

## Introduction

### Anthropology and the Future: Notes from a Shrinking Fieldsite

*'The future is a flying bullet.*

*It carries my name and it's going to hit me no matter what. /*

*My question is, How shall I catch it? –*

*With my head, my arse, my hand or with my cheek? /*

*Does it hit me like a torpedo, or brush me like a kiss?'*

*(Gerhard Gundermann, 'The Future')<sup>i</sup>*

I started fieldwork in the East German city of Hoyerswerda in 2008. On my arrival, huge excavators were busily tearing down several of the socialist apartment blocks in Hoyerswerda's New City (subsequently: *Neustadt*). Some used the usual wrecking ball; others deployed enormous forceps, breaking up these formerly five-, six- or eleven-floor buildings piece-by-piece. The piercing sounds of the heavy machines contrasted with the dull noise made by the falling concrete units. When mounting the heaps of rubble left over from what just months before had still been people's homes, the excavators wobbled like a ship on a sea

of concrete, adding a crunching sound to the somewhat eerie situation. Only the water pumps, fighting the dust formation, ran constantly. Once in a while, a former resident would pass by, take pictures and start a chat with the usually smoking operator of the excavator. The latter might have already heard some stories from the lifeworlds he was deconstructing here. He was, however, more eager to answer the not uncommon question of where all the debris would be going when his work is done.

The process of the city's large-scale physical demolition had started exactly ten years earlier, in 1998. That same year, the local singer-songwriter Gerhard Gundermann performed a song, "The Future" for the last time. In this song, whose first lines open this Introduction, Gundermann describes the future as a 'flying bullet', which carries his name and is going to hit him 'no matter what'. In Hoyerswerda, which would later in 2009 be officially labelled Germany's fastest shrinking city, the future, indeed, appeared to relentlessly carry demise. However, Gundermann adds a twist to his deterministic, hopeless characterization of the future as a flying bullet: 'My question is, How shall I catch it?' Instead of giving in to the inevitable flow of time he claims that we have the power to relate to the future in our own ways: we can – arguably – determine whether this future is to hit us 'like a torpedo' or brush us 'like a kiss'.

For the urban community of a shrinking city, the future poses an ongoing problem. This monograph explores the ways that inhabitants of Hoyerswerda relate to their oncoming futures, and shows how their experiences of shrinkage can help anthropology as a discipline to properly constitute the future as an integral part of its analysis. In the following Sections, I will introduce my fieldsite (Section 1), and sketch my vision of the anthropology of the future, continuing an old tradition in the anthropology of time by taking inspiration from recent philosophical work on time (Section 2). Having linked 'ethnographic' to 'metaphysical' presentism, I show how in Hoyerswerda the future has been rendered problematic, and how it has become an epistemic object in its own right – for both my

informants and myself (Section 3). I proceed by conceptualizing knowledge and time in relation to one another (Sections 4 and 5); and close by reviewing my overall argument. This book's general aim is to provide the reader with an ethnography of hope and the future in a city that, by many, was doomed to have neither of those. However, I read this city's present not through the lens of its (failed) past(s) – socialist or postsocialist – but from the perspective of what my informants considered a much more pressing concern: their personal and collective futures.

### *Introducing Hoyerswerda*

Gundermann's song poses the question for the whole book: How is the urban community of a shrinking city to relate to the future; and how is the discipline of anthropology to account for this effort? Gundermann's life is intimately linked to Hoyerswerda's past, and I will briefly reconstruct it here by way of introducing the troubled history of a fieldsite that is much more than an old town in the *Lausitz* region (Lusatia)<sup>ii</sup> near to the Polish and Czech borders, which rose to national and international fame as a model industrial city during state socialism. As will become apparent, Hoyerswerda's current problems are intimately linked with the recent political and economic past of Germany. However, these problems are similarly, if not more, drawn to the dystopian futures they seem to prefigure.

Gundermann grew up in Hoyerswerda during *Neustadt's* construction. The construction started in the mid-1950s and was part of the socialist government's response to a widespread existential housing crisis. The socialist part of Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as all of Germany, indeed, most of Europe and many other places in the world, lay bare and devastated at the end of World War II. After the official division of Germany in 1949, early Cold War conflicts were fought out between capitalist Western Germany and the GDR by competing in terms of state provisioning and economic success (Borneman 1992), and Hoyerswerda, part of the GDR, was quickly caught up in this conflict:

which political system could overcome the war legacies quicker, and provide its population with the much needed material goods, housing, and sociocultural infrastructure? Which system could better live up to its promises of a better future?

Gundermann was part of the second generation of *Neustadt's* inhabitants, the children of those workers who had come to build Hoyerswerda's *Neustadt* as the GDR's second socialist model city and the major settlement for the nearby emerging brown coal industrial complex exploiting the region's vast lignite deposits. He was raised in an avant-garde city that was constructed from scratch on top of the endless Lusation sands and the heaps of brown coal, which, as a local Sorbic myth has it, the devil himself had placed beneath it. And the different political economies surrounding the exploitation of lignite proved to be a blessing and a curse for Hoyerswerda's existence – at first a blessing, though. Hoyerswerda *Neustadt* was the first city in the world solely erected using industrially prefabricated concrete units; a vanguard socialist-modern project – meticulously planned, quickly expanded and fervently drawn towards a socialist future. Hoyerswerda was a GDR state experiment, full of personal promises and splendid future prospects for those privileged to live and work there.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Gundermann witnessed the construction of most of *Neustadt's* ten living complexes (*Wohnkomplexe* – subsequently: WK) including their many schools, kindergartens, “WK-shops” (*Nahversorger*), playgrounds, parks, sculptures, streets, and pavements – everything that belongs to a new city. He attended local schools, did his A-levels in the Old City's prestigious Lessing Gymnasium and then found a job in the mines, as did so many Hoyerswerdians of the first *Neustadt* generation. On his arrival, the city's population had already dramatically increased in size, from previously 7000 to over 70000 inhabitants by the early 1980s. Besides being a professional operator of one of the huge coal excavators (the length of which is twice the height of the Eifel-tower, I was often told proudly by many informants) he also played in Hoyerswerda's most famous band of that time: the “Brigade Firestone” (*Brigade Feuerstein*). This band was not part of the socialist plan for the

city, nor the many social, cultural and musical clubs and associations founded by those inhabitants who were ‘hungry for life’ – as a local idiom has it – in an environment dominated by planned efficiency and functionality.

With German Reunification in 1990, the Cold War ended in Germany. The former GDR’s sudden incorporation into the capitalist world system had severe social and economic consequences all over East Germany: unemployment roared and outmigration skyrocketed. With the modernization of the industrial complex, for which Hoyerswerda was originally built, Gundermann lost his job, too. Of the original 30,000 ‘miners and energy workers’, only a tenth were still needed. The city’s population shrank drastically in a very short period of time, eventually causing the widespread demolition of Neustadt’s cityscape. In the mid-1990s, Gundermann tried to retrain as a carpenter. Meanwhile he was touring around the former GDR, celebrated as ‘the voice of East Germany’. For many, he was one of the few public figures expressing the feelings and problems of a whole society in rapid transformation. Change, justice, solidarity and the future were topics of his songs. He found words for what – from one day to the next – had hit the whole region, but Hoyerswerda most dramatically: deindustrialization, decline, and the loss not only of the socialist future it once had, but also the future of the ‘imaginary West’ (Yurchak 2006: 158ff). It was the latter capitalist future that earlier came to dominate the nascent East German peaceful revolution, and later, after the 1989 “turn” or *Wende*, failed to deliver on its promises of post-reunification prosperity. Another recurrent theme in Gundermann’s work is the inevitable finitude of life. His own premature death in 1998, at the age of forty-three, tragically underlined the melancholy of his songs.

