



From the desk of Pierre Beaudry



REMBRANDT'S *THE NIGHT WATCH* AND THE PARADOX OF CREATIVITY

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“New discoveries in the sphere of his activities, which cast the bread-fed scholar down, delight the philosophical mind.”

Friedrich Schiller.

“My lord, hang this piece in a strong light and where one can stand at a distance, so it will sparkle (*voncken*) at its best.”

Rembrandt.

“Tragedy is not the expression of an error in the behavior of some person, or group of persons, but is, rather, as for Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Schiller, the expression of a systemic defect in an existing culture’s apprehension of the nature of the human species.”

Lyndon LaRouche.

1. THE IRONY OF *THE NIGHT WATCH* TITLE.

The principle of irony in a Classical artistic composition should never be difficult to establish, because irony is the natural state of mind of a creative individual, and it is also the natural form of change in the physical universe as a whole; in other words, ironies have both a delightful and a devastating effect of producing change in the universe as a whole. However, even if every human being is born with the power of that potential, the creative process is not always easy to discover and to exercise, because it requires that the mind be attentive to the little things that most people do not pay attention to, because they are considered insignificant in the eyes of public opinion. So, unless you discipline yourself by training your mind to look for what is not there, or to identify what seems to be there by accident, your creative and imaginative mind is going to remain dormant and its treasures locked up as in a vault of inaccessible ghosts and shadows; because public opinion may work perfectly well in the sphere of lies, but it doesn't do a bit of good in the realm of the truth. Let me exemplify this point with one of the greatest paintings in history, *The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburgh*, (*The Night Watch*) by Rembrandt van Rijn (1609-1669).

Beyond doubt, this masterpiece is one of the most famous and most controversial paintings in history, but it is also one of the least understood of all times. For instance, about a hundred years after its execution, the title of *The Night Watch* was given to this painting by British "Grand Style" perception painter, Joshua Reynolds, who was a proponent of "the aging look" effect in paintings, and wanted people to believe that the darkness of the Rembrandt scene was a mask added on by the aging varnish that he had used. This immediately fed the myth, still circulating to this day, claiming that *The Night Watch* was, actually, a "day watch" that had turned dark out of willful neglect. If you believe that sort of masquerade, then, think again, because either you have failed to understand the first thing about British intelligence, or you have failed to grasp Rembrandt's Platonic method of *chiaroscuro*, or both.

Reynolds just lied to cover up half of the truth. He had given the right title, but for the wrong reason. The truth of the matter is that *The Night Watch* expresses the general dynamic motion of a group of militiamen coming out of the darkness, as if from the inside of Plato's Cave, and moving toward the source of light located outside of the painting where you, the viewers, are situated. That is the way the historical stage of human knowledge is set. From that Platonic vantage point, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* is a pedagogical experiment in axiomatic change: *the intention of the composition is to express the chemistry of what happens to you when you come out of the shadows of sense-perceptions and come to be touched by the light of true knowledge*. However, most people will not understand this staging of their imagination, because they don't operate from principles. Thus, the irony of the painting is based on the ambiguity between this double entendre, between a literal meaning and an inferential meaning, *as if in the double meaning of a metaphor between sense-perception and inferential knowledge, between public opinion and creativity*. So, let me explain this sense-perception meaning first, and the inferential meaning after.

Firstly, the official Rembrandt title of the painting is superficial and purely for sense-perception consumption. That is the social title whose purpose is to identify for public opinion those officials of the

city of Amsterdam who accepted to pose for their immortality at the price of an average of 100 guilders each (1,600 guilders for the entire commission of the painting), some paying more and some paying less, and the two officers, of course, paying for the greatest share. However, in all cases, the musketeers are buying their positions within the painting, and are establishing the value of their worth, in accordance with what they expect to be the degree of brilliance and finish that Rembrandt decided to put on their faces. In a word, they are getting their money's worth. But, are they? Indeed, all of their names appear in equal darkness on the coat of arms shield hanging from the corner of the arcade in the background. Therefore, they have all been equally immortalized.



Figure 1. Rembrandt Van Rijn, *The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburgh, (The Night Watch)* 1642. Amsterdam Rijksmuseum. (Reduced from about 13 by 16 feet to about 12 by 14 feet)

Secondly, the inferential name of *The Night Watch* reflects the true expression of the creative process of artistic composition that is based on irony. In other words, you are witnessing, here, the

creative interplay between the diversified social positions of city officials and the dynamics that Rembrandt created with the chemistry of generating lights and shadows. This is where the chemistry of the painting becomes identical with the chemistry of the mind of its creator. My aim, here, is to show you the ironies that come out of this relationship, and which were introduced in this composition in order to provoke the spectator to discover the process of creativity itself, as opposed to the apparent objects that are represented.

The apparent subject of the entire fresco is the mobilization of a military company put into motion with all of the usual noise and confusion that such a deployment involves, including the clashing of weapons, the excitement of a barking dog, and the rolling of a drum. These shadows, however, are there to hide the true subject of the painting, which is the process of its composition, in which creativity is expressed by a tug of war between sense perception and inferential knowledge. That is a noisy place too, but of a completely different nature. In that sense, *The Night Watch* represents the fundamental and universal characteristic of all true classical artistic composition: a *quid pro quo*. But, in order to discover that irony, you must experiment the sudden appearance of singularities as in Leibniz's test of the *Continuity Principle*. In other words, you have to discover what role a singularity plays in the tug of war between reason and power?

If the reader wishes to pass this test successfully, he or she must recognize that these two titles reflect a single but ambiguous dynamics, whose continuity of effect and fundamental irony of discontinuity, both reside in an extremely curious discontinuity which is very difficult to discover, but which represents perfectly one of only two possible outcomes of this fight between creativity and public opinion, life or death. This is the only singularity inside of the entire painting which has the power to establish the true significance of this historically specific scene. There is no other singularity within this entire fresco that has such an effective and unique force of determination. It is the most astonishing and most disturbing singularity of all, and yet it is made not to be seen. It is the loudest you could ever hear in that circumstance, and yet, and yet it is made not to be heard by anyone. If the spectator were to fail in discovering that discontinuity, he would have no means of understanding the true significance of *The Night Watch*, and what makes it the true Classical artistic composition that it is. However, I will give you a clue: this unique singularity is not made visible unless it is inferred through the slight motion of the hand that brushes it aside as if it were a mere annoying distraction.

From the vantage point of this axiomatic discontinuity, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* represents a true reflection of the creative and social processes of a Classical artistic composition representing the delicate balance between different social conditionings and the treatment of the luxuriant pigments of the paint mixture itself; that is, like psychophysical waves, or layers of a palimpsest that corresponds to the chemistry of Rembrandt's thinking process. In other words, Rembrandt's brush work was a reflection of his thinking process, as replicated most dramatically in all of his self-portraits. The psychological and physical phenomena worked together in the same way, harmonically, and for the same purpose in expressing the same principle. In other words, Rembrandt's masterful brushstrokes generated the same "sparkling effect" on the canvas that his ideas generated in capturing the ironies that he painted.

