



Project
MUSE[®]

Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

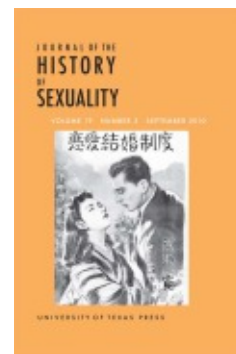
Got Medieval?

Dinshaw, Carolyn.

Journal of the History of Sexuality, Volume 10, Number 2, April 2001, pp. 202-212 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press

DOI: 10.1353/sex.2001.0027



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sex/summary/v010/10.2dinshaw.html>

Got Medieval?

CAROLYN DINSHAW

New York University

I WANT FIRST AND FOREMOST to thank our panel organizer, Ann Pellegrini, and our chair, Elizabeth Castelli: their generosity, both intellectual and spiritual, made this event possible. It's a great pleasure to be here today, though the pleasure is rather hard to describe. It's kind of like the pride one might take in having the best brain surgeons in the country operate on one's head. It's a displaced pride in the brilliance of these doctors here today that I feel: my book, which at times when I was writing it felt like a tumorous growth, has attracted their professional interest. But more immediately, I feel like a star this morning, too, perhaps because of the associations of our panel with both Nashville *and* Hollywood.

In writing *Getting Medieval* I tried to discern and work with personal and intimate motives of doing queer history, the deep desires for history that many queers (including me) feel. Years ago I began to feel such a desire to be able to extend somehow into the past, and I witnessed such desire in others, as expressed in passionate readers' responses to that landmark of gay history, John Boswell's 1980 *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. That book was infused with and energized by a 1970s post-Stonewall enthusiasm that triumphantly uncovered same-sex sexuality (as it turned out, a very '70s-style gayness) throughout the ages; but the desires for history that I noted and continue to note are not necessarily dependent on belief in or assumptions about an "essential" homosexuality across time. In *Getting Medieval* I discussed Michel Foucault's profound appreciation of Boswell's book as he configured and reconfigured his social constructionist *History of Sexuality* project. From a later generation, a resolutely queer student of mine ("queer" meaning here that he is uninterested in self-replication, wary of the politics of visibility, and fascinated by "an attachment to the hidden, unknown, and irretrievable" in history writing) recently claimed:

As is true for many queers, my own relationship to my queer sexuality was first articulated not through a relationship with another body but rather through texts, specifically queer films and queer

histories. I consumed such texts urgently. . . . I was looking for a way to be queer, for a way to fashion my own identity. Queer history is my queer past. . . . [D]oing queer history . . . constitutes a way of being queer, indeed a way of surviving as queered. Queer history is my queer present.¹

Developing queer history through the concept of affective connection—a touch across time—and through the intentional collapse of conventional historical time, I wanted in *Getting Medieval* to help queer studies respond to such desire. In fact, I intended to make affect central to the project of queer history writing; this would, I contended, further the aim (shared by me and other restive historians of sexuality) of transforming history writing altogether. It would *queer* historiography.

In *Getting Medieval* I presented affective history as an enabling concept with which readers could work in order to respond to their own situations—their places in space and time—and their needs and desires for a past. I am happy that the panelists today have picked up that intent in my book: in particular, Rosemary Drage Hale and Angela Zito have presented their own materials for queer historical contemplation. Even as I elaborated in the book on the personal and intimate nature of queer history, I was concerned that this approach be not so taken up with the individual and idiosyncratic that it would cease altogether to function as a method of coming to terms with phenomena in the past and of creating something collective, and that it would become, rather, only a way of writing personal autobiography. The papers on this panel are sensitive to this double imperative: they take up affective history as an enabling concept and they test it on wide-ranging materials of the past and present.

I shall organize these remarks as discursive answers to three questions about queer history and community that have come up in these rich and varied papers. First, the question Rosemary Drage Hale has posed about her own work: “How do I write about the daily lives of historically situated women without dissolving particularity into some solitary faceless Ordinary Other?” Or more precisely for my project in *Getting Medieval*, how do I get at the absolute singularities in history while nonetheless grasping and making explicit a connection to them in other times and places? The answer I developed in *Getting Medieval* is affective history, giving rise to what I have called queer community across time. Second, then, who gets to be in such a community, and who decides? And third, where can this community be asserted, and how can its power be unleashed?

