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**Re-assembling difference? Rethinking inclusion through/as embodied ethics**

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## Re-assembling difference? Rethinking inclusion through/as embodied ethics

This paper considers inclusion through the lens of embodied ethics. It does so by connecting feminist writing on recognition, ethics and embodiment to recent examples of political activism as instances of recognition-based organizing. In making these connections, the paper draws on insights from Judith Butler's recent writing on the ethics and politics of assembly in order to re-think how inclusion might be understood and practiced. The paper has three inter-related aims: (i) to emphasize the importance of a critical reconsideration of the ethics and politics of inclusion given, on the one hand, its positioning as an organizational 'good' and on the other, the conditions attached to it; (ii) to develop a critique of inclusion, drawing on insights from recent feminist thinking on relational ethics, and (iii) to connect this theoretical critique of inclusion, re-considered here through the lens of embodied ethics, to assembly as a form of feminist activism. Each of these aims underpins the theoretical and empirical discussion developed in the paper, specifically its focus on the relationship between embodied ethics, the interplay between theory and practice, and a politics of assembly as the basis for a critical reconsideration of inclusion.

Key words: inclusion; embodied ethics; Judith Butler; assembly; recognition; relationality

## Introduction

It is perhaps not surprising that diversity has been the subject of a growing body of critical research within work and organization studies (Ahmed, 2012; Ahonen et al, 2014; Ahonen and Tienari, 2015; Costea and Introna, 2008; Swan, 2010, 2016). Whether articulated through ‘trenchant formulations or transient fashions’ (Oswick and Noon, 2014: 286), a seemingly ubiquitous rhetorical commitment to diversity represents not just a problematic managerial discourse, but also a powerful one (Zanoni, 2011; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, 2015; Zanoni et al, 2010). Critical research has highlighted how the management of diversity has become an increasingly dominant way in which differences between people are not simply classified and governed, but are ‘made up’ (Dahl, 2014), that is, brought into being specifically in order to be appropriated. Through this reificatory process, lived multiplicities and their intersectional complexities become knowable and therefore manageable categories so that projected (‘protected’) characteristics can be co-opted as organizational resources in the service of the business case. The writings of thinkers as diverse as Bourdieu (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2011; Tatli, 2011), Foucault (Ahonen and Tienari, 2015; Ahonen et al, 2014) and Kristeva (Vachhani, 2014) have been drawn on to inform an increasingly rich and theoretically sophisticated critique of this co-optation.

Evolving from this body of work, critical scholars have argued for some time that in place of diversity, a theoretical and political commitment to ‘inclusion’ is something that we should be striving for (see Katila et al, 2010). Inclusion is a compelling force, itself emerging from a critique of the instrumental and individualizing tendencies of its US-originating predecessor, diversity. Yet, inclusion has also been subject to critique – as ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Nkomo, 2014) and as a managerial buzzword that needs ‘anchoring’ (Dobusch, 2014). Drawing on feminist writing on recognition, embodiment and ethics, I argue here that inclusion, whilst appealing, requires some reflexive re-thinking, both in order to question our own practices and assumptions (Holck and Muhr,

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3 2014) and to underpin ‘a more theoretically informed orientation towards practice and  
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5 activism’ (Ahonen et al, 2014: 263). With this in mind, this paper seeks to draw together  
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7 insights from critical discussions within work and organization studies focusing on the  
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9 organizational process and politics of inclusion, and feminist writing on recognition,  
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11 embodiment and ethics. The theoretical critique developed and the case that is made for  
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13 re-thinking inclusion through embodied ethics is illustrated with reference to two recent  
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15 examples of political activism: the anti-homophobic vigils held after the mass shootings at  
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17 Pulse, an Orlando nightclub in June 2016, and the Women’s Marches that took place on  
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19 the first full day of Donald Trump’s US presidency in January 2017.  
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23 Inspired by feminist thinking on the politics of assembly (Butler, 2015), and by  
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25 recent writing on embodied ethics within work and organization studies, the aim of the  
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27 paper is to contribute to a critical and reflexive questioning of the presumption that  
28  
29 inclusion is by definition a ‘good thing’, and something that feminist scholars and activists  
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31 ought to champion. Throughout the paper, inclusion is understood not just as a practice  
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33 that may or not take place within organizations but rather, as an organizational process in  
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35 itself. Thinking about inclusion as a process of organization is (hopefully) more than just a  
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37 semantic game, but represents a conceptual shift that encourages critical reflection on  
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39 whether work and organization studies should look to move beyond inclusion, exploring  
40  
41 alternative concepts to communicate how difference, as a complex and dynamic  
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43 multiplicity (Benjamin, 1995; Harding et al, 2012; Linstead and Pullen, 2006), might be  
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45 lived and experienced within organizational life beyond the confines of inclusion.  
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49 The discussion begins with a review of relevant literature on (i) inclusion in work  
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51 and organization studies, particularly within the growing sub-field of critical diversity  
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53 studies, and (ii) feminist scholarship on recognition and ethics. Here and throughout the  
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55 paper, recognition is understood in the Hegelian sense of a struggle for reciprocal  
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57 affirmation of our inter-subjective viability, narrated in Hegel’s own writing on the  
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master-slave dialectic, and developed in feminist writing particularly by De Beauvoir's (2011) reading of Hegel in her critique of woman as man's Other (as the object to his subject), and by feminist recognition theorists who have drawn on her work such as Jessica Benjamin (1990, 1995). In feminist hands, recognition is understood as 'the embodied, practical and cooperative character of the self-other relation' and is framed as 'dialogical, situated in cultural and social contexts and generated through embodied practice' (Harding et al, 2012: 57). Having examined this literature, the paper then goes on to focus specifically on some of the difficulties associated with 'doing difference' in and through contemporary organizations, before turning to Butler's (2015) recent writing on assembly as a conceptual framework through which to re-think inclusion through an embodied, recognition-based ethics premised upon an inter-corporeal, relational recognition of difference. By assembly, Butler (2015: 8) refers to those forms of standing together (literally and symbolically) that signify an 'embodied and plural performativity'. Assemblies, she argues, materialize a simple, but powerful and effective assertion of the right to appear beyond the permitted conditions or normative terms governing doing so. The two examples referred to above are considered as illustrations of how a politics of assembly, premised upon an ethics of recognition, might take us beyond an instrumental orientation towards inclusion within and through organizational processes. As examples of activist organising, the post-Pulse vigils and the Women's Marches are offered as examples of the collective, performative capacity of assembly as a form of 'standing together' that powerfully connects bodies, ethics and practices in opposition to normative regimes governing recognition in the name of 'inclusion'.