In fact, there is a note that Rembrandt sent to Huygens in 1639, just before entering into the difficult task of composing *The Night Watch*, and in which he wrote that what he was attempting to accomplish in his art was to express "*die meeste ende die naetuerreelste beweeghelickeijt*." This was

translated into two different ways by art critic, Robert Wallace. One was, “the greatest and most innate emotion” and the other was, “the greatest and most natural movement.” (Robert Wallace, *The World of Rembrandt, 1606-1669*, Time-Life Books, New York, 1968., p. 67.) Although many commentators have reportedly debated extensively on these two questions, separately, both meanings are to be understood as a single one, because Rembrandt succeeded in expressing simultaneously *the internal emotional force of man and the external natural moving dynamics of nature*, two phenomena that are based on the same principle.

However, the brilliance of the painting, which is generated by the irregularities of the painted surface, reflect rays and shadows differently, at different times of the day, such that Rembrandt’s mastery of the *chiaroscuro* is never visible to the physical eye at any one single moment of observation, but only when it causes a universal effect in the mind of the observer. The mastery of this process of exchange between light and shadow, especially in sections that are covered with a light coat of clear varnish, over Lead-white paint, is where the secret of Rembrandt’s method of psychophysical composition lies. This is the secret of the method that Rembrandt taught his student, Samuel van Hoogstraten, to express as a truthful “grasping” of the unity of effect of the intention of the painting. As Hoogstraten wrote about *The Night Watch*:

“The proper masters accomplish that their entire painting is ‘eenweezich’ [a unity in the sense that it subordinates everything to one compositional ‘grasp’] [...] Rembrandt observed that requirement very well in his piece in the ‘Doele’ in Amsterdam, [The Night Watch], but in the opinion of many, he went too far, making more work of the image as a whole as he preferred it than of the individual parts he was commissioned to paint. But this work, however much it may be reproved, will survive all of its rivals, because it is so painterly [schilderagtig] in conception and so lively in its spatial arrangement, and so powerful, that – in the opinion of some people – compared to it, all the other paintings [in the Doelen hall] are like playing cards. Although I would have preferred if he had put more light into it.” (Quoted by Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009 p. 253.)

What Hoogstraten is referring to, here, with respect to “all of its rivals” is the competition in which Rembrandt participated, with five other artists, to celebrate the visit to Amsterdam of the French Queen Mother, Marie de Medicis, in 1638. Therefore, that “one compositional grasp,” identified by Hoogstraten, is precisely the resolution of a higher gestalt capturing the conflict between public opinion and creativity that Rembrandt intended to replicate in *The Night Watch*, because when you go on a round of the city to watch out for potential dangers, you are always looking for little things that no one else would be looking for, and you must always pay attention to all of the insignificant details that might turn out to be anomalies lurking in the dark. The creative mind works in the same fashion.

The chemical equivalent of this mental process is known to modern chemists as thixotropy, which is a flowing effect, for example, of Lead-white paint that is transformed into a fluid and then gels almost instantaneously when a very faint rounding touch to the paint stops moving, and the brush or spatula is lifted immediately from the canvas in order to capture a contrapuntal sort of fugal effect. This is precisely the effect that Rembrandt is provoking the viewer to look for in the workings of his mind. This is what Schiller had also identified as the imperceptible difference between *art for bread* and *art for truth*.

2. THE HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC BACKGROUND.

As Lyn emphasized many times, historical events are not event driven, but epistemologically driven; and, similarly, *The Night Watch* was conceived by Rembrandt not as a specific event in the history of Amsterdam, but rather, as a contribution to the process of developing an epistemologically specific “philosophical truth” of universal history, in the sense that Friedrich Schiller attributed to that science. The execution of this historical portrait, therefore, marked an axiomatic inflection point in universal history, because Rembrandt dared to openly challenge the oligarchical principle in an historical portrait. Although the commission of that painting has not been clearly documented, or may even have been destroyed, we know that this work was executed in competition with five other commissions to city artists from different Militia Companies, during the period of 1638 to 1645, specifically to commemorate the visit of the French Queen Mother. These six paintings were originally hung together at the Musketeer Civic Guard headquarters, the Doelen Hall of Amsterdam, and were to be inspired by the pomp of that royal visit. Needless to say, the competition between artists was intense, and there was great expectation among the different militia officers as to who would have the best seat in the hall of fame of the musketeer universe of the time.

Because of the very nature of that commission, Rembrandt knew what state of mind the other paintings of the Musketeer Companies would represent, even before he had seen them, because he knew what an artist had to go through to survive under the rule of an oligarchic regime, and how reputations were made or broken based on the whims of the rich and powerful. Therefore, he decided to give his own work a sublime character which was to point to the tragic underpinning of the conditions under which all artists have to strive, that is, go through a life and death struggle between *art for bread* and *art for truth*. Schiller later wrote on the subject of this crucial fight that every young man or woman has to wage, in any circumstance, when confronted by the fallacies of public opinion. He wrote:

“Where the bread-fed scholar severs, the philosophical mind unites. He early convinced himself, that everything is intertwined in the field of understanding as well as in the material world, and his zealous drive for harmony cannot be satisfied with fragments of the whole. All his efforts are directed toward the perfection of his knowledge; his noble impatience cannot rest until all of his conceptions have ordered themselves into an organic whole, until he stands at the center of his art, his science, and until from this position outward he surveys its expanse with a contented look. New discoveries in the sphere of his activities, which cast the bread-fed scholar down, delight the philosophical mind. Perhaps they fill a gap which had still disfigured the growing whole of his conceptions, or they set the stone still missing in the edifice of his ideas, which then completes it. Even should these new discoveries leave him in ruins, a new chain of thoughts, a new natural phenomenon, a newly discovered law in the material world overthrow the entire edifice of his science, no matter: *He has always loved truth more than his system*, and he will gladly exchange the old, insufficient form, for a new one, more beautiful. Indeed if no blow from the outside shatters his edifice of ideas, he himself will be the first to tear it apart, discontented, to reestablish it more perfected. Through always new and more beautiful forms of thought, the philosophical mind strides forth to higher excellence, while the bread-fed scholar, in eternal stagnation of mind, guards over the barren monotony of his school-conceptions.”

(Friedrich Schiller, *Poet of Freedom Volume II*, Schiller Institute, Washington D.C., 1988, p. 257.)

This view of creative freedom by Schiller is the best illustration of Rembrandt's intention in executing *The Night Watch*, because it focuses on the very heart of the matter. However, the work has also to be viewed from the standpoint of the history of the Netherlands during the long period of its war of independence, which had been disguised, hypocritically by the Venetians, as a religious war. So, one thing is clear, Rembrandt did not respond to the expectations of what was acceptable to the social interest of the musketeer company of Amsterdam. He decided, instead, to show that the historical situation in Amsterdam was not driven by local events of a social character, but rather by the idea of a universal process of historical change which expressed the very tragic state of mind that the Netherlands had been living under since William I of Orange had come back from Germany in 1568 with a small army of "Beggars."

