Towards anarchist futures? Creative presentism, vanguard practices and anthropological hopes

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Towards anarchist futures? Creative presentism, vanguard practices and anthropological hopes

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Abstract
Recently, new political but also conceptual hopes have been invested in the study of anarchy as a non-prescriptive, native category, proposing a dialogue between actually existing anarchism and the discipline of anthropology. My article contributes to this anthropology of anarchists with an analysis of a specific form of temporal reasoning exhibited in the social, ethical and lifestyle practices of an anarchist group in the East German city of Hoyerswerda. By developing the term 'creative presentism', I present these contemporary anarchist practices as an arena of knowledge production in which the postmodern, neoliberal evacuation of the near future – so convincingly detected by Jane Guyer – is significantly challenged by an urge for a different relationship to the future. Anarchist practices thus ethnographically add to the growing anthropology of the future and additionally offer new grounds for a self-reflexive investigation of the role hope and the future play in our own knowledge practices.

Keywords
anarchism, creative presentism, East Germany, ethical practice, future, temporal reasoning

In December 2010 on a return visit to my field-site, the East German city of Hoyerswerda, I met my anarchist friends in the basement of the local socio-cultural centre. Since my departure in summer 2009, they had moved away from their hometown, as had most of their age group. After finishing their A-levels, almost all of the 40 young anarchists had left this, Germany's fastest shrinking city, for a

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year abroad, or to start university degrees in nearby cities. Like many young 'exile Hoyerswerdians', they now only returned home for the Christmas holidays. This annual reunion was celebrated with a (by now) traditional themed party, which was an important symbol of their continuous commitment to their hometown and group of friends. In 2009, its title was 'Destroyerswerda', mocking Hoyerswerda's unstoppable demographic decline and subsequent physical deconstruction. In 2010, they had decided to have a 'Diktatorenparty', a 'party of dictators', with a corresponding dress code.

On my arrival, my friends were busy decorating the basement with cardboard machine guns, a throne for a super-dictator and other authoritarian paraphernalia (including a book from the 1950s on the peaceful use of nuclear power). As the party's organizers, they wondered how many people would actually dress up as Hitler, Stalin or Mao. How 'non-PC' could a leftist group be that despises all forms of centralized power, let alone dictatorship? More attention was required for the party's programme and catering. Four local leftist bands were going to play ska, punk rock and hard-core music; and 300 vegan hot dogs still had to be prepared. Also, the most famous band in Hoyerswerda's youth scene, the punk band PlaRo (*Pla*ttenbau-*Ro*mantiker, i.e. 'Prefab-Romantics') were to have a surprise reunion – exactly one year after being dissolved because of, among other things, band members' emigration from Hoyerswerda. The party organizers and most active anarchists of this local subculture are the group of friends out of which PlaRo had originally emerged. Predominantly young men born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, that is, around the time of the fall of the Berlin wall, they had initiated this vibrant alternative youth culture without obvious local role models. Throughout their adolescence in Hoyerswerda, they had continuously organized concerts, parties and art sessions, while experimenting with particular styles of clothing, consumption, education and relationality. Such practices were part of their continuous efforts of simultaneously trying to be both committed anarchists and anti-fascists and to keep their own alternative way of life locally alive – against many impediments, Hoyerswerda's neo-Nazis, their local enemies, being only the most prominent of them. Since it was quite late already, they decided to reconvene party preparations the next day after lunch.

What does being an anarchist in Hoyerswerda mean? In this particular setting it seems to mean preparing vegan hot dogs for a party whose dress code expects you to turn up as some dictator of sort. Despite marking, appropriating and enacting alternative space, these practices are neither straightforwardly direct action nor elaborated ideological critique. Rather, I argue, they are practices with which local anarchists reclaim both the present and the near future in a city which otherwise seems to have lost its hold on the future. To quote the US-American Continental Direct Action Network's guidelines mentioned in Graeber (2009: 291, 292), it is through these practices that anarchists 'realize visionary change' and 'construct local alternatives'. These local *anarchisms in the making* exhibit a very particular form of temporal reasoning, that is, a distinct mode of 'implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world' (Guyer, 2007: 410).

As outcomes and performances of a future-oriented form of temporal reasoning, they adhere to a temporality of continuous experimental practice and – against all odds – they transform critical ideas in times of insecurity, constant change and a presumed impossibility for profound criticism into workable, if only temporary solutions. Local anarchists' enduring and hopeful work on their group's and their personal futures thereby combines a creative openness with an urge for social permanence (cf. Zigon, 2009).

