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‘Carrying’ in Art: A Meeting Between Performance Studies and Care Ethics by Analyzing the Artworks of Performance Artist Pepe Espaliú

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Abstract

This paper proposes a new approach to performance art analysis through the lens of care ethics. I argue that Pepe Espaliú’s artworks can be better understood when considering a political care ethics approach to inquiry, as developed at the Care Ethics and Policy Group at the Dutch University of Humanistic Studies. Care ethics emphasizes the importance of human relationships and the responsibility to nurture others, acknowledging inequities and asymmetries. I invite readers to reflect upon the dialogue between the two fields by inquiring the intersection between the fields along five themes: being the absent and vulnerable ‘other’; (inter)dependency in place and time; vulnerable *embodiment*; the absent presence/the presence of absence and politics and contextuality. This five-theme approach can be a valuable tool for art educators and ethics educators. By exploring these themes through artistic works, students can develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of care ethical concepts.

Introduction

It is December 1st, 1992 and it is World AIDS Day. People are demonstrating in the streets of Madrid, when fine arts and performance artist Pepe Espaliú appears, carried by his friends and bystanders. That same day, in the national newspaper *El País*, Espaliú declares that he is a homosexual, suffers from AIDS and expects to die soon (Cortés, 2016). He is tired of being hidden away, living in a molehill, far from what he calls ‘Reality’ or the ‘Limit’ (Espaliú, 1992). With his performance he makes a political statement and makes AIDS visible in a country where (at that moment) homosexuality is taboo and people with AIDS pass away unseen.



Figure 1. Pepe Espaliú.

Pepe Espaliú died one year later in 1993, but his work is still valued and exposed in several museums and galleries (Cortés, 2016). The exposition “Intimate Circle: The World Of Pepe Espaliú” (December 2016-March 2017 in IVAM, Valencia), shows a broad collection of his artworks, including sculptures, paintings, texts and video-registrations of his performances. His artworks are chronologically exposed. Walking through the museum as both a visitor and a student of Care Ethics with a bachelor’s degree in Theatre Studies, I [the author] realize that I really get to know the inner world through the outer world of Espaliú. His art expresses his experiences of what it is like to live with a disease. This makes me wonder if the work of Espaliú could function as a key to a dialogue between both studies.

Both Care Ethics and Performance Studies ask research questions that touch upon the liminal nature and complexities of our lived experiences. Both are academic, interdisciplinary fields of inquiry which incorporate the dialectical relation between practice and theory (Leget et al, 2019; Conquergood, 2002). In care ethics, care is seen as a socially and politically mediated

practice (Engster & Hamington, 2015; Leget et al., 2019; Visse & Abma, 2018). In general terms, care is described as:

a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

Such care is featured by embodied and affective knowing (Hamington, 2012), and some care ethicists connect care with aesthetics by addressing the importance of *unknowing* and being in wonderment, in order to be open to understand lived experiences with care (Visse, Hansen, Leget, 2019). For care ethicists, in everyday practices, the moral good is not determined by abstract principles or regulations, but the moral good emerges from the everyday experiences by those involved in a particular practice. In this process, those who receive care and their needs play a crucial role in how care is given and received (Leget et al., 2019). Care ethics aims to gain access to experiences of people by qualitative research approaches like phenomenology, narrative analysis, and more recently, arts- and aesthetic-based approaches (Visse et al., 2019; Hamington & Rosenow, 2019). Although some care ethicists feature the performative dimensions of care (Hamington, 2012), in care ethics, little is known about how aesthetic-based approaches, like Performance Studies, could sensitize the analysis of what occurs in care practices.

Therefore, this paper investigates the collaboration between a performance analysis and a care ethical analysis. My purpose is to examine if and how a combination of these two fields of studies can support us in gaining a deeper understanding of lived experiences of the people involved. The paper does so, by engaging a series of artworks Espaliú made during his life in the 80's/begin 90's in Spain. By analyzing the different artworks from both a Performance Analysis and a Care Ethics Analysis, we illustrate that this encounter between a performance and care ethical analysis can help us understand more about his experiences being marginalized as a homosexual and suffering from AIDS disease. In this paper, I start by a performance analysis on the subsequent art objects and then connect these insights with care ethics. Guiding questions are included for those who wish to carry out a similar analysis themselves. These questions invite us to reflect upon the dialogue between the two fields. The paper inquires the intersection between the fields along five themes: being the absent and vulnerable 'other'; (inter)dependency in place and time; vulnerable embodiment; the absent presence/the presence of absence; politics and contextuality.

