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A New Beginning

Gabriele Alex, Alexis von Poser

The last issue of ZfE-(JSCA), the double-volume 144 of 2019, marked the 150th anniversary of the journal. It dealt with the past and present of the discipline variously called Ethnology or Social and Cultural Anthropology, as well as expectations for its future. The present volume continues along these lines, but places the focus more firmly on the future, with a special section on 'Envisioning Anthropological Futures', and a new outline and design for the journal as a whole.

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Introduction: Envisioning Anthropological Futures (and Provincializing their Origins)

Kristina Mashimi, Thomas Stodulka, Hansjörg Dilger, Anita von Poser

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Abstract: This introduction pays tribute to the 150th anniversary of the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (ZfE, comp. Vol. 144) and situates the special section in the discussion on anthropological futures. It attends to the diverse challenges and opportunities stemming from the foundations of the discipline's theoretical and epistemological orientations, and discusses the ethicalities and potentialities of anthropological practice – today and in the years to come. We take the anthropology of the future as our conceptual starting point in order to show how visions of anthropological futures – and future anthropologies – emerge from entangled individual and collective imaginations, as well as previous experiences and histories, and arise from shared or contested worldviews and professional infrastructures. With regard to future pathways for the discipline of anthropology in German-speaking academia, we explore the ZfE's particular origins and position within the formation of the academic subject *Ethnologie / Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie*, and situate these histories in relation to the wider landscape of national and international anthropological scholarship and publishing. Against the backdrop of this historical overview, we contextualize the contributions of this special section – and their authors' theoretical, epistemological, and ethical agendas – both in regard to their ethnographic field sites in Spain, Germany, Indonesia, and Uganda, and in relation to the challenges and prospects they identify for doing anthropology today and in the future.

[anthropology; engagement; ethics; future; German Anthropological Association; academic publishing]

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Toward the Otherwise: Anthropology, Politics, Medicine

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Abstract: Within anthropology, a recent intensification of scholarship on “the otherwise” can be observed. The adverb “otherwise” means “differently, in another way.” In anthropology, however, it is also used as a noun, to denote something that is an alternative. I argue that a gradual transformation of anthropology’s epistemological politics, from a critique of otherings to engagements with the political potentialities of “the otherwise”, has triggered this intensification. In this article I show how an anthropology of the otherwise can be fruitful in medical anthropology. By presenting ethnographic material on a community health project in Madrid, I will demonstrate its heuristics. In particular, researching the otherwise reveals the *longue durée* of power and inequalities that permeates contemporary medicine *and* the spaces of the otherwise that are made to exist within medicine, too. I hereby argue for a political anthropology of health and medicine that lets itself be affected by others’ otherwise and contributes to crafting it into existence.

[care, community, inequalities, medicine, othering, otherwise, Spain]

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Anthropology as a Careful Design Practice?

Dr. Tomás Sánchez Criado

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Abstract: How can we envision the future of anthropology in the present times of crisis, when the social as we knew it, and the conventional descriptive and critical practices of our discipline may no longer be adequate? Here I tentatively draw on work at the crossroads of design, where the future can be reclaimed as a disciplinary concern for anthropology. Design has recently become a significant source of methodological and political inspiration for our discipline to take part in the materialisation of alternative forms of world-making. Yet, as design is not a unitary field, I will particularly dwell on how I have re-learned and experimented with what being an anthropologist might mean in encounters with urban accessibility design activism. In these careful explorations I have found not only an inspiring field of inquiry within knowledge politics, but also a relevant domain for interventions seeking to create technical democracy. Describing a particular case of how I became 'activated' by this design activism – drawing inspiration from their practices for teaching future architects – I speculate on the possible futures for anthropological practice that might open up when, rather than studying or collaborating in corporate or professional design activities, we undertake anthropology as a careful design practice.

