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The Bodies of the Commons: Towards a Relational Embodied Ethics of the Commons

We don't even know what the body can do

Spinoza (1677)

Abstract

This article extends current theorizations of the ethics of the commons by drawing on feminist thought to propose a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*. Departing from abstract ethical principles, the proposed ethical theory reconsiders commoning as a process emerging through social actors' embodied interactions, resulting in the development of an ethics that accounts for their shared corporeal concerns. Such theorizing allows for inclusive alternative forms of organizing, while offering the ethical and political possibility of countering forms of economic competition and addressing the issues of viability that have long bedeviled commoning practices. This, we suggest, is achieved in the context of social organizing processes whereby social actors are able to reproduce their resource systems and communities based on recognition of their actual corporeal vulnerabilities, which drives reciprocity and embodied relationality with the other.

Keywords Ethics of the commons, vulnerability, reciprocity, embodied relationality, feminist embodied ethics

Introduction

The idea of the commons as material resources (Ostrom 1998, 1999), and the social process of ‘commoning’ have recently attracted researchers’ and commentators’ attention (Fournier 2013; De Angelis 2007; Besson 2017; Meyer and Hudon 2018; Lopes and Tonkinwise 2019). In a global economy favoring economic rationalism and individual interests, these are seen as alternatives to profit-based appropriation of common resources (Nonini 2006; De Angelis 2007). Critical organizational accounts present commoning in terms of reciprocal and relational processes of *social organizing* (Linebaugh 2007; Pedersen 2010; De Angelis and Harvie 2013; Fournier 2013) to address such commoning problems. Specifically, Fournier’s (2013) typology of organizing *in*, *for*, and *of* the commons stresses communities’ collective efforts to allocate, use, and reproduce resources fairly, enabling forms of solidarity economy as alternatives to capitalistic accumulation (Federici 2004, 2019). More recently, researchers have also examined alternatives that emerged in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, for example in the empirical settings of reclaimed factories (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis 2017) and grassroots exchange networks in Greece (Daskalaki et al. 2018), to discuss how collectively performed values may lead to re-articulation of social relations and sustainable living in everyday practices. However, commoning initiatives are still challenged by unfair practices, such as free-riding, asymmetric competition, and unsustainability (Hardin 1968).

There is agreement that sustaining the commons and addressing the above-mentioned problems (Hardin 1968) depend on shared values that underlie ethical norms and guide social actors’ interactions (Brown 2006; Bollier and Helfrich 2014; Akrivou and Sison 2016). Yet the ethical perspective is largely implicit in the relevant literature, and the corporeal experiences that enable social, political, and ethical forms of organizing (Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018),

such as commoning practices (Müller 2012; Federici 2019), remain largely under-studied in commoning accounts. The only explicit references to the issue of the commons in the current business ethics literature draw largely on Aristotle's virtue ethics. This theorization prioritizes the *soul* over the *body* (Melé 2009, 2012; Sison and Fontrodona 2012) and emphasizes rational ways of ethical thinking, acting, and behaving, but ignores embodied experience as a precondition for morality, as argued in feminist thought (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Ettinger 2006; MacKenzie and Scully 2007; Butler 2015; author/s). We suggest that relying solely on abstract, disembodied rationality to understand the ethics of the commons may lie at the root of failure to provide sustainable alternatives to commoning problems. This reliance, we posit, disregards how recognizing social actors' shared corporeal vulnerability may enable reciprocal and relational processes of commoning (Ettinger 2006; Butler 2015) that account for these actors' localized ethical dilemmas (Hardin 1968).

In view of the central but under-studied role of the body in collective forms of political, social, and ethical action (Federici 2004, 2019; Butler 2015; Dean and Aune 2015; Tyler 2018) such as commoning (Polanyi 1944; Müller 2012, Fournier 2013), we re-theorize the ethics of the commons and commoning through the feminist lens of *embodied relationality* (Fotaki and Harding 2017). Specifically, we propose commoning as a feminine process of social organizing (Federici 2009, 2019), and integrate feminist ideas (Butler 2015; Ettinger 2006) to develop a *relational embodied ethics of the commons* based on recognition of corporeal vulnerability, reciprocity, and embodied relationality. This ethics, we suggest, promises to account more fully for social actors' ethical concerns. Our feminist approach politicizes the body (Rahmouni Eldirissi and Courpasson 2019; author/s), and addresses its ethical potential to encompass communal processes of social reproduction (Federici 2019; Fournier 2013). We argue that such theorization is necessary in an

era infused by necrocapitalistic tendencies that sacrifice living matter in exchange for commodification, and produce various forms of dispossession, death, and violence (Banerjee 2008; Sassen 2014) that dehumanize communities. We argue that this understanding might also counter problems such as free riding, asymmetric competition for resources, and failures to sustain the commons.

The proposed ethical theory contributes to business ethics debates on the commons (Melé 2009, 2012; Sison and Fontrodona 2012; Akrivou and Sison 2016), and to critical organizational literature on commoning as a process of social organizing (Fournier 2013; Pedersen 2010; Müller 2012) by linking the three pillars of commoning—organizing *in*, *for*, and *of* the commons (Fournier 2013)—with feminist embodied ethics. Specifically, we integrate a feminist ethical perspective on the body as a source of resistance and knowledge (Butler 2009; Butler, cited in Çetinkaya 2019; Ettinger 2006) with feminist political discussions of the commons (Federici 2004, 2009, 2019), thus connecting the ethical and political dimensions inherent in social commoning processes (Parker 2003). We also extend business ethics debates on forms of relationality that guide ethical and sustainable action (Allen et al. 2019; Dey and Steyaert 2016; Painter-Morland et al. 2017; Painter-Morland and Slegers 2018; Pérezts et al. 2019), as well as accounts of feminist embodied ethics’ usefulness in offering sustainable, inclusive solutions to organizational and social problems (Simola 2012; Kenny and Fotaki 2015; Pullen and Rhodes 2015; Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018).

We use examples from diverse settings (Müller 2012 on urban gardening; Tsavdaroglou 2018 on refugee collectives) to illustrate the capacity of *relational embodied ethics* to maintain the commons and their communities in ways that counter the aforementioned problems. We also identify broader practical implications for commoning, and propose applications of our

theorization to urban and digital commons. Finally, we discuss potential limitations of our theory and identify directions for future research.

Commons, Ethics, and Bodies

Commons and Commoning

Critical organizational accounts depart from a traditional understanding of the commons as a *noun*, and conceive *commoning* as a *verb* or action (Linebaugh 2007). In doing so, these perspectives focus on the social and participative processes of organizing and re-producing the commons (Fournier 2013; Meyer and Hudon 2018) to benefit community actors and safeguard independence from the market (Fuys et al. 2008; Ostrom and Hess 2008). Early economic conceptualizations see the commons as limited material resources involving “all the creations of nature and society that we inherit jointly and freely and hold in trust for future generations” (Hodkinson 2010, p. 243). Examples include fisheries, common grazing and croplands, and natural timber resources in communal forests. The traditional economic view limits social understanding of the commons to resource allocation, stressing the need for community rules that distinguish users from non-users, and specifying conditions for resource allocation (Ostrom 1999; Ostrom and Hess 2008).