As an ethnography of the failures and aftermath of German reunification, this book could be an elaborate account of dying, vanishing or demise. Hoyerswerda is a city of ‘historically unprecedented decline and deconstruction in peacetimes’, as German journalists were recurrently eager to point out. Between 1989 and 2009, Hoyerswerda’s population

halved from approximately 70,000 to less than 35,000 residents. The average age of the remaining inhabitants had doubled over the course of four decades. Demographically speaking, Hoyerswerda had turned from Germany's youngest city in the 1950s into one of its oldest by 2009. The future prospects were, to put it mildly, bleak, and especially the young and well-educated continued to leave the city; at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2008, the population was predicted to halve yet again, the latest by 2020.

Furthermore, Hoyerswerda not only had the reputation of having “no future”. It was also widely known to be of the past in at least two different ways. First, as a socialist model city it seemed stuck in the socialist past, unable to enter the capitalist present and future. The local election successes of the leftist successor party to the former state-ruling Socialist Unity Party seemed to confirm this in the early 1990s. The same goes for the city's apartment houses built in prefab style architecture (*Plattenbau*, see Hannemann 1996), which – as in West Germany – soon became defamed as soulless social housing for the poor and a representative of the failed project of state-socialism. Second, in September 1991, Hoyerswerda was also the first city in Germany to showcase xenophobic attacks on foreigners – newly arriving asylum seekers and former contract workers from other social states. The images of a drunken mob harassing innocent refugees went around the world, and linked the city to the even more distant past of Nazi Germany.

However, rather than providing an ethnography of dramatic demise or heroic survival, this monograph seeks to advance something different: an ethnography of the future.<sup>iii</sup> From a presentist perspective (and despite the initial historical contextualization), this study takes as its ethnographic objects the many explicit, tacit, and always concrete temporal notions that are sparked by – as much as they relate to – the temporal dimension of the future. These temporal relations to the future include all forms of representational and nonrepresentational forms of knowledge that pertain to this dimension. In Hoyerswerda, they obviously first of all deal with the negative developments the city presently faces. However, relations to the future have been

rendered problematic in many parts of the world. The postindustrial era, which arguably started with the 1970s oil crises, has had severe effects. As Jane Guyer argued in her seminal 2007 article on contemporary forms of temporal reasoning, people worldwide have lost their hold particularly on the near future. In place of five-year plans and widespread construction, they experience what Guyer labels ‘enforced presentism’: they are coerced to live only in the immediate present, having lost the ability to plan ahead. The post-Cold War era and its numerous new crises have, indeed, forced many people to face a reality in which the (better) future seems to be lost to the realm of fantasy (Guyer refers to this as fantasy futurism). The idea of the modernist future, of ongoing economic growth as well as urban and other development, however, has been overthrown in Hoyerswerda and in many other parts of the former socialist bloc much more suddenly than elsewhere in the postindustrial world. In less than a decade, the city had changed from a boasting and lively mining settlement to a drastically shrinking city without a future. In 2008, this loss of the future constituted the city’s most important problem.

In what follows, I ethnographically explore Hoyerswerda’s future. My central thesis is that the future as an ethnographic object should be an integral part of anthropological analysis – regardless of whether it seems lost or not in a specific fieldsite. Anthropologists as much as other social scientists tend to think that our present lives are the results of complex historical processes of causation. Accordingly, when analysing peoples’ presents, their pasts are frequently discussed to the exclusion of their futures (see Persoon and van Est 2000). Against this, I argue that the different ways in which people relate to the future is as, if not more, crucial for understanding their presents. This book explores the postindustrial condition and its social, cultural and epistemic repercussions in one social setting by mapping the loss, and re-appropriation, of the future by a particular urban community. Hoyerswerda is an ideal place to study this. No longer a vanguard socialist industrial city, it can be understood as a vanguard city of a different kind: a herald of the postindustrial future in Europe and beyond,

to which, as I claim in the book's title, we should return more consciously. Although a most drastic example, Hoyerswerda is only one of the many shrinking cities produced in the postindustrial era of finance capitalism. Outside of the former Eastern bloc, particularly cities in the USA (for Chicago, see Walley 2013; for Flint, Michigan, see Young 2013) and broader cultural changes in countries such as Japan (for example, Allison 2013) caught scientific attention. However, it is no coincident that the comparative literature on shrinking cities first emerged in East Germany (Hannemann 2003; Oswalt 2005, 2006; Oswalt and Rieniets 2006, see also Bude et al. 2011; Willisich 2012; Cliver and Smith-Prei 2014), and cities such as Hoyerswerda might as well provide a unique perspective on the postindustrial future.

To explore how Hoyerswerda's inhabitants have overcome their postindustrial representational paralysis with regards to the future, and how social scientists can follow suit analytically, I argue for a particular way of studying the future. I claim that anthropology, with its inherently presentist methodology of ethnographic fieldwork, allows us to come to a better understanding of the role the future plays in human life than other social science disciplines. Once this new conceptualization of the future is established, it will also change our understanding of the past. To assist in the elucidation of these two related arguments, I will briefly discuss the philosophical theory of presentism. Like Alfred Gell (1992), I take inspiration from the metaphysics of time in order to draw from this renewed transdisciplinary conversation a link to our own concerns (compare Bear 2014, Hodges 2008).

#### *Anthropology and Presentism: Past, Present and Future Reconsidered*

In the metaphysics of time, presentism is the account of time which holds that only the present exists while the past and future are in some way unreal; it is contrasted with eternalism which holds that the past, present and future are equally real. Metaphysical presentism resembles the approach of those anthropologists who hold that both the past and the future do not exist other than in their not necessarily accurate representations in the



present (for example: Gell 1992; Munn 1992). Kirsten Hastrup's 1990 definition of ethnographic presentism argues that in the discipline of anthropology this form of presentism is not just a literary device; it is the essentially presentist methodological approach to ethnographic material, which shapes anthropology's 'necessary construction of time' (Hastrup 1990: 45). Pushed to the extreme, as Alfred Gell so convincingly showed in his discussion of the temporal quality of the Magna Carta, it does not matter from an anthropological point of view whether a document held in a British library or cathedral dates from 1215 or not. What matters is how people attach meaning to it, i.e. whatever "temporality" or "historicity" they construct in their respective presents (see Ringel 2016b). To focus on the ethnographic present therefore does not detemporalize anthropological analysis (Pina-Cabral 2000), but helps us to put invocations of pasts that potentially never were and of futures that potentially never will be on their proper metaphysical footing.

However, historically minded scholars can easily counter the idea of ethnographic presentism. In their view, although any future might be open, the present came to be the way it is through a long and complex process of historical causation. Hence, for them, it would be important to read Hoyerswerda's postsocialist present through the lens of the socialist or an even earlier past. This seriously downplays the influence the representations of the future might have in and on the present, and it severely restricts human agency, or, more specifically, human temporal agency (Ringel 2016a). In their conceptual framework, the present is reduced to a momentary pause in an ever-continuous process of causation. Only the past gains a proper ontological quality. To undermine the view that the present is determined by the past, I turn to a recent discussion of presentism in the metaphysics of time.

In 2006, the philosopher Craig Bourne published a defence of metaphysical presentism – titled *The Future of Presentism* – and the work contains a piece of reasoning that is relevant to my concerns. Bourne seeks to identify and invalidate deterministic fallacies, using an argument that I simplify here.

