

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice A Conversation on Framing and Reframing

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Abstract In this conversation, Mieke Bal retraces the perimeter of her analytically based art practice and her practice-based theoretical work, taking advantage of the operational concept of frame but also of the many actions it generates – such as framing, unframing, de-framing, and re-framing. She considers the act of framing, understood as a first gesture of interpretation, much more useful than the noun itself for our understanding of the effects and meanings of art. Framing as an action can also potentially subvert the traditional, linear, and chronological views of time, bringing into question unilateral thinking. From this perspective, re-framing does not mean doing something again but doing something different – that is, something new – while unframing, instead of a refusal of the act of framing, is to put chaos into an artwork.



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EDITORS *The concept of framing plays a crucial role in both your theoretical work and practice as an artist and art curator, which are deeply interconnected. On the one hand, the way you have been carrying out theoretical research is a form of activism and practical militancy; on the other, your work as an artist and art curator is a form of theorization. How much, and in what way, is 'framing' a useful tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice?*

MIEKE BAL I like the way you reverse the traditional views in the formulation of your question. My theoretical writings tend to have a political, activist point to make, while staying theoretically precise. Moreover, my artistic and curatorial work figures as 'theoretical fictions', to bring in that term that Freud came up with. That reversal alone already demonstrates the usefulness of the concept of 'framing'. Because, what framing does, first of all, is delimiting what is relevant and what can be left aside. The practice of cultural analysis I have explored thus becomes inflected, or tainted, with fictionality. The concept of 'framing' has been productively put to use in cultural analysis as an alternative to the older concept of context. One of the most influential formulations of this concept, usefully succinct, is Jonathan Culler's "Author's Preface" to his volume *Framing the Sign*. 'Framing' can assist us in avoiding the conflation of origin, cause, and intention, a conflation of three ideas of beginning, so frequent in interpretive endeavours which confuses metaphysics, logic, and psychology (Culler 1988, XII-XVI). In its difference from the more usual deployment of 'context', framing refers to a verb, not a thing. As such, it helps to avoid the reification into a thing and, instead, to demonstrate that the verb form of framing produces an event, for which a subject (here, the analysing scholar) is responsible. While framing calls for the recognition of the subjective agency in the act, the agent of framing is framed in turn. In this way, the attempt to account for one's own acts of framing is doubled. First, one makes explicit what one brings to bear on the object of analysis: why, on what grounds, and to what effect. Then one attempts to account for one's own position as a subject of framing, including for the rules to which one submits. This is a double self-reflection. It thus might help solve the problems of unreconstructed contextualism as well as of a moralistic and naive self-reflexivity.

EDS *Absolutely. And what about the use of framing as a way to bring theory and practice closer together?*

M.B. I think your reversal in your account of my work already does this. Framing as a concept, brought to life with the use of verb forms, subject nomination, hence, responsibility, brings theoretical reflection into the practice, and compels people involved in practices to account for what they do, and realise why they do it that way. That



Figure 1 "Descartes mad, or doubting?" (still from Mieke Bal, *Reasonable Doubt*, 2016). Photo: Przemio Wojciechowski

accounting, which is what reflection on framing compels, is, precisely, where practice calls upon theory, and asks theory to help make the artwork meaningful, so that it can stand the test of analysis. In my film work I have attempted to do just that: for example, how can we make a film based on Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* from 1856 while staying true to what is most significant about that novel: its critical contemporaneity? The usual genre of the historical costume drama betrays just that aspect, and thus what is most important in Flaubert's novel. By placing/framing the story in the past of Flaubert's time the later films obliterate the novel's (then-)actuality. Also, in my film on Descartes, the alleged master of rationalism had to be shown in his bouts of madness, his moments where he could not stay the cliché rationalist and dualist we have made of him [fig. 1].¹ And then, there is the involvement of 'time' in interpretation and analysis. 'Framing' as a verb form points to process. Process both requires time and fills time. It is a factor of 'sequence' and 'duration'. And where there is duration, change occurs: differences emerge over time. This is where history, inevitably and importantly, participates in any act of interpretation or analysis. But not in a chronological, linear sequence.

1 See M. Bal, *Reasonable Doubt*, 2016, multiple-screen video installation, multi-lingual with English subtitles. See also Bal 2020.

