



Greater Together

8 July – 17 September 2017

Bik Van der Pol ***Letters to the Land***

In 1983, the year of ACCA's inauguration in a small cottage in the Domain, a red dust storm hit Melbourne: a dramatic and unusual meteorological phenomenon that saw over 50,000 tonnes of topsoil stripped from Victoria's Mallee and northern Wimmera regions and deposited across the state and beyond. For those that can remember it, the event marked a symbolic shift in our understanding of the environment; precipitating extreme, sometimes catastrophic, changes in the nation's climate, including hailstorms, drought, devastating fires and the extinction of native flora and fauna. In its current location, clad in rust-coloured Corten steel, ACCA is impervious to the elements – a contained or quarantined gallery space, in which Dutch collaborators Bik Van der Pol have brought the outside back in, presenting an expansive field of red soil, latent with potential.

Letters to the Land 2017 takes inspiration from Plato's philosophical text *Symposium*, in which a group of seven distinct thinkers converse on the topic of love. Bik Van der Pol have echoed the form of the symposium, inviting seven archetypes, or characters, to pen a letter to the land from their various personal and professional positions. Taking the form of a sound installation, with the letters read aloud by seven additional individuals, the perspectives of Australian thinkers including Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy (the host, or traditional owner), Evelyn Araleun Corr (the writer), Justin Clemens (the philosopher), Justine Poon (the legal expert), Nurin Veis (the educator), Dermot Henry (the scientist) and Michael Short (the rhetorician) are brought together as a chorus: to be heard individually, in dialogue with one another, with their voices eventually, absorbed back into the land.

Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol have worked together as artistic collaborators since 1994, a division of labour that is both conscious and political. Their mode of working – a collaborative and consultative process – consists of setting up conditions for encounter, to encourage communication and exchange. As with *Letters to the Land*, Bik Van der Pol's work frequently engages with local communities, bringing together ideas and voices that compliment and expand upon one another.

Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy AO
The Host / Traditional Owner

THE YEAR 2017 ON TUESDAY THE 16TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF MAY

DEAR, DEAR LAND,

HOW ARE YOU, HOPE YOU ARE FEELING OK! EXCUSE ME FOR WRITING TO YOU. I DON'T THINK YOU KNOW ME, BUT I KNOW YOU. I'VE KNOWN YOU SINCE I WAS BORN. YOU SEE, I WAS BORN INTO A CULTURE THAT HAS SURVIVED LIVING WITH YOU FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

YOU FASCINATE ME, BEWILDER ME, AMAZE ME AND I AM CURIOUS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOU. I WONDER HOW YOU SURVIVE DAY AFTER DAY. YOU BLOW MY MIND, HOW YOU ARE ALWAYS THERE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU.

I READ SOME SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY HOW YOU CAME TO BE, I GUESS THATS TRUE AND THATS OK. PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD. HELLO WITHOUT YOU THERE WOULDNT BE ANY. YOU ARE **THE** WONDER OF THE WORLD. I AM IN TOTAL AWE OF YOU. I DONT QUESTION YOU BUT I DONT KNOW HOW YOU EXIST. I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU AND MOST PROBABLY THERE WONT BE ANY ANSWERS. THAT IS WHY I AM SO FASCINATED. YOU ARE AS REAL AS ANYONE OR ANYTHING CAN BE. I WALK ON YOU EVERYDAY, I TOUCH YOU, I FEEL YOU WITHIN MY SPIRIT. OH THIS IS WHERE YOU SAY, WHO IS THIS NUTCASE?

OH WELL, I'M ONLY GOING TO WRITE THIS ONE LETTER TO YOU AND I WOULD LOVE ANSWERS BUT TRULY I AM NOT EXPECTING ANY. OMG THOUGH, IF YOU DID, THAT WOULD BE OUTRAGEOUS. NEVER MIND, BUT PLEASE CAN YOU PRETEND TO BE INTERESTED IN WHAT ELSE I AM SAYING. PLEASE, PLEASE READ ON.

