

HÉLÈNE FRICHOT –

# The Smoke of Burnt Witches in Our Nostrils

In a footnote appending the introduction to her fiery book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, feminist activist and scholar Silvia Federici claims that there is only one memorial to the victims of the witch hunts that swept through Europe and its colonies, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and it is to be found in Norway.[1] The Steilneset, as it is called, in Vardø opened in 2011 to commemorate the trial and execution of ninety-one locals as witches. It was a collaboration between feminist artist Louise Bourgeois and Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. More recently, Buildner Architecture Competitions mounted a student competition with the theme “Memorial for Witches,” in which the winning student projects addressed issues as diverse as political propaganda, the aftereffects of the pandemic, social justice, and truth in what some call a post-truth age.[2] The historical plight of witches here was broadly interpreted, and the aesthetic persona of the witch was brought into relation with contemporary political concerns.

Federici’s project is more pointed, going beyond memorialization. She connects the rise of capitalism and its resource dependence on colonial projects with the demonization of women as witches and gossips. Amitav Ghosh likewise argues that early capitalism developed alongside the panic and fear of the witch hunt, whose contagious violence extended to the colonies established by Empire.[3] Memorializing the victims of the infamous witch hunts risks merely circumscribing their stories in a delimited historical location, which further includes a forgetting of the enclosure of the commons. The compulsion to memorialize, which offers an excuse to forget, overlooks two things: the persistence of the witch hunt into the present (both figurative and literal), and the affective inheritance of the violence wreaked on women, which we continue to experience in embodied and visceral ways today.

Lest we imagine that the witch hunt was a limited historical event, Federici describes the persistence of witch hunts today in India and Africa. (I hasten to add that the witch hunt, broadly defined, is by no means isolated to the Global South, for it continues to infect all situations where women are sidelined, silenced, and, more violently, sacrificed through rape, murder, and the removal of their right of self-determination over their own bodies.)[4] Federici explains that, with the move toward the privatization of communal land, “witchcraft accusations become a powerful means to break the resistance of those who are to be expropriated.”[5] When architecture, for instance, a spatial and material

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[1] Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018), 6, footnote 1.

[2] See [link](#).

[3] Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (London: John Murray, 2021), 252–253; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2014); Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*.

[4] In the two final chapters of her book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, Federici discusses contemporary witch hunts in India, Latin America, and Africa and relates these to processes of globalization. Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, 46–86.

[5] Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, 66.

practice, is not contributing to the equitable distribution of a commons and an adequate spatial distribution of wealth in support of our common wealth, then it is bargaining in property relations and the enclosure of the commons. [6] Simply put, the so-called witch and the knowledge practices of those who identify as women have been repressed and excluded to clear the path for the rise of capitalism, resulting in erasures and exclusions, including in our own discipline of architecture. Drawing on Federici's thinking, as well as on philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway, who introduce the activist work of the contemporary ecofeminist witch Starhawk, this essay attests to how the witch hunt still haunts us today, especially in the ways it mobilizes affect: specifically, how we affect others, and are in turn affected. What I'm arguing for, with Stengers, is an immanent critical project that involves a grounded politics of affect.

[6] See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 69.



Installation by Louise Bourgeois at the Steilneset Memorial in Vardø Norway. Photograph © Bjarne Riesto / [www.riesto.no](http://www.riesto.no).

To return to the craft of witches, to witchcraft as an empirical art and a grounded politics of affect, Stengers argues for immanent attention rather than transcendent categories of knowledge:

WHAT THE WITCHES CHALLENGE US TO ACCEPT IS THE POSSIBILITY OF GIVING UP CRITERIA THAT CLAIM TO TRANSCEND ASSEMBLAGES, AND THAT REINFORCE, AGAIN AND AGAIN, THE EPIC OF CRITICAL REASON. WHAT THEY CULTIVATE, AS PART OF THEIR CRAFT (IT IS A PART OF ANY CRAFT), IS AN ART OF IMMANENT ATTENTION, AN EMPIRICAL ART ABOUT WHAT IS GOOD OR TOXIC—AN ART WHICH OUR ADDICTION TO THE TRUTH HAS TOO OFTEN DESPISED AS SUPERSTITION. THEY ARE PRAGMATIC, RADICALLY PRAGMATIC, EXPERIMENTING WITH EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT, AS THEY KNOW, IS NEVER INNOCUOUS AND INVOLVES CARE, PROTECTIONS, AND EXPERIENCE.[7]

[7] Isabelle Stengers, "Reclaiming Animism," *e-flux* 36 (July 2012), [link](#).

