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The Radical Politics of a Dialogized Corporeal Ethics

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Abstract

This paper addresses how corporeal ethics can lead to progressive change in the name of justice and equality through the assembly and recognition of bodies in political action. Building on research in corporeal ethics and organizations, the paper focuses on the relations between situated bodies that are organized in acts of political assembly. The discussion attends to how this ethics, while arising in each body, gains effect when mobilized through collective organization. Assembly is one such mobilization. The gathering of people, however, is not enough. The power of assembly comes when it serves a dialogic purpose; one that seeks to destabilize and temporalize the firm footings of injustice to enable the possibility of social progress. Through assembly, a radical politics of dialogized corporeal ethics lends itself to a form of connectedness where interdependence and difference come together as a meaningful force in the struggle for social justice.

Keywords

assembly, corporeal ethics, dialogue, organization of ethics, radical democracy, recognition, social justice

Iris Marion Young's (2005) foundational essay, *Throwing Like a Girl*, reminds us that our lived bodies cannot escape the facticity of their materiality. These are bodies that can be subject to injustice in particular environments. The individual body – sexed, sexual, raced, gendered and abled – is the place from which corporeal ethics emerges. This is 'a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation' (Young, 2005, p. 16). For Young 'The lived body is particular in its morphology, material similarities, and differences from other bodies' (p. 25): it is both the same as other bodies and unique unto itself. While fuelled by desire and affect, bodies are also social; they live amid the structural relations they find themselves in and the

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opportunities and resources available. They are 'habituated bodies reacting to, and reproducing, and modifying structures' (Young, 2005, p. 26).

Young alerts us to how the freedoms attributed to bodies are constrained by the social structures that surround them. Not all bodies are equal; some are more able to do and say more things than others. Inequalities are increasingly at stake in the world, inequalities that are unfairly experienced by certain typed bodies – not only income and wealth inequality but also access to health, rights to bodily autonomy, subjection to police brutality, and living in war and political conflict. Since 2020, Covid-19 has highlighted, if not exacerbated, the fact that such inequalities are inherent in the global economic system. This is a system where poverty, lack of health care, unaffordable housing and climate catastrophe are central features (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019). These inequalities raise social injustice concerns.

This paper charts how inequality can be contested by an organization of ethics rooted in the capacity of bodies to assemble collectively against injustice. In so doing, we contribute to research on corporeal ethics in organizations (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015; Prasad, 2014; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014) by exploring how this ethics, while arising in and between bodies, can gain political effect when it is mobilized collectively as a response to the injustice of inequality. The paper draws on Judith Butler's (2005, 2012, 2015) work on political assembly and its uptake in organization studies (Tyler, 2019a). This is brought together with Bakhtin's (1981, 1984b) theorization of dialogue and its application to organizational politics (Beech, 2008; Izak, Case, & Ybema, 2022; Shotter, 2010). From that, we can theorize assembly as a form of dialogue where the social and material intertwine across a multitude of unequal differences. We argue that ethically driven democratic action against institutionalized injustice is a practice of people working together to destabilize, indeed dialogize, the monologues that desire to constrain the bodies of others for the benefit of the few. In making this argument, the paper contributes to existing research in organization studies on corporeal ethics by theorizing how such ethics is effectively mobilized through assembled bodies that contest injustice through dialogue.

Our central concern is practical: *How can corporeal ethics move to change the world in the name of justice and equality through the assembly of bodies in political action?* In responding to this question, we focus on the organization of collective social action (see Fotaki & Pullen, 2024; Vachhani, 2020) in a manner that extends beyond what bodies can do individually. Every individual atomized body is limited through its inherent reliance on others for survival such that it is only collectively that we can endure and overcome the limits of the sole and vulnerable body. We thus turn to the ethical and political possibilities of communal intercorporeality that remains variegated across difference, such that politics does not fall victim to one system of injustice replacing another; that is, a politics that keeps the dialogue open without attempting to foreclose on the future in the present.

The main argument proceeds in the five central parts of the paper. First, we review the existing literature on corporeal ethics in organizations, showing how this growing body of work has fruitfully reconsidered organizational ethics to reconceive ethics as practised in the relationships between lived bodies acting together in resistance to injustice. Second, we extend the idea of corporeal ethics by considering Mikhail Bakhtin's distinction between monologue and dialogue. This enables us to elucidate a 'dialogized corporeal ethics' that accounts for the collective ethical mobilization of diverse bodies without them being appropriated into a unity that would seek to deprive them of their difference. Third, we turn to Judith Butler's accounts of recognition and assembly to consider how dialogized corporeal ethics emerges in practices as bodies gather in a collective struggle for recognition and justice. Fourth, we consider how the manifestation of corporeal ethics in assembly forms a project of radical democracy whereby democratic participation and resistance question, contest and change unjust forms of assumed consensus. This is illustrated by a discussion

of the Occupy movement. Fifth, we conclude by exploring how the politics of dialogized corporeal ethics enables interdependence and difference to come together as a meaningful force in the struggle for social justice.