WE HUMANS ARE STICKY BEAKS, WE NEED TO KNOW WHATS GOING ON AND EVEN WHEN IT IS NONE OF OUR BUSINESS, WE QUESTION MOST THINGS. I SEE AN IMPRINT ON YOU AND I AM GOBSMACKED BECAUSE I SEE YOU AS SOFT AND VULNERABLE, BUT I KNOW YOU ARE NOT. WHEN HEAVY MACHINERY THUMPS ON YOU, A MASSIVE BUILDING IS BUILT ON YOU, A CONCRETE BRIDGE IMPACTS ON YOU, YOU DONT CRUMBLE. YOU BECOME THIS FOUNDATION OF POWERFUL STRENGTH, OTHERWISE ALL WOULD FALL DOWN ON YOU.

IN A WAY YOU REMIND ME OF A MAMMOTH LASAGNE, THATS A MEAT AND PASTA DISH, LAYER UPON LAYER. YOU ARE GOBBLED UP BUT YOU DONT DISAPPEAR, HOW COME? MAYBE YOUR LAYERS ROTATE WHICH COULD ALMOST CONVINCE ME OF YOUR SURVIVAL.

SO WHAT ELSE THEN? EXCUSE ME FOR ASKING THIS DREADFUL QUESTION, BUT WHAT MAKES YOU FUNCTION? I MEAN DO YOU HAVE A BRAIN, WHAT MAKES YOU TICK. I HAVE TO ASK BECAUSE PEOPLE GO INTO SPACE NOW, TO FIND OUT WHAT THAT'S ALL ABOUT, BUT I BET THEY DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT WHO YOU ARE. AND YOU KNOW WHAT IT SEEMS STRANGE TO ME AND TRULY I DONT GET IT. I PREFER TO KEEP MY FEET ON THE GROUND, SO TO SPEAK NOT FLOAT AROUND IN AN UNKNOWN SPACE. YOU'VE GOT IT ALL DOWN TO PAT, RIGHT HERE I RECKON.

OK NOW I GET REALLY PERSONAL. I FEEL LIKE YOU ARE ROLLING YOUR EYES, THAT'S IF YOU HAVE THEM, DO YOU, AND YOU SAYING OH THIS BETTER BE GOOD.

SO IF A BUILDING, BRIDGE OR REALLY ANYTHING WAS BUILT ON ME, I WOULD DIE. FIRST THE IMPACT WOULD CRUSH ALL MY ORGANS, SQUASH MY VEINS AND MOST LIKELY I WOULD BLEED TO DEATH. IF I DIDNT DIE STRAIGHTAWAY I WOULD CRY BECAUSE IT WOULD HURT AND EVERYONE AROUND ME WOULD FEEL SAD AND BE CRYING TOO. IF I LIVED AND THAT WOULD BE A MIRACLE I WOULD BE HAPPY AND SMILING. OH HELL, IVE THOUGHT OF ANOTHER QUESTION SO I WILL ADD IT ONTO THESE ONES.

SO DO YOU HAVE THESE EMOTIONS OR DO YOU HAVE OTHER EXPRESSIONS. DO YOU FEEL PAIN, DO YOU CRY, DO YOU LAUGH. I'M A BIT OF A SOFTY. I'M SOOKY WITH PAIN, I CRY AND I TRY TO LAUGH AND HAVE FUN AS MUCH AS I CAN. I GET WHAT OTHERS ARE GOING THROUGH AND THAT MAKES ME SAD AND SOMETIMES ANGRY. WHEN I THINK YOU ARE HURTING, I WANT TO WRAP MY ARMS AROUND YOU TO GIVE YOU SOME COMFORT. OH THE QUESTION I ALMOST FORGOT, DO YOU HAVE FAMILY?