The aims of the paper are threefold: (i) to emphasize the importance of a critical reconsideration of the ethics and politics of inclusion within work and organization studies given, on the one hand, its positioning as an organizational 'good' and on the other, the normative conditions attached to it; (ii) to develop a critique of inclusion as it is currently

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2 understood and practiced within work organizations, drawing on insights from recent  
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4 feminist thinking on embodied ethics, and (iii) to connect the theoretical critique of  
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6 inclusion, re-considered here through the lens of embodied ethics, to assembly as a form  
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8 of organizational practice and activism. In pursuing these three aims, the feminist writing  
9  
10 on recognition and embodied ethics to which we now turn provides an insightful starting  
11  
12 point for a critique of inclusion, and constitutes an important contribution to the growing  
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14 body of critical diversity studies literature.  
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### 17 18 19 20 Inclusion, recognition and embodied ethics 21 22 23

24 Embodied ethics broadly refers to the idea that the basis of our ethical relationship to one  
25  
26 another is our embodied inter-connection and the mutual, corporeal vulnerability that  
27  
28 arises from this. Recognition of the organizational potential and implications of this  
29  
30 ethical relationship has been a strong theme in feminist and pro-feminist writing within  
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32 work and organization studies in recent years (Dale and Latham, 2015; Hancock, 2008;  
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34 2015). Much of this literature is either directly or indirectly premised upon a post-dualistic  
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36 understanding of subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) that thinks of embodied ethics as not  
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38 simply a moral obligation but an ontological compulsion. We exist in and through our  
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40 own bodies but also those of others, because our mode of being, our embodied ontology,  
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42 means that we encounter ourselves and others through the medium of our bodies, and  
43  
44 because of this, we are inter-corporeally dependent upon each other; we are ‘intertwined’  
45  
46 (Merleau Ponty, 1968). This basic presupposition constitutes the philosophical and  
47  
48 political basis of Butler’s (2015: 122, *emphasis added*) relational ethics emphasizing that  
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50 ‘it is not from pervasive love for humanity or a pure desire for peace that we strive to live  
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52 together. We live together *because we have no choice*’.  
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3 For Butler (2015: 197), assemblies consist simply of a recognition-based bodily  
4 presence, a 'collective thereness' (ibid: 197), enabling assembled bodies to 'enact a  
5 message, performatively' (ibid: 197) in a way that connects this relational ethics to  
6 politics. Assemblies are premised, she argues, on *recognition* of our shared inter-corporeal  
7 vulnerability, the basic need that we have for reciprocation, rather than some reified notion  
8 of ascribed characteristics. For Butler, our mutual, inter-corporeal dependency means that  
9 we are all vulnerable, but in a hierarchically organised society, some people are clearly  
10 much more vulnerable than others. In practice, this means that while we are all  
11 ontologically 'dispossessed' by our dependency upon one another, and by our need for  
12 mutual recognition, the materialities of our social, political and economic circumstances  
13 mean that we are not all equally or homogenously so (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013).  
14 These are themes and concepts to which we return below, drawing on insights from Butler  
15 and other feminist thinkers. Exploring these inequalities, and the political potential of  
16 embodied assemblage to challenge them, Butler (2015) considers a question posed by  
17 Adorno (2005: 39) when he asserts that a 'wrong life cannot be lived rightly'. Thinking of  
18 this as an organizational problem raises some important questions that will be considered  
19 in this paper: Is it possible to live an inclusive life in an exclusionary one (in other words,  
20 a life in which the inclusion of some is premised upon the exclusion of others)? What  
21 might this mean, in terms of the conditions of inclusion? How might these conditions be  
22 subject to critique, and re-thought, through the lens of feminist writing on embodied  
23 ethics? And how might this theoretical critique inform feminist activism, and  
24 organizational practice? These questions, and those outlined above, are explored here with  
25 reference to feminist writing on recognition and embodied ethics, and particularly Butler's  
26 work on assembly as form of political engagement and activism. Framing these questions  
27 as organizational challenges requires us to consider how inclusion might be thought about  
28 and practiced beyond, on the one hand, a logic of exclusion, and on the other, an

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2 instrumental co-optation of difference. It also requires us to think about what  
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4 organizational forms an embodied, relational ethics of recognition might take.  
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9 In working through these kinds of questions, the discussion below proceeds from  
10 the premise that inclusion is a basic human need - because of the reliance we have on one  
11 another, we need it as a sign of our recognition. This means that inclusion is necessary as  
12 it signals a reciprocal acknowledgement of our underlying inter-connectedness, and of our  
13 need to live free of domination, violence (Benjamin, 1995), exploitation and oppression  
14 (Fraser, 2000), and within social relations of reciprocity in which each affirms the  
15 presence and subjective viability of the other (McNay, 2008). In other words, we need  
16 recognition to make meaningful 'the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self'  
17 (Benjamin, 1990: 12).  
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28 Central to feminist writing on recognition is an Hegelian understanding of  
29 recognition as a process through which Self and Other come to a mutual understanding of  
30 each as reflected in the other. Feminist readings have emphasized how this reflection does  
31 not have to result in a collapse of the Self into the Other 'through an incorporative  
32 identification, ... or a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other' (Butler, 2000:  
33 272). Yet in Hegelian terms, the desire for recognition carries with it the perpetual risk of  
34 negation or misrecognition; it is precisely this risk that needs to be worked through in  
35 order to open up the possibility of mutual recognition. This paradox means that thinking  
36 about recognition as both a normative ideal to be worked towards, and as a template for  
37 political activism – as a process of struggle - is crucial to feminist approaches that  
38 effectively 'strive for the triumph of recognition over aggression' (Butler, 2000: 274)<sup>1</sup>.  
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52 If to recognize 'is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand,  
53 empathize, take in, appreciate, see, identify with, find familiar ... love' (Benjamin, 1990:  
54 15-16), we might argue that recognition epitomizes many of the qualities of social  
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2 relations that we would hope to associate with inclusion. As Ahmed (2000: 22) reminds  
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4 us, recognition means ‘to know again, to acknowledge and to admit’, implying a process  
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6 of inclusion premised upon a recollection, a ‘knowing again’, of our basic connections to  
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8 others, and of a sense of collective identification, or belonging (‘admission’). But because  
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10 of the conditions attached to inclusion *as an organized form of recognition* the question  
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12 becomes, does inclusion make lives more of less recognizable and therefore, livable<sup>ii</sup>?  
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16 As Butler notes, Adorno’s question cited above takes different forms depending on  
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18 when and where it is posed, and by whom, but it generally raises a basic problem: How to  
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20 live one’s life well in a world in which a good life is foreclosed to so many. The risk here  
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22 being that of living a good life not just in spite of but because of the bad life lived by  
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24 others so that one person or group’s ‘inclusion’ is a result of others’ exclusion. Adorno’s  
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26 own response to this question emphasizes that the constant temptations of complicity must  
27  
28 be kept in check, so that the political and ethical terms of inclusion must be continually  
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30 questioned. In itself, this suggests something important about the ethical templates  
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32 governing the compulsion to perform subjectivities that might elicit recognition in the  
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34 form of inclusion, reminding us of the ever-present trap of living difference not  
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36 ‘inclusively’ but *in collusion* within and through organizational life.  
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40 Difference is taken here, and throughout the paper, to refer to those points of dis-  
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42 identification and dissimilarity that come to be experienced or perceived as socially,  
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44 politically and ethically significant, and which are produced and reproduced in ‘on-going,  
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46 context-specific processes’ (Zanoni et al, 2010). In sociological terms, difference both  
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48 reflects existing power relations within a given context, sustaining inequality, oppression,  
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50 marginalization and discrimination, and contributes to maintaining, resisting and/or  
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52 transforming those relations. In philosophical terms, particularly from a critical, feminist  
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54 perspective, difference emerges when the relationship between Self and Other comes to be  
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56 organized in binary terms, and ordered hierarchically, so that the inter-subjective  
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3 relationality that underpins embodied social relations and processes of recognition is  
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5 arrested into a state of perpetual mis- or non-recognition, resulting in relations  
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7 characterized by the Other's negation. Ahmed (2012) emphasizes this when she argues  
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9 that difference emerges not from characteristics attributable to 'protected groups', or to an  
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11 individual's presumed capacity, but rather from the relationship between Self and Other,  
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13 once that relationship becomes a form of hierarchical oppression or exploitation. In her  
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15 discussion of racialization and nationalism, inclusion is read, in this respect, as a  
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17 technology of governance, a 'repair' plan as it were, through which strangers can be made  
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19 into subjects as long as they 'consent to the terms of inclusion' (Ahmed, 2012: 163). This  
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21 process, she argues, simply brings those involved closer to those norms that have  
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23 historically excluded them, resulting not in genuine freedom but rather in increasing  
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25 subjection to the negating regimes of normative violence. Difference, in this sense,  
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27 operates 'as a strategy of containment' (Swan, 2010), as Virdee (2014) has recently  
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29 illustrated in his discussion of the 'racialized outsider'. But it can also function as a co-  
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31 optation of that difference. What the 'business case' arguably seeks to recoup from this  
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33 negation of the Other, as noted in the critical diversity research, is an unreflexive, often  
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35 self-congratulatory reclamation of difference in the service of organizational performance.  
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40 As Swan (2016) in particular emphasizes, critical diversity research grew out of  
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42 opposition to the North American positivist, prescriptive preoccupation with 'managing  
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44 diversity': the idea that organizations can harness difference as the emerging 'problem' of  
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46 a demographically changing workforce. Drawing variously on discourse analysis, critical  
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48 theory, feminism and postcolonial theory, critical diversity studies brings a concern with  
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50 power, inequality and social justice to the fore (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Janssens and  
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52 Zanoni, 2005). Critical diversity research has highlighted how inequalities are reproduced  
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54 or even accentuated when organizations instrumentally deploy difference, co-opting  
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56 diversity as an organizational resource or strategic aspiration (Zanoni et al, 2010). Critical  
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2 approaches also scrutinize practices of domination and subordination that condition the  
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4 production of knowledge about diversity (Zanoni and Calás, 2014). Highlighting both  
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6 issues, Swan (2010) shows how diversity is normalized in advertising through a selective  
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8 recognition of difference in order to manufacture a particular image that does not make  
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10 dominant groups feel responsible for social justice or reform. Most fundamentally, as  
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12 Ahonen and Tienari (2015: 273) highlight, the ‘upbeat naiveté’ of the business case severs  
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14 diversity from its history of social oppression and political struggle, ‘re-framing difference  
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16 as an accumulation of individual attributes through which organizational performance can  
17  
18 be pursued and competitive advantage secured’ (Ahonen and Tienari, 2015: 278). This  
19  
20 simultaneously neglects established power relations and structural inequalities,  
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22 essentializing difference (Ashcraft, 2009; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). As Ahmed and  
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24 Swan (2006: 96) have put it, managing diversity ‘individuates difference, conceals  
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26 inequalities and neutralizes histories of antagonism and struggle’.