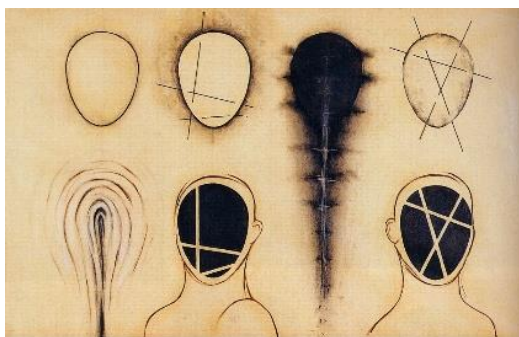


Figure 2. Espaliú, without title, 1989.



Figure 3. Espaliú, Santos V, 1988.



Figure 4. Espaliú, Santos, 1988.

Expressing Gender and Sexuality While Being the Absent and Vulnerable ‘Other’

Between 1988 and 1990, before he got diagnosed with AIDS, Espaliú produced a great number of different artworks, including drawings, paintings and sculptures about his experiences of being homosexual. In his article of 1992, he explains that his homosexuality was the first sign of being separated of the world and he criticized the way how homosexuals had accepted ‘cowardly’ this separated way of life within an imposed social structure. Espaliú wasn’t active as a performance artist yet, but he did seek for legitimate ways to express

himself and like other homosexual artists, to express the unknown, the sexual, the other, and the forbidden (Espaliu, 1992).

To understand the work of Espaliú, it is helpful to know that Espaliú expressed himself by using a lot of symbols in his work (Baez, 2010). Symbols are signs that don't have a natural relation with an object, but they are derived from an agreement between persons. Sometimes it can be hard to notice symbols, because they can solely be known if one are part of the group in which de agreement exists (Carlson, 2007). Looking at the work of Espaliú, it is possible to determine other interpretable signs, like indexes or icons. Therefore, we use semiotics as an analytical lens to carry out the performance analysis. In care ethics there is no explicit attention yet for semiotics, whilst in performance studies, semiotics is seen as one of the main characters of a performance, because everything in a performance functions as a sign and has meaning (Fischer-Lichte, 2014).

An example is the use of masks. In both figures (2,3) we see objects that can be interpreted as masks. Because of their shape (round, like something you can put your head in), the materials (use of leather, refers to something you can wear) and/or the placement in the drawing (before the heads). The only missing things are holes for the mouth, nose, eyes. Could it be shields to protect, or are they hiding someone, cutting of the air or imprisoning?

In ancient Greece, masks were already used during theatre performances. In performance analysis, the mask is often a symbol for theatre itself. The person behind or without mask then refers to the real world, the person expressed by using the mask refers to the world of theatre, play, art, fantasy (Balme, 2008). Masks can function as a tool, to accomplish a transformation to another person in another times or places, presented in the present. In that case, body, time and space are being doubled. But they can also refer to transformation of emotions or a certain state of consciousness (Schechner, 2003). And, masks can refer to the reflection of who we really are. It shows us the person who we would like to be, but it will never be somebody totally different than the performer him/herself (Howell, 2006).

The concept of being absent became important in feministic theories in performance analysis, when it became clear and disputable that till the '50s only men acted, wrote and directed in theatre. Women were always an object, never the subject itself. They were (bodily) absent, opposed to the (bodily) present men. But, being absent can become something noticeable and create an illusion. Then, the absentee, or 'the other', becomes something mystic or saint (Davy, 2007).

In care ethics, the concept of (rethinking) the 'other' is received ample attention. The well-known political theorist Joan Tronto (1993) argues for a democratic society in which care and

responsibility are central concepts. Currently, she contends, care is marginalized and only a few carry responsibilities for care. Because of the boundary between the private and the public in society, care still belongs to the private domain and is not acknowledged as a political issue, while according to Tronto care exists everywhere in society. When our society does not take responsibility for caring about people from marginalized groups, 'caring silos' emerge, and people take care for each other within their own favored group but will stay in a vicious circle of being marginalized and unequal.

