which they had been fighting for over a decade. In order to explain this situation, I will ground the Autonomen in their intellectual historical context, and explore the contemporary philosophical focus on subjectivity in the politics of resistance. By grounding the debate over a contract in Michel Foucault’s contemporary interest in political freedom and subjective resistance, I will argue that the idea of a contract violates the very principle of Autonomie. As the personal had become political, this transgression would violate not only the political idea of Autonomie, but also the personal identity of the Autonomen.



The slogan and advertising campaign released in 2001 by the Florians.²⁷⁶

Flora Bleibt Unverträglich!

In late 2000, the Hamburg Senate offered the Florians a rental contract for the continued use of the Flora as a cultural centre. At 1000 DM monthly, the rent was very low compared to the neighbourhood average. The contract also promised 400,000 DM for renovations, in addition to funds promised to bring the building up to fire code.²⁷⁷ After eleven years of occupation, street demonstrations, police violence and the constant threat of eviction, the contract was offered to the Autonomen was a final attempt to end the civil discontent. It was part of the official politics of “law and order”, as well as “internal security” policies propagated by both municipal Mayor Ortwin Runde and the Red-Green coalition, who lead a predominantly right-leaning Senate. The offer was also an official attempt to bring an end to both the drug scene and the street violence that had become a staple aspect of not only political protests and marches, but also everyday life in the Schanzenviertel.²⁷⁸ In addition to the state-senate’s “law and order” politics, which dated to 1997, the municipal concern with “internal security” arose after a year of

²⁷⁶ “Flora bleibt Unverträglich Manifesto”, 2001. ASB Box Rote Flora Flugis und Konzept Geschichte”

²⁷⁷ “Rote Flora’: Vertrag liegt vor. Abriss oder Erhalt?” 18 Jan 2001, *Eimsbüttler Wochenblatt*, ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁷⁸ Recall that Hamburg is a city-state, and thus has both a city council with a Mayor, at this time Orwin Runde, as well as a State Senate, led by Ole von Beust, until Ronald Schill took power in July of 2000.

riots and violence in the Schanzenviertel. During this year, a grenade had exploded in a dance club in the Schanze, and become the catalyst for a political and public debate over safety in the area. Furthermore, a riot on May 1st outside of the Rote Flora would not have normally been considered out of place. However, it was compounded by a Neo-Nazi march through the Viertel that same month, leading to an Autonomien backlash and subsequent riot.²⁷⁹ After such an eventful year, newspapers reported that forty percent of residents felt significantly less safe than before, and the right-wing opposition parties began to criticize the government for its lack of action.²⁸⁰ In addition, 2001 was the year of a municipal election, and the local government feared increased pressure from the right regarding public security.

Now located at the heart of the radical left in the Viertel, the Rote Flora became one of ten “focus points” of the state’s “internal security” policy, upon which the Mayor’s party would campaign in the next election. The mayor had made it very clear that he had no interest in debating the opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party over the Rote Flora topic, and thus would solve the issue before the next election, either through a rental agreement or by sale of the land. The Internal Security platform he offered to the CDU as compromise contained a written emphasis on “controlling this unruly and dangerous part of the city”.²⁸¹ In addition, the state sought to crack down on drugs, increase police presence, and impose “tougher penalties” on offenders.²⁸² As part of this campaign, the Mayor sought to improve the “image factor” of the Schanzenviertel and the Rote Flora and to placate this “dangerous city section” through a rental contract and building renovations.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ “Wie sicher fühlen”, *Hamburger Morgenpost*, 10.05.2000. ASB Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ “Rote Flora’: Vertrag liegt vor. Abriss oder Erhalt?” 18 Jan 2001, *Eimsbüttler Wochenblatt*, ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁸² Anke Schwarzer und Reemt Reemtsma, “Angebot heißt Angriff”, *Jungle Welt*, Nu. 11, 7.03.2001. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01

²⁸³ Ibid.

However, the contract was not overly harsh. It especially did not include the caveats faced by the Hafenstraße in 1986, whereby any illegal action or misdemeanor by any member (such as shoplifting) would lead to a nullification of the entire rental contract.²⁸⁴ For a building that was 1770 square meters, the 1000DM rental offer was indeed very low, and the renovation budget was more than the theatre would eventually sell for. Moreover, the fire safety upgrades were badly needed in a building that had caught fire in November 1995 and almost burned to the ground. Overall, although the contract came from a state policy intended to pacify leftist violence and civil protest, the terms of the contract were surprisingly fair for the right-wing senate, and it seemed to many at the time that this was a fair offer and one that could bring about a resolution to a long-standing dispute.

The Rote Flora plenum was given a deadline of February 2001 to make a decision, and after two intense months of internal debate, declared that they refused any contract.²⁸⁵ In response, the city sold the building in March to Klausmartin Kretschmer, a land speculator, investor, and a “close friend of the culture senator”.²⁸⁶ It went for 370,000 DM, significantly less than the one million DM the state bought the theatre for in 1977.²⁸⁷ The state included a clause in the sale that the land could not be sold for ten years, and must be used as a cultural center during that time. However, despite these conditions, many Florians saw both the proffered rental contract and the sale of the land as an “assault”, rather than an offer.²⁸⁸ Let us turn now to their refusal of the contract.

²⁸⁴ Kai von Appen, Fast wie noch Tarif, *TAZ Hamburg*, 26.02.2001, in ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁸⁵ “Rote Flora privatisiert”, *TAZ Hamburg* 21.03.2001, s.2. in ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁸⁶ “Das Phantom der Roten Flora”, *Hamburger Morgenpost*, 21.03.2001, s.12. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁸⁷ “So rechnet sich die Stadt eden Preis hin”, *Hamburg Morgenpost*, 21.03.2001, s. 13.

²⁸⁸ Anke Schwarzer und Reemt Reemtsma, “Angebot heißt Angriff”, *Jungle Welt*, Nu. 11, 7.03.2001. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

In fact, given the historical and financial situation, it is difficult to understand why the activists would refuse 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 standoff between municipal authorities and squatters in Berlin's Kreuzberg ended in 124 rental contracts out of 165 squats by 1984. Similarly, while Hamburg's Hafenstraße had arguably faced greater physical violence fighting for their land during the Barricade days they had concluded that full day and night of pitched street battles with a rental contract. Despite the extremist stances of these other autonomous projects, there was a historical precedent for this sort of capitulation, despite their use of the same ideology as the Florians. Finally, the rental contract was surprisingly generous for a right-wing government with little sympathy for the Autonomen. Indeed, a contract offered to a similar squat in the Centro Sociale Culture Centre, located nearby in the Schanzenviertel only eight years later demanded over €3900 monthly for 500 square meters. Accounting for inflation, this figure can be compared to €511 for the 1770 square meters of the Rote Flora. Although it emerged from a reactive and unsympathetic municipal policy of increased security, a somewhat sensationalist publicity campaign about public safety, and the attempt to appease a right wing opposition, the rental offer did not contain repressive legal clauses or exorbitant prices. So why would the Florians refuse it so vehemently?

