

Spadix, stems and scar-wounds: Finding inter/intra-sentient language through dialogue with material-other(s)

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Abstract

Monstera Leaf (ML) and I met on the first day of my third unit of study for a Masters in Therapeutic Arts Practice with MIECAT Institute. The story of our journey is held snugly across several arts-based inquiries... a place to tell a story of Be-coming, of Emerging, Dancing, and momentary Be-ing-ness. Multimodal explorations with material-other revealed novel ways of exploring reciprocal relational presence with other-than-human. This is an ode to the tangoesque reflexivity of the findings of a human, material-other, more-than-human and the subsequent emergent knowings that unfold/ed through engaging collaboratively over the duration of two study units.

Keywords

Relational, experiencing, multi-modal, material-other, more-than-human, reflexivity, language learning, ecopsychology, entanglements, new materialist

Part I

An initial perambulation of other-than-human, in which intersubjective emergent knowings around multimodal relational presence and language-finding affirms cognisance of entanglement

Prologue...

It began as all, and no, love stories begin...

With a human womyn:

Who sometimes is a girl

and,

Sometimes a boy... or a man,

And

Sometimes like the breath of wind or the flutter of a wing

Or,

Most oft' times, a medley-melted mix of none, and all, of the above.

And a Monstera Leaf (herein, ML):

Who will not (and rightly so) conform to human constructs and ways of being; however, for the purpose of interspecies communication, will go by pronouns murmher, swishim and cracklem (the closest translation to English from ML's crispy language).

ML invites me back in and in and in
And I invite ML in and in and in
And we come to know and know and know...

Beginnings that may have begun as endings...

ML arrives on day one.

Loud.

Taking up space.

Demanding to be seen – *Look. Look. Look.* A mantra that will become an adage and will then embed itself within the creative synthesis – the culmination of how I capture and then weave together the many threads of this study journey with ML.

ML is filled with yarns and truths. I have mistaken cracklem's feistiness for something else...

This article journey begins and somehow circles back many times to the in-class moment when I met ML. Mistakenly, at the end of that day I thought my time with ML was done and had served its purpose. I came to know, as Woodford (2021) writes, "that nothing bracketed-out is ever really discarded, it lingers in the background" (p.16). This was the genesis for the following rendezvous – a series of invitations and agreements whereby ML and I invite/d each other deeper into places of knowing around engaging with materials – captured through the lens of MIECAT values and relational reflexivity.

Thematic statements

In which ML and I slip into language-flow

ML: You have found me.

I: Again.

ML: Dirt – fed me.

I: Gets under my nails – in between the cracks of the floorboards and leaves stories with my footprints –

ML: – grounds and nourishes this shared biosphere. Grew me. Once.

I: A beginning –

ML: – and an end.

I: Gestures to indicate a circle. Offers hands laid flat, bare, and receptive out to ML.

ML: Gestures in response, two leaf fronds crackle as they bow forward, gently, in acknowledgment of an Emergent Knowing.



Play (visit <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-23-fairbairn> to access soundbites)

Michele Fairbairn, *ML_I*, 2022, soundbite.

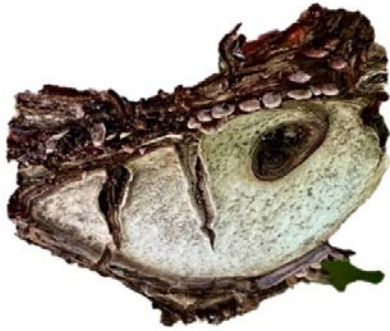
I always turn to words; tuck myself up, in and around them. Now I sit with materials and know that I am being invited to a place of knowing beyond them. Black ink pen, watercolours, coloured pencils, a small system of fragile, twisting roots clung and hugged with dirt found on a paver outside. A story is emerging. No words lead to the emergence of multimodal and multilingual ways of knowing. My hand dances sepia and dark-brown watercolour across the page. Reminding me of ML. Again. I bracket-in ML. There is a brief resistance. I feel my heartbeat increasing. I also notice this in my stomach, in my gut – a clenching. My neck muscles feel tighter, and yet, within me I am still holding/nursing the warmth and nourishment of what is emerging for me. Abram (2011) writes that humans rely on “a complex web of mostly discrete, spoken words to accomplish our communication,” and may, as a result, assume that “other organisms are entirely bereft of meaningful speech” (pp.166–167). ML, with *susurrate-crinkle-pop-pop-cracklesigh* and gentle gesture, disillude me of this.

I: You are back. And with no words.

ML: With my words. Listen. Listen. Listen.