Although organization of the commons is usually based on alternative forms of governance beyond governmental and capitalistic imperatives, traditional solutions often appear problematic. Ellickson et al. (1995) discuss the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin 1968) in explaining the potential for unfair practices to emerge in commoning efforts, owing to the state’s and private owners’ tendency to appropriate common resources. These practices include the free-rider problem, whereby community actors lose their motivation to contribute to collective efforts to sustain common resources and, driven by personal interests, free ride at the expense of others (Hardin 1968). Another challenge is asymmetric competition between actors, manifested in

depleting common resources through appropriation for individual interests (Hardin 1968), often by engaging in market exchanges.

To explain why the dilemmas of the commons emerge, researchers traditionally base their assumptions on behavioral theories such as the rational decision-making model, bounded rationality, heuristics and perceptual biases, as well as individuals' norm-obedient nature (Ostrom 1999). Proposed answers to commoning dilemmas center around rationalistic reformulations of the rules governing common-pool regimes (Ostrom 1998), or privatization policies that increase inequality (Dorling 2015; see also Fotaki and Prasad 2015 in the context of business ethics). Thus, although the commons are a terrain of political struggle (Fournier 2013; Federici 2019) to counter colonization of the public sphere and ensure independence from the market, their re-appropriation for market interests is often unavoidable in capitalistic development. For instance, in relation to the kinds of activities that promote flourishing communities, Meyer and Hudon (2017) discuss how complementary currency systems may be categorized as 'social commons' or 'commercial commons,' depending on their social and non-profit, or market-driven and profit-oriented focus.

Such equivocal relationships between the commons and capitalism fail to ensure lasting independence from the commercial market logic (De Angelis 2007; Fournier 2013) and inclusion of community actors in their own resource allocation. Thus, in the absence of viable alternative solutions, community actors are often seen as trapped in a tragedy of their own making (Ostrom 1999). In his influential discussion of the 'tragedy of the commons,' Hardin (1968) states that failure to find viable solutions to commoning problems may stem from the fact that we are searching for scientific technical solutions to what appears to be a problem of humanity rather than a technical problem. He states that most regulations proposed to address commoning problems derive from ancient ethical principles, which fail to counter the complexity of a constantly

changing world besieged by ecological, economic, social, resource-sharing, and overpopulation issues (see also Greco and Floridi 2004 for a related discussion of the Infosphere).

Seeking more viable alternatives to commoning problems, critical organizational researchers emphasize the importance of social processes in commons organization (Linebaugh 2007; Fournier 2013). These critical accounts attribute the problems of the commons to the prevailing one-dimensional theorization of the social nature of the commons present in Ostrom's (1999) influential work on economics and governance, which focuses only on resource allocation (organizing *in common*, in Fournier's 2013 terminology). Overall, mainstream theories of the commons almost entirely ignore the importance of values such as reciprocity and relationality that are intrinsic aspects of collective human action, as argued in this article.

To explore these issues, we draw on recent critical accounts of commoning to discuss the centrality of relationality and reciprocity to the social processes of commoning (Fournier 2013). This discussion allows us to stress the under-studied role of embodiment in this context, foregrounding our motivation to use the potential of feminist embodied ethics to develop a theoretical framework that offers ethical solutions to the intractable issues of the commons.

Reciprocity and Relationality in Commoning

Resonating with critical organizational accounts on commoning (Linebaugh 2007; De Angelis and Harvie 2013, Meyer and Houdon 2018), Fournier (2013) offers one of the most comprehensive critical understandings of commons and commoning. She suggests that commoning evolves around three interdependent axes of social organizing: (i) *organizing in common*, denoting users' responsibilities for and collective allocation of common resources; (ii) *organizing for the common*, denoting shared consumption and use of the commons; and (iii) *organizing of the common*,

denoting how the commons are constantly re-produced through collective use and reciprocal exchanges.

These critical perspectives do not assume the appropriation of limited material resources. They propose a “new commons” without pre-existing rules or clear institutional arrangements (Hess 2008, p. 1), focusing on the co-creation of resources and communities through shared use, reciprocal social contributions (Fournier 2013; Linebaugh 2007; De Angelis and Harvie 2013; Meyer and Hudon 2017; Tsavdaroglou 2018), participative management, and jointly developed community rules (Coriat 2015). Such social processes are produced by cultivating relations between social actors (Meyer and Hudon 2018), which cannot be explained by correlational patterns of causality nor fitted into clearly demarcated categories. This relational approach on which we build shares some similarities with the processual organizational accounts, which challenge the static view of organizations while emphasizing that organizational actors and phenomena cannot be reduced to identifiable, immobile entities, but rather are constantly created, changed, and constituted by incessant processes of *organizing* (Weick 1976; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Such a processual understanding also recognizes the fluidity and complexity inherent in commoning as social organizing (Hernes 2007; Linebaugh 2007), stressing the reciprocal and relational processes through which both resources and communities are constantly created and re-produced, rather than limiting the commons to their material outputs (Fournier 2013).

In the social process of exchange, usage is not restricted to community actors alone, but may be extended to the general public if the latter reciprocate by maintaining services to preserve and re-produce the commons rather than using them for commercial or profit-making purposes (Fournier 2013). This perspective draws on Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘right to the city’ in reconceptualizing commoning as distinguishing between *use value* and the capitalistic notion of

exchange value in allocating and appropriating space (Fournier 2013). For Pedersen (2010), the principle of “reciprocity in perpetuity” (p. 151) emphasizes the reciprocal nature of commoning, with rules specifying responsible use conditional on conserving resources. Such a view promotes a sense of shared responsibility, belonging, togetherness (Martí and Fernández 2015), and cooperation among community actors, highlighting both the emergent reciprocity and relationality and the inherent ethical underpinnings of commoning processes (Bollier and Helfrich 2014). These elements may help avert new forms of exclusion arising from free riding and asymmetric competition (Fournier 2013).

Studies of environmental commons explain the challenges emerging from depletion of natural resources in commoning practices (Ostrom et al. 2002) and efforts to build compensatory governance structures (Brousseau 2012). Some studies specifically discuss social, intangible commons that have a participative governance structure (Defourny and Nyssens 2010), such as care for vulnerable populations in need (Holder and Flessas 2008). More recent research considers self-managing forms of commoning in crisis-stricken Greece, involving agricultural cooperatives and various emerging solidarity economy formations (Karyotis and Kioupkiolis 2015), as well as alternative exchange schemes based on horizontal decision making and resource sharing (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis 2017). Other studies discuss interrelationships between the sociomaterial world, values, and ethics (Allen et al. 2019), as well as subjectivity, power, and freedom practices as critical ethical alternatives to neoliberal pressures (Dey and Steyaert 2016). In relation to urban commons, some authors consider cities as spaces of relationality and density made viable through collective use (Borch and Kornberger 2015). Recent studies also examine digital communities’ particular forms of organizing, and ethical dilemmas arising from expansion of the digital space (Greco and Floridi 2004). Overall, the relational and reciprocal forms of

organizing to which these works allude may involve mobilizing values and re-articulating social relations and sustainable living outside market exchanges (Daskalaki et al. 2018), thereby offering viable counter-responses (Fuys et al. 2008) to both private accumulation and state ownership.

