

I would like to begin by recognising that I am an uninvited guest on muwinina country, and that this exhibition takes place on unceded territory that has hosted atrocities which still go on largely unrecognised as the foundations of this colonial settlement. I pay respect and deep gratitude to our Palawa elders- past, present, and emerging, and extend this gratitude to all First Nations people.

Here it is also worth noting that much of this exhibition deals in, critiques, and analyses through frameworks delineated from western cannon. Much the same as the lineage of these words can be traced back to a british metropole, many of these concepts, even the most critical, are constructed by a western lens. Whilst decolonisation is not a metaphor, the practice will involve shifting, including, and centring worldviews, ideologies, and paradigms that are divergent from western cannon, of which Palawa and other First Nation's voices are crucial in their direction for us to move away, and heal, from the harm caused by normative frameworks.

I would also love to give thanks to a whole lot of people for their ongoing support and help in me seeing the world. Particularly Georgie and Bobby who have always just been there for me. And for many others for igniting the imagination- Izzy, Amber, Johnny, Pip, Aidan, Zoya, all the people at Good Grief, every student I have ever worked with, just to name a few... basically if you feel like you should be on this list, you are.

A big shout out to the young people who have come in to work on the show with me- Courtney, Ellie, Astrid, Eliza. You are all amazing and important.

Foreword

I have been thinking about the idea of development. It's a thought that goes something like this- things develop, over time, towards a particular outcome. In doing so it creates a sense of legitimate progression- that things, in order to "develop properly", should follow a particular sequence or path, and timeline in which to do so. This then manufactures set of spatial practices and physical realities, whilst also fabricating a particular temporality too. It creates a designed system that can define and contain the parameters of imagination itself, exploiting the imagination in the form of manufacturing a dream and a modality to achieve it. This is to say, developmental ideas create their own axioms of logic.

Flagpost. Milestone. Behind the curve. Ahead the pack.

To imagine beyond developmental pathways is often seen to be deviant, or detrimental to the larger societal project. Yet, the normative invisibility of developmental ideas allows them to enact violence to their margins, and anaesthetise their centres.

This exhibition, simply titled 'development', explores normative developmental pathways and their intersections.

State-building is seen to have a correct economic, infrastructural, and social modality of development. *Industrial practices, Urbanisation, GDP*. Children are meant to develop in specific ways through achieving age specific milestones. *first steps, first word, first job, mid life crisis*. Romantic relationships are meant to follow fairly normative pathways. *heyy, i love you, put a ring on it*. We are trained to believe things should progress in generally sequenced and mechanistic ways.

As a teacher, one of the biggest privileges it to be around young people that are yet to internalise these predetermined developmental pathways. The result is an unrestricted imagination and an ability to play. A way to see and move through the world that is novel and sees through the BS. You can walk down a street with a 3 year old and be made aware, through their constant questioning, that the world is built on some bizarre frameworks that become invisible to normative perspectives due to their ubiquity. I think the reason why many become frustrated with children's constant questioning of the world is that if we are made to look too close the world becomes frustrating in the way it has been constructed. At a point in time where many structures are being illuminated as violent and are calling to be dismantled, some of the most radical tools we have at our disposal can be learnt from children. Play, imagination, gentleness, kindness, patience.

Much of this show has been conceived to be anti-developmental. The crayon phones are to be used until they are no more... or stolen. The lighters and gingerbread silos are to be consumed. The jenga blocks are to be played with until they fall. This is a challenge to the notion that we must "grow up". It is a permission to play and see what happens.



A friend recently pointed out to me the most major urban cities in “Australia” have been built on grasslands. I think this is interesting given how much pastoral land colonial settlements have then developed to farm introduced grasses. Here I remember driving up to mparntwe and being struck by the endless horizons wheat-fields, not a single tree in sight. Or, much when I was much younger, cutting sugar cane stems at the side of the road to keep my sibling and I docile in the car whenever we stayed with my Aunt and Uncle in Queensland. Both memories are illustrative of colonial agriculture that employs introduced grass species.

Of course this country has domesticated grasses and maintained expansive grain-fields throughout time immemorial through the caring and intelligent agricultural practices of the many Aboriginal nations of the country. However colonial grasslands did something different. In the spirit of invasion and dispossession they were developed through a particular state-based and eurocentric mentality of extraction and land dominion. The people of the land were not listened to, let alone the country.

I’m driving past silo after silo, used for grain storage, and thinking of the violence of wheat. The silos themselves a representation of accumulative extraction processes. The reshaping of the landscape, the mining of its minerals, the storing and hoarding of its wealth. The silo is a form of infrastructure that stands to represent particular western cultural and social practices that enable particular institutional, social, and material realities, whilst disempowering and restricting others.

Wheat holds the largest agricultural production area of any crop in the world, accounting for roughly 19% of the world’s calorific supply. It takes many forms, empowering international food security and aid, and holding a sacred position within a diverse array of human cultures. The diffusion of wheat through human food consumption in many ways mirrors how colonialism has seeped throughout social structures. It’s applications and functions are often ambiguous and hidden, unknowingly entangled in our consumptive behaviours **may contain gluten**. It is a structure that is fed through feeding. Given its long history to human civilisation, the fondness of wheat signifies familiarity, cultural tradition, and unmatched material development. The attachment of European colonial powers to wheat illuminates the how this seemingly banal crop spread throughout the world as a preferred food source. Wheat was at the centre of colony imports throughout the 19th and 20th century. Akin to the cultural imperialism colonialism inlaid into social structures of colonised state, wheat products became entwined in food traditions of both settler and occupation states. From damper in Australia, to banh mi in Vietnam, and chapati in India, the malleability of wheat was embraced and enforced through the continuation of colonial supply chains. Colonial powers did more than desire wheat, they wove it into their cultural and social structures to the point that to separate it from daily lived practices would be sacrilegious or least leave people confused and not knowing what to have for breakfast.

