

Feeling otherwise: Ambivalent affects and the politics of critique in geography

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Abstract

Scholars across the social sciences and humanities have increasingly questioned the meaning and purpose of critique. Contributing to those conversations, some geographers have advocated for affirmative or reparative practices such as reading for difference or experimentation that seek to provoke more joyful, hopeful, or enchanting affects, as alternatives to what they perceive as a prevailing forms of ‘negative’ critique. In response, others have re-emphasized the centrality of negativity and revalued negative affects in the context of regimes of racialization, heteronormativity, and coloniality. Rather than taking sides in a debate thus framed, this article develops an ambivalent position that foregrounds multiple senses of difference that exist within affirmative and reparative projects. Drawing on feminist and queer geographic work, the explicitly political and difference-oriented writing of Sedgwick and Deleuze, and queer and postcolonial affect scholars, we argue for critique characterized by an ambivalent and pluralistic attitude toward feeling. Joining those arguing for a pluralization of the moods and modes of critical work, our readings suggest the necessity of a pluralism that refuses any escape from the ‘negativity’ of the social field in favor of an affectively ambivalent engagement with the inherent politics of critique in a plural and uneven world.

Keywords

affect, affirmation, ambivalence, critique, Deleuze, pluralism, Sedgwick

Introduction: What can (a) critique do?

A disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind—whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, *jouissance*, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation. (Sedgwick, 1997: 22)

Across the humanities and social sciences, the idea of critique has increasingly been brought into question. In the early 2000s, Latour (2004: 225) asked if critique had ‘run out of steam’, suggesting that the

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scholarly habits of critique had failed, at least in part, because they had not changed as the political environment around them shifted. His concern was for what he saw as the reduction of critique to only a debunking of ideologically naturalized ‘facts’. Instead, he called for an affirmative criticism of matters of concern. Before Latour, Sedgwick (1997) posed questions about the limits of what she calls a ‘paranoid’ or negative critique. In reference to Klein’s psychoanalytic research on paranoid-schizoid and reparative-depressive positions,¹ Sedgwick outlines paranoid critique as organized by suspicion and oriented toward exposure, exemplified by the critic revealing the hidden truths of a text or event to their readers. She suggested that paranoid critique had taken priority over a range of possible interpretative styles, including those that imagine or enact reparative relations to objects of critique. These influential texts have set the stage for an ongoing conversation about the different forms that critique, or ‘post-critique’, might take and proposals for alternative strategies and affective orientations toward critical work—often linked to an explicit relationship between analysis and feeling—in and beyond geography (Anderson, 2018; Anker and Felski, 2017; Best and Marcus, 2009; Braun, 2015; Dean and Wiegman, 2013; Felski, 2015; Gibson-Graham, 2014).

These projects of questioning critique arrive in tandem with what is sometimes characterized as a turn toward affirmation. A wide range of approaches travel under descriptions of the affirmative, but one often finds in them an ontological stance emphasizing the complex, rhizomatic, and transformative source of becoming and/or an ethical or political project emphasizing positive understandings of power and promoting capacities to act, individually or collectively (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2011; Connolly, 2011; Massumi, 2002; Ruddick, 2008). Key influences on affirmative scholarship like Spinoza and Deleuze can—and, we think, should—be read as denying a necessary link between, on the one side, affirmation as an intensity associated with being-becoming and, on the other, a simplistic preference for positive emotions/affects (see Ruddick, 2008). Nevertheless, it is often when specifically addressing questions of critique that scholars

mobilizing the affirmative can surface a preference for modes of critique that generate positive feelings, set against negative or paranoid critique. Ahmed (2010) argues that in such formulations there is a risk that a normative prescription of ‘good feelings’ may work to exclude those for whom such good feelings might not be possible or desirable, and cause scholars to devalue or dismiss the generativeness of ‘bad’ feelings. Partially in response to this problem, and partially following their own intellectual genealogies in, for example, queer theory or psychoanalysis, a range of work emphasizing the negative has emerged that variously revalues negative affects or develops negative ontologies (Edelman, 2004; Harrison, 2015; Ngai, 2007; Philo, 2017).

Rather than making a choice between affirmative and negative forms of critique, we make a case for the value of ambivalence in geographic critique and scholarship more broadly. In doing so, we build on scholars who have begun to explore ambivalence as a way to describe the overdetermination and the complexity of affective scenes (Berlant, 2016; Bondi, 2004; Thajib, 2017; Ye, 2016), and we highlight how ambivalence is *already* woven into conversations about affirmative and negative critique (Berlant, 2018; Gerlach, 2017; Moss et al., 2018; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2019). Just as Wilkinson (2009: 42) has worked to ‘unsettle the hierarchy of emotions’ in political activism, we argue against the idea that some affective attitudes toward critique are inherently better than others. Instead, we highlight the significance of ambivalence in a framework that theorizes our own non-sovereignty in the face of being affected and that theorizes affect as a relational concept in which feelings are mutable, overdetermined, and not mutually exclusive of one another. This ambivalent position is not exactly a middle ground between affirmation and negation, nor is it an indifference to questions about the relationships between the moods and modes of critique raised, differently, across these conversations. Instead, we hope it offers a way of inhabiting these questions otherwise that can simultaneously resist singular prescriptions of positive or negative affect, without imagining that the rich work on affirmation or negativity can be reduced to such prescriptions.

We seek to nudge conversations about critique away from positive-negative axes and further toward considerations of the *politics* of difference at work in the texts and contexts of all kinds of critical or other-than-critical (e.g., affirmative or reparative) work. This would be difference approached both as positive plurality and as violent, differentiating unevenness of the sort analyzed in Gilmore's (2002: 22) work on racism as the 'fatal coupling of power and difference'.

As Sedgwick notes in the epigraph above, there remains relatively little critical work that explores or endorses more than one or two affective dispositions as appropriate ways of knowing, which may, she argues, either limit our ability to know in the first place or limit the set of people deemed legitimate purveyors of knowledge. For this reason, we join Sedgwick and other affirmatively- and reparatively-oriented scholars in valuing a pluralization of both the moods and modes of critical work. However—and this 'however' is not in opposition to Sedgwick, though it might be in opposition to some mobilizations of her paranoid/reparative distinction—we argue that such moves need to be understood as necessarily political, rather than as any kind of escape from the politics produced by the 'negativity' of the social field. By political, we mean that such moves seek an intervention and are situated and contextualized by difference in a world that is constituted through power relations, tensions, and conflicts that cannot always be readily resolved.