I start my account by contextualizing my ethnographic material. In contrast to other local modes of situating oneself in time, the temporal reasoning of local anarchist practices adheres to the temporality of what I conceptualize as *creative presentism*. In its distinctive near-future teleology, this form of temporal reasoning contradicts the homogeneous notions of post-socialist and neoliberal temporal regimes, which both linger on what Guyer calls 'fantasy futurism and enforced presentism' (2007: 409). As the dominant forms of temporal reasoning in the post-modern era of 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 2000), they had succeeded the post-Second World War, modernist era's wholehearted colonization of the near future. Instead of five-year plans, Fordist production and the expansion of the welfare state, they tell a 'shock-therapy' story about unmanageable market forces, the need for constant adjustment and an acceleration of involuntary change. Following Guyer (2007), they have led to a worldwide evacuation of the near future, especially in religious and economic practices. Hoyerswerda's anarchists' conceptual, critical and, *pace* Graeber (2004: 6), *ethical* practices – and, perhaps, ethical praxis more broadly – thus constitute particular arenas in which this evacuation is profoundly challenged. Such re-appropriations of the near future cater to anthropological hopes by representing 'alternative modes of critical thought' (Miyazaki, 2004: 1) less by their concrete contents, more by their enduring temporal and creative work. Since the discipline of anthropology is also affected by broader socio-economic changes and their respective temporal repercussions, I end this article by exploring what, if anything, anarchy and anthropology have to offer one another, and how relations between anthropology and other arenas of knowledge production could be conceptualized.

This last point touches on issues of interdisciplinarity, and relates our own academic practices more thoroughly to concerns about time, hope and the future. How do we ourselves, politically and conceptually, approach our discipline's and our personal hopes and futures? Nancy Munn (1992) has already argued for refocusing our attention to this temporal dimension. Among others, Boyer (2006) with his analysis of the role of the future in post-reunification Germany's temporal politics, and Crapanzano (2003) and Miyazaki (2006, 2010) with their respective inquiries into the issues of hope, have already indicated possible approaches on how to study the future. Such analyses themselves might 'help to generate a hopeful moment' (Miyazaki, 2004: 7) for the discipline of anthropology. Anarchistic practices might therefore promise hope in an era of 'no hope' (Miyazaki, 2010) by pursuing the 'not-yet' of viable alternatives, not in the utopian distant future but in the concrete near future of particular places and social groups.

In their local specificity, such practices are not just another form of anarchy. As continuous and committed practices, they are strongly embedded in their own social and cultural context. They invite critical engagement as much as they help in understanding the role that actual and potential alternatives play in people's lives and experiences. As I show in the following section, by practically reappropriating the near future, local anarchists exhibit a rare vanguard attitude in a post-socialist city with 'no future'.

Anarchisms in context

Hoyerswerda, the former GDR's second socialist model city, is an all-too-typical provincial East German city. A former avant-garde settlement, Hoyerswerda now faces a stronger social decline than other post-socialist cities, a continuously decreasing and ageing population and the enduring physical deconstruction of its cityscape. With the modernization of the nearby industrial complex, it has lost its economic foundation and its modernist raison d'être. The results are as challenging as they are unpromising: the population of 70,000 people has halved since German reunification; the average age has doubled in the last four decades to over 50 years. Once Germany's youngest settlement, it has now turned into one of its demographically oldest and fastest shrinking cities. In the contemporary post-Cold War era, it is one of the places where the unequal distribution of hope (Miyazaki, 2010) took away the prospects of a better future. Due to the acceleration of change resulting from a combination of post-socialist transformation, de-industrialization and neoliberally orchestrated globalization, it admits close study of the changes in temporal reasoning initiated by the fall of socialism. Two permanently expected responses to the problem with the future are the nostalgic attachment to the (in this case, socialist) past[1] and a broadly prevalent 'enforced presentism' (Guyer, 2007: 410). Both approaches set strong limits on its inhabitants' capacity to concretely envision a local future altogether. In my analysis of local anarchist practices, I follow Crapanzano (2007) in scrutinizing presumably dominant forms of temporal reasoning by using more complex ethnographic and analytical approaches.

