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resurgence:
an increase or revival after a period of little activity, popularity, or occurrence.

▶▶ 1 VOLCANO

Let's go on a walk. I am carrying a copy of "Resurgence" by Isabelle Stengers and Ola Maciejewska with me, and I would like to read you some passages. We are meeting in our shared imaginary. Allow me to give you some keywords, so you can start imagining our surroundings: ✦ earth, devastation, nature, magic. ✦

We are going to build on this first fleeting vision and subconscious feeling you are experiencing now. If you need a moment to enter your imagination, take your time. When you are ready, open your eyes and keep reading.

I'm glad you're joining me out here today. We are walking towards an active volcano, as the grounds around us start growing into a solid piece of land. It's loud and hot and kind of exciting to be here right now. You look down and see a cardboard sign lying by your feet with the message "We are the grandchildren of the witches you were not able to burn." Hm. What do you do?

- ▼ If you are intrigued, go to 2.
- ▼ If you want to explore the landscape, go to 5.

▶▶ 2 RUINS

I'm also intrigued and somewhat confused. Does this statement imply that the people who were convicted and burned all those years ago were actual witches? I don't know how to feel about it. Not too far from where we are, some collapsed concrete pillars are sticking out of the rocky ground. Let's climb them and sit on the top as I read you a passage of the essay:

① "We are the grandchildren of the witches you were not able to burn"
- Tish Thawer

I will take this motto, which has flourished in recent protests in the United States, as the defiant cry of resurgence - refusing to define the past as dead and buried. Not only were the witches killed all over Europe, but their memory has been buried by the many retrospective analyses which triumphantly concluded that their power and practices were a matter of imaginary collective construction affecting both the victims and the inquisitors. Eco-feminists have proposed a very different understanding of the "burning times". They associate it with

the destruction of rural cultures and their old rites, with the violent appropriation of the commons, with the rule of a law that consecrated the unquestionable rights of the owner, and with the invention of the modern workers who can only sell their labour-power on the market as a commodity. Listening to the defiant cry of the women who name themselves granddaughters of the past witches, I will go further. I will honour the vision which, since the Reagan era, has sustained reclaiming witches such as Starhawk, who associate their activism with the memory of a past earth-based religion of the goddess - who now "returns." Against the ongoing academic critical judgement, I claim that the witches' resurgence, their chant about the goddess' return, and inseparably their return to the goddess, should not be taken as a "regression." ①

Somehow my confusion still lingers. The motto seems to stem from a fictive book called "The Witches of BlackBrook", in which three sisters escape the Salem witch trials by casting a magic spell. Considering that not everyone who was accused of witchcraft during the burning times and its witch trials might have actually been practising magic, I fear these references could discredit the horror and madness people experienced, being wrongly labelled and persecuted as witches. I am staring at the lava streaming out of the earth in front of us, feeling heated and conflicted.

- ▼ If you need to take a step away, go to 3.
- ▼ If you are feeling a sense of sisterhood with the victims, go to 12.

▶▶ 3 RUINS

You ask me to give you a moment. I don't know what you are thinking right now, but you have been staring at your hands for quite a while now. My mother once asked me: "Do you know what the best tool is?", quickly followed by her answering her own question, while digging into the grounds of our garden ripping out weeds: "Your hands." You look at me and reach for my hand. I pull you up from off the ground and we walk away from the burning fires of the volcano towards industrial ruins. I am sensing that you are ready to hear the following passage:

① Given the threatening unknown our future is facing, the question of academic judgements may seem like a rather futile one. Very few, including academics themselves, among those who disqualify the resurgence of witches as regressive, are effectively forced to think by this future, which the witches resolutely address. They are too busy living up to the relentless neoliberal demands which they have now to satisfy in order to survive. However, if there is something to be learned from the past, it may well be the way in which defending the victims of eradication operations has so often deemed futile. In one way or another, these victims deserved their fate, or this fate was the price to be unhappily paid for progress. "Creative

destructions," economists croon. What we have now discovered is that these destructions come with cascading and interconnecting consequences. Worlds are destroyed and no such destruction is ever deserved. This is why I will address the academic world, which, in turns, is facing its own destruction. Probably, because it is the one I know best, also because of its specific responsibility in the formation of the generations which will have to make their way in the future. ①

I take a breath, trying to lighten the pressure on my chest. It doesn't help. I am tired of hearing the constant argument replaying itself in my head about whether it is all hopeless, or if the only way to live is to endlessly battle this thought. To battle the feeling of being out of control.