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30 As Swan (2016) has recently argued, difference has been a central concept within  
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32 theoretical debates shaping critical diversity studies. Yet as she goes on to note, to date  
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34 there has been little explicit engagement with theoretical or philosophical ideas, including  
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36 those connecting a critique of inclusion to feminist politics and ethics. Swan’s own work  
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38 is among the exceptions to this, with the ontological focus of her writing being largely on  
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40 how difference is produced through processes of Othering. As she puts it, ‘diversity  
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42 management cannot let the Other be Other’ (Swan, 2016: 372). Yet this position can be  
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44 something of a practical and political dead end in terms of its prospects for findings ways  
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46 of living and working together beyond the negating effects of exclusion, or the  
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48 assimilatory consequences of over-inclusion. Swan’s own response to this reflexive  
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50 dilemma draws from Ahmed’s (2000, 2002) argument that it is the mode of encounter  
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52 with the Other rather than the latter’s ontological status that can open up the possibility of  
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54 recognizing rather than containing or assimilating the Other’s difference. For Ahmed,  
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3 however, the containing effects of media culture, combined with the wrenching of social  
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5 relations from their political contexts and historical processes, serves to close off the  
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7 openness on which such ethical encounters depend, producing instead a ‘stranger fetish’  
8  
9 (Ahmed, 2000: 3) through which the Other is encountered as an ontological given. Her  
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11 critical reflections on this process and its implications for politics and ethics mean that, for  
12  
13 Ahmed (2000: 6), it is important to consider ‘how the stranger is an effect of processes of  
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15 inclusion and exclusion’.

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18 With this in mind, critical diversity scholars have appealed for contributions that  
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20 ‘actively search for new, emancipating forms of organizing’ (Zanoni et al, 2010: 11),  
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22 arguing that it is time for the critical diversity literature to move towards a ‘reconstructive  
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24 reflexivity’ that could focus on exploring ‘practices and interventions reflecting an  
25  
26 affirmative, engaged and pragmatic ethos’ (Zanoni et al, 2010: 11 and 12). Connecting  
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28 this specifically to feminist politics and organizational practice, the question then becomes  
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30 not how difference can be made to fit into an organizational norm, but rather how  
31  
32 difference has the potential to rupture the normative conditions and corporate imperatives  
33  
34 governing its organization. Recent writing within work and organization studies on  
35  
36 embodied ethics, to which we now turn, emphasizes the importance of mutual recognition  
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38 of our inter-corporeal vulnerability to this potential rupturing.

