Hannah Chapelle Wojciehowski. *Group Identity in the Renaissance World.*
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10–700360–6.

According to Hannah Wojciehowski, "the 'subjectivity' of Renaissance groups,
as opposed to and distinct from . . . the subjectivity of individuals, and the . . . social
and cultural histories of specific collectives, has been largely untheorized" (14). In
aiming to address this gap in European Renaissance studies, the author draws —
somewhat disparately and even eclectically — on psychoanalytical, philological, and
sociological theories to suggest an important paradigm shift from an emphasis on
the individual to social and collective identities in the early modern period.
Reappraising theories of individualism such as Jacob Burckhardt's "Renaissance
man," as well as Stephen Greenblatt's more socially oriented understandings of
subjectivity, Wojciehowski explores a more elusive, though interactive, sense of
selfhood — what John Jeffries Martin defines as a relational self — "an important
reformulation of the interface between the individual and the collective that takes
both into account" (10).

Wojciehowski's methodology focuses on linguistic networks, identifying "group metaphors (i.e., fantasies that have become fixed in language) that come into being in a given time and place" although their origins may be lost in time (129). More specifically, she examines "social metaphors that date from the late middle ages to the Renaissance" (129). Each chapter unfolds through an archaeology of words such as *group utopia*, etc. as social metaphors on which the individual story turns. Thus, the chapters effectively function as "case histories" of groups, which unfold within language, art, and other semiotic forms. Chapter 1 links the unearthing of the *Laocoön*, a masterpiece of classical statuary, to the evolution of the source word *gruppo* from "undifferentiated knot to the relational artistic grouping" (60). Chapter 2 explores European uses of "bifurcating metaphors of *cannibal* and *caraiba*" in their interactions with American natives. According to Wojciehowski, "the practice of cannibalism, real or imagined, helped to transform European group identity," leading to a "differential reconfiguration of their large-group identities" (94).

Chapter 3 follows another group metaphor, *utopia*, coined by Thomas More (1515) as an ideal society and commonwealth. Interesting speculations on the origins of More's fantasy connect his fiction to the social and political environments of the time, especially the conflicting sentiments of Europeans toward exploration, trade (including the slave trade), and empire-building in regions beyond Europe. Chapter 4 extends this global perspective in following the Portuguese attack and destruction of a religious relic — the *dalada*, or tooth of Buddha — from Ceylon in 1560. At issue is not whether the relic destroyed by the Portuguese was authentic, since another one appeared in Ceylon in 1566, but that such relics as well as sacred objects and rituals help to solidify and maintain group identity of the people whom Europeans sought to conquer (182).

Chapter 5, on *Hamlet*, brings to light the early use of the metaphor of the machine to describe the human body, in ways that foreshadow the mechanistic fantasy that would shape modernity in the growing trope of the group as a machine. The final chapter somewhat fancifully explores the "topos of the animal hospital [in Gujarat, India] within European travel writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (294). In important travel narratives by figures such as Pietro del Valle, Jan van Linschoten, and the Jesuit Manuel Pinheiro, among others, in the period, European encounters with Indian animal hospitals, or *panjrapols*, premised on nonviolence toward animals and insects and the reincarnation of all living beings, illuminate how these interactions challenged the governing European preoccupation with the individual, singular identity; if humans can become animals in another life, does that mean that "each individual is in a sense a group"(283)?

A somewhat over-ambitious work, *Group Identity in the Renaissance World* nonetheless offers a compelling, far-reaching perspective on collectives in the period. In refiguring communities, the author curiously avoids any sustained engagement with Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities or with Édouard Glissant's concept of a cultural imaginary — both useful conceptual paradigms. However these are minor omissions that do not detract from the rich speculations of the book. Taking us through unexpected byways, this study makes important

interventions in discussions of early modern subjectivity, group fantasies — colonial and domestic — and the semiotic productions of social meaning in an emergent world system. In doing so, it globalizes and pluralizes the European Renaissance world by charting the reorganizations of early modern group identities that also help us to understand the group conflicts that have carried into our own times.

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