- ▼ If you have been with the weavers before, go to 6.
- ▼ If you haven't been with the weavers before, go to 16.

▶▶ 4 RUINS

I am now struggling to keep up with you, as you are walking through the forest, using the volcano as a landmark to follow. Suddenly you cannot go further, a fence is blocking the way, allowing me to finally catch up. We look up at the fence and I offer to push you up. You climb over the fence, pulling me up from the other side and now we are walking towards what looks like an overgrown amusement park. Moss and vines are tightly wrapped around the base of a ferris wheel. We climb into one of the compartments and sit down on the damp plastic. What a great moment to read you another passage, it's almost as if I brought you here for this reason:

① Resurgence often refers to the reappearance of something defined as deleterious - e.g. an agricultural pest or an epidemic vector - after a seemingly successful operation of eradication. It may also refer to the reworlding of a landscape after a natural catastrophe or a devastating industrial exploitation. Today, such a reworlding is no longer understood by researchers in ecology in terms of the restoration of some stable equilibrium. Ecology has succeeded in freeing itself from the association of what we call "natural" with an ordered reality verifying scientific generalization. In contrast, academic judgements entailing the idea of regression still imply what has been called "The Ascent of Man": "Man" irrevocably turning his back on past attachments, beliefs, and scruples, affirming his destiny of emancipation from traditions and the order of nature. Even critical humanities including feminist studies, whatever their deconstruction of the imperialist, sexist, and colonialist character of the "Ascent of Man" motto, still do not know how to disentangle themselves from the reference to a rational progress which opposes the possibility of taking seriously the contemporary resurgence of what does not conform to a materialist, that is, secularist, position. ①



▲If you feel dizzy from the speed of science and its insatiable urge for progress of the human species, go to 3.

▼If you crave rationality, go to 7.

▶▶ 5 VOLCANO

We are climbing up the volcano, dodging the streams of lava all around us, until we finally make it to the top. It's pretty hot up here, but then again we are in our shared imaginary, so it is only as hot as you choose to imagine. Writing this, I realise it's quite hard to imagine heat. As the volcano purges another gleaming hot rain of lava, I read you this passage:

① If resurgence is a word for the future, it is because we may use it in the way the granddaughters of the witches do: as a challenge to eradivative operations, with which what we call materialism and secularism are irreducibly associated, are still going on today. It is quite possible to inherit the struggle against the oppressive character of religious institutions without forgetting what came together with materialism and secularism; the destruction of what opposed the transition to capitalism both in Europe and in the colonized world.¹ ①

From up here you can see over the entire landscape. The volcano is surrounded by a dense pine tree forest. On the left end, you see a weird metal structure. On the right end, you see a large building.

▲If you want to go left, go to 4.

▼If you want to go right, go to 7.

▶▶ 6 RUINS

You tell me that you've had enough, that none of the options I give you are ever enough. None of the options are choices of your own. I try to think of a reasoning to clear our coast, but nothing comes to mind. We walk away from each other, as you think of which path to choose, now that they are laid out in front of you. Suddenly you find a note in your pocket:

① It is quite possible to resist the idea that what was destroyed is irrevocably lost and that we should have the courage to accept this loss.

Certainly it cannot be a question of resurrecting the past. What eventually returns is also reinventing itself as it takes root in a new environment, challenging the way it defined its destruction as a fait accompli. In the academic environment, defining as a fait accompli the destruction of the witches might be the only true point of agreement uniting two antagonist powers: those who take as an "objective fact" that the magic they claimed to practice does not exist, and those who understand magic as a cultural-subjective construction belonging to the past. ①

✕Your journey ends here. Thank you for joining me. Take a moment

to visualise our shared imaginary landscape, and start mapping it out on the main map.

