The Thin End of the Wedge: Self, Body and Soul in Rembrandt's Kenwood Self-Portrait

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A few years ago, convalescing after a serious illness, I saw Rembrandt's *Self Portrait with Two Circles* (c. 1663–1669;[1] Fig. 1) at Kenwood House, Hampstead. That the painting restored my zest for life was not the result of the empathic powers usually attributed to Rembrandt, though the mess of colours of the brushes in the artist's hand, warm against his scarlet smock and fur-trimmed tabard, was all the lovelier for the gloom of Hampstead Heath on a late December afternoon. Rembrandt's self portraits are celebrated for capturing the angst of aging and mortality, but what struck me about this one was not the melancholic *gravitas* of the figure, but a brisker and more purposeful mood about the painting which seemed to depend on something I had not noticed on previous visits—something far less conspicuous than the mysterious circles on the background wall on which so much has been written. Once it is noticed, the dimly discernible sliver back along the upper right-hand side of the painting transforms the stationary, lozenge-shaped figure of the artist, rooted as it is to the spot with one hand to his side and the other holding brushes, from an image of Rembrandt *being* someone, to an image of him *doing* something. The shift from the passive to the active mode defines the painting's relation to the viewer and the connoisseurs who were intended to appreciate it, and makes the artist seem manly, masterly and purposeful, instead of pensive and melancholic.

A hurdle immediately presents itself to such a decisive shift in the emotion associated with the painting. According to van der Wetering, my view is likely to have resulted from the projection of false, because anachronistic, interpretation of the physiognomy represented by the painting:

> A strong tendency (still) exists to read Rembrandt's states of mind and even his (assumed) thoughts into his self-portraits. This tendency has contributed to the persistent myth that Rembrandt … 'confided everything in his (late) self-portraits, including his unhappiness and loneliness; but … also his self-confidence and his pride and triumph as an artist.' As is well known, the history of cinematography has taught us that one is capable of reading

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Fig. 1 Rembrandt Harmensz
van Rijn, self portrait with
two circles. Circa 1665. Oil
on canvas. 114.3 × 94 cm.
(With permission of The
Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood
House, London, UK/(C) Eng-
lish Heritage Photo Library/
The Bridgeman Art Library)

all sorts of emotions and thoughts in an immobile face, depending on the context in which
it is seen. … it is not so much a question of reading emotions but rather the projection of
'knowledge' … of elements of the Rembrandt myth … into Rembrandt's face shown in
repose (Wetering 2005, p. xxxix).

Such skeptical statements may serve as a warning against ahistorical and sentimental-
ized readings of the painting, but they begins to sound dated in view of proponents
of Actor-Network Theory, who complain that 'all the objects people have learned to
cherish have been replaced by puppets projecting social shadows which are supposed
to be the only "true reality" that is "behind" the appreciation of the work of art… To
be affected is supposed to be mere affection' (Bruno Latour, quoted Zell, n.p.). One
wonders whether knowledge can ever be neatly parted from emotion, and whether to
do so risks denying emotional significance to all art. Yet if respect for historical accu-
racy of response to Rembrandt is the cardinal requirement before an interpretation can
be attempted, then we should at least acknowledge that the 'notion that painting can
represent emotions and inner feeling had a long tradition by the time that Rembrandt
was working' (Nash 2006, p. 192). In so far as van de Wetering's stricture loosens
the conviction that the emotional expression of a painting is necessarily fixed, then
it assists my thesis of an emotional transformation in our experience of the painting.
My imputation of this transformation will rely on several intersecting approaches,
not least an original method of comparing, across large historical intervals, what I
shall call 'sliver paintings'—portraits of artists at work on paintings whose canvas
or panel backs are turned against us in such a way that the actual frame crops them

Fig. 2 Max Beckmann, self portrait on yellow ground with cigarette. Circa 1923. Oil on canvas. 60.2 × 40.3 cm. (Gift of Dr. and Mrs F. H. Hirschland, Museum of modern art, New York, USA. (C) Max Beckmann/Bild-Kunst. Licensed by Viscopy, 2012)
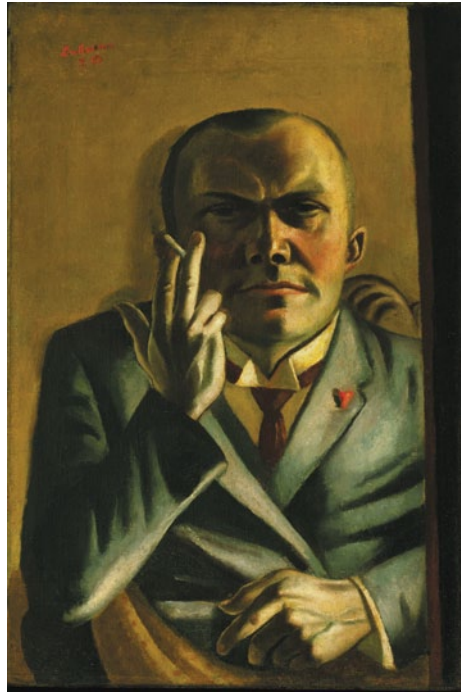
into a narrow sliver of canvas or panel, of the kind that, in the case of Rembrandt's Kenwood portrait, is dimly discernible rising upwards along the upper right hand side of the painting.

To specify the emotional transformation I discover in the Kenwood portrait, I shall compare it to a superficially similar composition by a twentieth-century artist who was more than usually steeped in the conventions of older art: Max Beckmann's *Self Portrait on Yellow Ground with Cigarette* (Beckmann 1923; Fig. 2) in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. A commentator observes that 'Beckmann might at first be mistaken for a successful businessman or member of high society in his elegant gray suit adorned with a red decoration in the lapel and stiff high collar, and with his ubiquitous cigarette' (Rewald 2006, p. 82). Whereas Rembrandt's working clothes firmly associate him with the studio, Beckmann is dressed to kill and seems to look daggers at us, before we realize that he is merely examining himself in a mirror while he paints the canvas whose back confronts us as a narrow sliver down the right-hand side of the painting. But what first appears as an attitude of arrogant superiority, conforming with the agonistic stance of Modernist art towards the public, soon turns out to be 'the look': that traditional gaze of ferocious concentration that the fraternity of professional painters adopts when they capture their own appearance at work (Georgel and Leqoc 1987, p. 134).

The tradition of 'the look' reaches back through Chaim Soutine, Van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Francisco Goya, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon

Chardin, Nicolas Poussin and Annibale Carracci. All of them depict it, while a sliver back cropped by the frame overlaps their bodies as they paint. Examples by lesser-known artists can probably be found on every continent since the last century and certainly in Canada, Pakistan, Germany, Italy, South Africa, Japan, America, Britain and Australia.[2] The motif creates a measure of parity across the ages, as each new contributor composes their features into an attitude of focused observation that unites their profession and distinguishes them from philistines who see, but do not consider what they see. In the seventeenth century, Nicolas Poussin wrote:

> …that you should know that there are two kinds of looking at objects. One is simply seeing them and the other is considering them attentively. Simply to see is nothing but naturally receiving in the eye the form and resemblance of the thing seen. But to see an object in considering it, is beyond the simple and natural perception of the form of the eye, one looks at it with a particular application as the means of best knowing this same object, thus one could say that the simple aspect is a natural operation, and that which I call the 'Prospect' is an office of reason. (Poussin, cited André Felibien, 1929 edn, p. 77)

The contrast is clearly shown by Pieter Breughel the Elder's pen drawing of *The Painter and the Connoisseur* (circa 1656), where 'the look' of fierce determination on the proud face of the artist is unforgettably distinguished from the baffled amusement of the acquisitive connoisseur peering through thick lenses, whose is hand is meanly clapped on his purse. This contrasts with the artist's exquisitely delicate and decisive grasp of his brush as he applies it to a picture surface just outside the limits of the frame. The drawing promotes the constancy of the artist's profession at a time of change when art was increasingly made for random buyers on the open market, instead of more cultivated patrons. 'Times may change, Brueghel reminds us, but the artist's job does not' (Harbison 1995, p. 17).