To develop our argument, we first show how difference, in multiple senses, emerges in affirmative and reparative projects, and show how difference becomes a fulcrum for those raising questions about the affirmative or reparative. We acknowledge the importance of these questions, while pointing to differences that exist *within* affirmative and reparative projects through emphasizing the politicizing contributions of feminist and queer geographers to these literatures. We then turn to two theorists, Sedgwick and Deleuze, who have been important influences in turns toward the affirmative, to emphasize the complexity and ambivalence of their thought against some readings of their work as straightforwardly positive. We do not reveal these theorists as actually theorists of negation, but

emphasize how their shared interests in non-dualistic difference, and situatedness within political projects that challenge violent and oppressive forces, ask us to imagine the possibilities of critique, and thus critical geography, otherwise. In the last substantive section, we engage with work on queer and postcolonial affect in the writing of Georgis to sketch out an approach to the politics of critique that advocates a minor pluralism attuned to the ambivalence of affect and to the vital importance of both difference-as-plurality and difference-as-unevenness in carrying forward conversations about the moods and modes of geographic critique.

Affects of critique in geographical thought

Affirmative and reparative modes of inquiry have made important contributions to geographic scholarship across a range of subfields and disciplinary conversations, including writing on critiques of political economy (Gibson-Graham, 1996); feminist affirmative politics (Moss, 2014; Ruddick, 2008); affect, representation, and materiality (Harrison, 2015; McCormack, 2012; Tolia-Kelly, 2013); and queer geographies (Browne, 2009; Lim, 2007; Seitz, 2017a; Wilkinson, 2017). Anderson (2018) highlights how affirmative and reparative scholarship seek to multiply the modes of inquiry available to geographers beyond singular scripts of critique toward a broader range of practices including, for example, description or experimentation. In this section, we show how difference matters in these conversations: differences between these projects, as well as the multiple senses of difference that circulate among both those committed to and those questioning affirmation. We then highlight feminist and queer work where affirmative and reparative modes of inquiry are mobilized to productively politicize difference in geographic scholarship (e.g., Lim, 2007; Moss et al., 2018; Ruddick, 2008; Seitz, 2017a). Rather than setting affirmation against negativity in either ontological or affective terms, we take from this work the centrality of ambivalence and from that ambivalent position seek to clarify, in the rest of the article, the politics of efforts to

pluralize the moods and modes of geographic scholarship.

Difference in affirmative and reparative critique

Much affirmative and reparative work seeks to understand and promote difference beyond singular modes or moods of critique. Yet, in that move, there is a risk that crucial aspects of difference can escape attention. For example, advocates of affirmative or reparative modes of inquiry often seek to cultivate a position ‘that does not allow the terms of critique to foreclose an ethos of presumptive generosity towards the object of [...] critique’ (McCormack, 2012: 726). A generous ethos of this sort is undoubtedly attractive to many, including ourselves, and yet, difference *can* be elided in such formulations. In particular, there is a question of what difference difference makes among objects of critique. Generosity may be a productive orientation toward many objects, but there are also objects of critique for which generosity may be a dangerous orientation, for example white supremacy or colonialism. Although it is important not to represent these objects as the same everywhere regardless of geography, as singular, or universal (important tenets of affirmative critique), an affective orientation of generosity may foreclose more than it reveals (in particular by being pushed to ignore, in the name of generosity toward an object, work or experiences that point the researcher away from generous readings), rather than having the intended result of generating new understanding through multiplying attitudes of thought toward an object. So while our affective disposition toward research matters in a non-trivial way, it remains important to situate those affects within an acknowledgment of difference (Catungal, 2017). Critics themselves—and the position of the critic need not be only an academic one—are necessarily different and, as such, the prescription of a particular affective orientation will affect a researcher and their work differently (Tolia-Kelly, 2006, 2017). This elision of difference—though by no means a universal feature of affirmative and reparative work—is, we think, at the core of a number of critical interventions that continue to raise

questions about affirmative or reparative approaches.

A number of scholars in and beyond geography have raised important concerns about how reparative and affirmative modes of inquiry may ignore difference in efforts to rethink critique for all scholars. As Harrison (2015) notes, there are real reasons to be hesitant over a turn toward affirmative, joyful, and enthusiastic affects of critique, in that such a turn may necessarily involve directing attention away from injustice and suffering. We echo that concern here, especially for those who may find joy or enthusiasm difficult to perform in the face of racist and heteropatriarchal forms of violence. Ahmed (2010) shows how feeling good may become a demand that works to discipline those whose access to various kinds of social and material goods is limited, to normalize certain conceptions of ‘the good’ over others, and to position those who are unhappy with existing arrangements as a problem, rather than to identify problems with the arrangements themselves. She further develops a critique of affirmative projects that turns on the way that positive affects are elevated as open, active, and generative, while negative affects become associated with closure and passivity. Ahmed emphasizes that negative encounters and moments of blockage have a life of their own and that ‘we cannot know in advance what different affects will do to the body before we are affected in this or that way’ (p. 215). Ahmed’s criticism of the affirmative turn could be read as a turn toward the negative, but it can just as easily be seen (as in Ruez, 2017) to suggest that some affirmative work has not been affirmative enough in approaching ‘negative’ affects and experiences. Ahmed asserts, after all, that ‘bad feelings are not simply reactive; they are creative responses to histories that are unfinished’ (Ahmed, 2010: 217).

Though much affirmative scholarship in geography does not explicitly conflate affirmation with positivity or ‘good’ feelings, there is the risk of an implicit connection between the two. Indeed, some efforts in geography to rethink critique as affirmative do make this explicit connection. Suggesting a solution to the personal negative feelings that academic work can engender, Woodyer and Geoghegan

(2013; see also Geoghegan and Woodyer, 2014) suggest that geographers can inhabit a more positive approach to critique through enthusiasm or enchantment. In doing so, they sometimes connect this positivity with affirmation, critique, and reparation suggesting ‘an “enchanted” academic stance in order to progress [to] a more affirmative mode of critique within geography’ and that ‘as a sensory encounter of unintelligibility, enchantment is an affective force that can lead to a changed emotional state’ (Woodyer and Geoghegan, 2013: 197, 203). While emphasizing too the ambivalence of their position, in which enchantment means both charm and uncanniness, their writing nevertheless tends to align affirmation with positivity, with both pitted against negative affects that include scepticism and anxiety. In their argument, enchantment becomes directly associated—through reference to Alexander von Humboldt and JK Wright—to an Enlightenment-era ‘pleasurable sense of mystery’ (p. 201). Without dismissing curiosity as a potentially enlivening motivation for inquiry and other valuable aspects of Woodyer and Geoghegan’s provocation, there is a risk, in the name of feeling better, of sidestepping longstanding feminist and anti-racist critiques of the masculinist and Eurocentric ocularcentrism that such forms of knowledge imply (Haraway, 1990; Rose, 1997; Said, 1978).

