



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #38: Smashing Language

Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan. This is another episode of Bewildered, which is the podcast for people who are trying to figure it out, like us.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: How are you doing, Marty?
- Martha Beck: I'm okay, better than okay, life is good. How about you?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, life's pretty good. I feel pretty good about life, when you consider the alternatives, I'm into it.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah. That's a wise thing.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, what are you trying to figure out?
- Martha Beck: Oh, let's see. Well, for me, I'm trying to deal with a personality clash within our household.
- Rowan Mangan: Uh-oh.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Is it me?
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: Is it me? Because this is not the right forum to start on issues that you're having in our relationship.



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- Martha Beck: No, it's that we have this two year old who is very excited to be communicating in language and who will sit at the dinner table saying to each of us in turn, "I love you." Then we say back to her, "I love you." But Adam, in case people haven't heard, my grown son with Down syndrome, he won't say it.
- Rowan Mangan: Adam's a taciturn character, isn't he?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, he's a man of few words. He's the Clint Eastwood. They told me he would not be that way, they told me he'd be all emotional. People have the weirdest delusions about this. But he's very proper, and so Adam says, "I love you." And he says, we all watch and wait and sometimes we're like, she even prompted him a couple nights ago, "Adam, I love you." But he wouldn't say it, he turned to her and said, "I like that you said that." Which is not what you want to hear when you've just told someone "I love you."
- Rowan Mangan: No, no.
- Martha Beck: But she's getting through to him, and you were wounded as a result.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, my god.
- Martha Beck: Physically wounded in the shoulder.
- Rowan Mangan: This little girl is like her whole life's mission these days is about getting Adam to express affection to her, isn't it?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, she's obsessed.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: He's this conundrum, because everybody else in the house is all, "Oh, we love you" all the time, and Adam is like, "Hello?" That's all he says, he's like James Bond, he's a mystery man. So the other day ...
- Rowan Mangan: Then sometimes she'll say, "Hello, Adam" again. He'll say, "Not too many hellos."



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- Martha Beck: Not too many. So the other day, it got to the point where he was really being rude, and I know Adam never wants to be rude, so I thought it was time to tell him, "You need to say goodnight." She gives us all a big hug goodnight, and she touches Adam lightly on the shoulder, which is what protocol allows. So, I just have a book of protocols for Adam, I can deal with, I was going to say the queen, but I mean the king now.
- Rowan Mangan: The king.
- Martha Beck: Oh, heavens. Anyway, as she was going up, Adam actually said, "Goodnight." I think he might have even said her name, "Lila." At which she became so overwhelmed with emotion that she went into spasms of ecstasy, turned to you, you were holding her, I don't know if you remember or you've repressed it.
- Rowan Mangan: I remember very clearly.
- Martha Beck: Turned her head into your shoulder, the way babies do when they're feeling shy, and bit you savagely.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes, she did.
- Martha Beck: You did make a sound.
- Rowan Mangan: I believe I might have even said a word or two, a choice word or two. It really hurt, her passions are strong, her emotion's she had to channel through me in that moment were intense.
- Martha Beck: I've felt that way when somebody said something and I'm really emotional, I can't hold the emotion in. What if we just bit when that happened?
- Rowan Mangan: Dude, since this kid was born, I have been having that reaction to her cuteness every single day.
- Martha Beck: Biting you, her? No wonder. You're going to need one of those cones of shame you put on a dog, she keeps biting herself.
- Rowan Mangan: I look at her and her little thigh rolls, I'm obsessed with her thigh rolls, everything about her. It's been nearly two years, I wanted to bite down on that baby for its cuteness so often, and I never have broken skin. She, I may scar from what she did to me, so I'm just saying. Okay, I may have decades of maturation and wisdom on her, but still, I have behaved better than her.



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- Martha Beck: That's a good point. Also, it begs the question, maybe we should do another podcast on it, why do we say that babies are so cute we want to eat them?
- Rowan Mangan: Because that is a physical reaction, it's not a concept. Don't you have that?
- Martha Beck: So evolution is like, you spend all your resources on this tiny helpless baby that can't even hold its head up, and you love it so much that you want to bite it?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yum.
- Martha Beck: Wow. Darwin, you're going to answer to me for this.
- Rowan Mangan: Part of our design is that you can do without a limb or two. If there was a moment where mommy got too overwhelmed with how cute you were and accidentally bit off your arm, I do threaten to eat her toes every single day.
- Martha Beck: You do, I've heard you say it. Oh, my god. She's going to need so much therapy.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, we've got to fund, we've got a therapy fund.
- Martha Beck: She has that weird habit, and this is literally true, she'll take off your shoes, press her head to your toes and shout, "More feet."
- Rowan Mangan: It's so weird, I don't if we've talked about this or not, because it's just so odd the way she does this that it's almost too odd to talk about.
- Martha Beck: Did you have a past life on some other planet where they would touch their foreheads to each other's feet and scream, "More feet?"
- Rowan Mangan: Or just some obscure religious cult or something?
- Martha Beck: Oh.
- Rowan Mangan: She honestly is too comfortable wearing glasses.
- Martha Beck: That's true, nobody should be, I'm not that comfortable wearing glasses.
- Rowan Mangan: That's weird.



