



Some thoughts on wicker and the playpen in the shitstorm.

Pascal Auclair, Buddhist teacher in Montreal, tells a story about quinoa and avocados in one of his retreat talks. The story is meant to illustrate a point about interconnection.

The story he tells is a story that weaves capitalism with indigenous plants, with desire, with food supply chains, with cultural histories and lost connections. The story is simply this: Some years ago 'the people of the North' started to want quinoa. Why quinoa became a 'thing' is a mystery, but suddenly, it was a desire, a demand. 'The people of the South' who had been eating quinoa for eons, suddenly found this staple, which they had grown and distributed and eaten amongst themselves, to be driven up in price, due to high demand in the North. The end of the story is that they could no longer afford to eat their traditional seed.

The story about avocados is a similar story. Due to a variety of conditions, the people of the North wanted avocados at some point, and a lot of them, very badly. The desire was strong. Avocados require a great deal of water in order to grow. The people of the South soon found themselves and their communities without water as water sources were being redirected to grow the avocados that the people of the North required to satiate their avocado desires (these desires which are never, in fact, satiated), while the growers could turn a huge profit.

This story could be told a million times with different peoples, different plants, rocks, minerals, animals, and so on and so forth. This is just one string connecting our feelings to our bodies to our actions to all sorts of others, all sorts of impacts. We are completely entangled.

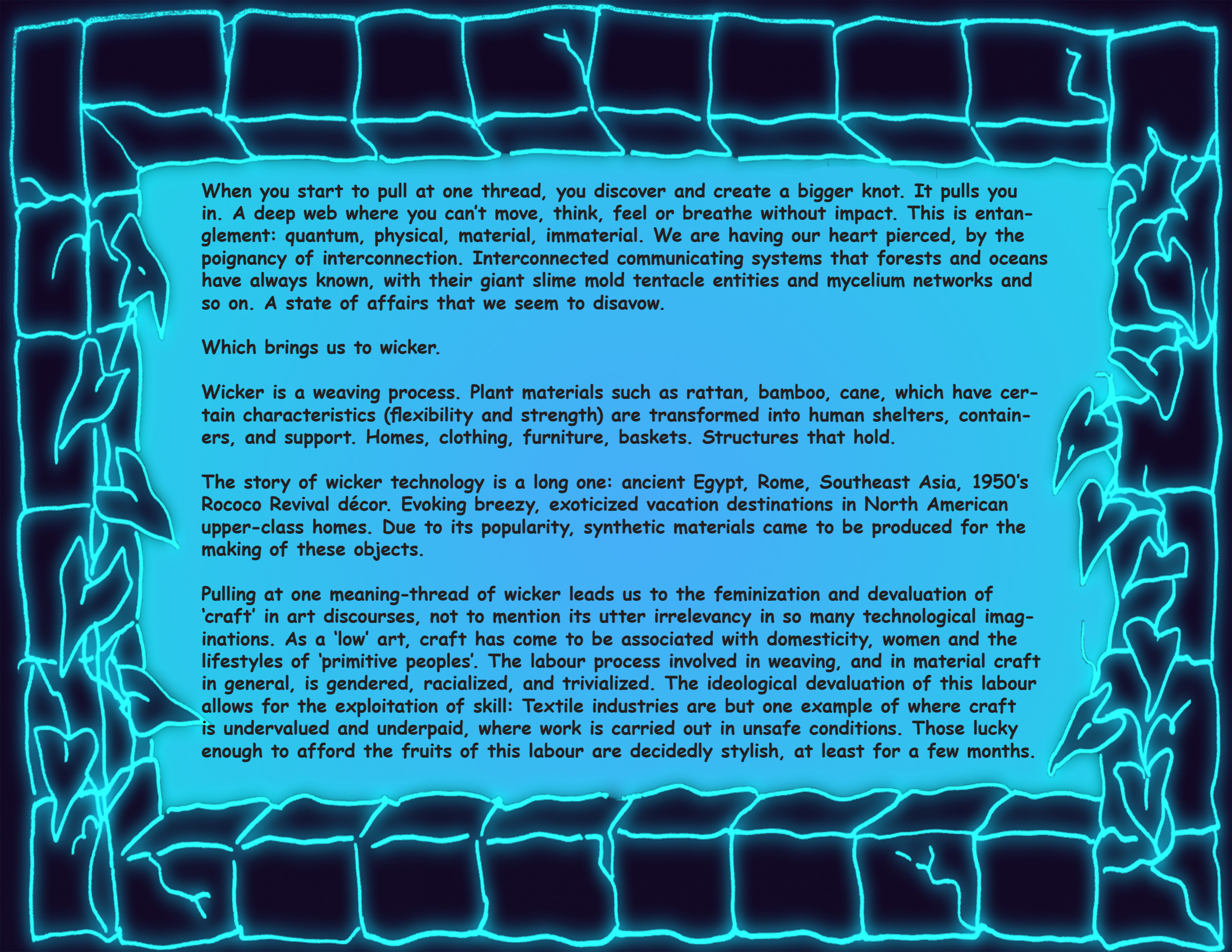


Pascal described this as poignant. Old French, means 'pricking'. Latin: To prick. Painful to physical or mental feeling. Evoking a keen sense of sadness or regret.