What Stengers insists here is that knowledge practices (craft) engaged in the empirical art of paying close attention can best address the material

specificities of situated problems. In introducing the “epic of critical reason,” what she is alluding to is a battle between transcendent criteria (imposed abstractly from above and beyond) and immanent critique (performed from the midst of things, *par le milieu*). Following an immanent mode of critique places us in the messy midst of things, resisting the kind of capital-S Science that seeks conquest from a privileged point of view on the world. Stengers discusses the hard lines set out by imperatives not to regress. She explains that she wants to resist thinking, and feeling, and speculating, in a way that would too easily situate and thereby pigeonhole others. She wants to challenge the received divide between primitive and modern, between colonized and colonizer, by undertaking what she names, after Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a “decolonization of thought.” Animism, Stengers argues, is too easily deployed as an attribute of primordality, against which philosophical and scientific tools have historically serviced projects of colonization (and still do). It is like the settler/Indigenous divide that must be tackled again and again in the Australian context: there is no easy resolution; there is no easy reconciliation; there is only ongoing, challenging, and crucial work. Furthermore, for the settler, the acknowledgment of complicity in enduring violence must be enunciated again and again.

These reflections on the lingering legacy of the witch hunts and their connection to the conjoined emergence of capitalism and colonialism were provoked by the question: What is at stake for architecture in its complicit relation with the “solids and flows” of neoliberal capitalism?[8] The exclamation that preoccupies me when considering this question comes from Stengers’s recitation of Starhawk’s passionate statement: “The smoke of the burned witches still hangs in our nostrils.”[9] My nostrils are flared: I can’t shake the sensation, so I’ll follow a line of acrid thought, which collapses pasts and presents and refuses any easy linear chronology of material and political events, obliging us, I argue, to combine critical thinking with an affective responsiveness to the specificity of occasions. This means going in search of an immanent mode of critique to struggle with the barbarism of neoliberal capitalism and its mores. An emphasis on immanence rather than transcendence is one Stengers shares with Starhawk as well as Donna Haraway.[10] Immanence means we are mired in our immediate milieu, that we must struggle from the midst of things, coping as best we can. How do we undertake a critique from this position, and refuse the purported end of the critical project or rather rethink criticality entirely? Stengers is cautious of the “epic of critical reason,” seeking out the immanent work of critique along other, less respectable channels.[11] By “less respectable,” what she offers is a retort to the status quo that overdetermines knowledge practices and that drives research funding based on capitalistic, profit-driven imperatives and metrics. “Less respectable” for Stengers means listening to those voices otherwise considered irrelevant, outside of institutionally approved domains of expertise: listening to the witches, for instance, or simply listening to women and those who do not identify as belonging to the patriarchy. For Starhawk, immanence is found in the bonds between community, the land, and its resources. Immanence situates a power-from-within (one’s self, one’s community) as distinct from a power-over, by which Starhawk means “the powers of connectedness, sustenance, healing and creating.”[12] Part of this obliges us to consciously expand our citational practices—count

[8] See Catharina Gabrielsson and Helena Mattsson, “Pay Attention!” *Architecture and Culture* 5, no. 2 (May 2017): 157–164.

[9] Starhawk cited in Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.” See also Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 219.

[10] See Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[11] Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

[12] Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

jury members, lists of architectural precedents, bibliographical references: Are women, queer/trans people, and POC adequately represented? Listening to the cry of the witch and ecofeminist Starhawk, Stengers asks: How can we slow down, pay attention, and care, learn locally where we might have otherwise imposed our expertise from the outside? How can we learn what is good and what is toxic (i.e., bad for us), and do this by respecting “care, protections, and experience”? [13] By foregrounding the aesthetic personae of the witch and by introducing the zombie-critic, this essay argues for an immanent mode of critique grounded in a politics of affect, one that challenges the conceit of a critical project imposed from an objective outside.

[13] Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, 4.