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Martha Beck: So many mysteries, but we have to move on, so Ro, what are you thinking about these days? What are you trying to figure out?

Rowan Mangan: Well, this is completely unrelated to yours, unrelated to our topic today, it's just something that's been going on in my inner life, which is that, and this is going to mean nothing to you, Marty, but what I'm trying to figure out is why the relentless heterosexuality of #VanLife.

Martha Beck: Who's Van?

Rowan Mangan: #VanLife.

Martha Beck: Hashtag, who is Van?

Rowan Mangan: So #VanLife, which I unfortunately learned about when there was a motor in a van, but anyway, it doesn't matter, don't focus on that.

Martha Beck: Van death.

Rowan Mangan: A lot of people, there's this subculture and it's very Instagram friendly where people live a little nomadic life and they get a van and they usually strip it down and turn it into a little home. It's lovely, and you know I do have a bit of a soft spot for tiny places to live.

Martha Beck: You love tiny places.

Rowan Mangan: I love tiny places. When I was a little small child, I used to climb out of my bed and go and sleep behind my dressing table, is that something you have?

Martha Beck: We don't have that here.

Rowan Mangan: It has drawers, you put clothes in it, maybe ...

Martha Beck: Oh, a dresser drawers, a chest of drawers, that's what we call them.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it was like that. I would go and climb in behind that and sleep there when I was little. Ever since then, or maybe from a past life, who knows? But I love, I could look at tiny houses forever.



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- Martha Beck: I'm sorry, I'm still thinking about how far was your chest of drawers from the wall? Were you literally one-inch thick? I'm just imagining you sliding yourself like a piece of paper between a heavy armoire and the wall.
- Rowan Mangan: Since you want to get into the furniture layout of my childhood bedroom, I will tell you. It was set up, there was a corner of the room and the dressing table was against the corner, thereby creating a little triangle of space.
- Martha Beck: Triangular space.
- Rowan Mangan: I was triangular at the time, so it worked well. I was bipedal and triangular, it was a confusing time, it was the '80s. We were all having a lot of identity issues.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, a lot of pyramids being sold. So tell me about this tiny house business.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I just love tiny ... They're sweet and there's just something, I don't know how universal it is, it must be a lot of people have this thing that I have, it's like you have that ASMR susceptibility, I'm really susceptible to the romance of the tiny house or the van life, #VanLife. So actually, I just remembered this, when we met and I was staying at the ranch, your ranch back in the day, back in California, good old California days.
- Martha Beck: Good old California, it was awesome.
- Rowan Mangan: But this is before we were together, and I loved being there so much and I was doing some work for someone else and I wasn't in the same house or anything, but we were in the same general environs.
- Martha Beck: Environs, as you may recall.
- Rowan Mangan: As you may recall from an earlier episode.
- Martha Beck: Oh, Ro, feel free to inhabit my environs.
- Rowan Mangan: Stop it. There was a disused chicken coop on the ranch and I had this ongoing fantasy that maybe if I finished working for the people I was working for, I would be able to save up enough money to convert that chicken coop into a tiny house that you might let me live in. Do you remember that?
- Martha Beck: It was made for chickens. The door was one-foot tall.



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Rowan Mangan: So cute.

Martha Beck: It was cute, it was cute.

Rowan Mangan: It was compact.

Martha Beck: No chickens in it.

Rowan Mangan: No, there were some evidence of former chickens in it.

Martha Beck: What, like subsequent chickens?

Rowan Mangan: Let's not get into that.

Martha Beck: It was full of black widows.

Rowan Mangan: There you go. Just some of my friends who claimed it before me.

Martha Beck: Australian spider friends.

Rowan Mangan: So anyway, I love van life, but one thing that ... So just to give you, I think everyone probably knows about #VanLife except you.

Martha Beck: Well, now I know.

Rowan Mangan: Because you don't understand ...

Martha Beck: Anything.

Rowan Mangan: Fearless listeners, she recently asked if we could reserve a hashtag for the next book. Could we buy it? Is it available? So let me tell you, people travel around, these nomads in a van, it's all very beautiful, which is why it's all over Instagram, and they open their van and look, there's a beautiful ocean and stuff like that. They're happy nomads cruising around the world.

Martha Beck: Got it.

Rowan Mangan: So, they're all freaking straight. They're like that kind of subculture that's like surfers, they have that, they've been swimming in the ocean and their hair is kinky in the way it gets when it's salty. That's the kind of people, I think that's all I need to say to describe that kind of people. I'm like, "Why? Where are the gays?" Where are the gays in van life?



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Because here's what I'm thinking, the dykes would be so good with the DIY aspect, because part of, I'll tell you what, part of everyone's genesis of their van life is that they strip down the thing themselves. Lesbians, tool belts, we all know.