This dynamic is addressed by Espaliú as well, in his article in the newspaper: homosexuals were separated from society, but they separated themselves too, because they felt forced to create an own parallel world, with their own values. That 'others' matter, is the most difficult moral quality to bring into practice and starts with being attentive for another. Attentiveness means that you notice the other, that you are aware of the vulnerability of the other and recognize the inequality of humans, by seeing his position and the way how he is showing his own vulnerability (Tronto, 1993). But how can you take responsibility in showing that you do need care, if you are part of a group that is invisible in society? In a caring democracy, care is part of a relational process, that begins within a caring practice, between caregiver and care receiver (Noddings, 1984). Care could be seen as the responsibility to protect and maintain someone's unique identity. Becoming an autonomous self should be interpreted as a process that everybody experiences, starting from birth (Lange, 2014). The caregiver has the responsibility to give space to the unique other to appear as an incomparable 'who' to each other (Van Heijst, 2011).

The relation of Espaliú with society was precarious and uncertain, when he made these artworks. The artworks tell a lot about this uncertainty, about looking for identity, while not being able or not being allowed to be yourself. He searched for ways to express himself, on the one hand by becoming an autonomous self, but on the other hand by being in a critical relationship with society.



Figure 5. Espaliu, el nido, 1993.

Becoming Dependent in Place and Time

When Espaliu got diagnosed with AIDS in 1990, he lived in New York. After that, he travelled around and lived in Mexico, Costa Rica and Italy, but finally he decided to return to Spain. He felt strongly connected with fellow patients and decided, in contrast to his earlier way of life, to take responsibility by becoming an active participant in society and politics as an artist (Baez, 2010). The picture above, shows one of his sculptures (Espaliú, 1993). It consists of eight crutches standing together in the shape of a circle. It is the first artwork of this study that is related to his illness. It was made in 1993, the year he passed away.

The history of theatre often begins with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who wrote that art is a mimesis: a representation or imitation. The mimesis is not a representation of someone's life, objects or experiences, but it is the act of imitation of an action of life. The artwork becomes the action itself: it takes over the impulse of the real life and changes in something else, which means that art has a double life: it is the process of transformation and at the same time it is a representation or imitation. This means art is always a reaction on life and exists in time and space (Schechner, 2003).

When we look at this artwork of crutches, at first sight it seems a stagnant sculpture. You don't immediately see action in time and space. However, in a performance analysis, the working of action in time and space is always part of the analysis, because theatre is a unique event in which acting people or forces show a story to a live public in that moment, in that space (Laeven, 2009). Symbolic time entails a reference to another time than the actual time (Schechner, 2003). Espaliú refers with this artwork to a certain stage of his illness, while he

was dependent of medical devices. There's also a notion of repetition and connection (because of the number of crutches being there, shoulder to shoulder) and infinity and circularity (because of the infinity of the shape of the circle). In theatre, when there's a notion of repetition of actions and circularity, it refers to an unchangeable and timeless situation. In that case, time is being constructed by the artwork itself and accentuates the futility of all that has happened before (Laeven, 2009).

Also, space has, besides to his functional meaning, a symbolic meaning in theatre. The interpretation of actions within a demarcated space, is called 'framing.' By placing an audience in a symbolic space, the interpretation of an artwork can be steered (Counsell & Wolf, 2001). When this sculpture is placed in a museum, the shape of the circle is the centerpiece that makes the public walk around it. Being the centerpiece, it also forms a borderline between 'nothing' or an 'empty space' in the circle and the public. The empty space acquires deeper meaning. It questions whether the crutches are protecting something, or if they are imprisoning something, taking the shape of bars.

The placing of functional objects of daily life into a symbolic place, like a museum, derived from the art movement Dadaism, when Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) installed his 'ready-mades.' The functional meaning of an object changes into a symbolic meaning, because it evokes wonder on what a crutch really defines and what it means on exhibit in the museum. Here, the crutches seem pointless, because they are initially made to support humans, but instead they are supporting each other. It looks like Espaliú wanted people to think about the crutches and the meaning of being ill and being dependent on others or medical devices. Who is the one that is supporting? Is it a human or an object, like a crutch? There are neither caregivers, nor care receivers in this artwork; there's an emptiness and the crutches are standing around it.

