8 Tacit Directionality

Processes, Teleology and Contingency in Global History*

Jan C. Jansen

These are hard times for teleologists. No one wants to be part of their club. Coined in the early eighteenth century by German philosopher Christian Wolff as a term for the explanation of things in view of an end, goal, aim or purpose, 'teleology' was rarely used, for most of its existence, outside of the secluded intellectual worlds of philosophers and theorists of history and the natural world. It nonetheless became the cornerstone of a powerful tradition of thought that reverberated across the world.[1] Since the 1980s, however, its use has proliferated, and in the following decade it entered the vocabulary of historians. Largely absent from research articles published in the *American Historical Review* until well into the 1980s, eight times more authors used it in the following decade, a number that then doubled again over the 2010s.[2] This increase was not due to a sudden popularity of teleological views of history, but rather to its opposite. 'Teleological' stands for an understanding of history (or of a discrete sequence in the past) that those who use the term do not embrace, and in most cases reject. 'Most historians are allergic to teleology and the idea of an end', fellow historian Holly Case quipped, 'even if it already occurred'.[3] Along with 'essentialism', 'teleology' counts among

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1 Henning Trüper et al. (eds.), *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); the longer philosophical tradition is retraced in Jeffrey K. McDonough, *Teleology: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

2 For numbers, see the search terms 'teleology' and 'teleological' on https://books.google.com/ngrams and https://academic.oup.com/ahr/advanced-search.

3 'Historiker against Future', 28 September 2019, https://science.orf.at/v2/stories/2992067. All translations in this chapter by the author.

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the cardinal sins a historian (and, by extension, a social scientist[4]) can be accused of today.

It is not easy to say how and why 'teleology' came to be associated with bad historical practice. It certainly has to do with the oscillation in twentieth-century philosophical and social science theory between periods in which human agency took centre-stage and counter-reactions leading to periods that shifted away from human agency.[5] In the historical profession, the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s–1990s revaluated ideas of contingency, fragmentation and discontinuity.[6] From quite different backgrounds and traditions, proponents of microhistory (especially in the tradition of Italian *microstoria* and German *Alltagsgeschichte*) and post-modernist and postcolonial scholars agreed in their distaste of comprehensive *métarécits*. There is a correlation between the rise of the anti-teleological credo and the demise of two powerful progressivist 'grand narratives': Soviet-style historical materialism and modernisation theory – 'the most teleological of the teleologies' of the mid-twentieth century.[7] Theorists and philosophers of history have argued that the breakdown of these totalising visions of the course of history also spelled the end for the entire Western modern concept of history as a coherent and meaningful process, although they disagree about what kind of regime of temporality and 'chronopolitics' would supplant it.[8]

Global history as a sub-discipline does not fit easily into the anti-teleology/teleology divide. On the one hand, global historians have been quick to embrace an anti-teleological stance and position their approach at the vanguard of anti-teleology. They have credited global history with the mission (and potential) to overcome teleologies of the nation-state, of macro-concepts such as modernisation or globalisation and of ethnocentrism.[9] In an

[4] See, for example, Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State Is Inevitable: Teleology and the Logic of Anarchy', *European Journal of International Relations* 9, 4 (2003), 491-542, here 492.

[5] Wolfgang Knöbl, 'Das Problem der Kontingenz in den Sozialwissenschaften und die Versuche seiner Bannung', in Frank Becker et al. (eds.), *Die Ungewissheit des Zukünftigen: Kontingenz in der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2016), 119–37.

[6] Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte: Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 419–29.

[7] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 118. Cooper also points to the new teleologies emerging out of the critical literature on 'modernity' (ibid., 121–35). See also Jerry H. Bentley, 'World History and Grand Narrative', in Benedikt Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs (eds.), *Writing World History, 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47–66, here 49.

[8] François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et experiences*, expanded ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2012); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: A Theory for the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

[9] Duncan S.A. Bell, 'History and Globalization: Reflections on Temporality', *International Affairs* 79, 4 (2003), 801–14, here 804, 813–14; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Globalgeschichte', in Hans-Jürgen Goertz (ed.), *Geschichte: Ein Grundkurs*, 3rd ed. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2007), 592–610, here 597; Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 66, 75, 166, 212–13.

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influential statement marking the launch of the *Journal of Global History*, veteran global historian Patrick O'Brien defined the field as the antidote to 'teleological chronicles designed to reinforce people's very own set of values enshrined in canonical Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Confucian and other sacred texts'.[10] At the same time, global historians have shown much less reluctance to engage in macro-historical reflections. It was precisely the reinstatement of the 'totalizing project', the launching of 'enquiries into global issues and long-run material developments' and the return to 'generalization on a global scale' that some early proponents found most liberating.[11] O'Brien combined his rejection of ethnocentric teleologies with a call for 'cosmopolitan meta-narratives'.[12]

It is difficult to decide what to make of these statements about teleology in global history. This is largely due to the way the charge of 'teleology' is commonly employed. Its meaning remains elusive, and it has been used to critique a host of methodological sins ranging from determinism and anachronism to one-dimensional analysis and presentism. Charges of 'teleology' also usually have a polemical bent. They are often employed to discredit a particular version of the past, a particular 'teleology'. British historian Herbert Butterfield famously dissected the progressivist *Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), but would himself not shy away from offering a unilinear (i.e. whiggish?) account of the history of modern science.[13] Interestingly, historians usually remain mute about what would be the opposite of a teleological position.

Still, 'teleology' does not come down to a mere game of words, some form of sophisticated bad-mouthing or susurration of the *zeitgeist*. For 'teleology' raises crucial questions that every historian has to address in their work. These questions have been built into the modern Western concept of history as a coherent and directional process and carried into history as a modern academic discipline.[14] Even if not necessarily under the umbrella-term 'teleology', historians have thus, for generations, theorised questions related to the directionality of history. In some contexts, their debates have crystallised around concepts such as 'progress', 'Whig history', 'prehistories', 'presentism', 'process' or the

[10] Patrick K. O'Brien, 'Global History', https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/global_history.html; see also Patrick K. O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restauration of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 1, 1 (2006), 3–39.

[11] A. G. Hopkins, 'The Historiography of Globalization and the Globalization of Regionalism', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, 1–2 (2010), 19–36, here 31.

[12] O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions', 32.

[13] Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Bell, 1931); Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (London: Bell, 1949).

[14] Reinhart Koselleck et al., Article 'Geschichte, Historie', in Otto Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1975), 593–717, esp. 647–78.