The importance of relationality for organizing (Cooper 2005), values, and ethics (Painter-Morland and Slegers 2018; Pérezts et al. 2019) is widely acknowledged. Scholars also recognize the central role of embodiment in the creation of ethical relational spaces among individuals (Ladkin 2012; Tyler 2018; Bell and Vachhani 2019). In particular, feminist understandings of relationality recognize “both individuality and relatedness, both separation and connection, in co-creation and in tension with each other” (Nelson 2001, p. 143, cited in Fotaki and Prasad 2015), while also considering the importance of reciprocity for ethics. Relational feminist accounts stress how reciprocity and relationality develop by recognizing mutual dependence and accountability between the embodied self and the other (Butler 2015; Ettinger 2006). Departing from abstract norms imposed on bodies, such approaches counter universalistic ideas of personal responsibility, and reframe the notions of responsibility, ethics, and values in relation to the other. This reframing, we suggest, is particularly relevant and urgent for commoning practices, as a tool to re-evaluate the societal impact of collective forms of organizing and identify sustainable alternatives to capitalism (Fotaki and Prasad 2015). In an era when globalized capitalism creates new inequalities and new forms of dispossession (Sassen 2014; author/s), such approaches may also propose meaningful forms of embodied resistance, as accounted for by transnational feminism and postcolonial ethics (Mohanty 2003; Fernandes 2013).

Adopting this feminist angle may thus allow better understanding of how the reciprocal and relational practices of commoning drive moral responsiveness (Painter-Morland and Slegers 2018), by considering how these practices are actually embodied. In the next sub-section, we

discuss the primacy of the body in relational and reciprocal forms of social, political, and ethical action (Müller 2012, Federici 2009; Butler 2015), such as commoning (Fournier 2013).

Embodiment in Commoning

There is a consensus that commoning relies on shared values, norms, moral principles (Bollier and Helfrich 2014; De Angelis and Harvie 2013), and respect for the ethics of community living to promote individual and collective growth (Haugh 2007; Melé 2009, 2012; Peredo and Chrisman 2006). Yet these issues are considered mainly in the context of participative social organizing. As already stated, business ethics accounts of the commons draw mainly on Aristotelian virtue ethics, arguing that citizens are the *soul* of the polis, which, as in all animals, is superordinate to the *body* (Aristotle 1988, section 1291a). Sison and Fontrodona (2012) explain how community actors promote the common good through virtuous labor and developing other members' moral sense, rather than being concerned merely with their own interests. Melé's (2009) 'personalist' and 'common good' principles emphasize that ethical duties of respect, care, and human dignity in cooperative relations are necessary for societies to flourish. Akrivou and Sison (2016) draw on Aristotelian ethics to discuss historical relationships between human dignity, virtues, and capitalism and explain how the common good is created. These Aristotelian-inspired approaches recognize that in a well-functioning society, citizens must lead good lives. However, in emphasizing the superiority of the *mind* and *psyche* over the *body*, such views tend to reproduce dualities and encourage abstract classifications (Hernes 2007) of ethical phenomena, disregarding the actual ethical experiences of living human bodies.

Overall, "there is notorious disregard for the role of embodiment, affect and emotion in the study of social movements and political mobilization" (Dean and Aune 2015, p. 376). Nevertheless, these are important aspects of alternative commoning initiatives, such as the

Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico (cited in Federici 2019), and the Rojava model of governance of Kurds in Northern Syria (Tax 2016) fighting for gender equality and caring for the environment. The politics of commoning is not simply a mind-driven technical management of resources in space, but a struggle to perform common, livable relations in real time (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez 2018) in the context of actors' reciprocal political and ethical processes of becoming (Tsavdaroglou 2018; Butler 2015). Indeed, some notable exceptions in the commoning literature challenge the duality of body and mind, and see commoning as an embodied process, often involving physical activity such as touching, tending, and caring. These accounts explain how commoning emerges and develops through collaborative everyday practices that counter capitalistic individualism (Müller 2012; Federici 2019). We must therefore pay attention to the corporeal dynamics of “both anguish and excitement that we embody in our proximities or relations” with others (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez 2018, p. 62), and rethink how our bodies can be used for collective resistance (Butler 2015).

Drawing on feminist accounts, we suggest that this can be done by understanding the social, political, and ethical organizing of the commons (Fournier 2013) from the novel angle of *embodied relationality* developed by Fotaki and Harding (2017). We extend the latter and integrate insights from feminist embodied ethics (Butler 2015, 2009; Ettinger 2006) to develop our theoretical proposition of a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*. We argue that traditional economic and universalistic approaches to commoning are problematic in taking a rational view of the phenomenon (Federici 2009). Unlike the proposed feminist angle, which focuses on the body, the traditional view focuses on normative regulations and abstract ethical principles, which disregard how social actors' experiences, affects, and embodied practices may shape the ethical, social, and political processes of commoning (Müller 2012; Federici 2009). Building on the above-mentioned

critical discussions of commoning (De Angelis 2007; Müller 2012; Fournier 2013), we suggest that recognizing actors' actual corporeal vulnerabilities (Butler 2015; Kenny and Fotaki 2015; Pullen and Rhodes 2015) may enable locally relevant ethical interactions and mobilizations of resistance against normative expectations (Butler 2015), based on reciprocity and relationality (Butler 2009; Ettinger 2006).

Our proposed embodied angle also accords with recent organizational debates on the inescapable role of the body in all expressions of ethical, social, and political life, and the need to further integrate corporeal vulnerability into business ethics research (Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018; Bell and Vachhani 2019). While some accounts discuss bodies' compliance with normative discourses (Courpasson and Monties 2017), others argue for the relational potential of vulnerable bodies to overcome this normativity (Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018; Doughty and Murray 2016; author/s). Bodies are also sites of both docility and resistance, as the political effect of vulnerability emerges at the intersection of the two (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson 2019). Specifically, this vulnerability "materializes a physical limit that forces people to take a stance" (ibid., p. 2) to resist the normative regulations imposed on their bodies. Bodies are already recognized as inherently precarious and vulnerable in health and social care contexts (Rogers et al. 2012; Herring 2016), but not yet in the business ethics, management, and organization studies literature. However, this may be changing, as researchers are inspired by feminist embodied ethics, and particularly Judith Butler's ideas on corporeal vulnerability, to position ethical and political collective action at the centre of philosophy of the body (Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018; author/s).