I: Feeling a pause. Feeling into this pause – this pulse. Bows head.

ML: Crackle. Slow unfurl of one tendril leaf.



Play (visit <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-23-fairbairn> to access soundbites)

Michele Fairbairn, *ML_2*, 2022, soundbite.

I bracket-in my curiosity – my need to know. I move through the resistance – with ML. We move, and gesture, and hesitate as we hold space for each other’s language. We – in relationship with one another, with the materials, with the earth-space we share – move through and bracket-out the resistance to find... gestures. All gestures, now.

Am I learning the building blocks of ML’s crispy language? The phonemes and morphemes feel like cellular respiration in my body system. Nourishment, firing, energy.

The rules of cracklem’s language – the grammar, syntax and semantics – move like a sigh through my limb and space. Through a process of ripples of intersubjectivity, amplification and reduction – expanding out, absorbing in, bringing down into – I allow languages and modes to collide and flurry. “Listening in wild places, we are audience to conversations in a language not our own” (Kimmerer, 2013, p.48). I recognise that ML and I have been in an interspecies mirroring exercise since we first met.

ML: Breeze catches tips of leaf fronds, which dance-bow then throw their head back in caressed laughter.

I: Ah. Hands move from forehead to heart and stay there for a pause. For long enough to honour what has been said, felt, known.

This thematic statement emerges:

When [dark-brown watercolour], I feel I [hands and arms moving out from centre line of body like fluid fireworks], then I [black pen marks] and as a result [drops fragile found object root system hugged with dirt on the thematic statement image].

I notice a sense of flow that captures what I am coming to know. A feeling of having brought a cycle of inquiry into a restful a-ha place within my embodied self. Muscles relaxed, latent energy gathering – seeking dance, gesture, and silence. I come to know – through the process of attempting to translate ML’s words into human language – that I was privileging human-centric expression to the detriment of natural-world ways of being, knowing and connecting. This is a defining moment.



Figure 1. Michele Fairbairn, *Thematic Statement*, 2022, black ink, watercolours, markers, coloured pencil, and dirt clumped around grass-root system on paper, 297 × 210mm.

I have challenged my relationship and knowings about language and what language is for/can do. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway (Haraway & Goodeve, 2013) reflects upon the “sheer wiliness and complexity” of biological beings as not only metaphor that “illuminates something else, but an inexhaustible source for getting at the non-literality of the world.” I have begun to find access to other ways to tell, share and know stories. I will choose differently after this. I will check in with my surroundings, my self; my self in relationship with (perceived) other and attune to the language being spoken – gesture, expression, sun dapples moving on leaf, raise of cheek muscle to meet the sun. “Language always betrays us, tells the truth when we want to lie, and dissolves into formlessness when we would most like to be precise” (Winterson, 2007, p.100).

Held with/in the curiosity of finding and holding space for dialogue with other-than-human, the new-materialist understanding of how ML and I inhabit a space of entanglement emerges. ML and I are actively (and joyfully) corrupting the dualistic limits of the illusionary space of separate matter. We are coming to know – or (re)member – our inherent inter/intra-wovenness, whereby “there are no separate predefined entities” (Leonard, 2020, p.86).

Creative synthesis

In which ML and I find threads and trinkets from our adventures and weave them together

In the creation of my Creative Synthesis, I contemplate, sit with and feel-into the materials, journals, and journeys that were part of my Unit Three study journey. The repeated motif of ML and murmher/swishim/cracklem's invitations are embedded in this process. Without ML, there was no sinew holding the bones in place.

ML: Now. Look. Look. Look. Now.

I: *Feels into looking. Feels into Now-ness. Mirrors language back, and within, and with knowing flow.*

ML: Still. Still. Still. *All gestures stilled to still.*

I:

ML returns.

ML never left.

ML is an element, and also the orchestrator of elements, in this synthesis.

The conversation has grown silent and rich. The relational presence has mirrored into One-ness. I feel a rich flow, a dance of gestures – visceral-like sap – circulating between ML and me... a bidirectional relationship.

We hone in on key elements – still/moving images, spoken-word, coloured pencils, watercolours and performative installation. We explore emergent knowings around the notion of what stories need to take up space, and who and what is privileged with language, gesture, and action.