EDS *As an interpretative process, framing seems to be at the core of your attempt to maintain the notion of 'reading' art while, at the same time, avoiding Manichaeian oppositions, such as text vs. image, verbal vs. iconic, and hermeneutical vs. visual. Is it so?*

M.B. Yes, for me, avoiding reasoning through binary oppositions (of which the sign 'vs.' is the primary symptom) is of crucial importance. Oppositional thinking makes reading for complexity quite difficult, perhaps impossible. It is the most widespread form of simplification. And it is the major source of discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping... Just think of the division of people into 'black' and 'white'. We all know that practically no one is really black, at most, brown; and no one, except perhaps people suffering from albinism, is truly white. So, that opposition is just a tool for simplification, hierarchisation, and in the end, racism. The male-female opposition is seemingly more reasonable, but is it, really? And what is the point of it? 'Reading' art is a way of entering into what the artwork, in all its complexity, is laying out, for its viewers or readers to unpack in its nuances as well as structural 'main lines'. The concept and act of framing help to keep those nuances in sight, delineating and deciphering what, in their combination, they achieve. 'Unframing' would be a way of refusing acts of framing, as if these acts were limitations. But the opposite is the case. Framing is giving sense and meaning to what we see or read. Unframing is reverting the complex artwork into chaos.

An important consequence of framing having its roots in time is the unstable position of knowledge itself. This might seem to lead to an epistemic aporia, since knowledge itself loses its fixed grounding. However, as I contended in an earlier book, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Bal 2002) a full endorsement of this instability can also produce a different kind of grounding, a grounding of a practical kind. Thus, every act of analysing begins and ends with a material practice. That practice, in turn, reaches out to cultural analysis, claiming to participate fully in the academic practices whose object it would otherwise, powerlessly, remain. Instead, in my practice, the object, an image staged, *mise en scène*, is put under pressure; its meaning is multiplied, and its material existence is set up as troubled. In other words, my object is 'framed'.

EDS *What does that entail?*

M.B. Framing, as a concept, has become so 'hot' since Derrida's discussion of Kant's *Third Critique* in *La vérité en peinture*, that it seems useful to avoid philosophical partisanship, in the disciplinary as well as deconstructivist sense. The verb form 'framing' - provisionally distinguished from the noun 'frame' - solicits the question

of its object. But, as a verb, it also predicates that object, not in the abstract void of theoretical reflection, but in time, space, aspect; it 'frames' it. Thus, all by itself, even on the level of the word alone, 'framing' questions the object-status of the objects studied in the cultural disciplines. This questioning results in a repositioning of the object as alive, in ways that have to do with the 'social life of things' rather than with a metaphysical hypostatising of objects or a rhetorical strategy of personification. It also results in the status of image - rather than text - as the most characteristic, indeed, paradigmatic, kind of cultural object, provided we continue to see it as living its life in the present and the ways we frame it as provisional. For, an image solicits and demands looking-seeing, and that act can only be performed in the present tense.²

Indeed, in my book *Double Exposures*, I considered the 'life of objects' in their 'present tense', and how they come to produce meaning (Bal 1996). That work is usually framed as museum studies although it might just as well have been called semantics, anthropology, or, to use my own favourite term, cultural analysis. On no account, though, can it be unproblematically assimilated into art history, for it challenged rather than endorsed the historical that defines that discipline, foregrounding, instead, the slippery but crucial 'now-time' of art objects seen as (Benjaminian) 'images'. But it did provoke art history. As a discipline, the latter was invited to reconsider its key terms and methods as being porously continuous with the other disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields that host my work. This invitation on my part fitted into my ongoing argument on the nature of interdisciplinarity, as 'non-indifferent' to disciplinarity.