▶▶ 7 ACADEMY

I follow you as you walk on a concrete road towards a large building. It has 'FACTS ONLY' engraved on top of a massive wooden door. You ring the bell but noone is opening. Defeated from walking aimlessly, you sink down onto the ground, as you can't help but feel lost out here. You look to your side, where I am sitting in a weird squat position. "I'm lost too", I say to you. After some lengthy awkward silence between the two of us, I decide to pick the essay back up and read to you:

① Getting rid of the Objectivity - Subjectivity banners

In the academic world eradivative operations are a routine, performed as "methodology" by researchers who see it as their duty to disentangle situations in order to define them. Some will extract information about human practices only and give (always subjective) meaning to these situations. Others will only look at "(objective) facts," the value of which should be to hold independently of the way humans evaluate them. Doing so, these academics are not motivated by a quest for a relevant approach. Instead they act as mobilized armies of either objectivity or subjectivity, destroying complex situations that might have slowed them down, and would have forced them to listen to voices protesting against the way their method leaves unattended knowledge that matters to others. ①

We accept that this journey is more complex than we expected and slowly get back up. I look at you and wonder what you see. How you see. How it would feel to experience the world as you. How impossible it would be to decide whether your or my eyes see the truth. Does human objectivity exist, or is it some kind of ideal we are chasing?

▼If you are feeling restless, go to 11.

▼If you want to stay around here for a while longer, go to 8.

▶▶ 8 ACADEMY

An almost enjoyable silence is cut by a sudden screech. A white rat has attempted to climb up on your lap. You jump up and do a little dance to shake off the unwanted companion. Should we cross this line and let animals talk? I would say let's just go for it. So anyways, I pick up the rat, looking into its beady little eyes. "Are you looking at me?", the rat asks. The silence is telling, and the rat continues: "I could see once, now I'm blind as a mole. Go on, read your friend another passage!", the rat squeaks. I read:

① That objectivity is a mobilizing banner is easy to demonstrate. It would have no power if it were taken in the strict experimental

sense, where it means the obtaining of an exceptional and fragile achievement. An experimental objective fact is always extracted by active questioning. However, achieving objectivity then implies the creation of a situation that gives the thing questioned the very unusual power to authorize one interpretation that stands against any other possible one. Experimental objectivity is thus the name of an event, not the outcome of a method. Further, it is fragile because it is lost as soon as the experimental facts leave the lab - the techno-social rarefied milieu required by experimental achievements - and become ingredients in messy real world situations. When a claim of objectivity nevertheless sticks to those facts outside of the lab, it transforms this claim into a devastating operator. As for the kind of objectivity claimed by the sheer extraction of "data" or by the unilateral imposition of a method, it is a mere banner for conquest. On the other hand, holding the ground of subjectivity against the claims of objectivity, not so very often means empowering the muted voices that point to ignored or disqualified matters. Scientists trying to resist the pseudo-facts that colonialize their fields, caring for a difference to be made between "good" (relevant) and "bad" (abusive) sciences, have found no allies in critical sciences.² For those who are mobilized under the banner of subjectivity such scruples are ludicrous. ①

▼To chase the rat, which has run off into the courtyard, go to 16.

▼To confront the scientists inside the building, go to 9.

▶▶ 9 ACADEMY

You seem focussed, as you walk up the steps of the academic institution in front of us. I am quite amazed, watching you bang against the wooden door of the building like Donkey Kong's aggressive uncle. Something seems to have gotten you heated. The frustration of coming across a locked door, perhaps? Don't be demoralised, please. Can you never just take a moment to enjoy being out here today with me? I grab your arm and pull you away from the entrance towards a bench. I unfold the essay and read:

① Academic events such as theoretical turns or scientific revolutions - including the famous Anthropocene turn - won't help to foster cooperative relations or care for collaborative situations. Indeed, such events typically signal an advance, usually the creative destruction of some dregs of common sense that are still contaminating what was previously accepted. In contrast, if there were to be resurgence it would signal itself by the "demoralization" of the perspective of advance. Demoralization is not however about the sad recognition of a limit to the possibility of knowing. It rather conveys the possibility of reducing the feeling of legitimacy that academic researchers have about their objectivity - subjectivity methodologies. The signal of a process of resurgence might be researchers deserting their position when they recognise that subjectivity and objectivity are banners only, imperatives to



distance themselves from concerned voices, protesting against the dismemberment of what they care for. ①

▼Go to 17.