"Beggar" was the name adopted by a group of noblemen who disguised themselves as such in order to petition Marguerite de Navarre, in 1566, for the support of their right to be Protestants and to abolish the inquisition. From that moment on, all patriots of the Netherlands adopted the name of "Beggar" as a badge of honor, and every Dutch freedom fighter against the Habsburg Empire became known as a "Beggar" from that day forward. Rembrandt considered himself a "Beggar" at heart because he never compromised in defending the rights and liberties of the Netherlands against the civil and religious despotism of the Habsburg. For example, on October 4, 1574, Leiden, the city where Rembrandt was to be born some 35 years later, was saved from a Habsburg siege by the Sea Beggars who brought food to the starving population. The fact that the Sea Beggars had as a motto, "*Rather Turkish than Popish*" also explains why Rembrandt favored the use of Turkish costumes and head-dresses in his biblical portraits. Thus, Rembrandt never displayed his political colors directly, but always through his inferential poetical method.

However, as a historical painting, *The Night Watch* is not about military warfare, as such, but is, rather, an expression of the social state of mind that was produced by propitiating oligarchism during the Eighty Year war (1568-1648) of the Netherlands. It represents an epistemological kick in the right place as a cure for that social condition. This is why Rembrandt chose to paint that scene like a dramatic theatrical setting that reflected the true strategic situation of the capital of the Netherlands with the underlying tragic setting of an implicit clash between the Republican outlook and the Oligarchical outlook. Schiller wrote a wonderful piece on *The History of the Revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish Rule*, which raises similar paradoxes that Rembrandt had to deal with. Although he omitted to discuss the significance of the Peace of Westphalia, Schiller's study is nevertheless one of the finest insights into the principle of republican statecraft.



Figure 2. Joachim von Sandrart,
The Company of Cornelius Bicker, 1638.



Figure 3. Govaert Flink,
The Company of Captain Bas, 1645.

Other paintings also help to identify the state of Rembrandt's "philosophical mind," for example, Sandrart's *The Company of Cornelius Bicker* in **Figure 2**. This is a typical *art for bread* composition which took the opportunity of the oligarchical visit to immortalize that musketeer company in the presence of a plaster bust of the Dowager Queen of France. However, Rembrandt was of the belief that an expression of immortality required a little more dignity than that.

Figures 2 and **3** show two of the six paintings of Musketeer groups that had been commissioned to different artists who executed them in the same short period of time. The competition was to celebrate the fact that France was allied with the United Provinces against the two Houses of Habsburg. But, this was also the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Netherland's *Eighty Years War*, which ended with The Netherlands becoming a Sovereign Republic ten years later, in May of 1648, just five months before the signing of the Peace of Westphalia. The Netherlands War of Independence against the Spanish and Austrian houses of the Habsburg Empire lasted from the time of the Dutch Revolt of the Beggars in 1568, until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648.

The Night Watch commission was essentially intended to be a commemoration of military discipline and service to the French oligarchy in which the musketeer Captains represented some form of welcoming committee for Marie de Medici, in the propitiating manner displayed by Sandrart. At the very least, it was expected to be a representation of important citizens who only had in mind the protection of the city and respect for Royalty. However, Rembrandt knew better than to propitiate the rich patrons of

the city, and decided to deal with this little military coterie from the vantage point of a “philosophical mind” in the sense of Schiller, rather than to accept the popular opinion conditions of the commission and *paint for bread*.

But, 1642 turned out to be more than a moment of fundamental axiomatic change for Rembrandt. It was also a turning point both for love and fortune. At the very moment that he was finishing his masterpiece, Rembrandt lost the love of his life, Saskia. This was a terrible blow, and regardless, Rembrandt managed to find strength in his art and not let himself be discouraged. This was the time when Rembrandt decided to finish the *Portrait of Saskia with Hat*, started in 1633, to which he added a new inferential element which related to the subject of vanity, and to the fight he was waging against public opinion with *The Night Watch* commission. Rembrandt added to her hat the same peacock feather that he had appended to the hat of Lieutenant van Ruytenburgh. The richness of the two costumes and the presence of the same peacock feather of vanity expressed a direct inference to the curative effect of irony in the presence of death whose universal sweep makes dust of us all. Rembrandt, therefore, was able to find solace in laughing at the brevity of earthly things, and found in the poetic principle of irony that he shared with Saskia, the strength to concentrate on the higher purpose of his immortal contribution to mankind.



Figure 4. *Portrait of Saskia with Hat*, 1633.

The risks Rembrandt took with the axiom busting treatment of *The Night Watch* had the expected effect on the musketeers who had put money down for their vanity as opposed to their true immortality. Everybody was shocked and upset. As art critic Roberta d'Adda admitted: "Tradition has it that the unusual composition of *The Night Watch* alienated his admiring townsmen..." (Roberta d'Adda, *His Life and Art*, in *REMBRANDT*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 2006, p. 50.) For Rembrandt, this reaction was a confirmation that he had done the right thing. The whole company was very upset for having been the object of such a truthful process of composition: "What will people think," they all asked one another? So, Rembrandt began to lose a lot of his former friends, especially those he did not need, and his mind became much clearer after he had abandoned the barren flatland of oligarchism, and had nourished his soul with the sweet republican fruits of irony.

3. THE SHOT THAT NO ONE PAID ANY ATTENTION TO.

Let us continue this process with order and method, because Rembrandt is taking us by the hand of our souls, and is walking us through the process of discovery of his science of composition, much in the same way that Kepler did with his consideration of universal gravitation as being both visual and harmonic, as Lyn emphasized so many times.

The first thing that strikes your eye when you observe *The Night Watch*, for the first time, is the contrast of light and shadow between the two central figures of Captain Cocq and Lieutenant van Ruytenburgh. The precise intention of Rembrandt was to induce the viewer into discovering the invisible singularities that he set into motion in an orderly fashion around the center of his process of change. What must be discovered, therefore, is not the contrast between the two figures, but the dissonant interval of action between the two: their in-betweenness.

Rembrandt dressed Cocq all in jet-black, and originally slightly off center. On the right, moving with him toward the left of the picture is Ruytenburgh, the second in command, who is slightly behind and completely dressed in bright yellow. Both officers are moving forward slightly, at the same pace. The hierarchy is maintained and the dress code and chain of command are both respected. However, as soon as these protocolary ranking procedures had been taken into consideration, as to dress, position, and marching order, Rembrandt began to focus the spectator on his "rounding method," by getting him to grasp his picture by moving his mind into a clockwise motion around that ambiguous light and shadow center, and gradually rotate toward the back of the scene, as if he were caught in a spiraling web of action that requires the spectator to pull everything out from the darkness of the shadowy background into the light of truth. The original geometric center of the canvas was located somewhere off of the left rim of Cocq's hat, and therefore, was originally forcing the concentration of the spectator deep into the dark backdrop of Plato's Cave, challenging him into an unstable spiraling motion relative to the two central figures in the foreground. The key to understanding the picture is to be found in this dynamic tug of war among the different layers between the foreground and middle ground, and from the middle ground and the background.