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I like to think of the era we are in as the jengacene. I call it this because the paradigms that dominate the world have all been built on physical processes that mine things from earth's lower horizons, placing them on top, with the knowledge that it all will eventually collapse.

Of course there is some hubris and denial in these paradigms. Having the knowledge of collapse does not mean people, particularly those spruiking jenga-esk paradigms, necessarily believe it. These paradigms come pre-packaged with models, ideologies, and attitudes that create latency, blindness, and stubbornness when it comes to seeing any other viewpoint. Perhaps this is through offering resources, capital, and power to those who adopt the model. This process exploits the imagination in the form of manufacturing a dream and a pathway of thought to reach it, which is to say, it creates its own sense of logic. This then suggests that if one chooses this model of thought, then the outcomes are predictable. It is a simulacrum which produces an almost anti-speculative mentality, leaving no room for divergence. Here i think of Hallin's spheres of consensus. Hallin suggested that public discourse is divided into 3 concentric circles. in the centre is the sphere of consensus- the point where everyone agrees. however as you move outwards you move to less credited or accepted discourse, moving to legitimate controversy, where debate is seen to be fair and merited, and finally to deviance, where viewpoints are seen to be so divergent that they can be ignored. This model of thought is useful framing as it shows how consensus, if harnessed and weaponised, can create ignorance and be used to discredit divergent views.

In the jengacene (which is a term that probably is best categorised as palliative humour), the ideologies that have been created are all too encompassing. not only do they construct a physical reality, but they fabricate a temporality too.

~ everything is moving so fast and urgently ~

In doing so these ideologies set forward a path to follow. It becomes a case where a designed system stands in for, or creates the conditions of, politics. The designed system itself is the centre of consensus, becoming so commonplace that it becomes largely neutral, conceded, unquestioned, and invisible. For contemporary society (whatever that means) the list is large: capitalism (or global economic systems in general), whiteness, colonialism, neoliberalism, modernity, property, western agricultural practices, industrial standards, binary gender, just to name a few. All of these designed paradigms have gone through their respective challenges and have been able to shift and change to suit the times. They are adaptive and fluid. A designed feature is good like that: always up for review and optimisation in order to keep its market share. They not only ascribe, suggest, and denote movement/ use/ gesture, but define the parameters and limits to thought itself. We become so confined by all we know, our imagination constrained by the conditions of normal, that we accept these conditions and carry on its legacy.

"Development" is one such underpinning narrative that centres perpetual design and growth. Development overlays existing histories and aims to continually produce architecture and monuments in order to falsely claim place-based identity and heritage. This increasing stratification aims to support the myth that there is only one way forward- to continually be building on top of other things; to always be moving forward and never looking back. It's modernity's: "make it new". This myth allows developmental societies to glorify particular theories, discriminating historical narratives and selectively choosing which historical stories to preserve and which to ignore or erase. This is a form of supremacy, particularly when the structures and individuals that engage in these practices, are doing it under the guise of "building a fair society".

keep calm and carry on, move forward, keep on the straight and narrow, grow forever.

This mentality creates distrust in rest and rejuvenation, or anything seen to be non-productive.

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As Dipesh Chakrabarti and Eyal Wiseman have stated, climate change was the intended effect of colonialism within many states, Australia in particular. Dreaming of the rolling knolls of the English countryside, colonists sought to transform the landscape in the image of the metropole, with English colonies falling under the umbrella of “The Commonwealth” (perhaps more aptly named “uncle pennybag’s pocket”). Through Chakrabarti and Wiseman’s provocation we see development, its hubris of control, and the problematic underpinning paradigms of supremacy in its many forms, flaunting its masters. If climate change was the intended effect of colonialism, then it has since broken free its domestic constraints, and run feral. It has escaped settler intentions and ran its own course, mocking both anthropocentric dominance and the nature/culture divide colonialism brought. Only now do we see climate change as what it is- the child of colonial and industrial development, no longer an infant it’s now making itself known as a somewhat awkward, but undeniably strong adolescent.

It is by no coincidence that colonialism as a term is derived from the word cultivate. Not only were agricultural practices paramount in the project of colonialism, but it attempted to cultivate and grow its own Eurocentric ideas. Built into the mentality was an ingrained sense of hegemony, which led to the othering of anything deviant. Early settler complaints of the Australian landscape are fantastic examples. The trees were the wrong green. The leaves were too loud. The birds sounded like they were vomiting. The easiest way to support development practices is to demonise the existing conditions. This practice still occurs. Now just done under the guise of globalised development, and much of it attempting to address conditions brought about by colonialism and its systematic creation of power, trade, and divisions across most of the world. Hence the terminology of the “Global South”. Development here can be seen as the selective provisioning of resources used to promote growth of particular social and physical reproduction. It invests in infrastructure to continue and enhance particular processes, in order to stifle, prevent, or dominate others.

Nausheen Anwar, among others, writes that questions around infrastructure are not a questions of what, but of when. I think this is a fantastic framing to end on. Development produces a sense of time which it then manages through future promises. *You too could be a billionaire if you work hard enough.* It manufactures aspiration and forces reproduction. Childhood is one framing to illuminate this. Often seen as future infrastructure themselves, children are subjected to being designed a shaped by other infrastructure. They enter the machine to become it.

I want to pause here and take a breath. There is a lot to digest, and that takes time. Plus we could all give a bit more attention to being unproductive. To grow down. Compost even.

There is much more to be said on the topic, I would love to encourage further dialogue. In fact, email me.

wbnrankin@gmail.com. Would love to hear from you and play some more..

