Think Globally, Act Locally? Anthropological Strategies in/of East-Central Europe

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Abstract: *The paper aims to analyze the main arguments and dynamics of the debate on anthropological traditions in/of East-Central Europe through the prism of the "anthropology of postsocialism," which has significantly conditioned intellectual exchange over the last decade. The internal logic of strategies employed by participants in the discussion has recently shifted from the need to "catch up with the West" towards a "think globally, act locally" rhetoric, but it has not managed to break entirely with an unproblematized concept of difference. Consequently, such binaries as East – West or local – global more or less explicitly still provide the organizing principles of the discourses in question. In the light of this predicament, the author turns to a toolbox that includes some elements of the "anthropology of the contemporary" of Paul Rabinow, the "para-ethnography" of George Marcus and the "ethnography in late industrialism" of Kim Fortun. The purpose of the suggested analytical devices is to destabilize the categories utilized in the discussed debate on the one hand, and to show its embeddedness in the wider context of the contemporary world on the other. This enables moving beyond dichotomous thinking and toward a more all-encompassing approach.*

Keywords: *postsocialism, difference, othering, hierarchies of knowledge, anthropological contemporary*

In one of his recent publications Chris Hann (2014: 37, 46) notes that due to outspoken "allegations of 'orientalizing' and 'hierarchies of knowledge,' we might speak lately of a new academic Cold War" between disciplinary traditions East and West. Although this "war" assumes "very different forms, according to local, regional and national contexts," in his view "anthropology/ethnography throughout Eastern Europe nowadays is a field of internecine skirmishing, whingeing and *ressentiments*." Contrarily, Kacper Pobłocki (2009) locates this agonistic debate within the "global knowledge market" and equates the disagreements with "the practice of manufacturing straw men that are utilized in waging academic battles." Because the post-Fordist academic environment fetishizes theory and rewards winners, anthropologists need to argue that "their theoretical output is not only superior," but also fundamentally different to the work of others. The same

"latent 'rules of the game'" apply to anthropologies in/of East-Central Europe.[1] The previous "peaceful coexistence in reciprocal ignorance" manifested both by "outsiders" and "insiders" was broken only recently, and that only because the establishment of "Anglo-American anthropology of (post)socialism" in Western academic institutions could no longer be ignored by "the locals" (Pobłocki 2009: 227, 231, 233).

Actually, over the last decade the frequency and range of opinions expressed on the complicated relationships between anthropologies East and West have both increased. Hann's choice of vocabulary in the aforementioned passage itself reveals that the debate has reached a rather heated stage. In this paper, I investigate the main arguments brought forward in the discussion, as well as its dynamics, through the prism of the "anthropology of postsocialism," which seems to have conditioned the intellectual exchange under consideration to a significant extent. The purpose is not to analyze the strategies employed by anthropologists in/of East-Central Europe in any comprehensive way, but to identify and, subsequently, to destabilize their internal logic, which has recently shifted from the need to "catch up with the West" toward a "think globally, act locally" rhetoric. This in turn aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by suggesting analytical tools that enable moving beyond the East – West or local – global binaries as the organizing principles of the discourses in question.

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Since the early 1990s, East-Central Europe has been basically approached in terms of "transition." Hana Červinková (2006: 52) remarks that "an essential source of [this term's] high market value (…) is the simplicity and clarity of the movement it implies – a passage from one point to another – from totalitarianism to democracy, from communism to capitalism, from Warsaw Pact to NATO, from East to West, from evil to good." The scholarly perspective called, at times seriously and at times tongue-in-cheek, "transitology" has been established in order to theorize the "transitional" process. But its large-scale frameworks, based on various unproblematized presumptions, could not and did not gain approval in the discipline of anthropology.