Care ethicist Eva Kittay (2011) questions the meaning of dependency. Every person is dependent, she argues. It is only temporally, when people aren't dependent on others, because from birth and during childhood we need care from others, but also later, every adult will sooner or later be confronted with illness, dependency or demanding for care. Being dependent on others or medical devices is not a disability, according to Kittay, as long as we are able to make our own choices, we are not disabled. It is the society who sets dependency against independency and who lets us believe that people with a disability are less autonomous. Besides, the one who gives care is also dependent, as well on the care receiver, as on the people and society around the caregiver. This is what Kittay dubs as people being part of a network of nested dependencies.

Being a spectator of the artwork, you are being stimulated to reflect upon what it means: being

ill and interdependent. Espaliú became dependent on care, but what are crutches without humans? As a spectator, you might just think crutches are just meaningless objects, without purpose. The crutches could function here as a metaphor for humans: if we were all to be equally (in)dependent, everything would be in balance, but at the same time we would be aimless, infinite and useless too.



Figure 6. Pepe Espaliú, El nido, 1993.

Performing Vulnerable Embodiment

Figure 6 presents stills of the video recordings of 'El nido' (translation: the nest), eight times live performed in 1993, in Arnhem, The Netherlands. During this performance, Espaliú walks in circles on an octagonal platform, built on the top of a big tree. While he is walking, he undresses himself, until he is naked, surrounded by his clothes.

This is the first artwork in this series in which we see Espaliú presented with his own body. The bodily presence of an actor/artist makes the difference between a performance and a text or another art object, because the materials of the artworks normally don't change. Still, the perception or the experience of the artworks differ, because they depend on the spectators, but the actual work exists separate from the (live) presence of the maker in changeable times or places. This means that performances are ephemeral because of their unique aesthetic material: the body of the performer, which is a continuing transformation of a self in progress. The live body is an aesthetic material that always recreates itself (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). In a performance, the body can be seen as the centerpiece, meaning that the body is the transformed system of signs that gives meaning to everything that happens around it (like the space, time, music) (Féral & Bermingham, 2002).

Looking at Espaliú, walking around the tree, we not only notice the transformational character just by the presence of the body, but the way he uses/moves his body, gives meaning to transformationality too: he undresses himself and walks around the tree. By circulating around the tree, the tree becomes the centerpiece and makes us wonder: is the tree, just like a living body, becoming a sign for natural impermanence? Or does the tree get a symbolic meaning for nature and the infinity (of the universe), because there's a contrast between the movements, the circulation of the body of Espaliú and the motionless tree? What does the position of the performance mean from different perspectives? The audience needed to watch upward to the stage, what made the contrast bigger between the 'grounded' audience and the almost 'floating' Espaliú, living in-between life and his closer coming dead.

One of the important philosophers who addressed gender, identity and sexuality, is Judith Butler. Gender is a construct identity, based on a stylistic repetition of acts, she argues, and it is not based on ontological principles. She calls the human acts 'performative acts', which are already embedded in the body, through practice (like drama actors repeat their texts in order to reproduce them realistically), before it comes out. Gender isn't something given to people before we are born, but from childbirth we get these identities by acquired acts (Reinelt and Roach, 2007).

Espaliú shows with this performance that by getting diagnosed with AIDS, his identity changes. He isn't hiding his homosexuality by separating and himself from society anymore.

We see in this performance how he moves, how he acts, while he is knowing that he has AIDS. His new identity isn't protected, but he shows his vulnerability during the performance, on a platform, like a theatre stage far off the ground.

When an actor performs something on stage, his body is the place where the self of the actor is confronted with the other in himself. At that moment the actor is vulnerable, because he depends on his body that is 'live' transforming and being seen by live present public. That body is the medium of symbolic signs, but at the same time it is an impulsive body, that can be controlled, but has also his own (imperfect) uncontrolled reactions or limits, vented by, for instance, making mistakes, refusing something to do, being shocked, shiver, blush, etcetera (Féral & Bermingham, 2002).

It appears that Espaliú moves from one extreme into another. Initially, he hid behind his sculptures as a fine art artist. Now, he transforms into a performance artist, using his own body as the artwork. The sculptures are no longer the objects; his body becomes the art. Espaliú's performance art is inherently vulnerable, exposing both himself and his audience. By undressing, he challenges his body's limitations, raising confrontational questions about identity: "Who are we when stripped of our physical coverings? Are we defined solely by our bodies?" This also makes me curious about the message he's sending to the public. Is he declaring authenticity, suggesting he has nothing to hide or sacrifice?