First, singularities—these “singular lives,” which Foucault calls the lives of infamous men whose traces so electrified him in the Bibliothèque Nationale. They lurk below power’s beam until some provocation brings

¹Richard Kim, “The Queer Future in the Queer Past,” unpublished manuscript, 18, 38.

them into the light; then and only then are they produced for our historical gaze. Perhaps they should be returned to obscurity so they are not made victims of the brutalities of power's operations through our writing. These are *infamous* men, not candidates for the cover of *The Advocate*. They were obscure, mad, abominable; they performed senseless crimes, isolated, raving, and denying god. They were repulsive and shameful creatures. But Foucault feels a "vibration" from the shreds of information he reads of them; convinced of their singularity, filling out no exemplary narrative of their lives, he nonetheless feels some sort of connection to them. It's a connectedness that yielded a plan for a book, "an anthology of existences," a queer history composed without the mechanisms of identification, resemblance, or filiation. Their connection is made not via shared identities but rather shared isolation. That's an oxymoron, like queer community.²

I've gone on about this because I want to stress that the community across time formed of such vibrations, such touches, is not necessarily a feel-good collectivity of happy homos. One reader of Boswell's book was enraptured that he had at last found "*gay* friends across the centuries," and that is what Boswell in essence offered: friends and lovers across time.³ But that's a community, however cross-temporal, based on resemblance among its members. What Foucault gestures toward in his essay, written at a time in which Boswell was working on his own book, is a community of the isolated, the abject, the shamed. Shame's simultaneously contagious—thus bonding—and isolating operations are one means by which such a queer community might be formed. (Here I'm alluding to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose importance is recently highlighted by Douglas Crimp.)⁴ Perhaps Foucault takes on the deeply isolating shame of those prisoners whose records he touches, and in taking on their shame forms a queer community across time.

Thus Saint Foucault. But what about the medieval German nuns whose *vita* Rosemary Drage Hale so compellingly describes and with which she seeks to interact? Here we approach question number two: Who gets to be in a queer community, and who decides? These two women were a delight and blessing to the entire convent in which they lived and died, unlike the imprisoned French scum barely noticed in their own time. My emphasis in *Getting Medieval* was on people who were and are disadvantaged by being left out of reigning classifications (in particular, dominant sexual categories), but here are two women who were elevated by their

²See Carolyn Dinshaw, "Good Vibrations," chap. 2 in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 136–40.

³Quoted in Dinshaw, 28.

⁴Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1: 1–16 (1993); Douglas Crimp, "Mario Montez, for Shame," in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays in Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. Stephen Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2002).

exceptional status. I gather from Hale's description that they were regarded in the convent as singular; they seem to have remained isolated from the rest of the sisters while bonded to each other in their shared abjection (mutual flagellation, etc.). Their friendship, made of the bonds of this mutual singularity, we might call a queer relation, even a queer community of two. Their queerness would not emerge from any "implicit lesbian relationship," as Hale's students jump to name it; rather, queerness emerges from the evidently tortured disjunction between body and soul that they both enact, and from their singular status in their surroundings. These elements of incommensurability are what we would focus on in making a relation with them now and putting them in our queer history. One astute question with which Hale is left is whether ideas of community from 650 years ago are commensurate with our current ideas of community. Undoubtedly they are different, given all that has intervened and given the indeterminacy of cultural phenomena to begin with; but the analytical power of "queer" makes manifest (and forges links between) differing kinds of relations—and differing kinds of communities—in a given time as well as across time.

So I have already gotten to my second question: Who gets to be in a queer community, and who decides? We might put the indefatigable Vesperus of Li Yu's fictive narrative there, too, with his hybrid body, refusal of patrilineal reproduction, and self-castrating zeal. Angela Zito's discussion, which mirrors Vesperus's adventures in its energy and wit, demonstrates the power of queer analysis to link various disparate behaviors: adultery, male same-sex relations, penile enlargement via cross-species grafting, and self-castration—all participate in Li Yu's anti-reproductive, anti-patrilineal project. Does Zito seek partial connection and thus queer community with this fictional figure? As I argued in the context of Chaucer's Pardoner in *Getting Medieval*, fictions can be crucial elements of queer histories: fictions have certainly come to life in queer lives, and being thus animated have become part of queer histories. Zito demonstrates the way queer analysis opens up historical artifacts—in this case, a fictional text from the past—as sites of potential self- and community-building, and thus sites of potential political disruption.

