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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Apostrophe, witnessing and its essentially theatrical modes of address: Maria Dermôut on Pattimura and Kara Walker on the New Orleans flooding

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Abstract Apostrophe is best known as a punctuation mark (') or as a key poetic figure (with a speaker addressing an imaginary or absent person or entity). In origin, however, it is a pivotal *rhetorical* figure that indicates a 'breaking away' or turning away of the speaker from one addressee to another, in a different mode. In this respect, apostrophe is essentially theatrical. To be sure, the turn away implies two different modes of address that may follow upon one another, as is hinted at by the two meanings of the verb 'to witness': being a witness and bearing witness. One cannot do both at the same time. My argument will be, however, that in order to make witnessing work ethically and responsibly, the two modes of address must take place simultaneously, in the coincidence of two modalities of presence: one actual and one *virtual*. Accordingly, I will distinguish between an address of attention and an address of expression. Whereas the witness is actually paying attention to that which she witnesses, she is virtually (and in the sense Deleuze intended, no less *really*) turning away in terms of expression. The two come together in what Kelly Oliver called the 'inner witness'. The simultaneous operation of two modes of address suggests that Caroline Nevejan's so-called YUTPA model would have to include two modalities of 'you'. Such a dual modality has become all the more important, in the context of the society of the spectacle. One text will help me first to explore two modes of address through apostrophe. I will focus on a story by Dutch author Maria Dermôut, written in the fifties of the twentieth century, reflecting on an uprising and the subsequent execution of its leader in the Dutch Indies in 1817. Secondly, I will move to American artist Kara Walker's response, in the shape of an installation and a visual essay, to the flooding of New Orleans in 2005. The latter will serve to illustrate a historic shift in the theatrical nature and status of 'presence' in the two modes of address. Instead of thinking of the convergence of media, of which Jenkins speaks, we might think of media swallowing up one another. For instance, the theatrical structure of apostrophe is swallowed up, and in a sense perverted, by the model of the spectacle in modern media. This endangers the very possibility of witnessing in any ethical sense of the word.

Keywords Apostrophe · Witnessing · Addressee · Address of attention · Address of expression · Rhetorical moment · Inner witness · News coverage · Pseudo-witnessing · Theatricality

1 Introduction

Literature may deal with historical events, and in dealing with them, relate these to a present, which is not only the present of the moment of publishing but any moment of reading. In this respect, literature can not only present us with witnesses but also serve as a witness itself. One story that was published in 1956 may prove the point, *The jewelled hair-comb*.[1] In the story, Dutch author Maria

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[1] Original title: *De juwelen haarkam*. I will use the version that was taken up in Dermoût's *Verzameld werk* (Collected Works).

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Dermôut dealt with an uprising that took place in colonial times in the Dutch Indies. In the Napoleonic era, the Dutch had temporarily lost control of the Indies to the advantage of the English. Of course, the balance of power shifted again after Napoleon's defeat. English rule, under Raffles, had been less harsh than Dutch rule, however, and had provided several Indonesian peoples with forms of autonomy. When the Dutch returned, they wanted to make clear that they were in charge again and did so with little respect for what had changed meanwhile. As a result, there was an uprising under the leadership of an Ambon-born leader, called Thomas Matoelesía, or Matulessey, who was better known under his resistance name of Pattimura. After a successful start on his part, and after severe battles, he was caught and executed as a sure sign of the restoration of Dutch rule. His corps was left rotting in a cage. The battles and execution were important news at the time, but the execution more or less concluded the story and decided the consequent irrelevance of Pattimura to the Dutch audience.

My question is twofold: why did Dermôut decide to take up the history again in the fifties of the twentieth century; and how can the story still function in terms of witnessing for us, today? As for Dermoût, one reason may have been that in the light of Indonesia's uprising and newly won freedom, Pattimura had become one of the great figures in Indonesian history (and has remained so until this day, becoming an icon on the 1000 rupiah banknote billet of the newly designed national paper money). More directly, within the Dutch context, there were reasons to consider this historical figure from the Moluccas, in particular. A substantial number of military men who had served in the Dutch colonial army had been recruited from the Moluccas. With their families, they were forced to come to The Netherlands after Indonesia's independence. They had not received a hearty welcome, however. The families were mostly hosted in fenced enclosures, sometimes even in former concentration camps left by the Germans after the Second World War. Within this set of historical complexities, Dermôut's story has a witness to Pattimura's execution as its main character. Moreover, the theme of witnessing, and of rhetorically turning away, structures the story in its entirety. In this respect, it has lost little of its relevance, and its effects are not restricted to the fifties of the twentieth century. The story speaks and acts rhetorically, aesthetically and politically now, for anybody caring to be addressed by it, when reading it.