Figure 5. Detail of *The Night Watch*. The musket shot behind Cocq and Ruytenburgh.

The second thing that strikes your eye and which forces you to move toward the left of the picture, almost immediately, and focus your observation two layers behind the frontal one, is the strange presence of a well-dressed young girl “rounded” with the same bright yellow as Lieutenant Ruytenburgh, and walking briskly in the opposite direction, with a dead bird tied to her belt. (**Figure 6**) That is a totally provocative scene which was meant to shock even the most alert of spectators. What is this “mise en scene” suppose to mean? The mind and the perception of the viewer are both challenged, and he must be

in a complete state of perplexity as to which way to turn, sense-perception or inferential knowledge, front or back, left or right, appearance or truth? Why is Rembrandt forcing the spectator off balance in this way? What is a young girl doing in the company of musketeers? Who is she, and who is the other child behind her? Who is the third short person quickly moving in the same direction as the girl, from left to right, dressed in a purple military uniform, and, behold, who has just fired his musket behind the head of Cocq and Ruytenburgh? (See **Figure 5**)

What is that *dissonant singularity* that no one has heard, and that no one has seen? Is this an assassination attempt? If so, who is the victim? Why does that spiraling motion bring us behind Ruytenburgh? What is happening behind there with this counterpoint motion that is stopping us from slowly pursuing our round toward the back of the scene? Is this a murder scene, or is Rembrandt simply shocking the viewer in order to shake him out of his complacency? Is this a sort of axiomatic singularity that is generally characteristic of conical spiral actions? What does that tell us about the method of composition of Rembrandt? Why is no one attempting to arrest that man who has just fired his musket, and who might hurt someone? Is anybody paying attention to any of this? As I will now show you, the reason for the introduction of a singularity is never found in any direct and obvious linear connection.

Why do most accounts of *The Night Watch* avoid mentioning this perplexing anomaly? In fact, there must have been a reason for Rembrandt to introduce, in the very center of his painting and immediately behind the most prominent and illuminated area of his entire fresco, something that people were not supposed to pay attention to. Why? In order to answer these questions, the viewer must go back to the striking presence of the little people and study the function of their fugal counterpoint motion. Where are they going with such a clearly determined opposite pace? (See **Figure 6**)

All of these questions should be considered as valid, and should all be answered in time, but the question that I will answer for you, now, is: ***what is the epistemological significance of that musket shot singularity that no one pays any attention to, inside of the painting, and that most observers outside of the painting don't even notice? What is the purpose of showing something shocking that people are not likely to see, but that they may discover, only if they pay attention to little things that appear to be there as if by accident?*** The answer is to be found in the realization that most people will not act, but will instead react, to events; and they will do so only after the pain has hit them, not before. This is the way people are conditioned and have been manipulated by oligarchies, to respond like animals, to a stimulus of pleasure or pain, as advocated by the Paolo Sarpi and Adams Smith principle of economics. That is the British intelligence method of behaviorism. People don't pay any attention to warning signals of danger, and refuse to take them under consideration, until it is too late, because they have not been educated in the habit of acting in a creative manner, but only in the passive habit of reacting to what is pleasurable or painful, and within the limited scope of their immediate and local situation. ***So, how do you teach people to pay attention to little things that appear to be there by accident as a matter of universal principle?*** That is the crucial question that Rembrandt is posing to the viewer in *The Night Watch*.



Figure 6. The young girl with a dead bird on her belt.

The answer to this last question is found, not so hidden, in the method of composition of Rembrandt, which is the same method that Leonardo da Vinci advocated when he called on artists to make visible with the means of the senses that which can only be seen through the eyes of the mind; that is, by making visible the purpose that is in the mind. As Leonardo put it: “**Represent your figures in such action as may be fitted to express what purpose is in their minds; otherwise your art will not be good.**” (*The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 177)

Let me give you a typical example of this process. Some insane people have fantasized about a murder plot as being the true story of *The Night Watch*. That is stupid, because that would imply that Rembrandt is using an oligarchical stimulus for pleasure or pain. There is even a movie made of this perverse view, but which was obviously made for the purpose of confusing the general public and degrading the character of Rembrandt, himself. Fantasies aside, the fact remains that the greatest painting of the greatest artist of the seventeenth century could not have been executed for the purpose of hiding a clue for the observer to discover a murder scene. That is merely a reflection of the cheap entertainment mentality of today’s post-baby-boomer generation. No, that was definitely not the intention of Rembrandt. So, how should you go about discovering what was the intention of Rembrandt behind that musket shot? Consider the effect of this dissonant singularity as being the equivalent of a discordant moment in a human drama, as in a Mozart opera, for instance, and its presence is to mark the crucial passing moment of an axiomatic change occurring as a shift in universal history.

Then, the shot is like a warning against an imminent danger, a signal that summons your attention to something that might happen if the Company did not do what has to be done to keep the city safe; the same warning shot which is to awaken the spectator to discover the difference between public opinion and creativity, that is, a matter of life and death. *The Night Watch* “warning shot,” therefore, is the waking up call that makes you discover the importance of little anomalies that no one normally pays attention to. That is the reason why the shot can barely be distinguished from the soft plumes on the Lieutenant’s hat. And, the point that Rembrandt is making is that the job of the musketeer is to be on the watch, and that a night watchman is supposed to identify any suspicious occurrence, no matter how insignificant it may appear to be.

The irony of this shooting anomaly is pointing to the fact that nobody in that painting is paying any attention to the shot that is being fired. However, don’t laugh at them, because nobody among you has paid attention to it either. Why? Because all of the minds are preoccupied with “How do I look?” This is the significance of what Rembrandt wanted to bring to your attention. So, therefore, it is a matter of life and death, but, only a fool would believe that Rembrandt was using the greatest painting he ever made to divert the attention of the spectator away from the creative process. So, what is Rembrandt’s punch line in answer to all of this feverish questioning?



Figure 7. Rembrandt Laughing, *Self-Portrait*, 1628.

4. A PASSION FOR TRUTHFULNESS.

Rembrandt highlighted the young girl with the dead bird tied to her belt because she was the mascot of the Company whose coat of arms bore an emblem of two talons. She is looking with a smile of complicity at the musketeer firing the shot, and she is carrying the Company's silver drinking horn on her belt, next to the dead bird. The reason for the two bird talons is derived from a Company joke that is meant to illustrate a pun between the talon (*klauw*) and the clapping sound of the arquebus (*klover*). But, that clapping sound also has an inferential meaning. This visual pun explains why the "*klauw*" does not disturb anyone, because everyone is used to joking with it. It also infers to the political "*clash*," between Oligarchism and Republicanism, and Rembrandt is using this imperceptible shock of discontinuity between the two domains in order to cause an axiomatic change in the viewer, in the hope of making him a more alert citizen.