In most local discourses in and about Hoyerswerda the domain of the near future remains 'evacuated' (Guyer, 2007: 410), especially by political and economic experts. The local future has already been lost twice: first, in form of the socialist-modern future; second, in form of the 'imaginary West' (Yurchak, 2006) that occupied East German fantasies before and during the post-socialist transition. Since thereafter the promised western future was not realized and was indeed finally replaced by dystopian visions of the future prominent in the process of shrinkage, there remained nothing to replace the vanished future visions. A new temporal framework emerged which questioned all future prospects for Hoyerswerda. Insecurity prevailed not only in the domains of urban planning, the housing market, the education system and other public arenas, but also in many personal lives. People could not be sure any longer that their jobs, schools,

dental surgery, favourite restaurants or football clubs would still exist in the years to come. Indeed, from an early age, every child is expected to leave the city eventually.

With only half of the population left, the usual state instruments expected to organize and regulate life continuously fail. Modern governmental technologies, effective in areas of growth, do not produce their intended outcomes. As in other post-Fordist areas, neoliberal ideas foster mobility, migration and precarity, but hardly any sustainable local solutions. Annually, several thousand people continue to leave Hoyerswerda due to the scarcity of jobs, creating much bemoaned gaps in Hoyerswerda's social fabric. Those remaining face severe economic and social repercussions. As in other dramatically changing places worldwide, they are forced to take over tasks that in growing, prosperous regions the state or a strong economy undertake, from the affective provision of a sense of continuity to the organization and funding of social events and festivities. To keep socio-cultural life going and have at least some 'quality of life' (as it is called) is now a task of 'mature citizens'. With the increasing cuts in public spending most state institutions retreat to a loose management of unprecedented demographic, social and economic crises. Subsequent disillusionment opens up spaces for dystopian imaginaries. This is already visible when entering Hoyerswerda, where one encounters expressions of particular relations to the city's future: a weird mix of abandoned, half-decaying socialist apartment houses and neo-Nazi slogans such as 'National Socialism now!' or 'Foreigners Out!'

It might be surprising to find in this setting signs of a very different stance to the complicated and heavily problematized present – signs of hope, if you like. Flyers and political graffiti of the anarchist local youth exhibit a more complex stance to the present. Statements like 'Utopias to reality, shit to gold!' ('Utopien zu Wirklichkeit, Scheiße zu Gold!') or (in English) 'Fight Heteronormativity!' pertain to a different form of temporal reasoning, as do the many encircled A's decorating Hoyerswerdian façades. In autumn 2008, the grand white letters on the top of a soon-to-be demolished 13-floor apartment house in Hoyerswerda's New City accordingly claimed that at least 'The thoughts are free!' ('Die Gedanken sind frei!'). In their practices, local anarchists have the luxury to thus direct their practices to the future. In the context of the city's general shrinking, such illegal artful intervention promises hope against all anxieties regarding the future. It expresses the logic of *creative presentism*, whose continuous application does not change the contemporary processes of shrinkage and decline, but creates different, somewhat indeed 'freed' knowledge about it. What, then, does it mean to be(come) an anarchist in this particular context, and why should anthropologists care to study that?

Anarchist knowledge practices challenge the temporal regime of shrinkage and economic decline through their consciously vanguard approach to the near future. This is to some extent a response to the context out of which they emerge. Many inhabitants of Hoyerswerda are forced to become shrinkage-experts, continuously searching for alternative ways of thought and practice in all domains of life. Every social or cultural club, entrepreneur, politician, school or kindergarten

tries to secure the immediate future with ever new solutions. Although many Hoyerswerdians think through the 'inchoate' (Carrithers, 2007) present, local anarchists persistently use different knowledge resources in creative, experimental ways, contextualize their practices by manifold forms of critical politicization and thereby continuously deploy in practice a fairly unique temporal orientation.

I follow High's invitation (this volume) to 'prospect' among a particular anarchist set of practices in order to see how their self-conscious stance on their hometown offers new ethnographic and analytic perspectives on the phenomena of shrinking and its temporal repercussions. This article also scrutinizes the potential for comparing the role the future and hope play in the different arenas of anarchist and anthropological knowledge practices. My anarchist friends' youthful 'here and now' (High, this volume) potentially consists of a very different presentism from anthropology's ethnographic (Hastrup, 1990) or Guyer's enforced presentism. The latter – to be sure – strongly affects anthropology as a discipline and professional practice.