The first premise is that, given a certain degree of contingency and indeterminacy, at any moment in time we face the probable emergence of a variety of possible futures. In other words, Bourne claims, that our future is not predetermined, as at any point in time many possible futures may come to pass. I suspect that most anthropologists would accept this premise (although many philosophers would not). Otherwise, meaningful action is hard to envision: most people at least seem to presume that their decisions have an impact on the future. The second premise is that, if our future is not predetermined, then our actual pasts – events, which were once one of these possible futures, but have actually become a present and then a past – were at no point predetermined to become an actual present either. Given both premises, the conclusion follows that neither our future, *nor* our past, is or was predetermined.

Bourne's understanding of metaphysical presentism does not entail that there is no causal relationship between past and present. Rather, it puts the past and the future on an equal ontological footing: neither past nor future exist in the present, and neither is predetermined. For a presentist, only the present exists. This framework suggests a new way of understanding anthropological presentism, both theoretically and methodologically: we should treat the past and future symmetrically in anthropological analysis, paying in-depth attention to *all* the temporal relations and experiences – pertaining to the past, present and future – found in our field sites' many successive presents. Building on this, I attempt to reconceptualize the anthropology of time with an increased and explicit attention to the future.

This approach helps me to avoid two traps: first, explaining postsocialist change solely through the perspective of the socialist past (Ringel 2013); second, projecting my own hopes and wishes for a better future, as much as my fears and worries, onto my informants' lives and struggles (Ringel 2012). As the experiences of my informants prove, any future might hold various surprises, as past futures have already done. For instance, had my informants been told twenty years ago that their city's population would decrease by half in 2008, the dystopian imaginaries to capture such an allegation would have had their own self-fulfilling

prophetic effects. However, now that people live in the deindustrialized future, the new present suddenly allows otherwise unforeseen spaces for hope and different, if still tentative, ideas of other futures. What counts for the future also has to count for the past: from a presentist point of view, neither of these temporal dimensions exists ontologically outside the present, in which they are presented and negotiated (see Adam 1990: 38). These temporal representations stem from a temporal agency all human beings have (see Ringel and Moroşanu 2016) and are usually subjected to all forms of temporal politics (for example, Kaneff 2003; Antze and Lambek 1996).

For their analysis, this book follows Jane Guyer's aim 'to develop an ethnography of the near future of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Guyer 2007: 410) and thus empirically explores the (epistemic) repercussions of a much broader collapse of formerly powerful modern and postmodern narratives of the future. Therefore, it is not about the past, memory, nostalgia or other representations of the past (see Gilbert 2006). It rather approaches change through the perspective of alterations in temporal knowledge in relations to the future. Following its presentist inclinations, it proposes that these temporal relations are primarily of an epistemic kind, which in turn entails our own practices of knowledge production (compare Fabian 1983, Wolf 1982).

This analytical decision has major repercussions for the study of change and transformation. Foremost, I have to reconsider the role of knowledge in times of change, exploring its adaptability and flexibility, without repeating the anthropology of postsocialism's initial mistake of depicting the former socialist "other" (in Fabian's terms) as surprisingly adaptable to new socioeconomic environments (see Buyandelgeriyn 2008). By that I distance myself from the implicit idea of a postsocialist ontology, fully predetermined by – and mostly directed to – the past, which took hold in many academic and nonacademic circles, particularly in the field of transitology. As other accounts from the vast and diverse body of literature in the field of postsocialist anthropology (for example: Pelkmans 2003,

Boyer 2006, Gilbert 2006, Pedersen 2012, Jansen 2014, Knudsen and Frederikson 2015), my case study depicts one example in which this paradigm ultimately fails. Instead of memories of – and concerns with – the past, I encountered an abundant variety of local knowledges, imaginaries and affects pertaining to the future, which, for a presentist, remain not (fully) predetermined by the past.<sup>iv</sup>

Under the heading of postindustrial shrinkage, I foreground the future in all its openness, indeterminacy and malleability, rather than depict the past as powerfully predetermining the present and the future. This is particularly important, because, as Nancy Munn observed, in the discipline of anthropology, ‘futuraity is poorly tended as a temporal problem... in contrast to the close attention given to “the past in the present”’ (Munn 1992: 116). It also challenges academic hopes that postsocialist persons because of their socialist past can articulate a fundamental critique of Western capitalism and actively partake in some form of ‘co-determination’ (Dunn 2004). Such new solutions, ideas, concepts, and practices were also locally awaited, but never really occurred. Rather, a new present demanded altogether new solutions for novel, problematic futures. By inspecting the diverse modes of temporal agency of Hoyerswerda’s inhabitants in relation to the future, my ethnographic material contributes to the overall discipline what the subdiscipline of postsocialist anthropology has always been concerned with: the issue of time.

Gilbert et al. (2008: 11) already put it rather felicitously regarding the potential theoretical contributions of postsocialism: ‘If anthropology is the social science of the present, it ought to offer insight into the future *in* the present’. They aspire to assemble a ‘social historiography of the future – a futurity to complement historicity’ (ibid.). However, my approach also substantially differs from such culturally exclusive prescriptions. For instance, in contrast to Hirsch and Stewart’s 2005 take on historicity, I doubt that we can convincingly account for the historical predetermination of relations to the past (and by extension to the future), i.e. what Hirsch and Stewart refer to as the *historically specific* and thereby

determined ‘relevant ways in which (social) pasts and futures are implicated in current circumstances’ (see Ringel 2016b). Futuricity, as a coherent, homogenous and collectively shared way of relating to the future, does not account for how my informants relate to the future (see again Ringel 2016b). Instead, as the overall postsocialist experience (Yurchak 2006) captures: things seem rather less determined and homogenous; they might radically change from one day to the other, and we should not be surprised by how (comparatively) easily humans adapt to this. As I claim throughout this book, for a presentist both, change and continuity, are in some way subject to people’s temporal agency: in each present different relations to different pasts and futures are possible.

Faced with the contemporary epistemic changes, the inhabitants of Hoyerswerda deploy their knowledge and experience to problems that are ‘conceptual’ and ‘new’. They refer to them as problems of ‘shrinkage’ (*Schrumpfung*), thus establishing a *postpostsocialist* epistemic arena. Superficially, the term ‘shrinkage’ might be understood to describe the merging of three different processes of transformation: postsocialist transition, (neoliberally orchestrated) globalization, and (post-Fordist) deindustrialization. I propose to study the concurrence of these processes not through a political economy perspective, but by regarding their epistemic impact on the life of the inhabitants of this shrinking city. My ethnographic material maps the final establishment and acceptance of the trope of shrinkage, and then tracks how this temporal regime, too, has been challenged. The emergence of the possibility of asking a new, rather simple question regarding the future depicts this challenge. ‘What happens after shrinkage?’, however, incorporates a local revolution in epistemic terms: it gives Hoyerswerda a new future by epistemically reclaiming it. The fact that futures can be lost and exchanged for other futures is an essential part of Hoyerswerda’s story, and I show how its citizens overcame their particular forms of enforced presentism and dystopian fantasy futurism, and established a new present from which to relate to yet other futures.

As Dominic Boyer (2006, 2010) suggested, this strategy has further political implications: such local concerns about the future might provide a position which finally allows East Germans – or anybody else, for that matter – to take their future in their own hands. Since the postindustrial decline hit East Germany faster and harder than their West German countrymen, the latter are less interested in what is officially seen as a specifically East German problem. In turn, local knowledge in this shrinking city is locally specific, practical, malleable and adaptable – not just postsocialist or East German in kind. This reconsideration of presumably postsocialist knowledge practices entails the reconceptualization of the notion of “East Germanness” as culture. Accordingly, this ethnography is not a study of East German culture. Beyond the construction of alterity between East and West Germany, which was the core object of study in the anthropology of East Germany (compare Borneman 1992; Glaeser 2000, 2001; Boyer 2001), I leave the omnipresent comparative reference to ‘the West’ out of my analysis. Hoyerswerdians, as many other East Germans, face problems of their own, and it is their responses to these concrete epistemic problems that I analyse here.