In fact, many groups and individuals within the Rote Flora community did not wish to refuse. Pointing to the Hafenstraße and other precedents for contracted leftist centers, authors writing under pseudonyms like "group rage" debated ferociously in the monthly newsletter *Zeck*, as well as at plenum meetings and public debates.²⁸⁹ While the only accessible record of these meetings is the published newsletter, it reflects a

²⁸⁹ Gruppe-rage, "Die Flora muss rot bleiben", *Zeck*, nu 95, Feb 2001, s.5. ASB Zeck Box.

diversity of opinion unprecedented in the Florian's self-published Autonomous literature.²⁹⁰ Granted, Autonomie as a concept emphasizes plurality, diversity of opinion and method, and the rejection of a singular definition, focus or leadership. The Plenum emphasized direct democracy, and made decisions only by consensus. However, the debate over a contract was divisive enough that three months of debate could not bring the Florians to an agreement. In the end, a consensus of 75% was established as enough to resolve the debate.²⁹¹ And yet, many who disagreed proposed concrete scenarios in which the state's funds could be used to subvert it from within.²⁹² Others explained that it was acceptable for the Autonomen to deal with the state on a limited and "strategic" basis, listing welfare as an example.²⁹³ Others simply

pleaded that the Flora-users rethink their attitude toward negotiations with the city. Naturally and obviously, to negotiate with the city always involves a risk, and there is a lot to lose in this. However, there is even more to lose if the Flora allows itself to get involved in a confrontation with the senate – namely, the entire Flora project, along with its practice and future possibilities.²⁹⁴

Florians who were interviewed explained that no one saw the contract or anything about it as a "good" thing.²⁹⁵ However, many interviewees began to argue that a *Rechtsfreiraum* and a totally "free life" were no longer possible. As one explains,

Of course it would be much better without a contract, for everything to just continue as it was, but I see no future without a contract. It seems clear to me that if we don't negotiate, it will finally come to an eviction.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Accessing the Rota Flora archival documents is actually very difficult, and involves a time period of earning the trust of the Autonomen. Scholarly techniques utilized included: being introduced by a friend who worked with the Zapatistas; the tactical employment of Che Guevara t-shirts; purposefully dirty black clothing; engaging in marches and rallies; and the provision of many home-baked goods from "authentic" family recipes. In my scholarly opinion, the third method was the most successful. However, despite these advances, the meeting minutes were not shown to outsiders, and while I was promised eventual access, it would have taken considerably longer than I had.

²⁹¹ "Die autonome Unverträglichkeit", *taznord Hamburg*, 31, Okt, 2004, s.2. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

²⁹² "Sieg oder Untergang- größtmöglicher Erfolg oder eine akzeptable Alternative?!" Dez 2000. ASB untitled box.

²⁹³ Gruppe-rage, "Die Flora muss rot bleiben".

²⁹⁴ "Wir plädieren dafür, dass die Flora-NutzerInnen ihre Haltung gegenüber Verhandlungen mit der Stadt noch einmal überdenken. Selbstverständlich sind Verhandlungen mit dem Staat immer ein Risiko, und es gibt dabei was zu verlieren. Jedoch, gibt es mehr zu verlieren, wenn die Flora sich auf eine Konfrontation mit dem Senat einlässt – nämlich das Projekt Flora mit seiner Praxis und seinen Möglichkeiten." Gruppe-rage, "Die Flora muss rot bleiben".

²⁹⁵ "Also ich glaube es gibt keinen hier der sagt es gibt an einem Vertrag was Gutes." Norbert interview, in "[K]eine Flora mit Verträgen?", *Zeck*, Dez 2000/Jan 2001, s.5. ASB Zeck Box.

²⁹⁶ "Mir wär's natürlich auch lieber ohne Vertrag, dass das so alles weiterläuft, aber ich sehe halt keine Zukunft ohne Vertrag. Für mich steht, wenn wir keine Vertragshandlung eingehen, am Ende immer die Räumung." Michael interview, in "[K]eine Flora mit Verträgen?", *Zeck*, Dez 2000/Jan 2001, s.6. ASB Zeck Box.

Furthermore, interviewees explain that they can no longer justify their stance to the community. As the political spectrum shifted distinctly to the right, the Autonomous refusal to compromise no longer made sense to what they dismissively referred to as a “liberallala” audience. Interviewee Michael explains that “no one on the street anymore will say ‘no contract for the Flora and nonetheless we preserved it’ but rather they will demand safety and security for the Flora through a contract”.²⁹⁷ Indeed, while most articles acknowledge that they still view the state as repressive, racist, and hegemonic, the diversity of willingness to compromise even with a “corrupt” negotiation partner demonstrated the degree to which many participants no longer felt as though they had the political clout or public support to refuse. Many listed the fear of losing the Flora altogether as their chief reason to accept a contract, and saw negotiations as the lesser of two evils.

However, despite this wideranging debate, the Flora plenum adhered to its stance of *Unverträglichkeit*. Indeed, the majority of the Flora plenum interpreted the offer of a contract as an “Angriff”, or “assault” upon their values, principles, and philosophical identity. As *TAZ Hamburg* reports, one speaker argued that “for us that is not an offer, but rather an assault on our project.” *TAZ* goes on to explain that the activists believe the contract “is a form of political muzzling” and “an interference with the self-administration of their political structure”. Finally, the speaker explains “The Rote Flora would no longer be itself without its structure.”²⁹⁸ As we have seen in

²⁹⁷ “Das ist jetzt ja gerade das Problem: Wie geht man überhaupt nach außen? Sagt man jetzt wir wollen keine Verträge, was die meisten Menschen wohl nicht verstehen werden? Also ich glaub so das Liberallala-Spektrum wird schon sagen: Warum macht ihr keine Verträge? Die Herrschenden stehen auch unter Druck, das unter Dach und Fach kriegen zu müssen und würden auch ziemlich viele Zugeständnisse machen. Die Hafestraße ist ja auch nicht ohne Verträge durchgesetzt worden, sondern da war auch immer der Tenor Verträge und nicht räumen. Niemand wird für uns auf die Straße gehen und fordern: ‘Keine Verträge für Flora und trotzdem Erhalt’, sondern Bestandssicherung für Flora über Verträge.” Michael, *ibid*, s.8.

²⁹⁸ “Für uns ist das kein Angebot, sondern ein Angriff auf unser Projekt”, sagt die Sprecherin. Die Aktivistinnen fürchten vor allem, dass sie durch einen Vertrag politisch diszipliniert und dass in ihre Selbstverwaltungsstrukturen eingegriffen werden soll: “Rote Flora gibt es nicht ohne die Strukturen der Roten Flora.” *TAZ*. 26.2.2001. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01.

chapter two, the form or praxis of Autonomous protest was an attempt to bring an idea into reality through performance and practice. To compromise that idea was to give up on the Autonomous identity itself.

One could even argue that the stance of the Florians was one of resistance for its own sake. Similar to their position on Hamburg drug culture, the Autonomen sought to reject and invert the state in a performative and symbolic way. They interpreted the state's offer as an imposed, hegemonic, top-down assault on their identities, and thus reacted by employing the inverse. A rental contract offer was met with the stance of political resistance, as a matter of principle. However, while this position might seem overly simplistic, it is important to question whether the state was perhaps playing with this narrative as well. As an area defined as "unregulated" or "free of law", a legal contract would be the ideal means of undermining the claims to political independence by these activists. As a squatted building, the space explicitly represents the rejection and inversion of property and ownership. A rental contract, paradoxically, would thus be the most effective means of sterilizing this stance of resistance. Furthermore, the sale of the land in 2001 to a private investor who explicitly tolerated the squatters effectively removed the *rechtsfrei* from the *Raum* of the Flora. In a 2009 interview, a STEG employee explains

That is a little weird, because actually the charm for the squatters is that it is squatted. And then...suddenly the private person appears [Kretschmer]...there he had suddenly took [sic] the drive away, suddenly it wasn't an unlegislated space anymore, not illegal anymore, because the private person bought it and said 'go and do your thing there'. Not illegal anymore. Sensational solution... nice tactic of the City, this solution.²⁹⁹

While the Florians do seem to be most interested in the stance of squatting and resisting the law as an act of inversion and resistance, that a STEG employee could identify the "tactic of the city" as a way to pull the rug out from under their feet lends some

²⁹⁹ STEG employee, interview with Laura Naegler, translation by Naegler. Cited in Neegler, 86.

credibility to the Autonomous complains of political “muzzling”. In making the resistant space no longer resistant, the state was able to target the idea of Autonomie itself. This establishes not only the stance of Autonomie as a perhaps overly generalized resistance for its own sake, but also the explicit attempt of the state to eliminate the grounds for this position. It seems that both sides had grounds for their criticisms.