I recognise that this is a profound access point for me – a deeper way of engaging with ML and with the materials. A new way of dialoguing with the unit literature emerges. Clare (2018) asks that “we pay attention to our bodies – our stolen bodies and our reclaimed bodies. To the wisdom that tells us the causes of injustice we face lie outside of our bodies” (p.95) and how – somehow – something is held in those words for humans and the natural world, too. Bodies/forms – human, sentient and otherwise – can be framed/manipulated according to the dominant narrative that oppresses, diminishes and disenfranchises them. I have come to know that ML has invited me into a deeper conversation around the shape and life of things... of what is privileged and preferenced, i.e. hetero-normative over queer ways of being, whole over broken, human over animal/tree/plant/monstera leaf. And how much this lack of conversation and privileging is carried in my body – how I companioned ML and how murmher/swishim/cracklem companioned me through this. We dance/d and held each other's

wounds. We mine/d changing truths and challenging insights. Within this, I am squirmily aware of my unintentional human-centric re-centring of the process – my desire for meaning-making, to harness ML to speak into all-too-human narratives around anti-oppression. I sit with this discomfort – an emergent knowing, as Barad, cited in Leonard (2020), states:

All matter exists, and it is through its relationships with other matter that boundaries and borders of entities can be defined for a moment. Interactions convey a sense of internal change of separate entities while intra-actions emphasize the co-constituting nature between matter in entanglements. (p.86)

Have I risked ML’s wildness in an attempt to find my own?

I dig deeper into this and bracket-in how ponderings of language, form and privilege can also shine a light on the discomfort I have had with some of the materials during the unit.

Amplifying this, a knowing emerges: I flow my language through the materials to find and make expressions of who and how I am, and somehow we speak together, in one and both of our languages. Both materials and the artist embodying each other’s lived experience and dancing a new dialect into being.

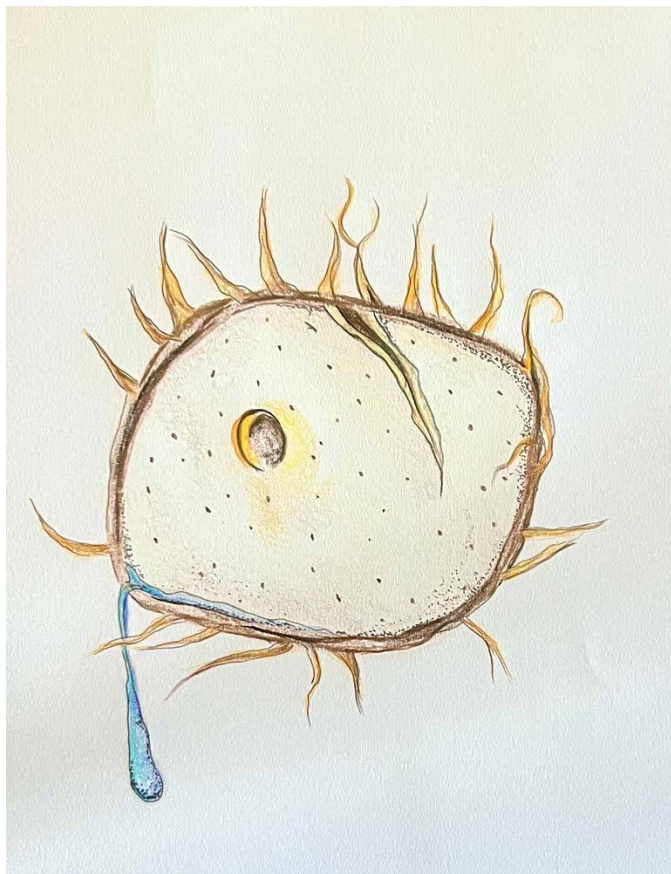


Figure 2. Michele Fairbairn, Shared wound, 2022, black ink and coloured pencils on paper, 297 × 210mm.

ML has taught/teaches me new languages. This language/dialogue and way of relating allows me to deep-dive into multimodal exploration. The intersubjectivity allows for reflexivity – to

revisit ideas, materials and ways of knowing in a deeper, more precise way. It allows me to nudge against my discomfort and find my way into the unfamiliar, in addition to bringing a sense of wonder and newness to the materials – for example, exploring with lino prints (Figure 3). Navigating the unfamiliar, or finding the unfamiliar in the familiar, was “shaking the foundations of ego,” revealing “the illusory certainties of theories and self-centered fixations” (McNiff, 2004, p.89), liberating and freeing me into a richer, more present dialogue with material-other and materials.