The artist's actions highlight another physiological attribute of the artist: the attentive 'look' guides the dexterous 'hand'. In the Kenwood portrait the hand is so fused to the brushes, the palette, the maul stick and the painting cloth that hangs beneath them that they effectively replace it. 'It is, in fact, as if Rembrandt had constructed his hand out of the instruments that it employed for painting. The hand of the painter is represented in what, following Aristotle's definition, we might call its instrumental use' (Alpers 1988, p. 22). This swiftly delineated bundle of implements is only a more extreme case of the general rule that the individuated hand joins of all dexterous painters across the ages, just as it is from 'the look' that the 'hand' self portraits by very different artists derive a shared 'accent of power and intellectual tension' as something held in common (Georgel and Lecoq 1987, p. 134).

Participation in the professional kinship of 'the look' and 'the hand' already sets limits to the individuality of Rembrandt's image of himself as we realize that, like

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[2] For example W. G. R. Hind, *Self portrait* (1863), Canada; Anna Molka Ahmed, *Self portrait* (1939), Pakistan; Gerta Overbeck, *Self portrait at an Easel*, 1936, Germany; Massimo Campigli, *Painter and Model* (1946), Italy; François Krige, *Self portrait with Buddhist Print* (1980s), South Africa; Narashige Koide, *Self portrait with a Hat* (1924), Japan; Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *At Work* (1943), Japan; Wyndham Lewis, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael* (1921), Britain; Barbara Hepworth, *Self portrait* (1950), Britain; Gillian Melling, *Me and My Baby* (1991), Britain; Horace Pippin, *Self portrait* (1941), North America; Fred Williams, *Self portrait at an Easel* (1960–1961), Australia; and Avigdor Arikha, *Self portrait Standing Behind Canvas* (1978), Israel and America.

Beckmann, he too exhibits 'the look' of gazing not at the viewer but at his own image reflected in a mirror, despite the fact that he has imparted to his own features an unusual degree of vulnerable intimacy by appearing to hold our gaze far longer than strangers in most cultures tolerate. The scholarly objection to the view of Rembrandt's self portraits as the quintessential expression of the shaping power of an individual 'I' created from within (Glaser, Lehman and Lubos, quoted by Wetering in White 1990, p. 18) is that it assumes an anachronistic nineteenth-century Romantic conception of the self that is alien to Rembrandt's time. Seventeenth-century subjectivity was more likely to have been understood in terms of human types (such as, in Rembrandt's case, the melancholic) whose nature was determined by the balance of the humours and reflected, for such authors as Montaigne, more in what selves held in common than in what differentiated them (Wetering, in White 1990, pp. 17–19), though this includes Michel de Montaigne's conviction that '[a]nyone who turns his prime attention on to himself will hardly ever find himself in the same state twice' (Montaigne 1991, pp. 373–377). The problem with the scholarly objection to anachronistic Romantic accounts of Rembrandt's self is that, when it comes to dating—and as everyone who has read Shakespeare knows—the so-called modern self is a moveable feast.

It is useful to consider a medley of conflicting accounts of the genesis of modern selfhood by a variety of authorities, as a way of situating our own sense of self in relation to the possibilities of pictorial selfhood available to Rembrandt. Keith Thomas cites a comment by the ancient historian Arnaldo Momigliano that 'it is my impression that Greek and Roman historians, and especially biographers, talk about individuals in a manner which is not distinct from our own' (Thomas 2009, p. 37). According to this widely appealing view the self was ever thus: its fundamental emotional and intellectual composition has never changed. John Jeffries Martin considers that a distinction between a collective and an individual self during the entire period of the Renaissance is naïve, and posits instead three kinds of self: (1) a 'communal' or 'civic' self, (2) an individual, expressive, performative self, and (3) a 'porous' self, 'open to strong influences from "spiritual" forces (through witchcraft or possession) from the outside'. All three selves would be combined in every individual (Martin 2002, pp. 210–211), but how could their discrepancies be simultaneously expressed in painting? For Joanna Woods-Marsden a modern individual self can be discerned for the first time in Renaissance self portraiture that arose from Roman conceptions of legal personhood and Christian conceptions of inner conscience. It entailed a combination of self-discovery and invention (Martin's second self) that was elaborated in written conceptions of self-fashioning with an emphasis, respectively, on public life in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and domestic life in Castiglione's *Courtier* (Woods-Marsden 1998, pp. 9–15). In these texts and in the portraits that illustrate their ideas (for example, Raphael's portrait of Castiglione), the self is proactive. It is liberated from the astrological influence that stamped fixed identity or *virtu* on the hieratic profiles of Pisanello's medals or straitened the herringbone patterns of Elizabethan portraits. As individuals began to think in terms of shaping Fortune to their own ends (Pocock 1975, pp. 36–37 and 168–169), portraits became psychological, so that Anthony Van Dyke, for example, could be brought to

England to imbue a whole social class with the suggestion of depth of character and the capacity for considered choice that would later be modified and passed down to the professional middle classes as the Cartesian ideal of 'a human agent who is able to remake himself by methodical and disciplined action' (Taylor 1989, p. 159).[3]

But Dror Wahrman is adamant in dating the beginnings of the individuated self to the late eighteenth-century, identifying its origin with a crucial shift from group identity to the 'quintessential uniqueness that separates a person from all others' (Wahrman 2004, p. 276). Roy Porter charts the demise of this unique self in the twentieth-century writings of the 'anti-humanist iconoclasts' Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault who argued for the primacy of sign systems in defining us. '"We don't think our thoughts, they think us"; ourselves are constructs, bearing discourses we only think are ours. To think otherwise is myth, an overvaluation of individuality, the malignant offspring of "humanist hagiography"' (Porter 2003, p. 15). In plainer terms, Wilfred McCay observes that in our own age the 'I' is no longer 'the fundamental building block in our apprehension of reality, the still point in a moving world' or 'a unitary thing' but 'an ever-shifting ensemble of social roles, a disorderly venue in which the healthy ego functions less as a commander-in-chief than as a skilled air-traffic controller' (McCay n.d., n.p.). In the history of art this finds expression in the development that Frederick Jameson charts from Edward Munch's late nineteenth-century *The Scream* (a histrionic variant upon the pathos of Rembrandt's figures), to Andy Warhol's strangely affectless 'Marilyn series' of the 1960s. For all the 'radical isolation and solitude, anomie, private revolt, [and] Van-Gogh type madness' of Munch's figure, at least it is still capable of suffering, whereas the liberation from intensely felt selfhood signified by Warhol's simulacra 'may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling' (Jameson 1991, p. 15). A rather different approach to the self was evident in certain artists of the 1960s Italian art movement Arte Povera, who, in attempting to avoid the commodity status of the art work depending on the fixed identity of the artist, gave rise to ambitions of mutability, such as this one articulated by Michelangelo Pistoletto: "Each successive work or action is the product of contingent and isolated intellectual or perceptual stimulus that belongs to one moment only. After every action, I step to one side, and proceed in a different direction from the direction formulated by my object, since I refuse to accept is as an answer" (Pistoletto, quoted in Potts 2008, p. 172). The difficulty of sustaining this continual renewal of self through art led to a rueful admission by Pino Pascali, another member of the group, that seeing his past works gave him the "welcome confirmation 'that when all is said and done, I actually exist'" (Pascali, quoted in Potts 2008, p. 181).

The interesting question about Rembrandt's picturing of selfhood is whether Jameson's affectless, decentered, contemporary self resembles or differs from

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[3] The concept of self-fashioning was developed in Stephen J. Greenblatt's literary study *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (1980) from Erving Goffman's pioneering psycho-sociological study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). It began to be applied to art history in the 1990s, including Mary Rogers, *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art* (2000).

the selfhood that precedes the long interlude of Romantic individuality. Warhman thinks it does, and that before the 'interiorizing and essentializing' tendencies of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture produced unique, inward and innate identities 'synonymous with self' (Wahrman 2004, p. 276), the fragmentation and disunity of contemporary selfhood was taken for granted by pre-Romantics (Wahrman 2004, p. xvii). On the other hand, if one grants a long period of life to the Romantic self, it seems unlikely that what followed it was merely a continuation of the period 'before the self' (Wahrman 2004, p. xvii). That would neglect the fact that the modern self is emphatically embodied, and therefore manifests different tensions than those that waged war between body and soul, immaterial and material realms, and eternal and changing qualities in the prior tradition (Taylor 1989, p. 121).

Moreover, the delicate wedge that René Descartes's seventeenth-century philosophical writings drove between body and soul to explain human consciousness introduced warring faculties that complicate Wahrman's assumption that the Romantic self in any simple sense was unified. The disengagement that Descartes required of the soul to constitute a self that was marginally independent of the body was not an impediment, but a prerequisite of subjective empathy with other selves. We need to observe other people before we can relate to them. To understand the emotional transformation enacted in Rembrandt's Kenwood portrait, the spectator must engage in an interaction between empathy and detachment that is in psychic interaction with the sitter.

