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Towards a Global Perspective on Contemporary History. A Critical Literature Review of Recent German *Zeitgeschichte*

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Contemporary history, subsumed under the term *Zeitgeschichte*, holds a prominent position in Germany's historical profession today. Practitioners in *Zeitgeschichte* often work in a network that transcends regional and disciplinary boundaries, engaging with work from social sciences and across historical sub-disciplines. The paper presents a meditation on recent literature in *Zeitgeschichte* and argues that its flexible framework can serve as a starting point for a global narrative in contemporary history. The paper primarily examines the research project *Nach dem Boom* dealing with economic and social ruptures in Western Europe around the 1970s as an example for the methodological framework *Zeitgeschichte* offers for Global Historians.

Contemporary history, subsumed under the term *Zeitgeschichte*, holds a prominent position in Germany's historical profession today. The German terminology relates to the word *Zeitgenossen*, people who were alive at the time of an analyzed event.¹ Accordingly, the periodization of *Zeitgeschichte* goes as far back as the oldest generation of *Zeitgenossen* still alive. Today, this strand of history primarily deals with the time after World War II. While the (West) German discourse of *Zeitgeschichte* has traditionally focused on a national approach to history writing, recent scholars have emphasized a broader look on (West) European topics and even sporadic case studies on global entanglements.

What distinguishes the German *Zeitgeschichte* approach from other historiographical traditions of contemporary history is its inherently critical political and presentist character, meaning that practitioners in this realm have interacted with recent history as a continuous stream flowing into the present and shaping present processes still underway. While contemporary history in the US predominantly follows narrative and historical analysis, recent *Zeitgeschichte* openly deals with contemporary problems through an interdisciplinary analysis of the past. Accord-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all following translations or descriptions of German terms are my own.

ingly, practitioners of *Zeitgeschichte* have often worked on the border between political and social science, emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches.

Due to its reliance on secondary sources from the social sciences, and its focus on unfinished historical processes, contemporary history is often criticized for straying too far from classical historical modes of analysis. While source base and temporal frame do certainly constrain historical methodology, contemporary history and its German offspring *Zeitgeschichte* provide trained historians with a venue to criticize and complicate narratives of the present, which deserves further engagement transcending the national frameworks that have dominated this strand of scholarship in recent decades. To acknowledge this, I engage in detail with practitioners from the German field of *Zeitgeschichte* in this essay, as the field has traditionally generated wide interest beyond the academic community due to institutional links to civic education in post-war Germany. *Zeitgeschichte* therefore fosters an active public engagement of historians as recently envisioned by global historians Jo Guldi and David Armitage in their *History Manifesto*.² This literature review therefore examines the school of “structural rupture” as a notable example of recent German *Zeitgeschichte* and argues that in its methodological framework, a first approach towards a globalization of contemporary history can be found.

The term *Zeitgeschichte* was popularized by the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute for Contemporary History), which was founded as the *German Institute of the History of the National Socialist Era* in Munich in 1947 and renamed in 1952. Established as part of the Allied Forces’ denazification effort, the Institute had a political agenda from the very beginning. Its journal *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (Contemporary History Quarterly), published since 1953, became a main organ for this new strand of historic writing. In 2016, the Institute published collected translations of journal articles into English for the first time, to reach a wider international audience and encourage transnational engagement with the topics presented.³

Notable among the more recent publications on *Zeitgeschichte* is the journal *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (Of Politics and Contemporary History) published on a regular basis by the *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung* (Federal Agency for Civic Education/BPB) since 2000. The journal has become highly influential among academics and practitioners in the field of civic education alike. The

² Jo Guldi and David Armitage. *The History Manifesto*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Note that Guldi’s and Armitage’s main claim is about a return to the *longue durée*, which is still absent from most of contemporary history, with notable exceptions such as for example Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

³ The first volume of the German Yearbook of Contemporary History contains recent essays from *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* on the topic of “Holocaust and Memory in Europe”. See Thomas Schlemmer and Alan E. Steinweis, eds., *Holocaust and Memory in Europe*, German Yearbook of Contemporary History, Vol. 1 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016).

publication efforts of the BPB therefore underline the significance of integrating *Zeitgeschichte* into a civic discourse in Germany.