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'openness of history'.[15] There is, to my knowledge, no systematic discussion of teleology or directionality as a problem of history-writing, whether from a philosopher, a theorist of historical methodology or a practising historian, comparable to the sophisticated discussions of the role of concepts, narration, the relationship between structure and historical actor, temporality and so on, of recent decades.[16] Nor have critics of teleology called for a new 'turn' or distinct methodology paralleling discussions of the micro- and macro-dimensions or materiality. I propose to map the sprawling debate on teleology in a slightly more systematic way. At the centre is the question of the directionality of history – that is, the question if (and when) a particular tendency, trend or process can be considered dominant for historical development and becomes part of the explanatory toolkit. A throng of thorny issues branches off from the question of directionality: How *inevitable* is the historical process (necessity)? How *linear* is it? How *reversible* is it? Such questions are inherently connected with debates about the form, position and role of history: of its narrative form or 'emplotment';[17] of historical responsibility for past wrongdoing;[18] of its involvement in present-day politics or ideologies;[19] and of its societal relevance, its ability to provide orientation to present generations or to allow prediction of future developments or events.[20] And, above all, the fundamental question of human freedom and agency looms large over the teleology-in-history debate.[21]

[15] Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation*; Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, 'Whig History and Present-Centered History', *The Historical Journal* 31, 1 (1988), 1–16; 'AHR Forum: Investigating the History in Prehistories', *American Historical Review* 113, 3 (2013), 708–801; Stiftung Historisches Kolleg (ed.), *Über die Offenheit der Geschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996).

[16] The best overview, although steeped in analytical perspectives, is Yemima Ben-Menahem, 'Historical Necessity and Contingency', in Aviezer Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 120–30; see further Anthony K. Jensen, 'Teleology', in Chiel van den Akker (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2022), 498–514; Rob Inkpen and Derek Turner, 'The Topography of Historical Contingency', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6, 1 (2012), 1–19.

[17] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Reinhart Koselleck et al. (eds.), *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1982).

[18] Isaiah Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability', in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94–165.

[19] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). A recent example is the debate about 'teleology'/'presentism' and 'identity politics'; see James H. Sweet, 'Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present', *Perspectives on History*, September 2022, www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/september-2022/is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present; Malcolm Foley and Priya Satia, 'Responses to "Is History History?"', *Perspectives on History*, October 2022, www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/october-2022/responses-to-is-history-history.

[20] David Armitage and Jo Guldi, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[21] Peter Wagner, 'Autonomy in History: Teleology in Nineteenth-Century European Social and Political Thought', in Trüper et al., *Historical Teleologies*, 323–38.

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Historians are more used to taking on such fundamental questions in practice, in the study of particular objects, rather than in abstract concepts. They nevertheless have engaged with them in theoretical terms – well before 'teleology' became a buzzword. Early generations of the nineteenth-century historical profession were anxious to drive contingency and chance out of their historical narratives.[22] Still, they strove to salvage the openness of history and human agency against Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's holistic – and teleological – system of history.[23] Despite being entangled in a view of history shaped by modernisation theory, Eurocentrism and nation, historians of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s did not shy away from debating how they construed historical processes and how they squared this with the autonomy or, as it was later called, the 'self-will' (*Eigen-Sinn*) of historical actors.[24]

Remarkably, theorists of global history today seem to be even less inclined to think about issues of directionality and teleology than have previous generations and practitioners of other historical subfields. This is certainly not for lack of need. For global history stands out, at least in its prevalent theoretical form, by its intimate relationship to the processuality of history. Most definitions of global history as a subfield centre on the idea of long-distance interconnections and their 'continuous, though not steady densification and consolidation' in time.[25] In one of the most sophisticated theoretical surveys to date, Sebastian Conrad emphasises that global history as a distinct field 'does . . . rest on the notion of global integration as a defining feature'.[26] Other historical subdisciplines may also have entertained a strong interest in particular processes – the emergence of capitalism in economic history, modernisation in social history, the polarisation of public and private spheres in gender history, to name but a few – but none of them has made statements about historical directionality as the foundation of how they defined their area of study.

[22] Alfred Heuß, 'Kontingenz in der Geschichte', *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 24–5 (1985), 14–43; Reinhart Koselleck, 'Der Zufall als Motivationsrest in der Geschichtsschreibung', in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 158–75.

[23] Daniel Little, 'Philosophy of History', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/history. They drew on concepts such as 'development' or 'historical continuity'. See, for example, Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik: Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, ed. Rudolf Hübner, 7th ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1937), 12, 270, 346. See also Peter Vogt, *Kontingenz und Zufall: Eine Ideen- und Begriffsgeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2011), 347–447.

[24] Karl-Georg Faber and Christian Meier (eds.), *Historische Prozesse* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1978); Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993). For a theoretical critique of these attempts, see Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Soziologie vor der Geschichte: Zur Kritik der Sozialtheorie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022), 198–205.

[25] Osterhammel, 'Globalgeschichte', 596.

[26] Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 110.

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In addition, global history is not just a statement about one particular historical process, but also about its relevance. Global history ascribes at least partial explanatory power to structures and forms of global integration, understood as regular and stable patterns of exchange and interaction. The term 'integration', however, remains conspicuously ambiguous. It designates both a particular historical *process* of growing interconnectedness reminiscent of what only a few years ago was called 'globalisation' and a *condition* or context of historical events (that may be applied to any period or event).[27] The most astute theoreticians and practitioners of global history take pains to make sure that it is not understood as a 'teleological' vision of history and gesture at the plurality of timelines and moments of disintegration.[28] But from their assumptions, global historians do privilege, or at least imply, one direction of history: the cross-border and long-distance interconnection and integration of societies across the world. Critics have hammered home this point and have asked if, limited to 'a highly abstract designator of interconnection', global integration would not 'obscure considerably more than it reveals'.[29] Some of them have depicted the history of global integration as the heir of modernisation theory and its teleological pitfalls.[30] Global history, from this perspective, is no more than the master narrative of the globalised present-day world – or, rather, of how cosmopolitan elites conceive it.[31] Some critics contend that, at its least reflective, global history is the heir to imperial worldviews or neoliberal 'connectivity talk'.[32]

Despite the embrace of integration as a defining feature by both its main theorists and critics, global history's historiographic roots diverge on these questions. For global history as a subfield grew out of several, conflicting lines of inquiry, each with its own vision of how to deal with historical directionality. Postcolonial scholars, for example – one important reference in global history – usually exhibit a strong suspicion against any kind of

[27] For the distinction between process and condition, see Niels P. Petersson, 'Globalisierung', in Jost Dülffer and Winfried Loth (eds.), *Dimensionen internationaler Geschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 271–91, here 276.

[28] Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 110–12.

[29] Michael Lang, 'Histories of Globalization(s)', in Prasenjit Duara et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* (Malden: Wiley, 2014), 402.

[30] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 96–7, 118.

[31] Craig Calhoun, 'The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 4 (2002), 869–97; Jeremy Adelman, 'What Is Global History Now?', *Aeon*, 2 March 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment.

[32] Richard Drayton, 'Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, 3 (2011), 671–85; Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 204; Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Towards a Critical History of Connection: The Port of Colombo, the Geographical "Circuit" and the Visual Politics of New Imperialism, ca. 1880–1914', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, 2 (2017), 346–84.