Witnessing appears to have an awkward relation with either rhetoric or aesthetics, because of the dominance of manipulation in rhetoric and of form in aesthetics. Rhetoric got a bad name because of its manipulative and by implication deceitful nature, starting with Plato's (1994) famous attack in *Gorgias*.[2] Aesthetics always carries the danger of emphasizing form or of turning into aestheticism. In this context, indeed, how could one think of witnessing and the ethical demands related to testimony, in terms of rhetoric or aesthetics? The first thing to note would be that manipulation, in origin, does not have negative connotations at all. Latin *manipulare* means simply to handle, and more specifically, to use one's hands with skill and care. Not only will being a witness often imply handling something with care but also will require *form*, literally and figurally. Perhaps more explicitly, *bearing* witness will demand skill and care, and form. It is not effective in and for itself. Any witness will have to appear rhetorically, in a formal setting, either because she is framed as such or because she wants to operate adequately, also in an ethical sense. Nevertheless, I do want to take the ambivalent meaning of especially rhetoric seriously. With regard to this, I will not be dealing with skilled witnesses, who know how to interpret what they are witnessing and how to give an adequate report of what they have witnessed. I will be dealing with the intrinsically *rhetorical structure* of the act of witnessing. On the one hand, this rhetorical structure may easily facilitate the manipulation of witnessing, in the pejorative sense of the word. On the other hand, it also facilitates the acts of witnessing and bearing witness in an ethically and affectively meaningful way.

The balance between the two is at the core of an installation turned into visual essay by the Afro-American artist Kara Walker; my second example. This work, entitled *After the deluge*, finds its historical starting point in the flooding of New Orleans in 2005, caused by Hurricane Katrina. As an international audience could see, this flooding struck the community of black Americans the heaviest, when 80% of New Orleans was covered with water. In the United States, so Walker contends, it also led to a response that fed on, or tapped into, centuries-old racial patterns and prejudices. Walker's essay is an investigation into these patterns, dealing with issues such as divine wrath, racial stereotyping and the perversities of both. It is of interest for my topic that the essay appeared relatively quick after an event that so many had been able to 'witness', as the common parlance of media commentators wants it, not just in the United States but worldwide. Indeed, one of the questions posed by Walker's essay is what the difference may be between seeing things on television and witnessing them. Even though events may be broadcasted nationally or globally, there are always very

[2] The rhetoricians that Plato attacked were also known as sophists. Like rhetoricians these acquired a bad name in European history, as in "sophistry". On the origin and history of rhetoric, and also on the rather positive ways in which rhetoric has been dealt with in relation to the construction of politics, society and civilisation, see Kennedy (1994), *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*.

different communities involved with disturbingly different histories, living in painfully different circumstances. In this regard, Walker's essay can be seen as a witnessing text looking for an audience. The essay performs something, here, that not only connects it in terms of its aims to Dermôut's story but also testifies of a rhetorical complication in the act of witnessing because of the ways in which modern media operate.

Because of the fact that witnessing implies a double address, it is intrinsically rhetorical. Because of the fact that these addresses imply a different modality, it is also intrinsically theatrical. This is hinted at when, for instance, Nevejan and Brazier state that 'Witnessing refers to the fact that the persona of the witness embodies the possibility to act upon and/or to testify about the act' (Nevejan and Brazier 2010: 203). Evidently, there are two acts: the act of witnessing and of bearing witness. The witness addresses the one that is being witnessed, and this form of address differs distinctly from the way in which one delivers testimony. The two acts imply two different modes of address. Moreover, the witness is being described here as a *persona*, who takes up a role, in looking, registering, acting and reporting. In this respect, the role of being a witness demands a simultaneous relation with two 'you's': the 'you' that is presently being witnessed and the 'you' of some sort of an audience, or more specifically, a community that is *virtually* present in the act of witnessing the first 'you'. One could think of the classical chorus, here, not so much in its role of commenting on the action or intervening in it but in relation to its being present all the time, simultaneously.

A double simultaneous address is the defining characteristic of a specific rhetorical and intrinsically theatrical figure, namely apostrophe. This form of apostrophe has nothing to do with the punctuation mark and is related to, but distinct from its poetic variant. Apostrophe, in what follows, is a rhetorical figure that indicates how a speaker can break away from one addressee to another whereas the two are connected simultaneously, theatrically, in a given situation.

2 Apostrophe: the moment of turning away

In the humanities, apostrophe is best known for its uses in relation to lyric. In famous articles by Johnson (1987) and Culler (1981), poetry was defined generically on the basis of apostrophe. The contrast with other major generic modes of speaking is that in narrative, somebody is speaking about something to an audience, and that, in drama, characters are addressing one other, speaking with one another. In contrast, poetry consists in a subject that speaks in calling upon something, not directly addressing another speaker or an audience. Poetry can exist because of a specific language situation, then, in which the speaker appears to be turned away in terms of address and speaking. This is why poetry could be defined by Mill (1950) as a form of 'overhearing'. It is as if we listen to someone in secret, or to someone who is not aware, or does not care, that we are eavesdropping on him or her.[3] With respect to this, the function of apostrophe in the realm of poetry was then defined to be fourfold by Culler (1981). Apostrophe may serve:

- to passionately express or exclaim;
- to call upon something;
- to direct attention towards the speaking subject in her calling upon something,
- to lend life to all kinds of things and subjects that become life-like because they are addressed.