In performance analysis, it is necessary to understand the complexity of the relation between actors and costumes. Clothes and costumes, dressing and undressing are meaningful signs in performance art, because they tell us something about the embodiment and identity of actors. The costume of an actor is neither the same as the clothes of the staged character of the actor, nor is it his own: it is his work wear. For the actor the costume leads him to the world of the performance; for the audience, the costume leads to the meaning of the body from the actor. In first instance, the public sees only a person with clothes, but through his costume the actor will transform and becomes a character with several dimensions. The body of the actor will become a product of the performance, as a composition of multiple bodies that are in motion as a series of ongoing practices. However, we need to be aware of the broad context of these bodies, because the audience and the actors themselves never lose the connection between the performed body on stage and the world 'outside' (Monks, 2010).

At first sight, Espaliú's clothes refer to a costume that could be his daily outfit. But now that we know more about Espaliú and his art, we can argue that this costume was carefully selected for this performance. Espaliú suggests the impression of a man in a black suit, referring to a businessman; someone with status and independence. A black suit can also refer to a funeral, a symbol for grief and sadness. The black suit contrasts with the natural, vivid,

colorful surroundings. And then, the act of undressing begins.

We should notice the difference between being naked at the beginning of a performance and a body that is dressed beforehand and undressed *during* a performance. Undressing on stage and the presence of clothes increases the meaning of nudity. The presence of clothes and the act of undressing make the naked body at the end look spectacular. They excite the public, because they are expecting to get to see the truth, *real* actor, in his full vulnerable private being. It is not a coincidence that during performances this moment happens just before the end, when the promise of truth or a certain insight is revealed to the actor. Even so, it is possible to perform without clothes. The presence of actors seems to be stronger when they are naked because nudity can be seen as a costume itself. Undressing accentuates the presence of actors. On the other hand, like children or animals on stage, the presence of a naked actor can also interrupt the idea of narrative illusion. In that case, nudity is not an unveiling of truth or insight, but the body is then reformed and renewed. Every time (part of) clothes have been taken off, a new costume is made, and a new dimension of the character emerges. Then, the naked body becomes an illusion itself, a fantasy and finally, when the naked body is showed, it could establish feelings of disappointment among the public. The public's perception of a naked male body on stage differs significantly from that of a naked female body (Monks, 2010). These contrasting interpretations often reinforce societal gender norms. A naked male body is frequently viewed as humorous or even absurd, while a naked female body is typically sexualized. When a man undresses in a public performance, the traditional power dynamics can shift. It's essential for male performers to consider strategies for mitigating potential audience laughter, which can be a form of ridicule or objectification. In contemporary performance art, naked bodies of man have become normal. Often, they are already naked at the beginning of a performance, in order to avoid the theme of losing the dominant position (Monks, 2010).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to watch the video to see the exact movements in time and space and give the extra meaning to the action of undressing and being naked. But the theory of Monks is clearly appropriate here: Espaliú suggests revealing an insight by undressing himself. Every time he takes something off, another image appears, that allows the public to view the body in a new way, again and again. Finally, Espaliú is there, naked and vulnerable. Is this the real Espaliú? The sick body of Espaliú is the harsh reality. It is not a fantasy or illusion, there is no hope or protection. The public is being confronted with the naked, sick body that Espaliú has become.

Embodiment is one of the critical insights of care ethics (Hamington, 2012a, 2012b). These critical insights constitute how we gain moral understandings on 'care' and include: relationality, contextuality, affectivity, practices, vulnerability, embodiment, attention to

power and position, and meaning (Leget et al., 2019). Embodiment is a physical element of care that is thoroughly deliberated by Hamington and connected with theatre studies as well (2012a and 2012b). According to him, caring is a physical act, and by doing it, you learn about the other, because through the physical presence of caregivers and care receivers, the care givers get a better understanding of the care receivers. This means that for care ethics, just like performance studies, practice and theory are closely intertwined. In fact, when you care for a person, you will realize that there is somebody made from flesh and blood, and not only an abstract idea of a person.

Together with his students, Hamington experimented with the theory of imitating care practices in order to create embodied knowledge that they would be able to repeat in 'real' caring practices (Hamington, 2012a). Besides, by experiencing emotions during acting yourself or witnessing other kinds of art, causes physical memories that helps us feel more sympathy when we are confronted with somebody who needs care. This knowledge, hidden in the body, is called tacit knowledge, and is, according to Hamington (2012b), the basis for care, because a caring relation starts with emerging empathy for the other.