Anarchisms in the making

Unexpectedly, the small city of Hoyerswerda has a very vibrant anarchist youth faction. The particular forms of temporal reasoning of Hoyerswerda's young anarchists contrast greatly with those of their political opponents. In contrast to the neo-Nazis' recurrent emphasis on the distant future (a Fourth Reich, a 'nationally freed' Germany), which mirrors Guyer's 'fantasy futurism', anarchists – like anthropologists – critically assess any dystopian notions of the distant future as much as other constraints in their present imagination. They do not access elaborate historical domains as guidelines for the future, being hence unable to replicate the past in(to) the future like the neo-Nazis. Local anarchists rather creatively strive to realize and maintain *new* alternatives. They are not the only milieu critically and creatively thinking through the present. Their practices nonetheless offer very different perspectives on Hoyerswerda than, for instance, their political opponents', because they target the near – not the distant – future.

Hoyerswerda's right-wing groups capitalize heavily on the politics of the past in order to understand – and claim power for – their position in the present. Local neo-Nazis continuously link the Nazi past to the national future, for example by violently intervening in local commemorational practices, such as the public annual wreath ceremonies for the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of the Second World War. It is on such occasions that they loudly – with banners and aggressive slogans – impose their own interpretations of the past, simultaneously resembling both the shadows of a terrible past and precursors of a similarly terrible future. They publicly commemorate the former Nazi official Rudolf Hess as a martyr in an annual Germany-wide commemorational week and worship German soldiers, who fell in the two world wars, as 'heroes' with SS-slogans such as 'In Loyalty Strong' (*In Treue fest*, a shortened version of the oath to Hitler) at the National Day of Sorrow (*Volkstrauertag*). On that day in 2008, a sticker posted throughout the town

depicted an Iron Cross with the slogan 'You for us, we for you!' Constant historical references reinforce a particular relationship to what they perceive as a 'glorious' German past, which is to be resurrected in the future once power is regained. The path to this future, nonetheless, remains as evacuated as most of Hoyerswerda's public discourses on the city's future. Neo-Nazis instead point to the fatal future Germany faces if the democratic system continues to exist – recurrently drawing a comparison between their hometown's misery and the nation's doomed downfall. Slogans like 'FRG is the German People's Death' or 'Future instead of FRG' press for the installation of National Socialism. The neo-Nazis' innovative capacity is limited to the production of short propaganda videos, which are regularly posted on their website. They draw heavily on a broader network of right-wing groups and their forms, styles and technologies. In clothing, as was often remarked, the autonomous neo-Nazis often copy their left-wing opponents. Their internet presence and their continuous enforcement of fear and violence in the city function as ways of claiming, marking and defending space in present political struggles.

In contrast, local members of the anarchist group exhibit a different form of temporal reasoning. Their main concerns are with the near future and they hardly dwell on historical references. For them, the GDR past and state socialism are as despised as contemporary forms of capitalism, since neither permits anarchist experiments. The only historical references I encountered cited the short-lived period of anarchism in Catalonia before the Spanish Civil War and the Mexican Zapatista movement. Political resistance and the search for applicable contemporary ways of being an anarchist concentrate more intensely on the immediate future. Similarly, the Nazi past only structures their struggle against local neo-Nazi groups in response to contemporary problems. The young anarchists emphasize that Hoyerswerda's officials do not pay enough attention to or publicly commemorate recent xenophobic violence and argue for a more active official stance against contemporary local fascism.

Apart from their political struggle, they express anarchist convictions by variously experimenting with and working on their future selves. Being vegan, playing in a band, producing poetry or art, and collectively thinking through issues of gender and sexuality are all part of this process. Even mid-range plans on how to practically establish a shared anarchist living project in the region are constructed in detail while refraining from further references to utopian pasts or futures. They also distance themselves from notions of avant-gardism, since in their eyes avant-gardism resembles state-socialist parlance. Anarchist 'practices of the self' (Foucault, 1984) rather target more mundane aspects of life, thereby exhibiting an approach to the present that is political and critical, but also practical and experimental. These practices help the anarchists to acquire what they know is always only a partial independence from the state, the market and general mainstream. In contrast, the neo-Nazis' struggle follows a clear-cut traditional ideal of a unified nation, comprising folkish gender hierarchies and sexuality models. The anarchists' ideals are less clearly historically defined. They creatively integrate new insights from different arenas of knowledge production, including

anthropological ones (cf. Morris, 2005). With a lack of historical resources, their form of temporal reasoning results in an openness towards the future and a strong emphasis on practice. This strengthens Graeber's (2004: 6) claim that anarchism is an ethics of revolutionary practice rather than – as Marxism supposedly is – an ideological and theoretical discourse for seizing state-power. In a Marxist critique, in turn, anarchists have been reproached precisely for being too practical and not utopian enough (cf. Kumar, 2010: 561ff). However, their practices adhere to a contemporarily hopeful, utopian temporal logic. Hope becomes, in Zigon's understanding, a matter of a concrete 'temporal orientation of intentional and ethical action' (2009: 267), not of a diffuse distant utopia.