As we will see, especially, the fourth function that also connotes Longinus' dealing with the apostrophe will prove to be of interest when the poetic apostrophe is used in a context that turns it into a successful *rhetorical* tool with regard to bearing witness.[4]

The poetic definition of apostrophe is not the oldest one. Apostrophe has its origin in rhetoric. Rhetoric is said to originate in Sicily, with Empedocles (490–430 BC) as its founding father (the source is Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*). After the overthrowing of the tyrant Thrasydaeus in 470 BC, Empedocles is supposed to have invented rhetoric in order to address a wide variety of injustices that had occurred under the tyrant's rule, which had to be solved peacefully. Following this story, one may say that rhetoric finds its origin in relation to the system of justice, and within that context, one of the oldest figures in rhetoric may be apostrophe. In this context, the term apostrophe literally means: 'to turn'(*strophein*) 'away' or 'aside' (*apo*). It is described by Quintillian as follows: "the diversion of our address from the judge is wonderfully stirring, whether we attack our adversary … or turn to make some invocation such as, 'For I appeal to you, hills and groves of Alba'" (Quintilian 1953, book IX, 2:37). So, apostrophe indicates that one uses the technique of turning

[3] Mind that I am talking about basic generic situations, not about individual poems. In a specific poem the speaking subject may be addressing another speaker or may be telling something. If that is the case one would have to conclude that these poems have a dramatic quality or narrative one. The generic definition of poetry was already indicated by John Stuart Mill, who in 1833 contended: "Eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener." Mill's definition is said to go back on Shelley's comparison of poetry with a nightingale that one can hear but not see (Furniss and Bath 2007: 219).

[4] Longinus suggests that apostrophe has ekphrastic powers (on which more later) as a result of which hearing about something may change into seeing it before one's imaginary eyes and, consequently, experiencing it (Longinus 1995: 200–201).

away from the subject one was speaking to, in order to address another one, in a different mode. With respect to this, according to classical rhetoric, the apostrophe may also involve a digression or change of topic. I will be focusing, however, on the different modes of address.

With regard to apostrophe's powers to affect an audience, the Quintillian passage may serve to illustrate how apostrophe works in terms of theatricality. In a real theatre, the characters on stage are supposed to speak with one another in their own 'world'. One of them may turn away from his interlocutor, however, in addressing the audience. This coincides with a shift in worlds and, consequently, modes. The character who turns away to the audience is saying something that should not and cannot be heard by his counterpart. That is, to say, the ontological borders of the world on stage are broken and a new one is created in the direct address of character to audience. In terms of theatricality, this may concern many sorts of situations in real life. In the case of a court, for instance, as was also indicated by Quintillian, there will be different addressees with different roles. There is a judge or a jury, there is someone accused and perhaps an accuser; there may be a general audience watching or an audience that consists of relatives and friends. In speaking to the accuser first, for instance, a lawyer may turn away to the judge. Or in speaking to the jury, she may turn away in order to start to speak to the audience. The shift in audience implies a shift in mode. One shifts from interrogation, for instance, to explanation. So, even when, in the context of a court, the addressee from which one turns away will still be able to hear the text that is addressed to another person, his status will have changed because the address shifts modes. In this lies the 'wonderfully stirring' rhetorical power of apostrophe.[5]

The 'wonder' involved consists, in part, in a change of situation that is not an event. An event can be described as a change of situation, or better, the shift from one situation into another (this, at least is its definition in narratology, the study of narratives and narrativity). An execution is an event, therefore, as is a flooding. First somebody lived, and then he was dead. First we had a prosperous city, then a devastated one. In the case of an apostrophe, however, there are not two distinct situations. The one situation alters in terms of mode; whilst remaining the same, in a sense, the situation becomes split. Consequently, the turning away can be better described as a *moment* at which the rhetorical momentum shifts gears and the situation becomes split.

The split is dealt with by Kacandes (1994) when she explains that whereas communication theory has taught us to think about communication in terms of addresser, message, and addressee (with addresser and addressee regularly switching roles), apostrophe offers another possibility:

> Rather, apostrophe is 'short-circuited' communication; messages do not flow in both directions. […] Perhaps, even more significantly – and bizarrely – the apostrophe bears two 'addresses'. Overtly, a speaker sends a message to someone or something as if that being or thing could respond but will not. Covertly, an apostrophe is meant to provoke response through its reception in a second (ary) communicative circuit received by the readers of a poem, in the case of lyric, or the audience, in the case of oratory. […] To put it yet another way, apostrophes are messages uttered with two addressees simultaneously in mind.[6]

The major point, here, is the double address and its *simultaneity*. Of course, there can be much more than two addresses operative simultaneously, because communication is never simply two-directional. In many situations, many different forms of address may and will be going on. Apostrophe, in that context, nevertheless, concerns the dynamic between two distinctly and intrinsically *related* modes of address that operate simultaneously in a given situation. This is the reason that apostrophe, especially, is able to *affect* an audience. It works 'not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself' (Culler 1981: 135).

Let me now move to the first of the two cases I want to consider in more detail, to see how this double address may work simultaneously and effectively. After that I will consider why this dual theatrical address may be in danger today.

3 Address of attention and of expression: Being witness to an execution at Fort Victoria, Dutch Indies, 1817

Maria Dermôut was born in Pekalongan, in 1888, as a member of a family that had lived in the Dutch Indies for generations. She would have liked to stay in the Indies, but was forced to leave in 1933, well before Indonesia's

[5] Longinus, in his study on the sublime also emphasizes how the change of person has a "vivid effect" (Longinus 1995: 200, 201).