Through this inaugural live performance, Espaliú invites the audience to abandon their preconceived notions of him, formed primarily from his earlier works created before his diagnosis. Now he shows himself as a real human being, from flesh and blood: he confronts the public. While we previously sought to understand Espaliú through his artistic creations, we now engage directly with his physical presence as the medium. This shift allows for a more intimate exploration of the artist himself. What makes me question: who is Espaliú behind his body? Do we really get to know the inner world of Espaliú?



Figure 10 (left). Espaliu, *El hijo pródigo I*, 1992

Figure 11 (middle). Espaliu, *Carrying VII*, 1992

Figure 12 (right). Espaliu, *Carrying figura humana*, 1992

The Absent Presence/the Presence of Absence

Big, closed, heavy, black boxes. Three examples of a bigger series. Espaliú wrote that these pieces should be viewed with a certain sense of love. It is not possible to see a person inside, it is just an assumption (Cortés, 2016, p. 155). In performance the presence of the physical actor is debatable. On one side, it is said that the physical presence of (different groups of people like) actors and spectators is immanent to the definition of performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). The performance emerges from the interaction between the physically present persons in space and time. However, this definition of theatre can be too restrictive to theatre artists who, for example, are experimenting with digital technologies, in which the actors won't have to be physically present in the theatres anymore, because it is not about the real presence, but the idea or aesthetics of presence (Manuel, 2014). In that case it is helpful to look at the (esthetic) signs that Espaliú chose to give the idea of a human absence/presence. The boxes all have handles that are indexes to the possibility of carrying the boxes. The boxes itself, having the shapes of cases and coffins, are both icons and symbols for removal and death. The use of icons points in these pieces to emptiness too: these are representations of incomplete objects, because it is not possible that the boxes are really filled with a human (death) body. It seems that Espaliú tries to involve the public actively in these artworks, by signs that refer to the presence of humans or to the responsibility of humans by carrying the boxes. In theatre as a collective or relational and complex whole, we can say that every person is involved (Fortier, 2002). The reader-, response- and reception theories in performance studies are about the meaning to the spectator of the artwork, without involving the artist him/herself. The spectator is the centerpiece of the theater in these theories, and without a spectator, the artwork would be a lifeless object (Balme, 2008). It is one of the crucial elements of theatre, to achieve a certain response from the spectators. Response is divided in two fields: the cognitive and the emotional. The cognitive responses consist of what Goffman calls 'frames': the (social, cultural) knowledge of attitudes and behaviors that are needed to know how to visit the theatre. 'Keying' happens when a new attitude or behavior is asked within these frames (Balme, 2008). The emotional field exists of the experiences of the spectator. Even if artists try to provoke premeditated emotional reactions, it is proved that every person reacts differently, dependent on his own, individual situation, so 'the' spectator doesn't exist (Balme, 2008). During a performance, both cognitive and emotional responses are appealed to. This provides a feeling of wandering between two worlds to the spectators and these oscillation makes the spectators aware of the dynamic process of perception (Fischer-Lichte, 2014).

The handles of the boxes make the spectators wander between the frames of the attitudes and behaviors in a museum, such as not touching anything and the emotional responses to death, disappearance and questions about care. Because: who is carrying the boxes? Who is carrying

about the unknown person inside the boxes? As a spectator we are looking to empty boxes, but what happens when someone dies? Nobody takes responsibility, it seems.

Care ethics is a political ethics that challenges the hierarchical, rational, and bureaucratic allocation of caring responsibilities to, for example, marginalized groups like women or other minorities (Tronto, 2014). It critically scrutinizes and discusses the invisibility of care in our society. Care is too easily passed on by those in higher positions to those lower in the social hierarchy. *Privileged irresponsibility* is the term used to criticize these processes (Tronto, 1993). Care ethics thereby creates space for political dimensions of care, including power, and values such as solidarity. Here, care is much more than *caring for*. It also includes *caring about* and *caring with* (Tronto, 1993). Caring for is an act; it refers to doing and acting, and is an important phase of care, requiring expertise and technical knowledge. However, equally important to good care are attentiveness to others' needs, acceptance of responsibility for others, and responsiveness to their changing needs and desires. Joan Tronto (2014) explicitly states that good care is linked to these moral virtues. Good care is always a two-way affair; it cannot be delivered in a paternalistic or parochial way. Care does not belong to the private domain but is constitutive for how we live together in a society. This is why care is also political: it illuminates the dependencies and power structures between people in institutions and democracy. It informs us about who accepts responsibility for what, whom and why. We now leave the theme of the absent presence and take a closer look at the political dimensions of Espaliú's work.



