About the Cover

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The experience of reading medieval manuscripts is profoundly visceral. The touch, smell, and appearance of the material object can be intoxicating, sometimes even generating feelings curiously akin to sexual desire. Yet scholars seldom discuss encounters with medieval codices in erotic terms, and many may well deny the validity of such responses. Lara Farina has observed that she ‘know[s] from personal experience that when a scholar proposes an erotic reading of a premodern text she is likely to be met with the retort, seldom explained, that the given work just *isn’t* erotic’ (Farina, 2011, 50). Farina goes on to pose the rhetorical question ‘What does it mean to say that something is not – and therefore *cannot be* – erotic?’ before pointing out the illogical assumptions behind such claims, including the conviction that the ‘erotic component of an artefact’ is somehow ‘prior to and independent of the act of reading/viewing’ – in other words, that such erotic responses, whether they be to texts or objects or both, are instinctive and involuntary rather than discursively constructed. While not primarily concerned with the erotics of reading manuscripts *per se*, this Special Issue puts forward innovative methodologies through which the manuscript page begins to emerge as a desiring surface saturated with queer *jouissance* and excess, and on which error and deviance

become sources not of anxiety but of pleasure. In so doing, the Special Issue proposes a new approach to codicology, a specifically queer philology, that is aimed at liberating the medieval manuscript from the shackles of a long tradition of patriarchal scholarship.

The expression of erotic longing is beautifully articulated in the Cover Image, which is one of a series of four photographs published online under the title 'Visual Diary 98 // Mapping Desire_s' in 'anothervisualdiary,' the blog of an anonymous photographer, essayist, zine artist, and writer who describes herself as 'a queer-feminist pirate.' From the shadowy background of this photograph emerges a poignant visualization of autoerotic pleasure and consumption of the self. The queer feminist body is not exposed as an aberration but is instead celebrated as the delicious object of (self-)desire. As the accompanying text states, this positive self-representation amounts to 'a political act' in defiance of normative expectations. Queer and female bodies are too often subjected to processes of violent repression and inscription, with meaning imposed upon them, and even written on or cut into the skin. Much like medieval manuscripts, in which text and image are inscribed on the skin of dead animals, queer bodies are rhizomatic and palimpsested; they refuse to signify linearly or monolithically. Deviance from cultural norms is reclaimed in the cover image not as a site of error, but as one of (self-)desire and, therefore, of resistance to patriarchal structures. Similarly, this Special Issue harnesses queer theory and trans and lesbian historiography in order to push forward new methodologies founded on the conceptualization of historical and philological research as the erotic drive to touch the past and to encounter it sensorially in all its seductive and at times uncomfortable 'stickiness,' as Elizabeth Freeman (2010, 111–23) would put it.

The cover image was also chosen because of the parallels we see between contemporary queer feminist zines, medieval manuscripts, and the future of codicology. The zine, like the manuscript, is the material and textual site on which the queer can be articulated. Zine and manuscript are co-terminous: they resist the oppressive imperatives of heteronormativity. They are queer assemblages, according to 'anothervisualdiary,' in which a multiplicity of traditionally marginalized voices can find spaces 'for personal stories on self-love and self-care' to build 'caring queer/feminist communities.' Both zines and manuscripts eschew restrictive ideas of single authorship and patrilineal transmission and embrace instead the slant methodology of collaboration. As refracted, rhizomatic, composite sites, zines and manuscripts accommodate queer errors and their pleasures, and in so doing defy technologies aimed at straightening and silencing them. Collaboration also links zine production to the approach to scholarship adopted in the compilation of this Special Issue. 'anothervisualdiary' describes the process of creating a zine in this way: 'all the people who participate change the project and they are all watering the seed and a beautiful plant is growing and growing.' Queer feminist zines, much like the future of manuscript studies that we advocate in the Introduction to this Special Issue, are

marked by the ethical and intellectual imperative to oppose privileged practices and to foster inclusive communities across time and cultures.

References

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