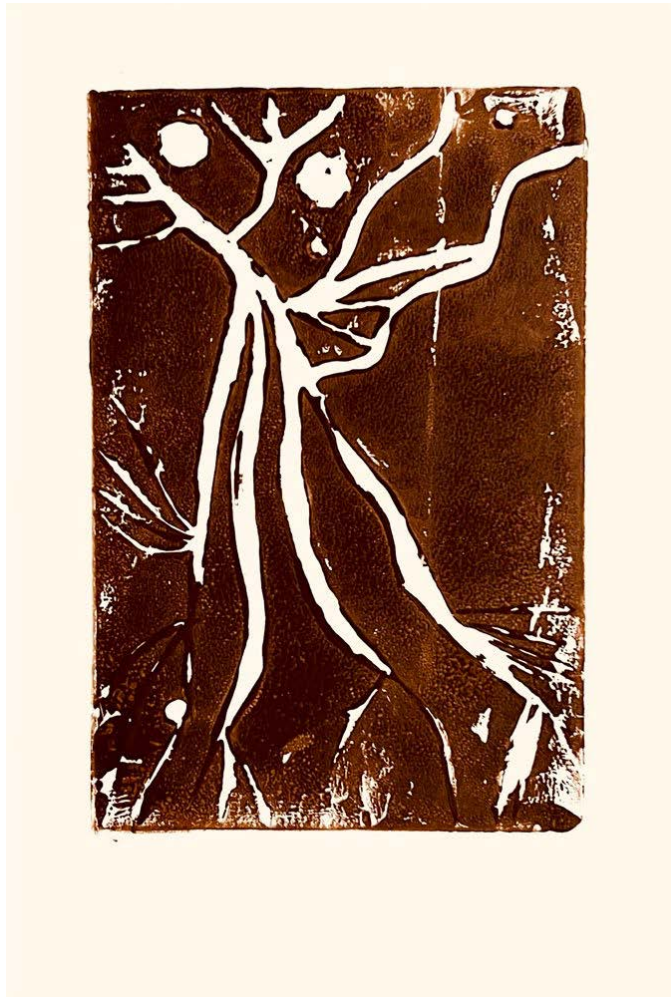


Figure 3. Michele Fairbairn, *Unknown language*, 2022, lino print on paper, 210 × 148mm.

This has created a significant shift in how I will approach materials in my arts practice and therapeutic work with people. I recognise how powerfully the intersubjective and emergent process of working with different materials can shift perspectives, allow new knowings, and liberate.

<https://youtu.be/D143FRcO7xI>

Michele Fairbairn, *Creative Synthesis (look, look, look)*, 2022, moving image with soundbites, 03:26.

Endings that are beginnings in flimsy disguise...

I have come to know that the dance with ML is ongoing – even now, as I write this essay and dive into stories gone, they feel more like stories coming into being.

We tango our relational presence with each other across the pages of this assessment. We learn that our languages are not so many worlds apart. We come to know that our in-built translator is our sentience, our dependence and intertwinement with/in the biosphere. “Isn’t this just what it means to be, to have the breath of life within, to be the offspring of Creation? The language reminds us, in every sentence of our kinship with all of the animate world” (Kimmerer, 2013, p.56).

I leave my material-other, ML, this expression/gift, and wait to learn more:

She didn’t expect to find herself

In the midst of crinkle, rustle and flattening veins.

Lush green

Turned

Muddy

Turned

Soggy

Turned Crisp

Didn’t expect

– And yet –

Here she is,

Here they are.

The eye-shaped wound blinking at her

From the place where her Other had been

Sawed, pulled and hacked.

A tear of morning dew gathered in the staring eye-wound.

Released

To free-fall from the gnarled fibrous duct

Glistening...