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41 While Pullen and Rhodes (2015) and Hancock (2008) draw predominantly on  
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43 feminist writer Rosalyn Diprose’s work on an inter-corporeal ethics of generosity, Dale  
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45 and Latham (2015) turn directly to Merleau Ponty and Levinas in their discussion of the  
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47 embodied experiences of people with disabilities. They argue that organizations both  
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49 produce boundaries that circumvent our basic intertwining (in Ahmed’s terms, producing  
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51 disabled people as ‘strangers’), at the same time as holding the potential for such  
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53 boundaries to be contested, advocating a proximal politics based on an ‘ethics of  
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2 entangled embodiment' (Dale and Latham, 2015: 178) that recognizes inter-corporeality  
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4 and the ways in which organizations make difference.  
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7 Developing similar themes, Kenny and Fotaki (2015), drawing on Ettinger, argue  
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9 for an inter-corporeal organizational ethics premised upon a relational subjectivity that  
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11 emphasizes mutual interconnection and responsibility. They stress, in particular, how  
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13 one's sexed, gendered or racialized bodily presence might form the basis of a disavowal of  
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15 inter-subjective vulnerability, resulting in the subjection or exploitation of others.  
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17 Developing this theme politically, and drawing on Levinas and Spinoza, Thanem and  
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19 Wallenberg (2015) emphasize how our collective ethical responsibility, our basic,  
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21 embodied sociality, becomes subsumed through dominant organizational preoccupations  
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23 such as personal achievement, individual freedom and self-development.  
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27 What insights such as these suggest is that the terms of inclusion mean that those  
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29 who are positioned or who identify as different are not allowed simply to 'be' different;  
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31 whether deviating from a sexual, gender, class, race or ethnic norm, or a physical or  
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33 aesthetic one, difference is something that has to be continually worked on in order to  
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35 conform to the normative ideals shaping inclusion. This 'working' or organizing of  
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37 difference is compelled by organizational policies and practices that involve, on the one  
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39 hand, difference's constraint and containment (Swan, 2010), and on the other, its  
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41 compulsion and commodification. Taken together, these twin processes mean that  
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43 inclusion is practiced in the name of performance, functionality and instrumentalism  
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45 (Knights, 2015)<sup>iii</sup>, within the broader context of a market-based discourse of diversity that  
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47 forecloses inter-subjective recognition (Hancock, 2008; Kenny and Bell, 2014). To  
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49 paraphrase Swan (2010), Ahmed (2012) and Ahonen and Tienari (2015), inclusion  
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51 becomes an instrumental recognition of difference on organizational terms. From a  
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53 critical, feminist perspective, this instrumental organization of difference distorts, rather  
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55 than fosters, recognition as difference comes to be governed by a code of domination, and  
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2 an accumulation imperative, rather than an ethic of mutuality (Benjamin, 1990). Framed in  
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4 this way, inclusion becomes, to borrow from Benjamin, a 'twisting' of the trust relations  
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6 on which recognition depends not through a repression of the desire for recognition, but  
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8 through its enlisting as a strategic, organizational resource (see also Swan, 2010, 2016).  
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11 In developing a critique of this 'two pronged attack' on difference, and in  
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13 exploring possible alternative ways forward that connect feminist theory and activism,  
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15 Judith Butler's (2015) recent writing on assembly provides valuable insights that build on  
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17 the feminist ideas from which the organizational scholars cited above have drawn. In  
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19 particular, Butler's concept of assembly speaks to the questions posed above: How might  
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21 inclusion be understood and practiced beyond a sameness/difference 'binary  
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23 fundamentalism' (Knights, 2015)<sup>iv</sup>, and how might it be possible to live an inclusive life in  
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25 an exclusionary one, at the same time as avoiding the (ontological and ethical) trap of  
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27 living difference 'in collusion'. In considering these issues, my aim below is to develop a  
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29 recognition-based critique of organizational inclusion drawing on Butler's *Notes Towards*  
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31 *a Performative Theory of Assembly*, arguing that finding ways of embodying difference  
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33 and of relating to one another beyond constraint and co-optation constitutes an urgent and  
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35 timely task for feminist theory and practice. I do this with reference to a discussion of (i)  
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37 the vigils that were held after the mass shootings at Pulse, an Orlando nightclub in June  
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39 2016, and (ii) the Women's Marches that took place in January 2017 on the first full day  
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41 of Donald Trump's presidency, arguing that the concept of assemblage provides an  
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43 interesting way of thinking about the significance and 'rupturing' potential of these forms  
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45 of activism as political assemblies premised upon recognition rather than inclusion.  
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52 Butler on dispossession, recognition and relationality  
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3 The basic premise of Butler's writing is that everyone is dependent on each other in order  
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5 to maintain a livable life (Butler, 2015). Yet at the same time, that dependency (while not  
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7 the same as subjugation<sup>v</sup>) can easily become the mechanism for subjugation when  
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9 recognition is conditional. This implies, as considered thus far, that inclusion is an  
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11 organizational exploitation of our need to belong, that is, of our basic need for recognition.  
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13 To reiterate, the theoretical basis of Butler's discussion of assembly is a critical,  
14  
15 feminist reading of the Hegelian dialectics of recognition<sup>vi</sup> and a phenomenological  
16  
17 understanding of the self as a situated, inter-corporeal 'relational sociality' (Butler and  
18  
19 Athanasiou, 2013: 65). The latter leads Butler to argue that it is our ethical relationality –  
20  
21 our embodied relationship of mutual inter-dependency - that defines us (Butler, 2000). In  
22  
23 her critical reflections on the differentiating effects of the normative regimes governing  
24  
25 this relationality that resonate strongly with the critique of inclusion considered above,  
26  
27 Butler argues that rather than mutual recognition, these regimes render others usable,  
28  
29 exploitable and 'eventually into waste matter, or of no use: always available, always  
30  
31 expendable' (Butler, 2015: 27). The political potential of this critique lies in its capacity to  
32  
33 open up radical re-articulations of what it means to matter: '*rather than a rehabilitation of*  
34  
35 *the humanist subject in the form of liberal tolerance or assimilatory inclusion of ready-*  
36  
37 *made identities'* (Butler, 2015: 34, *emphasis added*), Butler's explicit aim is to move us  
38  
39 towards a relational ethics and politics premised upon recognition (see also Benjamin,  
40  
41 1995).  
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46 It is in this respect that, in dialogue with Athanasiou (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013)  
47  
48 and developing themes introduced in her earlier work (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993), Butler  
49  
50 introduces the concept of 'dispossession' to her critique. For Butler, dispossession is the  
51  
52 collective, political corollary of undoing that she explored at a more individual level in her  
53  
54 earlier writing (Butler, 2004). Her account is premised on the view that there is, on the one  
55  
56 hand, a *relational* form of dispossession that must be valued<sup>vii</sup>, and on the other, a  
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3 *privative* form that must be opposed. In this sense, it is presumed that the former, a  
4 relational precarity, is shared equally as part of the human condition (as a consequence of  
5 our need for recognition), while the latter, ‘precarity as a condition of induced inequality  
6 and destitution ... is a way of exploiting [this] existential condition’ (Butler and  
7 Athanasiou, 2013: 20). In practice, this means that, on the one hand, ‘the self is always in  
8 relational sociality’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 65). As discussed above, this is  
9 because, through our inter-corporeality, ‘we are implicated in ... intense social processes  
10 of relatedness and interdependence’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 55), so that, in this  
11 sense, we are always ‘dispossessed’ by others as we are affected by them, and in turn  
12 affect others through our basic need for mutual recognition. Yet at the same time, we are  
13 also dispossessed, in a more ‘privative’ way, by normative powers that serve to exploit  
14 and oppress our desire to be recognized.  
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29 In contrast to ‘the governmental logics of tolerance’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013:  
30 66) that ‘seek to govern and enclose ontologically, possessively’ our basic relationality,  
31 what is needed, Butler argues, is not a politics of inclusion. The latter, she emphasizes, is  
32 far too susceptible to what she calls ‘the market of recognition’. Rather, we should work  
33 to destabilize (or ‘make trouble’ with, to borrow from her earlier writing – see Butler,  
34 1990) the regulatory ideals that constitute this susceptibility. In other words, we should  
35 look to find ways to draw on the collective, political potential of relationality in order to  
36 recognize, and address, more privative forms of dispossession. In effect, this suggests  
37 turning inclusion back on itself, revealing its tendency to appropriate and exploit our need  
38 for recognition while professing to do precisely the opposite.  
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50 In organizational terms, and with the questions outlined above in mind, this raises  
51 two important issues to consider. First, *lived experiences* of the dynamics of exclusion and  
52 inclusion shaping the pursuit of recognition, as well as the performative labour - the work  
53 involved in bringing particular subjectivities into being in order to conform to normative  
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2 regimes of intelligibility and recognition. Thanem and Wallenberg (2016) describe very  
3  
4 poignantly the emotional strain and pain of this kind of labour when it involves, for  
5  
6 instance, repressing transgender, as well as the effort and concentration (the performative  
7  
8 labour<sup>viii</sup>) involved in conforming to organizational/organizing gender norms and  
9  
10 expectations. Second, *the signifiatory processes* through which patterns of exclusion and  
11  
12 over-inclusion come to shape lived experiences of organizational settings and processes.  
13  
14 The latter in particular help us to understand more about how organizations that formally  
15  
16 proclaim a commitment to equality continue to practice inclusion is a way that simply  
17  
18 perpetuates exclusion<sup>ix</sup>. As Thanem and Wallenberg (2016: 268) emphasize in their  
19  
20 discussion of gender fluidity, while organizations may formally, rhetorically espouse an  
21  
22 ethos of openness to difference they ‘typically *depict* people who do gender  
23  
24 appropriately’. Ahmed (2012) reaches a similar conclusion in her critique of institutional  
25  
26 racialization in organizational cultures.  
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31 To sum up thus far, the critique of organizational inclusion outlined above  
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33 distinguishes between, as Butler puts it, (i) the exclusion of ‘that which gets abjected or  
34  
35 foreclosed’, and (ii) the over- or conditional inclusion of ‘forms of life that are conferred  
36  
37 recognition ... according to the established norms of recognizability, on the condition of  
38  
39 and at the cost of conforming to these norms’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 36). In  
40  
41 organizational terms, this produces an alienating, abjecting exclusion on the one hand or  
42  
43 an ‘assimilatory inclusion’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 34) on the other. The latter  
44  
45 Povinelli (2002) has described as a compulsion to embody an ascribed, ‘authenticity’ that  
46  
47 effectively converts recognition into nothing more than a reified form of difference  
48  
49 articulated through a rhetorical commitment to inclusion; the ‘stranger fetish’, in Ahmed’s  
50  
51 (2000) terms.  
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55 Proceeding from this critique requires careful thinking about how organizational  
56  
57 life might be made not more ‘inclusive’ (Katila et al, 2010), risking with it a perpetuation  
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1  
2 of exclusion or (conditional) over-inclusion and a reification of difference, but *relational*  
3  
4 where the latter is taken to mean open to difference, rather than seeking to control or  
5  
6 contain it.  
7

