

MY FAVORITE DERRIDA QUOTE

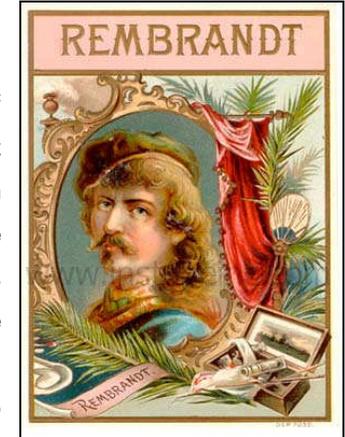
It comes anti-climactically at the beginning of his relentless *Restitutions de la vérité en peinture* (translated as "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing" by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod). He writes (and I translate):

"Let us posit axiomatically that the desire to attribute is a desire to appropriate. In art as in everything else. To say (this picture or pair of shoes) reverts to X, amounts to saying: this reverts to me by way of the thought 'this reverts to (some) one!'"

Name-dropping is inevitable in the history of art, but it is a questionable practice all the same (see entry 35). On one level, every occurrence of the name "Rembrandt" in connection with a verb attributing an action to him is a piece of fiction (I originally wrote "piction"), for it diverts the attention away from the author who is composing the alleged action. This is why I gave my introduction the odd-looking title "**@embran[d]t™**", which is the way Rembrandt's name, as ongoing cultural creation, commercial product, and intellectual phenomenon in the public domain should be written, if we were honest and rigorous enough.

No one really knows what Rembrandt really did and when—today less than ever. But writing that "in the year so-and so, Rembrandt did so and so" involves a mystical participation in an aura of which the writer is seldom, if ever, aware, for awareness of it would make the writing of history almost impossible. It is the aura of truth, of authentic, authorized knowledge, the apparent opposite of fiction and fantasy. This is what distinguishes it from the subjectively-tinged inventions of the novelist, who regains in credit what he loses in credibility. Yet historical truth rests on the belief that this truth, as fact, connects us to an unbroken chain of facts that stretches all the way back to Rembrandt's doing so and so in the year so and so., while we look over his shoulder and sigh.

Rembrandt is powerful medicine, there is no doubt of that. Why do we need repeated doses of it, and why do some of us never get enough? Gazing up at a distant summit is a more edifying experience than looking down at the dust at our feet, one would think. But Rembrandt's greatness comes from his having given such close attention to smears of paint that they could remain smears of paint, while resolving into the spitting image of a human presence or experience when viewed at a certain distance. He attended to surfaces with such devotion that he could create, not just the mere illusion, but the sensation of space and depth. Who noticed that I shifted into the fictional—I should have said "pictional"—mode without so much as saying "Simon says"?



This happens constantly in the writing and reading of history. Apparently we would be faced with an impossibility, if this impossibility were not what makes the writing of true stories so necessary. It demands not a "willful suspension of disbelief," but a willful indulgence in belief" that gives us an enhanced feeling of existence because it connects us to the dream of (a) more powerful being measured in terms of the paying of attention. Attention attracts. The mere mention of a name can be enough to get a whiff of it. It was Marcel Duchamp (see entry 72) who said that art was a habit-forming drug, even more for the artist than for the collector. Since he was a smoker and chess addict, I assume that he knew what he was talking about. Knowing this I can better understand his strategies to distill an ever more potent product with less and less effort and side effects, and why he has been suspected of alchemy. If, as Robert Lebel claimed, Duchamp's use of his time was his greatest work of art, we will never know what it was really about, but it is still a good hint.