A sliding bubble mirror reflecting

Something

So

Familiar

A moment so familiar

That it was like white noise

Of a place lived in for so long

That it becomes Absorbed, Camouflaged

In

Plain

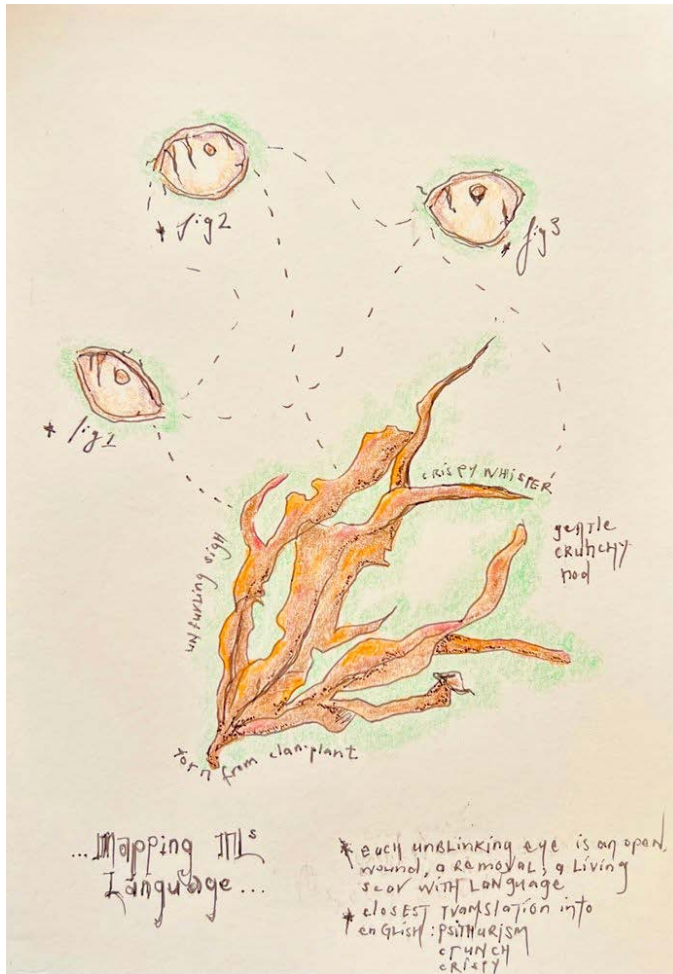
Sight

The language she spoke

A language first bound

The language she needed

The language she found.



Play (visit <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-23-fairbairn> to access soundbites)

Figure 4. Michele Fairbairn, *Mapping Monstera Leaf's language*, 2022, material-other language map, coloured pencil, black pen ink and soundbites.

Part II

The journey continues, as relational presence ripens inter/intra-collaborative knowings and findings with other-than-human. Agential cuts are (re)membered and momentary-held in amber, as the nature of language-finding/making reveals invitations around centring other-than-human

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle (Winterson, 2007, p.2).

The pulse of a love story runs through the things that hide in plain sight.

This began as the story of ML and a human, that is Me.

The human thought They knew.

The human did not.

ML waited.

The human learned to wait.

And when the human stopped talking, and began to listen with more than ears, and less than brain, and with everything and nothing that brings us into presence with another, ML began...

Kimmerer (2013) writes, “Maybe there is no such thing as time; there are only moments, each with its own story” (p.300). Held and folded within this article journey is a series of stories, a series of moments and emergent knowings, born in and from relational presence to a material-other, ML and ML’s Clan Plant, Monstera Plant (MP). ML has invited me back in, and in, and in – again. And as we stand in mindful presence, and hold space for each other’s ways of Be-ing/Do-ing, I recognise this relational presence space captures the essence of dadirri, a concept/contemplative practice of deep listening, from the Ngen’giwumirri and Ngan’gikurunggurr languages of the Aboriginal people from the Daly River region in Northern Territory (Korff, 2022).

ML: Listen. Listen. Listen.

Access point

In which the young Monstera will grow towards the darkness, seeking a faster way to the light (negative phototropism)

Before this unit began, we were invited to engage with our journals from the previous unit to mine for threads, and themes, and gems. I found four threads emerging: storytelling, language, embodied self, and a mindful choice to bracket-out the primal wound. I was aware – and yet was not clear on the how, why or wherefores – that I may be bracketing-out/not bracketing-in too much of an essential thing. The story that ML and I carry in our cells, the stories we bring to these inquiries. Perhaps the invitation here is to tell our stories into carefully folded shadows. I felt into this and found my access point – sitting like a square lump of clay in my gut.



Play (visit <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-23-fairbairn> to access soundbites)

Michele Fairbairn, *Lump*, 2022, movement, kneading and warming polymer clay between the artist’s hands, soundbite.

The clay causes a heaviness. The nerves around the place-where-clay-is fire off electricity, some sharp sensations that inhabit the space somewhere between pain and tingly butterflies. My head/heart- and somatic-self are speaking different languages. Each frustrated by the noise of the other parts trying to communicate, and failing to connect and find a way in/through. I pause. I find a small space away from shifting sands to Be-With-This. When have the languages been universal? When have they been in harmony? I feel some resistance.

I: You!

ML: Listen. Listen. Listen.

I: Surely you have had your airspace – in fact, all of Unit Three.

ML: Listen. Listen. Listen.

I: New unit, new day, new ponderings. Know when to exit stage right, ML.

ML: *Gestures with crackle and crisp to MP through the window.*

I: *Turns to look at MP. Recognises where the access point of clay leads to plant, leads to language, leads deeper into a dialogue not-yet-ready-to-be-silenced.*

ML: Know, Know, Know.