Corporeal Organizational Ethics

A corporeal approach to ethics, as it has increasingly been taken up in organization studies (e.g. Dale & Latham, 2015; Kenny & Fotaki, 2015; Poldner, Branzei, & Steyaert, 2019; Tyler, 2019b), forms a political corrective to the expanding limits of managerial ethical and political prerogative, as well as exemplifying recent calls to 'extend the practice of organization studies in ways that will encourage us to think politics in new ways' (O'Doherty & De Cock, 2024). More than two decades ago, John Roberts (2001) argued that the dominant practice of organizational ethics sought the appearance of ethics without grappling with the lived, sensed and felt experience of interpersonal ethical engagement. This rationalized and instrumental approach, Roberts evinced, failed to recognize that 'within and beyond the imaginary surface of the corporate body, lie sensible and vulnerable bodies' (p. 125). Through such sensibility, we can extend our understanding of how ethics might play out in organizations. Roberts concluded that the ethical challenge was 'to break the mirror in which we mistakenly conceive of interests as internal to the self or corporation, and allow us to make use of the real corporeal sensibility that knows interests to be always inter-esse' (p. 125); that is to be 'in-between' and relational.

Since Roberts alerted us to the disembodied and individualistic character of organizational ethics, there has been much work to remedy this and go against the grain of more rationalist and instrumental approaches. In organization studies, the parallel growth of interest in studying the body (see Gärtner, 2013) and ethics (see Rhodes & Wray-Bliss, 2013) have begun to cross with attention to the corporeal nature of ethics, having been increasingly attended to directly. The opportunity this has opened is for a 'reversal of the traditional principle on which Morality was founded as an enterprise of domination of the passions by consciousness' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 18) to be brought to bear on the study of organizations through connecting the body with ethics.

Within the organization studies literature, studies of corporeal ethics have addressed topics such as gender and organization (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015; Knights, 2015), difference and inclusion (Tyler, 2019b), women's embodied labour (Lee, 2018) and entrepreneurial subjectivity (Poldner et al., 2019). These projects share a political sensibility that engages with the material effects of embodied and affective experience at work. This sensibility enables a more engaged, compassionate, resistant and pluralistic ethics that counters strong organizational tendencies towards control and homogeneity. Importantly, corporeal ethics does not propose a universal solution or submit to a desire for one, asserting instead the possibilities of an ethics that is social, relational and embedded in its local contexts and situational particularities. This is a concern with an ethics of the body that engages with materiality, the fleshy substance of the human body, as well as its relation to the material of the world and of non-human bodies.

As an example, a study by Karen Dale and Yvonne Latham (2015) developed corporeal ethics from research in an organization that supported the social integration of people with disabilities. They draw special attention to embodiment as it relates to race, sex, physical ability and age, and how forms of difference outside the organizational norm become common sources of injustice. The corporeal ethics that Dale and Latham identify in this context is rooted in a responsibility to overcome inequalities written on the body by organizations themselves. The uptake of this ethics is political, Dale and Latham argue, in that it contests and disturbs organizations in actual encounters between people and their (different) bodies. Such politics is, however, always grounded in ethics and responsibility to others that take form in 'concrete relations made of care, compassion,

generosity and any forms of feeling experienced pre-reflexively through the body' to resist domination and the pursuit of self-interest at others' expense (Faldetta, 2018, p. 214).

Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Melissa Tyler (2019a) addresses corporeal ethics as it relates to diversity and inclusion in organizations. Tyler draws attention to how inclusion can be read as a 'normative regime' that members of organizations are compelled to conform with so that diversity and difference can be incorporated organizationally. Difference is thus codified and managed, with some forms of difference recognized and others not. Tyler's position is that 'the basis of our ethical relationship to one another is our embodied interconnection and the mutual, corporeal vulnerability that arises from this' (p. 51). This relational conception of ethics jars with approaches to inclusion premised on the codification of difference. By Tyler's account, inclusion must be ethically reimagined to move beyond its organizational regulation and towards a more embodied relational practice.

Care needs to be taken not to imagine that corporeal ethics in organizations occurs only in individual interactions; it can also be collective in spirit (Pérezts, Fay, & Picard, 2015). Sheena Vachhani and Alison Pullen (2019) clarify that corporeal ethics is very much a matter of embodied solidarity. As they aver with specific reference to ethical resistance to sexism in organizations: 'feminist resistance moves away from individualizing experiences of sexism towards collective resistance and organizes solidarity, experience and empathy that may combat ignorance and violence towards women' (p. 23). Through such solidarity, corporeal ethics develops into a social sensibility that provides a means to mobilize politics 'based on affective, embodied experiences in the resistance against sexism' (p. 26).

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that a corporeal ethics of organization is also an ethics of difference; specifically, one that recognizes connectedness to others as the ethical basis on which to oppose structures and practices of normalization and domination of people rendered 'other' (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015). This ethics is in necessary tension with modes of organizing that have been traditionally masculine, not only in that men have dominated them but also because they have privileged the mind over the body, the objective over the subjective and the rational over the emotional (cf. Acker, 1990). In dissolving these differences on ethical grounds, domination can be overcome by opening the self to difference through engaged and embodied relations at work (Knights, 2015). The trajectory that this embarks on is directed at enhancing individual and collective joy and mutual capability (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2015).