Another important angle on affirmative work emerges from Wilkinson’s (2017) critique of Hardt’s account of love as a political concept. While not dismissive of love in general, Wilkinson argues that Hardt’s account reduces the necessarily complicated and ambivalent nature of love to a singularly positive joy. In doing so, Wilkinson argues that Hardt fails to account for difference—specifically, how the same loving action or encounter might be experienced differently—and assumes, as well, too much about the political value of togetherness against discomfort or desires for distance. She builds on Ahmed’s revaluation of bad feelings and Spinozan themes of capacities to act that have been central to affirmative scholarship. Here, Wilkinson makes the important point that an undifferentiated project of increasing capacities to act is potentially problematic in contexts where those capacities to act are, from the beginning, differently distributed.

She suggests, in contrast to pervasive work centered on increasing affective capacities, and in the context of the massive inequalities that characterize the current moment, that some individuals’ capacities to act may instead need to be diminished.

Eng (2016: 3) poses similar questions to reparative approaches. Highlighting the implications of the Kleinian account of the reparative psychic position in colonial relations, Eng argues that ‘affect is unevenly distributed in the history of liberal empire and reason’ and shows ‘how love and hate are affectively policed to create a field of good and bad objects and liberal and indigenous subjects, regulated by a colonial morality that is not the cause but rather the effect of processes of repair’. Eng’s argument itself exemplifies ambivalence in and toward the reparative in that his critique of Klein’s concept of reparation is developed, in part *through* a Kleinian framework, which Eng (2010) has also productively used elsewhere to make sense of the racialization of kinship and intimacy. Eng argues that psychic processes of reparation can be found at work within colonizing subjectivities and projects, which raises important questions about the political limits of the reparative. Most significant for our purposes is Eng’s emphasis on how the reparative impulse is ‘unevenly distributed and received among different objects and subjects’ (Eng, 2016: 6). From this perspective, the reparative position can be understood not, or at least not only, as an alternative to paranoid critique, but as already bound up with the regimes of violent differentiation (e.g., racialization and coloniality) that are rightly the object of critique.

Taken together, the scholars discussed here raise questions about how affirmative and reparative modes of inquiry engage with the unevenness produced by heteronormative, racialized, colonial, and capitalist regimes. To be sure, these questions are not equally applicable to all affirmative and reparative work. However, if care is not taken, there are risks that, precisely in the affirmative embrace of difference as multiplicity or of pluralizing modes of inquiry against singular scripts of critique, the ‘negativity’ produced by those regimes will be sidelined *or* that scholars will assume too much about how particular affects or interpretive styles will be

experienced and how those experiences will be shared. This is the danger, following Tolia-Kelly's (2013: 157) similar point about differences within materialist geographies, of accounts that 'depoliticize and make palatable the material world'. Rather than enabling political action—which is a goal of much affirmative and reparative work—an insufficient engagement with difference, including both plurality and unevenness, risks eliding politics altogether.

Affirming ambivalence

The problems posed above are not, we think, solved simply by a turn to the negative as such. Indeed, we wonder what the language of the 'turn' does in terms of occluding or misrepresenting that from which one turns away (Wiegman, 2012). Many scholars have argued against the danger of fetishizing the negative in research, especially for marginalized groups, even when attempting to use that negativity as a leverage point for better circumstances or access to resources. Research that frames people of color and Indigenous people as only marginalized, injured, or damaged risks re-entrenching (rather than ameliorating) these very characteristics, both rhetorically and materially (McKittrick, 2011; Tuck, 2009). In a similar vein, Muñoz (2009) argues that anti-relational strands of queer theorizing (see Bersani, 1987, 1995; Caserio et al., 2006), while offering useful critical leverage on what Joseph (2002) has called the romance of community, nevertheless risk getting caught in their own 'romances of the negative' in turn (e.g., Edelman, 2004)—that through their very anti-relational theorization of sexuality or queerness along a singular axis which is inherently disconnected from race, gender, and class, this tends therefore toward undermining the intersectionality endemic to queer of color intellectual and political projects (Muñoz 2009; see also Cohen, 1997). Refusing both kinds of romance, Muñoz turns to Felman's (2003) account of a radical negativity that goes so far as to negate the positive/negative opposition itself. In dialog with that radical negativity, Muñoz develops a conceptualization of queerness in which a relentless critique of the present is linked to a very particular kind of hope for

another kind of time and place (for a different perspective on queer of color negativity, see Benedicto, 2019). Similar impulses can be seen across feminist geographic work where, for example, Koopman (2011) discusses the need to 'push back against what I do not want in the world in order make space for nurturing what I do want' (p. 276).

What is important here is *not* resolving tensions between affirmation and negativity. Retaining this tension, this ambivalence, allows us to sit closer to an impasse, in which 'there is no certainty, no guarantee, no external point from which to anchor our politics' (Secor and Linz, 2017: 571), and to acknowledge the undecidability in the worlds we research (Kern and McLean, 2017). We seek to inhabit this undecidable impasse while engaging with the difference and politics that already exists within affirmative and reparative projects, as well as with the productive tensions within varying approaches to affect (cf. Hitchen, 2019; Lim, 2007; Seitz and Farhadi, 2019).² Hemmings (2005) argues that the language of affect theory has too often ignored some of the complexities and rich histories of feminist, queer, and postcolonial thought in order to make a case for itself. But it is also the case that work on affect, and by extension affirmation (and negativity), often emerges directly from feminist, queer, and postcolonial work, even if this work is not always centered in disciplinary conversations about the affirmative. The project to question modes of critique, to think otherwise, and to embed thought as an embodied activity indelibly connected to the researcher's positionality is one that can be broadly associated with feminist geographies since their inception, albeit in myriad and changing forms (England, 1994; Militz et al., 2019; Rose, 1997; Sultana, 2007). From this perspective, it is not surprising that feminist and queer geographers have developed some of the most productive approaches to affirmative and reparative modes of inquiry precisely because, at their best, they bring to the fore questions of difference and politics.

Gibson-Graham's (1996, 2008) work is of central importance in understanding the possibilities and prospects of affirmative and reparative modes of geographic scholarship that are attuned to difference

and that offer alternative moods and modes of inquiry as a politicizing project. They pose a critique of Marxist political economy, arguing that this approach has become dogmatic and masculinist, unnecessarily representing capitalism as totalizing, dominating, and inevitable, and thus, as the sole cause of social phenomena (see also Deutsche, 1991; Massey, 1991). In representing capitalism in monolithic terms, academics mistheorize the economy and reproduce the notion that the only economic relations that matter are capitalist ones. Their diverse economies framework rethinks epistemological attitudes toward the economy as an object of geographical thought while explicating how capitalist and non- or not-only-capitalist economic activities exist alongside other dimensions of social life. By rhetorically diminishing capitalism as an object of inquiry, Gibson-Graham (2008: 614) seek to evade tendencies in other critical accounts that ‘seemed to cement the world in place rather than readying it for transformation’. In this affirmative move, Gibson-Graham do not ignore the fact that myriad forms of global structural violence are linked to capitalism in complex ways; they instead generate plural accounts of economic life that are meant to open up, rather than shut down, critical energies and political action. They offer practices of ‘reading for difference’ as alternative modes of inquiry that have been taken up across the range of geographic research to problematize singular narratives of critique that only read for dominance at the expense of the political possibility present in actually existing heterogeneity (e.g., Brown, 2009; Dombroski, 2016; Wynne-Jones, 2014). At the same time, it remains important to not set aside the ways in which this heterogeneity is itself structured unevenly, as Bledsoe et al. (2019) discuss in their recent work on diverse economies and racial capitalism.