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generalist or macro-perspectives (despite, in some cases, following their own teleology of colonial 'modernity').[33] Their stance contrasts with global history's other roots in the philosophy of history and historical sociology, a legacy that lowers the barriers to thinking about large-scale connections and contexts, at the risk of carrying along these traditions' Eurocentric and teleological baggage.[34] Global history also took shape against the backdrop of a revival of neo- and post-Hegelian philosophies of history after the Cold War.[35] In short, the fundamental tension between the universalism and unity of the past, on the one hand, and particularity and rupture, on the other, has come to a head in the intellectual milieu of global history.[36]

So why do directionality and teleology not appear higher on global historians' theoretical agenda? I think the reason why global historians have been less likely to engage in reflections about historical directionality has to do with their epistemological preferences. Since the emergence of their profession, historians have entertained a close theoretical relationship with the category of time. Global history has shifted focus to the category of space, which for a long time was thought of largely as a neutral container of history. Global historians have devoted much energy to rethinking spatial relations and movements and to exploring synchronicity and spatial alternatives to the territorially bound nation-state (networks, oceans, etc.).[37] While they have produced, for example,

[33] But see now Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[34] Alessandro Stanziani, *Les entrelacements du monde: Histoire globale, pensée globale* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018), Hervé Inglebert, *Le Monde, l'Histoire: Essai sur les histoires universelles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014); Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Global History and Historical Sociology', in James Belich et al. (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23–43. For the broader historiographic context, see George G. Iggers et al., *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 364–97; Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History: Global Historiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 262–79; and the excellent survey of debates in Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[35] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992); Krishan Kumar, 'Philosophy of History at the End of the Cold War', in Tucker, *Companion to the Philosophy of History*, 550–60.

[36] Michael Lang, 'Evolution, Rupture, and Periodization', in David Christian (ed.), *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 1: *Introducing World History, to 10,000 BCE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 84–109.

[37] Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, 'Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization', *Journal of Global History* 5, 1 (2010), 149–70; Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 115–40; Stefanie Gänger, 'Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 12, 3 (2017), 303–18. A similar case has been made for contemporary sociology; see Göran Therborn, 'Introduction: From the Universal to the Global', *International Sociology* 15, 2 (2000), 149–50.

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fascinating insights into historical 'moments' and their global ramifications in space and into the global short-term contexts of the French Revolution, global historians have been less invested, if not outright disinterested, in thinking about change over time and the temporality of global integration.[38] This neglect has produced a lopsided reflection on teleology and directionality in global history centred on spatiality. I argue that there is a lot to gain from stronger reflection on the particular challenges of time and temporality in how global historians construe historical change.

This line of argument may also help move a rather unfocused and polemical debate in a more productive direction. The question of whether global history as a historical subfield is uncritically directional or even inherently 'teleological' is too general to move the debate forward. Any conceivable response would not do justice to the diversity of the field and the different, sometimes contradictory methodological orientations and complex operations of its practitioners. That question raises a host of further questions that quickly move discussion away from global history per se, such as: Is claiming a trend or dominant direction in history necessarily teleological? When does a linear narrative turn into teleology? And why would this be a bad thing after all? For want of a – much-needed – contribution from the philosophy of history addressing these questions, this chapter seeks to ask more pragmatic questions and search for answers related to the practice of (global) historians. Seen from this point of view, global history shares a lot of the theoretical challenges and choices non-global historians face, and global historians can learn from the responses of historians active in other – including much older – subfields. The chapter will thus delve into the theory of historical processes to develop more precise questions about directionality and teleology in global history. It will then move to the responses global histories offer or may offer to the teleological pitfalls of global integration. While the directionality/teleology problem poses some particular challenges for global historians, it also offers chances to explore new research avenues. Most importantly, it can help think about not the one-and-only master narrative, but the multiple 'guiding scripts'[39] or 'framing devices'[40] global historians may use, refine and variegate in practice.

This reflection on 'guiding scripts' has its own positionality. It is based on issues of teleology and directionality as seen from the concept of history as a coherent process that has shaped history as an academic profession, while

[38] See, for example, Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Suzanne Desan et al. (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[39] Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Comment', in Tamm and Burke, *Debating New Approaches to History*, 38.

[40] Bentley, 'World History and Grand Narrative', 49.

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also mobilising critical voices from within this (Western) tradition, such as critical theory. These issues may appear entirely differently when approached from the vantage point of other cosmologies, past or present.[41]

Processes and Teleologies: Theoretical Insights

What do we mean when we speak of a series of historical facts as a 'process'? A process is not a thing, a substance to be found and explored, but an intellectual concept, a 'framing device' to integrate a number of events (or impulses) into a somewhat coherent sequence in time.[42] One and the same historical action or fact can be considered as a discrete event or as part of a comprehensive process. 'Process' and other related concepts take the incongruity of intentions of human action and their results as their starting point. They are grounded in the experience that events and historical change defied the control or intentions of individual volitional acts, a foundational experience for Western modern concepts of both history and society.[43] The 'processualisation' of the past – that is, the conception of the past as a coherent and meaningful process – has been the basis for the emergence of modern (Western) historical scholarship.[44] Long before the post-modernist and postcolonial critique of 'teleology', philosophers of history, proponents of critical theory (such as Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt) and practitioners of historical research have debated the implications, techniques and limits of history-as-process(es). As is the case with all thinking about history, these debates have often been informed by everyday experience outside of academia. Thus, in the looming destruction of the planet Earth through human-made climate change, an unsettling, catastrophic experience of directionality has permeated academic inquiry and life outside of academia. Conversely, unexpected political and social upheavals (such as decolonisation, '1968', '1989' or 'the Arab Spring') have often been the source of recurring discussions about 'the event' in history and its relationship to structures and processes.[45] With their weak sense for time and temporality,

[41] Warwick Anderson et al. (eds.), *Pacific Futures: Past and Present* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018); Giorgio Riello, 'The World in a Book: The Creation of the Global in Sixteenth-Century European Costume Books', *Past & Present* 242, supplement 14 (2019), 281–317.

[42] I am following in many respects the excellent discussion by Christian Meier, 'Fragen und Thesen zu einer Theorie historischer Prozesse', in Faber and Meier, *Historische Prozesse*, 11–66. For a broader interdisciplinary survey and critique, see Knöbl, *Soziologie vor der Geschichte*.

[43] Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 95.

[44] Koselleck et al., 'Geschichte, Historie', 666–8; Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 63–5.

[45] See Raymond Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique* (Paris: Plon, 1961); Edgar Morin (ed.), 'L'Evènement', *Communications* 18 (1972); Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel

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global historians' self-reflection about their 'guiding scripts' can benefit to a great extent from these debates among 'non-global' historians and sociologists of social and political change.

While theories of historical process vary, they all rest on the idea of directionality: 'The most important and probably only common feature seems to be that an incalculably large number of impulses seems to constitute a somehow coherent, uniform process. We gain its unity from the fact that we draw an arc from some kind of end to some kind of beginnings.'[46] This direction does not need to be clear at the beginning of the process, and the process does not need to be caused by one *telos*/goal. In that way, teleology, in its classical philosophical meaning, would designate only a subset of processes.