Accordingly, being an anarchist in Hoyerswerda does not just comprise of being against somebody/something, that is, anti-fascist or anti-capitalist. It also entails a commitment to conscious and continuous forms of self-formation and ways of life. A short comparison of political graffiti in the men's toilet of the aforementioned community centre exemplifies this: violent invocations such as 'Bash Nazis!', 'Attack Nazis!' or 'Fight Nazis!' ('Nazis klatschen/angreifen/bekämpfen!') as well as anti-capitalist ('Who[ever] doesn't take from the rich, can't give anything to the poor' – 'Wer den Reichen nichts nimmt, kann den Armen nichts geben!'; 'Fight Capital!' – 'Kampf dem Kapital!'), anti-nationalist ('No Border, No Nation!', 'Destroy Germany!' – 'Deutschland zerstören!') or anti-statist slogans such as the popular ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards) contrast with bluntly ironic remarks such as 'Eat Nazis!' and 'Castrate Nazis!' ('Nazis aufessen/kastrieren!') or 'Your People stink as much as mine!' ('Dein Volk stinkt genauso wie meins!'). Next to them, in turn, are many artful drawings, innovative graffiti and abstract philosophical statements, like the aforementioned 'The Thoughts are Free' and 'Utopias to Reality, Shit to Gold!'. The latter differ greatly in content, style and quality from the former.

However, the internal ideal-typical division between political fighter and lifestyle artist is not clear-cut. Both aspects play a part in anarchist practices of self-making. The politicization of local anarchists includes the harsh critique of, and readiness to fight, state-representatives, political opponents, mainstream culture and discrimination, as well as the constant ethical shared reflection and work upon their own selves. Keeping their alternative lifestyle is already seen as an invaluable achievement. Piercings, haircuts, tattoos, particular pieces of clothing, stickers, patches or buttons could all qualify as acts of resistance. Issues with gender, sexuality, food, drugs and alcohol consumption are as politicized as occupying public space, demonstrating, distributing flyers, surveying their neo-Nazi opponents and using violence in defence.

The holistic politicization of everyday life is one of the analytics, or methods, that it was hoped anthropology would re-incorporate into its own (ethical and) intellectual modes of knowledge production – especially at times when the discipline itself is under severe constraints as a result of state policies. Nonetheless, I rather concentrate on the formal, conceptual aspects of the anarchists' form of temporal reasoning. To do so, I link the concept of creative presentism to a

Foucauldian analysis of practices of the self. The common anthropological hope in the creative aspects of human life encounters in the case of anarchist practices in my field-site a practical urge for the alternative *and* a sense of social continuity.

The temporality of self-formation

In a late interview Michel Foucault (1984) defined four aspects for the comparative study of ethics. While disregarding *ethical substance* and *mode of subjection* (see 1984: 352ff), I concentrate on *askesis*, a particular set of self-forming activity (cf. 1984: 352ff), and *telos*. The *telos* responds to the question: to what kind of being do 'we aspire when we behave in a moral way' (1984: 355)? That said, the accomplishment of this anticipated goal is not always the most important part of ethical practice. Rather, the continuous practices themselves – directed by the telos – gain central attention. My informants continuously try to find answers to the question of how to be a good anarchist, but simultaneously occupy themselves with the continuation of established forms of practice in an often hostile environment. The more or less concrete teleological character of their practices expresses their relation to a future, which is performatively, bodily and sensually practised and experienced (Hirschkind, 2001; Mahmood, 2001). The idea of a straightforward, linear application of moral codes in ethical practice has rightfly been criticized using notions of moral multiplicity and failure (Simon, 2009), moral breakdown (Zigon, 2007), or moral ambivalence, fragmentation and incoherence (Schielke, 2009). With this critique of the presumed teleology of ethical practice in mind, the continuity of local anarchist practices is all the more surprising. I present two examples that elicit the complex ethical approaches at work in the local anarchists' enduring attempts to maintain their anarchist lifestyle. Their telos differs from other local ethical practices not in form (*askesis*, *telos*, etc.) but in its temporal embeddedness: there is no promised religious afterlife or established moral tradition, but a critical, vanguard and practical presentism whose creative character stems out of its own temporal uprootedness (no local role models, no historical exemplars). However, the anarchists' concern is not with the emergence of something new. Rather, the endurance of these practices itself proves their success.