8  
9 Drawing together insights from the feminist work considered above, from critical  
10  
11 diversity research, and from Butler's writing considered thus far, an important first step  
12  
13 towards re-thinking inclusion through embodied ethics has to be to explore how the twin  
14  
15 strategies of exclusion and over-inclusion of difference outlined above might be unsettled,  
16  
17 ruptured or 'troubled' (Butler, 1990). In some of her most recent work, Butler (2015)  
18  
19 emphasizes that this unsettling can take the form of a radical, affective solidarity enacted  
20  
21 in opposition to the precarious effects of contemporary political and economic forces,  
22  
23 enabling a new sense of mattering to emerge – interdependent, relational and persistent.  
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#### 28 Practicing assembly as recognition-based activism

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32 Two examples are considered here to illustrate what this sense of mattering as a  
33  
34 recognition-based assembly might mean in practice. The first relates to the politics of grief  
35  
36 and collective expressions of solidarity embodied through the candlelit vigils that were  
37  
38 organized in the immediate aftermath of the mass shootings at the Pulse nightclub in  
39  
40 Orlando, Florida on 12th June 2016, when 49 people were killed, and 53 more were  
41  
42 seriously injured<sup>x</sup>. Writing on the collective mourning that took place after the shootings,  
43  
44 Laing (2016) reflects on neo-liberal media attempts to erase homophobia from the event,  
45  
46 as it came to be reframed by right-wing commentators in particular as an attack on  
47  
48 'Western freedoms', whatever that might mean. Laing (2016) asks: 'What can we do?  
49  
50 How can we be visible, especially *if we exist in the blind spot between accepted*  
51  
52 *definitions?* We can keep finding language, we can *keep insisting on our presence, our*  
53  
54 *right to exist'* (Laing, 2016: 5, *emphasis added*). Facebook pages and other social media  
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2 sites were set up to provide ‘a peaceful space for honoring, remembering and grieving’ as  
3  
4 the Candlelight Vigil page described it. Mass vigils were held days, weeks and months  
5  
6 after the shootings in parks and public spaces demonstrating widespread global support for  
7  
8 the victims and their families. Rainbow banners were displayed, and flags flew at half-  
9  
10 mast over public buildings and organizations across many parts of the world. What was  
11  
12 arguably most notable about these vigils was the sheer sense of standing together, of  
13  
14 embodying and recognizing opposition to homophobia in all its forms, as the many images  
15  
16 on websites and social media illustrate.  
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19  
20 This response was by no means unproblematic, however. Ramirez et al (2017)  
21  
22 emphasize the need for more intersectional research on LGBTQ-POC’s (People of Colour)  
23  
24 identities and experiences noting that Pulse was hosting a Latin Pride event on the night of  
25  
26 the attack, yet much of the response erased or retired these intersectionalities. Park (2016)  
27  
28 argues that social media responses to the shootings raise questions about how to grieve  
29  
30 LGBTQ losses while avoiding ‘grief tourism’. For Park, global articulations of a shared  
31  
32 ‘we’ (through various social media hashtags and fundraising initiatives, for instance, as  
33  
34 well as slogans such as ‘we all share one pulse’) served to homogenize rather than  
35  
36 recognize the specificities of those closest to the victims, and to the communities most  
37  
38 directly effected. Criticizing these kinds of presumptions, Park argues that the kind of  
39  
40 grief ‘tagging’ that can occur in the aftermath of tragic events such as the Pulse shootings  
41  
42 can seem insincere, unseemly and trite. The problem, he argues, is largely the impact of a  
43  
44 digital age in which performative displays of mourning can become part of self-branding.  
45  
46 Yet Park (2017: 5, *emphasis added*) also acknowledges that social media played an  
47  
48 important role in connecting the people who took part in vigils, describing these as  
49  
50 ‘*organized networks of care and solidarity*’. Sharing this political optimism, Ganesh  
51  
52 (2017) describes the vigils as ‘mobilizing events’ providing opportunities to embrace, both  
53  
54 literally and metaphorically, a sense of connection and community beyond the boundaries  
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2 of heteronormative kinship<sup>xi</sup>. In Butler's (2015) terms, what these vigils potentially  
3 represent is an embodied relationality – a standing together to oppose homophobia  
4 through a recognition-based collective presence. The vigils, as poignant examples of what  
5 she means by a plural performativity, illustrate the capacity of assembly – organised  
6 opposition to induced, or privative precarity through a recognition of shared, inter-  
7 corporeal vulnerability and the ethics of relationality engendered by that vulnerability.  
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11 A second example, the pro-feminist global demonstrations that took place on 21<sup>st</sup>  
12 January 2017 (the day after Donald Trump's presidential inauguration) are but one recent  
13 instance of a long history of feminist activism, but an important one nevertheless. Their  
14 sheer scale and widespread level of support lend a very 'immediate' credence to Walby's  
15 (2011) observation that we are in the midst of a historically significant fourth feminist  
16 'circuit', one that makes effective use of social media. Estimates put the number of people  
17 involved at around 4.5 million (Sang and Lyon, 2017). Hereafter referred to as the  
18 Women's Marches, these demonstrations were part of a global movement of opposition to  
19 gender oppression, initiated in the US but rapidly spreading across sixty countries, to  
20 challenge Trump, support women's rights and champion equality. Setting off from  
21 Grosvenor Square, where the US Embassy is based, and ending in Trafalgar Square, over  
22 150,000 people joined the London March, support for which gathered unprecedented  
23 momentum through social media. Indeed, social media played a particularly important role  
24 in their organization, lending credence to McLaughlin et al's (2011) argument that  
25 developing technologies and cultural practices might enable new forms of feminist  
26 activism and identification to emerge, including those responding to collective demands  
27 for social justice that challenge established terms of recognition and conditions of  
28 inclusion (see also Munro, 2013). The numbers involved far exceeded the organizers'  
29 expectations, with those taking part 'seemingly coming together across boundaries of  
30 class, occupations, materialities, genders, races and sexualities' (Humm, 2017: 6). Again,  
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3 this is illustrated by the many images on social media and other websites, depicting the  
4  
5 sheer scale of the Marches.

