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Back in 2022, I was travelling across Europe and sending postcards home. For each city I visited, I'd buy one to keep and one to post back to my family in Aotearoa. They were all bound by the same format—a small rectangle of card—yet each one had a different language on the front with its own design, texture, and way of speaking. I've always felt that writing is a kind of alchemy. The words I spell, the letters I arrange on a page, are small acts of transformation—attempts to send understanding, feeling, and imagination from one person to another. But language is never a transparent conduit; it's a system of negotiation, translation, and change.

That experience of sending and receiving language across distance stayed with me. It made me think about how communication is never fixed. It shifts depending on who's speaking and listening, and what medium carries the message. These features of correspondence became a framework for thinking about communication as both connection and distortion: how do we reach towards one another through systems that are always shifting?

Every contributor to this publication brings a different understanding of carrying meaning across contexts, through linguistic, cultural, or formal translations. Together, these voices form a network—sometimes overlapping, sometimes tangling, but always in conversation with one another.

The first essay in this publication is by Raine Angeles, who was travelling at the time of writing. Raine was visiting her family in the Philippines, taking her partner back with her for the first time. She writes from the space between English and Tagalog, treating

translation as both labour and gift—a practice of carrying feelings, humour, and culture across linguistic thresholds.

In Nell May's contribution, she explores the materiality of type through School Pixel, a font built from the hand-drawn letterforms of Tāmaki Makaurau school children at Mount Roskill Intermediate, where collective mark-making becomes both a specimen and a story. A “pop” font tied to the digital world, School Pixel informed the CMYK palette, which was chosen to echo its vividness in print and to separate section tones with clarity. Here, design becomes another act of translation, moving between digital and printed worlds, individual expression and collective form.

This unknown space that you enter into when speaking, whether in design, voice, or gesture, underpins Bella Macdonald's series of letters to her grandmother who she has never met. Her letters shift in tone. Sometimes they are tentative, and sometimes bold, as if rehearsing the act of getting to know someone. Alongside them, Bella's hand-drawn illustrations reach

toward her grandmother in another, more tactile register that is part touch and part trace.

Jenny Gao reimagines the almanac as a personal and playful taxonomy of emojis, unpicking the symbols we rely on to convey love, intimacy, and mystique in digital spaces. She explores how emojis carry cultural subtexts in our now colloquial language, and why one should be wary of those who use certain emojis. Through humour and sharp observation, her work reveals how these tiny icons mirror our desires, misunderstandings, and the ever-evolving codes of online expression.

The failure of translation is something that recurs through the publication. Hāwea Apiata's essay builds on his research into late nineteenth and early twentieth century translations of religious texts into te reo Māori, and the contribution of Māori intellectuals and writers into the production of these texts. Hāwea traces the inadequacy of direct translations, and the way te reo Māori is loaded with meaning that communicated pūrākau and called on atua, even as these words and names were used in

the service of English ideas. The poem that accompanies this essay expresses the way old gods lay on the new page, always returning to te ao Māori.

Correspondence IV is a continuation of the serial that has been published by The Physics Room since 2021. This publication gathers fragments: kupu, alphabets, emojis, handwritten letters and archival scraps. It is a collection of conversations you can hold in your hands, messy and provisional, where meaning slips, overlaps, and multiplies.

Anna Welham

Editor

Writing and Publications Coordinator

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Raine Angeles

GETS MO BA?
(DO YOU UNDERSTAND?)

A twist of anxiety and curiosity fitted itself into the pit of the stomach, days before I was set to travel home to the Philippines. It's become a tradition for my parents and me to see our extended family every two years. Except this time, I was bringing a plus one: my partner of three years. It was one of those inevitabilities that had plagued me since the relationship had gotten serious enough for me to meet his family. Yes, I am worried about first impressions and approvals, and saving face during a faux pas, and dodging questions about marriage and babies. But above all, I am worried about language and translation.

The language most commonly spoken in the Philippines is Tagalog. It is the language of the province where I grew up, and it is my **mother tongue**.¹ But because I moved to New Zealand when I was barely nine years old, it means I've spoken more English in my life than Tagalog. I always worry about my ability to communicate when I go back home. I worry about my fluency, comprehension and keeping pace in conversation. There are words I stutter through, trying to figure out the **correct grammatical use**,² and there are sentences broken because I have **lost the Tagalog word and must replace it with the English translation**.³

With no formal training in either language, I found myself in a

¹ mother tongue is being used as a 'turn of phrase' and not literal, because my mother's 'mother tongue' is actually Kapampangan

² nagyaya (past tense; made plans to) versus magyaya (present tense; making plans to)

³ "Anong oras lilipat?" "Pwede ba half an hour?"

situation where I had to be conscious of not only my own self expression, but to also be able to communicate the intentions of others from one language to another. In the intimacy of my family home, it was not simply words I was translating, it was first impressions, attempts at playful banter, and efforts in earnest connections.

Of all the things I had to translate, perhaps jokes were the most complicated, as they are often delivered quickly in conversation. And unfortunately, jokes in any language get less funny the more you explain them. There were moments I would find myself laughing heartily, and then catch the clueless smile on my partner's face and realise I would have to relay the joke in English.



“Narinig nyo na ba yung bagong slogan ng Bulacan?” Tito asks as he drives us home from the airport.

“May bago na? Ano daw?” Dad replies, looking out the car window.

“Go Bulacan,” Tito smiles, “kasi daw lagi Nakalubog.”

As I laugh, I blurt out in English, “Oh no, how do I translate that?”

As it invites another round of laughter, my Dad is able to explain the pun,⁴ and we were all able to laugh along. But other family members were too quick-witted, and the word plays often built on top of someone else’s word play, ultimately becoming a round robin of puns. At those points, I could only helplessly translate the fragments of a punchline, during which my partner once said, “just give up on this one, I think it may be too complicated.” The labour of translation, especially in real time, sometimes means curating the paragraph into a sentence.

My favourite translations are phrases and expressions—phrases that often don’t have a direct translation to a commonly used English phrase, yet are commonly used in the everyday language of Tagalog.

⁴ Bulacan is an area of the Philippines that faces major flooding every time monsoon season hits due to lack of investments in infrastructure in flood protections, and slogans can be a fun way of creating identity and community for many areas of the Philippines. The punch line is that the new slogan for Bulacan is ‘Go Bulacan!’, which happens to be ‘Nakalubog’ when read backwards. And Nakalubog translates to submerged or sunken, commonly under water.

Sarap tumawa
(*Tagalog; expression*)

(Literal) delicious laugh.