*“Flora remains uncontracted, self-administered and self-determined”
The poster board on the Rote Flora is used to deliver the Plenum’s stance on the rental contract³⁰⁰*

As the state had realized, for the Florians to compromise involved the sacrifice not only of a space, but more importantly, of a philosophy, ideal and identity. As the Plenum

³⁰⁰ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 27.2.2001.

argues in the manifesto “Flora Bleibt Unverträglich!”

because for us it’s not primarily about the walls of this house, but rather of the Rote Flora as a political idea and a project of resistance itself, with which we can implement our desire for radical social change and implement political interventions.³⁰¹

The issue for the Plenum was not the building as much as the idea of Autonomie itself. It was that concept that a contract would sully or pollute, and it was against this idea that the state’s attempt to “interfere” was such an assault. In their manifesto declaring their refusal of the contract, the Florians explained that

Rather than deciding to embrace [the contract], we have decided to defend and clarify the ideas that make up the Flora project-ideas such as self-organization and emancipation, and that the Flora with a contract is thus no Flora at all any longer. To accept a compromise prevents the possibility of our using the project as an open political opposition, of public altercations, and of attacking racism. Therefore our goal: Flora remains uncompromised!

³⁰²

As we have seen, the Flora was defined as “self-organization and emancipation”; as a space of political freedom; as resistance; as self-determination; as political struggle against gentrification; and as a rejection of capitalist exchange. A contract involving the exchange of capital, imposed by a political state seeking to curtail leftist resistance and subsequently increase private property values in the neighbourhood thus ran counter to every aspect of this self-understanding. To subject that idea to a political and economic contract would essentially be to blaspheme and degrade the very idea that the Florians had fought for and identified themselves with. It was not just a political question – it was personal.

³⁰¹ “Denn uns geht es nicht in erster Linie um die Mauern des Hauses, sondern um die Rote Flora als politische Idee und als widerständiges Projekt, mit dem wir unser Begehren nach radikaler gesellschaftlicher Veränderung in politische Interventionen umsetzen können.” “Flora bleibt Unverträglich Manifesto”, 2001. ASB Box Rote Flora Flugis und Konzept Geschichte.

³⁰² “Statt uns darauf einzulassen, haben wir uns entschieden, die Ideen, die das Projekt Flora ausmachen – wie Autonomie, Selbstorganisation und Emazipation -, zu verteidigen und klarzustellen, dass die Flora mit Verträgen (zumindest längerfristig) keine Flora mehr ist. Verträge abzulehnen beinhaltet dabei die Möglichkeit, die öffentliche auseinandersetzung um das Projekt politisch zu nutzen um Ausgrenzung, Vertreibung, Rassismus anzugreifen. Deshalb ist unser Ziel: Flora bleibt – unverträglich!” “Flora Bleibt Unverträglich!” discussion paper, 17 Jan. 2000, ASB, untitled box.

Given the relatively generous nature of the rental contract, it is difficult for an outside audience to understand why the ideal of *Autonomie* would nonetheless triumph over a legally recognized and binding claim to the space. Indeed, many *Autonomen* even made this argument, pleading for a strategic use of state funds to continue the political subversion. However, because the plenum had crafted their personal identities around the political idea of a self-determined and autonomous life, they chose to decide based on principle. I will now try to explain this puzzling stance by grounding *Autonomie* in the historical and intellectual context of post-structuralist thought and post-anarchist thought.

The Historical Nature of Post Anarchism as Post-Structuralism

In order to ground the *Rote Flora* in its historical context of post-structuralism, I will summarize a concept known as post-anarchism. Coined by scholar and activist, Todd May, and engaged with most seriously by scholars Saul Newman, post-anarchism is the argument that late twentieth century French thought and political activism arose from a common source. In summary, Newman explains that

Post-anarchism is a political logic that seeks to combine the egalitarian and emancipative aspects of classical anarchism, with an acknowledgement that radical political struggles today are contingent, pluralistic, open to different identities and perspectives, and are over different issues – not just economic ones.³⁰³

While classic anarchism was rooted in Marxist thought and its focus upon economics, post anarchism is characterized by an emphasis on personal action and ethics, as part of a plurality, and the rejection of metanarratives in favor of a highly subjective praxis or performance. As power is dispersed, so too is resistance and the identity thereof. Indeed, this plurality of individual “signs”, so to speak, and their infinite flight from a unified or

³⁰³ Newman summarized in Duane Rousselle and Süreyya Evern, eds., *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 5. Todd May makes a similar argument in Todd May, “Anarchism from Foucault to Ranciere”, in Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, Deric Shannon, eds., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 11.

hegemonic meaning mirrors a post-structuralist logic, which we will explore in depth shortly. May, Newman, and other scholars demonstrate that post-structuralism and post-anarchism are congruent. I will thus argue that the Florians engaged in both discourses, which grounds their actions in the post-structuralist turn to ethics and subjectivity. Consequently, we can use Foucault's work on these topics as a lens within which to understand the Florians decision to remain unverträglich.

Let us define the terms post-structuralism and post-anarchism with reference to our case study. Like *Autonomie*, these two concepts represent a slippery discourse that defines itself largely by the rejection of a single unifying term. In fact, the emphasis of both is on plurality, multiplicity and resistance to a hegemonic concept. Scholar Julian Bourg offers a set of "broad brushstrokes" around this concept, arguing that

a number of family resemblances within this field can be identified: a concern about the opacity of language, suspicions about the unified self, doubts about historical progress, valorization of desire and anxieties about power. The buzzwords of French theory which gathered around these topics – terms such as discourse, difference, the other, decentering, absence, and indeterminacy – were set against categories such as universalism, origins, representation and metanarratives.³⁰⁴

Note that in order to avoid contradicting himself, Bourg refrains from making a "universalist," or hegemonic pronouncement of what post-structuralism is, and instead attempts to sketch around it. Like the *Autonomen*, he refrains from engaging in the discourse he is attempting to reject, and instead provides what can be considered a post-structuralist definition of the same. Similarly, anarchist scholar Gabriel Kuhn agrees, and has presented a list of characteristics that describe post-structuralism, which I will here transfer to post-anarchism.³⁰⁵ While he is of course careful to refrain from imposing this list as a "definition," as this would contradict his own position, we can look to these attributes as a guide for understanding post-anarchism in this time period and context.

³⁰⁴ Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought*, (McGill-Queens Press: 1997), 11.

³⁰⁵ Gabriel Kuhn, "Anarchism, postmodernity and poststructuralism", in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, 23-24.

These characteristics are

1. A “profound critique of the truth,” assuming “truth” is a meta-discourse that acts to enforce hegemony and an uncritical cultural bias resulting from patriarchy, capitalism, dominance, etc.
2. An “uncompromising commitment to plurality and all that goes with it”. He connects this to Deleuze’s work on “rhizomes, cracks, shifts, fluidity, etc.”. While bracketing Deleuze simply to retain focus, this notion of plurality is manifest in the concept of *Autonomie* as a movement of many small groups, united only by resistance rather than a singular discourse.
3. A “critique of representation”, which the *Autonomen* engage in through their rejection and deconstruction of state discourse.
4. A critique of the subject that “liberates us from the need to conform to fixed identities and opens a never-ending playground to create and permanently recreate subjectivities in self-determined processes”. As we shall see in this chapter, this critique of the subject and turn to alternate subjectivities is the cornerstone of *Autonomie* as a personal politics. This shall be demonstrated in our investigation of Michel Foucault’s focus upon the formation of the self.
5. Foucault’s theory of power, as acting not hierarchically, but from all sides and from everywhere. This theory allows post-anarchism to engage with and “understand the complexity of social stratification, strife, and struggle”. By transferring the focus of resistance from a single, top-down power source to the multiple sources of governmentality, post-anarchism acknowledges the insidious and pervasive nature of power
6. Foucault’s “specific intellectual”, who “pursues theoretical work as a contribution to solving concrete and immediate problems” rather than as a means to establish oppressive grand theory.” In terms of the *Autonomen*, this rejection of a “grand theory” mirrors not only their rejection of a “high culture”, but also their insistence on the practice of everyday life as individual acts of revolution. Of course, this also implies:
7. A “dismantling of the boundaries separating theory from praxis”
8. Derrida’s “difference” and deconstruction. We are going to bracket Derrida and sign theory entirely here, for purposes not only of brevity, but also to remain to remain focused upon praxis. However, much further scholarship could be done to apply the notion of infinitely referring and thus permanently elusive, resistant, and self-defining signs.³⁰⁶
9. “The focus on the minor”, as the *Autonomous* demand for a culture from below and the focus on everyday life demonstrates.
10. “A diverse, fluid and militant web of resistance”. While Kuhn here references Deleuze’s nomadic unity, the concept of *Autonomie* itself is very compatible with a shifting web of many resistant, autonomous actors.
11. A “focus on direct, non-mediated struggles”. Indeed, even a rental contract was seen as too much mediation and control for the *Autonomen*, who instead sought

³⁰⁶ Some scholars still argue that Derrida’s work is that of a postmodern “skeptical nihilistic” and thus prevents any political action. John Zerzan, for example, rejects the claim that Derrida’s work can be used for political purposes. However, as Richard Day explains, Derrida’s work in fact stems from deep and “powerful ethico-political commitments”. Derrida himself absolutely rejects the charge of nihilism, explaining in a 2002 interview that this claim “is stupid and utterly wrong, and only people who haven’t read me say this.” For a full discussion, see Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 159-160. Faced with a similar charge, Foucault replied “The ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger... My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous... If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism”. Michel Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress’, in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 343. Cited in Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 87.

