

Letters to the Land

Taking inspiration from Plato's Symposium, Bik Van der Pol commissioned seven individuals -each fulfilling a different role or archetype- to write a letter to the land. Following are extracts from the varied and considered responses; brought together into dialogue, in the manner of a symposium.

Evelyn Araluen Corr (the poet)

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 a 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.

Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy AO (the host/traditional owner)

You know what land, what I really want and need to say is thank you for loving my people, the Wurundjeri, my Father's people. What you provided sustained the many generations of my family for thousands of years. Our culture says whenever 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 nurtured you in return for your hospitality. 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 today's environment.

Dermot Henry (the scientist)

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. 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...gifting nutrients to the biota above and within...

Justin Poon (the legal expert)

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 space 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.

Justin Clemens (the philosopher)

...call in their own way for justice, a justice which, to come back to the *Symposium* itself, cannot not be the central concern of philosophy, 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 that becoming, like Socrates himself ultimately subject to the worse...

Michael Short (the rhetorician)

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 lights 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.

Nurin Veis (the educator)

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 miasma. We were one with the transient cycle. We come from dust. And to dust we return.