### Deflating Affect

Neoliberal capitalism is the diffuse political milieu in which we currently struggle, a milieu that architecture, with its idols and icons, is all too ready to prop up. Douglas Spencer directs a sharp rebuke at architectural culture over the last twenty years, and at how it has engaged in an assault on critical theory, resulting in its co-option by the forces of neoliberal capitalism:

ARCHITECTS HAVE LEARNED TO PLAY BY, AND PROFIT FROM, THE RULES OF THE NEOLIBERAL TRUTH GAME: DISCREDIT ANY AND ALL ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD AS ELITIST AND DESPOTIC; DEMEAN HUMAN CAPACITIES FOR REASONING, LEAVE EVERYTHING TO THE SUPERIOR CALCULATING POWERS OF THE MARKET, RESIGN ONESELF TO ENJOYING ITS PRODUCTS RATHER THAN INTERPRETING THEM; DON'T THINK, FEEL; MARKET YOURSELF; MARKET THE MARKET AS PROGRESSIVE.[14]

[14] Douglas Spencer, *Critique of Architecture: Essays on Theory, Autonomy, and Political Economy* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2020), 19.

He is concerned with the means of production of objects and subjects in their relations, asking how architecture is financed, fulfills, or stymies social, political, and economic projects. Citing Karl Marx, Spencer argues that capitalism produces not only an object for a subject but also a subject for an object. Here we have the risk of a reciprocal relay between an architecture constructed to produce the kind of subject who continues to fulfill a specific kind of architectural project as a matter of course; we have affective relations reduced to the meanest passions. Spencer is an architectural theorist well known for championing critical theory, which he pits against the rise of affect theory.

[15] He is wary of the deployment of affect by architects such as Alejandro Zaera-Polo and Farshid Moussavi, employed as a means of upholding the status quo, and presumed to be an applicable finish available in the materials library.

[16] He does not acknowledge that there might be a politics of affect, and he is joined by other thinkers who are equally suspicious of such a possibility.

For instance, in her demolition of affect theory, and especially of those affect theorists taking recourse to Gilles Deleuze, Ruth Leys argues that the “appeal to affect eliminates disagreement because to see or feel things from a different perspective is to see or feel the same thing differently but without contradiction.” [17] Feelings here are assumed to be merely private, while our rational claims, which establish our agreements and disagreements, are public

[15] See, for instance, Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 23–45; Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Sylvia Lavin, *Kissing Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Compliance and Control* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[16] Douglas Spencer, “Neoliberalism and Affect: Architecture and the Patterning of Experience,” in Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism*, 139–159.

[17] Cited in Walter Benn Michaels, “Uninterested/Unequal/Understood: Architecture’s Class Aesthetic.” Walter Benn Michaels in Conversation with Sebastián López Cardozo,” *PLAT 9 Commit* (Rice University, Houston), 11. See Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

and thereby occupy a zone of negotiation, performing a politics. Leys does not allow for the work of affect when it comes to rational argumentation, suggesting that affect dissolves all capacity for functional disagreement. She, too, refuses to agree that affect can be political. Those who argue with and for affect, Leys suggests, are doing so because they want to contest how political argument and rationality have been thought to operate.[18] According to Leys, Deleuzian theorists challenge the critical work of rationality, its divisions, distinctions, and taxonomies, and propose in their place “the non-semantic, the nonlinear, the autonomous, the vital, the singular, the new, the anomalous, the indeterminate, the unpredictable, and the disruption of fixed or ‘conventional’ meanings.”[19] For Leys, affect theory becomes total nonsense, entirely lacking any rationale, merely arousing a kind of animist utopia (here she is specifically critiquing the affect theory of political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett) wherein “vital, affective energies imping[e] on each other and produc[e] new, if unpredictable, lives and effects.”[20] These thinkers are determined to divide the world: on the one side, emotions, feelings, and affect; on the other, a capacity for critical reason, for arguing rationally and thereby establishing one’s capacity to partake in political relations in a proper and civilized way. It is worth pausing here to remember how emotions have been historically used as an argument against women’s involvement in politics, meaning that such a divide privileges some thinkers while overlooking the contributions of others.[21]