Theories of historical process combine four further elements in addition to the core notion of directionality. First, processes divide the past into clearly defined sequences independently from the question of causation. While it may be used for periodisation purposes, a process per se is not equivalent to an epoch or period as processes may overlap. Second, a process is, to a certain degree, autonomous. It is neither completely controlled by individual intentions nor entirely contingent, but 'possess[es] a relative necessity; [processes] have an autogenerative character and reproduce within particular conditions.'[47] 'Consisting of nothing but the actions of individual people, [processes] nevertheless give rise to institutions and formations which were neither intended nor planned by any single individual in the form they actually take.'[48] Similar to social institutions, there is a crucial moment, a tipping point, after which a process is able to reproduce its conditions (which may be different from its original causes). Their autonomy, however, remains conditional to the contingent historical contexts that allow them to emerge; likewise, human actions or dynamics internal to the process may change the conditions to the detriment of the process. Conflating these two elements – the identification of uniform sequences and autonomy – may result in a strongly 'teleological' vision of the past.[49] Third, there is a mutual relationship between autonomous processes and historical action and events, the latter conceived of as being, to a certain

(eds.), *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1973); Faber and Meier, *Historische Prozesse*; Stiftung Historisches Kolleg, *Über die Offenheit der Geschichte*; Andreas Suter and Manfred Hettling (eds.), *Struktur und Ereignis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001); François Dosse, *Renaissance de l'événement: Un défi pour l'historien: Entre sphinx et phénix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010); Theo Jung and Anna Karla (eds.), 'Times of the Event: Forum', *History and Theory* 60, 1 (2021), 75–149.

[46] Meier, 'Fragen und Thesen zu einer Theorie historischer Prozesse', 12.

[47] Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 'Der Hochimperialismus als historischer Prozeß: Eine Fallstudie zum Sinn der Verwendung des Prozeßbegriffs in der Geschichtswissenschaft', in Faber and Meier, *Historische Prozesse*, 249.

[48] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), xiii.

[49] Meier, 'Fragen und Thesen zu einer Theorie historischer Prozesse', 24.

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degree, unpredictable and contingent. Processes only come into being through contingent historical action and events; in turn, they also shape and generate historical action and events. An event, while conditioned by structures and processes, nevertheless constitutes an interruption of a routinised sequence and yields lasting changes in the course of a process: 'Every event produces more and at the same time less than is given in its pre-given elements [*Vorgegebenheiten*]: hence its permanently surprising novelty.'[50] Fourth, historical actors may or may not be aware of processes they are part of; they may seek to shape or change them, without determining the very existence of a process (autonomy).

A theory of processes helps generate a host of questions about how a particular historical process is construed. Theorists and practitioners of global history as a history of global integration need to address questions that include (but are not limited to) the following problems (in no particular order):

(1) *Multiplicity and uniformity*: Where does one process end and another start? To what extent are subprocesses aligned to each other (unidirectionality or even simultaneity)?
(2) *Autonomy*: Is a sequence a (conditionally) autonomous *process* or a mere *trend* that remains dependent on external and contingent conditions?[51] What is the tipping point between trend and process? Which are the contingent historical conditions for the process to emerge?
(3) *Interaction of processes*: How do different processes overlap, interfere with each other and impact on one another? To what extent is their interaction shaped by contingency?
(4) *Direction*: How does the process relate to existing historical conditions? Does it change or reproduce them? Is it part of cyclical developments or 'structures of repetition' (Koselleck) in history?
(5) *End point*: What is the end point/result/outcome of a process? When can it be considered complete or discontinued?
(6) *Relationship between processes and projects/historical action/intentions*: To what extent do historical actors (from individuals to institutions) seek to regulate, steer or control a process? Do they participate in it wittingly or unwittingly? In what way do they imagine and anticipate its outcome? What relationship can be seen between intended and unintended consequences of their action?

[50] Reinhart Koselleck, 'Ereignis und Struktur', in Koselleck and Stempel, *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, 560–71, here 566; see also William H. Sewell Jr., 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille', *Theory and Society* 25, 6 (1996), 841–81. A particularly elaborate version of this idea of the event is the 'critical juncture theory' in historical sociology.

[51] Wolfgang Knöbl, 'After Modernization: Der Globalisierungsbegriff als Platzhalter und Rettungsanker der Sozialwissenschaften', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 68, 2 (2020), 297–17, here 313.

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(7) *Relationship between process and event/moment*: How does a process relate to contingent events? In what way are they conditioned by the process? In what way do they disrupt it?
(8) *Causality*: To what extent and in what way can the process as a framing device help explain historical change and historical action?
(9) *Reflexivity*: To what extent and in what way is the notion of a particular process reflective of particular mindsets, interests, ideologies or experiences?

Mapping questions that grow out of the concept of historical processes may appear as overly abstract and technical. Yet it is precisely this technicality that can help denaturalise the way in which processes – in global history and beyond – are being construed. They push global historians to consider 'global integration' for what it is – a framing device, no more, but certainly no less either. Following questions like these can also help address one (if not the) key challenge of a process-centred understanding of history as embraced by theorists of global history: teleology.

Seen from the theory of historical processes, 'teleology' appears as a particular way (or pitfall) of conceiving the past as a continuous, directional and conditionally autonomous sequence. A teleological perspective highlights to its extreme one process by streamlining the past in one direction and evening out alternative paths and contingencies. It puts emphasis on necessities and constraints rather than possibilities. Given the complexity of most historical (especially long-term) processes, a teleological perspective shows itself in degrees rather than in a clear-cut opposition (more or less teleological rather than teleological or not). Teleology then denotes the potential of a processual perspective to degrade

> all individual things and events, every tangible and visible thing, into exponents, which have no other significance than to indicate the existence of invisible forces, and whose purpose is to fulfil certain functions within the over-all process … The process that degrades everything and everyone to exponents has acquired a monopoly of meaning and significance, so that the individual or the particular can be meaningful only if and when they are understood as mere functions.[52]

It is this potential that has prompted some scholars to reject concepts of process as 'dangerous', for they 'impede rather than enable the grasp of social processes, because they always pretend to know tendencies of long-term historical transformation or homogenise and disambiguate heterogeneous and contradictory changes'.[53]

[52] Hannah Arendt, 'Geschichte und Politik in der Neuzeit', in Hannah Arendt, *Fragwürdige Traditionsbestände im politischen Denken der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 81–3. An abridged English version is Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 63–4.
[53] Hans Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen: Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), 356.

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While the potential of teleological alignment is inherent to the very notion of process, one may distinguish at least two versions of it. In its philosophical tradition, teleology stands for a view of the direction and meaning of history as such. Teleology with a capital 'T', as we may term it for lack of a better alternative, conceives history in its entirety as one coherent unidirectional process. Teleology with a capital T may project its *telos* well into the future and usually posits the present as an important step in this broader process. It provides history with a higher meaning or purpose.[54] More common to the practice of historical scholarship is a slightly more modest version of teleology: a description of discrete sequences in the past (teleology with a lowercase 't'). This form of teleology usually refers to an endpoint/*telos* in the past, and explains (or rather implies) why a sequence of the past had to result in the outcome we already know. To be sure, this challenge is common to everyone making sense of the past in hindsight. For, in contrast to the participant's or witness's perspective, the retrospective view knows what happened.