Martha Beck: I have a tool belt, not you. You're the problem. You couldn't strip down a van.

Rowan Mangan: Not with that attitude. Yes.

Martha Beck: Busy hiding behind a chest of drawers in the wall.

Rowan Mangan: You look very attractive in your tool belt, can I just say?

Martha Beck: Thank you. It's all I wear to bed.

Rowan Mangan: The gays, the gay boys with the decorating. I probably am in so much trouble for the generalization, but guys, it's just comedic. Whatever. Where are the gays in van life? That's what I'm trying to figure out. Answer us on a postcard, we're done.

Martha Beck: Let's figure it, let's solve this deep mystery.

Rowan Mangan: I think our listeners know, I think there's someone listening to this right now who is like, "There are no gays in vans for this reason." I feel like they're going to tell us.

Martha Beck: They're going to tell us, we're going to hear.

Rowan Mangan: GaysInVans.com, is it available? Let's buy it.

We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a favor to ask, you might not know this but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. So it would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple, and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six if you can find a way to hack the system, I wouldn't complain. A review would also be wonderful, we read them all and love them. So thank you very much in advance, let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

Martha Beck: All right, let's get ...

Rowan Mangan: On to topic.

Martha Beck: Should we actually get a topic happening? Shall we?



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- Rowan Mangan: You know what, Marty?
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: It's an exciting day, because it's a Be-Wild files day.
- Martha Beck: Every day is a Be-Wild files day, we just don't always observe it.
- Rowan Mangan: That's true. Sometimes we're nonpracticing. So we are now going to listen to a question from a listener. We have listeners in Japan, we have at least one listener in Japan, isn't that awesome?
- Martha Beck: Is this person in Japan, or are they just from Japan?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know actually. It's not clear, we'll find out. But anyway, I'm so excited that you listen to our podcast. Here is Yoko.
- Yoko: Hi, Rowan, Hi, Martha. My name is Yoko, I'm from Japan. As a Japanese native speaker and an English learner, language learner, I'm experiencing that language and a culture are closely connected, intertwined. My question is, how can we be free from the culture while using the language and thinking in the language? Thank you so much.
- Rowan Mangan: Aw, thank you, Yoko.
- Martha Beck: First of all, she speaks better English than I do, so congratulations for that. But what an interesting question.
- Rowan Mangan: I think this is probably one of our favorite questions that we've ever had. We were just sitting there, we listened to it for the first time and we were both just like, "Ooh." Language and culture, ooh.
- Martha Beck: What do we think about it?
- Rowan Mangan: What do we think about it? Well, I think it's true, I've heard, I'm not a bilingual or not a multilingual person, poly-lingual?
- Martha Beck: Yes, you are.
- Rowan Mangan: No, I've tried to learn languages, I've got little high school level scraps of this, that and the other, but not really. But people I know who are genuinely poly ...
- Martha Beck: Polyglots.



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- Rowan Mangan: Those people that speak many kinds of things.
- Martha Beck: They have two sounds.
- Rowan Mangan: They are strange.
- Martha Beck: Polyglots.
- Rowan Mangan: All right. Gesundheit. They have said to me that they feel like they have slightly different personalities in different languages, but I don't know how much of that feels like ... So, is the culture somehow embedded in the language? Because I think to some extent it is.
- Martha Beck: Oh, I absolutely agree, and there's a part of me trying to so hard not to say ...
- Rowan Mangan: Polyglot.
- Martha Beck: Linguistic epistemology, I'm so sorry. Oh, it's a really good thing. It means that knowing and language weave each other. Epistemology is how we know things, and language is ... So, the whole idea that what we think, we feel ...
- Rowan Mangan: I'm so disappointed in you right now.
- Martha Beck: I'm so sorry. You're not angry, you're disappointed. I'll try harder. Anyway, there's a whole thing, a whole academic thing about how language and the way we know are interrelated. I remember thinking about it, and you've traveled more than I have, so I'd like to hear your observations on this, but I remember once going on my way home to America from Singapore, where I'd been going to a Chinese language learning center and my whole day was in Mandarin, I stopped in France where I also speak a little high school French, and watching television with this intense concentration that I had gained by sitting for five hours a day trying to understand Mandarin.
- I realized that everything in me started to relax as French came into my body almost. I was thinking about how people wonder why the French smoke and they eat butter and they drink wine and yet they live so long, and I'm like ...
- Rowan Mangan: Have you heard them? Have you heard them speak?