In this article, we adopt this feminist embodied angle in arguing for a need to consider the political and ethical effect of vulnerable bodies (Butler 2015; Ettinger 2006) bound together to

perform collaborative processes of resistance against the dominant political and economic order (Butler 2009; Federici 2019). In developing our framework, we take inspiration from the work of another prominent feminist, Silvia Federici, who stresses that there is “no commons without community” (Federici 2019, p. xvi). Federici emphasizes the need to bring social actors’ bodies together to build the social fabric through which resources and communities are constantly organized and sustained through shared use and cultural exchanges (Federici 2019). In her discussion, Federici argues against rational conceptions of femininity that conceive women as the commons of men, and criticizes capitalism for treating women’s bodies as labor-producing machines (Federici 2019). She advocates a feminist perspective on commoning that visibilizes women’s historically leading role in communal social movements (Federici 2004; Podlashuc 2009), and considers women’s traditional contributions to the house: “the oikos on which economy is built” (Federici 2009, p. 138). Women both create new lives and build social structures that, through care (author/s), can sustain new, powerful forms of community reproduction. Federici thus proposes that creating the commons be made a task of women. Both men and women must construct communities that break down gender stereotypes and find meaningful ways to reproduce themselves, without causing suffering to the other, but rather enabling “the production of themselves as common subjects” (Federici 2009, p. 136). Federici also condemns capitalism for exposing human vulnerabilities by “waging a war against our bodies, making it a signifier for all that is limited, material, and opposed to reason.” (Federici, 2019, p. 190). Capitalism suppresses our capacity to satisfy basic bodily needs such as “the need for the sun, the wind, the sky, the need for touching...and being in the open air, instead of being surrounded by closed walls” (ibid.). Stressing the embodied aspect of reproduction, with all its inherent vulnerabilities, as a political

resource, Federici's work uniquely motivates our theoretical development of a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*.

Next, we review the literature relating to the need to reconsider organizational ethics from a feminist embodied perspective. This foregrounds our theoretical proposition of a *relational embodied ethics of the commons* as a new form of organizational ethics that counters the aforementioned problems of the commons and commoning.

Embodied Ethics, Organizations, and Commoning

Embodied Organizational Ethics

Organizational scholars stress the need to draw on feminist embodied accounts to rethink organizational ethics as an embodied process (e.g., Pullen and Rhodes 2014, 2015; Thanem and Wallenberg 2015; Hancock 2008; Kenny and Fotaki 2015; Tyler 2018). This embodied approach is often contrasted with the codified universalizing ethical principles that dominate human passions by privileging consciousness (Deleuze 1988). Classic ethics (including Kantian, utilitarian and, to a degree, virtue ethics) favor rules over human interactions (Loacker and Muhr 2009), thinking over feeling and becoming (Pullen and Rhodes 2015), and pre-existing rational convictions that disregard bodily experiences (Borgerson 2007). For instance, Pullen and Rhodes (2010) argue that masculine conceptions of gender cast a mantle over the body that prevents the emergence of genuine corporeal connections. Using Hamington's (2004) theory of 'embodied care,' Simola (2012) proposes a feminist ethics perspective capable of driving cognitive decisions around sustainable responses to human aspects of business practices. Poldner et al. (2019) view the body as a critical source, sensor, and processor of entrepreneurs' ethical experiences, informing their moral decisions and actions, while Atkins and Parker (2012) posit the body as the main vehicle through which social entrepreneurs feel, understand, and respond ethically to environmental needs.

Embodied ethics accounts discuss the body as a medium for communicating and relating to others (Quinn and Dutton 2005), and argue that forming ethical subjects requires actual bodily experiences of ethical dilemmas (Skinner 2012).

In discussing the usefulness of feminism for re-theorizing organizations, Fotaki and Harding (2017) suggest a new organizational ethics based on *embodied relationality* as a way to promote collective political action, for instance to counter extractivism and expulsion (author/s forthcoming). Such feminist accounts focus on women's moral corporeal experiences (Derry 2002), and call for relationships between affect, gender, and power to be rethought, recognizing the ability of different other bodies to connect openly beyond 'bounded rationality' (Hancock 2008; Pullen and Rhodes 2010). They call for a better understanding of our processual becoming in relation to other bodies, to develop embodied experiences that may act as references for future ethical action (Poldner et al. 2019). Thus, the relevance of feminist embodied ethics goes beyond the duration of local corporeal encounters. Such encounters may be viscerally and sensorially registered, and thus retrieved and reproduced to shape ethical subjects' future decisions and interactions with unknown others in different contexts (Ettinger 2006).

Overall, rethinking the ethics of commoning through a feminist embodied lens challenges traditional conceptions of commoning as a technical, rational process by rehabilitating the experience of the body as a source of knowing. This understanding attends to how social actors embody their ethical dilemmas in their local contexts to develop reciprocal and relational ethical interactions that resist the abstract, disembodied, normative rules (Gilligan 1982; Jaggar 1992) imposed on them by a distanced humanistic perspective (Thanem and Knights 2019). Such an ethical approach also proposes ethicality as an embodied "work in progress" (Poldner et al. 2019, p. 26) enacted through fluid, complex and conflated practices and processes in the making and

becoming (Ettinger 2006; Hernes 2007). This embodied perspective, we suggest, helps resist capitalistic normative pressures, which tend to commodify social actors' embodied experiences in the practices of commoning (Federici 2019). We argue that we cannot understand how commoning initiatives work without examining how their participants interact and relate to each other through their living bodies. Hence, we focus on embodied expressions of relationality and reciprocity as ways to enhance communities' chances of survival (McNeill 2008; Fournier 2013).

Next, we draw on the eclectic ideas of feminist philosophers, Judith Butler and Bracha Ettinger, and on Fotaki and Harding's (2017) organizational ethics of embodied relationality to develop our theory of a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*. This allows us to develop and define each of our theory's three underlying pillars—recognition of corporeal vulnerability, reciprocity, and embodied relationality— and to explain their interdependencies and how they inform each other to enable meaningful community collaboration. We first present Butler's ideas to develop and define the notions of *recognition of corporeal vulnerability* and *reciprocity*. We then combine this understanding with Ettinger's theory of the matrixial and Fotaki and Harding's organizational theorization of it to develop and define the notion of *embodied relationality*. A combined discussion of these three pillars supports our theoretical proposition of a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*.

Feminist Embodied Ethics for a Relational Embodied Ethics of the Commons

Recognition of Corporeal Vulnerability and Reciprocity

At the core of Butler's philosophy lies consideration of corporeal vulnerability as a precondition for ethics. Butler suggests that our corporeal vulnerability "binds us to those whom we may well not know, and whom we have never chosen" (2011, p. 384). Thus, our bodies are interdependent and able to counter threats in our collective social, political, and ethical encounters (Butler 2015).

