

Such a journey is open and incomplete, it involves a continual fabulation, an invention, a construction, in which there is no fixed identity or final destination. There is no final referent that exists outside our languages. As Nietzsche insisted, *there are no facts, only interpretations*. Just as the narrative of the nation involves the construction of an 'imaginary community', a sense of belonging sustained as much by fantasy and the imagination as by any geographical or physical reality, so our sense of our selves is also a labour of the imagination, a fiction, a particular story that makes sense. We imagine ourselves to be whole, to be complete, to have a full identity and certainly not to be open or fragmented; we imagine ourselves to be the author, rather than the object, of the narratives that constitute our lives. It is this imaginary closure that permits us to act. Still, I would suggest, we are now beginning to learn to act in the *subjunctive mode*, 'as if we had' a full identity, while recognising that such a fullness is a fiction, an inevitable failure.

And, finally, Derrida (2001, p. 79, my emphasis):

...I insist on inheritance: because it is often through memory, through the endless and groundless return to the past that we are faced with the most unpredictable future. *The most unpredictable future may be hidden in a past which has not yet been re-presented or made present or remembered*, so from that point of view I would not dissociate between the to-come as future and the to-come as hyper-past, more than past, a past—as Blanchot and Levinas often say—a past which is not a present past, a past present, an immemorable past. The risk, the adventure comes ... from this absolute past and from the absolute to-come.

So let us begin by leaving...

#### Pedagondage:

As a theory and practice, *The Postmodern Pedagondage* recognises that 'learning' is often messy and disorientating rather than orderly and coherent. The learning trajectory is wayward and unpredictable—part accident, part intent—and involves both touring and drifting. Learners are simultaneously *strollers, players, tourists, and vagabonds* lost and found on the currents of postmodern life (Bauman, 1995).

By combining the terms 'pedagogy' and 'vagabondage' I have made the neologism *Pedagondage* to signify this messy-vagabond-tourist-pedagogy.

**"Never have we had a greater need for a militant utopianism to help us imagine a world free of conflict, oppression, terror, and death. We need oppositional performance disciplines that will show us how to create radical utopian spaces within our public institutions"** (Denzin (2005, p. 948, my emphasis).

#### The CLOD & the PEBBLE

"Love seeketh not itself to please,  
"Nor for itself hath any care,  
"But for another gives its ease,  
"And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."

So sang a little Clod of Clay,  
Trodden with the cattle's feet,  
But a Pebble of the brook  
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only Self to please,  
"To bind another to its delight,  
"Joys in another's loss of ease,  
"And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

(Blake, 1794 / 1992, p. 33)

#### Being-for rather than Being-with the Other

Using Bauman's (1995) terms, it could be said that the Clod (above) is articulating the moral position of *Being-for* the 'Other,' a gesture that need not be reciprocated to be given; whereas the Pebble could be said to be articulating the authoritative and punitive (a)moral position of 'Being-with' or 'Being-over' the other, a posture that demands reciprocity and adherence. The latter form of morality is really an Ethical Code or Law (a quasi-morality): an impersonal, rational, ordering, social system enforced through punishment and indoctrination; whereas the former is a personal, emotional, agonising, self-directed, and loving morality, not only for the Other in the here and now, but for the Others who cannot speak for themselves from the future (i.e. subsequent generations).

Speaking to an audience in Sydney,

Derrida (2001, p. 102) comments: "We inherit a language, conditions of life, a culture which is, which carries the memory of what has been done ... so then we are responsible for things we have not done ourselves, and that is part of the concept of heritage. We are responsible for something [o]ther than us. ... If I go on drawing some benefit from this violence and I live in a culture, in a land, in a society which is grounded on this original violence, then I am responsible for it. I cannot disclaim this history of colonial violence, neither in Australia nor anywhere else."

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Derrida explores a new hieroglyphic writing, supplementing verbal discourse with ideographic and pictorial elements (p. 229).

'By widening language we can change thinking' (p. 236).

(Ulmer, 1985)

#### Post-script-ual

<sup>15</sup> Originally, Iain Chambers' influence wasn't specifically invited or consciously sought in this text. However, having come across Chambers' work some years ago, I have (re)discovered that his ideas are very much part of my perceptual filtering and framing process, influencing how I view the world and how I view the 'self': that is, as incomplete and arbitrary constructions. (Janette Turner Hospital has had a similar influence).