1. When someone laughs so heartily that it makes you feel good to hear it.

2. Used to refer to the laughter of someone else, usually a small child.

"Ang sarap naman tumawa!" I clap, smiling at the toddler that waddles towards me. It prompts another laughter from his lips, and my heart feels full at the sound.

Tinamad sa init
(*Tagalog; expression*)

(Literal) lazy from the heat.

1. When the unbearable heat has caused one to abandon plans and stay home instead.

2. Used as an explanation for why plans have fallen through, sometimes used teasingly towards someone who's been asleep/ laying down the whole day.

"Ano ba plano nyo mamaya?" Tita asks.

"Lalabas po sana kaso," I pause to make a face, "Tinamad na sa init."

Tita smiles sympathetically, "ganun talaga dito. Pahinga na muna kayo sa malamig."

Asim na nakakakilig
(Tagalog; phrase)

(Literal) A sour taste that
causes shivers.

1. Tasting a flavour so sour that it
sends a shiver through the body.
2. Used to describe a strong
flavour positively, often
expressed as a craving.

“Masyado ba maasim?”
Lola asks nervously.

“Mas masarap nga po pag maasim,”
I smile, trying to hide my mouthful.

“Para ka pa la si Ama,” Tita smiles,
“Hindi yun kumakain ng sinigang
kapag hindi nakakakilig ang asim!”

These phrases reflect the
lifestyle and philosophies of
Filipino culture through the use
of words that consciously evoke
feelings. Empathy is embedded
into expressions that can be as
mundane as describing a flavour
that sends a shiver down one’s
spine or a sound that tastes so
delicious. The ways in which
Tagalog embraces emotions
in its language creates space
for community, giving each
other the ability to be seen
and felt in conversations.

Although truthfully, there wasn’t
much that had to be translated,
as my family knew a fair amount
of English. In fact most school
curriculums are expected to
include a basic knowledge
of the English language.⁵
English language movies
and shows are available on
broadcast television and

⁵ Because of
the history
of economic
struggle in the
Philippines,
speaking and
understanding
English
fluently
was seen as
a skill for
economic
opportunity
overseas, and
also a social
status symbol.

online streaming, and social media makes English language videos and posts accessible for consumption. The language is not far out of reach, but there is a difference between consuming and understanding the words and sentences, and being able to practise speaking the language itself.

There were instances where people who I had always known to be chatty and boisterous suddenly turned timid when speaking English. Their endless and expressive ramblings were simplified into brief words, as the ability for self-expression becomes limited in an unpractised language. And most people would introduce themselves only by given name, omitting the **cultural honorific of who they are in my family**,⁶ yet if I were to

⁶ Terms such as Tita and Tito (Aunt and Uncle), Ate and Kuya (older sister and older brother), are honorifics used to refer to someone older than yourself, and are a means of showing respect. They are not strictly used within blood-related relatives. For example, a female friend of your Mum can be referred to as 'Tita' despite there being no ancestral relation.

call them by their names alone, **it would be disrespectful.**⁷ These adjustments they've made in response to the difference in cultures and the gaps in language were the hardest to translate.

⁷ Personally this practice of referring to a relative or family friend with an honorific is one that transcends language. Say, if I knew a Filipino woman named Sarah who is my Mum's age (a significant age difference that calls for the respectful use of an honorific), I wouldn't just omit the word 'Tita' because I've switched to speaking English. Even when speaking to someone else in English, I still feel compelled to refer to them as Tita Sarah, because it would otherwise feel rude and unnatural.

It's the tail-end of our roadtrip to Baguio, and while I was fussing with my hair, my partner had been pulled to eat breakfast in an adjacent room. Gathering my hair into a clip, I hear my name echo from somewhere outside the door. Rushing over, before I can even take in the situation, my Grandmother appears with a plate in her hand, "we need a translator."

"Yung plato na kinakainan nya, masyado maliit, kawawa naman, di nagkakasya yung pagkain nya. Sinasabi namin, palitan nya nito, pero di yata kami nagkakaintindihan."

Chuckling, I take the plate and approach my partner. "They want to swap out the plate you're eating off of because it's too small to fit your food, they're offering you this one in exchange."

"Oh, sorry, I just didn't want to dirty the dishes," he explains while taking the other plate.

"No I figured, but they feel bad watching you eat off a small plate; they want you to have a bigger one so you can enjoy more food."



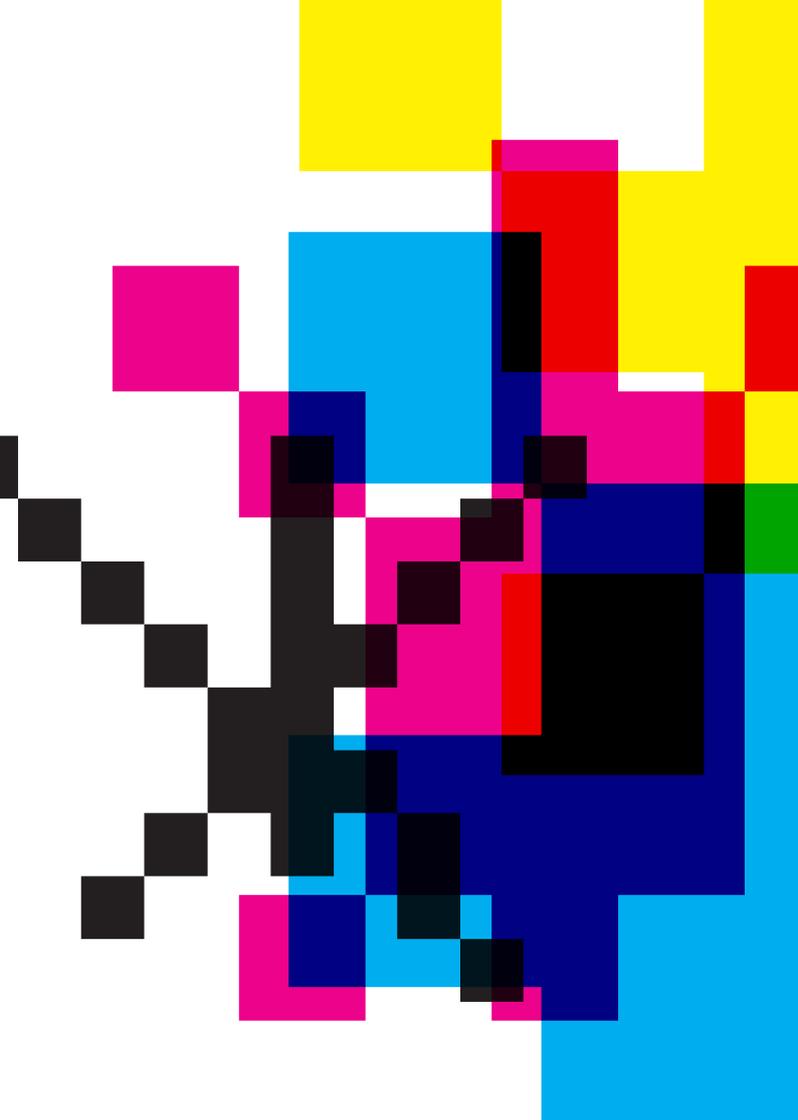
I often found myself bridging the gaps between my family's limited practice with English, and my partner's eagerness to communicate. Although my family understands how they ought to perform the language—ears trained by television shows and online videos—they are still confined within their lack of practice. But where language fails them, actions translate their heart and intent. My family compensates for my partner's loose grasp of their culture with an understanding of his, and along the way, they show him the best of Filipino hospitality. Homes are never without spare indoor slippers, there is always a cup of tea or coffee to prolong a visit, and plates will never be without food.