The question of Rembrandt's interpellation of his spectator brings into focus the relation between Rembrandt's image of himself in the Kenwood portrait and his social image as an artist. To what extent does Rembrandt's portrait answer to social archetypes of the artist externally defined in previous art, including his own? Arguments between sociologists and psychologists persist to this day about the nature of subjectivity, including the emotions. Some argue that feelings and experiences are always 'out there' in the interactions and relationships amongst people rather than inside the individual, so there is reason to suppose that there were similar tensions of perspective in the past. One strand in social cultural theory pioneered by the Russian social psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygostky and taken up by George Herbert Mead in America posits a constant dialogue between us and our social world, which is in turn internalized through symbolic representations of our culture. In this we are mentored through a process of guided participation into the ideas and processes of whatever culture or historical period we happen to be born into, a process that might particularly apply to an artist, such as Rembrandt, 'whose practice is peculiarly modern in its continuous oscillation between private interest and public statement' (Westermann 2002, p. 362). Before returning to the issue of whether the Kenwood portrait is best understood under the rubric of the self or the soul, I shall first pursue the external and then the internal determinants of its formation in isolation from each other before bringing them together.

Certain features of each self portrait in our anachronistic contrast between Beckmann and Rembrandt are externally determined by the artist's visual association with the tools of his trade—brushes, palette, maul stick, painting cloth, easel, sliver back in the Rembrandt—of which no single item takes particular precedence over

another. As attributes of the painter's profession, they define the artist's standing in society within a tradition that reaches back to attributes of saints: the keys of St Peter or St Catherine's wheel. In each portrait, however, the status of the artist changes in relation to his implements according to different arrangements of the formal components.

As soon as we see the sliver of the reversed canvas to the right of Beckmann, for example, we know that he is working on his portrait and looking at himself in a mirror to paint it. Semiotically, the primary function of 'slivers' is to confer presence on the body of the artist by occluding part of it. 'Presence', according to T. J. Clark, is generated by occlusion: 'everything in painting ultimately turns on the artist's success in establishing a strong, cored, convex form in and against an opposite flatness or void. And in practice this basic illusion depends on the engineering of a not-seen, a not-seeable … The moment of maximum visual information in a picture is that at which the object goes out of sight' (Clark 1999, p. 203). We may not notice the sliver at first partly because it is too busy enhancing the artist's presence by sacrificing its own, and partly because his arresting social confrontation with us distracts us from it. The artist's snappy jacket, winged collar, tie and button hole infuse his arrogant stare with social status that is all the more powerful for making us uneasy. The very opacity and inertness of the sliver painting makes the human gaze more sentiently penetrating. The effect is not adequately explained by the circumstantial evidence of dress and attitude that shows how Beckmann had gone up in the world in the years before 1923. Rather, while his attitude is thoroughly modern, it also adverts to the traditional type of the virtuous painter, or *pictor doctus*, depicted by Rubens (Fig. 3), Van Dyke, Dou and Honthorst when they showed themselves in noble attire and lofty attitude, freed from the implements that would otherwise associate them with the physical labour of painting (Chapman 1990, p. 96).

In Beckmann's painting the power of this tradition defers our recognition of the painter's solitary self-communion with himself at work on the canvas. Indeed, when we do notice the sliver, and our communion with him is replaced by our awareness of his communion with the mirror, our earlier relationship with him is not over. Rather, a modernist 'flip-flop' effect ensures that social interaction with the high society artist alternates with his 'look' of private fixation on his mirror-image. Like some *da/fort* game, the painting first commands our presence before the artist, then banishes us so that he appears to relate only to himself. Then we find ourselves interacting with him again. The alternation is effected by deliberately puzzling incongruities, such as the omission of brush and palette from the hand nearest the sliver back. If he is not painting, then must he not be looking at us after all? And why would he risk staining his smart clothes? Yet then again the sliver back reappears, with the artist in reach of it, despite his lack of painting implements, and, if so, then perhaps he is alone again, painting his image in the mirror, with canvas reversed so that, visible now, it appears in sharp geometrical analogy with the folded back collar and lapels. Or maybe, as a third possibility, the mirror has disappeared and he is sizing us up as his sitters?

And what of the red spotted saffron yellow shawl draped over his lap (Rewald 2006, p. 82) that keeps him warm or protects his clothes or both? How does it

Fig. 3 Peter Paul Rubens, Self portrait. 1638–1640. Oil on canvas. 109.5 × 85 cm. (With permission of Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria/The Bridgeman Art Library)

contribute to the overall effect of disquieting anomaly? Since the shawl is also an attribute of the artist as clown it undermines the defiance and reveals the inanity of his social posture. It also means that he is not standing in social combat with us at all, but sitting at his work with the chair back rising behind his right shoulder in the form of a carved wooden scroll (but if so why are the brush marks that constitute it so fluid and why is there no matching scroll above his other shoulder?). These contradictions are distinct from the slow, dawning change of awareness invoked by the Kenwood portrait. Their flip-flop effects explicitly expose the artificial status of the painting as a modernist construct, whereas Rembrandt enacts a transformation from a painter observing us to a painter painting himself painting. Once the change has happened, we can remember how it was before, but cannot go back to it.

To add to the complications, one might have thought that Beckmann's cigarette, ostentatiously held aloft, only sustains the first reading: the painter's haughty interaction with the viewer. It accentuates social posturing, but surprisingly it also keeps the other interpretation in play because (though Beckmann was a chain smoker), it enlists a long tradition of 'smoking painters' who—in contrast to the menial paint grinders in the background of studio paintings—but also to *virtuosi* like Rubens, liberated from their brushes—evoke 'the delights and difficulties of the art of painting'

(Brink Goldsmith 1994, p. 241) by freeing the artist not from work itself but from the disagreeable, physical side of manual work born by studio assistants.[4]

Where does the Kenwood figure sit amongst these binary indicators of externally determined professional identity? Following the Horatian antinomy of the *poeta doctus* and the *poeta vulgaris*, the counterpart of the virtuous painter is the *pictor vulgaris* of which Rembrandt made some idiosyncratic versions in earlier self portraits.[5] If the studio clothes and attributes of painting shown in the Kenwood portrait tacitly renounce the Rubens type of virtuoso painter, its monumental dignity has little to do with the drunken rowdiness and smoking of the *pictor vulgaris* either, for if the latter is relevant at all, 'it is recast in a positive light and applied narrowly to his professional identity' through manifest respect for his craft (Chapman 1990, p. 97).

Without recourse to smoking, Rembrandt's figure comes down with the 'smoking artist' on the thinking side of the artist's relation to menial work. Capturing himself in thought rather than in action, he resembles Velázquez, pausing from his work in *Las Meninas* (though Velázquez's brush is charged with paint) to observe and admire his monarch. But Velázquez's gaze is reciprocated by a monarch standing in the viewer's place, whereas Rembrandt gazes at a regal image of himself in the mirror, since the monumental stance and dignity of the Kenwood portrait come closest in his oeuvre to the 'princely' self portrait of 1658 in the Frick Collection (Chapman 1990, p. 97) in which the artist holds a cane that resembles a scepter. Instead of Alexander consecrating the art of Apelles by visiting his studio, the Kenwood figure is monarch of his own domain, so that if the two circles behind him signify the outlines of a double hemispherical map of the world on paper pinned to the wall (to cite only one of the many interpretations given to them), another external attribute of the artist would be the universal fame of Rembrandt's conquest of the visible world by mastery of the techniques of painting (Chapman 1990, p. 108). Making the studio an autonomous site of meaning, Rembrandt's image of his own figure conflates the roles of artist, sitter and patron (Stoichita 1997, pp. 226–228), so that a painting that might have employed an impersonal third-person mode to convey a general picture of the artist realizing work in the studio is to be read instead as an individual painter realizing his own work in a first-person mode (Chapman 1990, p. 231). While personalizing the general image of the prince, it also borrows a grandeur that expands the narrowly artistic aspect of the artist's life by associating it with the ubiquity and omniscience of a ruler.