Still, I also refrain from celebrating the many attempts of Hoyerswerda’s inhabitants involved in the endless endeavour to regain or uphold a sense of a personal and the city’s future. By that, I do not follow the future solely via uncovering the epistemic logic of the ‘method of hope’, as Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) so admirably did for his Fijian fieldsite. I rather attempt to approach the future as an ethnographic object that is – in many different ways – not only an epistemic problem for my informants in their presents, whose solution needs the constant ‘redirection of knowledge’, but it is a social, ethical and political concern, too. Importantly, the local production of knowledge is linked to the future not by myself as the analyst, but explicitly by my friends and informants in the field. My informants establish these links foremost because they face a situation in which their hometown’s future is rendered fundamentally problematic. The next section answers to Jane Guyer’s question,

which follows from this observation: ‘What kind of ‘stories’ does imagination create when the reference points lie in the future?’ (Guyer 2007: 417).

### *The Future in the Present*

In Hoyerswerda, the overwhelming omnipresence of the future in daily life entails mundane long- and short-term decisions; official planning practices; business development plans; strategy papers of local social clubs, organizations and associations; private and public investment plans; and the conceptualization and organization of potential future projects. It also comprises more intimate aspects: personal future prospects; expectations of the local youth’s outmigration; individual feelings and collective affects of fear, hope, and despair; issues of trust and the lack of self-confidence; as well as the constricted capacity to envision one’s own life in the future.

In recent years, topics such as hope (Miyazaki 2004, 2006, 2010; Appadurai 2002, 2013; Zigon 2006, 2009, Pedersen 2012, Jansen 2014) and planning (Alexander 2007, Guyer 2007, Weszkalnys 2010, Baxstrom 2012, Abram and Weszkalnys 2013, Nielsen 2011, 2014, Bear 2015) have received special attention as modes of relating to the future. In this book, I follow the more thoroughly collective, socially embedded, and continuously negotiated and contested future-relations (see Bear 2014, 2016). I thus focus on a specific set of collective epistemic practices and conflicts: public negotiations of temporal problems, specifically with the future, in which the citizens of Hoyerswerda collectively scrutinize their own and their hometown’s existence in time. This, in the first half of the book, combines different local arenas, such as educational and sociocultural projects, and controversial discourses, in which, for example, urban development strategies and the city’s future are passionately debated in moral, social, political or technological terms. Later in the book, I focus on two further aspects: the systematic imposition of affects of the future – spurred by dystopian predictions – and teleological practices of permanence and endurance. I use such sets of practices in order

to reconsider issues of, and relations between, hope, knowledge and temporal agency. The analysis of these heterogeneous practices draws together very different local groups, events, institutions, perspectives and opinions. The links between these different persons, places and situations were upheld by the widespread problematization of postindustrial shrinkage, the then characteristic feature of what I refer to as the local economy of knowledge: the collective exchange and contestation of ideas and opinions about the city and its future.

All of these practices targeted conceptually, practically and affectively the temporal dimension of the future (in the present). Nonetheless, they still did not add up to a local temporal culture. Rather, my informants' production of knowledge and affects about themselves, their city and respective futures remained concrete and situated. Their epistemic practices answered to specific questions and concerns, and indicated in their variety a complex, diverse and even contradictory reservoir of temporal thoughts and relations, and a certain flexibility in people's capacity to negotiate this multiplicity. If anything, it was the then current omnipresence of potential and widely feared repercussions of the drastic local economic, social and demographic decline that characterizes this local economy of knowledge.

Despite the fact that actual shrinkage has very different effects on different people, depending on their socioeconomic standing, age, education and personal conviction, all Hoyerswerdians were forced to ask themselves what kind of future their hometown has. In concrete terms, this meant that they had to define what for them, in their particular circumstances, the locally ubiquitous phrase 'quality of life' entailed, and how much of that they were ready to sacrifice when facing a bleak future. Is life worth living in a shrinking city? The sometimes prosaic, performative claim that Hoyerswerda was, after all, a 'loveable and liveable city' (*liebens- und lebenswerte Stadt*) – a phrase continuously brought forward by the Lord Mayor, local journalists, and other public voices – has a somewhat empty and sober, but at the same time passionate and desperate appeal to it.



However, actual shrinkage as well as its imagined future consequences impeded on the most intimate, relational aspects of social life – and even there sparked the production of knowledge about the future. The severe holes in the city’s social fabric affected every citizen. For example, all of the seven host families I stayed with during my sixteen months of fieldwork faced important changes stemming from their children’s outmigration. Out of my seventeen host siblings (all in their late teens to early thirties), thirteen had already left the city when I was doing fieldwork; by 2011, only four remained with three more to leave soon. Most host families usually housed me in the bedrooms of their offspring, who had already left the city. Even if the parents’ own futures in the city seemed secure (and three of the seven families seriously considered leaving during my time in Hoyerswerda) there were still potentially dramatic changes ahead. My first host parents, both teachers, worried about the future of the respective schools they worked at. If one of them closed down due to a lack of new pupils, where would they be allocated to – another school in Hoyerswerda, or another city altogether? My second host mother’s main concern was the impending move out of her WK 10 apartment. Although Hoyerswerda’s youngest living district, WK 10 was widely known to be completely demolished the latest by 2013 (which, indeed, it was). Should she move to Dresden, where her two sons live? Should she stay in Hoyerswerda where she is only precariously employed? Till that decision is made she endured all the concerns of living in a WK that is doomed to be demolished: the ongoing deconstruction of nearby apartment houses, the decay of green spaces and playgrounds, the accelerating departure of neighbours and friends. My third host parents faced leaving after their two children finished their A-levels and started university degrees elsewhere. They seriously considered moving to Dresden, Berlin or some alternative living project in the countryside. My host mother’s job as a headmistress of a local nursing school was constantly on the brink of being made redundant due to the school’s potential closure. My host father commuted daily to Berlin – why not move there for good?

Such personal concerns, problems and impediments are themselves not unusual and can be found in most parts of the world. Everywhere, institutions, shops, and surgeries shut down; people face migration, insecurity, and temporary hopelessness. Worldwide, children are leaving their parents' homes, and communities are forced to deal with fundamental alterations stemming from such outmigration; particularly what is known as the former first world suffers from ageing populations and demographic implosions. The division into winners and losers of contemporary changes has set into motion new flows of people, goods and investments, which severely affect – as this account's focus on outmigration suggests – not only those going away, but also to those staying behind (compare Ferguson 1999, Walley 2013, Young 2013, Gaibazzi 2015, Vacarro et al. 2016). In Hoyerswerda, it is not the kind of social, economic and cultural change – postindustrial, after all – that is significant, but rather its magnitude and rapid intensity. For many inhabitants the actual survival of their city is under threat, since there seems to be no end to this accelerated process of change. At its core, then, “shrinkage” precisely entails this problematization of the future because it pre-emptively prescribes to current changes a bad outcome, directing them to a future that seems already lost. It is for this reason that inhabitants of Hoyerswerda continuously renegotiated their personal and collective futures with one another.

