

# One Following Others

Brian Price & Clint Enns



Beginnings and continuities conceived in this spirit are an appetite  
and a courage capable of taking in what is normally indigestible.  
- Edward Said, *Beginnings*

If we tell them what we know, we take away their hope...and  
hope is a very dangerous thing to lose.  
- Sayid Jarrah, *Lost: Tabula Rasa*





◀ THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN a still life and a portrait is determined, probably, by the perceived presence or perceived absence of a visual perceptual faculty in the sitter/object. The subject of the portrait becomes one for having manifested an acuity in being, for having a capacity to both see the world and present oneself in a remarkable way, even if what manifests is inherited from, or even just honed beneath, power (what most portraits were and are commissioned to do, as we know). The portrait painter—wanting always to make themselves in self- portrait, too—must reconcile their own noticed acuity, the perceived evidence of their capacity to make things appear, with and before the sitter who was chosen to compel an appearance remembered from life as always out of time. The portrait is a record of a desire or an agreement to be out of time.

For what it's worth, the disenfranchised never claim to be short on time. Ask even less what, or who, should be without time.

The object in still life never did see, maybe is thought to be less worth seeing, given how little it can do for itself. What can it do but grow, die, nourish others or not, look appealing to others or not, become soil again or not? The object depicted in still life has needs but not feelings, if by feelings we include things like hope, resentment, desire, boredom. A still life forestalls the descriptive imprecision in the word “need.”

This is not to ask you to feel sorry for fruit or vegetables or herbs, or even to admire them. The point is to discern why the portrait, if not the portraitist, wants to bar access to the thought of the sitter and the duration—including the variation within—of the posing, in what the picture shows as pose. And to discover, by comparison, why we want the avocado or bouquet in still life to appear as though there were something moving in these objects, this scene shown still that cannot be seen continuously in life without a picture.

► IN THE REMBRANDT wing of the Rijksmuseum, there is an unintended, if curated, triptych of three paintings that are either portrait and still life at once, or neither. All three paintings are of tables supporting what remains of the food upon them. In Pieter Claesz's *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* (1627), there is, I think, a half-eaten Turkey pie, just in front of a glass of white wine, tasted but unfinished, a plate of fresh oysters uneaten, or yet to be eaten, a bowl of olives, bread, slices of lemon—all just slightly disordered from acts of disinterested grazing in a scene of staged and deliberately limited opulence. The limit is not borne of modesty, one supposes, but form. There is also a Turkey, upright in full feather with a flower in its beak. It is tempting to say that the Turkey is taxidermied, too alive for life. But what am I supposing of the medium in saying so? That what appears in a portrait or a still life is present to the painter as life is to the photographer? That the Turkey must be stuffed, since it would surely not sit still?

Or is Claesz being cheeky about the mode of the still life, which he declares the painting to be, even though there are signs of human presence in the crumbs and tussle. Premonitions of a portrait. The raw oysters, if before the painter they were, were still alive. They exist in time, just as the taxidermied Turkey is out of time. The still life is not a moment in time, but the accumulation of different times, including the time before what we see, which is indexed by the ruffles in the tablecloth, the creases that have not yet settled in time, as we typically hope they will before our guests arrive, as when we imagine what the painting will ultimately document. *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* is a portrait of human use and human presence, but no body; or, as the portraitist is imagined to say, no subject. Does the subject require a body to retain its consistency, its viability, as a subject? Is “Turkey Pie” better understood as the name of the being with the flower in its mouth, looking all so loveable and cute, so alive because stuffed or just all the imagined?









◀ THE ART OF SOME artists is more interesting than the art of other artists. Some of the lives of artists are more interesting, or salutary, than the lives of other artists. There is no problem to resolve between these statements.

► HAS IT REALLY been ten days since I called off the last image, the one full of fleshy folds and still lips, hair and ears where I have not seen either before? It was kind of you to agree and you were, just the same, right to think the other way was the right way.