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- Martha Beck: It's the language, man. It's the language of the heart, and Chinese is an incredible, the artistry of Chinese is amazing, but it's not the language of the heart in the same way French is. So I was going from this very perfectionistic, I've got to get this right sort of feeling, to like, "Ooh, yeah. Somebody bring me a croissant."
- Rowan Mangan: The best word in French as everyone knows is "Uh". What you need to do is you get your cigarette, you light your cigarette, you inhale and you go, "Uh."
- Martha Beck: Really? Because in Chinese, "Uh" means hungry or evil. I don't know if I got the tone right, I never know if I got the tone right.
- Rowan Mangan: No one does, no one does. I think that's actually a myth, I don't think there are tones, I think it's just an elaborate hoax.
- Martha Beck: I wish that were true.
- Rowan Mangan: You know what's funny? I just realized that, so we're at the point now where if we want to say, if we're in our family together and we want to say something, but we don't want Adam or Lila to understand it, we spell it. But if you and I want to say something we don't want Karen to understand, we'll use our crappy French, and then if you and Karen want to say something you don't want me to understand, you'll speak Chinese.
- Martha Beck: This is true. We are divided by our attempts at language.
- Rowan Mangan: And if Karen and I want to say something and we don't want you to understand, we just use pop culture references.
- Martha Beck: If Karen and I want to say something that you won't understand, we talk about anything that happened before 1990.
- Rowan Mangan: Shut up. Oh, my goodness. Where are we?
- Martha Beck: So the point is, there's no question that language and culture are tightly interconnected, intimately connected, the way our brains know comes from the way we speak.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. There's different ways to understand the concept of culture as well, because we use it in a derogatory way a lot of the time, talking about the culture as in the forces of human ...
- Martha Beck: Socialization.



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- Rowan Mangan: ... socialization that come down on us. But so much of culture is just a beautiful kind of connectedness of our psyches or whatever. So one of the things that occurred to me, well, the thing that people always say is that Eskimos have however many names for snow.
- Martha Beck: I think you're supposed to say Inuit now.
- Rowan Mangan: No, it's back to Eskimo.
- Martha Beck: Oh, sorry.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it's back to Eskimo. So, we were thinking about Yoko and how there's this concept that, thanks to the internet really, that we have from Japanese that we can now borrow from, and that's only because of the Japanese language expresses ideas that ...
- Martha Beck: Oh, god. It's beautiful.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: When I lived there for a summer, I literally would fall asleep while studying Japanese, wake up with a book on my pillow and start studying again, because the beauty of that language and the way of thinking that goes with it. I know there are probably disadvantages that Yoko may be bumping into, but oh, my God. Japanese grabbed me by the soul in the way no other language ever did.
- Rowan Mangan: Isn't it interesting how that happens and it just seems like an individual thing? I felt that with Spanish.
- Martha Beck: Really?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know.
- Martha Beck: It all boils down to past lives.
- Rowan Mangan: Anyway, I wanted to say, shinrin-yoku ... Actually, can you say them?
- Martha Beck: Shinrin-yoku. I don't say it ...



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- Rowan Mangan: You say them and say what they mean.
- Martha Beck: It means forest bathing, it means going into the forest and allowing your whole being to be cleansed by the forest. This is actually literally true, it's literally true that when you go into a forest, if you haven't been there, your cancer killing cells will triple in I think about an hour, and they'll stay elevated for weeks afterward. Because, we coevolve with the pheromones of trees, they put us in balance, we kill them. It's the story of Western European civilization.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you think trees have a culture?
- Martha Beck: I do.
- Rowan Mangan: What's their culture like?
- Martha Beck: Oh, my. Yes, I actually have been studying this, because someday I want to write a novel that involves this. There are trees, and this is not woo-woo crazy people on the fringe saying this, this is mainstream botany. They've discovered that trees are social and that they communicate and they have special friends and there are certain big trees ... When you have a tree that needs lots of sunlight, the babies die out because they're shaded by the adults. Pine trees usually grow up and take over everything, because they can grow in shade. So, there are big deciduous trees that, for some reason, are more willing to share the sugars that they create with the saplings that grow around them.
- So they will actually shunt their sugars to these smaller trees, which can then grow up even though they're not in the sunlight. These are called the mother trees, and when the mother tree gets old and loses her leaves, or breaks down to a stump, those saplings will feed their sugars back to her so that she stays alive even without her own leaves.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay, that just makes me cry.
- Martha Beck: Me too.
- Rowan Mangan: I can't handle it. But I also have to say that you said they had special friends, and I just thought, "Oh, special friends."
- Martha Beck: Want to share some bees?
- Rowan Mangan: You want some of my sugars? I'm going to shunt my sugar.