Language is a delicate thing. Translation comes with the risks of misunderstanding or misconstruing intentions. Language weaves together the philosophies of its people with expressions and turns of phrase. Love, loss, and comfort all find various meanings in the different languages they are spoken in, enriching the way our world is understood. During this short trip back home, I was able to share my culture with someone else in a way that I had never done before. I was laid bare between two languages: spoken in Tagalog, and then translated to English. To exist between two languages is a privilege. To be able to share it with someone else is a gift.



Nell May

REPORTER
NUMBER 5



REPORTER NUMBER

5

NELL
MAY

THE CHILDREN WERE FOLLOWING JAMES, THE SADDEST BOY IN THE WORLD. THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY AN OLD MAN GAVE JAMES A BAG OF MAGIC GREEN THINGS. RUNNING HOME TOO FAST, JAMES FELL TO THE GROUND. THE BAG POPPED AND A THOUSAND EMERALD SPECKS SLUNK INTO THE SOIL.

NOT LONG AFTER, A PEACH APPEARED AND BEGAN TO GROW.

PETER'S EYES FLICKERED AWAKE. TWO DOZEN OF HIS CLASSMATES WERE SPRAWLED AROUND HIM. JUST AHEAD WERE A PAIR OF DULL ADULT LEATHER SHOES. MISS KROPP'S USUALLY STERN VOICE — ONE WHICH ENFORCED OBEDIENCE WITH EASE — WAS VIBRANT AS SHE MORPHED INTO EACH CHARACTER: BE IT THE TIMID BROKEN JAMES, HIS CRUEL AUNTS, OR HIS NEW OVERSIZED INSECT FRIENDS AROUND INSIDE THE GIANT PEACH.

PETER DRIIFTED OFF AGAIN, JOINING JAMES AND HIS FRIENDS BACK INSIDE THE PEACH AS IT FLOATED LIKE A HOT AIR BALLOON.

"PETER, ARE YOU LISTENING?"

"HE'S SLEEPING, MISS KROPP!"

"I AM NOT!" PETER REPLIED AS HE KEPT HIS EYES SHUT.

'SIT UP, THE
STORY IS
OVER!'

PETER JOINED HIS CLASSMATES WITH LEGS CROSSED AND ARMS FOLDED. "I HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT," MISS KROPP BEGAN. "JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH WILL BE THE STORY FOR THIS YEAR'S SCHOOL THEATRE PRODUCTION. YOU WILL ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY."

SOON, NAMES WERE BEING CALLED AND MISS KROPP WAS INFORMING THE CHILDREN WHO THEY WOULD PLAY. PETER BECAME REPORTER NUMBER 5 — A NON-SPEAKING ROLE.

TEACHING WAS
SUSPENDED; THE
CHILDREN HAD
JOBS TO DO...

PETER'S TASK WAS CAMERA MAKER, BOTH FOR HIMSELF AND FOR HIS FIVE FELLOW MUTE REPORTERS. PETER ALREADY KNEW A BIT ABOUT CAMERAS. HIS FATHER OWNED A STURDY BLACK ONE — AN ANCIENT RELIC.

THE CAMERA WAS EASY TO USE - LOOK THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER AND LINE UP THE FRAME, THEN PRESS IN THE SILVER BUTTON AND HOPE FOR THE BEST. PETER'S FATHER WOULD LET HIM HAVE A GO TO FINISH A FILM OFF. THE RESULT WAS USUALLY BLURRY PHOTOS OF PETER'S BEST BLOCK CREATIONS. PETER DECIDED A PROFESSIONAL CAMERA WOULD LOOK MUCH THE SAME AS HIS FATHER'S, BUT *BIGGER* AND WITH *MORE* KNOBS TO MAKE IT *FANCIER*!

PETER'S
CLASSROOM
BECAME A
MINI
FACTORY

IN ONE CORNER SMALL HANDS COVERED MANY BALLOONS IN GLASS PAPER FOR THE INSECT COSTUMES

IN THE OTHER CORNER A TABLE OF PAINTERS COATED SMALLS ONTO BRICK MASKS

THE MIDDLE OF THE CLASS WAS CLEARED OF DESKS FOR SCULPTORS TO MOULD CHICKEN WIRE AND PEACH COLOURED FABRIC INTO SEGMENTS OF AN OVER-SIZED BALL

IN THE LIBRARY NOOK PETER FOCUSED ON CAMERA DESIGN. HE FOLDED CARDBOARD FOR THE BODY, DISSECTING OUT TWO RECTANGLES AS A VIEW-FINDER. HE THEN CUT A TOLLET ROLL FOR THE LENS AND WRAPPED IT IN PLASTIC

SOON PETER SETTLED ON A PROTO-
TYPE AND SWITCHED INTO
PRODUCTION MODE - ASSEMBLING
REPLICAS FOR REPORTERS 1, 2,
3, 4 AND 6. WHEN IT CAME TIME
FOR THE PAINT JOB, PETER PUT
THE ORIGINAL CAMERA ASIDE. HE
LINED UP THE REST. WITHIN TEN
MINUTES HE'D SLATHERED EACH
CAMERA IN GREY PAINT AND DECLARED
THEM AS FINISHED! NOW PETER
HAD MORE TIME AND COULD
CONCENTRATE ON COLOURING
A HIGHLY INTRICATE PATTERN
ONTO *HIS* ORIGINAL CAMERA
TO MAKE IT MORE DISTINCTIVE.