6  
7 Other organizational elements that were significant included the range of groups  
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9 that provided support, such as Amnesty International, Pride in London, Unite, the Green  
10  
11 Party, and the Women's Equality Party, as well as the Metropolitan Police. Humm (2017)  
12  
13 reports how the latter appointed six female officers to help with the organization of the  
14  
15 London March, and policed with a 'light touch'. As in the case of the Washington  
16  
17 Marches, no arrests were made. Along with many other posters and placards mobilizing  
18  
19 wit and irony as powerful weapons against oppression (Murphy, 2017), were banners  
20  
21 proclaiming 'pussy power'. Many marchers wore pink, pussy ear head-bands (making  
22  
23 reference to comments made by Trump about women's bodies), and several banners  
24  
25 declaring that 'nasty women' are tough, smart and vote could be seen not just in London,  
26  
27 but in sister marches across the world (turning Trump's reference to Hilary Clinton back  
28  
29 on itself). But many of the placards and banners displayed in London were also statements  
30  
31 conveying a sense of déjà vu, with one asking, for instance, 'Haven't we been here  
32  
33 before?' There is of course a risk of simplifying, even romanticizing the Marches as  
34  
35 examples of feminist activism. Like the post-Pulse vigils, they were complex events, with  
36  
37 concerns about commercial appropriation and exclusion being raised in the immediate  
38  
39 aftermath; the protest group, Idle No More for instance, raised concerns about the  
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41 marginalization of indigenous women's concerns from the Marches via their Facebook  
42  
43 posts.  
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48 So while these marches were certainly not homogenous, for many, what was  
49  
50 overwhelming about the experience of being immersed in them was the sense of embodied  
51  
52 inter-connection, of assemblage in Butler's terms – food and warm clothing were shared,  
53  
54 strangers embraced, laughed, sang and shouted together. Social media and various  
55  
56 feminist networks involved in their organization produced a sense that transnational  
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2 feminism, as a 'new chapter' or circuit in feminism's narrative (Walby, 2011), has the  
3 capacity to create conditions for a revived feminist solidarity characterized by a  
4 renewed sense of commitment and connection. The effective mobilization of social media  
5 to organize and garner support for the Marches, and their distinctive embodied, immersive  
6 materiality, literally showed us (or rather, reminded us, enabled us to recognize) what is  
7 possible when feminists assemble the combined forces of our *bodies, practices* and *ethics*.  
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15 Likening the March to an 'Outsiders Society' (see Virginia Woolf's *Three*  
16 *Guineas*), Maggie Humm (2017: 3) comments on the political effects of this in her  
17 account of the London March, citing Woolf's observation that when we take to the streets  
18 'we are no longer quite ourselves'; collectively, we become ek-static (Kenny, 2010).  
19 Evoking Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* Humm also recalls how on the day of the March,  
20 'London itself seemed to turn into a gigantic autonomous women's room', a corporeal  
21 claim to a public space, as Butler has put it (cited in Humm, 2017: 5). For Humm, it is this  
22 recognition of the 'multiple systems of oppression [that] we experience in our lives' that  
23 brought those involved together. This kind of ek-statis takes us 'beyond ourselves'  
24 (Kenny, 2010), enabling a 'standing outside of oneself' (Butler, 2000: 277), immersed in a  
25 collective, performative assemblage through which we experience ourselves through/as  
26 each other.  
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42 In understanding how features of these two examples (the Pulse vigils, and the  
43 Women's Marches) connect feminist thinking on embodied ethics to assemblage as a  
44 recognition-based form of activism, and in turn to our critique of inclusion, it is useful to  
45 remind ourselves of Butler's emphasis on a collective presence as embodying the ethics  
46 and politics of assembly. For Butler is in this embodied ethico-politics of co-presence,  
47 based on mutual recognition of our inter-subjectivity, that opens up the possibility of a  
48 more critical alternative to the binary, instrumental championing of inclusion discussed  
49 above. Specifically, in her attempt to develop a performative politics of assembly, Butler  
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considers what forms of ethics and politics assemblies embody that might enable us to think about ‘organization’ in its broadest sense beyond inclusion as it is currently understood and practiced. In response to this kind of question, Butler (2015: 43) emphasizes her conviction that there has to be a way to ‘find and forge a set of bonds and alliances [that enable us] to link interdependency to the principle of equal value, and to do this in a way that opposes those powers that differentially allocate recognizability’.

In this aspect of her writing, Butler comes closer to posing an organizational answer to this question than arguably ever before (developing some of the inroads made in Butler and Athanasiou, 2015), noting how ‘the ethical question, how ought I to live? or even the political question, how ought we to live together? *depends upon an organization of life that makes it possible to entertain those questions meaningfully*’ (Butler, 2015: 44, *emphasis added*). In pursuing a livable life beyond normative ‘inclusion’, the point is not therefore to court market recognition, or fall for what Povinelli (2002) calls the ‘cunning of recognition’, and hence not, as Butler puts it, ‘to rally for modes of equality that would plunge us all into equally unlivable conditions’ (Butler, 2015: 69). The opposite of marginalization is not inclusion, but ‘a livable interdependency’ (ibid: 69). It is this latter point that sets the basis for Butler’s response to Adorno’s question posed above, about how it might be possible to live a good life. It helps us to develop a critique not just of inclusion as an organized, conditional recognition, but also of the organizational processes and imperatives that exploit our need for recognition. At the same time, Butler’s notion of a livable interdependency requires a reflexive acknowledgement of our reliance on organizational processes and structures, as well as resources, that needs us to have considerable faith in the radical, democratic potential of social modes of organization, the latter having the capacity to act as ‘the space of sociality’ (ibid: 84). The vigils and marches considered above powerfully illustrate how this capacity might be organized in a highly embodied, relational way.