### *The Future as an Epistemic Problem*

*‘Once a city decreases in size, do its citizens subsequently increase in relevance?’*

*(Uwe Proksch, CEO KulturFabrik e.V., September 2008)*

At the end of my fieldwork in Spring 2009, the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning pronounced Hoyerswerda to be Germany's fastest shrinking and soon (demographically speaking) oldest city. More than before, the term shrinkage came to signify

the myriad intricate and large-scale changes experienced by Hoyerswerda's citizens, and put their city in national media spotlights. The future dimension, as shown in the previous section, had a special role to play in locally perceiving and making sense of these alterations. But how did shrinkage – or what it refers to – come to be a problem, and with which epistemic and social repercussions? Especially the search for a proper context, out of, in and with which to create new meaning for the present and the future in it, was essential in Hoyerswerda since the daily encounters with the deconstruction of major parts of the cityscape and continuous threats of further deconstruction, closure, and new impediments kept on influencing my informants' lives. Although many Hoyerswerdians claimed that they got used to the sight of the huge excavators tearing down apartment blocks, the noises of the concrete panels crashing down on huge heaps of rubble, or the smell of the irrigated cement residue, they, like I, often still experienced a sense of confusion when stumbling yet again over the absence of a particular apartment house, school or kindergarten – not to mention the absence of friends, children and neighbours.

In my first chapter, I scrutinize the following possibility: Anthropologists could convincingly approach life in Germany's fastest shrinking city from the perspective of postsocialism – composing a narrative about postsocialist failure and the burdens of the socialist past, tracking in detail what Caroline Humphrey aptly referred to as the 'unmaking of socialist life' (Humphrey 2002). In a bleak version of this, common in German media, the Hoyerswerdians could then be seen not as facing problems with their future, but as postsocialist subjects who have never been fit for the new (Western) future in the first place. Accounts of nostalgic attachments to the past (which I hardly ever encountered during my sixteen months of fieldwork) would neatly illustrate this situation, and the failure of German reunification could remain as depoliticized as it is in most public discourses in Germany. As I argue, however, the fundamental upheaval in Hoyerswerda cannot be reduced to being merely a postsocialist phenomenon. Rather, much broader processes simultaneously come to bear in

Hoyerswerda, producing an unprecedented dimension of change, which my informants tackled daily in their personal and professional lives.

From Hoyerswerda alone approximately 50,000 people have left, with much less people moving to the city. What happens when more than half of a city's population leave in a comparatively short period of time, and when urban life and sociality suddenly lose their endurance, permanence and predictability? In Hoyerswerda, the answer to these questions required the production of new knowledge in my informants' continuously problematic presents. The shift from the refusal of the term 'shrinkage' to accepting it as a valid description of the process gave a new structure to this knowledge. One of the crucial understandings it entails is an ethical one, namely that a 'good' life is not only possible in times of growth. Rather, in the eyes of my informants, life in times of shrinkage and decline is to be lived in as good a way as possible, despite (or even because of) their hometown's current decline. Established practices and institutions are to be maintained, and new forms of practices have to be tried out. At the core of this ethical response are the profound temporal operations in the form of temporal reasoning. This particular form of temporal agency allows the re-appropriation of the temporal dimension of the near future in concrete terms, and beyond the local politicians' dubious invigorations of the 'chances of shrinkage' (*Chancen der Schrumpfung*).

That the city and its future are rendered problematic therefore invites an analysis with reference to the anthropologies of time and of knowledge. The key term of *temporal reasoning* combines these two aspects most effectively. In Jane Guyer's definition, it refers to the different ways of 'implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world' (Guyer 2007: 409). In its original sense it comprised 'the reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influences, of engaging in struggles for specific goals' (ibid.) – all regarding relations to the near future, particularly in modern times (see Bear 2014, compare Pels 2015). I explore with it knowledge practices also aimed at other

temporal dimensions, in particular the past and the present, thus expanding its meaning to all epistemic investments in issues of time and particular temporal periods. Additionally, an analysis of human knowledge practices, temporal politics and the local production of meaning for the future also entails affective and ethical issues and questions about the efficacy of future knowledge more generally. The problematization of the city's existence in time creates the city of Hoyerswerda as an object of knowledge and stimulates the personal and public production, exchange and dissemination of knowledge about it. Virtually all citizens are drawn into these discursive or representational practices. They are genuinely concerned about their hometown's future, and a potential loss of their quality of life in it. Since Guyer specifically attends the potential privatization of the near future, I focus on the *public* explication, dissemination and negotiation of the (near) future.

In the succeeding chapters, I refrain from extensively describing disappearance, absence, change and hopelessness or the ongoing process of spatial and material deterioration, decay, and deconstruction of life-worlds and former socialist *and* postsocialist living spaces. Studying the epistemic or conceptual repercussions of the process of shrinkage, I rather focus on specific local clashes, in – and through – which particular knowledge about the city and its future is made explicit. In an urban context, public arenas of knowledge explication are multiple, but in my case remain linked by the widely acknowledged problematization of Hoyerswerda's future.

Problematizing urban life and the city's future also entails a problematization of local citizenship and these citizens' contemporary role and agency. What does it mean to be a citizen in and of a shrinking city? Uwe<sup>v</sup>, the CEO of Hoyerswerda's sociocultural centre, posed the ingenious question: 'Once a city decreases in size, do its citizens subsequently increase in relevance?'<sup>vi</sup>. He drew attention to the fact that those staying in Hoyerswerda are much needed for essential social responsibilities and functions. With every person leaving, the city's quality of life was seen to further deteriorate – so the worth of each citizen should be at

the centre of all political decisions in these troubled times. Such considerations were not new in Hoyerswerda. During the time of Neustadt's erection, a time of constant growth, the famous East German author Brigitte Reimann publically intervened on behalf of the young population, and approached the problem of the quality of urban life in a simple question: 'Is it possible to kiss in Hoyerswerda?'. In critique of the increasingly more economically restricted and functionally inclined official plans under state-socialism, she insisted that the city's architects should include the new Hoyerswerdians' social, cultural and emotional needs into their planning. She demanded more social meeting places, a central alley with shops and cafes, a theatre, a cinema, bars, a literature café. A socialist model city, she underlined, should consider the human being in all its complexity. So should a shrinking postindustrial city, I hasten to add, because it is not only that socialist life, or modern-industrial life, is being unmade, but a new form of life is emerging, and we – as my informants – should aim at finding words to capture this emergence.

In 2008, such questions were asked again in confrontation with the repercussions of the process of shrinkage. As Dorit Baumeister, a local architect, put it: 'In this process of shrinkage, which we have come to accept as such, it is our aim to intervene positively, to remain capable of exercising agency. We want to create an optimistic atmosphere, which in turn produces a different, a new quality and culture of life.'<sup>vii</sup> Her club's response was and is sociocultural: more 'togetherness' (*Miteinander*) of those who remain in Hoyerswerda. However, precisely these socio-cultural arenas faced the lack of public funds most severely. Since state money is allocated to local communities in relation to their population numbers, Hoyerswerda procured less and less funds, but still had to maintain the same urban infrastructure at increasing costs. The conservative Lord Mayor Stefan Skora was acutely aware of the fact that if he followed regional and state financial demands, he would have to close down most cultural institutions, all of which are sponsored – in legal terms – voluntarily by the city. He refused to do so, in order not to 'expel' even more of his inhabitants. As he

underlined: Hoyerswerda was, is and will be ‘a loveable and liveable city’. The quality of life the city was seen to provide is not only in this way an essential political, technical, and personal tool to handle shrinkage; its invocation might also be a crucial, if nascent attempt to recolonize the city’s presumably lost near future.

