



*From the desk of Pierre Beaudry*



## **A GLANCE OUT OF REMBRANDT’S SELF-PORTRAITS.**

by Pierre Beaudry, 12/21/2009



### **INTRODUCTION: PAINTING THE SHADOWS OF THE HUMAN SOUL.**

*“I do not care so much for honor as I do for liberty.” Rembrandt van Rijn.*

*“Rembrandt seems to have felt that he had to know himself if he wished to penetrate the problem of man’s inner life.” Jacob Rosenberg.*

As if he were treating the subject of a timeless universal physical principle, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) painted his own portrait to reflect the life of a self-conscious scientific investigator, and, in doing that, he was able to capture the shadows of the creative process. What he portrayed was not some romantic fantasy like the foolish artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who advertised how they “feeeel.” What he discovered and painted in his self-portraits was not just Rembrandt the individual, but Rembrandt the universal man, the creative individual caught red-handed in the act of discovering his creative humanity. During the course of his lifetime, Rembrandt painted almost 90 self-portraits, an average of three a year, representing a rigorous exercise of painting the shadows of the human soul.

The fact that Rembrandt did so many self-portraits is an extraordinary anomaly. The cause of this anomaly can be found in the fact that Rembrandt was the best

individual he could find who was willing to be subjected to such a rigorous experiment of expressing the secrets of the creative soul with the intention of educating the observer. Rembrandt understood well how light and shadow were the best visual means of expressing human development, because those are the two physical characteristics of the universe that most resemble the delicate fugitive behavior of human emotions. But, who could be the best subject for this experiment, outside of himself? So, his self-portraits were consciously designed to express the dramatic qualities of what comes and goes, is born and dies in the human soul and between human souls. It is as if light and self-consciousness were always meant to be the two companions best suited to work together in the task of piercing through the window of his own perception. One look through the window of his eyes and you can see the intention of his soul. The question here is: “what does he see behind the shadow screen of his vista?”

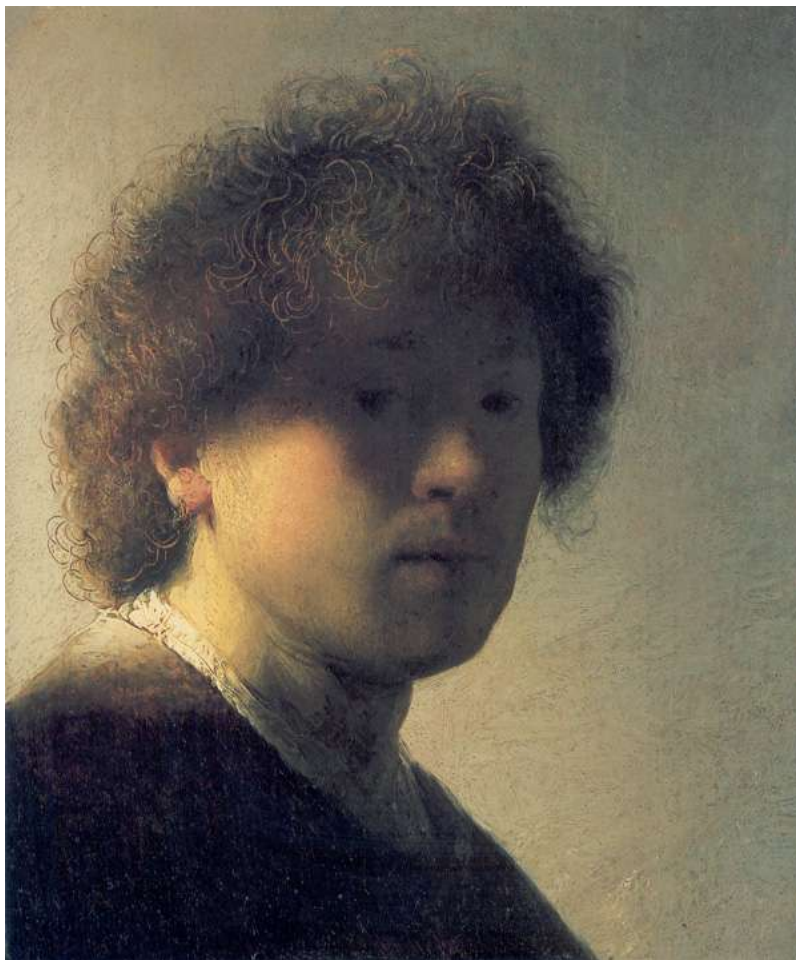


Figure 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-portrait*, (1628). **Paradigm of a cultural isotope.**

The thick window of perception is not an easy obstacle to pierce through if one wishes to discover the treasures of the mind, but Rembrandt explored this unbeaten pathway. What this pathway provides you with is a screen that you must study to discover the contradictions of perception. A self-portrait is such a screen of reality that

filters through the most intimate thoughts of the artist and leaves out the unwanted impurities.

