

Spring 2005

## Review of Joel Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern.*

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### Recommended Citation

Schneider, Bethany (2005). Review of "Review of Joel Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern.*," *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*: Vol. 5 : No. 1  
Available at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrc/vol5/iss1/3>

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**Joel Pfister, Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern**. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. 340 pp. (+ xiv) ISBN 0822332922.

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Joel Pfister's *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern* is a history of both white US and Native American subjectivities from the 1870s through the present. Pfister builds a brilliant argument that traces both Native responses to, and white investments in, the changing notion of the "individual." It is a book that takes up one of the challenges facing literary and cultural studies approaches to American Indian Studies today: building responsible and generative *comparatist* models for studying the often violent, always contested space of conflict and negotiation between Native and non-Native people in the Americas.

Rather than attempting a broad, sweeping vision, Pfister drops several plumb lines into the history of Native-white relations across the decades that interest him. The first half of the book explores the notorious school for Indian children in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which operated between 1879 and 1918. Here Pfister traces how, "Before pupils from dozens of tribal cultures underwent attempts to transform them into 'individuals' they were first lumped together as 'Indians,' a category that defined them as deficient in the desires, character, ambitions, and morality that constituted American 'individuality.' Put differently, Carlisle first *Indianized* its diverse students so that their *individuality* could be sanctioned -- the two ideological classifications worked in unison" (20). The second half of the book turns to the cultural and political manifestations of modernism in relationship to "Indianness." Pfister explores the ideological attachment of white modernists D.H. Lawrence, Mabel Dodge Luhan and Mary Austin to the American Southwest, arguing that the artists' colony resignified Indians as "therapeutic" to a beleaguered white "individualism." Concomitant with modernism's insatiable appetite for the comforts of savagery, Pfister shows how that very structure of desire resulted in particularly devastating Federal policies aimed at getting Indians to individualize through the commodification of their own culture. Pfister elegantly teaches us to see these modernist erotics of the multicultural as not so very different from the pedagogies of cultural destruction practiced at Carlisle a generation or two earlier. Under Indian Commissioner John Collier's "Indian New Deal," Natives were refigured as the experimental subjects of a new vision of governmental control of non-white Americans. It was a vision based in disturbing fantasies of what a "multicultural" US might mean for Natives

asked to perform their own multiplicity of cultural belonging, and for identity-hungry white Americans who wanted "individuality" to mean something more "deep" and "spiritual."

The second half of the book clarifies "the historical significance of the *modernist protomulticulturalisms* -- promoted by artists, novelists, intellectuals, bohemians, community activists, tourism companies, museums, schools, the Indian New Deal's Bureau of Indian Affairs. Discourses of 'depth,' the 'primitive within,' antipuritanism, cultural relativism, and in some cases socialism contributed to, and were in turn shaped by, the ideological formation of these modernist protomulticulturalisms. Some of what modernist protomulticulturalists stood for may seem unambiguously liberatory; but liberatory in what ways and for whom? As Native scholars in particular warn, critiques of internal colonization too often turn out to be new forms of that colonization" (141). Here, Pfister shows us what is at stake in his study. By connecting the "bad old days" of Carlisle to a modernism which may be acknowledged to be slightly misguided but fundamentally well-intentioned, Pfister is disallowing us the easy narrative that sees early twentieth-century fascinations with "the primitive" as perhaps naïve, but nevertheless a sign of the beginnings of the end of racism, a beginning, such logic goes, that we are still participating in and working toward. Instead, he draws powerful connections between a past that is acknowledged to be regrettable, and a self-congratulatory sense of a present dedicated to slow improvement: he disallows that handy rupture, and he does it -- brilliantly -- through a trope that seems to belong to white America but which he reveals as projected across the figure of the Indian. *Individuality Incorporated* helps us understand the present and the ways in which Indianness is eroticized by white Americans while Indians themselves are structurally and culturally abandoned, by tracing the enduring investments, across what might seem to be radical cultural change in white America, in what "individuality" means, and in how Indians are asked to perform it for a watching or even participating white audience.

In the book's introduction, Pfister reminds us that the idea of the individual is an invention that insists upon seeming natural and eternal, an invention and an amnesia to which Americans are firmly incited to convert. But, as Pfister notes via Clifford Geertz, "The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and against its social and natural background, is . . . a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures" (15). Certainly it is peculiar in the context of traditional Native American cultures, as Pfister notes this time via Louis Owens (Choctaw and Cherokee): "The privileging of the individual . . . is a more radical departure for American Indian cultures than for the Western world as a whole, for

Foucault's 'moment of individualization' represents an experience forced harshly, and rather unsuccessfully, upon Native Americans" (17). Pfister argues that the forcing of individualization upon Native Americans was, in fact, a repeated scene of experimentation and that its effects have redounded upon both Natives and whites, albeit differently. More than this, the book insists that we read the fact that Natives were the experimental subjects of, negotiators with and resisters to the project of inventing and reinventing the American "individual," as *integral* to any intellectual, political and cultural history of US subjectivity. Pfister does not relegate Native voices to a static subjecthood as uncritical reporters of tragedy or mysterious voices from a lost or disrupted teleology. Rather, he consistently and insistently employs and gives space to the critical, theoretical and interventative positions of Native intellectuals, historians and artists such as Luther Standing Bear, Charles Eastman, Black Elk, Zitkala Sa, Jimmie Durham, Leslie Marmon Silko and many others. This approach produces a scholarly conversation between and across a Native and a white archive and insists upon an equal platform for comparatist work. Although such an approach should be common, it is in fact all too rare.

Scholars interested in American Indian Studies have vast resources upon which to rely. The field is built upon decades of historical, anthropological and sociological research conducted by Native and non-Native scholars. But in literary and cultural studies the scholarship has been somewhat divided between work that focuses on Native cultures and cultural production, and a parallel body of scholarship, relying upon its own archive, which is engaged in intricate portraiture of the racist figure of the "Indian." There has been a growing concern about the increasing mutual exclusivity of these two approaches. Some scholars, like Craig Womack (Creek) in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, have argued persuasively that an appropriate response to this divide is to understand Native cultural productions as comprising national literatures *different* from (not merely internal to or eccentric versions of) US cultural production. This argument challenges scholars to see Native cultures as living and generative and politically sovereign, and to give to Native nations the same specificity of attention afforded to US literature and culture. Other scholars, like Philip Deloria (Lakota) in *Playing Indian*, have turned the model of scholarship that reiteratively explores the image of the "Indian" inside out, and rather than focusing on the various projections of racism onto Natives, focus on the structural importance of the obsession with Indians to white self-understanding.

Pfister's work, without ever directly referencing either Deloria or Womack's argument, represents an important bridging of the gap. This is not a book that, yet again, rehearses the structures of white racism without addressing Native responses and reactions. Here Pfister weaves an intricate double

helix, tracing the importance of the figure of the "Indian" to the development in US culture of the idea and ideology of individualism and to the increasing power of state and corporate uses of "multiculturalism." In addition and in conversation with that history, he explores the effects of the ideology of individualism on Native Americans. He traces how Natives were incited more or less forcibly to first perform the "Indian" who is not yet "individual," and then to perform the "individual" who emerges from the rejected, killed, or sloughed-off "Indian." It is a double portrait that, across its development, allows us to see the full potential and searing importance of responsible comparatist work being done in and around American Indian Studies.