A further question concerns the cross-racial nature of that connection. While I attempt to cross time and space, most of my examples in *Getting Medieval* are Anglo-American and Western European (and Foucault's archive was of course the Bibliothèque Nationale). Is such a cross-racial connection that is defined by queer positionality possible, or is this notion of queer history really white? The question at base: is the analysis of norm and deviation from a norm, or normal and queer, a white thing?

I'll elaborate on that question in a moment, though I don't have an answer, but now let me continue with question two. Is Margery Kempe going to be part of this queer community? This brings me to Amy Hollywood's challenging essay and the necessity of returning to definitions,

not just of “queer community,” but also of “queer” itself. Who is a queer? Hollywood asks in a parenthesis. “Are gayness, homosexuality, and same-sex desires subsets of the queer? And if this is so, are they in danger, as Leo Bersani argues, of disappearing within the larger category?” Yes, I’d say they are subsets of the queer, and I am less and less worried these days about the disappearance of same-sex phenomena. If we are careful to specify the singularities of our lives, we same-sexers have much to gain by linking ourselves into broader social and political categories. That is, we have more to gain than we might lose by making coalitions (with activists for labor, reproductive rights, or educational freedom, for example), and the more open and flexible classifications are, the more easily we all can form and participate in potentially very powerful communities made by partial connections.

The way I’ve formulated it for the most part in *Getting Medieval*, “queer” marks a relation to a norm. (David M. Halperin’s discussion of “queer” in his *Saint Foucault* remains the clearest explication of this widely shared formulation.)⁵ In my analysis of Margery Kempe, I take her queerness to be in large part a relation to normative sex/gender arrangements in her East Anglian community. In the chapters that precede that analysis, however, I demonstrate that queerness and normativity—heresy and orthodoxy, same-sex sodomy and heterosex—are indistinguishable. So the terms “norm” and “normativity,” by chapter 3, are considerably qualified.

Hollywood observes that the formulation of queerness as a deviation from a norm is dependent on a nineteenth-century conception of norms and the normative. She suggests that a reliance on a notion of queerness leads to a distorted view of a medieval woman—and, moreover, a mystic—like Margery. Normativity, she argues, and thus any queerness dependent on it, was “tied to concrete developments in statistical analysis and its application to the social sciences.” The terms carry along with them assumptions about “progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance,” creating a “dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be” (Hollywood quotes Lennard J. Davis here). The world of premodern England, and, within that, the world of a medieval mystic, is very different, Hollywood maintains; it holds entirely different conceptualizations, not of *norms* to be achieved but rather of religious ideals to be strived for that are precisely *not normal*.

Hollywood follows Davis in his *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, tracing the development of normalcy as itself an ideal, an imperative, in contradistinction to an earlier mode of idealizing what is thought to be indeed out of reach. “The concept of a norm,” writes Davis, “unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must

⁵David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

or should somehow be part of the norm. . . . Any bell curve will always have at its extremities those characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. . . . This . . . is in contrast to societies with the concept of an ideal, in which all people have non-ideal status.”⁶

Margery's behavior was nothing if not extreme in the eyes of her contemporaries. She was taken to sobbing uncontrollably at the most apparently inconsequential things: passing women with children in their arms, for example, because she was put in mind of Jesus. She screamed disruptively, interrupting meals and church services, and people could not stand to be around her because of the intensity with which she experienced the presence of our Lord. She turned gray in the face trying to hold it in, but then it just burst out. Her clothes made trouble for her, as they suggested she was a virgin when she was not. She made a bargain with her husband not to have sex with him, but still was the brunt of rumors undermining her own professed chastity even as she maintained a chaste life.

Does all this make her queer, abnormal, deviant in a society in which, as Hollywood says, “virginity and the refusal of human on human sex is itself posited as a religious ideal”? In a society in which there is no norm to which to aspire, but rather religious ideals to hold? If we remove the concept of the norm, as Hollywood suggests, we can more clearly see Margery's achievements in relation to those religious ideals she held. In such a reading, her relation to her earthly community becomes much less important than her relation to her spiritual world. Instead of constructing a norm for some average human and comparing her to it, we focus rather on her relation to the ideal: saints and the divine. As Hollywood urges, we can take more seriously the claims of her experiences. If we elevate her community habits and expectations into an ideal—via a modern norm—we have no way to distinguish the most important and explicit imperative toward an ideal in her life, her call to holiness, which was totally different in nature from her living in the earthly world. I accept this important point in Hollywood's critique.

