



ANIMISM READING LIST

Merlin CCC – 17th May 2020

Henry Kramer & David Nowakowski

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* and *Becoming Animal*.

Likely the leading philosopher today on the topic of animism, Abram argues that we should root ourselves both in our direct experience and in the encompassing Earth. His first book, *Spell*, is a philosophical argument in defense of animism; it is beautifully written and accessible to non-philosophers. His second book, *Becoming Animal*, is a collection of creative non-fiction essays interspersed with further compelling arguments.

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* and *The Enchantment of Modern Life*.

If you are looking to dive straight into some really dense (*be warned: we mean dense*) philosophy and theory surrounding New Materialism, Jane Bennett is a good place to start. She is also more cautious in her claims than Abram. We recommend starting with her essay “The Force of Things,” about how little we acknowledge the agency and unpredictability of the matter that surrounds us.

Graham Harvey, “[An Animist Manifesto](#).”

Just what it says on the tin. Short and sweet, a three-page summary of an animist approach to life and the world. Or, as the original publication subtitled it, “A call to arms. And antennae, branches, tentacles etc.”

Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*.

In this book and the [companion website](#), Harvey offers an accessible overview of historical and contemporary animist communities and practices.

Keith Johnstone, *Impro*.

This book is insane in the best way. Ostensibly, it is an instructional book for comedy improvisation. Yet somehow it is also a zen masterpiece, a philosophical theorem, an anthropological stroke of genius, and a psychedelic experiment. Try some of the

mental exercises he recommends – good for trying on new lenses, new ways of seeing and feeling into the world.

Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*.

Yes, *seriously*. Thanks to the persistence of Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, animism in Japan is alive and well. While it's never the subject of discussion in its own right, Kondo takes an animist worldview for granted, and simply lives it, page after page.

C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*.

In addition to being an author of childrens' stories, Lewis was a well-respected medievalist at Oxford. This book paints a vivid picture of the basic, taken-for-granted worldview of the Middle Ages—the worldview which was overthrown by the Cartesian/Newtonian modern approach.

Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness*.

Shepard is a psychologist who asks the question, "Is our society sane?" and wonders what it would be like if it were. He looks to biology, ontogeny (individual development as we grow up), and psychology to feel out some answers to these questions. He ends up with many animist-adjacent conclusions. This is a book, but you can find the title essay online as well.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Shaman*.

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, *Reindeer Moon*.

Two beautiful and vivid novels set in the last ice age, in communities steeped in an animist worldview. In *Shaman*, language and grammar is treated very experimentally and carefully, adding another layer to the attempt to drop into an animistic mode.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.

Thoreau was an animist, even if he didn't use the term. Read this book with an eye for how he attends to the natural world; there is a lot of wisdom here, even if some of it is outdated.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*.

This classic book of poems has so much life-affirming vibrancy in it. Many sections present a good model of what it might be like to inhabit a living, speaking world and affirm your own materiality and body.

Wohlleben, Peter, *The Hidden Life of Trees*.

Trees are people, too.