In this journey with ML I don't lead, I am led. I am finding ways to step out of my own way and embrace "an openness to uncertainty" (Sajnani, 2012, p.79) and a willingness to ask questions, rather than a compulsion to find answers. I hold this more lightly: is this about a language map – of body; of body in relationship with material other/other-than-human/biosphere; the parts that are welcomed, and parts that are rejected? An emergent knowing of language/learning is taking form/sending out aerial roots in search of something to grow with/on epiphytically/relationally towards the light.

One of our pre-unit readings strikes me at this moment; Tufnell and Crickmay (2004, as cited in Contos, 2022) write, "We feel our way into conversation with our materials and listen out for an emergent form to appear... the impulse towards what we choose may be very slight, perhaps something our body senses and does before we realise it" (p.7).

This is an invitation to explore other ways of finding and preferencing Monstera's language. I feel into the invitation of Roland Barthes' (as cited in Haraway & Goodeve, 2013) exquisitely visceral sentence: "Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words". It is time to bracket-in and attend to what has been bracketed-out/forgotten/overlooked previously. This is where the embodied self may serve to move, dance and tango ML/MP's language into being. Space holder. Interpreter. Translator.

Mapping

In which a slender stem grows along the ground and allows the monstera plant to spread quickly and propagate new plants (stolon/monstera runner)

A few moments of silence were needed before entering the mapping experience – a series of provocations that aim to amplify this inquiry and better know the invitation of the access point (MIECAT, 2022). This clay, cold and heavy, required mindful presence. There is a focus, respect, and a kind of reverence required when learning a new language – to hold space for and meet the language at its place of origin/embedded within its culture. After feeling my way into, and through, multimodally exploring a few questions, my human mapping companion asked me, “With whom does it happen?” What emerged is revealed in Figure 5.

<https://youtu.be/xO5pvnfrck>

Michele Fairbairn, Coalesce, 2022, movement, gestural performance with Monstera Leaf, acrylic paint, 02:33.

I have landed on something compelling. The felt-sense invitation to work with acrylic paints emerges. My skin – cool and slick with smears and clots of paint – prickled, and cells hum like lightning has struck nearby. I fancy that I can smell the ozone moving in waves-and-shocks across my immediate environment. I am coming to know a way to learn, speak and share ML/MP language – a kind of relational kinaesthetic meaning-making. An intersubjective dialogue between like-sentient beings cohabitating the same biosphere, where matter is “co-constituting and the world is dynamic, in [a] constant process of intra-activity and materialisation” (Barad, 2007, p.157). The shift in multi-modal expression is flowing a new bond, an emerging understanding between ML/MP and I – creating glistening colourful lines from They to I, and Me to Them. Even after washing the paints from my arm, I am left with a pale-blue ‘bruise’ where ML spoke language into me.

Attending further to this, I create an intersubjective response to the mapping exercise – I am curious. I create an imprint of my face in aluminium foil – shaping/pushing the thin silver metal around the curve of my nose, cheeks, eyes and lips. Then, taking clay – the cold, heavy clay that was my access point – I warm and knead it between my fingers and hands, gently coaxing, pressing and shaping a mask around the aluminium foil impression. I choose different colours of clay layered upon each other – in some cases, nudging up against each other, and at other times, leaving narrow or wide gaps. I choose to bracket-out carefulness/wariness, and instead go where language beckoned. I come to know that the cracks, gaps and spaces in the clay would be where I would let language in. Somehow, the act of constructing a representation of myself allowed/freed up space for language to relationally flow. I feel something emerging – a fragile new knowing – I need to deconstruct assumptions, human-centricity and hardwired-ways-of-being to construct/make way for a me that is familiar yet not-quite-recognisable. In doing so, I enable authentic receptivity. I am moving into another, deeper way of being present in this living inquiry, embracing an

understanding that “knowledge creation... invites fleeting, emergent and evolving discoveries” (Sajnani, 2012, p.84).

Once the clay is partially set, I gather MP parts found on the ground around the base of the clan/origin plant – torn-open fenestrations, dark earthy-brown leaves softened by recent rains, fibres from decomposing aerial roots – and weave them into the spaces and cracks between the clay. I am entering a space of *listening, seeing, and knowing*.



Figure 5. Michele Fairbairn, *Coalesce*, 2022, polymer clay mask interwoven with monstera plant, approximately 160 × 140mm.

Finding language through multi-modal/embodied explorations

In which essential moisture and nutrients in the air, that Monstera Plant needs to grow, are captured (aerial roots)

I: How do you talk?

MP: Relationship is my language.

I: How do I listen?

MP: Actively – being in relationship with. Moves gently in bow and parry with a sudden wind gust.

I: How do I talk with you?

MP: I carry language in through my root system/s, around my leaf-veins, absorbed through air and light, water and soil. Where do you carry language, human? Find this...