No interpreter has more resolutely chosen to interpret the external determinants of Rembrandt's pictorial identity than Svetlana Alpers. She interprets his construction of individualized portraits as a function of the market for which he worked and the objects he manufactured for it. To the external determinants of Rembrandt's artistic identity we have examined so far—which include 'the look', 'the hand',

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[4] See Leonaert Bramer's engraving of a smoking painter in Brink Goldsmith (1994), p. 241, dating back to a series of circa 1650–1655, a decade or two before the Kenwood portrait, depicting the various professions.

[5] For example, his *Rembrandt and Saskia in the Scene of the Prodigal Son in the Tavern* (c. 1635). See Chapman (1990), p. 97.

approximations to the image of the princely artist, the attributes of painting and symbols of fame—Alpers contributes an economic reading that casts Rembrandt as both the inventor and the commodifier of the modern self. In Alpers' reading the court painter whose status is defined by distance from physical labour becomes the studio painter whose authority depends on commercial success arising from mastery of his craft.

Alpers attends to the sliver back, that fragment of the painting that eluded me. She considers that:

> …the sliver of canvas just visible along the right edge of the Kenwood self-portrait (so light that it is often cropped in reproductions) to which he does not turn or lift a brush is Rembrandt's anti-illusionist way of calling attention to the painter's condition … It is on canvas, and in paint … that Rembrandt knows himself … his works are commodities distinguished from others by being identified as his; and in making them, he in turn commodifies himself. He loved only his freedom, art and money, to recall the words of Descaps. (Alpers 1988, pp. 117–118)

In this view nothing is interiorized in Rembrandt's self portraits; all is surface. They represent a truth to exterior appearances that manufactures for his other portraits an image of personal identity he first manufactured as an image of himself. His studio is an artisanal kind of assembly line for the mass production of individualized subjectivity.

But X-rays of the Kenwood portrait suggest the crafting of a deliberate delay in our understanding of the painting that holds the artist back from complete identification with the commodity he is making. Edwin Buijsen, Peter Schatborn and Ben Broos summarize the dominant interpretation of the changes revealed by X-rays that show that Rembrandt had once painted himself turned towards the canvas he is painting:

> In his first design, Rembrandt had initially intended to depict himself at work … the body was angled more to the right and the painter was applying a brush to the canvas with his raised hand. … With a few swift but effective brushstrokes, Rembrandt then altered this active pose to a more frontal angle, moving all the painter's attributes to the right and depicting his other hand resting on his hip. (Buijsen, Schatborn and Broos, catalogue, White 1997, p. 220)

Ernst van de Wetering insists that this change was '*undoubtedly* prompted by the problem facing anyone painting a self portrait, and one that confronted Rembrandt time and again throughout his career: the fact that the right hand becomes a left hand in the mirror' (my emphasis). Whether 'the hands in self portraits are usually omitted or just cursorily described', the 'right hand is unable to "pose", because as a mirror-image left hand it is moving as the artist paints' (Wetering 1990, p. 12). Despite the spectacular virtuosity of the way Rembrandt changed the hand that holds the brushes, 'what *must* have happened', according to van de Wetering again (1990, p. 13, my emphasis), is that 'he followed the reality in the mirror faithfully and then swiftly reversed the hands.' In other words he severs the tie with the mirror in a fashion akin to a midwife's routine cutting and tying of umbilical cords. I find this exclusive emphasis on Rembrandt's quest for likeness too dogmatic. And while Buijsen, Schatborn and Broos entertain more conflicted motives for the change,

they too assume that Rembrandt was only intent on mimetic virtuosity: 'On the one hand he was apparently driven by a desire to record things exactly as he saw them reflected, but on the other hand he did not want the viewer to recognize the picture immediately as a mirror image' (Buijsen, Schatborn and Broos, in White 1990, p. 220). I concur with the inference of temporal unfolding here: the conviction that Rembrandt wanted the spectator to understand the image's origin in a mirror eventually but not straightaway. *Pace* these scholars, however, I contend that Rembrandt wished to convey a narrative that could never be apprehended as the static image they assume was his objective, and that the painting represents the forethought immanent in the act of painting: the preparatory observation, calculation and invention that motivate the artist's eye and hand. Thus, at this point, my argument shifts from the external determinants of the portrait to its inner determinants, as far as they can be reconstructed from the theories and practices of Rembrandt's day.

In turning to the inner determinants of the painting I also return to the idea of the soul as an armature on which the meaning and emotion of the painting depend. To the many interpretations of the two circles on the wall behind the artist—a double-hemispherical map, a theoretical statement of the 'O' that Giotto drew to illustrate the perfection of the artist's skill, a compositional device securing (in modern parlance) the 'significant form' of the composition (Wetering 2005, pp. 565–567)—perhaps it would be crass to add the possibility that the 'incongruent and fragementary' circles, whose 'slight asymmetry … is repeated in that of the eyes' (Clarke 2006, n.p.), actually symbolize those artist's eyes as windows to the soul, where soul is understood as an older and more capacious category than self, as the seat of the passions and as the locus of spiritual inwardness.[6] As tendentious as the idea would be, to consider the painting as a portrait of the artist's soul has the advantage of suggesting visual sources that are arguably richer than the 'types of the artists' that I have been citing as possible precedents for the Kenwood portrait. In his essay on 'Representation of "soul" by Rembrandt', John Nash traces the origin of Rembrandt's self portraits to representations of individuals caught in meditative attitudes that serve as aids for prayer and meditation in the Christian tradition of devotional images of the Virgin and saints (Nash 2006, p. 195). Passed down from Flemish fifteenth-century paintings to Titian and from Titian to Rembrandt, the contemplative attitude inspired by this tradition stirs empathy for others in us and an appreciation of moments when we take stock of our lives and find value in our aspirations (Nash 2006, p. 198). Dwelling on Rembrandt's eyes as portals upon the passions of the soul gives us, once again, the spiritual complexion of the whole man beyond the scope of his experience and skills as an artist (Stoichita 1997, p. 226). Our contemplative reception of the image, however, is radically transformed by noticing the detail I mentioned at the outset, which implies a movement of the artist's body.

Apart from eyes as the windows of the soul, which the asymmetrical circles in the background may reiterate, another way of apprehending the soul was through

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[6] I am grateful to Professor Constant Mews of Monash University for emphasizing the relevance of the soul in Rembrandt's connection. For the Kenwood portrait, the circles and windows of the soul see also Susan Fegley Osmond (2000), p. 3; and Jean-Marie Clarke (2006), n. p.

motions of the body, since physical movement was identified with being emotionally moved (as for example in the Italian word *affetti* that means both motions and emotions). Nash explains that:

> Following ancient theories of rhetoric, Renaissance treatises on art advocate the use of body pose and gesture to express the internal emotional states associated with character. Gesture as discussed in these treatises has two functions. First, it conveys life, indirectly indicating the existence of the soul that animates the body. Second, specific gestures can be signs for particular emotions. Alberti wrote of how the 'feelings are known from movements of the body.' Leonardo essayed in the same vein: 'Let the postures of men and the parts of their bodies be so disposed that these display the intent of their minds'. (Adams 2009, p. 100)

Nash considers that this path to the passions and intentions of the soul is closed to Rembrandt's meditative portraits because they do not do anything (Nash 2006, p. 195). With his hand stranded by his side or in his pocket Rembrandt's figure transfixes us so steadily with his gaze that it takes inordinate time for us to notice the almost imperceptible sliver of canvas back that extends upwards as a misty wedge from half way up the right hand side of the canvas. Once noticed, however, its transformative power is proportional to its former unobtrusiveness. That is because it has the effect of dramatically pushing the figure backwards and sideways to energize the atmosphere that envelops the scene. The role of the sliver back in Beckmann's self portrait was to confer presence on the body it occludes, but here, since it does not touch the artist's body, it brings volumetric presence to the very air of the scene, enveloping it in a semblance of aerial perspective despite the shallow space between the back wall and the picture plane. It is an effect that greatly enhances the majestic monumentality of the figure already achieved by the strong relief of its silhouette against the untypically light background (Wetering 2005, p. 565). Lying parallel to the edge and surface of the painting, Beckmann's sliver back creates the reflexive effect of showing the back of the real painting as if it had been folded back into the illusion on the front. Rembrandt's misty sliver does no such thing. It resists that possibility by the angle at which it is set to the picture plane and tilted against the painting's edge (and by the possibility that there was no mindset in which such a modernist reflexive effect was meaningful). Its presence animates the whole picture space, and it was necessary to do that in order to achieve the ultimate goal of endowing the figure with potential movement.