PETER STILL WANTED ONE
EXTRA ELEMENT FOR HIS
SPECIAL EDITION CAMERA.
WHEN HE NOTICED MISS
KROPP OCCUPIED OUTSIDE
WITH HER RECRUITMENT
OF ACTORS - RUNNING
DRILLS OF RECITING
LINES - PETER TOOK HIS
OPPORTUNITY. HE SCOUTED
MISS KROPP'S DESK FULL
OF CONFISCATED ITEMS
AND SCHOOL STATIONERY.

40

INSIDE A DRAWER, PETER
FOUND A BOX OF SHINY
SILVER PUSH-PINS.
AMONG THEM HE SPOTTED
A LONG MAGENTA PIN.
PETER HAD FOUND THE
FINAL TOUCH: HIS
CAMERA'S

SHOOT
BUTTON



+1

Oh *OPENING* NIGHT

PETER WAITED BACKSTAGE WITH THE OTHER KIDS. LIPSTICK WAS SMUDGED ROUGHLY ONTO HIS CHEEKS BY ONE OF THE VOLUNTEER MOTHERS. PETER'S COSTUME WAS SIMPLE. A TUCKED-IN SHIRT AND JEANS, PLUS A TIE FOR ADDED PROFESSIONALISM. PETER CLASPED HIS *SPECIAL EDITION* CAMERA TIGHT, HE WAS PROUD OF ITS **blue** AND **yellow zig-zag pattern**. **very futuristic**, HE THOUGHT.

PETER RAISED THE CAMERA TO HIS EYE EVERY SO OFTEN LIKE A BACKSTAGE PHOTOGRAPHER. SOME KIDS WERE ALREADY IN CHARACTER, LIKE THE TWO GIRLS SNIFFING OVER THE FLOOR IN CHUNKY INSECT COSTUMES. THE BOY PLAYING 'JAMES' WAS DOING A FINE JOB OF BEING THE SADDEST BOY IN THE WORLD AS HE BEGGED MISS KROPP NOT TO HAVE TO GO ON STAGE.

WHEN THE MUSIC STARTED, 'JAMES' WAS SHOVED OUT PAST THE CURTAINS. THE REMAINING CHILDREN SAT QUIETLY BACKSTAGE WAITING FOR THEIR CUES.

TIME PROGRESSED SLOWLY THROUGH THE STORY. PETER BECAME TRANSFIXED BY THE SLIVER OF AUDIENCE VISIBLE THROUGH A GAP IN THE THICK RED DRAPE. EDGING CLOSER FOR A BETTER VIEW, PETER PEERED OUT. EACH PARENT LOOKED TIRED, BUT UPON SPOTTING THEIR PRECIOUS OFFSPRING TAKE TO THE STAGE THEY WOULD SWITCH TO

WE
R-
EXAGGERATED
SMILES AND
DOUBLE-THUMBS-UP!

A TAP
STARTLED
HIM.

PETER LOOKED
UP AND SAW MISS
KROPP, THE DEEPENING
CAVERNS BETWEEN HER
EBBROWS TOLD HIM SHE
WAS UNIMPRESSED WITH
SOMETHING...

CLOSING THE SLIT IN
THE CURTAINS PETER'S
EYES DARTED OVER TO
THE STAGE. WALKING AS
A PACK IN HUNTING
MODE TO DRAMATIC PIANO
PLAYING WERE

REPORTERS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
4. AND
- 6.

'GET OUT
THERE!'

MISS KROPP POINTED
TOWARDS PETER'S
REPORTER COLLEAGUES.
BEWILDERED, PETER'S
FEET DRAGGED OUT PAST
THE SHIELDING CURTAIN
AND

INTO
THE
LIGHTS!

AS HE SHUFFLED CLOSER,
THE OTHER REPORTERS
BEGAN TO AGGRESSIVELY
CIRCLE THE ENORMOUS
FABRIC AND CHICKEN-WIRE
PEACH IN THE STAGE CENTRE.

'JAMES' STOOD BESIDE
THE RAMSHACKLE HOUSE.
PETER DIS+RAGTINGLY
NOTED THAT THE HOUSE
WAS REALLY VERY WELL
CONSTRUCTED FROM
ITS CARDBOARD BOXES.

REMEMBERING
HIS SITUATION,
PETER REALISED
HE WAS UNSURE OF

HOW

TO JOIN IN THE
CHOREOGRAPHED
ROUTINE NOW
THAT IT WAS
ALREADY WELL
UNDERWAY.

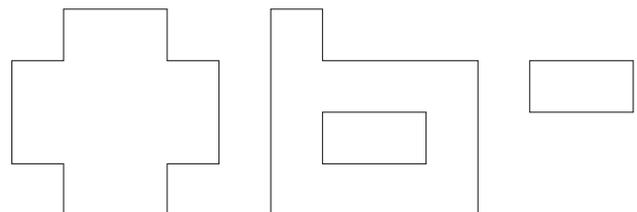
PETER
S L O W E D
AND
**STOOD
STILL.**

IN THE AUDIENCE BELOW, SOME
HEADS WERE TURNING TO EACH
OTHER BEFORE SWITCHING BACK
TO PETER. THEY EXPECTED HIM
TO DO SOMETHING, TO PERFORM.
PETER RESORTED TO THE ONLY
THING HE COULD THINK OF.
RAISING HIS PATTERNED CAMERA,
HE PEERED THROUGH HIS OUT-
OUT VIEWFINDER. WITH THIS,
HE WAS PROTECTED, AS GOOD AS
INVISIBLE. WITH ONE EYE CLOSED
PETER CAREFULLY GATHERED
PEOPLE INTO FRAME - THE
GRANDFATHER ARTFULLY ASIDE,
WITH HIS CHIN TUCKED INTO HIS
CHEST; THE TEENAGE SIBLING
TAPPING ON A NOT-SO-WELL-
HIDDEN PHONE; THE MOTHER
APPLYING A FRESH FACE - PETER
KEPT SEARCHING, DISCARDING
AND REFOCUSING.

TIME WAS NON-MEASURABLE. PETER
COULDN'T TELL IF THE REPORTERS
WERE STILL BEHIND HIM DANCING OR
NOT. HE KNEW HIS PARENTS MUST BE
SOMEWHERE IN THIS AUDIENCE - HE
WAS CORRECT - PETER FOUND THEM
RIGHT DOWN THE BACK AMONGST
THE LATE ARRIVERS. HIS MOTHER'S
FRIZZY HAIR FLOPPED AROUND AS
SHE WAVED EXUBERANTLY. AT LEAST
PETER THOUGHT IT WAS A WAVE
OR WAS SHE TRYING TO TELL HIM
SOMETHING? TO LEAVE THE STAGE
OR TO STAY AND PERFORM?