▶▶ 10 WEAVERS

Not too far from us, you hear a loud discussion. A crowd of people have gathered in the courtyard of an academy building. Someone from inside the building has come out to talk. We step closer. It seems like they are arguing about the meaning of common sense. "Don't you have common sense?", they scream from the building. I pull you aside and read you this passage:

① Making common sense

Addressing situations that are a matter of usually diverging concerns in a way that resists dismembering them, means betraying the mobilization for the advance of knowledge. The resurgence of cooperative and non-antagonist relations points towards situation-centred achievements. It requires that the situation itself be given the power to make those concerned think together, that is to induce a laborious, hesitant, and sometimes conflictual collective learning process of what each particular situation demands from those who approach it. This requirement is a practical one. If the eradicated power of the objective/subjective disjunction is to collapse and give way to a collective process, we need to question many academic customs. The ritual of presentations with PowerPoint authoritative bullet-point like arguments, for instance, perfectly illustrates the way situations are mobilized in a confrontational game, when truth is associated with the power of one position to defeat the others. In addition, we may need to find inspiration in ancient customs. New academic rituals may learn for instance from the way the traditional African palavers or the sweat lodge rituals in North American First Nations, these examples ward off one-way-truths and weaponized arguments. ①

Hm. Common sense can therefore never be a single man's opinion, but could there ever be something like common sense if we sense so differently from one another?

▼Go to 11.

▶▶ 11 WEAVERS

Did we dig too deep or not deep enough, I wonder. Is it enough? I tell you to wait for a moment, so I can be alone. When I think I've made it far enough, I scream along with the shaking earth. Clearly I was not far enough, I realise shortly after you approach me hesitantly, asking what my goddamn problem is. I look at you for a moment trying to put the force pressing against the inner walls of my heart into words, as an elderly woman approaches us. The

lines on her face are profound, but somehow soft. "There are times when you have to scream to be heard", she says, pointing at this passage of the essay I am somehow still holding in my hand:

① Today, many activist groups share with reclaiming contemporary witches the reinvention of the art of consensus-making deliberation; giving the issue of deliberation the power to make common sense. What they learn to artfully design are resurgent ways to take care of the truth, to protect it from power games and relate it to an agreement - generated by a very deliberative process - that no party may appropriate it. They experiment with practices that generate the capacity to think and feel together. For the witches, convoking the goddess is giving room to the power of generativity. When they chant "She changes everything She touches, and everything She touches changes," they honour a change that affects everything, but to which each affected being responds in its own way and not through some conversion She would command. Of course, such arts presuppose a shared trust in the possibility of generativity and we are free to suspect some kind of participatory role-playing. But refusing to participate is also playing a role. Holding to our own reasons demands that, when we feel we understand something about the other's position, we suppress any temptation to doubt the kind of authority we confer to our reasons, as if such a hesitation was a betrayal of oneself. What if the art of transformative encounters cultivated the slow emergence and intensification of a mutual sensitivity? A mutual sensitivity that generates a change in the relationship that each entertains with their own reasons. ①

▲If you have been to the forest, go to 9.

▼If you haven't been to the forest yet, go to 12.

▶▶ 12 FOREST

We are walking around the foot of the volcano, searching for anything significant I could use as a bridge to another passage.