In her performative theory of assembly, Butler argues that assemblies can only be built on the basis of corporeal recognition of vulnerability, reciprocity, and relationality, which associate ethics with politics in a space where bodies perform a “collective thereness” (Butler 2015, p. 197). Butler conceives an assembly in terms of an “embodied and plural performativity” (ibid., p. 8), suggesting different ways of being together, literally and symbolically, “to enact a message performatively” (ibid., p. 197). Her theory is that rethinking inclusion as a political, ethical, and embodied process counters normative conceptions of inclusion that suppress difference, stressing the body’s capacity to alter norms and transform social realities (Butler 2004).

In discussing our dependence on organizational practices, such as using and regenerating resources, Butler calls for consideration of communities’ potential to act as “spaces of sociality” (Butler 2015, p. 84), where social organizing evolves in a spirit of reciprocity rather than of individual benefit. Butler’s theory explains how individuals’ embodied dependence on the ‘other’ stems from a need for mutual recognition of our human existence as co-constituted in a wider social context, which also causes our obedience to normative systems (Butler 1990). Butler and Athanasiou (2013) also observe that social dispossession and self-dispossession (as performances of identity) are intertwined, creating conditions of shared vulnerability. Velicu and Garcia-Lopez (2018, p. 62) draw on these social, subjective, and political aspects of dispossession to re-theorize commoning as “constitutive relations in performing ourselves, which are also contingent, emotional and rather opaque processes of self-formation.” They argue that this “demands a non-violent politics which considers transformation and production of norms as open (ontologically and epistemologically) to what is foreign, unknown, uncertain, or unborn yet” (ibid., p. 64). Tyler (2018) draws on Butler’s (2015) theory of assembly to stress the potential of feminist embodied

ethics to promote meaningful forms of inclusion in organizing activism, which is based on mutual recognition of difference beyond normative expectations.

These ideas seem particularly relevant to the context of daily commoning processes, where disembodied capitalistic norms expose social actors' corporeal vulnerabilities (Federici 2019). While not all forms of commoning are explicitly about resistance, they are nevertheless concerned with counteracting privatization and encroachment of the public space. Butler's ideas are useful for understanding the political effect of recognizing corporeal vulnerability, resulting in the creation of relational and reciprocal forms of social commoning that counter asymmetric forms of competition. Looking across levels reveals the ways in which social processes interact with the corporeal vulnerability that individuals experience. This allows us to theorize how actors' mutual reliance on each other's embodied contributions ensures community survival.

Drawing on Butler, we see *corporeal vulnerability* as a state of existential precarity extending beyond injury and death, as an “*endless possibility of experiencing* injury and the shared fears about our own survivability” (Fotaki and Harding 2017, p. 144; Butler 2004). For Butler, precariousness is “a generalized condition [which] relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world” (Butler, cited in Çetinkaya 2019). This state is further exposed by capitalism (Federici 2019), and by lack of social and political support (Butler 2004, 2009), leading us to rely on and relate with others for survival. We suggest that recognizing our own vulnerability may compel us to intermingle these sensations with those of others' human bodies to develop a sense of shared vulnerability. This shared understanding may have a political effect in urging social actors to question and challenge their habitual normative practices, making them aware of their ability to sustain other bodies, resources and communities, and to relate with each other reciprocally to resist the abstract

regulations imposed on their ‘common’ bodies (understood here as the ‘bodies of the commons’). Such shifts require an embodied understanding of *reciprocity* in commoning, as mutually beneficial exchanges of (im)material resources, values, support, and care based on embodied relational processes of common reliance.

We now turn to Ettinger’s philosophy to expand on the ideas of ethical relationality inherent in the social, political, and ethical organizing of the commons (Pedersen 2010; Müller 2012; Fournier 2013) and develop the notion of embodied relationality.

Embodied Relationality

Ettinger’s theory of subjectivity focuses on the inseparable connection of the matrixial *I* with the *non-I* (other/(m)other), using the metaphor of relational co-existence in the womb. In this co-existence, “partial-subjects co-emerge and co-fade through returning and transformation via external/internal border-links with-in and with-out” (Ettinger 2006, p. 84, cited in Fotaki and Harding 2017). For Ettinger, in giving life to the other, the woman’s body creates the ethical possibility of partial subjects ‘becoming together’ while cohabiting in the womb (Ettinger 2006). This cohabitation relies on subjects opening up in a process that Ettinger conceives as “self-fragilization,” to make space for ethical encounters with vulnerable others without traumatizing them (Ettinger 2010, cited in Fotaki and Harding 2017, p. 152). The idea of the ‘matrixial,’ where such encounters happen, is thus conceived as a space of affective co-existence and reciprocity between the feminine and the masculine, countering dominating and exclusionary power dynamics, and promoting a feeling of ‘being-with’ the other. In this space, the *I* and the *non-I* co-exist to shape their subjectivities, which Ettinger calls the “matrixial stratum of subjectivization” (Ettinger 1996, pp. 125-6). This explains how embodied encounters activate sensing and understanding of the social world to enhance awareness and consciousness of subjects’ shared

ethical concerns. Ettinger also posits that these maternal links remain in the subject's psyche through memory, and are carried throughout life, shaping future ethical interactions with unknown others. These processes are not exclusive to women's experiences but apply equally to all subjects, regardless of gender (Ettinger 2006).

With reference to Ettinger's theory of the matrixial, Kenny and Fotaki (2015) develop an organizational ethics that reconciles the psyche with the body, in a shared borderspace where compassionate and inclusive relationships based on acceptance and care for the 'unknown,' irreducible other are possible. Fotaki and Harding (2017) propose a new organizational ethics based on *embodied relationality* as a precondition for our symbolic and literal survival (p. 144) amid the exclusionary tendencies of capitalism. We build on these developments by demonstrating how Ettinger's proposition of an embodied, compassionate relational ethics may inspire new possibilities for communities and organizations suffering the consequences of oppression and exclusion, where differences between the self and the other are lost in ever-increasing social dispossession. This perspective suggests a reframing of social actors' subjectivities in relational terms, not as separate from one another.

In reading Ettinger through Butler and extending Fotaki and Harding (2017), we understand *embodied relationality* as an ethical process emerging through social actors' mutual recognition of shared vulnerabilities, and reliance on reciprocal practical contributions that account for their actual corporeal, localized need for interdependence. In our theory development, Ettinger's ideas are used to stress the partial nature of the vulnerable subject reliant on a non-exclusionary and non-traumatizing embodied ethical relationship with the other (Fotaki and Harding 2017). Butler's recent work discussed previously, allows us to consider this ethical relationship as a reciprocal social condition emerging from recognizing subjects' shared vulnerability and precariousness,

stressing communities' performative potential to drive inclusive social, ethical, and political action.