Discussing the "orientalizing" premises of Polish "transitological" literature, Michał Buchowski (2006: 469-472) indicates its "black and white logic" aimed at dividing the world into the "winners and losers;" its anti-sociological character, which enables descriptions of people as "passive recipients of the reality that comes;" its teleological conviction that the "transition" is a "a period of 'cultural ambivalence' between communism and the democratic and free market culture;" its idealistic dimension revealed in the hope for generational change to resolve all

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1   I understand "anthropology" as an umbrella term that covers various disciplinary traditions focused on human beings in their social/cultural environment.

contemporary problems; and last but not least, its ideological praise of the new system. On the whole, the author demonstrates that "transitological" analyses are pervaded with cultural determinism, because they show that people "caught in their modes of thought" are unable to "modify their reactions."

Anthropologists working in East-Central Europe usually stress that their scholarship productively complicates the "transitological" approach. The specificity and value of the proposed perspective is claimed to lie in ethnographic insights exposing intricacies of everyday life. By revealing how structures of day-to-day existence under socialism have influenced the contemporary social process, anthropological analyses question the teleological and linear vision of "transition" and prove that its meanings should not be taken for granted, but rather studied afresh in every specific context (e.g. Baer 2003; Buchowski 2001; Hann 2002; Pine 1998).

However, even though anthropology undoubtedly provides a refreshing alternative to the "transitological" tendency, at least some authors have not managed to avoid reproducing its criticized premises. As a result, they too at times fall into the same trap of a generalized, essentialized and dichotomous thinking permeated with teleological, idealistic and ideological assumptions. For instance, some of them evoke a sort of "big bang theory" (Verdery 1996: 205) and write about "a historical transformation that touches virtually every aspect of social, political, and economic life" (Rivkin-Fish 1999: 802) or about people who are "paralyzed by a kind of shocked trauma" due to the enormity of the change they have undergone (Pine 2002: 95). Others invent "postsocialism" as a homogeneous entity. Considered to form a more or less coherent "region," "postsocialist" societies are described through the prism of the path dependency concept (cf. Thelen 2011) as stricken with "economic disintegration" (Hann 2005a: 548), "pervasive anomie" (Wolfe 2000: 198) or "moral breakdown" (Skalník 2014: 220).

Although usually disapproving of "knights of Western know-how rushing to rescue the distressed Eastern Europe" (Verdery 1996: 204), some anthropologists also assume the role of the pedagogist, as in the case of Michele Rivkin-Fish's (1999: 802) criticism of sexual educators in St. Petersburg who, while striving to distance themselves from "Soviet messages," still rely on "discourses of danger, pollution, and fear."[2] To emphasize the ambivalent nature of social life under "postsocialism," others stress its "uncertainty and institutional instability" (Hann 2002: 7) or declare that "situations in that part of the word evolve so rapidly, complications arise so often, and the valence to be placed on actions shifts so unpredictably that one's moral compass is in a constant spin" (Verdery 1998: 14). On the presumption that "culture is (…) a process operating at a deeper level than the public spheres of political and economic change" (Wolfe 2000: 200), some anthropologists are prone

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2   In this case, the critique which targets the continuities of the past is obviously valid in the light of a particular political/ethical stance, that is, particular values. The problem is that the author takes their validity for granted.

to think in terms of "cultural survivals" (cf. Kalb 2007).[3] Unsurprisingly then, they share Caroline Humphrey's (2002: 13) conviction that "as the generations brought up under socialist regimes disappear from the political scene, the category of post-socialism is likely to break apart and disappear" (see also Pine 2002: 109; Dunn, Verdery 2011: 254).