- to engage in direct action.³⁰⁷
12. An “affirmative character” of thought that emphasizes creativity, which the Florians explicitly valued.
 13. An overall “radicalism of thought”.

To this list I would add the following three related characteristics, which apply more directly to post-anarchism, but follow from the logic of post-structuralism.

14. Saul Newman’s argument that “anarchism is usually seen as an *anti-politics*, in the sense that it must both reject all politics, while proposing that stance itself as a politic.³⁰⁸
15. The attempt to engage in this politic of anti-politic through a stance of inversion, rejection, and the creation of a secondary space, such as the carnival. This rejection is related to the critique of truth, narrative, and hierarchy as listed above.
16. Finally, I would restate the importance of performance. While listed above, the value of physically enacting and *living* one’s politics was of utmost importance both to the Autonomes and to post-structuralists such as Foucault, who only ever sought to craft “a few fragments of autobiography”.

All of these listed characteristics apply equally to post-structuralism and post-anarchism, thus the latter can be grounded within the intellectual context of the former, and this reveals post-anarchism to be a kind of “lived” form of post-structuralism. What post-structuralists are trying to do with language and history, post-anarchists are trying to do with their own existence. While Gabriel Kuhn relies heavily on Deleuze and Derrida in his work, and Todd May, who originally coined the term “post-anarchism” limits his analysis to Foucault and Lyotard, I will focus even further.³⁰⁹ In order to remain focused upon praxis, which seems most appropriate for this case study, I will narrow this examination to only Michel Foucault’s work.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ See David Graeber’s discussion of “direct action” as a similar form of political praxis in *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (AK Press: Edinburgh, 2009).

³⁰⁸ Saul Newman, *The Politics of Post Anarchism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 138.

³⁰⁹ May, 1994, 12. In Süreyya Evern, “How New Anarchism Changed the World (of Opposition) after Seattle and Gave Birth to Post-Anarchism”, in Duane Rousselle and Süreyya Evern, eds., *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, 9.

³¹⁰ I am not relying on Michel De Certeau’s work on the everyday here for several reasons. The most simple is the brevity and focus of the chapter, which demands an intensive exploration of only one relevant theorist. More importantly, Foucault was explicitly relied upon and quoted by the Autonomes throughout their literature. Finally, Foucault participated in the Tunix congress. In contrast, De Certeau does not appear in the literature whatsoever, nor was he a part of these events or political struggles. Furthermore, the reader is advised to revisit my explanation in chapter one, or to turn to John Roberts for a discussion of why his altered use of everyday life as cultural consumption in fact counteracts the revolutionary political praxis that Lefebvre intended for this concept.

Foucault's Ethics, Askēsis and the Performance of Freedom

As an historical actor steeped in the anarchist and radical milieu of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Foucault demonstrates the widespread intellectual focus upon subjectivity, self-formation, ethics, freedom and purity. I will trace out a three-part analysis of the Autonomous discourse at this time and show how it conforms to some of Foucault's central philosophical contentions and foci: 1) The turn to care of the self; 2) the ethics of freedom, including the freedom from normalization; and 3) the concept of discursive purity.³¹¹ Of course, these three concepts are so inextricably connected that the following discussion will be structured more as a reciprocal loop than a clear and linear progression. However, such repetition demonstrates the emphasis upon *Autonomie*, self-determination, and self-formation as the key to understanding political resistance at this time.

The *Autonomen* frequently cited and referred to Foucault's work. After he attended the 1978 Tübingen congress, *TAZ*, the mouthpiece of *Autonomie* at the time, published an introduction to Foucault's work. It praised his "non-standard language", which stood in resistance and "comparison to the dominant model of Western thought." The *Autonomen* associated with his "alternative mode of thinking, a playful, flexible, and complex thinking in action." Their understanding that Foucault's work, like their own political goals, "inventively develops new areas of knowledge/non-knowledge, because it is the only way to escape the coercive power of traditional disciplinary boundaries", increased their appreciation of his focus on praxis.³¹² They saw his work engaging in the same struggle for self-creation, self-determination, and the creation of new, free spaces within language and society. Similarly, the *Rote Flora's* monthly newspaper, *Zeck*, is

³¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*, (New York: Picador, 2005), Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others Lectures at the College de France 1982-1983*, (New York: Picador, 2010), and Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984*, (New York: Picador, 2011).

³¹² *TAZ*, cited and translated in Von Dirke, 149.

littered with references to and expositions on Foucault. But moreover, I find Foucault not only contextually relevant but also philosophically useful as a means of understanding how the Autonomen acted politically and culturally. Indeed, Foucault might be considered a kind of poet or troubadour of the Autonomen movement—someone who gave creative expression to complex practices, emotions, and ideas. It's not always clear who influenced whom, since both Foucault and the Autonomen came out of the same anarchist milieu in the 1970s. Foucault's work prior to 1979 describes the type of power that the Autonomen lamented. After his involvement in Tunix and his campaigning for Amnesty for RAF members in France in 1978, his work changed drastically. Whereas before he has presented a rather gloomy and inescapable diagnosis of the hegemony of power, in this "third period" he turned to an ethical, even moral focus on how the individual might resist this power through the performance of a self-determined life. In fact, all three of the themes that Foucault emphasizes can be summarized through this concept of political performance, whereby the Autonomen sought to enact their personal politics and remain ethically committed to their principles, even at the material price of their building. In this way, they sought to embody self-determination and actualize it in praxis. This philosophical position helps explain why they rejected the state's contract offer and attempts at appeasement.

The Turn to the Self

After his participation in the 1978 Tunix congress, Foucault's work took a dramatic turn from concerns with state power toward the "care for the self."³¹³ The turn

³¹³ Biographer James Miller explains that during this time Foucault withdrew into a deep depression, separating himself from his friends, including Gilles Deleuze, with whom he would never speak again until his death. Strikingly, his work at this time began to emphasize the "withdrawing into the self, retiring into the self, or again, descending to the depths of oneself." Facing his own death in a few years, and perhaps "descending" to his own "depths", Foucault turned to the arts of the care of the self perhaps as a way of addressing his own ethical concerns as he faced his subjectivity and mortality. Alternatively, it could be argued that he sought to "complete" his rather one-sided work on power, in a sense, by offering a faint glimmer of hope as the other side of the coin. Either way, his deep depression mirrors the disenchantment and heartbreak suffered by the Autonomen after 1977. Both turned away from this overwhelming and hopeless fight with state power, and instead sought to create a person, individual

to the care of self was Foucault's attempt to escape the overwhelming nature of normalizing state power through the formation of oneself as a free and ethical individual, and thus as a politically resistant subject. Similarly, and as we saw in chapter two, the Autonomous attempt to create a self-determined, constantly resistant life was another instance of this historical concern with freedom. Indeed, faced with increased surveillance and police presence of "interior security" policies of the 1990s, of Modell Deutschland in the 1980s, and of the state's crackdown on the left after 1977, the Autonomen saw no other means of resisting political power. Rather than a widespread social movement, which had failed so dramatically in the RAF and the Deutsche Herbst, the political and philosophical left turned to the self as the site of political resistance. As Foucault explains,

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us now for several centuries.³¹⁴

Rather than engaging in a futile resistance of biopower, governmentality and the pervasiveness of power, or an attempt to "liberate the individual from the state" which Foucault's earlier work had laid out as impossible, instead, political actors in this period turned to target of power itself – the subject. They turned to a resistance from below, and to the focus upon "new forms of subjectivity" that simply "refus[ed] this kind of [state] individuality that has been imposed on us" from above.

resistance- one that could not be diffused by a special task force storming an airplane, or the suspicious deaths of political activists in Stammheim prison, but rather would be unassailably sequestered within the personal identity of the subject. See Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 20, Jan 1982, 85. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 3 - Power*, (New Press, 2001), 336.