I WANT TO LIGHT A FIRE WITH YOU COS THERE IS NOTHING LIKE SITTING AROUND A CAMPFIRE FEELING THE WARMTH, STARING INTO THE INTENSITY OF RED HOT COALS AND SEEING THOSE FLAMES FLICKERING, CREATING A MAGICAL DANCE. OR MAYBE ASK THE RAIN TO LIGHTLY FALL ON US WITH THE GENTLE RAINDROPS PINGING AGAINST THE SPIDERY COBWEBS SERENADING US WITH BEAUTIFUL MUSIC TO REFRESH OUR SPIRITS.

YOU KNOW WHAT LAND, WHAT I REALLY WANT AND NEED TO SAY IS THANK YOU FOR LOVING MY PEOPLE, THE WURUNDJERI, MY FATHERS PEOPLE. WHAT YOU PROVIDED SUSTAINED THE MANY GENERATIONS OF MY FAMILY FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. OUR CULTURE SAYS WHATEVER WE TAKE FROM THE LAND, WE GIVE BACK TO THE LAND. OUR PEOPLE GAVE BACK TO YOU, TO THANK YOU SO YOU COULD REGENERATE AND REPLENISH. THEY CARED AND NUTURED YOU IN RETURN FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY.

OUR PEOPLE CALL YOU MOTHER EARTH. WE BELIEVE WE ARE BORN WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF YOU. WE RESPECT YOU AND WE WILL LOOK AFTER YOU AS BEST WE CAN EVEN IN TODAYS VERY DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT.

TIMES CHANGED FOR MY PEOPLE, SAD STORY BUT TRUE. A COUPLE OF HUNDRED YEARS AGO, DIFFERENT PEOPLE CAME TO OUR TRADITIONAL PLACES. THEY CAME BUT DID NOT CONQUER. NO LONGER WAS THERE CARING AND NUTURING OF YOU. YOU HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED WITH A MASS OF STEEL AND CONCRETE BUILT ON YOU. BUT LIKE US, WELL NOT QUITE THE SAME, YOU MAINTAIN YOUR SPIRIT, STRENGTH AND STAMINA.

I SHOULD HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU A LONG TIME AGO. THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME SHARE WITH YOU ALONG WITH MY CHEEKINESS. IF YOU ARE STILL READING, THEN I AM HAPPY. MAYBE YOU WILL WRITE BACK TO ME WITH ALL YOUR QUESTIONS, I HOPE SO. BUT IF YOU DON'T THEN AT LEAST YOU KNOW THAT I AND MANY OTHER PEOPLE REALLY CARE ABOUT YOU.

IN MY LITTLE PART OF THE WORLD, DOWNUNDER IN AUSTRALIA, TODAY IS ALMOST A PERFECT DAY. ALL IS QUIET, NOT A BREATH OF WIND, THE TREES ARE MOTIONLESS, THE SKY IS BLUE AND GIVING SOME WARMTH. NOT A SOUND TO BE HEARD EXCEPT MY BEAUTIFUL LITTLE DOG MOOROOP WHO HAS DECIDED TO BREAK THE QUIET WITH HER SHARP BARK BRINGING ME BACK TO REALITY.

YOUR FRIEND

AUNTY JOY WHO IS SO PROUD TO BELONG TO THE OLDEST LIVING CULTURE IN THE WORLD

Evelyn Araleun Corr
The Writer

Learning Bundjalung on Tharawal

Above his desk it is written:
'I wish I knew the names of all the birds.'

I know this room through tessellation of leaf and branch,
wurahŋ-bil and *jaran-gir*,
in the shade of a *kulsetsi* —
(Cherokee) 'honey locust' [a flowering tree].

I am relearning these hills and saltwaters
and all the places wrapped around this room
We both have *dagahral* here,
lovers/fathers/friends/conquerors/
ghosts.