EDS *How would you define the difference - both in theory and practice - between the act of framing and that of reframing?*

M.B. Framing is a first gesture of interpretation. As I said above, framing as a verb of action, as embedded in time, as bound to a subject, and as delimiting what is relevant for the interaction between artwork and viewer/reader, is a much more useful concept for our understanding of the effects and meanings of art and literature than 'context' could ever be. Useful, because practical. Framing is something you 'do', whereas 'context' is a noun indicating something - some thing. Reframing is usually said of an act of revisioning the older status and meaning of, for example, pictures. This reframing comes later, and rejuvenates the old-master art, for example. But don't be fooled by the repetitiveness suggested by that preposition 're-'. Here, 're-' does not mean 'doing it again' but doing it anew,

² For Derrida's view see Derrida 1978. On the sociality of objects, cf. Appadurai 1986.

differently. This is what I have argued and demonstrated in *Quoting Caravaggio*. The act of quoting mentioned in that book is not a repetitive one, but a revisioning. This revisioning changes the older artwork, forever. After being reframed by a later work, the old one can never return to its earlier state. We cannot see it anymore as 'what it was' but only as what it has become. Without being able to predict what it will become later (Bal 1999).

EDS *Associating the idea of originality with the process of framing and reframing is indeed in itself problematic, as the process consists of a continuous movement between repetition and difference. Instead of worrying about the presumed origin of images, wouldn't it be better to focus on their destination trying to trace or imagine the plural temporalities and spatialities they shape?*

M.B. I think 'originality' is not about 'origin'. The idea of originality concerns the special quality of the artworks in question. It's about their creative, innovative mode of setting off or standing out from the usual, the habitual - their power of not repeating what came before them. That differentiation concerns the imagination and the way that faculty is capable of making something new. For me, the imagination and the intellect go hand in hand. The one cannot function without the other. And yes, you rightly call the result of the shaping they do, 'plural', as in 'plural temporalities and spatialities'. That plurality depends, of course, on the style and topic involved. But I tend to agree if the word means an opening up of possibilities. The destination rather than the source, or past, is open and can go in many different directions. It is also important to consider the future and allow artworks to come up with an as-yet-unknown future in which they can function in different ways.

EDS *The relationship between analysis and practice - first opened up, then negotiated - constitutes the area where framing might emerge as a concept that helps to define the parameters of interdisciplinarity in a radical sense.*

M.B. I cannot abide the distinction, let alone opposition, between theory and practice. Nor do I accept an opposition between analysis and practice. My film work, which would count as a practice, because it takes bodies, hands, and many participants to 'make' the films, is analytically based. Before I can start filming I am compelled to analyse the pre-text, the work or situation, story or image, on which I base the script, the scenario, the storyboard, the casting, and everything else involved. The two activities of analysing and practicing cannot, not ever, be distinguished. Their integration is, precisely, the interdisciplinary ground on which any analysis and any practice



Figure 2 “Thomas Germaine as, from left to right: Léon, Charles, Rodolphe” (still from Mieke Bal & Michelle Williams Gamaker, *Madame B.*, 2013). Photo: Thijs Vissia; collage: Margreet Vermeulen

stand. In the formulation of your question you speak of opening up, then negotiating the relationship between analysis and practice. But what is there to open up if the two are already, from the start, indispensable to each other? Perhaps there is a phase in the production when analysing comes first. For example, when considering making the film and installation *Madame B* that took off and addressed from Flaubert’s novel, it took an understanding of how the main character Emma is trapped in the double exploitation of erotic and capitalist seduction, to see how the three men in her life, the boring husband, the predatory Rodolphe, and the naive young Léon, in all their differences, are fundamentally alike. That takes analysis [fig. 2].³

But then, the practice took over quite quickly when we (Michelle Williams Gamaker and myself) decided to give form, or figuration, to that likeness by casting the same actor in the three roles. What we did was frame the relational similitude of their relationship to Emma in the figuration of the men in the same body. The practical side came from our conviction that the actor, Thomas Germaine, was brilliant in his theatrical skills and so, could do this in a convincing manner. But no; that is not just practical. It took a close analysis of Germaine’s acting in an earlier film to make that practical decision. Framing the male characters as similarly framing Emma (in the negative sense of exploitation and trapping) – was that an instance of analysing, theorising, practicing? I am happy to leave that question open. In relation

3 M. Bal (co-directed with M. Williams Gamaker), *Madame B: Explorations in Emotional Capitalism*, 2013, HDV, nineteen-screen installation, multi-lingual with English subtitles. See also Bal 2016.

to interdisciplinarity, I would suggest that we are far removed from any disciplinary constraints with this example.