However, there is a deeper meaning. Here, no one is laughing, because Rembrandt is reaching deep into the soul of his fellow man, and is making the spectator discover that an axiomatic change involves a fundamental step between two fundamentally opposed sets of contrasting beliefs, each clashing with the other in a manner such that the acknowledgement of one threatens the existence of the other. In fact, on the one hand, the musketeers have what appears to be safely guaranteed the formal belief of their existence, such as the military rules of conduct and habits of social behavior upon which their lives have been built up to that point; on the other hand, there is also a new phenomenon that some discordant anomaly has introduced into the former belief structure a self-generating irony which also offers a strong credibility by establishing a new strong conviction, but which is contrary to the previous one.

The problem then arises where the new idea challenges the very existence of the former, whose persisting erosion cannot be denied after seventy years of war. The historical situation is untenable because the Company depends on the power of a solidly established oligarchical tradition stabilizing the former state of its belief while, at the same time, its entire way of life is being destabilized by a self-governing republican belief, whose persistence denies the truth of the previous state of belief. Thus, the very existence of the musketeer Company is being challenged, and a new set of values appears as being more credible than the former set of beliefs had established. The problem is that if this new phenomenon is true, then the former state of belief must be in error, and therefore, must be eliminated, because the two cannot exist at the same time and secure existence with two opposite sets of relationships. At that point, an axiomatic change must then occur whereby the former state of belief must be replaced by the latter, or else, the latter must be destroyed by the former, because the two cannot exist in the same universe. Such is the axiom busting predicament of *The Night Watch*.

Don't get me wrong. Rembrandt never intended to be disrespectful to Marie de Medici. No. This process has nothing to do with her, personally. She was simply an opportunity for Rembrandt to use and to provoke a change in the system of corrupted values that existed during his time. Rembrandt was simply being clinical, and was honoring the Company of musketeers by inserting their own self-governing "joke" as a corroding agent that was putting into question the true identity of each and every one of them. This was done exclusively in the spirit of the Westphalia Principle of the advantage of the other. And, Rembrandt was displaying, at the same time, the three traditional steps in the use of their weapon:

loading, firing, and cleaning. In point of fact, from left to right, the man in red is loading his musket with powder, the man in purple clothing and a black cask is firing his musket, and the man just right of the Lieutenant is cleaning his musket by blowing the rest of the burnt powder off of the firing mechanism. The ordering motion of this three-step process is reinforced by the orientation of the movement highlighted just behind them. Thus, Rembrandt is using the A.B.C of small arms training, and a company pun, as the most appropriate means at his disposal to reflect an epistemologically driven historical axiomatic change. Nothing can be more proper and conventional than that, for that Company of musketeers. Similarly, the viewer must also go through a three step process in order to properly make the discovery of principle involved: *the loading of perplexity, the shocking awe of discovery, and the recoiling of laughter.*

Now, ask yourself: How did Rembrandt know this was the right thing to do? He knew, because the result of his painting made him happy! And, you know that he was right because you have discovered that this difference between what the Company is thinking and what Rembrandt is thinking is what defines your identify as a happy human being. And that discovery makes you happy too. In other words, you have discovered that if you go along with the Company's behavior, you will not only be wrong, but you will also fail and you will be doomed. On the other hand, if you adopt the changing course that Rembrandt adopted, and you discover that changing your assumptions is the only way to have a true human identity, then, that difference is the discovery of the principle of happiness. That's republicanism. That is all there is to it.

However, this sort of irony appeared to be unacceptable to several members of the Company, because their egos were bruised, and they considered that Rembrandt was taxing their attention span too much. Frans Banning Cocq, however, appeared to be pleased with the result since he had a small watercolor copy made of the same scene for his family album. The controversy over Rembrandt's "failure" nonetheless persists to this day. In 1967, for example, the Royal Dutch Airline, KLM, featured *The Night Watch* in one of its publicity flyers that invited travelers to visit Amsterdam. The flyer said: "See *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt's spectacular 'failure' that caused him to be hooted... down the road of bankruptcy." Rembrandt's truthful irony might also go a long way in explaining why *The Night Watch* has been the object of desecration by oligarchical lovers throughout the years. The worse occurrence was in 1978, when a deranged man slashed the painting six times with a knife.

5. SPREADING THE INFECTION OF AN IDEA

The science of light and shadow is the science of the human soul, in which light is to mind as shadow is to sense-perception. However, that proportionality is not a formula; it is an art of combining and measuring what is to be the final outcome of change in a human being. And Rembrandt provided us with a rigorous psychophysical proof of his understanding of this profound universal process by applying it to his art of composition of *The Night Watch*, as rigorously as Kepler and Einstein have done, by giving us a coherent scientific definition of universal gravitation, that is, by a process that is both finite and unbounded. That is the key.

What Rembrandt was composing with his experiment of the human mind, between perception and truth, was the same as between shadow and light. And to help him seal that process into an appropriate physical-inferential connection, he had discovered a chemical reaction whose effects reflected *a method of spreading the infection of an idea*. The physical substance is called Lead-white paint. That Lead-white paint process gave Rembrandt a means of uniting and uplifting into a single process both a chemical and a mental reaction which had consistency in terms of response to the brush stroke. That was the process he required in order to have the paint become fluid, and then stop its flow and gel in such a manner that when the painting is exposed to light, it “*sparkles*” in a way that it captures light without reflecting it all at once. Ironically, like photosynthesis, Rembrandt’s “sparkling” surfaces are optimized for the maximum capture and transformation of sunlight and ironies. Rembrandt had found a way to use a chemical process to shape the propagation of light like the propagation of life, or like the mind does with the propagation of ideas. The Rembrandt “sparkling” acts in such a way that it is capable of reflecting the axiomatic experiment of changing the mind of the spectator and of easily communicating the process to another mind as if by infection.

By means of that “sparkling” effect, Rembrandt was the anti-impressionist painter par excellence. His purpose was to change the way man looked at the world, not how he felt about it. The roughness of his brushwork may sometimes be interpreted as a modernist form of expressionism aimed at producing moulding reliefs of pigmentation for sensational effects, but that is false. This effect may be there to see, but it is a complete misunderstanding of how Rembrandt’s mind works, if it remains just that physical effect of a sensation. Rembrandt was an artist and a chemist, not an alchemist for entertaining the oligarchy.

