

Section I

CHRONOTYPOLOGIES

Questions of Space, Time,
Class, Race and State

Chronotypologies

An Introduction

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In this section, we engage in a critical dialogue with the idea of periodisation types, taking as our starting point the typology developed by Jörn Rüsen and introduced in chapter 1, “Making Periodisation Possible.” Here, Rüsen categorises “concepts of the course of time” (i.e. *Zeitverlaufsvorstellungen*) or periodisation models as “traditional,” and “exemplary,” “genetic” and “critical” types of narrative. In the five case studies that follow, we attempt to re-examine these typologies, considering, for example, the powerful hold of some of the most prevalent “traditional” and “exemplary” periodisation schemes in the world—speaking of the recurrence of revolutions, for example, in establishing linear concepts of historical thinking, or making use of established *chronotypes* such as the division into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern History. “Genetic” readings, according to Rüsen, emphasise the particular (national, racial, state) development of certain time frames within certain socio-historical and space-time contingencies, while “critical” approaches question the usefulness of specific periodisation schemes and the entire idea of their permanence. While Rüsen would contend that all of these typologies can be read as universal schemes, able to cover “the multitude and diversity of human life forms,” the authors in this section, each of whom take the perspectives of individual historical actors very seriously, are offering a variety of readings with different regional and disciplinary foci: from Islamic history writing (race), to subaltern history (class politics), from American history (time logics), to EurAsian *Histoire croisée* (space-logics) and finally, from the perspective of the Palestinian (non-) state.

The papers critically position themselves vis-à-vis the typology offered by Rüsen, by showing variations to what he has called “traditional” approaches to periodisation which emphasise the enduring value of certain normative epochal events (such as the Italian Renaissance, the Mongolian Invasion, the French Revolution, the Fall of the Berlin Wall) and their aftermath from which general rules for the development of time, with a universal and eternal validity within a certain historical unit, are formulated. While they discuss what Rüsen calls “exemplary” narratives which take such normative epochal events and make these events into *chronotypes* (Medieval, Modern), falling themselves more into the “genetic” than the “critical,” they simultaneously question to what extent typologies such as the four suggested by Rüsen,

are in fact applicable to different regions, times, races and state forms. As Susynne McElrone argues, periodisation is “temporal and temporary” and “in function it is impermanent.”¹ Indeed, in her view, all periodisations are always already “subjected to re-evaluation and likely reorganisation in the future as a result of, or sometimes in order to engender, a paradigmatic turn in our interpretation of the significance of the pasts they have ordered.” In her words: “The future restructuring of periodisations may be catalysed by uncovered aspects of the past that had remained hidden, future pasts that will have occurred in the interim, or the development of an innovative mode of thought that shifts perceptions about existent interpretations of the past.” It is the purpose of this section to scrutinize some of the theoretical possibilities enabling such a restructuring of chronological orders, thus rethinking the importance of particular ways of segmenting the past for the present and the future.

1 The citations following here are taken from her contribution to this volume, McElrone, 121.