Dialogizing Corporeal Ethics in Organizations

As discussed above, research on corporeal ethics in organization studies has developed an understanding of ethics and its practice emerging from bodies and the relationship between them. This is a materially situated ethics that can serve to mobilize political action against domination and the marginalization of difference. Corporeal ethics also draws attention to how people do not necessarily share common injustices, and our attention turns to the possible ethics within and across these differences through communal organizing. This evokes a demand for democracy in the form of a collectively organized commitment to equality and participation over domination at atomization but also asks that corporeal ethics consider more deeply how difference can remain present within collective political action and its organization. In other words, how can corporeal ethics bring people together in unity while valuing their difference be conceived? In this section we explore how dialogue, as a relation, provides a means to address this question.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) consideration of dialogue as a fracturing of 'a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue' and its 'orientation toward unity' (p. 274) offers a fruitful way of extending corporeal ethics. It does so by showing how corporeal ethics can incorporate within it both the facticity and the value of difference. Following Bakhtin, we can imagine the interaction of

bodies in social space as a relation of monologue and dialogue. For Bakhtin, there are always a multitude of voices and language forms present in the world and operating both within and between individuals, each representing different ways of being and interacting with others. This multiplicity is connected through dialogue, as exemplified by Bakhtin in the literary genre of the novel. Bakhtin claims that society is not characterized by a unified reality capable of being captured in a singular manner but comprises a complexity of interacting differences. Such multiplicity, however, is not simply a matter of all voices being equal, whether interpersonally or intra-personally. Some voices seek to control meaning and social practice by imposing a particular monologue over alternatives. The social world then becomes a site of tension between the centripetal forces of language (which posit a singular and central meaning) and the centrifugal forces (which reflect the multiplicity of meanings and associated language uses) – accounting for these centrifugal registers that there are always suppressed alternatives to dominant ways of being, acting, knowing and talking.

Dialogue is not simply about language. It occurs within and between bodies that are both material and discursive – language is a lived experience as much as it is a system of signification (Cresswell & Teucher, 2011). Indeed, Bakhtin was not simply interested in a notion of dialogue dislocated from the body. Ponzio (2016) explains:

> For Bakhtin dialogue is the embodied, intercorporeal, expression of the involvement of one's body (which is only illusorily an individual, separate, and autonomous body) with the body of the other [. . .] This is the body *in its vital and indissoluble interconnectedness with the world and the body of others.* (p. 2, italics in original)

Thus, we appreciate that dialogue, as much as being an act of language, occurs through the lived experience of bodies. Cresswell and Baerveldt (2011) explain that for Bakhtin dialogue is not just a matter of 'discursive rejoinders' and 'turn-taking' (p. 270) but fundamentally about how flesh-and-blood people live together in society, and of course in organizations. Dialogue is a mode of openness to other people that recognizes and accepts their differences without them being drowned out by one's own attempts to control meaning through monologue. Moreover, when such attempts at control are made from positions of political or managerial power or authority, the results are not merely a deterioration in communication but an undermining of democracy. From this premise, we can begin to appreciate the possibility of dialogized corporeal ethics – one that manifests in the world across the mobilization of diverse bodies that are both unified and different, without trying to resolve that difference. Such an ethics is about caring for others who are both known and unknown, working through difference while retaining some level of communal identification if not through humanity alone. Corporeal ethics becomes dialogical with the ethical desire to join together – to organize – without appropriation, whether in resistance against unjust forces or in solidarity towards social justice. This resistance comes into being through political opposition to monologue, formed by the desire for justice that corporeal ethics engenders.

The collective organization of bodies in difference can stand against dominant regimes that seek control rather than enable the differences within and between social groups and individuals. Such forms of organization are evident in movements that seek to counter the injustices resulting from the monologues of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy as they are sustained by sexed, class raced, political separation and enslavement. Dialogized, corporeal ethics serves as a decentralizing force that disturbs systems of injustice without seeking to instantiate a new form of domination, enabling us to imagine a politics that can 'deal with the life and behaviour of discourse in a contradictory and multi-languaged world' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 275) wrought through the interactions and dependencies between embodied experiences and the uncertainties and incongruities of life itself. Following Bakhtin, dialogue is not restricted to language but is an embodied dimension of life itself:

> Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 293)

Whereas monologue attempts to reify and objectify the world, closing it off in the here-and-now of dominant political interests, dialogue renders the world open-ended and subject to change. Dialogue marks a differential relation between oneself and the other. There is no place to hide in dialogue, given that 'a neutral position in relation to I and another is impossible in the living image and in the ethical idea' (p. 296); the deeds and words of a person always addressed to another, and hence also answerable to them. In undoing the 'sentimental-humanistic dematerialization of man [sic.]' (p. 297), Bakhtin raises the ethical possibilities of dialogues disassembling of the hubris of monologue.

Dialogizing corporeal ethics provides a position from which to engage in organized political action that would address the dominance of monologue as a principal feature of organizations and of life in institutions more generally. Applying Bakhtin's ideas to the study of organizations, Michal Izak et al. (2022) argue that organizations are profoundly monological in their operation. Such an organization:

> does not value or allow for a plurality of connotations to emerge; instead, it imposes singular, disambiguated meanings, synchronized with existing relations of power. Monologic organization leads not to dialogic understanding but, rather, to repetitive reproduction and regurgitation of meaning. (p. 1514)

These are organizations rife with a 'political hegemony enforcing silence and repressing dialogue' (p. 1516). Ethically, while acknowledging the predominance of this monological form, it is vital to register the possibilities of resistance to the damage repressive monologue can enact on people, especially people who are 'different' to the preferred characters in the monologue. Even though it may be reasonable to assume that those in positions of managerial authority will work to retain their monological control (Izak et al., 2022), the possibility of dialogizing and seeking emancipatory alternatives on ethical grounds can be expected to be located outside of the corridors of power. In this context, dialogism becomes less a way of thinking about the operation of organizations (Shotter, 2010) or individuals within them (Beech, 2008) and more a way of understanding how unjust dimensions of organizations can be collectively resisted on ethical grounds.