The perspective of *Zeitgeschichte* can serve historians as a model for a more presentist, political take on contemporary history engaging in public discussions and historically nuancing academic interpretations of the present. In times of growing discontent and a rise of populism in the “Western” world and beyond, historians need not shy away from engaging in public discourse and political discussions to contextualize and problematize currents of explanation for today’s world. The interdisciplinary practice of *Zeitgeschichte* and its institutional links to venues of public discourse provides historians with a toolset to work together with social scientists across disciplinary boundaries to establish more nuanced models for explaining current problems and challenging populist grand narratives.

The following part of this essay will examine a recent strand of *Zeitgeschichte* historiography in Germany by looking at the research cluster *Nach dem Boom* (“After the Boom”) as a growing body of literature providing methodology for the interdisciplinary integration of economics, politics, sociology, and cultural studies under a contemporary historical narrative. This recent project looks at structural transformations coinciding with the change from Keynesian economics to a neoliberal model of politics in Western Europe in the 1970s and beyond. I argue that the project presents a prime example of how *Zeitgeschichte* can serve as an integratory dialogue between history and a wider social science discourse, and that it represents the challenges and opportunities of an inherently presentist history writing. Following that, I explain why the project *Nach dem Boom* presents an ideal starting point for the venture of a global contemporary history. Building upon the methodological framework of the research project, I finally argue that *Zeitgeschichte* needs to take the current global turn in historiography seriously and engage with a more globally integrated contemporary history in order to nuance discourse about the roots of the present as parts of global systems of entanglements.

*Nach dem Boom: Structural Contemporary History in Western Europe after
1970*

The research cluster *Nach dem Boom* is a joint project of the seminar for *Zeitgeschichte* at the University of Tübingen and the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Trier. It is headed by the German historians Anselm Doering-Manteuffel (University of Tübingen) and Lutz Raphael (University of Trier). The research cluster builds on Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael’s eponymous book, which proposed a new perspective for Western European history from 1970 on. Both historians call for the re-evaluation of the period in a framework of interdisciplinary analysis and propose a historical caesura for the 1970s. Their

research cluster is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) since 2009 and has produced a wide array of scholarship since its inception.

The work of the research cluster is based on the publication of *Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (After the Boom. Perspectives on *Zeitgeschichte* since 1970) by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael in 2008.⁴ In this extended essay, the authors propose their new take on contemporary German history, partitioning it into an era of the boom following World War II and a time after the boom, beginning as a culmination of ruptures in the 1970s.⁵ Their take on history is superficially speaking materialistic, since they focus mostly on economic structures and events. However, in resemblance of Bloch and Braudel, they aim at a perspective on history close to a *histoire totale*, which acknowledges the entanglements between cultural, economic, political, and social factors. While this all-encompassing structural take on history only becomes visible to a limited degree in their publication, it is mostly due to the methodological character of the essay. For heuristic reasons, Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael predominantly use economic history to illustrate their methodology. The authors however encourage an engagement across historical sub-disciplines with the framework of *Nach dem Boom*, and their methodological work provides historians with a toolset for further analysis beyond the materialistic approach presented in the essay.

Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael do not use the term “boom” exclusively to address the German *Wirtschaftswunder* of the post-war years, to which it is commonly ascribed. Instead they rather define it as a general era of economic and political well-being marked by the strong presence of the state ranging from the 1950s to the early 1970s.⁶ The authors characterize the time of the boom in Germany, as well as in other West European countries (most notably France and Great Britain) as a period of strong economic growth, governed by the principles of Keynesian economics, aimed at a ‘liberal consensus’ between labor, state, and capital. These premises, however, fall apart in the 1970s, and give rise to the new ideology of neoliberalism and ultimately the system of digital finance capitalism still in place today. Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael propose that the ruptures of the 1970s and 1980s mark the beginning of the ‘Prehistory of the Present’.⁷

Their work becomes especially interesting for academics on a conceptual level: they introduce two concepts, which are central to the scholarship that followed.