[6] For this quote, see Kacandes (1994: 330). Kacandes is inspired by the work of classical scholar Elizabeth Block, who used apostrophe to indicate the ways in which Homeric and Vergilian narrators shift address from character to audiences (Block 1982). In terms of address, subjectivity and language, Kacandes bases herself on the work of Martin Buber and Emile Benveniste. Buber explored how human beings can only exist in terms of personhood because of the "you-ness" of every "I", that is to say of its being addressed and ability to address. Benveniste explored how in language the second person cannot exist without the first person. They can only exist because of their relation—what makes them distinct from the third person that Benveniste qualified as a "nonperson".

independence in 1945,[7] because of her husband's retirement and bad health. She only began to publish in 1951, aged 63, and was remarkably successful before her death in 1962.[8] Her novel *De tienduizend dingen* in 1955 (translated in English as *The Ten Thousand Things*) was on the best-seller list of The New York Times for a long while and was described as one of the best novels of the year. That said, her work is not particularly well known for its political content. Yet, *The jewelled hair-comb* is remarkably political, although the political issue is addressed 'on the side'. The main theme of the story concerns the return home, after a long journey to the Indies, of one of the sons of a well-to-do family: father, mother and five children. As far as this homecoming is concerned, the story is fictional, yet, the name of the young man, Quirien, is a clear reference to a historical figure: Captain Quirijn Maurits Rudolph VerHuell. The latter had been sent to the Indies originally in order to study and depict the Indonesian fauna and flora. In the Indies, he stumbled into a major uprising, however, under the leadership of Pattimura. So, he also used his drawing skills to depict the revolt and Pattimura. These sketches play a major role in the story.[9]

On his return home, Quirien is very much concerned because he knows that his family members deeply sympathise with the French and, in consequence, detest the English. The family has a biased knowledge of what had happened during the uprising. In this context, Quirien is constantly trying not to show his sketch of Pattimura. The dominant image of the family members and of the Dutch audience in general is that Pattimura was a monster. He and his troops had captured and killed the family of the Resident Minister Van den Berg at Saparua, leaving only one little child alive: the resident's son Jean Lubbert. The papers in The Netherlands had depicted an image of Pattimura as the classic colonial primitive, supposedly having paraded in the clothes of the ones he had killed, carrying the jewelled hair-comb of the resident's wife.[10] Quirien knows all this and is surprised to learn that his father is not as biased as the rest of the family. On the contrary, since the latter is well informed, intrigued by some pieces of information, he is happy to have an eyewitness with him. He tries to get his intuitions confirmed when asking Quirien about Pattimura:

> Had been a sergeant in English service; spoke and wrote fluently in Malay and English, had an English Bible! A good soldier, an intelligent man as well: his defense systems made of walls of coral was ingeniously constructed, eh Quirien. Gave you enough trouble? […] A brave and impressive man, is what somebody says, here, who has been fighting alongside—I mean on our side. What do you think, eh Quirien?[11]

The father is not only testing the possibility of whether this insurgent may have been an intelligent military man but he is also explicitly bringing forward something that had been downplayed in the Dutch papers, namely that Pattimura and his troops were devout Christians. In fact, one psalm in particular had played a large role during the uprising: psalm 17. It need not come as surprise then, that the story has the ending lines from that psalm as its motto, in English: 'I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness'.

The speaking 'I' in psalm 17 is David, and his major theme is a request for justice. God is being called upon, in what is a passionate expression of grief and belief, but also a request. Expression and request point back to the lyrical I, David, who describes the enemies that want to kill him. Their hearts, so the psalm states, are without feelings and closed; their language is one of arrogance. The psalm ends with the lyrical I expressing the hope that he will see justice done and will awake with God's face before him. So, the text is decisively poetic in the sense that it is a song, shot through with metaphors, and distinctly apostrophic. Its addressee in the text is clearly God, and we, as an audience, overhear David speak. In the context of the story and the historical situation, the apostrophe does not just work poetically, however, but also rhetorically. As Quirien's father appears to know, the psalm was used in a community. The members of that community would, by means of the psalm, have to turn away from one another to God as the other addressee. But in addressing God, they would testify of their belief to their community.

[7] In Indonesia the 1945 declaration of independence is remembered each year on the 17th of August. Tellingly, the Dutch audience was inclined to remember December 27th, 1949 as the date of the official independence. In 2005 the Dutch government acknowledged that August 17th, 1945, is the official date.

[8] There are, unfortunately, no English biographies about Dermôut, so the reader will have to do with the two in Dutch, one by van der Woude from (1973), and one by Kester Freriks from (2000).

[9] The historical VerHuell is better known under his second name, Maurits. His sketches and watercolours were part of an exhibition held in the historical museum in Arnhem in 2008 entitled *God's wonders in watercolor* (*Gods wonderen in waterverf*). On the uprising and the travels of VerHuell, see *Thomas Matulesia* (van Doren 1857), or the autobiographical *Herinnering aan een reis naar Oost-Indië* (van Fraassen and Klapwijk 2008).

[10] One of the descendants of the little child wrote a history of the events: *De tragedie op het eiland Saparoea in het jaar 1817 tijdens de opstand in de Molukken* (van den Berg 1948).