Political Assembly and the Demand for Recognition

As reviewed above, the corporeal approach to ethics has been fruitfully employed in organization studies to examine how ethics emerges as a productive and collective force to combat injustice. By dialogizing this approach, ethics is seen not as a system of rule-driven moral authority (itself monological) but as an open-ended and ongoing arrangement of intercorporeal engagements dedicated to disturbing and overturning systems of injustice. How might this ethics be organized into an emancipatory force for society more generally? To begin considering this question, we turn to the work of Judith Butler to engage in the idea of 'assembly' as a mode of organizing ethics in social contexts. Building on the previous section we also articulate assembly as an embodied dialogic process that disturbs dominating political inequalities and embraces responsibility and openness to people's differences.

Judith Butler (2005) suggests that ethics is wrapped up in the ability to give an account of oneself in pursuit of the recognition of one's subjectivity by others, a recognition, we add, that is not

just a meeting of minds but a dialogical encounter of bodies. Butler (2012) is concerned with an ethical responsibility and being 'held to account' by and for others such that 'the claims that others make upon us are part of our very sensibility, our receptivity, and our answerability' (p. 141). This answerability is not for one's own benefit but instead pleads with the other for acknowledgement and recognition, and hence is dialogic in character. In accounting for oneself, one is called to provide a 'convincing ethical defence of one's claim for recognition, particularly when that claim involves accounting for one's difference' (Butler, 2012, p. 11). This ethical defence is a political process of opening oneself to others' scrutiny in a desire for recognition. Responsibility is openness to dialogue, difference and vulnerability in that it requires the self to be subject to the demands of the embodied other. Nevertheless, recognition is not granted equally, with injustice arising from this maldistribution of recognition. As Moya Lloyd (2015) notes, discussing Butler's ethics, not all self-accounts are equal, just as not all bodies are equal, and the issue Butler takes up is 'how power operates to regulate and determine who counts as human, to shape and condition the scene of recognition, and to circumscribe the types of ethical encounter that might take place there' p. 167).

Butler's focus on ethical subjectivity as a dialogical relationship leads to a consideration of what different bodies can do and undo together. Collective calls for recognition reveal both the 'ethical defence' and the political intent of the organized collective. Following Butler, recognition is ethical when attention turns from the self to the other. Simply asking 'the personal question, what makes my own life bearable' is vital in its drive for self-preservation. With ethics, however, we ask, 'from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable?' For Butler (2004), the quality of one's response to that question demonstrates a normative ethical commitment to how one lives one's life and, crucially, reflects 'what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not' (p. 17).

Humanity, following Butler, is not intrinsic to possessing a human body but emerges from a sense of collectivity and responsibility for others through that body. To give an account of oneself is not just about the self but is based on a 'non-violent ethics of reflexive reciprocity' that accepts our inherent material interdependence and the realization that 'we are, from the start, ethically implicated in the lives of others' (Butler, 2005, p. 64). Butler highlights how the relational character of ourselves is that from which ethics and politics are formed. Relationality is about our ethical difference and ethical connectedness as embodied people, and it is the 'means by which we are both dispossessed and constituted within the sphere of recognition' (Tyler, 2019a, p. 119, discussing Butler); it is dialogue, quite literally 'discourse together'. Ethical relationality is premised upon recognition of the other as other; it is fundamental to subjectivity and the possibility of collective ethics based on an ethics of corporeal vulnerability (see Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). This political subject is not an idealized citizen but an embodied person in political connection with others that relate in a manner that exceeds the limitations of 'regimes of economization of life' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 176). Ethical intercorporeality is not about reciprocal exchange motivated by the maximization of self-interest. It is about being open and dialogically responsive to the needs and struggles of other people and for the benefit of all without collapsing others into one's own monologue.

The presence of corporeal ethics becomes especially palpable, as well as potent, when people come together and organize in the pursuit of a common justice, forcing the oppression that caused that injustice into dialogue. Throughout history, the appearance of people's bodies in an organized way for recognition and protest has been evident. This includes organized activist strategies such as street marches, public resistance performances, boycotts and sit-ins. In recent times, we have witnessed intense organizing to resist populism, racism, sexism, corruption, climate change and genocide (see Fotaki & Pullen, 2024). The mobilization and assembly of bodies against the dominant monologues that seek to constrain, deny and control them is central to social activism through a proliferation of bodies across difference that stand against violence and injustice; this is corporeal

ethics incarnate. These are bodies that move together in assembly towards recognition and rights. To what extent can such political action be connected to corporeal ethics and recognition? The bodily collectivity of the assembly is not an adequate answer. Indeed, the very act of people gathering together can be used across the political sphere for emancipatory and non-emancipatory purposes. Groups such as those upholding populist or even fascist politics, white supremacy, gun rights and anti-vaccinations organize, gather and protest in a similar manner.