One of my host-brothers turned vegan in October 2008. Just two months before Christmas, this decision caused culinary dismay in his family. When the many orders from www.vegan-wonderland.de were delivered and my host-brother was daily experimenting with new recipes, the family was exposed to a very different world, with its own ideology, objects and forms of practice. The ersatz-meat dishes – made from 10 kilo packages of *seitan*-powder – were bravely tried but ultimately not incorporated into the family's consumption patterns. For all involved, it was clear that the refusal to consume animal products (including, honey and leather shoes) did not spring from a major concern for animals per se. My host-brother's and many of his anarchist friends' conscious decisions to live as vegans rather constituted a form of continuous action against the capitalist 'system', substantially defining a good anarchist self. They were seen to be political

and ethical acts – practised and reflected upon several times every day. Such 'ethics of revolutionary practice' (Graeber, 2004: 6) are included in the most intimate aspects of everyday life and in creating and maintaining the aspired anarchist self. A few months later, my host-brother turned vegetarian, and still today continues to monitor and experiment with his consumption practices, thus keeping up his anarchist convictions (while discarding his strict vegan days).

Similarly, issues of gender and sexuality are enduring topics for practices of self-formation. In a chat with Mathias, a young anarchist, I had explained to him how intrigued I was to find a sticker in Hoyerswerda, depicting a transsexual, red-haired Japanese manga-fighter proclaiming 'Fight Heteronormativity!' I wondered what a saying like that – especially in English – would actually mean to my informants and their everyday lives. As a form of external knowledge from academic and activist milieus, did it pose a particular inclination to practice or was it just a visible critique of mainstream sexuality? Mathias replied that he so far had not managed to overcome his, as he phrased it, 'heteronormative upbringing'. He added that most of his friends refrained from experimenting despite their daring proclamations. They nonetheless recurrently discussed the links between capitalism, the state, gender and sexuality, thus rendering their own ideas and practices problematic. In order to overcome a system which they despise, they permanently rethink most intimate self-understandings, relations and practices, continuously (re-)producing and circulating a particular kind of knowledge. All members of the group checked their language for homophobic and misogynistic vocabulary and were ready to correct others for the usage of demeaning words or phrases, thereby continuously working on their anarchist selves.

These are only two examples of the many means and talents of anarchist self-crafting practices. Many Hoyerswerdian anarchists play musical instruments in one of the several local bands, produce art (from street art to drawings and installations), or compose poems, song texts, audio books or comics. Every concert, film screening or shared cooking session enacts a youth culture that otherwise would not exist and which Hoyerswerda's anarchists had originally initiated. In practices of self-formation, they maintain their own sense of being anarchist vis-à-vis other local milieus and the broader mainstream. Besides offering interesting ethnographic perspectives, how does that link to anthropologists' own knowledge practices?

The anarchists' constant experimental and near future-oriented mode of knowledge production and implementation, that is, the continuous deployment of *creative presentism*, might indeed resemble knowledge practices involved in our ethnographic, analytic and representational work. Without a concern for the distant past or future, the young anarchists are constantly scrutinizing themselves and the present that we so rigorously study, searching for and producing knowledge about, in their eyes, better ways of life. In continuous practices, they create their own local anarchist micro-utopias. Like the sciences in general, and more than other local milieus they maintain a vanguard outlook, which the city overall had lost abruptly with Germany's reunification, thus conceptually and practically escaping the dominant temporal regimes of the post-socialist transition, neoliberal

globalization and shrinking. The domain of (anarchical) ethics constitutes one important arena in which the neoliberal evacuation of the near future is fundamentally challenged. Accordingly, their politics are found not just in the contents but also in the formal and conceptual aspects of their knowledge practices. In turn, how do anthropologists respond to their current economic, conceptual and political constraints? What has happened to anthropological hopes and ethics with the rise of the contemporary global political economy? And if creative presentism is more than just another way of 'getting by' in competitive times, what politics are found in our temporal reasoning? To conclude, I theoretically discuss possible relationships between these different arenas of knowledge production.

Anthropology's creative presentism

From a perspective of the anthropology of time, anarchists fill the ideological, intellectual and temporal void of the post-Cold War, neoliberal present through their continuous ethical practice and the maintenance of their own alternative youth culture. In response to post-Cold War epistemological changes, anthropologists' forms of temporal reasoning, that is, how they situate themselves – and reach out – in time, indeed their own hopes and temporal constraints, have also altered. One outcome is the increasing interest in the temporal dimension of the future, especially the near future, which allows anthropologists to have a critical stance on their own entanglement in the temporal regime of neoliberalism. I see a similarly significant change in the many ways anthropologists, amid a revived urge for relevance, try more openly to implement their expertise in the creation of viable, mid-term solutions for their own and their researched communities' futures. How to theoretically conceptualize a comparison between these somewhat similar knowledge practices?