Figure 13. Pepe Espaliú, Carrying, Madrid, 1992.

Politics and Contextuality

Again, it is the 1st of December 1992 and it is World AIDS Day. People are demonstrating in the streets of Madrid, when fine arts and performance artist Pepe Espaliú appears, carried by his friends and bystanders. The picture above shows us how the human chain was made by different pairs of persons, together by intertwining their arms. Espaliú looks weak and doesn't wear shoes. With this performance he tried to emphasize the helplessness and the lack of protection for people with AIDS. Thereafter, he held the performance in a few more Spanish cities and never touched the ground, what was a symbol for the groundless of fear and the movement of death (Baez, 2010).

Performance is nowadays always associated with political and social concerns. Within performance there is a continuing relation with public and this relation is expended by using the broad gamut of (new) media (Carlson, 2004). Historically, this new way of broadcasting initiated in the first part of the 20th century. Society was characterized by immense changes and artists reacted by trying out new forms of art by experimenting (against the traditional art forms) with new technologies and embracing the development of new media, like radio, television and film. Simultaneously, art became an instrument for political urges to manipulate images and ideas (e.g. the Nazi- and Soviet regimes). These changes in art influenced the discussion point critical debate: the idea of representation and political consequences became the central points (Counsell & Wolf, 2001). In the 80's political street performance became a popular art form amongst solo performance artists. The indifference for particular, marginalized groups and the environment were a central theme, and by performing they expressed their critics and worries. Often the artists asked the members of these minorities to join the performance. These political orientated public actions became part of the world of performance art. An example given in the literature, is the work of Miller: he combined the personal with the political, by, just like Espaliú, making performances about the cultural and politic difficulties he experienced, being homosexual in the AIDS age. Besides he and an Australian friend made performances about their problematic experiences among the immigration politics of the U.S. (Carlson, 2004). The performance of Espaliú is to place in context of the *Zeitgeist* he lived in. It shows is how the personal allies with the professional and how this is related to the public and politics. His own experiences and development as an artist are personal, but at the same time there are non-ignorable congruencies to the experiences of other artists, like Miller.

During the 80's, AIDS dominated the white, homosexual community because it was a mortal epidemic. A movement among the generation that identified itself with AIDS emerged, and the members expressed themselves specifically by the medium of performance. The continuous evolution of cultural meanings and values tight to AIDS, is called 'an epidemic of signification' (Roman, 2007, pp. 372-394). Performance about AIDS is seen as well as a

political intervention, as an embodied theory. Roman gives insight of the importance of placing performances and movements in the political and social contexts (Roman, 2007).

Moral reflection is part of care ethics by analyzing the personal, political stories (narratives) in care practices. From a care ethics stance, morality isn't about universal norms and values, but it derives from interpersonal relations: that what happens between people (Walker, 1993). The work of Espaliú shows us his personal story and to us as spectators, it appeals to a kind of reflection about responsibilities and dominant positions (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). Narratives present moral problems, pointing out the different parties, how they understand themselves and others and how the relations between the different parties established the actual moral problems. It provides us with insider views from what social and institutional frames are being thought and the options for a resolution can be described (Walker, 1993).

With his performance, Espaliú entered the politic terrain. He, although he was dying, wanted to encourage change regarding the care for people with AIDS and equality of homosexuals. Solidarity is mandatory for a democracy that is inclusive and with equal value for every person. Because that means that every person in society knows everybody needs care. When marginalized persons are part of the vicious circle in which everybody is responsible for preserve dependency and inequality, society will not change (Tronto, 2013). But Espaliú and other performance artists of his age stood up for the rights for homosexuals and the oppression of people with AIDS and was able to erupt the vicious circle.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I used a combination of Performance Studies and Care Ethics to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences of the retrospective of the artworks of the fine arts and performance artist Pepe Espaliú. I found a meaningful reflection of lived experiences that could initiate the incorporation of the dialectical relation between practice and theory, that for both Performance studies and Care Ethics as academic, interdisciplinary fields of inquiry is a promise (Leget et al., 2019; Conquergood, 2002).