EDS *Speaking of reframing, you have stated that it stands as the opposite of historical interpretation. By adding meanings that were not envisioned either by the artist/maker or by former interpreters/viewers, reframing provides the image with new associations, while simultaneously obscuring other (previous) aspects and features. Could you elaborate further on this?*

M.B. As I have written at the beginning of my book *Quoting Caravaggio*, reframing is an indispensable mode of looking/seeing. The later image from within which we look at older ones reframes the latter. Let me quote that opening passage once more:

Quoting Caravaggio changes his work forever. Like any form of representation, art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active reworking. It specifies what and how our gaze sees. Hence, the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead. This process is exemplified by an engagement of contemporary culture with the past that has important implications for the ways we conceive of both history and culture in the present. (Bal 199, 1)

I suppose this relation between past and present (for me, in mutuality) is what your question alludes to. I used here the word 'quotation'. The concept of quotation, which serves as the central theoretical focus or 'hub' of this passage, will lead us beyond the common understanding of quotation. This has aptly been summarised by McEvelley. This author rightly points out that quotation is not a unified practice with unified goals. But, going beyond McEvelley's differentiation of the art practice called 'quotationalism', I have explored how this practice redefines and complicates the notion of quotation itself, as a crucial aspect of media products as well as transfers, and transformations, from one media product to another, through inflections of their respective media. In short, quotation is indispensable to understanding the intermedial practice and the media products that practice produces. I use the term 'media products', following Lars Elleström's choice to avoid medium-specificity as well as undefinable vague common words. If I use 'text' or 'image' it is to denote a media product within a particular medium.⁴

⁴ See McEvelley 1993. Classical works at the background of this argument are the two volumes edited by Lars Elleström in 2021 - with a long introduction that is almost a hand-

EDS *Intermediality is indeed a fundamental concept to be linked to framing and reframing. Thanks for bringing it up for discussion. How did you approach Elleström's work and how much has it influenced your practice?*

M.B. When the term 'intermedial(ity)' appears, I cannot help but briefly mention the key role Lars Elleström has played in developing that field. With the combination of rigour and creativity, he and the participants of the IMS-Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden, which he co-founded and shaped, have made a decisive step forward, to which I luckily have become a close witness and sometimes participant. As an academic who is also a filmmaker, I am very much aware of intermediality. The inevitable integration of words and images, colour, sound, narrativity, and technological effects and more, clearly demonstrates that no single disciplinary framework will do to understand, analyse and teach the significant and pervasive participation of intermediality in culture. As W.J.T. Mitchell has rightly argued, there are no "essential" differences between media, even if they differ in institutional and formal appearances. What catches my eye in the title of the two edited volumes Elleström published in 2021, is primarily that word 'relations', in combination with the preposition 'inter-'. This relationality is particularly important to me. In the title of those two earlier volumes, *Beyond Media Borders: Intermedial Relations Among Multimodal Media*, every word counts, and is programmatic.⁵

Briefly: 'inter-' stands for, or 'is', relation, rather than accumulation, as in 'multi-'. It is also to be distinguished in crucial ways from the (currently over-used) preposition 'trans-', which denotes a passage 'through' without impact from, another domain. I realise many colleagues use 'trans-' without implying such indifferent passages, but given my commitment to relationality I stick with 'inter-'. There is another aspect to this interest in 'inter-', which is part of what I have come to call 'inter-ship': its frequent use in different contexts. This makes the relationality appear in different framings. An obvious case is 'interdisciplinarity'. There are many other forms of inter-ship in all of which the focus on relation is important. Just think of intertextual, international, intermedial, intercultural and interdiscursive. Inter-ship as a focus encourages awareness and closer reflection on relationality. And the closeness of my neologism to the concept of

book in itself - which he published after his earlier book *Transmedial Narration: Narratives and Stories in Different Media*, from 2019 (Elleström 2021a; 2021b; 2019). Some of the following ideas were developed by Mieke Bal in an article currently in press (Bal 2023).

5 For Mitchell see Mitchell 1987, 2-3.

internship, which denotes learning through practice, yields a very welcome association.