I can no more separate myself from this earlier encounter and the resulting filters it set in place than I can the innumerable other voices, experiences, and filters that have gone into making me over the years: the difference is that where I recognise and reference Chambers' influence I am oblivious to the names and texts of other authors and people who have contributed to my subjective-making—and these, no doubt, go back to my very first days on planet Earth when I blinked open my eyes and began building my world. In the end, it would be impossible to acknowledge all the 'sources' of this *picaro* (*flâneur*) and this text, for that would require referencing every incident, encounter, person, text, conversation, film, and imagining I have ever experienced. It would also include all the things I haven't experienced, as the analogy of butterfly wings flapping in the Amazon will attest (Gleick, 1990). It would mean referencing right back to the 'big bang,' and further back still to when the universe was a speck of the most incredible energy, ready to burst into infinity and *me* as I am and have been. Some say I breathe the same star dust—the same atoms—that Jesus and Buddha breathed; that I am made of the very atoms that once inhabited their bodies; and that we all share this legacy at the atomic level, which would suggest that we are all interrelated, contingent, and sharing the universe from the inside out.

By extension, the same can be said of ideas, practices, languages, and perceptions; we are all composites of the things that have gone before us, whether they are distinct from us or earlier examples of our-selves; no doubt, too, we will all contribute to those that follow us, in more than genetic ways, and it is up to *us* to make sure these contributions help rather than hinder (or even destroy) those people when they arrive. For, as Derrida (2001) suggests, the *impossible* may prove possible—if we allow it.

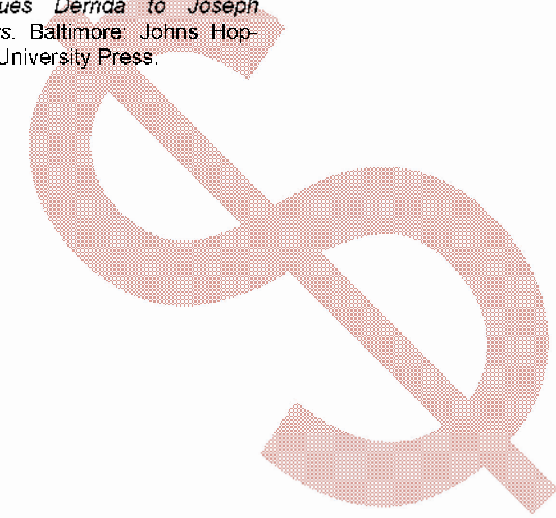
"But this is also a government which holds high the life-model of a shopping-mall stroller as the paragon of happy humanity and the good life, and by that standard disqualifies a growing number of its subjects – invalids, unemployed, deskilled, racially discriminated-against, single mothers – as inept and imperfect and unfit to improve on the ground of being flawed consumers ill able to afford frequent shopping-mall strolls' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 283).

Performing revolutionary pedagogy. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed., pp. 681-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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"... I'm not interested in what I'd regard as loose, superficial use of the term 'postmodern'. In my usage ... postmodernity is not a cultural or intellectual fashion or fad, not something that belongs to a particular school of thought or particular cultural theorists; it's a larger historical phenomenon which won't go away and in which we all participate in one way or another. The clearest way to see it is as a change to most or all aspects of our lives, and one generated by the communications revolution in alliance with globalizing consumerism" (Dobrez, *State of the Onion: Teaching English in 2007*, p. 2).





'Memory *selects*, and *interprets* – and *what* is to be selected and *how* it needs to be interpreted is a moot matter and an object of continuous contention. The resurrection of the past, keeping the past alive, can only be attained through the active, choosing, reprocessing and recycling, work of memory' (Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 2003/2006, p. 87).

4

**Pedagondage:**  
**Impressions of an**  
**Industrial Sunrise** (& the birth of death)



Claude Monet: *Impression: Sunrise* (1872)



Derrida favoured a mixture of rigour and play in scholarship (p. 236).

'Grammatology is about stimulating creativity not negating it' (p. 238).

(Ulmer, 1985)

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#### Impressions of a Masterpiece

##### *Impression: doom*

Colour is my day-long obsession, joy and torment. To such an extent indeed that one day, finding myself at the death-bed of a woman who had been and still was very dear to me, I caught myself focusing on her temples and automatically analysing the succession of appropriately graded colours which death was imposing on her motionless face. There were blue, yellow, grey tones – tones I cannot describe. That was the point I had reached.