Freedom

This concern with political freedom is of utmost importance for the Autonomens as well as the philosophies of their time period. In order to understand the argument, let us briefly examine how subjectivization as power functions, so as to determine what relations the subject (in this case, the Autonomist) is replacing.³¹⁵ Foucault explains that “there are two meanings of the word subject: *subject to* someone else by control and dependence, and *tied to* [or a *subject of*] his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.”³¹⁶ In the form of power that makes one a *subject to* something else, one is formed by “someone else by control or dependence”. The subject is constituted by external forces, which one takes in upon oneself, and then regulates oneself by, but which did not originate in the self. In contrast, when one is “*tied to*,” or, to make it more clear, a *subject of* “his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge,” then one has formed oneself through one’s own work upon the self. This is a very different concept of subjection, for it seeks to replace an external power with an internal active choice.

This practice of subjectivization through...the care of the self was a practice of freedom. The form of philosophical life and language that Socrates and Plato invented served to ‘desubjectify’ the political, ethical subject. They strove to detach the subject from its experience of itself, to disconnect it from the forms of control it had incorporated through the work of the ‘general opinion’ and the discourse of rhetoric.³¹⁷

By detaching the self from these “forms of control,” that the subject was “subject to” and replacing them with the “subject of” oneself, Foucault believes that we can resist this process of subjectivization.

Indeed, the Autonomous concern with a life free of domination by the state and its “imposed individuality” is rooted in what Foucault calls resistance to

³¹⁵ It is not entirely faithful to point to one particular thing and say, “this is what normalization *is*”. Because everything is a relation, definitions are difficult and not entirely appropriate here.

³¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power*. Emphasis mine.

³¹⁷ Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault’s Askēsis*, (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 2007), 44.

normalization.³¹⁸ This concept is an examination of the process whereby society gradually established a statistical norm of what the average citizen should look like, and then imposes it upon its citizens (or itself). Foucault explains that within a society of constant supervision, knowledge was “no long about determining whether an individual was behaving as he should,” but rather “it was organized around the norm, in terms of what was normal or not, correct or not, in terms of what one must do or not do.”³¹⁹ In his “Final Interview,” Foucault elaborates upon these “moral conformities, the structures of which are elaborated by sociologists and historians by appealing to a hypothetical average population.”³²⁰ Through this “hypothetical” statistical average, the individual is judged and formed not as an individual, but as his distance from an imagined norm. Thus, normalizing power functions as the standard by which and to which an individual attempts to conform himself to something invented—which is reinforced upon the self by the external forces to which one is subject.³²¹

Indeed, the Autonomes sought to resist normalization through the determined effort to create new norms and standards. Whether by marching naked, creating a new scene of bars, cafés, bookstores, and clubs, or simply by inverting societal dress codes and standards, the Autonomes sought to reject normalization and replace it with their own carnivalesque and absurd (and thus resistant) standards. These sorts of actions are what Foucault is thinking of when he discusses the struggle against normalization, which, of course, is part of the process of creating (or recreating) a new individual. This resistance “revolve[s] around the question: Who are we? [These present struggles] are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore

³¹⁸ Foucault, *Power*, 336.

³¹⁹ Foucault, *Power*, 59. See also the example of the Panopticon.

³²⁰ Foucault, “Final Interview”, 1985, cited in Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, (Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, 2002), 138.

³²¹ Note that these forces are not imposed on an unwilling subject, but rather that a subject who has not cared for himself is unable to choose which forces to accept.

who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition that determines who one is.”³²² Refusing these “abstractions and standing against this “scientific or administrative” normalization involves replacing this subjectivization enacted by normalization with one’s own individualization. As we saw in chapter two, this takes place in the practice of everyday life, which Foucault also explores, arguing that

this form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him.³²³

While this passage is meant to discuss the hegemony of normalizing power, it can in fact be read as the resistance thereof. In addition to a power that “categorizes the individual” and “imposes a law of truth on him” that he and others must “recognize”, Foucault also presents an ethical model of how one might practice her everyday life in order to create “individuality.” This takes place as a struggle against normalizing power, in order to attach an “identity”, which others will then “recognize in him.” Like the Autonomes proudly parading their reversal of societal norms in carnivals, spectacles, and symbolic rejections of power, the inversion of everyday life can be seen and recognized by others, which then begins to alter normalization itself. The Autonomes seek to recreate and perform everyday life from below, so as to struggle against the “top down” imposition of power that comes from a panoptic society of imposed normalization. This bottom up form of power will not be an abstract category of subjectivization, but a careful creation and determination of the self.

³²² Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, *Power*, 331.

³²³ *Ibid.*

Ethics and the Utopian Refusal

Let us briefly recap chapter one, in order to use it as our foundation here. The Foucauldian ethical stance is grounded in cultural and intellectual history since 1968. Scholar Julian Bourg argues that this ethical stance originates in the “values of 1968”, which he lists as

imagination, human interest, communication, conviviality, expression, enjoyment, freedom, spontaneity, solidarity, de-alienation, speaking out, dialogue, non-utility, utopia, dreams, fantasies, community, association, antiauthoritarianism, self-management, direct democracy, equality, self-representation, fraternity, self-defence [sic] – and romance. The May events [of 1968] presented an *épanouissement* – an opening toward self-realization.³²⁴

All of these values are individualistic, and operate by rejecting what was perceived as the societal status quo in favour of a stance adopted by both Foucault and the Autonomes. In his book on May 1968, Bourg carefully traces out the history that ties these values to the French thought that would become known as post-structuralism; a school of thought of which Foucault is often seen as the figurehead.³²⁵ As we have seen post-structuralism was the same historical milieu as post-anarchism, from which social movements, environmental movements, peace activists, and the Autonomes emerged. Overall, Bourg traces these values as the foundation for the Autonomous ethical stance.

Applying this summary, Bourg coins the term “utopian refusal” to describe this movement of valorizing individual subjectivity over an engagement with society.³²⁶ As the most important aspect of this refusal, Bourg explains that one of the key slogans of 1968 was that “it is forbidden to forbid.”³²⁷ Instead, those activists valued a freedom to create, which they saw as incompatible with the state’s imposed rules or society’s normalizing power. Note that this value persists into the Autonomes during the 1990s.

³²⁴ Bourg, 8.

³²⁵ See Bourg.

³²⁶ Ibid. 8.

³²⁷ Ibid.

However, as Bourq discusses, this stance involves a paradox for a movement attempting to articulate new goals and standards.

Almost by definition there seemed a hesitancy to articulate and explicate a 'new law.' To do so risked 'recuperation' by the status quo, reverting to the very norms one claimed to have broken – the *category* of norms, if not particular norms. The ethics of refusal was caught on a paradoxical double-edge when 'it is forbidden to forbid' was applied to itself.³²⁸

In both the 1968 movement and the Autonomen, the "utopian refusal" of power and norms categorically prevented a true engagement with the state. In order to avoid the paradox of positing new laws when it was "forbidden to forbid", the activists turned to a radical individualism, which, like post-structuralism, attempted to avoid metanarratives and dominance, which were associated with the state. Thus, the turn to a stance of rejection allowed them to forbid forbidding. However, this moral stance then brought the Autonomen into a paradox, whereby they were somehow positing the stance of Unverträglichkeit as a kind of absolute itself. While their position was philosophically consistent with the intellectual concentration on self-determination, this paradox would become problematic in their attempts to deal with the state.