More generally, theorizing affirmation has become a mode of thinking otherwise and focusing attention on capacities to act politically. Ruddick has developed affirmative thinking in geography through rigorous work on its philosophical roots. She examines affirmation as ‘potentia—that is, the impulse to preserve and expand out powers to act’ (Ruddick, 2008: 2589). She suggests instead of a

negative framing of the dialectic we might, through Spinoza, find a positive dialectic-as-becoming that deals with difference in terms other than through opposition, contradiction, recognition, and representation (see also Deleuze, 1994; Smith, 2012). Ruddick’s (2008: 2601) understanding of affirmation approaches joy as a form of ‘congruence between others and ourselves[,] [. . .] a knowledge produced in common’ rather than an individually-experienced emotional state. Thus ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ emotions may both be affirmative, if they increase our capacities for action or our set of available affects (Ruddick, 2010). In this vein, feminist geographers have theorized affirmation as not about individual positivity but as instead about imagining other worlds, accounting for difference in its myriad forms, and insisting that transformation is possible.

Moss (2014), building on the work of Braidotti (2011), exemplifies the idea that transformation cannot be conceptualized as incidental to our epistemological strategies as researchers. Her impersonal view of affirmation-as-transformation sees affirmation as being about mediating limits, intervening in the world, and finding a sustainable ethics of survival (Moss, 2014). In their writing on collective biography, feeling, and affirmation, Moss et al. (2018) develop a complex account of the relationship between emotions and the expansion or diminishment of embodied and structural capacities for action in the academy. Their conceptualization of affirmation emphasizes the dissolution of the ‘I’ into the ‘we’ through collective biography as a mode of inquiry (Hawkins et al., 2014). These authors emphasize affirmation in terms of capacities for action and carefully theorize emotions like joy as ambivalent—that is, closely connected to and sometimes indistinguishable from other emotions (Falconer Al-Hindi et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2014). Yet, there may remain, as Ahmed notes, an implicit link between impersonal conceptualizations of affirmation and positive feeling: though Moss et al. (2018) rigorously theorize affirmation as *not* linked to any particular emotional stance, the focus in their work *does* remain on joyfulness—and not only in the strictly delimited Spinozan sense—even as they usefully insist on the interrelationality, complexity,

and ambivalence of feeling. To build on Moss et al. (2018) in this article, we wonder how their project could be developed further when their affirmative politics is connected up with other less obviously positive kinds of feeling. Toward such an end, Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar's (2019) reparative approach to weariness provides important insights into both the generativity of negative feelings and the political potential of (in)action.

Queer geographers have worked with a range of affirmative and reparative approaches to develop geographically sensitive and politically capacious accounts of the geographies of sexualities and queer politics. Working with Gibson-Graham's approach to reading for difference, Brown (2009; 2015) has brought important attention to diverse gay economies beyond those captured by a rubric of neoliberalism, and Oswin (2007) points to the complex possibilities and complicities of queer globalizations. Responding to the difficulties of understanding spaces of people who have been marginalized that are also themselves exclusionary, Browne (2009) draws on Sedgwick to emphasize the value of local and fragmentary ways of knowing that cannot be defined by a single totalizing theory or affective state (also see Brown and Browne, 2011). Lim (2007) emphasizes how theories of affect and Sedgwick's reparative position both suggest different ways of relating beyond normative understandings of identity, what bodies can do, and how we can feel about politics. In resonance with the writing on affirmation cited above, repair in Lim's rendering does not seek to diminish oppositional forms of relation but to render them livable—without setting up an unnecessary opposition between ethical openness and political critiques of power and normativity (also see Hutta 2016 on paradoxical affirmation).

Seitz (2017a) draws on Sedgwick's writing on paranoia and repair to highlight the messiness of objects that are often framed negatively by queer and other critical scholars. Far from being objects that people uncritically accept as sites of belonging and inclusion, Seitz draws on fieldwork in a queer church to highlight the multiplicity of feelings that people may have in relations to complex, imperfect objects, and their capacities to integrate structural critique with capacious modes of relating. He

highlights how people work variously with and around these objects, try to change them, believe in them, disavow them, negotiate with them, and take with them what they need while leaving what they do not in complex ways. A reparative approach for Seitz is not about positivity, and neither can it be reduced to the cruelty of optimism in Berlant's (2011) framing. It is about the ambivalent mediation of expectation, survival, and the coalescence of relationality. Seitz's work moves reflexively in the muddled middle ground between affirmation and negation, and emphasizes that relation cannot ever be only one thing. It is complex, and sometimes, though relations may be damaging, people find ways to survive them, at least in the meantime. Repair in these writings means managing good-enough relations with always-imperfect objects. Further, Seitz (2017b), acknowledging and responding to Eng's critiques of reparation outlined earlier, emphasizes differences among those objects and foregrounds the differences between, say, a troubling reparative impulse toward colonial power compared to a reparative impulse toward messy projects of anti-colonial coalition building.

All this work opens up important questions about the kinds of stories we tell, often only implicitly, about what we study, how we can or should feel about it, and about how these stories make us and others feel. Much reparative and affirmative work—especially insofar as it engages with discussions about critique—shares a focus on telling stories that feel better to their tellers or their readers or that motivate or capacitate action in some way, often with an implicit assumption or explicit claim that feeling only one particular way (i.e., feeling better) promotes action in ways that feeling in any other way or in a multiplicity of ways does not. There is, to be sure, often a compelling rationale to such claims, but the movement from story to feeling to action may be neither so straightforward nor so singular, shaped as it is by difference (Gammerl et al., 2017). On this score, we think feminist and queer geographic currents within affirmative and reparative projects have tended to be better at understanding the way that these stories, feelings, and actions are constituted by a politics of difference and point toward the necessary ambivalence

involved in the attempt to tell better stories. This engagement with difference and ambivalence is also central to the genealogies of the affirmative and reparative in thinkers like Sedgwick and Deleuze, for whom the affirmative and the reparative are not a retreat from politics, but rather embedded with political critiques of fascism and heteronormativity.