Take this *Self-portrait of 1628* (Figure 1) for example. What ideas are filtering through? This remarkable study in *chiaroscuro* is already defining Rembrandt's genial method. Though his face is almost entirely in darkness, that darkness itself is meant to act like a powerful magnet attracting the spectator into studying his scrutinizing eyes to see into the mirror of his own soul. By pulling the spectator into that shadow in this manner, Rembrandt showed his commitment to classical artistic composition, and his intention to effect a change in mankind. The intention of his paintings is not for contemplation or for entertainment, but to pose a creative problem for the observer to identify and solve. What emotion is he portraying and how do you solve the paradox it poses? This 1628 painting is one of the first experiments in which Rembrandt succeeded in accomplishing that intended purpose. This is why, once you have begun to look into the shadow of his eyes, you are caught in his web and the process of change is already at work in you. In that sense, this early self-portrait should be viewed as the paradigm for all of the many others that will follow.

Rembrandt's purpose was recognized by Constantijn Huygens, the secretary of the Stadhouder, Frederick Henry, and father of Christian Huygens, who acknowledged in 1630, that what Rembrandt produced surpassed all other artists of his day "by his judgment and ability to express emotions." Huygens, who was also a personal friend of Rembrandt's said that his works were comparable to "everything that has been created during Antiquity and in Italy: here, the beardless son of a Batavian miller, has already surpassed the Greek painters, Protogene, Apelle, and Pharrhasios." (*Tout l'Oeuvre de Rembrandt*, Paris, Flammarion, 1971, p. 84.) It was through Huygens that Rembrandt became familiar with Leonardo da Vinci's *Notebooks*.

Once you begin to scrutinize Rembrandt's scrutiny of your involvement, the second step is to discover that Rembrandt is announcing, from behind the curtain of shadows, that the only way to discover the truth of the creative process is by looking through the flawed perception of a type 'A' personality. Rembrandt, thus, was already making visible the intention of the type 'B' personality, which was to make you access a truth that had never been shown before in this form of artistic composition. Never in the history of art had anyone made of self-portraiture a specific medium for investigating creativity. Leonardo had used religious subjects for a similar purpose, such as *The Last Supper*, and *The Virgin of the Rocks*, but never had an artist chosen self-portraiture for subjecting the viewer to the creative process of the artist.

Thus, Rembrandt had created an entirely new form of cultural isotope, that is to say, a new and higher combinational arrangement based on the same elementary artistic form of self-portraiture. Rembrandt transformed self-portraiture into the higher function of an epistemological mirror for the purpose of transforming the observer. The irony of this change in artistic composition was to add to the purpose of the classical artistic palette a higher form of composition that was aimed at educating the mind in capturing something through the senses that was not meant for the senses. In other words, the

intention is precisely to teach the senses to be at the service of the creative process. Here is how Lyn put this question of elementary transmutation in his most recent paper on *National Banking*:

“The fact is that, just as the chemical composition of the array of chemical elements and isotopes of the Solar planetary system reflects the generation of higher ranking elements of the periodic table of chemistry, higher than those which are reported from observation of the body of the Sun itself, so, creativity exists only “outside” the domain of what had existed under what had been known as preceding, *reductionist* states of local nature. Similarly, all net progress in human existence, is a product of a practice of breaking through every level which could be adduced from the earlier state of the relevant part of the universe, from progress defined as *that which has been born, like the mind of a child, from the domain of the previous unknown.*” (Lyndon H. LaRouche, *National Banking*, Morning Briefing, Sunday, December 20, 2009, p. 56 of 111.)

