Modern Language Association’s presidential theme for 2017 was boundary conditions. This is a notion that belongs in the study of differential equations. This notion was defined by Kwame Anthony Appiah, the then president of the MLA, as the parameters within which one seeks for solutions. We may add that these parameters (which are exactly the ones that need to be defined, at any rate) are also the ones within which one would need to seek for problems. This definition, or set of definitions, imply a metaphorical reading of the mathematical notion, and therefore it represents a challenge for the research in the Humanities: how —the presidential theme suggested— can we think with it from the perspectives of language, literatures, cultures? Will this notion provide us with different insights into our fields of research?

Those fields are, metaphorically as well, tridimensional spaces where movement, derivation, and change happens. Movement, derivation, and change are also three important concepts in the field of differential equations. In a certain way, we are challenged to focus on those notions, and to articulate those ideas, if you wish, to explore the ways in which we ourselves, as scholars, define the parameters within which we work —and to question them. The presidential theme supplied some supporting examples that include, in particular, ethno-territorial lines, disciplinary lines, or the lines between the public and the private as some of the parameters of boundary conditions that define how we approach our field of study. I find that these ideas and examples fit well within the genealogy of presidential themes of the last few years, and in particular those of
vulnerability (under the presidency of Marianne Hirsch in 2015), Literature and its publics (Roland Greene, 2016), or States of Insecurity (Diana Taylor, 2018).

For medievalists, there is a compelling visual and textual example that may help us understand the theoretical productivity of boundary conditions — Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Willeibalm* (a Mittelhochdeutsch epic poem based on the French *Aliscans*), as represented in the Munich-Nuremberg manuscript fragment. In it, the narrator adopts a sensorial role on top of the parchment pages. Outside of frames or other containing graphical devices, the narrator appears with his arms crossed and pointing with his fingers to the other characters he is summoning throughout his narrative. The narrator mediates between them, or between them and the readers. This crossed-arms and crossed-eyed narrator defines the boundary conditions of the interactions being performed on the manuscript page and through the epic poem. By occupying this place, the narrator is centrally challenging the production and uses of space by the different characters — putting them in their place, as it were, both graphically and politically, both narratologically and ethically. At the same time, the narrator also establishes the links between the bi-dimensional page and the symbolic fourth wall where readers and listeners dwell, between the public and the private (as the narrator is the one speaking to the readers, to the public, to the one who wears the mask of the public). He is thus locating himself in the most vulnerable position — even though he is in full surveillance mode in regards to the characters populating the epic. One could say that boundary conditions are those conditions within which one decides to become vulnerable.

These are some preliminary reasons why it seems particularly interesting to pose the question of the boundary conditions from the perspective of medieval studies. We may gain access not only to the formation of the discourses of power, but also to the moments of frailty, the moments of vulnerability — the
moments, indeed, in which the pre-modern public intellectual makes her or his appearance. In this sense, studying boundary conditions is not only about questioning the way in which we devote ourselves to our field of study, but also asking how medieval intellectuals defined the parameters within which they went in quest of problems and figured out possible solutions. How they negotiated their own ethnoterritorial issues, their disciplinary limitations, their public persona.

There are specific literary spaces that have been built across ethnoterritorial lines, that have challenged disciplinary boundaries, and that have played with the interpenetration between public and private personas. They are sometimes difficult to identify because vulnerability — paraphrasing a well known Benjaminian thesis on the concept of history — only flashes for a second in the moment of danger.[ Thesis #6, “To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.”] Moments of danger, however, are sometimes recorded in the form in which those who suffer this danger are able to define the parameters of their cultural and political endeavor.

A good case to study these moments of researched vulnerability and exploration of boundary conditions is what we call the ordo disciplinae, that is, the processes whereby a disciplinary field emerges. Think, for instance, of those moments of constitution of the ordo disciplinae of the field of Dialectics or Logic — a revolutionary theoretical contribution that will reshape knowledge in medieval universities. Such ordo disciplinae comes with extremely risky postulates and logical statements regarding time, the existence of god, or the nature of the immortal soul, as we can see in the works of those intellectuals that Putallaz included in his book on Insolente liberté: Siger of Brabant, of course, but also later
dialecticians like Jean Buridan, Nicolas d’Oresme, and others. Those postulates are the ones that perform the growing boundaries of logical research, conflicting in many ways with the ordo disciplinae of theology in the same universities. The conflicting emergence of these ordines disciplinae coincide in time with the moment of development of early inquisitions — and their postulates will become persecuted in different edicts, including the Anlis one, that will end up with the nailing of the libri catenati, or the better known list of theses condemned in the edict of 1277 by the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier.