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- Martha Beck: Don't take sugar from that stranger.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, that is all very interesting, I think we should do one on the culture of trees, a whole episode one day.
- Martha Beck: Which leads to the other word we wanted to talk about.
- Rowan Mangan: Which is, to me, a very, very powerful one.
- Martha Beck: Oh, it's a beautiful one. Komorebi.
- Rowan Mangan: Komorebi. It's the effect of the sunlight coming through leaves.
- Martha Beck: Komorebi. Is that not gorgeous?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I have a weird obsession with the way that the green glows when sunlight's coming through it.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, and having a word for it. I remember reading that and just walking around going, "Komorebi. Komorebi." Another, it's not just Japanese, when I was learning a little about horseback riding, which I know about as well as I know all the languages, besides English, that is not - we had this wonderful instructor named Katia from Germany.
- Rowan Mangan: Katia-coo, hi, Katia.
- Martha Beck: Hi, Katia-coo. I was on the horse being all rigid in the way I am, and yet still clumsy. It's incredible how I can be so extremely tense and yet, so unbelievably pratfall-ish. Anyway, Katia very gently, in her wonderful way, taught me the word *losgelassenheit*. I hope I pronounced that correctly. It means letting looseness, literally loose going.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. The process of becoming loose.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, the process of becoming looser. In that word, she taught me a different way to sit on a horse. Before I knew that word, I was sitting in a certain way, and after she taught me that word I sat in another way and it felt more natural. It really made me wonder what I'm missing by not knowing more words.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you think horses have a culture?
- Martha Beck: Oh, definitely. Marty takes a long breath. Yeah, I think they do, but we'll just stick with trees for this podcast.



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- Rowan Mangan: My dear friend Grania went, she and I studied French together and she went on exchange to France when we were at high school, and we just used to have so much fun with language things back and forth. There's an expression in French, which is c'est pas la peine, which just basically means it's not worth it, it's not worth it to do that.
- Martha Beck: Not worth the pain?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We would just always say, "It's not the pen. It's not the pen." Do you want to go to the ... "No, it's not the pen." We would write it, because of course in the pre-digital age, a lot of communication that was done at high school was done by passing notes, in my school anyway. So we would have to write it "pen." It's not the pen.
- Martha Beck: Aw, that's so funny for someone who speaks French and English.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, but it was or little, we were making a little third language between us that was part of our little two-person culture.
- Martha Beck: Didn't you have another one too? The two of you?
- Rowan Mangan: Ah, the casserole. Yeah, because I don't actually know, this is embarrassing, but there's, the stars together in the sky, constellation that you can see in Australia and it looks like a saucepan. This is so stupid, it only is funny if you're us and you're 16, 17. But we would say, it doesn't even matter, don't even worry about it, we would say casserole instead of saucepan, because casserole is French for saucepan and she wrote me a postcard once when she was in France and she said, "[French 00:29:00]." Now I can see the saucepan.
- Martha Beck: That's so sweet. Next time I eat a casserole, I'll be eating stars. Yeah, that's what the guy said, the monk said when he discovered champagne. It was a dude in a monk place, I guess a monk.
- Rowan Mangan: Come to think of it.
- Martha Beck: He went downstairs to get some wine and there was a bottle that wasn't quite the same as the others, and it had turned into bubbly. He drank a whole bottle and then he came out drunk as a skunk and told the other monks, "I have been drinking stars." At night, I can see the casserole. Then he ate all the casserole. Shocking.
- Rowan Mangan: I am not surprised. So we might have strayed a little bit from Yoko's question at this point.



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Martha Beck: What does the culture say about this? We always go, "Here's the culture." To put another note on that, often we mean Western European dominating the world, post Enlightenment culture, which is basically what's forming American societies, and many other places.

Rowan Mangan: And the digital hands and fingers that it now has everywhere.

Martha Beck: Yes, yes.

Rowan Mangan: I immediately, because I studied politics, I immediately go into language in the political culture with that. I thought of the novel, George Orwell novel 1984, which has a whole thing about that dystopian thing, and you've got the Party, the ruling autocratic Party has created its own language in order to effect mind control on the citizenry. The idea being, as ... Oh, my gosh. I just went sideways into Turkmenistan and the Turk man, he's dead now, thank God, but there was a horrible dictator in Turkmenistan who named, renamed all the days of the week after himself and his mother.

Martha Beck: I'm sorry, I shouldn't laugh, people suffered.

Rowan Mangan: Renamed the word for bread. It is interesting how there's an instinct that the names for things are a way of controlling the populace. So in 1984, the idea is that if the Party can control thought, it can also control action. There's an amazing book, which I think I've probably talked about before on this, I'm obsessed with it, it's called Don't Think of An Elephant by George Lakoff. Lakoff? Lakoff? I never know. Anyway, George, old George. It's about how a big part of what right-wing think-tanks do in contemporary American politics is come up with language for stuff.

He's basically saying if you can give language to your values or within a debate, then you will control the argument. The example I always give is the Democrat has to come out and say, "Well, it's not exactly a death tax." But then you've had to say death tax. So I definitely think that language can be a tool of some, for political agendas.

Martha Beck: This is ringing so true to me, because when I was studying Chinese, the cultural revolution was in full swing. All our textbooks were condoned by the Chinese government, and you could literally feel them, it was not subtle. I learned the word for comrade before I learned the word for husband or wife.

Rowan Mangan: Wow, yeah.



