Achronicity/Anachronism (1000-1700)

UNC Chapel Hill, Feb 21–23, 2013
Deadline: Apr 30, 2012

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An Interdisciplinary Conference to take place on February 21-23, 2013, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Sponsored by the Program in Medieval and Early Modern Studies (MEMS)

Anachronism is a term that seems to presuppose a fixed and dominant temporal order, a chronological sequence within which each element or event occupies its own proper coordinates within the orderly flow of time. A Greek term, the “anachronistic” has become inseparable from its close Latin counterpart, the “preposterous”—literally, the before-behind. Anachronism has often been seen as a fault; a fault either testifying to a given culture’s lack of historical consciousness and historicist sensibilities, e.g. the Middle Ages’s supposed inability to think in historicist terms, or else as a type of scholarly error. Anachronism is an accusation, an error, a transgression, a stigma. The charge of anachronism seeks to reveal a critical failure to understand the pastness of the past. This perceived failure in turn exposes to ridicule scholars, artists, and entire cultures that are guilty of this charge.

Yet arguably, even the most academically disciplined ways of thinking historically cannot proceed without disavowed acts of anachronism. As scholars of the “medieval” and “early modern” eras, we know that the very names attached to our historical fields of specialty are the product of creative anachronism. The Middle Ages could not become its middling self until the moment of its death, the advent of the Renaissance. What is more anachronistic than the idea of “The Renaissance,” imagined as a phoenix-like return to antiquity that completely circumvents history—the “Middle Ages” itself?

Furthermore, medieval and early modern texts bear evidence of a multiplicity of temporalities that allow for various and varied experiences of time itself. This heterogeneous premodern notion of time includes Biblical time, historical time, seasonal time, and times for worship. It recognizes diverse practices of typological or allegorical reading that coexist with literal reading, and it suggests a complex understanding of notions such as originality, authenticity, and authority. In the context of this conference, achronicity refers to this productive multiplicity of temporalities.

This conference will provide a select group of scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplinary fields in the humanities an opportunity to investigate together the creative potential of anachronism and/or achronicity. It addresses the ways in which temporality was conceptualized, experi-

enced, strategically exploited, aesthetically constructed and ideologically challenged in the medieval and early modern periods. Some of the questions driving this conference are: How can anachronism/achronicity be strategically deployed to highlight problematic aspects of temporality? How can anachronism/achronicity be used to signify competing temporal frames? How does anachronism/achronicity contribute to expressing complex schemes of history, e.g. by linking the eschatological to everyday experience? How does anachronism/achronicity point to the materiality of the historical object itself?

Please submit 500-word abstracts to Prof. Christoph Brachmann (AnachronicityUNC@gmail.com) by April 30, 2012.

Reference:

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