For the same reason Skora has recently introduced another group intervening in the public definition of the city’s qualities: marketing and advertisement experts. In search for unique selling points, they approached Hoyerswerda’s quality of life as a major tool in the increasingly fierce competition between small- and medium-sized cities. For their survival, these cities compete not only for investors and state funding, but also for the similarly scarce resource of citizens. Imagine there is a city, and nobody wants to live in it. Particularly the competition for increasingly scarce skilled personnel defines cities, towns and communities as quality providers for the lives of those much-desired citizens who promise tax income and the potential attraction of more people. However, the marketing experts’ job was also to convince those living in Hoyerswerda of their own city’s advantages, thereby creating a sense of togetherness like the architect’s sociocultural club had in mind.

For a social anthropologist to intervene in such discourses on a city’s quality of life, already captured as a neoliberal unique selling point, entails several problems. For one, the emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of human life often similarly reflects her own hopes and concerns. As Sara Ahmed (2008) warned, there is a danger in our interventions in such discourses, onto which we impose our own conceptualizations of social harmony, e.g. by wanting to put the ‘social glue’ back into moments of crisis and divergence. I accept her critique. However, the problematization of the core social relations that make up personal, public, urban, professional and everyday life in Hoyerswerda (i.e. the local urge for more togetherness and social cohesion) is in itself an ethnographic fact. As an outcome of various knowledge practices that centre around the city’s fate and future, it should not be easily debunked out of concerns about our own ethical and political convictions. In order to explain

what is theoretically at stake when local forms of reasoning about the city's worth in the present and the future are approached via their temporal characteristics, I present a few thoughts on the anthropologies of time and knowledge in relation to one another.

*Knowledge and Time / Knowledge in Time*

*'There is no need to be in awe of time, which is no more mysterious than any other facet of our experience of the world.'*

*(Gell 1992: 314)*

In the eyes of many Germans, Hoyerswerda is just another East German city with “no future”. A former avant-garde settlement where the socialist future was daily facilitated, Hoyerswerda faces more strongly than other postsocialist cities social decline, a continuously decreasing and aging population, and unrestrained physical deconstruction. It has lost its economic foundation and with it its modernist *raison d'être*. On all accounts, Hoyerswerda is perceived as a hopeless case. Still, as shown in the previous sections, the city remains infused with an urge towards the future. However, the new temporal framework of shrinkage fundamentally questions any future prospects for Hoyerswerda. It outruns in bleakness the disillusioning loss of the hopes of the postsocialist transition. As shown above, in the process of shrinkage, uncertainty prevails not only in the domains of urban planning, the housing market, the education system and other public domains, but also in personal lives. People have lost the security needed to plan the future. They cannot be sure that their jobs, schools, dentists, favourite restaurants or football clubs will continue to exist in the years to come.

The commonly expected responses to problems with the future – nostalgic attachment to the (in this case socialist) past<sup>viii</sup> or Guyer's otherwise accurate enforced presentism/fantasy futurism-dyad – set strong limits to the capacity of Hoyerswerda's inhabitants to envision not



only change and a different future, but a future altogether. They do not provide convincing reasons for the fact that people nonetheless continue in myriad ways to direct their practices and lives to the future (see Crapanzano 2007). What kind of ethnographic object and analytical tool are hope and knowledge of the future? And how should we approach temporal agency in this context of shrinkage?

My ethnographic material consists of the local mediation of Hoyerswerda's present and future by its citizens. As Haraway (1988) pointed out, knowledge is always situated; this means it is part of a specific social context and manifests there as the interface of sociopolitical processes of negotiation (Boyer 2005) and personal interpretations of the world (Barth 2001). In a presentist framework, I account for both the 'radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowledge subjects' as much as the 'radical multiplicity of local knowledges' (both Haraway 1988: 579). Accordingly, I approach knowledge less as an access point to local cultures (something ontologically given) and more as radically contingent, collectively negotiated outcomes of a multiplicity of local knowledge practices. In Hoyerswerda as elsewhere, these negotiations happen in discourses among friends and family members, at all sorts of social gatherings, professional city planning procedures, in expert circles, around conference and coffee tables, at public speeches and sociocultural projects targeting the city's future. This book maps a variety of public engagements with the city, presenting a citizenry that passionately produces and discusses knowledge about its own life, city, and future.

Such a practice-based approach to time and knowledge (see Rabinow 1986) throws light on local politics and the way the future is made to play a role in Hoyerswerda's citizens' lives and experiences. It has a longstanding tradition in the discipline of anthropology. As Gell in *The Anthropology of Time* pointed out, already Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* made clear 'that collective representations of time do not passively reflect time, but actually create time as a phenomenon apprehended by sentient human beings'

(Gell 1992: 4). However, I do concur with Gell's critique of Durkheim, whose 'thesis of the social origination of human temporal experience offers the prospect of a limitless variety of vicarious experiences of unfamiliar, exotic, temporal worlds' and 'their distinctive temporalities' (both *ibid.*). In contrast to such an ontologizing idea of temporality as a homogenous, closed cultural system (compare Ringel 2016b), and in accordance with Gell, I define time as an issue of (knowledge) practices, politics, and changing social conventions, but not as an aspect of culture, a term that, for example, one of the most influential theorist of knowledge, Michel Foucault, in his early works uses only very unreflectively (e.g. in Foucault 1961, 1966).

As Gell emphasizes, instead of searching for distinct temporal cultures, we should rather account for a more specific 'contextual sensitivity of knowledge' – including temporal knowledge: 'how much a person "knows" about the world depends not only on what he has internalized and what... is in his permanent possession, but also on the context within which this knowledge is to be elicited, and by what means' (1992: 109), i.e. the present context of its production. For example, as he observed in Bourdieu's early work, the Kabyle 'operate with a multitude of different kinds of temporal schemes, appropriate to specific contexts of discourse or action' (Gell 1992: 296). In Hoyerswerda, I am going to discern different forms of reasoning in similar ways. In both cases, political claims to time are part of the 'continuous production of socially useful knowledge' (*ibid.*: 304). Gell very successfully poses this idea of "contingent beliefs" against 'the doctrine of temporal "mentalities" or "world-views"' (*ibid.*: 55).<sup>ix</sup>

Carol Greenhouse also emphasizes the politics of time, and reminds us that we have to think about time and temporal representations always in relation to, in her case, changing or contested conceptions of social order and agency (1996: 4). As in Gell's analysis, this goes beyond wondering about the 'geometry of time' (*ibid.*: 5), i.e. its presumed cyclicity or linearity. Whereas she still focuses on temporality as an aspect of culture, I concentrate on the

particular knowledge practices that reference different temporal dimensions. As she observes, however, any dominant formulation of temporality is, in fact, hard to be maintained (see *ibid.*, 82). Pace Greenhouse, we could define shrinkage as the dominant formulation of time in Hoyerswerda, and it comes with the dominance of a particular version of temporal reasoning, what I call ‘enforced futurism’ – a constant attention to and problematization of the temporal dimension of the future. This form of temporal reasoning might have its histories (compare Rosenberg and Harding 2005, Pels 2016) or buy into particularly long-lasting problematizations (Rabinow *pace* Foucault 2003: 56), but I claim that there is no historical force that determines these practices. From a presentist point of view, the agency expressed in them might yield surprising results against all odds. Indeed, relations to the future in postindustrial modernity require the production of specific kinds of knowledges. As Ferguson has pointed out: these different kinds follow ‘the need to come to terms with a social world that can no longer be grasped in terms of the old script’ (Ferguson 1999: 252), in which dominant temporal frames fail to convincingly deliver epistemic clarification.