During this global pandemic, our awareness of the complex interweave of invisibles and materials are coming into a greater clarity. Shit, piss, fear, greed, toilet paper, contagious affect, in addition to the contagious virus, plus the supply chains, grocery stores and human labourers helping scared hoarders wipe their asses are but one small corner of this entanglement to consider. Mask supplies: a pulp mill in Nanaimo grinds cedar trees into pulp for surgical masks. A factory elsewhere turns that material into something else. Ships it elsewhere. A border between countries, what and who may pass, lorded over by dangerous delusions of separation and exceptionalism. Who is allowed protection. Who gets the quinoa. Who gets the clean water. The gender of labourers: nurses, nursing home staff, grocery store clerks are overwhelmingly female identified. Essential, underpaid, at risk.

Can you follow the thread linking the invisible manic-depressive dynamics of the stock market, the plastic islands in the ocean? Can you trace the link between your zoom meetings, your income, the minerals in your phone, the deforestation of mountains and dispossession of humans from land and the annihilation of ways of knowing the earth? The story of the pangolin, or the bat, or the pig or the cow—each of them creatures who, we are told, carry viruses. Entities that might shut down the world's economy, or wreak havoc on a body.

From the human perspective, these beings are caught in so many webs of meaning and relationship: objectified as product and consumed, revered as holy and venerated. Moreover, this entanglement does not uphold borders between species: There is no ground claim to human separation. A virus is a boundary trickster, weaving us all together and rearranging the coordinates.



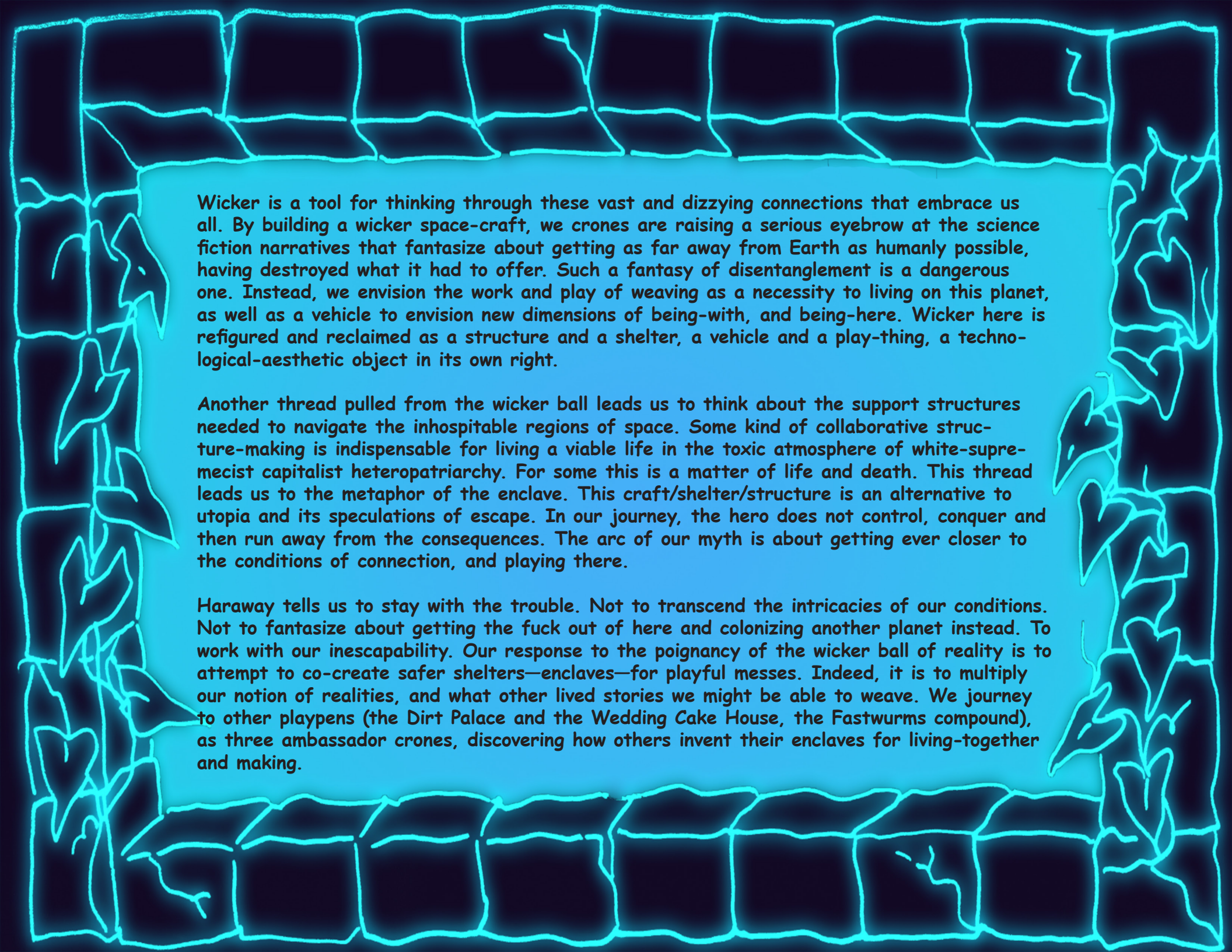
When you start to pull at one thread, you discover and create a bigger knot. It pulls you in. A deep web where you can't move, think, feel or breathe without impact. This is entanglement: quantum, physical, material, immaterial. We are having our heart pierced, by the poignancy of interconnection. Interconnected communicating systems that forests and oceans have always known, with their giant slime mold tentacle entities and mycelium networks and so on. A state of affairs that we seem to disavow.