What differentiates collective mobilizing as political action based on corporeal ethics is a desire to redress injustice in the name of creating liveable lives for others. A dialogized ethics seeks to disrupt the prevailing dominance of monological accounts that shut down difference, opposing them with more plural, democratic and tolerant alternatives. Moreover, in assembly, it is the dialogic relationships between bodies that transform desire for justice into a collective desire that can be organized in assembly. There is, however, no ethical purity in politics. The reality remains that what constitutes justice is always contestable across the multiplicity of bodies and ideas that constitute the dialogue. Protest movements are not without critique, as people are held to account for being exclusionary, and monological desires become imbued in moralizing modes of resistance. Some voices are not equal in the dialogue; neither are some bodies. Further, the ability to gather in protest is a position of collective political expression not available for all, with participation in dialogue appearing like a privilege of the few.

The right to assemble and join with others in a common call for justice is a precursor to the possibility of collective ethical resistance. However, one is always at risk of being quashed by the embodied violence of monologic authority. Nevertheless, assembled bodies are an organized site of collective corporeal ethics, perpetuated by political dialogue, grounded in situatedness, enacting an ethical sensibility between bodies in relation. Reflecting on the relationship between Bakhtin's dialogue and Butler's assembly, John M. Roberts (2023) notes that an overlooked feature of assembly is that it demonstrates the

> ability to build a place for a variety of dialogic events and spaces to flourish [. . .through. . .] assorted coalitions whose members will momentarily come together in these dialogic spaces to exercise and often develop their own unique creative energies within the wider place of the assembly itself. (p. 12)

Assembly is dialogic in that it allows for both sameness and difference to co-exist in political action. For Butler (2015), assemblies are 'recognition-based bodily presence' (p. 169), and the political value of co-presence where 'showing up, standing, breathing, moving, standing still, speech, and silence' (p. 18) are an unanticipated form of political action. The act of assembly is a mode of organizing and a dialogic act that not only exercises a plural 'right to appear' but also represents, for Butler (2015), 'a bodily demand [. . .] for a more liveable set of economic, social and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity' (p. 11).

In thinking through collective and dialogized corporeal ethics, political assembly represents the ethical and political imperative at the heart of a collective yet diverse demand for recognition. Through dialogue, assembly moves from an individual desire for recognition to one that becomes collective as people join dialogically to focus on recognizing and caring for others, as is only possible through a larger collective struggle. Collective struggle operates beyond ego-centric self-satisfaction in the hope that collective recognition of the many can be gained against economic and political injustices. Butler considers that bodies assembling in both real and virtual public spaces instate the body into politics. For Butler, the simple act of bodies being together 'enacts a provisional and plural form of co-existence that constitutes a distinct ethical and social alternative to "responsibilization"' (Butler, 2015, p. 16). These are bodies connected dialogically, resisting the monologue that heralds injustice. Butler refers to the responsibilization that comes from an ideological insistence on the primacy of individual over collective responsibility, whose privileging

self-reliance is that harbinger of social isolation and the death knell of dialogue. The assembly eschews such isolation through the embodied performance and organization of collective responsibility. Embodied protest as a form of political action and women's roles in mobilizing collective protests are well documented to make injustice public and visible (see Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2021). The assembly of human bodies and the relation between those bodies is a means through which ethically motivated democratic politics can be mobilized. This is a democracy where injustice suffered by particular 'types' of bodies and their continued capacity for existence is pursued by people working together in proximity and dialogic relation.

Political resistance is, for Butler (2005), an 'ethical obligation grounded in precarity' (p. 119). Furthermore, this 'shared condition of precarity situates our political lives, even as precarity is differentially distributed' (p. 96). These forms of assembly are democratic; they demand recognition of the *demos* – the people – whose plight might otherwise be ignored and 'slipped quietly into the shadows of public life' (Butler, 2015, p. 152). Assembling is an act of collective and embodied politics, as Butler and Athanasiou explain:

> The collective assembling of bodies is an exercise of the popular will and a way of asserting, in bodily form, one of the most basic presuppositions of democracy, namely that political and public institutions are bound to represent the people and to do so in ways that establish equality as a presupposition of social and political existence. So when those institutions become structured in such a way that certain populations become disposable, are interpolated as disposable, become deprived of a future, of education, of stable and fulfilling work, then surely the assemblies fulfil another function, not only the expression of justifiable rage, but their assertion of their very social organization on principles of equality (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 196).

Democratic privileging of equality is not about a desire to pursue one's own rights as an atomized individual. It is a dialogized ethics that seeks equality for the collective in its diverse representation; a situation where 'the "I" becomes undone by its ethical relation to the "you"' (Butler, 2015, p. 110). This is not simply a matter of choice of words but a fundamental dimension of how one relates to the world of others through ethics. Butler underlines how such ethical relations originate through the self's vulnerability to the demands of others, such that our very existence as 'selves' is always already defined through our ethical relations with other people. Ethics engages us in dialogic relations with the other we do not know, the stranger, alerting us to the existential fact that we live amid a world of difference. This demands an ethics where '[b]eing at ease with strangeness; knowing that we have no choice but to live with difference, whatever differences come to matter in specific times and places' (The Care Collective, 2021, p. 95). Assembly is a form of dialogic organizing that enables this coming together in community – in dialogue across difference – in strangeness, for democracy, equality and justice.