⁴ Lutz Raphael and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

⁵ Raphael and Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom*, 13.

⁶ For related descriptions of the ‘boom’ era see for example Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London; New York: Verso, 2013) for the European context and Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016) for the American context.

⁷ ‘Prehistory of the Present’ is the title of their most recent edited collection - Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Lutz Raphael, and Thomas Schlemmer, *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart: Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom*, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016). They use variations of the term already in *Nach dem Boom*.

First, they define the time between the 1970s and the 1980s as a caesura, which they refer to as a ‘structural rupture.’⁸ This rupture is qualified by the second concept they introduce, a ‘social change of revolutionary quality.’⁹ Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael identify several of these social changes of revolutionary quality, which build the foundation of their proposed structural rupture in the 1970s. However, they caution the reader that the semantic singular of structural rupture does not mean they are advocating a linear, homogenous transformation process in historical development. Rather, they chose to bundle a wide variety of ruptures they identified across different timeframes and spatial dimensions under the category of structural rupture.¹⁰ They justify this culmination of ruptures for heuristic reasons as follows: “Our thesis of the structural rupture (in the singular) stands in close relation to our lead hypothesis, that the various forms of ruptures all contributed to fostering the new constellation of financial market capitalism.”¹¹

Among the ‘social changes of revolutionary quality’ they identify in their book are the drastic rise in female employment rates, the expansion of the education sector, the digitalization of work processes and private life, as well as the decline of industrial labor in favor of the service economy, and the rise of individualism in management discourse but also in sports and body perception. These changes are obviously of different quality, pace, and range, and Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael acknowledge that throughout their work. They reiterate that the culmination of individual and diverse ruptures formed the structural rupture that paved the way for the structures we experience today. In fact, multi-temporality of ruptures and the paradoxical parallel of continuity and discontinuities are central to their argument: They illustrate this in the example of how despite the paradigm shift to market based neoliberalism in the 1970s, states like West Germany still widely expanded their social welfare programs. In an almost Foucauldian argument, Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael address these continuities and discontinuities by arguing that processes of the decay of one historical epoch and the rise of another happen at the same time, and do not necessarily negate the argument for a structural rupture but are rather part of a nuanced description avoiding teleology.

Methodologically, *Nach dem Boom* is a formidable demonstration of how historians can deconstruct historical processes that are so close to the present, where their impact is still feasible today. The book sparked a wide discussion in German academia, inspiring wide use of the concepts of structural rupture and social change of a revolutionary quality in a number of case studies, many of them coming from the research cluster *Nach dem Boom*, headed by Doering-Manteuffel and

⁸ ‘Strukturbruch’ in the German original text. Following, I will translate important concepts in the text and name the original in the footnotes. See Raphael and Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom*.

⁹ ‘Sozialer Wandel revolutionärer Qualität’.

¹⁰ Raphael and Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom*, 13.

¹¹ Raphael and Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom*, 13.

Raphael. Beyond the use of concepts, *Nach dem Boom* also called for a re-evaluation of the presentist mission of *Zeitgeschichte*; in resemblance of the German historian Hans Günter Hockerts, the authors explicitly call for seeing *Zeitgeschichte* as a problematized history (*Problemgeschichte*) of the present. By leaving behind traditional periodization in decades or political events, and declaring the time-frame from 1970 until today as one era after the boom, they want to encourage a historical discourse that integrates “national, European, [and] international” narratives to historicize the “challenges of the present.”¹²

Extending the Historiography Nach dem Boom

A first interim balance of the results of the research conducted in the cluster following *Nach dem Boom*, was presented in the publication *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart. Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom* (The Beginnings of the Present. Ruptures in Western Europe after the Boom) edited by Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer. The 2013 book features a collection of essays that present case studies, which used the concepts introduced by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael in their earlier publication. The various essays demonstrate how historians can use the presentist and structuralist approach advocated in *Nach dem Boom* for more narrative historical analysis, while still reflecting on the problematization of the present that Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael called for.¹³