At the same time, the voice of her community is powerful in her book in ways that cannot be entirely absorbed into the hagiographic model Hollywood cites. People complain that Margery is a hypocrite. They question whether she has indeed been chosen by Christ and has had the experiences she says she has had. The narrative thus may follow “saintly patterns” that “demonstrate the holy woman's commonality with Christ in his suffering exile,” as Hollywood writes. But there is another and very striking complaint in Margery's *Book*: as a priest put it to her, seeing her convulsed

⁶Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1999), 29.

with sobs when she sees a pietà, “Woman, Jesus is long since dead.” As I understand this remark, it is decidedly disenchanted, spoken by a voice that we might associate more with modernity than with the medieval: it puts in doubt the very ideal that one can touch—can experience the contemporaneity of—Christ. This comment seems not to respect the religious ideal of direct experience of Christ. It is only one sentence, granted, in a very long book, and Margery duly rebukes the priest and gains yet one more advocate through this incident. But it may make explicit in Margery’s *Book* another context in which the constant questions about her spiritual achievements may be read. They may not be merely hagiographic trials; they may also indeed voice contemporary doubts about what is in fact possible.

Thus, we must take seriously the challenges to Margery voiced by earthly doubters as well as in her own visions, even as we take seriously her own claims to religious experience. The *Book* is riven by these imperatives, and in this context I continue to hold that Margery can be seen as “queer” in relation to religious ideals as well as to behaviors, habits, and expectations of her earthly community. We do not need to impose an anachronistic concept of normativity in order to come to this conclusion; we hear it in her own milieu. Finally, Margery does not fit into either category of earthly or spiritual experience. She is incommensurate with both, a leftover.

Looking at Margery Kempe in *Getting Medieval*, I not only use the notion of a deviation from a norm but also, more or less synonymously, the notion of a residue after the imposition of categories. Since analysis of “What is left out, that residue, . . . the leavings of categories”⁷ doesn’t engage the same modernist apparatus as that of a deviation, Hollywood’s comments may be taken to clarify the advantages of using this notion of the remainder, the leftover, over the notion of the deviation.

So, in the debate about Margery Kempe’s putative queerness, it may come down to differences in emphasis between Hollywood’s interpretation and mine. Hollywood argues that Margery successfully imitates forms of sanctity that are intensely physical, “queer.” She’s queer according to Hollywood not because she fails to imitate sanctity, which is what I argue, but because she succeeds, and the doubters can pick at her all they like. Hollywood emphasizes Margery’s survival and the survival of her *Book*; I emphasize the constant doubt and her search for corroboration. There is truth in both interpretations, and I welcome Hollywood’s intelligent insistence that Margery is indeed touched by the holy and finally more powerful in her spiritual quest than many current readings allow. I certainly do not want to reinforce the tradition of scholarly dismissal of the *Book of Margery Kempe* as merely the diary of a mad housewife. The question of

⁷Dinshaw, 158.

emphasis itself, I believe, hinges in fact on a desire on the part of both of us to claim Margery Kempe for our own.

Let me pause here to comment on the more general methodological issues at stake here, and then I shall return to my three questions. Following the logic of Hollywood's remarks, one would conclude that an anachronistic use of the concept of a norm has led me (and others) to a distorted emphasis.⁸ I have agreed that the imposition of a norm as an ideal detracts from an engagement with Margery's spiritual ideals. But I have located within the *Book* itself a questioning of spiritual ideals; and further, other scholars have come to conclusions similar to mine about Margery without, as far as I can determine, employing a concept of a norm.⁹ What's more compelling to explore in terms of anachronism for the entirety of my project in *Getting Medieval* is the crucial connection Hollywood mentions (via Davis) between the concepts of normativity and deviation, statistics, and *eugenics*. What are the implications of this complex for queer history? I want to avoid modernist assumptions about race in fifteenth-century England.¹⁰ More generally, does the invocation of "normativity" racialize my analyses—of past and of present—in an implicit and unacknowledged way? My discussion of sodomy in *Pulp Fiction* allows me to get at relationships between straightness, masculinity, modernity, and whiteness. I want to pursue this line of thought further to help develop