When I walked into the room with sheep in the mountains I felt myself getting younger and less if not at all afraid of what I was seeing. In the next room that I remember was Leviathan, the cuts in colourful meat, the in-the-second summon of slaughter. I could have stayed much longer, was driven away in duty to a memory of how distracted or unhappy I was when I first saw it and by the force of what was better than what I could no longer give a name to. Why does it seem necessary, when it does, to remain in debt to first sense?

I don't recall the third room. Genie tipped me about the autopsy that came after it. I skipped ahead and sat in the one with the images of the now elderly Japanese man who, while a university student in Paris in 1981, killed his girlfriend and ate her, or at least a lot of the body that was her. It took me until Genie arrived there, after the autopsy, to realize that it was already too late for me to stay ahead of what I had been watching.

When you sent this image, I was reminded of Damisch's beautiful book, *A Theory of /Cloud/*—sent you a picture of it. “A cloud belongs to the class of ‘bodies without surfaces,’ as Leonardo da Vinci was to put it, bodies that have no precise form or extremities and whose limits interpenetrate with those of other clouds.”<sup>1</sup>

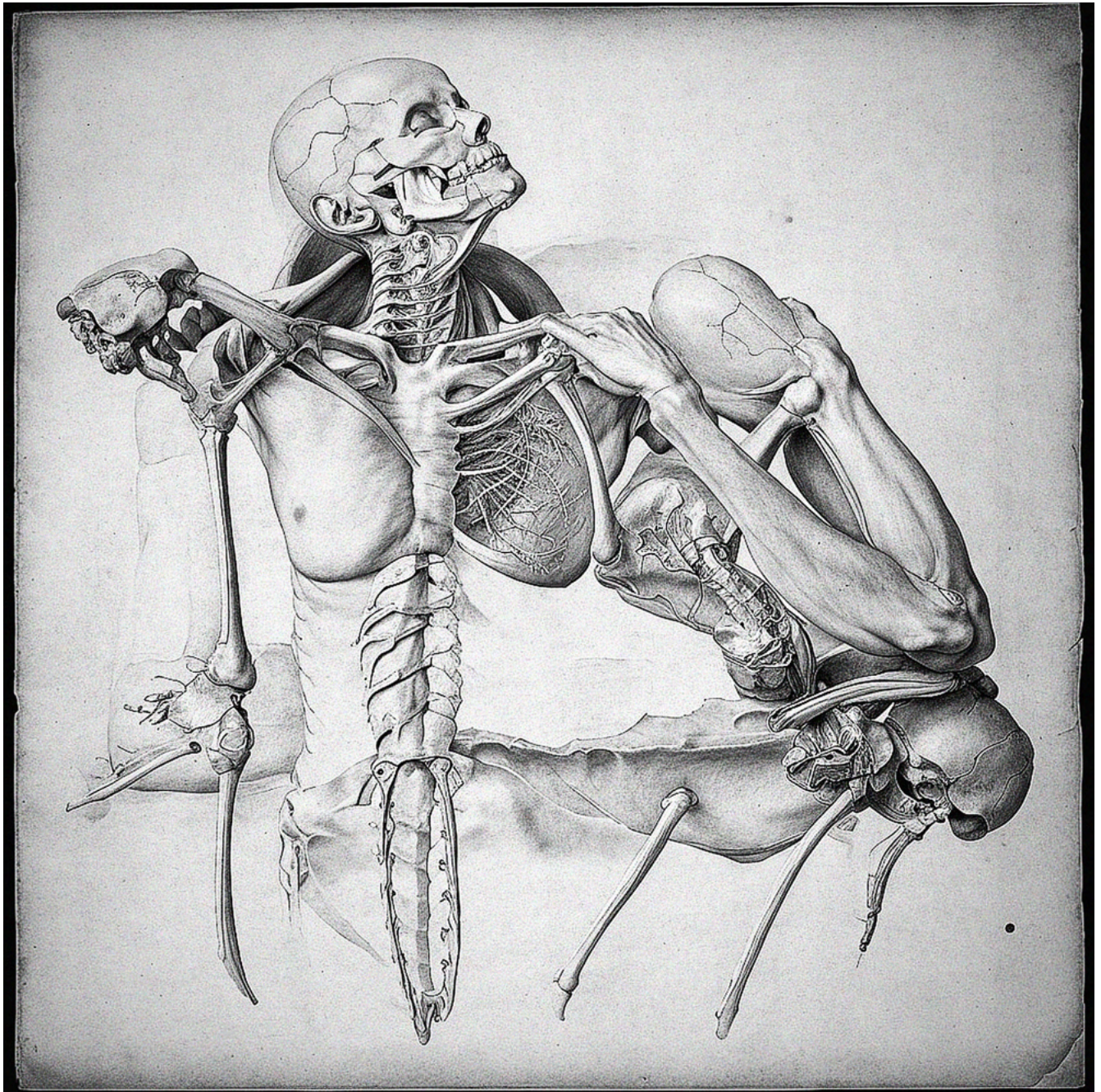
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<sup>1</sup> Hubert Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford University Press, 2002), 124.