Thus, following Lyn’s proposal to revive the need for nation-states to develop their respective language-culture, it is urgent to establish the required parameters for classical artistic composition in order to transform the currently backward cultural heritage of the present world. New cultural isotopes are required for the creation of a completely new culture of the solar system. However, how can one reform one’s own culture to conform to a new solar system requirement? What unknown does such a change require? Lyn answered that question in an earlier report:

“When you search – Look, when you get in stress, and you have to come up with ideas, and search inside yourself for ideas which are possible solutions to problems which you’ve not faced before, what’re you looking for? You’re looking inside yourself. You looking inside the cultural potential you have inside yourself, which is almost semiconscious, or unconscious. You’re looking for it. Which will enable you, as if by surprise, to get a kind of thinking, a kind of idea you never thought you had before. Hmm? Therefore, without promotion of culture, and without promotion of *Classical artistic composition*, which is the natural, healthy expression of culture, you have destroyed the ability of the human mind *to develop valid ideas of discovery.*” (Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr., *The World Has Changed this Week*, Morning Briefing, Sunday, December 6, 2009.)

This is precisely the situation that Rembrandt found himself confronted with in Leyde, when the *Thirty Years War* had already advanced into its 8<sup>th</sup> year. Think of the despair of civilization we find ourselves in, today, 7 years after the beginning of the Iraq War, which the British Empire also intended to be a new *Thirty Years War*. Are we not in a similar situation, today, where the world needs to restore the method of discovering new cultural isotopes as Rembrandt provided for his own time and for the future? So, let’s investigate Rembrandt’s method and discover what he had to offer.

## 1- HOW REMBRANDT DEVELOPED THE DYNAMICS FOR CREATING NEW CULTURAL ISOTOPES

Since the appearance of new isotopes inside of the solar system is the lawful result of the higher dynamics of creativity of the universe on itself, that is, generated from the outside of the domain of the Sun itself, similarly, the following dynamics for the creation of a new cultural isotope by Rembrandt will show us how to break through all of the obstacles in order to create a new and higher form of artistic composition from outside of the already known processes of generating self-portraits. Think of it as the combination of a catenary-tractrix process similar to the inversion of a monetary system turned into a credit-system in which large-scale international contracts must become integrated into the national economies of sovereign nation states. It's the same sort of idea.

Lyn showed us how to create such new cultural isotopes by taking two crucial steps. First, you must start by repudiating all the garbage that is called modern art. You must look into yourself and, especially, get rid of all of the counter-cultural garbage that the Congress for Cultural Freedom, for instance, has thrown at humanity since World War II. The second step you must take, and this is the most important one, is to look into yourself for the creative source of culture, that is, to look for the idea of developing the sense of irony that represents the dynamics of classical artistic composition. One of the best places you can find out how to do that is in the self-portraits of Rembrandt, which represent the anti-entropic dynamics of his entire life's work that he dedicated to you, the spectator. For example, the following three self-portraits that I have introduced below will show you how Rembrandt used irony in order to create the dynamics of a discovery of principle.

During a period of about 43 years, from 1626 to his death in 1669, Rembrandt painted close to 90 self-portraits as ironic studies representing human emotions ranging from perplexity, melancholia, surprise of discovery, joyful laughter, anger, arrogance, and so forth. He has treated just about every emotion that can be related, one way or another, to the process of creativity, or to the lack thereof. However, no matter what emotion he chose to display, Rembrandt was not expressing something that was self-evident. He was expressing change in what appeared to be self-evident. For example, just as an elementary pedagogical exercise, take my choice of three self-portraits representing what I would identify, in succession, the process of creativity as expressed by **Perplexity; Discovery; and Laughter**. How do these three self-portraits relate to each other as visible forms of a higher non-visible axiomatic change, a Riemannian change in the creative process?

First, consider them separately as three different and consecutive changing states of consciousness. Of course, they were produced at relatively different times and different circumstances during his life, but remember also that Rembrandt had a memory of each of those changes, either on hand or on record sitting in the back of his mind. Thus, you are observing in slow motion here, an experiment that subsumes, in the

simultaneity of eternity, three moments of relatively distinct physical space-time events into a unique rate of change of the creative process. As in the case of any point along a catenary curve, any glance out of this rate of change expresses the dynamics of the curvature as a whole.