These combined perspectives allow us to propose a *relational embodied ethics of the commons*, based on *recognition of corporeal vulnerability, reciprocity, and embodied relationality*, as symbolic, interdependent elements at the heart of the social process of commoning (Linebaugh 2007; Fournier 2013; Müller 2012). We propose that recognizing the vulnerability of the lived body and how this guides reciprocity and relationality with other bodies (Ettinger 2006; Butler 2015) alters the view of the body as an object of primitive capitalistic accumulation (Federici 2009). We emphasize the political potential for social actors' bodies to collectively disrupt the dominant order, while enabling reciprocal and relational alternative forms of community collaboration and reproduction that account for their actual ethical demands. Such ethical relationships are transformative, going beyond embodied encounters of vulnerability through exposure to potential injury or death, to become references that shape subjects' future ethical interactions with unknown others in the social spaces of commoning (Poldner et al. 2019). As illustrated in the examples below, this embodied perspective may be essential for developing cohesive communities that are able to sustain the continuous social processes of *allocation, use, and regeneration* of commons and communities (organizing *in, of, and for* the commons; Fournier 2013) against the intractable issues of the commons.

Furthermore, in discussing how recognition of one's vulnerability is projected onto the other's body to drive reciprocal and relational community mobilization, our post-structuralist feminist approach proposes ethical community action spanning individual, collective (Vachhani and Pullen 2019), and organizational levels of analysis. We propose an onto-epistemological understanding that emphasizes the materially embodied collective processes of "knowing in being" (Barad 2003,

p. 829), through which temporal, spatial, material, and symbolic boundaries in ethical and political struggles of commoning are constantly changed, conflated, blurred, reproduced, and reconfigured (Weick 1976; Hernes 2007). This approach acknowledges the impossibility of fitting the theorized embodied relational processes of commoning into generalizable, context-dependent patterns of ethical behaviour (Hernes 2007; Thanem and Knights 2019), and stresses the intertwining of mind and body, as manifested in various practices of care. Our theory therefore highlights the central role of the body in shaping consciousness and awareness of localized ethical experiences (Ettinger 2006; Poldner et al. 2019; author/s) of commoning in different contexts.

This *relational embodied ethics of the commons* is not based on a naturalistic conception of femininity (Ettinger 2006; Federici 2019). Rather, our theory stresses the need to consider feminist values surrounding women's historical community reproductive work (e.g., creation of spaces for communal cooking and schooling), which have allowed them to sustain communal structures based on care and responsibility for the natural and human resources involved in commoning practices (Federici 2019). The underlying principle is that neither commons nor communities are possible unless we stop seeing ourselves as independent of each other (Ettinger 2006) and refuse to build our lives on the suffering of others (Butler 2015; Federici 2019). Such an understanding, we suggest, can inspire all human beings to reproduce themselves as equals (Federici 2019) through reciprocal, relational forms of collective allocation, use, and regeneration of common resources independent of the market. Figure 1 depicts relationships between the concepts of our proposed theory across different levels of analysis, their association with the previously discussed theoretical frameworks, and the emerging implications.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Below, we present two commoning examples that demonstrate the political and ethical potential of the proposed *relational embodied ethics of the commons*.

Illustrative Examples

Refugee Communities

The first example relates to Tsavdaroglou's (2018) identification of a need to protect refugees and forced migrants from inhuman conditions in state-run refugee camps. This is a major factor guiding refugees' and civil society actors' collective efforts to occupy abandoned buildings for community living independent of the state. Tsavdaroglou explains that social actors develop self-organized structures based on the principles of anti-racism, anti-hierarchy, horizontal organization, mutual respect, openness to difference, reciprocity, equality, freedom, inclusion, and collective sharing, whereby people from different national, social, age, and gender backgrounds physically co-exist (Tsavdaroglou 2018). Individuals engage in embodied recreational activities by doing things together, such as sports, poetry, music, theatre classes, and performances, often in small and limited spaces, where they freely express their gendered identities and distinct cultural practices (Tsavdaroglou 2018). They feel free (Tsavdaroglou 2018), "better than being locked up in military camps" (ibid., p. 387) and realize that "only united we can be strong" (ibid, p. 390). These communities become 'spaces of sociality' (Butler 2015), where private and public life interfuse. The personal becomes political, and through collective embodied resistance, refugees "take the buildings in their hands" (Tsavdaroglou 2018, p. 389) to defend them from the state's exclusionary tendencies.

Tsavdaroglou draws particularly on Lefebvre's 'right to the city' to explain that refugees understand these spaces for their *use value* as opposed to their *exchange value*, recognizing the need to refrain from market exchanges in order to protect their communities. With the help of civil-

society actors, refugees collectively define their duties and responsibilities, such as mixed shifts for cleaning and cooking (Tsavdaroglou 2018), to allocate their common resources (organizing *in* common; Fournier 2013). They also collectively decide on the conditions for using their common resources, such as food, medicines, and common spaces, and agree on the need to use these reciprocally with care in their embodied activities (Pedersen 2010; organizing *of* the commons; Fournier 2013) in order to avoid depleting them (Tsavdaroglou 2018). As they realize their dependence on each other, refugees also engage in joint activities to ensure regeneration of their resources and the re-establishment of their communities (organizing *for* the commons; Fournier 2013). Women and men are treated as equals, and there is respect for privacy, alongside enhanced awareness of people's dependence on each other's presence and reciprocal contributions. For instance, people can always seek physical protection from each other when they feel afraid, but can also be alone when they wish (Tsavdaroglou 2018). Social actors may also disrupt the gender binary and other hierarchical divisions, as indicated in studies of various grassroots solidarity movements in Greece (Kouki and Chatzidakis forthcoming).

Reading the example through our proposed theory, we suggest that these communities emerge from recognizing refugees' and civil society actors' shared precariousness (Butler 2015), and specifically their corporeal vulnerability (Butler 2009; Ettinger 2006). Refugees come to recognize their shared predicament, irrespective of religious, ethnic, and other differences. They realize that their shared vulnerability can only be protected by relating with the unknown but openly accepted other under conditions of precariousness (Butler 2004, 2009). In this process, they understand themselves as 'partial subjects' dependent on reciprocal exchanges and embodied relationality (Ettinger 2006), as discussed above. As they emerge from their embodied experiences in limited spaces under conditions of precarity, these ethical relationships enhance a sense of community

belonging and interdependence. This heightens social actors' awareness of the need for fair allocation of and reciprocal participation in the use and reproduction of their material and intellectual resources (organizing *in*, *of*, and *for* the commons; Fournier 2013) to ensure community survival. Of course, these spaces are not conflict-free, as competition for scarce resources may still be present; but conflict can be avoided when these communities openly embrace existing and emerging tensions in an agonistic (Mouffe 2005) rather than antagonistic manner. Butler's (2015) theory of assembly indicates how this ethical relational space may trigger collective action infused with political energy, as refugees' bodies connect with each other to enact their messages performatively in the context of daily practices intended to counter the oppressive tendencies of the state (Tsavdargolou 2018).

This example might be seen as a relatively short-lived initiative, but the logic of the temporary commons also applies to other forms of community relationships fostered through collaborations and encounters between different actors (Mathews 2010). Whether or not such initiatives are short-lived may also depend on support from civil society and other actors, as well as the state's role in regulating the commons, as briefly discussed in our example. Yet, as we illustrate in our second example below, the proposed *relational embodied ethics* might also enable and sustain daily commoning practices in less intense situations where humans' interact closely, such as urban gardening.

