Kirsten Evenson

Midterm Self Evaluation #2

Word Count: 966

*“It won't give up, it wants me dead, goddamn this noise inside my head”*

Kyrsten followed the sound of the music and came into the kitchen to find Kirsten at the table. She was sitting in the morning light, surrounded by papers and books, her hands stained with ink and chocolate. She looked up when she heard Kyrsten’s footsteps, hands clenched in her hair.

"Are you seriously listening to Nine Inch Nails right now?" Kyrsten asked her, turning to the coffee pot and filling a mug. She leaned on the counter and looked at Kirsten over the rim.

"Yes, " Kirsten answered, "Don’t judge me. This song is particularly soothing at the moment."

"What are you doing?" Kyrsten asked.

Kirsten made a face. "I'm trying to write this self evaluation for class, and I'm having an anxiety attack about it, but I think that somehow the anxiety I'm having is a small example of what I've been thinking through for this project, and if I could just wrap it all up it would make sense."

Kyrsten tilted her head to the side and raised an eyebrow. "Tell me more."

"I just finished reading this book called Dark Ecology, by Timothy Morton. It's about... a lot of things, but one of his main points is that when some humans started practicing agriculture thousands of years ago, we by necessity shifted the way we think and see the world from one of wonder and humility to one of order and control. He talks about agrilogistics as a kind of program or virus that we started running, for good reasons at the time, but that it’s lead to the current mess we’re in with global warming and mass extinctions and the probability that we as a species won’t survive the changes either.”

Kyrsten nodded, after almost 20 years of friendship used to Kirsten’s need to talk around a subject in circles before she could get to the point.

Kirsten took a deep breath. “SO, people have started to pay attention to the fact that we’re in trouble, but Timothy Morton says we’re trying to think through the problem using agrilogistic programming.” She paused, and looked out the window.

“What does that have to do with anxiety?” Kyrsten asked. She came to sit across from Kirsten, and looked out the window with her, to where the new growth on the trees filtered the sunlight green.

“There is a part in Dark Ecology where Morton says... hold on, let me find it...” Kirsten rustled through the dog-eared, highlighted pages of a small orange book until she found the quote. “‘Depression is an autoimmune disorder of the intellect against its poor phenomenological host being, little you.’ And just prior to that, he talks about the ‘irreducible gap between what you are and who you think you are.’”

She shut the book. “I’m not entirely sure I’m interpreting him right, but I think it could mean that because our intellects have been shaped by agrilogistics there is a need to be ordered and make sense at all times, and when our messy, weird animal bodies don’t submit to the virus it attacks our... well, something like our souls, and the fight for the intellect to gain control over something uncontrollable can manifest as depression or anxiety.”

Kyrsten just looked at her.

“Look, it’s just a theory but it makes a lot of sense to me. I get the worst anxiety when I’m trying to corral the sensory input, emotions and intuitive knowledge of the world that comes from the gut- from somewhere around and below my intellect- into a logical, linear narrative.”

Kyrsten nodded and said, “What about clinical depression? Or anxiety from day to day life stress?”

Kirsten stared at Kyrsten with her chin on her palm. “Sure. I guess I’m not saying this is the ONLY reason for anxiety and depression. Maybe we just need more than two words.”

“In Portuguese there’s a word that means feeling melancholy and nostalgic for something you know will never happen,” Kyrsten said. “Or maybe it means a sadness you enjoy. I don’t speak Portuguese.”

“Yes! Either way.” Kirsten said. “There is the kind of anxiety that is a disconnection from your spirit, which you feel in one part of your body,” she patted her stomach, “and there is the anxiety that comes from worrying what people are thinking about you, which I feel here,” and she patted the top of her head. “I think mine comes from trying too hard to be linear, which is why I connected so much with Morton’s ideas.”

“Do you think there is a way to use language without being linear?” Kyrsten asked.

“I was starting to think there isn’t, but I read a piece by Linda Hogan where she talks about the way indigenous languages...” She flipped through one of the notebooks on the table and found the passage. “‘Indigenous languages contain and hold within them the embedded knowledge and deep science of our natural habitats.’” She looked back up at Kyrsten. “That got me thinking about the ways that when I write and read poetry, it feels like the words are coming from or landing in my body, rather than being processed with my rational mind. I think the rational mind is a tool of the body, but we’ve elevated it to be the master of all. I don’t know what I’m missing, but this obsession with language feels important to the questions Allan and I are trying to answer about animism, belief and embodiment. There is another passage, from The Lives of Animals... here it is:

“Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses?... No... Then why do it? You said that you were tired of clever talk about animals, proving by syllogism that they do or do not have souls. But isn’t poetry just another kind of clever talk: admiring the muscles of the big cats in verse? Wasn’t your point about talk that it changes nothing?... Later in the same conversation, the mother says... John, I don’t know what I want to do. I just don’t want to sit silent.”

Kirsten and Kyrsten looked at each other across the table for a long moment of silence.

“So for you this project, and all the reading and walking around in the woods you’re doing, is because you can’t sit silent? Even though it makes you feel crazy?” Kyrsten finally asked, sipping from her coffee mug as she waited for the answer.

Kirsten smiled at her. “I’m glad you’re here,” she said in response, and got up to make some tea.