Ferguson claims that we should focus on the epistemic consequences of such changes. In *Expectations of Modernity*, Ferguson’s advances an ethnography of decline, in which he strongly argues against modernist linear narratives whilst emphasizing our discipline’s own investments in these temporal knowledge regimes. He contrasts their counterparts (deindustrialization, deurbanization, and de-Zambianization) to his informants’ various expressions of agency. His aim is to trace the decline’s ‘effects on people’s modes of conduct and ways of understanding their lives’ (*ibid.*: 11-12). Whereas he sees most hope for overcoming the decline in the past as a resource for countering the false future promises of the modernization narrative, I want to establish the future as a resource for countering narratives of decline and shrinkage.

Facing widespread problems of and with knowledge itself, how do we specifically approach knowledge about the future? As I have pointed out above, I investigate particular

forms of temporal thought, practice, affect, ethics and agency in a context where the future is rendered problematic. In short, the future is not just a matter of professional planning practices in local, regional and national state institutions or their citizen's responses. Rather, the future is created, related to, and represented in a variety of different arenas, such as art, social, cultural and other communal milieus, and many more places. Accordingly, through their practices, many inhabitants of this shrinking city have become new experts of the (postindustrial) future.

However, if we follow the German philosopher Ernst Bloch's central predicament of *The Principle of Hope* (1986 [1959]), namely, that men are essentially determined by the future, we have to acknowledge that most social sciences still lack a comprehensive methodological and analytic toolkit for accounting for the future and the role it plays in human life. Liisa Malkki describes this as the 'theoretical invisibility of the future'<sup>x</sup> (2000: 326). Akin to my approach, she concludes that 'futures as well as traditions and histories are constituted in and constitutive of present struggles, identities ... communities, and social formations' (ibid.: 28-29). The acknowledged abundance of relations to the future – 'Once we start looking, it becomes clear that much of our political energy and cultural imagination is expended in personal and collective efforts to direct and shape (and, sometimes, to see) the future.' (ibid.) – provides enough ethnographic material to the future as an important matter of knowledge. In Hoyerswerda, as amongst her informants, Hutu refugees in Canada, in yet another moment of crisis, surprisingly, it is not the past that is problematic, but the future. However, as Bamby Schieffelin pointed out, since the 'future is the most unknown of the temporal dimensions', it 'has to be marked in the present' (both 2002: 12). Due to that, we can access the future's 'existence' in the present through the knowledge, which is produced and reproduced about it in the present.

In modernity proper, as Rabinow claims in his discussion of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, the future has either way been configured as a problem: it 'appears as a

contingent set of possibilities about which decisions are demanded; decisions are demanded because the future appears as something about which we must do something' (Rabinow et al. 2008: 57). In times of postindustrial shrinkage, this seems as impossible as the undisturbed production of other narrative trajectories. Rather, the change of the content and form of particular (temporal) knowledge practices also accounts for the ways in which human beings position themselves and their agency vis-à-vis the changes they are experiencing. The trope of shrinkage, as other epistemic tools, provides a very distinct imagination of the future, and yields specific epistemic repercussions. This book tries to locate, map and conceptualize agency in this context of shrinkage (see Ringel 2016a&b). The methodological question – less about how to study time, more about how to study knowledge (about time) and the temporal dimensions of knowledge – resolves in a focus on what Morten Nielsen (2011) calls 'anticipatory actions', which for him is guided by both, unknown and known futures, and which helps to reorient individual life trajectories by exploiting the former's imaginative potentials.

However, 'unknown futures' are not "no future". As a city with "no future", Hoyerswerda could, indeed, be seen as one of the places where the unequal distribution of hope (Miyazaki 2010) drew away the prospects of a better future. Deploying Miyazaki's own work (2004), this entails the loss of hope's epistemic function: with no hope, people lose the ability to (radically) redirect their knowledge. However, as Zigon (2009) argues, this urge for a radical redirection of thought is not necessarily hope's main point. Rather, hope entails particular incitements to *maintaining* practices – conceptually, ethically, and relationally (Ringel 2014). Apart from the need to diversify analytical approaches to the future, there is still an issue with the logic, practicality and efficacy of representations of the future in the present – which also needs to be taken into consideration. However, as I claim, this will only ever allow new insights into the present in which this knowledge is produced. As Miyazaki, for example, underlines in a different context: once the future is feared or otherwise made

concrete, the present is itself imagined ‘from the perspective of the end’ (Miyazaki 2006, 157; compare Miyazaki and Riles 2005). “The end” in my informants’ temporal knowledge practices, however, is much more indeterminate than Miyazaki suggests. In the context of shrinkage, the challenge is to have an accurate idea of the future in the first place. As I will show in the following chapters, under this paradigm, Hoyerswerda’s citizenry continuously establishes arenas for the common imagination of the future whilst daily struggling with the imposition of official dystopian demographic, economic and social visions of the city’s future. This hopeful re-appropriation of the future has been described by Appadurai (2002, 2013) as a political right, a right to aspire and to participate in the social practice of the imagination.

Finally, any consideration of hope and future knowledge should also involve our own position and practices, as ethnographer and analyst. Most of the aforementioned scholars attach a particular form of hope to including the temporal dimension of the future into their analysis. As Ernst Bloch has it: only ‘philosophy that is open to the future entails a commitment to changing the world’ (quoted in Miyazaki 2004: 14). Miyazaki remains cautious with regards to the ‘ongoing effort in social theory to reclaim the category of hope’ in a broader ‘search for alternatives’ in times of the ‘apparent decline of progressive politics’ (all *ibid.*: 1-2). The hopeful moments sustained in his fieldsite’s many knowledge practices show one efficacy of hope to be a *method* for the production of future knowledge: the continuation of thought (and) practice against all odds. Methodologically, Miyazaki answers his own questions of ‘how to approach the infinitely elusive quality of any present moment’ (*ibid.*: 11) by looking at concrete knowledge practices over time whilst being aware of their indeterminacy. In a presentist vein, he thus resolves the mundane paradox ‘to cherish indeterminacy and at the same time expect it to be resolved’ by showing how that ‘requires constant deferral of... closure for the better’ (*ibid.*: 69). For him, the maintenance of hope despite its constant failure affects not only our informants’ lives, but also our own academic practices. In Hoyerswerda, a city with supposedly no hope and no future, the analysis of

questions of knowledge and the future require a similar continuous reflection upon my own hopes and relations to the future. This also allows for a different methodology.

Once we conceptualize issues of time to be matters of representation, and understand that the production of knowledge about the future in a dramatically changing fieldsite keeps on changing, too, anthropological representations of these practices remain necessarily inapt. All it can do, is become part of this process by joining the search for more sustainable or convincing takes on the future. This methodological move is based upon an understanding that my informants are recursively adjusting their social metaphysics in order to find contexts and narratives for describing their current and past experiences. They do so collectively, passionately as much as pragmatically and in conflict with one another. As I claim in more detail elsewhere (Ringel 2013b), this continuous epistemic work allowed for several different forms of intervention during fieldwork. I therefore published weekly newspaper columns in the local newspaper over the course of a whole year, conducted a weeklong anthropological research camp for sixteen local youths, and initiated a two-week community art project.<sup>xi</sup> However, the instability of local representations, particular with regards to the future, also disallows me now in the process of writing to authoritatively impose my own conclusive representation upon this local processual heterogeneity.