While some critics argue that global history does indeed tend toward a teleological vision in the mould of the philosophy of history,[55] the idea of a unidirectional process driving history as a whole is probably as foreign to most global historians as it is to most other contemporary scholars of history. Things lie differently with teleology with a lowercase t. As a sub-discipline that attaches itself so closely to the concept of a historical process – global integration – global history is in many ways prone to teleological alignment. Due to the ambiguous meaning of global integration in global history scholarship – as a process and as a condition – the challenges are twofold: the risk of overemphasising inevitable directionality while describing the process of global integration itself, on the one hand; the risk of streamlining the past while describing and explaining historical sequences or events from the point of view of global interconnection, on the other. Turning to the practice of historical scholarship will reveal various 'guiding scripts' global historians use or may use on both these levels. A theory of global history will considerably benefit from reflecting on these practical insights.

Processes and Teleologies: Practical Insights (i)

How strongly do historians of global integration offer a unidirectional vision of the past? Are they aware of the inbuilt pitfalls of teleology that come with the concept of process, and if so, how do they deal with it? Two of the most fruitful debates that helped global history take shape have been triggered by the critical

[54] A very strong example of this kind of teleology is Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zurich: Artemis, 1949).
[55] Inglebert, *Le Monde, l'Histoire*, 948–74.

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adoption of concepts from the social sciences – two 'dangerous' processes, as some would have it: (1) the debate about the emergence of 'modernity', largely understood as a model of European origin, with a strong focus on the origins of industrial capitalism (transformed into the so-called divergence debate);[56] (2) the social science concept of 'globalisation', initially meant to underline the uniqueness of 'global' modernity of the 1990s, and then increasingly extended into earlier periods.[57] Conceived as historical master narratives, both concepts do have a strong teleological bent, and many historians operating with these concepts are well aware of their pitfalls. The strategies they use vary, and range from playing with different scales, multiplying processes and timelines, and including disruptive and disintegrating forces. Some of their responses may help us think about how to complexify directionality in global integration as a process.

(1) *Scales:* Teleology has often been cast as a problem of scale, a distortion created by a macro-view that prefers the big picture over the detail, the whole over the fragment, abstract concepts over concrete individuals. An approach that puts the question of scale on the agenda, although with a preconceived opinion, is so-called microhistory, which has been considered by some as a way around global history's methodological impasses.[58] Proponents of 'global microhistory' often cast their case in terms of bringing back the human dimension into global history, but they also touch upon teleology. Italian and German national microhistorians had already turned to the local, the quirky, the intractable with the precise aim to question and counter the grand narratives of social history, especially modernisation theory and Marxist orthodoxy. Yet we should not consider 'global microhistory' as the high road and the once-and-for-all solution to teleology. In historical fields other than global history, scholars have already turned to smaller scales precisely to find a full miniature version of macro-processes.[59] Global

[56] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Peer Vries, *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China 1680s–1850s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); overview in Jonathan Daly, *Historians Debate the Rise of the West* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[57] Overviews in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (New York: Norton, 2002); Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[58] 'Global History and Microhistory', *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019); Francesca Trivellato, 'Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33, 1 (2015), 122–34; Mark Gamsa, 'Biography and (Global) Microhistory', *New Global Studies* 11, 3 (2017), 231–41; Hans Medick, 'Turning Global? Microhistory in Extension', *Historische Anthropologie* 24, 2 (2016), 241–52; Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat, 'La microhistoire globale: Affaire(s) à suivre', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 73, 1 (2018), 1–18.

[59] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); David A. Bell, 'Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms', in

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commodity or object histories, for instance, have rarely been written to counter established narratives of the rise of capitalism and its global production chains.[60] Moreover, proponents of 'deep' or 'big history' (or of a renewed form of world history) have claimed that extending historical scales to their largest possible extent was the best way to overcome the teleology of modernity.[61] Likewise, some of the most holistic social macro-theories, notably Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems, are emphatically anti-teleological.[62]

While there is no innate relationship between the macro-teleological and the micro-anti-teleological, consciously playing with scale (*jeux d'échelles*) is certainly a promising, and tested, way to deal with issues of historical directionality.[63] Even outside of the field of microhistory, global historians have used scale as a means to temper and complicate the notion of global integration. Global integration can thus be explored as a multi-scalar process, including how historical actors navigate and move, or even 'jump', between different scales – a particularly promising but still largely uncharted avenue of inquiry. Following their prevailing interest in space, global historians have mostly turned to reflections on *spatial* scale by showing that 'globalising' forces played out in clearly confined geographic bounds and that global integration was in fact an uneven, polycentric and partial process across the world. One example of this kind of analysis is Vanessa Ogle's history of efforts to standardise world time since the late nineteenth century.[64] Instead of presenting time standardisation as a prime example of growing global uniformity, she shows how diverging regional interests and strategies shaped the process as much as top-down efforts by Western officials or international organisations. The standardisation of the clock remained incomplete well into the 1940s, and the notion of a universal time was never fully realised (related attempts to unify calendars went nowhere). Ogle is one of a growing number of global historians

Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 262–76.

[60] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985); Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

[61] Daniel Lord Smail and Andrew Shryock, 'History and the "Pre"', *American Historical Review* 118, 3 (2013), 709–37; Bentley, 'World History and Grand Narrative'.

[62] Niklas Luhmann, 'Evolution und Geschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2, 3 (1976), 284–309; Niklas Luhmann, 'Geschichte als Prozeß und die Theorie sozio-kultureller Evolution', in Faber and Meier, *Historische Prozesse*, 413–40; Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 148–90; Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012–13). Arguing for an open systems approach in world history as a way out of teleology: Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 293-4.

[63] Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

[64] Ogle, *Global Transformation of Time*.

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who cast doubt upon the directionality of global integration by questioning its uniformity in space, but few global historians have actively played with global histories' timescale. One of the few exceptions is Kenneth Pomeranz, who has reflected on the different timescales of the 'great divergence' between Europe and Asia. Pomeranz proposes a model of 'fuzzy periodisation' out of a mix of (very) long-term and short-term time scales as a way to complicate the notion of a straightforward, linear process.[65]

(2) *Multiplicities:* Pomeranz contends that construing the timescales of the 'great divergence' explicitly does not call into question the directionality of the process that unfolds within these time scales. The same applies to two strategies of gaining a closer idea of the temporality of global integration/globalisation: first, the idea of *multiple timescales* of different subprocesses (economic, political, cultural, etc.) that counters the notion of a homogeneous macro-process where all dimensions move in lockstep; and, second, concepts of historical *conjunctures* of globalisation, including aborted globalisation projects, that put capitalism-centred nineteenth- and twentieth-century globalisation into perspective and undermine its alleged uniqueness.[66] All these strategies are laudable as they inject temporal categories into the discussion of global integration, but they do not reflect on the directionality of the historical process itself.

A related strategy may precisely question the uniformity of direction. On closer inspection, historians of global integration do work on a variety of different processes that only at a cost are lumped together into one allegedly coherent macro-process of interconnection or integration. A fruitful line of inquiry consists in dissecting these multiple processes and looking at how these processes interfere. A set of more precisely defined processes like expansion, transfer/reception, densification, universalisation, convergence, polarisation, hierarchisation or standardisation (each with their own direction) may refine the vocabulary of integration.[67] It remains to be seen if the interference of, say, processes of global socio-economic polarisation (or divergence) with processes of densification of communication exchanges results in a uniform direction of integration.