A transfer of knowledge between anarchism and anthropology might follow the aim of a scientification of anarchist groups and a politicization of the discipline of anthropology, arguably the subtext for Graeber's (2004) engagement with anarchy. Although both aims are potentially interesting, the ambition should rather be an advancement of knowledge practices (for their own sake) on the social science side and the advancement of anarchist practices, through more diversified knowledge, on the activists' side. This should not result in transforming 'their' anthropology and 'our' anarchism but in sharpening and improving 'our' anthropology and 'their' anarchism. With such tension a relationship between these two arenas can be most constructive – as a contrastive foil, a laboratory for shared ideas. As contemporary enforced presentism affects academic knowledge practices, anarchists' practices might simply show that 'Hopelessness is not natural!' (Graeber, 2008), thereby emending recent academic approaches to hope in the neoliberal era (e.g. Cole and Durham, 2008; Harvey, 2000; Miyazaki, 2006, 2010). But what hope is actually gained from the ethnographic material I have presented? Neither shrinking nor economic decline have stopped. Most young anarchists continue to leave their hometown, some of them pursuing mainstream careers elsewhere. That said,

we should not measure their achievement in regard to our own hopes for change or the emergence of new solutions. The permanence of their critical stance and ethical practice, fostered by their youthful, economically fairly independent position, remains impressive. Despite its dispersal all over Germany, the group maintains these social relations, political convictions and forms of practice away from and, as initially shown, also temporarily back in Hoyerswerda. The knowledge produced is critical, self-reflexive, open and creative. How does that differ to the anthropological response to hopelessness?

Anthropological hopelessness, I presume, refers not only to the questioned relevance of knowledge production in an increasingly de-politicized and presumably more complex and accelerated world (cf. Zournazi, 2003). It rather points to the many instances in which contemporary anthropologists encounter hopeless, unjust and violent situations (Greenhouse et al., 2002). Furthermore, anthropology as a discipline is itself threatened by further cuts and bureaucratization (Strathern, 2000). The constraints of constantly audited work environments, among other things, might relate to the re-emergence of the category of hope, which Miyazaki interprets as academia's own searches 'for alternative modes of critical thought that have followed the apparent decline of progressive politics and the rise of right-wing politics' (2004: 1). He quotes Harvey's claim that 'in this moment in our history we have something of great import to accomplish by exercising an optimism of the intellect in order to open up ways of thinking that have for too long remained foreclosed' (Harvey in Miyazaki, 2004: 1). As shown, a shared and fundamentally critical engagement with the world makes anarchist alternatives potentially attractive for anthropologists in the neoliberal present. It is the exchange based on the appreciation of differences between these two arenas, not their respective colonializations, that could, if necessary, allow the emergence of alternative modes of critical thought in Miyazaki's terms. However, I do not think it is the anarchist drive for 'liberated imagination' (Graeber, 2009: 291ff) that enhances intellectual and academic creativity most profoundly. Their continuous critical practice tells less a story about the emergence of new utopias and more a story about the role of practice, knowledge and the future in human life. Such a perspective encourages the ethnographic, analytical and ethical re-appropriation of the dimension of the near future.

To foster a relationship between anarchic creative and anthropological ethnographic presentism against mainstream enforced presentism is therefore not an attempt to unite or homogenize any field of knowledge production. Arguing to keep these two arenas distinct follows a Strathernian critique of interdisciplinarity (e.g. 2006). Surely, any endeavour of de- and re-contextualizing particular concepts, ideas, perspectives, methodologies or '"analytical" forms' (Miyazaki, 2004: 5) is essential to our discipline and has stimulated much self-reflexivity regarding our own epistemological tools, entailing Melanesian societies as much as scientific or financial experts (e.g. Holmes and Marcus, 2005; Miyazaki, 2004; Miyazaki and Riles, 2005; Strathern, 1991). Graeber's definition of the role of a radical intellectual as someone 'providing larger contexts and implications and offering them back to

the practitioners' (2004: 12) captures one side of such a relation. Boyer and Howe's (2010) ideas of 'portable analytics' and 'travelling theories' add a possible strategy for the mutual de- and re-territorialization of epistemological categories.