To sum up this section, the analysis of time has long focused on particular and situated social practices. The undoubtedly interesting theoretical concerns regarding the distinction between linear and cyclical time have been dissolved in a general trend to de-ontologize human understandings of time. In contrast, with the attention being paid to the local construction of temporal knowledge – i.e. knowledge about time and knowledge that reaches out in time – recent anthropology acknowledges that the flexibility and multiplicity of forms of temporal reasoning challenges notions of temporal knowledge as culture or given temporalities (Ringel 2016b). With a strictly ethnographic approach, anthropologists could subsequently show how this particular kind of knowledge is infused with political and ethical

relevance since it is deployed for fundamental claims on both the past and the future in the present, and on life and what it means to be human. The future in particular thereby gains a newly prominent standing in anthropological analyses. Representational and nonrepresentational dimensions of human relations to the future allow insights into the efficacy of knowledge about the future as much as the wide ranging registers that are deployed in many different forms of practices to relate to the future. In this book I map a variety of local temporal knowledge practices and their relation to the future, in order to continue this theoretical quest. To rephrase Gell slightly, there is, indeed, no need to be in awe of the future.

*Conclusion: Knowledge in Motion*

As the song mentioned above by Gundermann indicated, the question at the heart of this study is how people relate to the future. Gundermann rightly draws attention to the human agency involved in one's positioning towards the future. This requires an understanding of knowledge itself being in motion. The ways that people relate to the future are not fixed and stable. They evolve in (and are reproduced by) everyday practice, in which all things social, political and ethical are at stake. With this in mind, I explore diverse aspects of a more general shift in local reasoning that occurred during my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, a shift that can loosely be described as one from a postsocialist to a postindustrial temporal framework. I also encountered many moments when both frameworks were overcome. In particular social, cultural, political and educational projects, such moments bear witness to the indeterminateness of human thought, agency and practice, which East Germans and other people affected by decline are so often seen to have lost. As the term "presentist ethnography" indicates, I see my analysis as an invitation to ponder on the issue of (temporal) knowledge, particularly on its efficacy and its relationship to present hopes and futures.



In the following chapters, I understand “knowledge in time” in three different ways. First, I chart the ways in which knowledge (in content, form and practice) changes over time: new concepts emerge, are negotiated, and have particular effects (compare Rabinow 2003, 2007). Second, I consider the temporal dimension of knowledge as the many different ways in which people in their knowledge practices reach out in time to the past or the future, both near and far (compare Guyer 2007). Third, I approach the affective aspects of knowledge practices and according temporal implications, scrutinizing the phenomena of hope and fear and their relations to knowledge about particular temporal dimensions, especially the future (Anderson 2006, Berlant 2011, Povinelli 2011). This does not deploy the concept of temporality as usually attributed to particular objects, forms, relations and situations. Instead of discovering some inherent quality that allows such analytical objects to exist in time, I approach issues of time via the politics that are done with them, the effects they have, and their own existence in time (Ringel 2016b).

In the book’s overall structure two forms emerge. First, I analytically zoom in on the theoretical issue of the future in Chapters One and Two, laying the groundwork for a more complex understanding of local practices of contextualization and narrativization, and local forms of temporal reasoning, which initially include the past. In Chapters Three and Four, I investigate two aspects of local futurity more thoroughly. Whereas Chapter Three enquires into the temporal dimension of the near future regarding conflictive local politics and forms of reasoning, Chapter Four focuses on affect and affective politics and their relations to the future. Chapter Five accompanies the preceding two chapters by zooming out again, i.e. proliferating the approach to the future. It presents the issue of maintenance and endurance in consideration of local beliefs in (and hopes for) the efficacy of future knowledge.

Through this explorative strategy, my overall account provides answers to the question posed in Gundermann’s song – by depicting a surprising variety of human relations to the future, and bearing witness to a community’s hard work to regain its own sense of the yet-to-

come in the conceptual space of the process of shrinkage. This impressive, continuous and multifaceted work stems from the choice that Gundermann had in mind, which motivated my own intellectual engagement with the lives of the inhabitants of Germany's fastest shrinking city. Its efficacy is hard to judge, but it keeps my informants going in their diversity towards a future that remains in many ways indeterminate by the past that once was their present. It keeps time, and knowledge about it, in motion.

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<sup>i</sup> The lyrics in German read rather beautifully: ‘Die Zukunft ist ´ne abgeschoss´ne Kugel, / auf der mein Name steht und die mich treffen muss. / Und meine Sache ist, wie ich sie fange, / mit’m Kopf, mit’m Arsch, mit der Hand oder mit der Wange. / Trifft sie mich wie ein Torpedo oder trifft sie wie ein Kuss?’ For the rest of the song, Gundermann uses further sets of metaphors, describing the future as an ‘unexplored country’ (*ein unentdecktes Land*), in which one has to chose sides with prey or predator; a ‘handed-in package’ (*abgegebenes Päckchen*), which could contain either a time bomb or precious issued stocks; and ‘a pale small woman’ (*kleine blasse Frau*), who is leaving and who one at this very moment could let go, force out, or hold back. Despite their bleakness, these metaphors focus on the agency involved in how one might potentially define one’s relationship to the future.

<sup>ii</sup> Lusatia (*Lausitz*) is the name of the region surrounding Hoyerswerda. For centuries, it has been inhabited by the Slavic minority of the Sorbs (*Sorben*).

<sup>iii</sup> For another, though very different example of an ethnography looking at the future, see Lorenzo Cañás Bottos’ monograph on *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia* (2008). He looks at the future relations of a community that for different and self-professed reasons was considered to be of the past. See also Holbraad and Pedersen 2013; Krøijer 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> I contrast this to theories that account for the influence of the past through a history of knowledge (practices). For example, recently Pels (2016) argued that we have to understand contemporary modes of representing and relating to the future in the West by accounting for the dominance of these modes over a time span of more than 500 years.

<sup>v</sup> All names used in this monograph are real names. In reference to contentious issues, I refrain from mentioning real names and instead circumscribe the people involved via social status, age, gender etc.

<sup>vi</sup> ‘Wenn eine Stadt kleiner wird, werden die Menschen in ihr dann größer?’

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<sup>vii</sup> ‘Unser Ziel ist es in diesem Schrumpfungsprozess, den wir als solches akzeptiert haben, hier positiv einzugreifen, handlungsfähig zu bleiben, und darüber eine positive Stimmung zu erzeugen, die dann für eine andere, neue Lebensqualität und Lebenskultur sorgt.’

<sup>viii</sup> For critiques of East German *Ostalgie* cf. Berdahl (1999, 2009) and Boyer (2001, 2006, 2010). Both authors show that temporal references to the GDR past should not be analysed as expressions of some form of past-fixation, but instead as critical contemporary statements with an inherent claim on the future.

<sup>ix</sup> He later strengthens this point by reference to the work of phenomenologists such as Husserl, who proposes that ‘our daily lives are lived within the set of temporal “horizons” which shift continually’ (Gell 1992: 221), ‘horizons of a temporally extended present’ (ibid.: 223), which still retain some continuity. Gell positions his own concept of temporal maps with regard to such ideas of temporal re- and protensions.

<sup>x</sup> Guyer et al. draw attention to a particular disciplinary ‘prioritization of different temporal frames’ (2007: 7). In the field of anthropology, the future did indeed not play any prominent role for a long time (see Munn 1992).

<sup>xi</sup> For more detail on the newspaper columns, visit the archive of the local newspaper, the *Hoyerswerdaer Tageblatt*. For visual material on the *AnthroCamp08*, the youth camp on anthropology, visit [www.kufa-hoyerswerda.de/anthro-camp-2008-2.html](http://www.kufa-hoyerswerda.de/anthro-camp-2008-2.html) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwmuMOZVe18>. For visual material on the community art project *Malplatte* visit <http://www.kufa-hoyerswerda.de/2009-malplatte.html>.