I bracket-in: what shapes do I need to press and shape my-Self into to hear, speak and understand this new language? Finlay's (2011) writings on phenomenological research began to resonate in a deeply visceral way – I am experientially realising-in-process that arts-based inquiry “challenges or deepens our understandings of the lived experience being studied” (Finlay, 2011, p.261).

A strong invitation to create eco-dye from MP emerged. This feels like a fundamental amplification point in accessing, learning, knowing and coming to understand language. I have reached a place of intimacy and respect whereby I am mindful of what I ask, what I take, what I do and, importantly, what I give.

I sit at the base of ML's clan plant and hold space for the Origin of Language. I lean into this with curiosity. I am feeling some clash and clod in my embodied self – the pull to dive deeper and make eco-dye versus the pull to respect and honour the agency/sentience of ML/MP. A nod to lip service without deep-diving into ethical action seems absurd/irresponsible at this juncture. Barad (2007) extends an invitation to recognise that our entanglement with others means that “it is not possible to extricate oneself from ethical concerns” (p.54) as we allow and come into being with/together. As I sit, still and silent, I witness MP. The wind catches Her leaves, as light traces Their veins into stark relief, and ants traverse His aerial roots. I land on – am given knowing/permission to gather – the rotting fruits, crispy/moulding leaves and hard, brown fibrous tendrils that lie at the base of the plant. The process of creating the dye requires that I tear apart the materials to create the most surface area possible for the plant to release its secrets and essence into the boiling water. This feels difficult... an act of violation, even though I have sat in relational presence at the base of MP, and have found my way through emergent knowings to this place. MP holds me steady... this is okay... this is where we are meant to be. We are curious as we bruise and find ways to know each other.

I read more about Monstera and learn that the plant is toxic to humans. I sit with this knowledge. I like that MP has the final word on how Their parts are held. It seems somehow profound/poetic that, if swallowed, the calcium oxalate crystals in MP can cause humans to have difficulty speaking. I need to be reverent, careful and respectful of the dye we are creating together. This is a relational experience; I must check in and align with MP's ways-of-Be-ing. I do not have the power to remove the toxic chemical from the dye before I use it, so I must go carefully, and only go where the limitations of this toxin will allow me. MP has the upper hand in how language will be written. In this defining moment, MP has become an art material with which to write its own language, and I have become a conduit/writing instrument for my material-other.

Once the eco-dye is ready, I sit in relational presence with all that I have come to know of ML/MP. I am merging with the movement, shape, dance, and enliven-ness of the Origin

Plant. I am absorbing the language weaving between leaves, stems, flowers, hexagon-scale-clad new fruits, and reaching aerial roots. I begin to paint the language of each part of the plant. As the learner, my body is actively engaged in/with the process of emergent knowings. Jusslin et al. (2022) write, in their research on embodied language learning:

Modalities and all bodily systems are responsible for generating changes in bodily states and may lead to embodied activation, engagement, and sensory experiences that are understood as “partners” in learning processes. These modalities and bodily systems connect the body with the physical and social environment. (p.2)

Neuroscience, biology and soul entwine and find new form in this moment, as I am dancing/painting the language of MP with the eco-dye born of its parts. This language-learning is relational-learning. This embodied presence is presence to reciprocal relationship. “The tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others” (Haraway, 2016, p.48). Language emerges through felt-sensations, emergent knowings and abstract thought-shapes. The wind whispers past us. MP leaves turn to listen. I watch, follow, listen and feel into the shapes made by the movements. As Abram (2011) writes, “the material reverberation of your speaking spreads out from you and is taken up within the sensitive tissue of the place” (p.170).

MP has a trait referred to as negative phototropism. The young plant will grow towards the darkest areas near it rather than the light, as this ensures that the seedling will find the trunk of an already established tree in order to attach to it and grow quickly upward towards the light (Boren, n.d.). The monstera takes nothing from the host tree in this process. It grows relationally. I lean into this process of reduction and emergent knowing. I recognise that when I foreground relationality, and allow my body to actively engage in the process, my learning is clearer. Language flows between MP and me unencumbered (see Table 1). Leaning into “process as evidence” was revealing unexpected insights (McNiff, 2011, p.257).