The affirmative turn after Sedgwick and Deleuze

Sedgwick and Deleuze are often cited as key figures in moves toward critical or more-than-critical modes of analysis that are intended, in some way, to feel better. Indeed, Sedgwick's account of paranoid and reparative critique provides a conceptual vocabulary in which certain affirmative scholars can set themselves against paranoid affects and practices. Deleuze's philosophical stance on affirmation have been readily taken up in what Harrison (2015: 285) calls an 'alliance between the ontological and ethical' that he argues risks conflating distinct forms of analysis. There are bases for such moves in Sedgwick's and Deleuze's writing, but we highlight how some of Deleuze's and Sedgwick's key insights are downplayed in their uptake as writers of positive feeling. Our aim is not to suggest that Sedgwick and Deleuze are really theorists of negativity, but to emphasize that in neither writer's thought can critical affects be siphoned off and classified either as positive or negative. Instead, their thinking, concerned as they each are, differently, with non-dualistic thinking and with structural unevenness, brings attention to the ambivalence of affect and the politics of critique.

Complicating depressive/reparative critique

Sedgwick's (1997, 2007) account of paranoid and reparative critique continues to reverberate in and beyond queer theory. She describes paranoia as the prevailing tenor of critical theory, as an approach that views text and event as structured by meaning hidden to most, but not to the learned reader. Paranoia's logic is anticipatory and functions through exposing how oppressive mechanisms are hidden

behind every social structure and phenomenon. Paranoid critique, as Sedgwick explains it, defines the structural inevitability of oppressive mechanisms like capitalism and patriarchy and represents those mechanisms as totalizing and monolithic. The critic thus situates herself as epistemologically in command of and master over her object—as in a position of sovereignty with relation to her object. Sedgwick's argument is that, while vitally important in the history of feminist and queer thought, paranoia has problematically become the only (or at least the most privileged) strategy for the pursuit of critique (Wiegman, 2015). She suggests another critical relationship to the object—the reparative—that is more capable of dealing with the messiness, ambivalence, and complexity of our never monolithic *relation to* objects.

Reparative reading seeks to operate through a less totalizing model and attempts to not situate the author in a position of mastery with relation to her objects. It challenges the relationship between academic inquiry, everyday knowledges, and practice to form what Sedgwick (1997: 23) calls 'local theories and nonce taxonomies'. She describes reparation as associated with the exploration of multiple affects, rather than privileging only one affect, thus seeking to highlight the value of multiple epistemological strategies and not having to decide on a single strategy (i.e., a paranoid one) in advance. However, this multiplication does not emerge out of a view-from-nowhere kind of pluralism, but rather emerges squarely within the particular time and space of queer theory and literary criticism, the specificities of the psychoanalytic traditions with which Sedgwick is engaged, and, most importantly for our purposes, within Sedgwick's long-term political project of mobilizing difference as multiplicity against the violent devaluations of homophobia. Insufficiently engaging the complexities of those contexts, commentators on reparation have tended to frame her claims as posing an abstract choice between paranoid and reparative critique (e.g., Barnwell, 2015; Stacey, 2014). In practice, Sedgwick does not really advocate for one critical stance over others (Hanson, 2011). Instead, her position is one of interchangeability, inter-relationality, and ambivalence with relation to objects that cannot

be apprehended otherwise than non-sovereignly, through an admixture of affects, which necessarily includes aggression, paranoia, and ‘negative’ feelings (Dean and Wiegman, 2013).

Sedgwick inherits and adapts her descriptions of paranoid and reparative critique from Klein’s writing on the paranoid/schizoid and depressive/reparative positions that form part of her model of psychic structure and object relations. Klein’s position is an adaptation of the psychic stages found in Freud’s (1962 [1905]) *Three Essays*. But while (at least in some readings) Freud’s stages are linear and totalizing, Klein’s positions emphasize the itinerancy of the psyche so that these stages become interrelated and overlapping. The subject can thus move between them—albeit not necessarily as a function of individual ‘choice’—rather than moving from one to the next and never backwards (Sedgwick, 2007). Yet, for the Kleinian subject, the paranoid position does necessarily *come first* in the psychic structure of the infant, who apprehends the world first of all from the point of view of aggression and anxiety. A crucial—and underemphasized—element of the reparative position is therefore that what is being imperfectly repaired is an already-split partial object. The reparative *depends upon* the paranoid and cannot be conceptualized without it (Seitz, 2017a). For Sedgwick it is not a matter of simply switching epistemological strategies and approaching an object anew from a depressive/reparative rather than a paranoid/schizoid stance. The object has already been apprehended (perhaps unconsciously) by the subject in the paranoid mode, and this paranoid splitting cannot be undone. The task of the depressive/reparative mode is to gather back together the subject’s shattered object, but not necessarily in a way that resembles some ‘original’ object prior to its paranoid apprehension (Sedgwick, 2007).

Sedgwick’s alignment of the reparative and depressive provides one reason to be skeptical of a ‘reparative turn’ that would associate the reparative position only with positive affect (Love, 2010; Wiegman, 2014). Sedgwick (2007: 637) says that it offers both the ‘precondition of severe depression and also a quite varied range of resources for surviving, repairing, and moving beyond that depression’.

That Sedgwick developed these theories following her own diagnosis with cancer is another key element of the ethics that she seeks. The reparative/depressive position purports an openness to the object and willingness to subsist alongside it, to live with it, and, perhaps, to change it and to be changed by it (Sedgwick, 2007). The interaction between the paranoid and reparative is such that the threatening objects of the former are reassembled (not into a pre-existing totality) in the latter (Sedgwick, 1997). This is, then, more an ambivalent than an affirmative enterprise. At most, it is about cultivating and, as best we can, trying to live within ‘good enough’ objects and relations.

In making these observations about the relations between the paranoid and reparative position in Sedgwick’s reading of Klein, we highlight three things. First, paranoia and repair are related and do not exclude one another. Second, the reparative/depressive position does not equate to a singularly positive account of a particular object. Finally, we note the importance of recognizing Sedgwick’s concepts (like all concepts) as intellectual and political interventions within particular contexts. This is, of course, not at all to say that they should not be mobilized in other contexts, but only that the embeddedness of Sedgwick’s concepts within a project of contesting violent logics and promoting difference against normativity cannot be ignored.

Affirmation as critique in Deleuze

Just as we question the alignment of the reparative with positive feeling in Sedgwick, in this section, we seek to complicate readings of Deleuze that link his affirmative philosophy with positive affects as critiqued by Ahmed (2010) and Harrison (2015). Specifically, we draw on Deleuze’s (1983) writings on Nietzsche—in which Deleuze makes some of his clearest statements about his attitude toward critique—to claim that affirmation in Deleuze is far more ambivalent than is often acknowledged by those advocating for more positive critical affects.

