I wrote my first historical essay when I was about 35 years old. It dealt with Galileo’s theories of inertial motion and it was just one chapter in my second PhD dissertation. The topic was inspired by my mentor at the University of Sussex (near Brighton), England, Paul Feyerabend, who impressed the importance of history on me. As such it was situated on a personal trajectory that began with a PhD in Physical Chemistry in Pretoria, followed by a major rupture when I was asked by my employer, the South African Atomic Energy Board, to contribute my skills to the apartheid-regime’s nascent atomic bomb program. This was out of the question: I had actively opposed racial oppression and worked with young Black activists against an increasingly brutal regime. Though relatively naïve about world affairs (TV was only introduced into South Africa in 1976) I was personally engaged at the intersection between state violence and nuclear politics. It was time to go.

The academic job market in the early 80s in England was probably even more discouraging than it is today. I had an adjunct teaching position in the History and Social Studies of Science at the University of Sussex, with no tenure track position on the horizon—but I was at one of best institutions of its kind at the time, the Science Policy Research Unit. SPRU regularly hosted senior UK government officials. One of them asked me to join an international team writing the history of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva. After five years based in the lab on that project, I was funded as team leader writing the history of the European Space Agency (ESA)—and was seconded as a research fellow to the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy (that hosted ESA’s archives). For all this time I was earning “soft money.” It was only in 1995 that I was recruited by the French national research system as director of the Centre de recherche en histoire des sciences et des techniques (CRHST), in Paris – where I finally got the equivalent of tenure in 1997. This peripatetic adventure may seem glamorous—Brighton, Geneva, Florence, Paris, there are worse places to be! But it was financially unstable, and the constant relocation seriously unsettled my family life. I also acquired multiple dimensions of the craft of the historian.

Writing institutional histories can pose perils to intellectual autonomy. There was no question that either CERN or ESA would control what we wrote and published. This was ingrained in the ethos of a major (civilian) physics laboratory. It was institutionalized at ESA, which specifically established an international

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advisory committee of historians to discuss our progress. Both institutions had huge archives that we could freely consult.

Working in a team had enormous benefits for me. An extremely fine French historian of science, Dominique Pestre, joined the team at CERN and became both a close friend and a mentor. There was nothing more fruitful than spending hours with Dominique discussing the significance of key documents, establishing a periodization for the narrative, planning and making oral histories, and selecting, from the mass of material at our disposal key questions that should frame our history. These are the skills most of my peers learnt at graduate school. I did not have that opportunity: collaborating with Dominique during my first few years at CERN filled the gap.

Institutional histories tend to be linear and undertheorized. They predominantly aim to tell a story and, if possible, to disturb existing myths and preconceptions that surround any major organization that wants a history to record its achievements. Working through thousands of pages of archival material in Geneva and then in Florence, while under pressure to produce before the money ran out, left little time to read the literature and to situate my research in a broader intellectual framework. I was determined to overcome this burden while at the EUI. There I participated in a weekly seminar inherited from the outstanding British historian of European integration, Alan Milward (author of *The European Rescue of the Nation State*), who had just left Florence. This fused my interest in the history of physics and of space in postwar Europe—two paradigmatic Cold War domains—with the history of European integration. I broke new ground in seeing CERN and ESA as robust scientific and technological platforms on which to rebuild Europe after the war. There was just one piece of the puzzle missing: the role of the United States in the process of European scientific and technological reconstruction. The “solution” to that arose for me when, in the year 2000, I was offered the Kranzberg Professorship in the History of Technology at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta (GATech). I could now easily complement my research in European sources and in the British archives in London with American documents, notably the wonderful official collections in the National Archives in Washington, DC and in US Presidential Libraries. This quickly bore fruit with the publication of my *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (MIT Press, 2006). This was followed later by my *Sharing Knowledge, Shaping Europe. U.S. Technological Collaboration and Nonproliferation* (MIT Press: 2017).