But here, in this new and ancient place,
I ask him to name the song that swoops through this mosaic:
Sometimes it is wattlebird sometimes it is currawong —
when we drive, he tells me king parrot, fairy wren, black cockatoo

and I know *jalwahn* and *bilin bilin* and *ngarehr*
but the rest are just *nunganybil*,
the rest are just: 'bird'

It is hard to unlearn a language:
to unspeak the empire,
to teach my voice to rise and fall like landscape,
a topographic intonation.

So in this place the shape of my place
I am trying to sing like hill and saltwater,
to use old words from an old country that I have never walked on:
bundjalung jagum ngai, nganduwal nyuyaya,
and god, I don't even know
if I'm saying it right.

But I watch the bark twist:
grey and slate and vanilla and vermillion
he tells me this is ribbon gum —
so I find five words for this bark
and I promise I will learn them all

Because to hold him is to hold the tree
that holds these birds I cannot name,
and a word spoken here
might almost sound like home.

We are relearning this place through poetry:

I open my book and say, *wayan*,
here is a word which means road, but also root
and in it I am rooted, earthed,
singing between two lands

I learn that *balun* is both river and milky way,
and that he is *baray-gir*, the youngest child
and the top of the tree,
where the *gahr* will come to rest —
to call its own name
across the canopy,
long after his word for it
is gone.

Dermot Henry The Scientist

Dear Niall,

Ah, there you are in the photograph at Ballytresna*, and me, no more than 5 years old, haircut short back and sides and sticky out ears... That serious solemn look that belies my real nature. I recall us hunting worms after the fields were ploughed... Skipping down the furrows, picking through the rich chocolate soil, pulling their slippery bodies from the earth. Fascinated by the worms, how could they live underground... sucking dirt in for food? What lay beneath the green grassy surface, sliced open and neatly stacked? The plough exposing the goodness of the soil formed on a volcanic landscape... Our dreams of unearthing Viking or Roman treasure went unrealised, our only bounty being rusty horse shoes, the fat 'juicy' worms, and my interest in the Earth.

We all cling to a thin veneer of arable soil to survive. It is the soil that nurtures the plants and the animals we eat. Soil – the interface of the biosphere, atmosphere and lithosphere. Complex chemical reactions: chelation, carbonation, oxidation, hydrolysis, dissolution and acid-leaching... altering rock to clays with bioturbation, by the creatures living within, blending in organic material. Recycling by Nature, recycling past life to support new life... gifting nutrients to the biota above and within...

There is fear entering the underworld yet there is also attraction. There's something compelling about peering into the Earth. Often, the window is at the grave... Exposed there are the transitions of the soil to weathered 'puggy' clays and, further below, unaltered rock. Sometimes the soil is only a few centimeters thick. At the grave we return the person to the comfort of the Earth's embrace.

I met a miner in Ban Lung, Cambodia, he was sinking a shaft into soil. Hot, humid, tropical weathering had transformed ancient lava flows to rich dark chocolate soil, which extended down for more than 14 metres. I watched him descend into the small, circular, worm burrow. Perhaps, unwittingly, he was descending into his tomb, as the collapse of the soil walls is common. His partner winched buckets of soil up to the surface and sieved the dirt for gemstones. For his morning's efforts he had recovered three brownish-red zircon crystals. Resistant to chemical weathering and abrasion, the zircons are the remaining unaltered crystal relicts of the ancient lava flows. When heated, these innocuous brown stones turn to a spectacular shade of turquoise. His livelihood depending upon finding trinkets in soil... I bought the three zircons for three US dollars, an, 'outrageously' inflated price... How could I not? I had watched him toil in the heat... It was easier catching worms.

It is often said 'Australia, in general, has poor soils'. This really means 'poor soils' for our agricultural choices. Before European settlement, life, naturally adapted to these soils, flourished... But now we have imposed a new regime on the landscape.