Alpers observed that Rembrandt does not turn or lift a brush towards the canvas sliver (Alpers 1988, p. 118), but I contend that our delayed recognition of the sliver opens a distance between itself and the body of the artist that will be crossed by the painting hand of the artist as it turns to the canvas, though the distance is too great for it to do so without the artist breaking his pose. Ergo, his hand must move to paint the next brushstroke; just as it has moved back from the last brushstroke he applied. Ergo the image of himself he is about to paint on canvas will be a short-term memory of the pose he will no longer be able to see. Our delay in noticing the sliver creates a premonition of visual action and the visual trace of a recent memory, neither of which equate simply with observable reality.

However, my contention that that the sliver was always too faint and narrow to be recognized quickly, faces a significant practical objection: it seems to fail, if we

accept Ernst van der Wetering's argument that 'the painting was originally wider. Its present width is just 13 cm short of the most standard size of 1.5 ell (app. 107 cm), which could mean that the width of the canvas was reduced by 13 cm. Given the absence of cusping along the left edge, at least 10 cm must have been cut off here. Despite the presence of cusping on the right edge, it is entirely plausible that a few centimetres of the image were also cut off along this edge' (Wetering 2005, p. 564). This practical obstacle to my hypothesis weakens, however, if we acknowledge by these calculations that the sliver would have extended to the right only by an extra three centimetres, which would make the actual painting only a little more than a thirtieth of its present width. In this case, the sliver would still be inconspicuous and would still be too far away for the artist to paint without him moving from his pose. In fact van de Wetering's calculations are far from neutral in intent. They comply with his belief that Rembrandt's was exclusively interested in verisimilitude: 'Should the painting have been slightly larger at the right, then the canvas at the right in the portrait—currently scarcely visible—would gain in recognisability' (Wetering 2005, p. 564). The belief determines the interpretation of the measurements, which do not necessarily support the belief. Thus van de Wetering is unlikely to entertain the possibility that Rembrandt was representing a memory, nor take into account the spectrum between Rembrandt's realism and visionary works such as *Balshazzar's Feast*. I do not wish to eliminate mimesis as a goal of Rembrandt's portraiture but rather propose a broader definition of mimesis that includes elements of memory, imagination, implied future action and painterly abstraction.

Having overcome this possible objection to my hypothesis, I shall pursue my case by arguing that the continuity between the painting as a depiction of a recent memory and the premonition of a future act is secured by the ostensive role of the conspicuous impasto paintwork left as tangible evidence of that action (for in a purely physical sense paintings just are residues of human action). Certainly the artist is no longer gazing at *us*, but neither is he gazing into the depths of his own soul. Consequently his gaze has become instrumental rather than meditative, and his hand (already made "instrumental", as Alpers observed, by substituting instruments of painting for it) will shortly comply with its purpose. He gazes now to commit what he sees to memory and so, in the next instant, to paint what he remembers, though it is possible that when he has left off painting, he will look back to remember more before turning to paint again, so that the painting does not record a moment but evokes a process, albeit one that is coming to a never-ending end.

In more senses than one the sliver is a thin end of the wedge that applies leverage upon our understanding so that we read the intentions of the artist's soul as vividly in the body's immanent action as we do in the eyes. Indeed it is possible that several of the competing scholarly interpretations of the circles behind the figure of the artist converge in this imminent action of eyes and hand. Not only do the slightly asymmetrical circles echo the eyes as windows of the soul, but their possible recollection of Giotto's dexterous drawing of the perfect circle on the wall prefigures the arc that the artist's hand is about to describe through the air in reaching the canvas.[7]

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[7] I am grateful to Philippa Boldiston for this insight.

As vectors of the soul's intentions, the circles ostensively emphasize both gazing and bodily turning.

Our deferred attention to the sliver is necessary because the conspicuous paint-work is not itself a sufficient trace of the artist's mental processing of long-term to short-term memory. We might have thought that the 'broad, insistent, rough tech-nique'—especially around the fist that holds the painting implements—sufficiently draws our attention to the painting as process (Chapman 1990, p. 101). It does not do so, however, in any way that meaningfully discriminates the order in which the brushstrokes were applied. (Even documentary films of the American abstract ex-pressionist painter Jackson Pollock at work do not help us to construe very clearly the order of brushstrokes composing the palimpsest of the final product.). The evi-dence of paint work certainly contributes to the appearance of the painting in its state of a 'never-ending *statu nascendi*' (Wetering 2005, p. 303), but it does not articulate the contours of the events that caused them, still less the artist's fluid metamorphosis of mood from vulnerable self-communion to masterly construction of the image, with all the intervening phases of emotional suspense, trepidation, tremulous optimism and determination. Neither is paintwork alone enough to con-vey the repeated sallies of the artist's cumulative turnings to and from his canvas.

As we become aware of how noticing the sliver changes the whole meaning of the painting, the painting loses the character of mimetic realism in favour of something ambiguous, though it does not flaunt contradiction as Beckmann's does. We are given to consider, for example, the paradox that the painting represents the mental prelude to an action that will take place after the residue of paint shows it has already happened. This articulates the opposite end of the painting process shown in Rembrandt's early *Artist in the Studio* (1629) in which, it has been argued, the artist contemplates the mental idea of what to paint before he has begun to paint the hid-den front of the panel (Wetering 1976). The Kenwood portrait, by contrast, is about to put (and, literally speaking, has already put) the last touch to the painting, but only after we have experienced Rembrandt communing first with us and secondly himself. It envisages the end rather than the beginning of the painting process and of the life of the person who has mastered it, for the very figure shown threatening to disintegrate with age is also at the height of his artistic abilities.

The sliver also helps to convince us we are presented with a memory because neither it nor anything else in the painting quite possesses the tangibility of an ob-ject. If paintings of *pictor doctus* dissociate the artist both from the tools of his trade and the physical act of painting, then, *mutatis mutandis*, it is also possible for artists to associate themselves with the objects they paint and the implements they paint them with far more closely than Rembrandt does here. He does not work at the me-chanical end of the intellectual spectrum. Earlier we saw how in a series of contrasts with the *pictor doctus* Rembrandt comes down with 'smoking artists' (like Leonaert Bramer's) on the thinking side of the artist's relation to menial work. We discover further limits to Alpers' contention that Rembrandt 'defines or knows himself in or as a material object' (Alpers 1988, p. 117) if the relatively opacity of objects in the Kenwood portrait are compared with the clarity of those in works by Clara Peeters and other Dutch painters earlier in the century. Celeste Brusati explains that those

artists are so committed to the mechanical aspects of art in self-representations such as *Still Life with Flowers and Goblets* (1612) that they are prepared to 'transform themselves into pictures, and appear as pictorial images displayed among other representations and products of their art' (Brusati 1990–1991, p. 168). They therefore depict themselves behind their canvases as images reflected from the polished surfaces of the objects they represent on still life tables. These are painted with such perfectionist clarity that Rembrandt's figure and his painterly attributes look unfinished by comparison. The juxtaposition of the artist and the canvas back in such reflections ties the identity of the artist to the obdurate quality of material objects to express the sentiment of *ars lunga, vita brevis*: the idea that the artist will live on only in what she has made. By contrast to the hyperreal clarity of Peeter's work, the point at which the ochre and brown sliver back is cropped by the edge of the Kenwood portrait is so smoky and diffuse that the image threatens to dematerialize.