(Claude Monet, as cited in Pool, 1967, p. 61)

Monet's painting *Impression: Sunrise* (1872) announced the arrival of a new episode in the history of art: *Impressionism* (Pool, 1967). Although valued today, early Impressionist paintings were considered crude, unfinished, and practically worthless by audiences of their day (Pool, 1967). In fact, the term 'Impressionism' entered circulation after the first Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1874, when one critic took the name from Monet's painting and used it to condemn the entire exhibition (Pool, 1967, p. 113). While the exhibition was a financial disaster, the term stuck, capturing as it did the Impressionist's infatuation with dappled light and fleeting impressions. Turning away from religious themes, noble subjects, the human figure, indoor settings, refined paintwork, preliminary sketches, artificial lighting, and the studio, the Impressionists ventured outside where they painted landscapes, picnics, gatherings, and street-scenes *straight onto the canvas* using prismatic colours and rapid brushstrokes (Pool, 1967, pp. 7-10). As the arch-Impressionist, it is fitting, then, that Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* not only announced the dawning of a new movement in art, but that it did so through an *impression* of an industrial sunrise. Monet was obsessed with fluctuations of light and colour and capturing the moment. He painted, in effect, from sense impressions rather than the mind or memory, "shaking off the world assembled by memory in favour of a world perceived momentarily by the senses" (Seitz, as cited in Pool, 1967, p. 86), an ambition reminiscent of the romantic poets and John Keats' famous remark: "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" in 1817 (Abrams, 1993, p. 829). Such ideas went against the grain of tradition, which was as obsessed with formality and refinement as the Impressionists were with informality

This is a noble ambition, but technically impossible. All impressions, thoughts, and actions 'percolate' through memory.



## Neoliberalization has meant ... the

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In a Darwinian neoliberal world ... only the fittest should and do survive.

(Harvey, 2007, p. 157)

## financialization of everything (p. 33).

"Thirty years of neoliberal freedoms have, after all, not only restored power to a narrowly defined capitalist class. They have also produced immense concentrations of corporate power in energy, the media, pharmaceuticals, transportation, and even retailing (for example Wal-Mart). The freedom of the market that Bush proclaims as the high point of human aspiration turns out to be nothing more than the convenient means to spread corporate monopoly power and Coca Cola everywhere without constraint. With disproportionate influence over the media and the political process this class (with Rupert Murdoch and Fox News in the lead) has both the incentive and the power to persuade us that we are all better off under a neoliberal regime of freedoms. ... As Polanyi might have put it, neoliberalism confers rights and freedoms on those 'whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing', leaving a pittance for the rest of us. How is it, then, that 'the rest of us' have so easily acquiesced in this state of affairs?" (Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 2005/2007, p. 38).

and upheaval, a point that inspired the Abstract Expressionists a century or so later (Pool, 1967, p. 63). And me, in 2007, against the strictures strangling the 'exegesis.'

Today, of course, we live in a very different world from that of Monet and his peers. For most of us, paints, paintbrushes, and canvasses represent the media of a mysterious bygone era far removed from the electronic and sexualised hustle and bustle of contemporary consumer life. Most of today's images, it seems, are created using computer software without ever washing a brush or wearing a smock (like this text). We may have practised finger painting at school as children but as adults most of us make few if any images (let alone 'art'). Whereas the Impressionists preferred to work in the open air with simple tools, even in snow and sleet in Monet's case, image-makers today tend to work indoors in re-conditioned air using complex visual-verbal idioms and modern technologies. If the power goes out, so do we.

We also live in an era where the world is staring down the barrel of global catastrophe. Monet's painting, with the smog of industry choking its borders, hints at this spectre. Our planet is literally choking on human excrement and the by-products of human 'success.' With this impending holocaust comes a grave new awareness and a deepening denial: a new way of thinking and un-thinking the world and our relationship to it. The 'economic-addiction' (the obsession with numbers and 'numerology' as the measure of human wellbeing and happiness) seems to be sucking the life-blood out of the very world it pretends to enrich, while paradoxically offering more spectacular products, markets, investments, and choices to those that can afford to shop around (i.e. the tourist classes). And yet with all this bustle and glitter and hype most of us only have to scan the media to see a world on the wane.

For this reason, I have assembled a 'visual essay' (of sorts) in response to Monet's original impression. Along with *The Road to Calvary* by Peter Paul Rubens (1632), Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* is one of my all-time favourite images, not simply for its foreboding atmosphere and sullen beauty, or its stark estrangement of the human figure, but because it represents a moment in history that seems to speak of *all* history: the human death-wish suspended: a greed-induced insanity that

Monet was particularly attracted by scenes of dissolution - ice-floes on the Seine, fog, mist... As Adrian Stokes has pointed out... some of Monet's best paintings are of 'a fragile, crumbling world'.

(Pool, 1967, p. 81)

'The sole character the practitioners of the market are able and willing to recognize and accommodate is *homo consumens* - the lonely, self-concerned and self-centred shopper who has adopted the search for the best bargain as a cure for loneliness and knows no other therapy; a character for whom the swarm of shopping-mall customers is the sole community known and needed; a character whose lifeworld is populated with other characters who share all those virtues but nothing else besides' (Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 2003/2006, p. 69).

'If the savings book was the epitome of modern life, the credit card is the paradigm of the postmodern one' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 5).