The collection is a valuable indicator of how strong the scholarship coming out of the original project has grown over time. It furthermore provides a re-evaluation of the concepts that Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael introduced in their earlier publication, after they have been *road-tested* in a number of case studies. The variety of essays in the collection furthermore provides readers with a sense of the diversity of application for the framework of structural rupture. While a number of essays deal with classical topics from labor history such as Lutz Raphael’s take on deindustrialization, a variety of authors historicize research from the social sciences, exemplified for example by Tobias Dietrich’s treatment of running as a popular sport and Hannah Jonas’ critique of the narrative of declining attendance figures in soccer stadiums coinciding with the rise of televised sport events.

Methodologically noticeable are two essays by the editors: In the opening essay of the collection, Thomas Schlemmer presents a reflection on the concept of structural rupture. He focusses on describing cultural phenomena as symptoms of a growing sense of uncertainty and loss in Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s. Schlemmer then argues that these sentiments widely contradict the ongoing growth of prosperity and freedom for individual expression central to economic and sociological accounts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This para-

¹² Raphael and Doering-Manteuffel, *Nach dem Boom*, 25–26.

¹³ Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer, eds., *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart: Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom* (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013).

dox, he explains, reiterates the necessity to acknowledge continuities and discontinuities in the narration of *Zeitgeschichte*. His colleague Morten Reitmayer supports this notion in the second introductory essay, when he shows how events with a distinct caesura character are hard to pinpoint in a structurally integrated – across disciplinary boundaries – history of mass cultural phenomena.¹⁴

In a concluding essay, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel reflects on the reactions and challenges of the concepts of *Nach dem Boom* five years after its first publication. He proclaims that the independent case studies presented in the volume exemplify a set of “deep drillings” into the terrain of the era after the boom, which helped establish *Zeitgeschichte* as a problematization of the present. However, the case studies also serve as an example of the plurality of currents in the era under consideration. Following Schlemmer’s introductory remarks, Doering-Manteuffel reiterates the need to consider continuities and discontinuities in the writing of *Zeitgeschichte* in order to challenge teleological frameworks.¹⁵

The essays in the 2013 collection show the broad variety of areas in which the concepts of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael can be used to complicate teleological narratives. Most of them furthermore interact with research from the social sciences, historicizing political and sociological data to provide a more nuanced picture.¹⁶ Notably absent from the collection, however, is a detailed engagement with the global turn in historiography. Most of the essays presented have a quite narrow spatial focus and rarely engage with transnational entanglements in their historical reasoning. While the collected volume demonstrates the diverse possibilities of applying Doering-Manteuffel’s and Raphael’s conceptual framework to different topical areas, a further engagement over extended spatial areas is still missing. Since a majority of the essays in the collection are part of larger dissertation projects, it is safe to assume that the scholarship on these topics making extensive use of the terminology, periodization, and conceptual framework of *Nach dem Boom* will continue to grow in the near future.

¹⁴ See Thomas Schlemmer, “Der diskrete Charme der Unsicherheit. Einleitende Bemerkungen,” in *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart: Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom*, ed. Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 8–10. Morten Reitmayer, “Nach dem Boom – eine neue Belle Époque? Versuch einer vorläufigen Synthese,” in *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart: Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom*, eds. Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 21.

¹⁵ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, “Die Vielfalt der Strukturbrüche und die Dynamik des Wandels in der Epoche nach dem Boom,” in *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart: Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom*, ed. Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 135–45.

¹⁶ See also Alexander Gallus’ essay “On the Relation Between History and Political Science”, where he names the research on *Nach dem Boom* as a prime example on how social and political sciences can serve as “suppliers of social data” for an integrated version of structural history. Alexander Gallus, “Über das Verhältnis von Geschichts- und Politikwissenschaft,” *Aus Politik Und Zeitgeschichte* 62. Jahrgang, no. 1–3/2012 (January 2, 2012), 39–45.