The power of what Rembrandt identified as the “sparkle” (*voncken*) was made to capture light and, but not merely, for the purpose of reflecting it. This is what he recommended to one of his patrons, Constantine Huygens: “My lord, hang this piece in a strong light and where one can stand at a distance, so it will sparkle (*voncken*) at its best.” (January 27, 1639 Letter of Rembrandt to Constantine Huygens.) The purpose of the “sparkle” was to create the process of an infection, that is to say, to cause a glowing potential within the painting, as if the light came from inside of the painting itself, glowing with different intensities at different times of the day, and depending on how much sunshine it could capture during the day.

Rembrandt used his own brush strokes as an instrument for capturing, transforming, and spreading cosmic radiation, by encapsulating the glow of the delicate interplay of lights and shadows contained in the field between the foreground and the background of his canvas. That is what space is all about. For Rembrandt, space has no ontological existence as such. Space was a field of interactions between things. Take, for example, Lyn’s discovery as a child of the principle of physical geometry from the Boston Navy Yard. The holes of the steel beams to which he referred are not empty spaces; they represent the least action principle of a wave function in much the same way that a cantilever triangulation expresses a wave function that holds the bridge together. Rembrandt used the same physical geometric principle for his pictorial space.

This wave idea was developed with the use of Lead-white paint which made certain light sections of a portrait “*sparkle*” when treated with *impasto*, for example, the jacket of Lieutenant van Ruytenburgh or the collar of Captain Cocq. But, this was applied in *The Night Watch* only in a limited number of

strong contrasts in order to establish the proper measure in the fight between perception and mind. The choice of only a few selected cases is exemplary in *The Night Watch*. According to his pupil, Hoogstraten, Rembrandt's method was to attenuate dark shadows by flanking them with less dark shadows, while lighter tones must be flanked by lesser light ones. As Hoogstraten put it: “ *I therefore recommend you not to mix up lights and shadows too much, but to combine them properly in groups; let your strong lights be gently accompanied by lesser lights, and I assure you that they will shine all the more beautifully; let your deepest darks be surrounded by lighter darks, so that they will make the power of the light stand out all the more powerfully.* ” (Quoted by Wetering in Op. Cit., p. 252.) In fact, you can note the expression of that process in **Figure 8**, especially, the different degrees of shading within the layers of Cocq's lace collar by comparison with his face and the background of both. The resulting *sfumato* is very gradual as it was typically with Leonardo's treatment of *The Lady of the Rocks*.



Figure 8. Detail of the lace collar of Captain Banning Cocq. 1642

For example, examine closely the intricate use of the Lead-white brush technique on the white multi-foil denticulation of Captain Banning Cocq's lace collar. The irony here is that the genial method of using Lead-white paint, from oxidizing spiraling rolls of lead strips, was a unique way of capturing and refracting light in order to create the effect of accentuating the different layers of the creative process of the artist, rather than to enhance the Captain's vanity. This is what the musketeers did not appreciate in Rembrandt's sense of humor, because he neglected the traits of their faces for the benefit of their costumes. "Who wants to remember a costume, really?" However, by taking the attention away from the chief sponsor of the commission, and by putting more emphasis on the multilayered collar of Captain Cocq, as in the case of the young girl's dress, or Lieutenant van Ruytenburgh's jacket, Rembrandt was giving this little military oligarchy a chance to participate in the true immortality of the mind, as opposed to the brief memorial of their mortal coils.

This role of the Lead-white paint technique, which is no longer employed for that purpose by artists today, but which became the hallmark of Rembrandt, had the purpose of enhancing the radiance of the creative process, and of capturing the viewer into a rotating spiral motion of alternating lights and shadows in a completely scientific manner, but from an off-center position of the painting as a whole. Unfortunately, the original painting was cut off on three of its sides, including a large vertical section on the left where three figures have completely disappeared. This truncation was reportedly done during a relocation of the painting in Amsterdam. However, it appears that this truncation had the benefit of relocating the face of Captain Cocq precisely in the geometric center of the new canvas. This is an interesting coincidence, for those who believe in such coincidences.

Finally, the method of discovering irony in a painting is the same as making the discovery of principle in chemistry, because the creative process is the same in art as it is in nature, and that is the revolutionary way that Rembrandt composed *The Night Watch*.

6. THE INBETWEENNESS OF AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

There is another instability, which might be less visible than the spiral motion of *The Night Watch*, but which is essential to notice if we are to understand Rembrandt's method and conception of composition. It is his treatment of the in-betweenness of interactions between things. For Rembrandt, the nature of things is in between them, not in them. Rembrandt had restored the Leonardo da Vinci method of *sfumato*; that is of blurring the contours of objects in order to emphasize the presence of the dynamic atmosphere between them. However, Rembrandt did his "blurring" differently. While Leonardo emphasized aerial perspective by eliminating the contour of objects and by introducing a bluish vapor or smoky (*fumo*) quality covering objects that were receding in the distance, Rembrandt, instead, emphasized the distance by passing from roughness to smoothness. In other words, it is the interactive activity of the in-betweenness of aerial perspective which determines the ontological substance of space. By making that discovery, Rembrandt also consciously destroyed the long standing fallacy of composition which said that the gestalt of aerial perspective is determined by the contrast between light and darkness.

Rembrandt totally rejected the idea whereby a light object appears to be closer to the viewer while a dark object appears to be receding away from him. As far back as ancient Greece, there are people who still believe that light colors tend toward the foreground while darker tones tend toward the background. Rembrandt proved that perception to be false. Captain Cocq, who is the closest to the viewer, does not appear to be receding. The contrary positioning of the two officers in center stage demonstrates the fallacy of this perception. Hoogstraten, made the following point which is fundamental for understanding Rembrandt's method, and especially in the case of *The Night Watch*. He wrote:

“I therefore maintain that perceptibility [*kenlijkheyt*] alone makes objects appear close at hand, and conversely that smoothness [*egaelheyt*] makes them withdraw, and I therefore desire that that which is to appear in the foreground, be painted roughly and briskly, and that which is to recede be painted the more neatly and purely the further back it lies. Neither one color nor another will make your work seem to advance or recede, but the perceptibility or imperceptibility [*kenlijkheyt of onkenlijkheyt*] of the parts alone.” (Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt, the Painter at Work*, University of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles, 2009, p. 185)

This point is fundamental because, by using this method, Rembrandt also demonstrated that, like a Classical musician, the Classical artist must also paint between the notes. This is also where both Rembrandt and Leonardo demonstrated most exquisitely their affiliation to Plato on that account. Rembrandt is painting the intervals between the different subjects as Leonardo did. I remind the reader what Lazare Carnot had also written about the same subject of “aerial perspective” in opposition to “linear perspective”:

“Linear perspective . . . is calculated mathematically [but] aerial perspective . . . can only be grasped by the sentiment. By comparing these two sciences, where one is sensual, the other ideal, the methodical course of one will help penetrate the mysteries of the other.... [Aerial perspective in painting is] the art of generating ideas by means of the senses, of acting on the soul by the organ of vision. It is in this way that it acquires its importance, that it competes with poetry; that it can, like poetry, enlighten the mind, warm the heart, excite and nourish higher emotions. We shall emphasize the contributions that it can bring to morality and to government; and how, in the hands of the skillful legislator, it will be a powerful means of instilling horror of slavery, and love of the fatherland, and will lead man to virtue.” (Lazare Carnot, from the “*Drawing Section of the Public Works Curriculum*,” Ecole Polytechnique, 1794.)