Social Justice: A Radical Democratic Project

Melissa Tyler (2019b) explains 'the capacity of assembly as organized opposition to induced, or privative, precarity through a recognition of shared, intercorporeal vulnerability and the ethics of relationality engendered by that vulnerability' (p. 58). Assembly thus renders ethics political, for example, through demands for recognition and inclusion. This leads Tyler to conclude that 'the concept of assembly, and the recognition ethic on which it depends, may provide the basis for a way to think about how we might enact a better way of living, being and organizing together' (p. 62). While Tyler is explicit in seeing assembly as an organized politics that opposes oppression, its democratic elements (including those developed by Butler, 2016) are not accounted for. What is left open is for the corporeal ethics of assembly to be considered more explicitly as democratically infused form of political action, as we explore below.

The vulnerability to the other that permeates corporeal ethics when manifesting collectively in assembly issues an ethical demand for justice and the recognition of difference in communion. On this basis, we can assert the entanglement of dialogized corporeal ethics with a project of radical democracy. In this regard, there is a difference between a gathering of bodies that constitutes a 'riot' or a 'mob' and one that constitutes an 'assembly', the former being disorderly and violent, and the latter being a form of collectivity and deliberation. Butler (2016) says, 'we have to distinguish between self-reflective and inclusive assemblies – seeking to exemplify modes of democratic participation and debate – and those who are giving up on democracy' (n.p.). What distinguishes assemblies from riots and mobs is that assemblies are democratic: they serve as a form of self-reflective inclusive deliberation and contestation in the name of justice. Assembly enables 'democratic participation and debate' (Butler, 2016), leading to political change and progress.

The rights of gender equality serve as a valuable example of the relationship between corporeal ethics and democracy, particularly radical democracy. Butler (2005) writes that for this social justice struggle 'to be characterized as a radical democratic project, it is necessary to realize that we are but one population who has been and can be exposed to conditions of precarity and disenfranchisement' (p. 66), oppressed by a dominant masculine monologue. Identifying as a woman, for example, may be a position from which to assert one's rights based on a history of disenfranchisement. However, it is not the only position from which to make that assertion. Democratic struggles are plural, Butler insists, such that 'the gender rights', while identifiable as a social movement, rely on the relations between people rather than the assertion of individualism. Dialogic interdependencies and alliances between different gender identifications and other forms of difference stand against a privileging of individualism and its attendant idea that identity is a form of personal possession rather than the location of relations of sameness and difference with others. Interdependency is the condition of democracy such that the struggle for democratic justice is a 'struggle for an egalitarian social and political order which a liveable interdependency becomes' (p. 69).

This struggle is radically democratic, with the underfunding of radical democracy as a dialogic politics. Radical democracy is not to be equated with the formal institutions and practices of liberal democracy, especially when the latter becomes entwined with elite corporate authority (Rhodes, Thanem, Munro, & Pullen, 2020). Furthermore,

> radical democracy differs from liberal democratic government in that it retains the root meaning of democracy as being that the power to rule must be retained with the social body, with the people rather than with a political class or the institutions of the state. (Rhodes, 2016, p. 1510)

Radical democracy is concerned with disrupting unequal hierarchies with a form of collective action that can mount a constructive disruption of inequality, leading to 'a reordering and reconsidering of a political order' (Barthold, Checchi, Imas, & Smolović Jones, 2022, p. 687). Radical democracy puts dissensus and dialogue at the heart of democratic politics.

The political assembly of bodies is a paradigm example of radical democracy. Assembly exemplifies how:

> radical democracy bears witness to marginalized voices excluded from the prevailing status quo and enacts a particular ethics rested in the radical questioning and subversion of the totalizing tendencies of power [. . .] With radical democracy, the political task is to fight against the powers, injustices and inequalities that affect people not just politically, but also materially. (Rhodes et al., 2020, p. 628)

Radical democracy is informed by a primary respect for difference and equality, exercised through 'dissensus' rather than a centrally imposed false 'consensus'. It involves a non-violent confrontation

of difference in the name of all the people (Mouffe, 1992, 2000). This is a 'radically vulnerable dialogical politics' enacted through 'participatory, egalitarian, and necessarily local' action against institutionalized injustice (Newson, 2016, pp. 244 and 252). With radical democracy, public life and its physical spaces are the sites where difference should engage in productive and dialogic conflict without assuming an idealistic or utopian realization of the needs of all (Thomassen, 2010) into a singular authoritative monologue. Instead, the unending pursuit of justice and equality, not the pretence of its achievement, marks the democratic project. It is an ethically disciplined 'challenge to the dominant apparatus of power' (Munro, 2014, p. 1129) through an assertion of 'political agency on behalf of and for the people' (Robbins, 2011, p. 62) legitimized in the name of equality and against domination.

Radical democracy can be understood as fundamentally dialogic in its orientation; not simply as communication, but as an underlying political privileging of the preservation of political differences such that one set of political interests or views take monological control and, in so doing, silence and suppress others. Politically, dialogue is opposed to authoritarianism. Nikulin (2006) explains that dialogue requires dissensus to ensure that authoritative monologues do not drown out such difference and contestation. Dialogue allows for 'the simultaneous presence of a multiplicity of different and mutually irreducible personal ideas [. . .] that does not reach an ultimate or final synthesis' (p. 198). The value of dialogue is precisely that it breaks up consensus through the presence of difference and dissent. Dialogue does not require agreement, and the presence of apparent agreement may well be the hallmark of dialogue's absence (Glozer, Caruana, & Hibbert, 2019).