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- Martha Beck: But the biggest ...
- Rowan Mangan: Did you have to say, "Hello, Comrade," seriously?
- Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Really?
- Martha Beck: The thing that was really, there were all these stories as it got more advanced and it was not just ... What was his name? Zhang You-Wen, that was the hero of all the stories. He wasn't just buying a sweater, Comrade Zhang was burnt over 90% of his body, these were the things we had to memorize and learn, he fell into a pit and was burned over 90% of his body, Western medicine could not save him, but the Chinese doctors came in and they said, "Don't die." And Zhang You-Wen said, "I can not die, iron needs me." Because they were trying to gather iron to build weapons at the time, so everybody was supposed to find their iron things and put them in a smelter.
- This is the type of dialog that I was memorizing to learn the language, and that's why when I went to France, I was like, "Oh, this feels so much better."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, because there it's just like [French 00:34:06].
- Martha Beck: Yes exactly. Now, I just want to add that I went on to learn more Chinese and fell in love with the poetry and beauty of that language, but I've got to say, when the Communist Party was really cracking down during the cultural revolution, I felt like my mind was put in a vice by the way I was taught vocabulary.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Oh, my gosh. That's so interesting. So Yoko was saying, "Can we be free from the culture if we still use language and think in individual languages?"
- Martha Beck: Right, right, right. So I think that, here's what I think, there's a saying, "A person with one watch, one clock, always knows what time it is. A person with two clocks is never sure." I think I've said that before on here, because what it means is that I think we are encased in the language we learn as children, but if you learn another language, even if you learn the language of another person's heart or maybe an animal's language or something ...
- Rowan Mangan: Or someone's love language.



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- Martha Beck: There you go. You are aware that language is arbitrary, you're aware that there are two sounds put on the same thing, but neither one of them is actually the thing, they're just the sounds chosen to make that thing.
- Rowan Mangan: To represent the thing.
- Martha Beck: That means it's always being made, and so you can step outside of it and say, "I can use this as a tool, I no longer have it as my world." I see it as a tool, so I step away from it and I think that you, I think Yoko, she's certainly freed herself to see that language was forming her brain. I think the moment you've seen that, you're in a part of the brain that is not formed by the language, it's formed by your own internal experience in the world.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I actually wonder, so you and I come from different countries, but we share the same mother tongue, I wonder if two people who have different languages can communicate more deeply, because you bring a richness of different perspectives. You can say, "Well, I ..." Do you think we can see and think and perceive beyond the limits of our own language? Did I really know about how I felt and how I believed in the power of the sunlight and the leaves before I knew that there was a word for it in Japanese? Or do I need to encounter the Japanese imagination and poetry in order to really grasp the beauty of that moment?
- Martha Beck: That's so interesting what you're saying. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm going to try to stop. Neurology. I couldn't help it. You're talking about the difference between the left and right sides of the brain, and the left side of the brain does language, almost always. So almost all your verbal capacity is in the left hemisphere of your brain, the only place the right hemisphere will come in and play with language is poetry, jokes and songs. So what you're talking about is the rigid captivity of being in the left hemisphere. Here's something I've been yammering about, sorry, guys, it's just true. Read books, it's amazing.
- The left hemisphere of your brain, unlike the right hemisphere, sees limited things, but it is absolutely certain that it's right and that it knows everything there is to be known. The right side of the brain is like, "Whoa, relationships between things, everything's always changing, that's just a mouth sound. How bizarre." It can't really talk, but it's out wandering.
- Rowan Mangan: It's so weird that it has no language, yet it has a Valley girl accent. That's wild.



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Martha Beck: But I honestly think that poets and songwriters can go out into the wildness beyond culture in their brains, into the wild right side, and connect things that have not been connected in the language so far, and create word images that take us out of all language and into a shared experience of sensory and emotional things.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. They shunt, when you have an amazing poem by John O'Donohue or someone like that, and the words are truly the vehicle to an emotional state. I find that the most extraordinary thing with poetry.

Martha Beck: For some reason ...

Rowan Mangan: It's like coding or something.

Martha Beck: I'm remembering a phrase from, who was the Road Less Traveled dude? Frost, Robert Frost. I learned this poem when I was nine and it changed my entire life, it's a long poem but it ends, "And when the mob is swayed to carry praise or blame too far, we may choose something like a star to stay our minds on and be stayed."

Rowan Mangan: Oh, wow.

Martha Beck: I remember feeling that and I'd been bullied at school that day or something, and so the mob was swayed to carry praise or blame too far. I remember thinking about the connection with the stars and letting it stay in my mind. I was out past language, but language took me to the place where I could take off.

Rowan Mangan: What's interesting actually is that it's not a star, it's something like a star. It's looser than a star, it's over in the right hemisphere then, because it just wants the suggestion of the image. It doesn't want to say, "I'm absolutely right, it's this."

Martha Beck: Yes, that's true. I hadn't thought of that.

Rowan Mangan: It's gentle.

Martha Beck: I think maybe that's what we have to do, whatever our mother tongue is, we have to be gentle with the minds that are trust into these little categories called words, and we have to say something like ... That's something I actually love about Japanese is you don't say, "You think this." You say, "You think this, I think." It softens things a lot, it also puts people in incredibly rigid hierarchies, because you have to actually use different verbs depending on whether somebody's your socially ranked inferior or superior.



