

Mark Minch-de Leon. *Indigenous Inhumanities: California Indian Studies After the Apocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2025. 352 pages. ISBN 978-1-5179-1830-9. \$30.00 USD pbk.

*Indigenous Inhumanities: California Indian Studies After the Apocalypse*, authored by Mark Minch-de Leon, assistant professor at the University of California, Riverside's Department of English and member of Susanville Indian Rancheria, is a serious meditation on the state of California Indian Studies but also a spiritual self-examination of the state/status of Indigenous intellectual investigation. *Inhumanities* asks directly only two things – (1) what is humanization, and (2) what exactly is the power of the dead – while speculating philosophically about a great many other things but certainly about apocali (apocalypses/apoc-ellipses), ghosts, ceremony, archaeology, anthropology, genocide, writing and painting. The book is antagonistic and punchy, downright defiant in tone. Yet, perhaps in its most endearing moments it is gentle, careful, and intellectually considered - I am thinking here of the feat of ritualized intellectualizing in the “Prologue” on Ghost Dancing that both thinks through the anticoloniality of the ceremony while performing a direct refusal of the discipline of Indian Studies. *Inhumanities* is an interpretation of the power of pure Indigenous brilliance out of step and out of time with the revelatory economics of Western academia.

In his Introduction, Minch-de Leon defies the formulas of trade criticism through philosophical pirouettes but also through straight rejection of the form. While at times it can feel like Minch-de Leon is leading you through the smoke circles of his well-read imagination, he never unfurls the tether so far as to lose touch with you as you float into the abyss of abstraction, paragraph-to-paragraph and sometimes sentence-to-sentence. A particularly poignant unpacking, via Audra Simpson, is the chiasmatic power of the Ghost Dance as his methodological foil. While his work might seek to situate the core disciplines of the humanities as something fixed, corporeal, a servant of the colonial episteme, it does so through the refutations and remonstrances of the Ghosts of those Indigenous bodies and bones the former wrought its intellectual violence upon while it upheld a genocidal violence it benefits from. Both ideas are indisputable insofar as the humanities as a field of study is colonially violent and the Ghost Dancers are in fact channeling the spirits of those who have suffered that violence. Thus, *Inhumanities* asks a third direct thing: what does a ghost have to say after an apocalypse. It is not so much that a ghost or ghosts should really say anything, but whether California Indian Studies could bow to hear it and if it can hear it, accept it as an entity born of that apocalypse.

Robust and comprehensively researched, *Inhumanities* is like a good round dance, a miasma of colours, sound, and ceremony. Minch-de Leon has broken down the meditation into two large parts, but the book unfolds in four general sections: open, cases, refuse, and synthesize. If that feels procedural in terms of criticism that is because the work is critical, yet in a post-structural way, it is also defying the boundaries of form and content, a rolling stream of consciousness that is consciously chewing-up disciplines as it engages them. A recurring theme then is considering what is left after a thing has been destroyed, which is a profoundly

destabilizing zone of influence from which to draw conclusions from. Conceptually, the thing left over may be Indigenous peoples post-contact or it could be an academic discipline like anthropology. For good or bad, there is always residue and there is always a channel back to that residue. I have never been to a Ghost Dance but I imagine that the arsenal which Ghost Dancers have to cross that spiritual plane is highly calibrated, a Geiger counter but for post-apocalyptic remnants.

The central weapon of mass destruction for Minch-de Leon in his contribution to the fight against colonialism is discombobulation. A leading assault, an arrow to the frontal cortex, is to oppose the “humanization of Indigenous peoples and our ancestors” (p. 33) through disorientation of the colonial apparatus. Archaeology, anthropology and genocide discourse - key instruments in the art of the colonial state - are ripe for the picking. A triumph of the book is how easily it seems he can knock these disciplines off kilter with the flick of the pen. Indeed, the pen is mightier in *Inhumanities* precisely because discourse is shaky, archaeology is political, and anthropology is hopelessly decontextualized.

The book cusses and scraps its way to its inevitable conclusion: shame on you if you wanted the revolution to be clean, or at least less vulgar. Destroying writing while drawing maps back to destroyed worlds, as Minch-de Leon does in Part 2, requires some curse words from time to time but in its own radicality. Not in a punk way, mind you. The work is too refined to be punk and too thoughtful to be bratty. Swearing is just another tool of the discombobulator. Calling *Inhumanities* a meditation or a criticism might be unfair, although one could read the entire work and be a bit suspicious that the whole thing is a work. Not a work in the literal sense but a work in the entertainment sense. Some might call it a work of staggering genius, because it does feel like it is a smart book, for smart people, who think about things in smart ways. Yet it would be more fair(er) to call *Inhumanities* a preparation of the “dance grounds” (p. 256) for the dizzying effects of disorienting the entire field of Indian Studies in California.

The book ends with a section from the polyphonic poem “IRL” by Kumeyaay poet Tommy Pico and then a line from the punk band Dead Pioneers. Both are working as an epilogue, epigraph, and epitaph simultaneously or a beginning of the end, so to speak. While I believe *Inhumanities* as a whole is not punk work, despite clearly channeling punk energy, there are punk(y) sentiments and punk exclamations. The lyric at the end of the book works like a whistle or the first thump of the drum, it is a launching off point. In order to clap back at colonialism, there needs to be the first trill shot, a clear knock between the eyes. In its own way, *Inhumanities* is an intellectual double slap to the temples, like capoeira, a dance-fight with the structures of coloniality, and a tonal drenching of the sensibilities.

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