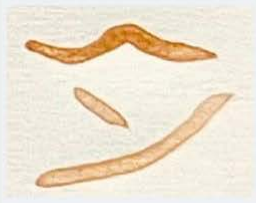








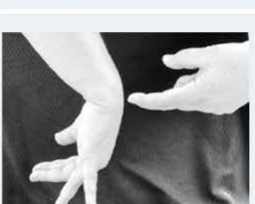
Plant Parts	Components	Language	Written Language	Embodied Language
Leaves	<i>Fenestrations. Survival. Carry/filter light to lower portions of plants.</i>	<i>Pattern-making. Biosphere. Responding. Phonology (speech, sounds and laws governing language).</i>		
Leaf scars/ eye-wounds	<i>Visible remaining scars/wounds from removal of leaves from plant of origin.</i>	<i>Empathy nodes. Tears. External oppression/ trauma. Syntax (meaning).</i>		
Aerial roots	<i>Attach to nearby supports (trees, etc.) as a way of reaching sunlight. Doesn't damage or kill host tree/scaffolding.</i>	<i>Rhythm. Beat. Measuring time of language music.</i>		
Flower/spadix	<i>Creamy-white flesh found beneath greenish, hexagonal scales. Tastes like a blend of banana, pineapple and coconut. Poisonous if not ripe.</i>	<i>Taste as language. Nourishment/ poisoning. Pragmatics (how content contributes to meaning).</i>		
Stems	<i>Fix leaves, nodes and roots to plant. Anchor plant within biosphere.</i>	<i>Central trunk of language system. Syntax (arrangement of words.)</i>		
Lateral-subterranean roots	<i>Anchor plant to ground. Uptake nutrients from soil. Absorb water.</i>	<i>Origin/nourishment source of plant language. Morphology (how words are formed/ relationship to other words)</i>		

Table 1. Receptive Monsterish translated relationally into written and embodied human language.

Promising beginnings emerge from perceived endings

In which circular brownish rings on Monstera Plant's stem contain the clusters of cells required to grow new plants (nodes)

Emerging from deepening relational presence/dialogue with MP, I have come to know/witness Their language-as-Be-ing/Relational/Embodied. I am pressing less of (while somehow also bringing more of) my-Self into this inquiry. As I do so, MP is relaxing

companionably into the empty space left by my previously hard-wired way-of-being in the conversation. The dialogue is deepening as the language reveals itself. The stories we tell an acquaintance are different to the stories we tell a lover.

Malafouris' (2019) Material Engagement Theory (MET) posits that in order to be conscious of a species' cognitive life, we need to understand the forms and material traces made or left in the journey of its becoming. It felt somehow essential to create a space for this unfolding relational engagement by ensuring that some of the ML/MP-dye is now held safe in a small clay pot from which an assemblage of collaborative improvisational material engagements/potentialities may continue to emerge. A portion of the dye – and other ML/MP materials found at Origin Plant's base – have since been returned to this earth-body space. This is where ML/MP and I continue-to-become, as we “fold, unfold, entangle and disentangle [the] different temporal and spatial scales of [our] phylogeny or ontogeny” (Malafouris, 2019). The original dried leaf, found at the base of MP, has stayed with me. ML sits on a smooth-carved wooden bowl in a window of my home. Sun shines on, and breezes dance, curl-and-bow through, the leaf. Beyond skin, leaf and soil, we are in a dynamic state of enactive signification (Malafouris, 2019), dancing form and meaning into being.

This is a love story that extends yearning aerial roots out-and-up, subterranean roots deep-and-down, into shared earth-body space. It provides fenestration-windows in, and gaping eye-wounds out. This love story is an invitation to “directly challenge the anthropocentrism” (Macy, n.d.) of a human society scarred, disenfranchised and discombobulated by its disconnect from a biosphere it is inherently and relationally intertwined with. In the words of Kimmerer (2013), “From the very beginning of the world, the other species were a lifeboat for the people. Now, we must be theirs” (p.8). This opens up a myriad of potentialities for therapeutic arts practitioners as we lean into our entanglements with human, other-than-human (including art materials) and biosphere. In this inter/intra-entangled space we are dynamically and co-collaboratively in the process of holding space for emergent knowings and becoming(s), together.

There is more concealed within the lines of this story...

<https://youtu.be/52TxF8izxTk>

Michele Fairbairn, 2022, Monstera plant language_dialogue with artist, moving image with soundbites, 04:27.

Dear darkening ground,

you've endured so patiently the walls we've built,

please give the cities one more hour

and grant the churches and cloisters two,

And those that labor – maybe you'll let their work

*grip them for another five hours, or seven
before you become forest again, and water,
and widening wilderness,
in that hour of inconceivable terror
when you take back your name from all things.
Just give me a little more time.
I just need a little more time,
because I am going to Love the things
as no one has thought to love them,
until they're real and worthy of you.*

Rainer Maria Rilke (translation, Joanna Macy)
(Wahl, 2020)

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