PETER WANTED
HIS FATHER'S
HELP TO
DECODE
HIS MOTHER'S
ABSURD SIGN
LANGUAGE,

BUT HIS
FATHER'S
FACE WAS



SQUARED

BY HIS
OWN
STURDY
BLACK
CAMERA

PETER'S INDEX
FINGER HOVERED
OVER HIS CAMERA'S
SHOOT BUTTON.
HE FOCUSED ON HIS
FATHER'S CAMERA.
PETER STARED ON STAGE
MOTIONLESS.
WAS THIS A

*SECRET
GAME*

BETWEEN
HIM AND
HIS FATHER?

PETER
WONDERED,

WHO
WOULD
BREAK
CHARACTER
FIRST...?

Bella Macdonald

DEAR NANI

To Rita,

I hope this finds you well,

I don't really know the right way to start this letter. I'm not even sure if we share the same language.

I am the daughter of the baby girl you gave away all those years ago. Her name is Rohini.

We don't know much about you. Mum was given her pre-adoption papers a couple of years ago with your information. We only know your name and that you're from Vitawa.

Not a lot, really.

Mum and Dad took us to Fiji a few times when we were young. I remember the taste of the coconut milk and the smell of the soil. I think I would look at it all differently if I went there again.

Where are you now?

I'm not sure what to tell you except that we love the family we were raised in. All Mum's brothers and sisters were adopted too, and that was a special environment.

I never felt I had to look or be any one way, surrounded by so many different faces and personalities.

In some ways, I am grateful to you for giving me that.

I've been researching more and more about Fijian-Indian history, and I feel a deep connection to everything. It makes me think about you and wonder who you are.

I'm not sure where I fit into the larger weaving of this history. I sometimes feel so silly and uncertain that I have a place in it at all.

That's it for now, I'll think it all over and try again soon.

Namaste,
B



To Rita,

Knots of
refined
sugar

Candamom

↳ Coriander



Dear Rita,

Connecting is hard for me; I say things funny or slip between other people's accents. I don't feel a centre of gravity, an axis from which to guide myself. I think this is why it's hard to write to you. I don't know how to write about something I've never been able to put into words before.

With Mum, I've never had to get it right. She might not always get me, but she understands beyond words this feeling that is both distant and so close it presses firmly against us.

I couldn't describe it to you if you asked, no arrangement of the alphabet could do it justice.

And it doesn't have to, as long as she knows what I mean.

We were spoiled throughout our whole childhoods, with various things, but especially food. Mum has always been a good cook.

She seems so intuitive when adding spices, herbs, sauces...she's a natural. She's always teaching me new things, and when she's not, I'm calling her up to ask her how she made that something-or-other from last Wednesday.

I associate her with the strong fragrance of cardamom. It's her favourite. She leaves behind whole pods in our meals, and the hard crunch and burst of sharp perfume leaves a lasting impression.

Her appreciation for food is something she has passed on.

I now refuse to make anything from the jar, from pasta sauce to 'curry', despite not knowing what I'm doing.

Cooking this way reminds me of Mum, and it often feels like a thread tied to you. The smell of fresh coriander and masala is something I allow myself to bask in, and I feel like I'm reforming connections even if they're imagined ones.

Namaskar,

B





Dear Nani,

I would like to know more about you

I wonder what you look like,
I wonder if I've seen you before,
I wonder what you're good at,
I wonder whether you're anything like us.

The more I learn about Fiji and India, the
more I feel I learn about you,
And about us.

At once, I'm becoming
And simultaneously unwinding myself.

I'm trying to find my place in it all.

I research, looking for traces of myself in
the details

I tread carefully, slipping in and out of
the woven path

Untangling and rethreading with the string
of you that is tied to me

At times, it is loose

tied between distant plains

And other times it is pulled so taut
I feel the hum of Indra's net tangled
behind me

Yet I worry our threads have become fraught
And I weave, I knot, I tie
Trying to mend them

I wind stories from my hands and, I suppose,
I do it because of you.

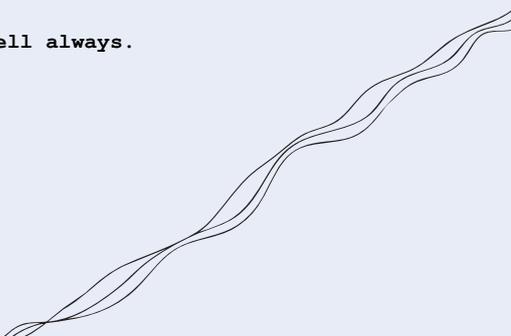
I sing songs to you, but you'll never
hear them.

And I make things from clay,
cardamom, and sugar,
but you'll never see them.

I don't know my place here yet.
I'm not sure that I will write to you again.

Wishing you well always.

Alvida,
Bella



Jenny Gao

THE HEART
EMOJI ALMANAC

Welcome to the Heart Emoji Almanac ❤️

Are you having a good day? 🤞

Beach cutie 🍷 How's Mum? 🤍

I need to call mine ❤️

Are you still feeling lost? 🍷 Same 🖤

Do you think we get to choose to be
reborn on a different planet after
we die? 🍷 Yeah idk either 🤍 But I think

I'm going to stop drinking oat milk 🍷

And break up with him 🍷

Maybe move to Sardinia 🤞



Etymology: The default, like Internet Explorer or a cow's milk flat white. A utilitarian classic. ❤️

Habitat: Everyone, everywhere. The "most beloved of all emojis, old or new," according to Emojipedia. Unfortunately, being the default means that you are a blank canvas for the world to project upon. In Saudi Arabia, sending a red heart on platforms like WhatsApp to the opposite sex is considered a harassment crime. Yearning is a complete breach of modesty that can lead to 2-5 years in jail and put you out 100,000 Saudi Riyals (45,000NZD).

Behaviour: Even when charged with our most feral neuroses and deepest paranoia, it remains for the people: an unyielding red beacon that has been embedded in our collective consciousness since we etched it upon a cave wall within the outline of a mammoth in 19,975 BC. Red heart remains available for us all and takes no heed to our age or ideology.





Etymology: Japanese. Emojis were created by artist Shigetaka Kurita in 1999 so they're technically all Japanese, but double pink heart feels the most Japanese in the spiritual sense. Kurita was working on an early mobile internet platform that only allowed 250 characters on 12-by-12 pixel grids, so he sketched a set of tiny artworks which became the original 176 emoji. The word emoji itself is Japanese: its kanji characters –絵文字– translate to “picture” (絵) and “character” (文字).

Habitat: The connective tissue of the most personal, passionate expressions about pop music, food or within a friendship. Found in passionate moments of transcendent glee.