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2 Underpinning Butler's critique of inclusion, and its social (organizational)  
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4 conditioning is the presumption that part of what the body is is an ontological claim to  
5  
6 inter-dependency on others' bodies and networks of support: 'the body is entered into  
7  
8 social life first and foremost under conditions of dependency' (Butler, 2015: 130). This  
9  
10 implies an ontological inter-connection premised upon shared vulnerability. It also brings  
11  
12 to the fore, as the basis of feminist activism, a politics of mutual recognition premised  
13  
14 upon that shared vulnerability (see Butler and Athanasiou, 2015). This understanding is  
15  
16 one that calls into question a presumption of the discreetness and self-sufficiency of the  
17  
18 human condition and of organizational recognition systems, or conditions of inclusion  
19  
20 premised upon this approach. Mobilizing our mutual vulnerability, 'the moment of  
21  
22 actively appearing', involves a deliberate risk of exposure (Butler, 2015: 140), including  
23  
24 in and through an organizational politics of inclusion. This is the basis for Butler's  
25  
26 understanding of embodiment as our lived experience of social (organizational) life, and  
27  
28 of its connection to assembly, as an 'ecstatic relationality' (Butler, 2015: 149; see Kenny,  
29  
30 2010). The vigils and Marches discussed above gave those involved a sense of the  
31  
32 political and cultural capacity of assembly, of an affirmative recognition of vulnerability,  
33  
34 and of what can be achieved when people simply appear together, providing some  
35  
36 momentum and encouragement on which contemporary feminist activism can build.  
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42 Returning to the theme of organizational practice raises the question of what kind  
43  
44 of inclusion or 'livable life' might be possible or desirable given the ethical and political  
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46 concerns raised by critical diversity scholars (Ahmed, 2012; Ahonen et al, 2014; Ahonen  
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48 and Tienari, 2015; Oswick and Noon, 2014; Swan, 2016; Zanoni, 2011; Zanoni and  
49  
50 Janssens, 2004, 2015; Zanoni et al, 2010) and the political potential embodied in the two  
51  
52 forms of assembly examined above. This issue returns us to a consideration of the  
53  
54 questions posed earlier, and to the task of connecting what a politics of assembly might  
55  
56 offer to the organizational challenges of inclusion. Butler herself puts considerable faith in  
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1  
2 the political possibilities opened up by ‘the collective assembling of bodies ... that press  
3 up against the limits of social recognizability’ (Butler, 2015: 153). But what might this  
4 kind of critique, and of activism, actually mean for organizational practices and  
5 experiences?  
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11 Turning to this theme, and drawing together insights from Butler’s discussion of  
12 assembly, from the feminist writing on embodied ethics and recognition considered above,  
13 from the critical diversity studies literature, and from the two examples of political  
14 activism examined, we might surmise that social solidarity emerges from mutual  
15 recognition of our embodied, relational multiplicity and shared inter-corporeal  
16 vulnerability rather than from a reified inclusion, or organization, of difference as a  
17 privative form of dispossession, in Butler’s terms. And so we need to find ways to support  
18 the potential for this emergence, through collective opportunities for mutual recognition.  
19 Yet how we accomplish this, in practical, organizational terms, remains challenging. It has  
20 been argued here that one possible way of approaching this task, and of re-thinking  
21 inclusion through an ethics of recognition, can be found in Butler’s (2015) writing on a  
22 feminist politics of assembly. The concept of assembly, and the recognition ethic on  
23 which it depends, may provide the basis for a way to think about how we might enact a  
24 better way of living, being and organizing together, or at least, as Butler (2015: 153) puts  
25 it, to reject the one that is currently ‘doing us in’. The priority then becomes one of  
26 thinking through how embodied assemblies based on mutual recognition of our inter-  
27 corporeal relationality and ontological vulnerability might move us beyond the  
28 presumption of inclusion as an instrumental co-optation or strategic exclusion, to  
29 paraphrase Pullen and Rhodes (2015) into a recognition-based relationality as the basis of  
30 organizational life. However we frame it, it is recognition rather than reification that  
31 potentially opens up the way for us to re-think inclusion through feminist theory and  
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2 activism; recognizing that inclusion, as it is currently practiced, is a form of reification  
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4 may in itself be a simple but important step towards this.  
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### 9 Concluding thoughts

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13 Butler's concern is that inclusion 'seeks to *govern and enclose* subjectivity and  
14  
15 relationality' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 66, *emphasis added*). As a reminder, the term  
16  
17 'inclusion' derives from the Latin 'to shut in' or enclose. Her recognition-based critique  
18  
19 implies that what is needed, politically and ethically, is a destabilization of the regulatory  
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21 ideals that shape this process, and our susceptibility to it. For her, it is in connecting  
22  
23 feminist thinking to activism, through assembly as an embodied, ethical and therefore  
24  
25 political practice, that this becomes possible rather than through normative regimes such  
26  
27 as 'inclusion'. The latter, she argues, is akin to a privative form of dispossession that, in  
28  
29 Ahmed's (2000) terms, simply takes the form of an organizational version of the 'stranger  
30  
31 fetish' and is an exploitation of our basic relationality, foreclosing rather than supporting  
32  
33 genuine recognition.  
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37 Questioning inclusion is a risky business of course. Butler is particularly critical of  
38  
39 what Povinelli (2002: 108) calls the 'cunning of recognition', referring to neo-liberalism's  
40  
41 capacity to reproduce established power relations and norms of recognition in the name of  
42  
43 tolerance and inclusion. Yet pursuing a relational rather than 'cunning', market-orientated  
44  
45 form of recognition poses risks. Not least, moving from a norm of 'inclusivity' premised  
46  
47 upon tolerance (risking over-inclusion, or conditional inclusion), to a recognition-based  
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49 ethic of relationality, requires taking the risk of living in a critical relation to its  
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51 governmental norms and the relative security that inclusion proffers. And so an uncritical,  
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53 unreflexive collusion is tempting in that respect alone. Further, having fought to join the  
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55 party, so to speak (that is, having championed 'inclusion' as an alternative to the business-  
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3 case dominated ‘managing diversity’ – see above), it seems somewhat churlish to refuse  
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5 the invitation. But the risks associated with questioning inclusion are not just political or  
6  
7 tactical, but ontological as well. Challenging the conditions of inclusion implies ‘living in  
8  
9 a critical relation to the norms of the intelligible’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 67),  
10  
11 further perpetuating what is likely to be an already precarious, outsider status; saying, ‘I  
12  
13 don’t recognize the terms on which you are offering to recognize me’ is a very difficult  
14  
15 position to be in, or to ask others to adopt particularly when our livelihoods or even our  
16  
17 very lives might be at stake. Assiter (2017) touches on this in her recent discussion of the  
18  
19 Women’s Marches, considering the immediate and longer terms risks to freedom, as well  
20  
21 as physical and emotional well being that resistance can engender.  
22  
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24  
25       Wherever we go with this, taken together, what this suggests is that inclusion *as an*  
26  
27 *organizational form of recognition* ‘is not in itself an unambiguous good, however  
28  
29 desperate we are for its rewards’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 82), particularly if the  
30  
31 terms - of an assimilatory, conditional over-inclusion - are not of our making, and because  
32  
33 of the associated costs and conditions attached to being included, or even to pursuing  
34  
35 inclusion. If the freedom to be oneself, and therefore to be open to and for others, within  
36  
37 the world of work is one that only ‘some’ have won, inclusion remains conditional upon  
38  
39 (i) adding something deemed to be of value; (ii) accommodation to dominant norms, and  
40  
41 (iii) making the ‘right’ (complicit) choices. Arguably, this means simply replicating rather  
42  
43 than tackling hierarchies of recognition in the name of ‘inclusion’.  
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47       This returns us to the question of how as organizational scholars, as feminist  
48  
49 theorists and activists, we might move beyond this, into a more relational, recognition  
50  
51 based way of living and working together. Framed another way, as an ongoing  
52  
53 consideration, how can the strength and solidarity that was mobilized across the world in  
54  
55 the aftermath of the Pulse nightclub shootings in June 2016, or the politics in evidence at  
56  
57 the Women’s Marches across the world in January 2017 be drawn on, and made part of  
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3 our everyday ways of organizing, as the basis of how we relate to, and understand, one  
4  
5 another? At this particular point in time, it seems that simply asking these kinds of  
6  
7 questions constitutes an important step towards rethinking inclusion as an organizational  
8  
9 ‘good’, as something that managerial discourses espouse as ‘enriching and empowering’  
10  
11 (Puwar, 2004, cited in Ahmed, 2012), through an emphasis on an embodied ethics of  
12  
13 mutual recognition. To borrow from Benjamin (1990: 221) what this implies is not  
14  
15 undoing our ties to others - on the contrary, but to ‘make of them not shackles but circuits  
16  
17 of recognition’.  
18