I had a number of major advantages at GATech. I was recruited to build the graduate program, so I had a low teaching load. My own research, and the graduate program, was given an enormous amount of financial support by the B&B Stern Foundation. This enabled me to visit archives and attend conferences almost at will, including many annual meetings of the History of Science Society (HSS), of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), and of the Society for History of Technology (SHOT; of which I was elected president in 2017–18). GATech was also very supportive of my accepting external awards e.g. to the Davis Center at Princeton, to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Caltech, to the Liu Institute at the University of British Columbia and to the National Air and Space Museum. As one member of a small department with a handful of historians in a huge engineering school, the intellectual stimuli and reorientations pursuant on immersion in the different kinds of history done at these various locations was crucial to me. As a social historian of science, technology and foreign policy during the Cold War, and up to the early twenty-first century, it is impossible to keep up with the literature. Attendance at seminars given by specialized scholars in one’s fields of interest helps bring the multidisciplinary historian “up to speed,” if only temporarily. It enabled me to publish extensively across a variety of disciplinary specific journals from the *British Journal for the History of Science* to *History and Technology* (of which I was the editor for over a decade), *Isis*,

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GATech offered me another advantage: I could interact regularly with several of the outstanding engineering research faculty. In fact this led to a major and ongoing research project. I was told that the Institute’s president had invited the FBI to address the engineering community on the risk of sharing unclassified knowledge with visiting Chinese scholars and even with enrolled Chinese graduate students. I was stunned by what I heard at that meeting and embarked on a major study of the overlooked role (at the time) of the US government in regulating the global circulation of dual-use knowledge and know-how on university campuses. The result was a co-authored book with Mario Daniels, who was then at Georgetown University, on the history of American export controls over knowledge circulation in trade and in university research from the early twentieth century to the Trump era.3 One of the spinoffs of that study has been invitations by both the NSF (National Science Foundation) and the Department of Commerce to discuss what history can tell us about the impact of export controls on university research—an engagement with current national policy making that still informs my work. Another has been a further broadening of my intellectual framework to engage with the growing body of scholarship on the US as an imperial formation, inspired by scholars like Kate Epstein, Daniel Immerwahr, Paul Kramer, Charles Maier, Mary Mitchell, and Jessica Wang.4 This has been particularly useful for analyzing the current ‘chip war’ between the United States and the People’s Republic of China, which involves the extraterritorial application of an increasingly sophisticated and far-reaching export control regulatory system.5

This rational reconstruction of my intellectual trajectory expresses my passion for writing history and the richness of the social interactions that have inspired me over decades. It draws a veil over the tremendous challenges faced by multidisciplinary research that constantly runs up against the conservatism of entrenched academic disciplines. In this regard transnational and global history have done more than simply break the national frame. Along with movements like cultural history and feminist history they have raised questions for students of US foreign relations that show no respect for sharp disciplinary boundaries. They have also created a space to think about the US as an imperial formation. In a book on empires published in 2006, Charles Maier remarked that he had “decided to avoid claiming that the United States is or is not an empire” since it was “so polarizing that readers never get past the definition.”6 Non-US citizens like myself were particularly vulnerable to discrimination—and experienced it—since, as Maier pointed out, until recently “most historians and commentators” who discussed the issue regarded it as “somehow un-American” to treat the United States as an empire.7 These days are over, helped along by the spike in empire talk around the time of the Iraq war, and the unabashed advocacy of American imperial rule by historians like Niall Ferguson.8 The drift in my own work from hegemony to empire took a different tack. It involved joining with others in decoupling imperialism from territorial possession and reading the exercise of American global power

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6 Maier, Among Empires, 3.
7 Maier, Among Empires, 2.
through the lens of “soft” instruments (like extraterritorial export controls over knowledge circulation) backed by various forms of coercion over allies and enemies alike. It was crowned by the publication of a Festschrift in my honor, edited by one of my PhD students, that will appear in the journal History and Technology later this year.¹¹

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¹¹ My contribution to the collection is John Krige, “From Coproduced Hegemony to Coerced Imperial Governance,” History and Technology, (2024), forthcoming.