**Mise en texte** and playing with norms

During the second year of our study cycle on the notion of *mise en texte*, we shall pay particular attention to the question of norm and codes, when authors, translators, editors, printers, or even readers, reinvent the conventions which regulate our relationships to written texts and the ways they were initially fashioned.

An historical approach to the *mise en texte* of early modern documents questions the interface between that initial authorial fashioning and the way in which those texts were later preserved and transmitted. The question of norms and codes can be applied to the processes of collecting, transmitting and fashioning community and institutional texts. Recent work in archival records has highlighted the processes of composition but also of the transmission of texts addressed to specific groups or institutions. The constitution of an archive was often normed, to answer several needs: to idealize certain communities for posterity and cement them together by the production of texts whose contents (and sometimes whose form) were considered as the property of a group rather than of a single individual scribe or author. What do those hybrid texts reveal, standing as they do at the crossroads of the individual and the collective, of the private and the public?

The notion of *mise en texte* applies also to editorial choices: edited texts lend themselves to a fragmented way of reading, in which the sum of selected excerpts forms a new whole. The very structure thus becomes the bearer of a new, modified meaning, which questions the relationship between the whole and its parts. Moreover, even when the contents remain whole, what happens when the medium changes? With the advent of digital editions, the reading of texts has been transformed: digitized texts can be approached much more partially, by focusing on specific excerpts now easily found thanks to keyword searching. Textual analysis can be enhanced by technological advances. Those new ways of reading are no longer linear but rather deconstructed and focused on targeted themes.

*Mise en texte* also invites a reflection upon language and the various modes of writing and transmission, whether the documents were destined for publication or not. Literary texts, in their reflexive nature, question language and the codes involved in the writing process. Language sometimes constitutes the main theme, or even the structuring theme, of a text – as is the case, for instance, with travel narratives such as *Gulliver’s Travels*.

The art of writing is, according to Roland Barthes, a ‘remembering freedom’ (*Degré zéro de l’écriture*): creative freedom and novelty flourish out of the fertile ground of tradition. Hence, literary creation should not be envisaged as a break but rather as a continuous process in which past and present meet to bring forth new forms. Therefore, the notion of *mise en texte* questions the codes of literary genres and the interpenetration of genres and modes: when the 18th century saw the birth of a new genre, justly called ‘novel’, what was the future of traditional codes within this new form? For instance, a traditional genre such as satire was reinvested to become a satirical mode which could be inserted into various media (novel, theatre, poetry), and the established epistolary genre lent some of its codes and conventions to the new novel.