[65] Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Teleology, Discontinuity, and World History: Periodization and Some Creation Myths of Modernity', *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, 2 (2013), 189–226; see also Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Vergangenheiten: Über die Zeithorizonte der Geschichte', in Jürgen Osterhammel *Die Flughöhe der Adler: Historische Essays zur globalen Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2017), 183–202.

[66] A. G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Globalization – An Agenda for Historians', in *Globalization in World History*, 1–10, here 5; C. A. Bayly, '"Archaic" and "Modern" Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, ca. 1750–1850', in Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, 47–73; Osterhammel, 'Globalizations'; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History.*

[67] Knöbl, 'After Modernization', 317; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Globalifizierung: Denkfiguren der neuen Welt', *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 9, 1 (2015), 5–16, here 11–15.

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(3) *Interruptions*, *Reversions, Dialectics:* The way global historians tend to deal with events – the conceptual antipode to processes – is emblematic for their neglect of temporal categories. To be sure, global 'moments' and 'events' have become a highly productive subfield of study in global history.[68] Yet they largely serve to expose synchronous effects and responses in space, and thus to illustrate global interconnection. Events' position as an interruption of continuous flows – the particular temporal structure ascribed to them by theorists of history – may transpire in the opening and closure of different paths, their multifaceted meanings and ramifications across the globe, but they tend to get lost to the gaze fascinated by spatial synchronicity.[69] Studies about the undoing of globalisation or moments of 'deglobalisation' in particular places or at particular points in time largely work without making reference to the concept of the event (or global moment).[70] Keeping up with these proliferating efforts, one may define a counter-process to each of the multiple processes one could dissect global integration into: expansion/contraction, hierarchisation/equalisation, convergence/divergence, densification/diffusion and so forth. The study of countervailing processes helps to demonstrate the fragility and reversibility of global integration; it has no implications for the directionality of globalisation or integration itself.

Things look different when we consider forces of disintegration as an integral part of global integration as a historical process. The idea that global integration and fragmentation are not mutually exclusive and pertain to discrete historical processes, but are more often mutually constitutive, has been present from the start in historical scholarship on globalisation.[71] Studies on a wide range of topics, periods and geographies provide us with a number of categories and a wealth of empirical data to rethink integration as a process in less teleological terms. They can be used as a starting point to think about what may be called the *dialectics* of global integration.[72] Over recent decades,

[68] Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*.

[69] Good discussions of recent conceptual approaches to events: Jung and Karla, 'Times of the Event'; Frank Bösch, 'Das historische Ereignis', *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 12 May 2020, http://docupedia.de/zg/Boesch_ereignis_v1_de_2020; on the particular event of the 'turning point', see Andrew Abbott, *Time Matters: On Theory and Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 240–60; Dieter Langewiesche, *Zeitwende: Geschichtsdenken heute* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 41–55.

[70] Harold James, *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jim Tomlinson, 'The Deglobalisation of Dundee, c. 1900–2000', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 29, 2 (2009), 123–40.

[71] Petersson, 'Globalisierung'; on social science globalization theory: Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[72] 'Dialectics' here is borrowed from Arif Dirlik, 'Globalization as the End and the Beginning of History: The Contradictory Implications of a New Paradigm', *Rethinking Marxism* 12, 4 (2000), S. 4–22; see also Middell and Naumann, 'Global History and the Spatial Turn'.

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historians have used a variety of concepts to capture this dialectical character, including:

- *Bordering*: historical border and borderland studies show how processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation impacted everyday life in borderlands; they show that the making and unmaking of borders was not a mere reflection of a global standardisation of nationhood (as some global historians would have it), but also involved complex and disruptive processes of disentanglement and re-entanglement.[73]
- *Control*: historians of migration and mobility show that the increase of migration movements and infrastructures that facilitated them across the world went hand in hand with increasing attempts at control and forms of forced immobility; the acceleration of transportation and migration was offset by decelerating measures of quarantine, identification and regulation.[74]
- *Isolation*: historians of social discipline and punishment have pointed to the fact that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw globalising efforts to physically isolate people as a means of social hygiene, from the emergence of prisons and convict settlements, to therapeutic institutions and quarantine, to spaces of exile and refugee camps; in forms of convict transportation, mobility became inextricably connected with carceral immobility.[75]
- *Unmixing*: historians of forced migration and nationalism have pointed to the fact that the movement of people in many instances did not serve the emergence of an interconnected world, but the creation of homogeneity along ethnic, racial, national or political lines.[76]

[73] The classic example is Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); more recent: Sören Urbansky, *Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the Sino-Russian Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[74] Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Renaud Morieux, *The Channel: England, France and the Construction of a Maritime Border in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); for a recent reflection in sociological theory, see Steffen Mau, *Sortiermaschinen: Die Neuerfindung der Grenze im 21. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2021).

[75] For a survey, see Alison Bashford and Carolyn Strange (eds.), *Isolation: Places and Practices of Exclusion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); for penal transportation as a mix of mobility and immobility, see Clare Anderson, 'Introduction', in Anderson (ed.), *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1–35, here 2.

[76] Rogers Brubaker, 'Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, 2 (1995), 189–218; Jan C. Jansen, 'Unmixing the Mediterranean? Migration, demographische "Entmischung" und Globalgeschichte', in Boris Barth et al. (eds.), *Globalgeschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2014), 289–314.

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Using concepts such as bordering, control, isolation and unmixing to highlight the dialectics of integration might help spur global historians to take disruptive and disconnecting forces more seriously. It may also help them avoid the trap of conceptual overcompensation that would lead them to replace teleologies of integration with teleologies of disintegration.

Processes and Teleologies: Practical Insights (ii)

The previous section focused on global integration primarily as process, and the ways in which historians may avoid getting trapped in too narrow a version of directional movement. These questions are certainly central to the self-understanding of global historians, but only marginal to the many historians working on particular topics. Most historians do not deal with macro-processes (or their local/regional ramifications); rather, they address discrete historical events or processes. How does the global historian's emphasis on interconnection affect their work in terms of teleology? What does examining and explaining an event or historical fact – for example, the 'age of revolutions' – under the condition of global integration do to the space of historical possibilities? Does the focus on synchronous interconnections streamline the historical process more strongly than locally or nationally framed histories? With regard to the two aforementioned examples, I see a tendency in that direction, but I will also argue that this is due to a rather one-sided use of global history's methodological toolkit. Global-integration-as-condition can also help build new arguments for a more contingency-sensitive – less teleological, if you will – understanding of history.