Taken individually, one by one, each of these three self-portraits expresses a specific emotional state of mind that relates to a precise qualitative level of development of Rembrandt's mind. What you see, in the changes between them, is the physical space-time rate of creative mentation of three discontinuous emotions reflecting three singularities of the process of creativity in the simultaneity of eternity of his lifetime. *As such, consider all three states together representing a single unity of effect that does not reflect a particular change, but a rate of change that is observable only from a fourth higher level of consciousness.* Each of the three self-portraits is an expression of a level of relativistic physical space-time, but a fourth level of consciousness bridges the discontinuities through the discovery of principle that dominates Rembrandt's active life during a period of 33 years of development. This is how the principle of poetic irony takes the form of simultaneity of eternity connecting different relativistic events in physical space-time. So, it is only with this fourth level in mind, that you can truly understand each case separately. So, what emotion does each self-portrait reflect, specifically?



Figure 2. *Self-portrait, (1629). Perplexity.*



**Perplexity** is the most important emotion that unlocks the door to the discovery of some important truth. It is the key that unlocked the state of mind of the slave boy in Plato's *Meno* when he discovered he was at first incapable of finding the solution for doubling the square. Here, Rembrandt painted his own eyes in the shadows in a way reminiscent of the *Self-portrait (1628)* to attract the viewer inside of his thought, but those eyes are much more inquisitive. His mouth is very different and is shown half-opened expressing bewilderment. The general effect is the state of ambiguity, as if he were confronted by a contradiction in his perception, that is to say, by something that should not be there, but which is staring him in the face just the same. The next step is the discovery of the cause of this anomaly.



Figure 3. *Self-portrait (1630)*. **Discovery.**

**Discovery** is the state of excitement in your mind when you find the cause of the anomaly that made you perplexed. Then, what happens is that your face lights up and your eyes open wide. This is a higher level of consciousness where you say: "Aha! This was the cause of my perplexity." This is the level of truthfulness that takes you out of your false enthusiasm about a discovery, or out of your blocking when you organize or you do research.

**Perplexity** and **Discovery** represent the two faces of the same coin, where one side is the inversion of the other. **Discovery** is the level of the poetic irony of the truth,

which is a very joyous and stunning state of mind, characteristic of the actual discovery of a higher plateau of thinking that you did not know existed before and that you could access only by way of the truth. That state is the actual moment of the discovery of principle. Moreover, the excitement of that moment makes you discover that you can replicate it, again and again, by making others go through the same steps of the process. Here, Rembrandt's eyes are no longer in the shadows and express total surprise, staring at the spectator, as if to say to him: "Hey! Do you see what I see in your mind?" His mouth also expresses the sense of surprise with a touch of theatrical realization of the truth. Rembrandt seems to be saying to us: "So, this is what it was all about!"



Figure 4. *Self-portrait*, (1662). **Laughter.**

Thirdly, **Laughter** is the joyful and joking state of mind that comes after the truthfulness of a discovery of principle has been confirmed. Leibniz's favorite expression describing this level of consciousness was to say: "*It is quite easy. It is like child's play.*" This third level of discovery is the state of playfulness of the mind that takes over your whole personality when you come to realize that the purpose of such an experiment was nothing but an actual axiomatic change that you thought was impossible to accomplish. It



is the level of consciousness where you realize that the only thing worth doing is the impossible, after you have realized that nothing else will work except to change. Note the nearly invisible profile of Heraclites on the upper left edge of the self-portrait. Rembrandt has included the “stern” profile of Heraclites watching over him, from higher up, as if to remind himself and the spectator that everything changes. The only thing that doesn’t change is change itself.

## 2- AS THIEVES OF TRUTH UPON THE SENSE-PERCEPTION OF OUR IMAGINATION



Figure 5. *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* (1653). **Sense Deception.**

The Heraclites joke of the *Self-portrait (1662)* is the same sort of irony that Rembrandt displayed in his well-known *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer (1653)*. Look at this painting as the characterization of the type ‘A’ personality failing to understand a type ‘B’ personality. (Figure 5.) The face of Aristotle reflects a completely stupefied state of melancholia, as opposed to perplexity. Aristotle is the best historical example of a mind that is totally blinded by sense-perception and earthly honors, and who has no sense at all of what the genius of Homer represented for civilization. His richly draped shirt covered with an apron adorned with a flashy jewel laden gold chain makes clearly the point that he is a rich man covered with honors, while Homer was known to be old, poor, and blind, wandering from place to place and singing his poetry.