In a recent book entitled *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart. Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom* (Prehistory of the Present. Dimensions of Structural Rupture After the Boom), editors Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael provide an extensive update on the current state of research on the era after the boom and also explicitly acknowledge the need to globalize scholarship on a structurally integrated history of the present. The edited volume contains twenty essays by authors from different sub-disciplines of *Zeitgeschichte* and from the social sciences. Given the scope of this essay, I will not describe the details of each article but rather group them in various areas of research.¹⁷

Among the authors are contributors from the earlier collection *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart*, who basically provide updates on their respective research projects, introduced earlier. The collection is furthermore structured into four distinct parts introducing various areas of scholarship where the framework of *Nach dem Boom* can be applied: The first part mainly deals with describing structural ruptures and formal transformations in the history of labor. Reoccurring themes in these essays are uncertainty and precarity, the transformation from industrial labor to an information society (*Informationsgesellschaft*), the rise of female labor and its implications in a changing work environment, and the revitalization of former industrial cities as ‘creative cities’.¹⁸

The second part of the collection focusses on economic and social policy in between the dynamics of continuity and transformation within contemporary history. Key ideas of this part are the changing conceptions of an anti-inflationary monetary policy, the restructuring of multinational companies in response to challenges and opportunities of a rising global digital finance capitalism, the paradox of continuity and discontinuity in the evolution of the German social welfare state, and the fragile relationship between capital (in the form of interest groups), labor (in the form of unions), and the state. In this chapter, Maria Dörnemann’s essay on the relation between supranational development politics and modernization theory takes a notable first step in the direction of applying the methodology of *Nach dem Boom* on a transnational or even global level beyond the Eurocentric realm.¹⁹

The essays in part three of the collection aim at historicizing the rise of contemporary consumer society and its implications for individualization processes advocated in the 2008 publication. Authors in this part present topics ranging from the rise of consumerism in general to a more genealogical analysis of trends like fast food and health food booms, the commercialization of sport events, and also

¹⁷ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Lutz Raphael, and Thomas Schlemmer, *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart: Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom*, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

¹⁸ Doering-Manteuffel, Raphael, and Schlemmer, *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart*, 37–170.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 173–290.

the changing perceptions of sports as an individual practice influenced by changing perceptions of gender and body.²⁰

The final part of the collection examines the different perceptions and intellectual debates surrounding temporality in the era after the boom. The essays in this part elaborate on dimensions of time and space in the history of ideas of sixties radical movements and the emergence of poststructuralism as a paradigm in the humanities and social sciences, the shift in mentalities and upcoming post-historical sentiments, transforming horizons of expectations coinciding with changing labor markets, and the semantics of elitism within a new global class of leaders in the financial sector.²¹

In a lengthy opening essay to the collection, Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael also reflect in more detail than in *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart* on the impact and current state of research of their project *Nach dem Boom*. They proclaim that since the inception of the project, the discourse of *Zeitgeschichte* “has left the accustomed paths of tenacious advancement through the decades.”²² Engagement with source material and data from across academic disciplines has ended the constraints of archival blocking periods. They furthermore reiterate that *Zeitgeschichte* has begun to “become a problematized history (*Problemgeschichte*) of the present.”²³ The project and publications following its methodological approach have served to strengthen the empirical foundation of research on a presentist contemporary history in Germany and across Europe.

However, eight years after the original publication of *Nach dem Boom*, the authors also see room for improvement in certain fields. In resemblance of Doering-Manteuffel’s closing reflections in *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart*, they call for a more productive engagement with the plurality of temporalities emerging from the assessment of diverse ruptures in different sub-disciplines under the umbrella-concept of a singular structural rupture qualifying the epochal change.²⁴ They furthermore argue for a stronger engagement of the history of science and technologies with the rise of digitalization in the 1990s, which was central to the original thesis of a rise of digital finance capitalism, and which the authors now see as possibly revolutionary enough to justify another internal caesura (*Binnenzäsur*).²⁵ Finally, Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael hope for a further engagement of historians and social scientists focused on the development of democratic systems with the loss of state sovereignty implicit in the emergence of supranational digital finance capitalism central in *Nach dem Boom*.²⁶