Given the variety of research topics, a general answer to these questions is not possible. I would like to turn to one example related to my own work: the late eighteenth-century 'age of revolutions'. The topic stands for a momentous transformation and a time of upheaval that was transnational if not global in scope, but it has been largely studied in a national framework (e.g. as the history of the American Revolution, the French Revolution …). Over the past two decades, however, the field has become part of the global history debate and, as a consequence, has been fundamentally reshaped. Hence, the particular revolutions in the Americas and in Europe are no longer seen in isolation, but as part of an interconnected era of upheaval that was Atlantic if not global in scope.[77] Researchers have stressed the mobilities of people and ideas between

[77] For surveys and syntheses of the most recent literature, see Wim Klooster (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Age of Atlantic Revolutions*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (London: Routledge, 2016); Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). On the idea of a 'world crisis' around 1800, see C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–*

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different areas of the revolutionary world around 1800. In doing so, they have placed strong emphasis on the historical actors who drove these events, as if interconnection or mobility were the sole attribute of those who may appear as the drivers of change (or even 'progress') in a highly volatile historical situation.[78]

In that sense, the global interconnection or integration argument (as it is being largely used) tends to streamline developments that local and national histories have described as highly uncertain, embattled and contingent. Each of the great revolutions around 1800 has been depicted as a violent civil war, during which the outcome of the struggles did not reflect what had been initially debated; similar to what could be seen in mid-twentieth-century decolonisation, these revolutions did not strike a straightforward path from empire to nation-state.[79] Furthermore, large exile communities of 'counter-revolutionaries' sought to carve out alternatives to the revolution and worked to undo the demise of the monarchy, the independence of a colony or the overthrow of slavery even decades after the fact.[80] Against the complexities of their local, national and imperial histories, many histories of the revolutionary era produced under the condition of global integration appear blatantly less complex and more teleological.

Is this the price one has to pay for an analytical perspective less devoted to localness and particularity? As already noted, I do not believe that teleology is purely a question of scale. It is a question of reflection on time and temporality (or the lack thereof), and it occurs to me that there are paths not properly taken by global historians. The question of how historical actors experienced and organised temporality – past, present and future – has been a common theme in social history. Their foremost theoreticians, Reinhart Koselleck above all, centred on the idea of a divergence of the historical actors' 'space of experience' and their 'horizon of expectation' due to the experience of an 'acceleration' of history; this gave way to the twin concepts of uncertainty (the unpredictability of the future)

1830 (London: Longman, 1989), 164–92; John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin, 2008), 157–217.

[78] Janet Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); applied to modern revolutions as such in David Motadel (ed.), *Revolutionary World: Global Upheaval in the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[79] On these complexities, see, for example, Josep M. Fradera, *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish and American Empires* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Manuel Covo and Megan Maruschke, 'The French Revolution as an Imperial Revolution', *French Historical Studies* 44, 3 (2021), 371–97, here 388.

[80] For example, Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Friedemann Pestel, *Kosmopoliten wider Willen: Die 'monarchiens' als Revolutionsemigranten* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

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and possibility (the feasibility of history).[81] An entire research agenda has sprouted from this idea of 'futures past', uncovering imaginations and expectations, plans and projects, many of which never came into being.[82] In recent years, following a general trend towards contingency in the social sciences, historians have questioned the close connection of this agenda to European 'modernity' and turned it into a more generally applicable theory of how historical actors coped with – and sought to benefit from – historical uncertainty.[83] Even if they only rarely relate to these concepts directly, local and national historians of the revolutionary era have tapped into the same ideas and uncovered the many alternative visions and projects that were on the historical actors' minds and that made alternative futures appear to the latter no less likely than the actual paths taken.

There is no reason why history, as seen under the condition of global integration, would have to do without the historical actors' concerns about uncertainty and their ways of imagining and coping with the future, even more so as many prognoses and predictions partly motivated their historical action.[84] To capture past experiences of uncertainty and imaginations of futures past, global historians do not even have to renounce their interest in connectedness and turn into local or national historians – although they would always do well to 'muddy [their] boots in the bogs of "micro-history"'.[85] In the histories of revolution and state-building mentioned earlier, scores of connected histories of alternative futures and failed projects await them.

[81] Koselleck et al., 'Geschichte, Historie', 702–6; Reinhart Koselleck, '"Erfahrungsraum" and "Erwartungshorizont" – zwei historische Kategorien', in Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 349–75; Koselleck, 'Über die Verfügbarkeit der Geschichte', in Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 260–77; Koselleck, 'Die unbekannte Zukunft und die Kunst der Prognose', in Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 203–21; Alexandre Escudier, '"Temporalisation" et modernité politique: Penser avec Reinhart Koselleck', *Revue germanique internationale* 25 (2007), 37–67. The dual character of contingency (as uncertainty and possibility) has already been emphasised by Ernst Troeltsch, 'Die Bedeutung des Begriffs der Kontingenz', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 20, 6 (1910), 421–30.

[82] Lucian Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2016); Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Maret Tamm, 'Historical Futures', *History and Theory* 60, 1 (2021), 3–22; on the praxeological dimensions of these imagined futures, see Jörn Leonhard, 'Europäisches Deutungswissen in komparativer Absicht: Zugänge, Methoden und Potentiale', *Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften* 4, 3 (2006), 341–63.

[83] Benjamin Scheller, 'Kontingenzkulturen – Kontingenzgeschichten: Zur Einleitung', in Becker et al., *Die Ungewissheit des Zukünftigen*, 9–30; Uwe Walter, 'Kontingenz und Geschichtswissenschaft: aktuelle und künftige Felder der Forschung', in ibid., 95–118; for the broader context, see Gerhart von Graevenitz and Odo Marquard (eds.), *Kontingenz* (Munich: Fink, 1998); Michael Makropoulos, 'Kontingenz: Aspekte einer theoretischen Semantik der Moderne', *European Journal of Sociology* 45, 3 (2004), 369–99; Vogt, *Kontingenz und Zufall*; Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne: Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2007).

[84] Christian Meier, 'Historiker und Prognose', in Stiftung Historisches Kolleg, *Über die Offenheit der Geschichte*, 45–81, here 52.

[85] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997), 735–62, here 750.

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The era was shaped by numerous efforts at revolutionary state-building, stake-claiming, imperial renewal or geopolitical reordering that ultimately failed or were thwarted by others.[86] Likewise, the enemies of revolution and their ideas were no less mobile than the revolutionists. The revolutionary era saw the emergence of exile as a transnational – or, more precisely, trans-imperial – political space. In a context of high geopolitical uncertainty, revolutionary alternatives and alternatives to revolution were fiercely debated and translated into projects that in many ways resembled the ones actually undertaken.[87] Taking this connected sphere of alternative imagination and failed initiatives into account is probably less a question of historical justice. After all, they were not always part of Walter Benjamin's disruptive hidden tradition of the oppressed – the unrealised hopes and expectations of justice and salvation.[88] Many of these interconnected alternative imaginations during the revolutionary era came from enslavers, monarchists, racists or staunch imperialists. Uncovering their ideas and projects can, however, help global historians see the outcome of historical processes as much less certain than it may appear at first from a perspective of global interconnection. Whole centuries can be (re)written from the perspective of failed projects, of unexpected and unpredicted developments and of 'questions' the contemporaries sought solutions for.[89]

Does giving futures past a more prominent place in global historians' toolkit mean that teleology will be replaced by unrestrained contingency? The fact that historical actors experienced a process as open-ended and the future as uncertain does not mean that the actual outcome is unexplainable in hindsight. After all, many expectations and plans failed, and the upheavals of the late eighteenth century ended in results only a few had initially foreseen or even sought – the

[86] Vanessa Mongey, *Rogue Revolutionaries: The Fight for Legitimacy in the Greater Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Chelsea Stieber, *Haiti's Paper War: Post-Independence Writing, Civil War, and the Making of the Republic, 1804–1954* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Linda Colley, *The Gun, the Ship and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Profile Books, 2021).