Our soils are vulnerable. Rising water tables, caused by rapacious land clearing, bring salts to the surface, which poison the soil. This salination, combined with desertification, caused by reduced rainfall, is killing the vegetation that binds the soil to the land. European land management practices, and over-grazing, have promoted erosion by wind and water. Reduced capacity to generate agricultural produce through soil loss and land degradation inflicts the social costs on rural communities.

*'The data shows that annual soil loss is commonly greater than **one tonne** per hectare across most of Australia, twice the rate at which soil is replaced by organic decomposition...'***

I remember the dust storm of 1983 that stripped the Mallee and the Wimmera of soil. Standing in Russell Street, outside the 'old' Museum, watching the sky glowing an eerie reddish-brown, as the hot, gritty, air enveloped the city. An eerie silence. Who could imagine? **Millions** of tonnes of soil transported hundreds of kilometres on the hot north wind... One week later, the small towns of Mt Macedon & Macedon (where I live today) were destroyed by wildfire, the Ash Wednesday fires... Both events, the wildfire and the dust storm, symptoms of the prolonged drought.

It is said '*it is only a disaster if it has an impact on something that people care about*'. A dust storm in the desert is not an issue for us, nor a fire burning for months in spinifex. They are natural processes in a dry continent.

Do we care enough about our soils...to avert disaster?

So, Niall, you wrote in the book you gave me at Christmas 1979, "*Make hay while the sun shines...*" conjoined with Ecclesiastes' "*...for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest...*" I suspect you are right, but there will be worms there...

Dermot

*Ballytresna, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

**State of the Environment report: 2001.

Justin Clemens

The Philosopher

I would like to tell you that the whole thing starts with Apollodorus telling a nameless friend, that is, *us* — who?! — about a guy called Glaucon, whose name derives from the adjective *glaukommatos*, bright-eyed, and which might make him sound more like a rabbit from *Watership Down* than he perhaps should, at least if you, like I, remember the Art Garfunkel song from childhood accompanying the animated film of that name, and who, moreover — Glaucon, that is! — happens to be Plato's older brother, that is, the brother of the author of the famous dialogues (in one of which this very story is related), who, just the day-before-yesterday (when *was* that, exactly?!), ran after Apollodorus on the road to town wanting to know more about a drinking party, a *symposium*, at the successful tragedian Agathon's place about which he'd gotten only sketchy details from a man (whose name we're not told), who'd been talking to another man (named Phoenix), but was convinced that Apollodorus, due to his well-known friendship with Socrates, would have had to have been there and therefore more capable than the man-who'd-been-talking-to-Phoenix of providing him with the fulsome details he desired, although, as it turns out, the fabled celebration had taken place long before, so long before in fact that both interlocutors, Glaucon and Apollodorus, were still children ('in the nursery,' reads Michael Joyce's translation) and therefore could not have been anywhere near any such reputed private drinking engagement, though, that old absence notwithstanding, Apollodorus was indeed in possession of such details even if he himself had only received them from the same source as the aforementioned Phoenix, *viz.*, a man known as Aristodemus of Cydathenaeum, whom Apollodorus thereafter basically ventriloquizes for the remainder of the dialogue, and who, having bumped into Socrates (who was uncharacteristically dressed to the nines) on the night in question, had invited the uninvited Aristodemus along with him to the private gathering which had been organized in honour of Agathon's recent prize-winning scripting of a tragedy, which was to be attended by all types of local luminaries — Agathon himself, of course; but also Phaedrus, an aristocrat; Pausanias, a legal expert of some kind (there's always a lawyer somewhere!); the doctor Eryximachus; Aristophanes, Athens' preeminent comedic playwright; and, joining this all-star cast, after a sequence of entertaining hijinks, the notorious statesman (I guess that's what we should call him) Alcibiades — who, being still pretty hung-over from the previous evening's celebrations, resolved to send out the flute-girls and hold off on any more wine (except, naturally, for the purposes of mere refreshment as distinguished from derangement, so that their throats did not become as we now occasionally say 'dry as dust'), while each giving an encomium to 'love,' whether venal or celestial, harmonic or dystonic, mortal, godly or something other, and in such a way that their speeches might answer to the extraordinary enigma of their topic, which, as world history has I suppose confirmed, yes, yes they do, for example in Aristophanes' incredible image of humans beings having been bisected by the gods as punishment now desperately seeking their missing half or, of course, Alcibiades' praise of that secret part of Socrates of which the physically-repellent Socrates himself was unaware, his hidden beautiful *agalma*, a god-trap statuette wrapped up in a satyr's skin, or indeed the backstory concerning little Eros, after Poros, Resourcefulness, stumbles out of Aphrodite's birthday party pissed as a newt on heavenly ambrosia and blacks out in the forecourt where he is fucked in that undignified state by Penia, Poverty, who, for reasons of her beggary, hasn't been permitted access to the celebrations, but, having made the most of her unfortunate lot, thereafter gives birth to Eros who, according to his mixed parental inheritance, is simultaneously and paradoxically both