Urban Gardening

Müller (2012) presents the example of German urban gardening communities, which are becoming increasingly visible in daily life. In her analysis, she discusses urban gardens as promising alternatives that allow communities to control their food production independently of the market (Müller 2012), and as spaces of solidarity where private and public life intertwine. Citizens join

forces and rely on “hands-on neighbourhood support” (ibid., p. 1) to politically defend public spaces in favor of community flourishing. They do so through collective embodied activities in close proximity, including keeping bees, creating cosmetics, hosting gardening workshops, and transforming city spaces into sites for community events and plant growing, as well as organizing social encounters such as open meals. Federici (2019, p. 105) also discusses the importance of urban gardens in the “rurbanization” process, echoing Fernandez’s (2003) view of urban gardens as spaces that reinforce community cohesion, where people have the opportunity to socialize and exchange cultural knowledge through collective gardening and reciprocal recreational activities that go beyond food production (e.g., celebrations, playing cards). Such social processes nurture a spirit of reciprocal giving and cultural and knowledge exchanges that overcome individual resource scarcity, allowing actors to benefit from each other’s contributions for the sustainable use and re-production of their resources and communities (Müller 2012). Müller describes urban gardens as self-organized structures that provide a refuge for the vulnerable, exhausted self and offer an antidote to the rapidity and ease of capitalist societies. She particularly emphasizes the interconnected nature of body and mind, suggesting that embodied gardening activities urge social actors to connect and cooperate with each other based on principles of multicultural openness, reciprocity, and collective involvement in community labor, as well as cooperation with and attention to each other. This is the opposite of capitalist competition, individualism, and consumption (Müller 2012).

Analyzed in the light of our proposed theory, this example illustrates how corporeal recognition of vulnerability, described here as inherent to human existence and further exposed by capitalism (Federici 2019), has a performative political effect (Butler 2015), motivating gardening practices that contend for public space for community welfare. We argue that these collaborative

commoning processes emerge as social actors recognize their mutual dependence on each other's practical, embodied contributions for community survival (Ettinger 2006). In other words, actors realize that urban gardens' sustenance depends on relational and reciprocal reproductive processes, respect for the conditions of use of their commons resources, and collective use based on care and responsibility (Pedersen 2010). This embodied ethical space of interdependence enhances a sense of community belonging (Fernandez 2003; Martí and Fernández 2015) and a spirit of relationality, cooperation, and reciprocity among gardeners by opposing capitalist individualism (Müller 2012). Such an ethical understanding might thus enable sustainable alternative forms of commoning (Müller 2012) for allocating (organizing *in* common), using (organizing *for* the common), and regenerating common resources and communities (organizing *of* the common; Fournier 2013) independently of the state.

The two examples above illustrate the emancipatory potential of *embodied relational ethics* for communities' sustainable living, as the latter is informed by interdependencies in social actors' reciprocal, relational, embodied, cognitive, and environmental shared resources (Fotaki and Harding 2017). Through our theoretical development and the supporting examples, we argue that basing our understanding solely on economic and/or universalistic ethical perspectives limits our ability to provide ethical and sustainable counter-responses to commoning problems. This is because such conceptions seek technical, rationalistic solutions, which often condition actors to think about individual benefits at the expense of community survival, thus potentially perpetuating free riding and asymmetric competition. They fail to consider how vulnerable bodies' mutual interdependence for survival informs social actors' ethical interactions on the basis of reciprocity and relationality, which sustain the daily social organizing of the commons and communities.

Discussion

In this article, we draw on feminist embodied ethics to challenge economic and universalistic ethical conceptualizations of commoning that view actors predominantly as rational agents (Ostrom 1999). Such conceptualizations, in our view, lie at the heart of problematic answers to commoning dilemmas (Fournier 2013). Instead, we respond to calls to adopt a humanistic ethical perspective on commoning (Hardin 1968), and to rethink commoning as a feminist process of social organizing (Federici 2009). We combine insights from feminist philosophers (Ettinger 2006; Butler 2015) and build on the notion of *embodied relationality* (Fotaki and Harding 2017) to propose a *relational embodied ethics of the commons* that considers how social actors' shared corporeal vulnerabilities may trigger commoning processes based on reciprocity and relationality. This ethical approach counters tendencies for free riding and asymmetric competition, with a view to enhancing communities' sustainable living. We thus make specific contributions to the theory and practice of commoning. We also acknowledge certain limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

First, our theory contributes a novel perspective on current business ethics debates on the commons, which to date have been heavily inspired by Aristotelian virtue ethics that prioritize the *mind* over the *body* (Melé 2009, 2012; Sison and Fontrodona 2012; Akrivou and Sison 2016). In discussing how relating reciprocally through the body informs knowledge and ethical decisions through processes in the making and becoming (Ettinger 2006; Butler, 2015), we stress the mutual co-existence of and interdependence between the *thinking mind* and the *feeling body* (Poldner et al. 2019). This understanding addresses calls to rethink organizational ethics from a feminist embodied perspective, to enable decision making around sustainable organizational practices

(Simola 2012) and to challenge dominant discourses that emphasize mind-driven ethical action and disembodied capitalistic logics (Kenny and Fotaki 2015; Pullen and Rhodes 2015; Fotaki and Harding 2017; Tyler 2018; Poldner et al. 2019; Thanem and Knights 2019). Bringing an embodied perspective of relationality and reciprocity to the ethical processes of commoning also contributes to current business ethics debates on relationships between the sociomaterial world, values, and ethics for sustainable action (Allen et al. 2019; Dey and Steyaert 2016; Painter-Morland et al. 2017; Painter-Morland and Slegers 2018; Pérezts et al. 2019).

Second, our theory contributes to current critical organizational literature on the commons (De Angelis 2007; Linebaugh 2007; Pedersen 2010; Fournier 2013; Müller 2012; Daskalaki et al. 2018; Velicu and Garcia-Lopez 2018) by arguing that, to fully understand the social, political and ethical processes sustaining commoning, we must pay attention to social actors' shared corporeal experiences. We specifically contribute to Fournier's theorization of commoning as social organizing by showing how corporeal recognition of actors' vulnerabilities drives ethical awareness of their shared needs, leading them to engage in relational and reciprocal interactions for the equal allocation (organizing *in* common), use (organizing *of* the common), and regeneration of their resources and communities (organizing *for* the common). From a feminist perspective of care, the proposed relational embodied ethics contributes to Pedersen's (2010) principle of 'reciprocity in perpetuity' by showing how care and responsibility for the other and for the use of common resources may be corporeally informed and sustained. We also build on Müller's (2012) example to demonstrate how recognizing bodies' shared vulnerabilities may enable reciprocity, relationality, and ethical decisions that sustain daily commoning practices.