The Night Watch demonstrates how Rembrandt used this Platonic method of aerial perspective in mastering what Hoogstraten called the idea of painting “the thickness of the air” (*de dikte der lucht*). In other words, there is no such a thing as empty space; there is only a field of interactions between the viewer and the objects he relates to and judges. As Leonardo had identified earlier, space is the field of an infinite number of images that reflect and act on each other to express the intention that is in the mind. Similarly, Rembrandt treated space as a field of interactive relationships that transforms lights and shadows between objects and subjects as opposed to being an empty container in which things sit as unchangeable things in themselves. The intention that is in the mind of the subject is, therefore, expressed by the mastery of such intervals.

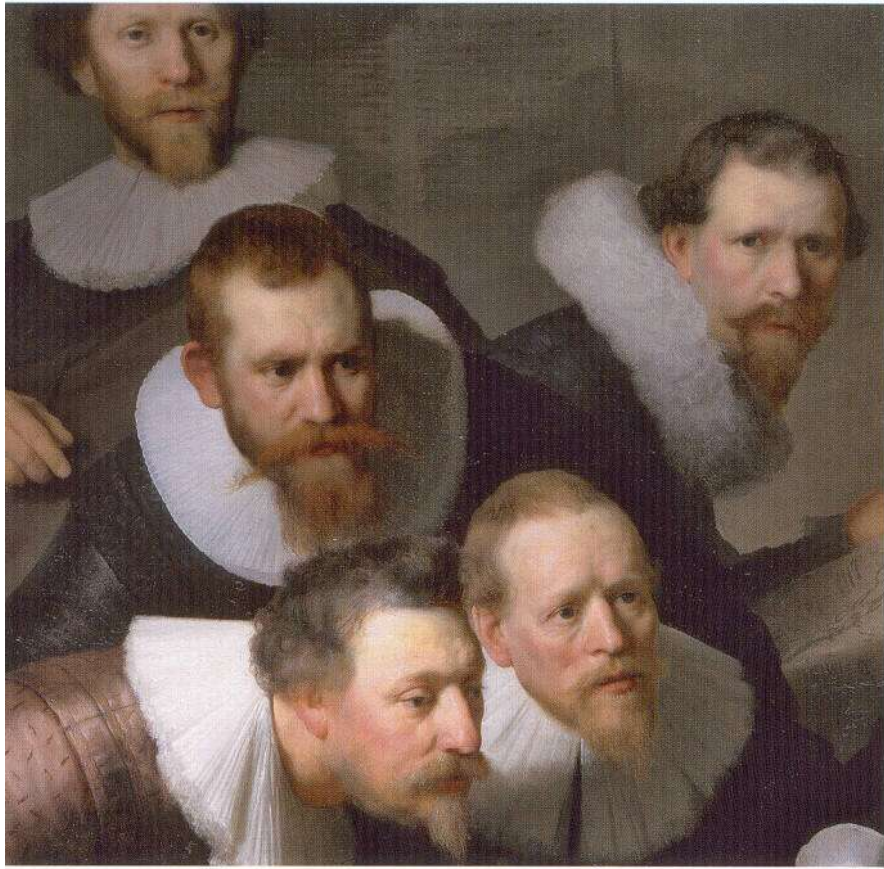


Figure 9. Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632)

The in-betweenness of aerial perspective, for example, is not treated with the *sfumato* of Leonardo, but with something similar that Rembrandt developed and could be identified as *receding perceptibility of brightness*. For instance, the receding into shadow of more distant objects will have a lighter and smoother tone than nearby objects which will have a rougher and clearer texture, as exemplified by the different faces of the group of surgeons in the anatomy lesson of Dr. Tulp. (See **Figure 9**) The air is thick with this filtering process. As a result, the shadows reflect the intentions that are in the minds of the physicians. Their intentions are indicated by the different degrees of *receding perceptibility* that is reflected on their faces, as they react differently to the dissection of the human body. From front to back, the different states of mind appear, successively, in the following order: 1) highly interested, 2) inquisitive, 3) doubtful, 4) distracted, and 5) out of it.

The different psychological effects of the in-betweenness of aerial perspective among the faces is exclusively obtained by modulating both light and tone in tune with the psychological state of mind of each physician, from front to back, through the decreasing of sharp roughness and coloration and the slightly increasing of shadows. I have shown, in a previous report, how a similar process had been applied in the two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks*, where Leonardo established, with the use of light and shadow alone, the epistemological difference between the two states of mind of the tragic and of the sublime. Note how Rembrandt applied the same process in Ruytenburgh's lance. The effect of painting the *spatial interval* in between things is achieved essentially by a "rounding and raising" method of rough brushwork applied to the foreground and a gradual smoothness toward the background, thus creating the desired effect of aerial perspective as indicated by Carnot. For example, look at the details of the Lieutenant's jacket and lance. (**Figure 10**) The white and blue knob head of the lance tassel is rough and highly contrasted, while the stripes are getting lighter as they recede in the distance of only a few centimeters, at the same time that the brush strokes are smoother as the stripes recede.

These finer details are important to identify because they serve as windows into Rembrandt's method of thinking about how man relates to man and to the universe. From this standpoint, his paintings and etchings never represent man or nature as they are, but as they are in a process of becoming. The details of sharpening and blurring of elements in any of his paintings are never executed for the pleasure of the physical eyes of the spectator, as if to describe an object of perception, but for the viewer's mind's eye to capture a universal process of change. The purpose is always for the viewer to capture the chemistry of Rembrandt's thinking process as a universal measure of change and to understand that a Rembrandt picture is always an expression of such a state of mind.

Note also the difference in the smoothness of the shadows. Hoogstraten added a further crucial insight on the same painting that art historian, Wetering emphasized very judiciously: "He (Hoogstraten) noted that plasticity and spatiality ('*ronding*' and '*uitheffing*', literally: rounding and raising) have to be achieved '*by a careful observation of lights and shadows*' in pictures which are '*evenly and smoothly*' executed, and in such a way that even artists are deceived and cannot believe that it is mere paint '*until touch assures them that it is so.*'" (Ernst van de Wetering, op. Cit., p. 186)



Figure 10. *The Night Watch*. Details of the Uniform and lance of Ruytenburgh.