⁸A word about anachronism: since I am trying to explore unconventional temporal possibilities in history writing, I do not tremble at the very concept of anachronism but rather want to investigate its potential productivity. Some anachronisms can distort the past, as Hollywood suggests here; given the deep desire for connection to the past that I have observed, though, "Anachronisms R Us," I suspect, and we need to find ever subtler ways of investigating historical conditions and reckoning with the affects that motivate our questions. My goal in *Getting Medieval* is to demonstrate the simultaneous copresence of different chronologies, to explore the power of multiple temporalities in a single moment—when, say, Barthes reenacts Michelet, who reenacts some other moment in time, or when I suggest that activists reenact Margery Kempe's answering back. Ann Pellegrini's discussion of Geeta Patel's essay brings out the affect in these collapsed temporalities.

⁹See, for example, Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1986), 34–57, which describes a mystical imperative to the ideal and the human inevitably falling short of that ideal: "[I]n medieval mystical theology the soul is both alienated from its maker and yet fantasises its own wholeness by misrecognition of itself with and in its maker" (p. 44). Through Lacanian analysis, Beckwith analyzes the "ideological function" of mystical identification with Christ, which could be used "to quell the discord of heresy": "This identification, mimesis, resemblance, never achieves the identity with its creator which is its goal; and it is this gap, this permanent alienation, which perpetuates the mystical desire as it explores the profundity of its own lack of and distance from its creator" (p. 45).

¹⁰Thomas Hahn has taken up precisely this issue in "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (forthcoming).

the power of queer analysis to interrogate its own racial framing.¹¹ We need constantly to widen the lens of our analyses, to see more of what has been cut out in order for sexual categories to cohere.

To return to my second question, then, “Who gets to be in a queer community, and who decides?” I have claimed that in the case of Margery, differently inflected answers hinge on a desire on the part of each of us—Hollywood and me—to claim Margery Kempe for our own. I want to address the apparent voluntarism of these processes of history and community making: this is the “who decides?” part. Andreas Krass, a German medievalist, has referred to my affective history as “a love relation.” His description, I believe, emphasizes the voluntary feel of such history making. Krass made this comment in a seminar discussion of *Getting Medieval* at the University of Munich this past summer (2000). There, the students pointed out to me gently but decisively that this queer history proceeds from a very American set of ideas and ideals. Many of these young Germans resisted it. They were suspicious of this virtual or invisible “community” in and of itself; for one thing, such community did not seem to benefit the dead who were its members. This latter point is certainly true, but I suspect now that they were voicing a larger problem with the dead. These young Germans may have been unfamiliar with the notion of *choosing* one’s history, they who are burdened by a horrible past (as these students seemed to be, pointing out various loci of Nazi activity as we walked in the city). Thus, I ruefully understood my queer history as my American history, even as I had developed it in the context of a critique of U.S. politics and national discourse.

So I do choose my history, but only in part, and I hope you will choose what you can of yours and articulate it with mine: communities across time will thus grow. I focused in *Getting Medieval* on affective history as “love relation,” but I take José Esteban Muñoz’s work seriously (Ann Pellegrini shows why one should) and can imagine another work of affective history that would reckon with more painful affects across time. To avoid total idiosyncrasy, in *Getting Medieval* I put my history in the context of larger political and cultural developments in the United States, and Ann Pellegrini has sharply extended that contextualization into the frightening present moment of this panel, the “historic” presidential election of 2000. (In addition, I am not surprised to hear from Rosemary Drage Hale, though I don’t want to take such things for granted, that the Canadian struggle over funding for the humanities has waged similar battles.)

¹¹This is an issue I take up in my current work, in which I consider the intertwined relationships of sexuality and race in Chaucer’s texts and in the normative (I use this term advisedly) sphere of the twentieth-century American home. In particular, I analyze sexual queerness as a manifestation of racial dynamics in another corporeal medium. See “Pale Faces: Race, Religion, and Affect in Chaucer’s Texts and Their Readers,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001) (forthcoming).