Hm, strange. I swear I just heard something. You close your eyes and listen. There it was again! A humming sound coming from a nearby forest. We are following the rhythmic humming, as our legs carry us faster and faster into the dense forest. All of the sudden, we arrive at a crossing. You lean against the bark of a pine tree, as I read you another passage:

① Polyphonic song

Curiously enough the resurgence of the arts of partnering around a situation, of composing and weaving together relevant but not authoritative reasons, echoes with the work of laboratory biologists. Against the biotechnological redefinition of biology they claim that the self-contained isolable organisms might be a dubious abstraction. What they study are not individual beings

competing for having their interest prevail, but multiple specific assemblages between interdependent mutually sensitive partners weaving together capacities to make a living which belong to none of them separately. "We have never been individuals" write Scott Gilbert and his colleagues who are specialists in evolutionary developmental biology.³ "It is the song that matters, not the singer," adds Ford Doolittle, specialist in evolutionary microbiology, emphasizing the open character of assemblages, the composition of which (the singers) can change as long as the cooperative pattern, the polyphonic song, is preserved.⁴ In other words, biologists now discover that both in the lab and in the field, they have to address cooperative worlds and beings whose ways of life emerge together with their participation in worlding compositions. One could be tempted to speak about a revolution in biology, but it can also be said that it is a heresy, a challenge against the mobilizing creed in the advance of science. Undoubtedly, biology is becoming more interesting, but it is losing its power to define a conquering research direction, since each "song", each assemblage, needs to be deciphered as such. If modes of interdependence are what matters, extraction and isolation are no longer the royal road for progress. No theory - including complex or systemic ones - can define a priori its rightful object, that is, anticipate the way a situation should be addressed. ①

It feels comforting to read about interdependence. I feel a sense of belonging, do you?

▼If you want to go left, where the source of the humming seems to be, go to 15.

▼If you want to go right, where a weird growth of mushrooms is coming out of the roots of ancient pine trees, go to 13.

▶▶ 13 FOREST

You follow the path, stepping up the roots of a pine tree where wild Matsusake mushrooms are growing. As you take a closer look, I read you another passage:

① This "heretical" biology is apt to become an ally in the resurgence of cooperative relations between positive sciences and humanities at a time when we vitally need demobilization, relinquishing banners which justified our business-as-usual academic routines. I will borrow Anna Tsing's challenging proposition, that our future might be about learning to live in "capitalist ruins."⁵ That is, in the ruins of the socio-technical organizational infrastructures that ensured our business-as-usual life. Ruins may be horrific, but Tsing recognises ruins also as a place for the resurgence and cultivation of an art of paying attention, which she calls the "art of noticing." Indeed ruins are places where vigilance is required, where the relevance of our reasons is always at risk, where trusting the abstractions we entertain is inviting disaster. Ruins demand consenting to the precariousness of perspectives taken



for granted, that "stable" capitalist infrastructures allowed us, or more precisely, allowed some of us. ①

▲If you have enough of the forest and want to find some civilisation, go to 7.

▼If you want to eat the mushroom, go to 14.

▶▶ 14 FOREST

You eat the mushroom. I look at you and laugh. "Are you gonna get one for me, too?", I ask. You don't really get why I can't just get my own, but for the sake of the story moving forward you pick another one and hand it to me. I start reading with my mouth full of mushroom:

① Tsing follows the wild Matsutake mushroom that thrives in ruined forests - forests ruined by natural catastrophes or by blind extraction, but also by projects meant to ensure a "rational and sustainable" exploitation, that discovered too late that what they had eliminated as prejudicial or expendable did matter. Devastation, the unravelling of the weaving that enables life, does not need to be willful, deliberate - blindly trusting an idea may be sufficient. As for Tsing, she is not relying on overbearing ideas. What she notices is factual but does not allow to abstract what would objectively matter from situational entanglements, in this case articulated by the highly sought mushroom and its symbionts including humans. Facts, here, are not stepping stones for a conquering knowledge and do not oppose objectivity to subjectivity. What is noticed is first of all what appears as interesting or intriguing. It may be enlightening but the light is not defining the situation, it rather generates new possible ways of learning, of weaving new relations with the situation. ①

▲If you feel like slowly making your way back to the volcano, go to 4.

▼If you've had enough of me and want to talk to other people, go to 10.