Leys is cited in a published conversation with literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels in the architectural journal *PLAT*. Affect, for Michaels, as for Spencer, is the dangerous miasma that depoliticizes us, rendering us prey to the voracious demands of neoliberal capitalism.[22] Michaels uses the platform economy Uber as an example. Uber drivers *feel* their freedom and autonomy and a sense of empowerment in their car on the road, and yet as gig workers, sooner or later they come up against the realization of their exploitation: no sick leave, no superannuation, sole responsibility for the functioning of their own work equipment, no access to a union to protect them. This is a dynamic that harks back to the emergence of capitalism, as Federici explains, whereby capitalism attempts to maintain the illusion that it fosters freedom rather than coercion, that is, demanding that we work as a matter of survival, with no access to the means of production.[23] Certainly the risks described here are pressing, and yet is the power of affect really what is at work, or only forms of alienated and passive self-deception? That is to say, the sad passions, which disable political action and reduce the worker to a state of docility.[24]

Michaels’s argument, much like Spencer’s, is deeply suspicious of feelings and affect. He is suspicious of the way contemporary capitalist society is compelled to sense, to experience, to describe what this feels like, for us, thereby overlooking the persistence of a class-based structure. He proposes a distinction between the mere description of feelings and critical judgment and its presumed rationality, arguing that “the distinction between the experience and the meaning matters.”[25] He follows Leys by arguing: “If you feel comfortable and I feel uncomfortable, we just have our feelings. If you think the point of the work is to produce discomfort and I think it isn’t, then we’re doing something more than having feelings—we’re making claims about the world and on each other.”[26] Where feeling is unstructured (and affect is regularly defined as pre-personal, nonlinear, and autonomous from cognition

[18] Leys, *The Ascent of Affect*, 309.

[19] Leys, *The Ascent of Affect*, 321.

[20] [19] Leys, *The Ascent of Affect*, 350.

[21] See Linda Åhall, “Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion,” *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 1 (March 2018): 36–51.

[22] Michaels, “Uninterested/Unequal/Understood.”

[23] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 87.

[24] As I explain in “Infrastructural Affects,” Deleuze uses Spinoza to offer an account of affect organized on a spectrum between active affects and sad passions, the former enabling political action in a world, the latter disabling one’s actions and capacities. Hélène Frichot, “Infrastructural Affects: Challenging the Autonomy of Architecture,” *Architectural Affects after Deleuze and Guattari*, eds. Marko Jobst and Hélène Frichot (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 15–16.

[25] Michaels, “Uninterested/Unequal/Understood,” 13.

[26] Michaels, “Uninterested/Unequal/Understood,” 12.

and meaning), critical theory is supposed to give us access to an analysis of the (class) structures, to which I would add the intersectional gamut of gender, sexuality, race, and diversely abled bodies that overdetermines the encounters and relations taking place in our everyday worlds. Yet what critical theory under this definition obviates are the ways we gather and mingle, affecting each other, and being affected in turn, and how this has an impact on embodied ways of becoming as well as on learning to cope in a local world alongside each other. The “feelings” diminished by the critics above are those that remain merely personal, not pushing and pulling with the political complexity of matters of concern.[27]

### Reanimating the Zombie-Critic

We must critique our own tools of critique, reinvent them for new problems. Despite Spencer’s misgivings about affect theory, new materialism, and Actor Network Theory, including Bruno Latour’s philosophy, this is what I hear the late Latour saying in his polemical essay, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.”[28] Latour argues that, indeed, critical theory has died, but it might live again according to its capacity for construction, rather than demolition, that is, by “generating more ideas than we have received.”[29] The problem, as Latour sees it, is that our critical weapons are blunt and out of date. The critic, he argues, “is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather.”[30] This means getting involved on the ground and listening to all those concerned.