[11] "Sergeant in dienst van de Engelsen geweest; sprak en schreef vloeiend Maleis, Engels, hij had een Engelse bijbel! Een goed soldaat, intelligent man ook: zijn verdedigingssysteem met koralen muren was ingenieus bedacht, eh Quirien? Hebben jullie last genoeg mee gehad? […] Een dapper en ontzagwekkend man, zegt hier iemand die meegevochten heeft, ik bedoel aan onze kant. Wat vind jij, eh, Quirien?" (Dermoût 2001: 315).

The psalm is used even more rhetorically and theatrically in relation to the Dutch enemy. In the night before their execution, the prisoners sang psalms together, and psalm 17 was the most important one. Not addressing the Dutch directly but turning away to God, the idea was not only to appeal to God as the supreme witness of what was happening but also to let the Dutch hear the content of what was being said in the psalm. Indirectly, the psalm charged the Dutch with their ruthlessness, arrogance and injustice. In doing this, Pattimura and his company also hoped for another form of turning away. They were counting on the fact that their acts and behaviour—their trust, faith and perseverance in their last hours—would become known to those who could not be directly there: their own community, but perhaps also the English audience. In this respect, Pattimura is consciously using the act of witnessing in a rhetorical and theatrical way, using the double mode of address.

In contrast, Quirien is being called upon by his father to bear witness in front of what Quirien experiences as a crossfire interrogation by his own family. Consequently, he is not willing to cooperate. He gives very short answers, only nods when his father is trying to get something confirmed, and obsessively tries to avoid showing the thing that will really speak: his sketch of Pattimura. Yet, his map with sketches does appear on the table, and the last one of the sketches, put underneath the others on purpose, shows Pattimura as a proud man, a man of honour, someone to be admired or loved. The immediate response of the eldest brother is telling:

> Must this be the image of that man! The head of the insurgents there, what's his name? The man Thomas! No, that's not him! He walked parading like a…. Like a woman, with a chain of epaulettes of all those fallen sown together around his neck and a jewelled hair-comb of the governor's wife in his hair. Everybody knows that here, it is common knowledge so to speak. You may have been there, but there are a couple of people here too who are well informed and know exactly what transpired there![12]

The eldest brother evidently wants to hurt the witness, of whom he condescendingly says that he 'may have been there', but whom he doubts to have been an adequate witness. To top that, he adds that portraiture was never what Quirien was particularly good at. Nevertheless, the sketch has become a testimony of the fact, and act, of 'having been there'. It shows that Quirien has not just been a witness, but a willing one and a loving one. Even as an awkward testimony, the sketch speaks, and its form of speaking is paradigmatic for both the rhetorical status of witnessing as a turning away and an address of attention that is specifically charged here, because it testifies of what Kelly Oliver defined as the look of love (Oliver 2001a: 56–78).

The making of a drawing can be considered as an icon for apostrophe, since the maker of the drawing has to look at the one to be portrayed and turn away to the paper of the sketch. He is addressing the one he portrays in terms of attention. In making the drawing, he is addressing and therefore turning away to another addressee, in terms of expression. It is this turning away that will convince the one portrayed that a portrait is being made, whilst producing a feeling of insecurity as to what exactly is being made—and for whom to see. The latter point suggests a pivotal point in the turn away. The turning away from the one portrayed, in order to be able to make a sketch, functions principally within the frame of the turn to another addressee and audience. To that other audience it *speaks*.

The act of witnessing implies a double form of address, then. It is on the witness's attention that the hope of a victim will rest. Equally necessary, however, is the fact that the witness relates, simultaneously, to an audience that is virtually present. I am using *virtually* here in the sense Gilles Deleuze defines it: as something that is not yet actualised but, nevertheless, real and present.[13] This is why the turning away is both reassuring and painful, because the turning away implies, and must imply, a painful but also hopeful not-being-there in the being-there of the witness. The not-being-there in the being-there is what constitutes both the theatrical and the rhetorical moment in witnessing, with affectively charged consequences for all the participants involved. Only when address of attention and address of expression coincide, in a different modality, can participants be 'stirred'. And only then, or such is my contention, can witnessing operate ethically, in relation to a community, in terms of responsibility.

The two modes of address are in play at the story's end, when Quirien is alone in his sleeping chamber and his mother comes to say goodnight. He then describes the final moment of the execution, and as the text explicitly states, he says it in a strange way, using other words than usual, as if he had written it down, once (Dermoût 2001: 326). That

[12] "Moet dit die man verbeelden! Dat hoofd van die oproerlingen daar, hoe heet hij? De man Thomas! Neen, dat is hij niet! Die liep aangedirkt als een… Als een vrouw, met een ketting van aan elkaar geregen epauletten van alle gesneuvelden om zijn hals en een juwelen vrouwenkam van de vrouw van de resident in zijn haren! Dat weet iedereen hier, dat is om zo te zeggen gemeen goed, jij bent er dan bij geweest, hier zijn toch ook nog wel een paar mensen die goed geïnformeerd zijn, die weten wat zich daar precies heeft afgespeeld!" (Dermoût 2001: 319).