▶▶ 15 WEAVERS

As we are walking towards a clearance, a group of elderly women comes to greet us. They ask us to join their circle. We follow them into their home, where everything is covered in endless fabrics. One of the women is showing us around the different rooms, where we lay down on a beautiful rug, looking at the weathered stone ceiling. I open up the essay and starting reading to you:

① We are the weavers and we are the woven

If our future is in the ruins, the possibility of resurgence is the possibility of cultivating, of weaving again what has been unravelled in the name of "the Ascent of Man." We are not to

take ourselves for the weavers after having played the masters, or the assemblers after having glorified extraction. "We are the weavers and we are the web", sing the contemporary witches who know and cultivate generativity.⁶ The arts of cultivation are arts of interdependence, of consenting to the precariousness of lives involved in each other. Those who cultivate do their part, trusting that others may do their own but knowing that what they aim at depends on what cannot be commanded or explained. Those who claim to explain growth or weaving are often only telling about the preparations required by what they have learned to foster, or they depend on the selection of what can be obtained and mobilized off-ground in rarefied, reproducible environments. In the ruins of such environments, resurgence is not a return to the past, rather the challenge to learn again what we were made to forget - but what some have refused to forget. ①

You close your eyes, thinking of all of the things you refuse to forget and carry with you. Conscious and subconscious threads woven into the very fabric of your being.

▲If you want to stay to hear what the weaver thinks about this, go to 11.

▲If you want to go back outside, go to 4.

▶▶ 16 WEAVERS

I wrote you a story, but it lost its thread. We are now chasing white mice. I am losing a sense of purpose. Does it matter? Could we make a change, even if we found what we were looking for? You feel a bit out of place, as I become teary-eyed. "What the hell is it with this one?", you ask yourself. Our silence reveals a nearby dispute. As we make our way into the courtyard of the building, we witness a group of elderly women arguing with people from the inside of the institution. Before you make your way into their midst, I read you this passage:

① When the environmental, social and climate justice, multiracial Alliance of alliances, led by women, gender oppressed people of colour, and Indigenous Peoples, claim that "it takes roots to grow resistance," or else, to "weather the storm," they talk about the need to name and honour what sustains them and what they struggle for.⁷ When those who try to revive the ancient commons, which were destroyed all over the world in the name of property rights, claim that there is "no commons without commoning," that is, without learning how to "think like commoners," they talk about the need to not only reclaim what was privatized but to recover the capacity to be involved with others in the ongoing concern and care for their maintenance of the commons.⁸ Resurgence is a word for the future as it confronts us with what William James called a "genuine option concerning this future". Daring to trust, as do today's activists, in an uncertified, indeed improbable, not to say "speculative," possibility of reclaiming a future worth living and dying for, may seem ludicrous. But the option cannot be avoided

because today there is no free standing place outside of the alternative: condescending skepticism, refusing to opt or opting against resurgence, are equivalent. ①

▲ go to 11.

▶▶ 17 ACADEMY

"What difference does it make, her taking me all the way out here to read this essay?", you ask yourself. "Wouldn't it have been easier to just read it by myself, in the order it was meant to be read in?" Maybe it would have been easier, but maybe something would have gone lost in the process. Sing with me:

① Such an option has no privileged ground. Neither the soil sustaining the roots nor the mutually involved of interdependent partners composing a commons, can be defined in abstraction from the always-situated learning process of weaving relations that matter. These are generative processes liable to include new ways of being with new concerns. New voices enter a song, both participating in this song and contributing to reinvent it. For us academics it does not mean giving up scientific facts, critical attention, or critical concern. It demands instead that such facts, attention, and concerns are liable to participate in the song, even if it means adding new dimensions that complicate it. As such, even scientific facts thus communicate with what William James presented as the "great question" associated with a pluriverse in the making: "does it, with our additions, rise or fall in value? Are the additions worthy or unworthy?"⁹ Such a question is great because it obviously cannot get a certified answer but demands that we do accept that what we add makes a difference in the world and that we have to answer for the manner of this difference. ①

✕Your journey ends here. Thank you for joining me. Take a moment to visualise our shared imaginary landscape, and start mapping it out on the main map.

?Footnotes

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