²⁰ Doering-Manteuffel, Raphael, and Schlemmer, *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart*, 293–370.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 373–495.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

Looking back on projects employing the framework of *Nach dem Boom*, they however also mention a number of historiographical trends in *Zeitgeschichte* outside of the direct vicinity of their research cluster. The authors proclaim that their project inspired a wider use of social sciences data in historical work, but that this entanglement between the disciplines also proved reciprocal: they see the formation of a “counterweight against the trend in social sciences to keep a distance from historical explanatory approaches and detailed critique.”²⁷ They acknowledge a general resurgence of economic history as a response to the global turn, and they laud the establishment of new research centers for a global history of labor in Germany and the Netherlands.²⁸

While the reception of the work in academic circles is hard to deny, it is important to acknowledge how the conceptual work of *Nach dem Boom* is also present in discourses that are aimed at a broader audience in the context of civic education. In a recent issue of *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* on the 1980s, various essays take up the approach advocated by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael: Angela Siebold examines the history of the 1980s as an “area of tension between old and new.”²⁹ Detlef Siegfried elaborates on the plurality of contrary processes emerging from similar structural changes, coinciding with the rise of right-wing rock music in his assessment of a new leftist understanding of popular music culture in West-Germany.³⁰ And finally Lutz Raphael reexamines the concept of the era after the boom in the same publication, arguing against what he calls a “fetish of decades” (*Dekadenkultur*) in *Zeitgeschichte*, which forestalls a nuanced periodization of contemporary narratives.³¹

The wide variety of scholarship stemming from the project *Nach dem Boom* not only underlines its significance with recent German historiography, it also demonstrates how the research cluster serves as a prime example for the German practice of *Zeitgeschichte*. In addition to that, the reception of the project beyond traditional academic circles exemplifies how *Zeitgeschichte* interacts with the public sphere and practitioners across disciplines.

While it successfully highlights the achievements of the research cluster in the recent years, the opening reflection of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael in *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart* should also make the reader aware of the limitations of the project: Without downplaying the academic impact the conceptual framework of *Nach dem Boom* exerts, the scholarship making use of it is still quite confined

²⁷ Doering-Manteuffel, Raphael, and Schlemmer, *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 and 20. They are referring to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and the re:work cluster at Humboldt University of Berlin.

²⁹ Angela Siebold, “So nah und doch so fern? Die 1980er Jahre historisch erforschen,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 65. Jahrgang, no. 46/2015 (November 9, 2015), 3–8.

³⁰ Detlef Siegfried, “Die Subversive retten. Eine Denkfigur der 1980er Jahre” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 65. Jahrgang, no. 46/2015 (November 9, 2015), 13–19.

³¹ Lutz Raphael, “1980er: Typische Jahre ‘nach dem Boom,’” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 65. Jahrgang, no. 46/2015 (November 9, 2015), 8–13.

to a circle of mostly German academics. None of the major publications I have discussed have been translated into English. Only individual members of the research cluster have published occasional articles in English journals. It is time to take the authors' call for a transnational or even global turn in the historiography *Nach dem Boom* seriously and integrate their conceptual framework into global narratives. While the approach pursued by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael is decidedly aimed at explaining Western European history, the framework they use is not limited to European application. Central to their take on *Zeitgeschichte* is a narrative evolving around structural ruptures and the fragile transition from Keynesian models of governance to neoliberalism. The processes underlying these larger trends coincided with phenomena of globalization and global historians should aim at expanding Doering-Manteuffel's and Raphael's concepts as a perspective for entanglements of a global spatial reach. *Nach dem Boom* is integrated across historical sub-disciplines and makes extensive use of scholarship from outside the historic discipline, however, there is still a need to integrate the idea of revolutionary structural change in a global history of the present. As much as *Nach dem Boom* presented a historiographical experiment by transcending (sub-)disciplinary boundaries, global historians may benefit from approaching contemporary history from a broad 'universal' perspective, looking at cultural, social, economic, and political processes as one structurally integrated narrative to overcome challenges of different temporalities in a global spatial arena and identify structural ruptures on a global level.