Foucault points to this same paradox in his work on askēsis, arguing that the call to lead an ethical life is non-universal and cannot be generalized. The individual formation of one's subjectivity must be inspired by another, but simultaneously can only be completed by the self. Similarly, applying this paradox to politics, he discusses "a certain window of opportunity [that] has opened up in the late 20th century not seen since the end of feudalism". Referring to the possibility of questioning the structures of government, state and hegemonic discourse, he goes on to explain that "we are perhaps at the beginning of crisis in the re-evaluation of the problem of governance," and "the nature of this crisis is at once ethical and political". For the first time in centuries, it has

³²⁸ Ibid.

become possible to critique the status quo and the legitimacy of state power as structures that are no longer ideal for today's political individual. And yet, here lies the paradox. In scholar Nancy Luxon's words, "Foucault comments that modern liberation movements seem to be in need of an ethics, even as he says that what is in crisis are ultimately the procedures and techniques that guaranteed 'the guidance (le guidage) of individuals by one another'.³²⁹ Foucault calls for the resistance of state hegemony and dominance through the ethical creation of oneself via the rejection of all structure. Yet, he simultaneously calls for this ethic to guide new liberatory social movements, such as the Autonomes. In order to create change, we must create ourselves as Autonomous subjects, but this call to resist cannot be generalized to the population in general, and also cannot be corrupted by or presented to the state. Resistance thus remains a paradox.

Foucault's work is also often criticized for this same reason. Political scholar Jon Simons summarizes other scholars' concerns that Foucault not only "fails to provide motivation or reason to resist, which is a necessary condition for revolt," but also that his turn to the subject actively prevents any widespread or organized revolt at all. Furthermore, others criticize Foucault for failing

to develop a concept of 'juridical subjectivity' (White, 1986:429). He does not promote arts of the self that fashion subjects who would be capable of cooperating politically in a polity or a social movement. These would be juridical subjects because they would accept the validity of consensually and rationally chosen rules and norms.³³⁰

In fact, has been argued that both Foucault's work and the Autonomous stance is intentionally anti-political, in the sense that it refuses any engagement with the polis

³²⁹ Nancy Luxon, "Ethics and Subjectivity: Practices of Self-Governance in the Late Lectures of Michel Foucault", *Political Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Jun., 2008), 393.

³³⁰ Simons, 102.

and turns instead to purely personal concerns.³³¹ There is indeed merit to this claim, for Foucault's work, and the Autonomous response of turning inward, or "checking out" as the Tunix congress emphasized in 1978, do not offer any platform for social change.

However, as we have seen throughout this thesis, the very point of the Autonomous form of resistance was to formulate a response to the impossibility of this organized, widespread social resistance after 1977. These actors are operating from a position of utter political disenchantment after 1977, and the quietism that Foucault's own work on power seems to lead to. Furthermore, the values of 1968 trumpeted aspects of self-creation that were fundamentally incompatible with a neoliberal and conservative state. After learning over and over that discourse with the state was not possible on what they considered to be fair terms, the Autonomes had given up on trying to be political subjects. In addition, the actors valued resistance as a value in itself. To posit a form of politically engaged compromise with the state would be to contradict this very position of an individual resistance thereof. Finally, Foucault had philosophized that it was impossible to be both a free and ethical individual and a political subject in society. Given that it is "forbidden to forbid", and that positing laws and rules are explicitly contrary to the utopian movement of refusal, Foucault would be contradicting himself were he to present the platform that critics are calling for. Thus, both turned to a "utopian refusal" of political engagement, of structures and thus of the rental contract. By this logic, accepting the state's offer would have been tantamount to adhering to the rules of a game that the Autonomes saw as corrupting, polluting and unethical. It would also have been a tacit acknowledgement of the state's power, which they saw (and still see) as illegitimate. In short, the state was not in a position to "offer"

³³¹ Simons in fact presents this claim, explaining that "Foucault singles out Greek ethics because it 'is centered on a problem of personal choice...without any relation to the juridical per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure' (1984b:348). In this light, arts of the self can escape all social power relations and become purely personal. Greek ethics entails no normalization." Ibid.

anything, and any contract entered into on the part of the Autonomes would have been inherently meaningless and unethical. At least, that's what the the Autonomes who won the debate ultimately argued.

However, such a stance is not without its price. While remaining entirely sympathetic to the post-anarchist movement, Saul Newman explains that this radically individual position leads and in fact led to a foreclosure of negotiation with the state, and to a dangerous kind of dogmatism. Acknowledging the criticism of this paradoxical "utopian refusal", Newman explains on the one hand that post-anarchism seeks to exist in a liminal position, so as to both refuse and posit a stance simultaneously. He explains

ethics is what opens politics to that which is beyond its own limits, disturbing the *sovereignising* tendency of political identities. In this sense, because postanarchism embodies a moment of an anarchic disruption, it is a way of thinking about politics that is also deeply engaged with ethics. Postanarchism can be seen as a way of reflecting on theaporetic moment of tension between politics and ethics.³³²

In this way, post-anarchism attempts to celebrate this tension and paradox as the fundamental nature of an ethical subjects' attempt to act politically. By creating this "anarchic disruption," the Autonomes thus seek to posit their resistance in a place that power cannot access. Faced with such an impossible stance, power could thus, in theory, be forced to change. However, on the other hand, Newman also concedes that this "delegitimising of universal moral categories, which can be found today in the plurality of moral positions, religious beliefs, ethical sensibilities and ways of life" gives rise to a vacuum of authority. As we have seen, Autonomie celebrates this paradoxical absence, arguing that they will replace state dominance with their own, self-determined life. However, Newman cautions that in response to this absence

we see the hysterical desire to reinvent moral absolutes: something that can be observed, for instance, in the construction of ethics – based on liberal notions of human rights – as a global ideology; or in the uncanny

³³² Newman, 157.

return of the worst kinds of religious dogmatism and conservatism.³³³

Without engaging in secularization theory and the return of religion³³⁴ in any depth, the reader can observe that the Autonomen could be compared to religious fanatics. Indeed, their decision to refuse all contracts can only be truly understood as a principled, ethical, moral, and perhaps even religious. Let us now return to the issue of the contract, bearing this criticism in mind.

Purity

To demonstrate the importance of the concept of purity, let us turn briefly to the anthropologist Mary Douglas.³³⁵ Her work on the purity of space is particularly relevant here, as she points towards the importance of boundaries, limits, doorways and entryways.³³⁶ These liminal areas represent a buffer or a boundary between a pure interior space, and the defiling influence of a foreign society. Similarly, Mircea Eliade³³⁷ explains that

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Though the reader is strongly urged to turn to Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, Slavoj Žižek, Lawrence Sullivan, Hent de Vries, Jürgen Habermas and Judith Butler for a critical debate of this topic.

³³⁵ I am relying here on Mary Douglas, rather than Emilio Durkheim quite intentionally. Of course, Douglas was a follower of Durkheim, and so his influence can still be detected here. However, while his work is explicitly structural-functionalist, hers is less so, and rather is more influenced by comparative religion. Granted, Durkheim remains a relevant theorist in this discussion, but his adamant focus on structural-functionalism clashes with the explicitly subjective approach of Foucault's third period. In short, to claim that individuals are formed by the structures of their society is incompatible with the argument that one creates oneself through an explicit care for the self, performed by a rejection of one's society. Furthermore, as an explicit Nietzschean, who valorizes the individual as a rejection of the masses *in the post 1979 works analyzed here*, Foucault is not compatible with Durkheim's structural-functionalism. Thus, I chose to use Douglas instead. Scholar Edith Wyschogrod explains that Foucault's work (and I argue Douglas' work on purity, pollution, contamination, thresholds and doorways in the creation of a sacred space), indeed originates directly from Nietzsche's analysis. "In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche locates the beginning of the modern self—a being with interiority, memory, conscience, the ability to make promises—in a certain fastidiousness, a certain desire for keeping clean. Modern selfhood begins in a dream of purity, of the putting aside, the exclusion of whatever appears extraneous, unnecessary, in excess. Perhaps it begins innocuously enough. This abstinence is empowering, selfaffirming; it breeds more of itself. And so a sorting process begins. As this complex of selfaffirming drives intensifies itself, it discounts, excludes, perhaps in some cases denies that which it now names *other*." Edith Wyschogrod, in Dallery, Arleen B., Scott, Charles E., Roberts, P. Holley, *Ethics and Danger: Essays on Heidegger and Continental Thought*, (New York: Suny Press, 1992), 244. In case of further interest, one could also see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) for a similar examination of askēsis and subjectivity, which he also grounds in Nietzschean, rather than structural-functionalist thought.