   Rembrandt paints memory as image, where image is something whose identity hovers between the status of an object (the painting itself), a representation (the scene depicted) and a perception (the idea produced by the painting in the minds of artist and viewer). The assumption that Rembrandt's primary goal was verisimilitude leads to a premature resolution of the question of whether the Kenwood painting is finished or not. I disagree with those who deem the question 'not particularly relevant, given the overwhelming impression the painting makes in its present state' (Buijsen, Schatborn and Broos, in White 1991, p. 222). Certainly van de Wetering cannot be counted amongst these scholars, for he defends the portrait's truth to reality so eagerly that 'however far-fetched it might seem at first sight,' he argues that the rough paint texture 'is comparable with that of a human skin whose pores are visible, as is the case with older people, particularly men.' In this view the grainy paint quality induces focus on surface textures whose illusion of reality is greater the rougher it is. Far from a signature of personal style, the degree of coarseness in the application of paint is adjusted to the subject, and van de Wetering believes that his argument is clinched by Rembrandt's paintings of young women from the same period whose application is as smooth as their young skin (Wetering 2005, p. 308). But it is possible to unsettle this claim without leaving the Kenwood painting, for there is massive variation in the substantiality of the illusion within this single work. The relief of the head against the pale background of the wall would not be so prominent unless the whole figure loomed out from sketchy darkness at the bottom of the painting at the lower periphery of our vision. Against the rich, highlit, polychrome illusion of the face—composed, nevertheless, of broad, abstract brushstrokes—goes the 'anti-illusionistic' sliver back and painting instruments (Alpers 1988, p. 118). We may well agree with van der Wetering that '[i]nfluencing the viewer's perception by varying the surface painting was a practice employed by Rembrandt more frequently—and with more sophistication—than by any other painter in the history of art' (Wetering 2005, p. 307) without foreclosing the possibility that by varying the paint surface he might have intended as a distinctive personal quality of his style the intention of both enhancing and detracting from the illusion within the same painting. 'In the same way that we can shift from a simple 2D form to the optical

illusion of a third dimension and back (as in M. C. Escher), we see Rembrandt appearing and disappearing in paint' (Clarke 2006, n.p.).

Despite the greater definition of the background and the face, the considerably diminished degree of finish in the cap, the torse and the shirt, descending to the 'indistinct blur' of painting instruments—thought to have been altered in a few seconds (Buijsen, Schatborn and Broos, in White 1991, p. 222, and Wetering, in White 1991, p. 12)—down to the shadowy base of the figure, recalls Jean Luc Nancy's brilliant distinction between paintings as things and images. The image:

> …must be detached, placed outside and before one's eyes (it is therefore inseparable from a hidden surface, from which it cannot, as it were, be peeled away: the dark side of the picture, its underside of backside, or even its weave or its subjectile), and it must be different from the thing. The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially. (Nancy 2005, p. 2)

Nancy is seeking to define the character of all images, yet the extent to which paintings announce their characters as images or things is a matter of degree in which Rembrandt is closer to images and Peeters closer to things. Arguably, this is because Rembrandt is painting the reality of a looming memory and Peeters is painting the enduring presence of a thing, including an artist manifested as a thing. This equivalence between Rembrandt's free manner of painting and the depiction of a memory may not be unprecedented. Its possibility is strengthened by an interpretation of a startling discrepancy of styles between two earlier companion portraits. Though the sitters for Frans Hals' portraits of *Nicolaes Pieterszn Hasselaer* (c. 1633–1635) and his wife *Sarah Wolphaerts van Diemen* (c. 1633–1635) were both the same age, the wife is painted far more circumspectly than the husband, who had died in 1635. 'The portraits may have been commissioned by Sara Wolphaets van Diemen after this, as a posthumous tribute to her deceased husband. It would perhaps explain … the swift and powerful nature of the man's portrait in particular' (Middelkoop 1997, p. 78). The portrait of *Hasselaer*, in other words, may be a memory.

That the space of memory Rembrandt's sliver opens up is also a narrative space becomes apparent if we contrast it with yet another modernist sliver painting: Henri Matisse's *Self portrait* at Nice (early 1918). In this painting the artist is seated before the canvas whose back appears to us only as a few brochettes on a sliver that widens downwards at bottom right. The way the tip of Matisse's brush applies pressure on a canvas that is mostly outside the frame (like Breughel's *Painter and the Connoisseur* mentioned above) turns the sliver into a hinge on which the reverse of the actual painting might be imagined to swing out to the right, forming a rectangular back view coextensive and isomorphic with the flat formal patterning of the whole frontal surface. We could not entertain this fantasy unless the flat surface we imagine on the back was not prepared for our imagination by the overall surface harmony of the front, and especially by the still life lying parallel with the picture plane behind the artist's head and shoulders. The coherent, integrated distribution of Matisse's patterns is as flat as the back of the actual canvas would be. This modernist conceit is wholly at odds with Rembrandt's sliver whose asymmetry at the outer limit of the canvas produces depth that destroys surface harmony, even as it helps to unify atmospheric volume and propel narrative action. 'This extreme placing

creates a tension between the flatness of the pictorial plane and the illusion of a three-dimensional canvas edge' (Clarke 2006, n.p.). It conforms with the different understanding of pictorial composition Alberti ascribed to bodies arranged to narrate stories through movements reflecting the intentions of the soul, an arrangement that is indifferent to modernist concern with coherent picture surface (Puttfarken 2000, pp. 49–62).

The implied narrative movement of the Kenwood portrait also suggests a complication in the customary hierarchical subordination of still life and portraiture to history painting. Svetlana Alpers remarks that 'attention to studio realities marks the demise of European history painting as it had been', yet the studio-bound action implied in the Kenwood portrait simultaneously evokes nostalgia for the grandeur of the highest genre and aspires, like many works in the subsequent tradition of studio painting, to reconstitute the narrative power of history painting in new ways (Alpers 2005, p. 34). Like Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, it is both a 'historiated self-portrait' (through its reminiscent princeliness) and a 'here-and-now painting' distinct from ordinary history painting (Knox 2009, pp. 121 and 149). There are precedents in Rembrandt's oeuvre for the implied narrative movement of the figure. The second figure from the left in *The Syndics* (1662) is caught rising in portentous preparation to answer the invisible speaker on the viewer's side of the picture surface (Adams 2009, pp. 103–104); likewise, as its title suggests, movement is implied in his *Portrait of a Man Rising from His Chair* (1633). (Figures turning in their chairs to greet the spectator in paintings ranging from Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* to Govert Flinck's *The Governors of the Kloveniersdoelen* (1643) also belong to this tradition.) Such movements invoke sympathetic movements in the viewer; we identity with figures' actions and the dawning intentions that appear to motivate them, creating a "psychic dialogue" in real time (Adams 2009, p. 111). Noticing the sliver and working out the artist's relation to it in the Kenwood portrait activates our sympathy with the body of the artist within pictorial space, endowing it with potential, story-telling motion expressive of the soul, though the story be so trivial—or grand—as the prospect of the artist turning to his canvas and back again—again and again—to paint what he has been observing, memorizing and inventing.

Philip Verene's reflections on the eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico, often regarded as the first autobiographer, help to explain why the transformation of the figure of the artist in the Kenwood portrait is important: 'Autobiographical knowledge, which is certainly self-knowledge, is dependent upon a move in thought from reflective understanding to speculative thinking in which the self becomes the maker of the truth of its own being' (Verene 1991, p. 87). Noticing the sliver back engenders the same kind of shift in self portraiture and guarantees our perception of a transition between two characteristically seventeenth-century conceptions of the self. One is the permanent self, the enduring subject of consciousness that many philosophers dwelt on. It is secured by our initial sense that Rembrandt is looking at us—and subsequently at himself—for such a protracted period of time and with such lowered defenses that we see whom he 'really' is. Realizing that he is about to break his pose to paint the memory of what he saw introduces us to a different experience of time. The enduring self, the permanent subject

of consciousness, gives way to a changing self: 'what one is at a particular time' (such as 'my former self' or 'my later self) or 'what one is in part' (Rosenthal 2005, pp. 14–15). The commonsense view may have been that a self can be enduring and changing, and that a fragmented, momentary self has always been a minority view in philosophy, but the experience of attending to Rembrandt's figure tends to separate these alternatives out. Since he now returns his own gaze to himself instead of engaging with us, this narrower sense of professional self intervenes and his gaze appears purposeful and instrumental, so that he gazes to remember what he sees and so be able, in the next instant, to paint it.

Usually the permanent and changing selves are in conflict as they would be in Beckmann's self portrait were his permanent self not tantamount to a social mask. But the changing self of the Kenwood portrait *sublates* the permanent self rather than replaces it. It preserves it, that is, as a partial element in the synthesis. When it dawns on us that Rembrandt's permanent self is going to break pose and take his brushes to paint the unseen side of the sliver back, and that he is observing himself primarily for this purpose, that purpose nevertheless includes the capture of his permanent self. But how could a changing self incorporate a permanent self? Would it not be the equivalent of pouring a quart into a thimble? Perhaps another way of putting it is that the changing self processes the long-term memory of the artist's enduring self into the short term or 'working memory' of the image he will carry from the mirror to the canvas. 'My history needs to be adapted to the moment', wrote Montaigne (2003, p. 740). As I remarked earlier, once noticed, the transition from one self to another is irreversible; they do not oscillate and undermine each other as they do in the deliberately unstable, consciously contradictory, Beckmann self portrait.