The research cluster *Nach dem Boom* serves as a prime example for a progressive approach to the German practice of *Zeitgeschichte*, and I argue that academics following a global perspective can benefit widely from building on this approach. In the latter part of this essay I present a number of examples in which transnational or global historians have interacted with structural ruptures similar to those of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael. Finally, I argue that the conceptual framework of *Nach dem Boom* is compatible and useful for examining contemporary history from a global perspective. Historiographically, a number of authors in world history have attempted to pursue a structurally integrated global narrative of the recent past. Most notably among these is Eric Hobsbawm in his work *Age of Extremes*, in which he follows the history of the 20th century from a universal perspective in the sense of earlier universal histories such as Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study of History*. While Hobsbawm's treatment of recent history does not live up to the methodology of global history defining the field today, he can be seen as a predecessor to integrating entangled narratives into his mostly teleological framework of universal world history. Since Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael cite Hobsbawm multiple times in *Nach dem Boom*, the following part of my essay will briefly introduce his work.

Towards a Global Contemporary History

“The History of the twenty years after 1973 is that of a world which lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis. And yet, until the 1980s it was not clear how irretrievably the foundations of the Golden Age had crumbled.”³² With these words, the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm made the transition into the 1970s in his major work on the 20th century, *The Age of Extremes*. Hobsbawm’s passionate account of a troubled century is a universal history with a startling geographical and conceptual range, encompassing all corners of the earth and acknowledging currents across historical sub-disciplines.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Hobsbawm’s unique take on history in detail, however there are a few details striking about his work that deserve mention in the context of a global perspective on *Zeitgeschichte*: First, *The Age of Extremes* is quoted and referred to by various writers within in the research cluster *Nach dem Boom*, including Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael. Second, its presentist, political approach to history bears resemblance to the framework advocated by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael (even though *Nach dem Boom* can hardly be considered a Marxist work). Genealogically, it is easy to trace back rough schemes for ideas elaborated by them, to the work of Hobsbawm. His chapter on “The Crisis Decades” widely examines the rise of neoliberalism and the demise of Keynesian economics in the “Western” world in the 1970s and 1980s. He suggests a similar periodization as *Nach dem Boom*, when he sets the recession and oil price crisis of 1973 as a rupture from the “golden age” and as the brink of troubled decades to follow. Hobsbawm furthermore identifies deindustrialization as the main cause of a shifting labor market across the globe. In regard to “Western” industrial societies he even acknowledges that the “rising unemployment of these decades was not merely cyclical but *structural*.”³³

Even though *The Age of Extremes* might look like an early globally integrated predecessor to the narrative of *Nach dem Boom*, Hobsbawm misses a structural analysis in the sense of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael in many ways: Hobsbawm’s explanations, despite their insightfulness, are to a large degree teleological. He fails to account for the plurality of processes of continuity and discontinuity so central in the later German scholarship. It is because of that that he misses the contradictory developments of market capitalism and social welfare state in Sweden when he declares that “[a]t the end of the Short Twentieth Century the ‘Swedish Model’ [meaning Keynesian policy *par excellence*] was in retreat even in its own country”, a prognosis that has been shown wrong by the absence

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995). 403. I am citing from the first American edition published by Pantheon Books 1995, the book was originally published in Great Britain by Michael Joseph and Pelham Books, 1994.

³³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 413. Emphasis added.

of the decay of the Swedish welfare state.³⁴ Furthermore, while treating inequality in the different industrial societies in quite some detail, Hobsbawm sees the decades of crisis as a rather homogenous period, not acknowledging different temporalities of decay and response in diverse spatial contexts. Finally, he widely underestimates the growing discourse of neoliberalism and its influence on the rise of digital finance capitalism in the 1990s, when he asserts that “neo-liberal triumphalism did not survive the world economic setbacks of the early 1990s.”³⁵ To be fair, it was hard for him to see these developments in hindsight, since his book was published in 1994, only shortly after the internet became publicly accessible and only on the verge of contemporary digitalization processes.