Methodologically as well as theoretically, anarchists demarcate the near future as a field of knowledge production, colonized by a variety of continuous practices of self-formation that (self-)consciously overcome the enforced character of the (contemporary) present. How would anthropological analyses change once they more thoroughly incorporated their informants' hopes and manifold imaginaries of the future as much as their own anticipative approaches? How do we continue to re-problematize the near future that is taken away from our informants as well as us in times of economic constraints and bleak future prospects? What if we followed more thoroughly Bloch's proposition 'to substitute hope for contemplation as a method of engagement with the world' (in Miyazaki, 2004: 14)?

Interestingly, during fieldwork it was not anthropological knowledge, but concrete practices that helped foster relationships across these two milieus. A one-week research camp for 16 adolescent Hoyerswerdians, the so-called AnthroCamp08, was one such practice. The local sociocultural centre and I provided, among others, several members of the anarchistic youth with space to think, experiment and socialize. We had opened this camp in four abandoned flats in Hoyerswerda New City's most heavily deconstructed living complex. Formally speaking, this was a practical re-appropriation of the otherwise passively endured process of shrinking and demolition, and thus of the city's near future. The local anarchist youth used the camp's flats for concerts, parties, and for the premiere and launch of an audiobook on Hoyerswerda's shrinkage. Several rooms were fully decorated with large-scale art-works. Hybridized slogans such as *'Alerta, Alerta, Ⓐnthropologista!'* underlined potentially powerful similarities between these two arenas. The anarchist participants' creative appropriation of anthropological methods and modes of knowledge production exhibited an inspiring experimental and practical urge for alternative ways of living. The AnthroCamp08, if you wish, was a temporary anthropologico-anarchist micro-utopia dedicated to the creative production of knowledge about Hoyerswerda. Retrospectively, the four research teams' much welcomed contributions to local discourses, targeting topics such as fear or poverty in Hoyerswerda, embodied an urge to re-occupy not only the (legally) squatted abandoned apartments, but also their city's immediate future.

Conclusion

This article has explored concrete local anarchist practices and their inherent forms of temporal reasoning. Anarchist practices offer a fascinating ethnographic lens on the contexts in which they emerge. For the sake of my argument, I focused on their particular form of temporal reasoning, which differs greatly from mainstream neoliberal *enforced presentism*, dominant in other Hoyerswerdian groups and, arguably, in anthropology's current era. Against that I posed the concept of *creative presentism*, which helps to scrutinize how far anarchists' critical and continuous

(knowledge) practices cater to anthropologists' hopes for change and their own concerns with the *ethnographic present*. I tried in this vein to show how anarchism provides one arena from which analytics might travel – for different aims – to anthropological arenas of knowledge production. Regarding the AnthroCamp08, I already hinted at a more open methodological approach that (unintentionally) used anarchist methods – occupied space, art, experiments – to produce different knowledge by enacting a different form of temporal reasoning.

In sum, this local anarchist group tells a possibly hopeful story about how a particular form of temporal reasoning, enforced presentism, is challenged despite the hopelessness of shrinkage and decline. The problematization of the ever more insecure local future is sidestepped by the fabrication and maintenance of anarchic selves/self-knowledge, spaces and practices. A certain form of conceptual autonomy is constantly and communally reclaimed, reproduced and defended. Meanwhile anarchist practices of self-formation create a different present by realizing the envisioned near future. They thereby in formal terms fundamentally criticize the contemporary dominant temporal order. Anarchy is not a better ethnographic field on account of being 'more progressive'. I only underline its continuous re-appropriation of the near future, urging the discipline of anthropology to reflect upon its own analytical, theoretical and political approaches to the near future.

Thus, a further engagement with (post-utopian) anarchist groups in form of a comparison of critical knowledge practices could be invested with new anthropological hopes at this particular historical moment. The potential promise of anarchy is not one of revolution, change or some ominous alternative. It is rather ethnographic and conceptual, not just vis-à-vis dominant state politics, but against all aspects that impinge on our knowledge practices. It might help to reconstitute the future as an analytical domain *and* a methodological tool for anthropological knowledge practices. This does not replace, but reinforces, anthropologists' responsibilities to continuously reflect upon both their own ethics and politics and their epistemological constraints and possibilities.

Note

1. For excellent critiques of East German *Ostalgie* see Berdahl (2009) and Boyer (2006, 2010). Both authors show that temporal references to the GDR-past should not be analysed as expressions of a past-fixation, but instead as critical contemporary statements with manifold inherent claims on the future.

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