The aforementioned examples show clearly that a qualitatively oriented ethnographic approach does not necessarily provide a sufficient tool to avoid the deficiencies of "transitology" and results in an "othering" of East-Central Europe and the people inhabiting that geographical area. One possible explanation of these anthropological flaws leads to the cornerstone of the discipline, namely to the concept of (naturalized) difference.[4] Just as in the "allochronic" projects discussed by Johannes Fabian (2002), the "anthropology of (post)socialism" has been frequently founded on the unproblematized distinction between the (western) self and the (non-western) other who "occupy 'naturally' discontinuous spaces" (Gupta, Ferguson 1992: 6). Consequently, the fieldwork undertaken as the archetypal "journey into otherness" (Owczarzak 2009: 4) brings descriptions of "postsocialism" as a stage or a synchronic system located "out of time" in an almost Malinowskian manner.[5] This in turn raises a kind of nostalgia demonstrated, amongst others, by Chris Hann (2002: 11) who states that "for some of us, who knew these places when they were more isolated but safe, cheap and somehow unspoiled, the new inequalities make painful viewing. The influx of multinational businesses, property developers and advertising agencies is painful to behold."[6]

The above conditioning has resulted in propensities to construct coherent wholes not only as "cultures" pertaining to specific ethnographic groups (e.g. Pine 2000), but also on country (e.g. Pine 2002) and regional (e.g. Verdery 1996: 61-82) levels. Elizabeth Dunn and Katherine Verdery (2011) defend such a stance in terms of ideal types aimed at explaining the workings of socialism and capitalism

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3   In this context Don Kalb (2007) mentions primarily Chris Hann's work on Tázlár, but the same strategy can be found in Elizabeth Dunn's (2004) work on Poland, even though she stresses the emancipatory potential of such socialism-based characteristics as "embedded personhood."

4   Other authors blame a neo-institutional approach (Thelen 2011) or the analytical toolbox of "postsocialism" in general (Kideckel 2014).

5   Hann (2007) also indicates the deficiencies of a "'presentist' perspective" common in postsocialist studies. But, in line with the "cultural survivals" approach, he limits his own apprehension of significant temporalities to the question of how the (socialist) past has been shaping the (postsocialist) present and future.

6   Dominic Boyer, who analyzes how the figure of the "nostalgic Eastern European" is being played out by Western (and Eastern) Europe as a part of the contemporary politics of the future, notes that "postsocialist" nostalgia is not usually interpreted as "a desire to return to state socialism per se," but "to recapture what life was at that time" (Boyer 2010: 18). The figure of the "nostalgic anthropologist" (most often coming from outside Central-Eastern Europe) can be approached in similar terms.

on the one hand, and at their mutual critique on the other. But "ideal types" evolve quite easily into "the realities under study" with the ambiguities and complexities of different people's lives simply erased, and the political/ethnical agenda that underpins the critique is never self-justifying (cf. Valentine 2007).[7]

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The same premises that underlie the studies on "postsocialist" societies of East-Central Europe, at least to some point, have organized certain threads of discussions on the local versions of anthropology. Buchowski (2012b: 25-26) notes the widespread stereotypes on East-Central European ethnologies under socialism which consist of their ideological character, isolation from western theoretical developments and the lack of research carried out outside the researchers' home countries due to prevailing nationalism. Accordingly, Hann (2003) draws a clear distinction between "Eastern" ethnographers/ethnologists and "Western" anthropologists. In his opinion, the former type is in a sense "static," parochial, nationalistic, empirically oriented and focused on folklore and material culture. In constrast, the latter figure embodies a flexible cosmopolitan who is committed to "the investigation of human diversity, untrammeled by [his/her] own national affiliations" (Hann 2003: 4), theoretically sophisticated and devoted to analyses of social and cultural structures and processes (see also Hann 2005b).[8]

The above presumptions have been shared by various anthropologists regardless of their particular academic and/or national affiliations. Actually, a homogenized and distorted image of East-Central European disciplines in the socialist era, epitomized by the "legendary *Volkskundists*," is not only evoked as a "black sheep" by "Western" anthropologists (Buchowski 2012b: 27, 31), but also is one frequently used in symbolic struggles both within and between fields of local anthropologies in the region (cf. Buchowski 2004, 2012b; Verdery 2007, 2012; see also Skalník 2002). Occasionally, it also finds its way into personal experience. Juraj Podoba (2007: 28-29) recalls his first encounter with western-style anthropology at the 1990 EASA conference as "a kind of cultural shock," when an "archaic, prescientific, descriptive field of ethnography" had to confront "an advanced, modern," "theoretically and methodologically elaborated social science."