[13] Deleuze is inspired here by Proust's ideas on what is constant in past and present.

is to say, whilst speaking to his mother, his words are turned away formally, as if intended for another audience:

> 'Thomas Matulessey walked the ladder with confidence, and coming above, when the fateful noose had been lain around his neck he greeted the judges politely and said…'
> The son looked at the mother. "He spoke Malay of course (Malay or English, not Dutch), the regular, everyday greeting – one says 'good fortune!' for the one that is going, the other 'good fortune!' for the one that stays; these are only two words in Malay, very short.
> That is how he said it as well, very short, with a calm but resounding voice: 'Good fortune for those that stay here! My lords!' – that is: Slamat tingal! Toeang toeang![14]

The description of the scene is a good example of what I want to call apostrophic hope. Apostrophic fear indicates the victim's and witness's insecurity as to whether the one who bears witness will not bury what happened under its own inadequacy or pervert it by a distorting eloquence. Apostrophic hope indicates the possibility that the one who bears witness will capture the pivotal character of what has happened.[15] Earlier in the story, the sketch appeared to have felicitously captured a different image of Pattimura than the distorted one in media reports. Likewise, verbal descriptions may be felicitous, as this one is, and produce an image through a verbal representation that may be so vivid that it turns us into the affected audience of one who, in turning away from what he witnesses, becomes one who bears witness.[16]

As I have phrased it now, the address of expression seems to come after the act. That, however, is only its actualisation in time. This may become clear when we consider the scene for its rhetorical structure. When Matulessey's last words are reproduced by Quirien, the latter is looking straight ahead into the silent room. He is not addressing his mother but somebody else in terms of attention. He is an inner witness, here, addressing Thomas and his fighters. However, looking straight ahead into the silent room with the imagined Thomas before him and being turned away from his mother, Quirien is also, in terms of address of expression, making the turn away from Thomas to the audience of readers. This audience, always virtually present in relation to the story, will materialise in the shape of different communities in a present—either in the fifties of the twentieth century in Holland, or now, in the present of 2011. Obviously, the turn away cannot concern just any addressee, as if any audience will do, indifferently. Rhetorically speaking, the apostrophe needs another addressee and an audience formally, but both can only be meaningful in terms of trust and concern, which is to say ethically, in relation to an interested audience. In the fifties, the communities of Ambon people in The Netherlands would have responded differently to the story than, let us say, Dutch catholic or protestant communities. And all these in turn will differ from contemporary communities. The point remains that, principally, the address of attention has to coincide simultaneously with a virtual turn away of the address of expression if the witness is to work meaningfully, ethically.

The implication for the YUTPA model of Nevejan (2009)—one that works on the basis of 'being with You in Unity of Time, Place and Action'—may be evident. There is always, simultaneously, a double 'you' involved because of the address of attention and the address of expression. These two 'you's' split the situation in a theatrical way, involving different relations and different modes of relation. The complex dynamic at stake finds an expression in and through the story by Dermôut. Yet, as her text also indicates, the delicate fabric may be distinctly threatened by 'media', for instance the ones that had reported on Pattimura as a monster. Let me now turn to that issue in relation to the essentially theatrical character of the relation between the two modes of address.

4 News coverage and ghosts from the past: New Orleans, United States, 2005

Kara Walker, born in 1969, is an Afro-American artist who has become famous especially for her installations with large-scale paper cut-outs, the dominant theme of which reflects back on the perverse history of racism in especially the Southern states of the United States, and more generally, on the way in which power will always be a node of racial and social inequality that is connected in turn to sexuality. In this context, her work relates not simply to the community of African Americans. In fact, when she received one of the

[14] 'Thomas Matoelesia liep met vaste tred de ladder op, en boven komende, toen hem de noodlottige strop om de hals geslagen was, groette hij zijn rechters beleefd, en zei…' De zoon keek de moeder aan. 'Hij sprak natuurlijk Maleis (Maleis of Engels, geen Hollands) de gewone groet van alledag: de een zegt: geluk! voor die heen gaat, en de ander: geluk! voor die hier blijft; het zijn maar twee woorden in het Maleis, heel kort. Zo zei hij het ook, heel kort, met een bedaard maar luide stem: Geluk voor die hier blijven! Mijn heren!—dat is Slamat tingal! Toeang toeang!' (Dermoût 2001: 327).

[15] I take my cue from Mitchel (1994), here, who in *Picture Theory* distinguished between "ekphrastic hope" and "ekphrastic fear". The first would be the hope one may set on a description of an image that allows "to make us see", the second would be the fear that the description will be winning over what actually was there to be seen. In terms of my argument apostrophic hope would be that someone will adequately bear witness. Apostrophic fear would be that the witness will steal the show or operates inadequately.

[16] This was Longinus's point, see note 7.

most famous fellowships in the United States, the MacArthur fellowship, a point of criticism was that she was predominantly received by a White audience. Indeed, from the beginning, her work has been considered in relation to the communities that her work addresses. Considering the history of slavery, one can easily imagine what these communities are, although a complicating factor, to say the least, is that Walker's work is also much concerned with sexuality and the asymmetric relations between men and women or between adults and children. Last but not least, the disturbing or provocative nature of the work complicates a straightforward address of a collective. In the words of writer and curator Hamza Walker, the work 'in presenting a radically negative critique of humanity, cannot help but alienate its audiences—black, white, Asian, Hispanic and other' (Hamza 2000:158).[17] This alienation, however, is not so much the result of Walker's work, but the way in which she addresses something that others are afraid to address. In fact, her work witnesses in both the ways explored above: paying attention to what happens and turning towards an audience.