Behaviour: The most unabashedly whimsical and feminine of all the heart emojis, with a preternatural innocence that feels brave and almost Machiavellian, remaining sweet and happy in spite of it all. Whether a belligerent refusal to acknowledge the world's evils or simply escapism, 💕 packs a punch without trying. Often found in flocks of two or three, used as a flourish. かわいい-----! 💕💕💕
めっちゃ楽しみです
(So cute-----! I'm super excited 💕💕💕)



THE
MILL
ENIAL

THE
MILL
ENIAL

Etymology: elder millennial with origins in tumblr. the famous 39-year-old bisexual man you're having a tumultuous fling with has finally 💖 reacted your message after two weeks of silence. it cuts like a knife, but you don't have grounds to get mad because, well, you're chill.

Habitat: over dms only with auto-caps off. he barely uses punctuation except for the god awful space before exclamation mark ! what is the convention where manipulative men who intentionally keep you in the grey attend where they all agree to do this ? is the insistence of that particular space intended to subliminally reinforce the amount of emotional space he requires for the romance to continue ? you'll never know because the dynamic you signed

up for doesn't facilitate that kind of candid casual inquiry. in a desperate bid to regain a crumb of control, you find his ex and grow a parasocial relationship with her social media account. she's the coolest, most beautiful girl you've never met who exclusively uses the yellow heart emoji 🟡 because her favourite colour is yellow, because she's bright sparkly awesome and probably never felt bothered the way you do now.

Behaviour: hey sorry for the distance, i've been under the pump ! but would love to see you. last minute but do you want to come out to [event that you'd never be able to access otherwise]? it's in two hours, i got you a ticket ! no worries if not though 💖

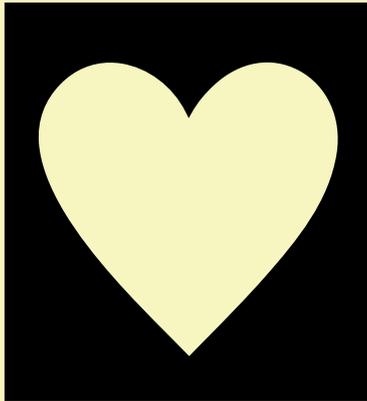
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THE CUTEST BOYFRIEND

Etymology: Your lover's ex—the coolest girl you've never met.

Habitat: Checking up on her online profile is now part of your daily routine. She's a freelance creative director with mysterious projects and a loaded new boyfriend with whom she travels with annually to the Blue Zones.



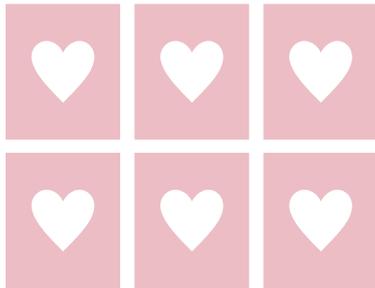
Behaviour: Eats a diet filled with seasonal farmers' market produce, natural wine and the occasional McDonald's. Her wardrobe is casual but eclectic, undefinable to one niche. She's backstage at some indie gig always, which she posts exclusively with the yellow heart emoji and her equally beautiful girlfriends, along with more yellow emojis: sunshine 🌞 smiling face with hearts 😊 and a wildcard, the sideways cry laugh emoji 😂 Although boomer-esque, it naturally works with her effortless conviction and lithe frame. She seems happy in her new relationship, you can tell he really treasures her. 🧡 is ❤️'s niche sister, living a cultivated life. She seems like she doesn't care for you to know, but you know her by proxy and projection, and such casualness is only effective because it is completely manufactured.





Etymology: A friend who you didn't realise you fell out with has invited you to her party and  reacted your message. It feels inexplicably hostile.

Habitat: She used to host all the gatherings in the scene you were in before your career took you down another path, and she pivoted away from the arts to work for her wealthy father. You thought your journeys naturally diverged, but at the party, she subtly sizes you up.

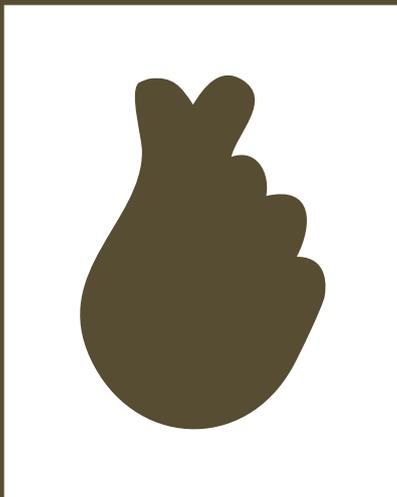


Behaviour: *What's the financial reward of making documentaries?* she asks with a restrained sweetness. There's an awkward, long silence as you take in what she's trying not to imply. She used to send red hearts, but now it's white for everything and everyone. You hold her gaze. *Well, creatively it's amazing. I'm the most fulfilled I've ever been in my life.*  almost never codes passion; it signals maturity and a neoliberal platonic sincerity. Its gentle hostility implies that you've been de-saturated and tidied out of their world.



Etymology: Korean. Thumb and forefinger pinched to form a tiny heart, both earnest and ironic 🍵

Habitat: K-pop royalty flashes us a finger heart on a soju bottle, in a skincare ad, at a fan meet. Supreme leader Kim Jong-un bestows upon us a finger heart from the top of Mount Paektu.



Behaviour: The distilled gesture of Hallyu soft power, irresistibly disarming. In use, it oscillates between genuine affection and tongue-in-cheek parody. Just like the consumer-friendly presentation of the Korean pop industrial complex, the finger heart is the most G-rated and corporate-friendly offering of goodwill. The heart shape the fingers supposedly make is Stage Three simulacra at best; an abstracted, flattened mimicry of what it is meant to represent. But its sanitised nature is its strength for contexts that require boundaries: you can drop it in your work Slack, possibly even an email.



Beware getting lost in translation across platforms. A warm, glossy 3D Apple heart can be received on Android as a detached, flat, minimalistic equivalent of a 'k'.

Beware the person who communicates with excess emojis, for a Cambrian explosion of semiotics risks obscuring meaning entirely. Attend to cadence and context to avoid misunderstanding. When all is emphasised, nothing is truly said.

Hāwea Apiata

TĀTAI TIKANGA KUPU
/ ETYMOLOGY

He whao, he patu hoki
ngā puka hāhi
mā te tipua arerorua.

Ko tāna he whakairo paki,
he tārai kōrero kia noho māori
mai i taku arero, i taku hinengaro,
āna, he tīpako kupu
hei raweketanga māna.
He kohinga kīanga e hopukina ana
ki ngā rau whārangi–

engari he kirituna tō te reo,
e kore e taea katoatia te mau.