Now, can this queer history and community, so American, function as a critique of U.S. politics? This brings me to my third and final question: How can we assert our “virtual” community or coalition, formed across space and time? And where will such assertion take place? (Angela Zito hints at the issues when she calls my business “resurrection” and “transportation.”) The dead may indeed come alive—some part, some aspect of them—as we touch and animate them in our own lives. It’s easier, though, to imagine linking our *living* selves together. But how shall we actually assert our political and cultural priorities in the here and now? I suggested in *Getting Medieval* that we can form communities by means of partial connections—coalitions—organized around specific interests, events, or causes, in so doing moving across conventional boundaries (medieval-modern, academic-non-academic, queer-normative). I also—using not only a principle of mimesis but also one of economy—suggested that we take up the central role that had already been allotted us in the culture wars. Since the work of medievalists—particularly feminist and queer medievalists—was made a topic of discussion on the floor of Congress in the mid-’90s, I reasoned, why not occupy that space and use it for our own perverse purposes, however abjected a locus it was in the first instance?

Mark D. Jordan eloquently presents the limits of this kind of strategy, and I’m certainly in agreement with him when he calls for action that is not simply a rehearsal of “roles offered us by our persecutors or stage-managers.” “Answering back” in the terms of our oppressors is not in itself adequate. “Why, after all, should they dictate our terms?” Jordan asks. What about some forthright efforts at resistance, I rejoin, especially as the ascendancy of “President” Bush seems assured? But Jordan and I do differ on our assessments of the disruptive power of mimesis or parody, even if we both endorse the idea that answering back is not enough. I can agree with Jordan’s tracing of the ecclesiastical genealogy of sexual abjection and his assertion of the transhistorical continuity of church communities while disagreeing that they will inevitably overwhelm a queer touch (and that therefore “the touch of the queer medievalist must be protected . . . from assertions of much stronger trans-historical continuity within church communities”). At issue is the power of parodists to dislodge long-standing primary meanings and contexts and create new ones. This is still a live debate in queer theory, and, mindful of the constraints on such performances, I nevertheless and idealistically hold out some hope for their effectiveness.

Ann Pellegrini poses the same questions, and offers the wonderful performance piece by Holly Hughes, “Preaching to the Perverted,” as an instance of answering back that moves us forward. In her precise and perceptive analysis of the piece, Pellegrini finds that it “helps us to imagine another position for the audience, and its solo performer, to occupy than the ones designated to ‘queers’ by the State”; it helps us imagine a “counter-public.”

If our communities are at least in part virtual (reaching into the past as well as the present, and across space as well as time), we might as well look at virtual technologies as providing a means of action. We can find in virtual space parodies not only of the abject, but of the empowered as well. I am thinking here of a challenging and renegade web site, *www.RTMARK.com*, that is dedicated to subverting the corporatization of everything in the United States, including educational systems and the nation's own history. According to its FAQ page,

®TMark is a brokerage that benefits from "limited liability" just like any other corporation; using this principle, ®TMark supports the sabotage (informative alteration) of corporate products, from dolls and children's learning tools to electronic action games, by channeling funds from investors to workers for specific projects grouped into "mutual funds." . . . Project groupings called "mutual funds" perform much the same function as their financial counterparts: by facilitating investment based on general areas of interest, they allow investors to participate in unpredictable behavior without fully understanding its nature or consequences. They are also called "mutual funds" in order to call attention to one way in which large numbers of people are led to falsely identify corporate needs as their own.

With mention of this site, with its structure of mimicry and goal of sabotage, its model of shared projects ("mutual funds") and caution about the vulnerability of concepts of mutuality or community to coercive misuse, I'll close. Reaching this site, we have traveled a long way from the medieval as it is conventionally construed, but we are close to the process I describe as getting medieval: making partial connections, bringing incommensurate entities into contact across space, across time. If we are worried about preserving singularities while finding bases for community building, sites like this one, with its attention to precise locale and specific operations in its general project of subversion, can help us feel optimistic even in our increasingly homogenized and isolating present. If we desire mutuality in this context of singularity—if we desire extension of ourselves into queer communities across space, across time—we might welcome the concept of unpredictability introduced by "mutual funds" rather than strive for exact resemblance among all. Though I am loath to suggest that the Internet solves everything, sites like this demonstrate to me just how much energy we stand to gain as we continue to seek partial connection with one another.