The phrase “beyond media borders” in Elleström’s main title suggests a commitment to transgressing those borders that academic traditions have so insistently drawn up around their fields, mostly through specific methodologies and definitions, whereas their key terms – think of ‘text’ and ‘image’ – remain vague. With his consistent interest in media ‘as’ intermedial ‘per se’, his many edited volumes, and as director of the IMS centre at Linnaeus University, Lars Elleström has become a primary authority in that domain that is best characterized as one that does not fit any of the traditional disciplinary concepts, yet is probably the largest, most frequently practiced mode of communication among humans; indispensable for human life. His recent untimely passing compels us all to work in the wake of his intellectual dynamism, where meticulous accuracy goes hand in hand with creative thinking.

EDS *You have already touched upon the issue previously, but it would be interesting to delve into the involvement of time. How does the process of framing/reframing subvert traditional temporal regimes? Also referring, of course, to your work?*

M.B. The opening passage from *Quoting Caravaggio* that I mentioned above says it already, even without using the concept of ‘framing’ with or without ‘un-’ and ‘re-’. That book was my first extensive reflection on temporality, provoked by the unexpectedly harsh critiques of my earlier book *Reading “Rembrandt”*, which was considered by many art historians as a-historical. This was a mis-reading of that book, but as I always learn from criticism, it compelled me to think harder about time (Bal 1991). In combination with a growing interest in contemporary baroque art that matched my ongoing fascination with Caravaggio, I came up with the form of re/framing that is quotation. The audio alliteration of Q and C in the title also helped.

Quoting can only be a reframing of an object that is thereby already unframed; its initial framing disappears, over-written as it is by the new (‘re-’) framing. The use of the active verb framing as distinct from a reifying noun such as context, already contains that subversion of traditional views of time, with chronology as its first victim. Chronology, or let’s call it ‘chrono-logic’, imposes linearity and unilateral thinking. The temporal turbulence I put forward in that earlier book is more extensively elaborated in chapter four of my recent book *Image-Thinking* (Bal 2022).⁶ The chapter’s title says it all:

⁶ This is the inaugural volume in the new book series “Re-fractions: at the borders of philosophy and art history”, edited by Kamini Vellodi. For the concept of figuration,



Figure 3 Mieke Bal, the process of shooting. *It's About Time! Reflections of Urgency*, 2020. Photo: Alicia Devaux

“Multi-Tentacled Time: Contemporaneity, Heterochrony, Anachronism for Preposterous History”. The metaphor of the octopus with its tentacles going in all directions, figures - to allude to Lyotard’s concept of figuration - the multi-directional movements of time. That temporal multiplicity is centrally relevant in narrative theory and in film.

The critiques that blamed me for being ahistorical after the publication of *Reading “Rembrandt”* in 1991 were a stimulating incentive to think harder about the issue of historical time. That led to my 1999 book *Quoting Caravaggio*, in which I addressed those critiques, and developed a new sense of history in relation to time. But it was when, already immersed in filmmaking, I was working with Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro on a large collective video exhibition devoted to the connections between the movement of images and the movement of people, in other words, video ‘and’ migration (not ‘on’ migration), that my thinking about temporality took another turn. This is also probed through my recent, 2020 short ‘essay film’ *It’s About Time! Reflections on Urgency*. This film, the title of which is as ambiguous as the concept of ‘pre-posterous history’, addresses the world’s self-destructive impulse, through the voice of Christa Wolf’s refiguring of the antique character Cassandra, the prophet of doom who will never be believed, in punishment for her refusal to sleep with her employer Apollo - an early #MeToo case. There is a poignant irony in the contemporaneity of the making of that film: I made it in Poland exactly one week before the coronavirus reached its pandemic crisis.

see Lyotard [1971] (2020), very adequately explained by David Norman Rodowick in the first chapter of his book *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy After the New Media* (Rodowick 2001).

In that recent film, temporality is central, both in theoretical reflection – when read without the exclamation mark – and as a narrative topic with political thrust: makes haste! The situation is urgent! The exclamation mark is the shifter between these two domains [fig. 3].⁷

EDS *You have reflected extensively on the active relationship between the mechanics of memory, visual practices, and (historical) narratives. The temporal aspect of the image preserves traces of the past and supports memory by structuring and crystalizing it as much as transforming and updating it. More specifically, you have argued that ‘acts of memory’ can be considered a ‘form of becoming’ understood as a narrativization of memory, and you have stressed that memory does not belong entirely to the past but to the present as a political act and as a form of responsibility. Could one consider the role of memory, especially in time-based art practices, as a form of active, future-oriented, and responsible unframing and reframing of the past?*