To begin, it is worth examining how Deleuze uses the term affirmation in his work on Nietzsche, since it also cannot be neatly aligned with positive feeling. In Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche, just as in

Moss et al. (2018) and Ruddick (2008) above, joy is not aligned with a literal external emotional expression of joyfulness. As in Sedgwick, Deleuze (1983: 16) persistently contradicts this equation: “those who suffer from the superabundance of life” make suffering an affirmation in the same way as they make intoxication an activity’. Enthusiasm, joy, hopefulness, enchantment, and so on, are affirmative only insofar as they allow a power to be aligned with what it can do. Affirmation is about a set of underlying forces that are not oriented toward the outward emotional expressions of a body. Rather than referring to an outward positivity, affirmation in Deleuze is about finding a new way of thinking that is aligned with chaos and the being of becoming. The affirmation that accompanies joyfulness is a set of physiological or unconscious psychic processes that may or may not be represented in consciousness by an actual feeling of joy. He writes, ‘it is no doubt more difficult to characterize these active forces for, by nature, they escape consciousness. [...] Consciousness is essentially reactive; this is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity is capable of’ (p. 41). In Deleuze, affirmation can in no way be equated with an outward emotional state, which he reads as an *effect* of other forces. Illness or depression may separate us from what we can do, but it also ‘reveals a new capacity, [...] endows me with a new will that I can make my own, going to the limit of a strange power’ (p. 66). An apparently unmoving, ill, or mournful body may be just as prone toward ‘joy’ or affirmation as any other.

While Deleuze and Sedgwick come together in their valuation of non-dualistic difference, and the above paragraph highlights some other important affinities between affirmative and reparative positions, Deleuze’s understanding of critique cannot be neatly mapped onto Sedgwick’s categories. On the one side, we find descriptions of critique that resonate with what Sedgwick might call paranoid critique: ‘philosophy is at its most positive as critique, as an enterprise of demystification’ (Deleuze, 1983: 106). Yet, at other times, his understanding of critique is quite distinct from the politics of exposure that Sedgwick aligns with paranoid critique. The role of critique is one of creation, of producing new

thoughts and new concepts. He writes, ‘but does not critique, understood as critique of knowledge itself, express new forces capable of giving thought another sense? [...] Thinking would then mean *discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life*’ (p. 101, original emphasis). From this point of view, critique in Deleuze is both oppositional and creative. Much can be made of this as a general point, and Deleuze’s affirmative stance in relation to difference as positive multiplicity is often a key reference for those seeking to pluralize the moods and modes of critique beyond singular scripts. However, much work that centers Deleuze as a figure of positivity ignores the politics of his commitments to retheorizing and foregrounding the importance of difference in philosophical projects (Deleuze, 1994; see Cockayne et al., 2017, 2020). Thus, there is a need for such conversations to center the differentiating forms of violence and domination that from the outset unevenly shape possibilities of life, and the embeddedness of conceptual work within those uneven processes. From that perspective, conversations about critique, and its affirmations and negations, could be less between lively, positive affects and the privileging of negativity in relation to death in the abstract, and more about the multiple senses of difference, the politics of intellectual work, and the complex relations between and within positive and negative forms of feeling. McKittrick’s (2014) project of thinking a ‘nonlinear’ Black living against remunerations of Black death stands as an important example, as a position that grapples directly with the negativity of anti-Black violence precisely through an engagement with the otherwise possibilities of Black life occasioned, but not contained, by that violence (McKittrick, 2011).

Situated in its political context, Deleuze’s writing on difference can, we think, play a role in conversations about the politics of critique, but pursuing such a project also requires going beyond Deleuze in any number of ways. Yet new critical projects are not, for all that, necessarily at odds with his writing on critique. Critique for Deleuze is not an ahistorical method. He writes: ‘if philosophy’s critical task is not actively taken up in every epoch philosophy dies. [...] This is why philosophy has an essential relation to time: it is always against its

time, critique of the present world. The philosopher creates concepts that are neither eternal nor historical but untimely and not of the present' (p. 107). Critique must always be refreshing itself and can never be said to be identical to itself. What was useful as critique for Nietzsche or Deleuze—what was capable of producing a new image of thought—may not have the same effects in our own present moment. One implication of critique being against or out of time with itself is that it appears at the surface to be always antagonistic. Deleuze (p. 106) writes that 'a philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one, is not a philosophy'. This claim further complicates the use of Deleuze as the supposed philosopher of positivity and feeling good (see also Culp, 2016). In Ahmed's (2010) terms—and somewhat against the grain of her own reading of Deleuze—what Deleuze suggests here is that the critic-philosopher has to be a killjoy.

The point here is not to reimagine Deleuze as a philosopher of negative feelings, which would not be particularly convincing in the broader context of his work, but to highlight a certain ambivalence that persists within Deleuze's affirmative project. Indeed, it's possible that through terms like affirmation and joy, Deleuze remains associated, perhaps by his own design, with ethically or epistemologically positive projects, in which, as in Ahmed's critique, the joyful shapes what is able to count as desirable or good in a political sense. Like Sedgwick, Deleuze's work needs to be understood in the context of its politics—where his thinking around difference as positive multiplicity is mobilized in implicitly or explicitly anti-fascist and anti-capitalist directions (most obviously in his collaborations, e.g. Deleuze and Guatarri, 1987). In that sense, a non-oppositional understanding of difference need not preclude and may even enable a politics opposed to an unjust political and economic order. Advocates of affirmative politics may find such an assertion obvious, but it bears repeating to the extent that moves to pluralize the moods and modes of critical work can veer in both politicizing and depoliticizing directions. In the final substantive section of this article, we clarify the relationship between critical ambivalence and politics, through engaging Georgis's writing on queer affect, and

suggest some of the implications of this approach for geographic scholarship

Queer affects, minor pluralisms

Projects emphasizing affirmative affects often share with more negatively-oriented work a desire to orient attention to the mutual constitution of feeling and knowing and to the affects that our critical stories invoke and provoke. We entirely endorse such attention, even as we have sought to sketch out the difficulties imposed by an undifferentiated positive-negative framing. From that perspective, we have highlighted the significance of ambivalence in the context of relationships between feeling, knowing, and acting that are complex, marked by difference, and essentially impossible to predict in advance. Georgis' (2013) writing on queer affect provides an exemplary case of the contribution this kind of ambivalence can make to the kinds of critical stories that people can tell. Georgis intervenes in conversations about 'racial suffering' and the 'anxieties of producing non-white people as victims rather than as resistant agents against racial injuries' by offering an analytic trained on the psychic work that stories do, rather than only on their representational content (2013: 3; cf. Cheng, 2001). Navigating between the 'better story' of resistance that has marked some currents of postcolonial studies and stories of relatively undifferentiated suffering—without entirely disavowing either—Georgis emphasizes instead theorizing from the point of view of those queer affects that point to improper objects, undomesticated feelings, and repudiated social desire that 'provide the conditions for engaging with subjectivity's aberrant desires when it comes into conflict with the existing better story' (Georgis, 2013: 11). Georgis' text moves deftly across a diverse set of experiences, narratives, and questions—from questions of agency and subalternity to 'terrorist subjectivities' to postcolonial sexualities. Throughout, she emphasizes the absences and omissions from the stories shaping intellectual and political collectivities, while also remaining committed to understanding the psychic work that people's own better stories do, in terms of constructing survivable relations to the situations in which they find themselves.