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- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: Yes, hard, and very vertical. There is a place in society for you and you know that place. English is much more of a losgelassenheit language like, "Whatever." Especially Australians. "G'day, mate." What's the thing that guy said to the prime minister or something?
- Rowan Mangan: What was it? It was like, "Oh, come on, mate, that's bullshit." Something like that, it was a journalist speaking to the prime minister.
- Martha Beck: Oh, come on, mate, you know that's bullshit.
- Rowan Mangan: That's bullshit, mate, come on.
- Martha Beck: So yeah, it's so interesting, because I love language, but I love to fall into it and love people who use it as a medium of the imagination. That is, I think, something that grows the more languages you learn.
- Rowan Mangan: Isn't there something about how as you form a culture, you also form a language?
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Like us, our family stuck in our house through the pandemic, we all started talking weird in the same way.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. For a long time, we only used the word, we always put the verb do or did in front of whatever other verb we had. Like, "I did see that yesterday. Ooh, you did see it? Yes, I did move it somewhere."
- Rowan Mangan: That's right, and I didn't even notice we were doing that until someone said to us like, "What are you doing?" We were like, "Oh, yeah."
- Martha Beck: And the phrase, "I am going to do this now and I will tell you for why."
- Rowan Mangan: That's right, that's one of your things.



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- Martha Beck: I do think, and there's something that becomes intimate between people who have their own language, that's separate from everybody else's. I remember reading that this is why there's no special culture for people with different abilities, unless that different ability is hearing. Hearing loss creates sign language, which is very, very different culturally from spoken language. For that reason, there's a tight sense of belonging, or so I've been told, among people with that language that we don't share.
- Rowan Mangan: I wonder if you are in conversation in sign language, because there's so much possibility for expressiveness, what do you think about that left/right hemisphere thing? Do you think there'd be more right hemisphere ...
- Martha Beck: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, because movements of the body, those are all in the right, and nuance and the relationships between objects and stuff. So, my younger sister once had a job at this school for people, for the deaf, I don't know if that's the word anymore, but that was what it was called at the time, and she was watching two people in the audience and they were having an argument. As their gestures got wilder and more frenetic, one of them signed to the other, "Calm down, I'm not blind." It was brilliant. This is all very, I love Yoko's question, because it makes me think differently about my own life and about how ...
- I remember saying to that same younger sister of mine, "We should invent words, let's just make up a word." So we made up a word that meant when someone's coming over and your place is a mess, and you have to make it look tidy on the surface by shoving everything under the bed and into closets, and the word we decided on was gbugliek.
- Rowan Mangan: Gbugliek.
- Martha Beck: Gbugliek, study it, learn it, come into my world, Ro.
- Rowan Mangan: I used to enjoy a Melbourne band in my teen years that was called Spdfgh.
- Martha Beck: Spdfgh, that's the name of the band. Spdfgh.
- Rowan Mangan: Spdfgh. I wonder how they're doing.
- Martha Beck: I'm sure they're gbugliek-ing away.
- Rowan Mangan: I bet they are. So I think that we need to talk a little bit about how to figure it all out.



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- Martha Beck: Oh, gosh. Yes, we do. Let's do that.
- Rowan Mangan: So here's what I think, and I feel like we've almost been groping our way towards it in this conversation, is that I think there's an inclination when we think about these kinds of things to see language as something that we receive from the culture, because that's almost what it feels like. But I think that if we bring the right attitude, like you and your sister and ...
- Martha Beck: Gbugliek.
- Rowan Mangan: Gbugliek, that language is actually something that we can wield creatively between humans as an expression of our true nature. We don't need to receive language, we are language creators.
- Martha Beck: Yes, in one way of looking at it, it creates the way we think, and if you flip it then the way we think creates it. So you move from, "Oh, I'm going to let language form my thoughts." To "I'm going to find thoughts outside of language."
- Rowan Mangan: The force language to ...
- Martha Beck: To fit it, yeah. Like poets do, that's what poetry is. I love your mom, who's a brilliant writer, she always says to me, "Live life like a poem."
- Rowan Mangan: That is exactly, I was just thinking about that too, that's exactly it.
- Martha Beck: I love that. Psychologically, it's incredibly powerful. There's good research to show that, I had a former therapist, she's passed away now, but she did her PhD on the use of language and depression, and there are all these studies that show that if people just stop using the phrases "I have to" and "I can't," and instead use words like, "I choose to, I will, I won't." That's in Julius Caesar by Shakespeare, I think Caesar says, "Go tell the council that Caesar will not come. That I can not is false, that I dare not, falser still. No, go tell the council Caesar will not come."
- Rowan Mangan: That's so good.
- Martha Beck: I know, that's authority. So when people stopped, they were being treated for depression and they had a group that was on meds and a group that had cognitive behavioral therapy, and then this other group that just stopped using "I have to" and "I can't. I can't come, I have to go to my mother's party." To "I won't be going, I choose to go to my mother's party." That group, the group that shifted language deliberately came out of depression further and faster and for longer than both the other groups.