Fostering spaces of gathering, slowing down to listen, acknowledging one’s merely situated knowledges, can enable the weaving of relations, and such activities also pertain to the empirical craft of the witch. Slowing down gives pause, for the critic must take the time to wonder at their own subjective construction, and how this influences their compulsion to capture and divide the world.[31] To slow down means to resist the “great economic race.”[32] Stengers, who is often found in theoretical dialogue with Latour,[33] puts it like this: “Some people love to divide and classify, while others are bridge makers weaving relations that turn a divide into a living contrast, one whose power is to affect, to produce thinking and feeling.”[34] Critique can bring us together into a public arena where we can vocalize our disagreements and get on with things—perhaps even hatch collaborative projects—and this is always a situated and affective practice. The challenge, seemingly intractable, is the current battle with the barbarism of neoliberal capitalism and its inexhaustible capacity for co-option, recuperation, and climate change denialism. Latour talks of this in terms of “instant revisionism,” the skepticism polluting everyday affects expressed in the ease of circulation of conspiracy theories, writing: “The smoke of the event has not yet finished settling before dozens of conspiracy theories begin revising the official account, adding even more ruins to the ruins, adding even more smoke to the smoke.”[35] Slow down, smell the smoke, acknowledge what materials and relations are smoldering.

In the face-off with the forces of accumulation for the sake of accumulation (all that fuel for the fire), and with a sentiment uncannily close

[27] For a critique of affect as defined under merely personal feelings, see my recent essay: Frichot, “Infrastructural Affects,” 10–25.

[28] Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225–248.

[29] Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” 248.

[30] Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” 246.

[31] See Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains.”

[32] Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press and Meson Press, 2015), 56.

[33] See Philippe Pignarre, *Latour-Stengers: An Entangled Flight* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023).

[34] Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

[35] Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” 228.

to that of Latour, Spencer—who considers Latour no friend—remarks that “criticality must repeatedly be brought back to life in order to be killed over and over again.”[36] Simply, we must keep trying. So, the critic is like a zombie constantly reanimated (and the traditional connection between the zombie and the witch should be noted here, the witch or witch doctor being the one who enslaves the undead).[37] What reanimates the zombie-critic if not the call to respond to the provocation of violent events, the slow demolition of civil liberties alongside the quashing of reproductive rights (for instance, the devastating aftereffects of the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the US)? Yet some caution should be issued here, because if the zombie-critic merely reuses critical tools that have previously proved ineffective, if they remain under the spell of the epic of critical reason, then their critique will only serve the purposes of further demolition. On the other hand, if the zombie-critic arouses affects such as discomfort, rather than ease, by saying things that break the mood, then they might instead be reanimated as a “killjoy,” complaining when necessary, calling out poor behavior when such is witnessed, especially in spaces of teaching and learning, thereby shifting our habits.[38] Sara Ahmed introduces the feminist killjoy around the intimate space of the family dinner table, where a daughter produces discomfort for her father by calling out sexism, and by refusing to agree that certain objects (of knowledge) are inherently good.[39] The killjoy plays an equally crucial role in the boardroom, at committee meetings, in all the places where decisions are made, where they risk their own position by calling out a lack of diversity of representation. Here a politics of affect arouses discomfort, provoking us to hesitate and reconsider our assumptions: the reanimated zombie-critic can invent new concept tools and hone their skills to become a killjoy, releasing themselves from the charms of the epic of critical reason. This is also why recourse to Stengers’ difficult thinking can be useful, and why the reclaiming of the witch and her craft manifests as a useful provocation to thought and practice.

Stengers argues that the philosopher, the theorist, is the “creator and creature of his own passionate construction,” and in this statement, which seems to suggest that the thinker is also at risk of becoming captured or captivated by her own thinking practices, Stengers is humble enough to acknowledge that the same goes for her. When Stengers follows Deleuze’s proposal for a creative philosophy approached through the creation of concepts that emerge as problems arise, she describes her own relation in terms of a “felt affinity.”[40] The thinker is involved in her situation, thinking-feeling her way through immanent relations, caring, protecting, experiencing, and experimenting.

### A Politics of Affect: The Power to Affect and Be Affected

What is the work of philosophy (to which I would add architectural theory) if not “the power to cause us to think, feel and wonder, the power to have us wondering how practically to relate to it, how to pose relevant questions about it”?[41] These are both orientations Stengers draws attention to. They must be distinguished from an engagement with architecture as an individualistic and merely subjective affair, prone to a *mise en abyme* of proliferating significations or mired in merely personal feelings that acknowledge no politics or, worst

[36] Spencer, *Critique of Architecture*, 19.

[37] Federici explains the connection between the witch and the zombie in the contemporary context of South Africa, describing an incident where young men in Limpopo burned older women alive, having accused them of turning dead people into zombies to make them work as slaves, thereby depriving the young men of jobs. Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, 69.