19  
20 To return to where we began, in her final essay in *Notes Towards a Performative*  
21  
22 *Theory of Assembly*, Butler (2015) follows up on Adorno’s question of how it might be  
23  
24 possible to live a good life in a bad one. She notes how Adorno underscores the difficulty  
25  
26 of finding a way to pursue a good life for oneself, as oneself, in the context of a broader  
27  
28 world that is structured by inequality and exploitation. Of course many different views on  
29  
30 what the good life might be have emerged, including within work and organization studies  
31  
32 – many have taken it to mean economic well being, prosperity and security, or self-  
33  
34 realization, but many claim to live a good life while prospering on the exploitation or  
35  
36 effacement of others, entrenching inequality, living a socio-economically ‘good’ life  
37  
38 because of an ethically ‘bad’ one. So the good life has to be defined and lived so that it  
39  
40 does not presuppose inequality and exploitation. But throughout this paper, it has been  
41  
42 argued that the pursuit of a good life cannot be unproblematically associated with an  
43  
44 embracing or celebration of inclusion either. This raises the rhetorical question explored at  
45  
46 the outset of the paper: Is inclusion too contaminated, conscripted into neo-liberal  
47  
48 discourse, to be useful to those who want to re-think the relationship between ethics,  
49  
50 embodiment and organization? When Adorno raises his question about living a good life  
51  
52 in a bad one, he is asking us to think about the relationship between moral conduct and  
53  
54 social conditions, or more specifically, about how relations of power and domination enter  
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2 into, or disrupt, our sense of how best to live together. For the feminist writers whose  
3  
4 work has been considered here, ethics is always socially situated, inter-subjective,  
5  
6 embodied and relational. But Adorno also reminds us of the bind in which we are situated,  
7  
8 of the need to undertake self-criticism of our compulsion to establish ourselves in terms  
9  
10 that make our lives recognizable. As he puts it, 'we ought also to mobilize our own  
11  
12 powers of resistance in order to *resist those parts of us that are tempted to join in*' (cited  
13  
14 in Butler, 2015: 216, *emphasis added*). In organizational terms, this emphasizes that we  
15  
16 need a politics that can expose the collusive contradictions at the heart of inclusion;  
17  
18 namely, that organizations can accentuate oppression while professing to do precisely the  
19  
20 opposite. In the name of inclusion, organizational life continues to exploit our need for  
21  
22 recognition. What the feminist theories and forms of activism considered here emphasize  
23  
24 are (i) the need to re-think inclusion beyond its current organizational and organizing form  
25  
26 and (ii) one possible means by which we might do so, shifting beyond a regulatory  
27  
28 reification to a more recognition-based relationality as a way of thinking about, and  
29  
30 enacting, how our lives might be (re)assembled differently.  
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<sup>i</sup> An ethico-politics of recognition has certainly not been without its critics within feminist thinking, however. Louis McNay (2008: 294) has argued for instance, that because recognition theory falsely unifies the diversity of political conflicts through a homogenizing unification of them as a basic ontological struggle, feminist thinking and activism should ‘dispense with the idea of recognition’.

<sup>ii</sup> To paraphrase Spivak (1993, cited in Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 76), inclusion (in the form of employability, for instance) as an organizational form of liberal, market recognition becomes ‘that which we cannot not want’.

<sup>iii</sup> Vachhani (2012) builds on this critique by arguing that in the case of the so-called ‘women in management’ literature, the attribution of value to women’s essentialized capacity to care simply reifies the same hierarchy that perpetuates exclusion, rather than providing a politically or ethically credible alternative.

<sup>iv</sup> Pullen (2006: 277) considers how this binary fundamentalism impacts not just on organizational practices and experiences, but on the social positioning of the research self, arguing that this positioning typically requires researchers to ‘do one of two things’: to suppress difference, or to adopt a position that ‘fails to do justice to the complex and unstable multiplicity that underpins the research self’.

<sup>v</sup> These ideas draw heavily on De Beauvoir’s (1976: 82) argument that our interdependence ‘explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful’; it is an exploitation of our mutual, but socially situated (and therefore hierarchically organised), vulnerability.

<sup>vi</sup> To illustrate, Butler’s recognition-based critique of dispossession proceeds from her acknowledgement that ‘being dispossessed by the other’s presence and by our own presence to the other is the only way to be present to one another’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 17). We can also see strong echoes of Butler’s Hegelian thinking when she describes recognition as the process by which human beings are construed as social subjects on ‘normative and disciplinary terms’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 90) with the latter regulating inter-subjectivity by defining ‘what renders a subject legible, recognizable, desirable’ (ibid: 94).

<sup>vii</sup> See *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Butler, 2005) for a more sustained discussion of relationality and ethics.

<sup>viii</sup> Drawing on Butler, I use the term ‘performative labour’ here to refer to the expenditure of time, effort and skills required in order to bring particular subjectivities into being through the work involved in conforming to normative regimes of intelligibility and recognition.

<sup>x</sup> To date, this attack is the deadliest mass shooting in US history ([https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/mass-shootings-timeline.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/mass-shootings-timeline.html?_r=0)).

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<sup>xi</sup> Ganesh (2017) and Park (2016) both acknowledge the sad irony attached to the way in which victims of tragedies such as the Pulse shootings and other violent or accidental deaths are connected to ‘next of kin’ heteronormatively so that the ‘right’ to grieve is attributed to (biological) families, who may or may not have been accepting or supportive beforehand. This heteronormative regulation means that partners, friends and other loved ones from within the LGBTQ communities, a person’s ‘queer kin’, often end up being excluded. Park describes this normative governance as a ‘straightening of grief’.