Which brings us to wicker.

Wicker is a weaving process. Plant materials such as rattan, bamboo, cane, which have certain characteristics (flexibility and strength) are transformed into human shelters, containers, and support. Homes, clothing, furniture, baskets. Structures that hold.

The story of wicker technology is a long one: ancient Egypt, Rome, Southeast Asia, 1950's Rococo Revival décor. Evoking breezy, exoticized vacation destinations in North American upper-class homes. Due to its popularity, synthetic materials came to be produced for the making of these objects.

Pulling at one meaning-thread of wicker leads us to the feminization and devaluation of 'craft' in art discourses, not to mention its utter irrelevancy in so many technological imaginations. As a 'low' art, craft has come to be associated with domesticity, women and the lifestyles of 'primitive peoples'. The labour process involved in weaving, and in material craft in general, is gendered, racialized, and trivialized. The ideological devaluation of this labour allows for the exploitation of skill: Textile industries are but one example of where craft is undervalued and underpaid, where work is carried out in unsafe conditions. Those lucky enough to afford the fruits of this labour are decidedly stylish, at least for a few months.



Wicker is a tool for thinking through these vast and dizzying connections that embrace us all. By building a wicker space-craft, we crones are raising a serious eyebrow at the science fiction narratives that fantasize about getting as far away from Earth as humanly possible, having destroyed what it had to offer. Such a fantasy of disentanglement is a dangerous one. Instead, we envision the work and play of weaving as a necessity to living on this planet, as well as a vehicle to envision new dimensions of being-with, and being-here. Wicker here is refigured and reclaimed as a structure and a shelter, a vehicle and a play-thing, a technological-aesthetic object in its own right.

Another thread pulled from the wicker ball leads us to think about the support structures needed to navigate the inhospitable regions of space. Some kind of collaborative structure-making is indispensable for living a viable life in the toxic atmosphere of white-supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. For some this is a matter of life and death. This thread leads us to the metaphor of the enclave. This craft/shelter/structure is an alternative to utopia and its speculations of escape. In our journey, the hero does not control, conquer and then run away from the consequences. The arc of our myth is about getting ever closer to the conditions of connection, and playing there.

Haraway tells us to stay with the trouble. Not to transcend the intricacies of our conditions. Not to fantasize about getting the fuck out of here and colonizing another planet instead. To work with our inescapability. Our response to the poignancy of the wicker ball of reality is to attempt to co-create safer shelters—enclaves—for playful messes. Indeed, it is to multiply our notion of realities, and what other lived stories we might be able to weave. We journey to other playpens (the Dirt Palace and the Wedding Cake House, the Fastwurms compound), as three ambassador crones, discovering how others invent their enclaves for living-together and making.

We are learning about structures that allow for different forms of connection, interconnection, weaving together. Different processes and kinds of relationship. Different friends to relate to and include in our world: ghosts, squids, witches, trees, slime molds, cysts, orbs, cats. This wicker ball is a hot mess of entanglement, one that we are committed to dealing with, playfully, experimentally, with care and curiosity.

Finally, there is a thread that has woven us together from the beginning: The fates. Also known as the Morai. This is an old story about three weaving goddesses named Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. These three sisters had the power to assign destinies to the mortals. Our wicker ball, our space craft, our sistership, our enclave, our cosmology, our collaboration is but one provisional proposal for other ways to weave together and imagine reality. One way to contribute to mortal destinies.

-The Powers