M.B. That would be a possible way of including memory in visual analysis. This is, at first sight, somewhat paradoxical, since memory is usually considered to concern first of all the past, while looking happens in the present. But as I have argued in the introduction to the collective volume *Acts of Memory*, this traditional view also asks for revision. This becomes very clear in an article by Palestinian scholar Ihab Saloul, who writes in an essay on “memory in exile” convincingly on the need to be nuanced with the idea of ‘post-’ in Marianne Hirsch’s concept of ‘postmemory’. Binding the idea of memory to the present, Saloul writes:

I argue that any disciplinary perspective employed should pose ‘the subject of the everyday’ as the question at the heart of any narrative about the condition of Palestinian exile. Posed as a question, ‘the subject of the everyday’ can help us not only to refine our reading of exilic narratives as historical representations but also to supply insights into the narratives’ depiction of current affairs. (Saloul 2020, 245)

Although he writes this in a specific and politically very charged frame, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, whereas Hirsch’s frame is holocaust trauma, equally political but from a different temporal side, Saloul insists with his plea for the ‘everyday’ on the present

⁷ This film can be watched online at <https://www.miekebal.org/films/it's-about-time!-reflections-of-urgency>.



Figure 4 “Lessons from madness”, exhibition view of *Landscapes of Madness* by Mieke Bal & Michelle Williams Gamaker, Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova, Turku, Finland (21 October 2011 - 29 January 2012). Photo: Jari Nieminen

tense of memory.⁸ In continuation to the quoted passage he explains the motivation for this: “This mode of reading entails a shift of focus from the historical event itself, in its inevitable pastness, to the subject of this event and his or her present-day condition” (Saloul 2020, 245).

According to the performative conception of art, art participates in the political – it does not simply represent it. Even more: rather than merely critiquing, it intervenes. For such intervention to be possible and relevant, art needs to possess as well as bestow agency. I understand ‘relevant’ in the sense of being incisive for that domain where differences of opinion are recognised and treated as antagonisms; as the alternative to enmity. This nuancing of the ‘parties’ in disagreement was proposed by Chantal Mouffe in her theory of the political as social – as distinct from ‘politics’ that is institutional (Mouffe 2005).⁹

In making exhibitions, I have always sought to maximise this political potential – not as party-politics, partisanship, or obedience to governmental measures but as enticing people to think, resist, disagree, or otherwise exercise their capacity to think and act, who knows? change their views. The exhibitions I have made experimental have offered visitors experiences they do not ordinarily have; neither in the cinema nor in the museum. In an exhibition in Turku, for example, *Landscapes of Madness*, based on the film we made after Françoise Davoine’s book on trauma *Mère Folle*, the display brought

⁸ For Hirsch see Hirsch 2012. Her concept took off like a whirlwind on the basis of an earlier publication, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997). This was criticised with useful conceptual amendments by Ernst van Alphen (2005).

⁹ Mieke Bal has written more extensively on Mouffe’s distinction in the introduction to her book *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo’s Political Art* (2010), and on art’s agency in terms of framing, see her recent article “Art’s Agency: On Being Flabbergasted” (2023).

in a combination of shock, pleasure, strangeness and beauty (Davoine 2014).¹⁰ Visitors were invited to make a journey through ‘madness’ – something most of us know, and none of us has an easy time dealing with. The preposition ‘through’ entails both a meandering through the relatively small spaces of the museum, and the activity of making choices. Where watching one film is already disturbed by the sound or the shimmering light of another, the activity of viewing requires a more active, performative attitude – a choice-making that allows pace and direction to remain the visitor’s decision [fig. 4].

Indeed, memory as practiced – performing ‘acts of memory’ – is future-oriented. Why would we bother with the past if we were not expecting from it to help us shape a liveable future? I think all committed, politically engaged artists are just doing that: making, shaping, figuring, what would become a better future. Such art is activating – it makes its viewers think.

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¹⁰ For information on the film, titled *A Long History of Madness*, see <https://www.miekebal.org/films/a-long-history-of-madness>; the first of several exhibitions is shown here: <https://www.miekebal.org/copy-of-exhibitions-islands-of-madness>. She made the film and the exhibition with Michelle Williams Gamaker.

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