[38] These being demeanors that Stengers as well as Sara Ahmed uphold. See Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

[39] Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seijworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 38–39. See also Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), and Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

[40] Stengers, “Speculative Philosophy and the Art of Dramatization,” 192.

[41] Stengers, “Speculative Philosophy and the Art of Dramatization,” 192.

of all, inspire heroic gesturing. This is the depoliticized version of affect that Spencer, Leys, and Michaels critique, challenging the conceit that affect could be applied from a catalogue of finishes.[42] Critique, for Spencer, is praxis and inherently political. He also argues that its relation to the object is “immanent” and not “issued from fixed coordinates.”[43] Despite his refusal of a politics of affect, this locates his version of critique in the vicinity of Stengers’s, who argues for immanent critique because she is distrustful of the position from above and from nowhere; the non-situated position of the omniscient thinker or critic, the conceit of transcendence—what Donna Haraway famously calls the “God’s trick.”[44] For Stengers, the work of immanent critique is animated by a politics of affect, how affect is circulated, impacting those who gather around a matter of concern, or what María Puig de la Bellacasa, riffing on Latour, calls a matter of care.[45] The power to affect and to be affected is a power to arouse *both* thinking and feeling. How we affect and are affected can animate our desire to venture into political relations and vehemently disagree with perceived moments of injustice, rather than simply withdraw while enjoying our spatio-material good feelings.

I do not want to argue against the need for critique, for a nuanced approach to criticality, and for the role of critical theory with due respect to its history of emergence. Instead, I want to argue for a critical disposition that includes the politics of affect as a reciprocal relation that can increase our mutually defined capacity for life. Here, though, I’ll return to the acrid smell of the smoke of burnt witches to argue that they have been burned exactly in the name of a rationality that seeks compliance and control, divisions between the empowered and the disempowered, the liberty of some at the expense of others. To smell the smoke of burnt witches “demands we decide whether we are heirs to the witches or the witch hunters,” Stengers explains.[46] Moving slowly and with great care, Stengers wants us to ask difficult questions about the role of critical reason and its truth claims. She must be wary, lest she be accused of mounting an argument that flies in the face of a scientifically determined evidence base. Still, when we become too enamored of a fixed truth and claims for universality, she warns, when we make statements such as “we no longer...”[47]—we no longer believe that, practice in that way, traffic in such superstitious bunkum—we also throw out a long and complex genealogy of hands-on learning and experience. This is the craft of which Stengers speaks when she talks of the witches and their emphasis on immanent attention and empirical art. When we instantiate condescendingly the distinctions “they believed/we know,”[48] the master words of progress begin to speak in our place, while development and its death drive eradicate customary practices. While I cannot devote time to an adequate discussion here, in the Australian context, among others, this pertains to a growing recognition of the role of Indigenous care for Country and the respect due to millennia-old cultural practices and the communities of practice these are involved in. A daughter of philosophy, Stengers confesses that she “could not belong without thinking in presence of women, not weak or unfairly excluded women but women whose power philosophers may have been afraid of.”[49] With what community are we able to think? Where is a feeling that can inspire a thinking fostered? Such questions pertain to all disciplines or knowledge practices and allow for the combination of the capacity to affect and be affected, as well as the capacity to

[42] See Spencer, “Neoliberalism and Affect,” 139–160.

[43] Spencer, *Critique of Architecture*, 20.

[44] Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Vision,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–599, esp. 581.

[45] María Puig de la Bellacasa, “Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things,” *Social Studies of Science* 41, no. 1 (2011): 85–106, esp. 90.

[46] Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

[47] Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183–196, esp. 194.

[48] Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 49.

[49] Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” 196.

agree and disagree and, in the meantime, work things out together.

Drawing on the thinking and practice of Starhawk, Stengers explains that this is what returns us to the “burning times.”<sup>[50]</sup> We see, and smell, and feel, the burning times all around us, closing in, not least on a warming planet amid ecological systems on the brink of collapse. To counter the burning times, Stengers risks philosophical disgrace by raising the topic of magic, yet magic turns out to be about craft, and rituals of gathering that oblige us to extract ourselves from the delusions of the individuated sovereign self, figured as a neoliberal, heroic subject (*Homo economicus*) pursuing wealth for his own self-interest. Instead, we can understand and feel our inextricable connectedness. We cannot go it alone, especially not in the burning times. To gather is not simply to find comfort in agreement, nor to find what we have in common, Stengers further explains, but to work amid disequilibrium, wary of habit, opinion, and cliché. Gathering transforms our relations from belonging to becoming, mobilizing us amid our ecologies of practice. The ritual magic of which Stengers speaks is aimed at fostering a milieu in which challenges can be addressed and experimentation undertaken, where a respect for an ecology of practices and their respective forces can be acknowledged, where thinking, feeling, and acting work concurrently.