Assuming that anthropologies East and West have constituted two coherent and antithetical traditions, some anthropologists apply a form of "big bang theo-

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7   For a more detailed analysis of the discussed issues see Baer 2009.

8   The differences between ethnologies/anthropologies East and West (but also within the respective traditions) certainly existed and are still discernible today. The point is that in this particular case the proponents of the assumed bifurcation seem to forget that just as in the wider context of "postsocialist studies", not only "the hardware of systemic circumstances," but also "the software of human beings acting within them" should form an important part of every anthropological inquiry (Buchowski 2001: 18).

ry," which includes "the knight of Western know-how" figure, to describe the situation under "transition." Verdery (2007: 48-50) declares that because "there was no equivalent to social anthropology before or during the socialist period in Central and Eastern Europe," only after 1989 "various scholars acted to bring in a new discipline that, they hoped, would displace the older ethnographic tradition." Consequently, they asked their "Franglus" colleagues for assistance. In her opinion, this process should be understood in terms of upward mobility aspirations, where "western-style anthropology" has constituted a symbol of "democratization."

In fact, not all East-Central European anthropologists entirely share the aforementioned views with regard to the character of local disciplines before 1989. For instance, Grażyna Kubica (2002: xiii-xiv) states that "at least in Poland proper anthropological reflection was always cultivated." Unsurprisingly though, the "proper" version involved knowledge of British and American literature which was to transform the "backward" and "ideological" disciplines of the region into "the new and promising discipline of social (and cultural) anthropology of Eastern and Central Europe." Although their personal trajectories differ, at that time not only Kubica, but also Buchowski (2001), Červinková (2005) or Peter Skalník (1998) employed a version of the need to "catch up with the West" rhetoric. Subsequently, they all came to agree that "the unique combination of cultural and social theory with empirical research practice, which lies at the basis of modern anthropological method, presents a radical alternative to traditional ethnology." Local scholarship should therefore emphasize its distinctiveness, not its connections with regard to "socialist" and "postsocialist" disciplines (Červinková 2005: 28-29).

This situation changed when it turned out that although some East-Central European anthropologists learned their lesson, it did not improve their peripheral position in relation to (mostly U.S.- and U.K.-based) anthropological knowledge production centers. Discussing existing hierarchies of knowledge in the "anthropology of postocialism," Buchowski (2004: 12-13) insists that "Western" colleagues should involve "'postsocialist' scholars and ideas into their projects and discourses." Hann (2005b), who agrees that hierarchies exist, replies that it is due to the low quality of local work. Similarly to other pedagogists of the ongoing "transition," he suggests further developments in line with a type of anthropology he has personally pursued: "if 'local scholars' wish to be as widely read as some of the outsiders who write about CEE, then they need to put in the field time and write monographs of equivalent depth and sophistication" (Hann 2005b: 195).

The above argument against East-Central European disciplinary praxis reflects the wider issue of its ambivalent character presumed to result from the socialist past. Despite attempts to establish the "proper" version of anthropology in the region, according to Červinková (2005), Hann (2007), Skalník (2014)[9] or Verdery

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9   Although Peter Skalník (2014) is very critical about the process which he perceives as a colonization of Central-Eastern Europe, in the specific context of anthropology he shifts the val-

(2007, 2012), the efforts have not succeeded due to "the realities of the postsocialist environment" (Verdery 2007: 48). Unlike the putative stability and coherence of "Franglus" anthropology, it is unpredictability, multiplicity and differentiation, which constitute the main characteristics of local anthropologies that comprise an "eclectic mix of (…) East European intellectuals" (Verdery 2012: 5).[10] Furthermore, this generalized picture – as an expression of the broader "postsocialist" condition – is occasionally treated as if "out of time."[11] Actually, the "aspiring" (Verdery 2007) or "self-identifying" (Hann 2012, 2014) anthropologists in East-Central Europe, just as the region itself, seem to be apprehended through the prism of neo-institutional theory, which constructs both socialism and postsocialism as, in a sense, deficient. While under socialism it was the institutions that were fundamentally "different" and "inefficient," after their replacement with Western models, the terms "inefficient" or at least "different" came to be applied to social actors (cf. Thelen 2011).