Queer affect, in this account, emerges in an ambivalence toward community mediated by the abject, the rejected, and the desire for forms of gratification that emerge beyond both liberal heteronormative modernity and fixed collectivities-in-resistance. This ambivalence, crucially, marks Georgis' relation to the idea of a better story. Any story, whether of resistance or pain, is inevitably haunted by what is excluded from that story: by subjects' lack of transparency to themselves, and by their inherent dependence on others who in turn necessarily have their own stories. From this perspective, difference within and among subjects renders 'knowledge [...] itself contingent and incomplete' (p. 56). These queer affects and their ambivalences are suggestive for approaching discussions of affirmative or negative critique in geographic scholarship. They push us to consider both how the search for a better story operates in the discipline and the omissions and elisions that can mark such better stories. It also reminds us to remain attuned in a more reparative way, beyond an indexing of positive and negative, to the various and ambivalent kinds of psychic work that different stories do—both in meta-conversations about critique and in everyone's interactions with the world.

Pointing as Georgis does to the relationship between politics and critique through ideas of ambivalence and queer affect suggests the limits of approaches that set out either affirmation or negation as a singularly enabling or appropriate affective orientation, ontological grounding, or better story for critique. Likewise, Berlant (2016) highlights the inevitable ambivalence of political life in common, and that this ambivalence extends into our critical practices as the result of the partially shared terrain that politics and critique occupy. That shared terrain is nothing less than the world—in all of its plurality. For Arendt (1970: 4) the world is that which 'lies between people' and this 'irreplaceable in-between' is simultaneously the site, condition, and outcome of politics. This is a world that takes us outside of ourselves and into an engagement with a plurality of distinctly equal and equally distinct others. As in Berlant, this plurality is an ambivalent site in Arendt (1958) where the existence of others is both a necessary condition of any political action and marks

the limit of any individual's agency. Approaching this plural world requires, as Mahmood (2008) has shown, attention to critique's context of iteration and the varieties of practices and imaginaries that inform critical orientations across those contexts. In such a world, there remains a necessary gap between understandings of how things are and what one should feel or do in response.

To be sure, moves to pluralize the moods and modes of critique in geography have much to offer in such a context, and geographic scholarship is, in many ways, already marked by a certain pluralism. For example, economic geographers—making an argument that is not limited to that sub-discipline—have held up 'engaged pluralism' as a way of engaging with disciplinary conversations in the context of multiple perspectives, methodologies, and critical aims (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010). We would also suggest that engaged pluralism espouses an imaginary of, and set of feelings toward, economic geography as welcoming of a diverse range of methods and approaches, purporting an affective orientation toward an idea of the subdiscipline defined by its inclusion and generosity. Engaged pluralism can be read as an attempt to cultivate economic geography's intimate publics organized around a perceived shared affective orientation toward and alongside the subdiscipline (Berlant, 2011). Yet, as Rosenman et al. (2019) show, this 'feeling rule' about economic geography does not necessarily reflect the actual realities of writing and publishing in economic geography, which continues to privilege a relatively narrow set of mostly white men scholars and topics (see also Cockayne et al., 2018). This particular appeal to pluralism, as a suggested (and, perhaps, rather singular) way of feeling and knowing about economic geography may not measure up to the object that it attempts to describe, or its set of associations that include institutional circumstances and researchers' relationships to them.

Rosenman et al.'s (2019) sympathetic critique points to the embodied, emotional, and institutional work that goes into the *production* of concepts like engaged pluralism, which are still too often imagined as disconnected from the feeling subject—where concepts become tools that can be

unproblematically picked up, put down, and used in ways that neither foundationally affect the individual ‘using’ them, nor the plural world that they are supposed to straightforwardly explain. Implicitly, then, this relationship toward concepts is essentially a fantasy of dominance and mastery over not only the world, but also the tool-concepts that we hope will explain it, the researcher-self, and the relations therein (Sedgwick, 1997)—an imagined and false relation that we have referred to as one of sovereignty or mastery over objects. Concepts understood thus are a way of imposing order and organizing the world, yet if concepts tend toward coherence, how do they deal with and manage messiness and difference? Seeking ambivalence means not just repositioning our relationship to the production of concepts which can no longer be assumed to be disconnected from feeling, but acknowledging that the concepts with which we are already familiar may have other stories to tell.

Trying to be open to those other stories is, for us, the primary promise of projects that seek to pluralize the moods and modes of critical scholarship. However, the pluralism of moods and modes of critique that we support must necessarily be a *minor* one. Attention to the ‘minor’ in both Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986) engagement with minor literatures and Katz’s (1996) development of minor theory in geography can productively inform a pluralism that maintains a political edge, even as it enacts and encourages a multiplicity of analytical styles and aims (see also Closs Stephens et al., 2017; Jellis and Gerlach, 2017; Kern and McLean, 2017; Merriam, 2019). Katz’s work draws out the alignment of the minor with everyday experience, with subjects minoritized against dominant regimes, and against ‘the language and practice of mastery’ (Katz, 1996: 497). One implication is that pluralistic impulses—whether couched in terms of reading for difference, reparative critique, or affirmative multiplicity—can effectively open up the grounds of critique, but they are at their best when they are kept in dialog with feminist, queer, and post- and de-colonial discomfort with the world as it is and their implicit hope that the world might yet be something other than what it is now.

Such pluralisms would refuse the gesture toward mastery implicit in an all-encompassing, relativizing pluralism. Rather than a multiplication that moves beyond politics, a minor pluralism would proliferate politics. Deleuze and Guattari argue that ‘in major literatures’—major pluralisms for our purposes—‘the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as mere environment or background’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17). The social milieu, in this case, is that world-in-between of plurality and unevenness that is relegated to the background of multiple individual lives and projects. This would be a kind of pluralism that retreats from the ‘negativity’ of a social field shaped by violence, domination, and unevenness. In contrast, the ‘cramped space’ of the minor ‘forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it’ (p. 17). The promise of a minor pluralism lies precisely in its ability to attune us to these other (better) stories and the multiplicity of feelings they provoke in differently situated people, without assuming too much in advance about *how* such differences in positioning will move others to feel or act, which might paper over the plurality that persists in the face of the ‘negativity’ of the social field (Bledsoe and Wright, 2019).