[50] Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” 194.

### The Smoke of Burning Witches

When Stengers speaks of the odor of the smoke of burning witches, she acknowledges how we are heirs to the eradication of social and cultural practices obliterated in the name of civilization. What haunts me about this affective olfactory confrontation still lingering in our nostrils is the temporal fold that is produced. The infamous era of the witch hunts, between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, extending from the Old World to the New and back again, is rudely inserted into our present historical moment. A temporal collapse takes place: I can still smell the smoke.

Before concluding, I want to briefly turn again to Federici’s powerful discussion of the correlation between the witch hunt, the suppression of a disenfranchised peasantry, and the emergence of capitalism in lockstep with colonization and its dependence on slavery. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the witch hunt, she argues, was a turning point for women economically, culturally, and politically, leading to the downfall of matriarchies and the destruction of female practices across a period of three centuries, from the end of the fifteenth century through the eighteenth.<sup>[51]</sup> She undertakes a Marxist critique, like Spencer, but takes issue with Marx, as he purportedly has nothing to say about the witch hunt, and not much to say about women’s unpaid reproductive labor. Federici explicitly argues that “the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women.”<sup>[52]</sup> She explains that women’s bodies became a site of power techniques and power relations, a means of dividing the working class from within by producing internal gender strife and distrust and thereby an incapacity to join forces against the ruling class. With land privatization and the enclosure of the commons, women’s capacity to actively take part in informal economies as well as in social life was destroyed.<sup>[53]</sup> Federici goes so far as to state that women’s bodies, by which she means their unpaid reproductive labor (akin to a form of slave labor), replaced the land lost, arguing that “women

[51] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 102–103.

[52] Federici draws on the biopolitical analyses of Michel Foucault to mount her argument. See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 14.

[53] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 71.

*themselves became the commons.*”[54] By the close of the seventeenth century, following a concerted devaluation of women’s labor, a definition of women as nonworkers, and their ensuing expulsion from socially acceptable labor and money relations is nearly complete—this includes the criminalization of women’s control over procreation.[55] All this sounds uncomfortably familiar in the current world-historical juncture.

When Starhawk cries out that “the smoke of the burned witches still hangs in our nostrils,”[56] she incants the violence of the witch hunt by rendering it uncomfortably present. This affective prompt, this olfactory discomfort, provokes Stengers to ask: “How can a culture as educated as ours be so oblivious, so reckless, in its relations to the animate earth?”[57] One answer might be: too much critical rationality unevenly shared, not enough acknowledgment of the felt reciprocity of affecting and being affected in our local environment-worlds. When witch hunts take hold, what results is the destruction of environment-worlds, the eradication of locales of meaning and situated practices, and an inability to undertake both land care and care for social relations, meaning that diverse knowledge practices are likely obliterated. The challenge remains and must be returned to again and again: How can we insert spaces of slowness, resistance, and refusal into architectural practice and thought by reclaiming other ecologies of practice, thereby challenging the ubiquity of an Integrated World Capitalism (IWC)?[58] Architecture, where it accepts a neoliberal capitalist logic, constructs its edifices fueled by the burning bodies of witches past and present. Is it surprising that the smoke of burnt witches can still be smelled in our nostrils? Indeed, my nostrils are flared, and I can’t shake this sensation. It is an uncomfortable sensation we must be prepared to return to again and again, not being tempted to extricate ourselves from those encounters that arouse discomfort and prompt hesitation.

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[54] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 97.

[55] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 92–94.

[56] Starhawk cited in Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.” See also Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, 219.

[57] Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

[58] See Félix Guattari’s account of what he calls an Integrated World Capitalism (IWC) in his essay “The Three Ecologies,” *The Three Ecologies* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 31.