Subsequently, Hann (2007) suggests that perhaps instead of undergoing the painful process of modernization, local anthropologists should rather comply with their "native" traditions finally recognized in terms of "the other." Thus, he admits that his aforementioned postulate of "normalizing" fieldwork practice in East-Central Europe was "both arrogant and naïve" (Hann 2007: 9). While Hann still emphasizes the significant differences between ethnologies and anthropologies East and West, he perceives them now as two branches sharing the same origin in Enlightenment thought. He insists therefore on combining both approaches within the same departments of East-Central European academia, a strategy which in his view is "preferable to the increasing bifurcation" (Hann 2012: 46).[12]

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The appreciation of East-Central European anthropological traditions as "the other" is certainly double-edged. According to Skalník (2007: 37), "the grand compromise as proposed by (…) Hann" is as "undesirable as the return from chem-

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ance and appears disappointed that "Western-type anthropology" has not entirely managed to drive out "Eastern ethnology." In this case, "continuity is stronger than discontinuity" and "the schizophrenia of anthropology/ethnology is an integral part of the mosaic of postcommunism" (Skalník 2014: 221-222).

10 The description should obviously be understood solely in discursive terms. While Central-Eastern European anthropologies undoubtedly form a heterogeneous field, the one of western/north anthropologies is very much alike (cf. Buchowski 2012b: 29).

11 For instance, Michał Buchowski (2012b: 22) demonstrates that the same few names of Central Eastern European scholars keep circulating in the Anglophone anthropological literature as if "not much happened in social sciences in the region between 1983 and 2002."

12 It is worth noting that in his later publications Hann (2007, 2012, 2014) also avoids his earlier propensity toward generalization (cf. Hann 2003, 2005b) and limits the analysis to the Hungarian case with which he is most familiar.

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istry to alchemy." He also doubts that the strategies recommended for East-Central Europe would be as equally eagerly employed by Hann in his own institute or home country. Verdery (2012) points to this difficulty as well. While Hann (2005b: 196) declares, for example, that he does not see a reason why East-Central European scholars should "try harder (…) to compete (…) in the [publishing] market that is dominated by the Anglo-Americans," Verdery (2012: 5) aptly remarks that "the 'Bologna' program of higher education now makes publication in international circles imperative." This means that in order to be counted in, an adherence to the "Franglus' style" is required.

Skalník (2014: 222) believes that the contemporary attempts to envision convergence have resulted solely from an increasing politicization of disciplinary divisions. Interestingly enough, Buchowski – who used to call for a merging of the historically distinct perspectives (cf. Buchowski 2004) – nowadays remains skeptical. He finds it very unlikely that "privileged anthropologies" would willingly scrutinize and undermine the "system from which they benefit" (Buchowski 2012b: 31-32). As Hann's recognition of "the other" is obviously rooted in the classic cultural relativism doctrine, which grants the difference "an absolute status" and "confers upon it a more enduring quality" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 125), the skepticism seems reasonable. Don Kalb (2007: 26, 28) notes that discourses which "take the appearance of postsocialist transition for its essence" are unable to grasp the studied processes as "a chapter of a much bigger book." Instead of contributing to theoretical approaches that would "help to lift the region out of its obsession with its putatively singular postsocialist predicament and out of its singular orientation on a putative West," they keep "othering" both "postsocialist" East-Central Europe and its anthropologies.[13]

Confronted by the above situation, those amongst the East-Central European anthropologists who refuse to be permanently "different," formulate their objections in slightly divergent terms. In his latest publications on the subject, Buchowski (2007, 2012a, 2012b) turns to highlighting Polish intellectual traditions and the innovative insights they offered, which frequently paralleled or even anticipated theoretical developments in Anglophone anthropology and beyond. By so doing, he aims not only to show that the whole narrative of "archaic" (post)socialist ethnology/anthropology is simply wrong and unfair, but also to emphasize the need to combine different intellectual horizons. Effectively, he hopes for "a choir of cosmopolitan anthropology," which links the voices of the local and the global, the ethnological and the anthropological, to appear (Buchowski 2012a: 99).