[anthropology, STS, urban accessibility, care, knowledge politics, intervention]

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Framing the Future through the Lens of Hope: Environmental Change, Diverse Hopes and the Challenge of Engagement

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Abstract: In this article, I explore three ways for a future anthropology to build on hope. First, I draw on recent research on hope and other positive notions to demonstrate that this “bright anthropology” is an important counterbalance to the long prevalent focus on “dark anthropology”. Second, I argue that paying attention to diverse hopes and their entanglements in webs of power and inequality offers a viable way to bring “dark” and “bright” anthropology into dialogue. Tracing a growing confidence among anthropologists concerning the relevance of our discipline, I finally argue for a more engaged anthropology that builds on the insights from “dark anthropology” as well as on those of “bright anthropology” to counter both, naïve optimism as well as overly destructive pessimism.

[hope, future, environmental change, “dark” anthropology, “bright” anthropology]

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Writing Planetary Futures: Plants, Loss, and Intersections of STS and Anthropology in Germany

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Abstract: A concern with the environment and contemporary political contestations of environmental crisis animates this paper. This planetary moment is a starting point for my reflections about future trajectories for anthropology (in German-speaking countries) as is my recent ethnographic fieldwork with plant molecular biologists in Uganda. I wrote this paper in the spirit of opening up new conversations. I sketch three promising strands of debate that have a direct bearing on how anthropologists write “planetary futures”: 1) the study of nonhuman or more-than-human lives that were long ignored; 2) intellectual stances between hope and loss that relate to our planetary ecological predicament and what to do about it; and 3) intersections of science and technology studies (STS) and anthropology in Germany that are gaining relevance as more anthropologists are grappling with environmental topics and the research of natural scientists.

[Plants, loss, multispecies ethnography, STS and anthropology]

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Lost Glory or Poor Legacy? The Past as a Political Instrument in a Sierra Leonean Mining Town

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Abstract: During the 2006–2014 mining boom in Marampa Chiefdom, Sierra Leone, local discourse around the performance and responsibilities of iron-ore mining company London Mining concerning the local environment was strongly informed by narratives of the colonial mining company DELCO. In referring to the time and impact of DELCO, which operated from 1933 to 1975, different mining actors like the mining corporation, local community members and local political authorities drew on a plurality of contrasting pasts involving stories of both the lost glory and poor legacy of DELCO. Crucially, more than ‘just’ memories of a bygone past, these narratives, produced under the conditions of the present and imaginations of the future, serve as a political instrument in the pursuit of specific interests: functioning as a social commentary on the present, legitimizing certain positions, claims and expectations, and negotiating different trajectories of the future. As such, these different narratives offer key insights into how the past can be turned into a political instrument to express, legitimize and negotiate claims about the performance and responsibilities of mining corporations in Sierra Leone and beyond.

[history, politics of time, mining, extraction, development, Sierra Leone]

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Transdisziplinarität als ko-produktives Scheitern? Autoethnographische Reflexionen zu einem Projekt in Thailand

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Abstract: Anhand eines durch die EU geförderten Projekts zwischen acht südostasiatischen und europäischen Institutionen geht der Aufsatz der Frage nach, wie transdisziplinäre Forschung mit vielfach ungleichen Akteuren gelingen kann und welche Probleme dabei insbesondere im transkulturellen Austausch aufkommen. Methodisch lotet der Beitrag das bislang in transdisziplinärer Forschung kaum genutzte Potential eines autoethnographischen Zugangs aus. Dazu werden eigene Erfahrungen während eines Vor-Ort-Aufenthalts im ländlichen Thailand dargestellt und kritisch – auch selbstkritisch – reflektiert. Die allgemeine Problematik transdisziplinärer Projekte besteht in hoher Komplexität und Zeitdruck. Zusätzliche Herausforderungen im hier analysierten Projekt bestanden in Zielkonflikten, unterschiedlichen Wissenschaftskontexten und postkolonialen Asymmetrien.

[Kollaborative Wissensproduktion, Wissenschaftskulturen, Autoethnographie, Südostasien, Thailand]

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[Kollaborative Wissensproduktion, Wissenschaftskulturen, Autoethnographie, Südostasien, Thailand]

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