Ka huna ngā atua i waenganui
i ngā rerenga kōrero,
he mea whakakākahu rātou
ki ngā pū o reo kē atu,
ki ngā tohu tauhou–
kua whakaahuatia he tinana
mō rātou anō ki te waituhi

So-called holy books are both
tool and weapon
for the two-tongued trickster.

They render their tomes into
familiar speech,
extract word and phrase
for experimentation,
syntax and lexicon held hostage
in paper leaves–

but language wears eel-skin
and can slip from the firmest grasp.

Old gods hide in plain sight on the page,
clothe themselves in robes of Latin script,
bending line and shape to form
legible two-dimensional bodies

r a n g i

t

ā

n

e

p a p a

he kupu, he ingoa,
he tapuwae hei whai atu,
he tapore e tohu nei
i te ara whakamuri
ki te takenga.

He waka huia
te kupu Māori,
ko ngā taonga o roto
he rau-kura-huna,
he whakapapa.

r a n g i

t

ā

n

e

p a p a

Printed in the trail
that leads back to
the source.

Each word is a waka huia
holding worlds,
holding whakapapa.

Some years ago, I completed a Master's thesis in which I studied examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century writing in te reo Māori.¹ Specifically, this research focused on translations of religious materials into te reo Māori and traced intellectual contributions from Māori translators and writers in the production of these texts. My initial interest in this subject sprung from a curiosity about how a world of foreign concepts (in this instance from Christianity) could be articulated in our language. I was interested in the connections, disconnections, tensions, adaptations, creations, co-

¹ Apiata, A. H. (2021). *He tangi mai i te puehu: He tangi mai i te puehu: He whakatewhatewha i te mahi whakamaori me te reo ā-tuhi a ngā tūpuna* [Master's thesis]. University of Waikato.

options, and corruptions, as well as the confluences between multiple languages and cultures, whether natural or contrived, and the choices made by translators regarding where and how to bridge these multiple worlds.

The accompanying poem is a somewhat playful reflection on this study, aspects of which remained unexplored as the project developed in different directions over time. For example, the use of 'Te Rēinga' in early editions of reo Māori scriptural translations offers a point of dis/connection that also underpins the poem. In a physical sense, Te Rēinga is located at the northernmost point of Te Ika a Māui, identified in many kōrero tuku iho as the place where the wairua of our dead 'leap'

into the afterlife. In a non-physical sense, that name Te Rēinga may also be used to refer to the afterlife itself. During funerary rites, orators delivering eulogistic kōrero may urge their dead on to Te Rēinga, encouraging them to follow the various pathways to the tail of Māui's fish, and it is sometimes said that the wairua of relations gone before will receive the newly departed into the hereafter.²

Despite these near-reverent descriptions of Te Rēinga from our traditional oral narratives, it was also the name used in early reo Māori scriptures (in both Te Paipera Tapu and Te Pukapuka a Moromona) as the translation for 'hell'. Details about this translation choice were scarce in my research, though it felt important to

² Mead, H. M. (2006). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values*. Huia Publishers.

interrogate this point further and consider why early missionaries would attempt to claim and distort a term like this, already so replete with spiritual meaning and weight. I use 'attempt' here because this translation of hell as Te Rēinga was later replaced in revised editions.³ In addition, the reo Māori reference book, *He Pātaka Kupu: Te Kai a te Rangatira*, compiled and edited by Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, includes the following comment under the entry 'rēinga',

He rēinga kāpura te rēinga e ako nei te Pākehā ki te Māori, ā ko te rēinga a te Māori i mōhio ai, he rēinga kē anō

³ See Matiu 5:22 (1868 version of Te Paipera Tapu)

(The rēinga taught by Pākehā to Māori is a 'rēinga of fire', and the rēinga that was known before by Māori, was different altogether)⁴

Words carry freight in the form of meaning. And perhaps the existing freight borne by this particular term left too little room for it to be successfully meddled with and co-opted for colonial objectives. Perhaps too many early Māori readers of this translation felt the same tension I did when reading it for the first time and were discontent with the extraction of word and phrase for experimentation.

⁴ Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori. (2008). *He pātaka kupu: Te kai a te rangatira*. (p. 764). Rauropo. Translation is my own.

Throughout other phases of my research, while reading through reo Māori scriptural translations, I was also regularly intrigued by the presence of words like ‘rangī’ and ‘papa’ in the text. Used in an everyday context to simply mean ‘sky’ (or even ‘heaven’) and ‘ground’, their upper-case forms, from which these lower-case renderings originate, are of course names of the primordial parents, Rangī(nui) and Papa(tūānuku), personifications of sky and earth–atua.

This piqued my interest because it was the explicit intention of European missionary-translators to instil a belief and understanding of a new god and faith among Māori, while encouraging them to abandon their existing worldviews.⁵ Though, because

⁵ Tina Ngata: *Dismantling Frameworks of Domination, Rematriating Ways of Being. “Indigenous Sacredness, Christendom and the Doctrine of Discovery.”* May 3, 2024. Web page.

of the nature of our language, its structure, its inextricability from cultural paradigm, our atua Māori were always going to be on the page in some shape or form. You cannot talk about the sky, let alone an omniscient being who ostensibly resides there, without using the word-name, ‘rangī’. Likewise, you cannot mention the ground on which we stand without ‘papa’. Even sermons on peace will eventually draw ‘rongo/Rongo’ from his kūmara pit.⁶ While equivalence is often utilised in translation for convenience, nuance is easily lost (especially over time) when words from one language are reduced to the meanings of their assigned counterparts from another. For this reason, I am usually hesitant to bring the words ‘atua’ and ‘god’

⁶ Rongo-marae-roa is the atua of peace, as well as the atua of kūmara and other cultivated foods.

into close proximity with each other, however, the line in the English version of the poem 'old gods hide in plain sight on the page' is used deliberately here with tongue in cheek. It is almost a taunt to those early translators who would have erased the cultural, philosophical, and ecological knowledge that comes with understanding our language and by extension, our relationship with atua Māori—the domains of the natural world.

The freight that these words carry is whakapapa, a layered pathway that will always lead back to whakaaro Māori, a Māori way of looking at and making sense of the world.



CONTRIBUTORS

Raine Angeles is a Filipino artist and writer currently based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from the University of Canterbury, her photographic practice has been a great source of inspiration for her writing. Previously published in *Rat World Magazine*, Raine is an active and observant member of the Aotearoa arts scene. She is forever chasing stories grounded in community, culture, and creativity.