The point to be made is that this Rembrandt method of “*rounding and raising*,” of adding and reducing light and shadow, of sharpening and blurring, with Lead-white paint, represents the chemistry of the thought process of change taking place in the in-betweenness of aerial perspective. That dynamic process of change represents the very founding principle of Rembrandt’s conceptual method of composition. In this manner, Rembrandt’s treatment of *chiaroscuro* is in perfect continuity of spirit with Leonardo’s method of *sfumato*. Compare the history and treatment of Leonardo’s *The Virgin of the Rocks* and the history and treatment of Rembrandt’s *The Night Watch*, and you are not only witnessing the very same universal process of creativity, but you are also witnessing the treatment of the same epistemological problem applied to the two different domains of religious and political beliefs. However, it would be wrong to think that this is merely a painting technique that Rembrandt and Leonardo have in common. What they have in common is the chemistry of the thinking process that reflects principles and replicates the creative process of the universe as a whole by such physical means. It is that process that the viewer is made to discover when he observes the universe through the mind’s eye of the creator: the use of the visual to express the invisible.

[Note] For those artists among you who wish to have a better understanding of how Rembrandt worked, the book of Ernst van de Wetering, *REMBRANDT: The Painter at Work*, is the best that you can find on the market, today. Wetering’s DVD, *The Rembrandt Collection*, also brings out the essential elements for a good understanding of the Rembrandt methodology.

7. THE “HOUDING” EYE OF THE CREATOR.

This Rembrandt psychophysical process also works like the process of the future changing the past. A change never occurs from the past, but always from the unexpected moment that lies ahead. And that is why the effect must always, paradoxically, appear to come before the cause. That is how causality works in creativity, in music as well as in painting or poetry. As Schiller described in the fight between the “bread-fed scholar” and the “philosophical mind,” the passion for the truth always leads to a point of realization that the work of a creative individual is never finished and always has something new to depend on, and which is coming from where it is required to go to: “*All his efforts are directed toward the perfection of his knowledge; his noble impatience cannot rest until all of his conceptions have ordered themselves into an organic whole, until he stands at the center of his art, his science, and until from this position outward he surveys its expanse with a contented look.*” (Schiller, Op. Cit., p.257)



Figure 11. Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*, Detail of the “houding” mind’s eye of the creator.

Again, this idea of the artist looking at himself work, from within the work he is accomplishing, is exemplified by the presence of Rembrandt, being ahead of himself, like a barely visible singularity located in the face of the least important of the militiamen posing before him in *The Night Watch*, and who makes his presence known only by showing a small part of his face, with only one eye, laughing. It is in that apparently insignificant detail of the “watch” that Rembrandt indulged himself in the highest form of ironic final causality. This is the least visible watchman, and therefore, the least important of the 20 militiamen portrayed, for the simple reason that he did not pay a single guilder for having his portrait immortalized like the others had to. He is the ironic eye that you see hidden in **Figure 11**. It is this least important function that has the most important task of all, which is to *watch over the watch*, and scrutinize the truth of the process, as if laughing at the tragedy from behind the scene, but inside of which everyone, including him, fail to eradicate the evil corruption of sense-perception. As Lyn demonstrated many times, the principle of tragedy is not based on the failure of a character, or a group of characters, but on the built-in imperfection of society itself. That systemic defect was best represented, poetically, by Saint Paul who identified, in Corinthian 13, that this human defectiveness is what condemns mankind to only see the truth, “*as if through a glass darkly*.” This is where the poetic principle comes in to unburden that universal tragic fault and ease the strain on mankind, but without erasing it.

It is this barely visible eye of truth seeing *through a glass darkly* which, from the depths of Plato’s Cave, examines all of the projections on the dark wall of our minds and which reveals the flaws of our false assumptions. It is the principle of tragedy which makes us discover that everything which appears on the screen of our sense-perception is merely a distorted shadow of reality, and that reality lies in the light source that is always located outside of the hollow cavity of our minds. This is what the mind’s eye of Rembrandt is staring at, through the entirety of the ambiguous field between the spectators and the subject matter of the painting, *The Night Watch*. As Rembrandt would have said in his Dutch vernacular, his eye is “*houding!*” But, is it his eye, or is it also the eye of the viewer?

Pedagogically speaking, Rembrandt, here, is giving us the ultimate key to “grasp” the unity of effect of his method of composition which comes to “sparkle” as the singularity of his own mental eye, in the center of *The Night Watch*. This is a pictorial expression for solving the Parmenides paradox of Plato, the paradox of the One and the Many. This is what seventeen century Dutch painters called the principle of “*houding*,” from the infinitive verb “*houden*,” or that which brings everything together into a unity of effect by the mastery of aerial perspective, as opposed to linear perspective. In his 1668 book on drawing, Willem Goeree defined the Rembrandt idea of “*houding*” as being:

“... *that which binds everything together in a drawing or painting, which makes things move to the front or back, and which causes everything, from the foreground to the middle ground and thence to the background to stand in its proper place without appearing further away or closer, and without seeming lighter or darker than its distance warrants; so that everything stands out, without confusion, from the things that adjoins them and surrounds it, and has an unambiguous position through the proper use of size and color, and light and shadow; and so that the eye can naturally perceive the interactive field, that distance between the bodies which is left open and empty, both near and far, as though one might go there on foot, and everything stands in its proper place therein.*” (The emphasis is mine. Quoted by Wetering, in Op. Cit., p. 150)

Indeed, what the physical eye does not perceive in the intervening field is how the harmonic appropriateness of those different parts comes together from their different places, how that which “holds” them together proportionately, in a unifying mental act, can only be captured by a universal mind that reflects the creative power of the universe as a whole. This is the quality of the mind that Cusa related to when he wrote about *The Vision of God*: “*Absolute sight is the limiting of limitation, limiting not being limitable,*” that is, finite and unbounded. Similarly with Rembrandt, this “*houding*” principle reflects the highest harmony which can be achieved by holding a true Classical artistic composition together.

This is the oneness of the unified field experiment of Rembrandt’s intention, the transfinite “grasp” which is obtained in opposition to linear perspective, and which takes the viewer by the hand of his mind and leads him to discover the highest degree of creativity through the transformation of certain perceived objects treated as singularities. This is how *The Night Watch* became a reflection of this higher quality of the creative human mind, by *including the presence of the spectator-creator as the outsider within*. This is the expression of the joyful triumph of the creator finishing his work after having succeeded in capturing, from the inside, the essence of human tragedy as Plato’s Cave reflects this universal character of human society, past, present, and future. This is also the sublime state that Mozart had intended his listener to experiment in his *Don Giovanni* opera. [I recommend the excellent performance of *Don Giovanni* by Bry Terfel, as well as his exceptional personal rendition of, [Ave Verum Corpus](#).]

So, this is how Rembrandt used his brush like the bow of a great violinist, playing his composition between the notes, and knowing that the effects he must produce do not depend on the quality of the bow or the violin, but on the richness of the imagination of the soul of who perceives it, and takes the responsibility to change society by wielding the principle of tragedy associated with that composition. Such is the “*houding*” effect that forces a change in the spectator who then, enthusiastically, might be impelled to recognize: “Ah yes. So, finally, this is what *The Night Watch* was all about!

FIN