

Anachronisms



International symposium
Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires et
Transculturelles (CRIT), Université de Franche-Comté
Musée du Temps, Besançon
19-20 March 2020

Organizers

Anne Deffarges, Université de Franche-Comté, CRIT
Hélène Valance, Université de Franche-Comté, CRIT

Scientific committee

Sylvie Aprile, Université Paris Nanterre
Gil Bartholeyns, Université de Lille
Laurence Dahan-Gaida, Université de Franche-Comté
Rémi Labrusse, Université Paris Nanterre
Laurence Reibel, Musée du Temps, Besançon
Daniele Rivoletti, Université de Clermont Auvergne
Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, Université Paris Diderot
Steven Sarson, Université Lyon III Jean Moulin

Call for papers

Brutus : « Peace ! Count the clock.”

Cassius: “The clock has stricken three.”

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II, i, 193-94.

Today, as historical truth is turned into mystification and conspiracy, censored by resurging nationalisms, and increasingly subject to open attacks from the political and media powers, it seems urgent to interrogate the way we imagine and reimagine history. The 19th century has often been described as the moment when history emerged as a scientific discipline, strongly marked by positivism. Yet modern and contemporary historians, thinkers, artists and writers have often pushed the limits of strict scientific approaches. Beyond a purely rational scientific method, they have developed a much less disciplined, somewhat baroque vision of the past, one that privileges distortions, divergences, incoherences. Anachronism appears as one of the most interesting of these forms of discrepancy. While at first sight anecdotal and amusing, if not ridiculous, the misalignments of anachronism open up a fertile field of significations for researchers in a wide range of disciplines.

Anachronism often betrays, first, historical forgery. It signals a sometimes deliberate, sometimes unconscious rewriting of history, always attesting to an inevitable projection of the present into the past. It jarringly questions historical interpretation and the multiple relays between past and present. It is a major issue in translation, as for instance with the introduction of Christian references in medieval translation of Ancient texts, or, more recently, in the introduction of medieval vocabulary in the French version of *Game of Thrones*, when the original text by Geore R. R. Martin was written in decidedly modern English.

Yet, because it helps to us identify with the past and thus to better understand it, anachronism is not just a deviance, but rather a byway into history. In that sense, it also invites historians to **an epistemological inquiry**, so much so that some actually praise its merits. Examining the rewritings of history through anachronism, this symposium will consider how literature and visual arts relate to history: how they write history, which history do they write, and how they situate themselves with regards to the specific, scientific work of historians. Just as history was developing into an academic discipline, a rival form, the novel, was imposing itself as a powerful tool to describe the rapid transformations of society (it is impossible not to think of Balzac’s *Human Comedy*, depicting the mutations of 19th century France). The rise of history also coincided with the birth of photography, which, as François Brunet has shown, became itself a form of history, if not counter-history. Literature and the visual arts, if not strictly speaking a historical source, can still provide great resources for historians.

Anachronism casts light on the issues of historical fiction and reality, exploring their productive intersections, as does for instance Patrice Boucheron’s exploration of “time concordance” and historical narration. In this perspective, this symposium will examine the **creative potential** of anachronism through the appropriations of the past in visual arts and literature. The aim is, to follow Pierre Bayard’s suggestion, to turn away from a

linear conception of history, and to consider the coexistence – be it discordant or harmonious – of multiple temporalities within one work.

Whether it is intentional or unconscious, born from manipulation or self-deception, anachronism stems from a certain vision of the world: this symposium will focus on the **political dimensions** of anachronism. Anachronism is often a past talking in the present tense: in Maurice Druon's *Accursed Kings*, for example, King Philip the Fair's portrayal is derived from Druon's contemporary Charles de Gaulle. Anachronism can be read as a persistence of the past, a reluctance to "be gone," the presence of a past that shapes us as much as we reshape it. Instrumentalizing historical facts, anachronism contribute to the construction of a historical vision, or help affirm the dominant discourse on history. One of the first novelists of modernity, Emile Zola, thus embedded new perspectives in the description of older ones. His characters experience life as would individuals living in the 1870s and 1880s, but the backdrop to their story is the Second Empire. Focusing through his anachronisms on the crucial transition between Empire and Republic, Zola, helps canalizing social trends towards the republican regime. His approach, very controversial in his time, was eventually accepted as the prevailing view on his works, so much so that today's readers can misconstrue the political atmosphere of the Empire. In this sense, Zola's novels have actually participated in the construction of history.

Conversely, anachronism can be used as a way to counter censorship, and to bring forth revealing analogies, an implicit critique nested in the interstice between historical truth and its reinventions. Theater and cinema often play with anachronism to that effect: in Imperial Germany, playwright Gerhart Hauptmann and visual artist Käthe Kollwitz transposed the social unrest of their times into the Silesian weavers' uprising of the 1840s. Christian Petzold's movie *Transit* (2018) is absolutely faithful to the letter of Anna Seghers's 1944 novel: as in the novel, the story takes place in Marseille, policemen are French, refugees are German, the threatening invader is also German. Yet the setting is that of today. The shift is never once mentioned in the film, but the viewer cannot see it without thinking of the migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean today. This last example, because it is so engrained in our time, raises the question of its future relevance. What other reading(s) of the film could emerge in the future? Paradoxically, anachronism is both out of step with time, and fundamentally *of its time*.

We are convinced that anachronism is essentially a theme which can be visited from varied points of views and allows for a wide debate, we do hope this call for papers will be of interest to colleagues in various fields of research. We invite scholars across disciplines and specializations to submit their proposals (one page maximum) **before October 15, 2019** to Anne Deffarges and H el ene Valance:

Anne.deffarges@univ-fcomte.fr

Helene.valance@univ-fcomte.fr

Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires et Transculturelles (CRIT, EA 3224)
Universit e de Franche-Comt e
32 rue M egevand
25000 Besan on