A mechanism of deferral is required to mentor our participation in this change of consciousness. In *The Navigation of Feeling: a Framework for the History of Emotions*, William M. Reddy has eloquently argued that 'An utterance is endowed with the capacity to reveal structure by a deferral, a delay that gives the utterance unity, from beginning to end, and allows parts and their relationships to emerge from this unity. An utterance can, in this way, seem to convey meaning or to be driven by an intention' (Reddy 2001, p. 321). Just as several interpretations in the voluminous literature on *Las Meninas* depended upon deferred understanding of the painting's structure (Cohen and Snyder 1980), so does Reddy's account of utterance as a unified event apply to the Kenwood portrait. The all-important consequence is that once the possibility is entertained that the artist is on the point of carrying the memory of himself to paint it on the hidden side of the sliver, his facial expression becomes irradiated with intentionality.

It is possible to speculate upon the nature of Rembrant's intention. In this period artists understood that customers' familiarity with their portraits 'enhanced their popularity at least as much as the engravings made after their compositions' (Zsuzna 2005, p. 135). The variable, *non-finito* quality of Rembrandt's paintwork reflected a shift of interest away from subject matter towards an aesthetic and commercial interest in signed paintings that bears witness to a master's characteristic personal

style. In refraining from giving all-over finish to his image, Rembrandt is pursuing a *non-finito* style that had appealed to a class of connoisseurs more interested in virtuosity than illusionism. In this sense mimesis could then apply to the capture of memory in the artist's memorable style. Houbraken reports that Rembrandt was never dissuaded from his practice of working certain parts of his paintings up in detail while leaving others inchoate, 'saying in justification that a work is finished when the master has achieved his intention in it' (Houbraken, quoted Wetering, in White 1990, p. 34). I attach the utmost importance to this phrase as it applies to the Kenwood portrait. The filtered and diffuse matrix of conspicuous brushstrokes that constitute the image represents the successful attainment of his intention to represent himself—just enough and no more—to satisfy the eyes of imaginary connoisseurs eager to purchase examples of his idiosyncratic skill. That is another reason why the level of finish appears to fluctuate, so that the memory of the artist continues to build and rebuild itself in paint. The transformation I have outlined in the meaning of Rembrandt's figure is contingent on relationships with connoisseurs through the agency of a sliver painting rendered as an image not a thing. It is an inter-subjective compound of what Rembrandt made and the intentionality he invites us to read in it. Once again this draws the painting back from the brink of materialism that Alpers attributes to it, for the soul re-enters the equation through the successful communication of the intention to project a memory of the future act of painting. Both the actual painting and the evanescent fragments represented in it, moreover—brushes, cloth, maul stick, palette and sliver back—embody the idea that objects and people in paintings are not entirely distinct 'and that the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations' (Appadurai 2006, p. 15).

The principle is illustrated by Rembrandt's relationship with the mirror he paints himself in. So far my argument seems to have neglected that second phase of our viewing in which we realize that the artist's focus on the mirror leaves him in solitude and cuts the spectator out of the equation, but we all know that sociality need not depend upon the immediate company of others. Imagination of social relationship can indeed be enhanced by physical isolation. My supposition has been that Rembrandt did not want the spectator to construe the derivation of his image in a mirror straightaway, but that he did want it construed eventually. It was a mirror that those in the know might have recognized as one of the larger, seventeenth-century kinds that allowed the torso to be reflected down to the hips (Wetering, in White 1990, p. 13). Perhaps, like evidence of the *camera obscura* in Vermeer's painting, there was status in oblique signs of owning such property. Where sociality is concerned it is useful to recall Jacques Lacan's dictum that the 'infant is split between identification with the mirror reflection and alienation from it as it realizes that it is an object for the gaze of others'. Mirrors convey sociality by rehearsing the process through which the 'infant is split between identification with the mirror reflection and alienation from it as it realizes that it is an object for the gaze of others' (Lacan, summarized in Woods-Marsden 1998, p. 34). Vermeer demonstrates this understanding in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (circa 1660–1665) when he represents a woman leaning on tiptoe, holding forward a necklace to a mirror to see how it will look on her. She is imagining how she will look in the eyes of others. Likewise,

Rembrandt's solitary image of himself in the Kenwood portrait was a vicarious engagement with his clientele, mentoring them still more in the taste by which he knew they wished to receive him. Solitary gazing in the mirror, therefore, is a surrogate for social interaction, for in painting by himself Rembrandt was also painting for imaginary connoisseurs who wished to see an image of him and his style in the same painting. The mirror image shows him internalized within prior social relations. At a time when his fame had spread quite broadly, 'Rembrandt's activities before the mirror should be seen in large measure in the context of a growing demand for "portraits of Rembrandt done by himself"… as self-portraits were referred to in the seventeenth century' (Wetering 2005, p. xxv). This takes place within a far wider taste for paintings of artists amongst a growing number of art-lovers. When Rembrandt painted Rembrandt, he was never quite alone, though his stance always seems personalized for reception by each and every viewer. Since painting is an act of imaginary communication, no self-portraitist ever is alone.

A proof of this is a self portrait at a far remove from the Kenwood portrait that perhaps comes closest to an ideal expression of solitude and yet ultimately fails to be so. It is Paul Cézanne's sliver painting, *Cézanne á la Palette* (1890) whose fascination for this viewer lies in the degree to which the impersonality of the artist's expression—cross-eyed as it is through the simultaneous focus of each eye on canvas and mirror-image respectively—seems to close the circuit of mirror, artist and milieu against the spectator completely, as if the artist were merely another inanimate object in the room. Nevertheless, there is exciting evidence of will power in the way that the artist holds his body and his shield-like palette so that they reinforce a series of rectangles that sharpen in their forward progression from amorphous patterns on the wall, through the stocky figure in the rounded, rectangular overcoat to the sharply delineated palette held rigidly parallel with the picture plane and finally the reversed canvas occupying the foremost plane on the right. This implies agency in the depicted human subject and not just in the way the painting is composed. Such voluntary conformity to a static pattern of inert objects in which the implied mirror closes the visual circuit nevertheless cannot avoid the impression that a viewer other than the artist overlooks the artist's strictly circumscribed field of vision. The agency is 'for' a viewer who includes the artist but who is ultimately everyone who looks at it. The special nature of the communication given to all is in Cézanne's case, however, the possibility of the artist's solipsistic communion with himself. It is that which is so paradoxically 'shared' with us. It does not, as Rembrandt's portrait does, so readily (if tardily) invite the appreciation of the specialist connoisseur, though certainly our prior knowledge that Cézanne worked in this solitude contributes to this claim.

I have moved from consideration of the soul back to the self and, in the case of working memory, to neuropsychology. As far as I am aware there is a lacuna in scholarship on the historical relationship between the self and the soul. The issue of David Hume's conflation of self and soul is highly contested, but it seems that he used these terms interchangeably in his eighteenth-century philosophical writings, which seem to represent a transitional phase between old and new regimes of subjectivity. If I now attempt to align the structure of pictorial and emotional