In a similar vein, László Kürti and Skalník (2009) stress that, because of inequities experienced by East-Central European anthropologists, their projects

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13 The status of Central-Eastern Europe's "otherness" is obviously of a more hybrid nature than that of the classic anthropological "other" figure. As Jill Owczarzak (2009: 6) notes, the former is rather comprehended in terms of the "intermediary other."

should be read as a contribution to "an ongoing world-wide debate on hierarchies of knowledge" in the discipline. But, unlike Buchowski, they do not question a vision of anthropology based on the western model, but just want "U.S. and British colleagues" to "realize" that the "new styles of anthropology" already exist in the region. Actually, in their view, "native" anthropologists engaged in "anthropology at home" are able to perform the task better because "they are not just visitors" whose "fundamental affiliation or obligations" lie elsewhere (Kürti, Skalník 2009: 12, 16, 18).

Likewise, Červinková seems to still understand anthropology as an ethnographically-based social or cultural critique. Nowadays, however, in view of "western epistemological hegemony in the academic discourse and practice," she suggests that "native" practitioners of "postsocialist studies" should turn to postcolonial studies and try to "think between the post" in line with Sharad Chari and Verdery's (2009) proposal. Because "postsocialism" has so far been "a project of epistemological dominance and subjugation," as "a hegemonic analytical tool," it "lacks the empowering qualities of postcolonial scholarship." In the light of an epistemological/political dissimilarity, only when "scholars in East-Central Europe (…) adopt the liberatory aspirations of postcolonial theory," will they be able "to develop forms of research and writing similarly inspired by a vision of social justice and engaged scholarship" (Červinková 2012: 155, 158-159, 161).

The responses to "othering" which are organized around various forms of the "think globally, act locally" phrase are obviously also embedded in the wider context of the "anthropology of postsocialism," namely in its tendencies influenced by poststructural thought (cf. Baer 2009). One of the early calls for the liberation of the subdiscipline from the "ghetto of Soviet area studies" and the shift towards a multidimensional inquiry of modernity was Verdery's (2002) project of post-Cold War studies that aimed at merging postsocialist and postcolonial perspectives. Since then, searching for parallels between various aspects of postsocialist and postcolonial conditions has become popularized in those strands of anthropologies in/of East-Central Europe which stress the need to move toward more globally-oriented approaches (e.g., Buchowski 2012b; Kalb 2007; Kideckel 2014; Owczarzak 2009).

Unsurprisingly, however, the critique of "Western imperialism" in some versions of the postcolonially-inspired analyses has reproduced and reinforced the East – West dichotomy. Subsequently, authors have not been able to break with the "postsocialist predicament" perspective (e.g., Giordano 2014; Skalník 2014). Furthermore, the contemporary positioning of East-Central Europe in anthropology and beyond has not been brought about by historically-conditioned (neo)colonial interactions between the metropolitan "first-" and the peripheral "third world," but from being the "not-quite-first world" (cf. Chivens 2007). Thus, unlike in the "third world" case, the strategies applied to resist "Western hegemony" are pre-

dominantly rooted not in subversive pride, but in the disappointment of not being counted in.