Outside of history departments, a number of mostly leftist sociologists and economists have developed notable treatments on the transformation of global capitalism and its dynamics in recent years. Among the most prominent works in this field are Luc Boltanski’s and Eve Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), which explores the influence of 1968 counterculture language on management texts, and proposes a rise of individualism in the rhetoric of financial culture beginning in the 1970s, Wolfgang Streeck’s books *Re-Forming Capitalism. Institutional Change in the German Political Economy* (2009) and the more radical *Gekaufte Zeit. Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*. (Purchased Time. The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism), in which Streeck traces back the transformation of capitalism in Germany (and in the latter book also in the US and Japan) to the end of consensual politics in the 1970s, and to a degree the recent best-seller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty, who has a far wider timeframe of transformation, yet still does not contradict the findings of Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael.³⁶

All these social science accounts have in common that they treat the economic and social phenomena described by Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael from a transnational if not even global perspective. As is common for work in these disciplines, all these accounts are furthermore fairly presentist, analyzing problems of the present by looking at the near past. However, a global historical account with strong presentist notion and an integration of a structural approach ranging across disciplines is still missing. Practitioners of global history aimed at informing about the present have mostly been confined to narratives of decolonization, the global Cold War, or generalized histories of globalization, which mostly fall

³⁴ For further assessment of Sweden’s crisis decades in the 1970s and 1980s within the conceptual framework of *Nach dem Boom* see Lars Magnusson, “Do the Nordic Lights Shine Bright Again? Sweden’s Response to the 1970s and 1980s Crisis,” *Journal of Modern European History* Vol. 9, no. 2 (2011), 195–214.

³⁵ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 412.

³⁶ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1999). Wolfgang Streeck, *Re-Forming Capitalism: Institutional Change in the German Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Wolfgang Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit: Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013). Thomas Piketty, *Le capital au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2013).

short of reaching into the present moment, explaining processes that are still underway.³⁷

Global historians should consider engaging with the practice of a presentist, political *Zeitgeschichte* as presented in this essay – the flexible toolbox provided by the methodology of *Nach dem Boom* which provides them with a starting point. In fact, a lot of the groundwork of the original study already bears the premises for a further global perspective on the topic: the pillars of Doering-Manteuffel's and Raphael's periodization lie in the recession connected to the oil price crisis in 1973. The oil price hike in itself presents a global moment that was only possible due to a globally integrated financial market. If we accept Sebastian Conrad's idea of global history as a historical perspective that acknowledges the integration of actors in a global network and then examines causation on a global level, the framework of *Nach dem Boom* presents us with a degree of approachable starting points.³⁸

Many of the dynamics described in the case studies that followed the initial publication furthermore show regional or local aspects of transformation processes that took causation from larger integrated networks. This emphasis on locality only underlines the fact that the nation-state is not the appropriate container for the study of the presented ruptures anymore. It is up to global historians to uncover the entanglements between the diverse local narratives and larger supranational networks of causation, and weave them into an encompassing global narrative. In a 2012 article the global historian Andreas Eckert argued that the comprising transnational and regional literature on development policies had the potential to become “a building block among many, upon which in a few years eventually a global history of the 20th century à la Osterhammel might be written.”³⁹ I argue that the conceptual framework of *Nach dem Boom*, indeed should become such a building block for global contemporary history.

³⁷ See for example: Dietmar Rothermund, *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations: The Aftermath of Decolonization, 1945–2013* (Daryaganj, Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Geschichte der Globalisierung: Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*, 5th ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2007).

³⁸ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton Univers. Press, 2016).

³⁹ Andreas Eckert, “Globalgeschichte Und Zeitgeschichte,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 62. Jahrgang, no. 1–3/2012 (January 2, 2012), 28–32. He is referring to Jürgen Osterhammel's monumental account of the 19th century, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung Der Welt. Eine Geschichte Des 19. Jahrhunderts*. (München: Beck, 2009).