The work that Walker made shortly after Hurricane Katrina had caused the flooding of New Orleans takes centre stage, firstly, how addressing something in terms of attention may be difficult because it is such a painful thing to do. Secondly, it focuses on why addressing something in terms of expression may be difficult, because the expression may be produced or received in a distorted way. *After the Deluge* was designed to be an installation (much more than an exhibition) at first, which could be visited from March 21 to 6 August 2006, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The installation consisted not only in major works by Kara Walker herself but also in many different works of art made by other American or European artists, which Walker had chosen out of the museum's collection. In the visual essay of the same title that was made out of the installation and published in 2007, there is only one picture that was made of the New Orleans flooding, namely the one with which the book opens: a black woman, photographed from above, moves through waters that are covered with a brilliantly coloured film of petrol, trying to keep some bags above the water, presumably carrying some of her possessions. Because this is the only explicit reference to the flooding, it becomes a statement in itself that all the works that reflect on the flooding are historical pieces. The conflict between the two is made explicit when, for instance, a historical engraving is reworked. Taking one specific image entitled 'Cotton Hoards in Southern Swamp' from the nineteenth century *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, Walker puts that into another perspective by adding, up front, the large cut-out of a black man. As a consequence, the past does not simply reflect on the present, and neither is the present simply re-inscribed into the past. Rather, the two are, indeed, placed in a different perspective.

In this context, the question becomes why, according to Walker, the vast amount of photographs and television images were not able put things in perspective. Or, in relation to my argument, the question is what they were the witness of or whether they were witnessing in an ethically responsible way. With respect to this, Walker's concern is not so much how to deal with the disaster of flooding itself but how to deal with the news coverage that considered the disaster as one that had African Americans as the main subject, either as deserved and negligible victims or as perpetrators that used the anarchy to plunder and steal. As Walker puts it in her introduction: 'a black subject in the present tense is a container for specific pathologies from the past and is continually growing and feeding off those maladies' (Walker 2006: 9). In the light of this quote, the question with regard to the coverage of what happened through and after the disaster was what was being *projected* versus what was being *witnessed*. Walker's point is that instead of really witnessing what happened, the news coverage was ruled by past 'maladies', as a result of which they did not witness properly either in terms of the address of attention or address of expression. I tend to take the term news coverage seriously, here. Something is, indeed, being covered.

Addressing the past maladies in her work, Walker's attempt may be to restore or make possible a form of witnessing that is less troubled by the sick ghosts of the past, which is not the same as saying that we can have transparent, past-less forms of witnessing, paying attention and reporting. In fact, this is one of the points in Kelly Oliver's work developed in relation to her idea of the inner witness:

> The inner witness is the necessary condition for the structure of addressability and response-ability inherent in subjectivity. […] The inner witness operates as a negotiating voice between subject positions and subjectivity. If one' s subject position is the sociohistorical position in which one finds oneself, and one's subjectivity is the structure of witnessing as infinite response-ability, then the inner witness is where subject position and subjectivity meet.
> (Oliver 2001b: 87)

So, both the bodily present witness and the inner witness are conditioned, and the former may be troubled by maladies of the latter, which is not to say that one can ever be

[17] On the complex relation of Walker's work to distinct audiences, see also Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw in the "Conclusion" of her study on Walker's work (Dubois Shaw 2004: 153–156).

completely healthy. Assuming that there is no purely healthy or non-perverse position, I would hold that the distinction at stake is one between degrees of perversion that are nevertheless principal because the differences in degree are pivotal *ethically*, concerning different choices and different attitudes.

In exploring the possibility of witnessing in a less perverse or more responsible way, Walker's work is confronted with a major difficulty. Taking the position of a collective witness, modern news media surely pay attention. It is very much the question, however, whether it is an *address* of attention. Or perhaps more fundamentally, the problem is that their rushing to the stage testifies to their determination to report. Their address of expression precedes the address of attention, and this short-circuits the possibility of a witness that operates rhetorically in an ethical way. Perverting their role as witness, they may even tend to expand the perversion (as is the dynamic of perversion) by placing the audience on the chair of a collective quasi-witness. As such, the audience does not have a real possibility to simultaneously turn to an audience or community. Firstly, that turn has already been made, and secondly, the question is what there is to report on, as a quasi-witness. The result for any audience, even a so-called international community, is to be put in a debilitating, suffocating position.

The point is ironically illustrated by some of Walker's pieces that depict the biblical flood or people drowning. It concerns Jean Audran's *The Flood* from the early eighteenth century, Joshua Shaw's *The deluge towards its close* from 1813 and William Turner's *Slave ship* (*Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying, typhoon coming on*) from 1840. The thematic relation between these and the flooding of New Orleans may be evident. For my argument, it is more important, however, that these pieces address, implicitly but powerfully, the question as to *who* is seeing and witnessing *what* in terms of apostrophe. The pieces seem to turn to another addressee, but they illustrate a structural issue that has become vexing in our own times, namely that they witness before us, and in turning to us, have blocked our own ability to witness. The only thing that may result because of this on the side of the audience is to remain stunned or to seek some sort of relief in a public outcry.

