Botanic Dialogue: Care to Talk With Me?

*Care to Talk With Me?* is an exercise in plant-human communication, collective care, and (ir)responsibility, exploring how the addition of extra “expressiveness” to a plant may influence a community’s feelings of connection with and understanding of a plant. Our work centers around a single plant that visitors are entrusted with caring for. By increasing the avenues for a human to communicate with and understand a plant, can the plant enhance a person’s awareness – of both the plant’s existence inside this group and the person’s role as an individual member of the group – and affect how said individual chooses (or feels obligated to) care for the plant?

Our system is constantly monitoring the soil moisture of the plant, its light exposure, the messages written to it, and how many times the plant has been touched. Visitors can freely adjust any of these – and must do so to get a better understanding of the plant’s status and/or help it survive. At the same time, thoughtless interference to the system can be as equally damaging as neglect. We aim to highlight the harm that can be done to the environment by the refusal to accept responsibility and ask if increased cognizance of a plant’s status can motivate thoughtful action from those who interact with it.