transformation I have outlined in the Kenwood portrait with the workings of the soul in the period 'before the self', a suggestive analogy arises between them and the implied movement of Rembrandt's figure. In Western philosophy and theology there are strong analogies between the turning of gazes and the conversion of souls. According to Charles Taylor, Plato maintained that 'just as the physical eye can only be turned by swiveling the whole body, so the whole soul must be turned to attain wisdom' (Taylor 1989, p. 123). For Augustine, too: '[t]he soul must be swiveled around; it has to change the direction of its attention/desire. For the whole moral condition of the soul depends ultimately on what it attends to and loves' (Taylor 1989, p. 128). In asking whether the imminent turning of Rembrandt's gazing body from mirror to canvas carries associations from this tradition, it must be acknowledged that Rembrandt's turn is counter-spiritual in so far as it turns from contemplating the immutable to acting on the most mutable of things: a painting under construction. Turning from an attitude of reverie to one of active memory, careful scrutiny (in Poussin's sense of looking), and purposeful action entails a tremendous act of detachment for both the artist and spectator and an equally tremendous renewal of empathy for a new subject: the artist who can communicate all this. While departing from the Platonic tradition of inwardness it closely corresponds to René Descartes' contention that we realize the immaterial nature of our being by disengaging from bodily perspectives in order to adopt an attitude of detachment towards the world, including our bodies, so that we may purposefully act upon them. The task requires the same sort of switch between first- and third-person perspectives that I commented upon earlier in relation to self portraiture. There, though, it entailed change from the general artist figure making art to Rembrandt painting himself. Now it is a change from Rembrandt in spiritual communion with the viewer (and afterwards himself) to Rembrandt observing and painting himself as if he were a stranger. Charles Taylor charts the corresponding move in Cartesian philosophy: 'In view of its transposition of first-person experience into an objectified, impersonal mode, it might seem surprising to class the stance of disengaged control as a modified figure of Augustinian inwardness. But the paradox is merely superficial. Radical reflexivity is central to this stance, because we have to focus on first-person experience in order so to transpose it.' It is only when 'we try to get clearer on what we feel about some person or event' (Taylor 1989, p. 163) that we can take an impersonal stance towards it, a stance of detachment that, paradoxically enough, invites empathy with someone as they 'really are'. This enables exactly the sublation of a permanent into a changing self that seemed problematic in my earlier argument. We realize our spiritual and permanent being by distancing ourselves 'from all the particular features which are objects of potential change' (Taylor 1989, p. 171), but the distancing is itself a change enacted by a punctual self, a self acting in the moment. The image reflected in the mirror that Rembrandt is about to carry in his working memory to paint on canvas is not his true being, however, because for both Rembrandt and Descartes true being has more the character of a verb than a noun. It is an imminent shaping power that exists 'nowhere but in this power to fix things as objects' (Taylor 1989, p. 172), in what it promises to become rather than what it presently is. As such, it is unpicturable, and not the static correspondence or

resemblance van de Wetering and other advocates of Rembrandt's exclusive realism insist it is.

But why should the act of painting be unpicturable? Why omit the act of putting brush to canvas if it is nothing more than reducing the stigma of manual work, preserving the secrets of the trade (Wetering 2000, p. 6) or concealing the literal left-handedness of the mirror image? Why not delight the connoisseur by preserving the original attitude shown in the X-ray, where the artist was reaching brush in hand towards the canvas, especially since he depicted himself as such on other occasions?[8] The deeper reason may be that here the occlusion of the hidden side of the sliver back and the artist's hand about to work on it creates the impression that the painter's creative act is structurally unpicturable, not just jealously concealed. As we look at Rembrandt he is not merely observing and remembering himself, but working out how to turn his own image into a structure that could be translated onto canvas by recalibrating thousands of visual relationships whose overall relation to each other could be changed at one stroke. Though not an authority on seventeenth-century art, the novelist Henry James is useful to call on here for his incisive formulation of the dilemma of representing the painter's distinctive achievement. In his reflections on the fictional character of the artist Nick Dormer in the 1908 preface to the New York edition of *The Tragic Muse*, James muses on the hubris of a word-smith attempting to capture what an artist achieves in paint. To make his point he aptly reaches for a literary image that negates itself:

> Any presentation of the artist *in triumph* must be flat in proportion as it really sticks to its subject … For, to put the matter in an image, all we then—in his triumph—see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work. 'His' triumph, decently, is but the triumph of what he produces, and that is another affair. … The privilege of the hero—that is of the martyr or of the interesting and appealing and comparatively floundering *person*—places him in quite a different category, belongs to him only as to the artist deluded, diverted, frustrated or vanquished; when the 'amateur' in him gains, for our admiration or compassion or whatever, all that the expert has to do without. (James 1908, p. xxi)[9]

Instead of reversing his back to become a *rückenfigur* (a person seen from behind) as James's artist does here, Rembrandt reversed his canvas to leave the missing act of creation immanent in the viewer's expectations. Since the end result is the moment before the action we are left to imagine, a tangle of tenses results: the image of a memory of the artist about to do something that in real time had just been completed a very long time ago by now.

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[8] For example, *Self Portrait at the Window, Drawing on an etching-Plate* (1648) and *Self Portrait at the Easel* (1660), where the hand with brushes was once positioned closer to the reversed panel.

[9] Of the unpicturable mystery of what artists do in James's novels, Maurice Beebe observes (1964), p. 222: 'Five appearances of the turned-back image do not, of course, prove that James used it always deliberately, but it seems significant that the five turned backs represent almost the same thing in each instance. To repeat, it matters not what the artist does in the world, how he dresses, what company he frequents; for when he creates, he inevitably withdraws to a private realm. The detachment of the artist is rooted in an innate consciousness that transforms and vitalizes normal perception, that actually "*makes* life." Thus James was able to use the turned back of the artist to symbolize the "artist *in triumph*."'

Returning to the discussion of the historical origin of the embodied pictorial self and its precipitation from doctrines of the soul, it seems far more convincing to connect Rembrandt with the leading thinker of his day than with Henry James's late Romantic aesthetic. But while several clues, including Rembrandt's drawing of Descartes, connect their lives in Antwerp (Wright 2007, pp. 275–276), strict analogies between Rembrandt's self portraits and Descartes' meditations on the mind-body dualism flounder on the intrinsic differences between painting and philosophy as forms of communication, especially since Descartes' position on the dualistic mind is complex, hence open to multiple or misinterpretation.

On the one hand Descartes initiated a division between soul and body in rejecting the scholastic followers of Aristotle, but equally, on the other hand, in adopting Plato's division of body and soul, he was in no textbook sense a 'sharp separator'. In fact there is variation in his position. Whereas the 'Cogito' principle ('I am thinking, therefore I am') establishes the existence of soul as distinct from the body in the first Meditation of the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), it appears to be denied in the second Meditation (Garber 1998, n.p.). In her essay on Rembrandt and Descartes, J. Leonore Wright provides useful commentary by suggesting that Descartes wished 'to diminish the wedge between mind and body' without eradicating it (2007, p. 284). This was because '[t]hought *must* be coupled with a supervening force, like memory, and a physical substance, like the body, to enjoy unity over time (and not merely mathematical unity but metaphysical and psychological unity as well)' (Wright 2007, p. 283). This may characterize the way Rembrandt contrives the impression of continuity between an abiding soul and a changing self, to mix the terms at this point. At best, however, perhaps only a loose analogy can be claimed between Rembrandt and Descartes. They were both interactionists whose works convey a strong sense of interplay between empathy and detachment in articulating the soul's relation to matter. I cannot therefore go so far as Wright in pronouncing with certainty on their differences by claiming that for Rembrandt 'the knowledge, fear and eventuality of death unifies the dualistic mind and body expressed in early Cartesian thought' (Wright 2007, p. 288). If I am correct in suggesting that Rembrandt's Kenwood self portrait represents an intention in the form of a memory, then perhaps he anticipates David Humes's conviction that, if the self is not to be split, introspection can only take the form of retrospection, and that we are not aware of our 'states as we have them but, rather, of our *immediate memories* of those states' (von Eckhardt 1988, n.p.). This would support Arthur Wheelock's contention that Rembrandt genuinely anticipated the unique, interiorized, unified self of later times because 'the myth of Rembrandt as isolated genius did not first emerge in the Romantic era … but was fostered and developed by the artist himself' (Wheelock 1997, p. 16). Even this, though, may provide only a reductionist account of Rembrandt as rebel at the expense of the multivalent nature of the interactions he is likely to have entered with patrons and clients (Zell 2011). Rather than joining body and soul that Descartes (sometimes) pulled asunder, I have shown why I incline to the view that the Kenwood figure is not an embodied self, but retains a distance from embodiment (enhanced by our deferred understanding) by which the soul gains purchase on matter, matter that is firstly to be conceived of as paint, but secondarily

as a memory of a particular person expressing purposeful intention through bodily action, an illusion forever recomposing itself from inert skeins of paint. As the representation of a rational and purposeful activity inviting acknowledgement from committed connoisseurs (Adams 2009, p. 105), this imminent act of painting sets up a tension between the experience of being in which we feel ourselves to be embodied creatures and a thinking thing that Descartes, and perhaps also Rembrandt, conceived of as distinct from the body. From the qualities I have argued for in the painting, this view is at least as tenable as Wright's view that body and soul are one in Rembrandt's image of himself. At the meta-level there may be an art historical lesson in the measure of uncertainty that abides in choosing between these alternatives. In relation to philosophy, art history partakes of the tensions between general theory and local knowledge in the sense that images arise from material practices that are not simply ideas, though they are deeply and often contradictorily informed by ideas, including those whose meaning is still open to debate.

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