[87] As a case study, Jan C. Jansen, 'American Indians for Saint-Domingue? Exiles, Violence, and Imperial Geopolitics after the French and Haitian Revolutions', *French Historical Studies* 45, 1 (2022), 49–86.

[88] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in Walter Benjamin *Selected Writings,* vol. 4: *1938–1940*, ed. Howard. Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 389–400, here 392.

[89] Marc Ferro, *L'aveuglement: Une autre histoire de notre monde* (Paris: Tallandier, 2015), although rather about the arrogance of elites and leaders; Simon Karstens, *Gescheiterte Kolonien – Erträumte Imperien: Eine andere Geschichte der europäischen Expansion, 1492–1615* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021); Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). While not entirely congruent, the study of 'futures past' is related to counterfactual history; see, for example, Quentin Deluermoz and Pierre Singaravélou, *A Past of Possibilities: A History of What Could Have Been* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

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quintessential experience of process.[90] The fact that it could have been otherwise cannot absolve historians from explaining why it eventually led to a particular result. Yet past imaginations push (global) historians to search for better explanations and to go beyond unidirectional explanations. They point to the horizons of what was imaginable and sayable at a given moment, and how global integration may have affected them. Seen from this perspective, historical processes are marked by spaces of possibilities that are shaped by both opening and constraining dynamics; the outcome stems from a shrinking of this space.[91] And an important argument that global historians can make is that one such factor both of constraint and of uncertainty is to be found in global integration and interconnection.

As a consequence, historians of interconnectedness might realise that the argument of global integration may in itself hold the key to a less teleological global history: entanglement as a source of uncertainty, as the particular global history complement to the classic notion of 'acceleration' of history. Such an idea was expressed well before the advent of global 'modernity', and well before the formation of the modern historical profession: by the Greek historian Polybius, usually represented as an early thinker of historical determinism and cyclical history, but writing himself in a situation of heightened consciousness of interconnection.[92] Revolving around the rise of Rome's Mediterranean empire, his *Histories* were in fact very much a history of large-scale entanglement and integration. Describing it as an 'enmeshment' or 'interweaving' (*symplokē*) of spheres, Polybius considered this process of expansion and integration as a source of increasing complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability for the historical actors.[93] Borrowing from historian David Bell, one may translate this idea into the vocabulary of twenty-first-century global history with the term 'connections by disruption'.[94]

[90] Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[91] Frederick Cooper, 'Possibility and Restraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', *Jourrnal of African History* 49, 2 (2008), 167–96. See also Willibald Steinmetz, *Das Sagbare und das Machbare: Zum Wandel politischer Handlungsspielräume, England 1789–1867* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993). Practices of prognoses are also strongly shaped by the time regime and cosmology in a given society.

[92] Elena Isayev, 'Polybius's Global Moment and Human Mobility throughout Ancient Italy', in Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys (eds.), *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123–40.

[93] Polybius, *The Histories*, transl. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1, 3–4; Frank W. Walbank, 'Symploke: Its Role in Polybius' Histories', in Donald Kagan (ed.), *Studies in the Greek Historians: In Memory of Adam Parry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 197–212; see on this point Felix K. Maier, *'Überall mit dem Unerwarteten rechnen': Die Kontingenz historischer Prozesse bei Polybius* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2012), 162–72.

[94] David A. Bell, 'The Atlantic Revolutions', in Motadel, *Revolutionary World*, 38–65, here 43.

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So how should global historians move on from here? Do they have to absolve themselves of their inherent teleology, or can they simply carry on as if they do not consider themselves affected by a purely polemical debate? What is certain is that they should move beyond what appear to be stale alternatives. Revealing branching and contingency in every past development is no more intellectually satisfying and convincing than the idea of a unidirectional past pervaded by anonymous necessity. While it is hailed by some as the golden path to a re-politicised academic practice, there is nothing inherently more critical in the notion that things may have been otherwise; it may even serve as the basis for complacency.[95] There is thus nothing inherently good or bad to thinking in terms of comprehensive directional processes or contingency. While a stronger attention to contingency may help break up reified ideas of historical unidirectionality, fetishised and unbounded contingency may end up in unrelated microhistories driven by local cultural determinism.[96]

This is not to say that global historians should shelve teleology as a polemical and helplessly abstract issue. Quite the contrary. They should carve out what is hidden in a seemingly ideological debate and turn it into a serious debate about their theoretical and methodological foundations. Seen from a less dramatised point of view, the teleology question raises serious issues that have been engrained in historical scholarship. The idea of the past as a directional and coherent process is an element of – and theoretical challenge to – all historical scholarship, at least in its modern Western mould. Yet it poses itself in a particularly acute way for a sub-discipline that contains a processual notion of history in its very self-understanding. While no historian can do away with issues of directionality and processuality, global historians have wedded themselves to it in a particularly strong fashion.

What about excluding integration (i.e. process) from the 'official' self-definition and closing the chapter? The actual practice of global history would defy such a parlour trick. In a variety of ways, the idea of global integration/interconnection – both as a process and as a condition – has strongly informed global history scholarship over the past two decades. In fact, it contains a wealth of ideas and approaches that a more self-reflexive global history can draw on. The result will certainly not be a new grand theory, but rather the theoretical identification and refinement of guiding scripts that inform global history scholarship. One of the greatest needs for the theory of global history is to study such guiding scripts for historians of 'globality' or

[95] See, for the case of legal history, Justin Desautels-Stein and Samuel Moyn, 'On the Domestication of Critical Legal History', *History and Theory* 60, 2 (2021), 296–310.
[96] Bentley, 'World History and Grand Narrative', 48.

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'global integration' – similar to the efforts that have been devoted to national histories.[97] Such guiding scripts would reveal more clearly how global historians construe historical change. They would be intrinsically situational, and would vary depending on whether someone is writing a textbook, conceiving a research article, pitching a research proposal to funding organisations or explaining to students or a broader public why global history matters. These scripts would avoid reifying 'global integration' teleologically, by injecting temporal categories into global history's theoretical reflection. They would allow space for interceding and countervailing processes, dialectical developments, tipping points, uncertainty and, yes, the interplay of necessity and contingency. And they would devote great attention to the historical actors' experience of time and historical change – their reflections, expectations, hopes and fears and the ways in which their plans and anticipations did not capture the actual outcome. Global interconnections can thus also be revealed – in their dual character – as both unlikely outcomes and sources of uncertainty.

[97] For example, Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Christopher L. Hill, *National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010).

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