This is the reason why Lyn always likes to play on the inversion of this portrait where it is Homer who contemplates the blind Aristotle. It is as if the Bust of Homer were looking directly into the soul of Aristotle and saying to him: “My poor fellow, you don’t seem to understand anything about the superior function of the mind, not even the principle of the catenary chain that is hanging on your hip.” On the other hand, Aristotle seems to be saying: “I cannot believe that Homer could have been such a great visionary. How can you know anything without perception? I guess you just have to accept that freak things will happen. Oh well...”



Figure 6. *Self-portrait, A Beggar Seated on a Bank, (1630). The Rembrandt Paradox.*

Lastly, I want to show you one of Rembrandt's most fascinating self-portraits, *A Beggar Seated on a Bank, (1630)*. Figure 6 represents what I would call Rembrandt's paradox. In that extraordinary etching, Rembrandt drew himself as the helpless wretch of a man reminding passers-by that even if he were not really a beggar, his sympathies were with them, and that he was a defender of their cause. The historical specificity for such an idea is compelling and necessary to identify for our purpose here.

The 1630's were very profitable years for Rembrandt, but they were very difficult for the poor of Amsterdam. Those were the years that followed the madness of the Dutch East India Company creating the world's first stock exchange, in 1602. Within the short

period of only a few decades, in 1637, the greedy bubble of the “Tulipmania” collapsed the Dutch economy. It was during those years of social dislocation and economic breakdown that Rembrandt composed his series of small but very powerful etchings on the subject of the beggar, and sold them for only a few florins to some of his rich clients who had suddenly become poor. The reader can find these etchings in the John Villarino Collection at: [www.a-r-t.com/rembrandt/unframed/](http://www.a-r-t.com/rembrandt/unframed/)

So, in a very profound and human way, but with total irony, Rembrandt showed his rich patrons how he identified with the poor. For him, the poor were not outcasts but dignified individuals who were following in Christ’s footsteps. In fact, one of the scenes he composed in that series was that of Mary and Joseph escaping to Egypt with baby Jesus. With that etching, Rembrandt was celebrating the most famous beggars in history. Rembrandt loved the poor because they had a form of goodness that the rich were unfortunately deprived of. Thus, it was in the faces of beggars that he saw the truth of the human struggle, and he identified with that.

In this self-portrait, it is as if Rembrandt were saying to the viewers passing by without noticing him: “Hey you! Don’t be deceived by your own sense-perception. Can’t you see the irony in the fact that I am a beautiful etching begging to be bought for only a few florins?” Thus, Rembrandt was proving what Lyn demonstrated: that it is by replicating the shadows of reality that are cast as thieves of truth upon the sense-perception of our imagination that one can represent the true construct of the creative process of both science and artistic composition. However, think of this thieving process of shadows as something that has the same function as the double curve of the catenary-tractrix would have in representing the dual function of a growing economy based on a fixed-exchange-rate credit-system. Lyn confirmed this process in the following manner:

“All valid human creativity, as in the instance of the discovery and proof of universal physical and also classical artistic principles, is located, in this way, within the ontological domain of the imagination. The indispensable key to this insight lies in the recognition of the fact that the form of the imagination is not the unreal experience, but as in great Classical poetry, precisely the contrary. It is the imagery of sense-perception which is the fantasy, a fantasy in the sense that sense-perceptions are not usually unreal, but that their value lies in their role as the shadows cast by reality, shadows whose actually real objects of reference lie in the domain beyond the direct reach of sense-certainty considered, mistakenly, in and of itself. It is a domain which we, especially through working through both physical experiment and Classical artistic exploration of sense-experiences, are able to prove, in practice, as being the object which produced the shadows cast as sense-perceptions. This view of the role of the imagination is the true content of what is competently named as being “science.” (Lyndon H. LaRouche, *National Banking*, Morning Briefing, Sunday, December 20, 2009, p. 65 of 111.)

In conclusion, therefore, the point to be made is that the subject of Rembrandt’s self-portraits is never what it appears to be. *A Beggar Seated on a Bank* is one of the best examples of this poetic method. By showing how sense-perception is merely the shadow

of something else that resides in the mind and soul of the spectator, Rembrandt was telling you where the universal physical principle had to be discovered. This poetical method was Rembrandt's way of creating ironies by checking himself against the illusory trappings of going along to get along. Instead, he was trapping you, the spectator, into his mirror of sense-deception in order to make you discover that, not him, but YOU were the true subject of his self-portraits!

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