How, then, might radical democracy be enacted through the assembly of bodies as an embodied demand for justice? The Occupy movement provides a paradigm example of what is possible. On 17 September 2011, near Zuccotti Park in New York's Lower Manhattan, a group of protestors started what was intended to be a week-long 'sit-in' in the heart of the Wall Street financial district. The location was carefully chosen; they protested the vast economic inequality created by a globally financialized America. The protestors communicated their message on the then-young social media site Twitter. They tweeted with the hashtag #OccupyWallStreet. News spread like wildfire, and Zuccotti Park was occupied by thousands of people and broadcasted as headline news worldwide. While the New York police arrested 200 protestors and forced the rest to vacate Zuccotti Park on 15 November, things did not end there. The movement was soon global, with Occupy sites arising across Europe, Asia and Australasia. The driving slogan of the movement was 'we are the 99%', reflecting how the wealthiest of the world's people – the top 1% – may be in control of the political and economic system. However, it is the vast democratic majority who has the rightful claim to that authority (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015).

The Wall Street protest lasted only 59 days, with most other protest sites worldwide closed down within a few months after that. While nothing materially changed in the immediate aftermath of Occupy, the bodies assembled in the occupation of streets and squares worldwide made a difference. They were an embodied symbol of both the failure and the promise of democracy. Butler (2011) spoke when she visited the Occupy Wall Street site on 23 October 2011:

> It matters that as bodies we arrive together in public, that we are assembling in public; we are coming together as bodies in alliance in the street and in the square. As bodies, we suffer; we require shelter and food, and as bodies, we require one another and desire one another. So this is a politics of the public body, the requirements of the body, its movement and voice. We would not be here if elected officials were representing the popular will. We stand apart from the electoral process and its complicities with exploitation. We sit and stand and move and speak, as we can, as the popular will, the one that electoral democracy has forgotten and abandoned. But we are here, and remain here, enacting the phrase, 'we the people'.

Occupy was ultimately a collective and organized democratic project where the conventional politics of parties, pundits and experts was replaced by an airing of the grievances and calls for justice for the people set asunder by global capitalism and the inequalities it produced (Graeber, 2014). The demands were not specific but created a 'crisis of legitimacy within the entire system by promoting a glimpse of what real democracy might be like' (p. xvii). The monologue of capitalist liberal democracy was decentred, enabling the dialogue of the many to be heard – the political move interrupted the monologue with dialogue. The call was for nothing less than a radical move away from a class-based wealth and inequality system towards one of an open and genuine democratic culture. Moreover, it achieved this through, following Butler, the acts of bodies together modelling and prefiguring the possibilities of democracy in broader culture.

Occupy can be understood as an organized practice of collective corporeal ethics through assembly and a dialogical practice of radical democracy. It leveraged an ethics of dissensus where political differences can be confronted without assuming that entrenched differences based on race, gender, class or sexuality can be overcome once and for all. Instead, practical democratic politics lies in the ongoing confrontation of those differences in the name of justice. That this is done without violence is a sign of the quality of democracy and the ethical vulnerability to difference through dialogue. It is only with such vulnerability that bodies come together and organize and that society changes in the direction of equality and justice. Corporeal ethics manifests as assembly as a mode of organized political action. Activism relies on the entwinement of bodies, practices and ethics that enable affectual relationships, organizing and resistance (Vachhani, 2020).

An ethics of dissensus located in radical democracy emerges from a concern with 'the role of ethical respect for the Other in proliferating democratic struggle against racial, sexist and class oppression' (Ziarek, 2001, p. 9). The relationship between 'struggle' and 'democracy' is worth emphasizing. Democracy is not a finite state achieved by having the right institutions in place; it is an ongoing practice in the name of justice and equality, whose pursuit does not cease. Struggle is a persistent feature of democracy, not resulting in an end state where difference dissolves into a consensual utopia. This struggle is against the imposition of a monologically controlled consensus that drowns out the multi-faceted and dialogic possibilities of difference. Such is the 'constitutive antagonism of democracy' (Ziarek, 2001, p. 9). Antagonism and dissent are constitutive of social movements premised on ethical relations. Exemplified in feminist movements, this illustrates 'the complex dynamics of dissent and radical democracy based on intercorporeal and embodied differences' and how this can 'challenge systems of oppression and the constitutive exclusions faced by different women with the promise of hope and vulnerability of the embodied and generous ethical relation' (Vachhani, 2020, p. 755). Hence, the collective acts of political movements are part of a corporeal ethical and political practice that challenges systems of difference that produce and reproduce injustice. This challenging involves the movement of assembled bodies as a collective politics that becomes a viable form of organizing for struggle for change and justice. While this challenging recognizes the intersectional diversity of bodies, the attention turns to focusing on the site of struggle to envisage change. Corporeal ethics dialogized through assembled bodies motivates 'democratic struggles against racial, patriarchal, and economic domination' where 'the respect for otherness is a necessary condition of solidarity and democratic community' (Ziarek, 2001, pp. 221 and 224). This is the democracy of collective, organizing bodies acting together across difference.