In this theoretical and historical frame, one of the most interesting cases of this cultural and political movement occurred in the complicated sociopolitical space defined by the use and transformation of what we call Occitan language. Literary and cultural production in Occitan language during the late 12th and early 13th centuries light up the boundary conditions, the boundary values of what we call courtly culture making them visible in all their vulnerability. This lighting up off those boundaries imply, at the same time the codification — which is one of the discourses of preservation — of the kind of problems and solutions that were defined within those boundaries. I call this movement cultural archeology.

I want to underline the concept of archeology, instead of genealogy or history. Archeology — in the way in which it was proposed by Foucault, and lately rekindled and redefined in the work of Alain de Libera at the Collège de France — is the kind of research that allows us to look not only at lineal boundaries, or at the way those boundaries pile up over time, but also at the interpenetration of boundaries across historical strata. In other words, we do not only look at the formation of a corpus (in this case, for instance, the troubadour corpus), but also at the early transformations in the cultural, political, and social interpretations of this corpus. Archeological research, cultural archeology is
something that belongs in the early transformations of the cultural parameters explored in Occitan language.

Courtly discourses from the 12th century are not necessarily doctrinal or dogmatic constructions regarding the art, techniques, and conceptual range of poetical research. Instead of that, troubadour poetry introduced notions, ideas, living and dead metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson), musical utterances, performing techniques, rhythms, rhymes, cross-referencing —lines of research to be explored, expanded, sometimes abandoned. Jaufre Rudel delineated the theoretical boundaries with four concepts in one of his poems:

No sap chantar qui so non di,
Ni vers trobar qui motz no fa,
Ni conois de rima co-s va
Si razo non enten en si.

These concepts are: mot, so, rima and razo (words, melodies, rhymes, and razo, this last being a notion that defies easy translation, and that may in fact be a very productive untranslatable). Those concepts or notions are nouns, and nouns, in good Aristotelian conceptualization, are detached from time. The verbs that govern the action of those nouns are as important as the central four notions: chantar, dir, trobar, far, conoisser, entendre —or better yet, entendre en si. These are five verbs that open up the disciplinary fields, they unleash the research into the possibilities of those actions. They are the ones that define the boundary values, they are the functions that set differential values across the poetic experience. With those, troubadour poetry expands and explores the topology of courtly cultures and language. Not detached from time —but in time.
This poetic exploration constitutes that of an implicit knowledge centered on those nouns and verbs. To know is also the first verb and main action governing the whole sequence in Jaufre Rudel’s poem: saber (the verb that governs the whole stanza). An implicit knowledge, says Foucault, is “different from the kind of knowledge you may find in science books, philosophical theories, religious justifications”. Such implicit knowledge facilitates — Foucault again — the manifestation of “speculations or ideas, of opinions and practices in a given moment”. The research into this implicit knowledge is what Michel Foucault calls archéologie du savoir.

At what point, under what circumstances, and with what purposes some poets and intellectuals from the very late 12th century and the 13th century became interested in practicing such kind of archeological research? How did they turn the implicit knowledge into an archive? How did they engage in the codification, even the reduction of that vast body of boundless knowledge to certain rules, to a certain science? How did they perform the troubadoresque ordo disciplinae?

The unfinished Occitan epic of Daurel e Beto gives us a good insight into this line of questioning. It is the story of an assassination, a getaway, and a comeback. The assassin is a nobleman, Gui, and the murdered is another nobleman, count Bobis, a father to a baby. Right after Bobis’ assassination, a loyal jongleur in Bobis’ court, by the name of Daurel, rescues the baby, Beto, and takes him with him to Babylon.

Maybe the first archeologist is that particular one jongleur who needs to get away. He is in danger, the generation he has been living with is in danger, the new generation is, indeed, in danger. He is at the crossroads of history, in a state of total insecurity, of maximal vulnerability. He needs to cross his own boundaries, as they are not safe anymore. He needs to cross to a different
language, while preserving his; he needs to cross to another culture while preserving his; he needs to cross to a different religion — preserving his. All that has become necessary — crossing and preservation — with the purpose of restoring a political order in due time.

The jongleur may not have the poetic creativity proper to troubadours. But he does have the archive and the repertory. He does have the rules that make the continuation of creativity possible. He understands that because he can productively manage and formalize the implicit knowledge, he may be granted entrance in the public spaces of the private households of the politically powerful.

Daurel becomes Beto’s teacher in the art of the jongleurs: he provides the kid with the archive and the repertory, transmitting to him the codified rules of the implicit knowledge of troubadour courtly culture. Daurel knows as well the limits of his knowledge, the boundaries of his own cultural expertise. He cannot, for instance, transmit the political code of nobility, chivalry, and the like — this is a borderline he cannot cross. Because of that, Beto’s second educator is the very Sultan of Babylon.