lacking and giving, desperate and masterful, balanced and unhinged, and it is perhaps this un-bearable paradoxical love that we need now, today, here, more urgently than ever before, because, as Socrates himself says (at least as related to me through the wisdom of my friends A.J. Bartlett and Bryan Cooke), he knows nothing, nothing except (*ouden allos*) *ta erotika*, the things or matters of love, a plural substantivized adjective, not Eros itself but that which pertains to Eros, 'glittering treasures and the evanescent Siren of its mask' as Cooke once texted me, because in this country, this land, place, this 'Australia,' invaded and named as it was by Learned Latin Loving Lords of Old Imperium, *the biggest estate on earth* in Bill Gammage's sardonic title, our situation is, as T.S. Eliot puts it in *Gerontion*, one in which 'Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices/Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues/Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes./These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree' and that because not a single one of us who is not an Indigenous Australian, whether migrant or refugee, war criminal or victim, whatever our will and thought, our knowledge and ignorance, our morals and actions, cannot not be considered occupiers and destroyers of land and country and peoples, as I think is made clear by all sorts of artists and poets and militants, such as when Gary Foley presents the placard *Pardon me for being born into a nation of racists* or Richard Bell repaints the image as *Foley v. The Springboks* or Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos call for an admission of *occupier-being*, not least because, as the ancient Latin historian Tacitus writes imagining a Pict leader's execration of the Roman Empire's rapacious and murderous ways, *solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant*, THEY MAKE A WASTELAND AND THEY CALL IT PEACE, which also reminds me of another Eliot poem, yes of course, *The Wasteland*, in which we find the lines 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,/You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/And the dry stone no sound of water. Only/There is shadow under this red rock,/(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),/And I will show you something different from either/Your shadow at morning striding behind you/Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;/I will show you fear in a handful of dust,' which perhaps sum up something essential and call in their own way for justice, just as when Evelyn Araluen says *Wangal Morning* 'sounds almost mute/like earth/like blood/like heat' or Natalie Harkin proposes her lists of *Dirty Words* or when Lionel Fogarty declares 'white literacy should have a black history soon,' a justice, which, to come back to the *Symposium* itself, cannot not be the central concern of philosophy, even if, as is perhaps too famous, Plato himself banned poets and artists from his ideal *Republic* as the patrons of the patrons of the flux, for anybody who is trying to think must always encounter the absolute necessity of seeking justice and seek to set things right as a matter of emergency if injustice has been and continues to be done, even if it means becoming, like Socrates himself, ultimately subject to the worst proclivities of the state, due to the fact that, as the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan was keen to emphasize, Socrates had turned himself into an *atopia*, a no place, a word which in Greek could also apparently mean 'allergy' and survives today in medicine as 'atopy,' a predisposition towards developing hyperallergic reactions like, I don't know, eczema, or perhaps even a cultural symptom of some kind, but that's what love is, under this description anyway, a distressing sojourning with nothingness in order to participate in justice in the land with which we live.