³³⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).

³³⁷ I am using Eliade rather than Durkheim because he is a philosopher and scholar of religion, rather than a sociologist. Further, he seems more interested in the experience of faith, rather than the social function of group religious practice. While both discuss the sacred and the profane, Durkheim's structural-functionalist approach is fundamentally incompatible with the other theorists I rely upon. Similarly, while Durkheim argues that religion as a societal structure was being superseded by science and individualism, in contrast I argue that this individualism is a

The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, 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.³³⁸

If we posit the space of the Flora as the “sacred” space of a political movement concerned with purity, and the police or the state as a “profane” influence capable of defiling the Autonomous discourse, the implications of a transgression across this frontier becomes clear. Indeed, it is for this precise reason that a 2008 forced entry and search by the police, and arrest of thirteen occupants was an enormous issue to the Autonomen across Germany.³³⁹ The search occurred when a woman was attacked on the street, and several members of the Rote Flora group went to assist her. However, when police arrived, they forced their way into the Rote Flora and arrested the activists as well as the woman’s attackers.³⁴⁰ The Flora was then searched. Critical to this incident is the press release, in which the group describes the search as a “border violation” of their sovereign society, and a dominating and repressive attack on the integrity of leftist projects and philosophy in its entirety. This invasion and defilement of space was the first time police had been able to transgress this boundary in over a decade, and resulted in a widespread riots and demonstrations in Hamburg, Freiburg, Dusseldorf, Hannover, Bremen, Berlin, Leipzig und Copenhagen.³⁴¹ Within this radical, perhaps even fanatical, discourse, this invasion was a violation, which defiled not only

new form of anti-structural political-religion. While Durkheim’s work of course remains an important periphery of the discussion, I simply prefer Eliade’s approach, and find it more sympathetic to an individual experience of sacred space and time, and thus more useful. However, in case of interest, the reader could see Emilio Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

³³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, (Orlando: Hartcourt, 1959), 25.

³³⁹ “Zweite Presserklärung der Roten Flora zu den Vorfällen vom Sonntag, den 08.07.2008”, *Zeck*, nu 146, September/Okttober 2008, p. 15. ASB Box Zeck.

³⁴⁰ “Zu diesem Zeitpunkt befanden sich nur noch einige Personen in den Räumlichkeiten der Roten Flora. Da sich die noch anwesenden Partygäste weigerten, freiwillig ihre Personalien der Polizei auszuhändigen, wurde mit einem immensen Aufgebot inklusive Beweissicherungs- und Festnahmeeinheit (BFE), Wasserwerfer und Hubschrauber, die Flora gestürmt. Nach diesem gewaltsamen Eindringen wurden alle noch in der Roten Flora befindlichen Personen vorläufig festgenommen. Entgegen aller Absprachen mit anwesenden Anwälten und trotz vorhandener Schlüssel wurden im Inneren etliche Türen von der Polizei mutwillig zerstört und alle Räume durchsucht”. “Presseerklärungen der Roten Flora zur Polizeiaktion 06.07.2008”, *Zeck*, nu. 146, Sept/Okt 2008, s. 15. ASB Box Zeck.

³⁴¹ “Zweite Presserklärung der Roten Flora zu den Vorfällen vom Sonntag, den 08.07.2008”, *Zeck*, Nu 146, Sept/Okt 2008, s. 15. ASB Box Zeck.

the space of the Rote Flora, but also the very idea of leftist projects in the entire society.³⁴²

Discursively, this concern with ideological purity lies at the heart of the “Flora bleibt Unverträglich” campaign, for the Florians also refused to negotiate or defile the purity of their ethico-political identities. Indeed, they stress that the concept of Autonomie itself negates the possibility of compromise or negotiation; as such cooperation would contradict the very idea of being autonomous. As stated in the 1991 Autonomie thesis, “We do not engage in dialogue with those in power! We only formulate demands. Those in power can heed them or not.”³⁴³ Their 1994 theses elaborate upon this, declaring, “We do not want to reform or improve the system. We do not conduct dialogue with those in power, because that is the first step towards integration.”³⁴⁴ Integration here would represent a transgression of the purity of Autonomous discourse.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, it would indicate the failure of political resistance as an ethical stance and moral goal. As they explain in 2001,

We fear that a contract will bring the Rote Flora into the revaluation process in the Schanzenviertel, and thus integrate us into the expulsion of all those [minorities, working class, the poor, immigrants, etc.] who do not fit the new image. The Flora will not take any part in these processes [of gentrification].³⁴⁶

³⁴² “Auftakt der ganzen Aktion war ein sexistischer Übergriff auf eine Frau, der mehrere Personen zu Hilfe eilten. Diese Einmischung in sich alltäglich abspielenden gewalttätige Übergriffe halten wir für unverzichtbar und vertreten diesen Anspruch auch offensiv in unserem Projekt. Die Polizei reagierte auf diesen Vorfall reflexhaft mit einem Angriff auf Besucher_Innen der Roten Flora und dem Projekt als Ganzen. Wir sehen darin eine Fortsetzung der in dieser Stadt vorherrschenden repressiven Linie gegen die Rote Flora im Speziellen und linken Projekten im Allgemeinen”. Rote Flora, “Rote Flora Erklärung zum Angriff der Polizei”, 06.07.2008 15:16, published online via <http://de.indymedia.org/2008/07/221425.shtml>

³⁴³ 1981 Autonomous Theses, in Geronimo, *Fire and Flames, Appendix*.

³⁴⁴ “2. Wir wollen das System nicht reformieren oder verbessern. Wir führen keinen Dialog mit den Herrschenden, denn das ist der erste Schritt zur Integration. Wir lehnen die Propagierung reformistischer Ziele ab. Uns kommt es zu allererst darauf an, das Selbstbewußtsein der Menschen in Alltag und Politik zu stärken, ihre Sachen selbst in die Hand zu nehmen und nicht an andere zu delegieren. Deswegen lehnen wir für uns den parlamentarischen Weg ab.” “Thesen zur Autonomen Bewegung”, 1994, Berlin Autonomie Kongress. ASB, Untitled Box.

³⁴⁵ In a discussion paper regarding negotiation with the state, the plenum explains that to communicate would be to allow the state to establish structures of domination within the free and autonomous space of the Flora. (“Flora Bleibt Unverträglich”, January 17, 2000, ASB, untitled box.) Viewing language as a tool of the domination they seek to subvert, the Autonomen refuse to engage in these corrupting and defiling structures. Instead, they maintained the purity of their space and their political stance, refusing to pollute it with the influences of the contract.

³⁴⁶ “Verträge sollen die Rote Flora in den Aufwertungsprozess im Schanzenviertel und damit verbundenen

Integration and the transgression of the discursive purity of social resistance was thus the chief fear of a contract. Indeed, the idea of accepting a contract was tantamount to the integration of the Rote Flora with society, and thus the effective end of social resistance. Hence, their repeated statement that “the Flora is no longer the Flora if it accepts a contract.” Instead, the space was defined by this Utopian refusal, which could not exist when the political and ethical identity of radical rejection of society was brought back into dialogue with the state. Purity had to be maintained, even at the price of the building itself.

Conclusion

In 2001, the Rote Flora was sold to the private investor Klausmartin Kretschmer. Unable to reach a compromise with the Autonomen, and having had their contract rejected, the state decided to eliminate the Rote Flora as a campaign liability. Furthermore, as explained by the STEG employee in 2009, selling the Flora to an investor who explicitly allowed the squatters pulled the rug of political and social resistance out from under their feet. While Kretschmer was contractually obligated to offer the Flora as a cultural centre for ten years, in March 2011 this stipulation expired. Currently, Kretschmer has been offered over twenty million Euros for the property by a condo developer, and the state is left with the decision of whether to purchase the Flora back at over ten times the original sale price. Moreover, Hamburg is now faced with the debate over whether the personal is in fact political, and if these political actors should be officially supported by public funds once again. While the Florians have not released a statement yet, one must also wonder whether they would attempt to stop the sale of

Ausgrenzung und Vertreibung aller einbinden, die nicht in das Bild passen", so die Befurchtung. "Die Flora wird sich nicht zum Teil diese Prozesses machen."TAZ 26.2.2001. ASB, Binder 09 Presse III 01

the land back to the state for their continued use. To what degree will they attempt to perform their discursive purity?

