Allan Davis

Animism in the Anthropocene ILC

Sponsor: Sarah Williams

Spring 2017

**Self Evaluation**

This quarter was both one of the most challenging and interesting that I have experienced during my time at Evergreen. The subject matter, animistic viewpoints in modern times, that my ILC partner Kirsten and I chose for our ILC is near and dear to my heart. I spend a huge amount of my time thinking and reading about this subject matter and although this has influenced my thinking in every program I have taken during my time at Evergreen, this is the first time that I have had the opportunity to dive into this subject with such depth. This collision of life and school was at times quite disorienting but ultimately proved to be an incredibly valuable and mind expanding experience and I feel more confident in my thinking than I did prior to this quarter.

When Kirsten and I first talked about this ILC we wanted to end the quarter having created a small booklet of work to share with the world. In hindsight this was a somewhat whimsical idea. Although I would still like to move in the direction of writing something substantial about animism, I feel like we barely had time to scratch the surface of this complex topic. It is now week 10, the final week of the quarter, and I have multiple pieces of writing that I haven’t yet finished. This isn’t because of a lack of work on my part, instead it’s because the subject matter is so rich! After 10 weeks of thinking, reading, and writing I am not yet ready for this quarter to be over.

The most difficult part of this quarter for me was that some of the readings that we chose didn’t resonate with me and didn’t do very much to inform my thinking on the subject of animism. This is one of the dangers of working on an ILC with another student. The book that I had the most difficult time with, *Dark Ecology* by Timothy Morton, was one that Kirsten had already read and had a huge impact on her. Although I read the book and agreed with the author’s message, I found the writing too abstract and impersonal for my personal taste. I was lucky that one of the other primary texts that we chose to use, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* by David Abram, had a much more profound and challenging effect on my thinking. The differences in the way these two texts was written and the impact they each had on me proved to be quite valuable in that it reminded me what it is that I find important in writing. Rather than being impressed by scholarly, intellectual writing I find it more valuable when the writer expresses their intelligence in a way that can be approached by a broader audience. This is especially important when an author is talking about an issue of such large importance, in this case the relationship between humans and what David Abram calls “the more-than-human world”. In hindsight we also bit off a bit more than we could chew as far as reading goes. The texts we chose required a lot of time to both read and process, and sadly we weren’t able to read the book *Staying with the Trouble,* by Donna Haraway, which I was really looking forward. Luckily, I plan to continue reading and writing about these issues, so *Staying with the Trouble* is still at the top of my upcoming reading list. Overall, I am happy with the amount of reading that I was able to accomplish this quarter, which included many other sources which Sarah suggested to me or I stumbled upon along the way. The readings, and the writing I did in relation to them, helped me to broaden my own thinking on the subject of animism and its role in modern dialog.

Another component of our ILC was what we referred to as Somatic Experiences. Somatics is the study of the body from the inside. It is often explored in dance and movement practices but I believe the idea of somatics has applications in all areas of life. Before moving to Olympia to attend Evergreen, I partook in a weekly somatic writing group and it was this previous experience that informed the development of this idea as part of our ILC. We saw it as a method for interacting with our senses and consciousness in an interesting manner that is little explored in the world of academia. This was a really rewarding experience and I feel like this is the portion of the ILC in which I feel I was most successful. As I mentioned earlier, the subject of animism and my own interactions with the “more-than-human world” is something I think about every day and is the primary focus of my own philosophical explorations. It was interesting and exciting to integrate this part of my life into my academic work for this quarter. The goal of this work was to put our animal bodies into direct interaction with the biosphere and write from a place of embodiment, as opposed to over intellectualizing our experiences. This felt so incredibly natural to me and proved beneficial to my life both in and out of school. I had a lot of stress and anxiety this quarter and having an excuse to be out in the world walking, breathing deeply, and paying attention to the subtleties of the sensual world was incredibly rewarding and I am very happy with the writing that came out of this experience.

Finally, Sarah asked Kirsten and I to create the mid-quarter self evaluation assignment relating to the book *The Lives of Animals* by J.M Coetzee. Because this book deals with moral issues relating to the ways in which humans, in an industrialized society, treat animals, it tied directly into the work that we did for the quarter. Kirsten and I were both honored that Sarah thought highly enough of us to give us this important task. We both had to write our own responses to the assignment and Sarah asked us to write more than one response each, so that the other students would have multiple examples to work from. It’s hard to initially measure the success of creating an assignment like this, but after reading over the work of our fellow students and realizing how creatively they approached the assignment I feel like the assignment we created was successful. We pushed students to think and write in an outside the box fashion and I really enjoyed many of the responses to the assignment, which included works of fiction, non-fiction, and even poetry. This was a very reward experience and I don’t feel like we could have possibly done a better job.

Overall I am very happy with the work that I did this quarter, I only wish there was a little more time to continue doing this work under Sarah’s tutelage and in the classroom community. However, since this is work that I want to continue exploring for the rest of my life I feel at peace with what I wasn’t able to accomplish during the quarter because I know that it will be accomplished in the near future.