Contributions

In the call for papers for the special issue of which this paper is a part, the editors (Hjorth, Janssens, Steyaert, Johansson, & Vachhani, 2020) invited authors to reconsider the possibilities for a

dialogically affirmative organization in an increasingly diverse and disjointed world. Politics was never far from what the editors expounded as the need to organize in a manner that actively addressed the world's biggest problems, be they related to, inter alia, climate change, sexual violence, war and discrimination. There is a 'search for new forms of collective feeling', the editors evinced, that accepted the challenges of today while being focused on a better future. In the name of hope and solidarity, the dialogue was put forward as a concept and practice that might weigh in to inform such a future through affirmative organizing.

Our paper has been informed and inspired by the agenda set out by the editors. In following their provocation, our paper set out to reconsider the ethics of organization through a consideration of the political practice of assembly. We suggested that inequality can be contested on ethical grounds through the political coming together of diverse bodies in the name of justice. Building on extant work in organization studies on 'corporeal ethics', we argued that assembly is a means through which bodies can be organized in response to such an ethics and in the political pursuit of justice. Of course, politics can serve to simply replace one dominant regime of thought with another through a battle of exclusive and opposing monologues, each laying claim to be better than the other. The very idea of dialogue, as we have deployed it in this paper, serves as an antidote to such authoritarian tendencies, enabling the monologues to be disturbed and displaced. Dialogue allows for a future that is open to new and progressive possibilities, imbued with the democratic spirit of respecting and valuing difference. Assembly can thus be seen a form of ethically grounded 'dialogic organizing' whose purpose is the democratic pursuit of justice and equality – it is a concrete form of political action that lives up to the potential of how 'the resonances and attunements of dialogic organizing can reshape our futures into generative and hopeful affective landscapes of living and working with multiplicity' (Hjorth et al., 2020, p. 4).

A central contribution of our paper, as we see it, is that assembled democratic political action can be productively understood as the emergence of dialogized corporeal ethics in a social form. Further, dialogized corporeal ethics is a shared responsibility towards collective recognition and emancipation in dialogue with others and across difference. Such ethics permits new ways for people to relate to each other in resisting injustice. In a globally connected world the possibilities for assembly include but are not limited to physical co-presence. This only goes to increase the political potential of people who engage in the struggle for justice and human rights in a powerful way. Such power sees corporeal ethics being collectively mobilized across difference beyond the limits of caring only about those with whom one has a shared identity. Such affectively grounded politics does not dispense with people's differences but engages them in dialogical relations. This means that an ethical sensibility that is embodied and directed against injustice through dialogically engaged overlapping political and democratic concerns marks the full potential of corporeal ethics for social justice on a global level.

In building on and contributing to existing work in organization studies on corporeal ethics, this paper has drawn on Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and Butler's discussion of political assembly to theorize a form of radical politics where bodies effectively assemble in the pursuit of justice. Through such assembly, corporeal ethics, as developed in the organization studies literature, can be more fully politicized in its conception and more practical in its execution. For scholars in the field of organization studies, this provides a means to reconsider how corporeal ethics can manifest in organizations themselves, as well as providing a platform to reconsider the ways that ethics can be organized and translated into action through embodied assembly. Each of these two possibilities offers potential future research directions that might stem from the discussion here. While the organization of ethics and politics have been widely studied, what the present paper points to is, more generally, an opportunity to politicize such studies by locating the enactment of ethics within a radical democratic tradition of change and progress.

As a form of political action, assembly itself retains a hope for change that is too easily forgotten when facing up to the vast injustices of the world. The differences and intersections between the ethical and political possibilities of physically and virtually assembled bodies, as well as the combination of the two and their organization, remain an important area for research to inform more effective political assembly on a global level. Also important is building a better understanding of just how corporeal ethics becomes organized through assembly; to ask through what process or practice assembly emerges to bring people together to combat injustice. It is also important not to ethically valorize assembly per se, suggesting the need to investigate how hierarchies of discourse can be established within political movements through monologizing forces, for example, in the form of those who take the role of representatives of a movement. In sum, vulnerability to others motivates corporeal ethics and calls for justice yield no change without a politics that engages with dialogue for change. Researching the ethico-politics of such change remains an urgent task and will continue to be so as long as injustice exacerbates across the world.

Dialogized corporeal ethics acknowledges that our life depends on others we do not know. None of us is self-reliant, each disrupted by the others on whom we rely, and those affected by our actions. That is dialogue. The form of corporeal ethics that we have written about in this paper registers a hopefulness that no monologue, no matter how loud and seemingly unsurmountable, is subject to contestation and change by the power of dialogue. While monologues may seek to stop time in its tracks by claiming a once-and-for-all finality of the way things should be, dialogue temporalizes and enlivens the static morbidity of a world whose injustices present themselves as 'just the way things are'. Inequalities and injustices that seem insurmountable are always subject to transformation. Assembly shows how the ethical and political possibility for dialogic recognition in the face of the other holds the potential to produce the disruption that can yield social progress. Assembly constitutes a movement where individual calls for justice unify into a collective desire for change. This marks an important transformation where separate individuals become a 'people' unified against an injustice differentially felt by all. People gathering together is not enough, however. The power of assembly comes when it serves a dialogic purpose; it seeks to destabilize and temporalize the firm footings of injustice to enable the possibility of social progress.

Corporeal ethics is not a matter of theoretical abstraction but the means through which life can become worth living. It requires a collective appearance that can create a rhythm against the unjust forces that continue to dominate bodies and towards a public body that first protects the most precarious and vulnerable.

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