Thus, this minor pluralism cannot be a pluralism that refuses critical evaluation or judgment altogether, but it needs to be a kind of adjudication situated in and responsive to both the inherent non-sovereignty of being affected in conditions of plurality and the uneven realities of domination and violence that constitute our world. In this sense, following Povinelli (2011), it requires acknowledging that such evaluation can only ‘emerge in the queasy space of dwelling within’ the worlds being evaluated, ‘a dwelling within that is reshaping the subject who will then assess these worlds’ (p. 33). In that sense, it is a response to an ‘immanent obligation’ that one cannot simply choose to choose and that is instead based on a ‘form of relationality that one finds oneself drawn to and finds oneself nurturing, or caring for in the midst of critical reflexivity’

(Povinelli 2011: 33). In responding to such obligation, we turn in part to Arendt (1981; also see Barnett, 2017) who, by taking seriously the ramifications of existing with a plurality of others, offers an alternative to accounts of judgment based on either sovereign decision or the application of universal standards, and instead approaches judgment as inherently political in the sense of involving an unavoidable address to others, whose response cannot be assumed or predicted in advance.

The necessity of such judgment, and the weight of such obligations, precludes a once-and-for-all choice between negation and affirmation, whether in affective or ontological registers—an impossibility occasioned by the plurality of the world and the indeterminacy of affect. However, insofar as difference qua plurality is inseparable from difference qua domination, Arendt's conception of judgment needs to be reworked such that, as Bhabha (1994) puts it in his reading of Morrison's *Beloved*, 'the very historical basis for our ethical judgement undergoes radical revision' when encountering 'the victim of social death' (p. 16). A minor pluralism, then, would be one that seeks *not* to evade or move beyond a reckoning with the catastrophes of racial capitalism, historical and continuing colonialisms, or heteronormativity—and their complex interrelations—but rather one that can engage with the multiple, ambivalent ways that people feel, know, and live in, to follow McKittrick (2014), nonlinear relations to these formations and with the possibilities of feeling, knowing, and acting otherwise and elsewhere (see also Oswin, 2020).

Conclusion

A significant part of our argument can be captured in Sedgwick's (1990) axiom that 'people are different from each other' (p. 22). While this could seem a truism, we continue to think that it presents some crucial questions to critical projects, and we hope that this essay presents a useful framing for further thinking around the place of multiple senses of difference within conversations about the modes and moods of critique in geographic scholarship. Affirmative and reparative projects have brought important approaches,

methods, and questions into geographic conversations. So has work seeking to revalue negative critical affects as an appropriate response to a world shaped by coloniality and heteronormative racial capitalism. We have sought to inhabit an ambivalent position that remains attuned to the importance of thinking affect and epistemology together, but that would do so without privileging either positive or negative feelings in advance. From this position, we seek to find a way to multiply the affective explorations that are animating the discipline, to be able to engage with other stories, and sit with ideas and concepts in ways that ignore neither the subjectivities of the researcher nor the plural and uneven world they seek to understand. Further, rather than centering these conversations on a positive-negative axis, we highlight the *politics* of feeling differently that exist among and within affirmative and reparative projects, and we argue for the necessity of keeping both difference as plurality and difference as unevenness in productive tension. Toward that end, feminist, queer, and de-/post-colonial theorizations of affect make some of the central contributions, in which a dissatisfaction with the world and the absence of a universal subject foregrounds the importance of feeling differently in a non-deterministic way. We hope, as well, that our readings of Sedgwick and Deleuze can help to counter their sometimes one-sided take-up in conversations about critique, while also highlighting the potential of their work in continuing to move thought forward.

Our argument follows in much longer traditions of work in feminist geography and elsewhere that have called attention to how the ways of feeling about a discipline are often shaped by a narrow set of scholars—mostly white, mostly men—and how those ways of feeling are often narrow, singular, and not able to give an account of the differences endemic to intellectual inquiry. It also shares much with recent work that pushes back against concepts that fail to measure up to the difference of the world, for example, in recent critiques of planetary urbanization as unable to account for actually existing differences that trouble the universal application of the concept (Oswin, 2018; Ruddick et al., 2018) or

critiques of assemblage as mobilized in geography as failing to account for difference (Kinkaid, 2019). Though arriving by somewhat different paths, it also shares something with recent projects emphasizing the openness of politics against certain styles of asserting theoretical mastery (Joronen and Häkli, 2017; Kern and McLean, 2017).

Critical geographers will never be affected by any object or argument in entirely the same way—due to both the difference of unevenness and the differences of plurality. This claim also applies to our arguments about ambivalence itself, and we would like here to acknowledge a certain awkwardness around ‘theorizing’ something like ambivalence, since theorizing as a practice tends toward making dogmatic statements, yet our ideas about ambivalence would lead us away from precisely this strategy. We would like, then, to leave this ambivalence about ambivalence with the reader, as something worth thinking about and working with, but not necessarily resolving or working through. This being said, there is much to appreciate about projects seeking to move beyond singular scripts of critique, but it is also a reason to think carefully about the ways that difference can be elided in efforts to tell a better story. Our emphasis on ambivalence provides one a way of acknowledging the importance of feeling in knowing, without privileging either positive or negative affects or assuming too singular a path between feeling, knowing, and acting. Researchers cannot inhabit a position of sameness either with relation to one another, to themselves, or to their objects. We are both within and without our objects, we form them and are formed by them, and we and they hover inadequately between coherence and incoherence, always evading perfect apprehension by and alongside our never-sovereign selves. Engaging with these differences and how they position us, as feminist researchers have pointed out, will never result in a ‘total’ or sovereign understanding of the self or unproblematically lay bare the power relations that structure our research. But, such thinking does do something. Thus, rather than offer here a thoroughgoing roadmap for understanding ambivalence and how to use it, we have attempted to emphasize some of the conceptual points that could

be valuable for researchers to think with, without being dogmatic or prescriptive, while still seeking to be emphatic about *why* these considerations matter in the first place.

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Notes

1. Though Sedgwick (1997) is careful not to pathologize paranoia as it is situated within a critique of psychoanalysis, we acknowledge that in the translation of her specific use of the term into new and less psychoanalytic contexts there is a risk of, as in Grosz’s (1994: 163) criticism of Deleuze and Guattari’s use of similar terms, ‘a romantic elevation of psychoses, schizophrenia, becoming, which [...] ignores the very real torment of suffering individuals’. We have chosen to refrain from using paranoia except when we engage directly with Sedgwick and her psychoanalytic milieu, or to related work (e.g. Seitz, 2017a), even as we point to the importance of a psychoanalytic perspective in and beyond geography that ‘works to political effect at numerous geographical scales’ (Nast, 2000: 220).
2. Following Thein (2005) we have chosen not to establish strict demarcations between terms like affect, emotion, feeling, and sensation (though see Anderson (2014) for a compelling discussion on this topic). Our definition of affect should not be taken to exclude these

other terms; as noted above, we draw on feminist, queer, and anti-racist affect theorists (e.g., Ahmed, Berlant, and Georgis) to view affect as structural, over-determined, complex, and mutable, in which particular feelings are not mutually exclusive of one another.

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