Hāwea Apiata (Ngāti Kura, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Toarangatira) is a Waikato-based writer and curator. His storytelling is informed by a commitment to land, language, and lineage. He completed an MA in Māori-language literature at the University of Waikato and his writing can be found in publications such as *Landfall Tauraka*, *Takahē*, *Turbine|Kapohau*, *Mayhem*, *The Quick Brown Dog*, *Poem Atlas*, *PŪHIA*, and *Huia Short Stories*. His work was shortlisted for the 2025 Pīkīhuia Award for short fiction writing in te reo Māori.

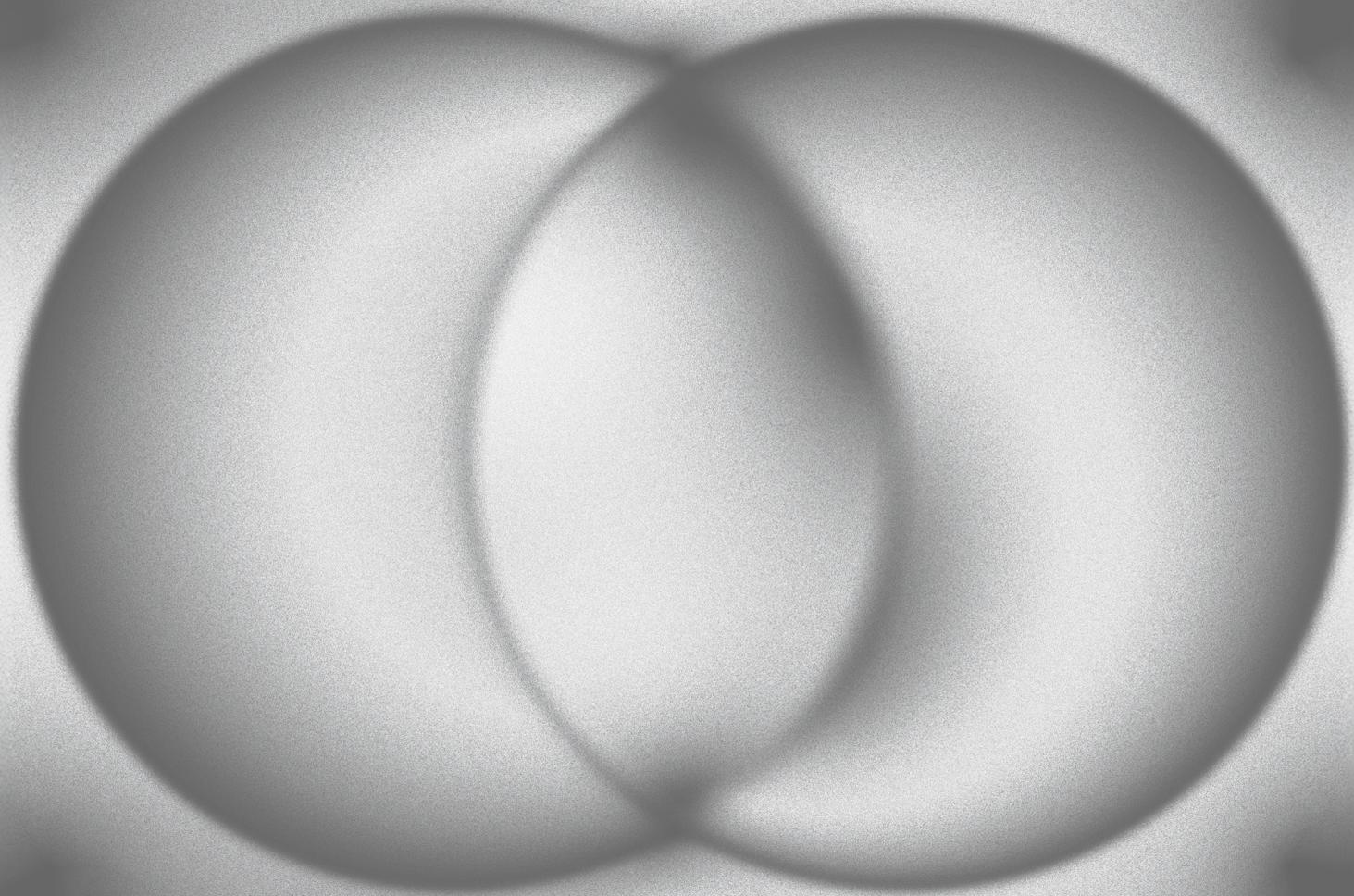
Jenny Gao is a writer whose work blends irreverence with diaristic intimacy. With a documentary background, she observes modern relationships, culture and power with a voice that is playfully sharp, mixing theory with the uncomfortably personal. She wants to let in on secrets you already half-knew.

Bella Macdonald is a multi-disciplinary artist of Fijian-Indian descent. In her broader practice Bella reflects on and explores ideas of community. Influenced by her own experiences, she considers the role community can play in a person's life and makes attempts to encourage engagement and the forming of bonds through relational art.

"Dear Nani," navigates the complexities of transgenerational relationships through letter writing to a maternal grandmother whom she may never meet. Her work attempts to find plurality between her contradictions, reflecting on what she has lost and gained through her diasporic experiences; while also acknowledging the innate connectedness she has to those who came before her.

Nell May is a New Zealand type and graphic designer based in Switzerland. She holds a Master of Type Design from ÉCAL, Lausanne and a Master of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland. May is a member of the antipodean typographic collective Counter Forms and alongside Kevin Kuhn she co-runs the design and research studio Mining Raw Letters. In addition to the short story "Reporter Number 5", research texts by May published in 2025 include: "The Visual World of Anthroposophy: Dynamic Lettering, Typefaces & Language," *Source Type*, Zurich; "Insects in the Night: A Nocturnal Journey through Light-on-Dark Type," *The National Grid* (Issue #9), Christchurch; "A quantum physicist's views on type," *ÉCAL Typefaces*, Lausanne.

"Reporter Number 5" is typeset in School Pixel. Designed by Nell May, School Pixel is based on source material from a 2021 Type Making Tools workshop given to children at Mount Roskill Intermediate, Tāmaki Makaurau. Exploring the grid as a tool, children used pencil and paper to design one letter across four different rasters. As the lattice size decreased, the difficulty in expressing the letterforms increased—sometimes prompting children to creatively break the grid. School Pixel is available in both a tight fitting proportional cut as well a monospaced version that corresponds to original drawings. It comes in four weights (4x4, 5x5, 8x8, 16x16) and is equipped with multiple stylistic sets and contextual alternates for endless play writing.



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