The story of the Biblical flood may be known to many, although their numbers are much smaller in comparison to the deeply Christian societies of Europe and the Americas in previous centuries, especially in those times in which slavery was custom. Because God is dissatisfied with the perverse behaviour of human beings, he decides to destroy the world, saving only one family (Noah's) and a couple of each sort of animal. These are all caught in a boat, so that after the flood, life can have a new beginning. Iconographically, the boat has always been seen as the church, the vessel that is the means of saving 'our' souls. The question, of course, is to whom these souls belong. The question is of interest because all souls outside of the vessel will have to perish. In consequence, of course, those who are saved have no interest in this. With respect to this, Audran's piece is paradigmatic.

In the distance, almost hidden by the grey of pouring rain, there is the boat. In the forefront, people and animals are trying to save their lives, desperately attempting to keep their heads above the water or struggling to find the last piece of dry land. Now, who is witnessing this? If we take the situation seriously in terms of its own 'present', the only ones able to witness the destruction would have been the ones in the boat. Tellingly, in this case, and contrary to the description in the Bible, the boat has windows. So, a report would have been possible, and the depiction of the scene from the viewpoint of those who are saved on the destruction of others would have been highly interesting. Of course, anybody outside of the boat could see the destruction taking place, but nobody could be a witness in terms of turning away, for there would be no medium to express it and no audience to turn to. One could argue that the witness would be God. But he would only have himself to turn to. So, who is witnessing the destruction that is taking place, turning to us and telling us meanwhile that it is a destruction that was deserved, for prominently in front there are two snakes—the symbols of evil in the Christian frame—writhing their bodies in order to escape their deserved punishment?

In the context of Walker's *After the Deluge*, the elliptic reporter on this biblical destruction resembles the modern news media. They are presenting us with, for instance, scenes of destruction that we *appear* to be witnessing, whilst of course, we are the audience addressed by a 'witness'. Or better, we are 'witnessing the witness' as Polchin (2007) called it in his study of lynching photographs. And, in this respect, the situation may be even more perverse. It is more as if we are turned into quasi-witnesses by quasi-witnesses, and this has consequences for the audience that we, as a quasi-witness, simultaneously turn to. Currently, this materializes in the obsessive blogging, twittering and phoning that takes place after a charged event. The process can be described as messages in search of an audience, an audience that might be then ever-expanding. Or it may be seen as a form of infinite regress, when twittering follows on twittering. Whereas the simultaneity of addresses in apostrophe splits up a situation, in terms of a charged moment, both media reports and the responses of audiences in these deeply mediatised times become events in themselves, almost covering up the event that caused it all in the first place.

Walker's solution, by digging in history and archives and turning the objects she has found into an installation in

which we are involved, is to re-theatricalize the situation, splitting it up in two different modes of address. In doing this, she hopes to help us to not simply participate in what happens, becoming false witnesses, as Cathy Caruth defined them on the basis of the work of Robert Jay Lifton.[18] For Lifton, false witnessing is involved in relation to historical circumstances that are used to justify repetition. His most powerful example is the My Lai massacre that was first witnessed to as having been a heroic battle. Bearing witness on the massacre as a heroic battle, the witnesses produced a testimony that was 'drawn narrowly, manipulatively and violently, in connection with retribution and pervasive killing' (Lifton 2003: 147). Modern news media are inclined to fall under the rubric of analogous repetition, in fetishizing the present and ignoring the maladies of the past. There is always the push and pull of immediately mobilising and attracting an audience. The repetitiveness of the process is captured specifically by the compulsive and massive generation of media images.[19] They embody an ever floating 'here and now' (*live*!), as a result of which the not-being-there in being-there—the double mode of address of the witness—implodes. We are carried along with what happens, instead of being aware of the split between two related modes of address. Theatricality is dead in any proper sense of the word.

One pivotal aspect with regard to theatricality is that it manifests itself in a present, in the presence of the participants involved. Especially, in terms of presence, it may be the case that 'current technologies challenge this presence design by providing new possibilities to transcend time and place at a high speed and large scale' (Nevejan and Brazier 2010, p. 204). As Nevejan and Brazier amply show, this in itself need not principally invalidate the possibility of witnessing. The problem remains that modern media have seriously altered the dynamic of apostrophe for its being rhetorical in a theatrical sense. The question is how such theatricality can work in deeply mediatized situations, which occur in what has been described as an age of convergence.[20] I agree with Henry Jenkins in his *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* that new media do not simply replace old media. Neither, however, do new and old converge without principally altering one another, as the term 'collide' suggests. Theatre and spectacle, for instance, are surely related, but also principally different kinds of 'media'. Witnessing can only appear and function properly, in an ethical sense, in a mode that has preserved essentially theatrical characteristics. If the theatrical mode is converging nowadays, through the operation of modern media, with the spectacle, this is not a matter of equal contribution. Currently, the model of the spectacle is dominant and there can be no ethically sensible way in which witnesses are able to function in the frame of spectacle. The predicament we are in, therefore, is not so much how to assess modes of media convergence or of stopping them converge or collide. The question may not even be, in general, how to preserve pivotal characteristics of certain 'old' modes and media in their connection with 'new' media. With regard to witnessing, however, the loss of theatricality proper would be more than damaging. It would be a loss, truly.

[18] Caruth 2008: 166–168.

[19] On this see, for instance, Guerin and Hallas (2007) in their introduction to *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, memory and Visual Culture*.

[20] Jenkins (2006).

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