It is because of all this boundary-crossing and forms of education, that the jongleur — the two jongleurs, Daurel and Beto — are epic characters. The poem inscribes them within the epic cycle of Beuve de Hantone — Provençal Bobis d’Antona — although changing the traditional narrative line of the cycle. In this version, the murdered hero’s political legacy must be restored in the midst of an act of culture.

The two jongleurs enter de house of Antona, now in the power of Bobis murderer, lo tracher Guis. Once there, they prepare for the play. They will represent... the actual treason and ulterior murder of Beto’s father. In that tremendous Hamletian moment of anagnorisis and epic tragedy, the manuscript
rushes to celebrate the victory of *lo cont Beto*. Right afterwards, the manuscript becomes mutilated. Readers need to dream the end — which means understanding the issues, problems, and solutions raised by those two strange characters, cultural agents of courtly culture boundary conditions.

Now, what we have here is a strange codifier, a strange educator, and an outstanding agent of courtly culture that comes from one of the most vulnerable social extractions. The jongleur-educator is an unexpected intellectual persona, but one that will become central in Occitan courtly culture self-theorization.

There are many texts that address the jongleur as a cultural agent. *Avril issi’e maiò intrava*, composed by Catalan poet Raimon Vidal de Besalu, is more than anything else, a *techne*, an art for the jongleur from the perspective of a visionary jongleur visiting the court of Dalfí d’Alvernha — maybe after the death of this latter troubadour, happened by the end of the first quarter of the 13th century.

Thirteenth-century poems regulating jongleurs activities vie for the control of the public activity of the jongleur. Catalan viscount Guerau de Cabrera’s poem to his jongleur Cabra, and the apparent response of Guiraut de Calanson addressed to his own jongleur, Fadet, constitute attempts to archive the repertory, and to build its relevance along with the knowledge of the jongleur in terms of performance. But they are, also, poems that introduce a certain variety to the archive and the repertory of courtly culture, this examining the very cultural boundaries of the network of courts jongleurs were supposed to visit and shape with their knowledge.

Guiraut Riquier considered himself a professional poet. He was, in a certain way, his own scholar and archeologist. In this sense, he compiled his own manuscripts and songbooks, and made explicit the implicit troubdaouresque knowkedge. His *Supplica* addressed to Alfonso X of Castile — and the following *Declaratio*, attributed to king Alfonso, but most probably due to the pen of
Guiraut himself—sounds like founded by a professional need to protect the parameters where troubadours operate, in order to separate them from those other agents of courtly culture that—unlike in the work of Raimon Vidal de Besalu, or even in Daurel e Beto—only constitute a means of communication, discontinuous lines interconnecting the real Actors and Networks within an economy of courts—courts that are increasingly centralized and more powerful from a jurisdictional point of view, in part because of the importance acquired by legal codification in some of those cultural and political spaces.

There is a flip side in the parámetro get of the jongleur as. An archeologist that seems particularly important

We might well say that the only real way to control the jongleur and his influence both de facto and de iure would be to identify him, to put him in his context, and hence to produce a new definition of his being and functions, in order to make him fit this new definition. Prosecuting him, banning him would be useless. Repressing him would probably be useless as well. It is better to modify the jongleur, to re-educate him.

This modification entails the setting of precise limits to the cultural agent, or, rather, to set borders to the jongleur’s agency. He’s given a concrete repertory, already written and rewritten, a repertory traceable in the History of Literature, or, even better, a repertory having already become History of Literature. This repertory, as Jean Bodel says at the beginning of his Chanson des Saïomes, must have already rescued from the grips of Cil bastart jugleor qi vont par cez vilax.

The repertory and the formalization of the art is the reason whereby the jongleur is either admitted or banished from the court, the space in which the influences, discourses, rhetoric, play, etc., are controlled by the law. In this idea of court, only the modified jongleur can actually enter. He must become a truthful professional, a repository of virtue, and, above all, somebody who can
actually educate the knights when they lack of the historical texts, even momentarily. This professional imagined by the Aragonese Raimon Vidal de Besalú, or claimed by Guiraut Riquier in front of Alfonso, teh only one who, by giving a name can make, at the same time, justice and law.

Archeology as a privileged vantage point of boundary conditions. This half sentence more or less summarizes what I wanted to point out. Now, what are, concretely, those boundary conditions? In other words, what does the archeological approach offer us regarding the definition of the parameters within which cultural agents seek for problems and solutions? The question cannot be answered with one all-encompassing vision. Look at the conclusions of Marisa Gálvez in her book *Songbook*: “what we consider poetry —she writes— is built on the remains of lyrics seen in the material formation of the songbook.” This is a very powerful thesis: it prompts us to address the material formation of the songbook itself, but also it prompts us to look at “the remains of lyrics”, at that complex archeological constellation of processes and procedures that, as Resende de Oliveira beautifully put, occur depois do espectáculo trovadoresco, after the troubadours performances.