In fact, the discussed reactions of East-Central European anthropologists to the "othering" approach do not usually focus on the literal links between (post)colonialism and (post)socialism, but rather refer to the concept of "world anthropologies." The project – advocated, amongst others, by Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar (2005) – has been planned as a process aimed at exploring "possibilities of communicating between and across epistemes and regimes of knowledge," which are "not doomed to reproduce existing or imagined power relations" (Fabian 2012: 62, 64). The authors declare that they do not only wish to destabilize "the taken-for-granted content of 'dominant anthropologies', but also (…) the *terms*, *conditions* and *places* of worldwide anthropological conversations and exchanges" (Restrepo, Escobar 2005: 118).

Restrepo and Escobar (2005: 119-120) emphasize that their proposal should not be read as "a new attempt on the part of the 'periphery' to strike back," but as an appeal for anthropological horizons to be enlarged. Nevertheless, both academic and political praxes prove that taking the difference solely in terms of its "constitutive function (…) in the political economy of visibilities" (Restrepo, Escobar 2005: 119) does in practice not exclude comprehending "us" and "them" quite literally (cf. Baer 2007). By privileging the "view from below," even though inscribed into globally-conceived frameworks, the East-Central European responses leave the East – West or local – global dichotomies ultimately untouched and the concept of difference (which underlies the "anthropology of postsocialism" in general) comes to provide an underlying structure to that particular thread of the debate as well.[14] For instance, the "struggle against intellectual discontinuity" (Pobłocki 2009: 239) – meant as a quest for one's own ancestors as a means to provide an alternative to the theoretical mimicking of Anglophone anthropology – ends up emphasizing a favouring of the past as the prism to apprehend the present and, more importantly, "the West" as the basic category of reference.[15]

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Given that the aforementioned strategies of coping with still existing hierarchies of knowledge are, in a sense, doomed to incessantly reproduce the binaries which form the very bases of the hierarchies themselves, it seems to me that mov-

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14 This does not mean that I find "difference" entirely irrelevant for contemporary anthropology. Although it is definitely not the only model for disciplinary praxis, I agree with Johannes Fabian (2012: 65) that the concept of alterity is decisive to any theoretical approach which deals with the issue of inter-subjectivity. Thus, I basically intend to question its specific uses (and abuses) in the anthropological strategies in/of East-Central Europe.

15 (Re)presenting "native" incarnations of Pierre Bourdieu, Sherry Ortner or Sidney Mintz (e.g. Buchowski 2012a, 2012b; Pobłocki 2009) sets the example.

ing out of the vicious circle requires shifts in analytical/political attitudes. To proceed with this task we certainly need to apply "the radical potential of an anthropology of anthropology" – as Restrepo and Escobar (2005: 119) suggest – but one put in motion by the use of devices other than those circumscribing the hitherto discussions. One possible option in this respect emerges from a toolbox that includes some elements of the "anthropology of the contemporary" by Paul Rabinow (2003), "para-ethnography" by George Marcus (2007) and "ethnography in late industrialism" by Kim Fortun (2012).[16] On the one hand, the proposed perspective aims at comprehending how disciplinary praxes and the exchange in question are embedded in the wider dynamics of the contemporary world understood as interrelated technical, biophysical, cultural and economic nested systems that are permanently reconfigured through the interactions of numerous scales, variables and forces (cf. Fortun 2012). On the other one, it points to the situated, fragmented and unstable nature of all categories which various actors play off against each other in various contexts of the discussed debate.[17]

In this context, I find particularly important Rabinow's (2003: 18-19, 47-48) concept of "problematization" which pertains to "the specific work of thought." It brings "a modal change" that allows for grasping every "situation not only as 'a given' but also as 'a question.'" Subsequently, the studied phenomena are approached as "emergent assemblages." The task of the "anthropology of anthropology" would be then not only to identify all the assumed certainties within the analyzed discussions, but also to set them in "an environment that is partially composed of apparatuses and partially of a variety of other elements (such as institutions, symbols, and the like)." This reveals "conjunctures between and among these diverse objects, and between and among their temporalities and their functionalities" (Rabinow 2003: 56).