◀ WE TEND TO REGARD flesh as the beginning and end of intimacy, as if flesh were either all the way bone, or the first experience of freedom; if, by freedom, we mean the autonomy of flesh in relation to what must hold to it, if flesh it will continue to be. Love is bone, not flesh. Despite the wind's excitements, all the images we may or may not like.



► IN *Remarks on Colour*, Wittgenstein says: “There is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems.”<sup>2</sup> A phenomenology implies agreement between more than two. But even three is not likely to be convincing. A phenomenological problem needs no more than one to be properly described and there is nothing proper, or defensible, in description.

The yellow in the sweater is heavier than its closest kin, perhaps because the blue pants, no matter how upright, feel less available to mist than does the sea, which is already saturated. The splits in light that constitute the rainbow split elsewhere, too, mark other points of possible emphasis; heavier less, each after the other, though less plain in the difference indicated.

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour* (Blackwell, 1998), 9 (§53).









◀ THERE IS A CONVENTION in academic conversation—and I don't think that I experience this so pointedly elsewhere—to say: “That's a good question.” I count myself among the ones who say it and most of the time I think I mean it. But it cannot be a primary, unreflective response. The turn of phrase does something other than what it purports.

If I say “good question” I might be attempting flattery, might be trying to keep you out of my blind-spot. It might also be the case that the question illumined for me a larger field than the one I had framed for myself and then did not overlap. There is also no quicker way to indicate that I see what you mean but cannot yet say what I think. The problem in aspect thinking, for instance, is that it cannot describe the time and movement between forms, nor the joy.

The impulse to say good question gives form to arrogance. Or can. As is in, well, I'm the one who would know, so: good question. More often compliments come in other words.

The index does not describe, any longer, a relation between an image and the thing that caused the image. It is somewhere between a style and a mood, on the idea that a mood edges up against, but is unsettling because is not yet, *a* style. This problem has always been one. Even in photographs, we say “cat” as what is indexed, and thus what indexes, but never rug or cabinet or grayscale.

► FOLLOWING THE STAY of the execution, she fell into obscurity, and against the idea—shared by those who gather, and by those who were there then—that she would be immortal. No one believed that she had a gun, and when it was not possible to believe that any longer, no one believed that she would fire it, once or a hundred times.







◀DOES IT MATTER—and if so, how—whether the emotions we feel follow from fiction, non-fiction, or something before us? Supposing that by “before us” we understand “without image.” How to name the degrees in difference? How do I know this orange from the other orange? Form is one answer, if by form one means shape, line, ridges (can’t be defined without form in mind), edges touched end to end. But what if I don’t say glove? What if I don’t say glass? What becomes of form when words go missing?

In his seminar on painting, given at Vincennes in 1981, Deleuze began by bearing the news that painting is caught up with catastrophe, generated it. Deleuze told everyone, and now us, that Cézanne was onto colour as something noumenal, that he sensed what Kant sensed by means other than colour. If noumenal, form questioning and form generating. And only then the deep and imperfect specification of time, or the moments when one begins to count after others.

*world picture*

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