Justine Poon
The Legal Expert

I have written more letters to the absent and the dead than I have sent to living people.

Like these letters to no one, law and land and love share the character of ghostliness. They exceed us and slip from the grasp of words and memory. Read separately, law, land, and love can contain their own distinct sense of unity. But taken together, law and land love become mirrors of loss for each other – figures of haunting that defy the logic of how we have conventionally told these stories.

Between and above and beneath what we see as the land, there is also air, water and earth, all the way down to the core. These have, more or less, been non-domains in history – spaces outside the reach of the law and spaces outside the concept of property. This tells us that law takes place on the surface and that property is a collection of surface relations concerning the division of two-dimensional spaces upon maps. The land that we see in law is reduced to this surface tension whilst the currents of atmosphere, ocean and molten rock circulate wildly around it and whilst many lives live and die within the land without acknowledgement. There is always tension in property because law is always an argument.

Our concept of land is thin.

This thinness leads to a tendency to see the land and our relation to it as primarily being about ownership, division and use. The law has no room for beauty when its face is turned towards rights to exploitation. The true measure of the land is always absent in law and the best approximation is the map.

A map is already form of haunting – neat lines dropped from nowhere to mark out jagged space; a ghost of an idea of land laid over the land itself. The land in its embodied sense haunts law with its reality and law haunts the land with its mostly diminished imagination.

Perhaps that is why billionaires will dream of Mars, as though the act of living elsewhere, were as simple as having the thought. There are preludes. Are they inspired by dust storms? Melbourne wakes up covered in red dust – the land itself obliterating those lines on maps that have pretended to contain it. For some, this is a call to action. For others, a call to escape what is coming. Both utopias and dystopias are stories about how we might respond otherwise.

These days I am often seized by the sensation of the future pulling away from me, like threads unspooling from my fingers into a mass of lines tugging at their own weight.

I am haunted by ghosts, some of which are dead and some of which are yet to even live. The law teaches us to see only one ghost, one possibility, and this is taken as reality. But there are many others at the periphery – the spectres of what could have been and what could be. We see this most easily when thinking of the past, but the future is even more crowded with ghosts. The unborn can be more persistent than the dead.

Plato wrote amongst the ghosts. I think of Plato conjuring his dead master's presence and voice and making the past through the act of writing. How curious to have a symposium – the forum for reason and reasonable things – on Love, and how curious to put these thoughts on love into the mouths of ghosts and set it several decades in the past, bookended and beginning and end by the spectre of Socrates. Socrates, who is long dead. Socrates who haunts and is longed for and gone.

In my own grief for my grandmother, what I missed most was her particular way of looking at things. I mourned for the fact that every experience after would be bereft of her perception of them and I would never know what she thought, never converse with her again and create together that unique pulse that is the result of the meeting and parting of minds.

Plato writes the past but what he makes is the present and where he reaches is the future, so that we read the Symposium and think about how that might change things now. Every act of mourning is an act of time travelling. Words are slippery and indelible fellows and the mark they leave can crook sharply away from the author's intention. That is their mystical character – they call forth things in excess of intentions.

Law too, as a system built entirely on words, can have these moments diversion and breaking, where the paths of potential futures become possible futures. Everything is possible until it chooses one.

If we can love ghosts so much that our attempt to bring them close to us again becomes an impossible traversal across time, what happens when we use the register of haunting and the force of love to rethink our relationship with the land? Could we love the spectral visions of the potential futures of the land, of lands, so much that we want to keep those futures living instead of abandoning them for something out in space – another blank slate to exploit? Another myth of empty lands?

A dust storm's sense of the uncanny is in temporarily transporting us to a time and place where all alternatives are buried and human bodies, culture and architecture have become mere cups for dust. We could instead imagine law escaping the flattening logic of maps, recovering the spherical complexity of the land and repopulating it with the agencies of the many lives within it.