Indeed, it is hard to reconcile an opinion on the actions of these fundamentalist radicals. On the one hand, a scholar cannot help but admire the principle of a group so determined to perform their ethico-political beliefs. On the other hand, the isolation of the Flora via its embrace of drug culture and refusal of contract has served to alienate it from the wider community. As one interviewee explains,

The original intent when I arrived was to create a Flora that was for everyone. I didn't want to only make a ghetto-centre for only the hard inner core of the Autonomen. Rather I belonged to the people who sought to create a Flora for everyone, using sometimes-absurd actions.³⁴⁷

While the Rote Flora originated as a cultural centre, and remains a place for music, art, politics, it has also evolved into a "ghetto-centre," which the Schanze residents are often afraid to enter. Indeed, as of 2013 the steps are home to dozens of sleeping vagrants and transients, and one is unable to safely pass through the front door for fear of drunken or drug-induced violence.³⁴⁸ Whether this gradual hyper-marginalization of the Rote Flora was inevitable politically, one could argue that the Florian's open embrace of a drug culture and their refusal to accept an arguably extremely moderate rental contract played a role. However, one must also consider the criticism leveraged against Foucault, and his corresponding response. It seems to somewhat miss the point of *Autonomie* when one criticizes a philosophical position defined by a disenchantment with organization, which correspondingly turns to a radical subjectivization of resistance,

³⁴⁷ "Als ich kam, war für mich der Ansatz ursprünglich 'Rote Flora für Alle', also ich wollte nicht ein Ghetto-Zentrum machen, wo nur der harte Autonomen Kern was macht. Sondern ich gehörte zu den Leuten die die Parole 'Flora für Alle' versuchten umzusetzen, mit teilweise absurden Aktionen." Interview mit B, in Haus, *Widerstand*, s. 45.

³⁴⁸ Journalist Jen Schneider describes this situation as well in "Rufmord", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 Nov. 2010, s. 3. ASB Box Presse 03 920 II. From another angle, the Florians themselves wonder if they have lost their political relevance. As the archivist of the Rote Flora explains, "People used to come here for politics. Now, the only people interested in us are academics. They come here [the Archive of the Social Movement] to take our sources and we never hear from them again. No one wishes to live a political or Autonomous lifestyle any longer." Interviewee Ami, 12 November, 2012. Interview by Ali Jones.

and to call for that concept to then propose a platform for widespread and organized social change. Similarly, to call for an Autonomous group to engage in a legal and economic contract with the state would be to overlook the purpose of Autonomie as an explicit rejection of that state and all of its structures, especially legally binding contracts on private property. As a group of ethico-political actors—one could even argue fanatical or radical believers, the Autonomes defined themselves by the maintenance of discursive purity. To call for the transgression of this political notion is tantamount to asking for a loss of one's personal identity. And, as we have seen, the leftist discourses since Lefebvre's call for everyday life as a work of art had consistently emphasized the personal creation of oneself, and the ethical nature of political resistance. As rational as the contract might sound to an outsider or scholar, one cannot help but recognize that the Autonomes remained true to their philosophic and intellectual discourse, at any price.

Conclusion

In the introduction I defined Autonomie as a culture; a performance or movement; a rejection; a relationship; a stance; and a political ideology verging on religious faith. While it explicitly refuses any definition, I argued that the stance of negating power in favour of individual sovereignty in fact underlies this concept. I then traced the 1989 occupation of the Rote Flora theatre back to its intellectual roots in 1968, and even as a response of the '68ers to the Auschwitz generation that they were trying to replace. Indeed, this soul-searching and ardent desire to redeem German culture from itself did not cease in 1989, nor is it limited to this particular case study. From 1968 it continued through the tragedy of the RAF and the German Autumn, to the peace, environmental, antinuclear and antifa movements, to the *Häuserkämpfe* in the Berlin Kreuzberg squats and the Hamburg Hafenstraße. Similarly just as Marx was taken up by Henri Lefebvre, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Michel Foucault, philosophical concerns with political resistance ran parallel to the German attempts to enact them. Indeed, the Rote Flora is a final crystallizing prism or lens through which we can view the political, social, and philosophical hopes of much twentieth century intellectual and cultural thought.

It is for this reason that I examine the political disenchantment of the Autonomien as indicative of a broader sense of leftist hopelessness. While earlier Marxists may have felt that the time for revolution was ripe, later scholars, such as Foucault and Lefebvre, both argue that the time for such widespread change has already passed.³⁴⁹ Positioning themselves at the end of a cul-de-sac of revolutionary hopes, many scholars, citizens and activists have thus turned to the self as the last site of potential political resistance. Whether in Foucault's ethical turn to the ancient practice of askēsis, or the Autonomous occupation of Rechtsfreiräume as symbolic rejections of

³⁴⁹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as the Frankfurt school in general, are other obvious examples. I will discuss this shortly.

societal law, the concern with loss of freedom and political subjectivity remains a great political and philosophical concern.

This, this thesis is both a history and an attempt, however fleeting, to examine one tiny space in which political actors sought to engage in resistance against all odds. Conceiving of themselves as moral crusaders in the fight against profit, racism, fascism, persecution of morality, and state restructuring of urban space, they sought to re-enchant their world, if only within a tiny rupture. While the culture centre eventually degraded into a haven for drug-addicts, it still struggles to maintain its mission as the haven of a political and social alternative to capitalist consumption. Whether or not the Rote Flora will be eventually evicted is beyond the scope of the author to determine. It is further against my methodology to judge whether they should have so openly declared their support for the drug scene, or refused the state's rental contract. What I sought to explain, however, was that these actions, however counter intuitive to an outsider, stem from a deep concern with ideological purity and the attempt to faithfully perform one's principles within this alternative set of cultural values.

Future Research

In the introduction I referred to Raymond Williams' notion of emergent cultures, which allowed me to address the Florians as a culture without judging their political decisions. Future avenues for research would continue this avenue of investigation, relying more heavily on cultural theory. After the 1956 invasion of Hungary, many intellectuals criticized the Community party for the first time. Some, such as Henri Lefebvre, left altogether. Others, such as Williams, sought to revise Marx in an effort to address culture without a purely economic focus. This era of scholarship provides a

wealth of unplumbed research, which would be very fruitful when applied to *Autonomie*.

Another cultural scholar left on the periphery here is Emilio Durkheim. His work, in conjunction with Pierre Bourdieu and Williams would provide more depth to many of these issues. However, in order to do so, one would have to return to an earlier, more structuralist Foucault. Concepts of governmentality, surveillance, language and power, and the panopticon are all explicitly focused upon and referenced by the Florians at great length. While this thesis remained focused on the ethical formation of the self, an expanded project would bring Durkheim into this more structuralist phase of Foucault.

Furthermore, while mentioned briefly here, Foucault's turn to ancient thought, *askēsis* and early monastic and scholastic groups is currently a widespread concern in the scholarly field. Increasingly, theory must deal with the return of fanatical religious movements including, I argue, political-theologies. As contemporary politics becomes less secular, and concern over religious violence and fundamentalist pressure groups dominates North American politics, an examination of a fundamentalist group on the opposite end of the political spectrum would provide a timely and fascinating foil to this debate. Furthermore, the concept of space is becoming a scholarly focus, especially as fields such as critical geography begin to merge with history and philosophy after the 1991 translation of Lefebvre's magnum opus. The concern with purity of not only discourse, but also the politically sacred space of the Rote Flora would provide an excellent angle through which to engage with Foucault's latter work.

Finally, the most obvious avenue of research missing in this thesis is the Frankfurt School. In terms of political disenchantment, the dialectical collapse of

Enlightenment into bureaucratic nihilism is mirrored in the Autonomous critique of their rapidly degrading society. This analysis would further demonstrate the historical roots of this philosophy, and the prevalence of the deep cultural concerns that the Autonomes bring to light. This comparison is, fortunately, already the subject of my next investigation.

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