Furthermore, Marcus' (2007) idea of the self and the other as epistemic partners sharing experience of global imaginaries demonstrates that because people's "lifeworlds" extend in multiple directions, it is simply impossible to envisagea contemporary word as structured by classical anthropological dichotomies: "a motivated interest in a 'third' elsewhere – an object of curiosity, fear, anxiety, a speculation about agency that is elsewhere" is "present in important ways in the scene of fieldwork," which in turn requires a multi-sited approach (Marcus 2007: 7-9). While Marcus' notion of global imaginaries is of a more mental character,

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16 The present paper is considered as a first step which provides a general background that constitutes the point of departure for the project outlined below. The next step would comprise analyses performed with the tools that the project offers.

17 Thomas Chivens (2007), who analyzes the category of gender in the context of the transnational circulation of police intervention techniques, strives toward similar ends by the use of different tools. Broadening the scope of Foucauldian ideas of "governmentality" and "biopolitics," he proposes an everyday ethnography of the state, which shows that both transformation and governmentality are complex and contestable.

Rabinow's interpretation of his concept of contraption admits vectors of power and force-lines that are beyond actors' control. It refers to disjoined processes in the world that actors seek to connect, but without any strategy or plan. Although there are nodes and rhizomes at some points, making connections to those things cannot be accomplished because the whole to connect to does not exist (Rabinow et al. 2008: 76-77). Even though both authors refer to the particular experience of fieldwork, the same rules apply to social interactions in general, including those of anthropologists in/of East-Central Europe. Such an understanding exposes not only the open-ended nature of all utterances which constitute the debate in question, but also the commonalities that inevitably permeate the assumed diversities. At the same time, it shows that having things in common does not necessarily erase power relations, which are at stake as well.

Last, but not least, Fortun's (2012: 450, 453) notion of ethnography as a sort of experimental system envisions a possibility for mobilizing questions that were previously impossible to formulate. In her project, ethnography provides a creative space of encounters aimed at provoking "new idioms, new ways of thinking, which grasp and attend to current realities," though "not knowing in advance what these idioms will look and sound like." Consequently, it offers a model of communication in which everyone has a chance to speak, but not as a matter of fairness, but as a matter of "being open to intervention and foreigners." A conversation that takes place "in a terrain only uncertainly mapped" (Strathern 2006: 203) is not based on a utopian idea of pluralism, but heads toward critiques and disagreements. Its ultimate goal, however, "is to come together – to literally collaborate, performing the labor of difference" (Fortun 2012: 453). The resultant type of communication appears much more productive than the actual (or potential) "academic Cold War" which entangles anthropologists in/of East-Central Europe in an inescapable deadlock.

The proposed stance definitely fits Buchowski's (2012: 31-32) description of "domesticated emancipation" in line with which adopting "the jargon and epistemological paradigms of the mainstream" makes recognition of "local anthropologists" as "postsocialist" or "Eastern European" rather problematic. The question is whether keeping the labels is really desirable and/or necessary. Considering that the (un-problematized) notion of difference seems to constitute the main reason why the agonistic debate has not been able to abandon an "anthropology of postsocialism" logic, the answer should be "no." Perhaps it would be more instructive to seek for a common anthropological contemporary understood as the "near future and recent past" (Rabinow 2003: 55).[18] Thus, I find convincing Johannes Fabian's (2012: 64 – 65) insistence on the need to shift the debate on "words world anthropologies"

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18 In the light of my own experience, this position appears most compelling. When I entered an anthropological path at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of AMU in Poznań in the early 1990s, perhaps naively, I did not perceive myself as a special kind, but just

towards epistemology. Facing similar problems in this respect, "first-," "second-" or "third world" anthropologists all remain involved, in a sense, in the same discipline, even though their specific positionings, views and practices may differ in a myriad of ways. This in turn offers a strategy to move beyond the need to "catch up with the West," to "think globally, act locally" and other binary rhetorics.

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as an anthropologist. Consequently, unlike Juraj Podoba (2007), at one of the EASA conferences I was quite "shocked" when a "Western" colleague called me a "native anthropologist."

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