As well as linking feminist embodied ethics with Fournier's (2013) three social pillars of commoning, our theory adds an ethical perspective of embodied relationality to Federici's (2019)

political discussion of the commons. In doing so, the proposed approach accounts for the political struggles involved in commoning (Federici 2019), and considers these in conjunction with social actors' localized, embodied ethical demands (Parker 2003). In discussing the political effect not only of individual but also of shared experiences of vulnerability in driving collective mobilization in the sphere of commoning, we also build on recent accounts that *politicize* the body (Rahmouni Eldirissi and Courpasson 2019; author/s). Our theorized ethical space emerges from actual corporeal experiences rather than idealized discourse (Rahmouni Eldirissi and Courpasson 2019); it is daily experienced through the body, shaping the social, ethical, and political processes of commoning, as illustrated in our examples. Below, we discuss the practical implications and potential applications of our theory to specific instances of commoning.

Practical Implications and Applications of the Social Practices of Commoning

On a practical level, we propose that *relational embodied ethics* may counteract the dehumanizing capitalistic tendencies that alienate bodies from each other and from their natural world (Müller 2012) with complete disregard for their vulnerabilities (Federici 2019). In introducing this core but neglected perspective, we retheorize and reposition the ethical dilemmas of the commons by calling for the embodied work of maintenance to be made visible. Through relationality and reciprocity, this work sustains social structures under capitalism but is often unacknowledged and unrewarded. We argue that, as actors recognize that their relational processes of social reproduction are indispensable to overcoming their individual and shared vulnerabilities, they may begin to understand themselves as partial subjects relying on reciprocity and embodied relationality with others for their own and collective survival (Ettinger 2006). This understanding, we suggest, may enable a sense of belonging in their community, rather than of a collection of independent individuals brought together to perform alternative economic practices. In so doing,

it promises to alter capitalistic ways of thinking favoring individual benefit in commoning practices, and to enable consideration of all lives as equivalent, beyond gender and cultural differences (Federici 2004). By putting community needs at the center of ethical decision making (Federici 2019), such commoning alternatives offer the ethical possibility of countering tendencies to free ride, privately appropriate resources, and engage in asymmetric competition. Various initiatives follow this approach to ensure viable forms of community living, such as the Chikpo movement in India, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Landless People's movement of Brazil (MST), and the now defunct Rojava model (Tax 2016; for more examples, see Federici 2019). These examples also highlight the issue of scarcity, which is created through accumulation and inequality enabled by cut-throat competition. Below, we propose practical applications of our theory to specific instances of commoning.

Urban Commons

In the case of urban commons, we propose the development of social spaces, such as community gardens, camps, cooperative households, community accountability structures, and communal art and sport spaces, where social actors can meet periodically to exchange knowledge and engage in embodied interactions, including collective cooking, gardening, art classes, and political resistance marches. Our theory suggests that being body-to-body in such urban spaces allows social actors to see, touch and feel each other, to recognize their shared needs and vulnerabilities (Butler 2015), and to acknowledge their mutual interdependence on each other's embodied contributions for community survival. These shared experiences might enhance a sense of community belonging and enable an embodied understanding of relationality and reciprocity to sustain collective social processes of allocation, shared use, and regeneration of urban commons and communities (Fournier 2013). For instance, Daskalaki et al. (2018) describe urban activities such as fairs,

bazaars, and assemblies, developing alongside grassroots exchange schemes where people collaborate and interact, as sustainable responses to the financial crisis and austerity in Greece. Notwithstanding the embodied nature of urban commoning practices, we acknowledge that other ethical theories may also be relevant and/or complementary in some cases, such as environmental ethics for urban reforestation practices.

Digital Commons

We also propose potential applications for digital communities, where human interactions are mediated mainly by technology, thereby promoting social alienation and reducing the sense of community belonging, and favoring individual benefit over community flourishing (Federici 2019). We suggest that bringing people together periodically through communal gatherings for collective voting or social events might allow social actors to develop shared understandings of their actual vulnerabilities and shared needs (Butler 2015; Ettinger 2006) and realize their reliance on each other's contributions to sustain digital communities. This realization might place community benefit above individual benefit, enabling relational and reciprocal online interactions that seek to sustain the social processes of allocation, use, and regeneration of digital commons and communities in the long term (Fournier 2013). However, we recognize that digital communities' ethical concerns may also be addressed or complemented by other ethical approaches, such as post-human ethics or an ethics suited to the Infosphere (Greco and Floridi 2004), that account for interactions between humans and technology.

Last but not least, although our theory promises to overcome precarious forms of 'inclusion in exclusion' (Tyler 2018), the potential of exploitation present in commoning initiatives must not be ignored. We must accept the possibility of exploitative relations emerging from power asymmetries, which are bound to co-exist with collaboration, relationality, and reciprocity.

Understanding these dynamics might allow us not only to be open to the unknown foreign other and his/her irreducible otherness in commoning practices, but also to attend proactively to the problems of the commons identified by previous research. Such an approach is essential for rethinking our wellbeing in terms of community flourishing that enables sustainable development, rather than in terms of possessing commodities and calculating individual material wealth (Painter-Morland et al. 2017).

Limitations and Future Research

While we argue for the potential of *relational embodied ethics* to propose meaningful alternatives to issues of viability surrounding commoning practices, we acknowledge that our theory has certain limitations.

Specifically, we recognize that community sustenance may depend not only on community actors themselves, but also on civil society support, the state's role in regulating the commons and enforcing enclosure, the effect of power asymmetries, and capitalistic or market logics. We have briefly discussed these tensions in the context of embodied ethics, but future research should extend these discussions. For instance, research might further examine alternatives that promote pluralist, non-hierarchical governance and eliminate coercion around the world, where self-governed communities that promote diversity and equality struggle to sustain territorial and other forms of independence from the state. Furthermore, discussion of relationships between human and non-human actants, such as the material artifacts and technologically mediated processes often involved in commoning practices (Greco and Floridi 2004), is beyond the focus of this article. Future researchers might draw on related ethical perspectives, including post-human ethics and non-representational theories such as sociomateriality, radical materialist philosophy, or action-network theory, combined with empirical material, to enhance understanding of how commoning

processes may emerge from interconnections between the embodied human subject and the material world. In addition, although we already depart from binary heteronormativity, future research might address new masculinities/femininities and hybrid forms of existence enabled by feminist embodied ethics. We also acknowledge that other ethical approaches may be more relevant to some instances of commoning, so we do not idealize embodied relational ethics as the only ethical avenue. Rather, in adopting this perspective, we call for further integration of the vulnerability of the human body into business ethics research.

We hope that this approach might inspire future organizational researchers to advance theorization of the commons as a feminine or social organizing process, and to conduct empirical research on how feminist embodied ethics is concretely manifested in different contexts and practices of commoning, such as alternative currency-exchange schemes, environmental commoning, and commoning for urban regeneration. More importantly, we call for conceptual and empirical research that critically discusses individualism and focuses on interdependence as central to our lives in the global world. We believe that our work on the ‘bodies of the commons’ furthers this goal by highlighting that issues of shared corporeal vulnerability, relational, and reciprocal forms of community belonging can drive ethical and inclusive alternative forms of organizing.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: This article does not refer to any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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