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Rowan Mangan: That's fascinating, that's fascinating. Talk about turnarounds, because this is a great example of wielding language creatively to me, to actually, it can change us and it can change beyond us.

Martha Beck: Yes. So I love the work of this spiritual teacher named Byron Katie, and her whole way of operating is that you take a thought that causes you suffering and you work with it and in the end, the opposite, the exact grammatical opposite of your worst, most frightening thought is basically your next step to truth and liberation. So I remember the first time I did it, I remember my thought was, "I'm mad at my knee, because it won't let me work out." I turned it around to, "I'm mad at my knee, because it won't let me work in." All of a sudden I went, "Oh, I'm supposed to be working in, not out. Oh, I get it."

Then another time I was taking a stand against something that I thought was horrific in the world and I'd written a book about it, and I kept having the thought, "Something terrible is going to happen to me because I wrote that book." It turned around to, "I'm going to happen to something terrible because I wrote that book." That's not a sentence that would be used in standard English, but it smashed my mind open. It put me in a place of, "Oh, I'm no victim. I'm going to do what I'm going to do, and people can do whatever they want back to me, but by God, I'm going to be myself no matter what the pressures are."

Rowan Mangan: I've never thought about turnarounds this way, but you're actually smashing language. They don't always smash language.

Martha Beck: Yeah, not all of them work.

Rowan Mangan: But often, some of the most powerful ones, like the two you just listed, where language, you're almost pulling it apart and reforming it into something new to show you something in your own psychology. Brains and language are just like these weird two machines that work with each other, and "I'm going to happen to something terrible" is just the most amazing sentence.

Martha Beck: Another one, just quickly, I think this will really ring true for a lot more people out there, when you're dealing with a narcissist and you just think, "He never thinks about anything except himself. He never thinks about anybody except himself." One of the ways people have turned that around is, "Oh, I never think about anything but myself. Oh, yes. I've got to be more self giving, more self effacing." They give themselves over to the narcissist, but the real turnaround is, "I never think about anything but himself." Which is not standard English, but it's exactly how you end up related to a narcissist who's ruling your life. That's where you get the freedom. I have to stop obsessing about him and live my own life, so that's another way. I like that way.



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Rowan Mangan: We should probably say if you are interested in this, go check out the work and you mustn't just do the turnarounds, because to get the really transformative power of the work, you need to go through all the steps that Byron Katie lays out. You can get all that online really, and it's amazing. But don't just, because we're making a very obscure point using that. But yeah, do it all, do it all. It's so good.

Martha Beck: Yeah, it's about taking apart the trap that a thought has put you in linguistically, and breaking the language so that you can break the thought.

Rowan Mangan: That's it, that's exactly it. It's so interesting, isn't it? I think before we go and leave this delicious topic, I want to talk a little bit about naming things, because I feel like what I want to say to Yoko in terms of culture, nature, language is just how deeply language can ... I'm not sure how to say this, this is one of those, my right brain, my right hemisphere is trying to find a way to put language to an idea, and I don't know how to do it. But it's about true names, is what I want to talk about, and about how there's a lot of stuff in magic, I only knew this through Ursula Le Guin and her Earthsea novels, but Marty was saying that the concept of having a deep true name is quite a common one.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Many, many cultures around the world, if you know someone's real name, there's a certain connection, there's a certain power you can have over them. So people are taught in many, many cultures to guard their real names with their lives.

Rowan Mangan: We've talked before about naming things, and there's a certain, like giving a name to something you're doing that's counter-cultural or something that you believe that's counter-cultural or something, and it's almost like you're reclaiming something, language, which could be a tool of the culture, but you're reclaiming it as a tool of your nature.

Martha Beck: I love that.

Rowan Mangan: I just think let's always be free to give names to what our nature does. It's almost like what I was just trying to do, where I couldn't find words. Part of our challenge as we escape a mainstream culture and build something, build a life that feels true to our nature, is we're going to have to be reaching across our brain hemispheres from the place where we know in the right hemisphere, to the place where we can name in the left hemisphere.

Martha Beck: Let's call it name-magination.



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- Rowan Mangan: Let's call it [vocalizing 00:53:08].
- Martha Beck: We have no idea what we've just said to each other. [vocalizing 00:53:18]
- Rowan Mangan: Great one. Oh, my god. There was a pun in there and everything.
- Martha Beck: This is really bad. Now, from the ridiculous to the sublime, you were reading me this Ursula K. Le Guin poem, and I wanted you to read it.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm working on one of my Wild Adventures newsletters this week and I had looked up this quote about names and language from the incredible Ursula K. Le Guin, from a Wizard of Earthsea. She said this and I want to say it to you. "My name and yours and the true name of the sun or a spring of water or an unborn child are all syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power, no other name."
- Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Mic drop, Ursula.
- Martha Beck: And?
- Rowan Mangan: Stay wild.
- Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word, WILD, to 570-873-0144. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

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