I am most haunted by one future, which contains multitudes itself. To the child I am yet to have, I long for you. The only justice I can offer you is to hope that we can keep this world haunted by the possibilities of its beauty and to suspend the arrival of permanent closure – before the futures in which you exist are gone.

Michael Short
The Rhetorician

We have little time. I'll come back to time, to cosmic time, in time. If I can remember. If the clouds - that storm, the speeding deranged dry mud mongrel migration - does not blind me and silence me.

And you. And you. And them. Us.

We have little time, so let's get to it. Directly. Deathly.

You, yes you, are in the centre of this, don't you know, and it's as repulsive as it is sublime. Really. That's your choice. And mine. And I'll come back to that, too, perhaps, in time. If there's time enough.

Without that land, love is void. Without that land, you are void. Without that land, we are void and might never have existed. Only if Descartes was right. We think so, therefore he was.

The true parameters of existence are not, though, don't you know, time and space. They are a manifestation. There is but one true parameter. Possibility. God maybe. Multiverse maybe. Anything and everything, maybe. Or nothing. Is not the greatest question why does anything exist?

But meanwhile our miraculous mysterious manifestation of possibility, our cosmic crystallisation, is this earth, is this time, is this space, is this land. This land that we blithely fry. That's hot, hot sand in which those gormless grotesque fools bury their hideous heads.

Others, the enlightened ones, the gentle ones, the loving ones, sleep on country. They know. They love. Themselves. Life. Land. You. Yes you.

Amid the possibility, and this is where you are at the centre, yes you, is our universal hope, our chance – enlightened self-interest. It binds. It begets survival. Individual and communal.

So spurn spouting shit. There is still, yes, time. This is our moment, this is our imperative, to collaborate and to communicate. And to excommunicate those who would focus on their own short time, blinded as the light warms while the international effort born in the city of light wanes. A blundering biological illogical orange storm, hot air from Washington via New York, as spectacularly menacing and unknowing, but more dangerous and destructive, than any natural disaster.

Your pale blue eyes should see our pale blue dot. They won't, not directly. Or maybe they will. Possibility. But you, yes you, can look at that six-billion-mile image. That'll have to do, for the time being. It's a lot.

Others, a special special group have slept not on country, but in space. Those astronauts, don't you know, yes you, still you, those astronauts were stunned from possibility to certainty. They know the land. All of it. 45 years. Apollo 14. Third landing on earth that is not where we are. Edgar Mitchell: *You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles and say, "Look at that, you son of a bitch!"*

Yep. Resist and ridicule, together we shall, those sons of bitches. It's possible some matter matters. It's probable. It's true. If you want. Yes, yes, you.

Some stuff matters. Behold, the most expensive handbag in the history of the universe, cruelly costly crocodile and compacted compressed carbon, just sold in Hong Kong. Where might that fit? A price that could have preserved land. Maybe to a son of a bitch. Like the pact, the accord, it was made in the city of light by those under the name of a son of Zeus. The god of transitions and boundaries. The god of creation at 24. Address, not age. Ages.

Sleep on country. We have little time. You. Have. Little. Time. Yes, you.

Nurin Veis
The Educator

A build-up of darkness and foreboding
We spilled out onto the street
The once busy roadway now quiet
A path lit by the front headlight of the stationary tram
Derek made us laugh
He leapt out
Skipping and dancing in defiance as the particles flew by
We followed him
Twirling in circles with our arms in the air
We mimicked the detritus that swirled past
All a circular dance
A dancing cosmos
The earth flew up and peppered our faces
It slapped us into sense
It grabbed us by the collar and shook
Don't forget about us it hissed
You here in the city
You think that you can create another universe
Outside the laws of nature
We were suddenly no longer fearful
We felt the force and surrendered to it
Around, around and round we danced
In the wind and the dust and the lamp-lit glow
Like the ticker-tape parade at V Day
We threw our hats up into the swirling miasma
We were one with the transient cycle
We come from dust
And to dust we return