I argue that Pepe Espaliú's artworks can be better understood when considering a political care ethics approach to inquiry, as developed at the Dutch Utrecht Care Ethics group (Leget et al., 2019). Care ethics emphasizes the importance of human relationships and the responsibility to nurture others, acknowledging inequities and asymmetries. I invite readers to reflect upon the dialogue between the two fields by inquiring the intersection between the fields along five themes: being the absent and vulnerable 'other;' (inter)dependency in place and time; vulnerable *embodiment*; the absent presence/the presence of absence and politics and contextuality. This five-theme approach can be a valuable tool for art educators and ethics

educators. By exploring these themes through artistic works, students can develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of care ethical concepts.

By analyzing the different artworks from both a Performance Analysis and a Care Ethics Analysis, I illustrate that this encounter between a performance and care ethical analysis can help us understand more about Espaliú's experiences being marginalized as a homosexual and suffering from AIDS disease.

I began by embracing the dialectic relationship between the everyday art practice of Pepe Espaliú and performance and care ethical theory. Both fields work with their own metaphor for dialectics. Performance studies speaks of *transgressive travel* (Conquergood, 2002), making a distinction between the map that we travel through in an abstract way, and the everyday, the practical and embodied stories we experience, while we travel. Care Ethics speaks of this dialectic in terms of a *lemniscate*: an ongoing, never-ending movement between theory and practice (Leget et al., 2019) where theoretical concepts shape how we see the world, and where empirical insights shape theory.

In this paper we travel through the landscape of Pepe Espaliú, of Performance Studies and of Care Ethics. The two theoretical fields were not travelling with us as luggage on the back seat, but were travel companions, they steered the unfolding of the map itself and became responsible for the lived understandings that emerged. For Espaliú, art was a necessary means to express his experiences and address his audience. For us, his works are a medium to evoke reflection on the socio-political contexts we are part of. His works are not instrumental to us, but we consider them to be partner in a conversation between different horizons. Take, for example, the care ethical concept of *relationality*. We wonder whether there can be relationship when the caregiver withdraws from the responsibility to care, just like Espaliú was no longer part of society because of his homosexuality. Who should accept responsibility to sense our needs? Are we responsible to express our needs to others, so they can hear the call for care? Performance studies is involved with expressing the personal (like vulnerability) in the public domain. It provides us with the possibility to cross the boundaries between the private and the public and to foster reflection on a caring and just society. Not solely through reflection by logos, but also by pathos: by becoming involved emotionally and through our affective and embodied bonds. The body as a vessel, provided us with a richer understanding of *meaning*, because it illuminated new meanings of being dressed, naked and the changing positions of the body in socio-political space.

The dialectic between care ethics and performance studies can be visualized as follows and is inspired by the Dutch Utrecht Care Ethics approach (Leget et al., 2019).

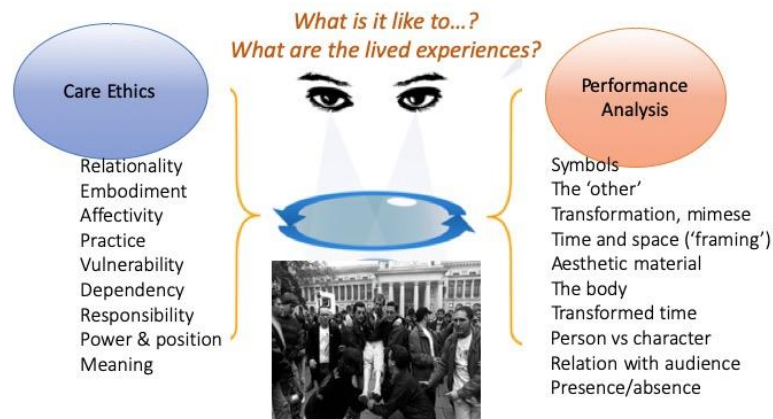


Figure 14. Connecting Performance Analysis and Care Ethics.

By exploring these themes through the artistic works of Espaliú, students gain a valuable tool for cultivating critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of care ethical concepts. Through this approach I aim to demonstrate how two distinct disciplines of inquiry can complement each other and transcend into new ways of analyzing and giving meaning to complex real-life phenomena.

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